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THE CURSE UPON THE FLESH: HARDY'S TREATMENT OF WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the treatment of women in four of Thomas Hardy's major novels: Far From the Madding Crowd, The Return of the Native, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, and Jude the Obscure. The central concept under examination is the pattern of ambivalent attitudes expressed towards Hardy's heroines and the manner in which the narrator deals with the theme of the fear of the sexual woman. As well, the theme of the fear of the sexual woman is examined in conjunction with Hardy's other thematic concerns.

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PREFATORY NOTE

All references to the four novels by Hardy dealt with in this thesis are from the following editions:

Far From the Madding Crowd. New Wessex Edition. London: Macmillan, 1974.

The Return of the Native. New Wessex Edition. London: Macmillan, 1974.

Tess of the d'Urbervilles. Norton Critical Edition. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1965.

Jude the Obscure. New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1961.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

> Indeed, if woman had no existence save in the fiction written by men, one would imagine her a person of the utmost importance; very various; heroic and mean; splendid and sordid; infinitely beautiful and hideous in the extreme; as great as a man, some think greater. But this is woman in fiction.[1]

Virginia Woolf's astute comment concerning the extremes and vicissitudes of female characterization in fiction bears an interesting relevance to the fiction of Thomas Hardy; for women in Hardy's fiction tend to reach extremes of character: the vanity and coquetry of Bathsheba, the passion of Eustacia, the purity and passivity of Tess and the powerful sexuality of Arabella. Although Hardy is traditionally considered a novelist interested in "tragedies of Fate rather than tragedies of character",[2] there exist in Hardy's fiction certain patterns of female characterization that require a close investigation. While on one level Hardy effectively portrays the unending tension between human hopes and aspirations and the "cosmic absurdity"[3] of chance,

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[1]Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own, pp. 44-45.

[2]F. R. Southerington, Hardy's Vision of Man, p.33.

[3]Jean R. Brooks, Thomas Hardy: The Poetic Structure, p. 12.

fate and an indifferent universe, he also is keenly interested in the passion of love that exists between men and women and how this passion shapes their destinies.

It is with this concern with sexual passion between men and women that the proportionate role of fate and character in the development of Hardy's novels becomes difficult to assess.[4] Certain elements of characterization when examined closely reveal that they are, in part, responsible for the downfall of the character concerned.[5] Thus Hardy's singular treatment of women in his fiction reveals a tendency to portray them on a sliding scale of castigation, a castigation of them that results from their respective character traits, as well as from the function of fate and coincidence. In many ways Hardy uses fate as a mode of working out his attitudes towards women. Fate also functions as a mask enabling him to portray women in a certain fashion

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[4]A classic example of this type of ambiguity occurs in Jude the Obscure. Although Jude is frustrated in his desire to become a member of the academic community, a frustration largely due to his misfortune of being born in a lower class, his choice of women is not governed by fate. Rather, Jude's choice is a result of elements in his own character; hence, Jude's tragedy is partly a result of his own tortured psyche, a point that will be dealt with in detail in a later chapter.

[5]Barbara Hardy in The Appropriate Form, p. 70, points out that the action and characters of Hardy's fiction are organized as illustrations of Hardy's belief in determinism; yet she also points out that the fiction of Hardy "succeeds in combining animated and realistic psychology with ideological pattern."

and then to punish these women; calling on fate or heredity to explain their tragic plight. Naturally, this tendency in Hardy is only a part of his thematic intention; nevertheless, a strong part, considering Hardy's fascination with the women that appear in his fiction. That Hardy's fiction reveals a fascination with women is a point which Michael Benazon makes in his dissertation, "Romance and Romanticism in the Fiction of Thomas Hardy":

> He [Hardy] seems to have shared in Swinburne's fascination with the femme fatale, the negative anima, who deceives, ruins or destroys the unwary male; such are Elfride, Bathsheba, Eustacia, Felice Charmond, Arabella -- even Tess and Sue in some of their traits.[6]

Mr. Benazon also illustrates his point with material from Hardy's life as evidence of this fascination:

> In a letter to Lady Hester Pinney, written in 1926, Hardy describes the execution of Martha Brown, which had taken place seventy years before:
>
> "I remember what a fine figure she showed against the sky as she hung in the misty rain, and how the tight black silk gown set off her shape as she wheeled half-round and back."[7]

This macabre description illustrates at once Hardy's awareness of the sexual power which women possess, "the tight black silk gown" and at the same time indicates the delight with

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[6]Michael Benazon, "Romance and Romanticism in the Fiction of Thomas Hardy", Ph.D. dissertation, McMaster University, 1975, p. 7.

[7]Ibid., pp. 9-10.

which he viewed the "fine figure" of a woman in her death throes. It is exactly this combination of sexuality and death that will preoccupy Hardy in much of his fiction.

The critical reaction to Hardy's treatment of women is predictably diverse. Randall Williams sees Hardy's portrayal of women as falling into two distinct categories: the essentially noble women, whose circumstances make their lives an almost unbearable punishment, and the creatures of moods, those women who exist at the mercy of their passion. However, Williams sees nothing unusual in this treatment, stridently asserting that:

> It is difficult to imagine how any reader, man or woman, can accuse Hardy of publishing anything libellous or malicious against "noble womankind". Such an accusation must be ruled out as unjust and impossible in the case of a novelist whose sympathy with humanity is no less intense than his consciousness of the exalting purpose of art.[8]

Nevertheless, on the same page, Williams admits that Hardy "exposes...the failings of women, their caprices, acidity of temper, inconsequences, and other pardonable faults peculiar to their sex."[9] What Mr. Williams has perhaps unwittingly pointed out, is a tendency in Hardy to dichotomize women, a tendency that is not overtly hostile, but that perhaps contains the seeds of some unconscious perceptions of women.[10]

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[8] Randall Williams, The Wessex Novels of Thomas Hardy, p.83.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Since the subject of this thesis is Hardy's treatment

In marked contrast to William's view, Samuel Chew states, "On the whole, however, Hardy's attitude towards women is unfavourable; his opinion of them is bitter."[11] Similarly, Albert Guerard sees an emerging pattern in Hardy's treatment of women, a movement characterized by "the shifting role of woman from that of fickle betrayer to that of simple-hearted betrayed" and a fascination on Hardy's part with women "as God's most perverse and delightful mysteries."[12] Most critics acknowledge that Hardy had a great talent for characterization of women and it is this talent which lends itself so well to critical assessment.[13]

What Williams sees as the two categories of women in Hardy's fiction and what Guerard notes as the shift in the role of women, emerges in a discernible pattern. Virtually all of Hardy's heroines possess, some to a greater extent

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of women, it will not consider Hardy's motivation for his portrayal, but simply the patterns in which his female characters appear. Biographical criticism, although fascinating, is relatively speaking in its infant stage with respect to other modes of literary criticism and for this reason will not be considered in this thesis.

[11] Samuel Chew, Thomas Hardy: Poet and Novelist, p. 133.

[12] A. J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy, p. 42.

[13] Perry Meisel in Thomas Hardy: The Return of the Repressed states: "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." p. 41.

than others, a powerful sexual attractiveness.[14] Particularly in the novels considered to be Hardy's major fiction, the portrait of woman as possessing physical allurements becomes increasingly strong. The consensus of critics is that six novels rank as major works in the corpus of Hardy's fiction. It is the intention of this thesis to deal, in detail, with patterns of female characterization in four of the six novels, those four novels being: Far From the Madding Crowd, The Return of the Native, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, and Jude the Obscure. The Woodlanders, considered by some critics as Hardy's best novel, will be referred to when applicable.[15] The Mayor of Casterbridge, which is dominated by the character of Michael Henchard, will be referred to when applicable, but will not be dealt with in detail. Far From the Madding Crowd (1874) and The Return of the Native (1878) are representative of an earlier Hardy and tend to reflect influences of his earlier heroines, while Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891) and Jude the Obscure (1896) reflect the mature Hardy, showing the degree

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[14] When a major female character lacks sexual attractiveness, it is usually found in a contrasting character. Hence, there tends to be a certain amount of balancing or contrasting of female characters, such as: Grace Melbury and Marty South, Arabella and Sue, and Eustacia and Thomasin.

[15] Richard Carpenter in Thomas Hardy states the reasons why The Woodlanders is considered one of Hardy's best works: "He [Hardy] must have been gratified over the next few decades when it was called 'Hardy's loveliest book,' 'the finest English novel,'...'most beautiful and noble,' and so on." p. 114.

to which Hardy is struggling with aspects of feminine sexuality.

The emergence of interest in women who possess this powerful sexuality is dealt with by Hardy in varying ways. There is a strong tendency in the earlier Hardy to endow these heroines with characteristics suggesting their vanity, capriciousness and ability to manipulate the males that move in their lives. These traits appear at first, to be characteristic of feminine stereotypes,[16] however, there are elements of aggressiveness[17] inherent in these traits and the characters who possess them. Without exception, women with powerful sexuality are controlled by Hardy. Bathsheba is overpowered by Troy and brought to the brink of financial and emotional disaster; Eustacia pays more dearly for her "sins": she pays with her life.

In contrast to the aggressive women characters are the passive ones. Often the passive female characters function as contrasts to the aggressive women and this process of pairing two contrasting women suggests an ambivalent attitude in Hardy.

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[16] The vanity of women has long been a popular conception and Hardy's initial view of Bathsheba, with mirror in hand and scarlet dress, firmly links her with this tradition.

[17] Aggressiveness is traditionally considered a masculine feature and yet Bathsheba and Eustacia both distinguish themselves as having a share of aggressiveness: Bathsheba controls her own farm and Eustacia dresses up as a knight with the local mummers, flouting all convention.

Ambivalence "refers to an underlying emotional attitude in which the contradictory attitudes derive from a common source and are interdependent."[18] Closely intertwined with the concept of ambivalence is the process of idealization where "an ambivalently regarded object is split into two, one resulting object being conceived as ideally good, the other wholly bad."[19]

The pairing of contrasting characters suggests not only ambivalence within the novels in which these pairs appear, but also Hardy's general treatment of female characterization appears to encompass the passive and aggressive types of women, and thereby echoes this pattern of ambivalence on a larger scale. When the passive woman stands alone, as in the case of Tess, the threat of her fecund sexuality remains and is controlled within the fiction by the action of the narrative. Tess's seduction by Alec is due in part to her abundantly sensuous body and her passivity. For these reasons she is open to exploitation and manipulation by Alec and the other

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[18]Charles Rycroft, A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis, p. 6.

[19]Ibid.,p. 67. An excellent example of Hardy's intuition of this psychological process is found in the preface to the first edition of Jude the Obscure, where he describes the theme of Jude as "a deadly war waged between flesh and spirit". In this statement, Hardy succinctly describes the ambivalence or contradictory attitudes toward women found in the character of Jude Fawley.

men in her life. Tess's destruction is made imminent by Hardy's characterization of her,[20] exposing his control over and fear of his heroine. Hardy's determination to portray a "pure woman" is undercut by the facts of Tess's sensuous body and her passive character.

By the time one approaches Jude the Obscure, the portrait of woman is totally dichotomized as a means of dealing with the threat of feminine sexuality. Arabella and Sue stand at opposite poles: the female animal and the intellectual and frigid woman. Ironically it is the woman with the over-powering sexuality that survives, a reversal of the previous pattern of punishing feminine sexuality.

The women of Hardy's fiction, although they progressively become more interesting, especially in terms of their psychological conflicts, are not portraits of autonomous women. Autonomy in an individual's character suggests these attributes: the ability to be active and passive in the realm of inter-personal relationships, the ability to give and receive emotional and sexual love without excessive masochism or aggressiveness and the ability to exist not as

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[20] F. R. Southerington notes this point in Hardy's Vision of Man, p. 126, "Everything suggests that Tess herself contributes to her union with Alec, that she does so consciously and half-willingly."

a parasite, but as an integrated individual, with a sense of self that operates outside of the life of another individual.[21] Hardy's inability to portray women in this manner is not a critical indictment of his art. Rather, the over powering ambivalence inherent in the female characters in Hardy's fiction, not only gives them deep and fascinating characters, but structures the thematic intentions of the novels. With this view in mind, this thesis will attempt to investigate the relationship between theme and female characterization and to examine closely the heretofore outlined patterns in which the women in Hardy's fiction develop.

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[21]This definition is derived from Rycroft's definition of genitality in A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis, p.58.

CHAPTER ONE

FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD

A consideration of female characterization in the fiction of Thomas Hardy must start with the novel that launched Hardy's career. Far From the Madding Crowd (1874) "combines the typical features of the other major novels without developing any one to extreme".[1] Perhaps one of the reasons for the success of Far From the Madding Crowd in Hardy's own life time is the balanced structure and the generally genial pastoral atmosphere. Hardy's ironic and tragic vision was still in its developing stages and the story of Bathsheba and her suitors, although containing tragic elements such as: the death of Fanny and Troy, and the madness of Boldwood, remains predominantly a happy and positive piece of fiction. In terms of Hardy's presentation of female characters, the novel initiates a pattern of ambivalence towards women, an ambivalence which resides in the character of Bathsheba Everdene and qualifies somewhat this notion of a "positive ending". That Bathsheba survives whereas Fanny does not, does not necessarily indicate a positive ending; for it is imperative that the critic ascertain at what price Bathsheba survives and therein

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[1]Richard Carpenter, Thomas Hardy, p. 81.

lies Hardy's ambivalent attitude towards his female characters.

