

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

Social Conditioning Versus Biological Determinism: A Study of the
Women Characters in the 'Minor' Novels of Thomas Hardy

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the University of Hull

by

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March 1985

SUMMARY

Summary of Thesis submitted for Ph.D. degree

by

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on

Biological Determinism Versus Social Conditioning: A Study of the
Women Characters in the 'Minor' Novels of Thomas Hardy

The popular and critical consensus with regard to the novels of Thomas Hardy is that they exemplify a fatalistic or pessimistic philosophy consequent upon their author's early contact with evolutionary thought. One of the functions of this thesis is to demonstrate that, whilst accepting that the life and development of the individual was necessarily determined by certain biological laws, Hardy's novels examine the operation of another shaping force on human existence: namely the social process created and perpetrated by humanity itself.

Hardy's literary career spans the period during which the emergent feminist movement constituted one of the major challenges to the status quo. By documenting Hardy's eventual active support of the women's suffrage campaign, this thesis seeks to reveal the extent to which he located the potential and need for social change in women's frustrations, and their rebellion against the confines of those laws, conventions and value structures which directly pertained to them. Whilst Hardy's novels offer few, if any, feminist solutions, by focussing upon women as the victims of the social process they reveal, through implication, those areas where enlightened social reform is both necessary and of potential benefit to all sections of humanity.

The minor novels have been chosen to illustrate this thesis because they, more clearly than the undisputed classics, bear witness to those aspects of Hardy's prose vision which do not fit the popular and critical stereotype. Moreover, the minor novels constitute a considerable portion of Hardy's prose output which has failed to attract the critical attention it deserves. This thesis seeks to redress the balance in that respect.

Summary cont.

Whilst the methodology adopted by this study is essentially text-centred, the intellectual background to these novels is amplified in the early sections by a selective discussion of their author's life and times.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful for the help received from the following: Mr D. J. Orton and the staff of the inter-library loans section of the Brynmor Jones Library, University of Hull; Mr R. N. R. Peers, Curator and Secretary of the Dorset County Museum, Dorchester; Mrs P. Stoneman; Dr John Osborne and, especially, my supervisor, Marion Shaw.

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviated forms of the titles of Hardy's fictional works, unless otherwise identified, refer to the New Wessex Edition of the Novels, General Editor P. N. Furbank, published in fourteen volumes by Macmillan (London, 1974-1975).

- DR Desperate Remedies (1871; London, 1975)
- UGT Under the Greenwood Tree (1872; London, 1974)
- PBE A Pair of Blue Eyes (1873; London, 1975)
- FMC Far from the Madding Crowd (1874; London, 1974)
- HE The Hand of Ethelberta (1876; London, 1975)
- RN The Return of the Native (1878; London, 1974)
- TM The Trumpet Major (1880; London, 1974)
- AL A Laodicean (1881; London, 1975)
- TT Two on a Tower (1882; London, 1975)
- MC The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886; London, 1974)
- TW The Woodlanders (1887; London, 1974)
- Td'U Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891; London, 1974)
- JO Jude the Obscure (1896; London, 1974)
- WB The Well-Beloved (1897; London, 1974)
- PWB The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved: A Sketch of a Temperament, Illustrated London News, 101 (Oct.-Dec.1982)
- LTH Florence Emily Hardy, The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928 (1962; London, 1973)
- PW Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings, ed. Harold Orel (1966; London, 1967)
- PN The Personal Notebooks of Thomas Hardy, ed. Richard H. Taylor (London, 1978)
- LN The Literary Notes of Thomas Hardy, ed. Lennart A. Björk, I Text and I Notes (Göteborg, 1974)
- CL Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, ed. Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate (Oxford, 1978-)
- ORFW One Rare Fair Woman: Thomas Hardy's Letters to Florence Henniker 1893-1922, ed. Evelyn Hardy and F. B. Pinion (London, 1972)

- THYB The Thomas Hardy Year Book, ed. J. and G. Stevens Cox (Guernsey, 1970-1979)
- THAB Michael Millgate, Thomas Hardy: A Biography (Oxford, 1982)
- YTH Robert Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy (London, 1975)
- TOH Robert Gittings, The Older Hardy (London, 1978)

Nineteenth-Century Periodicals

(os) old series

(ns) new series

FR Fortnightly Review

NC Nineteenth Century

SR Saturday Review

Darwin

OS On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection; or, The Preservation of Favoured Races in The Struggle For Life (1859; ed. J. W. Burrows, London, 1968)

DM The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex, 2 vols (London, 1871)

Spencer

FP First Principles (London, 1862)

SS Social Statics; or, The Conditions Essential to Human Happiness Specified, and the First of Them Developed (London, 1851)

SoS The Study of Sociology (London, 1873)

PB The Principles of Biology, 2 vols (London, 1864-67)

EIMP Education: Intellectual, Moral and Physical (London, 1861)

Comte

GVP A General View of Positivism, trans. J. H. Bridges (London, 1865)

Huxley

'EBW' 'Emancipation - Black and White', in Collected Essays, III, 66-75

ABBREVIATIONS [cont.]

Mill

Nature Nature, in Three Essays on Religion, with an introductory notice by Helen Taylor (London, 1874)

Liberty On Liberty (1859; London, 1867)

EW The Enfranchisement of Women, Westminster Review, 55 (1851), 289-311

SW The Subjection of Women (1869), in Collected Works, XXI, 259-340

Others

MT Cicely Hamilton, Marriage as a Trade (1909; reprinted with introd. by Jane Lewis London, 1981)

INTRODUCTION

Criticism of Hardy's novels has been characterized by a debate between those who class his literary productions as fatalistic or pessimistic, and those who detect a predilection towards a meliorist approach to human existence in his work. The conviction that greeted the publication of The Dynasts (1904-1908), that Hardy's characters were 'helpless impersonal agents of the clockwork thought of a blind and unreasoning It', grew steadily.¹ In 1935, Albert Pettigrew Elliot claimed that 'never in his entire life did [Hardy] look upon existence as being much worth while'. He was 'the victim of inherent gloom'.² Eighteen years later John Holloway declared: '[Hardy] is fatalistic, and he rarely seems to suppose that men will or even can do much to reform their lives'. Hardy's characters are at the mercy of 'a determined system of things which ultimately controls human affairs without regard for human wishes'.³ In 1964 Richard Carpenter acknowledged 'the power of [Hardy's] gloomy, deterministic philosophy'.⁴ By 1965, Roy Morrell could, quite reasonably, assert that Hardy's pessimism or fatalism was accepted: 'it is no longer something one questions'.⁵ Morrell's study set out precisely to question this accepted view and, as such, his book marks a watershed in the critical response to Hardy's work. It is essentially an impassioned, though somewhat speculative plea for a critical re-evaluation of Hardy's texts which claims that Hardy's aim was 'to move the reader to pity and to protest' rather than to despair or indifference.⁶ Morrell focusses upon what he sees as Hardy's emphasis on 'man's essential freedom: to choose, to act, and thus to create his own values'.⁷ Morrell's insistence upon the responsibility of 'man' rather than on the inevitability of Fate in Hardy's texts signalled the start of a new move to examine the novels as documents of social protest rather than of cosmic indifference. F. R. Southerington develops Morrell's thesis and suggests that the concern with social institutions which marks say, The Woodlanders, could not consistently be held 'by one who believes that man's actions are bound and his future necessarily

doomed'.⁸ Southerington suggests that the tragic action in Hardy's texts consists of 'man's' struggle to escape from the necessity of adapting to an environment which is unsuited to the fulfilment of personal aspirations, but that this environment is largely shaped and determined by man-made social laws and institutions which could, and should, be altered. Southerington's conclusions are symptomatic of the views of a large body of Hardy critics writing during the 1970s; including J. Hillis Miller, Ian Gregor and F. B. Pinion which, in their turn, have led to a sympathetic examination of Hardy's claim to an evolutionary meliorist, rather than a pessimistic, world view.⁹ For Southerington, Hardy's texts register the fact that humanity in general is governed by certain necessary determinants which include the process and inevitability of evolution in all living things; the passage of time and the corresponding processes of physical, mental and emotional atrophy and dissolution; and the inevitability of consequence. He claims that if the term 'Fate' functions as a feasible concept in Hardy's texts, its jurisdiction must be restricted to encompass these realities alone.

However, Hardy's novels also testify to the existence of a determining force other than biological or historical necessity, namely the social process: the system of corporate human acts formulated to order and regulate a civilized community. Nineteenth-century evolutionary thinkers such as Darwin, Spencer, Huxley, Comte, and John Stuart Mill recognized, in the construction of a moral and criminal code, humanity's attempt to control and limit and thus, to some extent, liberate itself from its subjection to natural laws. At the same time, while humanity collectively determined the nature and course of the social process, each individual was in turn determined by the system he or she had helped to formulate. Whereas Spencer and Comte accepted and applauded the inevitability of this process, Mill and Huxley questioned the need for humanity to submit itself en masse to a system which was, in many respects, as unjust as

the one it sought to remedy. Both writers claimed that humanity had the ability, and indeed the duty, to improve the conditions of existence through judicious social reform motivated by sympathy, and an awareness of the shortcomings of the evolutionary process. Consciousness freed the individual from the necessity to conform by confronting him or her with an ethical choice between good and bad courses of action. It was through the exercise of this choice that humanity experienced an albeit limited degree of free will.

Hardy freely acknowledged the influence of Darwin, Spencer, Huxley, Comte, and Mill on the formation of his own deterministic world view.¹⁰ Whilst reluctantly accepting the implications of Darwin's findings, that existence was determined by a blind and instinctive evolutionary process, Hardy was drawn to his suggestion that the possession of certain 'social instincts' separated and, to some degree, liberated humanity from the determining hold of the natural system. His enthusiasm for the writings of Huxley and Mill, and his rejection of Spencer, would appear to support this conclusion and lends strength to Hardy's claim to a meliorist rather than a pessimist philosophy. This thesis seeks to examine Hardy's rational determinism: his belief in the extent to which humanity was able to affect and improve the conditions of existence for all living creatures through the construction of a social system informed and motivated by moral awareness and altruism.

Many of Hardy's critics have claimed that his contact with evolutionary thought resulted in a gloomy and uncomplicated belief in biological determinism. Lance St. John Butler quotes the scientist C. F. Hockett who

writing forty-five years after Hardy's death, and certainly without thinking of him ... proposes that we should try to arrest our civilization's headlong rush towards disaster but warns that whatever we do may prove useless, in which case 'man's place in nature will turn out to have been merely that of a fleeting episode of caring in the blind evolution of an uncaring universe'.

This, Butler concludes, 'is pure Hardy'.¹¹ Harvey Curtis Webster locates in Hardy's poem 'Hap' (1866), the existence of an early metaphysic that was to remain with him throughout much of his life. As a direct result of the impact

of Darwin's theory of natural selection on the young author, Hardy was persuaded that it was 'mere Chance that man as he is and the world as it is exist rather than an altogether different world otherwise inhabited; it is Chance that accounts for man's consciousness, man's values, and man's suffering'.¹²

Webster suggests that Hardy's contact with Spencer only intensified his pessimism and that despite his enthusiasm for the works of Mill, Shelley and Swinburne there is 'no tinge of "socialism"' in anything Hardy wrote after The Poor Man and the Lady: 'he finally decided his hope for fundamental social change was as much an illusion as his belief in the beneficence of God had been previously'.¹³

Irving Howe detects an element of 'philosophical naturalism' in Hardy's novels:

There is a strong Wordsworthian quality in Hardy's conviction - perhaps one should say, Hardy's passionate intuition - that the natural world is the source and repository of all the energies that control human existence. Like Wordsworth, Hardy instinctively unites nature and man, making the external setting a kind of sharer in the human fate. Still more Wordsworthian is Hardy's persuasion that the best life is one spent in undemanding harmony with the biological and geographic environment.¹⁴

Like Butler, Howe acknowledges Hardy's interest in the theories of Huxley and Mill judging them to have been 'a kind of intellectual liberation' for him. However, Howe claims that Hardy responded 'not with their combative energy and hope but with his own low-keyed melancholy'. He remained 'overawed by the mechanistic determinism, which nineteenth-century science seemed to enforce'.¹⁵ Butler, Howe and Webster register the existence of what the latter describes as a 'dubious meliorism' in Hardy's novels but attach little or no importance to it. Howe declares:

The doctrine of Immanent Will allowed [Hardy] to express a mild hopefulness, what he called 'meliorism', in regard to the ultimate destiny of the race: consciousness, slowly creeping through the centuries, might elevate itself to higher forms. But in the immediate historical moment he could not avoid the view that man's place in the universe is pitifully small, that his possibility for freedom of choice or action is equally small, and that 'Crass Casualty' rules over human affairs with a brute indifference.¹⁶

The thesis which structures my study is that the critical rejection of

Hardy's claim to a meliorist philosophy is based on a myopic and partial response to his fiction. In mounting an assessment of Hardy's world view, critics have invariably concentrated on a small number of undisputed classics in the Hardy oeuvre, and have ignored the cruder, less deftly-crafted texts in which many of Hardy's philosophical and political ideas find their fullest expression. In addition to this, critics have failed to take into account the pivotal position of the women characters in defining the philosophy that motivates his novels.

Huxley and, more especially, Mill recognized that social laws and conventions were formulated by the dominant economic group and, more importantly, by the dominant gender, and consequently that the social process worked to the detriment of certain sections of society, namely the working class and women. Hardy's literary career spans the period which saw the rise and resolution of the women's suffrage activity of the second half of the nineteenth century, which was catalyzed by the speeches and theories of John Stuart Mill. In 1865, Hardy published his first literary offering 'a trifle in Chambers's Journal ... entitled "How I built myself a house", written to amuse the pupils of Blomfield'.¹⁷ That same year, Mill received an invitation to stand as the Parliamentary representative for the City of Westminster. He agreed but 'made it clear that he was not prepared to undertake any local business if he were elected, but he set out plainly the subjects for which he would work, among which Women's Suffrage held almost the first place'.¹⁸ Hardy was present at the hustings and heard one of Mill's earliest election speeches (LTH, p. 330). In addition to this, Hardy became familiar with the current debate on the role and position of women through his contact with contemporary magazines and periodicals, his social intercourse with talented and emancipated socialites, and his communication with leading feminists and women novelists of the day. He died on Wednesday 11 January 1928, just a few months before the Bill to extend the franchise to all women aged twenty-one and over was passed in the House of Lords by a considerable majority. Critics have

consistently ignored the implicit feminist sympathies exhibited in Hardy's texts. This thesis seeks to demonstrate that Hardy's novels are not simply concerned with man's insignificance in the scheme of things, rural decline, or social repression of the working-class individual, but that they increasingly locate the potential and need for social change in women's frustrations and sufferings at the hands of those who create and consolidate the laws, conventions and value structures of society. In addition to the sufferings of man at the hands of the evolutionary system, Hardy's texts seek to expose woman's sufferings at the hands of man, in an attempt to hasten the spread of altruism throughout the conscious world, and thus to improve the modifiable conditions of existence for all sentient beings.

I would claim that the use of the term 'man' as generic for the human race in critical studies of Hardy's work has led to an incomplete and necessarily one-sided appreciation of his world view, and of the potential of his doctrine of evolutionary meliorism. In Man Made Language, Dale Spender suggests that 'the introduction of he/man into the structure of the language has helped to ensure that neither sex has a proliferation of female images: by such means is the invisibility of the female constructed and sustained in our thought systems and our reality'.¹⁹ Thus it is important to dissociate women from the generic term 'man' in this context because the position and experience of the female is essentially different from that of her male counterpart. This was particularly true of the nineteenth century for, while humanity in general was subject to certain biological, historical and social determinants, women were restricted still further by their enforced political, economic and sexual subjection to men. Hardy himself recognized the need for some distinction to be made. He claimed that his novels were 'one plea against "man's inhumanity to man" - to woman - and to the lower animals'.²⁰

The cultural and linguistic invisibility of women is highlighted by the subjectivity of male critical responses to Hardy's work which purport to be objective, value-free and of universal significance. This has led to a

considerable distortion of the role and importance of women in Hardy's fiction - especially with regard to the freedom, or otherwise, of the human individual - which has manifested itself in two ways. To begin with, Hardy's women characters are invariably judged according to a male-defined model of womanhood which has its roots in the arbitrary sex-role differentiation of the nineteenth century which has been carried through into the twentieth. Because so many of Hardy's male critics themselves subscribe to the view that women are determined by their biology, they identify a similar response to women in Hardy's fiction. Concerning A Pair of Blue Eyes, Harvey Curtis Webster concludes:

Woman aspires to conquer man; woman is thoughtless; woman generally changes from love of a handsome face to love of a masterful personality - "the most vigorous males usually leave the most numerous progeny," said Darwin....

For the unhappiness which is found in A Pair of Blue Eyes natural law is primarily responsible.... It almost seems as if a malign external force, quite different from the "crass Casualty" that might bring either gladness or moans, is co-operating with natural law to make unhappiness general.²¹

Webster detects similar implications in Far from the Madding Crowd, despite the narrator's, and Bathsheba's, comments on the destructive nature of sexual possession:

In this pessimistic statement one detects a departure from good Darwinism that is characteristic of both Hardy and his period, for Hardy's women, although they are drawn to men irresistibly, retain a Victorian nicety about the consummation of love. Nevertheless, the biological basis of Hardy's sexual pessimism stands clearly revealed.²²

While it may be true that Hardy's women characters reflect their creator's contradictory responses to the nature of femininity and womanly instinct, Webster has clearly failed to register the political and economic factors surrounding Bathsheba's ambivalent attitude to sex which goes far beyond her 'Victorian nicety'.

In many cases, Hardy's female characters are seen as 'convincing' only in so far as they conform to the model of woman as passive rather than active, physical rather than cerebral, intellectually weak, and sexually susceptible.

Thus Richard Taylor describes Ethelberta as 'both a vamp and a symbol of purposive masculinity', ignoring the fact that the economic realities of the period during which the novel is set meant that prudential considerations normally outside the sphere of female concerns suddenly became central to a woman's survival.²³ Herbert Grimsditch has no doubts concerning Elfride's femininity for, 'coming within the orbit of Knight, she proves her complete womanhood by falling a victim to his superior powers, in this case mental'.²⁴

Joseph Warren Beach says of Bathsheba:

It is true, that with all her pride and candour, her fairness and moral responsibility, she became the victim of a woman's vanity, helpless against the assaults of gallant flattery; and that, without the heart of a coquette, she managed to play the role of one. These are weaknesses which detract less from her charm than they add to her lifelikeness. They are the debt she paid to nature.²⁵

Benjamin Sankey likewise claims that Bathsheba is 'a puzzling combination of personal strength and feminine weakness'.²⁶ It is precisely this 'feminine weakness' that irritates George Wing who dismisses her as 'irresponsibly flirtatious ... her mating-calls are uncontrollable and irresistible, and if she pays for this high and undiscerning sexuality, there would seem, under her contemporary social code, to be no great injustice done. All told, she gets away with it rather lightly'.²⁷

A. J. Guerard sees the fact that Hardy's women characters conform to certain stereotypes as evidence of their striking similarity to real women.²⁸ From his seven types of femininity, Guerard selects the 'sweet, passive ingénues' as 'the most distinct and the least interesting of all' in that 'like all women they are incapable of making unsexed judgments and so usually choose the wrong men'. It is ironic that Guerard places Tabitha Lark in this group, along with Picotee, Thomasin and the first Avice, and that he dismisses her as 'a mere pert and blooming presence bounding healthfully across a field, [who] might well be considered the reduction to nonentity of the conventional ingénue', for, if a heightened awareness of feminist issues is brought to an analysis of Two on a Tower, Tabitha Lark takes on a new and dynamic significance as the

spokeswoman of the new feminist spirit.²⁹

Hardy's male critics frequently tend to judge his women characters according to their ability to inspire them with desire or indulgence, and seek to convey a sense of the success or failure of a heroine in this respect to a reader who is invariably assumed to be male. J. I. M. Stewart admits that 'with Hardy we are in a masculine universe extremely susceptible to the attraction of women, and therefore extremely aware of their fatality'.³⁰ Thus, although Fancy Day's obsession with her appearance may be, in his view, reprehensible, 'it is only men of notably serious and elevated mind who would austerely rule out a girl on such an account':

Fancy's 'coquettishness', we are told, 'was never so decided as to banish honesty', and her swift response to real devotion - her vulnerability, in fact, before the masculine principle to which, conversely, she is potentially so dangerous - is something which makes us reluctant to turn down any sort of thumb on her.³¹

Likewise George Wing, commenting on the potential risibility of the scene where De Stancy spies on Paula in her gymnasium, suggests that 'after all it is basically only the pink flannel (with its associations of stale music hall jokes) which sets us rocking: Paula, similarly cavorting in a bikini, even in 1962, could make us one with De Stancy'.³² Wing goes on to express disappointment with Hardy's 'astonishingly good' male characters because they are 'curiously unmasculine men', not, he hastens to add, 'sexually perverted', but 'lacking in aggressiveness: in sex-conflict they are out-manoeuvred, and their attractive women are often disappointed by their passive chivalry'. He claims that 'a little more caddishness and assertiveness at opportune moments would have paid dividends'.³³ The point at issue here is that because so many of Hardy's male critics subscribe to traditional forms of sex-role differentiation themselves, they have failed to recognize the process as a form of environmental conditioning. This thesis seeks to demonstrate the extent to which Hardy's texts show sex-role differentiation to be a powerful environmental force which helps to determine the behaviour of people in general, and the nineteenth-century woman in particular.

In addition to this, the subjectivity of male critical responses to Hardy's texts has meant that, in many cases, the specificity of female experience has been denied or ignored. Consequently critics have failed to uncover and explore further and deeper levels of meaning in Hardy's fiction which often relate directly to the aims and ideals of the feminist movement of the day. For example, F. R. Southerington praises the heroine of Two on a Tower for her 'natural heroism and self-sacrifice', and suggests that 'Viviette's act in releasing Swithin from his "obligation" to marry her is an illustration of foresight and charity which is infrequent in Hardy's women'. He concludes that Two on a Tower, 'demonstrates the triumph of emotion over circumstances and the environment'.³⁴ Such a view is a gross distortion of the text's message for a feminist reader, and ignores the poignancy and significance of the ending of the novel which implies that Viviette's self-sacrifice culminates in her annihilation, and the possible triumph of a new type of woman - dedicated to forging new and more positive codes of female conduct. Equally questionable is Roger Taylor's assertion that the heroine's sudden and untimely death 'is a narrative irony which in no way negates the affirmative optimism implicit in Viviette's exemplary loving-kindness'.³⁵ While, as F. R. Southerington suggests, 'Lady Constantine's simple act of charity is of more significance for man than the external universe can ever be', its significance for woman is grim.³⁶

Roger Taylor claims that The Well-Beloved interrogates idealistic philosophy which has its basis in the notion that 'a man loves not the reality of a woman but the vision or image of her that exists in his own mind'. It is clear, however, that this particular tragedy is not merely 'personal and aesthetic rather than social'.³⁷ The text can be seen to function as a critique of a social system which grants men the power to force, or attempt to force, women to conform to a male-defined ideal of womanhood. Likewise, Taylor describes A Laodicean as an investigation into 'the intellectual, social and cultural ramifications of man's attempts to reconcile the impulses of reason and emotion'.³⁸ Approached from this point of view, the novel appears slight

and unsatisfactory. Indeed, F. R. Southernington criticizes A Laodicean for its failure to deal adequately with 'the roles of the dynamic, forward-looking men of the new generation and the sensitive but ineffective aristocracy of the old'.³⁹ However, as Barbara Hardy has indicated, 'A Laodicean is a feminist novel, and its defects and merits need to be placed in the context of the novels about women in the 1870s and the 1880s'.⁴⁰ Underlying the novel's general concern with the historical process and the disintegration of the aristocracy, is a more specific involvement with the limited choices available to women who are denied an adequate education and access to the professional world, and forced instead to consolidate their identity through a politic marriage.

By altering the critical focus so that it takes into account the specificity of female experience in nineteenth-century England, it is the intention of this thesis to uncover new significances in Hardy's texts which will, in turn, shed a different light on the roles played by nature and society in determining the existence and behaviour of the individual, in particular, the individual woman.

Recent critics of Hardy's fiction have begun to examine the central role of women in his texts. John Lucas pays serious attention to 'the ways in which [Hardy] uses his fictional women to focus upon precisely those issues of class and separation which his novels explore, and which give them their especial distinction'.⁴¹ Others have centred on the problems raised when a male author seeks to examine and present female behaviour in what he sees as a sympathetic and convincing way. Ian Ousby claims that, because of his time and place, Hardy 'inevitably proceeds from the assumption that women are alien, essentially unlike the male novelist who observes, describes and tries hard to know them'. This desire to acknowledge, yet at the same time apprehend, that difference means that Hardy simultaneously exemplifies and transcends the misogynist stereotype. Ousby confines his attention to Far from the Madding Crowd, and concludes:

Once Hardy has moved from a general contemplation of Woman in the abstract to the creation of a particular female character, he finds that she solicits memories, dreams, desires from his own experience, and provokes sensory responses with beguiling immediacy. And so, for Hardy, heroines like Bathsheba always remain fractionally outside his grasp, the objects of fascinated but inconclusive scrutiny.⁴²

Patricia Stubbs examines what she sees as Hardy's frustration with the inadequacy of available literary and sexual images which results in a tension in his portrayal of women between ideal and received form: 'here there is an uneasy co-existence between an intensely modern, even feminist consciousness and what are essentially archetypal patterns of feeling and relationship. This contradiction produces some of the strengths as well as some of the weaknesses both of his fiction and of his feminism'.⁴³

Rosalind Miles focusses upon The Mayor of Casterbridge as an illustration of the way in which 'Hardy the lover and collector of women was evolving into Hardy the social critic and even prophet, interpreting women to men, to society, and to themselves'.⁴⁴ However, she also suggests that this interpretation was informed by an intuitive insight into women's psyche, coupled with a strong element of sexual pessimism which, when combined with Hardy's native cynicism, almost amounts to an abiding misogyny. John Goode concentrates upon the same issue of Hardy's ambivalent presentation of women, taking as his major premiss the conviction that literary texts are not independent of economic and ideological determinants. What a novel reflects is mediated by certain factors which include its fictional nature, the determination of its characteristics, the history of forms and 'the highly specialized productive situation of the writer'. Goode centres on Tess of the d'Urbervilles and analyzes the way in which the narrative mode exposes the ideology which motivates and shapes a text. He concludes that the narrator's various mediations between reader and heroine serve to objectify Tess, and he claims that this novel is one of the most formally, and therefore the most politically, advanced of the texts produced during the nineteenth century.⁴⁵ Penny Boumelha extends and elaborates upon John Goode's thesis in a book-length study which is essentially an in-depth analysis of a selection of Hardy's novels in the context of the historical situation in which he was writing. She concludes that Hardy's use of certain narrative devices offers a 'focus of contradiction' which centres on the female characters. In this way the specifically sexual ideology embedded in any one

of the literary genres open to Hardy at the time, is questioned and undermined. Boumelha also examines Hardy's relationship with, and his response to, the 'New Fiction' written by women during the latter part of the nineteenth century.⁴⁶

Mary Childers welcomes feminist readings which are concerned to identify 'conditions of representation that are psychologically, culturally and economically over-determined'.⁴⁷ She suggests, however, that Hardy's statements about women are 'inadequate to the occasional if not constant complexity one can attach to the behavior of his women characters'.⁴⁸ Hardy's female characters represent 'a frustration at the heart of discourse' which is the direct result of their 'powerlessness in speech': 'lacking any social or legal obligation to regard language as a contract or a public representation of themselves, lacking even any code of honor which would make them fetishistically loyal to their own words, women characters can blatantly dramatize the volatile relationship between identity and language'.⁴⁹ Just as Mary Childers calls attention to woman's linguistic helplessness, Adrian Poole examines man's linguistic power in his essay on Far from the Madding Crowd. He concludes that Hardy is particularly sensitive to 'the effort of men's words to circumscribe and describe, confine and define, women's bodies'.⁵⁰

Although the rigorous and revealing studies by these more recent critics of Hardy's fiction have done much to highlight the deeper ramifications of the centrality of women in his texts, they are predictably selective in their choice of novels. Almost without exception, they focus on a relatively small number of undeniably great novels from which to mount an assessment of Hardy's response to women's relationship to the conditions of existence. Those few critics who have departed from this norm invariably reveal their findings in the form of articles rather than book-length studies. As Roger Taylor has indicated, Hardy's reputation as one of the best novelists in the English language is based on only half of his output in fiction. Taylor's study of the lesser texts is motivated by the conviction that they deserve more serious and sympathetic examination than they have hitherto received. He suggests that 'it

is surely wrong to isolate the lesser novels as separate and distinct, as aberrations and failures. They play an essential part in the dynamic process of the development of Hardy's fiction, and each stage of his career contributes to the integrity of the whole'.⁵¹ However, Taylor's reading of the minor novels fails to attach adequate significance to the pivotal role of women. Likewise, Paul Ward draws attention to 'the pernicious tendency among literary critics to make outright dismissals of "minor" works on no better grounds than the mere existence of more substantial and satisfying works by the same author', and calls for a critical re-evaluation of several of Hardy's lesser-known novels, including A Pair of Blue Eyes, The Hand of Ethelberta and The Well-Beloved, in their own right.⁵² However, his short individual studies show little sign of an awareness of feminist issues.

Penelope Vigar singles out certain of the 'minor' texts for especial consideration. Desperate Remedies is worth more than a 'cursory glance or a dismissing comment' in her view because, 'by reason of its naïveté and spontaneity, [it] is likely to reveal a great deal about its author'.⁵³ A Laodicean is also sympathetically examined, as are Under the Greenwood Tree and The Trumpet Major. She suggests that 'these shorter and more frivolous tales are mere sketches in comparison, but show in their very delicacy and lightness some of the qualities of vision which are often so drastically misinterpreted in the more ambitious texts'.⁵⁴ Yet Vigar fails to examine the specificity of women's experiences as they are presented in these novels. Consequently she makes no link with 'the contrast between appearance and reality' - which she isolates as 'consistently, the most important factor' in the artistic construction of all Hardy's novels - and man's idealization of woman which is also a major theme.

Perry Meisel agrees that Hardy's 'minor' novels repay serious examination because 'the world of these early books forms the fundamental structure of Hardy's entire production in prose': 'it is as though Hardy's early work defines the distinctively individual aspects of his creations, while the later

novels reflect the finally explicit and full-blown statement of the same mind after the experiences of twenty-five years that saw the decline of the Victorian climate'.⁵⁵ Meisel registers the fact that 'Hardy's conception of woman is at the centre of what later becomes an obvious tension between worlds', but notes:

The question of Hardy's conception of the nature of woman is an important but extremely difficult one, especially because of the pivotal importance of female figures in his novels. Whether he believed women to be inherently irresponsible and restive, or only symbolic of a characteristic sensitivity either social or historical, remains an open question.⁵⁶

Meisel makes no attempt to resolve this question and further, he refuses to recognize the presence of the tension between old and new worlds, which is centred on the women characters in the early works.

Roy Morrell comes closest to offering a persuasive feminist approach to Hardy's minor texts in a short article written almost a decade after the publication of The Will and the Way.⁵⁷ He suggests that the women in the minor and major texts are united by the fact that 'each stands rather alone, and at a disadvantage in the world, because of her sex'.⁵⁸ Thus Elfride 'is a victim, and as no man could quite be, of family pressures'. Likewise, the fact that Ethelberta is ignorant of the existence of Mountclere's mistress until after she has married him, while all the male characters are aware of Miss Gruchett well in advance of the wedding, is 'one of the many small indications that Ethelberta is living in a man's world'.⁵⁹ However, Morrell cannot do justice to his findings in the space of a short article.

This thesis centres on the 'minor' novels for the following reasons. Firstly, it is clear that these texts have been critically undervalued and, while no claims are made for them as hitherto unrecognized works of great literature, they merit serious and sympathetic attention in that each text makes a significant contribution to the development and integrity of Hardy's prose vision. Secondly, many of the ambiguities and contradictions, whether philosophical, political or stylistic, which characterize Hardy's major texts are at their most blatant and unresolved in these cruder novels. This is

particularly true of Hardy's portrayal of women's subjection to biological and social determinants. Thirdly, the minor novels are important for the way in which they anticipate, and in many cases illuminate the major works. Indeed, close examination of the lesser texts undermines the validity of certain critical assumptions concerning the later and the major novels. For example, William Rutland declares that Hardy's quarrel with sexual mores and social conventions is apparent only in those texts written during the late 1880s:

[Hardy's] quarrel with human society for its attitude towards sexual relationships, although it produced the two most widely known of his books, and seems, in the popular mind, to have overshadowed the more fundamental aspects of his work, was only a phase. This phase is inaugurated in The Woodlanders.⁶⁰

James Ostler Bailey lays great stress on Hardy's concept of evolutionary meliorism but claims that this philosophy is apparent only in the poems and, even then, only in the poetry written after 1900. The majority of Hardy's novels 'written before [he] fully developed his meliorism, express the pessimism of his first phase'.⁶¹ This conviction is shared by Harvey Curtis Webster who claims that despite the 'almost revolutionary ardour for social change' expressed in The Poor Man and the Lady 'it was not typical of Hardy in his later novels to place so much importance upon class differences as a cause of unhappiness'.⁶²

There was even a time in this period when it seemed as though Hardy was moving toward a militant meliorism, when he directed most of his attack against remediable, social wrongs. From A Pair of Blue Eyes through The Hand of Ethelberta, there was a continuous intensification of Hardy's social criticism. Then, probably as a result of the reception of The Hand of Ethelberta, the lack of any important movement for social change with which he felt he could ally himself, and his loss of faith in his ability to effect social change through his books,⁶³ his pessimism became more intense in The Return of the Native.

The project of this thesis is to demonstrate that serious consideration of those texts produced at an early stage in Hardy's career, along with others commonly dismissed as failures, reveals that his imagination was exercised by the issue of social repression and control of the individual from the very beginning. Far from having no 'important movement for social change with

which to ally himself', Hardy was deeply impressed with the aims and ideals of the emergent feminist movement of the day, so much so that later in life he pledged his full support to the women's suffrage campaign. This commitment is apparent throughout all of Hardy's novels.

Commenting upon the possible origins of the character of Sue Bridehead, Michael Millgate declares: 'although Hardy's heroines had often been exasperating creatures, given to flirtation and various forms of deliberate and innocent sexual teasing, they had rarely exhibited any fundamental uncertainty as to their suitability for, or willing acceptance of, the traditional female roles'.⁶⁴ However, close examination of Hardy's earliest and minor texts in their own right testifies to the extent to which his artistic vision was shaped by the spectacle of woman's growing discontent with, and in many cases her open rebellion against, the role and status assigned to her by a social system which she was forced to depend on for the means of subsistence. In a letter to George Egerton, in which he praises her volume of short stories, Keynotes, Hardy claimed, 'I have been intending for years to draw Sue, & it is extraordinary that a type of woman, comparatively common & getting commoner, should have escaped fiction so long'.⁶⁵ Millgate quite rightly disputes Hardy's suggestion that Sue was his first attempt to portray one of the modern women who, as his oft-quoted German reviewer suggested, 'do not recognise the necessity for most of her sex to follow marriage as a profession'.⁶⁶ However, Millgate locates Sue's progenitor in the character of Paula Power, whom he cites as the only exception to the pattern of conformity set by Hardy's previous heroines, when it is apparent that Sue's origins lie much further back than 1881. Hardy's imaginative interest in the 'New Woman' was incipient in Desperate Remedies, with the character of Cytherea Grey. There are obvious links to be made between the psychological results of Cytherea's response to Manston's 'animal love' and Sue's self-castigation for her physical love of Jude. Cytherea's masochistic dream on the eve of her wedding to Manston clearly anticipates Sue's deranged desire to 'prick myself all over with pins and bleed

out the badness that's in me' (JO, p. 365).⁶⁷ Thus Sue Bridehead can be seen to embody, in a fuller and more developed form, notions of female self-censure present in Desperate Remedies. The narrator of the earlier text exclaims over what he sees as woman's noble, but foolish exercise of 'an illogical power entirely denied to men in general - the power not only of kissing, but of delighting to kiss the rod by a punctilious observance of the self-immolating doctrines in the Sermon on the Mount' (DR, p. 240). In Jude the Obscure, this power is examined and explained as a form of destructive schizophrenia induced in a woman who seeks personal fulfilment within the existing social structure. It is also apparent that while Cytherea's poignant examination of her social duty falls short of Sue's ill-fated attempt to establish a new lifestyle for herself, the seeds of Sue's discontent with the traditional feminine role are present in Cytherea's perceptions of existence. Although separated by almost a quarter of a century, both Desperate Remedies and Jude the Obscure convincingly illustrate George Bernard Shaw's conclusion that 'unless Woman repudiates her womanliness, her duty ... to society, to the law, and to everyone but herself, she cannot emancipate herself'.⁶⁸

This dissatisfaction with the socially imposed parameters of womanly behaviour is discernible in almost every novel published by Hardy in the decade preceeding the appearance of A Laodicean, as well as in Two on a Tower and The Woodlanders which followed it. It is particularly noticeable in the heroine's relationship to the marriage and employment markets, as the histories of Cytherea and Ethelberta demonstrate, and in her awareness of the limits society imposes upon her freedom and self-expression, even when the woman in question is wealthy enough to be financially independent, as is the case with Bathsheba, Paula and Viviette. These social restrictions are especially evident when the woman seeks to express herself artistically and professionally, as Elfride and Ethelberta were to discover. Patriarchy and the Capitalist system act on women 'as a continual bribe to enter into sex relations for money, whether in or out of marriage'.⁶⁹ The one exception to this rule is the character of Anne

Garland in The Trumpet Major, a novel which, for reasons outlined later in this study, moves quite comfortably within the confines of the status quo.

In distinguishing between 'minor' and 'major' novels I have, for the most part, followed the general critical consensus. It is agreed that Desperate Remedies, Under the Greenwood Tree, A Pair of Blue Eyes, The Hand of Ethelberta, The Trumpet Major, A Laodicean, Two on a Tower, and The Well-Beloved are cruder, less satisfactory offerings than The Return of the Native, The Mayor of Casterbridge, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, and Jude the Obscure. Norman Page suggests that 'beside the human richness and professional confidence of the major novels, they are apt to appear imaginatively impoverished, morally evasive, incompletely engaged and awkward in execution'.⁷⁰ I have included Far from the Madding Crowd and The Woodlanders in this study because they are the subject of an evaluative controversy which has, so far, failed to challenge the status of the four texts cited above as 'major'. While it is generally accepted that Far from the Madding Crowd was the first text to give a true indication of Hardy's genius, the novel is only reluctantly admitted into the canon of 'great' Hardy works. Ian Gregor, for instance, finds fault with the middle portion of the book, and suggests that 'the main themes simply become atrophied' after Troy's disappearance and Fanny's burial:

... Hardy is simply bound to the mechanism of his plot, in the sense that he can add nothing to what has gone before. The characters become cut-outs By the time we come to the third and last communal gathering, Boldwood's Christmas Party, we are in a world of pure plot.⁷¹

By the same token, The Woodlanders occupies a somewhat ambivalent position among the great works. Many critics have accepted Hardy's claim that this was his favourite novel as sufficient justification of its merits. However, others such as F. R. Southerington argue that despite Hardy's preference for the novel 'it is a weak performance whose chief abiding interest lies in its connections with Tess of the d'Urbervilles and its treatment of more or less abstract ideas'.⁷² Joseph Warren Beach classes The Woodlanders with The Mayor of Casterbridge, both being 'really fine novels'. However, The Woodlanders suffers, in his

opinion, from a 'bungled narrative'.⁷³ Richard Carpenter remarks on the power of the novel but concludes that its qualities 'have not, to be sure, managed to keep The Woodlanders in its former position of esteem among the Wessex Novels'.⁷⁴ Both Far from the Madding Crowd and The Woodlanders are transitional novels and, as such, form a bridge between the minor and major texts. By including them in this study I hope to indicate ways in which my approach to Hardy's fiction could be extended to liberate new significances from the undisputed classics in the Hardy oeuvre.

By concentrating on the minor novels, and the women characters therein, this study seeks to demonstrate that Hardy's putative Fatalism can actively be shown to be qualified by his attack on an unfair and changeable human environment. Whilst acknowledging the contradictions and ambivalences inherent in Hardy's fictional portrayal of women, it is possible to read his texts as examples of the way in which man's sexual, economic and linguistic dominance functions as a modifiable determinant of woman's nature and behaviour. Hardy's minor novels are less concerned with the tyranny of a brute and indifferent cosmic system, than with exposing the ways in which humanity has failed to realize its potential to improve the conditions of existence. Hardy's lesser texts expose the way in which men have merely succeeded in making things worse, for themselves, for each other and, in particular, for women.

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

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66. Hardy claimed that an 'experienced' German reviewer of Jude the Obscure informed him that Sue 'was the first delineation in fiction of the woman who was coming into notice in her thousands every year - the woman of the feminist movement - the slight, pale "bachelor" girl - the intellectualized, emancipated bundle of nerves that modern conditions were producing, mainly in cities as yet; who do not recognize the necessity for most of her sex to follow marriage as a profession, and boast themselves as superior people because they are licensed to be loved on the premises'. Postscript to JO (1896; Wessex Edition, III, 1912) in PW, pp. 33-36 (pp. 35-36). See Abbreviations.
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CHAPTER ONE

HARDY'S PHILOSOPHY: FATALISM VERSUS RATIONAL DETERMINISM

On 31 December 1901, Hardy reflected:

After reading various philosophic systems, and being struck with their contradictions and futilities, I have come to this: Let every man make a philosophy for himself out of his own experience. He will not be able to escape using terms and phraseology from earlier philosophers, but let him avoid adopting their theories if he values his own mental life. Let him remember the fate of Coleridge, and save years of labour by working out his own views as given him by his surroundings.¹

Hardy claimed that his personal philosophy was 'a generalized form of what the thinking world had gradually come to adopt'.² The most persuasive philosophical concept extant during Hardy's lifetime was determinism: the belief that human action is not free but is necessarily determined by motives which are regarded as external forces acting upon the will.³ By 1904, he was able to claim that 'determinism is a commonplace' among 'our men of science'.⁴ Hardy was seeking a tenable philosophy which harmonized with his own views on existence. These views were primarily shaped by the controversies excited by the determinist debate, the challenge of the feminist movement and Hardy's own rural upbringing in mid-nineteenth century England. This chapter will discuss the first of these influences.

The contemporary thinkers who, by his own admission, had a great impact upon Hardy, and from whom he borrowed terms and phraseology, as well as ideas, in an attempt to synthesize his own perceptions on the nature of existence, were Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, August Comte, Thomas Henry Huxley, and John Stuart Mill. These thinkers reflected two particular facets of determinism, referred to at the time as absolute determinism, or fatalism, and rational determinism. The first of these totally rejected the notion of the autonomy of the individual, the second claimed that the individual possessed a limited amount of free will.

As Gillian Beer has suggested, the concept of determinism was constructed

most persuasively by the work of Charles Darwin.⁵ The Origin of Species conclusively replaced the notion of specific fixity with the thesis that species were undergoing a continual and costly process of evolutionary development.⁶ The theory of the evolution of the species through chance variations from the type had, in fact, been suggested to him by Malthus's 'Essay on the Principle of Population' (1826). Darwin located the impulse to change outside the mind and will of the individual, and claimed that the individual's development was subject to the conditions of his or her environment. However, he admitted that although the process was the result of necessary laws, the causes of these laws were, as yet, unknown.

Darwin personally was torn between a teleological view of existence and the view that evolution worked in a purely mechanical fashion. In his autobiography he declared that his discoveries compelled him 'to look to a First Cause having an intelligent mind in some degree analogous to that of man', and that he deserved to be called 'a Theist'.⁷ However, writing to Asa Grey he admitted: 'I cannot see as plainly as others do, and as I should wish to do, evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world'.⁸

Hardy was not quite twenty years of age when the Origin of Species was published in November 1859. He came to London just two and a half years later, when the scientific and religious controversy surrounding the appearance of the work was gaining momentum. Sometime during this period he was motivated, possibly by Horace Moule, to examine the evidence surrounding Darwin's theory of descent with modification through natural selection.⁹ Hardy's first published novel, Desperate Remedies, appeared in the same year as Darwin's The Descent of Man and contains an overt Darwinian reference.¹⁰ On 26 April 1882, when Hardy had at last established himself as a professional writer of fiction, he attended Darwin's funeral in Westminster Abbey. Darwin's influence on the young writer was to be significant and abiding.¹¹

There can be little doubt that Hardy's contact with Darwin's theories

contributed to the gradual erosion of his allegiance to orthodox Christianity. His early poetry was written shortly after the publication of The Origin of Species, and much of it reflects the spiritual and intellectual crises experienced by so many of Hardy's contemporaries during the period 1860 to 1870, when the struggle between the old faith in a benevolent and far-seeing Deity, and the new scientific thought was most acute.¹² Like Darwin himself, the young Hardy seems to have seriously considered entering the church. However, by August 1865, the 'curious scheme' of a curacy in a country village had been abandoned, 'less because of its difficulty than from a conscientious feeling, after some theological study, that he could hardly take the step with honour while holding the views which on examination he found himself to hold' (LTH, p. 50) Less than a year after Darwin's death, Hardy copied extracts from a review in the Spectator entitled 'Mr Footman on Modern Unbelief', in which the reviewer cites Henry Footman's arguments for and against divine design in nature. Significantly enough, Hardy concerned himself solely with the arguments against, which included G. H. Lewes' statement that 'there is not a single known organism which is not developed out of simpler forms Nothing could be more unworthy of a supreme intelligence than this inability to construct an organ at once, without making several tentative efforts', and later: 'the whole constitution of the world (so stupidly does it work) would be an impardonable crime did it issue from a power that knew what it was about'.¹³

As the final comment suggests, it was not so much the sudden discrediting of the creationist theory of existence that had such an impact on Hardy, for the ideas behind evolution had long been familiar through the works of such scientists as Lamarck, Chambers, Lyell and Herbert Spencer, whose discoveries had already done much to undermine the traditional teleological view of existence. What affected him most were the social and moral implications of natural selection itself: the distressingly tenable and apparently inevitable modus operandi of evolution which Darwin had proposed in The Origin of Species. The laws of existence were pronounced to be

Growth with Reproduction; Inheritance which is almost implied by reproduction; Variability from the indirect and direct action of the external conditions of life, and from use and disuse; a Ratio of Increase so high as to lead to a Struggle for Life, and as a consequence to Natural Selection, entailing Divergence of Character and the Extinction of less-improved forms. (OS, p. 459)

Hardy realized, as did others among his contemporaries including Swinburne, Mill, Tennyson, Gissing, and Meredith, that these laws were totally antagonistic to the basic Christian ethic of compassion and benevolence. Darwin himself constantly underlines the sufferings of the lower forms of animal life:

We behold the face of nature bright with gladness, we often see superabundance of food; we do not see, or we forget, that the birds which are idly singing round us mostly live on insects or seeds, and are thus constantly destroying life; or we forget how largely these songsters, or their eggs, or their nestlings, are destroyed by birds and beasts of prey; we do not always bear in mind, that though food may be now superabundant, it is not so at all seasons of each recurring year. (OS, p. 116)

This almost involuntary re-emphasis of pain and death consistently undermines his more optimistic observations.

Hardy came to the conclusion that in so far as existence was determined it was by a blind and instinctive process, rather than by the desires and purpose of an intelligent and loving God. In reply to a letter written to him by the Reverend Dr A. B. Grosart, on the problem of how to reconcile human and animal suffering with the notion of 'the absolute goodness and non-limitation of God', Hardy wrote that he was

unable to suggest any hypothesis which would reconcile the existence of such evils as Dr. Grosart describes with the idea of omnipotent goodness. Perhaps Dr. Grosart might be helped to a provisional view of the universe by the recently published *Life of Darwin*, and the works of Herbert Spencer and other agnostics. (LTH, 205)

The governing process which replaced the concept of God in Hardy's mind appears under several different titles in his writings, among them being: 'Necessity', 'Law', the 'First Cause', and the 'Unconscious Will'. He put down his difficulties in describing exactly what he meant to the lack of foresight shown by 'the makers of language'. However, he comes closest to resolving his dilemmas in two letters, one to Henry Newbolt and the other to Edward Wright. Hardy defines 'Will' for Newbolt as, 'that condition of energy

between attentive & inattentive effort which the scientific call "reflex", "instinctive", "involuntary", action; "unconscious formative activity", &c. "Urgence" occurred to me, & I think I used it once, but it seemed scarcely naturalized enough'.¹⁴ Edward Wright seems to have cast doubts upon Hardy's use of the term 'Will' to describe this 'vague thrusting or urging internal force in no predetermined direction', and suggested that 'Impulse' might be more appropriate. Hardy demurred, arguing that the word 'seems to me to imply a driving power behind it; also a spasmodic movement unlike that of, say, the tendency of an ape to become a man & other such processes'.¹⁵

The difference between Hardy's notion of 'Will' and the concept of God was that where God was concerned, 'externality is assumed ... rather than immanence'.¹⁶ Hardy was rationally persuaded to doubt the existence of an autonomous spiritual element or supernatural force outside the sum total of existing matter; whether it be 'Providence', Doom, 'God', or 'Satan'. He noted Leslie Stephen's conclusion that, as a result of Darwinism, 'we are no longer forced to choose between a fixed order imposed by supernatural sanction, & accidental combination capable of instantaneous & arbitrary reconstruction, [but] recognise in society, as in individuals the development of an organic structure by slow secular processes'.¹⁷

The thinker Hardy turned to in order to help formulate his conception of 'Will' was Herbert Spencer, whose First Principles added a degree of subtlety to his idiosyncratic theory of determinism. In 1893 he referred to the book in a letter to Lena Milman as one 'which acts, or used to act, upon me as a sort of patent expander when I had been particularly narrowed down by the events of life. Whether the theories are true or false, their effect upon the imagination is unquestionable, and I think beneficial'.¹⁸

Critics have found scant evidence to support Hardy's claim that he was strongly influenced by Spencer's philosophy.¹⁹ However, there can be little doubt that Hardy made an extensive study of Spencer's ideas. Apart from First Principles he read, and took notes from, a number of articles during the period

1881 to 1884, including 'Political Integration', 'Political Heads - Chiefs, Kings etc.', 'The Coming Slavery', and 'Last Words About Agnosticism and the Religion of Humanity'.²⁰ He also owned Spencer's Essays: Scientific, Political, and Speculative (1865), first published 1858, and his Autobiography (1904).

At the same time, as his comment to Lena Milman suggests, he regarded Spencer's philosophy more as an intellectual exercise than as a satisfying or convincing ideology. The main reason for this was Spencer's insistence on the notion that existence was not merely determined but irrevocably predetermined.

Spencer's concept of a motivating force behind existence is less theist than Darwin's. He believed that all matter can be comprehended as manifestations of what he refers to as 'Force'. He defines 'Force' as 'the persistence of some Power which transcends our knowledge and conception'.²¹ It is the Power which the Universe manifests to us, which both Science and Religion agree is inscrutable. Because we can never comprehend or define 'Force' adequately, Spencer argues, it is futile for us to try. Therefore he dismisses it with the title 'The Unknowable'.

In 1911, Hardy denied being able to exhibit a coherent theory of that universe 'concerning which Spencer owns to the "paralyzing thought" that probably there exists no comprehension of it anywhere'.²² Hardy did, in fact, record the term 'The Unknowable' from First Principles, possibly as early as 1867, and used the concept sporadically.²³ However, Spencer's determinism was too absolute for him to subscribe to with any degree of comfort. For Spencer, not only the organic and inorganic worlds, but also the human mind and the intricacies of social life - social evolution itself - were all explainable in terms of the evolution principle, and motivated by 'Force'. Therefore all facets of existence were not only determined but predetermined according to the basic laws of evolution: 'the changes going on in societies are effects of forces having a common origin with those which produce all the other orders of changes that have been analyzed' (FP, p. 283). As he believed that evolution was 'a felicity-pursuing law', and that natural selection was the decree of a

'large, far-seeing benevolence', it naturally followed that Progress was neither accidental, nor within human control, but a 'beneficent necessity'.²⁴

Although Spencer claimed that individuals were determined by heredity and environment, he was convinced that the operation of what he referred to as free will on their part was the actual motivating force behind evolution in the social sense. However, and there is an implicit contradiction here which Hardy may have recognized, although the individual appears to be making conscious free choices, in Spencer's view he or she is merely the means by which the Persistence of Force realizes itself. Spencer claimed that, in order to allow natural selection free play in society, every individual must be allowed total freedom of action regardless of whether the tendencies he or she displays are conservative or progressive, detrimental or beneficial:

Whoever hesitates to utter that which he thinks the highest truth, lest it should be too much in advance of the time, may reassure himself by looking at his acts from an impersonal point of view. Let him duly realize the fact that opinion is the agency through which character adapts external arrangements to itself - that his opinion rightly forms part of this agency - is a unit of force, constituting, with other such units, the general power which works out social changes; and he will perceive that he may properly give full utterance to his innermost conviction: leaving it to produce what effect it may He, like every other man, may properly consider himself as one of the myriad agencies through whom works the Unknown Cause; and when the Unknown Cause produces in him a certain belief, he is thereby authorized to profess and act out that belief. (FP, p. 123)

The question of whether free will was compatible with determinism was one to which Hardy constantly addressed himself. His concern can be inferred from the numerous entries in the Literary Notebooks which pertain to the issue.²⁵ Like many of his contemporaries, Hardy was convinced that each individual possessed a unique and specific identity. On a subjective level at least, he or she experienced the freedom to choose between alternative courses of action, and also to make a reasoned, moral choice between right and wrong. It was this 'moral sense' that Darwin had isolated in The Descent of Man as affording 'the best and highest distinction between man and the lower animals'.²⁶ Darwin claimed that

... the social instincts, - the prime principle of man's moral constitution - with the aid of active intellectual powers and the effects of habit, naturally lead to the golden rule, 'As ye would that men should do to you, do ye to them likewise;' and this lies at the foundation of morality. (DM, I, 106)

Unlike Spencer, Darwin drew a clear distinction between 'instincts', such as self-preservation, hunger, lust and vengeance; and 'social instincts' or, 'habitual dispositions', a term which covers all aspects of altruistic behaviour. He traced the origin of these social instincts back to the parental and filial affections and inferred that they were gained through natural selection or as 'the indirect result of other instincts and faculties, such as sympathy, reason, experience, and a tendency to imitation; or ... simply ... long-continued habit' (DM, I, 82). He proposed that humanity, as it slowly progressed towards perfection, would be able to repress its instincts and develop its habitual dispositions, or social sympathies, and that these would, in their turn, become overwhelmingly strong instincts until eventually 'the habit of self-command' is inherited like other habits (DM, I, 91-92). Darwin's use of the term 'self-command' implies that through the deliberate cultivation of altruism and sympathy - qualities which are antagonistic to the instinctive struggle for survival which motivates all living things - humanity could, to some degree, eventually break away from the determining hold of the evolutionary process. Therefore, progress and freedom lay in the deliberate cultivation of the mental and moral faculties of the human individual. The virtue of human behaviour

one of the noblest with which man is endowed, seems to arise incidentally from our sympathies becoming more tender and more widely diffused, until they are extended to all sentient beings. As soon as this virtue is honoured and practised by some few men, it spreads through instruction and example to the young, and eventually through opinion. (DM, I, 100)

As a direct result of his contact with Darwin's theory of natural selection, Hardy was aware of an incompatibility between the spiritual nature of the individual and the conditions in which he or she was forced to exist. He noted H. D. Traill's evaluation of the effects produced by the 'eternal incongruities between man's mind and the scheme of the universe' on temperaments

as diverse as Schopenhauer's, Novalis's, Rabelais's, and Sterne's.²⁷ On 7 April 1889 he lamented:

A woeful fact - that the human race is too extremely developed for its corporeal conditions, the nerves being evolved to an activity abnormal in such an environment. Even the higher animals are in excess in this respect. It may be questioned if Nature, or what we call Nature, so far back as when she crossed the line from invertebrates to vertebrates, did not exceed her mission. This planet does not supply the materials for happiness to higher existences. Other planets may, though one can hardly see how. (LTH, p. 218)

Hardy appears to have regarded humanity as 'a collective personality', the intelligence of which 'is pervasive, ubiquitous, like that of God'.²⁸ In this way, his concept of humanity appears to have something in common with his concept of 'Will'. Pain and suffering could be seen as the result of a basic incongruity between the conscious mind of the specific human individual - such as himself - and the unconsciousness of humanity in general. Hardy believed that the human mind was not, as Spencer claimed, just one unit of the Force or Will which motivated existence, but was also superior to It in that the individual was possessed of a moral consciousness which made him or her aware of the pain and suffering of existence which the rest of the Will, or perhaps simply humanity in general, was unable to register. Darwin's belief in the gradual spread of altruism throughout the world is translated by Hardy into a rather more abstract notion of the Unconscious Collective Will gradually becoming aware: in other words, that humanity in general will eventually be informed by the morally conscious individuals and therefore come to exercise an intelligent and conscious control over its own development. Darwin quotes Adam Smith's argument in an attempt to explain the origin of sympathy. Sympathy arises out of our strong retentiveness of former states of pain or pleasure, hence 'the sight of another person enduring hunger, cold, fatigue, revives in us some recollection of these states, which are painful even in idea'. Darwin concludes: 'we are thus impelled to relieve the sufferings of another, in order that our own painful feelings may be at the same time relieved' (DM, I, 81). Hardy elaborates on this idea in a statement written some time between March

and April 1890:

Altruism, or The Golden Rule, or whatever "Love your Neighbour as Yourself" may be called, will ultimately be brought about I think by the pain we see in others reacting on ourselves, as if we and they were a part of one body. Mankind, in fact, may be and possibly will be viewed as members of one corporeal frame. (LTH, p. 224)

This idea was central to Hardy's abhorrence of war. The human race was, to him, one species which included all men and women regardless of colour, class or religion. In a letter to the Secretary of the Royal Society of Literature, written during the First World War in February 1917, Hardy declared himself in hearty agreement with a memorandum proposing certain basic principles of international education for promoting ethical ideas leading to the establishment of a League of Peace. He proposed, by way of a modus operandi

'That nothing effectual will be accomplished in the cause of Peace till the sentiment of Patriotism be freed from the narrow meaning attaching to it in the past (still upheld by Junkers and Jingoists) and be extended to the whole globe.

On the other hand, that the sentiment of Foreignness - if the sense of a contrast be really rhetorically necessary - attach only to other planets and their inhabitants, if any'.

He added that he had been writing in support of such views for the last twenty years (LTH, p. 375).

Hardy was also deeply impressed with the notion of the evolutionary kinship of all living creatures, and not merely between members of the same species, and he seized upon this to counterbalance the idea of a ruthless struggle for existence which formed the basis of the theory of natural selection. In a letter to the Secretary of the Humanitarian League, written in April 1910, Hardy wrote:

'Few people seem to perceive fully as yet that the most far-reaching consequence of the establishment of the common origin of all species is ethical; that it logically involved a readjustment of altruistic morals by enlarging as a necessity of rightness the application of what has been called "The Golden Rule" beyond the area of mere mankind to that of the whole animal kingdom. Possibly Darwin himself did not wholly perceive it, though he alluded to it'. (LTH, p. 349)

This became one of Hardy's strongest arguments against blood sports and the practice of vivisection, or indeed any form of violence against animals.²⁹

The notion that humanity is intimately linked to other living species reverberates through Hardy's writings.³⁰

Hardy believed that the human race, having developed the concept of altruism itself, could eventually inform or alter the evolutionary process until altruism became the general guiding principle of all living creatures. In June 1909, he noted: 'the discovery of the law of evolution, which revealed that all organic creatures are of one family, shifted the centre of altruism from humanity to the whole conscious world collectively' (LTH, p. 346). In his letter to Edward Wright, Hardy declared:

'... that the Unconscious Will of the Universe is growing aware of Itself I believe I may claim as my own idea solely - at which I arrived by reflecting that what has already taken place in fractions of the Whole (i.e. so much of the world as has become conscious) is likely to take place in the Mass; & there being no Will outside the Mass - that is, the Universe - the whole Will becomes conscious thereby: & ultimately, it is to be hoped, sympathetic'.³¹

Hardy believed that humanity in general was, as yet, unconscious and therefore unable to take an active part in the amelioration of the evolutionary process. In August 1870 he noted: 'we are continually associating our ideas of modern humanity with bustling movement, struggle, progress. But a more imposing feature of the human mass is its passivity. Poets write of "a motion toiling through the gloom." You examine: it is not there'.³² As a result of the passivity of humanity, the evolutionary process was still in control of our thoughts and actions. On 20 October 1884 he queried:

... Is not the present quasi-scientific system of writing history mere charlatanism? Events and tendencies are traced as if they were rivers of voluntary activity, and courses reasoned out from the circumstances in which natures, religions, or what-not, have found themselves. But are they not in the main the outcome of passivity - acted upon by unconscious propensity?'. (LTH, p. 168)

Spencer, of course, recognized no merit or distinction in conscience or crude sympathy, claiming that both were actually detrimental to the progress of society unless properly regulated. Pain, cruelty, slaughter and death were not accidental defects but were absolutely vital to the development of life. His 'Social Darwinism' is centred upon the principle of the 'Survival of the Fittest',

a term which he coined in 1852 in an article entitled 'A Theory of Population Deduced from the General Law of Animal Fertility'.³³ He believed that society could only advance when its 'fittest' members were allowed to triumph, and its least fit were not artificially maintained, but allowed to die out naturally. Those who suffer inconvenience, pain and death, do so because they are ignorant and/or incompetent. If their experiences do not teach them to adapt, Spencer argued, they must be allowed to become extinct:

Not only does this struggle for existence involve the necessity that personal ends must be pursued with little regard to the evils entailed on unsuccessful competitors; but it also involves the necessity that there shall not be too keen a sympathy with that diffused suffering inevitably accompanying this industrial battle. Clearly if there were so quick a sympathy for this suffering as to make it felt in anything like its real greatness and intensity, life would be rendered intolerable to all.³⁴

For Hardy, it was exactly this sense of moral awareness which separated the mind of the individual from the 'Will'. He believed that true freedom resided in the individual's awareness of, and potential ability to ameliorate, rather than submit to the defects of existence, and at times life did indeed appear intolerable to him.

Hardy explained the development of consciousness and moral sense in mankind as the result of an accidental deviation on the part of the evolutionary process and concluded: 'the emotions have no place in a world of defect, and it is a cruel injustice that they should have developed in it'. He continues: 'if Law itself had consciousness, how the aspect of its creatures would terrify it, fill it with remorse!' (LTH, p. 149). Hardy also believed that there were specific moments in the history of the individual when that person was free to alter the course of his or her own existence, or someone else's.

The will of a man is ... neither wholly free nor wholly unfree. When swayed by the Universal Will (as he mostly must be as a subservient part of it) he is not individually free; but whenever it happens that all the rest of the Great Will is in equilibrium the minute portion called one person's will is free, just as a performer's fingers will go on playing the pianoforte of themselves when he talks or thinks of something else & the head does not rule them.³⁵

Hardy referred to his particular version of rational determinism as 'Evolutionary Meliorism': the belief that the evolutionary process or 'Law', and eventually the world itself, may be altered and improved through conscious human effort or, in his own words: 'the exploration of reality, and its frank recognition stage by stage along the survey, with an eye to the best consummation possible'. He claimed that to see existence this way would lead not to madness but to amendment:

... whether the human and kindred animal races survive till the exhaustion or destruction of the globe, or whether these races perish and are succeeded by others before that conclusion comes, pain to all upon it, tongued or dumb, shall be kept down to a minimum by loving-kindness, operating through scientific knowledge, and actuated by the modicum of free will conjecturally possessed by organic life when the mighty necessitating forces - unconscious or other - that have 'the balancings of the clouds,' happen to be in equilibrium, which may or may not be often.³⁶

The type of absolute determinism posited by Spencer was consistently challenged during the nineteenth century by followers of Thomas Henry Huxley and John Stuart Mill. It is significant that Hardy turned to these thinkers in his attempts to synthesize his ideas concerning the nature and limits of free will and its practical applications in what was to him a deeply flawed universe.

In direct contrast to Spencer's 'Social Darwinism', Hardy developed very early on a strong conviction of the necessity for enlightened social reform, and of its power to remedy the defects of existence. In formulating his ideas on this subject he may well have been influenced by Thomas Henry Huxley.³⁷ Hardy may have been introduced to Huxley's ideas as early as 1860 when the latter published reviews of the Origin of Species anonymously in The Times and in his own name in the Westminster Review.³⁸ In May 1864, The Times published a leading article on the famous clash between Huxley and Bishop Wilberforce at Oxford less than two years earlier. Huxley also led the scientific department of the Saturday Review for almost two years from July 1858, and afterwards became a frequent contributor to the journal.³⁹ Hardy read the Review consistently from 1857 onwards. In June 1878, Hardy was elected to the

Saville Club, and later that same summer he and Emma were invited to dine at the home of Kegan Paul where, we are told, Hardy met Huxley for the second time, having already been introduced to him by Mr and Mrs Alexander Macmillan on a previous occasion. Florence Hardy informs us that 'for Huxley Hardy had a liking which grew with knowledge of him - though that was never great - speaking of him as a man who united a fearless mind with the warmest of hearts and the most modest of manners' (LTH, p. 122).

