SECOND CHAPTER
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Pearl Buck picks up her women characters from a patriarchal society which values man above woman. A Chinese folk song records the status of a girl child: "When a baby boy was born, he was laid on the bed and given jade to play with, and when a baby girl was born, she was laid on the floor and given a tile to play with."¹ The Chinese society was predominantly a male dominated society and women lived an extremely subservient life. A male child was considered an asset and a female child was considered a burden because she had to be given away to other families.

Chastity among women was highly valued. But men were allowed by the society to enjoy pre-marital and extra-marital relations. A man could acquire concubines. Prostitution was a common practice. The poet Fu Hsuan expresses the sordid status of women in feudal China: "How sad it is to be a woman! Nothing on earth is held so cheap."²

The men in Pearl Buck’s novels are full of scorn for women. The contempt is clear in almost all the men.

irrespective of class and creed. The Wang brother's disgust towards women in their lives is simply crude: "We are men, you and I, my brother, and we know what women are and how ignorant and simple the best of them are. Man cannot concern themselves in the affairs of women and we understand each other, my elder brother, we men." Women are necessary evils in the lives of men. They tolerate women folk in their lives, sometimes they have to escape from these nasty creatures: "By now it was mid-morning and the house was filled with men like themselves who had come out of their homes to eat in peace away from their women and children, and having eaten to talk with friends and sup tea together and to hear latest news. For there can be no peace for any man in the house where women and children are, since women shriek and call, children are howling and weeping, for so their nature is. But here in this house it was a peaceful place with the busy hum of men's voices rising everywhere in good talk." Wang the Tiger educates his son: "Son, we are men, you and I and now cease to go into your mother's court except at those times when it is fitting to pay respect to her, for it is a very subtle easy way to waste life with women, even with mother or sister, for they are still but women and

4. Ibid., p. 6.
still ignorant and foolish." The American sculptor Blake echoes Wang the Tiger: "The great artists, the great musicians even the great cooks are men.... It's difficult for me to take women seriously perhaps." Kwei-lan's father holds the same views about women: "Ah, women are willful! And the best of them are ignorant having been shut away from the world." 

Pearl Buck looks at the ignoble state of these foolish and ignorant creatures in a male world and examines with a sensitive mind and sharp intelligence. She views this crippled world of women from her Western liberal and advanced point of view. She perceives the double standard of morality in the male culture. On one side there is extreme seclusion of women, on the other the licentious lifestyle of men. Men use women as wives for procreation and keep aside other women for pleasure. In such a paradoxical situation the status of women entirely depends upon men's decree.

To pickup one example, in the mourning procession of Wang Lung in The Good Earth his concubine Lotus, now a huge lump of fat, attracts the attention of the onlookers. As soon as the procession started Lotus begins her loud weeping and

5. Ibid., p. 381.
6. Pearl S. Buck, This Proud Heart (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1938), p. 345.
wailing. Her theatrical show of mourning is highly approved of by the onlookers. Some marvel to see so large and fat a body weeping with such a clamour and they say, "How rich he was to have her able to eat herself to such a size as this!" The villagers openly express their envy. Wang Lung's cousin also shares the same view with the villagers. After meeting Lotus he expresses his astonishment at Wang Lung's success: "Well, and Old Mistress indeed, and if I did not know my cousin Wang Lung were rich I should know by looking at you, such a mountain of flesh you have become, and well you have eaten and how richly! It is only rich men's wives who can look like you!" Even the fatness of a woman, in a way is the measure of a man's success.

Women bow before this masculine world and accept the inferior and dependent status. Man establishes norms and values for woman and she accepts them without any trace of doubt; her world is a man's world. For instance the world of Lotus is shaped by the norms and values of a male world. All throughout her life she has been perceived as a sex object. This is also her way of looking at life. She describes Wang Lung's daughter-in-law in terms of eatables, sex is her only medium of expression. She describes the wife of second son

8. Ibid., p. 20.
who is "at, ruddy and thick boned, "Well here is a good stout red radish from the country—a piece of sturdy red meat!" This coarse country woman echoes Lotus: "Well, and some men like a taste of hot radish, or a bite of red meat." Encouraged by these women the second son of Wang Lung makes a dig at her well-bred sister-in-law: "Well, and I had rather eat red meat any day than a slice of cold and tasteless flesh like this other one!" While describing the lust of the soldier cousin Cuckoo uses the same vocabulary—the soldier will seize the fruit nearest to him. In his youth Wang Lung brings Lotus as his concubine, "And he ate and drank of his love and he feasted alone and he was satisfied." This male world, as portrayed by Pearl Buck, conceives woman as an eatable; what Germaine Greer calls the 'consumer emphasis' is sharply clear. "She was for consumption, other sorts of imagery spoke of her in terms of cherries and cream, lips as sweet as honey and skin white as milk, breasts like cream uncruddled, hard as apples."  

10. Ibid., p. 246.  
11. Ibid.  
12. Ibid., p. 247.  
15. Ibid., p. 57.
Most of Pearl Buck's women cannot think of being equal to men; their inferior status is an absolute truth for them. For instance, Kwei-lan expresses her western educated husband's new notions about man and woman to her mother: "He tells me to be equal with him and I do not know how!" Her mother is simply bewildered: "Equal with him? She said mystified, her eyes growing large in her pale face. 'What does he mean? How can you be equal with your husband?'" The wife of Wang Lung's uncle in *The Good Earth* echoes the same tone of passive resignation. O-lan's husband brings home a sing-song girl from the brothel and the uncle's wife supports him: "And it is not to be thought, poor fool, that one woman is enough for any man, and if that one is a weary hard-working woman who has worn away her flesh working for him, she is less than enough for him. His fancy runs elsewhere the more quickly, and you poor fool, have never been fit for a man's fancy and little better than an ox for his labour. And it is not for you to rapine when he has money and buys himself another to bring her to his house, for all men are so, and so would my old do-nothing also, except the poor wretch has never had enough silver in his life to feed himself even." Women resign to the supremacy of men.

17. Ibid.
this brutally sexualized and gendered society women suffer silently. Pearl Buck tries to enter into the intricacies of woman’s mind, her confrontation with the male values, her interaction with men and her life in a masculine universe. Her women mirror the ways in which the male culture has treated them and show how women live in a male world.

At an early age, while living in China with her missionary parents Pearl Buck confronted the deplorable status of women in a patriarchal economy. In The Exile Pearl Buck narrates a horrible scene of female infanticide. Pearl Buck’s mother Carie met a man who had crushed the skull of his newborn daughter immediately after her birth. The infant was lying dead, its brain oozing from the skull.