For a number of critics, notably Ian Gregor, Far From the Madding Crowd "emerges as the moral education of Bathsheba in which she learns to reject the illusory world of Troy and accept the prosaic world of Oak. It becomes the story of the humbling of a spirited, vain and self-willed woman."[2] This concept of moral change in the character of Bathsheba is also put forward by Virginia Hyman: "As a result of her series of love relationships, the heroine, Bathsheba Everdene, changes from a vain, egotistical, and impulsive girl to a chastened, self-controlled, and practical woman."[3] The key note in both of these critical opinions is not so much the change for the better in Bathsheba's character, but the element of control exercised over her. The use of the words "humbling" and "chastened" recalls Troy's words to Bathsheba, "Qui aime bien châtie bien".[4] If Hardy, as Randall Williams asserts "cherishes an unmistakably strong love" for Bathsheba, "Although it is the love of a parent"[5], then the fact that the moral education of Bathsheba centres on the

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[2]Ian Gregor, The Great Web: The Form of Hardy's Fiction, p. 50.

[3]Virginia Hyman, Ethical Perspective in the novels of Thomas Hardy, p. 46.

[4]Thomas Hardy, Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 204.

[5]Randall Williams, The Wessex Novels of Thomas Hardy, p. 89.

concept of "châtiment" seems to suggest that Hardy felt a need to control his wayward heroine, or as A. J. Guerard states: "In Far from the Madding Crowd...Hardy was both more comprehensive and more charitable in his treatment of women, though he seldom wholly relaxed his amused distrust."[6] As pointed out earlier, Far From the Madding Crowd remains an essentially "positive" piece of fiction, yet it is somewhat qualified by the ambivalence expressed towards Bathsheba. Bathsheba, in no way "reject[s] the illusory world of Troy", but rather she is torn from it by the fact of Troy's death[7] and she is ultimately controlled within the fiction by the function of Hardy's notion of fate.[8]

The emerging portrait of Bathsheba seems to reinforce Guerard's idea that Hardy viewed his heroine with "amused distrust". The symbolic and archetypal associations of Bathsheba resonate within the narrative and place her squarely in the tradition of the "femme fatale". Bathsheba's first appearance in the novel shows her resplendent in scarlet

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[6] A. J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy, p. 131. Hardy is more "comprehensive" with Bathsheba in that she is more fully delineated than her predecessors Fancy Day and Cytherea Graye and he is more "charitable" in that he allows Bathsheba some happiness or at least stability in her marriage to Gabriel Oak.

[7] See page 403, Far From the Madding Crowd, where Bathsheba cradles Troy's head in her lap after he is shot.

[8] One must always keep separate the idea of fate as it exists in the real world and fate as it exists within the narrative of Hardy's novels: "'Fate's nothen beside a woman's schemen,'

jacket and dark hair. The colour of her hair and jacket introduces to the reader aspects of Bathsheba's personality that need no direct authorial comment. The dark-haired woman is traditionally the sensuous rather than the pure woman, and the colour scarlet also links Bathsheba to the archetype of the "scarlet woman" and indicates obliquely her passionate nature.[9] The colours black and red have archetypal associations stretching back into the distant past. J. E. Cirlot notes that "the profoundest meaning of black is occultation and germination in darkness"[10] and that red is one of the "warm 'advancing' colours, corresponding to processes of assimilation, activity and intensity...red is associated with blood, wounds, death-throes and sublimation...with passion, sentiment and the life-giving principle".[11] The establishment of Bathsheba as a powerful female is what emerges from this initial description. Blood, passion, death and "dark" powers are all a part of

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Clerk Crickett says in Hardy's first published novel." Quoted in A.J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy, p. 128. Mr. Guerard's choice of a quotation from Hardy demonstrates the need to keep separate Hardy's view and use of fate and the present use of the word.

[9]Leslie Fiedler and Robert Rogers both note this tendency to portray passionate women as dark-haired. See Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, p. 296, and Robert Rogers, The Double in Literature, p. 127.

[10]J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 58. This association with black will become increasingly important in the portrait of Eustacia Vye.

[11]Ibid., pp. 53-58.

Bathsheba's allure, particularly where Troy is concerned: "Bathsheba's beauty belonging rather to the demonian than to the angelic school, she never looked so well as when she was angry."[12]

The significance of Bathsheba's mirror also indicates more than vanity, just as dark hair and a red jacket indicate more than physical attractiveness. The mirror is the symbol of Venus[13] and Narcissus[14] and its significance in Bathsheba's character is related to the reader by Hardy:

> What possessed her to indulge in such a performance in the sight of the sparrows, blackbirds, and unperceived farmer who were alone its spectators, - whether the smile began as a factitious one, to test her capacity in that art, - nobody knows; it ended certainly in a real smile. She blushed at herself, and seeing her reflection blush, blushed the more...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 - .[15]

Mirror in hand, Bathsheba tests her powers of feminine sexuality

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[12] Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 170.

[13] Bathsheba herself, is referred to as "this Ashtoreth of strange report" who "was only a modification of Venus the well-known and admired." Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 85.

[14] J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 211.

[15] Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 44.

and speculates about probable triumphs as Pierre D'Exideuil notes:

> The desire for admiration, which we behold in all of them indeed, but most highly in Fancy Day and in Bathsheba Everdene, shows us that Nature herself acquaints them with the destined role of their charm and with the power which it wields, at the same time instructing them in its necessity.[16]

The need to control aggressive feminine sexuality becomes apparent in Bathsheba's case; for the portrait of her as an aggressive and threatening woman becomes more and more obvious. Phyllis Chesler draws attention to the pervasive attitude among men, that an active woman is a threat and needs to be controlled:

> A discontented, complaining, "weak" woman, although disliked, is far more acceptable than a contented and/or powerful woman - who is experienced as dangerous, and is ostracized and "killed" far more quickly and inevitably than her male counterpart - especially if she is in any way sexually knowledgeable, independent, or "aggressive".[17]

Bathsheba, in addition to her beauty is intelligent,[18] a

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[16]Pierre D'Exideuil, The Human Pair in the Works of Thomas Hardy. p. 106.

[17]Phyllis Chesler, Women and Madness, p. 242. It is interesting to note that the passive and stoical Fanny is ultimately idealized by Troy as his "true" wife. By extension then, Dr. Chesler's view is upheld, in that weak and "non-complaining" women are valued even more highly than weak and complaining women. In this respect then, Bathsheba, as a strong woman in contrast to Fanny, poses a decided threat.

[18]"She's so good-looking, and an excellent scholar

trait which Hardy seems to view with distrust as demonstrated by his ironic tone, when Bathsheba is revealed "to be a novelty among women - one who finished a thought before beginning the sentence which was to convey it."[19] The sense of Bathsheba as an active rather than a passive personality is reinforced by Oak's continual passive voyeurism of her. First in the mirror episode and then when Bathsheba "seated herself in the manner demanded by the saddle, though hardly expected of a woman" Oak watches unobserved.[20] In each case Bathsheba is made to feel that "Gabriel's espial had made her an indecorous woman without her own connivance" even though Hardy maintains that "without eyes there is no indecorum."[21] Oak passes judgment on Bathsheba's private acts as vain and indecorous,[22] yet Oak's voyeuristic tendencies[23] are accepted

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besides - she was going to be a governess once, you know, only she was too wild." Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 64. Clearly, these traits in Bathsheba are masculine in nature and make her unsuitable for the traditional role of governess, as well as being "unsuitable" as a woman, thus paving the way for her movement into emotional and financial disaster.

[19] Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 58.

[20] Ibid., p. 54.

[21] Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 56.

[22] Note Gabriel's musing about each episode: "A cynical inference was irresistible...as he regarded this scene" and "Oak was amused, perhaps a little astonished" seeing Bathsheba ride like a man. Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 44 and p. 54.

[23] A.J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy, p. 116.

even though he blushes (a sign of his guilt feelings) at the discovery of his spying. Bathsheba's private acts are part of her portrait of independence, strength and activity, an independence that will be controlled in the end by Oak. Oak's transgressions are forgiven by the authorial voice, largely because of his idealized position in the novel,[24] while Bathsheba's transgressions provide the rationale whereby she is brought under control.

Similarly Hardy remarks:

> The only superiority in women that is tolerable to the rival sex is, as a rule, that of the unconscious kind; but a superiority which recognizes itself may sometimes please by suggesting possibilities of capture to the subordinated man.[25]

Clearly, Hardy is suggesting that outward evidence of aggression by women in the sexual sphere is unacceptable, while the "devious" woman simultaneously "pleases" men and fulfills her "superiority". It is Bathsheba's misfortune to

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[24]That Oak is Hardy's idealized view of a hero becomes apparent in the constant reiteration of Oak's faithfulness, altruism and reason, "He [Oak] had sunk from his modest elevation as pastoral king into the very slime-pits of Siddim, but there was left to him a dignified calm...and that indifference to fate which,...is the basis of his sublimity...and thus the abasement had been an exaltation, and the loss gain." Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 75.

[25]Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 61.

possess qualities of the sexually aggressive woman. The sense of prey and predator is conferred in this passage as well, with woman allowing the male to think that he has captured her, while the reverse is the actual truth. Bathsheba becomes, in a sense, both predator and prey. While riding like a man, she glides with the "noiselessness...of a hawk"[26] and is able to charm Boldwood fatally. By the same token, Bathsheba's passionate nature allows her to fall prey to Hardy's vision of fate, in the form of Sergeant Troy.[27]

The imagery related to triumph, battles and power continually surrounds Bathsheba and establishes her as having the masculine attribute of aggressiveness, particularly in the sphere of love and courtship. When considering marriage Bathsheba states: "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",[28] while at the same time Bathsheba considers the usual outcome of marriage as distasteful: "I hate to be thought men's property in that

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[26] Ibid., p. 53.

[27] It is the combination of Bathsheba's forthright manner and her coquetry that constitues a major portion of her ambivalent portrayal. Compare Bathsheba's behaviour with Oak: "'Now find out my name', she said teasingly; and withdrew." with "I have formed a resolution to have no bailiff at all, but to manage everything with my own head and hands." Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 60, p. 112.

[28] Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 67.

way",[29] thus asserting a desire to triumph in both courtship and marriage. Having been a "tomboy" in her youth, Bathsheba, as an adult, adopts a male attitude of "remarkable coolness of manner"[30] and her stern authoritarianism with the men at the farm confuses them to the point where they call her "sir" instead of ma'am:

> "Now mind, you have a mistress instead of a master. I don't yet know my powers or my talents in farming; but I shall do my best, and if you serve me well, so shall I serve you. Don't any unfair ones among you...suppose that because I'm a woman I don't understand the difference between bad goings-on and good."[31]

Bathsheba's smooth running of the farm and her "debut in the forum...was unquestionably 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".[32] When Bathsheba considers alluring Boldwood, who appears not to notice her, "The numerous evidences of her power to attract were only thrown into greater relief by a marked exception."[33] Once successful in her scheme to

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[29] Ibid., p. 66. All italics are the author's, unless otherwise indicated.

[30] Ibid., p. 103, p. 115. Sue Bridehead is also a "tomboy".

[31] Ibid., p. 117.

[32] Ibid., p. 125.

[33] Ibid., p. 125.

entice Boldwood's love, Bathsheba's eyes are "bright with the excitement of a triumph", at which point the narrative voice comments on both women in general and Bathsheba specifically:

> To have brought all this about her ears was terrible; but after a while the situation was not without a fearful joy. The facility with which even the most timid women sometimes acquire a relish for the dreadful, when that is amalgamated with a little triumph, is marvellous.[34]

Bathsheba's quest for sexual triumph must be controlled by the fiction, as it poses a decided threat to the males around her.

Bathsheba, with her dark beauty and powerful femininity, with her ability to incite and distract the men around her becomes, in a sense, a queen of sexuality. She is at once "a delight and a torture"[35] to Boldwood and the "wilful and fascinating mistress"[36] to Oak. Inherent in Hardy's portrayal of Bathsheba's femininity is the element of destructive sexuality, the ability of Bathsheba to overpower men sexually and thus to control them. Just as Boldwood equates his feelings for Bathsheba with "A thing strong as death"[37] so "Diana was the goddess whom Bathsheba instinctively adored."[38] Bathsheba linked with the goddess Diana assumes the aspect of the night-

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[34] Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 190.

[35] Ibid., p. 256.

[36] Ibid., p. 275.

[37] Ibid., p. 232.