Huxley, who had championed Darwin's theory of evolution through natural selection, found himself antagonistic to Spencer's concept of the necessary 'survival of the fittest', and denounced his attempts to formulate ethical rules from the evolutionary process. To do so was, in his opinion, to suffer from the 'illusion which has arisen from the unfortunate ambiguity of the term "fittest" ... the fittest which survive in the struggle for existence may be and often is, the ethically worst'.⁴⁰ Huxley clarified his position further in the 'Prolegomena' to Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays published in 1894:

And in the living world, one of the most characteristic features of this cosmic process is the struggle for existence, the competition of each with all, the result of which is the selection, that is to say, the survival of those forms which, on the whole, are best adapted to the conditions which at any period obtain; which are, therefore in that respect and only in that respect the fittest.⁴¹

Several years earlier, Hardy had copied an extract from a review of Swinburne's 'Joseph and his Brethren', published in the Examiner on 6 May 1876, into his notebook indicating that he too was thinking along these lines: 'Science tells us that, in the struggle for life, the surviving organism is not necessarily that which is absolutely the best in an ideal sense, though it must be that which is most in harmony with surrounding conditions'.⁴²

Darwin himself had drawn a clear distinction between the operation of natural selection in human society and the mechanism of social progress, and Huxley adopted and developed this view. For him society differed from nature in that the former had 'a definite moral object'

... whence it comes about that the course shaped by the ethical man - the member of society or citizen - necessarily runs counter

to that which the non-ethical man - the primitive savage, or man as mere member of the animal kingdom - tends to adopt. The latter fights out the struggle for existence to the bitter end, like any other animal; the former devotes his best energies to the object of setting limits to the struggle.⁴³

Huxley likened human society to a garden cultivated in the midst of a wilderness: 'a state of Art created in the state of nature'. He concludes concerning the difference between the two:

The characteristic feature of the latter is the intense and unceasing competition of the struggle for existence. The characteristic of the former is the elimination of that struggle, by the removal of the conditions which give rise to it. The tendency of the cosmic process is to bring about the adjustment of the forms of plant life to the current conditions; the tendency of the horticultural process is the adjustment of the conditions to the needs of the forms of plant life which the gardener desires to raise.⁴⁴

Huxley believed that if the workings of the cosmos could be proved to be just, as Spencer had claimed, and if it could be shown that it only punished those who transgressed against its laws, then humanity should withdraw itself from the struggle, refuse to recognize the rules by which the cosmos operates, and strive to be totally independent from it.

Like Darwin, Huxley believed that humanity was able, to some degree, to effect its own destiny and alter the basic laws of existence through the conscious adoption of ethically laudable behaviour, assisted by environmental and moral reform. Huxley believed strongly in the importance of a moral and criminal code in curbing the cosmic process, but he also claimed that such codes should only be directed toward the well-being of society at large. Huxley drew a clear distinction between 'social morality', which relates 'to that course of action which tends to increase the happiness or diminish the misery of other beings', and 'personal morality', which 'relates to that which has a like effect upon ourselves', implying that the moral and criminal code should restrict itself solely to the regulation of the former.⁴⁵

Huxley looked forward to the time when the 'natural process' would be superseded by the 'horticultural process', which would in turn be superseded by the 'ethical process'. The struggle for existence would be displaced by

the struggle for 'the means of enjoyment'. Self-assertion would be replaced by 'energy, industry, intellectual capacity, tenacity of purpose, and, at least as much sympathy as is necessary to make a man understand the feelings of his fellows'.⁴⁶

Huxley still held that humanity was, to a large extent, determined by the biological process. Free will meant, for him, 'doing what one likes within certain limits'. However, the fact that each individual possessed a consciousness 'which in the hardness of my heart or head, I cannot see to be matter or force, or any conceivable modification of either', meant that he or she had the potential to alleviate some of the pain and suffering caused by the evolutionary process.⁴⁷ In direct contrast to Spencer's absolute determinism, Huxley's rational determinism made him sympathetic to the needs of others and tolerant of their failings. In 'Evolution and Ethics' he posed, what was to him, an unresolvable problem:

That there is a 'soul of good in things evil' is unquestionable; nor will any wise man deny the disciplinary value of pain and sorrow. But these considerations do not help us to see why the immense multitude of irresponsible sentient beings, which cannot profit by such discipline, should suffer; nor why, among the endless possibilities open to omnipotence - that of sinless, happy existence among the rest - the actuality in which sin and misery abound should be that selected.⁴⁸

In 1902, Hardy wrote to the Academy and Literature concerning a review of Maeterlinck's Apology for Nature which posited the theory that Nature's moral scheme might indeed be just and that humanity was merely unable to comprehend it as such through ignorance of Nature herself. For Hardy, Maeterlinck's arguments were pure sophistry:

'Pain has been, and pain is: no new sort of morals in Nature can remove pain from the past and make it pleasure for those who are its infallible estimators, the bearers thereof. And no injustice, however slight, can be atoned for by her future generosity, however ample, so long as we consider Nature to be, or to stand for, unlimited power

So you cannot, I fear, save her good name except by assuming one of two things: that she is blind and not a judge of her actions, or that she is an automaton, and unable to control them.' (LTH, p. 315)

Rather than accept Spencer's view that existence is predetermined and that humanity was, therefore, powerless to affect it in any significant way, Huxley concentrated on the little he, and others like him, could do to improve the quality of life for the fit and the un-fit alike:

... I think I do not err in assuming that, however diverse their views on philosophical and religious matters, most men agree that the proportion of good and evil in life may be very sensibly affected by human action Finally, to my knowledge, nobody professes to doubt that, so far forth as we possess a power of bettering things, it is our paramount duty to use it and to train all our intellect and energy to this supreme service of our kind.⁴⁹

There can be little doubt that Huxley neutralized Spencer's theories as far as Hardy was concerned. In 1902, Hardy wrote to Edward Clodd thanking him for his biography of Huxley and declaring, in distinctly anti-Spencerian terms: 'what we gain by science is, after all, sadness The more we know of the laws & nature of the Universe the more ghastly a business we perceive it all to be - & the non-necessity of it'.⁵⁰

For Huxley, the incertitude surrounding the existence of a benevolent Deity left humanity with a duty to improve things.⁵¹ The 'supreme service of our kind' which he refers to above, was the ideal which also motivated the followers of Auguste Comte who, for a short time, numbered Thomas Hardy among their congregation.

During the 1870s, a group of liberal intellectuals gathered together under the auspices of Richard Congreve, Edward Spencer Beesly and Frederic Harrison. Their views were based on the writings of Comte, and they became known as the English Positivists. According to Millgate Hardy began to read Comte's work sometime during 1865, encouraged once again by Horace Moule who gave him his own copy of the 1865 translation of A General View of Positivism.⁵² Hardy supplemented his knowledge by reading the major exponents of Comte's philosophy including: John Stuart Mill, Harriet Martineau, George Henry Lewes, George Eliot, and finally Edward Spencer Beesly, John Morley, and Frederic Harrison who were, all three, close acquaintances of Hardy's. Hardy's Literary Notebooks show that he was keen to distil the major ideas from works such as

James Augustus Cotter Morison's Positivist essay 'Service of Man' (1887), J. H. Bridges's article 'Evolution and Positivism', which appeared in the Fortnightly Review in 1877, and Frank H. Hill's 'Antithetical Fallacies', published in the same journal in the same year. In addition, Hardy studied and took notes from volumes two, three and four of the System of Positive Polity translated by Harrison (1875), Beesly (1876), and Richard Congreve (1877) respectively.⁵³ From notes in The General View of Positivism, it would appear that Hardy was most familiar with the chapters on 'The Intellectual Character of Positivism', and 'The Influence of Women'.⁵⁴ Comte's views on women will be discussed in Chapter Two below. In a letter to Agnes Grove Hardy declared: 'I am not a Positivist, as you know, but I agree with Anatole France when he says, as he did the other day (though he is not one either) that no person of serious thought in these times could be said to stand aloof from Positivist teaching & ideals'.⁵⁵ In Comte's teachings Hardy would have found much that harmonized with his own brand of determinism and much with which he disagreed.⁵⁶

Hardy was especially drawn to Comte's substitution of a 'Religion of Humanity' for one based on belief in a benevolent Deity. Hardy's awareness of the 'ghastliness' of existence was responsible for the gradual undermining of his belief in an orthodox Christian God. At the same time, however, he spent the rest of his life searching for a satisfying alternative to a religion which, although scientifically untenable, remained strongly emotionally attractive to him. Hardy deplored the extent to which 'Theological lumber' interfered with the ethical values of Christianity and claimed

'... If the doctrines of the supernatural were quietly abandoned tomorrow by the Church, & 'reverence & love for an ethical idea' alone retained, not one in ten thousand would object to the readjustment, while the enormous bulk of thinkers excluded by the old teaching would be brought into the fold, & our venerable old churches & cathedrals would become the centres of emotional life that they once were'.⁵⁷

The 'ethical idea' is a direct reference to Huxley, and it also links up with the concepts behind the Positivist Religion of Humanity.⁵⁸ Comte's new religion

allowed Hardy the atheist to remain 'churchy' to the end of his days. It allowed him to remain a religious man, in Huxley's sense of a man who 'loves an ideal perfection, which may be natural or non-natural' whilst rejecting 'Theology with all its supernatural connotations'.⁵⁹

Hardy was also drawn to Comte's suggestion that there are two distinct aspects of nature: one which is wholly determined, and one which is not; or, as G. H. Lewes put it 'one which is inaccessible to human intervention, uncontrollable by human skill, a Fatality which must be accepted; and another which is accessible to human intervention, a Modifiability which enables us to convert the Fatality into a power for our benefit'.⁶⁰ Comte held that 'Human Providence' could control 'the Fatality' through the development of the 'human' or civilized attributes and the repression of the 'animal' ones. Thus Comte, like Huxley, appears to locate free will in the individual's ability to modify and ameliorate the effects of the evolutionary process: 'for Humanity is ever at work to assert its own high freedom of action, and thus triumphs over the blind Fatality encompassing its life'.⁶¹ For Comte, individual free will was motivated by altruism. In A General View of Positivism he declares: 'the principal condition of right action is the benevolent impulse; with the ordinary amount of intellect and activity that is found in men this stimulus, if well sustained, is enough to direct our thoughts and energies to a good result'.⁶² He also states that all sympathetic tendencies are stimulated within us through impulses from the 'External Order'. Thus the External Order itself is active in the suppression of our more 'discordant' or egotistical impulses, but its workings are still susceptible to amelioration by humanity itself: 'the right understanding of this order is the principal subject of our thoughts: its preponderating influence determines the general course of our feelings; its gradual improvement is the constant object of our actions' (GVP, p. 28). As far as the improvement of the External Order is concerned Comte declares, in a statement which accords well with Huxley's doctrines: 'in all the other phenomena, the increasing imperfection of the economy of nature becomes a

powerful stimulus to all our faculties, whether moral, intellectual, or practical. Here we find sufferings which can really be alleviated to a large extent by wise and well-sustained combination of efforts' (GVP, pp. 31-32). Comte was also convinced that in the Positive Era, when reason and sympathy were brought into active co-operation, mankind might begin to construct 'that system of morality under which the final regeneration of Humanity will proceed' (GVP, p. 48).

Comte's theories appear less deterministic than Spencer's, and more akin to those of Huxley in that Comte endows the human race with the ability to modify the general laws of existence. Positivism, declares Comte, 'far from encouraging indolence, stimulates us to action, especially to social action, far more energetically than any Theological doctrine. It removes all groundless scruples, and prevents us from having recourse to chimeras. It encourages our efforts everywhere, except where they are manifestly useless' (GVP, p. 58).

However, Comte released humanity from its subjection to the biological process or 'Fatality' only to place it under the control of a rigid social process. The triumph of humanity over Destiny could only be accomplished if every individual worked as an integrated unit in an ordered social system, and if changes were effected only in keeping with what Comte called 'the fundamental laws of Human order'.⁶³ At this point his theories exhibit some similarity to those of Spencer in that Comte appears to view human society as a continuation and development of the biological process:

If we contemplate the history of the entire past, stretching from the first rudiments of civilisation down to the present condition of the most advanced nations, the spectacle presented to us is that of an uninterrupted development of the order determined by the fundamental laws of human nature. The long series of movements - movements which at first sight appear confused and even mutually opposed - make up the preparatory evolution of the Great Being from which we emanate, and of which we shall for ever form a part, if only we have worthily served her [Humanity] now begins to systematise her conduct with a view to bring it into conformity with the order of the world to which she is subject, and which at the same time she perfects.⁶⁴

Comte's 'science of society' was based on the notion that the individual units

of which society was composed, and the whole (society itself) were organically interdependent. Hence progress depended upon 'the decree of harmony in our ideas, and of co-operation in our actions'.⁶⁵ Any thought or action 'not tending ultimately to promote that characteristic unity [of life], whether in the individual or in the race, must be regarded as illusory'.⁶⁶

Comte also believed in what he termed 'the beneficent rule of the Past'.⁶⁷ In other words, in the indispensable nature of convention and tradition. He concludes:

Spirits new-made by our Religion will henceforward accept, knowingly and willingly, the ennobling dominion of the Past; whilst the rebellious spirits endure it blindly and perforce. But the good will bless it, as the source of man's highest perfection, as that which guides to good all personal desires, so that they are insensibly lost in the harmonious working of feeling and of reason.⁶⁸

Hardy's attitude to Comtean theory was one of ambivalence. Whilst he was impressed with the new religious system as a means of hastening the spread of altruism through the living world and combatting the evils of existence, his own experiences, coupled with his familiarity with the writings of John Stuart Mill, caused him increasingly to question the role played by tradition and convention in regulating the life of the individual.

Huxley and Comte believed that the natural process was flawed and unjust and that it was mankind's duty, as a civilized species, to combat and improve upon evolution by means of an organized social system with its own moral code. However, as Hardy matured as a man and as a writer, he grew critical, not of the need for and the potential of social reform and law to curb the natural processes, but of the need for humanity en masse to submit itself to a particular code of social morality which appeared to do little to aid the general progress of the species as a whole, but did much to retard the progress of the individual member.

Hardy's Literary Notebook (1) contains the following extract from Matthew Arnold's essay on the poet Heine. It is underlined in red ink:

Modern times find themselves with an immense system of institutions, established facts, accredited dogmas, customs, rules which have

come to them from times not modern. In this system their life has to be carried forward; yet they have a sense that this system is not of their own creation, that it by no means corresponds exactly with the wants of their actual life, that, for them it is customary not rational. The awakening of this sense is the awakening of the modern spirit.

Hardy also appears to have been impressed with Arnold's account of Goethe's 'profound imperturbable naturalism which is absolutely fatal to all routine thinking':

He puts the standard, once and for all, inside every man instead of outside him; when he is told, such a thing must be so, there is immense authority and custom in favour of its being so, it has been held to be so for a thousand years, he answers with Olympian politeness, 'But is it so? is it so to me?'.⁶⁹

What appears to have impressed Hardy about Heine and Goethe was what also impressed him in the writings of John Stuart Mill who championed the freedom of the individual.

In 1904, William Archer 'faithfully recorded' a conversation with Hardy during which the latter outlined the basic tenets of his doctrine of 'evolutionary meliorism', which his contemporaries had, in his view mistakenly, stigmatized as Pessimism:

'My pessimism, if pessimism it be, does not involve the assumption that the world is going to the dogs and that Ahriman is winning all along the line. On the contrary, my practical philosophy is distinctly meliorist. What are my books but one plea against "man's inhumanity to man" - to woman - and to the lower animals? ... Whatever may be the inherent good or evil of life, it is certain that men make it much worse than it need be. When we have got rid of a thousand remediable ills, it will be time enough to determine whether the ill that is irremediable outweighs the good.'⁷⁰

Hardy's evolutionary meliorism, as outlined above, bears distinct evidence of the influence of John Stuart Mill.

In a letter written to The Times on 21 May 1906, commemorating the one hundredth anniversary of John Stuart Mill's birth, Hardy described how, as a young man, he was present at the hustings which took place during Mill's candidature for Westminster. His comments on the appearance of the author of On Liberty, which Hardy claimed to have known 'almost by heart', show Mill in an almost Messianic light.⁷¹ Hardy notes 'the religious sincerity of his

speech', and Mill's ability to hold the attention of people normally indifferent to such occasions (LTH, p. 330).

Hardy was profoundly influenced by Mill's ideas which echo throughout his novels from the first unsuccessful literary offering The Poor Man and the Lady which, as far as we know, bore the marks of Mill's radicalism, to his final, and most controversial novel Jude the Obscure in which Sue Bridehead is shown to be a follower of the disciple of liberty.⁷² The Hand of Ethelberta (1876), shows one of Hardy's heroines attempting to regulate her life according to Utilitarian principles.

Mill's appeal for Hardy probably lay in the fact that he combined into a more radical and humanitarian form, arguments and ideas which the young author found in Darwin, Spencer, Huxley, and Comte. Like Darwin and Huxley, Mill drew a clear distinction between 'Nature' and 'Civilization' or, to use Mill's terminology, 'Nature' and 'Art', and he came to similar conclusions concerning the relationship of the one to the other. Mill's essay on Nature is, in fact, an inquiry into what is essentially the Spencerian view of existence, the doctrine in which nature is regarded as 'a test of right and wrong, good and evil, or which in any mode or degree attach[es] merit or approval to following, imitating, or obeying Nature'.⁷³ Mill concludes that 'though we cannot emancipate ourselves from the laws of nature as a whole, we can escape from any particular law of nature, if we are able to withdraw ourselves from the circumstances in which it acts' (Nature, p. 17). This may be achieved through the medium of 'Art' or civilization. To commend civilization,

... is to acknowledge that the ways of Nature are to be conquered, not obeyed: that her powers are often towards man in the position of enemies, from whom he must wrest, by force and ingenuity, what little he can for his own use, and deserves to be applauded when that little is rather more than might be expected from his physical weakness in comparison to those gigantic powers. All praise of Civilization, or Art, or Contrivance, is so much dispraise of Nature; an admission of imperfection, which it is man's business, and merit, to be always endeavouring to correct or mitigate. (Nature, pp. 20-21)

Mill goes on to suggest that if the natural order was created by some just and

benevolent being, 'it could only be as a designedly imperfect work, which man, in his limited sphere, is to exercise justice and benevolence in amending' (Nature, p. 25).

Mill agrees with Huxley and Comte that the perfection of society will only come about through the conscious cultivation of altruism and the cherishing of virtues, and that one of the best means of ensuring this was to adopt the Religion of Humanity as defined by Comte. Like Hardy Mill believed that religion could be 'morally useful without being intellectually sustainable'.⁷⁴ Hardy underlined Mill's comment in On Liberty that 'it is not necessary that in ceasing to ignore the moral truths not contained in Christianity, men should ignore any of those which it does contain'.⁷⁵

The Three Essays on Religion concern themselves with the extent to which the individual should submit him or herself to the dictates of nature. In his controversial treatise On Liberty, Mill examines the extent to which the individual should submit to the dictates of civilized society. In the Essays on Religion, Mill quarrelled with Spencer, in Liberty, he takes issue with Comte, and in particular with Comte's conviction that the individual must inevitably take second place to the species, and that not only the progress of society but its very existence was totally dependent upon uniformity of belief among its individual members. Mill's On Liberty is a celebration of the importance of the individual, a thorough examination of the 'nature and limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual', and a blatant attack on 'the Tyranny of the majority'.

In June 1876, Hardy deplored 'the irritating necessity of conforming to rules which in themselves have no virtue' (LTH, p. 111). Less than a decade earlier he had numbered Mill's chapter on 'Individuality' in Liberty among his 'cures for despair' (LTH, p. 58). Hardy's copy of On Liberty is heavily annotated and underlined. He also took notes from Leslie Stephen's 'An Attempted Philosophy of History' published in the Fortnightly Review in April 1880. Stephen praises Mill's analysis of laws and customs as 'due to some

irrational association of ideas' rather than 'divinely authorized truths'. Stephen goes on to agree with Mill that 'undoubtedly we are grievously inclined to regard transitory customs, political and intellectual, as part of the unalterable framework of the universe'.⁷⁶

In Liberty, Hardy underlined Mill's statement that custom is not only 'as the proverb says, a second nature, but is continually mistaken for the first' (Liberty, p. 3). Mill contradicts Spencer and Comte who believed that the social order was directly attributable to the influence of the evolutionary process on each individual. Hardy appears to have been drawn to the type of determinism which claimed that the thought processes and judgement of the individual were traceable to impressions received from his or her milieu rather than to his or her instinct. Consequently, the opinions of one person or group of persons might differ from those expressed by someone from an entirely different milieu. Hardy noted the quotation Leslie Stephen uses to illustrate Mill's beliefs:

Intuition v. Association. I have long felt ... that the prevailing tendency to regard all the marked distinctions of hum.ⁿ cha.^r as innate, & to ignore the irresistible proofs that by far the greater part of these differences, whether between individuals, races, or sexes, are such as not only might, but naturally would be, produced by diff.^{ces} in cir.^{ces}, is one of the chief hindrances to the rational treatment of great social questions, & one of the greatest stumbling blocks to human improvement.⁷⁷

Mill's ideas were to have a profound effect on Hardy's response to the 'Woman Question', one of the most pervasive social questions of the day, as I shall demonstrate below.

One of the ways in which society enslaved the individual was, in Mill's opinion, by failing to take account of differences in disposition and circumstances among the members of certain social groups.⁷⁸ Hardy's affinity with Mill may have prompted his comment in a letter written to the Parisian paper L'Ermitage in 1893, less than a year before the serial publication of Jude the Obscure:

I consider a social system based on individual spontaneity to promise better for happiness than a curbed and uniform one under which all temperaments are bound to shape themselves to a single

pattern of living. To this end I would have society divided up into groups of temperaments, with a different code of observances for each group'. (LTH, p. 258)

Hardy underlined Mill's statement in Liberty that

If it were only that people have diversities of taste, that is reason enough for not attempting to shape them all after one model. But different persons also require different conditions for their spiritual development; and can no more exist healthily in the same moral, than all the variety of plants can in the same physical, atmosphere and climate. (Liberty, p. 197)

Mill was convinced that the individual was prevented from exercising free will, not because he or she was controlled by the evolutionary process or 'Great Will', but as a direct result of the 'hostile and dreaded censorship' of social custom and opinion. Hardy drew a double vertical line in the margin next to a passage, which he later placed on the lips of Sue Bridehead, celebrating the importance of individual free will:

He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself, employs all his faculties. He must use observation to see, reasoning and judgement to foresee, activity to gather materials for decision, discrimination to decide, and when he has decided, firmness and self-control to hold to his deliberate decision. And these qualities he requires and exercises exactly in proportion as the part of his conduct which he determines according to his own judgement and feelings is a large one. (Liberty, p. 34)

In an oblique reference to the storm of criticism that greeted the publication of Jude the Obscure on 1 November 1895, Hardy lamented: 'artistic effort always pays heavily for finding its tragedies in the forced adaptation of human instincts to rusty and irksome moulds that do not fit them'.⁷⁹

While Mill agreed with Huxley that some rules of conduct must be imposed both by law and opinion, he was convinced that society did not pay enough attention to the problems of where to draw the line between individual independence and social control. Many of the rules of conduct which were in existence at the time were, in his opinion, merely customs and superstitions established by, and arising out of, an ascendant and powerful middle class. Hardy noted this fact in his copy of Liberty (p. 19), and also endorsed Mill's

statement that protection was needed not only against the tyranny of the magistrate, but also against

... the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling; against the tendency of society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them, to fetter the development, and, if possible, prevent the formation, of any individuality not in harmony with its ways, and compels all characters to fashion themselves upon the model of its own. There is a limit to the legitimate interference of collective opinion with individual independence: and to find that limit, and maintain it against encroachment, is as indispensable to a good condition of human affairs, as protection against political despotism. (Liberty, p. 3)

Mill claimed that the State should only interfere in the life of an individual to prevent harm to others; 'over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign' (Liberty, p. 6).

Mill's main quarrel with Comte was that in the System de Politique Positive he aimed at establishing what Mill saw as 'a despotism of society over the individual, surpassing anything contemplated in the political ideal of the most rigid disciplinarian among the ancient philosophers' (Liberty, p. 8). Even Spencer, for all his apparent heartlessness, recognized that progress was instigated through dissent. Hardy underlined Mill's declaration that 'the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of opinion, is that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation', of 'the clearest perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error' (Liberty, p. 10). He also noted Mill's implicit rejection of Comte's and Spencer's assertion that the 'unknown Cause' will ensure the triumph of truth over persecution. This, according to Mill, is 'one of those pleasant falsehoods which men repeat after one another till they pass into commonplaces, but which all experience refutes. History teems with instances of truth put down by persecution' (Liberty, p. 16).

Comte and Huxley placed absolute trust in a hierarchy headed by an authority far above the rest of humanity in intelligence and a sense of justice. For Mill it was up to each individual to put the world to rights by proving that it was mistaken on some vital point of temporal or spiritual interest. Social

intolerance, in his view, prevented the formation of 'open, fearless characters, and logical consistent intellects'. Hardy indicated his interest in this statement by underlining most of the page on which it occurs (Liberty, p. 19).

Mill believed that if compulsion and persuasion on the part of the State could be replaced by disinterested benevolence on the part of the individual - who would be free to exercise his or her ability to make a conscious, reasoned choice between right and wrong - then society itself would greatly benefit:

It is not by wearing down into uniformity all that is individual in themselves, but by cultivating it, and calling it forth, within the limits imposed by the rights and interests of others, that human things become a noble and beautiful object of contemplation; and as the works partake the character of those who do them, by the same process human life also becomes rich, diversified, and animating, furnishing more abundant aliment to high thoughts and elevated feelings, and strengthening the tie which binds every individual to the race, by making the race infinitely better worth belonging to. In proportion to the development of his individuality, each person becomes more valuable to others.
(Liberty, p. 36)

For Mill, the individual was of the utmost importance as the means of the slow, but possible, amelioration of society and he believed that progress could be made through the exercise of the limited amount of free will possessed by each individual. Free will, modified and improved by education and the deliberate cultivation of altruism, was for him the new motivating force behind existence, a force which should and would eventually supersede the biological process, or, as Hardy put it, 'loving-kindness, operating through scientific knowledge, and activated by the modicum of free will conjecturally possessed by organic life'.⁸⁰

Hardy's evolutionary meliorism can be seen to be influenced by the determinist debate as articulated by Darwin, Spencer, Huxley, Comte and John Stuart Mill. Whilst he rejected the notion of the absolute autonomy of the human individual, Hardy was persuaded to doubt the existence of any formative influence extraneous to the material universe, and this included the concept of a Christian God. The nature of the human individual - his or her actions, apprehensions, and very being - was seen by him to be determined by the

interaction of the biological with the social process.

The social process itself was essentially an arrangement of corporate human acts motivated by, and arising out of, the moral awareness experienced on a subjective level by the members of a civilized community. Hardy believed that, as such, it should aim to intercept and ameliorate the unconscious biological or evolutionary process. In other words, humanity motivated by sympathy and altruism, had the potential to improve and alter the conditions of existence through judicious social reform. However, while humanity collectively determined the nature and course of the social process, each individual was in turn determined by the system that he or she had helped to consolidate. Whereas Comte and Spencer accepted this as a necessary and inevitable consequence of existence Huxley, and more especially Mill, questioned their belief in complete social integration as a pre-requisite for social progress, and likewise their faith in the integral role played by tradition and convention in regulating the life of the human individual. In common with Mill, Hardy believed that certain social rules and ordinances exacerbated, rather than ameliorated, the conditions of existence for certain types of individual, in particular the fearless, the incautious, the proletarian, and most of all the female.

In his social intercourse with others Hardy remained painfully aware of his working-class origins, and persistent in his attempts to endow his background with some semblance of gentility. In his writings, however, he displays a smouldering indignation with the way in which the rules he felt himself forced to adhere to interfered with the personal liberty of himself and others. The young Hardy's 'passion for reforming the world', appears to have arisen from this perception (LTH, p. 61). Anxious to establish himself in his literary career, he seems to have taken to heart George Meredith's advice not to 'nail his colours to the mast' too early by giving vent to this passion, but no amount of circumspection on Hardy's part could prevent him from issuing regular challenges to the status quo. These challenges increased in vehemence as his reputation grew until the publication of his final, and most

controversial, novel Jude the Obscure. The collapse of Sue Bridehead is a clear example of the way in which social intolerance can prevent the formation of, or even destroy, a fearless character and a logical intellect which 'played like lambent lighting over conventions and formalities' (JO, p. 364). The fact that Hardy chose a woman to demonstrate the insidious tyranny of custom and opinion over certain individuals indicates the extent to which he was aware of the issues which galvanized the feminist movement of the nineteenth century.

Hardy's literary career spans the period during which the emergent feminist movement made its greatest advances against a social system which sought to deny the freedom of will of the individual woman. This system sought to impose a particular destiny upon women over and above that imposed upon them by their biology, to fit them into what Mill referred to as 'the small number of moulds which society provides in order to save its members the trouble of forming their own character' (Liberty, p. 38).

The following chapter seeks to assess contemporary feminist and anti-feminist reactions to the question of the limits of determinism and the existence and potential of individual free will and thus to provide a context for the discussion of Hardy's fictional response to 'The Woman Question'.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. LTH, p. 310. Further references to this work will follow quotations.
2. Thomas Hardy to Edward Wright, CL, III, 255 (2 June 1907).
3. The first recorded use of the term 'determinism' occurred in 1846: 'There are two schemes of Necessity - the Necessitation by efficient - the Necessitation by final causes. The former is brute or blind Fate; the latter rational Determinism'. Sir W. Hamilton, Reid's Works, 87 note (OED).
4. The Dynasts: A Postscript (2), PW, pp. 144-45 (p. 145).
5. Gillian Beer, 'Beyond Determinism: George Eliot and Virginia Woolf', in Women Writing and Writing About Women, edited by Mary Jacobus (London, 1979), pp. 80-99 (p. 82).
6. Darwin revised the Origin of Species extensively between 1859 and 1878. I have chosen to take all quotations from the Penguin Edition of On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or, The Preservation of Favoured Races in The Struggle For Life by Charles Darwin, edited with an introduction by J. W. Burrow (London, 1968), which reproduces the first edition published in 1859. Further references to this edition will follow the abbreviation OS in the text.
7. Reprinted in The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin Including An Autobiographical Chapter, edited by Francis Darwin in 3 vols (London, 1887), I, pp. 312-13.
8. Charles Darwin to Asa Grey, Life and Letters, II, 312 (22 May 1860).
9. Hardy declared himself to have been among the earliest acclaimers of the Origin of Species (LTH, p. 153). However, Michael Millgate has found no evidence to prove that he actually read the work between the years 1859-1865 (THAB, p. 90).
10. '[Manston's] previous experience of the effect of his form and features upon womankind en masse, had taught him to flatter himself that he could account by the same law of natural selection for the extraordinary interest Miss Aldclyffe had hitherto taken in him, as an unmarried man' (DR, p. 191). For a fuller discussion of the implications of the influence of Darwin on DR see G. Glen Wickens, 'Romantic Myth and Victorian Nature in Desperate Remedies', English Studies in Canada, 8 (1982), 154-73.
11. For a fuller discussion of Darwin's influence on Hardy's fiction see: J. O. Bailey, 'Hardy's Imbedded Fossil', Studies in Philology, 42 (1945), 663-74; Ward, 'A Pair of Blue Eyes'; Jean R. Brooks, 'Darwinism in Thomas Hardy's Major Novels' (unpublished M.A. dissertation, Birkbeck College London, 1961); Bruce R. Johnson, 'The Perfection of Species and Hardy's Tess', in Nature and the Victorian Imagination, edited by U. C. Knoepfelmacher and G. B. Tennyson (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1977), pp. 259-77; David J. De Laura, 'The Ache of Modernism in Hardy's Later Novels', ELH, 34 (1967), 380-99 (p. 380); Meisel, pp. 4-17; Webster, pp. 27-48; Roger Ebbatson, The Evolutionary Self: Hardy, Forster, Lawrence (Sussex and New Jersey, 1982), pp. 1-40; Gillian Beer,

11. Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Cont. Nineteenth Century Fiction (London, Boston, Melbourne and Henley, 1983), pp. 236-58.
12. For a fuller discussion of the impact of Darwin on writers in mid-Victorian England see: Knoepfelmacher and Tennyson; Stanley Edgar Hyman, The Tangled Bank: Darwin, Marx, Frazer and Freud as Imaginative Writers (New York, 1962); Leo J. Henkin, Darwinism in the English Novel 1860-1910: The Impact of Evolution on Victorian Fiction (New York, 1963); Georg Röpken, Evolution and Poetic Belief (Oslo and Oxford, 1956).
13. LN, I, 1301, 1301n. See Abbreviations.
14. Thomas Hardy to Henry Newbolt, CL, III, 113 (13 March 1904).
15. Thomas Hardy to Edward Wright, CL, III, 255 (2 June 1907).
16. The Dynasts: A Postscript, (2), PW, p. 145.
17. LN, I, 1194.
18. Thomas Hardy to Lena Milman, CL, II, 24-25 (17 July 1893).
19. Walter F. Wright claims that 'what Hardy found in Spencer's First Principles ... is ... conjectural. Some things he would have found better put than in Mill or Stephen, if only because more judiciously stated'. See Wright, The Shaping of The Dynasts: A Study in Thomas Hardy (Nebraska, 1967), p. 34. Björk states: 'despite Spencer's undoubtedly strong general impact on Hardy - or rather because of the general nature of his influence, conveying such a mixture of contemporary thought - there are only a few explicit and demonstrable traces of it in Hardy's writing' (LN, I, 882n). For a fuller discussion of the imprint of Spencer's philosophies on Hardy see Ebbatson, pp. 42-56.
20. Herbert Spencer, 'Political Integration' and 'Political Heads - Chiefs, Kings, etc.', first published in FR (os) 35, (ns) 29 (1881), 4-17 and 521-33 respectively; 'The Coming Slavery', Contemporary Review, 45, (1884), 461-82; 'Last Words About Agnosticism and the Religion of Humanity', NC, 16 (1884), 826-39. See Abbreviations.
21. Herbert Spencer, First Principles (London, 1862), p. 255. Further references to this work will follow the abbreviation FP in the text.
22. 'General Preface to the Novels and Poems' (Wessex Edition, I, 1912), PW, p. 49.
23. See Hardy's '1867' Notebook, LN, I, Appendix, 8. In August 1887, on his return to Max Gate from London, Hardy remarked on the differences between children from the country and those from the town, 'the former being imaginative, dreamy, and credulous of vague mysteries'. He gives as a reason for this the fact that 'The Unknown comes within so short a radius from themselves by comparison with the city bred' (LTH, p. 202).
24. Herbert Spencer, 'Progress: Its Law and Cause' (1857), reprinted in Essays: Scientific, Political, And Speculative (London, 1958), 1-54 (p. 52).
25. See LN, I, 1065, 1308.

26. Charles Darwin, The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex, in 2 vols (London 1871), I, 106. Further references to this work will follow the abbreviation DM in the text.
27. LN, I, 1289.
28. 'Memoranda II', 29 May 1922, PN, p. 59. See Abbreviations.
29. See also Hardy's letter to 'a lady of New York' (June 1909), in LTH, pp. 346-47, and Thomas Hardy to Reverend S. Whittell Key, CL, III, 110 (2 March 1904).
30. In The Hand of Ethelberta, the opening description of the pursuit of the duck by the duck-hawk establishes, through analogy, Ethelberta's relationship to a male-dominated upper middle-class urban society which regards her as both prey and predator. In Jude the Obscure, the young Jude is painfully aware of the common bond which links him to other living creatures (JQ, pp. 34-36). Tess of the d'Urbervilles, however, is Hardy's most fervent testimony to the consanguinity of all living things. In the famous passage where Angel's skill on the harp draws Tess through the uncultivated garden towards him, the narrator shows us humanity not as an interested observer of a disordered, yet subtly inter-related and homogeneous, natural world, but as an intrinsic part of that world (Td'U, p. 162). See Abbreviations. Throughout this text, Tess is shown to be an integral part of the natural world through which she moves; stirred by its impulses and subject to its laws.
31. See above note 2.
32. 'Memoranda I', in PN, p. 6.
33. Spencer, 'A Theory of Population Deduced from the General Law of Animal Fertility', first published Westminster Review, 1 (1852), 468-501.
34. Spencer, Principles of Psychology (1855; in 2 vols London, 1884), II, 611.
35. Thomas Hardy to Edward Wright, CL, III, 255 (2 June 1907). Hardy may have borrowed the term 'Equilibrium' from Spencer, who claimed there was an unceasing conflict between the tendency of a species to increase, and the antagonistic tendencies of its environment. Rhythm results 'whenever there is a conflict of forces not in equilibrium. If the antagonistic forces at any point are balanced, there is rest; and in the absence of motion there can of course be no rhythm' (FP, p. 317). Spencer goes on to declare that such equilibrium is impossible because any alteration between the tendencies concerned - which issue from the same constant source - must prevent uniformity of movement. Therefore there will always be rhythm. Hardy, however, may have chosen not to progress beyond the suggestion that 'Equilibrium' might occur at any point. He believed that when, and if, this happened, the individual was totally free to exercise his or her will independently from the Universal Will.
36. 'Apology to Late Lyrics and Earlier (1922; Wessex Edition, Verse V, 1926) in PW, pp. 50-58 (p. 53).
37. Although, as J. R. Ebbatson has indicated, Hardy's fiction contains only one specific reference to Huxley's writings, his influence on the novels in general was significant. See J. R. Ebbatson, 'The Darwinian View of

- Tess: A Reply', Southern Review (Adelaide), 8 (1975), 247-53. See also G. Glen Wickens, 'Hardy's Response to Mill, Huxley and Darwin', Mosaic, 14 (1981), 63-81; Southerington, p. 64.
38. Rutland, pp. 58-59.
 39. Merle Mowbray Bevington, The Saturday Review 1855-1868: Representative Educated Opinions in Victorian England (New York, 1966), pp. 273-87.
 40. 'A Modern "Symposium": The Influence Upon Morality of a Decline in Religious Belief', NC, I (1877), 536-39.
 41. 'Evolution and Ethics: Prolegomena' (1894) in Evolution and Ethics, in Collected Essays by Thomas Henry Huxley, 9 vols (London, 1893-94), IX, 1-45 (p. 4).
 42. LN, 392.
 43. Huxley, 'The Struggle for Existence in Human Society', in Social Diseases and Worse Remedies, Collected Essays, IX, 195-236 (p. 203).
 44. Huxley, 'Prolegomena', p. 13.
 45. Huxley 'Influence Upon Morality', p. 536.
 46. Huxley, 'Prolegomena', p. 41.
 47. Huxley, 'Science and Morals', first published FR (1886), reprinted in Collected Essays, XI, 117-46 (p. 141).
 48. Huxley, The Romanes Lecture given at Oxford University (1893), reprinted in Collected Essays, IX, 46-116 (p. 72).
 49. Huxley, 'Evolution and Ethics', p. 79.
 50. Thomas Hardy to Edward Clodd, CL, III, 5 (17 February 1902).
 51. In 1869, Huxley coined the term 'agnostic' (from the Greek 'agnostos' meaning 'unknown') to express the view that the existence of God could be neither proved nor disproved, in scientific terms at least.
 52. THAB, p. 91.
 53. Björk has found more extracts from the System of Positive Polity, by Auguste Comte, in Hardy's Literary Notebooks than from any other single work (LN, 618n.).
 54. THAB, p. 91.
 55. Thomas Hardy to Agnes Grove, CL, III, 53 (25 February 1903).
 56. See Pinion, 'Hardy and Myth', in Budmouth Essays, pp. 134-35. Frederic Harrison declared Tess of the d'Urbervilles to be 'a Positivist allegory or sermon' (THAB, p. 319).
 57. Thomas Hardy to Edward Clodd, CL, III, 5 (27 February 1902).

58. As Norman Arkans had stated:
 The preservation of an 'ethical idea' formed the basis of many of the rationalist apologies for Christianity, which found in the teaching of Christ the 'principles of true humanism, the golden rule, the spirit of tolerance, the love of man, in the best and highest sense of the word', and from which developed the Positivist creed of the Religion of Humanity. See 'Hardy's "Religious Twilight"', Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 21 (1979), 413-32 (p. 414).
59. Huxley, 'Influence Upon Morality', p. 537. In January 1907, Hardy set down some of his views on religion in connection with a hypothetical article entitled 'The Hard Case of the Would-Be-Religious'. He proposed that the word 'Religious' or 'Religion' would be used 'in its modern sense entirely, as being expressive of nobler feelings toward humanity and emotional goodness and greatness, the old meaning of the word - ceremony, or ritual - having perished, or nearly' (LTH, p. 332). See also LTH, p. 333, and Thomas Hardy to John Morley, CL, I, 136-37 (20 November 1885).
60. George Henry Lewes, The History of Philosophy From Thales to Comte, 2 vols (1845-46; London, 1880), II, 701-02.
61. Auguste Comte, Social Statics; or, the Abstract Theory of Human Order, in A System of Positive Polity; or, Treatise on Sociology Instituting the Religion of Humanity, 4 vols (Paris, 1851-54; translated 1875-77), II, 380.
62. A General View of Positivism, translated from the French of Auguste Comte by J. H. Bridges (London, 1865), pp. 15-16. Further references to this work will follow the abbreviation GVP in the text.
63. Comte, Social Statics, p. 384.
64. Comte, Social Dynamics; or, General Account of Human Progress in Positive Polity, III, 532.
65. Social Dynamics, p. 10.
66. Social Dynamics, p. 11.
67. Comte, Social Statics, p. 375.
68. Comte, Social Statics, pp. 381-82.
69. LN, 1017. As Björk has indicated, Hardy resorts to Heine in the Apology to Late Lyrics and Earlier: 'Heine observed nearly a hundred years ago that the soul has her eternal rights; that she will not be darkened by statutes, nor lulled by the music of bells' (LN, 1017n.). See also PW, p. 52.
70. Archer, Real Conversations, pp. 29-51 (p. 40).
71. Gittings suggests that 'Hardy's early reading in Mill's works has probably been exaggerated; though he claimed himself to know the reformer's On Liberty "almost by heart" in the year 1865, he did not apparently buy, read, and annotate his own copy until at least 1867' (YTH, p. 103). See Abbreviations.

72. Hardy's first novel was begun in July 1867 and finished 9 June 1868. The manuscript was later destroyed (LTH, pp. 56-63). For a brief, but necessarily speculative resumé of the plot of The Poor Man and the Lady see: Edmund Gosse, "'The World of Books": Thomas Hardy's Lost Novel', Sunday Times, 22 January 1928 (p. 8); Charles Morgan, The House of Macmillan 1843-1943 (London, 1943), pp. 87-93; C. J. Weber's Introduction to Hardy's An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress (New York, 1935), pp. 1-20; Evelyn Hardy, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography (London, 1954), pp. 84-89.
73. J. S. Mill. Nature in Three Essays on Religion, with an introductory notice by Helen Taylor (London, 1874), pp. 3-65 (p. 13). Further references to this essay will follow the abbreviation Nature in the text.
74. Mill, Utility of Religion in Three Essays on Religion, pp. 69-122 (p. 74).
75. All quotations from this work are taken from Hardy's copy of Mill's On Liberty, signed top right hand corner T. Hardy, Peoples Edition (London, 1867), p. 30. Further reference to this work will follow the abbreviation Liberty in the text.
76. LN, 1192, 1192n..
77. LN, 1190, 1190n..
78. Actresses and dancers were, for Hardy, good examples of uncustomary characters in uncustomary circumstances and he believed that society should make allowances for them. After making a tour of the music halls during the season of 1890, he declared:
 The morality of actresses, dancers, etc., cannot be judged by the same standard as that of people who lead slower lives. Living in a throbbing atmosphere they are perforce throbbled by it in spite of themselves. We should either put down these places altogether because of their effect upon the performers, or forgive the performers as irresponsibles (LTH, p. 117).
79. Postscript to Jude the Obscure (1896; Wessex Edition, III, 1912) in PW, pp. 32-36 (p. 35).
80. Apology to Late Lyrics, p. 53.

CHAPTER TWO

DETERMINISM AND 'THE WOMAN QUESTION'

Thomas Hardy's personal and fictional response to the question of women's relationship to nature and society is complex in that it is informed by an uneasy, and at times contradictory, combination of philosophical, political, idealistic and personal idiosyncracies. His appreciation of the aims and ideals of the emergent feminist movement of the second half of the nineteenth century is, however, firmly rooted in the determinist debate as outlined in the previous chapter. Darwin, Spencer, Comte, Huxley and John Stuart Mill all applied themselves to 'The Woman Question' - a synoptic term which embraced every aspect of woman's natural and social role - and their conclusions neatly reflect major aspects of the debate between biological determinism and social conditioning. Although there is little evidence that Hardy made a deliberate study of these thinker's views on women, his fictional and non-fictional writings evince some familiarity with their theories on this subject. Moreover, the controversy which they produced is clearly reflected in the magazines and periodicals of the day with which he was familiar. Hardy's Literary Notebooks show that periodicals such as the Saturday Review, the Fortnightly Review and the Nineteenth Century presented him with an endless fund of information, opinion and anecdote. These periodicals regularly provided a forum for debate on subjects related to the general emancipation of women, as well as containing reviews and notices of works such as Mill's On the Subjection of Women, and articles which were clearly informed by the ideas of leading contributors to the question of the nature and limits of individual free will.

Darwin's tendency to employ anthropological truisms, rather than strictly biological facts, in defining the female of the human species was a device frequently utilized by those concerned to prove that woman's apparent inferiority to man had been biologically ordained.¹ Ignoring women's limited

educational opportunities, Darwin concluded that 'man's decided eminence over women in many subjects' was sufficient evidence of an inherent mental and intellectual superiority in the male which had been preserved and augmented by natural selection (DM, II, 327). In his view, women were compensated by their greater tenderness and altruism which were directly traceable to their maternal instincts. This specialization of the sexes was due to the process of sexual selection. Those men who were not aggressive, energetic, persevering and courageous enough failed to obtain mates, while those women who lacked sweet voices, musical powers, physical beauty coupled with an awareness of its value, a love of ornament and a deep-seated maternal instinct, failed to attract any. Darwin claimed that man had gained the initiative in sexual selection by virtue of his superior physical and mental powers. Therefore, woman's attempt to shape herself according to a male-defined ideal of womanhood was a wholly natural response to the conditions of her existence. Moreover, Darwin's theories suggested that the nineteenth-century woman who most clearly displayed those characteristics traditionally imputed to the female sex was the direct descendant of those primitive women specially chosen by primitive man as best suited to his requirements, and was therefore best adapted to the conditions of existence.

It would appear that Darwin believed that the capacities and qualities of women were properly recognized in the role and position of the sexes in society and in the institution of marriage and the family, and he credited women with little ability to intercept the process of sexual selection. One section of the Descent of Man deals with the role of education in altering and ameliorating the natural process; a theme which both Huxley and Mill were to develop further. Darwin suggests that for a woman to reach the same standard as a man 'she ought, when nearly adult, to be trained to energy and perseverance, and to have her reason and imagination exercised to the highest point; and then she would probably transmit these qualities chiefly to her adult daughters'.

However, the process could only occur if 'during many generations the women who excelled in the above robust virtues were married, and produced offspring in larger numbers than other women' (DM, II, 329). According to his theory of sexual selection, such women would be far more likely to die unmarried for civilized man was more influenced by external beauty and social status than by internal vigour, whether of a mental or a physical nature.

Although there are no direct references to the Descent of Man in the biographical material relating to Hardy, comments in the Life suggest that he was familiar with many of the theories contained in the book, either through having read it himself, or through having read articles by people who were themselves acquainted with Darwin's ideas, or through discussing their implications with others. One of his acquaintances - Sir James Crichton-Browne - cited the theory of sexual selection to prove that sexually nescient, frigid women stood a better chance of marriage than their more passionate sisters. Hardy noted the 'interesting scientific conversation' during which Sir James suggested that 'the most passionate women are not those selected in civilized society to breed from, as in a state of nature, but the colder; the former going on the streets'. Hardy was, however, far from convinced by this idea. Sir James also discussed the possibility that 'a woman's brain ... is as large in proportion to her body as a man's', a fact that John Stuart Mill was concerned to emphasize (LTH, p. 259). However, the closeness with which Hardy studied the Descent of Man is largely immaterial. What is important is the fact that Darwin's theory of sexual selection was frequently used to undergird, and give scientific authority to, certain aspects of the nineteenth-century ideology of womanhood. For example, Darwin's discovery that the brain of the female was physically smaller than that of the male was eagerly seized upon to justify the fact that women were denied an adequate education. George G. Romanes claimed that women were unable to benefit from the kind of education enjoyed by men because they lacked that vital five ounces of brain.²

A thinker who made a still greater impact on the question of further

education for women was Herbert Spencer. Spencer's contribution to the debate on women's education and its effects upon maternal functions has been documented and discussed by Carol Dyhouse in her essay 'Social Darwinistic Ideas and the Development of Women's Education', which examines the way in which many evolutionary thinkers transferred the notion of Divine retribution from God to nature.³ This idea formed the basis of Spencer's theory of the incompatibility of further education and maternity. His views on the extent to which the iniquities of woman's biological and social role could be eradicated are predictably inconsistent. He manages to combine a sensitive and informed awareness of the problems with crude, reductive solutions, as Lorna Duffin has indicated in her essay 'Prisoners of Progress: Women and Evolution'.⁴

In Social Statics, Spencer confronts the issue of the possible amelioration of the status of women by outlining the basic differences between a social convention and a biological necessity:

We have some feelings that are necessary and eternal; we have others that, being the result of custom, are changeable and evanescent. And there is no way of distinguishing those feelings which are natural from those which are conventional, except by an appeal to first principles. If a sentiment responds to some necessity of our condition, its dictates must be respected. If otherwise - if opposed to a necessity, instead of in harmony with one, we must regard that sentiment as the product of circumstances, of education, of habit, and consequently without weight. However much, therefore, the giving of political power to women may disagree with our notions of propriety, we must conclude that, being required by that first pre-requisite to greatest happiness - the law of equal freedom - such a concession is unquestionably right and good.⁵

On the surface, Spencer appears to be applying the law of equal freedom to women but, in fact, he claimed that the social, moral and intellectual emancipation of women could only take place within certain, clearly definable, biological limits. He also held that these limits were properly recognized by the institution of marriage and the family, and by the existing divisions of labour between the sexes.

Spencer's explanation of how women came to occupy their inferior status in society anticipated Darwin's theory of sexual selection. Spencer begins from

the premiss that primitive man gained the initiative over women in the struggle for survival. Feminine altruism, the arts of persuasion, feminine intuition, the arts of concealment, the admiration of power, and especially the ability to please and the love of approbation, were traits evolved by women as necessary antidotes to male barbarism:

Clearly, other things equal, among women living at the mercy of men, those who succeeded most in pleasing would be the most likely to survive and leave posterity. And ... this, acting on successive generations, tended to establish, as a feminine trait, a special solicitude to be approved, and an aptitude of manner to this end.⁶

In this way he implies that the specialization of the sexes is predetermined according to the basic laws of biological development. Like Darwin, Spencer also confronts the issue of the possible amelioration of the status and mental disposition of women through education. In Social Statics, he appears to defend the premiss that woman is man's intellectual equal. Those who claim otherwise, he declares, have conveniently ignored the conditions under which she has been forced to operate:

Women have always been, and are still, placed at a disadvantage in every department of learning, thought, or skill - seeing that they are not admissable to the academies and universities in which men get their training; that the kind of life they have to look forward to, does not present so great a range of ambitions; that they are rarely exposed to that most powerful of all stimuli - necessity; that the education custom dictates for them is one that leaves uncultivated many of the higher faculties; and that the prejudice against blue-stockings, hitherto so prevalent amongst men, has greatly tended to deter women from the pursuit of literary honours. (SS p. 157)

Here Spencer appears to suggest that the inadequacies of women's education are the result of custom, and are therefore open to change. However, by means of an eminently logical, but casuistical, reasoning he concludes that society's failure to educate women as it educates men is a convention firmly rooted in biological necessity.

In the Principles of Biology Spencer attributes the fall in the birthrate, or what he refers to as 'the deficiency of reproductive power' among the upper classes, to the overtaxing of women's brains, 'an overtaxing which produces a

serious reaction on the physique'.⁷ The implication is that because women are necessarily intellectually undeveloped, they must draw upon their vital reserves of energy in order to benefit from an educational programme as rigorous as that offered to men. Mental labour carried to excess in women generally produces 'absolute or relative infertility' (PB, II, 485). He infers that excessive intellectual activity conspicuously affects a woman's outward appearance, and her ability to suckle a child, by making her flat-chested and angular.⁸ Spencer agrees that the standard of education enjoyed by women leaves much to be desired, but he is more in favour of improving what already exists than extending it to the point where women's maternal functions could be impaired. Spencer claimed that physical beauty was a greater asset to a woman than intellectual accomplishments. As a woman's raison d'être was maternity, her overriding instinct should be to attract a mate. He suggests that severe intellectual training not only made women physically ugly, it also frightened men away: 'how many conquests does the blue-stocking make through her extensive knowledge of history?' (EIMP; p. 187).

Anti-feminists accepted determinist evolutionary theory almost without question. If the initiative in sexual selection lay with men, and if women were biologically destined to be mothers, then it was a woman's 'natural duty' to please and be guided by men in all things. Mrs Theo Chapman, in her article opposing the extension of the franchise to women, adopts the Spencerian line of argument which claimed that every aspect of the organization of society was predetermined according to the basic laws of biological evolution. She therefore saw no reason to interfere with the process by granting to women a privilege which they had done without for so long: 'all the evidence of mankind's history goes to show that the relative position of the sexes as we know it has slowly worked itself out in obedience to deep underlying laws, which, unawares to us, have shaped its main outlines'. The subordinate position of women was due, in her opinion, not to the superior power of men, but to the unalterable laws of existence which demanded that each sex should

fulfil the functions for which it would appear to be best suited, 'the insistence has always been on what is fitting and beneficial to women in themselves, and as mothers, wives, and daughters of men; and the ideas of what is so have slowly shaped themselves according to the great unalterable facts of human nature'.⁹

Henry Maudsley maintained that those who were intent on improving the intellectual and social position of woman had failed to take into account their unique mental and physical organization, and the demands of maternity. To impose any intellectual strain upon her during the years of puberty would be to risk damaging her menstrual cycle and her sexual system in general. As a result of what he calls 'periodic functions'

a regularly recurring demand is made upon the resources of a constitution that is going through the final stages of its growth and development. The energy of the human body being a definite and not inexhaustible quantity, can it bear, without injury, an excessive mental drain as well as the natural physical drain which is so great at that time? Or will the profit of the one be to the detriment of the other?¹⁰

Woman, he argues, is governed by her reproductive organs rather than by her brain. Any alteration in the type of education she receives can do little to improve upon what he terms 'the fundamental character of sex', and could even prove harmful to her health:

For she does not easily regain the vital energy which was recklessly sacrificed in the acquirement of learning; the special functions which have relation to her future offices as woman, and the full and perfect accomplishment of which is essential to sexual completeness, have been deranged at a critical time; if she is subsequently married, she is unfit for the best discharge of maternal functions, and is apt to suffer from a variety of troublesome and serious disorders in connection with them. In some cases the brain and the nervous system testify to the exhaustive effects of undue labour, nervous and even mental disorders declaring themselves.

Maudsley also adds chorea, epilepsy and insanity to the list of the possible results of 'over-education' in women (Maudsley, p. 475).

Other anti-feminists suggested that education was mentally and morally subversive for women in that it positively disinclined them from the fulfilment

of their maternal duties. The educated woman would no longer be restricted in her choice of career, and would therefore be less likely to opt for marriage and motherhood. Grant Allen believed that such liberty should not be accorded to women in the interests of the race lest they become 'unsexed in the process', and acquire 'an unnatural distaste, for the functions which nature intended them to perform'.¹¹ One of the most frequent criticisms levelled against the nineteenth-century feminist was that she was going against her biologically ordained nature. After the publication of the Descent of Man Mrs Lynn Linton had scientific support for her moral outrage against the 'Girl of the Period'. She was able to declare, with authority, that women who indulged in activities normally outside the sphere of femininity 'have not bred true - not according to the general lines on which the normal woman is constructed':

There is in them a curious inversion of sex, which does not necessarily appear in the body, but is evident enough in the mind. Quite as disagreeable as the bearded chin, the bass voice, flat chest, and lean hips of a woman who has physically failed in her rightful development, the unfeminine ways and works of the wild women of politics and morals are even worse for the world in which they live.¹²

The theory of human progress and sexual selection favoured by Darwin and Spencer formed the basis of several hypotheses on the nature and role of women formulated by feminists during the second half of the nineteenth century. The census returns for 1881 indicated that in England and Wales one in six women could expect to remain unmarried. In the London area the number rose to one in five. Consequently, large numbers of women were compelled to attempt to support themselves in a society which offered them few professional openings. As Margaret E. Harkness declared: 'Necessity now forces many women out into the world where the law of the survival of the fittest, and therefore of the strongest, holds good for all comers'.¹³ In her opinion women who demanded entry into the trades and professions, an education which would enable them to exercise their chosen occupation - whether it be domestic or professional - and the vote, were merely adapting to circumstances, and those who opposed their demands were denying them the right to perfect and harmonious development. The conditions

of existence had changed dramatically, but the arbitrary laws under which women lived had remained the same. Many feminists demanded the right to put their lives in harmony with their altered environment. Arthur Arnold described the arbitrary laws which restrained women as 'hindrances in the path of progress to that condition of society in which every created being shall exercise his or her faculties to the fullest possible extent, and to the utmost advantage of others'.¹⁴ Millicent Garrett Fawcett called for an extension of Spencer's law of equal freedom to include women. She claimed that in Social Statics, Spencer had proved that all forms of despotism were antagonistic to this law and also to the divine will. Few would deny that men have certain inalienable rights. By the same token the rights of women must also be recognized, 'derived as they are from the same authority; involved in the same axiom; demonstrated by the same argument'.¹⁵ Likewise Viscountess K. Amberley declared, 'woman, as well as her stronger partner, is a human being first, and has the nature, rights, and duty of one; free scope, equal privileges, and the same standard is all that they require'.¹⁶ Many late nineteenth-century feminists recognized the tendentiousness of the Spencerian line of argument. It was undeniably true that women who were educated were less inclined to marry and have children than those who were not, but this said more about the nature of the institution of marriage and motherhood than about the sexual identity of the women concerned. Millicent Fawcett argued that it was no longer desirable to educate girls solely with a view to marriage, for as long as women were regarded merely as potential mothers and wives their intellectual and moral faculties would remain undeveloped. Mrs Fawcett also confronts the problem that, at that time, women significantly outnumbered men, therefore marriage was out of the question for a large proportion of the female sex:

All girls are not certain to become wives and mothers, but all girls, if they live, are certain to become women; therefore it is more expedient, and of far more practical utility, to train girls with the view of making them good and useful members of society, than to train them expressly for the duties of ordinary married life.¹⁷

In the Origin of Species, Darwin had suggested that perfection, as far as

the human species was concerned, resided in the triumph of the social over the animal sympathies, or of altruism over egotism. In the Descent of Man he located the source of altruism in the female psyche, and the source of egotism in the male (DM, II, 326). Although he refrained from suggesting that women held the key to the salvation of the human race, it was implicit in his findings. It was, however, the followers of Auguste Comte's Religion of Humanity who were most concerned with the elevation of women into mystical symbols of altruism. Like Darwin, Comte believed that progress and perfection for the human species lay in the successful resolution of the 'struggle of Social Feeling against Self-love.' (GVP, p. 229). The aim of a Positivist education was to strengthen the former at the expense of the latter. Because women appeared to Comte to embody 'Social Feeling', as a result of their maternal instincts, he regarded them as Positivists by nature, 'in the principle which animates it, in its manner of regarding and handling the great problem of human life, [Positivism] is but a systematic development of what women have always felt instinctively' (GVP, p. 223).

Comte believed that the social mission of Positivism could best be accomplished if men and women were encouraged to fulfil the functions for which they would appear to be best suited. In other words, he advocated a far more rigid system of division of labour between the sexes than that which existed at the time. Comte held that true progress lay not in equality, but in differentiation. Men would play the active role in the discovery of the basic laws of existence and in the transmission of civilization from generation to generation, because the very nature of their position in society rendered them more able to experience historical continuity. Women would renounce property, inheritance, dowries and any job or career which would prevent them from fulfilling their natural spiritual function within the home as the moral educators of men and the protected guardians and instigators of altruism. Comte made a virtue of woman's repressed and circumscribed existence in the domestic environment claiming that, as a result, she had escaped the influence

of the general decline in moral standards and social feeling which were the hallmarks of the age. Although men would seem to have the more important function as the active perpetrators of the new moral order, Comte argued that Positivism offered women a more valuable private and public role, because the thinkers and politicians would be merely moulding her instinctive moral code of behaviour into a philosophic system. It would be wrong for her to enter into public life because she would soon become contaminated by the masculine instincts of power and gain. Women were less energetic and more sympathetic than men, and were therefore less able to withstand these corrupting influences.

Comte argued that women's education should be exactly the same as men's, except that women should not be taught any professional skills, 'effectually to perform their mission of controlling and guiding our affections, they must abstain altogether from the practical pursuits of the stronger sex'. (GVP, p. 262). In the struggle for life, physical, intellectual and practical strength - all the qualities exemplified by men - were naturally predominant. It was woman's duty, therefore, to modify these forces through affection. Her principal sphere of action was the family where she could discharge her moral duties most effectively as a wife: the companion of man; and as a mother: his moral guide and the educator of his children. Comte strongly advocated the efficacy of marriage which was, in his view, 'the most elementary and yet the most perfect mode of social life' (GVP, p. 250). He held that humanity would 'rise by degrees to sincere affection for all mankind' through the personal experience of strong conjugal love (GVP, p. 252). Marriage was the best means of combining and regulating the 'natural qualities' of the sexes for the ultimate benefit of humanity therefore, in a Positivist State, it should be indissoluble and totally monogamous. If one partner died, the other would spend his or her life in perpetual widowhood.

For Comte, woman was 'the spontaneous priestess of Humanity', and should be venerated as such (GVP, p. 243). He advocated the private and public worship of women in place of the adoration of the Christian God, and proposed a banner

to be used in religious services which would depict a woman of thirty carrying her son in her arms as a symbolic representation of humanity.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, much was made of the idea of woman's superior moral qualities. Some feminists claimed that if women were allowed to vote, they would have a beneficial effect upon the way society was governed. Viscountess Amberley suggested that, as women's sympathies were strong, they would act as an effective antidote to laissez-faire economic policy, and thus be instrumental in improving the conditions of existence for a large section of the population, 'they will bring their interest and energy to bear on many injustices of social life, and not so readily acquiesce in the idea that these evils must be borne, and that legislation is powerless to make any impression on them' (Amberley, p. 100).

Those who were opposed to woman's suffrage justified their opposition by claiming that woman's emotional susceptibility would lead her to support a candidate for the wrong reasons, and to devote her energies to 'secondary' issues; namely issues which directly affected her own well-being and comfort. One contributor to the Saturday Review feared that 'an affectation of independence would promote domestic discomfort, and in some cases the votes of women might be controlled by political quacks or more commonly by spiritual agitators'.¹⁸ Others insisted that if she were to gain access to the political arena, woman's superior moral attitudes would become tainted and distorted: 'the chief objection to calling upon women to vote is that it would be a cruel and superfluous disturbance of the repose which is essential to them'.¹⁹ Margaret Lonsdale suggested that those who campaigned for the vote in public - 'Platform Women' - were actually helping to lower the standard of womanhood by rejecting the old ideal of femininity:

They are bartering the acknowledged sovereignty and boundless influence of gentleness, softness, and quiet dignity, which once belonged to them as an undisputed right, for an uncertain kingdom, held by declamation, and opinionativeness and by determined meddling with legislation, the very drift of some of which they are unable to appreciate.²⁰

Anyone who examined the mental and moral condition of such a woman would discover that 'no repose, outwardly or mentally, is to be found in her society, she produces a strong impression of unnaturalness, and of living in antagonism with the world around her' (Lonsdale, p. 415).

In the opinion of the anti-feminists, women could best achieve whatever political objectives they might have by using what Mrs Linton called 'their peculiar moral power over men', which was the result of 'the greater purity born of their greater ignorance - their daintier refinement, because of their more restricted lives'. In this way, they could influence men to vote for the issues and the candidates that the women themselves favoured (Linton, 'Wild Women', p. 87). To give women the vote, and thereby to interfere with what nature and 'common-sense' had decreed, would be to court disaster. Another contributor to the Saturday Review claimed that not only would it 'upset the basis of our present social system', but it would also 'plunge the country in anarchy and confusion'.²¹ To enfranchise women would be to encourage them to be less subordinate and to compete with men in 'masculine careers'. In short, women themselves would become unsexed and society, instead of advancing, would regress to a state of primitiveness and barbarity.

