CHAPTER - IV

A SURVEY OF THE FIRST FOUR MAJOR NOVELS

In his early novels Hardy was merely an apprentice often crude and clumsy, but nevertheless full of great promise. In his early novels Hardy had already shown his critical and sceptical attitude towards life, his trait of secular humanism, a sense of isolation and futility of human endeavour, his awareness of contemporary social realities, such as the vanishing rural virtues and the uprooting of the settled habits of life and thought; and his attitude of revolt against the conventional values of the society by the sympathetic treatment of the unmarried mother or the married lover. All these are certainly modern aspects, and these have been better demonstrated in his later novels.

With Far From the Madding Crowd Hardy's period of apprenticeship seems to have been over, and he entered upon the career of a full fledged novelist. This novel appeared in the Cornhill Magazine in serialised form. During the serial appearance of the story an incident of great significance occurred. Leslie Stephen, the publisher, had warned Hardy that the seduction of Fanny Hobin must have to be handled in a "gingerly fashion" or with extreme caution owing to the excessive prudery of the reading public of the time. Hardy thereupon replied that it had not occurred to him that there was anything to be objected to.
In *Far From the Madding Crowd* the theme chosen by Hardy seems to be the constancy or lack of constancy bringing peace or tragedy respectively. In spite of stormy days and balmy breezes, the country scene does seldom change. "In comparison with cities, Weatherbury was immutable. The citizen's Then is rustic's Now. In London, twenty or thirty years ago are old times; in Paris ten years, or five; in Weatherbury three or four score years were included in the mere present, and nothing less than a century set a mark on its face or tone. Five decades hardly modified the cut of a gaiter, the embroidery of a smock-frock, by the breadth of a hair. Ten generations failed to alter the turn of a single phrase. In these Wessex nooks the busy outsider's ancient times are only old; his old times are still new; his present is futurity." Like the country scenes Gabriel Oak, the protagonist of the novel, does not change even though he suffers distressing changes of fortune in course of the story. When all the trials and tribulations are over, the constancy of rural life and of such dependable character as Gabriel Oak, is there to provide a sheet anchor to Bathsheba Everdene, the heroine of the novel.

Farmer Gabriel Oak, a symbol of rural simplicity and constancy of character, used to live on his Norcombe allotment, "Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife". His simple, unsophisticated rustic existence was one day rudely shattered by the arrival in the adjoining area of one Miss Bathsheba

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Evedene, a country girl of enough cleverness, who was supposed to be averse to the idea of the simple and traditional Darby-and-Joan conception of marriage. Oak was once about to die of suffocation but he was timely rescued by Miss. Evedene. Since then Oak became infatuated for this girl and he used to say to himself: "I'll make her my wife, or upon my soul I shall be good for nothing". 1. Even when he was refused by Bathsheba, with a touch of genuine pathos in his voice, Gabriel spoke to her: "I shall do one thing in this life - one thing certain - that is, love you, and long for you, and keep wanting you till I die." 2. Bathsheba, on the other hand, did not wish a husband, rather a devoted husband like Gabriel, if she indeed wished one at all. She was much in doubt if such a man as Gabriel would at all suit her as a husband. "I want somebody to tame me; I am too independent; and you would never be able to, I know." 3.

In the meantime Bathsheba inherited a manor house at Weatherbury belonging to her late uncle. Without any feeling for and without any knowledge of her unhappy suitor she left the Norcombe Hill for her new possession at Weatherbury. The ill-fortune which Gabriel tasted in respect of love had also been demonstrated in respect of property. For within a few days of Bathsheba's departure, he lost his valuable flock of sheep. He was forced to sell his allotment and left

2. Ibid: P.41
3. Ibid: P.41
his original hearth and home in search of employment on the neighbouring farms. Soon after Bathsheba's arrival at Weatherbury, Fanny Robin, a young and beautiful girl attached to the Manor house was found to be missing. She was reported to have been seduced by a handsome soldier. The conduct of Fanny Robin was quite shocking to the rustic village-folk of Weatherbury. Her desertion of the Manor farm may be a simple matter in the days of our own but was not at all a simple matter in those days of the Victorian Age.

In search of employment Gabriel came to Weatherbury on a fateful night when Bathsheba's wheat ricks caught fire and her entire farm was in grave danger. Gabriel immediately rushed on to extinguish fire, without knowing of course that the farm belonged to Bathsheba, his erstwhile sweetheart. This unbidden and uncalled for service rendered by Gabriel almost amounted to a philanthropic spirit or the spirit of social service as we call it in our own time. The grateful Bathsheba, however, prevailed upon him to stay and work on her farm without caring to recognise that he was her unhappy suitor. Even if she recognised him, she did not at least make it known.

On the same very night of the fire havoc that coincided with Gabriel's arrival, the bailiff was discharged by Bathsheba on a charge of stealing corn. Since then she herself used to look after the superintendence of the farm, and she herself used to attend the corn market on week days, whereupon she was commonly known as the "queen of the Corn-market." The very fact of managing a big pastoral farm and
attending the bargain with the dealers in the corn market
by Bathsheba in person was indeed something unique, if not
quite impossible on the part of a Victorian girl.

Like many a modern capricious girl, Bathsheba, once
in a mischievous mood, sent a valentine with the inscription
"Marry Me" to the aristocratic Boldwood, a wealthy
neighbouring farmer of much repute and reserve. Farmer
Boldwood mistook Bathsheba completely, and by the sheep-
shearing time he was completely under the spell of this
capricious girl. Appreciating Boldwood's worth and desiring
only Bathsheba's happiness, the stoic in Gabriel prepared
himself to accept the situation calmly. Farmer Boldwood
heavily pressed Bathsheba for her consent to the marriage.
But the mischievous girl withheld her consent, though not
rejecting his candidature altogether.

In the meantime tragedy in a most attractive disguise
approached Bathsheba. She went about inspecting the fir
plantation before retiring for the night, and her skirt was
caught in the spur of a handsome young soldier named
Sergeant Troy. He was a rake in military tunic, selfish and
cynical, though not quite unfeeling. Troy was an emissary
of the general malevolence. Soon their acquaintance developed,
Bathsheba became an easy prey to his flatteries. Then,
// "the careless sergeant smiled within himself, and probably
too the devil smiled from a loop-hole in Tophet, for the
moment was a turning point of a career. Her tone and mien
signified beyond mistake that the seed which was to lift
Gabriel knew that Sergeant Troy was the person who had seduced Fanny Robin and expected that Bathsheba's common sense would re-assert itself. He even pleaded on behalf of Farmer Boldwood, but Bathsheba was now too much infatuated to be guided by any good counsel at all. On being frightened by Boldwood's threat to sergeant Troy, Bathsheba hurried forth to Bath by riding at night and performed a clandestine marriage with Troy. Indeed, certain acts of Bathsheba, such as, her journey to the 'hollow amid the ferns' at eight o'clock of the midsummer evening to enjoy the sword exercise of Sergeant Troy, her stealing of the horse of her own stable, her nocturnal riding to Bath and her clandestine marriage certainly pointed to her exceptional courage and were truly something uncommon on the part of a common girl of the Victorian Age.

Within a few days of her marriage Bathsheba became disillusioned about her husband who, as a philanderer, as a libertine, had taken to almost all the vices of modern times, such as, excessive drinking, gambling, horse-racing, squandering money and seducing girls. Fanny Robin, the unfortunate girl seduced by him, was deserted just when she was in the family way. The poor girl died in her childbed in a work house alone with her new-born baby. Joseph Poorgrass was sent to bring the dead body. While carrying

the dead body from the work house, he stopped for a while at Buck's Head for the purpose of drinking. There he met with two of his colleagues, Mark Clark and Jan Coggan. The latter seemed to be much against the conventional notion of religion: "... a man can belong to the Church and bide in his cheerful old inn, and never trouble or worry his mind about doctrines at all". While Joseph was in a hurry to leave with the dead body, Coggan consoled and detained him with his notion of what may be termed as the modern utilitarian behaviourism: "All that could be done for her is done - she's beyond us: and why should a man put himself in a tearing hurry for lifeless clay that can neither feel nor see, and don't know what you do with her at all? If she'd been alive, I would have been the first to help her. If she now wanted victuals and drink, I'd pay for it, money down. But she is dead, and no speed of ours will bring her to life. The woman's past us - time spent upon her is threwed away: why should we hurry to do what is not required? Drink, shepherd, and be friends, for tomorrow we may be like her." 2.

The two dead bodies, of the unmarried mother and her illegitimate child, were brought home at night. To her utter distress Bathsheba realised that this was the doing of the man she had married. Troy returned home at midnight. He saw Fanny lying dead in her coffin with her child by him in

2. Ibid: P.320
her arms. He was overcome by so much remorse that he
even renounced Bathsheba whom he heartlessly told: "you
are nothing to me ... nothing ... A ceremony before a
priest doesn't make a marriage. I am not morally yours." 1.
The conception of the unmarried mother and the illegitimate
child and the secular conception of marriage were certainly
not in tune with the tradition of the time when the novel
was written.

Sergeant Troy deserted Bathsheba, and there was no
trace of him for about a year. Meanwhile rumours about the
death of Troy by drowning reached the village. At the corn
market Bathsheba heard the news of her husband's death
trough a stranger. But in the heart of her heart she
doubted as to its validity. It however gave a chance to
Boldwood to renew his wooing. On being too much pressed by
Boldwood, Bathsheba agreed to marry him at the end of seven
years, if she would marry anyone at all. Besides this, she
would not promise anything until the coming Christmas, for
that was the time required to establish her widowhood.
Gabriel, the dutiful servant, had by then become the bailiff
of both the farms - that of Bathsheba and of Boldwood and
serving both of them as best as he could.

Boldwood arranged a grand Christmas Eve party in his
residence. It was to be attended by Bathsheba, and so was
its added attraction. It would be the occasion for Bathsheba
giving her final consent to marriage, and for Boldwood the

1. Thomas Hardy: Far From the Madding Crowd.
beginning of a secret courtship to be culminated in marriage at the end. Bathsheba already arrived to attend the party and had also consented to marry Boldwood at the end of six years provided that both of them were alive, and that her husband had been missing still. But unkind fate was haunting Boldwood like a hound; and in the same Christmas Eve party Sergeant Troy, the supposed drowned man, appeared in person. He came in a staggeringly drunken state to claim his wife. "Even then Boldwood did not recognise that the impersonator of Heaven's persistent irony towards him, who had once before broken in upon his bliss, scourged him, and snatched his delight away, had come to do these things a second time. Troy began to laugh a mechanical laugh; Boldwood recognised him now." Enraged at the thought of being deprived for the second time, Boldwood took his double barrel and shot his tormentor to death.

Farmer Boldwood was already in a state of insanity. After murdering Troy he tried to commit suicide but could not. He then left his house never to return. He finally surrendered himself to the Justice and was sentenced to death. But he was found insane and his death sentence was subsequently reduced to life imprisonment. For many months Bathsheba kept indoors but gradually she recovered her strength. During this time devoted Gabriel seemed to have become indifferent and remained in a state of isolation. He even avoided meeting Bathsheba as far as possible and finally resolved to leave Weatherbury. Bathsheba was now

1. Thomas Hardy: Far From the Madding Crowd
convinced of the sterling qualities of Gabriel who, as constant as a pale star, stood beside her both in fair and foul weather. One evening she visited his cottage and declared her love to him. Finally Bathsheba and Gabriel Oak were wedded together in a simple ceremony.

"Far From the Madding Crowd" has thus a curious assortment of traditional and non-traditional elements. The characteristic Hardy novel, as Donald Davidson observes, is conceived as a 'told (or sung) story'... it is an extension, in the form of a modern prose fiction, of a traditional ballad or an oral tale...L. Hardy does not write the chronicle novel, nor does he write the biographical novel. He also does not build up circumstantial detail like Zola or Flaubert. He has an extreme fondness for what may be called the "country story". Gabriel Oak, the hero of the novel, is the faithful lover of many a ballad with many of the elements of a masculine "Patient Griselda". He endures almost the same kind of testing as the ladies do often put upon their lovers in romances and ballads. He is obviously the excellent lover who aims his affections high and always keeps on the high road and is finally rewarded like virtues getting reward in many ballads. Fanny Robin is a typically deserted maiden of any typical ballad. She is more accurately the forsaken girl found in "Mary of the Wild Moor". Her lover and her seducer, Sergeant Troy is the soldier or the sailor of any number of later ballads, and it is worth noting that Hardy's fondness for soldiers has

everywhere the echo of many ballads of his own time.

As to the non-traditional elements of the novel, Fanny’s seduction and her becoming a mother before becoming a wife are most striking, inasmuch as they do certainly strike at the root of conventional notion of marriage and child-birth. Besides, the other modern elements of the novel consist in Gabriel’s spirit of altruism, his sense of isolation, his stoicism and his sense of futility which he, and more vividly, farmer Boldwood, suffered from. This novel, further, shows an awareness of the contemporary social realities consisting in the vanishing rural virtues and the uprooting of settled habits of life and thought. Jan Coggan, the ancient man of the malt is interested to know about his old familiar place of Moresome. He is informed by Gabriel that the place has altered much owing to the gradual process of industrialisation. Thereupon the ancient man of the malt laments: “Dear, dear – how the face of nations alter, and what we live to see nowadays! Yes – and ‘tis the same here”. 1.

In this first major fiction Hardy has not yet dwelt at length upon fate and chance. But the traces of accidents and co-incidences, here, leave ample indications that he was soon to amplify this subject in a much broader scale.

Far From the Madding Crowd was thoroughly reviewed by the leading periodicals of the time and most of the reviewers were quite laudatory. In this novel of “Character and Environment” as Hardy called it, the contrasted characters

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of the three chief men of the story have been worked out well: the man of single eye, who waits and works patiently, scarcely hoping for any reward or recognition, but ready to help the woman she loves, literally through fire and water; the profligate soldier, who comes, sees and for a time conquers; and the reserved middle aged farmer falling in love for the first time in life at the age of forty, and then driven almost to insanity by disappointment. Each of them plays his part well and takes his due share in the development of the story. H. G. Duffin is quite vocal in his praise of the novel and observes: "Far From the Madding Crowd is Hardy's first masterpiece; and it went near to being his greatest. Only Tess surpasses it, and for sheer Hardian quality I doubt whether even The Mayor, even Jude, quite reaches the wonderful heights of this first wonder of all". 1

The second major novel The Return of the Native is almost a breakway from the Victorian convention. In his early novels Hardy could easily move within the Victorian convention, and its limitations were in no way in conflict with what Hardy chose to tell. It is chiefly for this reason Far From the Madding Crowd, moving within the Victorian convention, is supposed to have attained almost the same rank as that of Tess of the Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure wherein the convention has been totally ignored.

It is for this again that *The Return of the Native* is assigned even a lower rank than *Far From the Madgazine Crowd*. Nevertheless, the novel has several redeeming features. It has defied the Victorian convention of compromise, of the reward of virtue and the punishment of vice; it has also given a dramatic shape to the intellectual crisis of the nineteenth century, its crisis of values. Daniel R. Schwarz observes: "Hardy's novels dramatise the movement of the speaking voice from the perspective of the rural world to one located within the intellectual crosswinds of the nineteenth century's crisis of values (*The Return of the Native*)". As much by defying the Victorian convention as by dramatising the crisis of Victorian values, *The Return of the Native* has come to be regarded almost as a novel of modern times.

This human drama of pain and pathos begins with an impressive description of Egdon Heath. This description is highly poetic and may be regarded as the best specimen of Hardy's superb power of descriptive art. Egdon is a vast tract of unenclosed wild which embrowns itself moment by moment. "The face of the heath by its mere complexion added half-an hour to evening; it could in like manner retard the dawn, sadden noon, anticipate the frowning of storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of a moonless night to a cause of shaking and dread". In other words, Egdon presents a face upon which time makes but little impression.

1. *Modern Fiction studies* edited by T. Stafford & Margaret Church: Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana 47907 (Vol. 18, Number 2, Summer 1972) P. 180

Infiniti and eternal as it is, Egdon exists and has been existing for some centuries unknown. Its wildness cannot be softened, nor can its existence be tamed; it is the very antithesis of civilisation, which is supposed to be its deadly enemy. A man wearing modern dress and pursuing modern ideas is, in all appearance, an anachronism in Egdon. "A person on a heath in raiment of modern cut and colours has more or less an anomalous look. We seem to want the oldest and simplest human clothing where the clothing of the earth is so primitive." 1 Human beings have not been able to introduce any other change over this unenclosed wild called Egdon Heath. "Distilled by the sun, kneaded by the moon, it is renewed in a year, in a day, or in an hour. The sea changed, the fields changed, the rivers, the villages, and the people changed, yet Egdon remained." 2 Ever since its creation Egdon has remained primitive and unchanged. Whatever change has been made here, it includes an old road and an artificial mound. But even this road has also now become its integral part.