[38] Ibid., p. 303.

huntress "in turn linked with the demons of chthonian cults... so, then Diana emphasized the terrible aspect of Woman's nature."[39] Bathsheba becomes an embodiment of "the Dark Lady with her luxuriant flesh [who] is a bearer of poison."[40] George Wing views Bathsheba's sexuality in this light also:

> Who philandered with Oak in the first place? Who teased Boldwood out of a contented bachelordom? Who encouraged Troy and shamelessly pursued him to Bath? The point is that Bathsheba is 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: far more lightly than Eustacia, Grace, Tess, Sue. [41]

Aspects of Bathsheba's powerful and destructive sexuality appear often in the novel. Consider the following passage:

> The young girl with the remarkably pleasant lips and white teeth was beside him. More than this - astonishingly more - his head was upon her lap, his face and neck were disagreeably wet, and her fingers were unbuttoning his collar.[42]

On closer examination this passage reveals imagery of a startling and significant nature. Bathsheba has just rescued

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[39] J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 81.

[40] Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, p. 296.

[41] George Wing, Thomas Hardy, pp. 40-41.

[42] Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 57.

Oak from a fire with the somewhat unorthodox method of applying fresh milk to his face. The association of maternalism and the milk of human kindness with Bathsheba constitutes a part of the effect of this image, yet the sexual nature of Oak's position in Bathsheba's lap points to another ambivalent meaning. Oak notices Bathsheba's lips and teeth in an apparently insignificant and casual manner. However Freud points out in The Interpretation of Dreams that: "sexual repression makes use of transportations from a lower to an upper part of the body" in many instances.[43] As a corollary, what is occurring in this image is the upward displacement of Bathsheba's genitals to her teeth and lips, indicating the strongly sexual nature of Hardy's heroine. Taken in isolation, this interpretation of the above passage appears dubious, but Hardy focuses on Bathsheba's teeth and lips in two other situations, both of which concern Bathsheba's aggressive sexual nature:

> Something in the exact arch of her upper unbroken row of teeth, and the keenly pointed corners of her red mouth when, with parted lips, she somewhat defiantly turned up her face to argue a point with a tall man, suggested that there was potentiality enough in that lithe slip of humanity for alarming exploits of sex, and daring enough to carry them out.[44]

In this instance, Bathsheba is testing her strength in the male dominated world of the farmer's market and Hardy is

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[43] Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, p. 513.

[44] Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 124.

explicit in his assessment of her capabilities for "alarming exploits of sex". Similarly, Bathsheba in the process of refusing Boldwood,[45] whom she had in fact initially encouraged, is described in this manner:

> She allowed a very small smile to creep for the first time over her serious face in saying this, 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.[46]

Bathsheba's lips and mouth are a curious combination of red, sensual fulness juxtaposed with "keenly cut edges" and "keenly pointed corners". There is a suggestion of fear and fascination in these descriptions of Bathsheba's mouth, an attitude which reflects Hardy's ambivalence toward his heroine. Bathsheba's attitude of heartlessness suggests that she is a potential source of fear and her pleasant eyes fascinate at the same time, thus simultaneously capturing the essence of narrative ambivalence. Taken together, these three passages in Far From the Madding Crowd point to an unconscious portrayal of Hardy's heroine as a sexually destructive woman.

The concept of mouth as vagina takes on a more sinister connotation when the recurring image of teeth is examined.

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[45] This refusal can be seen as Bathsheba emasculating the men around her, first Oak and now Boldwood. This emasculating woman becomes characteristic of Hardy's portrayal of women.

[46] Far From the Madding Crowd, pp. 160-161.

The imagery which describes Bathsheba suggests not only that she possesses a sexually aggressive nature, but also a destructive one. The image of lips and teeth when considered in the light of upward displacement reveals that Bathsheba possesses a castrating vagina, a vagina with teeth. Bathsheba then, emerges as the sexually destructive female, the woman with the "vagina dentata".[47]

In the first passage, where Bathsheba rescues Oak, the narrative voice has unwittingly painted an ambivalent view of Bathsheba. The contrast between the maternal image of rescue and revivification through milk and the startling image of Bathsheba's vagina dentata[48] constitutes this ambivalence. Further, the narrator relates to us that Bathsheba "seemed to prefer a less tragic probability; to have saved a man from death involved talk that should harmonize with the dignity of such

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[47]Sandor Lorand and Sandor Feldman, "The Symbolism of Teeth in Dreams", The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, XXXVI (1951), pp. 153-155. "The sight of the female genitals is unpleasant or frightening for many males. Mythology, folklore, and anthropology contain many references to this reaction...One of the many manifestations of castration fear is the legend that the penis can be caught too tightly in the vagina during intercourse...Another form of the castration fear is the concept of the 'vagina dentata'...where the vagina has two rows of teeth like the mouth...Castration fear as the cause of the 'vagina dentata' is considered by Winterstein also...and in American myths the vagina is equipped with teeth...all the vagina dentata stories point to the cruelty of sex..."

[48]An interesting analogue to this concept is found in the popular slang usage of the nineteenth century. The "mouth that cannot bite" is defined as a slang expression for the female pudend. Eric Partridge, (ed.) A Dictionary of Historical Slang, p. 596.

a deed and she shunned it."[49] There appears to be a subtle denigration of Bathsheba in this passage by the narrative voice. Bathsheba as the agent of rescue is made to appear unworthy of that rescue, that is, she lacks the ability to deal with Oak with dignity and the act of rescue is thus undercut, revealing the ambivalence that rests beneath it. Bathsheba's rescue of Oak, because of her sexually aggressive nature, becomes a thinly disguised sexual threat and, for this reason perhaps, the narrator unwittingly denigrates her action in the passage quoted above.

The crystallization of narrative ambivalence toward Bathsheba appears in the following passage:

> Bathsheba was no schemer for marriage, nor was she deliberately a trifler with the affections of men, and a censor's experience on seeing an actual flirt after observing her would have been a feeling of surprize that Bathsheba could be so different from such a one, and yet so like what a flirt is supposed to be.[50]

The intention of this statement by the narrator is to establish Bathsheba as something more than flirt, which indeed she is, as one critic points out: "Bathsheba Everdene, at first another Fancy Day, a vain and highly amusing tease, becomes almost a symbolic figure of resourcefulness and endurance."[51]

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[49] Far From the Madding Crowd, p.59.

[50] Far From the Madding Crowd, pp. 155-156.

[51] A. J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy, p. 131.

However, the sense that Bathsheba possesses the power of a flirt, but does not consciously use it, pervades the passage and this ambivalent attitude makes this attempt to "explain" Bathsheba's behaviour a failure. The means by which Hardy reconciles his ambivalent view of Bathsheba becomes clear. Hardy rescues himself from the recognition of this ambivalence by structuring the plot in such a way as to effectively control the "bad" part of Bathsheba, her destructive sexuality.

The agent of Bathsheba's chastisement is Sergeant Troy and the first clandestine meeting of the pair echoes Bathsheba's song at the sheep-shearing supper.[52] Troy, "The man to whom she [Bathsheba] was hooked was brilliant in brass and scarlet."[53] Hardy continually asserts the deterministic nature of their meeting with such devices as Bathsheba's ironic song. The role of coincidence and fate, Fanny forgetting at which church to meet Troy, the hooking of Bathsheba's skirt to Troy's spur and the song of Bathsheba, all point to the destiny of Bathsheba in the fiction and effectively mask the intention which rests behind the device of fate. Bathsheba is controlled by the sexually aggressive male, the expert at sword-play,[54] the rake who is destined to

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[52] Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 188.

[53] Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 193.

[54] The chapter "The Hollow Admid the Ferns", where Troy demonstrates his prowess with his sword-phallus, effectively demonstrates the extent of his control over Bathsheba.

break her heart in order to demonstrate to her the folly of her ways.

Although Bathsheba herself claims "I want somebody to tame me; I am too independent"[55] the taming of her goes beyond the guidelines of relative autonomy within marriage. Once the female warrior, who delighted in her "battles" and "triumphs", Bathsheba "recklessly throws away her strength"[56] and falls victim to Troy's manipulations:

> She was conquered; but she would never own it as long as she lived. Her pride was indeed brought low by despairing discoveries of spoilation by marriage with a less pure nature than her own. She chafed to and fro in rebelliousness, like a caged leopard; her whole soul in arms, and the blood fired in her face... 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.[57]

Even after Troy's disappearance, Bathsheba is no longer the strong, independent woman that she was. The chance valentine that exploded Boldwood's repressed passion, asserts its control over Bathsheba and, conscience bound, she agrees to wed him. Once again, the forces of Hardy's fate reintroduce Troy into Bathsheba's life and culminate in the passing of Bathsheba

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[55] Ibid., p. 68.

[56] Ibid., p. 219.

[57] Ibid., p. 303.

from the hands of Troy to Boldwood and finally to Oak. The resolution of ambivalence that is felt towards Bathsheba is reached by the function of fate. Hardy simultaneously saves his heroine and expunges the destructive aspects of her sexuality. Bathsheba is reduced from "this haughty goddess, dashing piece of womanhood, Juno-wife"[58] to the safe and passive "stuff of which great men's mothers are made."[59] The ultimate control of Bathsheba by the narrative voice occurs within the context of her sexuality. The relationship with Oak lacks all the passion, potency and threat of death that once characterized Bathsheba's relationship with Troy and Boldwood. The dangerous passion of Bathsheba's sexuality has been muted to a "camaraderie" and Oak is firmly in control:

> They spoke very little of their mutual feelings; pretty phrases and warm expressions being probably unnecessary between such tried friends. Theirs was that substantial affection which arises (if any arises at all) when the two who are thrown together begin first by knowing the rougher sides of each other's character, and not the best till further on, the romance growing up in the interstices of a mass of hard prosaic reality. This good-fellowship - camaraderie - usually occurring through similarity of pursuits, is unfortunately seldom superadded to love between the sexes, because men and women associate, not in their labours but in their pleasures merely - .[60]

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[58] Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 387.

[59] Ibid., p. 403.

[60] Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 419.

The convergence of theme and characterization expresses again Hardy's ambivalent treatment of Bathsheba. The portrait of Bathsheba, and what one critic calls "Bathsheba's willfulness which has reaped its ultimate reward in the death of one man and the spiritual destruction of another"[61] function as the central issue of the novel. The forces of fate and character direct Bathsheba into a near tragic state, from which she is plucked by the same forces. Fate and a change of heart are what save Bathsheba and in this context, one of the central themes of Far From the Madding Crowd appears to be that the individual must suffer the consequences of his or her folly in order to be morally re-educated into a better state. Bathsheba's character, the vanity, the capriciousness, the stubborn independence, is transformed by educative suffering, so that character exists as a concomitant to theme. Yet the revelation of subtler nuances inherent in Bathsheba's character, for instance the threat of destructive sexuality that she poses, are successfully controlled within the theme of moral re-education. What emerges is an ambivalence in theme as well as characterization. The re-education through suffering theme is revealed as a mask for the hidden theme of the need to control the sexually aggressive woman. The Sophoclean notion that "character is fate" is expressed in Far From the Madding

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[61] Richard Carpenter, Thomas Hardy, p. 87.

Crowd in such a manner as to disguise the ambivalent attitude towards Bathsheba. One is left with the feeling that Bathsheba was lucky to survive the emotional and financial disaster that she brought down on herself and the mask is nearly successful. In the context of all of Hardy's major fiction, the mask becomes less successful. That Bathsheba survives, an expression of the positive nature of Far From the Madding Crowd, effectively clouds the deeper psychological issues of the fear of the sexual woman. The question that arises after the realization that Bathsheba will live happily ever after is one of a more disturbing nature. The price paid by Bathsheba and indeed by nearly all the women in Hardy's fiction bears investigation, for the progressively tragic destruction of women reveals the ambivalence felt towards them by the narrative intelligence.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE

The development of Hardy's female characters reveals Eustacia Vye following to some extent in the footsteps of Bathsheba Everdene. Although the subject matter of The Return of the Native is ostensibly different, the treatment of the heroine is, as in Far From the Madding Crowd, compelling and predicated on an essentially ambivalent attitude towards women. Hardy makes the following entry in his notebooks, as the idea for The Return of the Native germinates:

> April - Note: A Plot, or Tragedy, should arise from the gradual closing in of a situation that comes of ordinary human passions, prejudices, and ambitions, by reason of the characters taking no trouble to ward off the disastrous events produced by the said passions, prejudices, and ambitions. [1]

The interesting and somewhat ambiguous question of Hardy's intentions in this novel and the disparity between those stated intentions and the actual portrayal of his characters becomes apparent. Those "ordinary passions, prejudices, and ambitions", on careful examination are not "ordinary" at all. From the onset of the novel, Eustacia Vye is set apart from the ordinary people. She possesses "celestial imperiousness,

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[1] Quoted in Perry Meisel, Thomas Hardy: The Return of the Repressed, p. 69.

love, wrath and fervour".[2] Hardy's intention of portraying ordinary passions is belied by the extensive elevation of his heroine to the level of a goddess. Dwelling on what Hardy considers to be ordinary can be a misleading and fruitless endeavour, complete satisfaction to this question being unattainable. The problem of what Hardy considers ordinary is based on the fact that he chooses "Aeschylean" concerns, a woman with the passions of a goddess, and deals with them in a rural or pastoral milieu. The effect is one of disparity, so that the reader cannot discern whether the situation is truly tragic in proportion or merely a story of ordinary people in highly ironic situations. The question of whether Hardy writes tragedies of fate or of character is the issue here. However, in terms of Hardy's depiction of women, in this case Eustacia Vye, one can again see the same concerns emerging, regardless of Hardy's stated intention: that women are seen as a threat, especially women with sexual or aggressive power. This concern becomes abundantly apparent from Hardy's delineation of Eustacia, a delineation based on elements of her character that are extraordinary, given the fictive milieu in which she emerges.[3]

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[2]Thomas Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 94.