There can be little doubt that Hardy was strongly influenced by Comte throughout the greater part of his literary career.²² However, this influence waned as he grew more sceptical of the utility of social institutions, such as marriage and the family, and social mores in general. Like Angel Clare, Hardy also began to question 'the old appraisments of morality' and the conventions and attitudes Comte supported, and the clearest expression of this doubt is contained in his final novel Jude the Obscure, which is heavily indebted to the theories of John Stuart Mill.

Where determinists such as Darwin, Spencer and Comte claimed that men and women inhabited their separate domains because nature, through the evolutionary process, had so willed it, and that any interference with the decree of nature

was not only misguided but was also potentially disastrous, rational determinists and meliorists claimed that humanity had the potential to alter the conditions of existence, and consequently to determine the rate and direction of its own development. Those who believed in the power of enlightened social reform declared that man, rather than nature, was the originator and perpetrator of social injustice and that therefore it was up to man to do what he could to change things. Huxley and Mill were both powerful exponents of this particular line of argument.

In 1865, Thomas Henry Huxley wrote a short but polemical treatise entitled 'Emancipation Black and White', which touched upon issues that Mill was to explore in greater detail in his essay On the Subjection of Women.²³ Huxley claimed that there were obvious emotional and psychological differences between the sexes. Women were 'by nature, more excitable than men - prone to be swept by tides of emotion, proceeding from hidden and inward, as well as from obvious external causes'. At the same time, he also claimed that these 'alleged defects' were exaggerated by the type of education women received which 'does its best to weaken every physical counterpoise to this nervous mobility - [and] tends in all ways to stimulate the emotional part of the mind and stunt the rest' ('EBW', p. 71). Far from accommodating her to her biological role, Huxley believed a woman's education should aim, as far as possible, to free her from its dictates. He attacks the notion that girls should be 'educated to be men's drudges or toys', yet at the same time he repudiates what he calls 'the new woman worship' which seeks to place woman above man as a species of angel ('EBW', p. 72). A wise man, declares Huxley, need have no fear of competition from an educated woman for even though motherhood might take up less of a woman's life, 'as society advances towards its right organization' so leaving her free for other occupations, she will always bear a greater share in the reproduction of the species. Indeed, Huxley believed that while potential motherhood remained a woman's lot, she would be 'fearfully weighted down in the race of life' ('EBW', p. 75).

Education would also fail to compensate for a woman's inferior physical strength which would always militate against her in her dealings with men.

Huxley suggests that the arguments advanced in the cause of the inferiority of women are comparable to those cited by the white man to demonstrate the inferiority of the negro, and he claims that just as the abolition of slavery was beneficial in moral terms to the master, so the emancipation of women will prove advantageous to men. Likewise, society could only benefit from a higher standard of education for women, for 'better mothers will bring forth better sons, and the impetus gained by the one sex will be transmitted in the next generation, to the other' ('EBW', p. 74). Huxley's solution to this much debated aspect of 'The Woman Question' was simple:

Emancipate girls. Recognize the fact that they share the senses, perceptions, feelings, reasoning powers, emotions of boys, and that the mind of the average girl is less different from that of the average boy, than the mind of one boy is from that of another; so that whatever argument justifies a given education for all boys, justifies its application to girls as well. So far from imposing artificial restrictions upon the acquirement of knowledge by women, throw every facility in their way. ('EBW', pp. 72-73)²⁴

He concludes that 'the duty of man is to see that not a grain is piled upon that load beyond what Nature imposes; that injustice is not added to inequality' ('EBW', p. 75).

John Stuart Mill was also a strong supporter of justice and equal freedom for everyone regardless of sex. He had pioneered Comte's thought throughout the 1840s but later found himself unable to accept many of the latter's basic tenets. Mill constantly disputed the findings of those evolutionists who used the argument of sexual organization to justify woman's inferior status, and who attempted to compensate her for this by offering her moral rather than political power. As he declared with Harriet Taylor in the essay The Enfranchisement of Women, 'what is wanted for women is equal rights, equal admission to all social privileges; not a position apart, a sort of sentimental priesthood'.²⁵ Mill's treatise On Liberty deplored the fact that the social organism - the aims of which should be in direct antagonism to the biological

process - actually prevented, rather than encouraged, the development and exercise of individual spontaneity and freedom. Nowhere was this more in evidence than in the case of women, who were subject to a particularly invidious type of social conditioning by the powerful and ascendant middle-class male.

As Susan Moller Okin has indicated in her resumé of Mill's feminism, his arguments in favour of the liberty of the individual, and especially the liberty of women were, like Huxley's, conducted in the name of the advancement of the human species.²⁶ In the Principles of Political Economy (1848), Mill declared that 'the ideas and institutions by which the accident of sex is made the groundwork of an inequality of legal rights, and a forced dissimilarity of social functions, must ere long be recognised as the greatest hindrance to moral, social, and even intellectual improvement'.²⁷ In both The Enfranchisement of Women and The Subjection of Women, Mill questioned the authority of those who attempted to define the natural limits of womanhood. Society, in his and Harriet Taylor's view, had imposed artificial restrictions on the intellectual, social and political freedom of women and the supposed mental differences between the sexes were but 'the natural effect of the differences in their education and circumstances, and indicate no radical difference, far less radical inferiority, of nature'.²⁸ Mill and Taylor denied

the right of any portion of the species to decide for another portion, or any individual for another individual what is, and what is not, their 'proper sphere'. The proper sphere of all human beings is the largest and highest which they are able to attain to. What this is, cannot be ascertained without complete choice. (EW, p. 295)

In the Subjection of Women, Mill was concerned to prove that women were prevented from exercising this choice, and therefore prevented from exercising the limited amount of free will they possessed by the restrictions placed upon them by the society in which they lived. These restrictions effectively denied them any liberty of development:

[Women] have always hitherto been kept, as far as regards spontaneous development, in so unnatural a state, that their nature cannot but have been greatly distorted and disguised; and no one can safely pronounce that if women's nature were left to choose its direction as

freely as men's, and if no artificial bent were attempted to be given to it except that required by the conditions of human society, and given to both sexes alike, there would be any material difference, or perhaps any difference at all, in the character and capacities which would unfold themselves. (SW p. 305)

Mill claimed that in discriminating against women, society was adding injustice to the injuries already heaped upon them by nature in terms of their maternal functions and responsibilities.

The Subjection of Women takes as its starting point arguments advanced by Mill in the cause of individual liberty and applies them directly to women. Mill supports his thesis by exploring the relationship between nature and civilization using a similar line of reasoning to that employed in his essay on Nature. He claims that society has adopted certain attitudes and implemented certain laws which reinforce woman's inequality in the misguided belief that these laws accurately reflect nature and are therefore conducive to the greater benefit of humanity and to social progress. However, he suggests that

laws and systems of polity always begin by recognising the relations they find already existing between individuals. They convert what was a mere physical fact into a legal right, give it the sanction of society, and principally aim at the substitution of public and organized means of asserting and protecting these rights, instead of the irregular and lawless conflict of physical strength. (SW, p. 264)

In this way women, who are physically weaker than men, have their weakness reinforced by laws made by the stronger sex. They are unable to fight against social institutions because of the vitality and durability of custom, which places right on the side of might. At the same time, every woman is forced to live on terms of closest intimacy with her oppressor against whom the law allows her no retribution, and the very nature of her subordinate position renders it in her best interests to avoid offending him. The 'masters', as Mill puts it, exact obedience through fear, indoctrination and the whole system of general education which persuades women that

their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men; not self-will, and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others. All the moralities tell them that it is the duty of women, all the current sentimentalities that it is their nature to live for others; to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections. (SW pp. 271-72)

Mill also criticized the institution of marriage, condemning society for giving women a mere 'Hobson's choice' in the matter by closing all other doors, especially those of employment and the means to an independent income, against them. Society forces women into marriage, he claims, because it is afraid that, if given the choice, no self-respecting female would voluntarily submit herself to such indignities. Once married, the law victimizes women by delivering them up to men as objects to be used, just as negro slaves were delivered up to their white masters.

Mill's view on women's apparent obsession with their appearance and their tendency towards flirtatious behaviour is interesting and acute. He claims that by refusing them liberty, society forces women to assert themselves in other ways, 'where liberty cannot be hoped for, and power can, power becomes the grand object of human desire Hence also women's passion for personal beauty, and dress and display; and all the evils that flow from it, in the way of mischievous luxury and social immorality' (SW p. 338). He explains that women seek sexual and moral control over men in order to compensate for their legal and political helplessness.

Mill was convinced that what was regarded as 'the nature of women' was the result of social rather than biological pressures. It was 'the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others' (SW p. 276). The inferior status of women reflected their subjection to man rather than to their biology. Thus, he argues, woman's emancipation in legal, social, political and psychological terms was not only eminently possible, but also eminently desirable:

The benefits which it has appeared that the world would gain by ceasing to make sex a disqualification for privileges and a badge of subjection, are social rather than individual; consisting in an increase of the general fund of thinking and acting power, and an improvement in the general conditions of the association of men with women. But it would be a grievous understatement of the case to omit the most direct benefit of all, the unspeakable gain in private happiness to the liberated half of the species; the difference to them between a life of subjection to the will of others, and a life of rational freedom. After the primary necessities of food and raiment, freedom is the first and strongest want of human nature. (SW p. 336)

John Stuart Mill was the acknowledged champion and spokesman of the feminist movement during the second half of the nineteenth century. His polemical essays, which set out to undermine traditional notions of the proper sphere of womanhood, and to challenge the accepted view of what constituted 'natural' and 'unnatural' behaviour, excited both praise and dissent long after their publication. Those who believed that the nature of women was governed by their biological functions found themselves in violent disagreement with Mill's theories. Henry Maudsley declared:

Some may be disposed to argue that the qualities of mind which characterize women now, and have characterized them hitherto, in their relations with men are in great measure, mainly if not entirely, the artificial results of the position of subjection and dependence which she has always occupied; but those who take this view do not appear to have considered the matter as deeply as they should; they have attributed to circumstances much of what unquestionably lies deeper than circumstances, being inherent in the fundamental character of sex. It would be a delusive hope to expect, and a mistaken labour to attempt, to eradicate by change of circumstances the qualities which distinguish the female character, and fit women to be the helpmate and companion of man in mental and bodily union.

In the light of this, he considered many of the statements made by Mill on the subjection of women to be preposterous (Maudsley, pp. 472-73).

Feminists eagerly adopted Mill's claim that what was called woman's nature was in fact the result of social conditioning and that, if the circumstances women were forced to operate under were altered, women themselves would also change. Mona Caird called upon thinking women and men

... to consider the nature of popular sentiment with regard to the relation of the sexes, and to ask themselves whether the social fiat which for centuries has forced every woman, whatever be her natural inclinations or powers, into one avocation be really wise or just; whether, in truth, it be in the interests of the race to deprive one half of it of liberty of choice, to select for them their mode of existence, and to prescribe for them their very sentiments.²⁹

Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, in her reply to Maudsley's article, describes the way in which certain negative womanly traits were the result of inadequate educational facilities rather than of woman's biological organization. She claimed that if women were given 'some solid intellectual work which demanded

real thought and excited genuine interest' upon leaving school, the morbid, self-absorbed or even hysterical aspects of a woman's nature would cease to be the norm.³⁰

One of the most outspoken and articulate supporters of the proposition that woman's mental and emotional characteristics were artificially created by her environment was Maria G. Grey, writing in the Fortnightly Review in 1879. Mrs Grey insisted that the alleged defects of women: their lack of courage, truthfulness, justice, generosity, and magnanimity, their meanness, artifice, vanity, frivolity, jealousy and spite, were the result of conditioning and enforced subordination, rather than of sex. The same was true of woman's so-called special virtues, which included: modesty, 'tenderness, self-devotion, delicacy and quickness of perception, idealism, reaching its highest form in religion', all these qualities were more 'graces d'état' than inherently feminine. She suggests that if one were to compare the moral and intellectual powers of men and women one would find that

... human nature is substantially the same in both, and that the common expression: How like a man! How like a woman! should be translated into: How like what men and women generally have been made by conditions of life, education, and inherited aptitudes, from generation to generation, causing certain qualities to be more or less developed in each sex taken as a whole.³¹

The traditional belief that women were inferior beings created for the use and convenience of men was the natural result of the hereditary subjection of women: 'it pervades all classes of society; it is reflected alike in the higher literature and in the popular proverbs of all nations, and is so habitual as to make the expression of it quite unconscious' (Grey, p. 681).

Maria Grey calls for certain changes to be made in the condition of women generally including the breaking down of educational and professional barriers in order that they might be free to develop their capacities, the extension of the franchise 'to insure the speedy redress of their special grievances', the reform of the marriage laws and all laws affecting woman's property, her person and her rights over her children. She concludes:

It is the writer's profound conviction that when men and women stand thus equal helpmates in the work of life, equal sharers in its rights and duties; when the false standards of morality, resting on distinctions of sex, are exchanged for the true standards resting on the moral law obligatory on all human beings, and virtue and honour have but one meaning for man and woman alike; then, and only then, may we hope to see the moral cesspools of society cleansed away, and the human family advancing with steady step and even front to the final conquest of civilisation over barbarism, of the man over the brute, of that which is divine and immortal in human life over that which perishes in the using. (Grey, p. 685)

Mill's analysis of the way in which society forces women to compensate for their lack of political power and liberty through the use of sexuality informs Mona Caird's reply to Mrs Linton's attack on the 'Wild Women' of the new feminist movement. Mrs Linton draws a distinction between 'natural' and 'unnatural' specimens of nineteenth-century womanhood, placing in the first category 'the Good, beautiful, submissive, charming, noble, and wise', and in the second 'the bad, ugly, rebellious, ill-mannered, ungenerous, and foolish'. Mona Caird is concerned to show that Mrs Linton's 'natural' woman has been artificially produced and, in reality, has more potential for evil in her make-up than her more unconventional sister. The 'meek, sweet creature who cares nothing for her "rights"' is, in her view, 'a finished tyrant':

... she knows she can get all she wants by artifice; [she] makes a weapon of her womanhood, a sword of strength of her weakness, and does not disdain to tyrannise over men to her heart's content by an ungenerous appeal to their chivalry. She is a woman - poor, weak, helpless, and her husband may not call his soul his own!

She is the type 'which power on the one side and subordination on the other tend to produce' (Caird, 812-13). To insist that women are invariably determined by their biology is to ignore the lessons of science and history:

... every new development of society, every overthrow of ancient landmarks, tends to prove more and more conclusively that this fetish 'nature', who is always claimed as the patroness of the old order, just when she is busy planning and preparing the new, has not separated the human race into two distinct sections, with qualities entirely and eternally different. If this were so - if women were, in fact, the only beings under heaven not modifiable by education and surroundings, then we should be forced to reconstruct from the foundation our notions of natural law, and to rescind the comparatively modern theory that it is unwise to expect effects without causes, and causes without effects, even in the mysterious domain of human nature. We should live once more in a world of haphazard and of miracle, in which only one fact could be counted upon from age to age, viz., the immutable and stereotyped 'Nature' of Women. (Caird, p. 819)

Mona Caird claims that woman's apparently all-consuming maternal instinct is partly attributable to her biology, but is mainly the result of 'the tyranny of society', which has denied her any other outlet for her energies. Like Maria Grey, Mona Caird concludes her argument with an attack on the notion that it is nature who intends or desires women to behave in a particular fashion, 'she intends and desires nothing - she is an abject slave. Man intends, Man desires, and "Nature," in the course of centuries, learns to obey' (Caird, p. 820).

Hardy was apparently unfamiliar with Mill's written contribution to the feminist debate until Florence Henniker drew his attention to On The Subjection of Women. In a letter dated 3 September 1895, Hardy expressed his surprise that Florence was not only reading, but agreeing with 'any book by J. S. Mill'.³² It was possibly her enthusiasm for the book which prompted Hardy to declare in his next letter, 'I am going to get Mill's Subjection of Women - which I do not remember ever reading'.³³ However, although Mill left any discussion of the 'almost despotic power of husbands over wives' until the publication of On the Subjection of Women in 1869, even in Liberty he does not let the subject pass without demanding equal rights and protection under the law for women as well as for men. Indeed, at least one twentieth-century critic regards On Liberty as 'the case of women writ large' and, as I have suggested, Sue Bridehead's feminism is firmly rooted in Mill's concept of liberty, equality and justice as articulated in this treatise.³⁴

From his markings in Liberty, it would appear that Hardy was impressed with Mill's arguments concerning the power of circumstances, rather than biology, to determine the character of the individual. Comments in the Life suggest that he was also aware of the power of custom and convention to determine women's response to themselves and others. He notes, for example, how one of his female acquaintances - Lady Winifred Herbert - 'spoke of her betrothed as "He" - as a workman speaks of his employer - never mentioning his name' (LTH, p. 184). Several years later, he discussed 'hypnotism, will, etc.'

with Ray Lankester at the Saville Club. Lankester

... did not believe in silent influences, such as making a person turn round by force of will without communication. But of willing, for example, certain types of women by speech to do as you desire - such as 'You shall or you are to, marry me,' he seemed to have not much doubt. If true, it seems to open up unpleasant possibilities. (LTH, p. 266)

At the invitation of his friend Dr J. Fitch, Hardy visited Whitelands Training School for Schoolmistresses on 28 April 1891. On this particular day a May Queen was chosen according to a custom originated, appropriately enough, by Ruskin. After the visit Hardy observed:

A community of women, especially young women, inspires not reverence but protective tenderness in the breast of one who views them. Their belief in circumstances, in convention, in the rightness of things, which you know to be not only wrong but damnably wrong, makes the heart ache, even when they are waspish and hard You feel how entirely the difference of their ideas from yours is of the nature of misunderstanding. (LTH p. 235)

Hardy was acutely aware of woman's mental and emotional susceptibility and her consequent capitulation in the face of apparently overwhelming social pressures. However, as Elaine Showalter has indicated, his emphasis on the economic determinants of female dependency is frequently undermined by his insistence on the biological determinism of sex and childbirth.³⁵ For example, Sue Bridehead's companions at Melchester Normal School - which was based on Whitelands - are described in terms which suggest that from the very start they will be handicapped in the struggle for existence by their biological organization.

Half an hour later they all lay in their cubicles, their tender feminine faces upturned to the flaming gas-jets which at intervals stretched down the long dormitories, every face bearing the legend 'The Weaker' upon it, as the penalty of the sex wherein they were moulded, which by no possible exertion of their willing hearts and abilities could be made strong while the inexorable laws of nature remain what they are. They formed a pretty, suggestive, pathetic sight, of whose pathos and beauty they were themselves unconscious, and would not discover till, amid the storms and strains of after-years, with their injustice, loneliness, child-bearing, and bereavement, their minds would revert to this experience as to something which had been allowed to slip past them insufficiently regarded. (JO, p. 161)

One of the ways in which this weakness manifested itself was in women's

potential for motherhood. In his reply to the review of Maeterlinck's Apology for Nature, Hardy suggests that chivalry on the part of men merely excuses nature from having endowed women with such overwhelming physical handicaps and that though, as a man, one might have 'the chivalrous satisfaction of screening one of [Nature's] sex, you only throw responsibility a stage further back' (LTH, p. 315). Woman's physical weakness, as manifested in her reproductive functions, undermined for Hardy any suggestion that she could be man's physical equal.

This view was, of course, common to Darwin, Spencer, Comte, Huxley and John Stuart Mill. However, Spencer, Comte and, to some degree, Darwin claimed that social laws should continue to reflect women's physical and, in Spencer's view, their mental inferiority if the human species was to continue to progress along the lines established by natural law. This determinist view of woman's nature and her social role was used to justify her social, political and economic subordination. Huxley and Mill, however, believed that a civilized society had a duty to lighten the burden nature had imposed upon women through judicious social reform. The rational determinist was generally favourable to the suggestion that, given the right conditions, women could emancipate themselves from their subjection to their biological make-up, and Hardy's novels can be seen to support this view.

As several critics have noted, in particular A. R. Cunningham, Françoise Basch and Martha Vicinus, feminists during the period from 1860 up to the rise of the militant suffrage movement in the early 1900s were concerned with the interrogation and discrediting of traditional views and assumptions concerning 'natural' femininity, and woman's proper role and place in society.³⁶ The steady succession of political and pragmatic reforms designed to open up to women both the labour market and the field of higher education, and to ameliorate, if not annihilate, the iniquities suffered by wives and spinsters alike seriously challenged accepted notions of womanhood. As Maria G. Grey declared:

Among the questions agitating men's minds in this age of transition between the old world of thought and faith and custom, so rapidly disappearing, and the new world scarcely yet visible in its rudiments beneath the tide of change and destruction, there are none that go deeper to the very roots of our social life than those touching the relations between the sexes, and the position assigned to women in the family and in the State. For centuries those relations had been considered fixed as the law of nature itself and too sacred to be touched by profane hands; but, of late years, they have shared the fate of other revered institutions and have become open questions, to be tried as freely as any others in the ruthless crucible of doubt and analysis. (Grey, p. 672)

Periodicals, reviews and journals of the period, including those regularly consulted by Hardy, became increasingly aware that the women of the day were somehow different from their forebears.³⁷ The Saturday Review, the Fortnightly Review and the Nineteenth Century frequently addressed themselves to the question of women's dissatisfaction with, and at times their revolt against, the position assigned to them by custom, law and opinion. Hardy's rational determinism, coupled with his awareness of the major issues surrounding 'The Woman Question' as reflected by the popular press of the day, led him eventually to embrace the aims and ideals of the feminist movement. He believed, in common with Huxley and Mill, that women's biological weaknesses were exacerbated by existing social conventions and laws. Injustice features strongly alongside loneliness, child-bearing and bereavement, as one of the main causes of women's inferior status, and Hardy's texts suggest that true equality and freedom for women is dependent upon the abrogation of social, as well as natural, iniquity. However, Hardy's meliorist response to 'The Woman Question' was mediated by other factors, including his gender and his upbringing, both of which complicated his belief in the role played by biology in the formation of the feminine psyche and the establishment of woman's social and political role. His response to feminism was also shaped by his own sexual and emotional interaction with women in general, and with emancipated women in particular. The following chapter sets out to explore some of the formative influences which, on a more personal level, helped to determine Hardy's complex fictional analysis of women in society.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. See Beer, 'Beyond Determinism'.
2. George G. Romanes, 'Mental Differences Between Men and Women', NC. 21 (1887), 654-72 (p. 666).
3. Carol Dyhouse, 'Social Darwinistic Ideas and the Development of Women's Education', History of Education, 5 (1976), 41-58. See also Bernard Semmel, Imperialism and Social Reform 1895-1914 (London, 1960), pp. 29-52.
4. Lorna Duffin, 'Prisoners of Progress: Women and Evolution' in The Nineteenth Century Woman: Her Cultural and Physical World, edited by Sara Delamont and Lorna Duffin (London, 1978), pp. 57-91.
5. Spencer, Social Statics; or, The Conditions Essential to Human Happiness Specified, and the First of Them Developed (London, 1851), pp. 170-71. Further references to this work will follow the abbreviation SS in the text.
6. Spencer, The Study of Sociology (London, 1873), p. 375. Further references to this work will follow the abbreviation SoS in the text.
7. Spencer, The Principles of Biology, in 2 vols (London, 1864-67), II, 486. Further references to this work will follow the abbreviation PB in the text.
8. Spencer, Education: Intellectual, Moral and Physical (London, 1861) p. 186. Further references to this work will follow the abbreviation EIMP in the text.
9. Mrs Theo Chapman, 'Women's Suffrage', NC, 19 (1886), 561-69 (p. 563).
10. Henry Maudsley, 'Sex in Mind and in Education', FR, (os) 21 (ns) 15 (1874), pp. 466-83 (p. 466).
11. Grant Allen, 'Plain Words on the Woman Question', FR (os) 52, (ns) 46 (1889), 448-58 (p. 453).
12. Eliza Lynn Linton, 'The Wild Women as Politicians', NC, 30 (1891), 79-88 (p. 79).
13. Margaret E. Harkness, 'Women as Civil Servants', NC, 10 (1881), 369-81 (p. 369).
14. Arthur Arnold, 'The Political Enfranchisement of Women', FR (os) 17 (ns) 11 (1872), 204-14 (p. 205).
15. Millicent Garrett Fawcett, 'The Electoral Disabilities of Woman', FR (os) 13 (ns) 7 (1870), 622-32 (p. 625).
16. Viscountess K. Amberley, 'The Claims of Women?', FR (os) 15 (ns) 9 (1871), 95-110 (p. 101).
17. Fawcett, 'The Medical and General Education of Women', FR (os) 10 (ns) 4 (1868), 554-71 (p. 567).
18. 'Women's Disabilities', SR, 41 (1876), 539-40 (p. 539). See Abbreviations.

19. 'Women', SR, 37 (1874), 454-55 (p. 455).
20. Margaret Lonsdale, 'Platform Women', NC, 15 (1884), 409-15 (p. 414).
21. 'Women's Suffrage', SR, 33 (1872), 550-51 (p. 551).
22. See Pinion, 'Hardy and Myth', pp. 134-39.
23. Huxley, 'Emancipation - Black and White' in Collected Essays, III, 66-75. Further references to this essay will follow the abbreviation 'EBW' in the text.
24. Huxley appears to have put his theories into practice for, although he opposed the admission of women to the meetings of the Geological Society in 1859, claiming it to be 'not ... a place of education for students, but a place for discussion for adepts', he determined to give his daughters the same training in physical science as he gave his sons in the hope that 'they, at any rate, shall not be got up as man-traps for the matrimonial market. If other people would do the like the next generation would see women fit to be the companions of men in all their pursuits'. He also championed the cause of Elizabeth Garrett Anderson who was denied entry to all the medical schools because of her sex. In November 1869, he taught 'Physiography', or the elements of science in South Kensington to a class composed almost entirely of women. See Cyril Bibby, Scientist Extraordinary: The Life and Scientific Works of Thomas Henry Huxley 1825-1897 (Oxford, New York, Toronto, Australia, Braunschweig, 1972) pp. 53-54.
25. John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor, The Enfranchisement of Women, Westminster Review, 55 (1851), 289-311 (p. 311). Further references to this essay will follow the abbreviation EW in the text.
26. Susan Moller Okin, Women in Western Political Thought (1979; London, 1980), pp. 197-230.
27. Mill, Principles of Political Economy with Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy in Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, introduced by V. W. Bladen, edited by J. M. Robson, 21 vols (Toronto, 1981-84) II-III (III, 765).
28. Mill, The Subjection of Women (1869) in Collected Works, XXI, 259-340 (p. 302). Further references to this essay will follow the abbreviation SW in the text.
29. Mona Caird, 'A Defence of the So-Called "Wild Women"', NC, 31 (1892), 810-29 (p. 811).
30. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, 'Sex in Mind and Education: A Reply', FR (os) 21 (ns) 15 (1874), 582-94 (p. 591).
31. Maria G. Grey, 'Men and Women', FR (os) 32 (ns) 26 (1879), 672-85 (p. 678).
32. Thomas Hardy to Florence Henniker, CL, II, 86 (3 September, 1895).
33. Thomas Hardy to Florence Henniker, CL, II, 87 (11 September, 1895).
34. See Gertrude Himmelfarb, On Liberty and Liberalism, cited Moller Okin, p. 330.

35. Elaine Showalter, 'The Un-Manning of The Mayor of Casterbridge', in Dale Kramer, Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy, (London and Basingstoke, 1979) pp. 99-115 (p. 100).
36. See: A. R. Cunningham, 'The Emergence of the New Woman in English Fiction 1870-1914' (D. Phil. dissertation, Oxford University, 1974), and 'The New Woman Fiction of the 1890's', Victorian Studies, 17 (1973-74), 177-86; Gail Cunningham, The New Woman and the Victoria Novel (London and Basingstoke, 1978); Françoise Basch, Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel 1837-67 (London, 1974); Martha Vicinus, A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Women (Bloomington and London, 1977).
37. For a brief synopsis of changing attitudes of women as reflected in the media of the day see Cynthia L. White, Women's Magazines 1693-1968 (London, 1969), pp. 41-92.

CHAPTER THREE

HARDY AND WOMEN: POLITICAL AWARENESS AND MASCULINE IDEALISM

In his essay on 'Romantic Myth and Victorian Nature in Desperate Remedies', G. Glen Wickens suggests that Hardy's fiction clearly articulates a contradictory view of nature which was characteristic of nineteenth-century imaginative writing after the publication of Darwin's Origin of Species. This dual view places the emphasis on nature 'as a powerful adversary', whilst simultaneously exemplifying 'the underlying respect, the persistence of a sacramental feeling for Nature as a model to be emulated'.¹ Hardy was convinced of the consanguinity of all living things, and of the human individual's close, instinctive relationship with the unconscious natural process which created him or her. In one sense the process of civilization was to be applauded for it afforded humanity the only means of combatting the laws of existence. In another sense it was to be deplored for, as humanity in general became more 'civilized', men and women became increasingly alienated from the elemental rhythms which linked them to the rest of creation. This chapter will examine the way in which women appeared to Hardy to embody this contradiction.

Returning to Dorset in 1888, after a protracted stay in London of sixteen months, Hardy noted: 'the literary productions of men of rigidly good family and rigidly correct education, mostly treat social conventions and contrivances - the artificial forms of living - as if they were the cardinal facts of life' (LTH, p. 213). As the son of a stonemason and a servant girl, Hardy was acutely aware of his own humble origins, rigidly suppressing all but the most gratulatory references to either in the biography ghost-written by himself. At the same time, having spent the first thirty-four years of his life in and around the parish of Stinsford, Dorset, and returning there periodically from London, Hardy used his experiences of rural life and customs as a basis from which to question 'the artificial forms of living', which he believed constituted a direct threat to the social and sexual freedom of the individual.

From evidence contained in his biography, it would seem that rural women in particular provided him with a focus for his analysis of the human individual's relationship to nature and society, especially in so far as the issue of sexual morality was concerned. However, this idealistic, Romantic view of nature and rural life which permeates Hardy's observations on women is constantly undermined by his awareness of the hardships and shortcomings for women of an existence lived in close harmony with the elemental rhythms of nature. Hardy recognized a more pragmatic aspect to the rural woman's apparently spontaneous and instinctive sexuality which led him to draw parallels between her situation and that of her more sophisticated middle-class sisters.

The Reverend Calder Scott, writing in the Saturday Review in August 1836, was disturbed by the fact that 'ante-nuptial unchastity is rather the rule in the country districts than the exception - it is the recognized order of society for young people not to marry until it is necessary'. Female morality in some country districts was, in his view, 'at a deplorably low ebb':

If, as is too frequent among the lower classes, a girl sacrifices her person as the best chance for a husband, the wonder is that, with the double barrels of an action for the breach of promise of marriage and for seduction, any young woman in those ranks which usually produce plaintiffs in these suits fails in the matrimonial line.²

Richard Jefferies, a contemporary of Hardy's, noted that

the number of poor girls, from fifteen to five-and-twenty, in agricultural parishes who have illegitimate offspring is extremely large, and is illustrated by the fact that, out of the marriages that take place - and agricultural poor are a marrying class - scarcely any occur until the condition of the girl is too manifest to be any longer concealed.³

The statistics were so alarming that the Honourable E. Stanhope, reporting for the Commissioners on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture, suggested certain restrictions be placed on the labour of women and children:

The principal objection to field work for women is the loss of refinement which almost necessarily ensues. 'It is most destructive to the female character', says Lord S. Godolphin Osborne. 'Whenever any number of females work in company at farm work, especially when in that company there are also male workers, the conversation is of a character most destructive to all purity of thought'.⁴

Rural courtship, with its 'custom of unreserved comradeship out of doors', differed greatly from a middle-class urban engagement with its elaborate and formal system of chaperonage (Td'U, p. 235). As late as 1894, Hardy described how the servants he and Emma had brought with them from Dorset to their house in South Kensington attracted great attention from 'butchers and bakers young men, postmen, and other passers-by', the reason being that their 'innocent country servants [had] set up flirtations with all these in a bold style which the London servant was far too cautious to adopt' (LTH, p. 263).

Engagement in rural areas was often ratified by sexual intercourse and marriage followed when, and often only if, the woman conceived, the motto being perhaps: 'if thou houd'st, I wed thee; if thou doesn't, thou'rt none the waur'.⁵ Marriage automatically eradicated any stigma, and if the man refused to marry the pregnant girl she could sue for breach of promise.⁶ However, if marriage was not forthcoming, some women preferred their own form of revenge to any legal proceedings. Hardy noted one case concerning Mil (Amelia) C.

[who] had an illegitimate child by the parish doctor. She christened him all the doctor's names, which happened to be a mouthful - Frederick Washington Ingen - and always called him by the three names complete. Moreover the doctor had a squint, and to identify him still more fully as the father she hung a bobbin from the baby's cap between his eyes, and so trained him to squint likewise. (LTH, p. 231)

Richard Jefferies cites some of the reasons behind the agricultural girl's fall from virtue:

Bread is cheap - that is the staple - rents are the same, and there are more allotments than ever, making vegetables more easy to obtain. The result, therefore, is this, that the girl feels she can sin with comparative immunity. She is almost sure to get her order (very few such appeals are refused); let this be supplemented with some aid from the parish, and she is none the worse off than before, for there is no prejudice against employing her in the fields.

Having a child seems, at least, to have ensured a regular income, if it did not always ensure a husband. If a girl's seducer was unable or unwilling to offer marriage, a generous allowance would sometimes more than compensate for her loss of virtue:

If she is fool enough to yield to a man who is badly off, she may be jeered at for a fool, but rarely reprimanded as a sinner, not

even by her own mother. Such things are not looked upon by the rural poor as sins, but as accidents of their condition.⁷

Many of Hardy's contemporaries believed that agricultural districts were under the influence of a desolating moral pestilence; however, aspects of Hardy's fictional and autobiographical writings suggest that he saw the rural attitude to sexuality as healthy and in tune with the rhythms of nature: 'the great passionate pulse of existence, unwarped, uncontorted, untrammelled by those creeds which futilely attempt to check what wisdom would be content to regulate' (Td'U, p. 199). He was particularly impressed with the rural attitude to marriage. He viewed the indissoluble bourgeois marriage contract as an example of a repressive social law imposed upon a natural instinct. In areas of Dorsetshire marriages were often set up on a trial basis for a year and a day, or seven years, after which time either party was free to dissolve the union. Hardy refers to the ancient custom of 'handfasting' extant on the ancient Isle of Slingers, and is at pains to emphasize the unhappy consequences of Pierston's interference with the tradition on behalf of Ann Avise, who is remarkably outspoken on the subject of sexual inconstancy.⁸

In Tess of the d'Urbervilles Hardy confronted contemporary conventional attitudes to pre-marital sex with a vengeance. Tess, like Grant Allen's novel of roughly the same date, was designed to show that woman who 'did', i.e. a woman who indulged in sexual intercourse before marriage, could still be regarded as being essentially pure, both in terms of her morality as well as in her total freedom from artifice.⁹ Harriet Waters Preston detected in Tess 'an enlarged perception of the moral possibilities of primitive womanhood'.¹⁰ Neither Tess of the d'Urbervilles nor, for that matter, The Woman Who Did advocated sexual delinquency. Sex is presented as a purely natural and instinctive act which should be neither regulated nor repressed by social ordinances. Hardy's farm and field women have a close working relationship with nature. As a result, they remain faithful to a moral code which is antagonistic to the conventions of a civilized, Christian, middle-class

community. In Tess, the narrator refers to 'the charm which is acquired by a woman when she becomes part and parcel of outdoor nature, and is not merely an object set down therein as at ordinary times A field man is a personality afield; a field-woman is a portion of the field; she has somehow lost her own margin, imbibed the essence of her surroundings, and assimilated herself with it' (Td'U, p. 123). Later in the same text, women who spend a great part of their lives out of doors are described as primitive and fetishistic, retaining in their souls 'far more of the Pagan fantasy of their remote forefathers than of the systematized religion taught their race at later date' (Td'U, p. 141). This 'Pagan fantasy' extends to a spontaneous, unrestrained approach to sexuality in which the processes of mating and giving birth are regarded as natural events rather than as social tragedies. However, Tess is not only a 'pure woman' in that she 'had been made to break an accepted law, but no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly', she is also 'pure woman' in that she exemplifies the traditional notion of woman as pure sexual energy.¹¹

Hardy was acutely aware of what he regarded as the artificiality of life in an urban middle-class environment, and conscious of its effect upon women in particular. However, his response to the problem of women's relationship to 'the artificial forms of living' was informed by a high degree of masculine idealism which occasionally clouds his appreciation of the iniquities of woman's social and economic position. Many nineteenth-century feminists agreed that woman's so-called nature was created rather than innate, but they wisely refrained from attempting a definition of 'Natural Woman', or woman as she might appear freed from the artificial constraints imposed upon her development by society. John Stuart Mill declared: 'we cannot isolate a human being from the circumstances of his condition, so as to ascertain experimentally what he would have been by nature; but we can consider what he is, and what his circumstances have been, and whether the one would have been capable of producing the other' (SW, p. 313). Many feminists realized that in suggesting

that the codes and conventions of a civilized society were somehow antagonistic to a woman's true essentiality, they could fall into the trap set by determinist theorists such as Darwin, Spencer and Comte who defined women as the embodiment of uncivilized instinct, emotion and sex. Indeed, many who subscribed to this view believed that woman's primitive impulses actually constituted a threat to an organized polity unless regulated and checked by man-made laws and conventions. The Englishwoman's Review quoted one such extreme of masculine logic from Macmillan's Magazine:

There is nothing, it would seem, that a woman more dislikes than being permitted to do as she likes One reason for this appears to be that women are endowed by nature with so strong and peculiar an idiosyncrasy that they must necessarily run counter to it if they are let alone. The laws of nature are so powerful in women that it is essential to make human laws in aid of them. The instincts of their sex so imperiously demand of women to do what is feminine, that it is necessary for men to forbid them to do anything masculine. Therefore it stands to reason that women who wish to be guided by womanly instinct must place themselves under the guidance of men. Possessed by an innate sense of feminine propriety, women feel that if the law did not protect them against themselves they would be inclined to do many unsuitable things.¹²

To some extent, Hardy subscribes to this traditional view that women, as a direct result of their physiology, and their involvement with the processes of mating and giving birth, were somehow closer to the elemental rhythms of nature than were men. Aspects of both his fictional and non-fictional writing suggest that rural women, untainted by the degradation and artificiality of urban life, were even closer and were, in that sense, 'pure' women. In April 1899, Hardy listened to the young Duchess of M--- recite Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard' at the poet's graveside:

With startling suddenness, while duly commending her performance, he seemed to have lived through the experience before. Then he realized what it was that had happened: in love of recitation, attitude, and poise, tone of voice, and readiness of memory, the fair lady had been the duplicate of the handsome dairymaid who had insisted on his listening to her rehearsal of the long and tedious gospels, when he taught in the Sunday School as a youth of fifteen. What a thin veneer is that of rank and education over the natural woman, he would remark. (LTH, pp. 303-04)

Rank and education were not the only elements of the veneer of artificiality. The urban environment itself often produced what Hardy regarded as a lamina

over the essential woman. In April 1884, he described how four itinerant girl musicians appeared transfigured by 'the silvery gleams' from Saunder's Silversmith's shop:

They were now sublimed to a wondrous charm. The hard face of the eldest was flooded with soft solicitous thought; the coquettish one was no longer bold but archly tender; her dirty white roses were pure as snow; her sister's red ones a fine crimson: the brass earrings were golden; the iron triangle silver; the tambourine Miriam's own; the third child's face that of an angel; the fourth that of a cherub. The pretty one smiled on the second, and began to play 'In the gloaming', the little voices singing it. Now they were what Nature made them, before the smear of 'civilization' had sullied their existences. (LTH, p. 165)

Hardy's fictional and non-fictional writings register the pernicious effect of the gradual intrusion of the urban environment and its corresponding moral values on what he regarded as the 'natural' - in the sense of destined by nature - rural response to sexuality. His heroines, and more especially his rural heroines, are to some extent shaped according to received assumptions concerning 'natural' femininity and, by linking women with the primitive and the natural, Hardy's texts suggest that women's mental and physical responses are strongly determined by their biological constitutions. However, Hardy's texts also display an awareness of the economic factors behind the apparent freedom with which rural women approached sexual relationships. This awareness grew out of his first-hand experience of the hardships of women's lives and it periodically undermines any attempt in his novels to idealize women as 'pure' or natural.

In an agricultural community where women were both wage earners and the producers of wage earners in the form of children, strength, health and fertility were more valuable assets than virginity in the campaign to procure a mate. A family unit of man, woman and children was potentially more economically viable than a unit composed of a single woman or even a single man. If the children produced were male, the benefits of consolidating the union were even greater for both husband and wife. In his essay 'The Dorsetshire Labourer', Hardy describes some of the advantages to the labourer of a large family of boys:

With a family of half-a-dozen children, the eldest of them delicate girls, nothing that he can hope to receive for the labour of his one pair of hands can save him from many hardships during a few years. But with a family of strong boys, of ages from twelve to seventeen or eighteen, he enjoys a season of prosperity. The very manner of the farmer towards him is deferential; for home-living boys, who in many cases can do men's work at half the wages, and without requiring the perquisites of house, garden-land, and so on, are treasures to the employer of agricultural labour. These precious lads are, according to the testimony of several respectable labourers, a more frequent cause of contention between employer and man than any other item in their reckonings. As the boys grow, the father asks for a like growth in their earnings; and disputes arise which frequently end in the proprietor of the valuables taking himself off to a farm where he and his will be better appreciated.

Such a family is also beneficial to the wife who, thus provided for, can remain 'genteelly at home', and look with 'some superciliousness upon wives who, having no useful children, are obliged to work in the fields like their husbands'.¹³

As a direct result of her limited financial opportunities and restricted life-style, sexual bargaining was often a rural woman's sole means of survival and social advancement. In this way, her situation was almost exactly parallel to that of her middle-class urban counterpart who was denied the means towards an independent existence outside marriage and was therefore obliged to cling to the monogamous family unit for economic and class security.

In most agricultural districts there was a distinct social barrier between the men and women who laboured in the fields and those who did not. Thus it became the ambition of girls from the lower sections of the community to rise to the position of dairymaid or maidservant and by working hard or, even better, by marrying well perhaps gain the chance to go to the towns and work as a servant to a tradesman's family.

The growth of sophistication and social ambition among rural women, from field worker to farmer's daughter, occasioned by the opening up of hitherto remote and secluded rural areas, and the ready access to the world of society, literature and the arts which this process afforded them, was seen by Hardy as instrumental in the gradual decline of rural customs and the increasing, and possibly ill-considered, rejection of the rural moral code by women in favour of the ideals of womanhood originated and perpetrated by the middle and upper

middle-class urban societies. The growth of the railways, in particular the Great Northern, not only precipitated the general decampment of depressed or ambitious rural workers to the towns, but was also responsible for the growing influx of newspapers, reviews and periodicals from London through which rural women were introduced to the attendant rules and regulations of the marriage market created by the dominant economic class which valued virginity above fertility. Many of Hardy's texts - and in particular the so-called 'minor' novels - centre on the conflict between the heroine's instinctive loyalty to her rural roots and her social aspirations which cause her to question and/or eventually reject rural values and the rural way of life in favour of an urban middle-class existence.

This gradual rejection of the old ways in favour of the new extended to all sections of the rural female community. The women's ambition was reflected in their attire. Hardy noted how, in their attempts to imitate town workers, peasant women took to wearing 'shabby millinery bonnets and hats with beads and feathers, "material" dresses, and boot-heels almost as foolishly shaped as those of ladies of highest education', rather than 'the wing bonnet like the tilt of a waggon, cotton gown, bright-hued neckerchief, and strong flat boots and shoes', which rendered them so attractive to Hardy and to many of his male contemporaries.¹⁴ Richard Jefferies, writing in 1880, also noted a change in the demeanour of the cottage girls who 'have taken to themselves no small airs of recent years - they dress, so far as their means will go, as flashily as servants in cities, and stand upon their dignity'.¹⁵ He also detected an increase in their notions of self-respect and a corresponding decline in the numbers of illegitimate births from the 1870s onwards. He suggests that the reason behind this lay in their newly-acquired social ambitions, which were a direct consequence of their contact with urban areas:

The girl who leaves her home for service in the towns sees a class of men - grooms, footmen, artisans, and workmen generally - not only receiving higher wages than the labourers in her native parish, but possessing a certain amount of comparative refinement. It is not surprising that she prefers, if possible, to marry among these.¹⁶

Sensitivity to class issues and the desire for social advancement are characteristic of several of Hardy's lower-class rural women characters. For Arabella, Jude with his superior aspect and his academic reputation, represents a chance to move up from her position as pig-farmer's daughter to artisan's wife. By utilizing the rural custom of courtship she gains not only a husband, but one 'with a lot of earning power in him for buying her frocks and hats' (JO, p. 79). Her infatuation for Jude is a coarser version of the love of Izzy, Retty, Marian and Tess for the educated and refined Angel Clare.

Moving up the social scale, we find this desire for social improvement articulated by Thomasin Yeobright, who initially responds to Diggory Venn's proposal of marriage with the words "[my aunt] will want me to look a little higher than a small dairy-farmer, and marry a professional man",¹⁷ or Fancy Day who is tempted to forsake the homely Dick Dewy for a man more able to gratify her love of 'refinement of mind and manners; but even more than this ... the idea of surroundings more elegant and pleasing than those which have been customary'.¹⁸

At the top of the social scale stand the favoured daughters of tradesmen, wealthy farmers and the clergy, and it is from this section of the social élite that so many of Hardy's major female characters are drawn. These women, such as Elfride, Fancy and Grace, have had the benefits of an education and are often the daughters of refined and cultured women who married beneath them. At the same time, each is vaguely dissatisfied with her humble surroundings. Richard Jefferies describes the nature of this class consciousness on the part of the more genteel sections of the rural female population in Hodge and his Masters. He comments upon the air of wealth, social status and refinement such women cultivate, even in the midst of straitened financial circumstances:

These girls, the local leaders of fashion, hold their heads far above those farmers' sons who bear a hand in the fields. No one is eligible who takes a share in manual work: not even to be invited to the house, or even to be acknowledged if met in the road Nothing less than the curate is worthy of their smile.¹⁹

Jefferies speculates upon the kind of man most likely to become the husband of

such a girl and concludes that her chosen mate would have to be, 'something higher in the scale' than even a tenant farmer of her own class to whom she would be something of a financial burden. He ends his speculations thus:

You cannot blame these girls, whether poor or moderately well-to-do, for thinking of something higher, more refined, and elevating than the cheese-tub or the kitchen. It is natural, and it is right, that they should wish to rise above that old, dull, dead level in which their mothers and grandmothers worked from youth to age. The world has gone on since then - it is a world of education, books, and wider sympathies. In all this they must and ought to share.²⁰

Hardy's fiction acknowledges the fact that the impulse to escape the hardships and limitations of rural life, and the desire to climb up the social ladder into what might be regarded as the artificially restricted milieu of the middle classes comes, almost invariably, from the very women who would appear to be closest to the elemental rhythms of life. It is the recognition of this fact that mitigates against the traditional concept of rural women as portrayed in his novels.

Robert Gittings and Michael Millgate have painstakingly documented the histories of Hardy's female relatives and, in the light of their accounts, it would appear that their experiences provided Hardy with a model for his analyses of the life of a working-class rural woman.²¹ This is particularly true of his mother's case. Hardy's mother Jemima seems to have inherited her mother's love of reading and her intellectual aspirations as well as a driving ambition to improve her own impoverished circumstances.²² She is described as

a girl of unusual ability and judgement, and an energy that might have carried her to incalculable issues By reason of her parent's bereavement and consequent poverty under the burden of a young family, Jemima saw during girlhood and young womanhood some very stressful experiences of which she could never speak in her maturer years without pain, though she appears to have mollified her troubles by reading every book she could lay hands on.
(LTH, p. 8)

Jemima was manually dexterous and a good cook. She had worked for the Reverend Fox-Strangeways at Maiden Newton and also as a servant in other Dorset houses. Her ambition was to be a 'cook in a London club-house', but 'her plans in that direction were ended by her meeting her future husband and being married to him

at the age of five-and-twenty'. Thomas Hardy senior, Hardy's father, handsome and popular with the ladies, was a self-employed mason. Jemima may well have sensed his wage-earning potential for she was three months pregnant by him when they married in December 1839. Throughout their marriage, she seems to have channeled her energies into looking for opportunities to develop her husband's business and later into encouraging her son in his efforts to enter London society.²³ We read of how her notions of what was 'respectable' extended to placing restrictions on the traditional dances her children were familiar with. Hardy's father delighted in jigs, hornpipes and folk dances and performed them with 'all the old movements of leg-crossing and hop, to the delight of the children 'till warned by his wife that this fast perishing style might tend to teach them what it was not quite necessary they should be familiar with, the more genteel country dance having superseded the former' (LTH, p. 13).²⁴ We may detect this concern for appearances in Hardy's light-hearted portrayals of Stephen Smith's mother in A Pair of Blue Eyes, Fancy's step-mother, and Mrs Dewy in Under the Greenwood Tree.

Texts like Under the Greenwood Tree and The Woodlanders, display a fundamental contradiction in their attitude to life close to the soil. In one sense rural life is exalted as somehow more 'natural' and elemental and the heroine's repudiation of the rural value system is questioned. At the same time, certain aspects of these two texts interrogate this implicitly idealistic view of country life by exposing its less salutary points - especially where women were concerned - and by examining sympathetically the methods used by women to escape its limitations.

Hardy's first-hand knowledge of the economic hardships suffered by rural women and their independence, both of mind as well as of morals, may have helped to effect his eventual conversion to the aims and objectives of the feminist movement of the time. Rural attitudes to sexual relationships had much in common with the advanced ideas of the feminists and Fabian Socialists with whom Hardy came into contact during his periodic sojourns in London.

Many rural women eschewed marriage altogether in a way which would have impressed their sophisticated urban sisters. One story which particularly interested Hardy was told to him by a Mrs Cross - an elderly peasant women - and is retold in the Life. The implication is that the story is the teller's own. It deals with a young girl seduced and deserted by her lover. She gave birth to a child which she kept and supported through her own efforts. Later her lover returned poorer than she and offered to marry her. She refused, and he ultimately went into a workhouse. We read:

The young woman's conduct in not caring to be 'made respectable' won the novelist-poet's admiration

The eminently modern idea embodied in this example - of a woman's not becoming necessarily the chattel and slave of her seducer - impressed Hardy as being one of the first glimmers of woman's enfranchisement; and he made use of it in succeeding years in more than one case in his fiction and verse. (LTH, p. 157)

Hardy also noted a story told to him by his mother concerning a woman named Nanny Priddle who, when she was married would never be called by her husband's name "because she was too proud" ... and to the end of their lives the couple were spoken of as "Nanny Priddle and John Coggan" (LTH, p. 202). Hardy seems to have been impressed by the woman's independence, although he makes no comment on the wider implications of the story.

Hardy came to feminism relatively late in life, but several of the major aims and ideals of the movement had already become familiar to him as a result of his own personal experiences both in Dorset and later in London and through his acquaintance with the writings of radical and liberal thinkers such as Shelley and John Stuart Mill. Later he was to become friendly with Positivists and Fabian Socialists such as Grant Allen and George Bernard Shaw, both of whom were intensely concerned with women's issues.

In 1866, Hardy bought a copy of Queen Mab and Other Poems by Percy Bysshe Shelley. Apart from the title poem, the volume also contained Alastor, The Revolt of Islam, and Prometheus Unbound. On the title page of the volume, under Hardy's autograph, Sir James Barry wrote the following inscription:

This Shelley and another volume like it were given to me by Mrs Hardy after T. H.'s death. In his early days when he was in an architect's office (Blomfield's) in Adelphi Terrace he carried these two books in his pockets and often read them aloud and discoursed on them to the other clerks. All the linings and marks on them were made by him in those days.

In addition to the four poems mentioned above, Hardy also read and quoted from Epipsychidion, 'When the Lamp is Shattered', Adonais, and several shorter works, in fact, as Phyllis Bartlett has indicated, Hardy quotes more freely from Shelley than from any other nineteenth-century poet except Browning, and there is evidence which suggests that Hardy regarded Shelley as a philosophical and ethical as well as a poetical mentor.²⁵

Shelley's emotional and intellectual influence upon Hardy has been noted, especially with reference to the former's ideas on the pursuit of the ideal beloved.²⁶ However, it is clear that Shelley's poetry and, more especially, his theoretical writings also strongly influenced the young Hardy's political opinions. Even before he met Emma his ideas on marriage were beginning to crystallize and, as he grew older and the bitterness which characterized his later life with her became more overt, he turned back to his favourite poet who had articulated ideas on the iniquity of the marriage contract which the older Hardy could now identify with. 'Love', declares Shelley in his 'Notes' to Queen Mab, 'withers under constraint: its very essence is liberty: it is compatible neither with obedience, jealousy, nor fear: it is there most pure, perfect, and unlimited, where its votaries live in confidence, equality, and unreserve'. He goes on to suggest that the sexual connection should only last as long as the love between the two people involved. Just as the ties of friendship are outside the jurisdiction of the law, so too the ties of love should be beyond the realms of private judgement, for love 'is more vehement and capricious, more dependent on those delicate peculiarities of imagination, and less capable of reduction to the ostensible merits of the object'. No rational, intelligent and inquiring mind can vow, in all conscience, to love the same woman, and the present system of marital constraint makes hypocrites or enemies of rational individuals:

Persons of delicacy and virtue, unhappily united to one whom they find it impossible to love, spend the loveliest season of their life in unproductive efforts to appear otherwise than they are, for the sake of the feelings of their partner or the welfare of their mutual offspring: those of less generosity and refinement openly avow their disappointment, and linger out the remnant of that union, which only death can dissolve, in a state of incurable bickering and hostility.

Shelley concludes that the abolition of marriage would result, not in promiscuity, but in 'the fit and natural arrangement of sexual connection That which will result from the abolition of marriage will be natural and right; because choice and change will be exempted from restraint'.²⁷

Hardy's first public statement on the iniquities of the marriage laws was contained in The Woodlanders. However, the institution of marriage itself had been subjected to subtle and perceptive criticism in nearly all of his previous novels. While The Woodlanders appears to condemn Fitzpiers for his marital infidelities, Hardy implies in the 'Preface' that he viewed Fitzpiers' behaviour as the inevitable result of the waywardness of the human sexual instinct for which marriage made no provision.²⁸ Eight years later, Jude the Obscure was published and Hardy was immediately granted honorary membership of Mrs Oliphant's 'Anti-Marriage League', despite his fervent assertion that 'only half a dozen pages' of the novel had any direct bearing on the marriage question. The Savoy declared: 'in Jude the Obscure we find for the first time in our literature the reality of marriage clearly recognized as something wholly apart from the mere ceremony with which our novelists have usually identified it'.²⁹ Like Shelley before him, Hardy was concerned to rescue his opinions on marriage and sexual relationships from the charges of licentiousness. He claimed to be concerned with liberty rather than with libertinism, and was quick to deny any links between his views and those of the Free Love Movement, preferring instead to echo Spencer's remark that he failed to see 'any possible scheme for the union of the sexes that w[oul]d be satisfactory'.³⁰ Hardy appears to have been more concerned with improving the marriage laws than with abolishing the covenant altogether. In June 1912 he contributed to a symposium of answers to the question, 'How Do We Solve the Divorce Problem', which appeared first in

Hearst's Magazine. His views appear to echo Shelley's theories on marriage and utility:

I have already said many times, during the past twenty or thirty years, that I regard Marriage as a union whose terms should be regulated entirely for the happiness of the community, including, primarily, that of the parties themselves.

As the English marriage laws are, to the eyes of anybody who looks around, the gratuitous cause of at least half the misery of the community, that they are allowed to remain in force for a day is, to quote the famous last word of the ceremony itself, an 'amazement,' and can only be accounted for by the assumption that we live in a barbaric age, and are the slaves of gross superstition.

As to what should be done, in the unlikely event of any amendment of the law being tolerated by bigots, it is rather a question for experts than for me. I can only suppose, in a general way, that a marriage should be dissolvable at the wish of either party, if that party prove it to be a cruelty to him or her, provided (probably) that the maintenance of the children, if any, should be borne by the breadwinner.³¹

However, Hardy's condemnation of marriage appears to have been fuelled as much by his personal frustrations and dissatisfaction with his own conjugal experiences as by a reasoned analysis of the contract from a political or feminist point of view, although in a letter to Florence Henniker informing her of the successful confinement of Florence Hardy's sister, Hardy ventures the observation 'if I were a woman I should think twice before entering into matrimony in these days of emancipation when everything is open to the sex'.³²

Hardy's views on the ethics of divorce and the problems of illegitimacy, as articulated in Jude the Obscure, were even more advanced than his views on marriage and again they have much in common with Shelley and Mill.³³

Phillotson's release of Sue provokes in Gillingham a milder form of the alarm felt by certain sections of the public towards any attempt to facilitate divorce:

'But if people did as you want to do, there'd be a general domestic disintegration. The family would no longer be the social unit.'
 'Yes - I am all abroad, I suppose!' said Phillotson sadly. 'I was never a very bright reasoner, you remember And yet, I don't see why the woman and the children should not be the unit without the man'.
 'By the Lord Harry! - Matriarchy! ... Does she say all this too?'.
 (JO, p. 252-53)

Jude himself advocates not Matriarchy exactly, but something akin to the planned community experiments conducted by Robert Dale Owen and his followers which were

also favoured by Harriet Taylor:³⁴

'I must say that, if I were better off, I should not stop for a moment to think whose [Little Jude] might be. I would take him and bring him up. The beggarly question of parentage - what is it after all? What does it matter, when you come to think of it, whether a child is yours by blood or not? All the little ones of our time are collectively the children of us adults of the time, and entitled to our general care. That excessive regard of parents for their own children, and their dislike of other people's is, like class feeling, patriotism, save-your-own-soul-ism and other virtues, a mean exclusiveness at bottom.' (JO, p. 293)

The publication of Jude the Obscure may well have prompted a letter from George Bedborough who wrote to Hardy in 1897 to draw his attention to the 'Legitimation League', founded in 1893 to campaign for freedom in sexual relationships and the acknowledgement of children born out of wedlock to ensure that they enjoyed equal rights with legitimate children. Hardy replied to Bedborough thanking him for his information concerning the league and 'its practical endeavours in respect of the tragedies of life that form the subject of some of my novels'.³⁵

Although Hardy denied any affiliation whatsoever with the 'Anti-Marriage League', the feminist movement, or the movement for Free Love, he and those who belonged to these various organizations had much in common. The feminist movement in particular, with its attacks on the monogamous and indissoluble patriarchal family unit, its demands for justice and equality in the laws relating to illegitimacy, attracted Hardy's attention. The second half of the nineteenth century saw some of the most controversial reforms in the marriage laws. The Married Woman's Property Acts of 1870 and 1874 did much to improve the position of married women as far as their rights to their own property and their person was concerned, and the Marriage and Divorce Bill of 1857 allowed divorce without an Act of Parliament for the first time. The process of reform was completed by further Property Acts passed in 1882 and 1893, but by this time the institution of marriage itself was under attack, especially by those women who had achieved a place in professional life and were loath to sacrifice the advances they had made so painfully.³⁶ Between the years 1850

and 1870, great alarm was expressed at the large numbers of single women who were facing poverty and hardship. As Henry Cecil Raikes observed in the National Review, 'an immense per-centage of these poor widows and spinsters will be women utterly illiterate, absolutely destitute of any interest in, or information about, political affairs, and, in a vast number of cases, contending with want and privation in their most painful forms'.³⁷ Higher education for women, coupled with professional training, became increasingly necessary. Jessie Boucherett went part of the way towards widening the options for unmarried women by setting up centres like the one at 19, Langham Place, London in 1858, which aimed to teach women the rudiments of law-copying. Under the auspices of 'The Society for Promoting the Employment of Women', founded by Adelaide Anne Proctor in 1859 as a direct result of the Langham Place project, women began to infiltrate areas of employment hitherto monopolized by men, especially the printing trade, the offices and the banks. 'Ambition' became the byword of the modern woman: 'that burning, restless desire to do and know everything', and many were reluctant to submit themselves to the restrictions of married life.³⁸

Increased opportunities in higher education also improved the prospects of these women eager to escape the seeming inevitability of marriage and motherhood, or destitution. With the founding of Queen's College and Bedford College in 1847 and 1848 respectively, the opening of the North Collegiate School by Miss Buss in 1850, and Cheltenham Ladies College by Miss Beale four years later, the whole system of female education in England underwent radical alteration. The situation was further improved by the founding of Girton College Cambridge in 1869, and Lady Margaret Hall and Somerville College Oxford in 1879.³⁹

Although he sympathized with the aims and ideals of the 'New Woman', as far as her own personal and sexual liberation was concerned, Hardy's response to the question of the efficacy of political action was at first cautious. On

23 April, 1892 - less than five months after the publication of Tess of the d'Urbervilles in book form - Alice Grenfell wrote to him confirming the proposal of the Woman's Progressive Society to elect him as their Vice-President. Hardy declined the honour stating in his defence that he had not 'as yet been converted to a belief in the desirability of the Society's first object . Should such a conversion take place I shall have much pleasure in informing you'. The Society's first object was woman suffrage and although Hardy closed the letter expressing 'much sympathy with many of your objects' votes for women was apparently not among them.⁴⁰

Emma Hardy may well have effected the conversion of which he speaks for her support for the suffrage cause was well known: Gordon Gifford described his aunt as a 'believer in the virtues and qualities of women in general'.⁴¹ Although Emma was strongly committed to political reform, she espoused an essentially Comtean view of woman, similar to that which informed Eliza Burt Gamble's provocative study of woman and her relationship to Darwin's theory of evolution and natural selection.⁴² On 24 April 1899 Emma wrote to Rebekah Owen raising the question of whether 'woman's rule of the world would not have produced a better world than it is'.⁴³ In November of the same year she wrote her name in a copy of Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.⁴⁴ She expanded her ideas in another letter to Rebekah Owen on the last New Year's Eve of the nineteenth century:

'Do you read much of the new poetry - so involved, obscure & so much of it? There is a mystical poem by Yeats - 'The Shadowy Land' What does it mean? That no woman's love is worth offering to a man, who is as a god? I like Ad Astra by Chas Wentworth Wynne - a countryman of yours - Supposing women had always held the reins of this world would it not have been - by now, getting near the goal of happiness? This is a man's world - & in spite of their intellect shown most especially in science! it is in fact a terrible failure as to peace & joy.'⁴⁵

As a stout old lady of sixty-seven Emma braved the mud, the rain and the jeers of amused spectators to join two thousand other women on what came to be known as 'The Mud March' from Hyde Park to Exeter Hall which took place on 9 February 1907 (LTH, p. 333). When the women reached the Hall a mass meeting was

held and a resolution passed in an attempt to force Parliament to commit itself to giving women the vote.⁴⁶ On 18 July 1910, Hardy wrote to Emma assuring her that his signature would not be appearing on Lord Curzon's anti-suffrage letter which was to be signed by influential people and to appear in The Times.⁴⁷ Although Michael Millgate regards Emma's involvement with the suffrage movement as one way of finding 'a convenient platform[] for the harassment of her husband', her activities and her indomitable character may well have been responsible for Hardy's support of the suffrage struggle in later life.⁴⁸

From 1892 onwards, Hardy met and regularly corresponded with leading figures in the militant suffrage movement, perhaps recalling Herbert Spencer's dictum, 'successful militancy leads to political power'.⁴⁹ These figures included Helen Ward, Evelyn Sharp, Millicent Fawcett and Alice Grenfell. From letters addressed to these women it is clear that Hardy, like many of his contemporaries, soon located the impetus for what he regarded as much needed social reform, within the Women's Movement. The issues of further education, higher education and woman's entry into the labour market largely failed to arouse his active support but, because he saw women as the potential instigators of social change, the issue of the vote both excited and alarmed him.

As early as 1862, William Gregg had recognized the threat feminism posed to the status quo in that it aimed to make women independent of men. In Gregg's eyes, feminism sought to undermine the institution of marriage in that its goal was

to multiply and facilitate [women's] employments; to enable them to earn a separate and ample subsistence ... to induct them generally into avocations, not only as interesting and beneficent, and therefore appropriate, but specially and definitely as lucrative; to surround single life for them with so smooth an entrance ... that marriage shall almost come to be regarded, not as their most honourable function and especial calling, but merely as one of many ways open to them.

He concludes: 'few more radical or more fatal errors, we are satisfied, philanthropy has ever made'.⁵⁰ Mona Caird, writing in the Fortnightly Review in 1890 also declared that 'if the woman's claim were granted, if she could

secure a liberty as great as that of man, in all the relations of life, marriage, as we now understand it, would cease to exist'.⁵¹ Hardy eventually came to share this conviction.