"Oh! the man ought to be killed!" added Carie fiercely.

The helpless mother of the child answered: "Who can touch a man?" sobbed the Chinese mother. "A man can kill a girl if he wishes—Oh, that he killed me, too."

An American lady, Carie could not understand why the woman had to tolerate the cruel man. She asked her this simple question directly: "At least you will not stay with him."

The woman’s answer is revealing: "Where can I go? ... Men are same. I have lived

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20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
here and there and men are always the same."22

Pearl Buck remembers a Chinese woman who despised her very existence as woman. The defeated woman told Pearl Buck's mother about her sad life: "Tell me what to do and I will do it. Tell me what to believe and I will believe. There has never been one in all my life long who cared to heed one word I might say or one tear that fell from my eyes. My father did not love me for I was a girl; my husband did not care for me, my son despises me. I have been despised all my life because I am a woman, ignorant and ugly."23

Thus at an early age Pearl Buck was acquainted with the painful world of women. The sordid status of women around her began to obsess her. Once she asked her mother: "Do you mind that I was a girl?"24 Instantly her mother assured her: "No indeed... I would have been ashamed to mind... because we are American."25 No doubt these experiences moulded the novelist in Pearl Buck. These exposures surely cultivated a submerged sympathy in her towards suffering women in a patriarchal society. Pearl Buck places her

22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., p. 104.
24. Ibid., p. 50.
25. Ibid.
characters in the ordinary and mundane family life and thereby brings forward the social forces that govern them.

In *East Wind : West Wind* Pearl Buck portrays the sheltered life of Chinese girl Kwei-lan from a well-to-do family background. She loves her elder brother, admires him and enjoys his company. He teaches her to brush the ink over the characters outlined in her primer. Kwei-lan lives in a society which believes in the seclusion of women. The Confucianists pushed the seclusion of women to such an extreme degree in China that married sisters could not eat at the same table with their brothers. Confucianism saw that sexual differentiation was necessary for social harmony; its main principles emphasized the distinction between superiority and inferiority; it stood for division of labour between man and woman and encouraged the traditional feminine virtues like obedience, good manners, quietness etc.

According to the custom of the society Kwei-lan is separated from her brother. She narrates her separation:

"But he was a boy and I only a girl, and when he was nine and I six years of age, he was taken out of the women's apartments into those where my father lived. We seldom met then, for as he grew older he considered it shameful to visit among the women; and moreover, my mother did not encourage it. I, of course, was never allowed in the courts
where the men lived."  

In Sons Wang the Tiger’s son pines for his sister and finds it difficult to tolerate the separation. He suffers silently. One day his father notices that the boy cannot swallow his food because of his suppressed sobs. Wang’s conviction is firm: "But at his age he cannot play and idle his time away and with women."  

Thus society imposed extreme seclusion on women and allowed all sorts of licentiousness to men. The double standard of morality is reflected through Kwei-lan. From her childhood she is accustomed to her mother’s pious life and her father’s mysterious and forbidden ways. In a summer night Kwei-lan peeps at the man’s apartment, it is a strange sight: "The doors were flung wide and the light from a hundred lanterns streamed out into the hot, still air. Within I saw men sitting at square tables eating and drinking and servants hurrying back and forth with food. Behind each man’s chair stood the vine-slender figure of a girl. But seated at my father’s side, the only woman at the table was La-may." Her mother who catches her, and commands her

27. Pearl S. Buck, Sons, p. 377.  
to return to her room, beat her severely. The next day her mother orders opaque shell lattices to be placed over the moon gate. Her father’s life remains a forbidden question to Kwei-lan for the rest of her life.

Man  crippled woman for his pleasure, killed baby girls to avoid expenses, corrupted woman as prostitute and imprisoned her inside the house for procreation. A close analysis of Wang-Lung’s relationship with his wife and his concubine reveals how woman is used by man for various purposes. O-lan and Lotus—both are exploited and used but in different ways.

O-lan has strong and normal feet, she has no one to bind her feet. Her father sells her during a famine to the Great House of Hwang. Her status as a kitchen slave in the Great House is no better than a mule. In her own words: “I was beaten with a leather thong which had been halter for one of the mules, and it hung upon the kitchen wall.”29 The horrors of her life as a slave in the Hwang house never leave her. They chase her like a nightmare even in her own home. After the wedding feast is over, Wang Lung finds O-lan sleeping in the straw piles besides the ox. When he calls her, “she put up her arm suddenly in her sleep as though to

29. Pearl S. Buck, The Good Earth, p. 103.
defend herself from a blow."30 As O-lan is not crippled for beauty, she can carry on the strenuous roles of mother, housewife, and her husband's workmate in the fields. Her labour begins to reflect in the home; the first winter after her arrival is plenty and prosperous. O-lan is full of health. "But out of the woman's great brown breasts the milk gushed forth for the child, milk as white as snow, and when the child suckled at one breast it flowed like fountain from the other and she let it flow."31 She pours out this inexhaustible life in her into Wang Lung's home, fields and his children and establishes him as a rich land-lord. In his bad days Wang-Lung wants in his wife a partner in the struggle of life, after gaining the status of a rich land-lord he begins to feel a desire for woman as a source of pleasure. In the middle of his life he finds his faithful wife "a dull and common creature, who plodded in silence without thought of how she appeared to others. He saw for the first time that her hair was rough and brown and unoiled and that her face was large and flat and coarse-skinned, and her features too large altogether and without any sort of beauty or light. Her eyebrows were scattered and the hairs too few, and her lips were too wide and her hands and feet were large

30. Ibid., p. 22.
31. Ibid., pp. 34-35.
and spreading.\textsuperscript{32} In a brothel Wang Lung finds his dream-woman and brings her home. The stern woman O-lan who does not shed a drop of tear even in her worst days of struggle, cries bitterly: "It is a bitter thing in my own house, and I have no mother's house to go back to anywhere."\textsuperscript{33} The mother's house symbolizes O-lan's longing for some place of her own. The bound feet of his concubine gives him immense pleasure and his hatred for O-lan's unbound feet is also clear. Wang Lung expresses his irritation, rather crudely:

"I have laboured and have grown rich and would have my wife look less like a hind. And those feet of yours--.' He stopped. It seemed to him that she was altogether hideous, but the most hideous of all were her big feet in their loose cotton-cloth shoes, and he looked at them with anger so that she thrust them yet farther under the bench."\textsuperscript{34} Lotus is proud of her tiny feet; what Wang Lung considers to be her beauty is also her undoing. As she ages the beauty so highly praised in her yester years fades and she becomes an ugly, unattractive, old and disabled woman. The bound feet can no longer help her even in so mundane an activity as walking or standing. As for Lotus, she leaned on Cuckoo for everything, as she grew blind, and now because of the mighty weight of

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 129.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p. 155.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 130.
her chair of carved black wood where she sat a little while afternoon and then back to her bed again. Even so she must be supported by four slaves and more, for those pretty little feet of hers which had once been Wang Lung’s pride and pleasure were nothing but stumps beneath the great and monstrous body which in other days had been slender as a bamboo and passionately beloved by Wang Lung.”35 Thus Pearl Buck exposes the dubious status of woman in a male culture and analyses it with a keenly sensitive mind.