The very description of Egdon Heath in its minutest details indicates Hardy's mastery in descriptive art, and in his power of description he excels many of his Victorian contemporaries. But what is worth noting, in the context, is that what he suggests is much more than what he describes. As a descriptive writer Hardy belonged to his own age; but

2. Ibid: P.7
for what he chose to describe one might easily take him for one belonging to our own age. "The new Vale of Tempe may be a gaunt waste in Thule; human souls may find themselves in closer and closer harmony with external things wearing a sombreness distasteful to our race when it was young. The time seems near, if it has not actually arrived, when the chastened sublimity of a moor, a sea, or a mountain will be all of nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind." One may smile a little at his choice of words and his rather priggish phrase "the more thinking among mankind"; but none can perhaps deny the correctness of his prophecy. Loneliness in an overcrowded world, is a matter of great delight to a modern man. But the way in which Hardy described it makes him emphatically a Victorian.

In this pathetic human play, Egdon is, indeed, something colossus, something more than a protagonist. Egdon is the symbol of Nature and Necessity; this untamed, fecund impassive force suggests the abiding and the eternal, and for Hardy himself it is the same as 'President of the Immortals' of Tess of the D'Urbervilles and the 'Immanent Will' of The Dynasts. The Return of the Native is really the story of Egdon Heath, in which Nature is found to have occupied the most conspicuous place. "Egdon is not only the scene of the tale; it dominates the plot and determines the characters.

It is sentient: it feels, it speaks, it slays. Almost with a colossal human existence Egdon is certainly untameable, Ishmaelitish. At the approach of the evil it renders a chilly premonition to its best loved child. And the evil having fallen upon him, the anguish of his soul is met by the imperceptible countenance of the heath.

The hero of the novel, Clym Yeobright, is the product of Egdon. Its shaggy hills are friendly and genial to him. They exhilarate, strengthen and soothe him completely. In his palmy days the oppressive horizontality of Egdon gives him a sense of equality with any living creature of the heath. In his rainy days, however, Egdon swallows him up and absorbs him into its furze and into its infinite winged and creeping things. While Clym is the child of Egdon, the Heddleman is its true spirit and Eustacia, the heroine of the novel, is in every sense a rival to it. Unlike Eustacia, pretty Tamasie does not look upon Egdon as a 'ghost'. To her it is just an impersonal open ground. Her fear of it is rational, while her dislike of its worst mood is reasonable.

The very introduction of Egdon in its colossal dimension along with the introduction of such humanity in the twilight of a November afternoon as the fantastic Heddleman and his unexplained pre-occupation, the anomalous old naval officer, the mysterious figures on the barrow, the woman momentarily queen of the solitude, then vanishing into Egdon's shade etc.,

1. H. C. Duffin: Thomas Hardy (Oxford University Press: 1967) P. 128
not only rouses the curiosity of the readers but also suggests the whole trend of the novel - the impending disaster looming large in the horizon. Standing as an arch enemy of civilization, Egdon is found to be at constant war with those persons who are opposed to its ways and ideas. Those who love the ways of Egdon and have become parts of Egdon are in no way harmed and rather made happy. But those who hate or oppose Egdon shall in no way escape its punishment.

The rustics are part of Egdon and so they have their happy lives to live in. Egdon is hand-in-glove with its true spirit, Diggory Venn, and helps him in his constant war with Wildeve. He appears on the scene whenever he is required to appear; and at last he becomes successful in getting his beloved. Clym also loves Egdon; and he is its chosen child; but Clym's ideals are against the primitive nature of it. So he is alternately provided with disappointment and consolation. Damon Wildeve, an Engineer, is just a misfit in the wilds of Egdon, and he and Mustacia do cherish a positive hatred towards it. That is perhaps the reason for which the full revenge of Egdon falls upon them. They hate Egdon; and Egdon kills them whenever they make an attempt of escape from it. This Egdon is not only the scene of action but even the cause of the tragic demesneament of the novel.

The very introductory scene of Egdon at the opening of the novel is suggestive of this idea.

This Egdon of awe and wonder, this central place as well as this central cause of the tragedy also leaves behind a subtle but sure autobiographical touch. In the shaping and
the colouring of Hardy's genius, Egdon has had a great influence. Hardy was born on the edge of the heath, which was virtually his playground when his genius was germinating out of its embryonic form. "If any one knew the heath well it was Clym. He was permeated with its scenes, with its substance, and with its odours. He might be said to be its product. His eyes had first opened thereon; with its appearance all the first images of his memory were mingled; his estimate of life had been coloured by it."1 This is certainly an autobiographical touch and what has been said about Clym may well be said about Hardy himself. Besides the wild and the wonderful Egdon with its all out effort of preserving its own identity against the gradual approach of modern civilisation, it again provides the most exalted instance of Hardy's habitual and involuntary personification of nature. For the heath is perfectly in accord with human nature, neither ghastly, hateful nor ugly; neither commonplace, unmeaning nor tame. It is something like a man, slighted and enduring.

Should any single novel be taken as the key to Hardy's mind and art, it is probably *The Return of the Native*. One reason that distinguishes Hardy from other novelists and asserts his greatness over them, is the close association between the stories of his novels and their appropriate settings. Always sensitive to the impressions of sights and sounds, with capacity to render them with precision and with

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an earnest care of keeping the aesthetic effect of the scene or the object rendered, Hardy always maintains harmonious relations to the emotions involved. In other words, the Hardian art has three-fold appeal - to our sense of reality, to our sense of beauty and to our sense of sympathy (sympathetic emotions). And to find out the three-fold appeal of Hardian art one needs turn only to The Return of the Native which is an outstanding example of a unique association of events with the settings in which they occur. This association of story with the settings, again, determines the structural beauty of the novel more than anything else.

The importance of Egdon Heath in the motivation of characters, especially, the major characters, such as Eustacia Vye and Clym Yeobright, has already been told. What is yet to be told is the philosophical significance of Egdon in the very design of the novel. Far from being a scenic backdrop to the action, Egdon is all-pervasive and indispensable in as much as the heath provides the action with special dimension in which it has its being. The function of the heath in the novel is to describe the real circumstances in which man lives. Whatever an individual may feel about those circumstances, it is irrelevant; it is immaterial; it is useless. For he or she must have to bear them as he or she cannot escape them. The heath, as an extended image of nature of which man is a part, entraps man, conditions his very being but cares nothing for him. And man’s life in relation to this extended image of nature called Egdon is as
ephemeral as the bonfires which the peasants make of the heath furze. This ephemerality of man, the insignificance of his being against the eternity of the heath is the philosophic significance of Egdon Heath.

The general plot of the novel hinges upon the old theme of a man who is in love with two women, and a woman who is in love with two men; the man and the woman being both selfish and sensual. Although it is an old and conventional theme of love, yet what Hardy chooses to convey is something unconventional and almost new in Hardy’s age. Having discarded the accepted convention of marriage with guardians’ consent, Hardy has introduced seemingly unconventional marriage not merely without guardians’ consent but even against guardians’ opposition. Bustacia’s mother married her musician husband, a Corfiote by birth, and the marriage was scarcely in accord with the wishes of Captain Vye, Bustacia’s grandfather. But the climax is reached in the marriage between Clym Yeobright and Bustacia Vye. Not only does Mrs Yeobright disapprove of her son’s marriage with Bustacia, but even the very marriage question ensues a bitter quarrel between mother and son and ultimately ends in a separation between the old woman and her nearest kin. In the interval between his cousin Thomasin’s attempted marriage with Damon Wildeve and its final execution, Clym Yeobright, the hero of the novel, a manager of diamond trade in Paris, returns to Egdon Heath or the native returns to his native soil. Clym’s cousin Thomasin, madly in love with Damon Wildeve, went to Anglebury for her marriage with
him in spite of her aunt Mrs. Yeobright's wishes to the contrary. Because of certain defects in the licence, their marriage is postponed. Greatly disappointed Thomasin returns back to Egdon, availing of a van belonging to Diggory Venn, a reddenman. Reddenman is a class which is rapidly becoming extinct in Wessex and which is an interesting and nearly a perished link between obsolete forms of life and those which generally prevail. On his way to Egdon the reddenman meets Captain Yve. The Captain is shrewd enough to guess that the proposed marriage between Damon and Thomasin has not taken place and informs his grandchild, Eustacia accordingly.

When the reddenman proceeds towards BloomsInd, some indistinct human figures are found on the mainbarrow engaged in bonfires. While the revellers at the Mainbarrow appear to have taken a sudden dive into the remote ages of the past, they are now visible as the symbols of man's instinctive rebelliousness against Nature - the rebelliousness of Prometheus, the fire-bringer. "It (bonfire) indicates a spontaneous, Prometheus rebellion against the flat that this recurrent season shall bring foul times, cold darkness, misery and death. Black chaos comes, and the fettered gods of the earth say, Let there be light."

1. Though man is at times rebellious, but his rebellion, as Hardy seems to suggest, is meaningless. For the general impression one may get at such a scene as when the nimble flames of the bonfires sometimes tower, mod and swoop through the surrounding air,

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1. Thomas Hardy: The Return of the Native
is that all things are impermanent. "All was unstable; quivering as leaves, evanescent as lightning". 1.

Wildeve, with his pantomimic expression of a lady-killing career, is the type of a modern philanderer in whom no man would have seen anything to admire and in whom no woman would have seen anything to dislike. Before he intended to marry Thomasin, he was already in love with Eustacia Vye. Having come to know from her grandfather that Thomasin and Wildeve have not been married, Eustacia at once summons Wildeve and again takes him back into favour. Once Wildeve can resume his intrigues with Eustacia, he wilfully puts off his promised marriage with Thomasin, who has then nothing but to pine in sorrow and anxiety. In all appearance, Eustacia may thus be supposed to be sensual. But it is more apparent than real. She is passionately in love, not for any particular lover, but for the sake of love only just to drive away the eating loneliness of her days in Egdon. Born and bred in a little port town called Budmouth, she has been a girl of some forwardness of mind, and in her brain there has been the strange assortment of ideas from old time and new. It has led her instincts towards social non-conformity and made her a total stranger in Egdon from which she always wants to escape. Her spontaneous prayer has always been: "O deliver my heart from this fearful gloom and loneliness; send me great love from somewhere, else I shall die". 2.

1. Thomas Hardy: The Return of the Native (Macmillan & Co. Ltd: London: 1906) p.18
2. Ibid: p.80
To dwell on a heath without studying its meaning is like 
wedding a foreigner without learning his language. The subtle 
beauties of Egdon are lost to Eustacia. She has only caught 
its vapours. "An environment which would have made a contented 
woman a poet, a suffering woman a devotee, a pious woman a 
psalmist, even a giddy woman thoughtful, made a rebellious 
woman saturnine." 1. It is thus in a strange state of 
isoIation, in a violent state of rebellion that she falls 
in love with Damon, and that too, because there is no one 
else better available in Egdon. At times her pride rebels 
against her passion for him, and sometimes she even longs to 
be free; but she cannot. The only remedy that can dislodge 
Damon lies in the emergence of another greater than Damon. 
And Eustacia also knows it only too well.

Hardy introduced the reudleman not certainly to emphasise 
the moral order in the form of Diggory's winning Thomasin 
as a reward for his patience, constancy, selfless and almost 
impersonal love for her. Hardy left a significant note at 
the end of the Chapter III, Book Sixth of the novel; it shows 
that his original conception of the story had no design of 
a marriage between Thomasin and Diggory, but serial publica-
tion of the novel forced him to revise his original plan. 
Then Hardy's real purpose in introducing the reudleman was 
to show the gradual extinction of the old things of the past 
as a result of an onslaught of modern civilisation. "Reudle-
men of the old school are now but seldom seen. Since the 
introduction of railways Wessex farmers have managed to do 
without these Mephistophelian visitants .... Even those who

1. Thomas Hardy : The Return of the Native 
yet survive are losing the poetry of existence which characterized them when the pursuit of the trade meant periodical journeys to the pit whence the material was dug, a regular camping out from month to month, except in the depth of winter.... A child's first sight of a reddlemaster was an epoch in his life.... 'The reddlemaster is coming for you!' had been the formulated threat of Wessex mothers for many generations". 1. But the reddlemaster has been successfully supplanted and his place has been filled up by modern inventions.

Diggory Venn, the reddlemaster, has a deep but one-sided attachment for Thomasin having been developed right from his early youth. Diggory also offered his suitership to her. But Thomasin has not only been unresponsive but also rejected his suitership. "Rejected suitors", as Hardy comments, "takes to roaming as naturally as unhived bees...." 2. Diggory, too, takes to roaming; but his frequent wanderings, by mere stress of old emotions, are often undertaken towards the direction of Egdon. "To be in Thomasin's heath, and near her, yet unseen, was the one ewe-lamb of pleasure left to him". 3. The facts that she has rejected him, and that she has chosen another man do not in the least diminish his love for the girl. He still loves her; but it is a generous love, a kind of platonic love, without any desire for return in future. To help Thomasin at the time of her need and to preserve her happiness at all costs, do now become the be-all and end-all of Diggory's life.

1. Thomas Hardy: The Return of the Native
   (Macmillan & Co. Ltd: London: 1909) P.80
2. Ibid : P.92
3. Ibid : P.92-93
So, according to his mission of helping Thomasin and fostering her happiness, Diggory desperately attempts at persuading Bustacia to give up Wildeve in favour of Thomasin. But he fails to convince Bustacia who remains adamant and refuses to give up Wildeve: "I will never give him up — never!" Now Diggory offers himself to marry Thomasin. Mrs Yeobright, Thomasin's aunt and only guardian, rejects the offer but uses it as a grand strategy to tame Wildeve. Wildeve, in turn, goes to Bustacia and requests her to marry him, since Thomasin is reported to have accepted Diggory's offer. But Bustacia will not accept a rejected lover. To her, Wildeve was so long interesting yet inadequate. But now he is in the awkward position of an official who is no longer wanted. The very idea that she is comparatively cheap drives Bustacia to a state of abnormal fury. It strikes at her very sense of social superiority, and for the first time she has a feeling that she stooped too low in loving Wildeve. Her rejection of Wildeve turns him again to Thomasin. And this is natural.

In the mean time the time of Native's return to his native soil approaches. The Egdon rusties begin to talk of it as a kind of a historic arrival of a historic man from Paris. They report that Clym Yeobright has now become a man of real worth with strange notion about things, and this is considered to be the result of his attending school right from his early age. Bustacia's grandfather also joins the

1. Thomas Hardy: Return of the Native
discussion and comments upon the growing modern tendency of schooling; and schooling sometimes causes loosening of moral fibre in country life: "Ah, there's too much of that sending to school in these days! It only does harm. Every gatepost and barn's door you come to is sure to have some bad word or other chalked upon it by the young rascals: a woman can hardly pass for shame sometimes. If they'd never been taught how to write they wouldn't have been able to scribble such villainy. Their fathers couldn't do it, and the country was all the better for it". 1. The so-called modern education, not in the real university of life, gets one disposed to romantic nonsense, and the old captain feels, if B Bustacia had less romantic nonsense in her head, it would have been much better for her.

When the captain walks away, the conversation between the two remaining furse cutters, Humphrey and Sam, takes a different course. Both of them are of opinion that Clya and Bustacia would make a very good pair, because both of them are learned, of one mind and always thinking about high doctrines. Bustacia overhears the whole conversation, and the subject of their discourse has been highly interesting to her. A young and educated and an intelligent man is coming into the lonely heath from, of all contrasting places of the world, Paris. It is like a man coming from heaven. More singular still, the Egdon rustics have immediately coupled her and Clym together in their minds as a pair born for

1. Thomas Hardy: The Return of the Native
each other. Bistacia almost instinctively falls in love.

It is not a love at the first sight, rather at the first hearing of the news of a youth coming from the dreamland of Paris. Indeed, as ascribed by her grandfather, her peculiar education and her peculiar situation have thrust upon Bistacia this very modern romantic nonsense for which her grandfather has always had a word of reproof.

Clym Yeobright comes back from Paris to her mother.

Being greatly fascinated, Bistacia concealing her female identity attends Mrs. Yeobright's Christmas Party as one of the mummers and meets Clym face to face. Bistacia has the greatest contempt for mummers and mumming as the fossilized survival of a remote past in this modern ‘refurbishing age'. Nevertheless she appears as a mummer by discounting the simple country lad Charley's romantic attachment to her only with a view to satisfying her own romantic disposition. For her romantic disposition she is destined to suffer like so many modern heroes and heroines. These "incurably romantic disposition", as Bernard Shaw calls it, in Arms and the Man, prevents them from taking a true stock of the situation, and so they suffer as Bistacia does.