On 22 November 1906, as a direct result of Emma's involvement with the women's suffrage movement, Millicent Garrett Fawcett wrote to Hardy in connection with a pamphlet which she was intending to publish entitled 'Opinions of Eminent Men on Woman-Suffrage'.⁵² Hardy replied thus:

'I have for a long time been in favour of woman-suffrage. I fear I shall spoil the effect of this information (if it has any) in my next sentence by giving you my reasons. I am in favour of it because I think the tendency of the woman's vote will be to break up the present pernicious conventions in respect of manners, customs, religion, illegitimacy, the stereotyped household (that it must be the unit of society), the father of a woman's child (that it is anybody's business but the woman's own, except in cases of disease or insanity), sport (that so-called educated men should be encouraged to harass kill for pleasure feeble creatures by mean stratagems), slaughter-houses (that they should be dark dens of cruelty) & other matters which I got into hot water for touching on many years ago'.⁵³

Hardy closes his letter by stating that he did not believe that, given the vote, women would actively press for many or even any of the points mentioned but that they would at least be in a position to assert themselves and would encourage men to be more vocal on these issues. Mrs Fawcett perhaps proved his point, for in her reply she declared herself unable to publish Hardy's letter preferring instead to keep it 'for myself and a few friends John Bull is not ripe for it at present'.⁵⁴

Mrs Fawcett's reply may well have dampened Hardy's ardour for the suffrage cause. On 22 December 1908, Helen Ward invited him to contribute to a proposed weekly newspaper - The Coming Citizen - dedicated to the constitutional struggle for woman's suffrage. Hardy declined and excused himself thus:

'Though I hold, as you may know, that women are entitled to the vote as a matter of justice if they want it, I think the action of men therein should be permissive only - not cooperative. I feel by no means sure that the majority of those who clamour for it realize what it may bring in its train: if they did three-fourths of them would be silent. I refer to such results as the probable break-up of the present marriage-system, the present social rules of other sorts, religious codes, legal arrangements on property, &c. (through men's self protective countermeasures). I do

not myself consider that this would be necessarily a bad thing (I should not have written "Jude the Obscure" if I did), but I deem it better that women should take the step unstimulated from outside. So, if they should be terrified at consequences, they will not be able to say to men: 'You ought not to have helped bring upon us what we did not foresee.'⁵⁵

In both this and his earlier letter to Millicent Garrett Fawcett, Hardy suggests that if women were given an equal share in the running of the country and in the formation of its laws and conventions their special qualities would ensure that the more repressive social mores and laws would cease to exist. Women, he believed, could totally revolutionize society in terms of its manners, its customs, its religious belief, its dependence upon the monogamous patriarchal family unit, and its inhumanity to animals. If Emma's belief in the female's instinctive abhorrence of war is taken into consideration, feminism appears as the single most powerful force tending towards the eventual perfection of the human species and the improvement of the conditions of existence. Hardy appears to have endowed the women's movement with the power to eradicate 'man's inhumanity to man, to woman and to the lower animals'.

Hardy regularly corresponded with and met several of the so-called 'New Woman Writers' of the day, many of whom were concerned to challenge what they regarded as repressive social institutions, and to undermine the conventional fictional stereotypes of woman. He greatly admired Sarah Grand's novel The Heavenly Twins, and wrote to Ouida, May Sinclair, and 'that brilliant woman' Pearl Craige. On 22 November 1895, George Egerton (Mary Chavelita Clairmonte) wrote to him praising the characterization of Sue Bridehead and describing her as 'a marvellously true psychological study of a temperament less rare than the ordinary male observer supposes'. Hardy replied the following month praising her volume Keynotes and commenting upon 'the verisimilitude of the stories'.⁵⁶ Of his friends, both Grant Allen and George Bernard Shaw were well known at the home of the Pankhurst family; number eight Russell Square.⁵⁷ Socially Hardy attended gatherings frequented by Mary Haweis who was herself active in the Woman's Suffrage cause and the Anti-Vivisection Movement, which were closely

linked, and who often invited him to 'Lecturettes' held in her own home.⁵⁸

He also knew Mary, afterwards Lady Jeune whose qualified support for the 'New Woman' is demonstrated in the articles she submitted for publication in the Fortnightly Review and the National Review.⁵⁹ In 1893, Hardy noted a conversation between himself, Lady Londonderry, the Duchess of Manchester and Lady Jeune in which

'all four of us talked of the marriage-laws, a conversation which they started, not I; also of the difficulties of separation, of terminable marriages where there are children, and of the nervous strain of living with a man when you know he can throw you over at any moment.' (LTH, p. 258)

Hardy's views on marriage were outspoken, and it may have been conversations such as these which prompted Emma's vitriolic remark: 'he is very vain and very selfish ... and these women that he meets in London society only increase these things ... They are the poison; I am the antidote'.⁶⁰

Hardy's affinity with the aims and objectives of the feminist movement was complicated, however, by his emotional and sexual attraction to women in general - and to advanced or emancipated women in particular - and by his idealization and fear of sexuality. He was fascinated by women, whilst at the same time occasionally displaying a little contempt mingled with insecurity in their presence. He observed them constantly; on trains, where they appeared 'statuesque', 'sly', 'a Cleopatra'; on omnibusses; in the houses of friends; and in fashionable dress shops. He wondered, 'where do these women come from? Who marries them? Who knows them?' (LTH, p. 220). Some he found vaguely sexually threatening. In July, 1888 he dined at Walter Pater's where he met 'an Amazon, more, an Atlanta, most, a Faustine. Smokes: handsome girl: cruel small mouth: she's of the class of interesting women one would be afraid to marry' (LTH, p. 212).

His opinion of the ordinary conventional woman appears to have been somewhat low. In March 1866 shortly after his arrival in London, he declared,

The woman at first interview will know as much of the man as he will know of her on the wedding morning; whilst she will know as little

of him as he knew of her when they first shook hands. Her knowledge will have come upon her like a flood, and have as gradually soaked away. (LTH, p. 49)

The previous year he had decided that

There is not that regular gradation among womankind that there is among men. You may meet with 999 exactly alike, and then the thousandth - not a little better, but far above them. Practically therefore it is useless for a man to seek after this thousandth to make her his. (LTH, pp. 47-48)

However, this conviction did not stop Hardy from trying. Throughout his life he was strongly drawn to cultured, intellectually emancipated women whose outlook and life-style was unconventional in some way. Genevieve Smith, for instance, whose 'varied knowledge & experiences' he admired profoundly.⁶¹

Likewise Helen Allingham whose ability as an illustrator astonished him into making a strange, but poignant, declaration of love for her to Edmund Gosse in later life.⁶² Evelyn Lady Portsmouth was for Hardy, 'one of the few, very few, women of her own rank for whom I would make a sacrifice: a woman too of talent, part of whose talent consists in concealing that she has any' (LTH, p. 210). Earlier, Hardy had described Lady Portsmouth, her daughters, and Lady Winifred as 'an extraordinarily sympathetic group of women' (LTH, p. 170). In July 1891, he encountered 'a pair of beauties' at Mrs Jeune's, and the following year he escorted Arthur Balfour's sister into dinner, again at Lady Jeune's. Her 'frank, sensible, womanly way of talking' led him to observe 'some of the best women don't marry - perhaps wisely' (LTH, p. 246).

Of all the emancipated women Hardy came into contact with, the two who appear to have impressed him most were Florence Henniker and Lady Agnes Grove. Hardy seems to have suffered from a traditionally masculine tendency to idealize women as romantic or sexual objects, and his well-documented infatuations for Mrs Henniker and Lady Grove suggest that his involvement in feminist politics - limited though it appears to have been - was not entirely disinterested.⁶³ In both cases he seems to have equated political and intellectual advancement with the emotional and even sexual largesse he was familiar with from his early

years in rural Dorset. In both cases he was swiftly disabused.

Florence Henniker had a reputation for being both intellectually gifted and a trifle 'fast'.⁶⁴ She married comparatively late in life at the age of twenty-seven and spent most of her married life separated from her soldier husband. She and Hardy met - possibly for the first time - at her brother's home in Dublin and Hardy pronounced her 'a charming, intuitive woman apparently' (LTH, p. 254). Her literary ambitions, her gregarious nature, her famous literary and cosmopolitan gatherings, her intellectual gifts and, above all, her intense sympathy for the sufferings of animals aroused a passionate attachment in Hardy. Their long friendship was marred, however, by two factors: her conventional views on religion and sexuality, and her firm but polite repudiation of his affections. Hardy tried constantly to modernize her outlook. On 16 July 1893, he expressed his delight that she was reading Shelley's Epipsychidion simultaneously with him, but regretted that

'One who is pre-eminently the child of the Shelleyean tradition - whom one would have expected to have been an ardent disciple of his school and views - should have allowed herself to be enfeebled to a belief in ritualistic ecclesiasticism. My impression is that you do not know your own views. You feel the need of emotional expression of some sort, and being surrounded by the conventional society form of such expression you have mechanically adopted it Depend upon it there are other values for feeling that the ordinances of Mother Church - my Mother Church no less than yours'.

Although he ends the letter with an apology for his apparent harshness, the effect is somewhat marred by his conclusion that he must 'trust to imagination only for an enfranchised woman' (ORFW, pp. 14-15). Despite her enthusiasm for the writings of John Stuart Mill, she seems to have retained her staunchly orthodox views on religious as well as feminist matters.

Hardy was tireless in his efforts to further Florence's literary career, acting as both mentor and critic to her. In 1907, Mrs Henniker published a novel entitled Our Fatal Shadows which Hardy praised for its 'Trollopian' features. Her heroine, however, left much to be desired:

'Of course I should not have kept her respectable, and made a nice decorous, dull woman of her at the end, but sh[ou]ld have let her go to the d---- for the man, my theory being that an exceptional career alone justifies a history (i.e. novel) being written about a person. But gentle F. H. naturally had not the heart to do that. The only thing I don't care much about is her marrying the Duke's son - whom she did not love; an action quite as immoral, from my point of view, and more so even, than running off with a married man whom she did love would have been. But convention rules still in these things of course'. (ORFW, p. 134)

Florence Henniker may well have taken Hardy's criticism seriously for, some four years later, she sent him a 'brief story' whose heroine quite captured his imagination although he regretted the story's dénouement:

'The girl, though so slightly sketched, is very distinct - the modern intelligent, mentally emancipated young woman of cities, for whom the married life you kindly provide for her would ultimately prove no great charm - by far the most interesting type of femininity the world provides for man's eyes at the present day. In fact, between ourselves, I don't quite believe she did marry that other man'. (ORFW, p. 147)

Towards the end of Florence Henniker's life the religious and other differences between herself and Hardy began to alienate them. He ceased to send her copies of his poems in the belief that she might be offended by them and from time to time lamented the fact that they had drifted so far apart. She died on 4 April 1923 'after a friendship of 30 years!' (LTH, p. 419)

Hardy made Agnes Grove's acquaintance at a country dance in honour of the annual sports at the Larmer Tree held at Rushmore in September 1895. He described his stay at Rushmore to Florence Henniker as 'the most romantic time I have had since I visited you at Dublin' (ORFW, p. 45). In the Life, however, the occasion is dismissed with the laconic comment that Hardy's energetic activities 'left him stiff in the knees for some succeeding days' (LTH, p. 269). Agnes Grove was independent, beautiful and literary and may well have replaced Florence Henniker in his affections for a while. Robert Gittings describes her as: 'dazzlingly beautiful in her extreme décolletage, flamboyant and vigorous, she was more robust, talented, and intellectual than Florence Henniker. She had a genuine journalistic gift, which she deployed with considerable success' (TOH, p. 77). Not only was she more gifted than

Florence Henniker, she was also less conventional, more broad-minded and ardent in the cause of women's suffrage. As Desmond Hawkins has indicated, Hardy was reluctant to send a copy of Jude the Obscure to Florence Henniker, possibly because of her deepening conventionalism. In February 1896 he wrote to her enclosing a copy of the Saturday Review which featured a favourable review of the novel. He added, however, 'I don't suppose you will care to read a word in favour of poor Jude'.⁶⁵ Three months earlier, and shortly after their first meeting, Hardy had dispatched a copy of the novel to Agnes Grove with the confident comment: 'you are, I know, sufficiently broad of view to estimate without bias a tragedy of very unconventional lives'.⁶⁶

Desmond Hawkins describes Agnes Grove as 'active and indeed combative, in the causes of Liberalism, Women's Suffrage, Anti-Vivisection and Anti-Vaccination'.⁶⁷ She was president of the Forward Suffrage Union and author of The Human Woman, a collection of articles arguing for the extension of the franchise to include women, published in 1914. Many of the articles contained in the volume had been previously read, corrected and recommended to editors of periodicals such as the Nineteenth Century, the Fortnightly Review and the Cornhill Magazine by Hardy himself. In November 1895, Mrs Grove submitted for Hardy's consideration a reply to an article entitled 'Why Women do not Want the Ballot', written by the Bishop of Albany and published in The North American Review two months earlier. Hardy read the 'Reply' 'with much interest' and declared it, 'a spirited & sincerely written article, & quite worth sending to the Review on the chance of getting it inserted'.⁶⁸

Ten days later, Hardy submitted Mrs Grove's 'Reply' to the editor of the North American Review complete with a letter of recommendation in which he describes the piece as 'a spirited reply to the argument of the Bishop in your pages'. He added, 'it is, besides, essentially feminine - typically feminine - &, as such has a value to students of the question, apart from its representations & reasonings'.⁶⁹ By 'feminine' Hardy may have meant that the

article expressed a woman's point of view. On the other hand, he may have been referring to certain traits which he labelled 'inexperience', 'irrelevancy' and prolixity, and which he seems to have regarded as characteristic of women's writing in general for, when Agnes submitted a second piece of writing on the enlightenment of children, Hardy praised its 'sustained power of reasoning' which was, in his opinion, 'not usual in women's arguments'.⁷⁰ Despite his intervention, Agnes's 'Reply' was rejected. Hardy then suggested that she 'shape the article into a general reply to the customary objections; & then wait for an opening for it when the question again comes to the front'.⁷¹ Agnes later recommended a novel on the suffrage question to Hardy entitled Theories: Studies from a Modern Woman (London, 1894), but there is no evidence that he followed up her suggestion.

Agnes's first published article on the 'Woman Question' entitled 'Women in Assemblies' appeared in the New Century in March 1897. Hardy had read the piece during the previous December.⁷² 'Women in Assemblies' appealed for the election of more women onto local government bodies, and vehemently contested any suggestion that they were naturally unfit for such offices. Mrs Grove concludes:

So obvious does the inevitable gain to public life that women's co-operation would afford appear, that one may be sure that any objection thereto is based on purely selfish and self-seeking principles The desire is avowedly not to advocate the cause of human progress generally, but to emphasise the conflicting interests existing, in imagination, between men and women; and in women's encroachment on the sphere of public life, it is not a possible all-round gain, but merely an encroachment on men's present power that is anticipated.⁷³

Hardy's response to Mrs Grove's arguments reflects his contradictory and ambivalent attitudes to the question of mental and physiological differences between men and women. His reply, written just sixteen months after the publication of Jude the Obscure, is evasive and non-committal. He declares himself 'by no means sure that it is not one of those many questions wherein justice & policy are opposed to each other - cat-&-mouse questions, where the unalterable laws of nature are based upon a wrong - much to the discomfort of

the optimistic Christian's theories'.⁷⁴ Such a response was characteristic of Hardy at this time. It reflects his conviction that nature has unfairly discriminated against women - a conviction shared by both Huxley and Mill - yet, at the same time, his suggestion that the laws of nature are 'unalterable' undermines the meliorist view of existence implied by his recognition of the injustice of such discrimination against women.

Agnes's 'Reply' may well have formed the basis of her article 'Objections to Woman Suffrage Considered' published in the Humanitarian in August 1899. As its title suggests, the article examines and dismisses some of the more commonly expressed objections to the extension of the franchise to women. In it Mrs Grove suggests:

Until the woman is given full liberty to respond with her whole being - without any artificial restrictions as to her capabilities and functions - to the efforts initiated, if you will, by man in the direction of the perfection of the human race, the progress of the great universal cause of truth will be slow, spasmodic, and uncertain. The combined efforts of the male and female mind will never see fruition until the chief obstacle to this perfect union is removed. This is at present their almost universal inequality in the eyes of the law, and the inevitable antagonism such inequality creates.⁷⁵

Mrs Grove's article is distinctly meliorist in tone whilst at the same time reflecting the influence of John Stuart Mill in its emphasis on the pernicious effect of social conditioning on women. It was Hardy who suggested she write such a piece, and this time his praise was unqualified. He wrote:

'I have read with much interest your article on the Objections to Woman-Suffrage, partly because I agree with you in most of your opinions, & further because the article itself is a forcible piece of rhetoric. Indeed, I don't know any woman-writer who puts such vigour into her sentences as you do, or who is so dexterous in the conduct of an argument of that kind'.⁷⁶

In 1908, Agnes Grove published her collection of essays entitled The Human Woman, and prefaced it with 'a plea for the removal of the artificial man-made barriers, that exist to the detriment of the progress of the Anglo-Saxons as a nation, and of human beings as a race':

It is a plea for women to be allowed free development for the faculties and functions they possess, not for permission to enter

spheres for which they are by nature unfit. But let it be understood that we recognise the right of none to pronounce where these spheres lie.⁷⁷

Here Agnes Grove is clearly echoing The Enfranchisement of Women by John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor. Hardy expressed his admiration for the preface in particular which he declared to be 'so well written that I feel quite proud of you'.⁷⁸ As for the remainder of the book he pronounced it 'really a series of brilliant and able essays, which all who favour woman suffrage should be grateful for'. He continued, in true meliorist fashion:

'I, of course, who have long held that in justice women should have votes, whatever may be said of the policy of granting them to the sex (from a man's point of view), have not needed convincing, though some of your ingenious arguments had not occurred to me.

That women do not realize the ultimate effect of conceding to them what they are entitled to, is natural enough, & perhaps it is as well that they do not, or they would never combine in sufficient numbers to obtain it'.⁷⁹

Hardy's admiration for Agnes Grove was obviously stimulated by her advanced opinions on the 'Woman Question', as were his tireless efforts to further her literary career. However, as his fulsome praise of her articles - many of which contained ideas which he could not comfortably uphold - indicates Agnes's feminism encouraged romantic and sexual, as well as intellectual, admiration in her mentor who marked her death with a wistful lyric in which the speaker longs to relive

That old romance,
And sit apart in the shade as we sat then
After the dance
The while I held her hand, and to the booms
Of contrabassos, feet still pulsed from distant rooms.⁸⁰

Hardy's personal response to the question of woman's social and political rights was complex and contradictory. In one sense, his qualified support for many of the demands of the feminist movement, and in particular the women's suffrage campaign, was a logical extension of his rational determinist philosophy, and his meliorist approach to the question of humanity's relationship to the conditions of existence. He eventually embraced the women's movement of the day as a positive and powerful force for social change which would be

instrumental in the abolition of inhumanity, injustice and cruelty to all living creatures. On a more practical and immediate level, he recognized its potential to undermine and radically reconstruct the way society was organized, particularly with regard to the marriage laws and the whole system of sexual morality and social ordinance - 'the artificial forms of living' - which he believed constituted a direct threat to the freedom of the individual. In another sense, however, his appreciation of the objectives and implications of women's campaign for political, social and economic freedom was clouded by his sexual and emotional response to women themselves. This response was determined by several factors which included his own personal idiosyncrasy, his rural upbringing, and his experiences as a member of the dominant gender and as an aspiring member of the dominant economic class.

As a direct consequence of his early life in Dorset, and his first-hand experience of the gradual encroachment of urban life and values - 'the smear of civilization' - on secluded rural areas, Hardy was nostalgically drawn to the simplicity and comparative freedom of an existence lived in close harmony with nature. Rural attitudes towards sexuality, procreation and marriage seemed, in many ways, to be healthier and more in harmony with human instincts than the restricted conventions and social ordinances of an urban middle-class existence. His Romantic view of nature and rural life led him to idealize the sexual and procreative potential of the female, and he regretted the way in which social ambition led many women to reject the old traditions and values of their community in favour of middle-class notions of gentility and respectability. At the same time, he regarded woman's instinctive connection with the rhythms of life as a potential threat to the aims of an organized social system, thus reflecting misogynist notions of woman as pure sexual energy. However, Hardy's early experiences also made him aware of woman's vulnerability, in both physical and economic terms, and the way she was forced to barter her sexuality in order to gain financial and class security. Because

of the limited earning potential of women in rural districts, mainly as a result of the unequal distribution of wages among male and female agricultural workers, women looked to marriage as one way of increasing their social mobility.

Hardy's sensitivity to the relationship between sexuality and economics was heightened by his contact with the writings of Shelley and Mill, and with leading feminist agitators of the day during his periods in London. He consulted journals and periodicals which regularly featured articles on the major aspects of the 'Woman Question', and attended social gatherings where such issues were openly discussed. In addition to this, he found himself emotionally and sexually drawn to women with unconventional and advanced views on politics, culture, art and society. Even so, Hardy suffered from a tendency to equate the abolition of sexual inequality with a return to a more liberated approach to sexuality characteristic of the rural area he grew up in. In his middle and later life, distinctions between the sexual liberation and the sexual exploitation of women frequently became blurred in his private and public dealings with the women he met and fell in love with. His outspoken views on the iniquities of the bourgeois marriage contract were fuelled as much by his own conjugal disappointments and the frustrations caused by his extra-marital flirtations as by an informed analysis of the institution from a feminist point of view.

Hardy's novels reflect this ambivalent and complex attitude to both the feminist movement and women. They frequently confirm and subscribe to traditional determinist ideologies of women, yet within their framework they contain elements which interrogate and undermine the received assumptions they re-cycle. This tension is most clearly present in the less successful texts. Precisely because they are cruder and more carelessly managed, the contradictions and ambiguities are more blatant and more revealing in the minor novels than in the acknowledged masterpieces. This is particularly true of the question of whether woman's nature is determined wholly by her biology, or by the demands and expectations of the society in which she lives. In The Subjection of

Women, Mill discusses 'the artificial state superinduced by society [which] disguises the natural tendencies of the thing which is the subject of observation, in two ways: by extinguishing the nature, or by transforming it' (SW, p. 313). Hardy's minor texts illustrate the way in which women in particular are the victims of this process. On one level they suggest that the urban middle-class environment and its value system sought to disguise and distort natural sexual instincts which rural women are encouraged to indulge. On another deeper and more politically aware level, they register the way in which women's so-called nature is the product of her subordination to man, and man-made circumstances. Because men are physically and economically dominant, they have gained and retain the initiative in sexual selection. Consequently, women were forced to adapt themselves to fit a male-created model of femininity. At the same time, the minor texts display some recognition of the problems facing a male author attempting to portray female characters realistically, sympathetically and yet innovatively. This tension is most obviously present in the relationship between the male narrator and the female heroine in any single text. Hardy's lesser novels also bear witness to the way in which his artistic intentions were shaped by the expectations and moral outlook of a nineteenth-century middle-class readership, and by the rigorous demands of the publishing and lending library systems. This issue will be examined in detail in the following chapter and the discussion will centre on two of the least critically valued novels in the Hardy oeuvre - Desperate Remedies and The Trumpet Major.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. Wickens, 'Romantic Myth', p. 156.
2. The Reverend Calder Scott, 'Breach of Promise and Marriage Morals', SR, 2 (1856), 314-15 (p. 314).
3. Richard Jefferies, 'Field Faring Women', first published in Frazers Magazine (1874); reprinted in The Toilers of the Field (London, 1894), pp. 111-50 (pp. 135-36).
4. 'Report by the Hon. E. Stanhope on the Counties of Dorset, Kent, Chichester, Salop, Stafford, and Rutland (Together with one farm in Sussex)' in Second Report From the Commissioners on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture with Appendix (Session 10 December 1868 - 11 August 1869), Irish University Press Series of British Parliamentary Papers, Agriculture XI, pp. 3-31 (p. 14).
5. William Acton, Prostitution (1870), cited Duncan Crow, The Victorian Woman (London, 1971), p. 201.
6. Hardy noted as 'interesting' an item on 'Breach of Promise and Elopement', in the Morning Chronicle, 2 March 1803, p. 3. See The Trumpet Major Notebook in PN, pp. 117-86 (p. 130).
7. Jefferies, 'Field Faring Women', pp. 137-38.
8. WB, p. 37. See Abbreviations.
9. Grant Allen, The Woman Who Did (London, 1895).
10. Harriet Waters Preston, 'Thomas Hardy', The Century (os) 24 (ns) 46 (1893), 353-59 (p. 358).
11. For a detailed discussion of the controversy surrounding Tess's 'purity' see: Jacobus, 'Tess: The Making of a Pure Woman', in Tearing the Veil: Essays on Femininity edited by Susan Lipshitz (London, Henley, Boston, 1978), pp. 75-92, and 'Tess's Purity', Essays in Criticism, 26 (1976), 318-38.
12. 'Women and Criticism', The Englishwoman's Review of Social and Industrial Questions, I, no. 1 (1866), 35-60 (p. 51).
13. Hardy, 'The Dorsetshire Labourer' (1883) in PW, pp. 168-89 (pp. 185-86).
14. 'Dorsetshire Labourer', p. 176.
15. Jefferies, 'Cottage Girls' in Hodge and his Masters, 2 vols (London, 1880), II, 145-69 (p. 145).
16. 'Cottage Girls', p. 146.
17. RON, p. 106. See Abbreviations.
18. UGT, p. 188. See Abbreviations.
19. Jefferies, 'Country Girls' in Hodge and his Masters, I, 217-34 (pp. 228-29).

20. 'Country Girls', p. 232.
21. See YTH and THAB respectively.
22. Hardy describes his maternal grandmother in terms which suggest that she was both educated and socially ambitious. She 'was an omnivorous reader, and one who owned a stock of books of exceptional extent for a yeoman's daughter living in a remote place'. Her literary knowledge extended as far as the writings of Addison, Steele and others of the Spectator group. In addition, she was familiar with Richardson and Fielding and standard works such as Paradise Lost and The Pilgrim's Progress (LTH, p. 7). She made an unfortunate marriage with a serving man of whom her father disapproved. She was disinherited and, when her husband died, she was left a penniless widow with several small children. Gittings and Millgate have uncovered evidence that Betsy Hand was forced to draw monthly sums of money from the Poor Law Overseers at Melbury Osmond. The rather wistful conclusion in the Life reads: 'her bright intelligence in a literary direction did not serve her in domestic life' (LTH, p. 7).
23. On Thomas Hardy senior's death in 1892, thanks largely to Jemima's ambition on his account, he left a considerable personal estate and properties at West Stafford and West Knighton (YTH, p. 7).
24. The original wording of this passage read: 'till warned by his wife that this fast perishing style might tend to vulgarize the children in their admiration for it' ('The "Life" Typescripts: The Omitted Passages', Appendix to PN, pp. 215-87 (p. 215)).
25. Phyllis Bartlett, '"Seraph of Heaven" A Shelleyan Dream in Hardy's Fiction', PMLA, 70 (2) (1955), 624-35.
26. See: Pinion, A Hardy Companion, pp. 213-15 and Thomas Hardy: Art and Thought (London, 1977), pp. 148-57; Rutland, pp. 14-288; Tom Paulin, Thomas Hardy: The Poetry of Perception (London, 1975), pp. 45-67.
27. Percy Bysshe Shelley, Queen Mab: A Philosophical Poem With Notes in Shelley: Poetical Works, edited by Thomas Hutchinson (1905; second edition corrected by G. M. Matthews Oxford, 1983), pp. 762-835 (pp. 806-08).
28. Preface to The Woodlanders (1887; Wessex Edition, VI, 1912), in PW, pp. 19-21 (p. 20).
29. The Savoy (October 1896) reprinted in Thomas Hardy and His Readers, edited by Laurence Lerner and John Holmstrom (London, 1968), p. 143.
30. Thomas Hardy to Florence Henniker, CL, II, 122 (1 June 1896).
31. Life and Art By Thomas Hardy: Essays, Notes and Letters Collected for the First Time, with introduction by Ernest Brennecke Jr, Essay Index Reprint Series (New York, 1925), p. 120.
32. Thomas Hardy to Florence Henniker (27 October 1918), in One Rare Fair Woman: Thomas Hardy's Letters to Florence Henniker 1893-1922, edited by Evelyn Hardy and F. B. Pinion (London, 1972), p. 182. Further references to this work will follow the abbreviation ORFW in the text. See also Hardy's contribution to a symposium on the physiological aspects of marriage and questions of sexual morality in general which first appeared in the New Review (May 1874), in which he implicitly questions 'whether marriage,

- as we at present understand it, is such a desirable goal for all women as it is assumed to be ('On the Tree of Knowledge', in Brennecke, Life and Art (pp. 118-19), p. 119).
33. See especially John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor, 'Early Essays On Marriage and Divorce', (1832), reprinted in Essays On Sex Equality, edited with an introductory essay by Alice S. Rossi (Chicago, London, 1970), pp. 67-87 (p. 69).
 34. See Barbara Taylor, Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century (London, 1983).
 35. Thomas Hardy to George Bedborough, CL, II, 160 (12 April 1897).
 36. For a detailed discussion of Marriage Law reforms during this period see: Lee Holcombe, 'Victorian Wives and Property: Reform of the Married Women's Property Law 1855-1882', in Vicinus, pp. 3-28; Constance Rover, Love, Morals and the Feminists (London, 1970), pp. 20-46; Crow, pp. 147-58.
 37. Henry Cecil Raikes, 'Women's Suffrage', National Review, 4 (1884-85), 631-41, (p. 638).
 38. Mary Jeune, 'Women of Today, Yesterday and Tomorrow', National Review, 13 (1889), 547-61 (p. 549).
 39. However, women were not admitted to degrees at Cambridge or Oxford until 1947 and 1920 respectively. See Rita McWilliams-Tullberg, 'Women and Degrees at Cambridge University 1862-1897', in Vicinus, pp. 117-45.
 40. Thomas Hardy to Alice Grenfell, CL, I. 266 (23 April, 1892).
 41. THAB, p. 391n.
 42. Eliza Burt Gamble, The Evolution of Woman: An Inquiry into the Dogma of Her Inferiority to Man (London, New York, 1894). Eliza Gamble attempted a re-evaluation of Darwin's findings to prove that, far from being man's inferior, woman actually represented a higher stage of human development. She stresses the importance of altruism and maternal love in the growth of civilization. Human society was, in her view, 'masculinized': animal instincts such as the sex drive and the desire to fight one's fellow creatures predominated over more 'feminine' values: 'mankind will never advance to a higher plain of thinking and living until the restrictions upon the liberties of women have been entirely removed, and until within every department of human activity, their natural instincts, and the methods of thought peculiar to them be allowed free expression'. Gamble p. 75.
 43. Cited in THAB, p. 396.
 44. THAB, p. 399.
 45. Cited in THAB, p. 407.
 46. See The Times, 11 February 1907, p. 11.
 47. Thomas Hardy to Emma Hardy (18 July, 1910), in Dearest Emmie: Thomas Hardy's Letters to His First Wife (London, Toronto, New York, 1963), p. 93.

48. THAB, p. 356.
49. Spencer, 'Political Heads' (p. 530). See LN, 1221, 1221n.
50. William Gregg, 'Why Are Women Redundant?', National Review, 14(2) (1862), 434-460 (pp. 454-55).
51. Caird, 'The Morality of Marriage', FR, (os) 5 (ns) 47 (1890), 310-30 (p. 318).
52. Millicent Garrett Fawcett to Thomas Hardy (22 November 1906) in The Thomas Hardy Memorial Collection housed at The Dorset County Museum.
53. Thomas Hardy to Millicent Garrett Fawcett, CL, III, 238 (30 November 1906).
54. Millicent Garrett Fawcett to Thomas Hardy (4 December 1906), in The Thomas Hardy Memorial Collection.
55. Thomas Hardy to Helen Ward, CL, III, 360 (22 December 1908).
56. Thomas Hardy to Mary Chavelita Clairmonte, CL, II, 102 (22 December 1895).
57. See E. Sylvia Pankhurst, The Suffragette Movement: An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideals (1931; reprinted with a new introduction by Dr Richard Pankhurst London, 1977), pp. 90-91.
58. See Bea Howe, Arbiter of Excellence (London, 1967). Purdy and Millgate suggest that Hardy was also familiar with Mary Haweis's article 'The Equality of the Sexes', New Century Review (1897). See Thomas Hardy to Agnes Grove CL, II, 154 (21 March 1897).
59. See note 38 above.
60. Cited Rt. Honourable T. P. O'Connor, M. P., Personal Traits of Thomas Hardy, Monographs on the Life, Times and Works of Thomas Hardy, edited by J. Stephens Cox (Guernsey, 1969), no. 54 (pp. 238-39).
61. Thomas Hardy to Genevieve Smith, CL, I, 26 (6 January 1874).
62. Thomas Hardy to Edmund Gosse, CL, III, 218 (25 July 1906).
63. See: TOH, pp. 77-209 (See Abbreviations); THAB, pp. 365-569, ORFW; Desmond Hawkins, 'Concerning Agnes', Encounter, 48, no. 2 (1977), 45-49.
64. ORFW, p. xiv.
65. Thomas Hardy to Florence Henniker, CL, II, 110 (11 February 1896). See also Hawkins, 'Concerning Agnes', p. 46.
66. Thomas Hardy to Agnes Grove, CL, II, 91 (3 November 1895).
67. Hawkins, 'Concerning Agnes', p. 48.
68. Thomas Hardy to Agnes Grove, CL, II, 91 (3 November 1895).
69. Thomas Hardy to the Editor of the North American Review, CL, II, 95 (13 November 1895).

70. Thomas Hardy to Agnes Grove, CL, II, 115 (14 April 1896).
71. Thomas Hardy to Agnes Grove, CL, II, 101 (20 December, 1895).
72. Thomas Hardy to Agnes Grove, CL, II, 139-40 (6 December 1896).
73. Agnes G. Grove, 'Of Women in Assemblies', New Century Review (1897), 191-99 (p. 198).
74. Thomas Hardy to Agnes Grove, CL, II, 153 (21 March 1897).
75. Grove, 'Objections to Woman Suffrage Considered', The Humanitarian (1899), 90-100 (pp. 99-100).
76. Thomas Hardy to Agnes Grove, CL, II, 226 (11 August 1899).
77. Grove, The Human Woman (London, 1908), p. ix.
78. Thomas Hardy to Agnes Grove, CL, III, 345 (12 October 1908).
79. Thomas Hardy to Agnes Grove, CL, III, 354 (13 November 1908).
80. Thomas Hardy, 'Concerning Agnes', The New Wessex Edition of The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy, edited by James Gibson (London and Basingstoke, 1976), no. 862, p. 878.

CHAPTER FOUR

A WOMAN'S PLACE EXAMINED: DESPERATE REMEDIES (1871)

THE TRUMPET MAJOR (1880)

Hardy's relationship to the popular fiction of the day was ambivalent. As his reputation, and consequently his courage, increased he began to express his anger at the rigorous moral censorship imposed by the circulating libraries, the periodical form of publishing and the very section of the reading public whose attention he had hoped to attract, and who were later described by him as 'the mentally and morally warped ... of both sexes'.¹ Early in Hardy's career, Leslie Stephen had exhorted him to 'remember the country parson's daughters'. At the height of his popularity Hardy claimed that 'fiction should not be shackled by conventions concerning budding womanhood, which may be altogether false'.² By 1874, less than three years after the publication of his first novel Desperate Remedies, Hardy had openly expressed his dislike of 'the perfect woman of fiction', and his novels up until 1880 bore witness to this. In 1880, however, The Trumpet Major was published, and its heroine - Anne Garland - came surprisingly close to the fictional stereotype he purported to despise. Neither Desperate Remedies, nor The Trumpet Major has been taken seriously by Hardy's critics: Desperate Remedies because it was his first novel and bears all the hallmarks of an apprentice piece, and The Trumpet Major because Hardy seems not to have taken it seriously himself. However, both texts merit closer critical attention than they have hitherto received. Precisely because Desperate Remedies was Hardy's first published novel, it retains traces of the political mischief-making which had sealed the fate of his rejected first novel The Poor Man and the Lady.³ The social and political message is still largely uncompromized by the young author's desire for popularity, even though the style and structure of the narrative suffered greatly. The Trumpet Major roughly corresponds with the mid-point of Hardy's career as a writer of fiction during which his popularity had remained disconcertingly low, despite the success of Far from the Madding Crowd. The growing need for a regular income from his

writing may well have led him to revise his artistic intentions radically, in accordance with the proclivities of the reading public. As a result, The Trumpet Major has the dubious distinction of being Hardy's most conventional and, ironically enough, his most enduringly popular novel - the one text in which he deferred, almost without murmur, to the demands of the status quo.

In June 1893, at the close of a particularly busy London season, Hardy noted, 'I often think that women, even those who consider themselves experienced in sexual strategy do not know how to manage an honest man' (LTH, p. 257). The concept of sexual strategy was a familiar one in the nineteenth century, and was practised by rural working-class and urban middle-class women alike. Hardy's fear of, and distaste for, sexual manipulation on the part of women frequently appears as an uneasy footnote to his ostentatious displays of familiarity with high society women. This vaguely censorious and, at times, frankly patronising view of women's social and sexual manoeuvres is reflected in his fiction, especially in the earlier texts. However, these novels also examine women's behaviour from an economic and political point of view, and suggest that certain aspects of their nature, in particular their use of sexual strategy, are as much an artificial response to their physical and political subordination to men and to man-made laws, as they are anarchic female instincts. At the same time, Hardy's own traditionally masculine idealization of women is reflected in the narrator's uneasy response to the central female characters which at times undercuts the political implications of their experiences, and of their behaviour.

Desperate Remedies exhibits many of the inconsistencies in narrative tone and intention which were to characterize Hardy's later, more complex and more deftly-crafted texts. At the same time, the novel sets the scene for the close examination and analysis of a woman's place in society which was to form a major theme of the later novels. The text focusses on two issues which were of specific importance to women, in that they offered them their only chance of survival: marriage and employment. Desperate Remedies exposes the extent to

which women's relationship to both the employment and marriage markets is determined by social rather than by biological pressures.

Critics have consistently failed to make the link between the title of the novel and the predicament of the central female protagonist - Cytherea Grey - preferring instead to concentrate upon the text as an inferior example of detective fiction in the style of Wilkie Collins.⁴ The 'desperate remedies' are invariably attributed to the male characters - Owen, Edward and more specially Manston. When approached from this point of view, the failures and shortcomings of the text are conspicuously evident. However, if viewed as a study in sexual politics, Desperate Remedies appears a subtle and surprisingly sophisticated examination of a woman's situation, which analyzes the way in which her nature and response to her surroundings is shaped by modifiable social conditions as much as, if not more than, by biological ordinance.

At the start of the narrative, Cytherea is in a situation similar to that of the young trainee teachers at Melchester Normal School in Jude the Obscure - perched on the very brink of experience:

... she unknowingly stood, as it were, upon the extreme posterior edge of a tract in her life, in which the real meaning of Taking Thought had never been known. It was the last hour of experience she ever enjoyed with a mind entirely free from a knowledge of that labyrinth into which she stepped immediately afterwards - to continue a perplexed course along its mazes for the greater portion of twenty-nine subsequent months. (DR, p. 45)

The labyrinth is a metaphor for Cytherea's complex and difficult predicament. When the death of her feckless father deprives her of economic support, there are only two courses open to her as a woman: she can either turn to the men around her for emotional and financial support, or else find some means of achieving economic dependence in a society which refuses to recognize women's claim to a professional as well as a domestic role. Her situation neatly illustrates woman's uncongenial relationship to both the employment and marriage markets in mid-nineteenth century England. Cytherea is, at first, naive enough to view both prospects with equal relish. Her expectations concerning the ease

with which she will gain either a position as a governess, or the ring of a rich or gentle man, intermingle as she moves rapidly from the contemplation of her future with a 'thriving family, who had always sadly needed her', to 'the contemplation of her own left fourth finger' (DR, pp. 54-55). Her arcadian innocence with regard to the nature of love and romance is demonstrated by her speculations concerning the kind of man she will marry: the 'gentleman of fashion', the 'bold dashing soldier', the 'sailor', and the 'poor man', are reminiscent of the children's skipping rhyme, 'Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor, Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggar-Man, Thief'. As far as her appreciation of her employment prospects is concerned, the change in the tone of her advertisement reflects the extent to which she must lower her estimation of herself, and compromise her individuality in order to become a member of the female working population: 'A YOUNG LADY is desirous of meeting with an ENGAGEMENT as GOVERNESS or COMPANION. She is competent to teach English, French, and Music', becomes 'LADY'S-MAID. Inexperienced. Age eighteen' (DR, p. 54; p. 84).

Desperate Remedies is concerned with the socialization of the individual woman and charts her progression from self-awareness to self-adjustment as she is prevailed upon to adopt an artificially imposed social role which is antipathetic to her own self-image. The implication is that gender and class determine the existence of the individual as much as heredity. Although wealthy women like Miss Aldclyffe experience rigid social constraints - a theme which is further articulated in Two on a Tower - it is the financially impoverished woman who has the least control over her life. The implications of the socialization of women are examined through the creation of a complex, symbiotic relationship between the heroine and another older woman; a device which is used to similar effect in The Woodlanders. The young, impoverished, sexually innocent and naïve young girl is compared and contrasted with the older, more mature and sexually experienced woman. The fact that the two women are given the same name - Cytherea - heightens both their identification with each other, and the

reader's awareness of their interconnection. This link is further strengthened by other similarities between the two women. For instance, both lose their fathers during the early stages of the narrative. Later, faced with the loss of the man she truly loves, and pressured into favourably considering a marriage of convenience with Manston, Cytherea Grey longs to be rich enough to indulge in 'the luxury of being morbidly faithful' to her first lover for the rest of her life without his knowledge, in other words, to be rich enough not to have to marry (DR, p. 254). Finding herself in a similar situation some years earlier, Cytherea Aldclyffe was wealthy enough to do just that. Cytherea Grey's position at the end of the narrative reflects Cytherea Aldclyffe's at the start. She too becomes a victim of rigid social convention and repressive, archaic concepts of female purity. Their close relationship highlights the extent to which all women are socially constrained against their will.

The link between the two women is strongly suggested by an incident early on in their professional relationship. Cytherea Grey is in a state of revolt against the impotence which poverty, and the ensuing need to sell her labour has created:

She was thinking that nothing seemed worth while; that it was possible she might die in a workhouse; and what did it matter? The petty, vulgar details of servitude that she had just passed through, her dependence upon the whims of a strange woman, the necessity of quenching all individuality of character in herself, and relinquishing her own peculiar tastes to help on the wheel of this alien establishment, made her sick and sad. (DR, p. 98)

A dispute arises between the two women as Cytherea inexpertly undresses her mistress before her mirror. Each woman confronts her own image, and the image of her antagonist as they are reflected back to her in the looking-glass. The heated verbal interplay between them exposes the way in which each attempts to define her own self-image, whilst at the same time imposing an accepted social role upon the other which her rival violently objects to. Cytherea rejects her role as Miss Aldclyffe's maid, and still claims for herself a social rank equal to that of her employer, along with the respect such a rank commands. Miss Aldclyffe seeks to remind her of her subservient position by referring to her as

a 'girl', and 'a lady's maid'. Cytherea resists this attempt at appropriation and redefines her own status and that of her employer. She insists that she is a 'lady', not 'a lady's maid' and that nobody is her 'mistress'. Miss Aldclyffe on the contrary is neither 'lady', nor 'mistress' but 'Woman'. This spontaneous interchange of female roles as defined by a patriarchal society: 'lady', 'girl', 'maid', 'mistress', 'Woman' (the use of the capital emphasizes the generic rather than the purely gender-based significance of the term) highlights their inadequacy as satisfying identities. Miss Aldclyffe's eventual denial of her own 'Womanhood' is an ironic but appropriate conclusion to the argument (DR, p. 107).

Significantly enough, it is during the death of Miss Aldclyffe's father - the representative of patriarchy - that the barriers between the two women are removed. Both acknowledge their mutual helplessness and establish a passionate if precarious sisterly relationship of their own which temporarily replaces the artificially constructed connection as female employer and employee: "let me come in, darling." The young woman paused in a conflict between judgment and emotion. It was now mistress and maid no longer; woman and woman only. Yes; she must let her come in, poor thing.' (DR, p. 112). Critics have commented upon the apparently overtly lesbian overtones of the relationship between the two Cythereas. Richard Taylor engages upon a predictable, if perfunctory, examination of the 'butch/femme' dichotomy which he discerns within the text itself, and concludes by suggesting that 'all this reaches its climax in the scene between the two women in bed'.⁵ The incident is obviously sensual but there is a deeper underlying motive than naïve voyeurism, or even simple daring on Hardy's part. On one level the bedroom scene can be viewed as an investigation into the potential of female solidarity.

Desperate Remedies exposes the way in which a patriarchal society effectively prevents women from fulfilling their duty to one another and uniting against the common enemy - male coercion - by forcing them to compete for the favours of men themselves. Just as Miss Aldclyffe's sisterly, maternal or even

lesbian connection with Cytherea gathers in intensity as her father's life ebbs away in the room below, so the advent of the older woman's illegitimate son initiates the disintegration of their relationship, despite Miss Aldclyffe's plea to Cytherea not to "let any man stand between us" (DR, p. 115). The sisterly, maternal or lesbian bond fails to become a liberating experience for either women as both remain ineluctably bound to men. The point is emphasized in the episode where Cytherea meets Edward's fiancée Adelaide Hinton for the first time. This theme is further developed in Hardy's later texts especially Far from the Madding Crowd, and A Laodicean.

On another level, it is clear that Miss Aldclyffe seeks not only to unite with Cytherea but also to control her - mind and body. Miss Aldclyffe's original identity, her good name, was sacrificed in her ill-starred liaison with her cousin. She therefore seeks to escape from her role as a ruined maiden and live vicariously through her younger, innocent namesake whose services she has purchased. She is searching for an echo of herself as she was at some point during her youth, when she too stood on the very brink of experience. She believes that Cytherea is at that stage in her own history and tells her: "I long to be what I shall never be again - artless and innocent, like you" (DR, p. 113). Although her demands upon Cytherea's emotional and physical virginity anticipate those made by Knight upon Elfride in A Pair of Blue Eyes, and later by Angel on Tess, her motives appear as much substitutional as sexual.

Desperate Remedies also confronts the issue of class and gender - a theme which is developed more fully in A Pair of Blue Eyes. Although Miss Aldclyffe, as a woman, experiences a high degree of social constraint, her wealth leaves her much freer than Cytherea. In fact, Miss Aldclyffe's social and economic standing place her in almost exactly the same relationship to Cytherea as a man might stand. Cytherea notes 'the elder lady's marked treatment of her as if she were a mere child or plaything', Miss Aldclyffe holds her 'almost as a lover would have held her', and later we read she is 'as jealous as any man'. The wealthy woman engages the impoverished woman, as a man might engage a wife, to

service her and to provide her with sensual gratification:

She murmured to herself, 'It is almost worth while to be bored with instructing her in order to have a creature who could glide round my luxurious indolent body in that manner, and look at me in that way - I warrant how light her fingers are upon one's head and neck'.
(DR, p. 89)

The fact that money gives Miss Aldclyffe an unfair advantage over Cytherea, and a certain amount of power over her, undermines her attempt to befriend the younger woman as an equal. It also anticipates Cytherea's relationship to the marriage market in general and to Aeneas Manston in particular. If the interchange between Cytherea and her employer contributes to 'the martyrdom of her last little fragment of self-conceit' concerning her relationship to the labour market, her experience with Manston completes the process with regard to her attitude to romance.

As a financially impoverished woman, Cytherea is subservient to the needs of the society of which she is a member. She is of no real economic value except as a sex object - in the most literal sense of the term: her body is the only economically useful possession which she and her brother Owen possess. Owen's physical disability, which incapacitates him as far as earning a living is concerned, points up Cytherea's potential value in sexual and economic terms. Her body must be bartered in exchange for the means of existence for both of them. Cytherea eventually realizes that marriage, like work, offers not self-fulfilment but self-annihilation.

Desperate Remedies shows a woman's sexual vulnerability to be dependent upon her wealth and social position. The lower her status the greater her impotence, as the history of Tess Durbeyfield was to show. Judith Bryant Wittenberg has noted how Cytherea's descent of the social ladder following the death of her father manifests itself in a 'newly-acquired sensitivity to being stared at'. The male gaze becomes 'a weapon that threatens vulnerable females'.⁶ Cytherea is constantly watched and coveted by men from the sons of 'ancient pot-wallopers' and thriving shop-keepers to the cider makers and finally to Manston himself: "I am exactly opposite to him now," she thought, "and his

eyes are going through me" (DR, p. 162). Manston's arrogant appraisal of her face and body is eventually followed by an attempted violation of her person. Even the gathered rustics speculate somewhat crudely on her eventual maternity following her marriage to Edward (DR, p. 416). As a result of her social and economic and, consequently, her sexual vulnerability, she is continually exploited by and dependent upon those more powerful than herself, who are almost invariably of the male sex. She passes from dependency upon her father to her brother to her husband back to her brother and then to another husband until, by the end of the narrative, she is of no more consequence than a valuable piece of baggage seized in turn by Edward, Owen and Manston.

When her lover's ghostly presence at her wedding forces Cytherea to confront the pecuniary nature of her reasons for marrying Manston, her brother reminds her of what he calls her 'duty to society, and to those around her'. Cytherea retaliates with one of the strongest condemnations of the control exercised by society over women ever to issue from the mouth of a Hardy heroine:

'Yes - my duty to society But ah, Owen, it is difficult to adjust our outer and inner life with perfect honesty to all! Though it may be right to care more for the benefit of the many than for the indulgence of your own single self, when you consider that the many, and duty to them, only exist to you through your own existence, what can be said? What do our acquaintances care about us? Not much. I think of mine. Mine will now (do they learn all the wicked frailty of my heart in this affair) look at me, smile sickly, and condemn me But they will never, never realize that it was my single opportunity of existence, as well as of doing my duty, which they are regarding; they will not feel that what to them is but a thought, easily held in those two words of pity, "Poor girl!" was a whole life to me; as full of hours, minutes, and peculiar minutes, of hopes and dreads, smiles, whisperings, tears, as theirs'. (DR, pp. 272-73)

At this point, Desperate Remedies confronts the notion of 'social duty' as it affects women and questions the social organicism of Spencer and Comte. Spencer and Comte's theory of social progress was based on the belief that man fulfils the role destined for him by nature. The unspoken correlative to this theory, recognized by nineteenth-century feminist writers, was that woman occupied an even lower position in the hierarchy than man. As man necessarily obeys nature, woman, by virtue of her enforced political and economic

subservience, necessarily obeys man. Therefore the notion of woman's 'social duty' is a spurious one. Cytherea is called upon to consider not the well-being of a combined community of men and women, but the well-being of the dominant section of society alone. At the same time, the text confronts the Utilitarian notion of morally 'good' and 'bad' action, which suggests that 'good' action is defined as that which is conducive to the general happiness of mankind. Utilitarianism takes as its basic premiss the thesis that society is composed of autonomous entities existing in a state of free interaction. As feminist writers were concerned to show, women enjoyed neither liberty of thought nor of action. This theme is further developed in The Hand of Ethelberta.

Cytherea's romantic idealization of both employment and marriage culminates in her realization that adopting the role of employee or wife, as defined by the society of which she is a dependent member, involves the sacrifice of her integrity, and the repression of her inner life. Her abortive marriage to Manston renders her even more anonymous than ever in real terms, depriving her of her reputation and her identity as a human being. Ironically enough, Cytherea's only chance of redeeming her good name and her locus standi lies in marrying a second time. This disparity between what a woman feels she intrinsically is, or what she would like to become, and the way society forces her to see herself and to project herself to others, her inner and outer life, is a theme which was to motivate Hardy's later analyses of woman's place in society.

In this way, Cytherea's tragic drama is clearly created by human laws which decree that women's physical disabilities should be exacerbated by a social system which forces them to be economically dependent upon men. Interested social pressures, which Cytherea identifies as practical wisdom, common sense and Christianity, combine to produce in her 'a wilful indifference to the future' where once 'unwonted cheerfulness' and anticipation reigned. In reality, Cytherea has no real control over her own destiny. She must either resign herself to a life of drudgery and dependence upon the good nature of

women like Miss Aldclyffe, or else submit to the misery of marriage with a man she fears, and grows to hate, in order to escape that dependency. She is likened to a trapped bird - a familiar image of female helplessness in Hardy's texts - 'terrified, driven into a corner, panting and fluttering about for some loophole of escape, yet still shrinking from the idea of being Manston's wife' (DR, p. 250).⁷ Cytherea's actions in engaging herself as Miss Aldclyffe's maid, and later as Manston's wife, are 'desperate remedies' for her predicament as a woman, the true nature of which is brutally articulated by the two men who stand to benefit most from at least one of her actions - her brother Owen and her lover Manston.

However, there are elements within the text which suggest that Cytherea's vulnerability and passivity are natural characteristics of the female. Despite the obvious commitment to exposing the social forces which shape and circumscribe women, which it is possible to detect in Desperate Remedies, Cytherea is, at times, shown to be swayed by pressures which emanate not from society, but from her own biological organization and from her susceptibility to elemental natural rhythms which are portrayed as powerful, atavistic and potentially anarchic. Cytherea lacks the 'well-disciplined heart' which will enable her to withstand the promptings of the law of sexual selection: "ah, Brain", she sighs, "there is one in me stronger than you!" (DR, p. 146). Her total indifference to the future could be seen as the result of primordial forces as well as social pressures. Manston, who relies on the 'law of natural selection' for his success with women, fascinates Cytherea into 'involuntariness of bearing' (DR, p. 262). At their first meeting, the touch of his clothes 'sent a thrill through Cytherea', at his command she is 'compelled to do as she is bidden, and looked in his too-delicately beautiful face'. The combination of his powerful sexual presence, and his music, 'heightened by the elemental strife of light and sound outside', leaves her bereft of all conscious self-control (DR, pp. 164-66):

The varying strains - now loud, now soft; simple, complicated, weird, touching, grand, boisterous, subdued; each phase distinct,

yet modulating into the next with a graceful and easy flow - shook and bent her to themselves, as a gushing brook shakes and bends a shadow cast across its surface. The power of the music did not show itself so much by attracting her attention to the subject of the piece, as by taking up and developing as its libretto the poem of her own life and soul, shifting her deeds and intentions from the hands of her judgement and holding them in its own. (DR, pp. 167-68)

This involuntary self-surrender to 'emotional opinions' concerning Manston is entirely different from her acquiescence to Edward's embrace, even though her feelings for the latter also appear to be entirely in accord with nature. The image of a boat is used to describe her emotional and sexual reaction to both men, but the differences are striking. In the boat with Edward, Cytherea is in control of her responses. She has her hand on the tiller of the craft and determines its course. With Manston 'she felt as one in a boat without oars, drifting with closed eyes down a river - she knew not whither' (DR, p. 252). Manston's hold over her is of an altogether more violent and forceful nature and his 'animal' love elicits a response from her at a deeper, more subliminal level: 'she was interested in him and his marvellous beauty, as she might have been in some fascinating panther or leopard - for some undefinable reason she shrank from him, even whilst she admired' (DR, p. 172).

The mental and sexual ascendancy which Manston gains over her, purely by virtue of his strong animal magnetism, threatens her self-control as much as social and economic pressures do. Cytherea is palpably aware of the disintegration of her integrity under Manston's influence. After leaving his house, she carries with her a mental picture of 'her own self, as she had sat spell-bound before him' (DR, p. 169). Atavistic sexual urges appear to undermine her own self-image as much as her enforced bondage to Miss Aldclyffe does.

This notion of woman as animated solely by an external natural energy is articulated in Desperate Remedies in a way which highlights the contradictory impulses at work in Hardy's fiction. These impulses can be discerned in the relationship between the male narrator and the female protagonist in the text.

The narrative voice is clearly uneasy and insecure in its relationship to the central female character. Kevin Z. Moore has noted the way in which Cytherea constantly eludes the narrator's grasp:

... she will not be snared in his web of words. He can list her prominent features, but must add the caveat that 'to attempt to gain a view of her or indeed of any fascinating woman - from a measured category, is as difficult as to appreciate the effect of a landscape by exploring it at night with a lantern - or a full chord of music by piping the notes in succession' Later on, the narrator will reemphasize this problem when he admits that 'one of the most difficult things to portray by written words is that peculiar mixture of moods expressed by a woman's countenance'.⁸

The narrative voice seeks to compensate for this shortcoming by constantly intruding into the text patronizing and at times demeaning aphorisms on the nature of woman which discuss, among other things: 'the many contradictory particulars constituting a woman's heart'; the 'instincts of her sex'; 'the difference of sex'; 'woman's petty cleverness'; her 'illogicality'; and her capacity for 'self-immolation', as if these characteristics were biological données despite the fact that the text itself has shown them to be socially inculcated.

Cytherea's helplessness in social and economic, as well as sexual, terms arouses strong sexual desire in Manston: it is "that fact of her being so helpless against the blows of circumstances which renders her so deliciously sweet!" (DR, pp. 174-75). To a certain extent, the narrator seeks to elicit a similar response in the reader by presenting Cytherea as at her most sexually attractive when at her most vulnerable: 'involuntarily shrinking up beside [Manston], and looking with parted lips at his face' (DR, p. 168). This quasi-erotic revelling in the prospect of woman as helpless victim of her instincts anticipates the passage in Tess of the d'Urbervilles where the dairy maids are consumed with passion for Angel Clare:

The air of the sleeping-chamber seemed to palpitate with the hopeless passion of the girls. They writhed feverishly under the oppressiveness of an emotion thrust upon them by cruel Nature's law - an emotion which they had neither expected nor desired. The incident of the day had fanned the flame that was burning the inside of their hearts out, and the torture was almost more than they could endure. The differences which distinguished them as

individuals were abstracted by this passion, and each was but portion of one organism called sex. (Td'U, p. 187)

Desperate Remedies, as a whole, is aware that competition and jealousy between women is a direct result of their economic powerlessness. However, the antagonism which arises between Cytherea and Adelaide Hinton is also seen as resulting from their natural atavistic responses to each other when forced to confront their common interest in the same man. The room is no longer pervaded by amiability but by what the narrator identifies as 'concentrated essence of woman':

The two rivals had now lost their personality quite As is invariably the case with women when a man they care for is the subject of an excitement among them, the situation abstracted the differences which distinguished them as individuals, and left only the properties common to them as atoms of a sex. (DR, p. 152)

Although such views are occasionally marginalized by being made the property of a minor character such as Mr Nyttleton, Desperate Remedies lacks the objectivity of A Pair of Blue Eyes or The Hand of Ethelberta in which the misogynistic narrative voice is personified and therefore to some extent objectified in the characters of Alfred Neigh and Henry Knight.

At the same time, the text suffers from the polarization of certain mental and emotional traits along crudely gender-based lines. The physiognomy of each character is presented as an identikit picture composed of forehead, jaw and mouth. Thus the impression that Edward Springrove will do reasonably well in the world, which is suggested by his handsome face and head 'bounded by lines of sufficiently masculine regularity', is offset by his brows which are 'somewhat too softly arched and finely pencilled for one of his sex' (DR, p. 63). Miss Aldclyffe's mouth expresses 'a capability for and tendency to strong emotion, habitually controlled by pride'. The lower lines of her face are severe or 'masculine' which implies self-control but 'Womanly weakness' was visible in her forehead and brows, 'there it was clear and emphatic' (DR, p. 88). Manston is a well-formed, handsome man, his forehead is 'square and broad' and his eyebrows, in contrast to Springrove's, are 'straight and firm'.

However, the intellectual severity of his eyes and forehead is counteracted by his mouth. His lips are

... full and luscious to a surprising degree, possessing a woman-like softness of curve, and a ruby redness so intense as to testify strongly to much susceptibility of heart where feminine beauty was concerned - a susceptibility that might require all the ballast of brain with which he had previously been credited to confine within reasonable channels. (DR, p. 164)

This equation of reason and self-control with 'masculinity' and emotion and sexual susceptibility with 'femininity', suggests that the narrative voice subscribes to the notion that general characteristics are as much biologically constructed as socially defined, despite the fact that elements within the text of Desperate Remedies contradict this suggestion. However, the political awareness which informs the portrayal of Cytherea Grey and, more especially, Cytherea Aldclyffe, is only marginally disabled by the narrator's periodic adherence to traditional notions of femininity. The text itself remains a persuasively argued case for the removal of the artificial man-made barriers to woman's progress and liberty.

Hardy experienced some difficulty in getting the manuscript published. Alexander Macmillan rejected the original version of the novel declaring it to be 'of far too sensational an order for us to think of publishing'. Hardy then submitted the manuscript to William Tinsley who eventually agreed to publish a revised version after Hardy had offered to contribute £75 towards the printing costs.⁹ The critics praised his manipulation of the plot but were dismayed by his handling of certain sensitive issues such as female sexuality, and illegitimacy. The Athenaeum (April 1871) commented: 'Desperate Remedies,' though in some respects an unpleasant story, is undoubtedly a very powerful one', and confined its criticisms to the novel's 'occasional coarseness'.¹⁰ The Spectator, however, acidly dismissed 'the corrupt body of the tale'. It praised the 'gaping village rustics' and the 'consequential village worthies', and suggested that the author's powers 'might and ought to be extended largely in this direction, instead of being prostituted to the purposes of idle prying

into the ways of wickedness'. The reviewer was particularly dismayed by the character of Miss Aldclyffe: 'an unmarried lady of position and fortune ... a miserable creation - uninteresting, unnatural, and nasty'.¹¹ The novel was eventually remaindered, and Hardy made an overall loss of £15. 7s. 5d. Almost a century after its publication Lerner and Holmstrom dismiss Desperate Remedies, as 'almost unread nowadays'.¹²

The Trumpet Major appeared some nine years after Desperate Remedies and in this later, somewhat more competently crafted, narrative little or no attempt is made to discuss women without direct reference to the traditional mythologies of femininity.

Few contemporary critics deem The Trumpet Major worthy of serious consideration. J. W. Beach, for example, dismisses it as 'a light and pleasing confection'.¹³ Desmond Hawkins describes the text as 'an undemanding pot-boiler'.¹⁴ For Irving Howe, the novel can be 'read at leisure and forgotten with ease'.¹⁵ F. B. Pinion condemns it for its 'unreal and conventional' nature.¹⁶ While it may be true that few claims can be made for The Trumpet Major on the grounds of its artistic merit, or its literary worth, its very conventionality renders it, if not one of the most successful, certainly one of the most revealing of Hardy's novels especially in terms of its portrayal of women.

The Trumpet Major was written with the express intention of making money. Both its immediate predecessors - The Hand of Ethelberta and The Return of The Native - had provoked a largely dismal response from reviewers and reading public alike and Hardy may well have felt compelled to modify his artistic intentions according to the dictates of conventional taste. To this end he produced what he himself described as 'a cheerful story, without views or opinions ... [which] is intended to wind up happily'.¹⁷ The phrase 'without views or opinions' is a telling one for, in The Trumpet Major, conventional social, economic and sexual relations between the sexes are portrayed in their most blatant and politically uncensored form.

The Trumpet Major has at its centre the traditional concept of man as active, progressive, protective, and woman as passive, quiescent and helpless. However, whereas in previous texts this concept formed the basis of a subtle and controversial critique of society, here it functions as an accepted norm of human behaviour. The novel is set at the time of the Napoleonic Wars and during war these stereotypes of masculine and feminine behaviour are exaggerated. Men are not only actively encouraged to go out and fight in defence of their womenfolk, their children and their country - which is itself often personified as female - but may be compelled to do so either physically or morally. Bob Loveday escapes the press gang aided by Anne and Matilda only to be driven by his conscience and his sense of moral duty to volunteer for Nelson's flag-ship. Woman's function in war is to remain quietly at home as the symbol of that which the man is fighting to defend: innocence, harmony, virtue; or, as Ruskin put it: 'the centre of order, the balm of distress, and the mirror of beauty'.¹⁸ This is clearly illustrated in the final chapter of the novel in which Mrs Loveday and, more especially, Anne herself are called upon to bestow their blessings on the departing regiment and to provide them with incentive and inspiration: "we'll drink your health throughout the campaign", declares Saddler-Sergeant Jones.¹⁹ Traditionally, man's greatest assets were his strength and his courage, woman's - her virtue and her innocence, and The Trumpet Major upholds this view. Bob and, more especially, John are respected for their bravery, their loyalty and their dependability - on the battlefield at least - while Festus Derriman is an object of derision: a bully, a braggart and a coward. Similarly, Anne Garland is approved of for her beauty, her grace and her respectability, while Matilda is scorned for her artificiality, her guile and her easy virtue.