[3]Not only was Hardy writing at a time when assertive women were ostracized or non-existent, but the village setting

What Perry Meisel sees as the common thread between Eustacia and her predecessor Bathsheba is the threat each one poses to the community: "She [Bathsheba] is potentially a danger to individual suitors before Troy's intrusion renders her a threat to the community as well,"[4] and similarly, "Eustacia is the intruder upon the heath, the danger to the community..."[5]

If Eustacia is a danger to the community, then she is also a danger to the critics, who are tempted to see her in the same ambivalent manner in which she is portrayed. A striking example of this situation arises in Richard Carpenter's assessment of the novel:

> What would otherwise be little more than the folk tale of a fair and wilful girl who wanted to be loved to madness and who married the wrong man becomes something more Aeschylean by equating Eustacia with goddesses and with passionate ladies of antiquity.[6]

Carpenter's assessment of the special qualities of Eustacia is both lucid and insightful and he rightly recognizes her

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of Eustacia's drama contrasts strongly with her assertiveness and unheard-of independence. The basic contrast exists in the headstrong attitude of Eustacia and the conformist attitude of Thomasin. Eustacia cares nothing for the opinions held by the local people of her, while Thomasin, an exemplar of the village girl, suffers agonies over her good name when the marriage between herself and Wildeve fails to take place.

[4]Perry Meisel, Thomas Hardy: The Return of the Repressed, p.47.

[5]Ibid., p.77.

[6]Richard Carpenter, Thomas Hardy, p. 96.

important impact on the novel as a whole. However, Carpenter wishes to take both stands concerning Eustacia. She is at once, as he points out, "the raw material of a divinity" and she is also, in his view, the chief element which causes Clym's downfall. Clym falls "victim to the wiles of Eustacia and misconstruing her character which his mother assesses quite correctly",[7] he subsequently is led astray from his spiritual endeavour. Carpenter's view of Eustacia reflects the very ambivalence with which she is portrayed. He sees her as Mrs. Yeobright does, as a "hussy" and at the same time, he sees her as a goddess, something "Aeschylean".

Virginia Hyman is another critic who does not see ambivalence in Hardy's delineation of Eustacia. She notes Hardy's use of authorial intrusions and ironic commentaries, which he uses in order to objectify his heroine's subjective statements. In this manner, according to Ms.Hyman, Hardy ensures that the reader does not completely sympathize with Eustacia and she states: "On the other hand, those critics who do not take into account the ironic commentaries that 'objectify' Eustacia conclude that Hardy expresses an unresolved ambivalence toward his heroine."[8] The result of ignoring

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[7]Richard Carpenter, Thomas Hardy, p. 99.

[8]Virginia Hyman, Ethical Perspective in the Novels of Thomas Hardy, p. 163.

the authorial intrusions is an identification with Eustacia which, Ms.Hyman states, "leads the reader away from the novel to unanswerable questions about Hardy's 'fatalism' or 'pessimism'."[9] For Virginia Hyman, The Return of the Native is a juxtaposition of "Eustacia Vye's decline with the ethical ascent of the more advanced Clym...for her effect upon Clym completes his education as an altruist."[10]

In terms of authorial intrusion, there seems to exist evidence that the authorial point of view concerning Eustacia is in itself ambivalent.[11] Hardy's technique of ironic commentary coupled with delineation of character by imagery points to the punishing of Eustacia. It would seem very relevant and to the point to consider Hardy's fatalism in this context, for it would seem to indicate that Hardy uses fate as a mask, in order to deal with the threatening woman. Moreover, the fact that Eustacia is used to complete "Clym's education as an altruist" justifies further investigation. Clym's movement towards preaching is a direct result of guilt over his mother's death, not altruism. Blaming himself initially for the death of his mother Clym states: "I sinned against her,

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[9] Ibid., pp. 62-63.

[10] Virginia Hyman, Ethical Perspective in the Novels of Thomas Hardy, p. 56, p. 62.

[11] This point will be considered in detail later in this chapter.

and on that account there is no light for me,"[12] and he obsessively guards his mother's house: "It had become a religion with him to preserve in good condition all that had lapsed from his mother's hands to his own."[13] The equation in Clym's mind runs in this manner: "I killed my mother because I rejected her in favour of a sexual woman (Eustacia) and I must therefore atone for this crime". Eustacia becomes in Clym's mind "his mother's supplanter"[14] and the evidence that Clym feels guilty due to his choosing Eustacia over his mother exists in his outraged voice as he confronts Eustacia with the evidence of her crime: "I shall no doubt be gratified by learning in good time what a well-finished and full-blown adept in a certain trade my lady is."[15] The implication made by Clym that Eustacia is a prostitute affirms the notion that Clym sees his wife as a sexual woman who supplanted his mother. With the death of Eustacia, Clym now assumes the burden of guilt for both events: "I was a great cause of my mother's death; and I am the chief cause of hers."[16] Clym's altruism emerges as a defence against guilt and the defense is laid

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[12] The Return of the Native, p. 329.

[13] Ibid., p. 361.

[14] The Return of the Native, p. 361.

[15] Ibid., p. 346.

[16] Ibid., p. 394.

bare by the text of his first sermon: the interdependence of mother and son. Hardy himself points out that Clym's motivation is not altruistic, but based on guilt:

> So what course save one was there now left for any son who reverenced his mother's memory as Yeobright did? It is an unfortunate fact that any particular whim of parents, which might have been dispersed by half an hour's conversation during their lives, becomes sublimated by their deaths into a fiat the most absolute...He had but three activities alive in him. One was his almost daily walk to the little graveyard wherein his mother lay; another, his just as frequent visits by night to the more distant enclosure which numbered his Eustacia among its dead; the third was self-preparation for a vocation which alone seemed likely to satisfy his cravings - that of itinerant preacher of the eleventh commandment.[17]

That Eustacia causes her own doom by insisting "upon achieving her own personal freedom and happiness"[18] is nothing more than what Clym insists on also. Indeed, there is no apparent justification for the treatment of Eustacia as compared to Clym[19] except in the light of authorial ambivalence.

A. J. Guerard states that "The women of these early novels are willing to live and therefore come to life; the

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[17] The Return of the Native, pp. 409-410.

[18] Virginia Hyman, Ethical Perspective in the Novels of Thomas Hardy, p. 62.

[19] This treatment will be dealt with in detail during the consideration of Eustacia in this chapter.

strength of character - non-conformist penalty for individualism in society is death.

men do not come to life, since they are content to dream and wait".[20] Eustacia is one of these women who comes to life, but part of the price she must pay for her independence is an existence outside of social convention. Moreover, D. H. Lawrence sees this price as being death: "Eustacia, because she moves outside of convention, must die,...",[21] Lawrence astutely perceives that the threat which Eustacia poses is so great that the only possible result for her is death. In this respect, Eustacia exists as the logical extension in the development of Hardy's heroine which commenced with Bathsheba. The character of Bathsheba is brought under control by means of the narrative action, whereas Eustacia's character is so strong, and poses such a threat, that the only means of controlling her within the fiction is by her death.

Certain parallels in the characters of Bathsheba and Eustacia tend to validate the notion that Eustacia is a Bathsheba taken to her fullest power. The obvious classical imagery associates Eustacia with such powerful female deities as Hera, Artemis and Athena, all connoting warrior-like aggressiveness.[22] Indeed, just as Bathsheba instinctively

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[20] A. J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy, p. 131.

[21] D.H. Lawrence, Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence, edited by E. D. McDonald, p. 414.

[22] The Return of the Native, p. 94.

adores Diana, so Eustacia contemplates the powerful men in history: Strafford, William the Conqueror and Napoleon.[23] A. J. Guerard remarks that Eustacia possesses a "recklessly masculine intellect"[24] and one striking example of Eustacia's attitude clearly recalls Bathsheba's triumph in the market-place:[25]

> The only way to look queenly without realms or hearts to queen it over is to look as if you had lost them; and Eustacia did that to a triumph.[26]

Eustacia succeeds in controlling the people around her by means of her assertive presence and attitude. Captain Vye, Wildeve and Johnny Nunsuch respond to the demands of her will. Johnny is like a "little slave...feeding the fire as before. He seemed a mere automaton, galvanized into moving and speaking by the wayward Eustacia's will."[27] When questioned by her grandfather, Captain Vye, about the bonfire, Eustacia's reply demonstrates "that she was absolute queen here".[28] With Damon Wildeve, the power of Eustacia to control and subjugate men becomes clear:

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[23] Ibid., p. 97.

[24] A. J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy, p. 138.

[25] See Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 125.

[26] The Return of the Native, p. 96.

[27] The Return of the Native, p. 86.

[28] Ibid., p. 85.

> "I merely lit that fire because I was dull, and thought I would get a little excitement by calling you up and triumphing over you as the Witch of Endor called up Samuel. I determined you should come; and you have come! I have shown my power."[29]

The confluence of imagery of power and divinity serves to reinforce the portrait of Eustacia as an aggressive woman. She is "the raw material of a divinity" with the "passions and instincts which make a model goddess".[30] At once as capricious as Fate,[31] Eustacia is also as enigmatic as the Sphinx[32] with "A true Tartarean dignity".[33] Hardy envisages his heroine as a person of lofty stance and divine bearing while at the same time hinting at the more sinister aspects of her personality. If Eustacia is a goddess, then according to Hardy, she is a fallen goddess, who symbolically inhabits the mythical underworld of Tartarus.[34] In the same manner, the qualities which render Eustacia a model goddess fail to make her a model woman in Hardy's view, thus qualifying her

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[29] Ibid., p. 91.

[30] Ibid., p. 93.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., p. 94.

[34] The Return of the Native, p. 94. "Tartarus with its gates of bronze was the sombre gaol of those who had committed crimes against the gods." Richard Aldington and Delano Ames (trans.), New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology, p. 167.

elevated role with sinister hints of her potential for destructiveness:

> Thus she was a girl of some forwardness of mind, indeed, weighed in relation to her situation among the rereward of thinkers, very original. Her instincts towards social nonconformity were at the root of this...She seldom schemed, but when she did scheme, her plans showed rather the comprehensive strategy of a general than the small arts called womanish, though she could utter oracles of Delphian ambiguity when she did not choose to be direct. In heaven she will probably sit between the Heloises and the Cleopatras. [35]

Like Bathsheba, Eustacia's power rests in her sexual attractiveness, as Diggory Venn remarks: "'Your comeliness is law with Mr. Wildeve. It is law with all men who see'ee."[36] Inasmuch as Venn is presented as a positive, unselfish character, similar to the patient and disinterested Oak, his comments and perceptions of Eustacia place him in the role of a narrative spokesman who indicates the general feeling directed towards Eustacia throughout the novel. Venn comments about both Eustacia and Thomasin, and much of what we feel about these characters is influenced by him. That Thomasin is the "innocent heroine" and that Eustacia is the "femme fatale" of the novel, is a piece of information provided in part by the reddleman: "His instinct was to regard her

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[35] The Return of the Native, pp. 97-98. Note the similarity in language and allusion of this passage to the passage referring to Bathsheba; see page 24, note 50.

[36] Ibid., p. 116.

[Eustacia] as a conspirator against rather than an antecedent obstacle to Thomasin's happiness."[37]

Eustacia uses her attractiveness and aggressiveness in order to satisfy her essentially libidinous nature. With "Pagan eyes, full of nocturnal mysteries" and a soul which is said to be "flame-like"[38] Hardy establishes his heroine in the vein of the archetypal dark woman, and the powerfully sexual seductress figure. Eustacia's physical rather than spiritual affinity with the heath reinforces the portrait of her as a dark temptress, for she fears nothing in the darkness and wildness of Egdon:

> There she stood still, around her stretching the vast night atmosphere...Her extraordinary fixity, her conspicuous loneliness, her heedlessness of night, betokened among other things an utter absence of fear. A tract of country unaltered from that sinister condition...was not, on the face of it, friendly to women.[39]

That Eustacia's nature is predicated on a desire that is libidinous, is nowhere more clear than in the following passage:

> To be loved to madness - such was her great desire... Her loneliness deepened her desire. On Egdon, coldest and meanest kisses were at famine prices; and where was a mouth matching hers to be found?[40]

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[37] The Return of the Native, p. 107.