Religion is one of the most effective forces of controlling woman in a male dominated society. “Patriarchy has God on its side.”36 Carrie’s subjugated status as reflected in Pearl Buck’s The Exile, originates in religion, tradition, customs and age old beliefs in a patriarchal culture. Since the earliest days of patriarchy religious ideology had contributed a lot to the oppression of woman. In her, Christians find the gateway of the Devil, the church finds in her flesh and temptations. Tertullion defines her as a ‘temple built over a sewer.’37 St. Augustine calls attention to the sexual and excretory organs: “We are born

35. Pearl S. Buck, Sons, p. 364.


between faeces and urine" In the hands of St. Paul Christianity was contaminated and perverted. St. Paul emphasized the sinfulness of sex, sanctioned the institution of marriage only as a means of erotic release, narrowed down the necessity of marriage and reduced the status of woman to mere slavery. "St. Paul enjoined self-effacement and discretion upon women; He based the subordination of woman to man upon both the Old and the New Testaments. 'For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man.' And in another place: 'For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church ... Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.'

Andrew, Carie’s husband, is a follower of St. Paul. Andrew and his fellow missionaries believe in the miracles of Virgin birth, water changing into wine, the dead rising to life and the second appearance of Christ. The whole-hearted adoption of St. Paul’s contempt for women is obvious in their life-style: "In that little band of missionaries no women even raised her voice before men, either to pray or to speak in meeting. In their meetings the women knelt mutely before the men, who knelt before God and alone

38. Ibid., p. 200.
39. Ibid., p. 129.
could speak to him. "Andrew emphasizes the doctrine of St. Paul that woman is created to be under the complete subjection of man. When he learns Chinese together with his wife Carie, his wife shows amazing facility at the spoken language. Andrew cannot acknowledge his wife's talent, which "Andrew found at times a little trying and which made him somewhat stiff, reared as he had been in the doctrine of male superiority. But he was more patient at learning characters than she, and this consoled him, for he considered it the real test of scholarship. "Andrew does not desire intellectual companionship or spiritual understanding in a woman: "... he had not seen a woman companion to a man. Among men he heard a crude scorn of women as creatures full of notions and whimsies, necessary to man and to be respected only in the simple functions of mating and housekeeping, and the scorn was slacked only by brief aberration of courtship, to be resumed once it was over." Through her saint husband, Carie comes into close contact with St. Paul's subjugation of woman.

In patriarchy man re-creates woman and fashions her according to his needs. A woman in patriarchy is a


41. Pearl S. Buck, The Exile, p. 70.

42. Pearl S. Buck, Fighting Angel, p. 89.
marginal citizen, given only a chattel status. This chattel status invades the consciousness of woman and she begins to accept the male world as the absolute truth. The limited roles assigned to woman fence her into a small place. If a woman can ensure the legal line of inheritance by producing a son, she gains some legal status in the society.

Giving birth to a son is almost a passion in some of the female characters of Pearl Buck. The patriarchal family system in traditional China attached high value to a male child. This aspect of patriarchy has tremendous effect upon the psychology of woman. A male child ensures a woman legal rights and social status. Woman begins to consider that giving birth to a son is the highest achievement in life. This aspect of woman's psychology recurs in the character of O-lan in various stages of her life. The Ancient Mistress of the Hwang House bids farewell to her slave O-lan with these words: "Obey him and bear him sons and yet more sons. Bring the first child to me to see."43 In her first pregnancy Wang Lung is eager to have a male child. When he hears the thin and fierce cry, he asks impatiently: "'Is it a man? ' The thin cry bursts out again, wiry, insistently. 'Is it a man? ' he cried again, 'tell me at least this - is it a man? '"44 O-lan herself thinks that a daughter is a

43. Pearl S. Buck, The Good Earth, p. 18.
44. Ibid., p. 32.
burden, a boy is an asset to the family. She mentions her new born daughter thus: "It is only a slave this time, not worth mentioning." During the famine year O-lan kills her new-born daughter and proposes that Wang Lung should sell her surviving one. In her oppressed and neglected life her sons are an achievement, a pleasure, a fulfillment. At the last stage of her life this woman who lives in silence all her life, tries to assert her rights. She calls for Cuckoo, the beautiful slave of the Hwang House, who comes to O-lan’s house as the maid of Lotus and tells her: "Well, you may have lived in the courts of the Old Lord, and you were accounted beautiful, but I have been a man’s wife and I have borne him sons, and you are still a slave." O-lan holds the fundamental tenets of patriarchy that child bearing is the primary reason for a woman’s existence, a girl is a liability, begetting sons for man is the highest achievement in life. In her death bed O-lan justifies her existence as a woman: "Well, and if I am ugly, still I have borne a son; although I am but a slave there is son in my house." And again she said, suddenly: "How can that one feed him and care for him as I do? Beauty will not bear a man sons!"  