In March 1879, Mrs Annie Franklyn wrote to Hardy requesting that he present a 'good' woman in his next novel, one more worthy of men such as Oak, Yeobright or Venn than Bathsheba or Eustacia. Hardy wrote back to reassure her that 'the good woman is to appear next time', and added: 'I hope that you & my

other lady readers will like her'.²⁰ We do not know what Mrs Annie Franklin thought of her namesake Anne Garland, but Hardy's critics were enthralled. 'Anne Garland' declared Havelock Ellis in the Westminster Review, 'tender, womanly, coquette, with the "row of round brown curls, like swallow's nests under eaves", peeping out between her forehead and the borders of her cap, is among Mr Hardy's most perfect and delicate creations. We cannot quite forgive her for marrying Bob instead of John; but such failures of perception are customary with Mr Hardy's heroines, and Anne's womanly instincts never forsake her'.²¹ Anne is selfish, declares Julian Hawthorne in the Spectator, 'as Mr Hardy's heroines are selfish - not wilfully or intellectually, but by dint of her inborn, involuntary, unconscious emotional organism'. He goes on to compare her with Dickens's Agnes Willoughby and concludes:

When a woman is governed by reason, conforms to the canons of respectability, obeys the dictates of prudence and strict propriety, and sacrifices herself on the altar of what she is pleased to consider her womanhood, the less we hear of that woman (in fiction), the better are we content. What we want, and what artistic beauty demands, is colour, warmth, impulse, sweet perversity, pathetic error; an inability to submit the heart to the guidance of the head, a happiness under conditions against which a rational judgement protests; and all this, and more, we get in Anne Garland and her kindred. Their conduct is indefensible, but it is charming - we love them the better for their tender naughtiness.²²

Anne Garland pleased Hardy critics because she conformed to conventional ideas concerning woman's nature. The very fact that she encourages each of her suitors in turn and then marries the wrong one was taken as an illustration of 'true, womanly instinct'. She is selfish, shallow and highly romantically minded. Her perversity and her unquestioning single-minded pursuit of a husband socially her equal, was seen as evidence of 'the charm of the simplest and most familiar womanhood'.²³

Hardy's characterization of Anne Garland owes much to the romantic heroine of popular fiction. She is fair and she is honest; managing to combine sensuousness with reserve, and 'dignity with sweetness': 'in short, beneath all that was charming and simple in this young woman there lurked a real firmness, unperceived at first, as the speck of colour lurks unperceived in the heart of

the palest parsley flower' (TM, p. 39). Anne first appears, as do so many of Hardy's heroines, in the familiar 'woman at the window' pose characteristic of Victorian painting: an image which is repeated throughout the novel at intervals. She is engaged in worsted work, measuring out lengths of wool for a rug which lies, three-quarters finished, across her knee. The work is tedious and essentially futile as is the case with so many domestic tasks:

... a hearth-rug was a thing which nobody worked at from morning to night; it was taken up and put down; it was in the chair, on the floor, across the hand-rail, under the bed, kicked here, kicked there, rolled away in the closet, brought out again, and so on, more capriciously perhaps than any other home-made article. Nobody was expected to finish a rug within a calculable period, and the wools of the beginning became faded and historical before the end was reached. (TM, p. 41)

From the worsted work before her she glances through the window at two cavalry soldiers in full military dress riding proudly on, 'as if nothing less than crowns and empires ever concerned their magnificent minds' (TM, p. 42).

Jenijoy La Belle detects certain similarities between this opening description of Anne Garland and Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shallot', and suggests that Hardy was establishing a context for his readers by 'consciously referring us to one of the best known Victorian renditions of a woman's first glimpse of a highly romanticized male'.²⁴ The text also immediately establishes the contexts within which it will discuss men and women by implicitly contrasting woman's sphere with man's - the domestic with the worldly.

This pose at the window at once establishes Anne as trapped and cloistered woman as well as temptress: aspects of a woman's nature which were seen to be closely connected. Denied the opportunity of active participation in the world at large, woman is perpetually condemned to the role of watcher and waiter. At the same time, she constantly seeks an outlet for her frustrated active potential by attempting to draw the man into the domestic milieu through the exercise of her sexual power. As Jean Jacques Rousseau explained in Émile, cunning is a special gift in women:

This special skill with which the female sex is endowed is a fair equivalent for its lack of strength; without it woman would be

man's slave, not his helpmeet A woman's real resource is her wit ... that wit which is adapted to her condition, the art of taking advantage of our position and controlling us through our own strength.²⁵

Schopenhauer also expressed a similar argument in his essay 'On Women'. He believed that Nature had furnished women with,

superabundant beauty, fascination, and fullness ... in order that ... she may be able to conquer the imagination of a man to the extent that he shall be so far carried away as to honourably undertake in some form or shape the care of her for life; a step for which mere reasonable deliberation seems to give no adequate security.²⁶

Thus we find Anne, worried that Bob will desert her to go and fight, using 'the utmost art of which she was capable to seduce him from his forming purpose':

She came to him in the mill, wearing the very prettiest of her morning jackets - the one that only just passed the waist, and was laced so tastefully round the collar and bosom. Then she would appear in her new hat, with a bouquet of primroses on one side; and on the following Sunday she walked before him in lemon-coloured boots, so that her feet looked like a pair of yellow-hammers flitting under her dress.

But dress was the least of the means she adopted for chaining him down. She talked more tenderly than ever; asked him to begin small undertakings in the garden on her account; she sang about the house, that the place might seem cheerful when he came in. (TM, p. 275)

Having failed in her attempt to entice him into staying with her by appealing to him on a sexual and domestic level she is left, standing on Portland Bill, watching his ship through a telescope as it disappears from view. The reader is reminded of Elfride watching Stephen's steamer from the cliff top as he returns from his travels to claim her, or Eustacia with her telescope firmly fixed on Damon Wildeve's dwelling. The incident also anticipates Viviette Constantine gazing at the stars through the telescope which she has bought for her lover in the hope of helping him on to the fame and wealth which she can never strive for in her own right.

However, Anne's appetite for sexual conquest extends further than the man she loves to the man she admires - John Loveday - and the man she fears - Festus Derriman. Women in The Trumpet Major estimate their worth according to the number and social status of their male admirers. As the narrator informs us, in tones a long way removed from those adopted by the narrator of A Pair of

Blue Eyes or Far from the Madding Crowd, and more reminiscent of the glib generalizations on woman's conduct to be found in the early sections of the Life:

Any woman who has ever tried will know without explanation what an unpalatable task it is to dismiss, even when she does not love him, a man who has all the natural and moral qualities she would desire, and only fails in the social. Would-be lovers are not so numerous, even with the best women, that the sacrifice of one can be felt as other than a good thing wasted, in a world where there are few good things. (TM, p. 119-20)

Thus Anne derives satisfaction from the effect she has over Festus Derriman. She is struck with 'the power she possessed of working him up either to irritation or to complacency at will; and this consciousness of being able to play upon him as upon an instrument disposed her to a humourous considerateness, and made her tolerate even while she rebuffed him' (TM, p. 91). Although she denies hotly to his face that her "go away" means "come on", her behaviour would suggest otherwise. Anne responds to his aggressive sexuality with a 'not altogether unrelished fear and excitement', she also experiences an irresistible instinct to run which, as one might expect, evokes in him an equally irresistible instinct to chase after her. Their acquaintanceship culminates in the threatened and attempted rape of Chapter Twenty-Seven. Anne's position at the window of the barricaded house suggests the extent to which she has put herself out of Festus's reach in physical as well as emotional terms, although her actions still entice him on. They also excite in him an infuriated desire to take by force that which has been refused him: "you threw me into the water. Faith, it was well for you I didn't catch 'ee then! I should have taken a revenge in a better way than I shall now. I mean to have that kiss of 'ee" (TM, p. 236). His mood is aggravated by her refusal to allow him access and, 'brimful of suppressed passion', he declares at last: "one kiss would have been enough that day in the mead; now I'll have forty, whether you will or no!" (TM, p. 238). Although Anne's coquettishness echoes the behaviour of Fancy Day in Under the Greenwood Tree, the narrator of The Trumpet Major gives no indication of the economic and social reasons behind Anne's apparently

heartless and thoughtless handling of the eligible men who cross her path. In the earlier text, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Six below, Fancy's flirtatiousness is explained as the result of her struggle for social anchorage.

The narrator of The Trumpet Major is at pains to distinguish between Anne's 'natural womanly instincts' which make it difficult, if not impossible for her to discourage John Loveday and Festus Derriman even while she desires neither, and the duplicitous feminine wiles which animate Matilda Johnson. As in The Hand of Ethelberta and Far from the Madding Crowd the device of parallelism is used to highlight the way class determines the means by which women set out to acquire husbands. However, whereas the situation of Ethelberta and Menlove or even Fanny and Bathsheba was seen as analogous, that between Anne and Matilda is antithetical. The narrator's largely unsympathetic treatment of Matilda Johnson is firmly based on conventional ideas concerning the nature of women, whilst at the same time it reflects certain assumptions prevalent at the time concerning the relationship between prostitution and marriage. Men like John Loveday and the ---th Dragoons, Bob, Admiral Nelson and the crew of the Victory, go to war to defend their womenfolk, who are expected to remain chaste and faithful at home as the symbol of decency and virtue. There is, however, no onus on the men to refrain from sexual activity; in fact the very opposite is encouraged. In peacetime, men were granted sexual privileges both before and after marriage of which no woman, heedful of her reputation, dared avail herself. Thus the problem arose of how to grant comparative sexual freedom to the male, without endangering the ideal of womanly chastity. The answer lay in prostitution, and the general opinion at the time was that standards of feminine purity could only be maintained at the expense of a class of degraded and fallen women. This view of the role of the prostitute is neatly expressed in W. E. H. Lecky's History of European Morals:

Herself the supreme type of vice, she is ultimately the most efficient guardian of virtue. But for her, the unchallenged purity of countless happy homes would be polluted, and not a few who, in the pride of their untempted chastity, think of her with an indignant

shudder, would have known the agony of remorse and despair. On that one degraded and ignoble form are concentrated the passions that might have filled the world with shame.²⁷

Camp followers like Matilda Johnson make it possible for women like Anne Garland to exact the courtesy, reverence and respect that they expect from men.

Matilda could never be Bob's wife, as John himself explains. Anne, however, is, and always will be, a 'queen' to Bob and an object of veneration to the very men of the ---th Dragoons who have enjoyed Matilda's sexual favours.

The narrator introduces a note of irony in Bob's letter to the family in which he describes the apparent virtues of his fiancée Matilda. He emphasizes her 'innocence' as well as her beauty and concludes that 'if there was one thing more than another necessary in a mill which had no mistress, it was somebody who could play that part with grace and dignity' (TM, p. 134). The narrator lays subtle emphasis on the word 'play', for Matilda Johnson, like Felice Charmond in The Woodlanders, is an actress and, as such, adept at role-playing. The implication is that she is an imposter. She also adopts a considerable amount of make-up and a gorgeous costume to aid her in her performance, and she appears to Bob as 'a lovely and virtuous young maiden, in whom he found the exact qualities necessary to his happiness' (TM, p. 133). However, as the narrator is quick to inform us, everything about Matilda is sham. Just as in real life the prostitute was the antithesis of the chaste woman, in literature a dichotomy often exists between the 'lily' and the 'rose' in conventional Victorian writing, or, as Eric Trudgill has defined it, between the 'madonna' and the 'magdalen'.²⁸ Matilda Johnson, with her pre-marital sexual experiences, her dark hair and her green parasol plays the 'rose' to Anne Garland who, with her virtue, her fair hair and her prayer book appears the perfect 'lily'.

Matilda has the tragic potential of a Tess Durbeyfield. She is an actress of dubious morals who attempts to leave her past behind and settle as the respectable and protected wife of a decent man, and at least one

reviewer considered her more worthy of interest than 'the correct and lady-like Anne'.²⁹ However, this tragic potential is never realized. The iniquities of her situation are glossed over, as is the obvious pain which John's threat to betray her origins causes her. The nearest the narrator comes to evoking sympathy for her is in his description of her appearance after her long walk to Overcombe to warn Bob of the press gang. The passage has all the pathos of Fanny Robin's walk into Casterbridge:

The woman came up quickly, and, to her amazement, Anne recognized Matilda. Her walk was convulsive, face pale, almost haggard, and the cold light of the morning invested it with all the ghostliness of death. She had plainly walked all the way from Budmouth, for her shoes were covered with dust. (TM, p. 270)

On the whole, we are not meant to take Matilda seriously. Indeed, in The Trumpet Major, women in general are viewed with a mixture of, at best, detachment and at worst tolerance and amusement. They appear flippant, rather selfish, vain-hearted creatures, coquettish and romantically minded in the traditional stereotyped poses of popular nineteenth-century fiction.

Although there is evidence that, while the novel was still in manuscript form, Hardy went through it systematically exaggerating the class differences between the Garland family and the Lovedays, the real problems surrounding the issue of marriage between a man and a woman from different class backgrounds, which is of central importance in Under the Greenwood Tree, and The Hand of Ethelberta and which was to feature strongly in Two on a Tower and The Woodlanders, are constantly evaded. As Michael Millgate has observed, Mr Garland's status

leaves his widow and daughter with some freedom (within the limits of their income) to choose the precise point on the social scale to which they will lay claim. In Anne's case, this freedom is much increased by her occupying, as a pretty girl of marriageable age a position of maximum social mobility.³⁰

The narrator's aim in The Trumpet Major was to expose the ridiculous nature of social ambition in the face of greater matters such as war. Anne appears to Bob as 'a woman who by education and antecedents was fitted to adorn a higher sphere than his own', but in this time of crisis both Anne and her mother

trade in their social aspirations for the love and protection offered by the miller and his sons. Indeed, Anne's regard for Bob, and more especially for John and Festus, is born not so much out of love as out of their suitability or otherwise for the role of 'thorough woman's protector' in the impending crisis. Mrs Loveday finally capitulates and marries the down-to-earth miller, not without a sense of having done herself less than justice however, and Anne receives the best of both worlds - the man she loves and a legacy to compensate for her drop in status.

Anne may be different from the other girls in that she occupies a higher social position, but as far as her reaction to the presence of the soldiers is concerned she is exactly the same. Their arrival opens up to all the young women 'unbounded possibilities of adoring and being adored', and later Bob's appearance in uniform has the same resolve-weakening effect upon the heroine as the dashing dress of the York Hussars has upon the other village girls. All the women in the novel are united by their single-minded pursuit of a husband. The more serious implications of the soldiers' presence in the village, which were examined in Far from the Madding Crowd, are ignored in The Trumpet Major.

There are, however, a few points in an otherwise unremarkable novel where the narrator's ability to isolate and identify the less savoury aspects of a woman's existence in a patriarchal society can still be discerned. One example of this is the relatively minor incident at Oxwell Hall during Uncle Benjy's absence when a young servant-girl is forced to play the fiddle like a performing monkey before a dozen drunken yeomen (TM, p. 99). Another is the fact that even the gallant John Loveday is quick to take a sexual advantage over a girl faint from her narrow escape from violation at the hands of the arch bully Festus Derriman (TM, pp. 241-42). Perhaps more obvious is the narrator's implicit criticism of the fickle and egocentric Bob Loveday, whose constant pursuit and renunciation of Anne takes no account of her own or his brother's feelings. His assumption that John would be 'keeping [his] place warm' during

his absence tells us as much about Bob's contempt for Anne's sensitivity, loyalty and emotional resilience as it does about his faith in John's.

There is, however, a peculiarly Hardyian touch in this portrait of a conventional Victorian heroine, which hints at a tragic future for her with a sexually inconstant husband - a device which was to be employed to greater effect in The Woodlanders. As Leslie Stephen pointed out, Anne marries the wrong man, a fact which he and others considered the only flaw in an otherwise perfect novel.³¹ Towards the end of the narrative the narrator asks rhetorically: 'youth is foolish; and does a woman often let her reasoning in favour of the worthier stand in the way of her perverse desire for the less worthy at such times as these?' (TM, p. 338). The answer provided by The Trumpet Major is, of course, 'no' as it was to be in The Woodlanders, but, unlike the later text, The Trumpet Major makes no attempt to confront the issue, nor does it explore the circumstances surrounding a woman's apparent inability to obey the dictates of emotional prudence. In The Trumpet Major, Hardy deliberately suspended his capacity for social criticism in an attempt to popularize his fiction and the attempt paid off. Although the novel sold only 750 of the original one thousand three-volumed editions over a period of twenty years, it was reprinted every two or three years in the Pocket Edition between 1907 and 1970 which is, as H. A. T. Johnson has observed, more frequently than Jude the Obscure.³²

Both Desperate Remedies and The Trumpet Major examine the way in which women manipulate others - especially men - in order to achieve what they themselves desire. Cytherea Grey and Anne Garland are professional 'fishers of men', who 'set out their fascinations so as to bring about the highest possible average of takes within the year' (DR, p. 89). However, whereas the earlier novel questions this conventional view of women by exposing the way in which society prevents them from gaining direct access to the means of existence, The Trumpet Major diplomatically avoids the issue. The success of the later novel, in popular terms at least, was partly due to the way in which it blandly reiterated traditional myths concerning woman's sexual organization, in

particular her illogical sexual perversity, her irrationality, and her single-minded and indiscriminate pursuit of masculine approval. As Hardy's critics are keen to emphasize, The Trumpet Major is uncharacteristic of its creator. It is light-hearted, it is discreet and above all it was uncontentious. The novels which preceded it and those which came after are closer, in tone and tenor, to Desperate Remedies. This is especially true of their analyses of woman's social and sexual behaviour.

Desperate Remedies examines the way in which a woman in Cytherea Grey's position is forced to abandon her aims and ideals, and sacrifice her integrity in order to survive. Sexual strategy is seen not as biologically determined, but as a socially conditioned response to the circumstances of a woman's existence. Cytherea laments to her brother:

'O, if people only knew what a timidity and melancholy upon the subject of her future grows up in the heart of a friendless woman who is blown about like a reed shaken with the wind, as I am, they would not call this resignation of one's self by the name of scheming to get a husband. Scheme to marry? I'd rather scheme to die! I know I am not pleasing my heart; I know that if I only were concerned, I should like risking a single future. But why should I please my useless self over-much, when by doing otherwise I please those who are more valuable than I?'. (DR, pp. 262-63)

The conflict between a woman's social duty, and her duty to herself is examined in greater depth in A Pair of Blue Eyes and The Hand of Ethelberta. Both texts also confront the traditional myth of women as sexually manipulative and emotionally devious, and in each case the reader is presented with an acutely sympathetic examination of the social forces which shape women's destinies, which is only slightly undermined by the narrator's periodic commitment to a type of biological determinism with regard to the portrayal of women.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. Hardy, 'The Profitable Reading of Fiction' (1888), in PW, pp. 110-25 (p. 125).
2. Hardy, 'Candour in English Fiction', (1890), in PW, pp. 125-33 (p. 131).
3. Alexander Macmillan compared Hardy's treatment of upper-class Londoners to Thackeray's but concluded that where Thackeray 'meant fair', Hardy 'mean[t] mischief' (THAB, p. 110).
4. Irving Howe describes Desperate Remedies as 'one of the most interesting bad novels in the English language, bad with verve, bad with passion, bad (one might even say) with distinction' (Howe, p. 34). Lerner and Holmstrom declare 'nothing of importance in the book either anticipates the later novels, or suggests a writer of genius' (Thomas Hardy and His Readers p. 14). For analogies between Desperate Remedies and the Victorian sensation novel see: Taylor, p. 10; Millgate, Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist (London, Sydney, Toronto, 1971), pp. 30-32; Page, p. 92. For a fuller discussion of the relationship of Desperate Remedies to this particular genre see: Lawrence O. Jones, 'Desperate Remedies and the Victorian Sensation Novel', Nineteenth Century Fiction, 20 (1965-66), 35-50; Kevin Z. Moore, '"The Poet Within the Architect's Ring": Desperate Remedies, Hardy's Hybrid Detective-Gothic Narrative', Studies in the Novel, 14 (1982), 31-42; Wing, 'Edwin Drood and Desperate Remedies: Prototypes of Detective Fiction in 1870', Studies in English Literature 1500-1900, 13 (1973), 677-87. Refreshing alternatives to this view are contained in Wickens, 'Romantic Myth', and 'Hardy's Desperate Remedies', Explicator, 39 (1980), 12-14; Judith Bryant Wittenberg, 'Early Hardy Novels and The Fictional Eye', Novel: A Forum on Fiction 16 (1983), 150-64. C. J. P. Beatty discusses the text in relation to Hardy's architectural training in 'Desperate Remedies', THYB, 2 (1971), 46-55.
5. Taylor, p. 15.
6. Wittenberg, pp. 158-59.
7. See Pinion, Art and Thought, pp. 136-47. Compare Edward's views on the nature of true love as reported by Owen: "he says that your true lover breathlessly finds himself engaged to a sweetheart, like a man who has caught something in the dark. He doesn't know whether it is a bat or a bird, and takes it to the light when he is cool to learn what it is" (DR, p. 59).
8. Moore, p. 36.
9. THAB, p. 126.
10. Reprinted Lerner and Holmstrom, pp. 12-13.
11. Unsigned review of Desperate Remedies, Spectator (1871) in R. G. Cox, Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage (London, New York, 1970), pp. 3-5 (p. 5).
12. Lerner and Holmstrom, p. 13.
13. Beach, p. 117.

14. Hawkins, p. 81.
15. Howe, p. 44.
16. Pinion, Art and Thought, p. 75.
17. Thomas Hardy to John Blackwood, CL, I, 6 (9 June 1879).
18. Ruskin, 'Of Queen's Gardens' in Sesame and Lilies (1865): Two Lectures by John Ruskin, MA, The Works of John Ruskin, 39 vols (London, New York, 1903-12), edited by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 18, 5-144 (pp. 109-144), p. 137.
19. TM, p. 343. See Abbreviations.
20. Thomas Hardy to Annie Franklin, CL, I, 64 (26 March 1878).
21. Havelock Ellis, 'Thomas Hardy's Novels', Westminster Review, 63 (1883), 335-64 (p. 354).
22. Julian Hawthorne, 'The Trumpet Major', Spectator (1880), in R. G. Cox, p. 76.
23. Coventry Patmore, The Woodlanders, St James's Gazette (1887), in R. G. Cox, pp. 146-49 (p. 148).
24. Jenijoy La Belle, 'Hardy's The Trumpet Major', Explicator, 38 (1980), 10-11, (p. 11).
25. Rousseau, Émile (1780; translated by Barbara Foxley London, 1911), pp. 334-35.
26. Schopenhauer, 'On Women', first published in Parerga and Paralipomena (1851), reprinted in Selected Essays of Schopenhauer, edited by Ernest Belford Bax (London, 1914), pp. 338-52 (p. 339).
27. W. E. H. Lecky, History of European Morals, cited Keith Thomas, 'The Double Standard', Journal of the History of Ideas, 20 (1959), 195-216 (p. 195).
28. Eric Trudgill, Madonnas and Magdalens (London, 1976).
29. Unsigned Review, Athenaeum (1880), reprinted in R. G. Cox, pp. 71-73 (p. 72).
30. Millgate, Hardy: His Career, p. 150.
31. Hardy replied that heroines usually did marry 'the wrong man'. Stephen is reputed to have answered: 'not in magazines'. The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen, edited by Frederic William Maitland (London, 1906), p. 277.
32. H. A. T. Johnson, 'In Defence of The Trumpet Major', in Budmouth Essays pp. 39-59 (p. 40).

CHAPTER FIVE

WOMEN AND SEXUAL STRATEGY: A PAIR OF BLUE EYES (1873)

THE HAND OF ETHELBERTA (1876)

The claim that woman's sexual behaviour was determined by her biology was consistently challenged during the second half of the nineteenth century by those with a more meliorist view of human existence. As we have seen, John Stuart Mill explained woman's use of sexual strategy as a symptom not of her mating and maternal instincts, but of the economical and political subjection under which she was forced to operate. This view was perhaps most clearly articulated by Cicely Hamilton in her book Marriage as a Trade, published some forty years after Mill's On the Subjection of Women, but still bearing witness to the persuasiveness of Mill's arguments.¹ Hamilton's study is a retrospective glance at the conditions which have helped to shape women's behaviour over the centuries and thus provides a useful insight into a meliorist view of women's social and economic position.

Like Mill, Hamilton claimed that women were created rather than born women. As she is, and has been in the past, woman 'is the product of the conditions imposed upon her by her staple industry' - marriage (MT, p. 17). She is forced to concentrate her energies on attracting and securing an appropriate mate because of what Hamilton terms 'unsound economic and social conditions'. Sex is merely one of the ingredients of the natural woman, 'an ingredient which has assumed undue and exaggerated proportions in her own life owing to the fact that it has for many generations furnished her with the means of livelihood' (MT, p. 35). Likewise aspects of women's behaviour commonly imputed to 'sexual impulse', owe their origins more to 'the commercial instinct' (MT, p. 38). Woman, in Hamilton's view, has been trained and conditioned to shape herself according to a standard of womanhood artificially imposed by a male majority, 'since the more widely she was admired the better were her chances of striking a satisfactory bargain' (MT, p. 41). Honour, in the widest sense of the word,

honesty, intellectual independence and independence of action, self-reliance, and courage are not qualities of womanhood because they have never been required of women. Such qualities are the property of 'free people' and women, according to Hamilton, are not free. Instead, they are expected to possess 'submission, suppleness, coaxing manners, a desire to please and ingratiate, tact and a capacity for hard work for which no definite return is to be expected', such as befits a servile race. The same is true of women's obsession with their appearance:

This concentration of energy on personal adornment, usually attributed to vanity or overflowing sexuality, is, so far as I can see, largely the outcome of a sound business instinct As a matter of business then, and not purely from vanity, she specializes in personal attractiveness; and the care, the time and the thoroughness which many women devote to their own adornment, the choosing of their dresses and the curling of their hair is thoroughly professional and a complete contrast to their amateurishness in other respects. (MT, p. 90)

Cicely Hamilton saw the root of the problem in women's exclusion from direct access to the means of existence, and the compensatory measures she was forced to adopt as a result:

From woman, who has always been far more completely excluded from direct access to the necessities of life, who has often been barred, both by law and by custom, from the possession of property, one form of payment was demanded, and one only. It was demanded of her that she should enkindle and satisfy the desire of the male, who would thereupon admit her to such share of the property he possessed or earned as should seem good to him. In other words, she exchanged, by the ordinary process of barter, possession of her person for the means of existence. (MT, pp. 26-27)

Writing to Edward Clodd in November 1895, à propos of Jude the Obscure, Hardy declared 'the modern views of marriage are a survival from the custom of capture & purchase, propped up by a theological superstition'.² Nowhere in his non-fictional or fictional writings does Hardy express views as acerbic or as explicit as Cicely Hamilton's, but his early novels are clearly motivated by an appreciation of women's relationship to the employment and marriage markets, and the effect this has upon their social and sexual conduct, which has much in common with Hamilton's overtly Milliean analysis of the subject. Both A Pair of Blue Eyes and The Hand of Ethelberta are concerned to locate the reasons behind

women's use of sexual strategy in their economic powerlessness rather than in their biological organization. In A Pair of Blue Eyes, the day to day existence of the central female character is imaged in terms of a game of strategy demanding cunning and intellectual dexterity on the part of the main participant whose fortunes, and in Elfride's case whose very life, depend upon the outcome.³ In this text the game of chess functions as a subtle metaphor for life which demonstrates the way in which women of all classes, along with working-class men, compensate or, in this case, fail to compensate for their social and economic powerlessness in a society which primarily serves the interests of the middle-class male.⁴

In the light of A Pair of Blue Eyes, Victorian society appears as a vast chess board upon which each piece enacts a subtle game of strategy within the realms of love and marriage, or work, in order to improve or maintain his or her social and economic position. At the head of the patriarchal chess board stands the king, who represents the customs and conventions of a nineteenth-century middle-class society. Although the king is the weakest piece on the board, in terms of moves allowed, it is the piece which will eventually determine the outcome of the game. The function of the other pieces: the queen as represented by Elfride; the bishop as represented by the rector, Elfride's father; the pawn as represented by Stephen Smith; and the knight as represented by its namesake, Henry Knight; is to protect and defend the king even if each is forced to sacrifice his or her own aims in the process. The irony inherent in the function of the king is also present in that of the queen which, although seemingly the strongest piece on the board in that she has almost unlimited freedom of movement and therefore almost unlimited power of capture over the male pieces, may be, and frequently is, sacrificed in defence of the king. This irony is convincingly reflected in Elfride's position as a woman.

Darwinian theory attributed to women overwhelmingly strong sexual impulses, and the capacity for deceit, claiming these as powerful weapons in their struggle

to attract and secure a mate. However, in direct contrast to this image of woman as the incarnation of the more animalistic side of man's nature, she was also viewed as pure, innocent and sexually nescient: the repository of man's higher instincts, and the guardian of his soul. As we have seen, this view of women was particularly dear to the Positivist school of thought. Paradoxically enough, these ideas on the nature of women were not as contradictory as they might appear. Regarding her as subject to natural law, and more firmly in the grip of instinct than man, it followed that the Victorian male should fear and distrust her closeness to the processes which, as Darwin had so uncomfortably reminded him, linked mankind to the lower animal kingdom. Thus, once captivated by the woman's sexual display, the rational man seeks to justify his descent into the realms of physical passion by elevating his chosen partner above the rest of her peers in attributing to her the characteristics he finds lacking in the remainder of her sex. The woman becomes transmogrified from physical to spiritual entity, thus vindicating the man's descent to the level at which he believes her to function. She becomes his 'queen', but her actual power, ie. the sexuality which in reality 'rules' him, must be relinquished. This elevation of the actual woman to idealized angel or queen, and the subsequent metamorphosis of the man's approach to her from physical desire to spiritual worship reduces her in real terms to the status of an idol, an object or a possession. She has little, if any, social or economic power, and her sexual power is ultimately controlled by the society to which she belongs.

As in Desperate Remedies, the issues of sexual politics are comprehensively explored through the use of parallelism. The relationship between Elfride and her two lovers is compared and contrasted by means of a series of incidents common to both in a way which highlights the comparative strengths and weaknesses, in class and gender terms, of the main characters. The turning point in each relationship is marked by an actual game of chess between Elfride and her prospective lover which 'had its value in helping on the development of

their future', not only in that it affords each pair the opportunity for closer intimacy, but also because it establishes beyond doubt the nature of their future relationship with one another. The exploration of the two relationships, which occupies the bulk of the novel, is preceded by, and concludes with, the portrayal of the relationship between the two lovers - Smith and Knight - and in this way the text examines how social intercourse between men is also shaped and determined by the demands of conventional society.

Elfride Swancourt, although nowhere near as well versed in the strategy of courtship as a town-bred young lady, is aware of the efficacy of feminine charm in dealing with members of the opposite sex. She has already captivated or 'captured' her father and, it is implied, the unfortunate Felix Jethway. However, despite the esteem in which her father holds her, Elfride has gathered a distinct impression, albeit from novels and magazines from London, of the social advantages enjoyed by members of the opposite sex, as well as of her own lowly position as a woman. This impression coupled with her lack of social polish renders her inferior, in her eyes, to the imagined visitor from London: 'the dark, taciturn, sharp, elderly man of business ... a man with clothes smelling of city smoke, skin sallow from want of sun, and talk flavoured with epigram'.⁵ However, at their first meeting, Stephen's feminine appearance and his social unease place him almost immediately on the same level as herself: 'his face is - well - pretty; just like mine', she tells her father (PBE, p. 48). Despite his unprepossessing appearance, however, Stephen still represents status and security to the isolated and comparatively impoverished clergyman's daughter. Elfride therefore prepares herself to do battle in an attempt to capture him, exhibiting what the narrator refers to as 'Woman's ruling passion - to fascinate and influence those more powerful than she' (PBE, p. 218).

The tactics employed by woman consist of physical display - through carefully controlled flirtatious behaviour - coupled with sexual resistance: her virginity is her main bargaining asset which she will exchange in return for the status and security of a wedding ring, thereby involving herself in a

subtle game of strategy during which she must be careful not to give too much away. A too liberal endowment of physical favours before the game is won would considerably weaken her position. Elfride's skill is considerable:

Her head is forward a little, and her eyes directed keenly upward to the top of the page of music confronting her. Then comes a rapid look into Stephen's face, and a still more rapid look back again to her business, her face having dropped its sadness, and acquired a certain expression of mischievous archness the while; which lingered there for some time, but was never developed into a positive smile of flirtation. (PBE, p. 55)

She quickly realizes that Stephen is not 'critical or experienced', and is surprised at the swiftness of her victory over him. She gradually brings him ever more firmly under her control by means of a series of tactical attacks and withdrawals, such as jumping from a moving carriage in a fit of pique at his failure to acknowledge her from the tower, and then pettishly refusing to take his arm. However, her sovereignty over him is established in the actual game of chess which takes place between them. Stephen's knowledge of chess is a metaphor for his knowledge of women and the marriage game. The virgin Smith has learned of both from his mentor Henry Knight, 'the noblest man in the world'. He tells Elfride:

'I have never seen the playing of a single game. This is the first time I ever had the opportunity of playing with a living opponent. I have worked out many games from books, and studied the reasons of the different moves, but that is all.'

This was a full explanation of his mannerism; but the fact that a man with the desire for chess should have grown up without being able to see or engage in a game astonished her not a little. (PBE, p. 83)

Elfride, of course, plays chess 'very well for a lady', and her skill soon becomes evident. However, in terms of the game of courtship, both she and Smith are bound by certain rules and formulas. As it would be poor strategy to take public advantage over her opponent too early, Elfride attempts to compensate for Smith's lack of prowess by playing both the courtship game and the game of chess below her standard: 'it was the cruellest thing to checkmate him after so much labour, she considered. What was she dishonest enough to do in her compassion? To let him checkmate her' (PBE, p. 85). Her speech,

sweetly excusing herself for her deception, could be applied to either game: 'Mr Smith, forgive me I see now ... that what I have done seems like contempt for your skill. But, indeed, I did not mean it in that sense. I could not, upon my conscience, win a victory ... over one who fought at such a disadvantage and so manfully' (PBE, p. 85).

Throughout this early stage in their relationship Elfride, who knows no other way of relating to a member of the opposite sex, is forced to prompt Stephen in his knightly role. She also seeks reassurance from him that she is playing her own role well: "do I seem like La Belle Dame Sans Merci?", she demands of him. The inexperienced Stephen eventually responds to her 'move':

'You know I think more of you than I can tell; that you are my queen. I would die for you, Elfride!'
A rapid red again filled her cheeks, and she looked at him meditatively. What a proud moment it was for Elfride then! She was ruling a heart with absolute despotism for the first time in her life. (PBE, p. 90)

However, her victory is not entirely total. Her dismissal of Henry Knight from the pedestal in Stephen's imagination and her substitution of herself completes the process: "'there; now I am yours!" she said, and a woman's flush of triumph lit her eyes' (PBE, p. 97). With a matchless piece of irony, Elfride firmly establishes herself in the regal role by voluntarily abdicating her power over Stephen.

However, both Elfride and Stephen have adopted roles - she as queen and he as knight - which only one of them is competent to fill. Up until this point in the narrative Elfride, her father and the reader have been deceived as to the nature of Stephen's social and economic standing. Although he plays his part 'with Castillian gallantry', idealizing his lady as 'queen' as he will later use her face as a model in his carvings of the virgin, Stephen has neither the class nor the financial qualifications to support his claim as defender of the status quo. As the truth concerning his background becomes known, and he descends in the Rector's eyes from 'a London professional man' to 'Jack Smith the mason's son', so his status on the chess board changes from that of prospective knight to indisputable pawn. Stephen also lacks the necessary knightly skills:

he cannot, for example, ride a horse - much to Elfride's dissatisfaction. He also fails in his role as defender of the queen's honour, and guardian of her sexual power. Elfride's earrings recur throughout the text as symbols of femininity, more especially symbols of vanity and adornment. At one point Elfride entrusts him with the care of her "very favourite darling ones". She tells him: "it would be doing me knight service if you keep your eyes fixed upon them, and remember them every minute of the day, and tell me directly I drop one' (PBE, p. 88). It is significant that Stephen forgets his charge and one of the precious earrings is lost. Likewise, his inability to act manfully after the abortive elopement destroys his credence in his lady's eyes. By running away with Stephen, Elfride has entrusted her honour into his safe-keeping: by failing to drag her 'by the wrist to the rail of some altar, and peremptorily marrying her', Stephen again shows himself unworthy of the knightly role (PBE, p. 157).

The Reverend Swancourt, who is one of the strongest defenders of the status quo, represents the bishop on our metaphorical chess board. Lacking in funds appropriate to his aristocratic pretensions, his aim is to strengthen his economic and social status through a judicious courtship and eventual marriage with the wealthy Mrs Troyton. He pursues this aim with abaxial singlemindedness, ignoring his daughter's behaviour and, at times, her very existence. A bishop on a chess board may move diagonally over any number of vacant squares. Stephen, with his working-class origins, and his pretensions to Elfride's hand, presents a substantial obstacle to the Rector's progress, so he is summarily dismissed from the game. Elfride, however, still stands by her promise to marry him, providing that her pawn battles his way to the top of his profession, thereby earning the right of promotion to the eighth rank. The Rector's politic marriage effectively raises his social standing, which is dignified still further by the family's migration from the rectory to Mrs Swancourt's queenly residence:

Mr Swancourt at first disliked the idea of being transplanted to feminine soil, but the obvious advantages of such an accession of

dignity reconciled him to the change. So there was a radical 'move'; the two ladies staying at Torquay as had been arranged, the rector going to and fro. (PBE, pp. 167-68)

The function of the new Mrs Swancourt is to act in loco parentis to the motherless Elfride and prepare her for marriage with a man capable of securing her step-daughter's new-found status. Mrs Swancourt is highly experienced in the marriage market. She encourages Elfride to publish her novelette - The Court of King Arthur's Castle - merely as "a guarantee of mental respectability" to her future husband, adding in characteristically submissive fashion that this type of mental activity on the part of a woman "rather resembles the melancholy ruse of throwing loaves over the castle-walls at beseigers, and suggests desperation rather than plenty inside" (PBE, p. 156).

Elfride is engaged in an attempt at self-definition similar to that of Cytherea Grey. Like Desperate Remedies, A Pair of Blue Eyes examines the way in which a woman's identity is defined for her by the society she is dependent upon for survival, which demands that she conform to the pattern of its own making by exercising what the text implies is a type of artificial selection. Women are expected to be beautiful, ignorant, virgin and preferably wealthy. They are expected to function in sexual, rather than in intellectual terms. As Cicely Hamilton pointed out, independence of thought and action are traits inconducive to society's definition of Womanliness. Elfride's attempt to gain access to culture by seeking to enter literary discourse is, to her, an act of artistic self-expression; an attempt to articulate her own feelings and thoughts as a woman in a society which continually seeks to silence her.⁶ She has a strong independent mind, coupled with a suspicion that this is an undesirable quality in a woman. Harry Knight's review of her novelette confirms this suspicion. At the same time, he dismisses her act of self-expression as the mere 'murmuring of delicate emotional trifles' (PBE, p. 177). He criticises her attempt at mental respectability and implies that it calls into question her 'Womanhood'. Elfride is at once torn between her desire to assert herself as a Woman and as a person, for the two are necessarily

incompatible:

At noon and at night she had been pestering herself with endeavours to perceive more distinctly his conception of her as a woman apart from an author: whether he really despised her; whether he thought more or less of her than of ordinary young women who never ventured into the fire of criticism at all. (PBE, p. 180)

Knight's is the archetypal voice of patriarchal repression which seeks to silence women, and force them to adopt their proper queenly role in order to protect and defend the status quo. He immediately begins by showing his disapproval of Elfride's claim to intellectual powers:

'That a young woman has taken to writing is not by any means the best thing to hear about her'.

'What is the best?'

'Well ... I suppose to hear that she has married'.

Elfride hesitated. 'And what when she has been married?' she said at last

'Then to hear no more about her. It is as Smeaton said of his lighthouse: her greatest real praise, when the novelty of her inauguration has worn off, is that nothing happens to keep the talk of her alive'.

'Yes, I see', said Elfride softly and thoughtfully. 'But of course it is different quite with men'. (PBE, p. 186)

Elfride learns slowly and painfully that society demands total self-effacement before it will extend to her the hand of protection and security. She learns this through a series of emotional and intellectual contests with Henry Knight, whose systematic defeat of her effects her transmission from self-willed young girl to self-effacing young woman. In her debates, exchanges and games with Knight, Elfride is taking on not one man alone, but one man with the whole of society ranked behind him.

Henry Knight - the true knight on our metaphorical chess board - is the personification of the misogynist narrative voice of Desperate Remedies. A Pair of Blue Eyes sets out to expose and criticise both the conventional view of woman, which had its origins in the teachings of the determinists, as well as those who expounded such views in the journals and periodicals of the time. Knight is a reviewer of books and women but, as he informs Smith, "it is only those who half know a thing that write about it. Those who know it thoroughly don't take the trouble. All I know about women, or men either, is

a mass of generalities" (PBE, p. 162). Elfride notices when Knight talks at length, that 'there was a hard square decisiveness in the shape of his sentences, as if, unlike her own and Stephen's, they were not there and then newly constructed, but were drawn forth from a large store ready-made' (PBE, p. 184). Knight has the traditional determinist view of woman. The desire to be first-comer in a woman's heart has its roots in an inbuilt sexual insecurity which expresses itself in intense gynophobia. Women, in Knight's view, are foolish, devious, deceitful, treacherous and sexual; they are also ethereal, spiritual, pure and honest. In order that he may love Elfride, she must be made to conform to this paradoxical stereotype of woman, to the queenly role.

Elfride is caught up in the desire to please 'the highest class of man she had ever intimately known', and the desire to assert control over her own identity: a 'complexity of instincts' undermines her 'conventional smiles of complaisance' (PBE, p. 180). When she risks her neck walking round the parapet of Endlestow tower it is not an acknowledgement of her charms she seeks but of her intellectual worth. We read that she was wilful 'by reason of [Knight's] inattention, which she privately put down to his thinking her not worth talking to' (PBE, p. 190). Knight's physical appropriation of her after her fall anticipates his eventual appropriation of her identity. He calls her a fool and orders her to submit quietly, which she does (PBE, p. 193).

Knight interprets her attempt to gain his respect as merely her way of drawing his attention to her: 'an innocent vanity is of course the origin of these displays', he writes disparagingly; '"Look at me," say these youthful beginners in womanly artifice, without reflecting whether or not it be to their advantage to show so very much of themselves' (PBE, p. 203). He is, initially at least, entirely misinformed for the narrator tells us that 'Woman's ruling passion - to fascinate and influence those more powerful than she - though operant in Elfride, was decidedly purposeless. She had wanted her friend Knight's good opinion from the first' (PBE, pp. 218-19). Only later does this need for his respect become a desire for his love.

The battle for her identity reaches its climax during the game of chess which immediately follows this incident, and which mirrors a similar game with Stephen a year before. If the rook and the queen are seen as symbols of masculine and feminine sexual power respectively, the way in which the game anticipates their future relationship becomes apparent. Knight, 'by one of those inexcusable oversights which will sometimes afflict the best of players', momentarily surrenders his control by placing his rook - the tower - in the arms of one of her pawns: 'it was her first advantage. She looked triumphant - even ruthless' (PBE, p. 194). However, Elfride eventually surrenders her control by placing her queen 'on his remaining rook's file'. That night, her sleep is disturbed by a dream about armies of bishop and knights; the most powerful male pieces and, significantly enough, those which threaten her integrity the most - her father and her prospective lover.

Knight eventually manages to thwart Elfride's attempt at intellectual independence and succeeds in manipulating her into the conventional feminine position of seeking masculine approval on the basis of her physical attributes alone. Having lost the intellectual game of chess, Elfride embarks upon the game of sexual attraction which is dependent upon the skilful manipulation of chance factors, as is roulette or poker:

And now, like a reckless gambler, she hazarded her last and best treasure. Her eyes: they were her all now.
 'What coloured eyes do you like best, Mr Knight?' she said slowly.
 'Honestly, or as a compliment?'
 'Of course honestly; I don't want anybody's compliment!'
 And yet Elfride knew otherwise: that a compliment or word of approval from that man then would have been like a well to a famished Arab.
 'I prefer hazel', he said serenely
 She had played and lost again. (PBE, p. 205)

Knight, like Angel Clare, falls in love not with the image his lady projects but with his own image of her. Having effectively robbed her of her self-confidence, and reduced her to a form which he feels he can comfortably accommodate, he allows himself to want her. The desire he feels for her body, implied in the description of his response to her on the first day of their

acquaintance, is transformed into love for her soul, 'which had temporarily assumed its disembodiment to accompany him on his way' (PBE, p. 216).⁷

Knight's transmogrification of Elfride from an object of intense sexual desire to a spiritualized embodiment of purity is his attempt to counter his disgust at having been sexually overcome: 'she began to rule him so imperiously now that ... he almost trembled at the possible result of the introduction of this new force among the nicely adjusted ones of his ordinary life' (PBE, p. 216).

Knight's purchase of the earrings for Elfride is symptomatic of his desire to mould her into the very stereotype of femininity he earlier affected to despise. Having poured scorn on her preference for a pair of the very prettiest earrings in Bond Street over the well-chosen little library of music, regarding this as proof of woman's vanity and shallowness, he now expresses his approval of such a preference because it confirms his image of woman:

He had never forgotten his severity to her because she preferred ornament to edification, and had since excused her a hundred times by thinking how natural to womankind was a love of adornment, and how necessary became a mild infusion of personal vanity to complete the delicacy and fascinating dye of the feminine mind. (PBE, p. 217)

Elfride's refusal of them indicates the extent to which she is still unwilling and unable to conform to his definition of her, and it leaves him 'feeling less her master than heretofore' (PBE, p. 221).

Elfride's eventual sacrifice of her aims and desires is effected, significantly enough, on 'The Cliff With No Name'. When Knight falls from the cliff - an event which was anticipated by her fall from the tower - he is totally at her mercy. The narrator takes an almost mischievous delight in the role reversal effected by Knight's accident:

It was a novelty in the extreme to see Henry Knight, to whom Elfride was but a child, who had swayed her as a tree sways a bird's nest, who mastered her and made her weep most bitterly at her own insignificance, thus thankful for a sight of her face. (PBE, p. 244)

Once convinced of the possibility of rescue, however, Knight immediately assumes 'his position of ruling power'. When the rescue is complete, Elfride appears to lose 'all sense of self-command':

An overwhelming rush of exultation at having delivered the man she revered from one of the most terrible forms of death, shook the gentle girl to the centre of her soul. It merged in a defiance of duty to Stephen, and a total recklessness as to plighted faith. Every nerve of her will was now in entire subjection to her feeling - volition as a guiding power had forsaken her. To remain passive, as she remained now, encircled by his arms, was a sufficiently complete result - a glorious crown to all the years of her life. Perhaps he was only grateful, and did not love her. No matter: it was infinitely more to be even the slave of the greater than the queen of the less. (PBE, p. 246)

The juxtaposition of the metaphors of 'queen' and 'crown' here again suggest the game of chess. Elfride is encircled by Knight's arms, just as her queen was encircled by the arms of his rook. The true nature of Elfride's hold over him is symbolized by the underwear rope with which she rescues him. It is this sexual power that she relinquishes in Knight's embrace. Her self-abnegation is significant when the reader refers to the rules of the game of chess. The role reversal on 'The Cliff With No Name' is a threat to the status quo. Elfride's response exactly mirrors the function of the queen when a threatened check can only be averted through the sacrifice of the more powerful piece. She surrenders herself, body and soul, to Knight and the balance is restored. She remains a queen but she no longer has any power, as is suggested by the image of the slave. The sacrifice is complete when Knight dresses her in the earrings she had previously declined. When he had finished he 'held her at arm's length, as if she had been a large bouquet, and looked at her with critical affection' (PBE, p. 302). From this point on, we read that Elfride 'made her heart over to him entirely', she 'idolized him and was proud to be his bondservant', and that she 'sunk her individuality in his entirely'.

In Desperate Remedies, Cytherea experienced what the narrator referred to as 'the charming sensation ... of being compelled into an opinion by a man she loved' (DR, p. 76). In A Pair of Blue Eyes, this type of self-abnegation is shown to be destructive and negative. Knight is not in love with Elfride but with his image of her. For this reason, she is reluctant to enlighten him as to the nature of her relationship with Stephen, for she knows that to do so would be to destroy his love.

Knight's predictable rejection of her upon learning the truth foreshadows Angel's rejection of Tess, and also echoes the rector's dismissal of Stephen, thus uniting the themes of social status and sexual purity as the yardsticks by which men and women are respectively measured:

Elfride loved him, he knew, and he could not leave off loving her; but marry her he would not. If she could but be again his own Elfride - the woman she had seemed to be - but that woman was dead and buried, and he knew her no more! And how could he marry this Elfride, one who, if he had originally seen her as she was, would have been barely an interesting pitiable acquaintance in his eyes - no more? (PBE, p. 364)

Having once determined that Elfride is not the innocent he envisaged, Knight instantly dismisses her as a whore. In metamorphosed form she formed the basis of a religion in his heart, in her physical aspect she assumes the 'hue of a temptation'. In this way Knight articulates both sides of the conventional dichotomy of womanhood.

Just as Stephen descended from the rank of knight to pawn, so Elfride descends from that of queen to 'mere characterless toy', and the word 'characterless' here functions as an indication of her moral, as well as her intellectual, worth in Knight's eyes. It is futile for her to reason with him now as her previous uniform submissiveness not only robs her of the power effectively to combat his criticism, but her overwhelming guilt at her failure to live up to his ideal leads her to accept his verdict almost without murmur. Seeing herself as unfit to be his wife, she offers instead to be his mistress or his servant.

In the closing chapters of A Pair of Blue Eyes, the reader is offered an insight into the way in which men conduct their relationships with one another. As I have previously suggested, Stephen's working-class origins and his lowly social status place him on exactly the same level as Elfride. Their similarity is emphasized by the fact that Stephen possesses the plastic ability to shape himself according to the company he finds himself in, and by the suggestion that he, like Elfride, is drawn to masochistic relationships with members of the most powerful sex. Stephen's loyalty to Knight is seen as

arising out of Knight's treatment of him as an inferior:

[Knight] had at last, though unwittingly, inflicted upon him the greatest snub of all, that of taking away his sweetheart. The emotional side of [Stephen's] constitution was built rather after a feminine than a male model; and that tremendous wound from Knight's hand may have tended to keep alive a warmth which solicitousness would have extinguished altogether. (PBE, p. 377)

Later, however, love for the same woman alters the relationship between them from one of disciple and mentor to one of rivalry. Unlike Elfride, Stephen is able to consolidate his masculine identity through hard work, and make his way to the upper ranks of the chess board by taking advantage of 'a natural professional progress where there was no opposition' (PBE, p. 373). Material success, coupled with physical maturity, has allowed Stephen to exchange his status of 'pawn' for one of 'knight'. On the train to Endlestow, each 'knight' plays his own game of strategy in order to hide the true state of his feelings for Elfride from the other, unaware that the queen of both their hearts is travelling on the same train in her coffin. This judicious use of melodrama points up the supreme solipsism of the Victorian male ego. It is further emphasized by their reaction to the news of Elfride's act of total self-sacrifice:

'You have an idea that Elfride died for you, no doubt,' said Knight, with a mournful sarcasm too nerveless to support itself.
'Never mind. If we find that - that she died yours, I'll say no more ever.'
'And if we find she died yours, I'll say no more.'
'Very well - so it shall be.' (PBE, p. 397)

It is only when faced with the painful reality of another knight's grief - that of her husband Lord Luxellian - that Henry Knight is shamed into contrition. Even so, his comment seems to owe more to a recognition of property rights than to any other emotion.

However, despite the text's convincing exposé of the way in which women are compelled to shape themselves according to a male-defined standard of womanhood, A Pair of Blue Eyes bears evidence of the influence of determinist misogyny. The narrative voice is as evasive in its attempts to realize Elfride as it was with Cytherea. Of Elfride, we learn that:

... you did not see the form and substance of her features when conversing with her; and this charming power of preventing a material study of her lineaments by an interlocutor, originated not in the cloaking effect of a well-formed manner (for her manner was childish and scarcely formed), but in the attractive crudeness of the remarks themselves. (PBE, p. 39)

The narrator shows some desire to break free of the conventions concerning the portrayal of women in fiction by suggesting that Elfride does not conform to the recognized model of womanhood: she is too young and too socially inexperienced to have modified her personality along the lines dictated by society. However, in the absence of any other satisfactory language in which to describe her the narrator is, at best, evasive. At worst, as in Desperate Remedies, he seeks to compensate for his insecurity by intruding conventional maxims and platitudes concerning the nature of women into the text. At times, Elfride's impulse towards sexual self-assertion is seen as the product of the fundamental amorality of the female. Although the text explains her dishonesty to her father, Stephen and Knight as stemming from her economic and social vulnerability, an intrusive narrative voice frequently passes moral judgements on her behaviour. For example, she is compared to Knight in terms of moral integrity and found wanting:

It is difficult to frame rules which shall apply to both sexes, and Elfride, an undeveloped girl, must, perhaps, hardly be laden with the moral responsibilities which attach to a man in like circumstances. The charm of woman, too, lies partly in her subtleness in matters of love. (PBE, pp. 288-89)

Likewise her disregard of convention in her dealings with both lovers, and her reluctance to inform Knight of her abortive elopement with Stephen, appear to stem from a species of feminine instinct which is antagonistic to any form of moral control. While to some extent this does expose the way in which women are discriminated against by a male-dominated society which rules by reason and repression, it is also an example of the social exaggeration of biological difference favoured by determinist thinkers such as Darwin, Spencer and Comte. However, A Pair of Blue Eyes suffers less from a gender-based definition of mental and emotional characteristics than did Desperate Remedies. In fact,

Ronald Blythe has detected in the characters of Elfride and Stephen the peculiarly modern 'uncomfortable semi-awareness of confused genders'.⁸ Whenever the terms 'man' or 'woman' are used, far more is signified than the simple biological differences between the sexes. The text alludes critically to the categories society fits people into according to how well they demonstrate certain imputed characteristics. It is Stephen's failure to measure up to the rector's definition of manliness, and Elfride's to conform to Knight's ideal of womanliness that bring about their downfall. In A Pair of Blue Eyes, there is little evidence of the notion of an absolute predestination in biological terms. Elfride is governed by the rules and conventions pertaining to society which are shown to be as arbitrary, yet as binding, as the rules of the game of chess.

The notion of life as a game with its own set of rules is examined in more detail in The Hand of Ethelberta, which considers woman's relationship to the marriage market in greater depth than any of the preceding novels. At one point in Desperate Remedies, Miss Aldclyffe attempts to persuade Cytherea to marry Manston using the metaphor of a game of cards:

'My father used to say to me as a child when he was teaching me whist, "When in doubt win the trick!" That advice is ten times as valuable to a woman on the subject of matrimony. In refusing a man there is always the risk that you may never get another offer. (DR, p. 247)

In A Pair of Blue Eyes, the rector uses the same metaphor to Elfride when describing the matrimonial possibilities open to her as a result of his new-found wealth: 'with your good looks, if you now play your cards well, you may marry anybody. Of course, a little contrivance will be necessary; but there's nothing to stand between you and a husband with a title, that I can see' (PBE, p. 153). If life is seen as a game of chess, and love a game of whist, The Hand of Ethelberta shows women as participants in both games. However judiciously and skilfully Ethelberta plays her cards, she is still bound by the rules of the game of life - custom and convention - as played by the society upon which she is dependent.⁹

The double entendre implicit in the title of the novel has been commented

upon by critics who have, nevertheless, failed to analyze its implications satisfactorily.¹⁰ The 'Hand' of Ethelberta refers both to her hand in marriage, and also to her hand as in a game of cards: a hand which, by chance, contains the trump cards of beauty, youth, native wit and social advantages, but which is severely handicapped by her origins - a card which she reserves, to play it last of all.

Ethelberta is far more aware of the unequal power balance between the sexes than either Cytherea or Elfride was. She is not a passive heroine, and she appears to be in total control of her own destiny. Ethelberta is also aware of the tendentiousness of the rules and maxims which both Cytherea and Elfride attempt to live by. As she tells her sister Picotee: "don't you go believing in sayings ... they are all made by men, for their own advantages. Women who use public proverbs as a guide through events are those who have not ingenuity enough to make private ones as each event occurs".¹¹ Ingenuity is the key word here, for The Hand of Ethelberta clearly demonstrates the need for the weaker sex to develop cunning, skill and strategy if it is to compete with the stronger: "to continue harmless as a dove you must be wise as a serpent, you'll find - ay, ten serpents, for that matter" (HE, p. 72). Both Cytherea and Elfride lacked sufficient ingenuity, but Ethelberta is 'a rare hand at contrivances' (HE, p. 226).

Like Elfride and Cytherea, Ethelberta is forced to rely on her ability to utilize her sexual attractiveness, or what she refers to as her 'man-compelling power', in order to achieve what she cannot obtain through intelligence alone. Her initial ability to sustain herself and her family gives her a distinct advantage, as far as the marriage game is concerned, in that it obviates the necessity for marriage whilst at the same time allowing her a certain queenly freedom from the restraints which ordinarily governed the behaviour of unattached women:

She stood there, as all women stand who have made themselves remarkable by their originality, or devotion to any singular cause, as a person freed of her hampering and inconvenient sex, and, by virtue of her

popularity, unfettered from the conventionalities of manner prescribed by custom for household womankind. The charter to move abroad unchaperoned, which society for good reasons grants only to women of three sorts - the famous, the ministering, and the improper - Ethelberta was in a fair way to make splendid use of: instead of walking in protected lanes she experienced that luxury of isolation which normally is enjoyed by men alone, in conjunction with the attention naturally bestowed on a woman young and fair. (HE, pp. 249-50)

However, her sex still stands as an insuperable bar to any serious attempt to establish herself as a professional story-teller outside London whilst still retaining a necessary modicum of respect. Defeated in her fight for financial independence Ethelberta, like Cytherea, is forced to join the ranks of ordinary women for whom a well-contrived marriage is an economic necessity. In terms of the chess analogy of A Pair of Blue Eyes, Ethelberta's queenly freedom is subject to the demands of kingly convention. Though she may manipulate her 'pawn' - Christopher Julian - and her 'knights' - Neigh, Ladywell and Mountclere - she is subject to the rules of the game which demand that she function with reference to the customs and conventions of a nineteenth-century patriarchal society.

During the period in which the novel is set, 1850-1870, the media was expressing concern at the increasing numbers of single women facing poverty and hardship simply because there were not enough men to go round.¹² During this 'man-famine', to borrow Mrs Chickerell's phrase, women were at the sexual and economic mercy of predatory and self-confident men such as the misogynist Alfred Neigh, 'who knew as well as any man how far he could go with a woman and yet keep clear of having to meet her in church without her bonnet', and the lascivious Viscount Mountclere, who fills in the time between chasing Ethelberta and visiting his mistress by indulging his semi-pornographic interest in the latest fashion plates. Likewise, even the minor male characters of the lower classes are shown to possess a distinct advantage over women of a higher social standing. Ethelberta's appearance and demeanour are no protection against the private speculations of the milkman and ostler at the beginning of the novel, which are not only prurient but verging on the criminal (HE, pp. 34-35). By

the same token, the precocious Joey is quick to realize the advantages of being a man - however homuncular. He informs his sister: "husbands is rare; and a promising courter who means business will fetch his price in these times, big or small, I assure 'e" (HE, p. 222). As far as courtship is concerned, man and woman are players in a game in which the cards have been unfairly distributed in that, before it begins, 'Old Adam' already holds the trump of economic and social power. Ethelberta plays her game well, however, and utilizing her main trump - her sexual power - she systematically defeats each opponent in turn and manages to make a politic marriage, despite her lowly origins, rather than an impolitic sexual liaison.

In the relationship between Ethelberta and Lord Mountclere, the notion of courtship as a game of cards is most clearly expressed. The seemingly playful battles of wit between them are as serious as those between Elfride and Knight; however, in this case Ethelberta and her knight are more evenly matched. Taken out of context, Ethelberta and Mountclere appear as mere caricatures; indeed, Penny Boumelha regards the Viscount as 'an almost parodically exaggerated instance of the patriarchal male', more 'frog' than 'prince'.¹³ However, in contraposing two such extremes, in terms of appearance, age and station, the text isolates Ethelberta and Mountclere as exaggerated representatives of their sex, as far as the bourgeois marriage ideal is concerned. Ethelberta, with her youth, beauty and social graces, embodies the desirable feminine attributes which are not, of course, incumbent upon the male. Mountclere, in turn, is the physical embodiment of the most important masculine attributes - wealth and a title - which are beyond the reach of most women. The handicaps of age and origin serve to particularize their relationship. Both are perfectly matched in terms of shrewdness and perspicacity and both are determined to play for as many tricks as possible. Ethelberta pits her beauty and her youth against Mountclere's money and position, and the game is satisfactorily resolved through a mutual exchange of assets.

It is during the course of her relationship with Mountclere that

Ethelberta becomes aware of the potency of her physical attributes. The alteration of the landscape at Enkworth Court to suit her whim causes in her 'a sudden realization of vague things hitherto dreamed of from a distance only - a sense of novel power put into her hands without request or expectation' (HE, p. 256). She also realizes that any advantage she may have gained must be followed up with care if she is to make any real advances, for 'what, seeing the precariousness of her state, was the day's triumph worth after all, unless, before her beauty abated, she could ensure her position against the attacks of chance?' (HE, p. 257). Once more the metaphor of the game of chess is employed to describe a woman's strategy for living. Her sagacious use of the weapon of sexual resistance in order to obtain the best possible return ensures status, security and a degree of respect in exchange for sexual submission. This is especially true of her reaction to the presence of the usurper Miss Gruchette whose presence threatens her reign as queen of Enkworth Court.

In the closing pages of the novel, the contest between Ethelberta and Mountclere is heightened to a mood of melodramatic intensity as the balance of power shifts from one to the other. Assured of the eviction of the pretender to the title of Lady Mountclere, Ethelberta is prepared to call a truce and declares: 'it was stratagem against stratagem. Mine was ingenious; yours was masterly! Accept my acknowledgement. We will enter upon an armed neutrality' (HE, p. 402). Up to this point, it has been suggested that Ethelberta is indeed the victor. Her sexuality is more than a match for the Viscount, as is indicated by their symbolic ascent to the parapets of the cathedral at Rouen. Whereas Ethelberta climbs the tower with ease, the physical effort almost kills Mountclere. In view of this incident, there is a certain irony in her father's comment that the Mountclere household discovered that "there was somebody among them whose little finger ... was thicker than a Mountclere's loins" (HE, p. 409). However, as was the case with Elfride, Ethelberta's victory is, in real terms, pyrrhic, as Mountclere's answer to her declaration of stalemate indicates: "let me be your adorer and slave again, as

ever. Your beauty, dearest, covers everything! You are my mistress and queen!" (HE, p. 402). Mountclere's use of two such highly ambiguous terms as 'mistress' and 'queen' suggests that, in one sense, the distinction between marriage and concubinage is purely academic in Ethelberta's case. As his 'mistress', she rules over him yet is kept by him. As his 'queen' she has gained her power through the sacrifice of both her sexual and personal autonomy.

As in Desperate Remedies, the issues of sexual politics are explored using the device of parallelism. The clumsily, but appropriately, named Mrs Menlove and her former mistress Ethelberta are driven to similar extremes in their search for a suitable husband. Just as Menlove disguises her age and appearance, so Ethelberta disguises her origins. Class and social status do little to obviate the sexual and economic vulnerability of the women, the difference between them is merely one of degree. What is for the privileged mistress a sophisticated game of strategy, is for her maid a crude, and rather blatant, sparring match at which Ethelberta's father, the butler, officiates as chief 'bottle-holder' (HE, p. 228). The mistress benefits from the maid's arts but refuses to recognize the similarities between them. Indeed, Ethelberta scolds her maid for watching her through the window as if she were a doll that Menlove had manufactured "and sent round for sale", an ironically accurate description of the situation (HE, p. 42). Similarly the game of 'cat and mice' between the footman and the maid servants at the home of the Doncastles is analogous to the pursuit of Ethelberta to Rouen by Neigh, Ladywell and Mountclere. The comparison is even more striking when one remembers that Ethelberta herself is originally of servant stock.

In A Pair of Blue Eyes, class and gender are shown to be the vital determinations of social and financial success, in that women and working-class men are circumscribed by the conventional moral and ethical values which govern a nineteenth-century commercial society in the same way as the movements of the queen and pawn are dictated by the rules of the game of chess. These dominant themes of class and gender are united in the heroine of The Hand of Ethelberta

who, as Berta Chickerell, belongs to both the rural and the urban proletariat as her family migrates from Arrowthorne Lodge to Exonbury Crescent. At the same time, as Ethelberta Petherwin, she belongs to the leisured upper classes. It is her situation as an unprotected single woman which unites the essentially disparate elements of her class identity.