[38] Ibid., p. 93.

[39] Ibid., p. 80.

[40] The Return of the Native, p. 96.

Although Hardy never states outright any sexual indiscretion between Eustacia and her lover Damon Wildeve, the impression left with the reader is that Hardy is merely being decorous to his reading public. The hints of sexual misconduct, whether real or fancied, give the impression of "where there is smoke there is fire", as Mrs. Yeobright states: "Good girls don't get treated as witches even on Egdon."[41]

In conjunction with the portrait of Eustacia as "Queen of Night" exists the notion that Eustacia's power to attract men and her assertiveness that approaches social nonconformity are based on supernatural abilities. Eustacia, "the lonesome dark-eyed creature up there that some say is a witch",[42] has a degree of mastery over men that Hardy presents as somehow unnatural. Indeed, due to the scholarly diligence of John Paterson, in his study The Making of "The Return of the Native", what is revealed is that Eustacia began in Hardy's mind as a supernatural being:

> Of this fact the almost total transfiguration of Eustacia Vye offers the most dramatic proof: the splendid creature who now dominates the novel as the "erring" heroine to Thomasin's "pure" heroine earlier recalled not the romantic protagonist but the wicked and even disreputable antagonist. In her

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[41] Ibid., p. 202.

[42] Ibid., p. 77.

> initial appearance, indeed, she was to suggest a satanic creature supernatural in origin.[43]

Nowhere is the evidence more clear or incisive that Hardy views Eustacia ambivalently than in his cancellations and reworkings of the chapter "Queen of Night". Originally named Avice, and later changed to Eustacia, Hardy's heroine "Even in her final development...is pictured formidable as well as grand..."[44] What is interesting to note is the change in the description of Eustacia's mouth. As Paterson points out, the original description clearly indicates a "more predatory than amorous" mouth in her character and "it seemed formed 'less to speak than to taste, less to taste than to quiver, less to quiver than to curl'."[45] Compared to the final description of Eustacia's mouth, there arises some interesting changes: "The mouth seemed formed less to speak than to quiver, less to quiver than to kiss...less to kiss than to curl."[46] Hardy has deleted "taste" from his final description and added "kiss". The sense conveyed is of Eustacia's sexual power with less emphasis on her "devouring" aspect, hence the deletion of "taste". Nevertheless, the potential for destructiveness

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[43] John Paterson, The Making of "The Return of the Native", p. 17. All italics are the author's unless otherwise indicated.

[44] Ibid., p. 19.

[45] Ibid., p. 20.

[46] The Return of the Native, p. 94. (My emphasis)

in her sexuality is imparted by the fusion of the terms of "kiss" and "curl" in reference to Eustacia's mouth.

The pinnacle of Hardy's ambivalence toward Eustacia is demonstrated in the various manuscript revisions he made in one sentence concerning her lovability. Hardy laboured long on this revision, repeatedly changing the meaning of the statement by subtle revisions of word choice and word order, ultimately revealing his vacillating and ambivalent state of mind concerning Eustacia. Again John Paterson points out these changes:

> "And so we see our Eustacia," he originally said in the manuscript, "for she was lovable after all." Evidently regretting his undisguised enthusiasm, however, he subsequently modified his estimate:
>
> And so we see our Eustacia - for she was lovable ~~after all~~ sometimes. [fol. 80]. [sic].
>
> Still unsatisfied, Hardy sought refuge from the conflict of his thinking and feeling in an equivocal construction: "And so we see our Eustacia,"he declared in the first edition, "for she was not altogether unlovable -" (F,I,158). And in the Uniform Edition of 1895, he was to enter yet another qualification: "...for at times she was not altogether unlovable" (U,84).[47]

The origins of Hardy's ambivalence toward Eustacia appear to be founded on her highly sexual and assertive portrayal, as suggested by Hardy's revisions. Hardy's portrayal of Eustacia, as well as her role in the action, suggests that Hardy harbours

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[47]John Paterson, The Making of "The Return of the Native", p.134.

feelings of fear as well as ambivalence toward his heroine. Like a straw man, the voluptucus and destructive heroine is set up in order to be knocked down and if necessary done away with due to this ambivalence and fear on Hardy's part.

To return again to the chapter entitled "Queen of Night", one of the most striking passages concerning Eustacia's appearance confirms and reaffirms her link with Bathsheba as a destructive heroine:

> The mouth seemed formed less to speak than to quiver, less to quiver than to kiss. Some might have added less to kiss than to curl...One had fancied that such lip-curves were mostly lurking underground in the South as fragments of forgotten marbles. So fine were the lines of her lips that, though full, each corner of her mouth was as clearly cut as the point of a spear.[48]

The presence of ambivalence in this description resides in the juxtaposition of images used to describe Eustacia's mouth. At once full and sexually inviting, the mouth is also pointed like a spear, reinforcing the destructive nature of a mouth that "curls" as readily as it "kisses". One is again reminded of the descriptions of Bathsheba's mouth. The lips that offer both sex and death in Eustacia's case, resemble the emasculating "vagina dentata" mouth of Bathsheba. The repeated occurrence of the elaborate descriptions of the mouths of these two heroines tends to substantiate the concept of upward displacement, that is, that there exists an unconscious use

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[48] The Return of the Native, p. 94.

of these images on the part of the narrative voice. This use of images, when examined carefully reveals a latent content, much as a dream when analysed reveals unconscious wishes and desires, all disguised by the manifest content of the dream.[49]

It may not be readily apparent that sexuality or sexual activity is linked with death in the unconscious. In the case of Eustacia, her role as sexually desirable woman and reputed witch can be seen as merely part of her character and a part of those "passions, prejudices and ambitions"[50] to which Hardy addresses himself in the formulation of the conflict and theme of his novel. Certainly, this use of Eustacia's character is valid. Nevertheless, the existence of ambivalence, whether conscious on the part of the narrative voice or not, speaks of a deeper concern or fear on the part of the narrator than merely the structuring of thematic conflict. The conflict exists within the narrative voice itself and finds expression in the latent content of the imagery he chooses. The existence of a fear of women is something which Freud recognizes as a universal condition and which he discusses in terms of primitive taboos erected

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[49]For a complete investigation of the work of displacement and the manifest and latent content of a dream, see Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, Chapter IV, p. 381.

[50]See note 1, chapter two of this thesis.

around women:

> Whenever primitive man institutes a taboo, there he fears a danger; and it cannot be disputed that the general principle underlying all these regulations and avoidances is a dread of woman. Perhaps this fear is founded on the difference of woman from man, on her eternally inexplicable, mysterious and strange nature, which thus seems hostile. Man fears that his strength will be taken from him by a woman, dreads becoming infected with her femininity and then proving himself a weakling. The effect of coitus in discharging tensions and inducing flaccidity may be a prototype of what these fears represent; and realization of the influence gained by the woman over a man as a result of sexual relations, and the favours she extorts by this means, may all conduce to justify the growth of these fears. There is nothing in all of this which is extinct, which is not still alive in the heart of man to-day.[51]

What primitive man dealt with by means of taboo, modern civilized man, particularly the artist as spokesman for his culture, hides with elaborate defenses and sublimations. In this respect, the ambivalence of the narrative voice toward Eustacia functions as a sign post, a kind of aesthetic taboo, which hides, distorts and conceals the dread and fear with which the narrative voice invests women. Eustacia is a literary creation of Thomas Hardy and, as such, any ambivalence expressed towards her is a result of the unconscious perceptions with which her creator endows her. To say that Hardy felt a dread

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[51]Sigmund Freud, "The Taboo of Virginity (1918)" in Sexuality and the Psychology of Love, (ed.) Philip Rieff, p. 76.

of women in his own life[52] is difficult to prove and not entirely related to the fiction itself. Yet to state that the novels of Thomas Hardy indicate a pattern of ambivalence and a dread of women, adds meaning and resonance to the artistic impact of the novel. That men harbour unconscious fears of women is not of primary importance. What becomes essential to a more meaningful understanding of the fiction is how these unconscious fears become embodied in the fiction and how these conflicts find resolution. In the case of Eustacia, the resolution is achieved through her annihilation.

What emerges as an interesting analogue to this dread of women, is A. J. Guerard's remarks concerning the "sexless and self-denying heroes", the men in Hardy's novels who are characterized by an absence of "normal aggressiveness, by an at least figurative lack of virility."[53] This marked passivity in the heroes of Hardy's fiction, particularly in Clym's case suggests that Eustacia has indeed "infected" Clym with her femininity as Freud postulates.[54] Moreover, Clym is "infected" not only by Eustacia's death-dealing sexuality, but also by

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[52] Hardy's apparent appreciation of the aesthetics of a lady's hanging adds an interesting dimension to this question. See page three, note seven.

[53] A. J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy, pp. 119-120.

[54] Clym says: "How bewitched I was! How could there be any good in a woman that everyone spoke ill of? " The Return of the Native, p. 348.

his aggressive and domineering mother.[55] Interestingly enough, both Eustacia and Mrs. Yeobright symbolically pay for their misdeeds by death. What appears to be fate working out the destinies of Eustacia and Mrs. Yeobright is, in another sense, narrative retribution for the control that they exercised over Clym, and this retribution is effectively cloaked by the forces of fate in the action. Damon Wildeve also dies because he is a passionate man who does not employ intellect as Clym does, in order to counteract the effects of the sexually destructive Eustacia.

The theme of an unhappy alliance, predicated on two equally strong but opposing obsessions, Clym's for a school and Eustacia's for Paris, is transmuted into the theme of sexual betrayal. Clearly, the sense of the woman betraying the more noble man is evoked in Eustacia and Clym's relationship. Clym as the intellectual and, in some respects, the artist figure, must control the sexually destructive woman.

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[55]Henchard in The Mayor of Casterbridge, another of Hardy's masochistic and passive heroes, is so "infected" by women, (both his wife and daughter) that he dies. As a result, Henchard is regarded as a tragic hero. In The Return of the Native similarly it is Clym and not Eustacia, even though she dies, who is regarded as the central tragic figure. (For this view see Virginia Hyman's book Ethical Perspective in the Novels of Thomas Hardy.) This same process can be seen in the figure of Giles Winterborne in The Woodlanders.

What appears as the theme of opposition of desires (Clym's and Eustacia's) is revealed as the theme of the fear of the sexual woman and this theme is seen to structure and redefine the conflict of The Return of the Native in new and enriching patterns. The destructive and aggressively sexual woman threatens the intellectual man, and even threatens the world of intellect and spiritual altruism with her uncontrolled passions. Just as Bathsheba is perceived as a threat to the community because of her independence and assertiveness, so Eustacia must be controlled because of her passionate and destructive sexuality. What underlies both of these portraits of women is the fear of the sexual woman which makes its appearance in the form of narrative ambivalence. In The Return of the Native the threat posed by Eustacia is so strong that the means of controlling her lies only in her destruction, a means which Hardy will turn to again in his fiction.

CHAPTER THREE

TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES

With the publication of Tess of the d'Urbervilles a change in the presentation of women occurs. Previous to Tess, the heroines of Hardy's fiction have been assertive, wilful and sexually potent women. From these overtly aggressive heroines, who according to Hardy, reap the harvest of their vanity, selfishness and sexual dangerousness, the fiction of Hardy moves to the tender, passive and pure Tess. As A. J. Guerard remarks:

> His attitude progressed, as we have seen, from fascinated and unwilling sympathetic criticism to almost uncritical sympathy, but his view of woman's incorrigible nature long remained unchanged.[1]

It cannot be denied that Hardy treats Tess's plight with sympathetic understanding. Nor does he seem to condemn Tess for her loss of virginity, but rather he pointedly invokes the reader's censure of Angel's sexual hypocrisy and Alec's sexual exploitation of Tess. The heroine of Hardy's fiction has metamorphosed from the betrayer to the betrayed and Tess appears an anomaly in the gallery of Hardy's heroines.

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[1]A. J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy, p. 129.

However, despite the suggestion that a disparity exists between the character of Tess and her feminine predecessors, at least at the level of narrative action, a close scrutiny of the patterns of imagery, the use of landscape and the character of Tess herself reveals that Hardy is still engaged in a struggle with his ambivalent perception of women.

Many of the insights and problems that critics have seen in Tess of the d'Ubervilles reflect the ambivalence inherent in Tess's character. Indeed, it is rare when two critics agree on the reason for Tess's destruction and this too, can be seen as a reflection of the ambivalence in her character. Virginia Hyman states: "It is this natural passivity, inherited from her parents, that is to be Tess's downfall"[2]; on the other hand A. P. Elliott maintains:

> While Hardy's women are not by any means all alike, they do possess qualities common to their sex, and which he thought necessary to every woman's nature. Among these he rated unrestrained passion - with its chief supplement, indecision - very high. Now neither of these is an evil, but when operating in unison, brings [sic] man untold woe. "Mere vessel of emotion", he calls Tess, and the epithet might be applied to many of his Tesses.[3]

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[2]Virginia Hyman, Ethical Perspective in the Novels of Thomas Hardy, p. 108.