The emergence of a greater personality takes Bistacia off Wildeve's hold. Wildeve now proposes to marry Thomasin quite privately at the church belonging to his own parish. This time Thomasin also agrees, because experience has taught her to be wiser and more practical. She utters:
"I am a practical woman now. I don't believe in hearts at all. I would marry him under any circumstances"...1. Thomasin is thus less romantic and more practical than Bustacia and is supposed to be happier than Bustacia. Accordingly, Wildeve and Thomasin are married; neither Clym nor his mother accompanies her to the church. The bride is presented to the groom by Bustacia, who is now more anxious to the immediate disposal of Thomasin. Lest Clym, her latest and brightest choice, due to his living in close proximity to Thomasin, leans to her.

Clym has come all the way from Paris to be settled in his native soil only with a very noble mission of educating the ignorant, illiterate and superstitious Egdon population. On the morning of every Sunday local barbering is done by Fairway in front of his house. A fairly good number of rustics usually gather at the local barbering centre and discuss various topics as much as it is done in any up-to-date saloon of our own time. Here, at this local barbering Clym makes a public declaration of his mission. He will keep a day school near Egdon, and a night-school in his mother's house at Blooms-End. At the outset he must however study a little to get himself properly qualified. His mother Mrs. Yeobright does not approve of his plan and tries to deter him from doing so. But Clym is firm. He becomes still more firm in his project when he learns that Bustacia is looked upon as a witch, and in consequence, has been

pricked with a long stocking needle by Susan Nunsuch. Now Clym is most emphatic in his statement; he has to clear these cobwebs; he has to remove these superstitions.

"I want to do some worthy thing before I die. As a schoolmaster I think to do it - a schoolmaster to the poor and ignorant, to teach them what nobody else will." 1. In Clym we thus hear the echoes of a modern altruist.

Quite in no time Bustacia and Clym are acquainted with each other, and their acquaintance ripens into a deep love within a period of even less than three months. Clym's mother is however, not at all happy at this development. Though the pair fall in love, yet there is a characteristic difference between them: Clym is social, while Bustacia is unsocial; Clym is altruistic, while Bustacia is egoistic; Clym loves heath people, while Bustacia hates them. So Clym says to her: "There is no use in hating people - if you hate anything, you should hate what produced them." 2. For, to be born in this world is a palpable dilemma, and this is a sentiment gradually gaining ground among many of our own age owing to the uncertainty of modern existence.

Mrs. Yeobright, Clym's mother, is not favourably disposed to Bustacia because she is aware of her affairs with Wildeve in the past. She is very much shocked to learn that her son has not only developed a deep attachment for Bustacia, but is also going to marry her soon. The mother tries to convince her son that he should give up the idea

2. Ibid : P.219
of an ill-assorted match with a girl whose past is not free from blemishes. Clym loves his mother immensely but cannot be persuaded. He says to her mother: "Mother, whatever you do, you will be always dear to me - that you know. But one thing I have a right to say, which is, that at my age I am old enough to know what is best for me." 1. One thing is certain that Clym is firm in his resolve, and no amount of persuasion can change him from his decision. He resolves to marry Eustacia and he must do so even in spite of his mother's wish to the contrary. Upon the question of Clym's marriage there is a separation between the mother and the son: The mother remaining in their original house at Blooms-End, while the son leaving for Alderworth with a view to marrying the girl of his choice. Separation of this kind and on such question as marriage was occasional in the past but is indeed quite common in our own day. Duffin observes: "Parental opposition to a son's choice of a wife is age-old, and is not excused by the fact that quite often the parents are, as Mrs. Yeobright is here, right." 2. Indeed, the opposition of parents to their son's choice of a wife is a fact as much ancient as it is modern.

Being deserted by her only son, the afflicted mother recalls the sacrifices which she had to make for Clym, the only prop of her blasted existence. When her husband died,

she was quite young and she could have easily married.

But she did not marry only in consideration of her only son, Clym. Thomasin thinks that it was her nobility not to have married. "It is more noble in you that you did not". 1. But the old woman thinks: "The more noble, the less wise." 2. This is a sentiment, gradually gaining ground among certain men and women of our own age obviously resulting from various complexities of modern life.

Nevertheless Mrs. Yeobright bears no ill-will against her son. Ever since Clym's departure from Blooms-End, she is sincerely eager for a reconciliation. She has a hundred family guineas to be evenly distributed between Thomasin and Clym. She wants to give Thomasin's share without Thomasin's husband's knowledge. She chooses Clym's marriage day to be the appropriate occasion for distribution of the family guineas. On the one hand, it will keep Wildeve ignorant, for Clym's marriage at Mistover will be attended by Thomasin only. On the other, it will make Clym think that his mother has no ill-will against him. Accordingly, Christian Cantle, an Egdon rustic, is deputed to Mistover to distribute the respective share of the family guineas. On his way to Mistover he is allured to gamble with Wildeve and loses the entire family guineas to him. But Wildeve cannot also enjoy the guineas grabbed by him. For the Reddleman is on a constant watch over him. He overhears the conversation between Wildeve and Christian, and he tempts

2. Ibid: p. 252
wildeve to gamble with him again. Gambling is always an
amusement to the gamblers when pockets are full. Wildeve
gambles only to lose, and he loses all the guineas. The
gambling scene, in a feeble glow-worm light, appears
certainly a bit queer; yet it is almost like any modern
gambling scene. The difference between any modern gambling
scene and the gambling scene presented by Hardy is one of
degree, not of kind. These two scenes may differ in form
and technique but not in essence.

Clym marries Bystacia partly out of her attachment and
partly out of a motive of using her in his fantasies of
philanthropy. But Bystacia has no interest in his
philanthropic mission. Far from living a lonely life in the
heath, she is more interested in an urban life and that,
too, preferably Paris. Before her marriage she was almost
sure that once married to Clym, she would have the power
of inducing him to return to Paris. So she has married Clym.
But until now Paris has remained to her only a dream. She
has not been able even to broach the subject to her husband.
In the meantime a violent quarrel ensues between the
mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law due to a misgiving
upon the question of distribution of the family guineas,
even though neither of them has any ill will, ab initio,
against the other. Bystacia charges Mrs. Yeobright for having
injured her honour by casting a slur on her character. She
will not tolerate any further, and she will also try to
harm her mother-in-law as much as she can. Mrs. Yeobright
knows that she will possibly set Clym against her, and she is prepared to bear it as others have borne before her.

The couple, after their marriage, live happily for a few weeks only. Soon it becomes clear to both of them that their temperaments are incompatible. Clym, to Justicia's dislike, begins to study hard to prepare himself for his career as a schoolmaster. Owing to continuous studies, Clym has an attack of temporary blindness. Clym is upset but undaunted. In the face of this mishap which only affects his social standing, Clym becomes a stoic. He will be satisfied even with the humblest walk of life, if it is of some use to his philanthropic scheme. He does not hesitate to undertake the most humble occupation of a furze cutter partly to engage his idle hours, and partly to earn some money by an honest means. It is too much for Justicia to bear. The bare fact of being the wife of a mere furze cutter gets on her nerve quite heavily. Clym can still rebel in high Promethean fashion; but it is useless; for there is nothing mean or small in a humble occupation.

He says: "Now, don't you suppose, my inexperienced girl, that I cannot rebel, in high Promethean fashion, against the gods and fate as well as you. I have felt more steam and smoke of that sort than you have ever heard of. But the more I see of life the more do I perceive that there is nothing particularly great in its greatest walks, and therefore nothing particularly small in mine of furze-cutting." 1.

Clym thus provides an instance of perfect stoicism which, if disturbed sometimes by an occasional rebellious attitude, does not altogether destroy his very practical sense of the need for adjustment with the circumstances as they are. While Clym, as a stoic, goes on happily with his new occupation of furze-cutting, Bustacia, as a romantic, goes on pining for what is not.

Clym's stoicism makes Bustacia first regretting and then revolting, and that too not without a taint of regret. One may call it a rebellious sadness, and it makes her attend a village gipsy singing just to overcome her mental depression. There, for the first time after her marriage, she meets Wildeve and even dances with him. The old passions of the old lovers revive. From now onwards Wildeve prowls about her house in the evening in the hope of seeing her; but his attempt is foiled by Diggory's strategy. Then Wildeve decides to go to her in daytime on the term of a friend or a relative. For so long as Bustacia was within his reach, he did not perhaps feel much for her. But now that she is beyond his reach, Wildeve's passion for her is all the more intensified. It naturally makes Thomasin sad. Though not quite sure, but she is half in doubt that her husband may have again resumed his old affairs with Bustacia. She requests Diggory to tell her of a secret plan so as to keep her husband home in the evening. "Husbands will play the truant, you know. I wish you could tell me of some secret
plan that would help me to keep him home at my will in the evenings". Thomasin is thus like many modern housewives who have often a problem of keeping their philandering husbands home in the evening. Thomasin's request acts as a magic in Diggory, and so begins his counter-moves against Wildeve. Egdon silently works out Eustacia's doom; and the reddieeman, as its true spirit, also applies his own "silent system" to prevent Wildeve from resuming his old love.

Though the mother and son have been separated from one another, but each of them, far from bearing any ill-will, rather deeply feels for each other. Having learnt from the reddieeman that Clym has been living a life of affliction, Mrs. Yeobright pays a visit to her son's rented residence at Alderworth. When the old woman knocks at the door, Eustacia appears at the window. But she thinks it unwise to open the door, because Wildeve is within, and it may create further misunderstanding between them. So she directs Wildeve to escape through the backdoors before Mrs. Yeobright should come in. At that time Clym is in profound sleep, and under the influence of dream he mutters "Mother". Eustacia is misled; she thinks that her husband is woke up from sleep to open the door for his mother. Thus Eustacia does not then open the door. After some time when she finds her husband still asleep, and opens the door herself, her mother-in-law is not to be found. She has already gone away. The irony of the situation is obvious.

1. Thomas Hardy: The Return of the Native.
Mrs. Yeobright, tired, exhausted and utterly shocked, takes her weary way once more across the heath with a broken heart. She has the feeling of one cast off by her son. On her way to Blooms-End through Egdon she meets Susan Mansuch's little boy Johnny and tells him of her sad tale. Mrs. Yeobright's physical and emotional exertions cause her to take rest and she sits on the grass. The old woman requests the little boy Johnny to bring some fresh water but the water is so warm that she cannot drink and throws it away. The little boy Johnny does not wait for the old woman and goes off. In the meantime the old woman is bitten by an adder. The same evening Clym starts for Blooms-End to meet his mother. On the way he discovers his mother lying in an unconscious state. A few Egdon rustics also gather on the spot. They understand that the old woman has been stung by an adder. Some old remedy like the fat of other adders has been applied, even though Clym has little faith in it. Clym distrustfully utters: "Tis an old remedy, and I have doubts about it. But we can do nothing else till the doctor comes."

Clym's distrust in this ancient quackery is akin to a modern man's distrust in what is not scientific. A doctor is called in. But Mrs. Yeobright cannot be saved; she dies.

The same evening Eustacia comes to know from her grandfather that Wildeve has got a modest sum by way of inheritance. From every Egdon point of view he is now a

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rich man. It also dazzles the eyes of Eustacia who now begins to think of him with an added interest. As Hardy observes: "Though she was no lover of money she loved what money could bring..." This is perhaps equally applicable to every modern romantic girl who loves money, not for its own sake, but for the sake of its utility - its command over goods and services - its command over various material comforts of life.

Clym probes into the mystery of his mother's death and finds Eustacia indirectly responsible for it. He is terribly shocked to learn from Susan's child Johnny that his mother visited his house and twice knocked at the door; but his wife, who appeared at the window and also saw his mother, did not open the door, because she had another gentleman with her at that time. Clym monstrously accuses Eustacia, and a bitter quarrel takes place. It also results in a separation between the husband and the wife. Eustacia leaves Clym's house and goes to her grandfather's, while Clym returns back to his ancestral house at Blooms-End. Eustacia leads an extremely miserable life, and at times she even thinks of committing suicide. Now Wildeve has a genuine feeling of love for Eustacia and he assures her of every help. They chalk out a secret plan of elopement. At the last moment comes a propitiatory note from Clym; but the note does not reach Eustacia. On the night appointed for elopement Eustacia steals out of her grandfather's house. It is a dark rainy night; and Eustacia comes out

sobbing. She is much eager to go to Paris, the central beauty spot of the world. But she has no money; so the only course open to her is to accept Wildeve's money and to accompany him as his mistress. But she is not yet completely lost and cannot quite bear this thought. In utter desperation she throws herself into the pool at Shadwater weir and is drowned. Clym and Wildeve are in search of Bustacia separately. Both of them are alerted by hearing the sound of her falling. Both of them also jump into the pool to save her. At last the three bodies are hauled out by Diggory Venn with the help of some other heathmen. Bustacia and Wildeve are pronounced dead by the attending physician, but Clym gradually comes back to life.

Despaired of happiness, Clym finds his ultimate consolation in the career of an itinerant open-air preacher. His discourses are sometimes secular, sometimes religious but never dogmatic. It seems that one who is the product of an age of reason, the modern age as it were, is free from dogma. "Some believed him, and some believed not; some said that his words were commonplace, others complained of his want of theological doctrine; while others again remarked that it was well enough for a man to take to preaching who could not see to do anything else. But everywhere he was kindly received, for the story of his life had become generally known". 1. The novel ends in a

union between Thomasin and Diggory Venn. As Hardy admits, he did not originally intend this union. "But certain circumstances of serial publication led to a change of intent". Nevertheless, the grim sense of tragedy and frustration of the story is to some extent relieved at the end by this union.

It may be noted that *The Return of the Native* shows a kind of modern spirit in the conception of its characters, especially the character of its hero, Clym Yeobright. Sylvia Lynd, in her introduction to the novel, rightly calls Hardy modern in mind. To find out how wholly modern Hardy is and how immediate his opinions are, one need look at Hardy's portraiture of Clym in the beginning of the Third Book of *The Return of the Native*. Hardy's conception of man of future is embodied in Clym, who is the first of Hardy's idealists, who is all along conscious of the "ache of modernism" and whom Hardy called the nicest of his characters in his letter dated April 22, 1912 to a friend, an extract of which has been incorporated in *The Life of Thomas Hardy* by his second wife, Florence Emily Hardy.

"I got to like the character of Clym before I had done with him. I think he is the nicest of all my heroes, and not a bit like me". 2

Clym's countenance shows that he has faced utter disillusionment in life. For his life has lost all its glamour.

1. Thomas Hardy: *The Return of the Native*.
2. Florence Emily Hardy: *The life of Thomas Hardy*.
and is a thing to be endured. Depression has settled upon
his countenance like a cloud settling upon the sky, and
his natural cheerfulness cannot break through it. "In
Clym Yeobright's face could be dimly seen the typical
countenance of the future. Should there be a classical
period to art hereafter, its theidias may produce such
faces. The view of life as a thing to put up with, replacing
that zest for existence which was so intense in early
civilisations, must ultimately enter so thoroughly into
the constitution of the advanced races that its facial
expression will become accepted as a new artistic departure.
People already feel that a man who lives without disturbing
a curve of feature, or settling a mark of mental concern
anywhere upon himself, is too far removed from modern
perceptiveness to be modern type. Physically beautiful men -
the glory of the race when it was young - are almost an
anachronism now; and we may wonder whether, at some time
or other, physically beautiful women may not be an
anachronism likewise. The truth seems to be that a long line
of disillusioned centuries has permanently displaced the
Hellenic idea of life, or whatever it may be called. What
the Greeks only suspected we know well; what their Msculys
imagined our nursery children feel. That old fashioned
revelling in the general situation grows less and less
possible as we uncover the defects of natural laws, and
see the quandary that man is in by their operation". 1

1. Thomas Hardy: The Return of the Native.
Sylvia Lynd feels that this statement of Hardy is certainly a statement of the disillusionment of life. There is a little "revelling in the general situation" of life being lived right from Hardy's time to that of our own. But most of the Victorians in their smug complacency were in a habit of hiding the bitter truths of life. Thomas Hardy was unusual in that he did not hide what he had felt. He spoke his griefs and fears aloud to people who preferred to forget them.

The age of a modern man, as Hardy observes in this novel, should be measured not by the years but by the intensity of his history. And Clym as the perfect specimen of modern man has a face which is less indicative of the years passed and more indicative of the experiences encountered. His is a face, that like Father Time's in Jude the Obscure, foreshadows the countenance of the generations to come. Clym shows that "thought is a disease of flesh" and indirectly bears evidence to the fact that "ideal physical beauty is incompatible with emotional development and a full recognition of the coil of things". L

So far as his look is concerned, it is a kind of natural cheerfulness striving against depression from without, but not quite succeeding. Such a look suggests isolation; but it also reveals something more. As is unusual with his bright nature, "the deity that lies ignominiously chained within an ephemeral human carcase" 2, shines out of him.