Like working-class men, women had little financial and social power. However, unlike working-class men, who could benefit from the enormous scope for social mobility which characterized the nineteenth century by judiciously applying themselves to their chosen careers, the systematic exclusion of women from almost all walks of professional life denied them the opportunity to improve, or even maintain their social position through their own efforts. Ethelberta's early history almost exactly parallels Stephen Smith's in A Pair of Blue Eyes. She falls in love with her employer's son and, despite his parents' opposition, secretly marries him. Her position also corresponds to that of Cytherea and Elfride before her. She is her family's most lucrative possession and, as such, is personally responsible for its economic welfare. In this respect her situation also anticipates that of Tess Durbeyfield:

The two absent brothers and two absent sisters - eldest members of the family - completed the round ten whom Mrs Chickerell with thoughtless readiness had presented to a crowded world, to cost Ethelberta many wakeful hours at night while she resolved schemes how they might be decently maintained. (HE, p. 127)

Ethelberta sees it as her duty, "at all risks and all sacrifice of sentiment, to educate and provide for them" (HE, p. 141). She is thus called upon to sacrifice her integrity and her own desires for the good of others, and annex herself to a man of superior financial and class status, in order that she and her family might benefit from his assets. It is at this point that her similarity to Stephen Smith ends, for Ethelberta is more subject to social constraints as a woman than Smith is as a working-class man. Ethelberta's short-lived foray into poetry parallels Cytherea's self-deluded attempt to enter the labour market, and Elfride's publication of her novelette. The societal values by which she is expected to regulate her life demand that she

resign any attempt at self-definition outside the accepted channels of marriage and motherhood. Her move towards artistic self-expression is, in Lady Petherwin's eyes, a "sin against [her] conventional state", just as Elfride's was in Henry Knight's (HE, p. 100). It is Ethelberta's refusal to resign her intellectual independence which precipitates her downfall. Because she will not suppress her poems she is left with nothing but her "conventional state": she has all the appearances of a young wealthy widow without the substance. Ethelberta's relationship to literary discourse and her determination to enter it is highly significant. Society demands that as a woman, she should be what one female onlooker describes as "of that curious, undefined character which interprets itself to each admirer as whatever he would like to have it" (HE, p. 94). In order to prosper, Ethelberta must suppress who and what she really is to conform to society's (i.e. men's) image of her. It was Cytherea Grey who recognized that "scheming to get a husband" involved the total resignation of one's self. Ethelberta, arch-contriver and strategist, is therefore, of necessity, arch-dissembler. The successful resolution of her plans involves the rigorous suppression of her emotional life and the exercise of 'the full power of ... self command', 'a talent for demureness under difficulties without the cold-bloodedness which renders such a bearing natural and easy, a face and hand reigning unmoved outside a heart by nature turbulent as a wave' (HE, p. 133). The heart, as Cytherea and Elfride discovered, is "a troublesome encumbrance when great things have to be done", and Ethelberta successfully subordinates the dictates of her heart to those of her head. In confrontation with the only man she has truly loved but who, by reason of his poverty, can hold no place in her schemes, Ethelberta effects what is described as a reversal of the sexes:

She gave him a hand so cool and still that Christopher, much as he desired the contact, was literally ashamed to let her see and feel his own, trembling with unmanageable excess of feeling. It was always so, always had been so, always would be so, at these meetings of theirs: she was immeasurably the stronger; and the deep-eyed young man fancied, in the chagrin which the perception of this difference always bred in him, that she triumphed in her superior control. (HE, pp. 137-38)

In the face of her enforced 'silence', Ethelberta can consolidate and express her identity in fictionalized form only. We read that her 'novel-telling', 'owes its chief interest to the method whereby the teller identifies herself with the leading character in the story' (HE, p. 135). Ethelberta's written and spoken discourses reveal what is hidden and suppressed in her own life - her emotional and social self. Her verses are described as 'warm-hearted', 'impulsive', 'tender' and her story-telling is 'impassioned'. Julia Kristeva claims that a woman's aim and purpose in writing is to tell her own family story.¹⁴ This is certainly true of Ethelberta who, towards the end of the narrative of The Hand of Ethelberta, is seized by what the narrator defines as one of those 'devious impulses and tangential flights which spoil the works of every would-be schemer who instead of being wholly machine is half-heart' (HE, p. 306). Her impulse is to 'show herself as she really was' to Mountclere and his guests. With this end in view, she recounts the story of her own life with the intention of establishing an even closer connection between the 'I' of the apparently fictional narrative and herself than ever before even if, by playing this particular card at this precise moment, she risks losing a game which, like poker, depends on the ability of each player to bluff his or her opponent.

At the same time, Ethelberta's writings articulate what is hidden and repressed in other women's lives. We are told, concerning 'Metres by E', that 'the lines presented a series of playful defences of the supposed strategy of womankind in fascination, courtship, and marriage - the whole teeming with ideas bright as mirrors and just as unsubstantial, yet forming a brilliant argument to justify the ways of girls to men' (HE, pp. 47-48). In this way, Ethelberta's poetry publicly articulates experiences which are specifically female, and which have been denied utterance by a patriarchal society. Women see themselves reflected in the bright mirrors of Ethelberta's ideas. The mistress of the house regards the verses as a rather public revelation of private emotions with which she herself identifies whereas a 'plain

married lady' admits, with disarming honesty, "I don't understand high art, and am utterly in the dark on what are the true laws of criticism But I know that I have derived an unusual amount of amusement from those verses, and I am heartily thankful to "E" for them". Her comment provokes a characteristically male riposte from a gentleman 'suffering from a bad shirt-front', who declares dismissively, "I am afraid ... that an estimate which depends upon feeling in that way is not to be trusted as permanent opinion" (HE, p. 77). Penny Boumelha suggests that in both her writing and her storytelling Ethelberta 'takes speech for herself, and in doing so transgresses all the determinations of class and kin'.¹⁵ It is significant that we leave Ethelberta as Lady Mountclere engaged in the writing of an epic poem.

The Hand of Ethelberta, in common with A Pair of Blue Eyes and Desperate Remedies, examines the concept of 'duty' and its implication for women. Cytherea and Elfride are emotionally blackmailed into fulfilling their duty to society through marriage. Ethelberta attempts a more rational approach to the problem by applying the principles of Utilitarianism, which Cytherea questioned, to the marriage issue. Her recourse to 'distorted Benthamism' highlights what the text has revealed to be the gender-based nature of woman's oppression. Darwin and Comte were united in their belief that the conditions of existence could only be improved through voluntary restraint of the instinct for self-assertion, and the conscious pursuit of altruism on the part of man. Their invariable use of the masculine pronoun as generic for humanity is significant for, when their theories are examined in detail, women appear to be in a supportive rather than in an initiatory role. Indeed, as far as Comte was concerned, women naturally possessed altruistic tendencies which were more highly developed than men's. The narrator of Desperate Remedies defines feminine altruism and self-denial as the 'exercise of an illogical power entirely denied to men in general - the power not only of kissing, but of delighting to kiss the rod by a punctilious observance of the self-immolating doctrines in the Sermon on the Mount. (DR, p. 240). All three novels

demonstrate the way in which women are compelled to develop this characteristic as a direct result of their economic powerlessness. The quest for happiness on the part of each of the heroines is inextricably bound up with the desire for self-knowledge and self-definition which, in its turn, is constantly thwarted by the conditions of a woman's existence. By condemning Ethelberta's 'sorry but unconscious misapplication of sound and wide reasoning' the text makes a valid point concerning the social repression of women. Cytherea, Elfride and Ethelberta are, in reality, never given the chance to consider their own individual wants and desires. Each is forced to regard herself as at the disposal of others and is thus denied the opportunity of developing the enlightened self-interest necessary to any truly Utilitarian action. Ethelberta's voluntary resignation of her duty to herself in favour of her duty to others is shown to be a destructive and negative response, in terms of her own potentiality, to the complexities of her existence. Her action clearly demonstrates the truth of her earlier statement to Picotee that women cannot adopt the sayings men formulate for their own advantage as a guide through life. If they are to survive and succeed as individuals rather than as accessories they must formulate their own rules and codes of conduct. This theme is further developed in Two on a Tower.

As in A Pair of Blue Eyes, the misogynist narrative voice is ironized by being located in the perceptions of the male characters. Ethelberta is nearly always perceived through the eyes of a male observer whose appreciation of her is shown to be coloured by the degree of sexual attraction he feels towards her. At the same time this device serves to reflect prevailing conventional responses to women. For Alfred Neigh, Ethelberta presents a serious threat to his masculine identity and his assumed mental and emotional superiority. His gynophobia reflects that of Henry Knight, except that in Neigh's case it is born out of a life-time's sexual exploitation of women rather than, as in Knight's, the ignorance which arises out of emotional and physical virginity. Ethelberta has unwittingly enslaved Neigh's 'secret self' and his greatest

concern lies in avoiding 'incurable matrimony' whilst still enjoying the pleasures of a seemingly 'honest courtship'. His response to the threat Ethelberta poses to his ordered existence is, like Knight's with Elfride, to undermine her confidence in her own worth. Neigh's unexpected appearance at the meeting of the Imperial Association at Corvsgate Castle, where Ethelberta is to achieve her greatest triumph over Mountclere, momentarily unsettles her: 'perhaps he had come to scold her, or to treat her badly in that indefinable way of his by which he could make a woman feel as nothing without any direct act at all. She was afraid of him' (HE, p. 251). That Ethelberta succeeds in securing for herself the opportunity of becoming Neigh's wife rather than his discardable mistress is a tribute to her skill at the marriage game.

Mountclere's attitude to Ethelberta is equally predatory, although to him she represents an opportunity to be exploited rather than a threat to be overcome. His interest in women is purely sexual: he treats them all like prostitutes, buying and selling their sexual favours and then throwing them over.

Christopher's desire for Ethelberta represents the Ruskinian idealization of woman as ethereal and spiritualized - the embodiment of purity and perfection and a priceless unattainable object. Like his prototype Stephen Smith, and like Henry Knight, Christopher transforms his physical desire for the woman he loves into spiritual worship of her:

... he had learnt ... that a woman who has once made a permanent impression upon a man cannot altogether deny him her image by denying him her company, and that by sedulously cultivating the acquaintance of this Creature of Contemplation she becomes to him almost a living soul. Hence a sublimated Ethelberta accompanied him everywhere - one who never teased him, eluded him, or disappointed him: when he smiled she smiled, when he was sad she sorrowed. (HE, p. 326)

By elevating her in his imagination from complex, contradictory women to an idol of his own creation, Christopher substitutes a spiritual for a physical act of appropriation. Ethelberta becomes just as much an object for his own private use as she does for Neigh and Mountclere. Christopher regards her 'as a stall-reader regards the brilliant book he cannot afford to buy', or as 'an

ornament to [Mountclere's] parlour fire' (HE, pp. 319, 320).

This objectification of Ethelberta by each of the three men in turn is accomplished most obviously by Ladywell, who projects his image of her for all to see in his portrait of an Elizabethan knight parting from his lady with the title: "Farewell! thou art too dear for my possessing,/ And like enough thou know'st thy estimate' (HE, p. 191). The image is significant in that each prospective knight is forced to abandon all hope of possessing Ethelberta on his own terms: she becomes 'too dear' in both the financial and the emotional sense of the term .

The Hand of Ethelberta and A Pair of Blue Eyes are remarkable for the clarity with which they expose the pecuniary basis of courtship and marriage, and the way in which the nature of women is shaped by the demands of a patriarchal and commercial society. The histories of Ethelberta and Elfride demonstrate that women's behaviour is conditioned as much by what Cicely Hamilton termed 'the commercial instinct' as by biological impulses. Both texts show a degree of familiarity with the aims and ideals of the feminist movement of the second half of the nineteenth century, as well as a degree of sympathy with them, in that they can be seen to contain an implicit criticism of the way in which women are forced to develop and utilize their sexual power over men to compensate for their lack of political and economic strength. At the same time, women's power itself is subject to certain social conventions formulated with the interests of a patriarchal capitalist society at heart. However, despite the chameleon-like nature of the narrative voice of The Hand of Ethelberta, the detachment and acknowledged insecurity with the central female character which characterized A Pair of Blue Eyes, and Desperate Remedies before it, is less pronounced in this later novel. Although the text demonstrates that Ethelberta's ruthless social ambition is directly attributable to her position as a woman, it also contains an implicit criticism of her behaviour which reflects both Hardy's position as a member of the dominant gender, as well as his own anxious and uneasy sense of displacement with regard to the cultured

and intellectual circles he was part of by this time. The character of Ethelberta is a vehicle for three separate statements. She is, at once, a female social victim, a female predator and a figure of class ambivalence through whom Hardy articulated his own insecurities.

Ethelberta continually sees herself as inextricably committed by circumstances to a life-style which she herself has chosen. Cytherea's 'wilful indifference to the future' or Elfride's self-committal to the stream of events are recounted with more sympathy than Ethelberta's deliberate and calculated use of marriage as a means to an end. Her actions constantly undermine the narrator's attempts to justify her motives. The narrator reminds the reader that

One palliative feature must be remembered when we survey the matrimonial ponderings of the poetess and romancer. What she contemplated was not meanly to ensnare a husband just to provide incomes for her and her family, but to find some man she might respect, who would maintain her in such a stage of comfort as should, by setting her mind free from temporal anxiety, enable her to further organize her talent, and provide incomes for them herself. Plenty of saleable originality was left in her as yet, but it was getting crushed under the rubbish of her necessities. (HE, p. 220)

However, when one surveys her choice of suitors, only Christopher can be said to inspire anything like respect; the man she eventually chooses inspires the least. The apparent cupidity which underlies Ethelberta's motives in marrying is emphasized by her comment upon entering Enkworth Court for the first time: "how lovely! ... His staircase alone is worth my hand" (HE, p. 304). As the wife of Mountclere, there is no suggestion that she will organize her talents to provide incomes for her family. Her epic poem is, as we have seen, more a means towards self-expression than financial independence.

Ethelberta's driving social ambition frequently points up her manipulation of various characters which is, at times, less than laudable. She constantly laments the 'strange accidents' which have placed her in what she sees as her false position. She tells Christopher "I felt always like an intruder and a bondswoman, and had wished myself out of the Petherwin family a hundred times, with my crust of bread and liberty" (HE, p. 116). Later she declares,

"experimentally, I care to succeed in society; but at the bottom of my heart, I don't care" (HE, p. 141). Eventually, she informs her mother, "if I stood alone, I would go and hide my head in any hole, and care no more about the world and its ways. I wish I was well out of it, and at the bottom of a quiet grave - anybody might have the world for me then!" (HE, p. 181). The harassing social fight waged by Cytherea and Elfride was seen as necessary to their survival. In Ethelberta's case, the reader is not given enough grounds to condone her behaviour or to sympathize with her predicament. Her family, although not comfortably well off, is neither desperate, nor penurious. Most of the older children are employed, as is her father. Ethelberta is frequently condemned by the narrator for forgetting 'the smallness of the end in view', and the reader is reminded 'that in a strife for such a ludicrously small object as the entry of drawing-rooms, winning, equally with losing, is below the zero of the true philosopher's concern' (HE, p. 245). As Richard Taylor has suggested, unlike many of Hardy's heroines, Ethelberta 'is in control of her life. She determines her course and runs it; Chance has no significant part to play and her only impediments are mundane and social'.¹⁶ In addition, Ethelberta is free from the parental and sexual pressures which help to determine the courses of both Cytherea and Elfride.

The ethical value of her marriage to Mountclere is called into question by the rift it causes between herself and those whom it was designed to aid. The narrative begins with Ethelberta forbidden to recognize her family, it ends with their refusal to recognize her. Her brother Sol regards her not as a potential saviour of her family, but as a deserter of her own lot:

'When you were a girl, you wouldn't drop a curtsey to 'em, historical or otherwise, and there you were right. But, instead of sticking to such principles, you must needs push up, so as to get girls such as you were once to curtsey to you, not even thinking marriage with a bad man too great a price to pay for't'. (HE, p. 383)

Robert Gittings suggests that The Hand of Ethelberta was of great private significance to Hardy: 'in it, Hardy made his last gesture from the class to

which he really belonged. He wrote out of his system the Hardy who was one of the people who toiled and suffered. From now onward, he surveyed such people as one who has escaped from their world'.¹⁷ The contrast between the settled and secure environment of Dorset, and life in a thriving, bustling city like London must have been intense. For the first time Hardy perceived life 'not as an emotion, but as a scientific game' (LTH, p. 104). It may have been this feeling that inspired the vague contempt for 'the abnormal, almost morbid, development of the passion for position in present-day society', that informs some sections of The Hand of Ethelberta (HE, p. 197). Ethelberta's own frantic foray into intrigue, deception and ruthless ambition is frequently contrasted with 'the free habits and enthusiasms of country life' (HE, p. 122). However, as I have suggested in Chapter Three above, Hardy's personal experience of the hardships of life in a rural community constantly irrupts into his fictional portrayal of rural life, and threatens his pastoral ideality.

The following chapter will explore the contraposition of urban and rural values in two of Hardy's so-called pastoral texts: Under the Greenwood Tree and The Woodlanders. In both texts, women provide the focus for the exploration of class and social change in the rural environment. At the same time, the histories of Fancy Day and Grace Melbury provide a context within which to discuss the problem of the individual's and, more especially, the individual woman's relationship to the rural and urban environments.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. Cicely Hamilton, Marriage as a Trade (1909; reprinted with an introduction by Jane Lewis, London, 1981). Further references to this work will follow the abbreviation MT in the text.
2. Thomas Hardy to Edward Clodd, CL, II, 92 (10 November 1895).
3. Recent criticism of A Pair of Blue Eyes has concentrated on the influence of Darwin's theory of evolution on the text. See Bailey, 'Hardy's Imbedded Fossil', and Ward, 'A Pair of Blue Eyes and The Descent of Man'.
4. Hardy was familiar with the rules of chess for there is a chess board in The Thomas Hardy Memorial Collection. Mr R. N. R. Peers describes it thus: 'It is of ordinary deal with checkered paper pasted to one surface (looks home made). On the reverse, a note written in pencil "Thomas Hardy's chess board, used by him at Bockhampton". There are two sets of chessmen, one wooden set and one "The Staunton Chessman" in ebony and boxwood by Jaques of London, Set no. 1363' (R. N. R. Peers to Jane Thomas, 16 March 1982).
5. PBE, p. 47. See Abbreviations.
6. In May 1984, Hardy attended what was probably the first anniversary meeting of the 'Woman Writers' Club', and, knowing what women writers mostly had to put up with, was surprised to find himself in a group of fashionably dressed youngish ladies, the Princess Christian being present with other women of rank. "Dear me - are women-writers like this!" he said with changed views' (LTH, p. 264). Hardy grew to entertain a high opinion of the literary skills of women writers (see p. 110 above).
7. From the very start of their relationship, the reader senses that Knight's growing sexual interest in Elfride will, like fire, both illuminate and consume her:

Knight could not help looking at her. The sun was within ten degrees of the horizon, and its warm light flooded her face and heightened the bright rose colour of her cheeks to a vermilion red, their moderate pink hue being only seen in its natural tone where the cheek curved round into shadow. The ends of her hanging hair softly dragged themselves backwards and forwards upon her shoulders as each breeze thrust against or relinquished it. Fringes and ribbons of her dress, moved by the same breeze, licked like tongues upon the parts around them, and fluttering forwards from shady folds caught likewise their fair share of the lustrous orange glow (PBE, p. 189).
8. Ronald Blythe, Introduction to PBE (p. 14).
9. On 1 May Hardy noted: 'Life is what we make it as Whist is what we make it; but not as Chess is what we make it; which ranks higher as a purely intellectual game than either Whist or Life' (LTH, p. 314).
10. See YTH, p. 206. The Hand of Ethelberta has been largely ignored by recent critics, a noteworthy exception being Paul Ward, who blames the unpopularity of the novel upon the fact that neither the Victorian reviewer nor the modern critic appears to have grasped that 'what the book really has to offer is a fascinating commentary on the relationship

10. (cont.) between the tragic and comic masks, and on the technique of the artist in establishing and exploring his genre' (Ward, 'The Hand of Ethelberta' p. 38). However, mention must be made of Clarice Short's brave defence of Ethelberta in which she suggests that a re-evaluation of the novel must be based upon 'a careful consideration of what comedy meant to Thomas Hardy, who gave the book the subtitle of "A Comedy in Chapters". She concludes: 'the social triumph will never move us as powerfully as the human failure, particularly when the human downfall seems to be the outcome of conflict with vast, dim, unsympathetic forces beyond human control. Ethelberta's career is the triumph of intellect and will over the forces of impulse within and adverse social circumstances without. The gods are not here. Evidently Hardy considered their absence one of the essentials of comedy'. See Short, 'In Defense of Ethelberta', Nineteenth Century Fiction, 13 (1958), 48-57 (pp. 56-57).
11. HE, p. 158. See Abbreviations.
12. See 'The Export Wife Trade', SR, 14 (1862), p. 276; Dora Greenwell, 'Our Single Women', North British Review, 36 (1862) 62-87; Gregg. See also: A. James Hammerton, 'Feminism and Female Emigration 1864-1886', in Vicinus, pp. 52-71.
13. Boumelha, p. 42.
14. Kristeva, 'Oscillation Between Power and Denial', in New French Feminisms: An Anthology, edited, and with introductions by, Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (1980; Sussex, 1981), pp. 165-67 (p. 166). Mary Childers suggests that 'it is no accident that Ethelberta and Elfride suffer from being reprimanded for their writing and that women in [Hardy's] novels so often represent a frustration at the heart of discourse. The situation of women makes them appropriate representations of a powerlessness in speech which everyone shares. Lacking any social or legal obligation to regard language as a contract or a public representation of themselves, lacking even any code of honor which would make them fetishistically loyal to their own words, women characters can blatantly dramatize the volatile relationship between identity and language' (Childers, p. 333).
15. Boumelha, p. 42.
16. Taylor, p. 66.
17. YTH, p. 209.

CHAPTER SIX

WOMEN IN THE RURAL ENVIRONMENT: UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE (1872)

THE WOODLANDERS (1887)

The critical response to Hardy's second published novel, Under the Greenwood Tree, has centred on the relationship of the text to the pastoral genre.¹ While some critics have detected a subtle note of irony and ambivalence in the novel the tensions are located either in its uneasy closure, or else in the opposition of the old ordered Wessex environment, represented by the Mellstock Choir and its members, to the new external values espoused by Fancy Day and Parson Maybold.²

If viewed as a rustic idyll, Under the Greenwood Tree appears slight, inconsequential and relatively serene. Looking back at the narrative after an interval of forty years, Hardy suggested that 'the realities out of which it was spun were material for another kind of study', but that 'circumstances would have rendered any aim at a deeper, more essential, more transcendent handling inadvisable at the date of writing'.³ His comments appear to relate to his treatment of the dispossession of the Mellstock choir; however, he may also have had in mind the character of Fancy Day, who receives fuller and more considered handling as Grace Melbury in The Woodlanders. Despite its unprepossessing appearance, Under the Greenwood Tree is a complex and contradictory novel and its complexity lies in the portrayal of the character of Fancy Day who provides a focus point for the text's ambivalent attitude towards rural and urban values, class mobility and the 'essential' nature of woman.

Under the Greenwood Tree was submitted to Alexander Macmillan less than five months after the publication of Desperate Remedies, yet already it showed signs of the developing social awareness which was to characterize Hardy's later texts.⁴ The spontaneous primitive urges which stun Cytherea into compliance are, for the most part, replaced in Fancy's case by strong social and

economic considerations. Like A Pair of Blue Eyes and The Hand of Ethelberta, Under the Greenwood Tree examines the implications, in terms of her capacity for self-governance, of the way in which a woman is forced to concentrate and adapt her energies to attracting and securing an appropriate marriage partner. The struggle for economic support which Cytherea, Elfride and Ethelberta were engaged in becomes, in the case of Fancy and Grace, a struggle for social anchorage. The marriages of Cytherea, Ethelberta and, to some extent, Elfride were motivated largely by financial considerations. In the case of Fancy and, as I shall demonstrate later in this chapter, Grace Melbury, marriage is shown to be not merely a meal ticket but, more importantly, the means by which women escape the restrictions of the class they were born into, and establish and consolidate their membership of the class above.

To accept the dominant view of Under the Greenwood Tree as a pastoral idyll, one must accept that the text idealizes, and is nostalgically inclined towards rural values, the rural way of life and the rural environment. Daniel L. Schwarz suggests that 'his use of the pastoral calendar to measure time, the prose epithalamium of the closing chapter, and his refusal to intellectualize the greenwood tree into a literary symbol demonstrate that the narrator is a part of the world that he lyricizes'. Schwarz also suggests that 'the disjointed and disorganized quality of the choir's verbal behaviour mocks rather than imitates usual patterns of discourse', and that the text affirms 'the value of the pastoral world where feelings and consciousness have an existence independent of linguistic patterns'. This affirmation is, in his view, ratified by the use of the nightingale's song to end the novel.⁵

If Under the Greenwood Tree was wholly and exclusively concerned with the misfortunes of the Mellstock choir, then the term 'pastoral' could be applied to the novel without equivocation. However, the displacement of the choir by Fancy Day, in terms of the novel's conception as well as in terms of its plot, renders the relationship of the text to the pastoral genre ambiguous and contradictory. This ambivalence is focussed upon the female characters; not

only Fancy Day but also her stepmother, Mrs Dewy, and the rural women in general. The rural alternative is shown to be far from idyllic in terms of the hardships women had to face: hard work, early marriage and continual childbirth accounted for the premature deaths of women in many country districts. The text implies that as far as women are concerned, to choose the rural alternative is to resign all control over one's existence and place oneself under the determining forces of men and nature.

As has been established, it was the custom in rural areas for a woman to prove her fertility before marriage took place. Sexual submission on the part of a woman rendered her liable to exploitation not only by urban middle-class invaders such as Troy, Fitzpiers and Alec Durberville, but also by her rural male counterparts. Fancy's fear of being jilted on her wedding day, though unfounded in her case, has its roots in the fact that rural women were frequently abandoned after committing themselves emotionally or sexually to a man. The apparently light-hearted speculations of Mr Penny, grim Grandfather James and Fancy's father, concerning certain "would-be weddings when the men didn't come", conceal the histories of women like Mrs Cross and Amelia C (see above p. 101). Throughout the text, the pastoral idyll is undermined by the introduction of elements which are alien to it - namely the "wretched shifts poor maids have been put to" (UGT, p. 196).

Fancy's eventual acceptance of Dick implies an acceptance of a mode of existence which is not only closer to the natural processes but which is, in one sense, totally determined by them, especially within the realm of sexuality and reproduction. At the start of the narrative, Mrs Dewy enquires about the health of Mr Penny's daughter, Mrs Brownjohn. Mr Penny replies

'Well, I suppose I must say pretty fair' But she'll be worse before she's better, 'a b'lieve.'

'Indeed - poor soul! And how many will that make in all, four or five?'

'Five; they've buried three. Yes, five; and she not much more than a maid yet. She do know the multiplication table onmistakable well. However, 'twas to be, and none can gainsay it.' (UGT, p. 39)

Likewise, the history of Thomas Leaf's mother serves to undermine the notion

of the peace and simplicity of life close to the elemental rhythms of Nature:

'Now to my mind that woman is very romantical on the matter o' children?' said the tranter, his eye sweeping his audience.

'Ah, well she mid be,' said Leaf. 'She had twelve regular one after another, and they all, except myself, died very young; either before they was born or just afterwards'

'I never see such a melancholy family as that afor in my life,' said Reuben. 'There's Leaf's mother, poor woman! Every morning I see her eyes mooning out through the panes of glass like a pot-sick winder-flower'. (UGT, pp. 95-96)

Mr Penny's comment, "'twas to be and none can gainsay it", is reiterated by Mrs Penny, the mother of the unfortunate Mrs Brownjohn, in an attempt to soothe Fancy's wedding nerves:

'And I walked into the church as quiet as a lamb, I'm sure,' subjoined Mrs Penny But certainly I was flurried in the inside o' me. Well, thinks I, 'tis to be, and here goes! And do you do the same: say "'Tis to be, and here goes!'".

'Is there such wonderful virtue in "'Tis to be, and here goes!?"' inquired Fancy.

'Wonderful! 'Twill carry a body through it all from wedding to churching, if you only let it out with spirit enough.'

'Very well, then,' said Fancy, blushing. 'Tis to be, and here goes!'

'That's a girl for a husband!' said Mrs Dewey. (UGT, p. 195)

The suggestion is that in accepting the rural way of life, Fancy is submitting herself to an experience which promises to be limiting and exhausting rather than liberating and life-enhancing, as a direct result of the natural laws of sexuality, reproduction and mortality.

To assert that Fancy's decision to marry Dick rather than Maybold, and to re-inscribe herself into the rural way of life is 'right' in terms of the text, is also to ignore the models of Mrs Dewey and Mrs Day, each of whom epitomizes the rural woman's ambition and her desire to escape the wretchedness of rural life by bettering herself socially, preferably through marriage. The concern with appearances which characterizes Mrs Dewey and which, in Robert Draffan's opinion, amounts to mental disturbance in Mrs Day, parallels Fancy's awareness of the homeliness and the limitations of Mellstock.⁶ Fancy Day typifies the growth of sophistication and social ambition which both Hardy and Richard Jefferies detected in the rural women of the day; especially in her desire to marry something higher in the scale than a tenant farmer. The link between

Fancy and Dick's mother is established and reinforced throughout the text, serving as a subtle comment on Fancy's future relationship to her rural environment. Fancy in fact becomes the new Mrs Dewy at the close of the novel, having begun her married life on a note of deception as did Dick's mother; or so we are led to believe.⁷ It is relatively easy to envisage the development of Fancy's dissatisfaction with Dick's plainness and the fact that at times he appears 'silly', and 'not quite good enough' into something akin to Mrs Dewy's discontent with her husband's 'low notions', his 'vulgar' sweating and his coarse companions:

'Such a man as Dewy is! Nobody do know the trouble I have to keep that man barely respectable. And did you ever hear too - just now at supper-time - talking about "taties" with Michael in such a work-folk way. Well, 'tis what I was never brought up to! With our family 'twas never less than "taters", and very often "pertatoes" outright; mother was so particular and nice with us girls: there was no family in the parish that kept themselves up more than we.'
(UGT, p. 80)

This development is suggested by Fancy's reluctance to 'march two and two' round the parish after her wedding, regarding the custom as not respectable, and her insistence that her father and the tranter should refrain from saying 'thee' and 'thou'

... on the plea that those ancient words sounded so very humiliating to persons of newer taste; also that they were never to be seen drawing the back of the hand across the mouth after drinking - a local English custom of extraordinary antiquity, but stated by Fancy to be decidedly dying out among the better classes of society.
(UGT, p. 204)

The implicit sympathy with the rural woman's desire to transcend the limitations of her environment shown by the text is matched by its awareness and vindication of the means which she is forced to employ to achieve her ambition. For Fancy, marriage is the only means by which she can consolidate her social position, and she employs all the traditional female ploys of vanity, artifice and coquetry in order to attract an appropriate man.

Critical reaction to the character of Fancy Day has been mixed. Whilst recognizing the merits and complexity of the text, John F. Danby sees it as essentially Dick's story.⁸ Harold Child affirms the centrality of Fancy Day

but finds little comfort in her as an example of Hardy's concept of woman: 'it saddens me to read [Under the Greenwood Tree] now; because I seem to detect the young author accepting a little too complacently the common view that women are, of course, shifty and deceitful creatures, traps for trusting men, and that it really does not matter much'.⁹ For J. I. M. Stewart, it is precisely this aspect of Fancy's character that makes her 'so much a woman'. Fancy is 'saved' in his opinion, by what he terms 'her vulnerability ... before the masculine principle to which, conversely, she is potentially so dangerous'.¹⁰ I would suggest that Under the Greenwood Tree is distinguished by its equivocal response to Fancy Day and the narrator's unwillingness, in the final analysis, to condemn or applaud her behaviour.

Fancy Day never emerges as a clearly-defined character. However, one thing does emerge from the text and that is that she represents a disturbing new force which affects everything with which it comes into contact. On one level she symbolizes woman as representative of a modern ethic which infiltrates the community and challenges its values, threatening to displace them. She is the epitome of the 'New' rural woman, and neither the male nor the female sex escapes her influence. The choir regard her as the invincible leader of 'united 'ooman'. She inspires the village school-girls with a new independence and boldness which allows them to outsing the male musicians:

Now this had never happened before within the memory of man. The girls, like the rest of the congregation, had always been humble and respectful followers of the gallery; singing at sixes and sevens if without the gallery leaders; never interfering with the ordinances of these practised artists - having no will, union, power, or proclivity except it was given them from the established choir enthroned above them. (UGT, p. 65)

However, on another level, Fancy functions as little more than a sexual catalyst for the men of Mellstock. Her presence awakens their latent sensual desires both troubling and exciting them. Her entry into the church arouses the already bewitched Dick Dewy from his rustic torpor: 'a new atmosphere seemed suddenly to be puffed into the ancient edifice by her movement, which made Dick's body and soul tingle with novel sensations' (UGT, p. 63). She also

arouses the ebullient Farmer Shiner, and stimulates Parson Maybold's dormant instincts - 'the person in question was surprised at his condition, and sedulously endeavoured to reduce himself to his normal state of mind' (UGT, p. 64). Her influence is portrayed as both fresh, new and potentially energizing whilst at the same time it is vaguely disconcerting, disturbing and potentially destructive, especially where the religious man is concerned: 'he was conscious of a cold and sickly thrill throughout him; and all he reasoned was this, that the young creature whose graces had intoxicated him into making the most imprudent resolution of his life was less an angel than a woman' (UGT, p. 186). The notion of woman as the antithesis of an angel: a devil, or at best 'Eve' or some other anarchic anti-Christian force, is articulated by the rustic chorus: "then the music is second to the woman, the other churchwarden is second to Shiner, the pa'son is second to the churchwardens, and God A'mighty is nowhere at all" (UGT, p. 107). In whatever guise she appears, Fancy is the cue for 'a new music' to greet the ears of the Mellstock inhabitants in more ways than one. (UGT, p. 78).

Fancy's 'newness', and the narrator's ambivalent attitude towards it, is apparent in the manner in which she is first presented both to the reader and to the rustic carol singers gathered beneath her window on Christmas Eve:

Remaining steady for an instant, the blind went upward from before it, revealing to thirty concentrated eyes a young girl framed as a picture by the window architrave, and unconsciously illuminating her countenance to a vivid brightness by a candle she held in her left hand, close to her face, her right hand being extended to the side of the window. She was wrapped in a white robe of some kind, whilst down her shoulders fell a twining profusion of marvellously rich hair, in a wild disorder which proclaimed it to be only during the invisible hours of the night that such a condition was discoverable. Her bright eyes were looking into the grey world outside with an uncertain expression, oscillating between courage and shyness, which, as she recognized the semicircular group of dark forms gathered before her, transformed itself into pleasant resolution. (UGT, p. 55)¹¹

It is perhaps the mixture of courage and shyness exhibited by Fancy which characterizes her as one of the new breed of women torn between extrovert rebellion and humble conformity; a dilemma which Hardy was to explore in greater

depth in the character of Sue Bridehead. Apart from her 'newness', little else concerning Fancy emerges with any real clarity. The narrative voice offers her to the reader in a variety of stereotyped poses none of which proves entirely satisfactory. The choir serenade her with hymn number seventy-eight which seeks to remind mankind of Adam's fall. Their choice of hymn suggests that Fancy is to be seen as the archetypal 'Eve' figure. This suggestion is reinforced by Fancy's position 'framed as a picture by the window' reflecting the image of the woman at the window beckoning to her victim below so prevalent in early Victorian paintings.¹² At the same time, her countenance is illuminated to an almost visionary brightness by the candle she carries. She is wearing white - a colour representative of purity and innocence - while her loosened hair implies maidenhood; a suggestion which is undermined by its wild disorder, and her own state of semi-undress, which carries with it a sense of overt sexuality.

Fancy's newness, and her chameleon-like qualities, disconcert Dick who is also unsure as to how to apprehend or even address her: '"perhaps the new young wom - sch - Miss Fancy Day will sing in church with us this morning," he said' (UGT, p. 61). Later he laments Fancy's ability to transform herself into an entirely different sort of woman at will:

She disappeared temporarily from the flagging party of dancers, and then came downstairs wrapped up and looking altogether a different person from whom she had been hitherto, in fact (to Dick's sadness and disappointment), a woman somewhat reserved and of a phlegmatic temperament - nothing left in her of the romping girl that she had seemed but a short quarter-hour before, who had not minded the weight of Dick's hand upon her waist, nor shirked the purlieus of the mistletoe. (UGT, p. 80)

Fancy modifies herself from a 'touchable, squeezable - even kissable' maid into someone Dick dare not approach (UGT, p. 81). It is significant that Dick's image of Fancy alternates between the two stereotypes of the coquette and the divinity.

Parson Maybold also experiences some difficulty in comprehending Fancy. He attempts to compensate for this by fixing her into the roles of 'temptress',

and 'angel'. Maybold can in fact be seen as an early, albeit undeveloped, prototype of Henry Knight. Dismayed by the renascent sexual feelings Fancy's presence evokes within him, Maybold elevates her in his own imagination from her identity as mortal, fallible woman to idealised, visionary angel.

Farmer Shiner's response to Fancy is unashamedly sexual, anticipating that of Festus Derriman to Anne Garland in The Trumpet Major. His attempts to appropriate her are correspondingly boorish, assertive and verging on the violent. He shows 'too much assurance' in asking her to dance with him at the Dewy's Christmas party and, passing her in his brand new gig as she sits with Dick in his cart, Shiner 'stared with bold admiration in her face' (UGT, p. 136).

The narrator frequently emphasizes Fancy's 'flexibility', and it is as if she moulds herself to fit the mental image of woman held by each of her male suitors. There is a suggestion that Fancy has some control over how she is seen, unlike Grace Melbury and, as I shall demonstrate in Chapter Seven below, Bathsheba, Paula and Viviette, each of whom appears totally powerless to affect the way in which she is regarded by her male suitors.

In the case of Dick, Shiner and Maybold, mental appropriation of the object of their desire - the woman Fancy Day - is swiftly followed by an attempt at physical possession. It is possible to detect a certain complicity between the narrator and the male characters, each of whom is engaged in an attempt to pin Fancy down. The narrator frequently offers her to her admirers, and to the reader also, as an object to be appropriated. At the Dewy's Christmas party she is tendered as a 'comely, slender, prettily-dressed prize' who falls to Dick, a 'flower among vegetables' waiting to be picked (UGT p. 71). Later she trips across his path with 'an easy bend of neck and graceful set of head; full and wavy bundles of dark-brown hair; light fall of little feet; pretty devices on the skirt of the dress; clear deep eyes; in short, a bunch of sweets' (UGT, p. 131). Dick is never slow to avail himself of the opportunity, as in the episode where he passes her on the road and offers her a lift. The reader is immediately struck with a sense of Fancy's unwillingness

and her powerlessness in the situation:

As Fancy's power to will anything seemed to have departed in some mysterious manner at that moment, Dick settled the matter by getting out and assisting her into the vehicle without another word.... Dick, being engaged with the reins, thought less of this awkwardness than did Fancy, who had nothing to do but to feel his presence, and to be more and more conscious of the fact that by accepting a seat beside him in this way she succumbed to the tone of his note. Smart jogged along, and Dick jogged, and the helpless Fancy necessarily jogged too; and she felt that she was in a measure captured and made a prisoner. (UGT, p. 132)

It is significant that as soon as Fancy has committed herself to Dick, he immediately begins the process of transforming her from free young maid into engaged young woman. The dress and hat which attracted him are now considered 'rather too coquettish and flighty'. Having won her, Dick is concerned to annex and appropriate her sexuality for his own use: "well, I think the bonnet is nicest, more quiet and matronly", he declares (UGT, p. 149). Fancy's decision to wear the hat, in spite of his disapproval, indicates the extent to which she is still intent on evading him. Like Henry Knight, Dick resents Fancy's refusal to deliver herself up to him entirely. As she won't conform to his image of her as a simple girl, he dismisses her as a flirt:

... if not a flirt, a woman who had had no end of admirers; a girl most certainly too anxious about her frocks; a girl, whose feelings, though warm, were not deep; a girl who cared a great deal too much how she appeared in the eyes of other men. (UGT, p. 155)

Once again the narrator appears to be in collusion with Dick, commenting that 'it is just possible that a few more blue dresses on the Longpuddle young men's account would have clarified Dick's brain entirely, and made him once more a free man' (UGT, p. 156).

The impulse to assume ownership over Fancy is also common to both Shiner and Maybold. Shiner takes her down to the stream, makes a presumptuous proposal of marriage and attempts to take her hand (UGT, p. 145). Maybold succumbs to the feelings Fancy 'inspires' within him, proposes gallantly but humbly, and 'advanced quickly, and put his arm out to embrace her'. Disconcerted by her tearful response, it was 'with visible difficulty that he

restrained himself from approaching her' (UGT, p. 184). Like so many of Hardy's women, Fancy is likened to a bird which each of the male characters attempts to cage. This image recurs throughout the narrative: Maybold drives a nail into the wall upon which to hang her caged canary, and Shiner takes her to catch bullfinches - commonly kept as caged birds. The stillness following Fancy's capitulation to Dick is broken by 'some small bird that was being killed by an owl in the adjoining wood, whose cry passed into the silence without mingling with it' (UGT, p. 166).

However, Dick's appropriation of Fancy is not entirely successful. She manages to escape his physical and sexual cage at the last moment and once again bird imagery is used to draw attention to this:

'Fancy,' he said, 'why we are so happy is because there is such full confidence between us.... We'll have no secrets from each other, darling, will we ever? - no secret at all'.

'None from today,' said Fancy. 'Hark! what's that?' From a neighbouring thicket was suddenly heard to issue in a loud, musical, and liquid voice -

'Tippiwit! swe-e-t! ki-ki-ki-! Come hither, come hither, come hither!

'O, 'tis the nightingale,' murmured she, and thought of a secret she would never tell. (UGT, p. 208)

Fancy's secret, that even while she was engaged to Dick she encouraged and accepted a proposal of marriage from another man, is symptomatic of her unwillingness to place herself totally under Dick's control. The nightingale with its invitation to 'come hither' suggests that at least some part of Fancy's personality is still as free as a bird.

The fact that Fancy seems to be in control of her existence to some extent, renders her more open to censure for her apparently cavalier treatment of both Maybold and Dick, than Elfride in her dealings with Stephen and Knight. Penny Boumelha regards Fancy as conforming 'almost exactly to the unfavourable literary stereotype of female character in her vanity, fickleness, whimsical inconsequentiality, and coquetry. She lacks what this image would have her lack: personal sexual identity (as opposed to generalised gender identity), genuine feeling, independence of thought, consideration in the exercise of her

will'.¹³ Other critics have commented, somewhat unfavourably, upon the portrayal of Fancy Day. Richard Carpenter, for example, sees her as an 'ingénue' described in terms 'appropriate to a doll or a kitten, idealized in appearance but a trifle skittish in personality'.¹⁴ For Penelope Vigar, the name 'Fancy', implies 'a butterfly brittleness; we see her as a fluttering combination of flowers, curls and feathers, indistinct and indefinite'.¹⁵ The choice of the name 'Fancy' is, I believe, highly significant. The noun 'fancy' is defined as 'delusion', 'unfounded belief', 'mental image'. The word itself is a contraction of 'fantasy', and implies an individual taste or inclination (OED). Fancy herself represents a specific 'mental image' of woman in accordance with the sexual or emotional proclivities of each of the male characters. This idea is further emphasized by the narrator's refusal or inability to define her adequately, and thus she herself and her behaviour are open to a number of contradictory interpretations.

At the same time, this early text displays some of the political awareness that was to characterize Hardy's later, more complex texts. Like Cytherea, Fancy has no real control over her own destiny, or even her identity. Both are defined for her by the conditions of her existence. She may indeed choose whom she will marry, but marry she must because life as a single woman offers neither certainty nor satisfaction: 'she was thinking ... how weary she was of living alone; how unbearable it would be to return to Yalbury under the rule of her strange-tempered step-mother; that it was far better to be married to anybody than to do that' (UGT, p. 180). As far as Fancy's 'fickleness' is concerned, it is implied in the text that her physical and emotional feelings are constantly held in check by more practical considerations, as is apparent during her conversation with Dick on the journey from Budmouth to Melstock. Fancy's response to Dick's love-making is cool and restrained, and Dick reacts angrily:

'Why, you make any one think that loving is a thing that can be done and undone, and put on and off at a mere whim.'

'No, no, I don't,' she said gently; 'but there are things which tell me I ought not to give way to much thinking about you, even if - '

'But you want to don't you? Yes, say you do; it is best to be truthful. Whatever they may say about a woman's right to conceal where her love lies, and pretend it doesn't exist, and things like that, it is not best; I do know it, Fancy. And an honest woman in that, as well as in all her daily concerns, shines most brightly, and is thought most of in the long-run.'

'Well, then, perhaps, Dick, I do love you a little,' she whispered tenderly; 'but I wish you wouldn't say any more now.'
(UGT, p. 134)

In her letter to Maybold, Fancy declares that 'it is my nature - perhaps all women's - to love refinement of mind and manners; but even more than this, to be ever fascinated with the idea of surroundings more elegant and pleasing than those which have been customary' (UGT, p. 188). Whereas men can improve their social and economic position through the more legitimate channels of hard work and exploiting their business acumen, women are driven to more devious strategies. Their position in society - whether urban or rural - and their lack of social and economic power is such that it precludes the exercise of honesty and emotional preference. Love and marriage must be reduced to the status of a commercial enterprise in which the woman is constantly on the alert for better financial returns for her sexual favours: "this is how a maid is", Dick's father informs him, "she'll swear she's dying for thee, and she will die for thee; but she'll fling a look over t'other shoulder at another young feller, though never leave off dying for thee just the same" (UGT, p. 126). The narrator implies that Fancy is honestly in love with Dick and, as honesty triumphs over her coquettishness as far as her physiognomy is concerned - or so we are told - it is Dick whom she finally marries, but not before she has been offered the chance of escaping the restrictions of rural life on the arm of Parson Maybold. In accepting Maybold's offer she tells him, in an agitated whisper: "there are things; - but the temptation is, O, too strong and I can't resist it" (UGT, p. 184). At this point it is the vicar who is presented in the guise of the tempter rather than the woman.¹⁶ Fancy's constant evasion of the circumscribing arms of Dick, Shiner and Maybold is a

pragmatic response to her own circumstances. She seeks to retain her emotional and sexual liberty for as long as possible whilst still retaining control over those who threaten it. Because she is concerned to barter herself in exchange for financial and social advantages she estimates her value, in personal terms, according to her ability to inspire desire in men. Hence her pleasure at Dick's and Shiner's bold admiration of her face and figure, and her triumphant perception of Maybold's interest in her. As she informs her fiancé, praise is "meat and drink to a woman", and later tells Maybold "praise is life to me". These two statements are true in the actual, as well as the metaphorical, sense.

On one level, the text suggests that vanity and obsession with dress are intrinsically feminine characteristics: "'tis their nature," said grandfather William. "Remember the words of the prophet Jeremiah: 'Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire?'" (UGT, p. 202). Fancy too is willing to admit that the need to be admired is inherent in her biological make-up:

'Well then, Dick,' she said, with good-humoured frankness, 'I'll own it. I shouldn't like a stranger to see me dressed badly even though I am in love. 'Tis our nature, I suppose.'
 'You perfect woman!'
 'Yes; if you lay the stress on "woman",' she murmured, looking at a group of hollyhocks in flowers, round which a crowd of butterflies had gathered like female idlers round a bonnet-shop. (UGT, p. 148)

The simile suggests that women are drawn to bonnet shops as irresistibly and instinctively as butterflies are drawn to flowers. At the same time, Fancy's caveat suggests that this feminine trait renders women less than perfect. However, on another level, the text demonstrates that the term 'Woman' as it is translated by a nineteenth-century rural and urban society, is predominantly a social rather than a purely biological construct. Without nectar butterflies perish. Without the means with which to attract the admiration of those who hold the social and economic privileges, women may likewise perish, but through physical rather than through emotional or sexual deprivation, as both John Stuart Mill and Cicely Hamilton were concerned to establish.

Under the Greenwood Tree articulates a contradictory attitude to woman's

use of sexual and emotional manipulation. Although Fancy has little or no control over her own ultimate destiny, her hold over the men of Mellstock is tangible and apparently inescapable. It is Fancy and women like her who have the power to change men's lives: lead them astray until they are lost. Just as Clerk Crickett's wife in Desperate Remedies demonstrated in her struggle to have a living husband that "Fate's nothing beside a woman's schemen!", so Fancy's step-mother proves "the power of maiden faces in setting your courses". Dick's belief in the power of 'doom' to determine whether a man is to marry or not is strongly contradicted by Geoffrey Day: "there's that wife o' mine. It was her doom to be nobody's wife at all in the wide universe. But she made up her mind that she would, and did it twice over. Doom? Doom is nothing beside an elderly woman - quite a chiel in her hands!" (UGT, p. 116). The power of a woman's capacity for sexual manipulation is a force to be reckoned with even when the intended victim is a young, tenor-voiced parson: "my belief is she'll wind en round her finger, and twist the pore young feller about like the figure of 8 - that she will, my sonnies" (UGT, p. 60). Fancy herself lays great store by her ability to "manage any vicar's views about me if he's under forty" (UGT, p. 121). The power of a woman is, according to her victims, second to none not even 'God A'mighty'.

However, as the history of Elfride Swancourt was soon to demonstrate, woman's power is ultimately controlled by the society upon which she is dependent. Sexual manipulation is used by women as a tactic for survival in a society which denies them any real 'power' in social and economic terms. Like Ethelberta, Fancy may be free to play her marriage card skilfully, but she is still bound by the necessity to conduct her life in such a manner. Woman's power is neither divine nor supernatural, it is the result of contrivance and common sense. Fancy entrances Dick not through witchcraft, but through the age old weapon of sexual enticement and resistance as practised by Elfride on Stephen Smith:

The balance between the evidence that she did love him and that she did not was so nicely struck that his opinion had no stability.

She had let him put his hand upon hers; she had allowed her gaze to drop plumb into the depths of his - his into hers - three or four times; her manner had been very free with regard to the basin and towel, she had appeared vexed at the mention of Shiner. On the other hand, she had driven him about the house like a quiet dog or cat, said that Shiner cared for her, and seemed anxious that Mr Maybold should do the same. (UGT, p. 123)

Fancy's management of her father, likewise, owes its success to Elizabeth Endorfield's sound practical advice rather than to any spell or potion she might concoct. Liz informs her "the charm is worked by common sense, and the spell can only be broke by your acting stupidly" (UGT, p. 170).

Women, in Hardy's lesser texts, live vicariously through the skilfull manipulation of those who are physically, socially and economically stronger than they and, although they are free to manipulate whoever they please in whatever manner they choose, they are not free to live life on their own terms or to develop their own identity away from standardizing social and economic forces. At the same time, the notion that woman is somehow more in tune with primitive, amoral natural forces, which function as a more positive alternative to the artificial social system designed by men, is undermined in Under the Greenwood Tree by the text's implicit sympathy with the hardships endured by rural women in general. It is also called into question by the narrator's unwillingness to condone wholeheartedly Fancy's marriage to her rural suitor.

The Woodlanders is essentially a more sophisticated and candid reassessment of the history of a young educated rural woman than Under the Greenwood Tree which might well be regarded as a preliminary sketch for the later, more deeply considered study.¹⁷ In addition, the text's relationship to the pastoral genre is even more ambiguous and complex than was the case with Under the Greenwood Tree in that the conventional dichotomy between the cultured urban and the naturally rural is less acutely realized in the later novel. Most critics agree that despite the fact that The Woodlanders utilizes the traditional pastoral convention, there are elements within the text that challenge and evade this definition.¹⁸ However, as in Under the Greenwood Tree, it is the text's concern with major social issues pertaining to the position of women which most

conclusively undermines the potential victory of the pastoral mode.

Grace, like her prototype Fancy Day, is 'in mid-air between two storeys of society': the urban middle-class, as represented by Edred Fitzpiers and Felice Charmond; and the rural lower-classes, as represented by Giles Winterbourne, Marty South and Suke Damson. Although she is financially secure, she is socially alienated and seeks to ally herself with what she sees as the particular value system embodied in the life-styles of these groups of people. In the end, the pastoral dichotomy is shown to exist solely in Grace's mind, rather than in the fabric of the novel itself, and her neat compartmentalization of social and ethical values is exposed as factitious, reductive and inaccurate.

Felice Charmond has been dismissed as a stilted dummy 'cut out with scissors from a vulgar fashion plate', a 'wild, irrational, neck-or-nothing' kind of woman.¹⁹ Indeed, she must rank as one of the most artificial and contrived female characters in the Hardy oeuvre. Significantly enough, however, we know more of Felice's inner thoughts and motivations than we do of Grace's, and that, I believe, is because the narrator deliberately attempts to portray her as a known entity: an easily definable and predictable cliché. She has a heart 'capable of quick extempore warmth - a heart which could indeed be passionately and imprudently warm on certain occasions'.²⁰ Her one aim and function in life is to entrap men; a fact which is rather crudely symbolized by the man-traps which adorn the walls of her gallery. Indeed, should the allusion be lost, Felice draws the reader's attention to them (TW, p. 89). She is 'a woman of perversities', she likes 'mystery in her life, in her love, in her history' (TW, p. 224). Regarding her business as 'love' alone, she is constitutionally unfit for the more 'masculine' tasks of managing an estate and guarding the well-being of her tenants. She possesses that 'oblique-mannered softness', characteristic of 'women who lingeringly smile their meanings to men rather than speak them, who inveigle rather than prompt, and take advantage of currents rather than steer' (TW, p. 90). The choice of imagery is far from fortuitous. As in Desperate Remedies, the boating image is employed to suggest

a passive, purely instinctual response to life and love. Felice functions only in the presence of men and concerns herself solely with the business of attracting a lover to fill the empty boredom of her days. Without Fitzpiers 'her whole being seemed to dissolve in a sad powerlessness to do anything' (TW, p. 228). She was, as Giles informs us in an oblique reference to her name, 'a bit of a charmer A body who has smiled where she has not loved, and loved where she has not married' (TW, p. 257). On the surface, Felice exhibits all the characteristics of the conventional stereotype of woman as instinctive and elemental; especially where her passion for Fitzpiers is concerned:

Mrs Charmond's mobile spirit was subject to these fierce periods of high tide and storm. She had never so clearly perceived till now that her soul was being slowly invaded by a delirium which had brought about all this; that she was losing judgement and dignity under it, becoming an animated impulse only, a passion incarnate. A fascination had led her on; it was as if she had been seized by a hand of velvet; and this was where she found herself - overshadowed with sudden night, as if a tornado had passed. (TW, p. 262)

In one sense, Felice Charmond articulates the notion of the anarchic incompatibility of female sexuality with 'the terrible insinuations of society' (TW, p. 227). However, there is no suggestion that her response to life is natural. Felice is, in fact, associated with artifice and artificiality, as is clear during her first encounter with Fitzpiers:

He was shown into a room at the top of the staircase, cosily and femininely draped, where by the light of the shaded lamp he saw a woman of elegant figure reclining upon a couch in such a position as not to disturb a pile of magnificent hair on the crown of her head. A deep purple dressing-gown formed an admirable foil to the peculiarly rich brown of her hair-plaits; her left arm, which was naked nearly up to the shoulder, was thrown upwards, and between the fingers of her right hand she held a cigarette, while she idly breathed from her delicately curled lips a thin stream of smoke towards the ceiling. (TW, pp. 217-18)

Everything about Felice appears contrived. Her hair is, as we know, false. She is illuminated by an artificial light, even though it is broad day-light outside, and she has the distinct air of having struck a pose. In addition, she smokes.²¹ Felice represents everything that is 'cultured', not only in the social sense, but also in the sense of that which is manufactured or

synthetic. This association of Felice with artificiality serves two purposes. Firstly it serves to point up the text's criticism of the urban bourgeois value system as false and unnatural, and secondly it exposes the image of womanhood she projects as artificially constructed.

The relationship between Felice and Grace is both interesting and revealing. To begin with, Felice represents the peak of Grace's aspirations. The younger woman envies the older woman's cultured surroundings, her wealth and her sexual power. During their first encounter, and at the height of Grace's idealism, her face and Felice's are reflected in the same mirror. The narrator implies that Grace's bourgeois aspirations and her desire to reflect Felice are misguided, as Grace in her innocence and honesty is, and always will be, superior to her more synthetic rival (TW, p. 92). The looking-glass image occurs again when the two women meet in Hintock Wood. By this time, Grace is thoroughly disillusioned with Felice and all she represents. Instead of seeking to imitate her, Grace finds that she and her rival have nothing in common: 'Grace stood like a wild animal on first confronting a mirror or other puzzling product of civilization' (TW, p. 266).

The narrator is concerned to identify Felice as a conventional femme fatale, examine her motives, and then dismiss her. His distaste for what he has made her represent is unconcealed. He reveals her to the reader when the morning light shows her to distinct disadvantage as a 'typical femme de trente ans', with 'touches of powder on her handsome face' (TW, pp. 259, 261). However, this attempt to fix her as a particular type in order that she might act as an obvious foil to the character of Grace Melbury is undermined by the political awareness of the situation of women which informs even the characterization of Felice. When Fitzpiers asks her why she came to a place like Hintock, which she so obviously detests, she replies: "a man brought me. Women are always carried about like corks upon the waves of masculine desires" (TW, pp. 219-20). Her reply is ambiguous, for in one sense she is merely reiterating the narrator's implication that women passively acquiesce to men's sexual demands

because they are biologically programmed to do so. In another sense however, she is suggesting that because women are kept in economic and social bondage to men they are forced to acquiesce in men's demands against their will.

In the same way, the man-traps which adorn Felice's walls are symbols of woman's sexual power which can be read against themselves. The man-trap, though 'a relic of a barbarous time' is, in metaphoric terms, a weapon of modern sexual warfare. The cultivated woman's tactic of sexual enticement as practised by Felice Charmond makes the honest, simple emotional impulses of women like Suke Damson, Marty South and Grace as ineffectual and insignificant as 'a bow and arrows' (TW, p. 244). Although the man-trap is symbolic of the way in which women use their sexuality in order to capture an economic provider, its function in The Woodlanders is to expose the fact that it is the woman who is, in reality, as trapped as the man, just as, in the closing pages of the novel, it is Grace who is caught in the man-trap set by Tim Tangs to catch his rival Fitzpiers.²² This incident symbolizes the fact that after the reconciliation between husband and wife it will be Grace who will be trapped in a marriage to an unfaithful man as a result of the unjust divorce laws of the time.

Faced with failure of her professional relationship with Felice Charmond, Grace turns to marriage as her only means of anchoring herself within the upper middle classes and thus consolidating her identity for, as her father informs her, "a woman takes her colour from the man she's walking with" (TW, p. 117). By marrying Fitzpiers, Grace fulfils the rural girl's ambition to escape from the confines and limitations of her own class, to embrace the life of refinement offered to her by the class above: 'it was an opportunity denied very frequently to young women in her position, nowadays not a few; those in whom parental discovery of the value of education has implanted tastes which parental circles fail to gratify' (TW, p. 202). As in The Hand of Ethelberta, the narrator is anxious that the heroine's motives for marrying without love should not be seen as entirely pecuniary. However, Grace's desire for

intellectual stimulation and cultured surroundings is more convincing than Ethelberta's somewhat implausible need for temporary economic support in order to put her own talents to their best use. The fact that Grace is denied the life of refinement and 'subtle psychological intercourse' she had grown to expect after her marriage to Fitzpiers, and receives only treachery, indicates the extent to which her view of upper middle-class existence is grounded more in fantasy than in fact. As her bourgeois pretensions disintegrate, she turns back to her rural roots in an effort to achieve the social anchorage she so desperately craves. Again, her idealism is exposed, this time through her connections with Giles, Suke and Marty, who in reality exemplify the fragility of human life and the hardships endured by those who live in harmony with nature.

Grace is described as an 'impressionable creature, who combined modern nerves with primitive feelings' (TW, p. 325). Once married to Fitzpiers Grace represses her 'primitive feelings' in deference to her position as the wife of a professional man. It is only when faced with Fitzpiers's treachery that she allows her senses to turn from what he represents and to 'lapse back to nature unadorned'. In becoming the 'crude country girl of her latent early instincts', Grace seeks refuge, and an outlet for her frustrations, in nature and in Giles Winterbourne, in whom her early interest

... had become revitalized into growth by her widening perceptions of what was great and little in life. His homeliness no longer offended her acquired tastes; his comparative want of so-called culture did not now jar on her intellect; his country dress even pleased her eye; his exterior roughness fascinated her. Having discovered by marriage how much that was humanly not great could co-exist with attainments of an exceptional order, there was a revulsion in her sentiments from all that she had formerly clung to in this kind. Honesty, goodness, manliness, tenderness, devotion, for her only existed in their purity now in the breasts of unvarnished men; and here was one who had manifested such towards her from his youth up. (TW, p. 249)

However, her conception of Giles as the 'fruit god' or 'wood god' - the natural man - is exposed as idealistic and misguided. While she abandons herself to a passionate desire for primitive life and rejects social ordinances, she is confronted by a man whose emotional and sexual reticence and suicidal discretion

is totally alien to her own newly-formed conception of life. By investing Giles with modern sensibilities which overrule his sexual or 'manly' impulses, the text rejects him as the conventional pastoral alternative while at the same time exposing Grace's naïvety and idealism for what it is. Giles's apparent rejection of her effectively alienates her from the rural community, just as her trust in the regenerative powers of nature is destroyed by the storm which is directly responsible for Giles's death. As before, Grace's disaffiliation from a proposed mode of existence is effected in Hintock Wood and, as in the scene with Felice Charmond, she is forced to confront her own idealized self-image:

She had never before been so struck with the devilry of a gusty night in a wood, because she had never been so entirely alone in spirit as she was now. She seemed almost to be apart from herself - a vacuous duplicate only. The recent self of physical animation and clear intentions was not there. (TW, p. 335)

If Grace's desire to live in communion with nature as Giles's wife or mistress is ironized by his premature death at the hand of nature, her attempt to imitate the impulsive instinctive sexual behaviour of Suke Damson, and her wish to 'work in the woods like Marty South', is also dismissed as naïve and misinformed by the text's sympathetic exposition of the hardships endured by rural women.

Because of the custom of pre-marital sexual intercourse in rural areas, the lower-class woman was a prime target for exploitation by unscrupulous men from a culture which valued virginity high above fertility.²³ Fitzpiers, like Mountclere and Alec d'Urberville, is a species of sexual carpet-bagger who takes advantage of the helplessness and sexual vulnerability of rural working-class women. Initially, Grace's lowly origins allow Fitzpiers to regard her as an object of sexual interest to be used, abused and discarded. However, her refinement and her obvious affinity with the middle-class value structure causes him to alter radically his attitude towards her. He no longer entertains her as 'a light flirtation', instead, she becomes 'the light of [his] life':

His first lax notion (acquired from the mere sight of her without converse) - that of a vulgar intimacy with a timber-merchant's pretty daughter, grated painfully upon him now that he had found what Grace intrinsically was. Personal intercourse with such as she could take no lower form than seemly communion, mutual explorations of the world of fancy' (TW, p. 165)

Fitzpiers's image of Grace as a physical and spiritual ideal is complicated by the Midsummer's Eve incident during which he experiences intense sexual desire for her which can only be satisfied through the legitimate channels of matrimony. By employing the tactic of sexual resistance, Grace forces Fitzpiers to conduct his courtship of her in accordance with the bourgeois convention which involves chastity, on the woman's part at least, until after marriage. The effectiveness of this tactic is, however, dependent upon the woman's social and financial standing. Grace's fortune is, of course, an added incentive to Fitzpiers who acquiesces in her implicit demands. He proposes marriage, rather than an illicit sexual liaison, and uses conventional religious terminology to do so (TW, p. 172).

However, although Grace provides Fitzpiers with spiritual inspiration and the prospect of a steady income, he must seek sexual gratification elsewhere. He finds it with Suke Damson, 'a bouncing young woman with her skirts tucked up and her hair wild' (TW, p. 143). Yet there is little suggestion that Suke's spontaneous acquiescence in Fitzpiers's seduction of her is any more positive than Grace's self-restraint. The love-making between Suke and Fitzpiers is accompanied by 'the coarse whirr of the eternal night-hawk [which] burst sarcastically from the top of a tree' (TW, p. 180). In indulging her instinct for sexual enjoyment, Suke not only places herself under the control of nature, but also of man, forfeiting even the limited amount of power that Grace enjoys. In allaying Grace's fears, Fitzpiers declares that her only rival is 'vegetable nature'.²⁴ His comment implies that both Suke Damson and Felice Charmond, with their subsumption of themselves in instinct and sexual gratification, have lost their individuality to become merely a 'portion of one organism called sex' (Td'U, p. 187).

The narrator's relationship to the character of Marty South is both complex and contradictory. Penny Boumelha has argued that Marty's irrelevance to the process of sexual selection isolates her from the central concerns of the novel, and indeed Marty's sexlessness renders her of little value to a community

where sexual attractiveness is valued highly. Poor and plain, Marty has the weakest hand of all in the courtship game; her only trump card being her knowledge concerning the origin of Mrs Charmond's magnificent pile of hair. Marty is out of the game from the very beginning, all she can hope to do is expose the fact that Mrs Charmond is cheating.