[3]A. P. Elliott, Fatalism in the Works of Thomas Hardy, p. 94. It is interesting that Mr. Elliott continually focuses on the woes brought to men by women, when in fact, as this thesis has endeavoured to point out, it is the women who suffer

Evelyn Hardy evaluates Tess's character and her subsequent downfall in an extremely lucid manner:

> Tess was not only the victim of Fate. Circumstance, a malign progenitor, of shiftless, cowardly or bestial people, she was also the victim of her own strong sensuality, and of an insidious need to immolate herself under the deceptive guise of benefiting others.[4] [sic]

Still another argument is posited by Dorothy Van Ghent that Tess is "incapacitated for life by her moral idealism, capricious of life through her sensualism."[sic][5] Passivity, fecund sexuality, masochistic tendencies, moral idealism, all these reasons and more are suggested by the critics as the determinants of Tess's situation. Perhaps the confusion that exists among the critics can be traced back to the novel itself, for divergent readings of Tess suggest a certain inscrutability of the motivational factors in the novel and this inscrutability further suggests that Tess is an embodiment of contradictory attitudes. It is with this view of the ambiguities inherent in Tess, that a study of the

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the most. That Mr. Elliott could single out Tess as an example of his thesis that women are instruments of Fate bringing woe to men, seems somewhat untenable, as Tess is the victim of these woes and not the men in the novel.

[4]Evelyn Hardy, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography, p.234.

[5]Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function, p. 209.

ambivalence surrounding her character becomes a critical necessity.

Unlike Bathsheba and Eustacia, both of whom are striking characters of contrast to Fanny and Thomasin, the principal aspects of narrative ambivalence find their expression simultaneously in the figure of Tess. Tess contains elements of both passivity and aggressiveness; she is at once ethereal and related to baser animal instincts.[6] At this point it may be useful to introduce Hardy's view of these character traits in order to clarify his expression of ambivalence toward his heroine. In "The Profitable Reading of Fiction" Hardy explicitly states how he views certain character traits:

> The higher passions must ever rank above the inferior - intellectual tendencies above animal, and moral above intellectual - whatever the treatment, realistic or ideal. Any system of inversion which should attach more importance to the delineation of man's appetites than to the delineation of his aspirations, affections, or humours, would condemn the old masters of imaginative creation from Aeschylus to Shakespeare.[7]

Behind Hardy's manifest intention of relating Tess's moral and spiritual beauty, lies the latent intention of

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[6]This is not my judgment but rather it becomes clear that instincts are indeed considered to be "baser" by Hardy. See note seven, this chapter.

[7]Quoted in William Newton, "Hardy and the Naturalists: Their Use of Physiology", Modern Philology, XLIX (1951), 31.

revealing Tess as a creature of instinct and one who must tragically be destroyed by these instincts. The tension between the manifest and latent intention of the novel could account for the narrative ambivalence, for Tess is at once instinctual and ethereal. The pattern begins to re-emerge: just as Eustacia and Bathsheba must be controlled because of their destructive sexuality, so must Tess; the difference being that Hardy is consciously sympathetic to Tess while maintaining the latent thematic strand of fear of the sexual woman. In this manner then, the ambiguities noted by the critics and readers become clear, they are expressions of this struggle in which Hardy is engaged and Tess is another victim claimed by the battle.

The characteristic of Tess's passivity stands in opposition to the assertiveness seen in her predecessors. Pierre d'Exideuil describes Tess's passivity as "a certain carelessness, a readiness to surrender under the pressure of the desires which came roaming about her "[8] a view which concurs with the facts of Tess's relationship with Alec, whom "she obeyed like one in a dream"[9] or with her mother, to whom Tess defers "with calm abandonment".[10] Not only is

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[8]Pierre d'Exideuil, The Human Pair in the Works of Thomas Hardy, p. 78.

[9]Tess of the d'Urbervilles, p. 34.

[10]Tess, p. 40.

Tess's passivity a characteristic of her daily life, it also deeply influences her when she finds herself in a potentially erotic situation: "She abandoned herself to her impulse, climbed the gate, put her toe upon his instep, and scrambled into the saddle behind him."[11] This scenario of Tess succumbing to her impulse to ride behind Alec suggests an iconographic scene: the acquiescence of Tess to the horse, which is symbolic of passion.[12] Indeed, Alec makes an implied and highly ironic comparison between Tess and his mount, which serves to re-define the affinity between Tess's passivity and her passions:

> "If any living man can manage this horse I can: - ...But she's touchy still, very touchy, and one's life is hardly safe behind her sometimes."[13]

The scene of Tess's seduction, which the narrator later recalls, confirms again the passivity inherent in her character:

> She had dreaded him, winced before him, succumbed to adroit advantages he took of her helplessness, then, temporarily blinded by his ardent manners, had been stirred to confused surrender awhile...[14] [my emphasis].

Hardy attributes Tess's passivity to a "slight incautiousness

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[11] Ibid., p. 58.

[12] "The horse stands for intense desires and instincts" J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 152.

[13] Tess, p. 44.

[14] Ibid., p. 69.

of character inherited from her race."[15]

Juxtaposed to this essential passivity in Tess's character is evidence that aggression lurks behind it. Tess has the pluck to deny Alec d'Urberville his initial kiss and her reply echoes the elements of assertiveness already seen in Bathsheba and Eustacia: "'No, sir.' she said, revealing the red and ivory of her mouth as her eyes lit in defiant triumph..."[16] In other instances as well, Tess's aggression and assertiveness is provoked, as she turns "impetuously upon him [Alec], her eyes flashing as the latent spirit (of which he was to see more some day) awoke in her."[17] The sign painter[18] and even Angel[19] feel the sting of Tess's anger. The culmination of Tess's lurking anger and aggression is, of course her murder of Alec d'Urberville. Although Tess is unmercifully driven to this point in her life by circumstances beyond her control, Hardy curiously reasserts Tess's passivity concerning this act:

> I still maintain that her innate purity remained intact to the very last; though I frankly own that

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[15] Ibid., p. 76.

[16] Ibid., p. 46.

[17] Tess, p. 65.

[18] Ibid., p. 68.

[19] Ibid., p. 295.

> a certain outward purity left her on her last fall. I regarded her then as being in the hands of circumstances, not normally responsible, a mere corpse drifting with a current to her end.[20]

There seems to exist a curious conflict in Hardy's portrayal of Tess, for she is at once "a mere vessel of emotion"[21] and a woman capable of flinging a gauntlet into the face of Alec d'Urberville.

If as Freud postulates in his essay "The Economic Problem of Masochism" that "the suppression of an instinct can...result in a sense of guilt and how a person's conscience becomes more and more sensitive the more he refrains from aggression against others",[22] then Tess's increasing sense of guilt and personal responsibility, which precipitates her acquiescence to Alec, hides a tremendous amount of anger and aggression.

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[20] Quoted in Evelyn Hardy, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography, p. 228. The same pattern, seen in Far From the Madding Crowd and The Return of the Native, of Hardy using fate as a disguise for his ambivalent attitude toward his heroine, is expressed here. It is also curious as to why Hardy would blame Tess's situation on fate when Tess's latent aggression can easily be accounted for as the source of her plight, rather than fate. Again, this can be attributable to Hardy's ambivalence. In order for him to portray a "pure" woman, she cannot have any aggression, hence the role of fate in the novel.

[21] Tess, p. 12

[22] Sigmund Freud, "The Economic Problem of Masochism", The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, edited by James Strachey, XIX, 170.

Tess's sense of guilt begins with the death of the Durbeyfield horse, for which she feels responsible. In fact, her guilt is so great that "she regarded herself in the light of a murderess"[23] and the narrator relates that "Nobody blamed Tess as she blamed herself."[24] It is this initial sense of guilt that sends Tess to "claim kin" with Alec d'Urberville. Indeed, once at d'Urberville's, Tess's sense of guilt increases and she turns that guilt against herself claiming "'I wish I had never been born - there or anywhere else.'"[25] Instead of expressing anger directly towards her seducer, Tess turns it against herself in a classic example of moral masochism.[26] The suppression of aggression is an integral part of moral masochism and Tess indulges in this suppression to the greatest extent with Angel Clare. Upon discovering that Tess is no longer a virgin, Clare reacts with hypocrisy. However, instead of expressing natural rage and indignation, Tess turns this anger against herself: "But her mood of long-suffering

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[23] Tess, p. 28.

[24] Ibid., p. 28.

[25] Ibid., p. 64.

[26] Moral masochism is a term defined by Freud as a "tendency to submit to one's own sadistic super-ego" which "derives its moral force from instinctual aggressive energy." Charles Rycroft, A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis, p.88.

made his way easy for him, and she herself was his best advocate."[27] In this light then, Tess's ultimate action against d'Urberville is based not on her circumstantial plight as Hardy maintains, but rather on a suppression of her aggression. Moreover, it would appear that Hardy himself did not fully perceive the motivation with which he endowed his heroine, thus enabling him to appear sympathetic while simultaneously controlling the passionate sexuality of his heroine.

This proposition becomes more apparent when the different types of imagery used to describe Tess are examined. These image patterns reveal the same ambivalence or contradictory traits in Tess as appear in the narrative treatment of her guilt and suppression of anger. What appears initially to be a sympathetic treatment of Tess is revealed as being riddled with ambivalence. It may be helpful to remember Hardy's view of human passions[28] as opposed to intellect and morality in this consideration of the ambivalent imagery surrounding Tess. With Hardy's view in mind, Tess's fecund sexuality is revealed to be the mortal flaw in her character. Tess's demise, therefore, suggests not the untoward fate of a pure woman, but the containment and control of the feared

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[27] Tess, p. 212.

[28] See page fifty-one, note seven.

sexual woman. The sexual aspect of Tess's character is clouded by Hardy with such devices as heredity and fate and is thus difficult to ascertain. Nevertheless, there exists evidence that shows Tess to be a member of the ambivalently perceived heroines, the difference being that instead of being dealt with by the narrative action, as in Bathsheba and Eustacia's case, Tess herself becomes the agent of her own destruction. This self-destruction is largely due to Tess's vacillation between passivity and aggression. It now becomes necessary to examine carefully the subtle patterns of imagery which reveal Hardy's latent intentions.

The contrasting images surrounding Tess portray her as both an ethereal being and a sensual woman. Hardy tries to pinpoint the sensuality of Tess when he states:

> She had an attribute which amounted to a disadvantage just now; and it was this that caused Alec d'Urberville's eyes to rivet themselves upon her. It was a luxuriance of aspect, a fulness of growth, which made her appear more of a woman than she really was.[29]

Moreover, Hardy is extremely vivid and clear in his idea that Tess's sensuality is linked to her peasant status:

> ...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.[30]

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[29] Tess, p. 34.

[30] Ibid., p. 74.

Nature and fertility are found in the union of woman and the soil, as Tess holds "the corn in an embrace like that of a lover."[31] Tess's movement into the Valley of the Great Dairies is the major metaphor for her sensual affinities with the fertile landscape. An intricate part of this lush valley, Tess is seen as a component of the "sensuous, pagan pleasure in natural life and lush womanhood."[32] Associated with vegetable life, Tess is

> The sapling which had rooted down to a poisonous stratum on the spot of its sowing [and] had been transplanted to a deeper soil,[33]

and the result for Tess is a rediscovery of the "invincible instinct towards self-delight".[34] Although Tess's beauty is undeniably great, it is strongly associated with passive biology and therefore according to Hardy, it is somehow less admirable, ethically inferior to moral or intellectual development and more prone to destruction:

> And probably the half-conscious rhapsody was a

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[31] Tess, p. 75.

[32] Ibid., p. 133.

[33] Ibid., p. 109. Not only is Tess associated with sensuous vegetable life, but her connection with the image of the tree connotes both a sexual and an aggresively phallic attribute.

[34] Ibid., p. 85.

> Fetichistic utterance in a Monotheistic setting; women whose chief companions are the forms and forces of outdoor nature retain in their soul far more of the Pagan fantasy of their remote forefathers than of the systematized religion, taught their race at later date.[35]

Hardy appears to be celebrating the spontaneous song of Tess as natural and akin to nature, but nature itself is seen to be an embodiment of uncontrolled sexuality and therefore dangerous.

Tess as part of the passive and fatalistic world of nature, fertility and sensuality is inherently weakened or stained by this association. The implication that unrestrained sexual lushness is considered by the narrator to be a quality both desired and feared is evidenced by Tess's dealings with Angel and Alec. Although the fertility and natural sensuousness of Tess aid her in recapturing her zest for life, it also poses a decided threat to the men around her and ultimately to herself. Consider the following passage:

> The outskirts of the garden in which Tess found herself had been left uncultivated for some years, and was now damp and rank with juicy grass which sent up mists of pollen at a touch; and with tall blooming weeds emitting offensive smells - whose red and yellow and purple hues formed a polychrome as dazzling as that of cultivated flowers. She went stealthily as a cat through this profusion of growth, gathering

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[35] Ibid., p. 88.