1. Thomas Hardy: The Return of the Native.
2. Ibid : p.162
like a ray. Such a face and such a look are evidently the result of an awareness of living in a tragic age which, according to Cyril Connolly is an important aspect of modern movement. 1.

Clym has a way of thinking somewhat differently from that of the common run of mankind. He shows absolute indifference to worldly success or failure. So, it has become possible for him to leave the managerial job of a diamond trade in Paris in favour of a poor schoolmaster's profession in Egdon. He even becomes a forge cutter when he has nothing else to do. For him there is no difference between one kind of honest labour and another, and there is no antagonism between culture and manual labour. Clym thus typifies in him the dignity of manual labour, for which there is so much of emphasis in modern times.

Clym, as an idealist, has no illusion about the world. When he finds that this world is a vale of tears, where only a very few are destined to be happy, he begins to feel more deeply for mankind. He can no more be content to sell diamond to the idle rich. He is now conscious of the infinite sufferings of the poor. This is Clym's idealism, his altruism - his humanism. With a deep love for the poor and the have-nots, for the ignorant and the illiterate, for the lowliest and the lost, Clym wishes to raise the class at the expense of the individuals, rather than the

1. Cyril Connolly: Modern Movement
individuals at the expense of the class. What is more, he is at once ready to be the first unit sacrificed. He firmly believes that the want of most men is the knowledge of a sort which brings wisdom rather than affluence. He is imbued with the idea of plain living but high thinking.

Almost towards the end of the novel when Clym loses his mother as well his wife, he is found to be in a "wrinkled mind". The afflictions he has been subjected to, make some outward changes in his appearance; yet the alteration is chiefly within. Sometimes he thinks that "to be born is a palpable dilemma, and that in stead of men aiming to advance in life with glory they should calculate how to retreat out of it without shame". 1 This is surely a statement of utter disillusionment. One who has fallen upon the thorns of life and one bled. The same disillusioned mood of immensely tragic nature is also not quite uncommon among those of us who, with an infinitely high ambition, soar only to fall like dried and cramped leaves of autumn.

Clym is thus the best specimen of Hardy's modern man, while Eustacia his modern woman. The characters of both of them have been conceived from an enormous height. Clym is made the representative of modern man and man of the future, while Eustacia has been magnified into a splendid romantic figure. She has been described as the "queen of Night" and likened to the majestic charm of some pagan deity. Her very

presence brings memories of such things as roses, rubies and tropical midnights. Her moods recall "lotus-eaters, and the march in 'Athalie'; her actions the ebb and flow of the sea; her voice, the viola". In a dim light, and with a slight rearrangement of her hairs, her general figure stands almost like that of a higher female deity. But such celestial imperiousness, love, wrath and fervour are proved to have been somewhat thrown away on Egdon. She has limited power, and her consciousness of this limitation has affected her development. As Hardy discloses, "Egdon was her Hades, and since coming there she had imbied much of what was dark in its tone, though inwardly and eternally unreconciled thereto. Her appearance accorded well with this smouldering rebelliousness, and the shady splendour of her beauty was the real surface of the sad and stifled warmth within her". 2.

By reason of her celestial imperiousness, and her somewhat seductive magnetism, Bustacia can cast a spell upon all. Captain Vye leaves her alone to do what she likes. Wildeve hovers around her like a moth around a candle. Clym falls under the enchantment of this exotic flower. Charley has a distant and hopeless romantic adoration for her. One thing is however certain that such a dignified, magnetic and romantic woman cannot possibly become the fit wife of an idealist like Clym who wants to raise the class at the

2. Ibid : P.77
expense of the individuals. Although Buestacia has many
limitations and cannot become an ideal wife to an idealist
like Clym, yet she is undeniably endowed with a kind of
noble soul. It is because of her essential nobility that
she hates to be the mistress of Wildeve and prefers to
commit suicide. Her tragedy really is the tragedy of a
misfit, the tragedy of misplacement. She accuses Heaven for
the wrongs done to her: "How I have tried and tried to be
a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me!....
I do not deserve my lot! O, the cruelty of putting me into
this ill-conceived world! I was capable of much; but I have
been injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond my
control! O, how hard it is of Heaven to devise such
tortures for me, who have done no harm to Heaven at all!" 1.

Be it noted that in spite of so much of vitality, so much
of potentiality, and so much of the desire to be splendid,
Buestacia is crushed, and she is crushed by Egdon. Thus,
Egdon has its revenge on Buestacia because she revolted
against its serene and sombre spirit. The tragedy of
Buestacia is thus a tragedy of misplacement, a tragedy of
mal-adjustment between character and environment, which is
an inevitable fact of many a modern tragedy.

Arthur Symons in his A study of Thomas Hardy observes
that "Buestacia Vye is one of the greatest achievements in
modern fiction". 2. According to him, her imagination is

1. Thomas Hardy: The Return of the Native.
(Macmillan & Co. Ltd. London, 1930) P.420
2. Arthur Symons: A Study of Thomas Hardy
Published by Chas. J. Sawyer Ltd. Grafton House,
(MCM XXVII : London: Year not mentioned) P.44
complex and her beauty is subtle and passionate and sombre and enigmatical and, above all, intensely fascinating. There is in her an extra-ordinary mixture of good and evil; morbid, brooding, strangely sensitive and magnetically nervous. She is, in short, a mass of contradictions. She is unable to fathom the mystery of her being; at the same time she is immensely proud of her Southern beauty. There is in her a constant war between her instinct and impulse. She is, as Arthur Symons observes, tremendously lonely like the tremendous loneliness of Egdon Heath, and her tragedy results from her loneliness, from her misplacement into the lonely world of Egdon. Here is thus a tragedy caused by the incompatibility between character and environment.

It will perhaps not be out of place to point out the most vital difference between the Shakespearean tragedy and the Hardian tragedy. Shakespeare with his subtle sense of artistic finish and with an essential charity to his created beings kills both hero and heroine. But Hardy differs from Shakespeare in that he does not kill both of them. Hardy kills one and leaves the other alive but maimed. So, Duffin calls Hardy more cruel. Maybe Hardy is more cruel, but at the same time it suggests that Hardy is more true to life. Tragedy in real life does not often bring death to both the hero and heroine; either of them is dead, leaving the other to moan and to pine throughout his life. In this sense, Hardy is perhaps more true to life than Shakespeare, and his tragic masterpieces are based on a realistic perspective of what life generally does.
Hardy's third major novel, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, published in 1886 has the sub-title "A story of Man of character". It has little of the fatality of grimness of his early tragedies in which fate, chance and accidents have played the most vital role. Nevertheless, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* has a tragic grandeur and a grand catastrophe much larger and more painful than his early novels, arising not so much out of fate, chance or accidents, but out of character. In the whole novel its protagonist Michael Henchard is the domineering personality, and his personality stands in its stark and tragic grandeur. It is undoubtedly and unquestionably the story of a "Man of character".

It is upon this point, that is, tragedy issuing forth from character, that the modern relevance of the novel lingers. Character is after all the nucleus to make a man happy or unhappy in life, according to whether it allows or denies him an adjustment with the situation in which he is placed. And in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* the tragedy of its protagonist is essentially the tragedy of his character.

The novel records a state of transition in society from primitive forms to gradually modern forms of occupation. It charts the changes and disorders in the Southern English Communities, owing to severe disturbances in the agricultural and economic life of the English people in general. It explores a related disordering of human values, resulting from the introduction of new forms of commerce, as well as the disordering of human attitudes promoted by the gradual introduction of the modern forms of occupation. Its general tenor
reflects the pressure of powerful economic forces affecting particularly the Southern Agricultural districts of England. All these Hardy's imaginative art explores, not exactly as a detached observer, but with a feeling heart. The facts of agricultural life presented by Hardy are stern and sometimes bewildering, but nevertheless faithful. He has faithfully presented the predicament of the agricultural society under the pressure of powerful economic forces.

The Mayor of Casterbridge has a supremely good opening, reminding us at once of the opening of Far From the Madding Crowd. Yet there is a difference between these two novels in so far as their opening scenes are concerned. The opening scene of Far From the Madding Crowd is bright with sunshine and the joy of life, while that of The Mayor of Casterbridge is dark with silence, fear and pathos. The Henchard family of three, the husband, the wife and the two year old daughter, approach on foot the large village of Weydon-Priors in Upper Wessex.

The husband, Michael Henchard, a labourer, fit and skilled, is in search of a job like many young men of our own day seeking a job. His very clothes and his tools sufficiently indicate his class, sufficiently indicate the role that he plays in agriculture and in society. He appears at first less as a human being than as a representative of his class. His measured, springless walk is the walk of a skilled countryman. Each step of his foot is suggestive of his stern and swarthy aspect as well as his dogged indifference quite peculiar to himself.
The wife Susan Henchard is bright in sunlight and pale in shade. As Hardy tells us, the first is the work of nature; the second is the work of civilization which, by bringing many disturbing changes in economic and social life, tends to make many half-cynical and half-tragical in outlook, almost like that of a fatalist. "When she plodded on in the shade of the hedge, silently thinking, she had the hard, half-apathetic expression of one who deems anything possible at the hands of Time and Chance except, perhaps, fairplay" 1. As is common to people of all ages, particularly of the modern, the difficulties in the livelihood have evidently staled the relationship between the husband and wife and made the couple migrate from their village home in search of a livelihood.

The couple come to Weydon-Priors which offers neither work nor home. And the utter hopelessness implicit in the situation of this migratory labourer is first sounded through the voice of another labourer passing by.

"Pulling down is more the nature of Weydon. There were five houses cleared away last year, and three this; and the folk nowhere to go - no, not so much as a thatched hurdle; that's the way o' Weydon-Priors".2. It is the fair day, and the couple enter a furmity booth owned by an old woman.

But there is more in that tent than a cursory glance can

1. Thomas Hardy: The Mayor of Casterbridge
(Macmillan & Co. Ltd : London : 1964) P.8
2. Ibid : P.9
reveal. And the man, with his instinct of perverse character, can scent it immediately. He winks to the fumity woman who nods and understands its meaning. Immediately liquor is poured into his basin; it is rum; and Henchard drinks in spite of a protest from Susan.

Michael Henchard consumes four basins of rum consecutively. He rises to serenity at the end of the first basin; at the end of the second he becomes jovial; at the end of the third he is argumentative; and at the end of the fourth he is overbearing and conspicuously quarrelsome. As it happens on such occasions, his conversation takes a serious turn. The theme of it is given by Hardy:

"The ruin of good men by bad wives, and, more particularly, the frustration of many a promising youth's high aims and hopes and the extinction of his energies by an early imprudent marriage, was the theme*. 1. This is all the effect of wine upon him. It has paralysed his outward senses and brought to the fore the truth lying hidden in the subconscious.

Henchard's frustration arising out of early marriage is not something peculiar; nor is it something peculiar to a late nineteenth century youth doomed to frustration by an early marriage. The frustration of an early marriage is rather more keenly felt by the youth of our own age, and many of them, like Henchard, appear to take refuge in liquor just to drown their senses of frustration.

When the liquor has completely paralysed the outward senses of Henchard, the voice of an auctioneer selling the old horses in the field outside is being heard. It gives a clue to the frustrated husband, and he also proposes to put his wife on auction. At first the other customers present in the tent regard it as a piece of sardonic comedy. But it is gradually found that the man is in grim earnest, and he actually sells his wife to a sailor for five guineas, of course under the influence of liquor. Susan, the wife, as a simple and an innocent woman, does not question the legality of the transaction. With a bitter sob she takes up her child and walks away with her buyer and disappears in the darkness. For evening has by then set in. Outwardly Susan is calm and placid, but perhaps beneath her placidity there lies a resentment at the wrongs and ill-temper she has so long been subjected to. Next morning, when the influence of liquor is over, Henchard comes to his senses. He is now full of remorse for his wife and daughter. But he knows neither the name of the sailor nor his whereabouts; and all his attempts at tracing out his nearest kins prove futile. At last Henchard enters a Church and takes a solemn vow to abstain from drinking for the next twenty-one years. He is then aged twenty-one.

This is the opening scene of The Mayor of Casterbridge, which is one of the most striking in the whole range of modern English fiction. It also serves as an admirable beginning for the novel. It at once arrests the attention of
the reader and leaves him on a curiosity to know what follows next. The very opening incident of the novel also throws a flood of light on the character as well as the relation of the husband and wife. Long suffering has blunted their feeling for each other, and the husband would fain get rid of her. Hence in a reckless vein, under the influence of liquor he has broached the idea of selling his wife by auction. The proceeding begins in a serio-comic mood but ends in the most unexpected manner. It brings the reckless husband to his senses. The softer side of his nature asserts itself and he will fain undo his work. Thus, beneath the hard crust which poverty has brought upon his character, there is still a genial feeling soul. The fountain of affection in him has not yet run dry, though it is flowing intermittently. The wife shows herself as an embodiment of passive suffering, a sort of patient Griselda. There is something pathetic in her quiescence and meek acceptance of her fate. It is the prelude to the painful drama of Henchard's life, the long drawn suffering that is in store for him. Hardy is really a master of the opening scene, and the opening scene of The Mayor of Casterbridge strikes the key-note of the whole work.

Henchard is found again after long eighteen years. By dint of sincerity, industry and perseverance he prospers in life and is now at the height of distinction and affluence. He is now a prosperous businessman and the elected mayor of the town of Casterbridge, where he has since got settled.
During this interval Susan has been known as Susan News on after the name of her new owner. Susan and Newsom migrate to Canada where Newsom makes a living by doing odd jobs. Henchard's daughter dies and Susan gets a new baby by the sailor. For a time she lives happily with the sailor undisturbed by any qualms of conscience. But one day Susan discloses her story to one of her acquaintances. She questions the propriety of Susan's relation with the sailor. Since then her peace of mind is lost. In the meantime a rumour is heard that Newsom has been drowned. It makes her free to seek out Henchard and to return to him.

In search of Henchard the mother and the daughter start for Weydon-Priors and reach its fair. Susan notices how the years have told upon this traditional fair. It has no doubt registered some mechanical improvements, but its real business has considerably dwindled. "The new periodical great markets of neighbouring towns were beginning to interfere seriously with the trade carried on here for centuries. The pens for sheep, the tie-ropes for horses, were about half as long as they had been. The stalls of tailors, hosiers, coopers, linen-drapers, and other such trades had almost disappeared, and the vehicles were far less numerous." 1. The changes brought about in the fair of Weydon-Priors by the forces of time also imply a change in the age-old and accustomed agricultural societies of the South. Having come to the fair, the mother calls at the old

furnity woman's shop. Once upon a time the furnity woman was young and had quite a flourishing trade. But now she has become old and her once flourishing trade has fallen into wretchedness. Her lamentable state suggests the poignant incapacity of the tight-knit local societies to withstand the shocks of change. They simply disintegrate. The old furnity woman "opens the sluices of her heart" to speak her elegy; and a vital part of Hardy's imagination resides in this sense of loss. The furnity woman's comment on the mode of the new economy is most significant: "But Lord's my life - the world's no memory; straightforward dealings don't bring profit - 'tis the sly and the underhand that get on in these times! " So the new economy is felt to bear upon the old community; it has contributed much to the disintegration of the settled communities of the old. It is significant to note that in our own times some of us share almost the same view as that of the old furnity woman.

The new generation, however, makes its voice heard through the daughter quite in a disconcerting way. The daughter does not like that her mother should enter that old and shabby furnity booth. "Don't speak to her - it isn't respectable! " 2 And she does not follow her mother to the dirty furnity booth, and when the mother returns, the daughter further says: "Mother, do let's go on - it was hardly respectable for you to buy refreshments there. I see none but the lowest do." 3.

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2. Ibid : P.25
3. Ibid : P.28
So, in stead of accompanying her mother to the dirty shop, Elizabeth Jane turns to the stalls of coloured prints. It is thus evident that Elizabeth Jane, like any sensitive modern young woman, has developed as sense of new middle class respectability due to the importation of new economy and also a keen desire to see, to know and to understand. "How could she become a woman of wider knowledge, higher repute - 'better' as she termed it - this was her constant inquiry of her mother."

From the furmity woman Susan is furnished with a dim knowledge of her husband's whereabouts. Accordingly, the mother and the daughter go to Casterbridge, which is characteristically an agricultural town, untouched by the faintest sprinkle of modernism. It is a compact box of dominoes, without any suburbs in the ordinary sense, country and town meet at a mathematical line. The agricultural character of the town is apparent from the nature of the objects hung on the shop windows, such as, scythes, reap-hooks, sheep shears and some such things. In the chemist's shop, there are horse-embrocations; at the machinist's carts, wheel-barrows and mill-gears etc.