Despite Marty's sexual impotence, her position parallels that of Grace, Felice and Suke, each of whom is forced to barter her body for the means of existence. Percombe's seduction of Marty with the two gold sovereigns is analogous to Fitzpiers's temptation of Grace with the promise of anchorage in the middle class.²⁵ Grace, Suke and Marty are forced into ritual prostitution in order to obtain what honest labour cannot obtain for them. As Barber Percombe reminds the reluctant Marty, a gold sovereign is as much as she could earn in a week and a half spar-making, "and its yours for just letting me snip off what you've got too much of" (TW, p. 42).²⁶ The sale of Marty's hair sets the scene for the textual analysis of the sexual bargaining power of Grace, Suke and Felice. The whole episode is couched in distinctly sexual language:

On this one bright gift of Time to the particular victim of his now before us the newcomer's eyes were fixed; meanwhile the fingers of his right hand mechanically played over something sticking up from his waistcoat pocket - the bows of a pair of scissors, whose polish made them feebly responsive to the light from within the house. In her present beholder's mind the scene formed by the girlish spar-maker composed itself into an impression-picture of extremest type, wherein the girl's hair alone, as the focus of observation, was depicted with intensity and distinctness, while her face, shoulders, hands, and figure in general were a blurred mass of unimportant detail lost in haze and obscurity. (TW, p. 41)

The description of Barber Percombe's single-minded obsession with the girl's hair, to the exclusion of her personhood, anticipates the failure of Melbury and Fitzpiers to regard Grace as anything other than an object to be bought and sold, Fitzpiers's callous sexual exploitation of Suke, and Giles's inability to register Marty's love for him. At the same time, this sympathetic examination of the hardships endured by women like Marty who 'work in the woods' for their living points up the absurdity of Grace's conception of rural life.

Like her prototype Fancy Day, Grace never emerges as a fully rounded and sharply delineated character. The narrator deliberately resists any attempt to codify or define Grace as he did with Felice Charmond and to some extent Suke Damson. To begin with we are told that

It would have been difficult to describe Grace Melbury with precision, either then or at any time. Nay, from the highest point of view, to precisely describe a human being, the focus of a universe, how impossible! But apart from transcendentalism, there never probably lived a person who was in herself more completely a reductio ad absurdum of attempts to appraise a woman, even externally, by items of face and figure.

Speaking generally it may be said that she was sometimes beautiful, at other times not beautiful, according to the state of her health and spirits. (TW, p. 69)

This apparent reticence on the part of the narrator serves two functions. Firstly, it underlines the linguistic inadequacy experienced by an author attempting to create a credible female character without reference to the available fictional stereotypes. Grace remains throughout the text 'a shape in the gloom'.²⁷ Secondly, it is significant that what characterizes Grace most is her lack of assertiveness: her basic inability to express her own desires and emotional responses:

Her look expressed a tendency to wait for other's thoughts before uttering her own; possibly to wait for others' deeds before her own doings. In her small, delicate mouth, which had hardly settled down to its matured curves, there was a gentleness that might hinder sufficient self-assertion for her own good. (TW, p. 69)

The narrator's refusal to define Grace adequately emphasizes the attempts of the male characters to reduce her to the status of a truism. She is an empty, passive receptacle, pliant, malleable and willing to accommodate herself to the demands of those closest to her.

Grace is everything to her father except a human being. She is a gift he is unwilling to waste, a 'sacrifice' to atone for his own sin, a 'chattel' to be sold to the highest bidder, and later an 'article' to be admired, and a 'prize' to be won. Melbury's attitude to his daughter epitomizes the notion of woman as commodity: a tangible indicator of her owner's wealth and a visible sign of his social status, Melbury is committed to the socially defined notion

of womanhood. He takes what he regards as 'as promising a piece of maidenhood as ever lived - fit to ornament a palace wi'', and with a little trouble and the help of 'near a hundred a year', moulds his daughter to fit it (TW, p. 111). His aim, as he informs her, is to 'show an example to the neighbourhood of what a woman can be' (TW, p. 117). Melbury's use of the term 'woman' here refers not to his daughter's gender, but to an artificial construct: a passive, pliant, beautiful, sexually enticing but sexless automaton, expensive, but simple to produce given the right tools, and promising raw material. Melbury intends to use Grace as means towards the vicarious enjoyment of educational and social advantages which were denied him in his youth. Grace is therefore both a part of his family and a part of his estate. His tyranny over her is absolute in emotional as well as physical terms. He refuses to recognize the existence of any faculty within her which might be in opposition to his will. As a result there is no filial relationship as such between Grace and her father. The reader's attention is drawn to this fact by the emphasis placed upon Grace's inability to communicate her inner feelings and fears to him especially with regard to the man he has chosen to be her husband, 'she could not explain the subtleties of her feeling as clearly as he could state his opinion, even though she had skill in speech, and her father had none' (TW, pp. 188-89). This aspect of her identity is the most difficult to verbalize because it has been denied existence by her father who has, from the very beginning, defined what could and could not be articulated. In this respect, Grace's plight mirrors that of Ethelberta and Elfride except that Grace is denied the advantage of a literary outlet for her feelings.

Melbury's appropriation of Grace is matched by Fitzpiers's, whose patriarchal attitudes are thinly disguised as German metaphysics. Fitzpiers, we learn, 'preferred the ideal world to the real' (TW, p. 144). In practical terms, this means that he has a tendency to idealize reality, especially within the realm of sexual relationships. He is engaged upon a constant quest for a woman who will correspond to his mental image of what a woman should be, as

he informs Giles "I am in love with something in my own head, and no thing-in-itself outside it at all" (TW, p. 147). Like Melbury, Fitzpiers is intent on moulding Grace to fit his ideal, 'dominating any rebellious impulse, and shaping her will into passive concurrence with all his desires' (TW, p. 200).

The text brilliantly exposes the sense of masculine complicity between Fitzpiers and Melbury who are united in their attempts to dominate and control Grace. Melbury hands his daughter over to her future husband with as little regard for her feelings in the matter as if she had indeed been one of his horses.²⁸ Fitzpiers's wish that she had not been 'so cheap' suggests the true nature of the transaction. He is attracted to her as much by her father's wealth as by sexual considerations. Melbury exchanges his daughter, along with a few golden guineas, in return for the reflected glory accruing from her marital triumph. The bargain is sealed with a kiss and both men surreptitiously congratulate themselves and each other on the terms they have obtained:

... the lover took the girl's hand in his, drew it under his arm, and thus led her on to the front door, where he stealthily put his lips to her own.

She broke from him trembling, blushed, and turned aside, hardly knowing how things had advanced to this. Fitzpiers drove off kissing his hand to her, and waving it to Melbury, who was visible through the window. Her father returned the surgeon's action with a great flourish of his own hand, and a satisfied smile. (TW, p. 193)

In Under the Greenwood Tree, Fancy's secret is indicative of her determination to retain control over her identity in the face of Dick's appropriation of her as his wife, Grace's willingness to allow Fitzpiers to draw 'the extremest inference' from her presence in Giles's hut can be seen as a continuation of her impotent attempts to retain some control over her own identity. However, unlike Fancy, Grace does eventually divulge her secret, and the significance of her ensuing reconciliation with Fitzpiers is rendered even more acute by her ironic yet prophetic statement that 'no woman of spirit' could return to him, neither could 'any woman who is not a mere man's creature live with him after what has taken place' (TW, pp. 310, 352). Throughout the text, Grace shows

herself to be little more than 'a mere man's creature' in the sense of having been created by and belonging to the men to whom she is emotionally and sexually linked. As a direct result of her dependence on the economically dominant gender, Grace's true 'nature' is transformed and extinguished:

What people ... saw of her in a cursory view was very little; in truth, mainly something that was not she. The woman herself was a conjectural creature who had little to do with the outlines presented to Sherton eyes; a shape in the gloom, whose true quality could only be approximated by putting together a movement now and a glance then, in that patient attention which nothing but watchful loving-kindness ever troubles itself to give. (TW, p. 69)

With the exception of Giles Winterbourne, the male characters who are closest to Grace - her father and her husband - consistently fail to display the 'watchful loving kindness' which the narrator suggests is so vital to a full understanding of her true nature.

The Woodlanders can be seen to be motivated by Hardy's philosophy of evolutionary meliorism. The text's subtle criticism of man's inhumanity to woman, with the corresponding implication that it is possible to improve a woman's mental and physical make-up by improving her social and financial status, is placed in the wider context of an agonized and grim exposition of the defects of the natural world, and a firm connection is made between the Unconscious Will's general mismanagement of existence for all living creatures, and society's mismanagement of the existence of men, and more especially women.

In Hintock Wood

... the Unfulfilled Intention, which makes life what it is, was as obvious as it could be among the depraved crowds of a city slum. The leaf was deformed, the curve was crippled, the taper was interrupted; the lichen ate the vigour of the stalk, and the ivy slowly strangled to death the promising sapling. (TW, p. 83)

In The Woodlanders, women are seen as flexible young saplings who are frequently deformed by social and economic pressures; like the walking sticks sported by the bidders at the wood auction

... which ... exhibited monstrosities of vegetation, the chief being corkscrew shapes in black and white thorn, brought to that pattern by the slow torture of an encircling woodbine during their growth, as the Chinese have been said to mould human beings into grotesque toys by continued compression in infancy. (TW, p. 84)

This reference to the Chinese inevitably brings to mind the barbaric sexual fetish of binding women's feet in order to make them conform to a male-defined standard of beauty. A parallel is drawn between the physical distortion of women practised by the Chinese, and their mental and emotional disablement by the customs and conventions of a Western patriarchal capitalist society.²⁹

The Woodlanders implies that humanity has the power to remedy the 'Unfulfilled Intention' through the conscious pursuit of altruism. Nature does not carry on her government with a view to human happiness neither, it is implied, does a society which sanctions laws such as the Divorce Act of 1857, which not only failed to take account of the waywardness of the human sexual instinct, but also fixed the degree of cruelty necessary before a woman could liberate herself from an unsatisfactory marriage whilst allowing a man to free himself with comparative ease. The text presents women with two alternatives: stoic or passive resignation, as in the case of Grace and Marty, or some alteration in the balance of economic and political power which is tipped in favour of men.

The degree to which the power of sexual selection belongs to the politically and economically dominant will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter, which focusses upon Hardy's study of a man's pursuit of, and attempt to create, his ideal woman - The Well-Beloved. This is succeeded by a detailed discussion of three of Hardy's minor texts which are obviously informed by the aims and ideals of the feminist movement, - Far from the Madding Crowd, A Laodicean and Two on a Tower, - in which some attempt will be made to analyze the extent to which these texts suggest that radical improvements in the social, economic and political status of woman would undermine man's control over her development and freedom.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

1. Geoffrey Grigson, in his introduction to the Wessex Edition of Under the Greenwood Tree, regards the novel as 'a simply constructed pastoral', 'a story of a more or less unblighted pastoral innocence' (UGT, pp. 12, 15). For F. B. Pinion, 'clouds quickly pass, and the tone of the novel brooks no heartaches'. He concludes: 'serious conjectures about the matrimonial future of the lovers (unlike those relating to Grace Melbury and Fitzpiers in The Woodlanders) would be alien to the spirit of Under the Greenwood Tree' (A Hardy Companion, pp. 21-22). Joseph Warren Beach dismisses the novel as 'a sylvan idyll' (Beach, p. 61). Barbara Hardy suggests that 'the pastoral exerts its binding-power over the text'. See Barbara Hardy, 'Under the Greenwood Tree: A Novel About the Imagination', in Smith, pp. 45-57 (p. 48).
2. Merryn Williams suggests that 'it is no longer possible to see this book as a mere charming rustic idyll'. See Williams, Thomas Hardy and Rural England (London and Basingstoke, 1972), p. 124. Samuel Chew, likewise, has discerned 'more serious implications, perhaps, than appear on the surface'. See Chew, Thomas Hardy: Poet and Novelist (New York, 1964), p. 27.
3. Hardy, Preface to Under the Greenwood Tree (1872; Wessex Edition, VII, 1912), in PW, pp. 4-6 (p. 6).
4. Under the Greenwood Tree was eventually published by William Tinsley in June 1872.
5. Daniel R. Schwarz, 'Narrator as Character in Hardy's Major Fiction', Modern Fiction Studies, 18 (1972), 155-72 (p. 160).
6. Robert A. Draffan, 'Hardy's Under the Greenwood Tree', English, 22 (1973), 55-60 (p. 58).
7. In answer to Mrs Dewy's accusation that all the Dewy family were "so easy to be deceived", Reuben replies "that's as true as gospel of this member" (UGT, p. 40).
8. John F. Danby, 'Under the Greenwood Tree', Critical Quarterly, 1 (1959), 5-13 (p. 10).
9. Harold Child, Thomas Hardy (1916; revised edition Edinburgh, 1925), pp. 53-54.
10. Stewart, p. 61.
11. For John Lucas, this passage emphasizes the unreality, or delusion, inherent in the choir's vision of Fancy Day (Lucas, pp. 122-23).
12. See for example, James Collinson, "To Let" (c. 1857).
13. Boumelha, p. 30.
14. Carpenter, p. 45.
15. Penelope Vigar, The Novels of Thomas Hardy: Illusion and Reality (London, 1974), p. 91.

16. Geoffrey Thurley has described the social and sexual fascination exercised by the cleric over rural girls and women in the nineteenth century: 'the vicar of the Victorian novel brings light, and a new kind of sexual grace, into a world dominated by rude extrovert masculinity', The Psychology of Hardy's Novels: The Nervous and the Statuesque (Queensland, 1975), p. 46.
17. Although The Woodlanders did not appear until 1887, there is evidence that the idea for the novel was in Hardy's mind as early as 1874, just two years after the publication of Under the Greenwood Tree. The success of Far From the Madding Crowd was slightly marred for Hardy by the fear that the reading public was expecting him to write 'for ever about sheepfarming'. This fear led him to abandon 'a woodland story he had thought of' in favour of The Hand of Ethelberta. The woodland story 'later took shape in The Woodlanders' (LTH, p. 102).
18. See: Charles E. May, 'Far From the Madding Crowd and The Woodlanders: Hardy's Grotesque Pastorals', English Literature in Transition 1880-1920, 17 (1974), 147-58. Peter J. Casagrande suggests that the distinction between 'natural' and 'cultivated' man is an illusion because 'nature as something separate from and superior to culture is a fiction'. Also, Hardy's sense of 'scientific naturalism' leads him to expose the inadequacy of the 'romantic naturalism' represented by the pastoral hero and heroine - Giles and Marty. See Casagrande, 'The Shifted "Centres of Altruism" in The Woodlanders: Thomas Hardy's Third "Return of a Native"', ELH, 38 (1971), 104-25 (p. 123). Although David Lodge categorizes the text as 'a quiet meditative novel' belonging to the genre of pastoral elegy, he too recognizes disparate elements within it. There are, he declares, 'conflicting and logically incompatible value-systems and knowledge systems' held in tension and balance, namely 'the old view of nature as cyclical, harmonious, life-giving, self-renewing, susceptible of magical or intuitive control by suitably endowed persons versus the new evolutionary account of the biological world that was superseding it' (Introduction to TW).
- Schwarz concludes that 'the urbane and condescending tone towards Hintock inevitably dramatizes [the narrator's] separation from the rural world and places him in a position of displaying Hintock's sensibilities for the benefit of those who would be interested in its "dramas of grandeur and unity" (Schwarz, p. 165). There are, however, a few dissenting voices. Stewart declares that 'simple and unambitious and unspeculative people - those immersed in the primary tasks of an agricultural or at least rural economy - are the people best circumstanced in the end' (Stewart, p. 131). John Holloway concludes that The Woodlanders demonstrates that 'it is right to live naturally ... to live naturally is to live in continuity with one's whole biological and geographical environment' (Holloway, p. 281).
19. See Rutland, pp. 211-12 and Trevor Johnson, Thomas Hardy (London, 1968), p. 118.
20. TW, p. 71. See Abbreviations.
21. See J. O. Hunting, 'Women and Tobacco', National Review, 14 (1889-90), 218-28: 'endless are the motives which have led our girls and women to adopt the habit, and it must not be denied that there exists a large class ... who smoke in order to curry a certain sort of favour among men; in other words, there are girls who take up smoking as the least harmful pursuit whereby they may be considered "jolly good fun", decidedly "free-and-easy", if not a little fast!' (Hunting, p. 223).

22. See Mary M. Saunders, 'The Significance of the Man-Trap in The Woodlanders', Modern Fiction Studies, 20 (1974-75), 529-31.
23. See Elizabeth Hardwick, Seduction and Betrayal: Women and Literature (New York, 1970), for a discussion of this theme in works by the Brontës, Ibsen and Hardy.
24. Mrs Charmond's dwelling, Little Hintock House, is described earlier as 'vegetable nature's own home' (TW, p. 89).
25. We may also assume that money played a large part in Mr Charmond's courtship of the young actress who became his wife Felice.
26. As Penny Boumelha has noted, Marty receives even less money than her male counterparts for 'barking' the trees as her time is worth less than theirs (Boumelha, p. 103).
27. Rebecca Owen recorded a conversation between herself and Hardy at Max Gate on 13 September 1893, during which he admitted his frustrations with the character of Grace, 'he said that Grace never interested him much; he was provoked with her all along. If she would have done a really self-abandoned impassioned thing (gone off with Giles), he could have made a fine tragic ending to the book, but she was too commonplace and straitlaced and he could not make her'. Cited C. J. Weber, 'Hardy and The Woodlanders', Review of English Studies, 15 (1939), 330-33 (p. 332).
28. The idea of women as portable property also occurs in Under the Greenwood Tree. When Dick unwittingly informs Parson Maybold that he is to marry Fancy, he hands the vicar a card which reads 'Live and Dead Stock removed to any distance on the shortest notice' (UGT, p. 187).
29. See Julia Kristeva, About Chinese Women (1974; translated from the French by Anita Barrows London, 1977), pp. 81-85.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE PURSUIT OF THE IDEAL WOMAN: THE WELL-BELOVED (1897)

Consistently classed as a minor novel, The Well-Beloved has received scant critical attention.¹ It was originally published in serial form as The Pursuit of The Well-Beloved in the Illustrated London News in 1892, in place of Tess of the d'Urbervilles which Hardy withdrew from periodical publication in deference to the moral qualms of the newspaper syndicate Tillotson and Son. It was nearly five years before The Well-Beloved appeared in book form, during which time Hardy radically revised the text in such a way that neither the plot, nor the tone of the original remained the same. In preparing the text for book publication, Hardy elided the marital irregularities of The Pursuit and considerably weakened the strong indictment of the marriage laws contained in the earlier version.

The Well-Beloved focusses upon the idealization of women by men and the conventions of a nineteenth-century middle-class society. It exposes the way in which a man achieves confirmation of his ego through a possessive relationship with a woman who corresponds to his ideal, in that his ideal establishes and vindicates his dominance in society as well as his corresponding legal subordination of the female sex.

The Well-Beloved interrogates this essentially narcissistic male attitude in the character of Jocelyn Pierston the sculptor. In a letter to Lewis Hind, the editor of the Academy, written in March 1897 Hardy stated that The Well-Beloved is 'a phantasmal narrative of the adventures of a Visionary Artist in pursuit of the unattainable Perfect in female form'.² However, the text implies that what is true of the male artist is also true of the man. Writing to a literary periodical in the same year Hardy declared: 'underlying the fantasy followed by the visionary artist [is] the truth that all men are pursuing a shadow, the Unattainable' (LTH, p. 286). The artist is, in fact, the man writ large. As Somers tells Pierston:

"you are like other men, only rather worse. Essentially, all men are fickle, like you; but not with such perceptiveness' (WB, p. 58). In this way, The Well-Beloved can be seen to encapsulate and analyze in depth the themes explored in Hardy's earlier texts.

Jocelyn Pierston, the man and the artist, is obsessed by the conventional imaginary projection of Woman, and spends his life in a fruitless search for a woman who embodies his ideal: 'the migratory, elusive idealization he called his Love who, ever since his boyhood, had flitted from human shell to human shell an indefinite number of times' (WB, p. 31). His search is fruitless, because its object has no existence in reality: she is a fictional concept only, a figment of his own imagination. As such she can never be fully realized and, consequently, never fully recognized or apprehended: 'essentially she was perhaps of no tangible substance; a spirit, a dream, a frenzy, a conception, an aroma, an epitomized sex, a light of the eye, a parting of the lips. God only knew what she really was; Pierston did not. She was indescribable' (WB, p. 34).

J. Hillis Miller, Kathleen Blake and Tom Paulin have conclusively proved The Well-Beloved's considerable debt to the philosophy of Shelley as articulated in such poems as The Revolt of Islam, Prometheus Unbound, and Epipsychidion.³ However, all three critics agree that, far from being a celebration of Shelley's ideas, The Well-Beloved sets out to expose and undermine them. Tom Paulin and Kathleen Blake draw attention to Hardy's interest in Bagehot's essay on Shelley, published in 1856, in which Bagehot both admires and censures the poet for his reductive and simplistic theories on love and women. Shelley's poetry can be seen to express a desire for an individual woman not in her own right, but as the epitome of all her sex. The Well-Beloved is a critique of the Shelleyan substitution of the aesthetic and romantic concept of woman as generic for the feminine gender. However, just as the dilemma of the artist can be seen to apply to all men, so The Well-Beloved implies that the reduction of women to a single type, and the subsequent elevation of this type, has a far more universal significance in that it too is common to all men.

Pierston fuses every possible manifestation of the female form - be it tall, short, plump or lithe, dark or fair, with blue eyes, black eyes or brown - into a single feminine compound having 'instant access to all ranks and classes, to every abode of men' (WB, p. 34). A parallel is drawn between the workings of Pierston's mind and the operation of the tides in 'the vast concave of Deadman's Bay, rising and falling against the pebble dyke'. Pierston listens to the sea and imagines 'a presence'

... an imaginary shape or essence from the human multitude lying below: those who had gone down in vessels of war, East Indiamen, barges, brigs, and ships of the Armada - select people, common, and debased, whose interests and hopes had been as wide asunder as the poles, but who had rolled each other to oneness on that restless sea-bed. There could almost be felt the brush of their huge composite ghost as it ran a shapeless figure over the isle, shrieking for some good god who would disunite it again. (WB, p. 36)

Pierston's composite feminine ideal embodies all the essentially contradictory elements of Woman. She is both pure, creative and nurturing, as well as fleshly, beguiling and destructive. At various points in the text Pierston identifies her with Aphrodite, Astarte, Freja, Juno, Lillith, Minerva, and Psyche, thus combining every aspect of the traditionally Feminine.⁴

The sculptor's attitude to women is similar to Edred Fitzpiers's in that both conceptions of the Feminine owe much to the influence of Shelley. However, it has more in common with Henry Knight's view in that Pierston's ideal is, essentially, a product of emotional and, more importantly, sexual repression. Throughout the text, Pierston insists that his desire for women is spiritual, rather than sexual, as in his vindication of his passion for a woman forty years his junior:

It was not the flesh; he had never knelt low to that. Not a woman in the world had been wrecked by him, though he had been impassioned by so many. Nobody would guess the further sentiment - the cordial loving-kindness - which had lain behind what had seemed to him the enraptured fulfilment of a pleasing destiny postponed for forty years. (WB, p. 193)

Although he has been infatuated with women of every conceivable shape and size, his preference lies with 'a lithe airy being, of no great stature', a species of Sue Bridehead, a fleshless, refined almost phantom-like creature (WB, p. 57).

Like Jude, Pierston worships the new moon - symbol of chastity and purity sacred to Diana and Artemis. In his imagination he sees the dead body of the first Avice under the young pale moon:

The symbol signified well. The divinity of the silver bow was not more excellently pure than she, the lost, had been. Under that moon was the island of Ancient Slingers, and on the island a house, framed from mullions to chimney-top like the isle itself, of stone. Inside the window, the moon irradiating her winding-sheet, lay Avice, reached only by the faint noises inherent in the isle; the tink-tink of the chisels in the quarries, the surging of the tides in the Bay, and the muffled grumbling of the currents in the never-pacified Race. (WB, p. 89)

The first Avice comes eventually to represent his Well-Beloved for two reasons: firstly, although he felt affection for her, he was never sexually attracted to her: 'it was love rarefied and refined to its highest attar' (WB, p. 88). Secondly, death finally places her forever beyond his reach rendering sexual consummation impossible. Pierston, like Henry Knight, refuses to acknowledge his sexual impulses and, consequently, attempts to repress Avice's physicality also. At their first meeting for some years, Avice greets him with a spontaneous kiss of affection to which he responds with embarrassment and restraint. His behaviour radically alters Avice's conception of herself, leaving her confused and mortified by her own sexuality. When she speaks again, 'the accents were those of one who had for the first time become conscious of her womanhood, as an unwonted possession which shamed and frightened her' (WB, p. 31). She is 'transformed into a very different kind of young woman by the self-consciousness engendered of her impulsive greeting' (WB, p. 32). She refers to this enforced repression of her sexuality as her 'modern feelings'; a term which brings to mind both Grace Melbury and Sue Bridehead, and in her fear at being thought overtly physical she fails to keep her last appointment with Pierston worried that he might assume she desired 'the formal ratification of a betrothal', namely pre-marital sexual intercourse. In the face of Pierston's implicit rejection of her, Avice swiftly adapts herself to his specifications.

However, despite his protestations, it is clear that Pierston's initial

response to women is entirely sexual and that, like Henry Knight, he vindicates his descent into the realms of physical passion by elevating the woman he is drawn to onto a more spiritual plain. Sometimes the woman proves recalcitrant, obstinately refusing to conform to his spiritual ideal of her, and Pierston ceases to find her attractive. For example, his infatuation with Marcia Bencomb is preceded by his appreciation of 'how soft and warm the lady was in her fur covering, as he held her so tightly', and it reaches its zenith during his somewhat voyeuristic contemplation of her wet underclothing (WB, p. 48). Significantly, it is Marcia's inability or refusal to conform to his spiritualized image of her that is responsible for the departure of the Well-Beloved from her form. His Juno subbornly refuses to transform herself into Diana.

After Marcia's departure, Pierston resumes his search for his ideal: 'how instantly he would recognize it under whatever complexion, contour, accent, height, or carriage that it might choose to masquerade!' (WB, p. 73). He is, of course, impelled by intense sexual desire, and his momentary identification of the Well-Beloved with his hostess Lady Channelcliffe - a married woman - is seen as the result of 'the highly charged electric condition in which he had arrived by reason of his recent isolation' (WB, p. 74).

The clearest indication of the workings of Pierston's mind is contained in the description of his relationship with the second Avice. He is initially drawn to her by her sex and her prettiness; she is the phantom of her mother 'now grown to be warm flesh and blood' (WB, p. 97). At the same time, her crudeness of intellect shocks his sensibilities. He resolves both his sexual and intellectual dilemmas by idealizing her: 'after all, it was not the washerwoman that he saw now. In front of her, on the surface of her, was shining out that more real, more inter-penetrating being whom he knew so well!' (WB, p. 101). She becomes 'an irradiated being, the epitome of a whole sex: by the beams of his own infatuation "... robed in such exceeding glory/ That he beheld her not": beheld her not as she really was, as she was even to himself

sometimes' (WB, p. 117). The narrator, however, exposes the true nature of Pierston's regard for her as strongly sexual and draws the reader's attention to the sculptor's self-delusion:

All this time Pierston was thinking of the girl - or as the scientific might say, Nature was working her plans for the next generation under the cloak of a dialogue on linen. He could not read her individual character, owing to the confusing effect of her likeness to a woman whom he had valued too late. He could not help seeing in her all that he knew of another, and veiling in her all that did not harmonize with his sense of metempsychosis. (WB, p. 102)

Pierston conveniently ignores the second Avice's self-confessed strong, but fickle, sexual urges and concludes: 'she was pure and single-hearted: half an eye could see that. Whence, then, the two men? Possibly the quarrier was a relation' (WB, p. 124). The irony is at Pierston's expense, for not only is the quarrier indeed a relation - he is her husband - but she is pregnant with his child. In addition, Avice is as emotionally promiscuous as Pierston himself, and far less sexually reticent than her mother was. Rather than return to a husband she no longer loves, she expresses her willingness to stay on with Pierston, possibly as his mistress. Pierston dismisses the idea as disloyalty on his part 'particularly to an inexperienced fellow-islander and one who was by race and traditions almost a kinswoman', but, more importantly, as disloyalty to his ideal of a more spiritual union with the object of his affections.

The nature of Pierston's regard for the third Avice, a girl some forty years his junior, is less clear, but once again the narrator implies that his desire to marry her is motivated as much by sexual passion as by his sense of the artistic fitness of such an arrangement. His insistence that nothing but 'cordial loving-kindness' lay behind his attempts to secure her is undermined by his use of coercion and emotional blackmail in his dealings with her. Despite his recognition that no law of nature or reason could justify him in forcing her to marry him against her will, he resolves to make the most of his and her mother's influence over her to hasten the wedding arrangements. After

she elopes with Henry Leverre, on the eve of her wedding to Pierston, he is dismayed at the thought that his attraction to her 'would be regarded by the world as the selfish designs of an elderly man on a maid' (WB, p. 193).

Indeed, the narrator has earlier suggested that this may have been the case, and Pierston's affections are as much sexual as paternal:

Pierston would have regarded his interest in her as overmuch selfish if there had not existed a redeeming quality in the substratum of old pathetic memory by which such love had been created - which still permeated it, rendering it the tenderest, most anxious, most protective instinct he had ever known. It may have had in its composition too much of the boyish fervour that had characterized such affection when he was cherry-cheeked, and light in the foot as a girl; but if it was all this feeling of youth, it was more. (WB, pp. 164-65)

Throughout his courtship of the first Avice, Marcia, Nicola, and the second and third Avices, Pierston consistently represses the physical side of his nature, transforming sexual desire for the woman in question into the spiritual worship of the ideal which he erects in her place. Like Henry Knight, Edred Fitzpiers and George Melbury, Jocelyn Pierston is guilty of a stubborn refusal to regard women as anything other than mere objects to be used for his own gratification and to further his own desires. The Eternal Feminine worshipped by Pierston exists solely in his own imagination and as such is totally outside the physical female realities of sexuality, change and the ageing process - hence his dismay when confronted by the first Avice's kiss, the second Avice's pregnancy, and the bodily degeneration of the second Avice and the queenly Marcia. By elevating women into an impossible, wholly fictional ideal, Pierston avoids having to confront what and who she really is. His experience of Woman in the abstract is matched by his ignorance of her in the flesh. Indeed, Pierston vindicates his obtuseness with regard to the thoughts and feelings of the objects of his affection by citing his knowledge of, and sensitivity to, the abstract phenomena she comes to represent. Speaking of the third Avice he informs her mother: "I do not require to learn her; she was learnt by me in her previous existences" (WB, p. 160). Likewise, he seeks to justify his stubborn coercion of the younger Avice by the belief that

he had 'such prescriptive rights in women of her blood that her occasional want of confidence did not deeply trouble him' (WB, p. 174).

The same is true of Pierston's fickleness. He informs Somers that, although he has betrayed many a real woman, "I have always been faithful to the elusive creature whom I have never been able to get a firm hold of" (WB, p. 58).

By making this clear to his mind sometime before to-day, he had escaped a good deal of ugly self-reproach. It was simply that she who always attracted him, and led him whither she would as by a silken thread, had not remained the occupant of the same fleshly tabernacle in her career so far. Whether she would ultimately settle down to one he could not say. (WB, p. 34)

Just as the inherent elusiveness of his fantasy guarantees the durability of his infatuation with the woman who appears to embody it, so does his repeated failure to consummate his passion:

Once she was a dancing-girl at the Royal Moorish Palace of Varieties, though during her whole continuance at that establishment he never once exchanged a word with her, nor did she first or last ever dream of his existence. He knew that a ten-minutes' conversation in the wings with the substance would send the elusive haunter scurrying fearfully away into some other even less accessible mask-figure. (WB, p. 68)

Although Pierston realizes that his fickleness has its origins in the fact that a real woman can never match up to his ideal he never questions his ideal, preferring instead to relinquish the woman. The narrator suggests that Pierston's refusal to reproach himself is deluded and wrong through subtle references to the sufferings of the women who fall victim to his self-centredness, especially the first and the third Avices.

Pierston can never gain possession of his Ideal because the concept signifies an absence rather than a presence and therefore something which can never be translated into a tangible form. This explains his constant failure to create an image of what he desires in stone. Interestingly enough, his unsuccessful attempts to express his feminine ideal in stone or clay are enormously popular with the general public by virtue of the fact that his sculptures present men with a concrete manifestation of what they most desire in women, whilst presenting women with a representation of the identity which

it is in their interests to adopt. Pierston's eventual acknowledgement of the failure of his ideal is accompanied by a vision of the former shapes of his love: 'many of them he had idealized in bust and in figure from time to time, but it was not as such that he remembered and reanimated them now; rather was it in all their natural circumstances, weaknesses, and stains' (WB, p. 192). The process is aided by the onset of an illness which destroys his libido.

The idea of the Well-Beloved as an absence is significant in terms of what it reveals about the Victorian male psyche. Pierston is obsessed with recurrent duplicates of his notion of the Feminine. As this idea is a figment of his imagination which he has projected outwards, it is in fact an intrinsic part of his own personality; an aspect of his nature compounded of elements which he either fails to, or is preventing from articulating. Thus Pierston is seeking, in his idealized image of Woman, both his opposite and his complemental self. The sight of the new moon, 'as representing one who, by her so-called inconstancy, acted up to his own idea of a migratory Well-Beloved, made him feel as if his wraith in a changed sex had suddenly looked over the horizon at him' (WB, p. 156). Critics have noted this aspect of The Well-Beloved, and have linked it with Jung's theory of the anima and animus, Shelley's concept of brother-sister love, and Aristophanes's fable on human sexuality.⁵ Whilst acknowledging the validity of these interpretations, I hope to show that Pierston's attitude to women owes its origins as much, if not more, to the rigid definition of gender-roles which characterized the nineteenth century, and which was in turn the direct result of the way in which society was organized, rather than to the influence of any one philosophical system over the author.

By locating the so-called 'inferior' instincts in woman - the irrational, and the creative (in the non-intelligent organic sense) in particular - the male forfeits his right, as a member of the dominant species, to experience and articulate these instincts himself. Therefore he combats his sense of incompleteness by desiring those who are seen to embody those instincts. If

the man in question is an ordinary working-man, he will seek to express his wholeness through a possessive relationship with a woman. If he is an artist, he will locate the repressed side of his nature - the creative urge or impulse - in the figure of the female muse who is seen to inspire him. Woman in her apparent submission to the natural processes of reproduction, her capacity and responsibility for the bearing and sustenance of children, and in her adoption of the ethic of self-sacrifice for the good of others, symbolizes - 'the essence and epitome of all that is desirable in this existence', for both the artist and the man. At the same time, woman is seen as the passive instigator of action, man as the achiever. When Pierston asks Marcia to marry him, she inquires: "will you ever be a Royal Academician?". He responds: "I hope to be - I will be, if you will be my wife" (WB, p. 51). After her departure, Pierston's effortless promotion to A.R.A. means nothing to him:

... recognitions of this sort, social distinctions, which he had once coveted so keenly, seemed to have no utility for him now. By the accident of being a bachelor, he was floating in society without any soul-anchorage or shrine that he could call his own; and, for want of a domestic centre round which honours might crystallize, they dispersed impalpably without accumulating and adding weight to his material well-being. (WB, p. 67)

This concept of woman as emotional inspiration or Muse serves as a compensation for her circumscribed and marginalized existence.

Pierston's self-deception is continually emphasized by the narrator, who is concerned to expose the limited nature of the hero's insight into his motivation. For example, it is the narrator who suggests that Pierston's Well-Beloved is located solely in the hero's imagination and that, like Edred Fitzpiers, he is impelled by a sense of lack which leads him to project his own ideal onto any suitable object. Thus, at Lady Channelcliffe's party we learn that Pierston, in searching for 'the next new version of the fair figure ... did not consider at the moment, though he had done so at other times, that this presentiment of meeting her was, of all presentiments, just the sort of one to work out its own fulfilment' (WB, p. 75).

Not only is The Well-Beloved a criticism of man's idealization of woman,

it is also Hardy's manifesto on the waywardness of the sexual instinct, and the corresponding compromises society should effect as a result. The Well-Beloved appears to identify the ancient Isle of Slingers, 'the home of a curious and well-nigh distinct people cherishing strange beliefs and singular customs', as the final outpost of spontaneous physical interaction. Pierston's 'urbanism' is described as a 'garment', an artificial lamina which he shrugs off upon entering his island environment. Urban society is characterized in the text by duplicity and affectation. It is a place where ladies 'almost think it vulgar to smile broad'. The Isle of Slingers, with its Roman temples to Venus, its custom of pre-marital intercourse, and its ignorance of the concept of female virginity, symbolizes the human sexual instinct at its most open and its most basic. The narrator of The Well-Beloved rejoices in the victory of Pagan divinities and customs over the precarious hold established by Christian belief and custom, symbolized in the destruction of the Old Hope Church by a landslide. The Isle of Slingers is a last living testimony to the triumph of Aphrodite over God the Father (WB, p. 36).

However, this cultural primitivism on the part of the narrator periodically undermines the political validity of the text. The Well-Beloved's constant re-iteration of the positive aspects of the cultural and moral ethos of the ancient Isle of Slingers detracts from the main thrust of its implicit social criticism. The sexual and intellectual independence of Marcia Bencomb, 'in circumstances which usually make women the reverse', is seen as the result of her fidelity to local custom, rather than as a daring step toward sexual liberation. Likewise, the fact that she and Pierston establish a 'free union', akin to that of Herminia Barton and Alan Merrick in Grant Allen's roughly contemporaneous novel The Woman Who Did (1893), loses much of its significance by being disguised as Island custom rather than cited as a challenge to conventional sexual behaviour. In this respect, the 1892 version of the text - The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved - is more vigorous and in some

respects more interesting than its successor.

The Pursuit differs from The Well-Beloved in that Pearston and Marcia actually marry, and the speedy disintegration of their relationship - an 'ill-matched junction on the strength of a two or three days passion' - forms the basis for a bitter attack on the marriage laws of the day, particularly aimed at exposing the way in which women are unfairly discriminated against as wives. This attack issues from the lips of a somewhat more radical and outraged Marcia, whose independent spirit and straightforward feminist anger is refreshing if a little clumsily expressed:

Marcia's haughty temper unfolded in the direction of irascibility when she beheld clearly in what a trap she had been ensnared. She was her husband's property, like one of his statues that he could not sell. 'Was there ever anything more absurd in history', she said bitterly to him one day, 'than that grey-headed legislators from time immemorial should have gravely based inflexible laws upon the ridiculous dream of young people that a transient mutual desire for each other was going to last for ever!'.⁶

Marcia and Pearston eventually part at Marcia's instigation and what is more it is she who advocates bigamy in defiance of the legally indissoluble matrimonial bond:

'And as for my part ... I fail to see why, in making each our home, we should not make our own matrimonial laws if we choose. This may seem an advanced view, but I am not ashamed of advanced views. If I strictly confine myself to one hemisphere, and you, as I expect you to do, confine yourself to the other, any new tie we may form can affect nobody but ourselves. As I shall feel at liberty to form such, I accord the same liberty to you'.
(PWB, p. 481)

Some years later, Pearston bigamously marries the youngest Avice, despite her obvious distaste for him. His second marital disaster functions as a critique of the almost tyrannical power which husbands exercised over their wives by law. Although women could no longer be imprisoned for refusing a husband his 'conjugal rights', he was still legally entitled to demand them.⁷ Despite his passion for the young Avice, Pearston comes to the conclusion that 'whatever the rights with which the civil law had empowered him, by no law of nature, or reason, had he any right to partnership with Avice against her evident will'. In growing misery, he discusses his moral qualms with a

passer-by:

'Now, would you assert, my friend, that a man has a right to force himself into her presence at all times and seasons, to sit down at her table, to take her hither and thither - all against her liking?'

'No, sure.'

'I thought so. And yet a man does it; for he has married her'.

'Oh! She's his wife! That's a hoss of another colour. Ha, ha, ha!'. (PWB, p. 741)

The narrator dwells upon the poignant irony of the fact that, even though Pearston is willing to release Avice from her marital vow, he is prevented by law from doing so, and suggests that 'it was certainly an age of barbarism in which he lived; since whatever were his honest wish to right this ill matter, he could not do it' (PWB, p. 742).

The Pursuit demonstrates the way in which the masculine idealization of women - man's imaginative appropriation of the female - is endorsed by the laws and ordinances of the time which granted him almost unlimited physical power over her. Strangely enough, this implicit social criticism is almost entirely absent from The Well-Beloved. In addition, the later text is ambiguous on the question of the training and education of women. Pierston regrets the effect of an enlightened upbringing on the first Avice, whom he seems to value as a potential repository of rural tradition, however backward and narrow her life might be as a result:

He observed that every aim of those who had brought her up had been to get her away mentally as far as possible from her natural and individual life as an inhabitant of a peculiar island: to make her an exact copy of tens of thousands of other people, in whose circumstances there was nothing special, distinctive, or picturesque; to teach her to forget all the experiences of her ancestors; to drown the local ballads by songs purchased at the Budmouth fashionable music-sellers', and the local vocabulary by a governess-tongue of no country at all. She lived in a house that would have been the fortune of an artist, and learnt to draw London suburban villas from printed copies.

Avice had seen all this before he pointed it out, but, with a girl's tractability, had acquiesced. By constitution she was local to the bone, but she could not escape the tendency of the age. (WB, p. 36)

At the same time, he is attracted to the gentle and thoughtful Mrs Pine-Avon who held 'sound rather than current opinions on the plastic arts, and was

the first intellectual woman he had seen there that night' (WB, p. 78). Likewise, he regrets the lack of cultivation and ambition in the second Avice who, as a personality, shocked his intellect: 'it was extraordinary, indeed, to observe how she wilfully limited her interests; with what content she received the ordinary things that life offered, and persistently refused to behold what an infinitely extended life lay open to her through him' (WB, p. 134). In contrast, he is drawn to the thoroughly educated third Avice, 'a still more modernized, up-to-date edition', lady-like, mature and finely proportioned. However, Avice's intellectual cultivation seems to have done little for her personal emancipation. In contrast to her grandmother's impulsive affection, and her mother's sexual openness, she exhibits much of the sexual schizophrenia of Sue Bridehead. Her 'flippant, harmless freedom' is contradicted by 'her rather nervous lips [which] were thin and closed, so that they only appeared as a delicate red line. A changeable temperament was shown by that mouth - quick transitions from affection to aversion, from a pout to a smile' (WB, p. 153). Like Sue, Fancy and Grace, education has done little for the third Avice except to alienate her from her rural roots, and to render her a prey to the conflicting impulses of quietism and social ambition.

However, in direct contrast to this, the text is sympathetically aware of the narrow circumscribed lives women are forced to lead. The imperious Marcia Bencomb can only escape submission to her father's will by annexing herself to another man. Like Ethelberta, the third Avice can only realize her social ambitions - ambitions shared by every young woman on the island - by marrying a man forty years her senior whom she does not love. The histories of Ethelberta and the third Avice are grotesque parodies of the Cinderella story, and the link is strengthened in Avice's case when Pierston is left holding the young girl's pretty boot following his symbolic act of freeing her from the Slingers limestone (WB, p. 159).

The text's strongest criticism of woman's circumscribed position and lack of educational opportunities is contained in the description of the effect of

marriage and motherhood on Nicola:

Mrs Somers - once the intellectual, emancipated Mrs Pine-Avon - had now retrograded to the petty and timid mental position of her mother and grandmother, giving sharp, strict regard to the current literature and art that reached the innocent presence of her long perspective of girls, with the view of hiding every skull and skeleton of life from their dear eyes. She was another illustration of the rule that succeeding generations of women are seldom marked by cumulative progress, their advance as girls being lost in their recession as matrons; so that they move up and down the stream of intellectual development like flotsam in a tidal estuary. And this perhaps not by reason of their faults as individuals, but of their misfortune as child-rearers. (WB, p. 166)

The text contains an implicitly contradictory view of the education of women. On one hand it is seen as 'the tendency of the age', which gives rise to 'modern feelings' in the women concerned, alienating them from their environment and from their own sexuality. On the other hand, it also appears to suggest that education is necessary if women are to escape the circumscription of their lives both in the towns and in the country.

The Well-Beloved exposes the way in which men justify their dominant position in society by forcing women to conform to an inferior, fictionalized, stereotype of femininity which helps to determine the way others regard them as well as the way in which they regard themselves. Pierston's idealization, and attempted appropriation of the three Avices - transforming the first into a bodiless muse, the second into 'so much more luggage', and the third into a reluctant sacrifice to atone for his desertion of the first - is endorsed by Somers's attitude to the woman he eventually marries: "I wanted something darker," said Somers airily. "There are so many fair models among native Englishwomen. Still blondes are useful property!" (WB, p. 124). The implication is that Somers the painter will use Nicola as a model for his own ideal of feminine beauty, just as Pierston the sculptor uses the first Avice.

In The Woodlanders, Fitzpiers is likened to the mythical figure of Pygmalion who fell in love with his own ivory sculpture of a woman.⁸ At their first meeting, he looks at Grace 'as at a piece of live statuary' (TW, p. 160). In The Well-Beloved, Pygmalion takes the leading role in the character of

Jocelyn Pierston, who prays to the goddess Aphrodite to give him a wife resembling his statue of the Feminine Ideal. In the unrevised version of the novel, which was serialized as The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved in 1892, the implication is that man's imaginative appropriation and determination of a woman's self-image is compounded by the laws and conventions of the day which not only gave him almost unlimited power over her body, but also effectively prevented her from establishing and consolidating her identity in her own right.

In the following chapter, I will discuss the correlation between masculine idealization and the social, legal and economic repression of women as it is presented in three of Hardy's earlier texts: Far from the Madding Crowd, A Laodicean, and Two on a Tower. I hope to show that each of these minor texts displays some familiarity with, and sympathy for, the aims and ideals of the feminist movement of the second half of the nineteenth century, and that each recognizes the potential threat the movement posed to the hitherto unchallenged power to determine the existence and nature of women which was the unearned privilege of the Victorian male.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SEVEN

1. Norman Page dismisses The Well-Beloved as a 'slight and, psychologically speaking, not very interesting tale' (Page, p. 119). For Harvey Curtis Webster it is little more than 'a rather tedious and long-drawn-out illustration of ideas' (Webster, p. 183). Gittings and Millgate have isolated and identified the autobiographical elements within the novel (see TOH and THAB). Mary Jacobus defines the novel as 'a self-conscious, ironic, and over-schematic account of the artistic temperament', and concludes 'the dominant motif in the novel is less the nympholeptic pursuit itself than Pierston's growing self-estrangement - the alienation from an ageing bodily self which mirrors Hardy's own'. See Jacobus 'Hardy's Magician Retrospect', Essays in Criticism, 32(3) (July 1982), 258-79 (pp. 270-71). Harold Duffin has little time for the hero whom he describes as 'the rake with a theory'. Duffin, Thomas Hardy: A Study of the Wessex Novels, the Poems, and The Dynasts (Manchester, 1916; revised edition 1962), p. 59.
2. Thomas Hardy to Lewis Hind, CL, II, 155 (27 March 1897).
3. See: J. Hillis Miller's introduction to WB; Paulin, pp. 45-67; Kathleen Blake, 'Pure Tess: Hardy on Knowing a Woman', Studies in English Literature 1500-1900 22(4) (1982), 689-705 (p. 692).
4. Aphrodite: beauty, love, earth mother, fruitfulness, vegetation, the moon, the sea, the underworld, war and the reproductive forces of nature.
 Astarte: love and harlotry.
 Freya: fruitfulness, love, sensual love, the dead, sorcery.
 Juno: procreative powers of woman, passive production principle, chastity, marriage.
 Lillith: beguiler and seducer, destroyer of the new-born.
 Minerva: dawn and rustic life, wisdom, nature of the mind which directs the creative impulse, great fertilizer.
 Psyche: life, breath, the human soul.
 Gertrude Jobes, Dictionary of Mythology and Folklore and Symbols, 3 vols (New York, 1962).
5. See: Rosemary Sumner, Thomas Hardy: Psychological Novelist (London, 1981), pp. 32-45; Michael Ryan, 'One Name of Many Shapes: The Well-Beloved', in Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy, ed Dale Kramer (London, 1979), pp. 172-92; Ian Ousby, 'The Convergence of the Twain: Hardy's Alteration of Plato's Parable', Modern Language Review, 77(4) (1982) 780-96.
6. PWB, p. 481. See Abbreviations.
7. A woman could be imprisoned for refusing her husband his 'conjugal rights' until 1884, and could be prevented from leaving him by force until 1891. See Crow, p. 147.
8. At Pygmalion's request, the goddess Aphrodite gave the statue life. However, Galatea caused so much mischief as a result of her want of worldly knowledge that she was returned to her original shape (Jobes, I, 623).

CHAPTER EIGHT

BREAKING THE MOULD: FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD (1874)

A LAODICEAN (1881)

TWO ON A TOWER (1882)

Far from the Madding Crowd, A Laodicean and Two on a Tower conclusively demonstrate that while the social, economic and political conditions of a woman's existence remain unchanged, she will never be at liberty to realize her own potential, and to determine her own existence away from the standardizing forces exerted by men.

The heroine of Far from the Madding Crowd is a clear example of a woman in rebellion against the confines of the traditional roles ascribed to the female sex.¹ She is 'too wild' for a governess, too beautiful for a spinster, too self-willed for a wife, too feminine to be manly and too independent to be womanly. At the same time she seeks security, confidence in her own capabilities, social approval, and social recognition. Far from the Madding Crowd suggests that society will only sanction what it has prescribed itself. In this way, it is clear that Bathsheba can only achieve recognition by conforming to the identity prescribed for her by convention and social ordinance.

The text opens with the heroine as a beautiful and impoverished orphan. Like every rural girl, her aim is to escape the poverty and circumscription of her environment and, like every Victorian woman, she realizes that the only method open to her is sexual bargaining. Unaccustomed to this role she has literally to practise her art, and this I believe to be the function of her opening actions on the spring waggon. Bathsheba's self-scrutiny in the mirror is not, as Gabriel Oak assumes, an act of pure vanity; on the contrary, like Gwendolen Harleth in George Eliot's Daniel Deronda, or Lily Bart in Edith Wharton's The House of Mirth, Bathsheba is assessing her sexual bargaining potential. Gabriel's 'cynical inference' is undermined by the narrator's self-confessed ignorance as to Bathsheba's motivation:

There was no necessity whatever for her looking in the glass. She did not adjust her hat, or pat her hair, or press a dimple into shape, or do one thing to signify that any such intention had been her motive in taking up the glass. She simply observed herself as a fair product of Nature in the feminine kind, her thoughts seeming to glide into far-off though likely dramas in which men would play a part - vistas of probable triumphs - the smiles being of a phase suggesting that hearts were imagined as lost and won. Still, this was but conjecture, and the whole series of actions was so idly put forth as to make it rash to assert that intention had any part in them at all.²

The suggestion put forward by the narrator is that her smile at her reflected image may well have been 'factitious', 'to test her capacity in that art'. Her performance ends in a blush of self-consciousness and a real smile of satisfaction. Bathsheba's smiles occur at significant points throughout the narrative, as if she is indeed putting her skill into practice. Her smile is her means of control over Gabriel who, from the very beginning, remembers her as 'the young girl with the remarkably pleasant lips and white teeth' (FMC, p. 57). Her initial triumph over Boldwood is accompanied by 'a very small smile ... and the white row of upper teeth, and keenly-cut lips already noticed, suggested an idea of heartlessness, which was immediately contradicted by the pleasant eyes' (FMC, p. 161). In seeking to detain Troy at home she employs 'pretty looks', 'the well-known attitude that expresses more than the words it accompanies, and which seems to have been designed for these special occasions' (FMC, p. 299).

However, even at this unpropitious stage in her career, Bathsheba recognizes the implications, in terms of her own integrity, of conforming to the conventional womanly role. Having captivated Gabriel she is unable to play out her part to its logical conclusion. Although she is tempted by the trappings of a respectable middle-class existence which Oak offers, she cannot accept the realities of marriage in terms of wifhood and maternity:

'... a marriage would be very nice in one sense. People would talk about me and think I had won my battle, and I should feel triumphant, and all that. But a husband - '

'Well!'

'Why, he'd always be there, as you say; whenever I looked up, there he'd be.'

'Of course he would - I, that is.'

Well, what I mean is that I shouldn't mind being a bride at a wedding,

if I could be one without having a husband. But since a woman can't show off in that way by herself, I shan't marry - at least yet'.
(FMC, p. 67)

Bathsheba constantly seeks to re-define the terms of the female role. As far as the chess analogy of A Pair of Blue Eyes goes, she desires the regal without the sacrificial duties of the queenly role. However, as men have framed the rules of the game, her attempt to avoid becoming "men's property" is destined to be short-lived. Her sudden accession of economic power confuses the issue even more for her wealth serves to reverse the traditional masculine and feminine roles.

As a wealthy woman Bathsheba is uncomfortably poised between two conflicting socially constructed categories of 'mannish' and 'womannish' behaviour. Significantly enough the narrator shows himself willing to transcend the issue of gender by referring to Bathsheba as 'the young farmer', but this is a step others are unwilling or unable to take. She is compelled to justify her position in a conventionally manly role before the rustics by promising to excel. Her spirited attack upon the dishonest Bailly Pennyways is interpreted as the behaviour of a 'tomboy'. What would be applauded in a man as determination or courage is dismissed in the woman as proud, headstrong and unnatural behaviour. Bathsheba herself is torn between conformity and innovation and her inward struggle is rendered even more acute in the masculine ethos of the Corn Exchange:

... this Saturday's début in the forum, whatever it may have been to Bathsheba as the buying and selling farmer, was unquestioningly a triumph to her as the maiden. Indeed, the sensation was so pronounced that her instinct on two or three occasions was merely to walk as a queen among these gods of the fallow, like a little sister of a little Jove, and to neglect closing prices altogether.
(FMC, pp. 124-25)

Her ambivalence results from woman's traditional incompatibility with direct purchasing operations. Business acumen is intimately connected with, and corroborates, manliness: it is totally incompatible with traditional notions of womanliness. In addition to this, Bathsheba knows that it is her beauty, not her shrewdness, which elicits admiration from those around her.

Far From the Madding Crowd develops ideas present in embryo in Under the Greenwood Tree in that the male characters - Oak, Boldwood and Troy - are concerned to force Bathsheba to conform to a particular 'womanly' identity, and it is the weight of this coercion, coupled with the distinct lack of a viable alternative, which is responsible for her eventual capitulation. The role of the male characters has been analyzed by more recent critics of Hardy's fiction but not, I feel, in sufficient depth.³ Oak, Boldwood and Troy are characterized by a desire to define and possess Bathsheba and her unwillingness to allow herself to be appropriated by them is highlighted by the use of images of violence which accompany her emotional, and at times physical, struggles with each in turn.⁴ Gabriel Oak epitomizes Fitzpiers's conviction that love is an entirely subjective emotion. Men begin with an ideal of femininity and then shape the object of their sexual desire to fit it or, as the narrator puts it, colour and mould 'according to the wants within us whatever our eyes bring in' (FMC, p. 52). Gabriel is involved in two necessarily contradictory processes. On one hand he seeks to elevate and idealize Bathsheba; she is for him 'the embodiment of all that was sweet and bright and hopeless' (FMC, p. 275). On the other hand, he desires to subjugate and control her; to change her from a 'leopard' to a meek ewe. A close correlation is made between Oak's sexual conquest of Bathsheba and the shearing of a ewe which is described almost in terms of a rape:

... Gabriel ... put down the luncheon to drag a frightened ewe to his shear-station, flinging it over upon its back with a dexterous twist of the arm. He lopped off the tresses about its head, and opened up the neck and collar, his mistress quietly looking on. 'She blushed at the insult,' murmured Bathsheba, watching the pink flush which arose and overspread the neck and shoulders of the ewe where they were left bare by the clicking shears - a flush which was enviable, for its delicacy, by many queens of coteries, and would have been creditable, for its promptness, to any woman in the world. (FMC, p. 178)

Oak's snipping of the ewe is the result of sexual jealousy. Bathsheba realizes that she is indirectly responsible for the animal's wound 'because she had wounded the ewe's shearer in a still more vital part' - not simply his

heart but also his phallic pride - by her refusal to place herself under his control.

Gabriel's method of subjugating her is to make himself indispensable to her existence. To begin with Bathsheba reacts to Oak's insinuation of himself into her affairs with anger and distress, dismissing him from her service each time he threatens to take control of her and force her to conform to his idea of a 'thoughtful, and meek, and comely woman' (FMC, p. 166). As Adrian Poole has suggested, his moral strictures are his means of undermining her confidence and threatening her independence.⁵ However, he is so successful that finally she cannot function without him. During her emotional turmoil at Troy's supposed and then actual death, Oak has gradually displaced her as manager of her own farm and Bathsheba's only hope of economic survival lies in total capitulation through marriage.

The identity Boldwood chooses for Bathsheba is the conventional mindless, fickle, sexually susceptible coquette which owes its origins to the social construct imitated by her in the opening pages of the novel and in her thoughtless dispatch of the fateful valentine. Boldwood's initial refusal to 'bow the knee' to Bathsheba's sexual power undermines her confidence in her 'womanly identity', therefore his submission becomes essential to her peace of mind. However, Bathsheba enters the courtship game with a very imperfect knowledge of the rules. What begins as a game practised on the spring waggon becomes a frightening reality as she realizes that the identity she embraced demands the total resignation of her professional ambitions. Bathsheba's ability to acquit herself with ease in the male world of commerce incenses Boldwood, 'it was debasing loveliness to ask it to buy and sell, and jarred with his conceptions of her' (FMC, p. 150). Visiting her home on impulse, he conveniently ignores the fact of her position as an agriculturalist 'that being as much of a farmer, and as extensive a farmer, as himself, her probable whereabouts was out-of-doors at this time of year' (FMC, p. 157). In

proposing to her, Boldwood offers himself as the conventional manly suitor who will take care of her, protect and cherish her, relieve her of the cares of the farm, and substitute endless leisure in place of her busy days. Unable to come to terms with her rejection of him in favour of Troy, he absolves her of all responsibility by regarding her as gullible and easily swayed: "Bathsheba, sweet, lost coquette, pardon me! I've been blaming you, threatening you, behaving like a churl to you, when he's the greatest sinner. He stole your dear heart away with his unfathomable lies!" (FMC, p. 237).

Like Oak, Boldwood equates true womanhood with submission to his will, he tells her, with regard to their engagement, "I can't help seeing that if you choose from a feeling of pity, and, as you say, a wish to make amends, to make a bargain with me for a far-ahead time - an agreement which will set all things right and make me happy, late though it may be - there is no fault to be found with you as a woman" (FMC, p. 377). "I am afraid what to do!", Bathsheba tells him, "I want to be just to you, and to be that seems to be wronging myself" (FMC, p. 397). As she informs Oak, the harm she has done to Boldwood, through her unsubtle lead in the courtship game, is a debt which can only be paid with her own body, "and I believe I am bound to do it if it honestly lies in my power, without any consideration of my own future at all. When a rake gambles away his expectations, the fact that it is an inconvenient debt doesn't make him the less liable" (FMC, p. 380).

Bathsheba's emotional make-up is, we read, composed of two antagonistic forces which the narrator defines as 'womanliness' and 'understanding'. 'Womanliness', would seem to be some part of her character which she is unable to bring under total conscious control. She is 'a woman with some good sense in reasoning on subjects wherein her heart was not involved' (FMC, p. 105). Her impulses are 'pleasanter guides than her discretion' (FMC, p. 219). It is this impulse mixed with pique which leads her to send the valentine. Later, despite her reluctance to marry Boldwood, she experiences a certain compulsion to agree to his proposal which is presented as a direct product of her

'femininity': 'Bathsheba, in spite of her mettle, began to feel unmistakable signs that she was the weaker vessel. She strove miserably against this femininity which would insist upon supplying unbidden emotions in stronger and stronger current' (FMC, p. 234). However, on closer examination, the unbidden emotions are revealed to be, above all, pity, shame and guilt. These feelings are an intrinsic part of her training as a woman rather than of her biology, and it is this which overrules even her understanding of the situation. Boldwood's emotional blackmail is so effective because, in terms of the courtship game, he is right to expect her to submit to him. Bathsheba feels pity, guilt and shame because 'she had a strong feeling that, having been the one who began the game, she ought in honesty to accept the consequences' (FMC, p. 163). Her assumption is of course, as the narrator declares, 'irrational' but this does not mean that social convention does not have the power to make women behave irrationally, as the history of Sue Bridehead was to demonstrate.

If Bathsheba's dealings with Boldwood illustrate the emotional trap that women fall into, her relationship with Troy reveals the sexual one. It is Troy who fixes her most violently into the identity she is initially tempted to consider - the instinctively sexual siren. His method of courtship acknowledges the power of her beauty and establishes her in the role of the destructive female:

'Such women as you a hundred men always covet - your eyes will bewitch scores on scores into an unavailing fancy for you - you can only marry one of that many. Out of these say twenty will endeavour to drown the bitterness of despised love in drink; twenty more will mope away their lives without a wish or attempt to make a mark in the world, because they have no ambition apart from their attachment to you; twenty more - the susceptible person myself possibly among them - will be always dragging after you, getting where they may just see you, doing desperate things. Men are such constant fools! The rest may try to get over their passion with more or less success. But all these men will be saddened. (FMC, p. 204)

In this speech Troy reflects back to Bathsheba the image of herself that she sought in the mirror on the spring waggon - her leading role in the 'dramas in which men would play a part ... probable triumphs' (FMC, p. 44).

Bathsheba's surrender to Troy's definition of her takes place during the much discussed sword-play episode in the hollow amid the ferns. Apart from the clearly sexual symbolism noted by some critics, the imagery also suggests the Pygmalion myth present in The Woodlanders and The Well-Beloved. Troy tells Bathsheba to "stand as still as a statue", and proceeds to use his sword, as a sculptor might use his chisel, to carve out her image: 'had it been possible for the edge of the sword to leave in the air a permanent substance wherever it flew past, the space left untouched would have been almost a mould of Bathsheba's figure' (FMC, p. 216). Bathsheba's consequent recidivism to a purely instinctive level of existence finally leaves her feeling ashamed and defiled, a traitor to her own self:

She chafed to and fro in rebelliousness, like a caged leopard; her whole soul was in arms, and the blood fired her face. Until she had met Troy, Bathsheba had been proud of her position as a woman; it had been a glory to her to know that her lips had been touched by no man's on earth - that her waist had never been encircled by a lover's arm. She hated herself now. In those earlier days she had always nourished a secret contempt for girls who were the slaves of the first good-looking young fellow who should choose to salute them. She had never taken kindly to the idea of marriage in the abstract as did the majority of women she saw about her. In the turmoil of her anxiety for her lover she had agreed to marry him; but the perception that had accompanied her happiest hours on this account was rather that of self-sacrifice than of promotion and honour. Although she scarcely knew the divinity's name, Diana was the goddess whom Bathsheba instinctively adored. That she had never, by look, word, or sign, encouraged a man to approach her - that she had felt herself sufficient to herself, and had in the independence of her girlish heart fancied there was a certain degradation in renouncing the simplicity of a maiden existence to become the humbler half of an indifferent matrimonial whole - were facts now bitterly remembered. (FMC, p. 303)

Kathleen Blake has persuasively examined the way in which female sexual self-repression is vital to personal emancipation in Hardy's texts, in that 'a woman gains freedom as she gains access to a man's wider world while ceasing to be his sexual object'. Sue Bridehead, for example, rejects men 'because of their reduction of women to merely sexual beings'.⁶ I would claim that Bathsheba's fierce virginity anticipates Sue Bridehead's in that it is essential to her Gestalt. To submit oneself totally to the demands of one's biology is, for a woman, to resign all control over one's existence.

Bathsheba's sexual vulnerability has also made her legally helpless. In marrying Troy, she has delivered herself up to his legal ownership. She is only too aware of the iniquities of the marriage laws, as she informs Liddy:

'There is one position worse than that of being found dead in your husband's house from his ill-usage, and that is, to be found alive through having gone away to the house of somebody else.... A runaway wife is an encumbrance to everybody, a burden to herself and a byword - all of which make up a heap of misery greater than any that comes by staying at home - though this may include the trifling items of insult, beating, and starvation'. (FMC, p. 332)

Troy has access not only to her body, but also to her livelihood. It is this sense of her legal helplessness which causes her to live in a state of barricade against Troy's return and, significantly enough, it is Troy's perception of Bathsheba's legal duties as a wife which tempt him to return to her, 'the idea that he could claim a home and its comforts did he but choose to return to England and Weatherbury Farm' (FMC, p. 364).

The narrator censures Troy for his callous exploitation of women's vulnerability, while at the same time criticizing a social system which encourages and sanctions that exploitation. Troy's behaviour is described as 'a system of ethics above all others calculated to win popularity at the first flush of admission into lively society' (FMC, p. 197). Society vindicates the way such men take advantage of women's dependence on their ability to inspire admiration and desire in the more powerful sex:

... that a male dissembler who by deluging her with untenable fictions charms the female wisely, may acquire powers reaching to the extremity of perdition, is a truth taught to many by unsought and wringing occurrences. And some profess to have attained to the same knowledge by experiment as aforesaid, and jauntily continue their indulgence in such experiments with terrible effect. Sergeant Troy was one. (FMC, p. 199)⁷

The narrator's relationship with Troy is characterized by cynical laughter at his expense: he literally ridicules this agent of patriarchal repression. Fanny's plaintive request of Troy to stand by his promise to marry her, as she is carrying his child, is greeted by laughter from the men in Casterbridge Barracks which merges with the gurgle of the tiny whirlpools on the river (FMC, p. 122). This laughter is repeated as Troy waits in vain for Fanny at the

church but this time it is directed not at the hapless girl but at the arrogant man. Fanny's loss of dignity outside Casterbridge Barracks is avenged as Troy runs the gauntlet of the women and girls who 'threw off their nervousness, and titters and giggling became more frequent'. Troy leaves the church to the sound of 'two bowed and toothless old almsmen' who 'chuckled, innocently enough; but the sound had a strange weird effect in that place' (FMC, p. 147). The mirth of the toothless old men anticipates the text's most cynical condemnation of Troy's attempts at reparation to the woman he has so bitterly wronged - his erection of a gravestone to the dead Fanny and her child, and his cultivation of the grave. The hideous gargoyle which spouts water over the grave and destroys Troy's work bears a remarkable resemblance to the old almsmen:

The lower row of teeth was quite washed away, though the upper still remained. Here and thus, jutting a couple of feet from the wall against which its feet rested as a support, the creature had for four hundred years laughed at the surrounding landscape, voicelessly in dry weather, and in wet with a gurgling and snorting sound. (FMC, pp. 341-42)

The sound of the gargoyle also echoes the laughter of the men and women, and the noise of the river outside Casterbridge Barracks.