45. Ibid., p. 90.  
46. Ibid., p. 197.  
Birth of a female child brings disgrace to the mother. When Sakota the Consort of the Emperor gives birth to a girl, the Emperor’s mother accuses her: "I knew the Consort would bear only girl. I told you so, you woman do you remember I said a creature of such soft bone, such slack flesh, would bear only a girl?" Yehonala’s male child helps her to achieve the unbelievable rise from a third rank concubine to an Empress. In Sons Pearl Buck draws a man who is obsessed with his son. Wang the Tiger, the powerful war lord is fascinated by his only son: "He sat glowering and silent and he dwelt with a mighty pride upon the thought of his own son and the man into which he would shape him." He adores his inheritor to an extreme degree: "Then he had the child brought to him continually, although he did not know how to play with any child, not even his son. He commanded the nurse to seat himself where he could see the child, and he sat and stared at every movement the boy made and at every transient look that flickered across his face." A girl child would hardly have been the object of such obsession; needless to say the question of continuation and inheritance plays its part here. O-lan prides herself on being the mother of a son, because she derives her values


49. Pearl S. Buck, Sons, p. 370.

50. Ibid., pp. 370-71.
Pearl Buck captures the changing mood of the time through Wang the Tiger’s learned wife. Unlike O-lan she treats her daughter as a human being. She dares even to weave dreams around her daughter and demands equal rights with her step-son: "No, my husband, at least look at her, for she is no usual child. She walked three month before the boy did and talks now as though she were four instead of two and under. I have come to ask for a favor to me that you will give her learning also and share your goods with her as you do with your son."51 Her husband finds her dream an absurd one: "How can I make a soldier out of a girl?"52 The mother is insistent: "If not soldier, then some skill in a school, for there are many such in these times, my husband... I shall not bind her feet, and let us send her to a school and make such a woman out of her as there are here and there in these days."53 Wang the Tiger’s question reflects the traditional backward consciousness: "But who will wed such a maid?"54 O-lan also reflects the same backward consciousness. O-lan feels guilty while Wang Lung

51. Ibid.
52. Ibid., p. 372.
53. Ibid., p. 373.
54. Ibid.
expresses his hatred for her un-bound feet: "My mother did not bind them, since I was sold so young. But the girl's feet I will bind—the youngest girl's feet I will bind." 55

Time changes and with it change attitudes. O-lan's daughter-in-law looks at the future of her daughter from a diametrically different point of view: "Such a maid can wed whom she likes, I believe." 56

The world drawn by Pearl Buck is undoubtedly a masculine universe. This chapter endeavors to probe into the male characters of her novels. Here is an attempt to examine her attitudes towards man and this chapter tries to perceive man in his privileged world. It attempts to explore the masculine logic. The author's power of penetrating into a man's world is to be analysed attentively. The answers to these queries should help clarify the status of women in Pearl Buck's novels.

Pearl Buck portrays some of her male characters against the backdrop of a decadent feudal society which was male dominated to a degree unsurpassed in the world. Male child is always welcome in the families, the sons are over privileged, over protected, very often pampered with extreme love, care and importance. Most of them grow into spineless

55. Pearl S. Buck, The Good Earth, p. 130.
56. Pearl S. Buck, Sons, p. 373.
adults without any moral backbone. In *The Exile* Pearl Buck shows her mother’s efforts to save her children from this culture. "Her constant fear was that she would not be able to keep her children to the standards of life and thought in their own country, that in spite of her the languid Oriental acceptance of things as they were would creep into her children’s souls and enervate them."57 She had a quarrel with her Chinese maid servant on this issue. Carie entrusts his son with the task of carrying fire woods and the task of keeping his own room tidy. The eldest son of the house was forced to perform manual labour; to Wang Amah the maid servant, this was sacrilege. While the family was busy with the breakfast she would creep into Edwin’s room and clean it up. Carie caught her and the gentle old Chinese woman replied apologetically: "It is a shameful thing in your eyes to make the eldest son work. For the girls, yes, it is well, but not for the sons."58 Carie attacked her with these words: "... and so your men grow idle and devilish like that one from whom I took you."59 The Chinese servants treated Edwin too deferentially and he became conscious about his place as the eldest son in the family. Carie found this too difficult to counteract. The whole environment tended to give the boy

58. Ibid., p. 127.
59. Ibid.
a false and exalted opinion of himself. The conflict between Carie and Wang Amah is the conflict between two cultures. These experiences equip Pearl Buck with a detached attitude towards the patriarchalism of China. Her portrayal of male characters upholds objective representation of reality.

Mr. Wu is one of the devilish lazy and male characters that Pearl Buck draws so vividly and convincingly. He is a thoroughly spoilt child. He is highly precious for his mother as he is the only one to survive out of her several births. "... She out of the excess of her love, helped him play when he should have studying. She gave him rich and delicate foods and when his young belly was overstuffed and ached she taught him to puff an opium pipe to relieve the pain."60 No wonder this pampered child grows to be a lazy and sensual man: "Thus, as he was never able to resist a well-seasoned dish at the table, so he would not be able, however he longed for perfection to deny himself the pleasure of a young woman."61 All his life he satisfies his sensual desires without any restraint. A glance into his last days with the prostitute Jasmine reveals his gross and beastly life.

61. Ibid., p. 74.
youth, his young concubine now finished. Whatever Madame Wu had fostered in him had faded away, like a light dimmed because it fed on no fuel. He grew gross and heavy, eating too much and drinking often but always with Jasmine. He went no more to the flower houses, for Jasmine gave him all her arts... There is the court where they lived so closely together, that almost they lived alone, they were ribald and gay and drunken and happy, two pieces of meat and bone, and content so to be." 62 Mr. Wu, a wealthy land lord affords a lazy and comfortable life, all he has to do are eating, drinking and womanizing.

The Son of Heaven is also another glaring example of a pampered and spoiled male child. At an early age he becomes an impotent and disabled person, his debauched sexual desires cripple him in the prime of his youth. The last days of the Emperor evoke no other feelings than pity and revulsion: "Though he was young in years, indeed his third decade not yet come, he was an old man in body, weakened by his own lusts. Too early had he yielded to his desires, too humbly had the Court physicians whipped his blood alive again with herbs and medicine. He was exhausted and only death remained." 63

62. Ibid., p. 293.
63. Pearl S. Buck, Imperial Woman, p. 74.
Some important events forced Pearl Buck to leave China permanently. The turmoil in China, her invalid daughter, her unhappy marriage with John Lossing Buck, her second marriage with Richard J. Walsh are some such events. In 1934 she left China to settle permanently in America. In 1938 she published *This Proud Heart* a novel against American background. In this novel Pearl Buck presents the contradictions of a gifted woman in a world of man. While treating the woman of genius and her problems, the author draws a host of male characters to sharpen the conflict.

David Barnes, a devoted and successful sculptor, spots Susan’s talents. He despises the woman in Susan: "'A woman!' she heard him muttering in a whisper. 'damn, damn, damn, that it’s been given to a woman!'" He asks her to go to Paris for further training, but Susan refuses as she has a home to tend. David lashes at her: "Any woman can have husband and children. What have they to do with you?" He tried to make her conscious of the exceptional gift in her. He takes it himself to guard and enrich the creator in Susan as he is aware of the attitudes of the masculine universe towards a gifted woman. In his own words: "... I tell you it’s bad enough for a man to go through with racket— it’s

64. Pearl S. Buck, *This Proud Heart*, p. 81.
65. Ibid., p. 93.
hopeless for a woman. They won't take you seriously. It's all bosh about there being any equality. And artists are the damnest, rottenest selfish lot—everyone trying to down everybody else. A woman hasn't a ghost of a show. If she's good she makes the men rage—they're jealous enough of each other, but for a woman to rival them—it's sheer impertinence. You're damned the day you're born a woman—that is, if you do anything to compete with men.”