In the town stands St. Peter's Church, old and weather-beaten whose massive square tower rises high into the sky. The joints of the walls are visible, and there are vegetable growths in the crevices. The curfew, which is still in vogue in Casterbridge, is rung from the towers of the Church and

serves as the signal for shutting the shops. Besides the
curfew, other clocks chime from time to time, one from the
jail, one from the almshouse and others from the clock-
maker’s shop. All these constitute the chief charm of the
Casterbridge town.

Time, the great magician, has wrought much change in
Henchard since he was last seen by his wife. He is now about
forty years of age, of competent frame, large features and
of commanding voice. As the Mayor of the town he is found to
preside over the great public dinner at King’s Arms. The
feast and revelry run high. Port, sherry and rums are
served in plenty. But the glasses before the Mayor are empty
and he is drinking only large quantities of water. It shows
how Henchard is true to his vow. He has a vow not to drink
and so he does not drink. Henchard is certainly a man of
iron will and firm determination. It knows no half way
compromise. Speeches follow, and the voice of Henchard
becomes quite audible. As it happens in modern business
world, a sharper always tries to befool a simpleton; like-
wise Henchard was once about to be befooled by a sharper
in corn trade, but ultimately Henchard rather outwitted him.
This is Henchard’s patent humour; it also earns applause
of the audience. But beneath this general humour, there is
an irritable temper which expresses itself when a minor
tradesman interrupts Henchard with reference to his supply
of bad corn which has been the current topic of the whole
town. It is the same temper which once when intensified,
banished his wife and daughter eighteen years ago.
Having reached Casterbridge, the mother and the daughter take shelter in Three Mariners' Inn for the night. A brilliant young Scotchman named Donald Farfrae is also putting up in the same hotel. He is like any modern young man inquisitive, informative and with a desire to see the world. For, when Henchard wants to appoint him the manager of his establishment, he courteously refuses the offer. "I wish I could stay - sincerely I would like to. But no - it cannot be! It cannot! I want to see the world". Farfrae is also a very good singer. In the night's revelry at Three Mariners, he presents a few songs at the request of the master tradesmen. These songs are very much appreciated by his listeners who are not without sentiment or romance, and they seem to discover in the young man's song a voice of their own deeper feelings. Hardy observes that "he was to them like the poet of a new school who takes his contemporaries by storm; who is not really new, but is the first to articulate what all his listeners have felt, though but dumbly till then". 2

Almost at the very first sight Henchard has taken a keen fancy for the young Scotchman; he is convinced of the latter's worth and requests him to stay with him for the purpose of management of his business. It was by physical strength and exertion that Henchard had built up his business firm. But mere physical energy is not enough to maintain it.

2. Ibid : P.57
What is needed to keep it going is the power of judgement and wisdom. So Henchard says: "In my business, 'tis true that strength and bustle build up a firm, but judgment and knowledge are what keep it established." This is the expression of a kind of truth which is common to all men of all ages. Henchard knows that he lacks in these qualities; he is also very weak in arithmetic and calculation so very essential to a modern business organisation.

Farfrae, as the specimen of an intelligent and creative modern youngman, possesses sound judgment and the knowledge of arithmetic and calculation without which a modern business establishment can hardly run. On being too much pressed, Farfrae at last accedes to Henchard's request and stays with him to look after Henchard's business as its Manager.

After long eighteen years comes the much desired meeting between the husband and the wife. It takes place at the Roman Amphitheatre which is locally called the Ring. This melancholy, lonely and imposing place has long been used by the people of Casterbridge for secret appointments. Intrigues are arranged here; tentative meetings are also experimented here after divisions and feuds. But there is one kind of appointment, namely, of happy lovers which seldom takes place in the amphitheatre. From a long time the place has a sinister and gloomy association which renders it unfit for happy meetings of lovers. There is

the town-gallows nearby; the sanguinary executions, especially the burning of a woman who murdered her husband, impart an unusual horror to the place. And it is in such a place as this that Hardy arranges the much desired meeting between Henchard and Susan after their long separation for eighteen years. Perhaps Hardy, thereby, wants to suggest that this meeting and its resultant re-union between the husband and wife are not likely to lead to enduring peace and happiness.

After the meeting at amphitheatre things proceed rapidly towards the re-union between the husband and wife. One November morning both of them drive to the church and are wedded. As the pair come out of the church, Christopher Coney, Solomon Longways, Nance Mockridge, Mother Cuxsom and some others expound and discuss the matter according to their own light.

Meanwhile the great corn and hay traffic, so long conducted by Henchard somehow, begins to thrive much under the superior management of Farfrae. "It had formerly moved in jolts; now it went on oiled castors. The old crude viva voce system of Henchard, in which everything depended upon his memory, and bargains were made by the tongue alone, was swept away". 1 In stead, there are now letters and ledgers as are found in modern business houses. Henchard has, of course, a very poor opinion of Farfrae's slim physical girth; but it is more than counterbalanced by Henchard's immense

respect for Farfrae's brains. Indeed, in modern age a man is respected more for his brains than for his physical strength, and from this angle Farfrae may be looked upon more as a man of our own generation and less as a man of the age Henchard represents.

Farfrae is thus quite indispensible to Henchard. But soon comes the rupture. Hardy seems to have suggested that at the very moment when the foundation of their friendship had been laid, the seeds of ruin were also sown. Hardy makes Farfrae serve as a foil to Henchard. Henchard is haughty, tyrannical, and sacrifices all shreds of decency when he is angry. Farfrae, on the other hand, is cool, thoughtful and considerate. The manner in which Abel Whittle is treated by each of them illustrates the difference in their temper. Gradually the star of Henchard begins to set, while that of Farfrae begins to rise. It is whispered among the employees of the firm that Farfrae is well tempered and quite intelligent, while Henchard is a dolt, an idiot. The opinion of Farfrae is eagerly sought for by people in all affairs, and they want him to be the master of the place in stead of Henchard. Henchard notes all these with great agony and views his rival with jealousy. Here is the beginning of the breach between impetuous cordiality and genial modesty, between prudence and imprudence, between impulse and reason, between emotion and wisdom and between the ancient and modern.
It makes Henchard to be more formal and less cordial to Farfrae. By about this time Farfrae makes an arrangement for a public rejoicing in celebration of a contemporary national event. Seized with jealousy Henchard also wants to put up a similar show just to out-rival Farfrae. Like any modern public show, Farfrae also charges a nominal amount as admission fee. But the Mayor's show is a free show, even with elaborate arrangement of entertaining the visitors with tea, free of charge. The Mayor's show is held in an open space; it is eventually marred by the equal of rain. Farfrae is prudent enough to have provided for the vagaries of weather, and so his show is a tremendous success. The whole town crowd in to Farfrae's show, such a delightful idea of a ball-room never having occurred to the inhabitants of Casterbridge before. In a fit of jealousy Henchard dismisses Farfrae. Now the breach between the two is complete; and it finally results in Henchard being completely defeated in all spheres, in business, in love and even in Mayoralty.

After his dismissal Farfrae sets up an independent business for himself. He has opened the gate of commerce on his own account at a spot on Durnover Hill. Farfrae on his part is far from intending, much less acting on, rivalry. He should do nothing which may adversely affect the business of his erstwhile master. But when Henchard makes it known that he is bent upon ruining Farfrae's trade, the latter finds himself helpless. Henchard tries to outbid
Farfrae in the price of corn, and Farfrae, too, can rise to the occasion and is able to get the better of his rival. The fight between the two is really a fight between shrewdness and dexterity of the Scotchman and tenacity and temper of Henchard. Varying the metaphor one may call it a fight between the 'dirk and cudgel' between Northern insight and Southern doggedness. The combat is decided in favour of Farfrae who ultimately holds Henchard in his power. Henchard becomes a victim of his own character.

Following Susan's death Elizabeth Jane is so much tortured by her step father that the unfortunate girl is forced to flee to the shelter of Henchard's lover, Miss Lucetta Templeman. The lady receives Elizabeth with genuine warmth of affection and it makes her suffer from a lurking fear that such a treatment is too good to last for her.

"Fancies find room in the strongest minds." 1. Hardy, here, suggests the all time truth that even the strong-minded people sometimes indulge in idle thoughts about their own future. As has been rightly apprehended by Elizabeth, it becomes a cruel irony of fate that the lady, who takes her so kindly, soon turns out to be her most formidable rival for the love of Farfrae.

Now that the barrier is removed in Susan's death, Lucetta comes to be settled at Casterbridge with the obvious intention of marrying Henchard. Being glad at the prospect of marriage, Henchard goes to see Lucetta but is informed

that she is engaged for that evening and she would be glad to receive Henchard the next day. But here again Henchard's imperious nature stands in the way. So sentimental Henchard is that as he was refused on the previous day, he does not go to meet Lucetta the next day. Lucetta, on the other hand, is longingly waiting for him; yet there is no Henchard. She is so full of Henchard that she sends Elizabeth out for an excursion to the museum and sends a note requesting Henchard to visit the High Place Hall. She will be all alone to receive him. Having sent the note, Lucetta has been waiting for Henchard with an artistic pose so as to captivate the man of her longing. As soon as the step of a man is heard on the stairs, Lucetta is hardly able to keep up her artistic pose, perhaps because of her strong natural feelings for the caller who is supposed to be Henchard. In spite of the waning of passion the situation for her is an agitating one, for she has not seen Henchard since his temporary parting from her in Jersey. Hardy observes that for such an agitating situation as this, Nature is too strong for Art to assert itself; and none can perhaps question the universal validity of Hardy's observation.

The caller is not Henchard but Henchard's erstwhile Manager Farfrae, now his rival in business and is being destined to be his rival in love too. He has evidently come to enquire about Miss. Henchard. In course of his conversation with Lucetta, Farfrae echoes the modern sentiment
that as a Schotchman he is very eager to live in his motherland; at the same time he cannot ignore Casterbridge which is the source of his livelihood. "It's better to stay at home, and that's true; but a man must live where his money is made." 1 Such rational outlook, the outlook of a modern man, makes Lucetta regard him with critical interest. She is amazed to discover the curious double strands in Farfrae's thread of life, the poetic and the practical, the romantic and the commercial. She kindles the youngman's enthusiasm, while she herself is also not safe from the dart of Cupid. It is a case of love at the first sight. And who loved but not loved at the first sight?

In this age of transition from old to new ways of life and living, machines gradually begin to be introduced; and in Casterbridge town Farfrae is their prime demonstrator. At his instance a "new-fashioned agricultural implement called a horse-drill, till then unknown, in its modern shape, in this part of the country" 2 has been brought on a market day for exhibition. Good many people including Lucetta and Elizabeth gather about the place to have a look at the machine. Partly from ignorance and partly from his ill-will to Farfrae Henchard has a contempt for it. But Farfrae is quite hopeful about its usefulness. He says: "It will revolutionize sowing hereabout!" 3 Each grain

1. Thomas Hardy: The Mayor of Casterbridge
2. Ibid : P.168
3. Ibid : P.170
will go straight to its intended place. In short, modernisation of agriculture gradually begins to set in by a man like Farfrae who is much ahead of his time.

Meanwhile, Henchard's passion for Lucetta is quickened and he has now a strong desire to possess her. Accordingly he visits her in the absence of Elizabeth. The first thing that strikes Henchard on her visit to Lucetta's house is her set of furniture. Lucetta, more advanced than many of the Casterbridge folk, and with her somewhat modern notion of luxurious living, has brought these furniture from London. Casterbridge can claim it not until 50 years of civilization has passed. Henchard has evidently come to propose for the hands of Lucetta. But she dismisses Henchard with deliberate coldness. Lucetta resolves to cling to Farfrae and not to be a slave to her past. Elizabeth passively watches the love tangle among these three persons - Lucetta, Farfrae and Henchard. Her native instinct tells her that Farfrae's love is the unforced passion of youth, while Henchard's is the acquisitive of mature age. She also feels, not without a touch of slight pain, how the two men are drawn to Lucetta, while she herself is now pushed to the backstage. It has always happened to her that she is granted what she does not desire and that she is not granted what she desires. She, however, stoically endures the neglect of Farfrae and wonders what Heaven has in store for her next.
The sense of rivalry in love, superadded to the rivalry in business, inflames the soul of Henchard. To regain his lost love and to re-instate himself in prosperity he is now bent upon crushing Farfrae's trade. So, Jopp, the Manager who was replaced by Farfrae's timely arrival, is now appointed by Henchard as his Manager. Acting on his advice as well as on the weather prophet, superstitious as he is, Henchard invests his entire fortune in buying all the available stocks of wheat. He intends to overbuy and undersell Farfrae. But the god of weather smiles an ironical smile upon him. The threatening weather takes an unexpected turn for the better and leaves Henchard a completely ruined man. Henchard has been steadily losing ground in popular estimation and now this financial ruin rounds off his tragedy. It has been rightly said that Henchard's character is his destiny. His insensate jealousy and impulsive nature have involved him in commercial rivalry with Farfrae who, by his rational and modern outlook, has come to be regarded as the man of destiny. The wheel comes full circle and Henchard is crushed. It may be noted, however, that in spite of his jealous and impulsive nature Henchard does never show any meanness. He intends to ruin Farfrae by fair competition. "By fair competition I mean, of course," he says. Hardy observes: "That character deteriorate in time of need possibly did not occur to Henchard." 1

Meanwhile there has been steady social and moral degradation of Henchard. His social degradation from a

respectable man in society is brought about by the sensational revelation of his scandalous past by the old furmity woman in the Court, while his moral degradation from an honest businessman is brought about by his failure in maintaining a strict correspondence between the stock and the sample. This is, of course, the mistake of one of his employees. Such disparity between stock and sample is undoubtedly a common feature of the modern trade, and Hardy by alluding it undoubtedly gives a modern touch to his novel. But Henchard is not so easily broken down. He behaves manfully at the meeting of the bankruptcy commissioners and his conduct wins the admiration of all the members present in the meeting. Like a rose that smells sweetest when bruised, Henchard's character, under the stroke of calamity, evinces all its noble qualities - his manliness, honesty and his defiance of misfortune.

While Henchard is rapidly falling from eminence, Farfrae is rapidly rising to it. Soon comes the news that Lucetta and Farfrae have been married. Henchard's house, his business and his furniture, too, have already passed into the hands of Frafrae. It only wrings out a pathetic cry from his broken heart - "Surely he'll buy my body and soul like wise ! " 1. But Farfrae feels no triumphant glee over the defeat of his rival. He is rather anxious to help Henchard. He invites Henchard to live with him in his old house and use some of his old furniture, since bought

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by Farfrae. But Henchard's insensate pride and hatred for the man does not allow him to accept the offer. He, however, accepts the employment of a journeyman hay-trusser under Farfrae. His cup of misery will be full to the brim with Farfrae's election to the Mayoral office, and this is the current rumour at Casterbridge. This is too much for Henchard to bear, and to escape his mental agony, he has the recourse to drinking again. Financial degradation follows moral degradation, and after long twentyone years, he takes to drinking. Wine as a means of escape from unbearable mental affictions has become almost a universal phenomenon. And Henchard, like many men of our own age and of other ages, takes refuge in wine to drown his sorrows of life.

The volcanic stuff of Henchard's character which was held in check so long by moderation and prosperity, is at once let loose. Working as a journeyman hay-trusser in Farfrae's farm yard a sense of contrast between his past and present almost drives him mad, and he insults Mrs. Lucetta Farfrae with biting sarcasms. Similar to class conscious labour force of the present generation, Henchard seems to have now become conscious of his own class and draws a contrast between the labour of the lower class and the leisure of the upper class. He addresses Mrs. Farfrae:

"Ah, ma'am we of the lower classes know nothing of the gay leisure that such as you enjoy!" 1

1. Thomas Hardy; The Mayor of Casterbridge. (Macmillan & Co. Ltd: London ; 1961) P.237
With the death of Doctor Chalkfield, the present
Mayor, Farfrae steps on to the Mayoralty. Feeling much
embittered Henchard is bent upon wrecking his rival's
happiness by disclosing to him his wife's amorous past.
He will bring about a deliberate catastrophe. But in the
supreme moment of action his heart fails to do it in a
cold blooded manner. The fact is that Henchard is not a
born villain; he cannot ruin others by some deliberate
act like a confirmed criminal. He becomes cynical about the
feminine virtues and takes pity on the poor woman. With
a generous heart he hands over all those love letters
written by Lucetta to Henchard in the past, to Jopp for
delivery to her, little knowing that a far greater
catastrophe is still in the offing. Curiosity makes Jopp
unseal the packet and preparation follows for a "Skimmity-
ride" at Mixen Lane. "Skimmity-ride" was a ludicrous
procession, formerly common in villages and country districts,
usually intended to put a woman to ridicule or her husband
when one is unfaithful to the other. The husband and wife
were sometimes represented by the living actors and some-
times by the stuffed dummies, as in the present case. The
expenses of the "Skimmity ride" are to be borne by a
sailor named Newson, who was the other chief actor of the
auction sale of Henchard's wife with which the novel opens.