As was noted in The Woodlanders, a woman's vulnerability in relation to a man like Fitzpiers or Troy is consequent upon her wealth and social status which determines her relationship to the marriage market. This is emphasized in Far from the Madding Crowd by parallelism. The lives of Fanny Robin and Bathsheba - maid and mistress - are subtly compared and contrasted in such a way as to highlight the class, as well as the gender-based nature of women's oppression. Both are forced to use their sexuality in an attempt to establish a hold over Troy. However, whereas Bathsheba can legitimately use the weapon of sexual resistance to ensure marriage, as does Grace Melbury, Fanny's only hope lies in sexual submission and a sense of honour on the part of the man. Where Fanny's visit to Casterbridge Barracks ends in desertion, disgrace and death, Bathsheba's corresponding visit to Troy in Bristol ends in marriage.⁸

The reason behind this lies in the fact that Bathsheba has, as a result of her education, imbibed middle-class notions of virginity and beauty as marketable qualities. Later she acquires the necessary credentials, in terms of property and wealth, to support her pretensions and increase her value. In marrying Bathsheba, Troy gains total control over her body and her fortune. Fanny, however, lacks any real bargaining power in that she is of little social or economic worth. It is this powerlessness which renders her even more vulnerable to male dissemblers such as Troy.

There are, however, obvious links between the two women. Bathsheba's cry to Troy beside Fanny's open coffin to 'kiss me too', reminds both him and the reader of Fanny's supplication outside Casterbridge Barracks.

There was something so abnormal and startling in the childlike pain and simplicity of this appeal from a woman of Bathsheba's calibre and independence, that Troy, loosening her tightly clasped arms from his neck, looked at her in bewilderment. It was such an unexpected revelation of all women being alike at heart, even those so different in their accessories as Fanny and this one beside him, that Troy could hardly seem to believe her to be his proud wife Bathsheba. Fanny's own spirit seemed to be animating her frame. (FMC, pp. 327-28)

The suggestion that all women are 'alike at heart' can be seen to issue from Troy, or from a tergiversating narrative voice. In one sense the suggestion is true in that all women, regardless of class, are forced to estimate their personal worth according to the value placed upon them by men. At the same time, it is a somewhat superficial and disturbing determinist speculation which has the effect of negating the separate agonies endured by both women. The fact remains that Fanny's sufferings are far greater than Bathsheba's as a direct result of her lowly social and economic status. Whereas Bathsheba is chastened by mental torment, Fanny dies in physical agony.

Far From the Madding Crowd examines the way women are forced to conceive of themselves in terms of male expectations even when wealth and social status obviate any dependence upon marriage as a way of securing the means of existence. Despite her position, Bathsheba is caught up in the need for social approval, and social ratification of her own feminine identity, which is granted

in the form of masculine approbation. Her initial intention was to make herself into the sort of woman who would attract the male gaze for, as Liddy declares, "men be such a terrible class of society to look at a body" (FMC, p. 126). As the narrative progresses, she comes to realize that to be the subject of the male gaze, whether she wishes it or not, is to be the subject of his censure : "some rash acts of my past life have taught me that a watched woman must have very much circumspection to retain only a very little credit" (FMC, p. 379). The function of her Christian name is, I believe, to identify her with the archetypal watched women - her namesake in the Old Testament.⁹

Unlike Fanny, Bathsheba is in rebellion against the role she is eventually forced to play. However, as the text demonstrates, while social and economic conditions remain as they are, she has no alternative mode of self expression. Bathsheba's history demonstrates woman's marginality in a society which seeks to silence, repress and determine female experience. As she informs Boldwood, "it is difficult for a woman to define her feelings in language which is chiefly made by men to express theirs" (FMC, p. 376).¹⁰ However, as Grace and Elfride discovered, to reject masculine forms of self-expression is to condemn oneself to silence. It is ironic that Troy's desertion of his wife does not, in any sense, liberate her; rather it deprives her of her identity not only as a wife, but also as a woman. When she is nothing to Troy, she is nothing to herself. It is significant that Bathsheba loses her voice in the same hollow amid the ferns that witnessed her earlier capitulation to Troy.

For the same reason, Bathsheba's anger at her own helplessness is essentially futile. Confronted by the disastrous results of her capitulation to Troy, she regrets that she had ever 'stooped to folly of this kind, respectable as it was', and wishes that 'she could only stand again, as she had stood on the hill at Norcombe, and dare Troy or any man to pollute a hair of her head by his interference!' (FMC, pp. 303-04). Again there is a painful irony in her final act of capitulation - her marriage to Gabriel - for, at his request, Bathsheba arranges her hair 'as she had worn it years ago on Norcombe Hill'.

and 'seemed in his eyes remarkably like the girl of that fascinating dream' (FMC, p. 423). Despite her rebellion, Bathsheba is eventually forced to conform to Gabriel's initial mental image of her - to a man's dream which, in this case, finally comes true. The text is a devastating critique of the traditional womanly roles that Bathsheba is compelled to adopt. Fanny Robin's entry into Weatherbury on the flower-laden funeral car replicates Bathsheba's entry on the spring waggon in the opening pages of the novel; in fact, the same vehicle is used. Fanny's death therefore neatly symbolizes the destruction of Bathsheba's romantic ideals. The siren's demand for 'nothing less than the highest homage from the husband I should choose' becomes a plea for bare justice. At the same time, Fanny's death also symbolizes the negative and destructive nature of the traditional womanly role for the woman concerned, a theme which was to motivate a much later novel - Two on a Tower.

Far from the Madding Crowd does consider other alternatives to woman's enforced dependence upon men, in addition to the fierce virginity favoured by many feminists of the time. As in Desperate Remedies and The Woodlanders, Far from the Madding Crowd explores the idea of female solidarity as one remedy against male coercion. Weatherbury Farm is a privileged sanctuary for Bathsheba who is surrounded and supported by her female servants and, more especially, by her companion Liddy. Betrayed by Troy and desperate, Bathsheba is rescued, in mental as well as physical terms, by the faithful Liddy who brings her food, drink and emotional support:

Bathsheba never forgot that transient little picture of Liddy crossing the swamp to her there in the morning light. Iridescent bubbles of dank subterranean breath rose from the sweating sod beside the waiting-maid's feet as she trod, hissing as they burst and expanded away to join the vapoury firmament above. Liddy did not sink, as Bathsheba had anticipated. (FMC, p. 330)

The iridescent bubbles made by the swamp reiterate the luminous streams, gleams and hisses made by the movement of Troy's sword through the air during his impressive display of swordsmanship. However, on this occasion the woman in question - Liddy - manages to remain in control of the situation.

Fanny Robin deserts the secure female world presided over by Bathsheba in order to seek access to the male world presided over by Troy. We move from the cosy domesticity of Weatherbury Farm to the bleak, wintery forbidding façade of Casterbridge Barracks where Fanny stands, on the wrong side of the river, throwing ineffectual snowballs at the closed windows of Troy's quarters (FMC, p. 120). In the light of this, I would claim that if the text contains any indication of Bathsheba's moral development, it resides in the growth of her genuine sympathy for her dead rival evident in her ministrations at Fanny's graveside. These actions, and the emotions which accompany them, are more telling than her eventual appreciation of the benefits of marriage with Gabriel Oak which, as the narrator is at pains to stress, is a purely pragmatic arrangement. However, the fact remains that while women continue to be socially and economically dependent upon men, close female relationships are under constant threat from a male intruder. This idea is also discussed in A Laodicean which is likewise concerned to examine the pressures which compel a financially independent woman to sacrifice her personal liberty to the demands of social convention.

Despite her wealth and social status Paula, like Bathsheba, is engaged in a quest for a socially approved identity to replace the traditionally masculine role of proprietor of Stancy Castle and heir to a substantial fortune. She can only achieve this through marriage, and voluntary re-subjection to a conventional female role which is incompatible with her own self-image. The extent to which gender determines the ability of the individual to operate freely within society is one of the central concerns of this text.

Unlike Bathsheba, Paula enjoys 'a clandestine stealthy inner life which had very little to do with her outward one'.¹¹ In this respect, she resembles Grace Melbury, and in both cases the suggestion is that the type of person each woman appears to be bears little or no resemblance to the woman she really is. Paula is distinguished from most of Hardy's heroines by an emotional and sexual self-management which surpasses even that of Ethelberta Petherwin. We learn

that her habit of 'self-repression at any new emotional impact was instinctive with her always' (AL, p. 239). The use of the term 'instinct' is interesting for, as the narrative progresses, we learn that Paula's self-management is as much a product of art as it is of nature. As an independent and wealthy heiress, she has developed a strategy for survival to compensate for the unequal balance of power between the sexes which mitigates against her despite her social position. As she informs Somerset, "there are genuine reasons for women's conduct in these matters as well as for men's, though it is sometimes supposed to be regulated entirely by caprice" (AL, p. 260). A Laodicean examines these reasons and shows them to be determined by women's economic and social situation.

Allied to her emotional circumspection is Paula's laodiceanism - in the religious, artistic and emotional sense. She shares this unwillingness to commit herself to any one line of action with all of Hardy's 'New Women' from Fancy Day to Sue Bridehead. A Laodicean, like Under the Greenwood Tree and Jude the Obscure, suggests that this trait is a product of the 'New Woman's' powerlessness and her circumscribed position in a society which denies her freedom of action and utterance. Society grants this freedom to men however. George Somerset, for example, suffers from 'the modern malady of unlimited appreciativeness' (AL, p. 41). He is 'a man of independent tastes and excursive instincts', at liberty to take 'greater pleasure in floating in lonely currents of thought than with the general tide of opinion' (AL, p. 39). In the absence of a satisfactory alternative to convention, the 'New Woman' remains in a state of irresolution. Paula describes herself as 'one of that body to whom lukewarmth is not an accident but a provisional necessity, till they see a little more clearly' (AL, p. 434).

However, Paula does progress a little further in her search for an alternative to the socially defined female identity than did Bathsheba. Paula is, in fact, one of Hardy's most emancipated heroines, not only in the financial but also in the economic sense, and as such reflects her creator's growing awareness of, and interest in, the feminist debates of that time. She is a

great believer in mental and physical self-culture. Her room is filled with popular papers and periodicals from England, Paris and America in addition to books from the London circulating libraries, paper-backs from France and Italy and the latest monthly reviews. As Havill informs Will Dare:

...she holds advanced views on social and other matters; and in those on the higher education of women she is very strong, talking a good deal about the physical training of the Greeks, whom she adores, or did. Every philosopher and man of science who ventilates his theories in the monthly reviews has a devout listener in her; and this subject of the physical development of her sex has had its turn with other things in her mind. So she had the [gymnasium] built on her very first arrival, according to the latest lights on athletics, and in imitation of those at the new colleges for women'. (AL, p. 194)

'New Women' like Paula, with her books, her journals and her gymnasium built in imitation of those at Girton and Newnham, signalled the gradual deconstruction of the socially determined feminine model. In this sense Paula enjoys greater opportunities, and is consequently able to offer greater resistance to the pressure to conform, than her predecessor. On the surface, it would appear that Paula is in rebellion against orthodoxy in any form: she is 'a Dissenter, and a Radical, and a New Light', and, of course, a feminist. However, despite her avowed non-conformity, she is still bound by the socially prescribed limits which determine the freedom of women. Her situation is clearly symbolized by her environment. She inhabits a comparatively modern wing of a castle which is, for the most part 'irregular, dilapidated, and muffled in creepers' (AL, p. 51). She is literally almost immured alive in a mouldering ancient pile, a 'modern flower in a mediaeval flower pot' (AL, p. 67). Her only links with the outside world are a large modern clock - symbol of the passage of time - and the telegraph wire - symbol of communication - which enters this monument to the past 'like a worm uneasy at being unearthed' (AL, p. 54). The indomitable and subtly inescapable influence of Stancy Castle symbolizes tradition and convention, and its effect upon the 'modern type of maidenhood' (AL, p. 46). Somerset attempts to estimate 'the disqualifying effect ... of her nonconformity, her newness of blood, and other things, among the old country families established around her', and realizes that her only hope of

being accepted and recognized by society lies in her beauty, her wit, and more importantly, her willingness to conform to an accepted social role - that of a wife (AL, p. 124). As her Uncle Abner puts it, "you could marry more tin, that's true; but you don't want it, Paula. You want a name, and historic what-do-they-call-it" (AL, p. 360).

Paula, in common with the majority of women of her time, can never achieve a name for herself in her own right, she can only inherit her father's, or adopt her husband's. As Stephen Heath declares, 'she has independence and force, her name is Paula Power, but no particular course of action or decided commitment, her name after all reflects only the strength of her engineer father'.¹² Somerset questions her search for an identity of her own and tells her "you represent the march of mind - the steamship, and the railway, and the thoughts that shake mankind", but, as she so rightly rejoinders, he refers not to her, but to her father, "my father was a great man; but I am more and more forgetting his greatness: that kind of greatness is what a woman can never truly enter into. I am less and less his daughter every day that goes by" (AL, p. 118). Like Bathsheba, Paula can only hope to be 'of the stuff of which great men's mothers are made', she can never be great in her own right. Faced with the frustration and uncertainty of the future, her impulse is to turn to the past and ally herself with an inherited tradition in the form of marriage with the aristocracy. This option is represented by the heir to the effete de Stancy line - Captain William de Stancy. The nobility of talent and enterprise, represented by Archimedes, Newcomen, Watt, Telford and Stephenson, whom Somerset cites as her father's direct ancestors, is a male nobility to which Paula as a woman can never truly belong. Marriage to de Stancy, however, would immediately identify her as belonging to the nobility of romance and history, the inviolable past as opposed to the insecure and unwelcoming future. "If I were one", she informs Somerset in the de Stancy family vault, "I should come here when I feel alone in the world, as I do today; and I would defy people, and say, "You cannot spoil what has been" (AL, p. 135).

Paula's recidivism is compounded and encouraged by those around her from the minister of religion Mr Woodwell, who regards it as his function to contest Paula's 'wild opinions' and her 'intractability', to the antiquarians who seek control over her environment and the suitors who seek control over her body, her mind and her fortune; in particular George Somerset, who is yet another in the long line of idealizing and restraining lovers in the tradition of Knight, Maybold, Fitzpiers, Boldwood and Oak. Like Oak, Somerset ascribes to his beloved the womanly characteristics most conducive to his passion, and seeks to mould her into his courtly ideal: 'the soul of all that was tender, and noble, and kind' (AL, p. 93). He desires her to be 'so good and honourable ... that he could have laid down his life for her' (AL, p. 131). Like Boldwood, he is uneasy at the prospect of his beloved displaying any familiarity with commercial matters; any talk of money 'seemed to disturb the softness of their relationship' (AL, p. 106). Like Knight, Somerset responds to Paula's inability to conform to his ideal by conceiving of her as its opposite 'a finished coquette and a dissembler' (AL, p. 120). His conclusion that her prevarication is the result of womanly instinct reflects the traditional misogynist stereotype of woman as fickle, unstable and untrustworthy, and also undermines his desire to idealize her as the soul of truth and honesty.

Paula's reaction to Somerset's circumscribing presence is twofold. She is aware of his interference in her life and requests him to keep his distance. She is, however, unwilling to relinquish him entirely so remains in a state of mental equipoise, neither conforming to nor utterly rejecting his demands, and retaining her emotional and sexual liberty for as long as possible. The implication that she truly loves Somerset is reinforced by her somewhat humiliating and, in terms of the plot, unnecessary pursuit of him across Europe. However, there are other considerations to take into account. Marriage with Somerset would do little to legitimize her claim to the de Stancy heritage, neither would it provide her with any real social anchorage. Somerset registers Paula's unwillingness to commit herself to him but fails, understandably

perhaps, to appreciate the practical reasons behind her motivation. Perplexed by her behaviour he turns to inherited assumptions about women's fickleness: 'he did not understand her. History has revealed that a supernumerary lover or two is rarely considered a disadvantage by a woman, from queen to cottage-girl; and the thought made him pause' (AL, p. 132). Although Paula seeks confirmation of her womanhood, she desires to retain her 'undisturbed maidenhood' in the emotional as well as the sexual sense.

Captain William de Stancy represents the pernicious and tenacious - yet outworn - influence of tradition over the 'New Woman'. It is he who verbalizes the process of male appropriation of the female which Hardy's texts examine. He informs Will Dare that mere looking has less to do with the courtship of a pretty woman than what he describes as "mental attentiveness - allowing your thoughts to flow out in her direction - to comprehend her image", as a preliminary step towards the possession of her body (AL, p. 185). The use of the term "image" here reflects the negative and sterile nature of Paula's impulse to tradition. Although an alliance with the de Stancy line would render her safe from the insecurities and precariousness of her position as a modern woman, it would effectively invalidate any intellectual and cultural advances she has made and imprison her even more securely in the outmoded restrictive social conventions represented by de Stancy Castle. Paula would take her place in the long line of beauties whose portraits adorn the mouldering gallery; a one dimensional image with no potential for the development of a distinct personality.

De Stancy's desire for Paula is initiated by an act of voyeurism which mirrors Somerset's espial of her humiliation in the chapel, and replicates Gabriel's observation of Bathsheba's unself-conscious gymnastic display on horseback. Hardy's heroines recognize the need to exhibit themselves to their best advantage, and it is this which lays them open to accusations of exhibitionism and deliberate provocation from Hardy's critics as well as from his male characters. However, in the case of both Bathsheba and Paula, the

attentions their actions elicit are, for the most part, unsolicited. De Stancy's behaviour, like Oak's, is implicitly criticized by the narrator who, throughout the text, is at pains to emphasize Paula's insistence upon emotional and physical privacy. Indeed, our awareness of her reticence and discretion serves to make de Stancy's act of blatant prurience even more distasteful. What is perhaps more distressing is the fact that de Stancy spies on Paula as she is doing her exercises in the gymnasium thus, as Barbara Hardy has observed, extracting erotic stimulation from her attempts to train and exercise her body.¹³

Paula then, like Bathsheba, is moved by two contradictory impulses: the pressure to capitulate to, and the desire to transcend the sterile and circumscribing bounds of convention by resisting the pressures brought to bear upon her by the men who are closest to her. Her uncle describes her marriage to de Stancy as 'diplomatically ... such an obvious thing to all eyes'. She replies, "not altogether to mine" (AL, p. 360). Marriage with de Stancy may be Paula's most pragmatic option, but it is clear that it would also fix her firmly in her traditional female role, and would re-establish the social order which she has violated by her desire for intellectual and emotional freedom. As de Stancy reminds her, although conformity to the social idea may well involve the sacrifice of her personal happiness, "still the social idea exists" (AL, p. 354).

However, if marriage with de Stancy would make a 'Woman' out of Paula, it would also make a 'Man' out of de Stancy by providing him with the necessary trappings of bourgeois manhood - money and property. De Stancy's proper place in the social order is that of "husband to Miss Power, and proprietor of that castle and domain" (AL, p. 156). It is Dare, whose illegitimacy places him outside the social order, who seeks to remind his self-emasculated father of his social duties by re-introducing him to the conventional trademarks of masculinity - wine and women. De Stancy's return to masculinity, as defined by society rather than by biology - is described and underlined through the use of traditionally phallic symbols, and through the creation of a traditionally

masculine environment and ethos. Having already determined to break his vow of celibacy, de Stancy prepares to break his vow of tee-totalism, aided and abetted by the hamper of wine provided by Dare:

De Stancy looked out and listened. The guns that stood drawn up within the yard glistened in the moonlight reaching them from over the barrack-wall: there was an occasional stamp of horses in the stables; also a measured tread of sentinels - one or more at the gates, one at the hospital, one between the wings, two at the magazine, and others further off. Recurring to his intention he drew the corks of the mineral waters, and inverting each bottle one by one over the window-sill, heard its contents dribble in a small stream onto the gravel below.

He then opened the hamper which Dare had sent. Uncorking one of the bottles he murmured, 'To Paula!' and drank a glass of the ruby liquor.

'A man again after eighteen years,' he said, shutting the sash and returning to his bedroom. (AL, p. 202)

Like Bathsheba, Paula is forced to resign her power and independence in order to achieve a recognizable social identity and, even though she eventually decides to face the future on the arm of the architect rather than immure herself in the past in the arms of the aristocrat, she does so as an unenfranchised wife, rather than as a liberated woman. When she returns to Stancy Castle as Mrs George Somerset, a bystander comments: "that's no more Miss Power that was, than my niece's daughter Kezia is Miss Power - in short it is a different woman altogether." (AL, p. 427).

Although Paula epitomizes the 'New Woman' in her hesitation between a traditional and modern life style, her options are still presented in terms of a choice between men. The text tentatively suggests that true liberation for Paula lies in her reciprocated love for Charlotte de Stancy who speaks of her more like 'a lover ... than a friend' (AL, p. 64). However, this suggestion is never developed and Charlotte remains even more marginal to the central concerns of the text than Fanny Robin or Liddy Smallbury was to Far from the Madding Crowd. More significantly perhaps, Paula Power anticipates Sue Bridehead's insecurity in the modern age by rejecting innovation for tradition, and rebellion for conformity. After the destruction of her castle by Dare, Paula declares somewhat wistfully to Somerset, "I wish my castle wasn't burnt;

and I wish you were a de Stancy", thereby articulating the 'New Woman's' distrust of a future which appears to make little or no provision for her, whilst at the same time reflecting the inescapable hold of society over the modern spirit, which was to form one of the major themes of Jude the Obscure. A Laodicean challenges the notion that the social idea is fixed and unalterable by suggesting that the conditions of existence are undergoing a slow but inevitable process of change, whilst highlighting the fact that the arbitrary man-made laws under which women were forced to live remained artificially stabilized. Like Far from the Madding Crowd it is a plea for the removal of the artificial barriers to women's social, economic and intellectual progress in order that they too may be free to develop in response to 'the great modern fluctuations of classes and creeds' (AL, p. 67).

Two on a Tower enters more fully into a dialogue with determinist and meliorist notions of the proper sphere of womanhood than either of the two texts previously mentioned in this chapter. The vague, and somewhat nebulous concept of female solidarity posited in Far from the Madding Crowd and A Laodicean is displaced by a serious if rather wary consideration of the potential of the feminist movement to provide women with viable alternatives to the traditional social role and mental outlook. The narrative concludes with the death of the heroine, who has been a martyr to convention and to the inherent misogyny of the society in which she lived, and her subsequent replacement by Tabitha Lark - the spokeswoman of the modern feminist spirit.

Viviette Constantine's alienation from the world is total. She has no place even within the limited traditional female sphere of action because she has no accepted role. As Granny Martin declares, "the state she finds herself in - neither maid, wife, nor widow - is not the primest form of life for keeping in good spirits".¹⁴ In addition, she has no social outlet for her frustrations. Consequently she is the victim of 'an almost killing ennui'. Tabitha Lark describes her as "eaten out with listlessness neither sick nor sorry, but how dull and dreary she is, only herself can tell' (TT, p. 44).

Her isolation is a direct and indirect result of the moral and emotional pressure exerted upon her by men. Her husband's jealousy and possessiveness sentence her to a period of near imprisonment in Welland House while he indulges his somewhat implausible passion for lion-hunting, "which he dignified by calling it a scheme of geographical discovery; for he was inordinately anxious to make a name for himself in that field" (TT, p. 51). Viviette's marital situation functions as an exaggerated, and rather blatant model of the conventional nineteenth-century domestic pact in which the woman remains firmly closeted in the sanctuary of the home while the man fulfils his role as social and sexual adventurer. Her sentence is extended by Parson Torkingham who, as the voice of patriarchal religion, fulfils a similar duty to that of Parson Woodwell in A Laodicean. Viviette's marriage to Sir Blount was a marriage of convenience, similar perhaps to those of Ethelberta and Felice Charmond. As such it offered neither outlet for emotional expression nor scope for personal development. However, it did provide her with an identity of sorts for without her husband she is mute and helpless.

Viviette's frustration is both sexual and intellectual. Hers is 'a warm and affectionate, perhaps slightly voluptuous temperament, languishing for want of something to do, cherish, or suffer for' (TT, p. 49). Whereas Ethelberta chose literary discourse as a means of expressing what was repressed in her existence Viviette, like Felice Charmond, turns to the traditional feminine occupation of love. However, it is clear that there are elements within her personality that cannot be satisfactorily expressed through sexuality alone. From the very beginning, she realizes the limitations of love as a woman's sole raison d'être. Her passion for St Cleeve, which began as merely 'an attractive little intervention between herself and despair', expands to embrace the desire for active participation in the outside world - the traditionally masculine sphere of activity. Viviette seeks to escape the circumscribed, outmoded and decaying domestic environment - symbolized here as in A Laodicean by her home - and gain access to the male environment of

intellect, ambition and achievement symbolized by the Rings Hill Speer.

The column is a memorial - albeit a neglected one - to a man of action: her husband's great grandfather who was an officer killed in the American War of Independence; 'here stood this aspiring piece of masonry, erected as the most conspicuous and ineffaceable reminder of a man that could be thought of She herself had lived within a mile of it for the last five years, and had never come near to it till now'. At first she is hesitant to ascend. Although she owns the tower, she is unable to claim it with confidence. Her predicament echoes that of Bathsheba and Paula whose wealth and power is inert and who await the advent of a suitable man to galvanize it into action. At the top of the tower Viviette is greeted by a man who, at first, seeks to deny her access to his intellectual world:

This sort of presence was unexpected, and the lady started back into the shade of the opening. The only effect produced upon him by her footfall was an impatient wave of the hand, which he did without removing his eye from the instrument, as if to forbid her to interrupt him. (TT, p. 34)

The meeting between Viviette and Swithin is initially one between representatives of the female and male worlds. Her knowledge is purely sensual whereas Swithin, who exists in a 'primitive Eden of unconsciousness', knows only of the scientific and the celestial. The use of the word 'Eden' here suggests the traditional myth of Eve, whose longing for knowledge, both intellectual and sexual, was a disruptive force in Paradise. Viviette longs for both. She is immediately conscious of the limitations of her sphere and demands access to Swithin's. His reluctance is symptomatic of society's general attitude to further education for women:

'These stars that vary so much - sometimes evening stars, sometimes morning stars, sometimes in the east, and sometimes in the west - have always interested me.'

'Ah - now there is a reason for your not coming. Your ignorance of the realities of astronomy is so satisfactory that I will not disturb it except at your serious request.'

'But I wish to be enlightened.'

'Let me caution you against it.'

'Is enlightenment on the subject, then, so terrible?'

'Yes indeed.'

She laughingly declared that nothing could have so piqued her curiosity as his statement, and turned to descend. (TT, p. 38)

Viviette's desire to participate in Swithin's world is transformed into a desire to fascinate and influence Swithin himself. In addition to the attractions of astronomy she is piqued by his indifference to her beauty, attracted by his virginity and provoked by his mental and emotional inaccessibility: 'as she continued to look at the pretty fellow before her, apparently so far abstracted into some speculative world as scarcely to know a real one, a warmer wave of her warm temperament glowed visibly through her' (TT, p. 35). Her desire to captivate and manipulate the possessor of intellectual power can be interpreted in two ways. Biologically processed to experience existence on a purely sensational level, Viviette seeks to lure Swithin away from his intellectual pursuits into the realms of the physical where she will have complete control over him; "'do come out of it," she coaxed, with a softness in her voice which any man but unpractised Swithin would have felt to be exquisite. "I feel that I have been so foolish as to put in your hands an instrument to effect my own annihilation"' (TT, p. 87). She expresses jealousy over Swithin's single-minded obsession with astronomy: "I sometimes think you would rather have me die than have your equatorial stolen", she pouts (TT, p. 106). In this way, Viviette acts out the conventional role of Eve ascribed to women by a society conditioned to equate sex with sin and dissipation, and to locate the source of all sex within the female. Viviette herself subscribes to the popular conviction that women, by virtue of their narrow-minded and instinctive sexuality, drag men down to their own irrational level and succeed in enmeshing them in domesticity and physicality. Hence, when she discovers that she is not legally married to Swithin she regrets 'the being obliged, despite his curious escape from the first attempt, to lime Swithin's young wings again solely for her credit sake' (TT, p. 231). Her regret is rendered even more poignant by the fact that in marrying her, Swithin would forfeit his uncle's legacy:

No money from his uncle; no power of advancement; but a bondage with a woman whose disparity of years, though immaterial just now, would operate in the future as a wet blanket upon his social

ambitions; and that content with life as it was which she had noticed more than once in him latterly, a content imperilling his scientific spirit by abstracting his zeal for progress. (TT, p. 243)

Viviette's views are to some extent ironized, however, in the character of Swithin's uncle, 'a bachelor and hardened misogynist of seventy-two', who warns his nephew in his will

If you attempt to study with a woman, you'll be ruled by her to entertain fancies instead of theories, air-castles instead of intentions, qualms instead of opinions, sickly prepossessions instead of reasoned conclusions. Your wide heaven of study, young man, will soon reduce itself to the miserably narrow expanse of her face, and your myriad of stars to her two trumpery eyes. (TT, p. 144-45)

Swithin's uncle also shares Henry Knight's Spencerian-like contempt for women's intellectual capacity and their trustworthiness, which Viviette echoes, "I shall not understand your explanation", she tells Swithin, "and I would rather not know it. I shall reveal it if it is very grand. Women, you know, are not safe depositaries of such valuable secrets." (TT, p. 89).¹⁵

Swithin's uncle's views are a deliberate parody of nineteenth-century misogyny and, as such, are held up for ridicule by the text. His is the voice of masculine prejudice and superstition which women like Viviette are so susceptible to. On reading his letter, she is seized with indignation, which is rapidly displaced by humiliation and 'a miserable conviction that this old man who spoke from the grave was not altogether wrong in his speaking; that he was only half wrong; that he was, perhaps, virtually right' (TT, p. 242). However, while the voice of patriarchal repression is deliberately exaggerated and implicitly criticized within the text in order to expose Viviette's self-deception, there is evidence to suggest that the narrator holds with the view that sexual and intellectual activity are incompatible, and that women are responsible for thwarting or defusing men's natural ambitiousness. This idea occurs in A Pair of Blue Eyes where Knight's books seem to reproach him for deserting them in favour of 'an unstable delight in a ductile woman' (PBE, p. 365). It is also present in Jude the Obscure, where Jude wonders "is it ... that the women are to blame; or is it the artificial system of things,

under which the normal sex-impulses are turned into devilish domestic gins and springes to noose and hold back those who want to progress?' (JO, p. 238). However, in both cases it is clear that such speculations are the property of the characters concerned, and the narrative voice remains impartial. In Two on a Tower, the boundary between the narrative voice and Swithin's somewhat limited conjectures is less clear. The reader cannot help but detect a note of wistful regret in the description of Viviette's distraction of Swithin from his observations, and her dulling effect upon his personality. Sexual passion is described as 'the alchemy which ... transmuted an abstracted astronomer into an eager lover - and, must it be said? spoilt a promising young physicist to produce a common-place innamorato' (TT, p. 115). Later we read of Swithin that 'scientifically he had become but a dim vapour of himself; the lover had come into him like an armed man, and cast out the student, and his intellectual situation was growing a life-and-death matter' (TT, p. 122). Likewise, it is difficult to forgive the narrator's censure of his heroine for fixing her time for meeting Swithin 'when at last he had an opportunity of seeing the sky; so that in giving to her the golden moments of cloudlessness he was losing his chance with the orbs above' (TT, p. 278). The narrative voice also seems to share the view promulgated by followers of Comte and Spencer that women were mentally and physically unfitted for strenuous mental activity. Despite the fact that Viviette's intellectual capabilities and her frustrations are sympathetically discussed, when it comes to finding a solution to her problems she is described as worrying 'her little brain' (TT, p. 245). When applied to women, diminutives have the effect of minifying their claims to physical or intellectual prowess. One is immediately reminded of Tennyson's Lilia tapping 'her tiny silken-sandal'd foot' in anger at man's condescension to woman.¹⁶

It is possible, however, to detect a more enlightened view of Viviette's motivation which implies that her responses are a direct result of her intellectual and social powerlessness. Viviette seeks an outlet for her intellectual frustrations and her boredom and these she can only relieve

vicariously through Swithin:

The possibility of that young astronomer becoming a renowned scientist by her aid was a thought which gave her secret pleasure. The course of rendering him instant material help began to have a great fascination for her; it was a new and unexpected channel for her cribbed and confined emotions. With experiences so much wider than his, Lady Constantine saw that the chances were perhaps a million to one against Swithin St Cleeve ever being Astronomer Royal, or Astronomer Extraordinary of any sort; yet the remaining chance in his favour was one of those possibilities which, to a woman of bounding intellect and venturesome fancy, are pleasanter to dwell on than likely issues that have no savour of high speculation in them. (TT, p. 73)

Astronomy can never be more than a hobby for Viviette, like farming for Bathsheba, or architecture for Paula. As Barbara Hardy has suggested: 'the woman has money, position, property, energy and intelligence, but has to pay the skilled man to do the interesting work, whether he is a shepherd, an astronomer or an architect. The woman is an enthusiastic pupil, providing enough ancillary "collaboration" to make her inferiority even plainer'.¹⁷ Swithin becomes her Astronomer Royal, and she becomes his benefactor, his inspiration, but never his intellectual counterpart. Viviette's desire to fascinate and influence Swithin can be seen as the desire to exercise a little power over one whose social and intellectual privileges she may never share.

Two on a Tower exposes the way in which women who are restricted to the realm of the emotions and sex, and who therefore choose love as their sole means of self-expression, risk effacement rather than achieve fulfilment. What begins as a diversion eventually threatens to take her over as, faced with the possibility of losing him altogether, Viviette finds herself in 'that state of anguish in which the heart is no longer under the control of the judgement, and self-abandonment, even to error, verges on heroism' (TT, p. 92). The key term here is 'self-abandonment' for, all the time that she is prompting Swithin in the conventional courtly role - just as Elfride prompted Stephen -, Viviette is aware that she is sacrificing her 'power of self-control' and concealment (TT, p. 108). However, despite her desire to emancipate herself from "that which is called the Eve in us", and her recognition that she is

speaking "by the card of the outer world", she knows of no other way to behave (TT, p. 119). Viviette's reluctance to marry Swithin also stems from more practical considerations. As with Cytherea, Elfride and Ethelberta, Viviette's social duty is to secure her own and her family's prospects after the death of Sir Blount, through another politic marriage. In terms of the card metaphor, which once again features in conjunction with marital strategy, Viviette stands to profit more from taking a trick which contains the bishop - 'the King of Spades', than from one which contains Swithin - 'the knave of Hearts' (TT, p. 193). However, by this time Viviette has 'played her card - recklessly, impulsively, ruinously, perhaps; but she had played it; it could not be withdrawn' (TT, p. 178).

In finally relinquishing Swithin, Viviette functions as an apparently commendable example of the Comtean doctrine of feminine altruism and self-sacrifice in action. In the preface to Two on a Tower Hardy expressed the hope that some readers

will be reminded by this imperfect story, in a manner not unprofitable to the growth of the social sympathies, of the pathos, misery, long-suffering, and divine tenderness which in real life frequently accompany the passion of such a woman as Viviette for a lover several years her junior. (TT, p. 29)

Hardy's use of the term 'social sympathies' is reminiscent of Darwin and Huxley, but more especially Comte, each of whom located the source of altruism in women and the maternal instinct. The use of the term 'divine tenderness' strengthens the link with Comte. On the surface, Two on a Tower appears to support the Comtean thesis. Viviette's feelings for Swithin are both sexual and maternal; she regards him 'with all the rapt mingling of religion, love, fervour, and hope which such women can feel at such times, and which men know nothing of' (TT, p. 175). Swithin, on the other hand, is the embodiment of 'scientific earnestness'. He is immersed in 'sublime scientific things', and consequently is oblivious to 'woman ... her sacrifices, [and] her fears' (TT, p. 275). His final rejection of the aged Viviette is seen as the result of 'the inexorably simple logic of such men which partakes of the cruelty of the natural laws that

are their study' (TT, p. 291). Viviette's actions are obviously motivated by Comtean philosophy. In addition to the maternal instinct, Comte held that the experience of conjugal love would eventually lead humanity to sincere affection for all mankind. Thus Viviette reasons

Love between man and woman, which in Homer, Moses, and other early exhibitors of life, is mere desire, had for centuries past so far broadened as to include sympathy and friendship; surely it should in this advanced stage of the world include benevolence also. If so, it was her duty to set her young man free. (TT, p. 244)

Her sacrifice of her own happiness and comfort, in order that Swithin might benefit from the terms of his uncle's will, is an act of pure altruism and, from the Comtean point of view, both heroic and ethically laudable. However, Viviette's altruism is admixed with an element of Christian self-sacrifice which, ironically enough, further strengthens her link with Eve - not as the cause of the world's evil, but as the one who is punished for it.

As in The Hand of Ethelberta, Two on a Tower demonstrates that the philosophies created by men are formulated with a callous disregard for the female experience. In the final analysis, convention proves to be stronger than philosophy for the discovery that she is pregnant with Swithin's child, and her fears both for herself and her unborn baby, resurrects the 'instinct of self-preservation' in her, and 'her altruism in subjecting her self-love to benevolence, and letting Swithin go away from her, was demolished by the new necessity, as if it had been a gossamer web' (TT, p. 257). The text examines the way in which women who regulate their conduct according to the social idea cannot hope to win for, in fulfilling the dictates of a philosophy which was created by men they risk offending against a set of social conventions which are likewise established by the dominant sex. Viviette's unethical deception of the bishop is a desperate attempt to escape moral censure. She enters into another game of strategy in which 'convention was forcing her hand' and, the narrator asks rhetorically 'to what will not convention compel her weaker victims, in extremes?' (TT, p. 272). This question was to be answered nearly thirteen years later in Jude the Obscure.

Viviette's conduct is negated even further by the response of the man it was designed to aid. Rather than learning from the example of feminine altruism, as Comte believed they would do, the text demonstrates that men will inevitably seek to profit from women's altruistic tendencies. Hence, Viviette's predicament is forgotten by Swithin 'in his feeling that she had done a very handsome and noble thing for him, and that he was therefore bound in honour to make the most of it' (TT, p. 255). Though the narrator regrets Swithin's dismissal of Viviette from his mind, he regards it as an inevitable masculine response:

Whoever may deplore it few will wonder that Viviette, who till then had stood high in his heaven, if she had not dominated it, sank, like the North Star, lower and lower with his retreat southward. Master of a large advance of his first year's income in circular notes, he perhaps too readily forgot that the mere act of honour, but for her self-suppression, would have rendered him penniless. (TT, p. 274)

In common with the texts previously discussed in this chapter, Two on a Tower implies that women's hope of emancipation lies in forging new codes of conduct in direct opposition to the social idea, and the sexual and emotional predilections of the dominant sex. In this way, the narrative can be seen to reflect Hardy's cautious affinity with the aims and ideals of the feminist movement of the second half of the nineteenth century championed by John Stuart Mill. The novel ends on a note of optimism with the reappearance of Tabitha Lark, who

had left Welland shortly after [Swithin's] own departure, and had studied music with great success in London, where she had resided ever since till quite recently ... she played at concerts, oratorios - had, in short, joined the phalanx of Wonderful Women who had resolved to eclipse masculine genius altogether, and humiliate the brutal sex to the dust. (TT, p. 286)

Tabitha's determined bid to escape the limitations of the traditional female role, unaided by legacies or benefactresses, can be seen as a positive alternative to Viviette's eventual capitulation despite the narrator's somewhat flippant and vaguely threatened attitude to her achievements. The text ends with Swithin - now the sole occupant of the tower of knowledge and ambition - cradling the lifeless form of the martyred Viviette in his arms: 'he looked up for help. Nobody appeared in sight but Tabitha Lark, who was skirting the

field with a bounding tread - the single bright spot of colour and animation within the wide horizon' (TT, p. 292). Although the educated 'New Woman' is still conceived of in terms of Swithin's amanuensis, her energetic circuit of the Rings-Hill Speer suggests her inevitable ascent to the top of the tower, and perhaps even her eventual eclipse of its inhabitant.

The three texts which form the focus of this chapter are concerned with examining the traditional options available to women in the nineteenth century, and exposing their limitations in terms of personal fulfilment. Bathsheba and Paula are 'New Women' in that they are the product of changing social and economic conditions. They are united by the degree of economic and social power they possess which grants them certain privileges of sexual and emotional liberty denied to Hardy's other female characters. Far from the Madding Crowd and A Laodicean chart the gradual and inevitable abdication of this power and its corresponding privileges on the part of the central female protagonist whilst at the same time demonstrating the extent to which the heroine's re-subjection of herself to the demands of the status quo is the result of inescapable social pressures. Both texts conclude that self-realization and self-determination are incompatible with the legal and social conditions of a woman's existence. Two on a Tower interrogates the stereotype of femininity created and enforced by a society deeply influenced by the determinist philosophies of Darwin, Spencer and Comte, and concludes that women's only hope of emancipation lies in the abandonment of the traditional altruistic and self-sacrificing role in favour of the development of their physical, intellectual and emotional capabilities. At the same time, the ambiguous relationship between the narrator and the central female protagonist indicates the extent to which traditional fictional stereotypes of women prove inadequate to the demands of Hardy's artistic intentions.

In the earlier text, the narrator is concerned to isolate the heroine as a distinct individual rather than a recognizable feminine type. At the same time he seeks to retain the nineteenth-century reader's credence in Bathsheba by

attributing to her certain characteristics, such as vanity and impulsiveness, traditionally ascribed to women. Ian Ousby has noted the tensions in the presentation of Bathsheba, and discerns the narrator's knack of simultaneously exemplifying and transcending the misogynist stereotype.¹⁸ A Laodicean, however, adopts a tactic similar to that used in the characterization of Grace Melbury in The Woodlanders in that Paula Power remains, throughout the narrative, an enigma to both the narrator and the reader. The narrator places himself in a relationship to the heroine similar to that of the male characters, while at the same time emphasizing the insubstantiality of their conclusions concerning her motivation. However, in the absence of any viable alternatives Paula, like Bathsheba, can only be defined against the available stereotypes as in Somerset's, and the reader's, first encounter with her:

It would be impossible to describe her as she then appeared. Not sensuous enough for an Aphrodite, and too subdued for a Hebe, she would yet, with the adjunct of doves or nectar, have stood sufficiently well for either of those personages, if presented in a pink morning light, and with mythological scarcity of attire.
(AL, p. 87)

At other points in the text, the reader is reminded that whatever conclusions he or she may have come to regarding Paula, 'of Miss Power it was unsafe to predicate so surely' (AL, p. 208). It is perhaps significant that Hardy described her as 'of that reserved disposition which is the most difficult of all dispositions to depict, and tantalized the writer by eluding his grasp for some time'.¹⁹

Two on a Tower is a candid and compassionate appraisal of the life of a wealthy, sensuous woman and, in this respect, Viviette Constantine is sister to Cytherea Aldclyffe and Felice Charmond. Although the narrator displays a far greater commitment to Viviette than to either of her counterparts, her characterization is, like theirs, informed by received assumptions concerning women's nature. Just as Cytherea Aldclyffe and Felice Charmond are stereotypes of female sexuality and self-gratification, Viviette is a model of feminine altruism and self-sacrifice. Consequently, the reader is given a clearer

insight into her psychology and motivation than was the case with either Bathsheba or Paula. Both Bathsheba and Paula are 'New Women', and as such their perceptions, responses and motivations lie outside the accepted notions of womanhood and thus beyond the range of the existing linguistic forms invented to define them by 'the makers of language'. Tabitha Lark is scarcely confronted at all, except as a 'graceful female form', an 'apparition', and 'a wonderful young woman' (TT, p. 286). Bathsheba, Paula and Tabitha are all preliminary sketches for Hardy's final and most notorious 'New Woman' - Sue Bridehead, of whom he wrote 'Sue is a type of woman which has always had an attraction for me, but the difficulty of drawing the type has kept me from attempting it till now'. Sue's elusiveness, and abstruse complexity testify to Hardy's failure to tailor the available literary genres to fit his artistic and political vision, and his frustration in this respect may well have contributed to his disaffection with the novel form.

Hardy constantly sought to present in his fiction a 'truthful' reflection of the way existence was ordered for all living creatures, and especially for women, in the hope of exposing those areas - particularly legal, social and economic - where change should and could be effected. Until these changes came about, Hardy found it impossible to conceive of a satisfactory alternative role-model for women. In addition to this, the essentially conservative nature of popular nineteenth-century realist fiction created an atmosphere which was uncongenial to the healthy fictional development of the fully-fledged "New Woman". Disillusioned by its inability to inspire social change, Hardy turned from fiction to a more active involvement in the political issues of the day - one of the most prominent being the campaign for the enfranchisement of women.

NOTES TO CHAPTER EIGHT

1. The critical debate surrounding Far from the Madding Crowd has centred on the dissipation of the heroine's 'masculine energies', the destruction of her self-willed independence and the taming of the heroine through the medium of sexual experience. Ian Gregor defines the text as 'the story of the humbling of a spirited, vain and self-willed woman' (Gregor, p. 50). John Halperin traces her development from 'a state of moral solipsism and narrow vision to one of moral expansion and wider sympathy'. Halperin, Egoism and Self-Discovery in the Victorian Novel (New York, 1974), p. 217. Michael Squires sees Bathsheba's experience in the swamp as one of 'moral regeneration through intense suffering' and 'calm self-analysis'. Squires, 'Far from the Madding Crowd as Modified Pastoral', Nineteenth Century Fiction, 25 (1970-1971), 299-326 (p. 317). Richard Carpenter suggests that the humbling of Bathsheba undermines the apparently happy ending of the novel for 'in subduing her to a mature and knowledgeable adult, Hardy has subdued our enjoyment of her as a character' (Carpenter, p. 87).
2. FMC, p. 44. See Abbreviations.
3. Penelope Vigar suggests that Bathsheba, 'like a chameleon ... is seen in totally different ways by the three men who want her: to Oak she is a part of the natural world he loves and understands; to Troy, she is a challenging enemy; to Boldwood, who epitomizes the reversal of rationality, she is an exaggerated and impossible dream' (Vigar, p. 123). Vigar's use of the simile of the chameleon suggests that Bathsheba deliberately reflects back to the male observer his own image of her, whereas in reality she has little or no choice in the matter.
4. For a detailed discussion of 'phallic aggression' in Far from the Madding Crowd see Carpenter, 'The Mirror and the Sword: Imagery in Far from the Madding Crowd', Nineteenth Century Fiction, 18 (1964), 331-45.
5. See Poole, p. 329.
6. Kathleen Blake, 'Sue Bridehead: "The Woman of the Feminist Movement"', Studies in English Literature 1500-1900, 18 (1978), 703-26.
7. P. J. Casagrande interprets this comment as the narrator's defence of Troy, whose villainy towards Bathsheba can, in his opinion, 'be made to seem less a function of his depravity than a response, almost excusable, to her infirmity'. However, Casagrande makes the mistake of regarding Troy as a reliable and morally unimpeachable authority on women's nature - an assumption for which there is no evidence in the text. Troy's damning dismissal of Bathsheba beside Fanny's opened coffin ('if Satan had not tempted me with that face of yours and those cursed coquetries, I should have married her. I never had another thought till you came in my way'), is the final stage in his attempt to define, control and reject Bathsheba in her siren's role. At no stage in Troy's courtship of Bathsheba is the reader encouraged to regard her as responsible for Fanny's death. To suggest, as Casagrande does, that the narrator's defence of Troy's treatment of women 'lends unexpected strength to Troy's claim later that Bathsheba, and not he, is responsible for Fanny's plight' is to expose an unconscious allegiance to the very patriarchal attitudes which the text is concerned to expose and undermine. See Casagrande, 'A New View of Bathsheba Everdene', in Kramer, pp. 50-73 (pp. 56, 57n).

8. It is significant that we are not told the exact nature of Troy's proposal to Bathsheba in Bristol. She tells Oak that Troy's constancy could not be counted on unless she "at once became his And I was grieved and troubled" (FMC, p. 282). The missing word could be either mistress or wife. We may assume that Troy said something very similar to Fanny Robin.
9. King David desired Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, after he had seen her bathing from the roof of his palace. Bathsheba conceived a child by David and, in order that he might marry her, he ordered Uriah to be placed in the front line during the battle against the Ammonites, where he was killed. However, God was displeased with David's actions and their child was struck down with an illness and died (II Samuel 11-12).
10. Kathleen Blake notes 'Hardy gives signs of some awareness of the shaping or constraining force of language on apprehension. For instance, he cites with interest Comte's statement concerning the difficulty of expressing new ideas in existing language, that is, the vehicle for existing conceptualization' ('Pure Tess', p. 700). The fact that the statement comes from the mouth of a woman adds a new significance to Comte's observation.
11. AL, p. 47. See Abbreviations.
12. Stephen Heath, The Sexual Fix (London, Basingstoke, 1982), p. 90.
13. Barbara Hardy, Introduction to AL, pp. 13-30 (pp. 17-18).
14. TT, p. 45. See Abbreviations.
15. Entries in Hardy's Literary Notebooks would seem to suggest that Virgil provided him with such notions of women's inability to keep a secret. See LN, 276, 276n.
16. Tennyson, The Princess, in The Poems of Tennyson, edited by Christopher Ricks (London, 1969), pp. 741-844 (p. 747).
17. Barbara Hardy, Introduction to AL, p. 17.
18. Ousby, 'Love-Hate Relations', p. 30. Rosalind Miles suggests that 'on the inexperienced novelist the swaggering pose of the man who knows about women sits somewhat uneasily in this rather too effortful assumption of masculine superiority' (Miles, p. 34).
19. Hardy, Preface to A Laodicean (1881; Wessex Edition, XVII, 1912), in PW, pp. 15-16 (p. 16).

CONCLUSION

It is impossible to mount a valid and convincing assessment of the philosophy that informs Hardy's novels without examining the Hardy oeuvre in its entirety and, in particular, the earlier and less-refined texts. As a direct result of their ingenuousness, and their candid naïvety, the minor novels clearly reveal the complexity of Hardy's deterministic world view. The conclusions of those critics who would class his texts as the meditations of a gloomy and uncomplicated pessimist are consistently devalued by the trenchant and implicitly prescriptive social criticism contained in the lesser novels, which reflect his real and avowed concern with remedial social ills. At the same time, no critical evaluation of Hardy's novels as documents of social protest can be complete without detailed reference to the sympathetic awareness of feminist issues which clearly motivates his analysis of the social and political restrictions incumbent upon women. Hardy's sexual pessimism - and in particular his exposition of the destructive nature of 'feminine' sexual behaviour - has its roots in social analysis rather than in any overriding commitment to the theory of biological programming.

Hardy was deeply influenced and disturbed by contemporary evolutionary thought and in particular by the discoveries of Charles Darwin and the theories of Herbert Spencer, Auguste Comte, Thomas Huxley and John Stuart Mill. Darwin's persuasive, yet reluctantly admitted conviction that the development of the individual was determined by natural forces essentially beyond his or her control is mediated by his insistence on the importance of human altruism and sympathy in improving the conditions of life for all sentient beings. This belief in the effective powers of the 'social instincts' appealed to Hardy as evidence of humanity's ability to escape the determining hold of the evolutionary process, and led him to question the sociobiology of Spencer and Comte. Evolutionary theory revealed to Hardy that, just as certain environmental and climactic conditions had naturally favoured the survival and eventual ascendancy

of particular species, so certain social, legal and economic conditions had artificially favoured the ascendancy of one sex - in this case men - over the other. Although he believed that the social process freed the human individual from its subjection to evolutionary law, he realized that the social process was itself a determining force which shaped the behaviour of the individual along certain gender-based lines. Sex-role conditioning is, in Hardy's novels, one of the strongest forces with which the human individual comes into conflict. He was convinced that if the construction of the social system was informed by sympathy and altruism, many of the defects of existence could be remedied. This conviction was strengthened by his contact with the writings of Huxley and Mill; both of whom placed specific emphasis on the role and position of women in society. Huxley and, more especially, Mill isolated the economic and political subordination of women as a clear example of the way an unjust and unfeeling social system exaggerated certain biological inequalities between the sexes, and called for radical changes to be made in the laws governing the weaker sex.

Darwin's exposition of the laws of nature selection was frequently used to justify the subjection of women. It was argued that the nature and status of women was a direct and inevitable result of the evolutionary process which ensured that only the 'fittest', ie. the best suited, survived to reproduce and transmit their characteristics to their offspring. The nineteenth-century 'womanly' woman, with her vanity, frivolity, shallowness, narrow-mindedness and ignorance, was seen to have been naturally selected through the centuries as best adapted to, and most in harmony with, the conditions of existence. Any attempt to improve her status or broaden her intellectual horizons was regarded as an unwarrantable interference in a system which, unaided, had produced the dominant, and successful human civilizations of the nineteenth-century western world. In addition, the organicist theories of Herbert Spencer and Auguste Comte stressed the notion of an organic interdependence between society as a whole and its component parts, and the necessity of slow cumulative growth and

progression which, they claimed, could only come about if each sex fulfilled the the duties for which nature had apparently equipped it.

However, the feminist activists and thinkers of the nineteenth century claimed that the law of evolution, as expounded by Darwin, necessitated the acceptance of the inevitability of change and the inherent instability of the prevailing social order. They suggested that the conditions of existence had, in fact, altered drastically, and they demanded corresponding alterations in the mental and moral outlook of men and women and also in the structure of society. They believed that society exercised a type of artificial selection over its individual female members which prevented the sex as a whole from adapting to its changing environment and progressing in accordance with the basic law of evolution. Galvanized by the libertarianism of John Stuart Mill, feminists declared true progress to be the advancement and development of society through the advancement and development of each individual unit, and that if well over half of the units was artificially prevented from progressing, then society as a whole would suffer. They also claimed that if society persisted in regarding women solely in terms of their biological or reproductive functions, and training them accordingly, then women would never be free to realize their mental and emotional potential. They called for a clear division to be made between those characteristics which were innate in the sexes, and those which had been circumstantially determined and declared that, in the case of women, social institutions and value structures had exacerbated certain tendencies - especially within the realms of sexuality and the maternal functions - to the point where woman's sole raison d'être was seen both by herself and by those around her to be the sexual and domestic entrapment of men. John Stuart Mill explained woman's apparently tenacious single-minded pursuit of the male as a result of her circumscribed existence. Denied equality or liberty, she sought the illusion of power through sexual and moral tyranny over those who, in reality, ruled her. Her energy was not naturally concentrated on vanity, frivolity, adornment and display, but had been artificially perverted into those

channels as a result of the restrictions placed on her intellectual, social and political freedom.

Hardy was familiar with the aims and ideals of the feminist movement of the 1860s. The magazines and periodicals he favoured all bore witness to the controversy excited by Mill's theories. These and other feminist ideas formed the topic of conversation at several of the social and literary gatherings he frequented during his formative years in London. In addition to this, his acquaintance and correspondence with leading figures associated with the movement for the equality of women suggests that he was both informed about and sympathetic towards their cause. Hardy's awareness of the way an unsympathetic and biased social system exacerbated the inequality of women is clearly demonstrated in his minor works. The novels covered by this study register the fact that women are the victims of laws and conventions, initiated and perpetrated by a male-dominated social system in order to capitalize upon their physical idiosyncracies. In each text, the heroine's conduct - especially her sexual and emotional manipulation of eligible male suitors - can be seen to be as much a conditioned and often, as in the case of *Ethelberta*, a fully conscious response to the conditions of her existence as it is an atavistic and instinctive biological urge. Women, in Hardy's minor novels, are confronted by the socially induced necessity to conform to a male-defined standard of womanly behaviour and appearance in order to survive. Desperate Remedies, A Pair of Blue Eyes and The Hand of Ethelberta illustrate the way in which women have to annex themselves to an economic provider to compensate for their exclusion from direct access to the means of existence. Under the Greenwood Tree and The Woodlanders examine this theme in more detail by presenting marriage as as much a means towards class mobility as it is the result of emotional attraction, or the fulfilment of a woman's biological urges to mate and reproduce. The theme of man as the force which shapes the raw material of womanhood into his feminine ideal reaches its fullest expression in The Well-Beloved, in which the hero is closely identified with the mythical figure of Pygmalion. Far from the Madding Crowd,

A Laodicean and Two on a Tower centre on the way women shape themselves into forms responsive to masculine demands in order to gain confirmation or vindication of their existence in a society which will not allow them to consolidate their identity through artistic or professional achievements. In each case, conformity leads not to self-fulfilment but to self-annihilation. Two on a Tower develops this theme by taking this self-annihilation to its logical extreme with the death of the heroine who exemplifies those womanly qualities most conducive to the patriarchal society she is dependent upon, and the succession of a new type of independent and educated young female. The implication is that while women remain ineluctably bound to men - both emotionally and financially - they will never be free to determine their own lives.

In this way, Hardy's minor novels can be seen to register the dissatisfaction with the role and position assigned to women by custom (rather than by nature) which was prevalent among the feminist agitators of the day. He recognized the importance of feminism to his own world-view which had its roots in the rational determinism espoused by Huxley and John Stuart Mill. Hardy's minor texts demonstrate that women's emancipation - in legal, social and psychological terms - is both possible and desirable, in order that they too might enjoy what Mill calls 'rational freedom', or doing what one likes within certain obviously necessary limits as long as one's actions do not impinge upon the liberty of another to do likewise. Because of certain social and economic restrictions, women in Hardy's lesser texts are unable to exercise the limited amount of free will which he claimed to be the birthright of every individual, and which he believed to be the main motivating force behind the improvement of existence for all living things.

At the same time, however, Hardy's fictional response to the question of the natural and social role of women is periodically obfuscated by the conditioned subjectivity which, as many feminist critics have indicated, undermines his portrayal of the social forces which determine women's behaviour. The novelist Pearl Craigie, for whom Hardy had a great deal of professional

respect, claimed that many men achieved their reputations as feminists by "realizing, incarnating, the masculine dream of the ideal woman"¹ and indeed, critics such as Edmund Gosse and J. M. Barrie saw Hardy as essentially a man's novelist: men were fascinated by his heroines, women, more often than not, were grossly offended.² Hardy's novels consciously interrogate conventional views of women, while unconsciously subscribing to many of the gender-based stereotypes they purport to undermine, and suggesting that little can be done to improve women's lot. This is particularly noticeable in the ambivalent relationship between the narrative voice and the heroine in each of the minor texts. Thus, in Desperate Remedies, the sympathetic examination of the economic and social conditions which shape Cytherea's response to life is undermined by the narrator's loyalty to arbitrary concepts of 'womanly' and 'manly' behaviour. It is also compromised by the suggestion that women have somehow retained an instinctive connection with the natural process which men were in danger of losing sight of but which, if not brought under the control of reason, was potentially an anarchic force. As Kathleen Rogers suggests, Hardy's novels imply that 'to be rational - which means to be fully human - a woman must rise above her sex, and in this she does not often succeed'.³ However, the myth of woman's instinctive connection with the beneficial forces of nature is exploded in Hardy's equivocal versions of the pastoral novel, Under the Greenwood Tree and The Woodlanders, in which rural life for women is shown to be restrictive, frustrating and life-denying.

In the same way, the narrator's evasiveness with the characters of Cytherea, Bathsheba, Grace and Paula, and his unwillingness to define them adequately, is offset by his recourse to misogynistic generalizations about women. As Mary Childers has suggested:

Much of the productive tension in Hardy's novels comes from his use of misogyny to name and therefore to bring into the realm of control his discovery that women were different from himself and maddeningly different from what they appeared to be in fantasy. His fiction registers an urgent desire to understand something about the behavior of women, perhaps why no matter how much he thought about a particular woman a certain frustrating mysteriousness persisted

that he could only explain by having recourse to the idea that women are different. The most glaringly obvious fact of any woman, her sex, can be used as an explanation of her when nothing else is forthcoming.⁴

In addition to this, whilst the narrator's numerous caveats and provisos can be seen to be both a recognition of and a refusal to define or contain the 'otherness' of the female, Mary Childers suggests that his ambivalence implies that because women are not men, they are somehow not human. However, this line of reasoning would be more plausible if Hardy's male characters, both individually and collectively, were not so often shown to be less human still.

Finally, although the 'New Woman' constantly skirts the boundaries of Hardy's minor fiction, threatening at every turn seriously to disrupt the proceedings, she never emerges as a positive force for social change. It was this mauvais fois on Hardy's part which, as A. R. Cunningham has demonstrated, led so many feminists to reject him as their literary champion in favour of the more optimistic and flattering George Meredith.⁵ There are two factors which might account for Hardy's apparent lack of foresight and courage in this respect. To begin with, Hardy came to organized feminism relatively late in life. There is little evidence to suggest that any of his novels was directly informed by the suffragist agitation of the day, although the influence of John Stuart Mill is a tangible presence throughout his fictional writing. It was only after the end of his novel-writing career that Hardy admitted the obvious connections between the points he was seeking to articulate in texts like Jude the Obscure and the more trenchant aims of the late nineteenth-century feminists.

Secondly, although Hardy regarded his novels as illustrations or at best critiques of life, he constantly denied that they constituted a programme for social reform. In a letter to Edward Clodd, he wrote: 'you are right in assuming that I have no suggestion or guidance to offer. I can only state (most imperfectly alas!) cases in which natural and human laws create tragic dramas. The philanthropists must do the rest!'⁶ However, Hardy's own highly subjective versions of what he was pleased to call 'the truth' indicate that

there were certain areas of human existence which he believed could and should be altered. This was especially true of the way human or man-made laws created tragic dramas for women. Hardy's minor novels illustrate the extent to which men, by virtue of their dominant social, economic and political position impose a particular destiny upon women over and above the one chosen for them by their biology. While biology determines gender, it does not determine an individual's intellectual capabilities, his or her social or legal status, or his or her economic potential. These aspects of a person's existence are controlled by modifiable social conditions.

Re-reading Hardy's neglected novels in the light of a heightened awareness of feminist issues, it is possible to see their creator not as a grim believer in biological determinism, but as the exponent of a militant meliorism, firmly committed to the abolition of man's inhumanity to members of his own gender and, more especially, to women.

NOTES TO CONCLUSION

1. Archer, Real Conversations, III, with Mrs Craigie (John Oliver Hobbes), pp. 51-70 (p. 57).
2. Edmund Gosse testified to the unpopularity of Hardy's heroines among women,

... even educated women approach him with hesitation and prejudice The modern English novelist has created, and has faithfully repeated, a demure, ingenuous, and practically inhuman type of heroine, which has flattered womankind, and which female readers now imperatively demand as an encouragement.... But Mr Hardy's women ... are not always constant even when they are 'quite nice'; and some of them are actually "of a coming on disposition".

See Edmund Gosse, 'Thomas Hardy', The Speaker (1890) Cox, pp. 167-71 (pp. 169-70). J. M. Barrie declares 'Mr Hardy is disliked by lady readers In an old library copy of "The Return of the Native," I have been shown, in the handwriting of different ladies, "What a horrid book!" "Eustacia is a libel on noble womankind" and (should this be mentioned?) "Oh, how I hate Thomas Hardy!'. See J. M. Barrie, 'Thomas Hardy: The Historian of Wessex', Contemporary Review, 56 (1889), pp. 57-66 (pp. 63-64).
3. Kathleen Rogers, 'Women in Thomas Hardy', Centennial Review, 19 (1975), 247-258 (p. 258).
4. Childers, pp. 325-26.
5. A. R. Cunningham 'The Emergence of the New Woman', p. 53.
6. Thomas Hardy to Edward Clodd, CL, II, 92 (10 November, 1895).

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4. <u>Far from the Madding Crowd</u> , introd. by John Bayley	1874
5. <u>The Hand of Ethelberta</u> , introd. by Robert Gittings	1876
6. <u>The Return of the Native</u> , introd. by Derwent May	1878
7. <u>The Trumpet Major</u> , introd. by Barbara Hardy	1880
8. <u>A Laodicean</u> , introd. by Barbara Hardy	1881
9. <u>Two on a Tower</u> , introd. by F. B. Pinion	1882
10. <u>The Mayor of Casterbridge</u> , introd. by Ian Gregor	1886
11. <u>The Woodlanders</u> , introd. by David Lodge	1887
12. <u>Tess of the d'Urbervilles</u> , introd. by P. N. Furbank	1891
13. <u>Jude the Obscure</u> , introd. by Terry Eagleton	1896
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