David Barnes can rise above the ugliness of a genderized society, but Mark and Blake cannot. Mark, Susan's first husband is an honest fellow; in Susan's maid servant Jane's words: "Mr. Keening's the same, isn't he, Mum? Never takes a drink, and just the same, day in and day out. It's a wonderful disposition in a man." Mark's gifted wife causes an inferiority complex in him, which he can never get rid of: "You've married a everyday chap," "You've married a stupid fellow," "This street's full of fellows like me--Hal, Tom, Page, Bob, Shaplin--we're all off, the same piece." Susan's superiority hurts Mark's male ego, he is visibly disturbed when his wife tries to help him in solving

66. Ibid., p. 313.
67. Ibid., p. 131.
68. Ibid., p. 33.
69. Ibid., p. 24.
70. Ibid., p. 49.
the economic crisis in their young home: "... a man would rather provide for his family himself. It makes him out a poor fish if he can't buy necessities for his own baby."71

The statue created by Susan in which a woman looks away from the man and the lady, digs out the old pain in Mark: "It's the old trouble--I can't forget it. I am not good enough for you--it comes to that."72 With all her love, care and efficiency Susan fails to make Mark happy. His death is sort of psychic suicide. His last question is: "The woman was looking away, wasn't she?"73, then he turns his head away from her towards the wall and died quietly.

Susan's second husband Blake--a rich artist settled in New York, however ignored the artist in her. Blake declares clearly that he hates independent women. Susan is enchanted by Blake's passionate love. He adores her beauty, heaps upon her costly dresses, loves her children, gives her a life of comfort and luxury. "He did not care in the least that there was power in her to do or to make. It was nothing to him that she was a sculptor, great or small. He laughed whenever she said soberly that she must work. 'Why need you

71. Ibid., p. 63.
72. Ibid., p. 128.
73. Ibid., p. 157.
work when you have me to take care of you?'

Susan starts her sculpting and to her utter dismay she notices jealousy in Blake. Susan feels very small before this biased world. Susan faces the male-dominated society in her refined and cultured husband. Susan believes that "There ought not to be man or woman in work... Work is a sort of heaven where there is neither male or female." Blake assesses woman however talented she may be, in terms of traditional notions about woman; he believes firmly that women are inferior to men: "Whether you're man or woman sets you, whatever you do." Blake sees woman from a single point of view, the male: "It's difficult for me to take women seriously, perhaps." Blake fails to consider Susan as an artist without regard to her sex. He assesses Susan in terms of his conformity to traditional notions of femininity; she is conceived only in biological terms. Susan's dream of cultural androgyny is ridiculed by Blake.

74. Ibid., p. 238.
75. Ibid., p. 345.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
Mr. Wu, Blake or Son of Heaven try to dominate their women but fail. Pearl Buck allows two men, both of them given to asceticism, David Barnes and Brother Andre, to influence her two strong and superior women—Madame Wu and Susan Gaylord. Like David Barnes, Brother Andre also leads an austere life of a priest. He is a priest defrocked for his heretical beliefs. He directs a foundling home. Both David and Andre shut themselves out from the ordinary course of life. They reject the traditional conception of life and society and of course conventional notions about woman also. These two ascetics, therefore do not represent the crude masculine universe which Pearl Buck's female characters have to confront. Both of them have positive influence in the growth of the two gifted women in a hostile world.

David Barnes stirs the creator in Susan, Brother Andre urges Madame-Wu to conquer her weakness, to de-emphasize and subordinate selfishness. The love of liberty in Madame Wu is paralyzed by the role of a mother and wife but not eradicated; Andre is only an outlet. The creative urge in Susan is also not destroyed, David Barnes only helped it find its course.

This chapter attempts to trace the reactions of women to the masculine universe. This query would raise yet more queries. Here is an attempt to examine whether women in Pearl Buck's novels submit to the strong social forces or
dare them, whether they pose as martyrs accepting the masculine authority or question it. A glance into some of the female characters of Pearl Buck and their reactions to their world would help us in finding answer to these queries.

Madame Wu is lucky to have a liberal father who dares go against the society to educate his intelligent daughter and even to unbound her feet. The moment her father put her free feet into her slippers, the urge for liberty is set in her. Wealth, luxury, comfort— even a devoted husband cannot satisfy her urge. All along she is eaten up by a secret dissatisfaction. No wonder in her fortieth birthday she astounds her husband; there are protests from all sides. She has her answers ready, it is very embarrassing for a woman over forty to bear a child. She says to her husband: "You are young man still... your fires are burning and strong. You ought to have more sons. But I have completed myself." She feels relieved, after arranging a concubine for her husband: "She felt, indeed, restored to herself and almost as she had been a girl. How strange and how pleasant it would be to lie down at night and know that she could sleep until morning, or if she were wakeful that she could be wakeful and not fear waking another! Her body was given

80. Pearl S. Buck, Pavilion of Women, p. 31.
back to her."\(^{81}\) She liberates herself from being a sex slave, in her own words: "To give one's delicate body to indelicate hands, to see lust grow hot and feel one's own flesh grow cold--to feel the heart grow faint and the mind sick, and yet to be compelled, for the sake of peace in the house."\(^{82}\) She feels that her body is returned to her and there is a new need to take care of it: "I will take care of my body carefully, not that it may any more please a man, but because it houses me and therefore I am dependent upon it."\(^{83}\) Brother Andre opens her mind to a new intellectual curiosity. She has a new longing for freedom: "For the first time in her life she longed to rise out of these four walls and travel everywhere upon the earth and to see everything and to know all."\(^{84}\) Brother Andre dies in an accident, after his death Madame Wu realizes that he is the only man whom she loves. Her secret love strengthens her with a new outlook of life and a totally different woman emerges out of her. She begins to run Andre's orphanage for girls, solves family problems with a new gusto and continues her intellectual pursuit. The new strength shows up in her deeds. She saves her middle aged friend Meichen from sure death. She

\(^{81}\) Ibid., p. 35.

\(^{82}\) Ibid., p. 205.

\(^{83}\) Ibid., p. 47.