For such a piece of downright villainy Mixen Lane is
supposed to be most suitable. Hardy shows a rare power in
bringing out the essential facts of this sinister locality.
He endows it almost with a malignant personality. The place
is the soul of evils; vice, debauchery, shame and murder
find their proper hiding place in Mixen Lane. Hence,
when a human being is brought within the orbit of its in­
fluence, we may at once be sure that the result would be
disastrous. Almost like Egdon Heath in *The Return of the
Native*, Mixen Lane is a super-human protagonist, making
or marring the fates of the puny human personalities
that come under its spell. Egdon Heath and Mixen Lane
virtually differ, not in character, but in degree only.

In the mean time comes the memorable visit of a
Royal Personage, who is on his west-ward journey to inau­
gurate an immense engineering work. He has agreed to halt
at Casterbridge for half an hour. The Corporation of
Casterbridge has decided to present him an address of honour
and welcome in recognition of the great services rendered
by him to the cause of "agricultural science and economics,
by his zealous promotion of designs for placing the art of
farming on a more scientific footing." L. Hardy, here,
demonstrates that with the gradual industrialisation,
mechanisation of agriculture and scientific system of
farming, gradual modernisation of these areas of the South
is already in the process. The visit of the Royal Personage
is symbolic of such modernisation. The visit of the Royal
Personage has, however, nothing to do with Henchard
because he is now nobody in the Casterbridge Corporation.
But the occasion reminds Henchard of his hay days and he
refuses to be disallowed to take part in the function.

1. **Thomas Hardy: The Mayor of Casterbridge.**
Henchard's conduct in the Town Hall shows his insanity; and humiliation and despair drive him mad. He plans to kill Farfrae, the doer of the outrage. He pinions his left arm in order to fight with the weaker man on a term of equality. Henchard may be an enemy, but he is no bad enemy, and even in his plan of revenge his inner sense of justice does not leave him. At last, when he has Farfrae completely at his mercy, his heart fails within him, and he loosens his grip over him. Like a child he flings himself before Farfrae: "God is my witness that no man ever loved another as I did thee at one time... And now - though I came here to kill thee, I cannot hurt thee! Go and give me in charge - do what you will - I care nothing for what comes of me!" 1. His mental equilibrium is completely lost.

The day of the Royal visit is the day of highest triumph both for Farfrae and Lucetta. Farfrae, as the Mayor, receives the Royal Personage, reads the address and converses with the illustrious person. Lucetta, as the Mayor's wife, shakes hands with the Royal Personage. This day of highest glory for the couple also proves to be the day of greatest misery for them. For, on the very same day, in the afternoon, the husband is about to be killed in a duel by Henchard, while the wife is killed by the sinister "Skimmity Ride" arranged by Jopp and his companions. Hardy seems to be quite fond of combining such contrasted events, perhaps to heighten the tragic effect of his stories.

1. Thomas Hardy: The Mayor of Casterbridge
The death of Lucetta is quite upsetting to Henchard. Frustrated, disappointed and shocked he now begins to consider Elizabeth to be the only prop of his blasted life. She is now his only object of affection in the world. The day after Lucetta's death, a stranger calls at Henchard's place. He is Newson, the sailor. Now that Susan is dead, Newson has come to claim his daughter. Henchard tells him a deliberate lie that Elizabeth is dead. It solves the problem temporarily; but the possibility of its future development cannot be ruled out. Henchard lives under constant fear that the truth may be revealed some day. The thought of his loneliness tells upon his mind and Henchard thinks in terms of committing suicide. As Hardy observes: "Susan, Farfrae, Lucetta, Elizabeth - all had gone from him, one after one, either by his fault or by his misfortune." Henchard has no zest for life, not even a desire to keep him up. Only music can, perhaps, keep him up, for it has a sovereign influence upon him. This is another side of Henchard's character. There is characteristically a Shakespearean touch in Hardy's delineation of men. Almost all his heroes are keenly sensitive to music.

Driven to despair Henchard goes to the riverside apparently to commit suicide. But he cannot commit suicide. Fate has more miseries and indignities in store for him, as though his cup of suffering is yet not full. The chance

sight of his own floating effigy strikes him with supernatual fear and he shrieks back from his fatal resolution. It may be noted that Henchard shows in him a modern tendency to learn, and all through his life he has tried to learn; but the more he has learnt, the more ignorant he has become. He confesses: "I don't know so much as I could wish. I have tried to peruse and learn all my life; but the more I try to know the more ignorant I seem". But in spite of his modern aptitude of learning, Henchard is incurably superstitious and believes in miracles. Elisabeth, who is more modern than Henchard, feels that no miracles really exist: "I don't quite think there are any miracles nowadays." Finding him sad and lonely Elisabeth proposes to stay with Henchard. He is indeed overjoyed and readily gives her the necessary permission. For the first time after many days Henchard shaves himself, puts on clean linen and combs his hair. It shows how eagerly he longs for a little affection.

Once again Henchard, after his spiritual gloom, regains his mental composure and lives happily with his step daughter. But Hardy will not allow this man, who is marked out for doom, any respite from misery. On the one hand the fear of Newsom constantly haunts him; on the other hand Farfrae's renewed interest in Elisabeth, after Lucetta's death, revives his ancient jealousy. Though

2. Ibid : P. 207
Henchard may be personally benefited by the union between Farfrae and Elizabeth, but out of his characteristic abnormality, he hates the idea. Henchard at once decides to leave Casterbridge for an unknown and unsettled destination. His last words to Elizabeth breathe a soft and tender pathos. The scene of his departure is really moving. Henchard disappears from Casterbridge for good as an out-cast, as a vagabond. It has the austere simplicity of a great tragedy.

Closely following this moving scene of parting, Hardy brings in another scene of re-union, the re-union between the long-lost father and the daughter. What follows is a pure joy and it relieves to some extent the tragic pathos of the novel. Even in the moment of joy, Henchard, the doomed man, is not forgotten. Newson takes a charitable view of Henchard's life, and through Newson, Hardy's sympathy for this man of many sorrows seems to find its unique expression.

Elizabeth is the fruit of a strange union between Susan and the sailor. Such a union has neither legal, social nor moral sanction. Yet, it is a surprising mystery that out of this strange and non-moral union has sprung up a girl, the like of whom can seldom be seen in any civilised society. Elizabeth, indeed, is the jewel of a woman, the perfect flower of nature. "It was an odd sequence that out of all this tampering with social law came that flower of Nature, Elizabeth." 1 In the birth of Elizabeth Henchard finds a blindness and perversity of Nature in supporting immoral

1. Thomas Hardy: The Mayor of Casterbridge.
relations between man and woman. Neither society nor morality does ever support such union as between Susan and Newson, but Nature does. It makes Henchard feel, like many modern men and women, that Nature is full of anomalies and inconsistencies; Nature is most mysterious. Far from expecting justice, man should be ready to get injustice, in the hands of Nature. Hardy, here, evinces a mind which is certainly revolutionary and much ahead of his time. Contrary to orthodox social principles and conventional morality of the Victorian Age, Hardy has created his heroine as the gem of a woman out of the supposed unlawful, immoral and unconventional process.

The very awareness of his immoral act of having sold his wife on auction and of Nature's "Contrarious inconsistencies" in supporting unorthodox social principles fills Henchard with disgust for life. It partly leads him to retire into seclusion, far away from the known society. Like a frustrated man as having missed almost the every bus of life, he often expresses his genuine disgust for life: "Here and everywhere be folk dying before their time like frosted leaves, though wanted by their families, the country, and the world; while I, an outcast, an encumberer of the ground, wanted by nobody, and despised by all, live on against my will! "1. Although Henchard has retired into seclusion, yet his mind is still occupied by Elizabeth.

From a casual talk of some passers-by Henchard comes to know

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1. Thomas Hardy: The Mayor of Casterbridge
   (Macmillan & Co. Ltd; London; 1961) P.319-20
of the impending marriage of Elizabeth with Farfrae. He at once resolves to join it. He buys a caged goldfinch, a fitting symbol of Henchard's own life, a wedding gift for Elizabeth, and proceeds to Farfrae's. It shows Henchard's infinite capacity for loving, the warmth of his heart, that is still clinging to its object, and that does not allow him to think of the consequence at all. But Elizabeth's mind is already vitiated against Henchard for his deliberate lies to Newson and she treats him coldly. It shocks Henchard so much that he is unable to bear it any longer. At once he leaves her house assuring Elizabeth that he will not darken her doors ever again.

The coldness of Elizabeth's reception of Henchard and her admonition of him for the lie seems to be ill-timed. Had the girl understood the fierce flame of love that was still burning in him and that had brought him hither on the scene of her marriage, she would not perhaps, have the heart to scold him in the manner she did. It is really shocking that Elizabeth, the gem of a woman, totally fails to understand the depth of Henchard's love for her. Henchard is a man more sinned against than sinning; and there is something pungently pathetic in the fate he encounters throughout the whole course of his life. After about a month of Henchard's departure his caged goldfinch, now dead, is discovered in a screened corner of the garden.

2. Thomas Hardy: The Mayor of Casterbridge (Humphrey & Co., 1904; Macmillan: 1886)
Elizabeth comes to know that this was Henchard's wedding gift to her as well as a token of his repentance. Her mind is filled with a deep feeling of sorrow. She begs Donald to find him out, for she wants to make peace with the wronged man. After a good deal of inquiries and search in every nook and corner of the neighbourhood, they could obtain the news at last. But it is too late; Henchard is already dead just a while ago.

Thus, the erstwhile Mayor of Casterbridge, the man who once upon a time at the acme of honour and prosperity, ended his life in a deserted house, attended in his last moment by none but one of his former employees, Abel Whittle who was, of course, not treated well by Henchard, while Abel was in his employment. Abel shows a piece of paper to Farfrae and Elizabeth; it contains Henchard's last testament written down in pencil by Henchard himself.

Henchard's last testament runs as:

"That Elizabeth-Jane Farfrae be not told of my death, or made to grieve on account of me.

'& That I be not bury'd in consecrated ground.

'& that no sexton be asked to toll the bell.

'& that nobody is wished to see my dead body.

'& that no mourners walk behind me at my funeral.

'& that no flowers be planted on my grave.

'& that no man remember me.

' To this I put my name.

'Michael Henchard' "

The grim bitterness of the will is recognised by Elisabeth as the piece of the same stuff that his whole life was made of and is not to be tampered with. All Hardy's art goes into imagining Henchard's death rather as a loss in community than as the death of an individual self. He is an agricultural man defeated in the battle of life, and his vitality flows out with his last testament. He leaves no posterity behind; his only one foster child is also united to his young rival and his successor. He leaves behind nothing but his last testament. It is the voice that speaks the language of the old traditional sanctities, now fractured and discarded. The curt testament with the social pieties of funeral still living in its authoritative phrase, amounts only to a self annihilation; it amounts to a self repudiation; and yet by signing the name to a last transaction, he makes it a deed of gift. Thus, Henchard in his last act repudiates and revolts against the age old tradition which he valued so much in his lifetime.

There is quiet grandeur and artistic restraint in Hardy's description of Henchard's profoundly tragic end. The novel ends with its last words about Elizabeth Jane. She realises how a reasonable person should see and be ready to put up with life's little compensations. Hardy observes that "her strong sense that neither she nor any human being deserved less than was given, did not blind her to the fact that there were others receiving less who had deserved much more". 1. This is just the reasonable

thinking of a person of an age of reason. It leaves us
with the taste of some thing other than sheer hopelessness.
It perhaps conveys a gentler philosophy of life. The
painful experiences of her life have enabled her to
understand and appreciate the higher values of life. Not
unlike many reflective people of our own age, Elizabeth
has gradually come to realise "that happiness was but the
occasional episode in the general drama of pain". 1. This
is perhaps the kernel of Hardy's philosophy of life.
Using the dramatic metaphor, Hardy wants to say
that pain is the rule of life, while joy is the exception;
pain is the drama and joy is the interlude. This is the
lesson that Elizabeth, like her creator, has received
in the hard school of life.

Albert J. Guerard observes in his essay: "On The Mayor
of Casterbridge" that Henchard is Hardy's Lord Jim and he
stands at the very summit of Hardy's achievement. He is
one of the greatest tragic heroes in all fictions. He has
an assured place among the towering figures of Melville,
Hawthorne and Dostoevsky. As a man of character he is
obsessed by guilt and so committed to his own destruction.
"He (Henchard) anticipates not merely Lord Jim and the
Rasumov of Under Western Eyes but also Michel of André's
Gide's L'Immoraliste." 2. It shows Henchard's immortality

1. Thomas Hardy: The Mayor of Casterbridge.
2. The Victorian Novel: Modern Essays in criticism
(edited by Ian Watt: Oxford University Press: 1971) P. 401
as a tragic hero. He is undoubtedly one of the greatest tragic heroes of the time.

According to Frederick A. Kerl "Hardy's Henchard, although dwarfed by his natural surroundings, isolated by his townsmen and made absurd by his grotesque acts, is still of heroic stature, evidently a nineteenth century counterpart of an Aeschylean or Euripidean protagonist." 1 Frederick A. Kerl has further observed that Henchard is unable to be free from himself, just as he is unable to be free from society. Indeed, the impact of the social changes introduced by new form of economy tells upon Henchard heavily and crushes him altogether. It undoubtedly makes Henchard a great tragic hero of the modern times, for modern tragedy mostly emanates from social complexities.

R.L. Stevenson was highly impressed with Hardy's 
The Mayor of Casterbridge. According to him Henchard was a great fellow, and Dorchester was touched in with the hand of a master. He even expressed his desire to dramatise the novel. This has been gathered from Stevenson's letter of 1886 to Hardy incorporated by Mrs. Florence Emily Hardy in her The Life of Thomas Hardy. 2.

1. Modern Fiction Studies : Published by Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana 47907 (Volume 21 : Number 3 : Autumn 1976 ) P.414
Hardy's urban masterpiece *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is followed by his rural masterpiece *The Woodlanders*. It is decidedly the most powerful and the most balanced work of Thomas Hardy. Hardy himself classified it as a Novel of Character and Environment and was published in 1887, that is, one year after the publication of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

*The Woodlanders* has neither the tragic catastrophe of *The Return of the Native* nor the Lear-like poignancy of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, but it has even more an artistic finish than any other novel written by Hardy so far. The novel gradually reaches its natural development through the natural unfolding of its plot, though chances and coincidences play some part. There is no violent or outstanding character, no Henchard or Tess or Jude. The persons in the story pair off naturally with their counterparts. There is a balance of emotion, and tragedy at times is relieved by humorous touches.

This novel also makes a perfect balance between the traditional ideas and the newly grown ideas born of the spread of education and civilisation. For it is primarily a "story of an unhappy marriage promoted by snobbery and perpetuated by convention". Perhaps, in this novel Hardy has laid for the first time a stress upon some new social forces. The countrymen, even though uneducated, are in possession of a keen sense of social distinction. They are always eager to accept the man-made moral laws as a condit—

*J. L. A. Stewart: Eight Modern Writers*

tion of any secure social standing. At the same time the pressure of new ideas make them violate their deeper and original sensibilities of life. Herein lies the modern significance of *The Woodlanders*. The reconciliation between Grace and Fitzjibs towards the end of the novel suggests the triumph of modern education and civilisation over the primitive civilisation and culture so conspicuous in Hintock Wood.

What lends a special charm to *The Woodlanders* is Hardy's description of Hintock wood. Hardy has already shown his superb mastery in describing Egdon Heath. Again he shows almost the same power of description in this novel. With the fervour of a poet and the thorough intimacy of a countryman, Hardy describes Hintock wood in its minutest details, and on this account this novel seems to be standing as a triumph of Hardy's descriptive art. As Hardy describes: "It was one of those sequestered spots outside the gates of the world where may usually be found more meditation than action, and more listlessness than meditation; where reasoning proceeds on narrow premises, and results in inferences wildly imaginative; yet where, from time to time, dramas of grandeur and unity truly Sophoclean are enacted in the real, by virtue of the concentrated passions and closely-knit interdependence of the lives therein". 1. The woods constantly unfold their many moods and changes according to changes in seasons.

and Hardy notes them as the changes occur. The story opens
in a cold winter evening, winter is followed by spring when
the rush of sap in the veins of the trees is almost percep-
tible if not quite visible. Spring is followed by summer
when the Hintock wood appears to change from an open filigree
to a solid body of larger shape and importance. Then comes
early autumn when the orchards are encrusted with scarlet
and golden fruits under a luminous mist. Early autumn is
followed by late autumn with dried leaves getting redder
and rotting underfoot. And then comes winter again with
cold bleak wind, snow, drizzle and shower.