> cuckoo-spittle on her skirts, cracking snails that were underfoot, staining her hands with thistle-milk and slug-slime, and rubbing off upon her naked arms sticky blights, which though snow-white on the apple-tree trunks, made madder stains on her skin; thus she drew near to Clare, still unobserved of him.[36]

The fertility of this over-grown garden, which is clearly associated with Tess's fecund sexuality, is revealed as something "rank" and "offensive". Although the garden appears as a "polychrome" of colours and the blights are snow-white on the trees, Tess's movement through and affinity with this garden produce "madder stains on her skin" and cover her with "sticky blights", "cuckoo-spittle", "slug-slime" and other repulsive elements. Tess moves through the garden as "stealthily as a cat" toward the unsuspecting "Angel" playing a harp. She is degraded by the rank and offensive blights, slugs and snails and paradoxically she threatens to degrade the pure Angel. Tess threatens to pollute and emasculate Angel with her rank sexuality, as there is a great deal of aggression implied in the cat metaphor used to describe her. The fecundity of the garden, perceived as having an almost excremental quality, is representative of Tess's sexuality. The garden stains her character and undermines any spiritual or moral qualities that the narrator professes Tess to possess. Tess's affinity

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[36] *Tess*, p. 104.

with the natural is in conflict with her growth as a moral person, just as her "feminine smoothness becomes scarified by the stubble [of corn which she gathers], and bleeds."[37]

The overwhelming evidence of her sexuality becomes then, in the narrator's mind, one of the chief reasons for Tess's destruction. The "slight incautiousness of character"[38] which belongs to Tess, translates as sexuality out of control, just as the garden runs wild with a profusion of rank growth and Tess runs wild through it. As a result, the ambiguous phrase used by the narrator to describe Tess's fall from purity takes on an interesting connotation. Tess is "stirred to confused surrender",[39] that is, her passionate nature becomes aroused by Alec and her passivity aids in sealing her fate. The result is a compromised moral nature, despite what Hardy maintains. For Hardy then, the chief flaw in Tess's character is the stain or "blight" of her sexuality, the knowledge of which he hides even from himself.

The conflict in Hardy concerning Tess's character is further evidenced by an opposing strain of imagery surrounding her. This imagery, which stands in opposition to Tess as the fertile animal, demonstrates the authorial ambivalence felt toward Tess and accounts for Hardy's inability to condemn

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[37] Tess, p. 75

[38] Ibid., p. 76.

[39] Tess, p. 69.

Tess directly.[40] In spite of Tess's animal sensuality, she is also an ethereal, bodiless being. Tess "looked ghostly, as if she were merely a soul at large"[41] and she appears to Angel as a "rosy warming apparition."[42] Tess becomes metamorphosed from the pink-cheeked, robust milkmaid, to "a visionary essence of woman - a whole sex condensed into one typical form."[43] Even at the moment of her seduction, the narrative voice sees Tess in a contradictory manner: she

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[40]This reluctance to condemn the sexual woman is unique in Tess and demonstrates the high degree of ambivalence with which Hardy regarded his heroine. A contemporary review of Tess unwittingly pinpoints a portion of this ambivalence. Despite Hardy's attempt to portray a sexually fallen woman sympathetically, this critic saw these aspects of Tess's character: "For what are the higher things to which this poor creature eventually arises? She rises through seduction to adultery, murder and the gallows." From The Quarterly Review (April, 1892), quoted in Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Norton Critical Edition, p. 382. This is a question which is extremely valid and the answer perhaps resides in Hardy's own ambivalent perceptions of Tess. Hardy's attempt to portray Tess as a pure woman is unconvincing because of the stream of ambivalent and contradictory imagery surrounding her character.

[41]Tess, p. 110. This imagery, which stands in contrast to Tess as a sexual woman, suggests that the narrator needs to diffuse or render impotent this sexuality. He does this by making Tess appear as a ghostly and literally disembodied (and hence, desexualized) woman. This imagery is also a part of the narrator's idealization of Tess.

[42]Ibid., p. 109.

[43]Ibid., p. 111.

is a "beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow"[44] and she appears to Alec as a desembodied "pale nebulousness at his feet."[45] Moments before her wedding, Tess is perceived as "a sort of celestial person, who owed her being to poetry - one of those classical divinities"[46] and "In the ecstatic solemnity with which she swore her faith to him the ordinary sensibilities of sex seemed a flippancy."[47] It becomes difficult to believe that Tess is also a part of "lush womanhood".[48]

The ambiguities of Tess's presentation are encapsulated in a moment when Angel comes upon Tess unawares as she awakens from a warm sleep:

> It was a moment when a woman's soul is more incarnate than at any other time; when the most spiritual beauty bespeaks itself flesh; and sex takes the outside place in the presentation.[49]

If Hardy is saying that a woman's soul and spirituality is fused with her sexuality, then Tess's moral purity becomes questionable, despite Hardy's pains to present her otherwise.

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[44] Tess, p. 62.

[45] Ibid., p. 62.

[46] Ibid., p. 179.

[47] Ibid., p. 179

[48] Ibid., p. 133.

[49] Ibid., pp. 142-143

Tess's soul is paradoxically "incarnate" as it is embodied in her flesh and the essence of her soul is "sex" which "takes the outside place in the presentation."

The crystallization of the ambivalence expressed towards Tess occurs, as is by now characteristic of Hardy, in a passage describing Tess's mouth. The transfiguration of Tess from the "celestial person" to the woman with the "vagina dentata" culminates in the "prosaic sneeze" of Clare:

> How very lovable her face was to him. Yet there was nothing ethereal about it; all was real vitality, real warmth, real incarnation. And it was in her mouth that this culminated. Eyes almost as deep and speaking he had seen before, and cheeks perhaps as fair; brows as arched, a chin and throat almost as shapely; her mouth he had seen nothing to equal on the face of the earth. To a young man with the least fire in him that little upward lift in the middle of her red top lip was distracting, infatuating, maddening. He had never before seen a woman's lips and teeth which forced upon his mind with such persistent iteration the old Elizabethan simile of roses filled with snow. Perfect, he, as a lover, might have called then off-hand. But no - they were not perfect. And it was the touch of the imperfect on the would-be perfect that gave the sweetness, because it was that which gave the humanity.
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> Clare had studied the curves of those lips so many times that he could reproduce them mentally with ease: and now, as they again confronted him, clothed with colour and life, they sent an aura over his flesh, a breeze through his nerves, which wellnigh produced a qualm; and actually produced, by some mysterious physiological process, a prosaic sneeze.[50]

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[50] Tess, p. 127. Note Alec's similar reaction to Tess's

The startling sensuality of this passage confirms the sexuality of Tess and links her firmly with Eustacia and Bathsheba as a possessor of destructive, consuming sexuality. Even though Tess does not use her sexuality as a weapon, it is nonetheless a flaw in her otherwise "pure" character. That Tess's lips and teeth are an upward displacement of her genitals is proven inveterately by Hardy's astute psychological insight into the relationship between mental and physical activity. Angel Clare's sneeze is obviously a sexual response, driven home by Hardy's conscious comparison of his reaction to a "breeze through his nerves", "an aura" and a "qualm".[51] Whether or not Tess is actually the destructive woman she is perceived to be, is not the essential issue. The struggle of the narrator with his ambivalently perceived heroine is based on just such a disparity: Tess is at once innocent morally and culpable sexually and therein lies the central message of the image of "roses filled with snow". The purity of the snow is surrounded by the fiery red lips and the evocation of fire and ice is achieved. This image recalls

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mouth: "Surely there never was such a maddening mouth since Eve's!...You temptress, Tess; you dear damned witch of Babylon." p. 268.

[51] "The nose as an organ of sexual curiosity assumes the character of sexually stimulated genitals with congestion and increased mucous secretion and discharge." Douglas H. Frayne, Psychoanalytic Considerations Concerning the 'Sneeze'. p. 3. Presented to the Canadian Psychoanalytic Society (Toronto) 1976.

Tess as the "pale nebulousness" - the snow maiden with "minute diamonds of moisture..and drops upon her hair, like seed pearls"[52] - as well as the red-lipped, maddening, "dear damned witch of Babylon."[53]

Hardy sees Tess's flaw as a "slight incautiousness of character" and predisposition to passivity,[54] which when examined in conjunction with the imagery associated with Tess, reveals a crucial connection with fecund sexuality and latent aggression.[55] It is therefore not surprising that Tess should destroy herself by murdering Alec. In one deft stroke, Hardy has effectively controlled Tess's flaw - she herself points to the destructiveness of passion when she recalls "the notion expressed by Friar Lawrence: 'These violent delights have violent ends.'"[56] - and Hardy effectively distances himself from the outcome of her plight by having Tess destroy herself, all the while remaining the detached yet sympathetic

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[52] Tess, p. 111.

[53] Ibid., p. 268.

[54] Ibid., p. 171.

[55] The latent aggression is seen in the image of Tess's mouth as the "vagina dentata" and is expressed in the murder of Alec.

[56] Tess, p. 181

observer.[57] In reality, the narrator has consistently presented Tess in an ambivalent manner and has therefore paved the way for Tess's destruction without appearing to be involved.

Still another incident confirms Hardy's need to destroy his sexual heroine: that is the substitution of 'Liza-Lu for Tess. If Tess is a victim, a wronged woman and a "pure woman faithfully represented", then why does Hardy replace Tess with her sister? The answer comes from Tess and corroborates the existence of her flaw: "She ['Liza-Lu] has all the best of me without the bad of me; and if she were to become yours it would seem as if death had not divided us..."[58] The only suitable surrogate for Tess is a woman who has been cleansed of sexuality and Hardy is explicit in his assessment of 'Liza-Lu: she is "half girl, half woman - a spiritualized image of Tess".[59] 'Liza-Lu exists then as a purified Tess, a woman without Tess's destructive sexuality, and she uniquely

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[57] I am thinking here of Hardy's famous phrase "the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess." p. 330.

[58] Tess, p. 326.

[59] Ibid., p. 329. Michael Steig in his essay "Sue Bridehead", Novel I, (1967-68), p. 261 states: "There is a likelihood that Hardy considered Sue...a more advanced form of humanity than Arabella, a form tragically unadapted to survive in an essentially animalistic world; this is at once parallel toand an inversion of the apparent assumption in Tess of the d'Urbervilles that the more ethical Angel Clare and 'Liza-Lu...are at once more advanced evolutionary products than Tess and more fit to survive."

expresses and confirms Hardy's ambivalence toward Tess.

Tess emerges as a fusion of the passive and aggressive women seen earlier in the novels of Hardy. She also represents Hardy's attempt to reconcile his ambivalent view of women, yet as A. J. Guerard remarks:

> Hardy's women, young and old, unfailingly betray themselves by some radically feminine impulse which another novelist would have ignored; by some characteristic gesture or some unguarded word. They blunder ahead, creating the circumstances that trap them - ...[60]

It may be more useful to restate Mr. Guerard's assessment, by stating that Hardy unfailingly betrays himself when dealing with his fictional women; always watchful to find a menacing trait in his heroines.

The character of Tess is by far the most complex of those yet dealt with in this thesis. Nevertheless, the fundamental problem in Tess of the d'Urbervilles exists not in the clash of social convention and the laws of instinct and nature, nor in the tragic destruction of an innocent sensibility, although these issues are of importance. Rather, the nexus of Tess and her dilemma exits within her ambivalent role of virginal innocent and fallen Magdalene (a name used to describe Tess by Hardy himself). When all is said and done, is it not Tess's physical attractiveness, her sexuality, which

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[60]A. J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy, pp. 145-146.

is "too rank, too wild, too deadly"[61] that is ultimately responsible for her downfall? Even though Hardy clouds this fundamental issue with statements about heredity, social evolution, fate and coincidence, the problem of the sexual woman remains paradoxically foremost in Hardy's creative mind, although hidden by numerous disguised compromises.

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[61] *Tess*, p. 181.

CHAPTER FOUR

JUDE THE OBSCURE

The movement from Tess of the d'Urbervilles to Jude the Obscure shows a shift in focus from the pastoral to urban setting and from a woman as the central figure of the action, to a man. It may not seem suitable to conclude a study of female characters with a novel concerning a man, but Jude the Obscure not only delves deeply into "psychological insecurities",[1] it also concerns itself with a theme directly related to the relationship of the sexes: the "deadly war waged between flesh and spirit; and to point the tragedy of unfulfilled aims."[2] This "deadly war" some critics, notably A. Alvarez, see as the war within Jude's own nature and the characters of Arabella and Sue, mere projections of differing aspects of Jude's personality.[3] Although this view is in part true, it is however, Jude's ambivalent view of women that drives him to seek such mates as Arabella and Sue. In this respect, these female characters both reflect parts of Jude's mind and exist

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[1]Richard C. Carpenter, Thomas Hardy, p. 138.

[2]Taken from the Preface to the First Edition, appearing in Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure, v.