\(^{84}\) Ibid., p. 156.
confronts death in the woman who lies in her maternity bed after forty. She is not afraid of the smell of blood, the stench of death, the ugliness of Mr. Kang's fat weeping face, the disgust of his thick body, the sordidness of his mind. She orders Mr. Kang to stay beside his wife's maternity bed and makes him realise that "Birth for any woman is always near to death." He is almost forced to comprehend: "I never knew about life", he mumbled. "How hard it comes—it costs too much." In her own ways Madame Wu is a rebel against society and tradition. She revolts against the sexual mastery of man over woman. She does not depend upon the male society for her sense of identity and emotional life. Love for Andre is a part of her quest for self.

In *The Exile* Pearl Buck draws the figure of her mother, Carie. At an early age Carie seeks a sign from God so that she can believe in God. She faces a trying period during her mother's fatal illness. When her mother comes to the moment of eternal sleep, her last words are: "Why—it's—all true." Carie accepts these words as the long awaited sign from God and she offers herself to God.

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85. Ibid., p. 243.
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid., p. 242.
The young preacher Andrew touches her spiritual cords. They get married and set out on a trip to China.

Carie loves beauty; hers is a sensuous nature:
"She loved the feel of things, the texture of silk and porcelain and linen and velvet, the touch of rose leaves, the roughness of pine cone." Some rose cultured curtains, a well shaped table, a little renovation of her simple mission home give her pure joy. There is also a strong puritanical streak, a fear for God in her. She perceives that souls are important but bodies are immediate and real. For Andrew the Chinese people are heathens, souls to be rescued but for Carie they are 'fathers, mothers, little children merry as brown crickets in the earth, she saw them as families and as people earning their living from the soil and they became human to her.' "His life was wrapped in mystic union with God and with the souls of men—always their souls. Men and women were first of all souls to him and seldom any more." His complete absorption in his mission work, his inability to face or to understand the practical difficulties in human lives, his ascetic and rigorous life-style deny life to him.

89. Ibid., p. 41.
90. Ibid., p. 66.
91. Ibid., p. 86.
Obviously there are contradictions between Carie and Andrew. To pick up one -- before summer set on, Carie, already a mother of two finds with dismay that she is again with child. It means that the second baby Maude must be weaned before the summer set on. The change makes her daughter ill and they have to move to Japan for a change. The voyage across the turbulent China seas proves fatal for the baby who is attacked by a violent stomach disorder. There is no doctor on that little Japanese ship. She flew to the Cabin and threw herself upon the floor in an agony of prayer. If God were going to speak out of His Heaven, let it be now -- let it be now! Andrew cannot tolerate Carie’s ‘fevered importunate besieging of God,’ and he rebukes her gently. Carie cries in anger: "You do not bear these little children... you do not understand what it is to give your life to the making of a child and then see it die--it’s myself dying!" Andrew turns a quiet face to her: "It is God’s will." Being a missionary’s wife she utters these violent words: "Don’t talk to me about God!" Such conflicts and frustrations are just a part of day-to-day living.

92. Ibid., pp. 79-80.
93. Ibid., n. 80.
94. Ibid.
95. Ibid.
96. Ibid., p. 81.
of Carie. Four of her seven children die in China. She fails to reconcile herself with the idea that these deaths are sacrifices demanded by God. The intense tragedies she beholds in China also shake her belief in a power which allows such pitiless things to happen.

Inspite of her doubt over God's existence and her disappointment with her husband she does what she can to support Andrew's missionary works. Once she had contacted tuberculosis and was advised to return to America. Inspite of the risk she had stayed with her husband. Through rigid self-denial and extreme frugality she had supported her husband's Chinese translations of the New Testament. When Andrew was near retirement, Carie protected her husband from the new missionaries with new ideas, thus expressing her loyalty and devotion.

Carie wants from her husband companionship, she desires to be his soul mate not a mere housekeeper, which Andrew simply denies her. The religious subjection of women rouses in her 'an irrepressible independence and desire for self-expression, born of their innate and unconscious sense of injury and injustice. All subject people so suffer.'

All her life Carie is an exile not only from her motherland, but from the natural joys in life, from a true self and even

from God. In her everyday life she battled on through recurring deaths, disease, war, revolution, famine and poverty. She buries in the alien land her four children and also many of her hopes and desires. Towards the last part of her life she grows to resent her husband's selfishness, his impracticality, his doctrine of subjection and his rigid notions of God. "When Carie perceived his mind, all her swift, rebel blood boiled. It seemed to her that for the first time she saw this saint of hers that she had married for his goodness, as he really was—for all his goodness toward her he was narrow and selfish and arrogant. What—was she not to go to God direct because she was born a woman? Was not her brain swifter, keener, clearer than the brains of most men? Why—was God like that, Andrew's God?" The final contradiction cannot be averted. She begins to hate her husband and his God. As the rich humanism in her deepens the puritan side becomes weak. In her death bed, she spoke often of the 'bird calls in the trees about the house, of the green shadows on the grass, of the splendor of the lilies on the terrace.' On hearing the record of the song "O rest in the Lord. Wait patiently for Him." she says with a quiet and profound bitterness: "Take that away. I have waited and

99. Ibid., p. 211.
100. Ibid., p. 212.
patiently for nothing. \(^{101}\) Near the end of her life she does not allow her husband to come near her. While lying in her death bed she expresses her desire to see the fox trot dance. After enjoying the dance to the tune of the jazz music she comments: "Well, that's a pretty thing—so graceful and light. I should not be surprised if Andrew is all wrong about God. I believe one ought to choose the happy, bright things of life, like dancing and laughter and beauty. I think if I had it to do over again I would choose those instead of thinking them sinful. Who knows?—God might like them.\(^{102}\) She deliberately cuts herself off from all thoughts of religion and God and chooses the beauty of the world. When she is dying she rouses herself for a moment and expresses her intense love of life: "Do not sing any sad hymns over me. I want the Glory Song. I hate to die. My life is unfinished.\(^{103}\) Carie's daughter's words can be taken as the final comment on this brave lady: "Strange remote soul of a man that could pierce into the very heavens and discern God with such certainty and never see the proud and lonely creature at his side! To him she was only a woman. Since those days when I saw all her nature dimmed I have hated Saint Paul with all my heart and so must all true women hate—----

101. Ibid.
102. Ibid., p. 214.
103. Ibid., p. 216.
him, I think, because of what he has done in the past to women like Carie, proud free-born woman, yet damned by their very womanhood. I rejoice for her sake that his power is gone in these new days."104

Madame Wu tries to refute man's sexual mastery over woman. Carie interrogates patriarchal ideology but O-lan's reactions to the male world is one of passivity and resignation. Towards the last part of her life O-lan, especially after the arrival of Lotus breaks down with grief and disease. She sinks without love, attention or any medical care. "...Wang Lung saw her only as he saw the table or his chair or a tree in the court, never even so keenly as he might see one of the oxen dropping his head or a pig that would not eat."105 Like all other oppressed people she lives in silence. She accepts the masculine universe and never questions it.