The woodlanders is, in fact, no idle title. It does
not merely put a label to the dwellers of the Hintock wood
but also signifies something deeper and greater. The
atmosphere of the woodlands pervades the whole story. Old
John South’s fate is bound up with the sympathetic life of
an elm tree. As his daughter Marty reports: “The shape of
is seems to haunt him like an evil spirit. He says that it is
exactly his own age, that it has got human sense, and
sprouted up when he was born on purpose to rule him, and
keep him as its slave. Others have been like it afore in
Hintock”. 1. None can plant trees like Giles Winterborne;
and to Marty South the sighing firs are human in their
sorrows. Their sylvan life in Hintock wood makes them open,
honest and for bearing and preserves their elements and
integrity up to the last. Besides, the woods at once divide

1. Thomas Hardy: The Woodlanders
the lovers and again unite them together. The rites of the Midsummer-Eve signifying the selection of future partners are also carried out in this memorable woodland by its inhabitants in full conviction. The trees of the woods far from leading the wanderers astray, stand as a vague but with dominating presence in the life of the Hintock folk. The decline of Grace's love for Fitzpiers and its rekindling for Giles are reflected in the woodlands, and her surroundings are quite in sympathy with her changes. Thus, the Hintock wood, not unlike the Egdon Heath of The Return of the Native (both the woods differing in degrees, not in character), is not merely a scenic background of the action but is a potent force influencing the action. Hardy, here, seems to share a comparatively modern concept that environment is partly responsible for the joys and sorrows of human beings.

Hardy observes: "In the present novel, as in one or two others of this series which involve the question of matrimonial divergence, the immortal puzzle - given the man and woman, how to find a basis for their sexual relation - is left where it stood". Indeed, Hardy, here, makes a tentative study of what he later on works out to an intense conclusion in Jude the Obscure. But sex relations are no obsession with those characters who are not so violent as Jude or Sue. Grace Malbury, as Hardy observes, has more of "Artemis than of Aphrodite in her constitution".  

charm resides in pensive altruism rather than in a 
highly-strung impulsiveness. The alternatives she gets 
are not quite easy for her to choose. At times her judgment 
is too much determined by her father. This is chiefly 
because of her obligation to duty and obedience to her 
parent. In spite of modern education and culture unknown 
in Little Hintock, she is fundamentally a country girl who 
is quite fond of the simple Hintock ways. She can tear off 
her reserve of culture and join the Midsummer-Eve 
festivities with as much enthusiasm as the bouncing Suke 
Damson. Much of her education has been little more than a 
veneer, and the sufferings she is subjected to serve only 
to rob her of this husk and reveal her inborn qualities. 
She combines modern nerves with primitive feelings. And 
there is a struggle going on within her between acquired 
sophistication and native simplicity. Civilisation draws 
er to Fitzpiers, while Nature draws her to Giles.

Fitzpiers, the romantic egoist, gives the total 
impression of an impetuous youthfulness. He is dreamy, 
idealistic, and theorising - Hardy calls him "a whirl-
minded Hamlet" but without Hamlet's noble mission of life. 
Duffin calls him "a philanderer of more than unusual 
interest: a versatile student, numbering among his subjects 
alchemy, astronomy, astrology, literature, metaphysics, 
and anatomy, with a keenly appreciative, modern, unpractical 
mind and a real taste for abstract philosophy". 1. Like

1. H.C. Duffin: Thomas Hardy: 
(Indian Branch: Oxford University Press: 1967) P.43-44
any other product of modern education Fitzpiers combines in him intellectual curiosity and the habit of self analysis; and these two redeeming qualities of his character almost save him from a mere sensualist like Alec D'Urberville or Troy. While Fitzpiers is neither wholly good nor wholly bad, the purging that he suffers from dispels many of his fancies and vanities of his rebellious youth. It also makes him sober at the end.

In an age of conventional morality of the Victorian type, it seems to be almost revolutionary for Hardy to assert that human lives for the most part are dominated by sex. Fitzpiers is the case in point. Duffin observes that "he is one of the few characters in Hardy who fit the theory that men's lives are dominated by sex (Jocelyn Pierston is another, and to some extent Jude and in a sense Boldwood are others, but there is a great array on the other side, of men with whom sex is a fascinating item in a long list of varied interests)." For Grace, he sacrifices his social ambition, while for Mrs. Felice Chardon, he sacrifices his professional ambition. He is the descendant of an ancient family of some tradition and renown; yet, his sex-weakness prompts him to marry the daughter of a Hintock Wood timber merchant Mr. George Melburt at the cost of his social status because the Melburies stand much inferior to the Fitzpiers in social position. Again, he is the same very person who destroys his lucrative Budmouth practice just to stay in Little Hintock and to flirt with

1. R.C. Duffin: *Thomas Hardy*:
Mrs. Charmond for whom he develops a positive sexual weakness. It is also relevant to understand his relation with Suke Damson, a hoydenish Hintock maiden. It is basically his sex-urge that drives him to chaise this girl of bare arms on the Midsummer-Eve into a hayfield, where they spend the night under the midsummer moon. Since then Suke Damson continues to visit him at night.

Mrs. Felice Charmond is the true counterpart of the philandering doctor, Mr. Fitzpiers. She is a total stranger to the Hintock woods not knowing the difference between a beech and an oak. She has been created chiefly for the exigencies of the plot, but she is by no means a lay-figure. If not so finely drawn as Rustacia in *The Return of the Native*, yet her personality is less shadowy than that of Lucetta in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. She is depicted as a prankish and a superior being, who is supposed to have the capacity of shaping the ends of the Hintock dwellers. Nevertheless, her confessions to Grace on the occasion of their wanderings at night in the woods betray her apparent strength, and reveal herself pathetically ordinary. She takes fancy over the long brown curl of a poor woodland girl and uses it like many fashionable modern women using false tresses to make them more attractive. The poor girl whose tresses she purchases at a high price is Marty South who mutters: "She wants my curls to get another lover with; though if stories are true she's broke the heart of many a noble gentleman already." 1 It proves that she is a

perfect coquette; it is further borne out by the fact that she charms the young doctor by deserting her erstwhile lover, that Italianised American gentleman; and its consequence is that she has to pay the penalty in the form of her premature death in the hands of the deserted. Indeed, Mrs. Felice Charmond leaves the impression of one who is a perfect representative of modern feminine frailties, such as, coquetry, vanity and prankishness.

These three characters, Mrs. Felice Charmond, Dr. Fitzpiers and in a sense Grace Melbury represent the forces of modern sophistication. The onset of modern civilisation and modern education in a primitive community rudely shakes and violently disturbs its otherwise peaceful and simple sylvan existence. In *Far From the Madding Crowd* Sergeant Troy comes to disturb the otherwise easy and peaceful life of Bathsheba Everdene. In *The Return of the Native* Damon Wildeve and Eustacia Vye, both of whom are the products of modern civilisation, and Clym Yeobright with his comparatively modern ideas of educating the heathfolk, come to vitiate and disturb the easy going and peaceful life of Mrs. Yeobright, Thomasin and Diggory Venn. Further, in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* the comparatively civilised foreigners from the town, Farfrae and Lucetta, violently disturb and uproot Michael Henchard completely. Now, in *The Woodlanders* Doctor Fitzpiers, Mrs. Charmond and to some extent Grace Melbury, with her modern education and idea of civilisation, are in conflict with
the spirit and principles of the Hintook woodland community whose true representatives are George Melbury, Giles Winterborne and Marty South. This simple woodland folk have been born and bred with sylvan simplicity and have become a part and parcel of the Hintook woods. They would have had a comparatively easy and free life but for the arrival of the civilised persons from the town.

Old Melbury, the timber merchant, as the representative of the Hintook woods, has some of its simple and unassuming style of life. At the same time he has a little bit of social ambition which makes him educate his daughter in a London Boarding School, unknown and uncommon in Hintook life. Before the education of his daughter he encourages the development of love between his daughter Grace and Giles Winterborne, the son of his much 'wronged friend'. But as soon as Grace returns after her education the old man is torn between his conflicting duties towards Grace, his daughter, and Giles, the son of his much 'wronged friend'. "'Tis a pity to let such a girl throw herself away upon him - a thousand pities!... And yet 'tis my duty, for his father's sake". His elemental simplicity urges him to be in favour of Giles, while his acquired complexity urges him to go against Giles. For, Giles Winterborne is poor, uneducated and is of no higher social standing than the Melburys. Melbury feels for Giles and

is willing to help him and patronise him in business; but he is not prepared to look upon him as his prospective son-in-law.

The old man cannot appreciate the request of his daughter that she should not be treated as a chattel or as a business deal like the horses, wagons and corn. Melbury is keen to make his daughter a lady, and so the rejection of Giles's suit for Grace becomes an obvious necessity. For a woman takes the colour of the company she keeps. The father, indeed, sows in the heart of his daughter the seeds of social ambition, and he succeeds in making her a little snob. She does as he bids her do. At his command she rejects Giles and marries Fitzpiers instead; again at his command she encourages Giles and leaves him again. Whatever she does, she does according to the dictation of her father who has in him a dual trend — his native simplicity and his acquired complexity; his natural affection and his social ambition. And this dual trend makes the old man suffer as much as his daughter does. Towards the end of the novel his ambition lessens but without the lessening of his affection. The sufferings borne by him and his daughter make him reasonable at the end, and he comes to realise the meaninglessness of his social ambition which prompted him to meddle with the private and personal affairs of his daughter.

Giles Winterborne, the real tragic hero of the piece, is most perfect and finished product of the Hintock woods.
More self-controlled than Henchard, more magnanimous than
Angel Clare, more patient than Clym Yeobright and more
unassuming than Gabriel Oak, Giles Winterborne is one of
the finest and the strongest male characters of Hardian
picture gallery. He is a man not particularly young for a
lover, nor particularly mature for a person of affairs.
Both the functions he is able to discharge in some degree.
There is reserve in his glance, restraint upon his
mouth and shyness in his nature. Though undemonstrative
in his ways, but he has almost a divine beauty of
disposition transcending the most of Hardy's best men.
without possessing Gabriel Oak's unending endurance, John
Lovelady's serene cheerfulness or Jiggory Venn's sense
of humour, Giles Winterborne has patience that is enormous,
that amounts almost to stoicism. Grace even feels that
Giles is something more than an ordinary woodlander who
has almost all the cardinal virtues of a lover as
prescribed by the German theologian and critic Schleier-
macher. It is true that Winterborne has not perseverance;
yet he is, as Grace admits, has the other three
requisites of a lover, such as, self-control, wisdom and
love. To her, Giles Winterborne is something more than a
man, "the fruit-god and the wood-god in alternation".

Giles Winterborne is in cider and apple trade; he
is the specimen of an apple tree as his trade mark or his
trade symbol. This is also perhaps the key to his personality.
When Grace on her return from the Boarding School meets him in the Shepton market, he is found to be standing under his hieroglyph - the tall, nodding apple tree. This impression of him is further heightened by Grace's description of him, almost in Keatsian style, as "autumn's very brother".

As a true product of the Hintock Woods Winterton is wise in nature's age-old secrets. Hardy tells of him: "He had a marvellous power of making trees grow. Although he would seem to shovel in the earth quite carelessly there was a sort of sympathy between himself and the fir, oak, or beech that he was operating on; so that the roots took hold of the soil in a few days". Such identification of his life with the trees gives him his imperturbable poise, and a passivity that amounts to peace with all that comes in his way. Notwithstanding his ill-luck in worldly transactions, his forbearance can be compared with that of Horatio, who has been described by Shakespeare, "As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing". And this certainly invests Giles with a genuine touch of sublimity. Hardy observes: "There is no such thing as a stationary love; men are either loving more or loving less; but Giles recognised no decline in his sense of her (Grace's) dearness ... He had once worshipped her, laid out his life to suit her, wooed her and lost her". Yet he is still magnanimous to Grace. He shows his rare magnanimity

1. Thomas Hardy : The Woodlanders.
2. Ibid : p.343 & 349.
not only to Grace but also to Grace's father. Malbury realises his mistake in having rejected Winterborne in preference to Fitzpiers. The old man again cruelly stirs up the old fires by expressing his regrets for what he has done. But Giles shows his extra-ordinary calmness even at the cost of much mental torture, and by hiding his real feeling he exclaims in a dry impassioned voice: "Oh, she never cared much for me". In drawing Winterborne's character Hardy has certainly poured forth his most admirable excellence. In spite of his calm endurance, stoicism, shy sensitiveness and self-control, Winterborne is completely human and not without endearing traits of anger and bitterness. His occasional presence in the locality after he is uprooted from his home, and the sight of him now and then "lying on his elbow under a tree, with a cynical gaze at the surrounding objects", now cutting woods, now pressing cider and the like make Winterborne the very spirit of the locality. The last sacrifice that he makes to preserve Grace's honour as a married lady clearly points not only to his genuine love for her but also to his entire personality; and his unfortunate death for such a noble cause is all of a piece with his character. His death seems but a natural metamorphosis - his faithful spirit will live on in the trees he has so capably planted. Duffin rightly observes: "Gabriel Oak is his nearest parallel. But Giles keeps more in the background of his story, a shyer, more sensitive figure. Take him for all in all, there is

no male character in Hardy who can hold a place by his side. 1

Like Giles Winterborne, Marty South is also the perfect product of the Hintock woods. She is, in fact, Giles's counterpart; and her patience and devotion, like those of Elizabeth Jane, are no less real and are almost infinite. She knows for certain that Giles Winterborne is not for her; yet she continues to love him silently and loves him still even after his death. This silent love, unexpressed at least until Winterborne's death, is almost platonic in character and also shows Marty's capacity of forbearance. Born and bred under sylvan simplicity, she is doomed to remain passive and sacrifice her own desire to oblige others. Her passivity, like that of her counterpart, Giles, makes her at peace with all that little she gets or does not get in life.

Of all the women in the Hintock woods Marty South alone has approximated Winterborne's level of intelligent intercourse with Nature. In this respect, she lives as his true counterpart, and has formed within her his true complement. And it is but a natural corollary that she also subjoins her thoughts to those of Giles. What is merely a casual glance of other people at this wonderland of sap and leaves called the Hintock woods, is a clear gaze to Marty and Giles. Both of them are in possession of its finer mysteries as a commonplace knowledge; and both of them

1. H.C. Duffin : Thomas Hardy :  
are also able to read its hieroglyphs as ordinary writing. The various sounds of night, winter, wind, storm amid those dense woods of Hintock appear uncanny and even supernatural to Grace; but to Marty and Giles they are just ordinary occurrences. For they are thoroughly acquainted with their origin, development and the laws of their growth. As to the deepest affinity and closest co-operation between Giles Winterbourne and Marty South Hardy observes: "They had planted together, and together they had felled; together they had, with the run of the years, mentally collected those remoter signs and symbols which seen in few were of runic obscurity, but all together made an alphabet". 1.

Grace can also notice the natural affinity and organic attachment between Giles and Marty and so she says that Giles should have married Marty. Thereupon Marty replies: "In all our outdoor days and years together, ma'am, the one thing he never spoke to me was love; nor I to him". 2.

Grace then adds what must be the final comment upon their relationship: "Yet you and he could speak in a tongue that nobody else knew - not even my father, though he came nearest knowing - the tongue of the trees and fruits and flowers themselves". 3.

It is Marty South who opens the novel as she closes it. She is a girl of twenty with long tresses of chestnut colour. She is visited by a Sherston Barber, Percival, the

2. Ibid: P.416
3. Ibid: 
supplier of tresses and wigs to ladies and gents almost similar to that of our own time. The Barber has come to buy the admirable tresses of the girl for the use of Mrs. Charmond who is almost the specimen of a modern coquette. In this sylvan life of Little Hintock, the girl has developed a one-sided attachment for Giles Winterborne. So the girl is reluctant to part with her tresses at the cost of her physical charm. But as she overhears a discourse at the dead of night between the timber merchant and his wife, she realises that Winterborne is not for her. It makes her cruelly cut her hair off for being sold to the Barber.

The timber merchant Mr. Melbury, although simple, affectionate and unassuming, is yet a little snob, the like of whom is quite common in our own days. He takes a little pride in getting his daughter educated in Public School, unknown in Hintock life. Creedle, a workman under Winterborne, appreciates the idea and expresses almost a kind of modern sentiment that "learning is better than houses and lands". Melbury also gives an explanation justifying his action. When he was a boy, he was often a laughing stock because he had no education. But it was not his fault; the fault was with his father. He does not, however, want his children to be laughed at by others for want of education. "But they shall never laugh at my children, if I have any! I'll starve first! Thank God I've been able to keep her at school at the figure of near a hundred a year; and her scholarship is such that she has stayed on as governess for a time."
Let 'em laugh now if they can; Mrs. Charmond herself is not better informed than my girl Grace". 1. Thus the old man gets his daughter educated not for the sake of learning and knowledge but for the purpose of gaining certain social advantages. His is a type which is rather uncommon in Hintock but quite common in our society of to-day. His daughter is soon returning home; and Mr. Melbury, however moody by nature, becomes unusually cheerful. Hardy says in the context: "Even among the moodiest the tendency to be cheered is stronger than the tendency to be cast down; and a soul's specific gravity constantly re-asserts itself as less than that of the sea of troubles into which it is thrown". 2. Indeed, Hardy, here, has expressed a universal tendency which is shown by all men of all ages.