Susan Gaylord in This Proud Heart questions the patriarchal ideology, defies and transcends it. Susan, a gifted sculptor is contented with her marriage, home and children but the creator in her remains hungry. One fine morning her maid-servant inspires Susan into sculpting:

"For suddenly she saw this essential Jane, looking out from

104. Ibid., pp. 195-96.
105. Pearl S. Buck, The Good Earth, p. 182.
among pots and kettles, humble, fearful, living moment by moment in another woman's contented house, in a timid precious peace, borrowed for a moment from a troubled and tragic life."106 Susan takes Jane as a model for her sculpture. The process of creation is a secret and ecstatic experience for her. The creative urge in her alienates her husband, he is unable to communicate with the artist in his wife. Mark is visibly disturbed by his wife's divided personality. "I tell you everything, see? There isn't any more to me. But there's so much you don't tell me. You listen, but only a part of you is listening. I think that's it--I'm only married to part of you."107 Mark dies and his death allows Susan to live her own life. She goes to Paris for further training in sculpture. The world around her reminds her constantly "... that women were never artists. Women were too passive, they lacked the cold desire for perfection. Women were lazy, they could not give themselves, women were machines and not creators, women had no imagination."108 Susan is not influenced by these traditional notions about woman, but she has doubts in her. She comes into contact with Blake—a rich artist in Paris and marries him. To achieve artistic perfection Susan has to purify

106. Pearl S. Buck, This Proud Heart, pp. 109-10.
107. Ibid., p. 115.
108. Ibid., pp. 200-201.
herself and the process of purification starts with her marriage, it eliminates the dross in her. Nearly for a year Blake was in her blood like a mad drink."¹⁰⁹ She is satisfied with her life with Blake: "It was sweet to live in Blake's house, to feel herself Blake's wife. It was nearly enough."¹¹⁰ Gradually Susan ceases to identify herself merely as Blake's wife. She starts sculpting and emerges successful. To her utter dismay she finds that Blake is jealous of her. Susan's exhibition is a roaring success and Blake cannot take it naturally; he describes her sculptures as obvious and simple for the sophisticated mind. Susan reads his mind: "For she knew nothing could make him so angry as this except jealousy of his work. She had seen him jealous of many others. If she felt this towards her, nothing could heal the wound between them."¹¹¹ Susan and Blake are separated. She returns to her country house and realizes that "She was too much for everyone, and none could fill her and each knew it and went away."¹¹² The dross in her eliminated, Susan devotes her entire being to art with undivided attention. Susan encounters the male world and emerges a winner.

In *Imperial Woman* Yehonala challenges the male

¹⁰⁹. Ibid., p. 263.
¹¹⁰. Ibid., p. 247.
¹¹¹. Ibid., p. 346.
¹¹². Ibid., p. 368.
dominated society in her own way. Her love and her illegal child are her protests against the brutal world which she has to confront as a third rate concubine.

Pearl Buck picks up her female characters from a male dominated society where women are naturally supposed to be weak and spineless. The characters of Susan, Yehonala, Carrie and even silent O-lan are stronger and more sensible than the men in their lives. She traces in them an irrepressible desire for self expression born out of injustice and oppression. Through these characters Pearl Buck shows her belief in the strength of the neglected. Neglect and injuries make her women more self-reliant. She presents her women with superior virtues and loftier ideas. Besides their courage and resilience the male characters appear pale and worthless. Though society does not regard women as autonomous beings, they assert themselves. She delineates some of her women as superior to men and invests them with loftier ideals and sharp intelligence. Against all odds these characters stand up and assert themselves. Pearl Buck wants to show that women can do as well as men given half the chances to prove themselves. But this does not mean that Pearl Buck is blind to the woman’s helpless situation and characters shaped by a brutal masculine world. She draws earthly, commonplace woman as Lucile in This Proud Heart to whom life means nothing but cooking and washing diapers. The mundane,
monotonous repetition of life turns her into a commonplace and ordinary woman. Susan hates Lucile: "I hate women who think of nothing except how they can get the most out of some man. Look at Lucile and poor Hal! She thinks she's a respectable woman. She doesn't see she's sucked Hal dry until he's nothing. He's done nothing all his life except support Lucile. He works all day to feed and clothe her and comes home at night and helps her wash the dishes and put the children to bed because she's tired. That's his life. Nobody knows what Hal is, really. He's never had time to find out himself." In Lucile, Pearl Buck draws a parasite. Lucile's life simply expresses the fact that her horizon is closed. She is accused of being a parasite, everything happens to her through her husband. Her mundane life leaves no way to acquire a sense of grandeur. "It is her duty to assure the monotonous repetition of life in all its mindless factuality. It is natural for woman to repeat, to begin again without even inventing, for time to seem to her to go round and round without ever leading anywhere."

If Lucile debases herself to a parasite, Mary disintegrates herself to a basely utilitarian woman. Susan never looks at the masculine universe for her identity; The

113. Pearl S. Buck, This Proud Heart, pp. 303-304.
115. Ibid., pp. 615-616.
death of Mark, Blake’s love affair with Sonia cannot disturb the creator in Susan. Mary not only looks at man for her identity but she exploits man for her economic benefits. She marries a sixty years old man for money. After the marriage Susan finds her sister visibly excited about her new found status of a rich man’s wife. Mary is rather crude in the exultation over her new found prosperity: "We’re going to buy a house in town, Susan, isn’t it exciting? And one at Palm Beach! Benny spends months in the South every winter!" Mary wears her diamond wedding ring and another of emerald with explicit pride. Mary’s husband Mr. Rhodes is simply grateful to his young and beautiful wife: "A man can’t be too kind to a woman anyway, is what I think, and when a lovely young girl like Mary trusts herself to an old fellow like me---" he broke off. There were tears in his blue innocent eyes—'Well, I can’t do too much for her. What she sees in me, I don’t know. It can’t be much.'