As desired by Melbury, Giles has to receive Grace at Sherton Abbas. On such an occasion as this, Giles should have been a little careful about his dress. But to Giles dress is of little importance. He feels pained to notice that external trappings, such as, the colour of a hat, the fold of a coat, the make of a boot and the like should have great influence upon feminine opinion about the worth of a man; a reflection upon this causes in Giles a certain causticity of mental tone towards himself and the world at large; it also prevents him from taking a due care of his dress. This is an attitude of mind which is shared by the reflective and the right thinking men of our own age too.

2. Ibid: P.31 - 32
And this attitude of mind has, however, its usual consequences for Giles. True, Grace has nothing remarkable about her dress beyond a natural fitness; but it is a style that is quite recent and most modern for the streets of Sherton. Winterborne, on the other hand, though well mannered and well attired for a yeoman, looks quite rough beside her. And she is found to be rather cool towards him.

Grace, on her returning home, first comes to know of Dr. Fitzpiers from the account of their maid servant, Mrs. Grammar Oliver. She informs Grace, "Though he (Dr. Fitzpiers) belongs to the oldest, ancientest family in the country, he's stooped to make himself useful like any common man. I know him very well." Dr. Fitzpiers is a man of strange meditation, and his eyes seem to see as far as the north star. He knows that he is made for higher things, and has a high ambition like that of any modern young man. But he has come to the Hintock woods only with a noble mission of serving its folk. Mrs. Grammar further informs Grace that the young doctor would also take away her body after her death for the purpose of his anatomical experiments. An agreement to this effect has also been executed, and she has already received an advance of £10 from the young doctor on this account. This was certainly an advance step quite rare in those days.

It is a great satisfaction to Grace to look upon the young professional man as a tropical plant in a hedgerow,

a nucleus of advanced ideas and practices having nothing in common with the life around. Chemical experiments, anatomical projects and metaphysical conceptions have found a strange home in Little Hintock. It shows that there is a gradual advancement towards certain aspects of modern life.

Now, Grace in her modern attire looks almost odd where everything else is old fashioned. One day she gets an invitation from that great lady Mrs. Charmond and she goes to the Hintock House to meet that great lady. In Hintock House Grace finds, among other things, the man-traps. These are interesting as relics of a barbarous time happily past. The gradual invasion of modern civilisation has caused these primitive and barbarous objects to fall into disuse. Mrs. Charmond will very soon start for a continental tour, and she proposes that Grace may accompany her as her assistant. If Grace has no objection to the proposal, she will soon be informed of it. These two ladies of modern education and culture also have a discourse on the arrival of the young doctor in the Hintock Woods. Grace maintains that he belongs to the ancient family of Oakbury - Fitzpiers. Mrs. Charmond, thereupon, expresses a somewhat modern sentiment. "It is of rather more importance to know what the man is himself than what his family is, if he is going to practise upon us as a surgeon". 1 Mrs. Charmond who is more modern in outlook than Grace, expresses a kind of modern utilitarian sentiment that a man's worth should be judged not by his family aristocracy but by the utility of

the services he renders. It is rather strange that as Grace returns after her interview with Mrs. Charmond, she comes to the first notice of the young doctor. Giles Winterborne also meets Grace on the way. He is half in doubt if her father's ambition which has endowed her with a life of intellect and culture, unknown and uncommon in the Hintock woods, will not affect her future interests above and away from the local life which she valued so much in her childhood.

With a desire to bring his affairs with Grace "soon to a crisis" as Giles terms it, he arranges a Christmas Party in his house. But in stead of the desired result, it produces only the opposite. Mr. Melbury, who was so long favourably disposed to Giles, is now reluctant to let Grace marry him. For Giles is indefinitely occupied as woodsman, cider-merchant, apple-farmer and what not. In other words, he has no settled profession, and what he does is not in keeping with the standard of an educated and cultured girl like Grace. Mrs. Melbury advises her husband not to upset the notion of Grace towards Giles. Mrs. Melbury, who is more practical and less socially ambitious, maintains that things get gradually familiar: the stone floors do not appear so very cold and hard, the hooting of owls do not seem so very dreadful, and loneliness does not appear lonely after a while. In other words, man gets used to things, however unpleasant, after a while. None can perhaps dispute the universal appeal of this statement.
In the mean time things do take rapid turns. Mrs. Charmond leaves for her continental tour without even letting Grace know anything. Grace's father thinks that perhaps because Grace keeps low company (he evidently means the company of Giles), she has not been chosen by Mrs. Charmond. By about the same time Marty's father, John South dies of a peculiar dread for an elm tree. It results in the uprooting of Giles Winterborne from his original ancestral hearth and home. For the freehold plot of land so long occupied by Winterborne rested upon a condition of any one of the male members of the South family remaining alive. With the death of Marty's father, the last male member of the Souths' is gone, and so Giles is compelled to leave his original holding according to the desire of its original owner, now Mrs. Charmond. Another interesting incident that occurs by about the same time is that Dr. Fitzpiers is able to locate the origin of his cynosure, Grace Melbury, the daughter of the timber merchant. This is somewhat disheartening to the ambitious medical man. From his very first glimpse at her he has developed a strong passion for the girl, and he thought that she might be of the blue blooded stock and not the daughter of a mere timber merchant. Naturally the young and the ambitious physician is disheartened by his discovery. Nevertheless, with due regard to his future, he is eager for a casual acquaintance with her mostly in the form of a mild flirtation. Like many modern ambitious young men, Dr. Fitzpiers has high aims which, according to him, will surely lead him someday
into the other spheres than the Hintock Woods. Sometimes he also thinks of the advantageous marriage he is bound to make with a woman of a family as good as his own, and of purse much larger. This sort of social and material upliftment through matrimony is almost a common tendency of the modern age.

Circumstances compel Grace to pay a visit to Fitzpiers' House in spite of herself. She is amazed to find the young doctor investigating the fragment of old John South's brain. She is also amazed to note that the doctor has been "endeavouring to carry on simultaneously the study of physiology and transcendental philosophy, the material world and the ideal, so as to discover if possible a point of contact between them". 1. These are the kinds of experiments which we are expected to carry on only in modern times. And Hardy foresaw them in advance. Grace returns with full regard for the young doctor, and this is perhaps the first significant step towards the shifting of her affection. "The idea of so modern a man in science and aesthetics as the young surgeon springing out of relics so ancient was a kind of novelty she had never before experienced". 2.

The fair face of the blonde makes Fitzpiers forget his high ambition in life and his social upliftment through a rich matrimony. In stead, he now thinks in terms of

2. Ibid : P.204.
settlement in Hintock Woods by marrying Grace Melbury. Why should he go further into the world than where he is? The secret of happiness lies in limiting the aspirations. Thus Fitziuers thinks almost in terms of a philosopher. But all his philosophising is caused only by his passion for Grace. For her sake, he sacrifices his social ambition. With Melbury's permission he begins to court his daughter. Melbury permits him not because of his professional position but because of the standing of his family in the county in bygone days. The old timber merchant is quite sure that it will restore Grace to the society she is destined by virtue of her education and upbringing. Hardy says: "No woman is without aspirations, which may be innocent enough within limits; and Grace had been so trained socially, and educated intellectually, as to see clearly enough a pleasure in the position of wife to such a man as Fitziuers". 1. This is not something peculiar to Grace alone; Hardy's observation has a universal appeal inasmuch as almost every woman has a longing for social elevation.

Soon comes the question of marriage between Grace and Fitziuers. Fitziuers, like most of modern people, suggests that their marriage should be performed not in a Church but in a Registry Office. "Marriage is a civil contract, and the shorter and simpler it is made the better. People don't go to church when they take a house, or even when they make a will". 2. This is quite a rational outlook, common in modern age but certainly uncommon in the Victorian age. Soon Fitziuers and Grace become husband and wife.

2. Ibid : P.209
Before their marriage, in one early morning Grace finds Suke Denson leaving the house of Dr. Fitzpiers. She is correctly led to a suspicion about the moral character of the man she is going to marry. But so clever the doctor is that he can delude the educated but otherwise simple girl quite in no time.

Having lost his ancestral house Giles Winterborne has now become a vagabond moving from pillar to post. One day he returns to his old familiar spot and finds his house completely pulled down. Such pulling down of cottages is obviously for the sake of modernisation. In the mean time Mrs. Charmond meets with a minor accident and Doctor Fitzpiers is immediately called in. Mrs. Charmond always feels sad whenever she is at Hinton. But she could not help coming to the place, for she was brought here by a man. "Women are always carried about like corks upon the waves of masculine desires". L. Mrs. Charmond, as a matured woman, better understands the women's point view. And so she tells what is almost universally true to all women. The acquaintance between the physician and the patient develops into a friendship, and friendship into a deep love. This is the reason for which Dr. Fitzpiers even forgoes his lucrative medical profession at Budmouth.

Fitzpiers is not only a philanderer with double or "treble-barrelled heart", but he is also a kind of modern epicure.

L. Thomas Hardy : The Woodlanders
He, like many of his prototypes in our own age, despises Melbury, his station and his daughter whom he has married, but does not despise to spend Melbury's money, nor does he despise to use the horse belonging to his wife. That Fitzpiers is a downright philanderer having an illegal and illicit relation with Duke Damson and Mrs. Charmond is now quite clear to Grace as well as to Grace's father. Her husband's infidelity to her in preference to other women makes Grace disillusioned. She is disillusioned about the so-called modern education and the so-called gentle society. She tells her father: "I wish you had never, never thought of educating me. I wish I worked in the woods like Marty South! I hate genteel life, and I want to be no better than she!" 1. Taught by many harrowing experiences of her short married life, Grace comes to realise that she can never be happy outside the orbit of the Hinton woods. Even when she was in her boarding school she had to bear the burnt of class distinction, so common in modern age. She confesses: "I used to wonder why I had to bear it. And I was always a little despised by the other girls at school, because they knew where I came from, and that my parents were not in so good a station as theirs". 2. Meanwhile Fitzpiers meets with a fatal accident. His two petticoats, Mrs. Charmond and Duke Damson, are so much startled by the news that they immediately rush on to the

2. Ibid: p.280
house of the timber merchant to enquire about the
condition of their lover. But Fitzpiers, in stead of
returning to his father-in-law's house, shelters himself
in a secluded room in the Hintock House under the loving
care and affection of Mrs. Charmond. Hardy comments:
"What will not women do on such devoted occasions?" 1.
Hardy is right in asserting that what Mrs. Charmond does
for her lover is done by every woman under similar
circumstances. The room in which Fitzpiers is sheltered is
secluded by old fashioned furniture, now fallen into
disuse, due to changing taste and style of the modern
times. This is the room they have selected for recuperation
of injured Fitzpiers so that he is not seen by others.

On the night of the accident Grace is shocked to
learn that her husband has not returned home, not due to
fatality of the accident but due to a violent quarrel
between her husband and her father. It is a critical time
in Grace's emotional life. She thinks of her husband a
good deal. "How attractive he must be to everybody; and
indeed, he is attractive." 2. There is, in truth, a
lovebird yearning to fly from her heart; and it wants a
lodging badly. Within a few days she receives a letter
from her husband, bearing the post mark of a distant town.
It does never occur to her that he has been lying wounded
within a distance of two miles only.

1. Thomas Hardy : The Woodlanders
2. Ibid : P. 330
Fitziuers, after his recovery, leaves the Hintock woods for a long term of continental tour. Within three days of his departure he is followed by Mrs. Charmond. Soon a rumour becomes current in Hintock that both Mrs. Charmond and Fitziuers have been seen together in Baden in such a relation as is befitting only a husband and a wife. Melbury enters the Valley of Humiliation even more than Grace. His spirit seems almost broken. Such a rumour is quite sufficient to give another twist to the story by thrusting Giles again into the life of Grace. For, there still remains the possibility of legal protection for Mrs. Fitziuers under the strength of a new law passed last year, something like the divorce suit of our own time. This has been suggested by no other man than Fred Beaucrook, once a promising lawyer's clerk and a local dandy. Hardy comments: "An idea implanted early in life is difficult to uproot." Indeed, many elderly tradespeople still cling to the notion that Fred Beaucrook knows a good deal of law. On the strength of this valuable piece of legal information, Grace, mainly on the insistence of her father, begins to encourage Giles again. Melbury, on the other hand, proceeds to London to arrange for the legal separation. When the pair achieve a considerable progress in their reciprocal attention to each other, they are told that legal remedy shall never be possible and that Grace shall ever be doomed to remain Mrs. Fitziuers. Such freak of fate Winterborne endures with

1. Thomas Hardy; The Woodlanders.
the forbearance of a stole; but it is certainly too much for Grace to stand. She lives almost in seclusion; lest she should encounter Giles.

After many months of sojourn in the continent, Fitzpiers is again returning to his wife. Mr. Melbury has softened his temper a little towards his son-in-law. But Grace does not want to meet her husband any more. A sensitive creature as she is, combining modern nerves with primitive feelings, Grace is "doomed by such co-existence to be numbered among the distressed, and to take her scourgings to their exquisite extremity". 

Her husband enters by the front door, and she leaves the house by the back door. She comes directly to Winterborne's house. She intends to go to Exonbury; but she is afraid to walk alone at this hour of night. So she requests Winterborne to accompany her a little way. They proceed together, but rain suspends their journey, and they are forced to return back to Winterborne's house again. Grace hesitates to enter the house; Giles understands her dilemma and instantly leaves his cottage for the exclusive occupation of Grace. In spite of his illness, he sleeps outside under the heavy rains just to shield her name and her honour as a married woman. Although social law has made their expected paradise a void for ever, yet it is not without a stoical pride that Giles accepts the present trying situation.

There is one man on earth, on whom Grace can still rely, and he is that man.

Giles, without being noticed by others, has already been in a falling state of health for some time past, and his present sacrifice to save the honour of Grace makes his condition extremely critical. He is, however, discovered by Grace in his hide-out in the open when he has been suffering from high temperature and attended unconsciousness. He is dying, and Grace feels an instinctive urge to save him even at the cost of her own reputation. If Grace relies on her husband in any respect, it is on his skill in medical profession; and he, as a modern physician, is completely free from conventional errors and outdated prejudices. With a wonderful mental courage she goes to fetch her husband to save the life of her dying lover. But the die is cast and all is over. The dying man cannot be saved. He dies just when the doctor reaches. But the strength of mind shown by Grace, her sense of duty to a dying man and her somewhat revolutionary flight from her conventional moral sense, make her character, on this particular occasion, undeniably unconventionally and unquestionably modern.

Death of Winterborne leaves Grace and Marty in certain soothing memorial acts of mourning. Twice a week the pair visit the Hintock Churchyard in the dusk to sweeten his sad grave with flowers and tears. While Giles's memory is still quite fresh in Grace, she is requested by her husband to see him. She agrees to see him not alone but with Marty. And that, too, she does for no other reason than to ascertain from an experienced professional man
like her former husband (for she no more admits him as her husband) how far she was responsible for Winterborne’s death. By now Fitzpiers has become penitent. He has now become more practical and wiser by the hard experiences of life. This meeting is followed by some more in course of time, and ultimately the husband and wife are re-united.

The closing episode of the novel shows the triumph of the forces of education and culture in the re-union of Grace and Fitzpiers. While showing the triumph of modern culture and modern education, Hardy does not altogether want his readers to forget the sincerer and the more abiding influence of the pagan simplicity. For this, there is Marty South, who stands silhouetted almost as a sex-less figure over the grave of Giles, pronouncing the final words; which are almost poetry:

"Now, my own, own love, you are mine, and only mine; for she has forgot 'ee at last, although for her you died! But I - whenever I get up I'll think of 'ee, and whenever I lie down I'll think of 'ee again. Whenever I plant the young larches I'll think that none can plant as you planted; and whenever I split a gad, and whenever I turn the cider wing, I'll say none could do it like you. If ever I forget your name let me forget home and heaven! ... But no, no, my love, I never can forget 'ee; for you was a good man, and did god things!" 1.

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1. Thomas Hardy: The Woodlanders.  
It may be noted that when Hardy finished this novel he did not feel quite glad, although he was much relieved. This was recorded by Hardy in his personal note book dated February 4, 1887 incorporated by Florence Emily Hardy in her compilation of *The Life of Thomas Hardy: 1840-1928*. Mrs. Hardy also maintains that her husband in his after years was of the view that *The Woodlanders* was in some respects his best novel. 1.

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1. *Florence Emily Hardy: The Life of Thomas Hardy: 1840-1928.*