Characters like Lucile or Mary reflect the mutilated consciousness of woman. Pearl Buck draws these characters in a few strokes but succeeds in capturing the distorted consciousness of woman. Jasmine in Pavilion of Women also expresses the insecure world of woman. Jasmine is a prosti-

116. Pearl S. Buck, This Proud Heart, p. 340.
117. Ibid., p. 339.
tute. Like other sex-slaves, her existence depends completely upon man and she is fully aware that if man ceases to feel desire for her she will be nowhere. In her case Jasmine depends upon Mr. Wu for existence. The sense of insecurity compels her to become a liar. She tries to trap her rich suitor with a fatal lie, that she is pregnant: "I am afraid I have happiness in me... that is why I want the house. I can't have a child here. ... It is my fate. Girls like me—sometimes it happens in spite of ourselves. Especially when we really love a man. That is my mistake... I will bear the child. I want to bear him."\textsuperscript{118} Jasmine comes to Mr. Wu's house and meets his first wife Madame Wu, who detects her lie and draws the truth. Jasmine lies in front of the intelligent first wife: "I want to settle myself before the child is born."\textsuperscript{119} At last Jasmine is forced to speak the truth and Madame Wu ferrets out her secret motive: "If you come for rice and shelter, I beg you to tell me. I will promise you these. You may have them freely without having to buy with your body."\textsuperscript{120} The answer of Jasmine brings out the helpless woman behind this brazenly coquettish harlot: "Who gives a woman something for nothing?"\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{118} Pearl S. Buck, \textit{Pavilion of Women}, p. 196.  
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., p. 281.  
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., p. 221.  
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid.
physiological or psychological factors shape this cunning woman; she is the product of a male dominated society.

Pearl Buck’s portrayal of female reality has many nuances. Her women’s reactions to the masculine world are of many different shades. Carie, Madame Wu, Yehonala defy it in their own ways, O-lan surrenders and kneels before the world she finds, Lotus and Jasmine debase themselves, La-may hurts herself, Lucile and Mary use the male world for their own advantages, Susan encounters it. Andrew’s mother as drawn in Fighting Angel presents a thought-provoking picture. Her reactions against her world is a curious one. When Andrew’s mother attains her sixtieth year, she turns not only a Methodist but decides that she has worked enough and she will never work again. With this abrupt decision she transforms herself from a busy and devoted housewife of a big family to a woman of complete leisure. She even gives up simple works as making up her own bed. The whole family is puzzled and her husband is simply mad with rage. In spite of all these she maintains her life of complete leisure for nearly thirty five years. Very often her husband shouts aloud: "The Bible said man was head of the woman."122 But his shouting makes no impression on the indomitable old woman eternally on her rocking chair. She defies the world by withdrawing herself from ordinary household chores.

122. Pearl S. Buck, Fighting Angel, p. 12.
Very often woman feels helpless in a masculine universe and fails to find effective ways to express her anguish. She has to express her powerless situation and her anger but finding no outlet she bursts out into futile protests. Simone De Beauvoir observes: "There is a way out that is open to the woman who has reached the end of her resistance—it is suicide. But it seems less often resorted to by women than by men. Here the statistics are very ambiguous. Successful suicides are much more common in men than in women, but attempts to end their lives are commoner in the latter." In case of Pearl Buck's female characters suicides or attempts to end their lives are very often expressions of protest. Many of the Pearl Buck's women reach the end of their resistance, but their ways to express the revolt are limited, they take the easiest path of suicide. Out of sheer disgust at her life as a concubine of Mr. Wu, Chi-luming who was an orphan, in Pavilion of Woman, tries to commit suicide. After her first pregnancy she becomes afraid of her master. She discloses the news of her pregnancy to the first wife and begs her frenziedly for protection from the master: "Let me stay here tonight... Let me sleep here as I did when I first came. And you—you tell him for me.

Beg him—beg him to leave me alone!"124 The first wife Madame Wu refuses to shelter her and reminds her duty to the master: "Remember who you are. You come to me without father and mother, a foundling, picked out of street by a farmer's wife. You are widowed without having been wed. Today you are second only to me in this family, the richest in the city, a house to which any family in the region longs to send its daughters. You are dressed in silk, jade hangs in your ears and you wear gold rings. You may not return to my court. How could I explain it to the house? Go back at once to that court where you belong, for which you are purchased."125

Chiuming returns to her master, but her cold attitude, her moroseness repel him and he goes after a prostitute. She tries to commit suicide by hanging herself from the pomegranate tree. Her attempt to kill herself is not the usual frenzied show of jealousy of woman deserted by man, it has a tragic note of passive resignation. The orphan who becomes a concubine finds her world too tough to tackle, her power of resistance fails her and she tries to kill herself.

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125. Ibid.
Shut up in a male world, a woman sees herself completely dependent upon man. When her man shows any signs of rejection she becomes desperate. The description of her father's concubines by Madame Kang reveals to what an extent woman can be dependent on man: "When my father took a concubine my mother cried and tried to hang herself, and we had to watch her night and day, and when he took a second concubine the first one swallowed her earrings, and so it went until he had the five he ended with." 126 These suicide attempts are direct expressions of jealousy.

In case of La-may the beautiful concubine of East Wind: West Wind, her threat to commit suicide is a means to express her hatred. She loves her master and mistakes his fascination as devotion. After her pregnancy he deserts her and La-may breaks down with grief and despair. She promises to take poison if he continues to come to her.

Yehonala's plan to commit suicide is a voice of protest against her sordid status of a debauched Emperor's concubine. Three nights with the Emperor are enough to kill her desire to live, she vows not to meet him again. She does not leave her bed for seven days and seven nights and keeps earrings besides her bed. She declares that if anybody forces her to go to the royal bed chamber, she will swallow

126. Ibid., p. 98.
her earrings. The Emperor recovers from the stimulating drug and calls for his new concubine. Yehonala continues her threat to die. She reaches the end of her resistance: "Then I must die... for truly I will not live." Later on, she recovers from her wish to die but at such moments of frustrations and agony suicide is her only expression of protest.

Leah, the Jewish girl in *Peony* not only threatens to die but actually kills herself. Leah finds that her would-be husband David does not love her; she gives way to her furious disappointment: "Leah stopped crying. She stared at him, her eyes blank, her lips quivering, while the meaning of these words seeped into her mind. She felt them thunder in her heart and drain through her blood like poison. Then her mind grew dark." She strikes David and he falls down. Thinking him to be dead, she kills herself with the same sword. The cause of Leah's theatrical suicide is the refusal and rejection of man. These suicides or attempts to commit suicide are women's reactions to the masculine world where they are trapped.