[3]Quoted in Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure, with an afterword by A. Alvarez, p. 406. As well, Richard C. Carpenter concurs with Mr. Alvarez in this view; see Thomas Hardy, p.146.

as characters in their own right. It now becomes apparent that a study of female characterization would be incomplete if it did not encompass both Jude's attitude towards women and the ambiguities of Sue Bridehead's character.

If Tess of the d'Urbervilles reveals the fate of the sexual woman, then the story of Sue Bridehead and her relationship with men, chronicles the fate of the apparently sexless female. In terms of a study of female characterization the portrait of Sue exists as another massive attempt by Hardy to deal with his ambivalence towards women, an attempt that is remarkably similar to the delineation of Tess. Sue Bridehead emerges as a fascinating character in her own right and indeed, no study of female characterization would be complete without her. Critic after critic has extolled the complexity of Sue's character. Even Mr. Alvarez, despite his view that Jude is "fundamentally a work without any heroines at all",[4] relents and acknowledges Sue: "Her complexity lies in the way in which Hardy managed to present the full bitter sterility of her narcissism and yet tried to exonerate her."[5] A. J. Guerard maintains that the character of Sue is a portrait

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[4]Quoted in Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure, p. 408.

[5]Ibid., p.410.

"which remains one of the most impressive in all fiction of a neurotic and sexually maladjusted woman".[6] As well, F. R. Southerington states: "Sue Bridehead is perhaps the most remarkable feminine portrait in the English novel."[7] Perhaps Robert B. Heilman best sums up the importance of Sue's character:

> Thomas Hardy comes close to genius in the portrayal of Sue Bridehead. Sue takes the book away from the title character, because she is stronger, more complex, and more significant, and because her contradictory impulses, creating a spontaneous air of the inexplicable and even the mysterious, are dramatized with extraordinary fullness and concreteness, and with hardly a work of interpretation or admonishment by the author.[8]

Hardy, somewhat more modestly, had this to say about Sue: "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."[9]

Even though Jude the Obscure ostensibly deals with the life of Jude Fawley, Hardy takes great pains to establish his theme: "to show the contrast between the ideal life a man wished to lead, and the squalid real life he was fated

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[6] A. J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy, p. 109.

[7] F. R. Southerington, Hardy's Vision of Man, p. 145.

[8] Robert B. Heilman, "Hardy's Sue Bridehead", Nineteenth Century Fiction, XX (1965-66), 307.

[9] F. E. Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, p. 42.

to lead."[10] Further to this idea of contrasts Hardy writes: "Of course the book is all contrasts - or was meant to be in its original conception...Sue and her heathen gods set against Jude's reading the Greek testament,...Jude the saint, Jude the sinner; Sue the Pagan, Sue the saint; marriage, no marriage".[11] These contrasts naturally encompass the characters of Arabella and Sue and their respective relationships with Jude. Within the context of Hardy's notion of contrasts emerges an ambivalence concerning women felt at differing levels of the novel. There would appear to be two basic areas of the narrative dealing with this ambivalence: Jude's ambivalence toward the women in his life and the ambivalent portrayal of Sue Bridehead, with her etherealized sexuality.

The presentation of Jude's ambivalent attitude towards women resembles the pairing of contrasting female characters in Far From the Madding Crowd and The Return of The Native. Arabella joins the ranks of Bathsheba Everdene and Eustacia Vye as the sexually dominant woman,[12] but with an important difference. Whereas Bathsheba and Eustacia

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[10] Ibid., p. 41.

[11] Ibid., p. 41.

[12] There is a striking similarity between Arabella, Bathsheba and Eustacia, particularly in the imagery connoting warrior-like aggressiveness. As already documented, the portraits of Bathsheba and Eustacia abound with this type of

emerge with a sense of majesty and evoke a grudging admiration on the part of the narrator, Arabella achieves none of this majesty. She is purely and simply a woman motivated by selfish and greedy libidinous desires. Whereas Tess flings a gauntlet, Bathsheba flings haughty, proud looks and Eustacia flings epithets of rage against Mrs. Yeobright, Arabella flings a pig's pizzle at the hapless Jude. She is a

> fine dark-eyed girl, not exactly handsome, but capable of passing as such at a little distance, despite some coarseness of skin and fibre. She had a round and prominent bosom, full lips, perfect teeth, and the rich complexion of a Cochin hen's egg. She was a complete and substantial female animal - no more, no less; and Jude was almost certain that to her was attributable the enterprise of attracting his attention from dreams of the humaner letters to what was simmering in the minds around him.[13]

Each compliment to the ample sensuousness of Arabella is qualified by a declaration of her essentially animalistic nature. Her handsomeness is only passable at a distance, her rich complexion is somewhat coarse and Hardy is explicit about the nature of her mind which "simmers" with sexual desire in contrast to Jude's "humaner" thoughts.

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imagery and Arabella shares with them this characteristic. The pig's pizzle thrown by Arabella is referred to as a "missile" and as a type of "novel artillery". Arabella's desire for Jude is seen as an "attack on him" and Arabella laughs with "the low and triumphant laugh of a careless woman who sees she is winning her game." Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure, pp. 44, 46, 50.

[13] Jude, p. 43.

Sue is diametrically opposed to Arabella's coarse sensuousness with her "half-visionary form"[14] and "artless and natural"[15] demeanor. Even physically there exists a marked contrast between the two women: Sue with "the small, tight applelike convexities of her bodice, so different from Arabella's amplitudes."[16] Arabella receives no quarter from the scathing portrait Hardy gives us of her, while Sue, despite her capriciousness, is rendered in a charming manner when compared to the rendition of Arabella.

Despite the fact that Jude is meant to be the central figure of Hardy's fiction, the curious thematic metaphor of "the deadly war waged between flesh and spirit" speaks more of the two women in Jude's life than of Jude himself. Arabella as the embodiment of flesh and Sue as the embodiment of spirit are seen to dominate the novel, as they dominate Jude. The central action of the novel appears to be the manner in which Jude is acted upon. Arabella acts on Jude in such a way as to turn him from his academic pursuits, while Sue acts upon Jude with the result that Jude relinquishes his ambition of achieving a religious vocation. It becomes, then, not altogether irrelevant to consider Jude's perceptions of

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[14] Ibid., p. 92.

[15] Ibid., p. 102.

[16] Ibid., p. 187.

these two women in order to reveal the ambivalent portrayal of them.

The portrait of Jude Fawley presented by Hardy is that of a young man psychologically immobilized by his inability to alleviate a desperate feeling of insecurity. Burdened by the family curse of obscurity, isolation and rejection, Jude attempts to redress this aimlessness in his search for "something to anchor on, to cling to."[17] Jude's first object of adoration and idealization is Christminster, the "scheme or dream" of Phillotson, which Jude quickly adopts as his own. Jude believes, as did Phillotson, that the pursuit of academic knowledge will provide him with a niche, a reason for living and a replacement for the apparently non-reasonable and miserable deprivation of love. Christminster becomes for Jude his "Alma Mater; and I'll be her beloved son, in whom she shall be well pleased."[18] So desperate is his need to secure a sense of stability in a psychological world fraught with anger, feelings of rejection and personal superfluousness, that Jude invests all his mental energies in the pursuit of knowledge at his "heavenly Jerusalem."[19]

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[17] Jude, p. 29.

[18] Jude, p. 42.

[19] Ibid., p. 24.

It is this process of idealization,[20] the perception of Christminster as wholly good, that opens up the avenue for the corresponding part of idealization, that which is perceived as wholly bad: the flesh and Arabella.

When Jude is confronted with the embodiment of animal sensuality in the character of Arabella, the satisfaction he previously derived from his study pales before the power of his repressed drives. Arabella, the "woman of rank passion"[21] represents both the allure and the threat of the sexual woman. For Jude, the call of sexuality is strong:

> There was a momentary flash of intelligence, a dumb announcement of affinity in posse, between herself and him...She saw that he had singled her out...for no reasoned purpose of further acquaintance, but in commonplace obedience to conjunctive orders from headquarters, unconsciously received by unfortunate men when the last intention of their lives is to be occupied with the feminine.[22]

The threat of the sexual woman is revealed not only in the imagery associated with aggression[23] but also in the threat of emasculation: with all the cunning and artifices of an animal, Arabella prepares to "shear" Jude of his

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[20] See note eighteen of the Introduction for a full definition of idealization.

[21] Ibid., p. 373.

[22] Ibid., p. 43.

[23] See page seventy-one, note twelve.

masculinity.[24] The pig-keeper's daughter is revealed as the devouring woman, who with a "curiously low, hungry tone of latent sensuousness"[25] and "a jealous, tigerish indrawing of breath"[26] speaks of her desire:

> I've got him to care for me: yes! But I want him to more than care for me; I want him to have me - to marry me! I must have him. I can't do without him. He's the sort of man I long for. I shall go mad if I can't give myself to him altogether! I felt I should when I first saw him![27]

The purely physical, unrefined by the intellectual or spiritual, soon comes to disgust Jude and his desire for sensual gratification begins to diminish.

When Jude and Arabella part ways, Jude takes up his old ambition with renewed zeal. The idealization of Christminster by Jude becomes gradually fused with his cousin, Sue Bridehead. Jude's motives for journeying to Christminster become a tangled mass of desires:

> The ultimate impulse to come had had a curious origin - one more nearly related to the emotional side of him than to the intellectual...Jude had observed the photograph of a pretty girlish face, in a broad hat with radiating folds under the brim like rays of a halo...His grand-aunt gruffly replied that she was his cousin Sue Bridehead...and that the

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[24]The "shearing" of Jude refers to the repeated image of Samson and Delilah, evoked by Hardy several times in connection with Arabella and Jude. Jude, pp. 50, 373.

[25]Jude, p. 54.

[26]Ibid., p. 58

[27]Ibid., p. 54.

> girl lived in Christminster...His aunt would not give him the photograph. But it haunted him; and ultimately formed a quickening ingredient in his latent intent of following his friend the schoolmaster thither.[28]

Christminster, Sue, Phillotson, all these elements of motivation taken on symbolic meanings in Jude's psyche. Sue, already associated with Christminster, is a "spirit... disembodied creature...tantalizing phantom"[29] and proves to be as impenetrable as the colleges of Christminster. The love that Sue teasingly holds out to Jude represents to him a feeling of belonging and nurturing that he thought his "Alma Mater", Christminster held out. Not only the family curse against marrying, but the taint of incest[30] characterizes Jude's relationship with Sue, resulting in guilt, drinking and increased feelings of worthlessness:

> He passed the evening and following days in mortifying by every possible means his wish to see her, nearly starving himself in attempts to extinguish by fasting his passionate tendency to

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[28] Jude, p. 80.

[29] Ibid., p. 243.

[30] The idealization of Sue, associated with Christminster, suggests that part of Jude's ambivalent view of Sue is due to her association with a mother-figure. Jude, in effect, steals Sue from Phillotson, Jude's father-figure and his relationship with Sue is therefore fraught with guilt feelings. See Sigmund Freud, "Contributions to the Psychology of Love" in Sexuality and the Psychology of Love, edited by Philip Rieff, pp. 49-70.

> love her. He read sermons on discipline; and hunted up passages in Church history that treated of the Ascetics of the second century. Before he had returned from Marygreen to Melchester there arrived a letter from Arabella. The sight of it revived a stronger feeling of self-condemnation for his brief return to her society than for his attachment to Sue.[31]

Jude is unable to derive emotional satisfaction from the sensual Arabella, nor physical gratification from Sue, the "whited sepulchre."[32]

Jude's ambivalent attitude towards women, reflected in his choice of Sue and Arabella as objects of love, emerges as a theme that runs parallel to the spirit and flesh conflict. Jude's lament to Sue that "We are acting by the letter; and 'the letter killeth'!"[33] functions as a mask, relying on the idea of social convention as a scapegoat for their failing relationship. What Hardy viewed as a "tragedy of unfulfilled aims" becomes in part, a tragedy of the unreconciled psyche of Jude.

As well as Jude's ambivalent attitude towards women, there also exists the complex and highly contradictory portrayal of Sue Bridehead. In terms of Jude's perception, the ambivalence

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[31] Ibid., p. 191.

[32] Jude, p. 216.

[33] Ibid., p. 383.

is focused in two contrasting women: Sue and Arabella. Whereas Arabella is seen by Jude as entirely a sensual woman, Sue is perceived as an ideal, spiritualized being, hardly a woman at all. However, close scrutiny of the narrative portrayal of Sue reveals that she is, like Tess, ambivalently regarded. Even after all the events of Sue and Jude's abortive relationship have transpired, Jude still wonders: "Perhaps - perhaps I spoilt one of the highest and purest loves that ever existed between man and woman!"[34] Jude's idealization of Sue remains intact to the degree that he feels he may have desecrated their relationship by making it sexual as well as emotional in nature.

Hardy continually portrays Sue as sexless, a woman with sexual feelings of a "supremely delicate kind"[35] which ultimately translates into a "physical objection - a fastidiousness",[36] a "repugnance"[37] for sexual relations with men. Contrasted with this attitude professed by Sue is her teasing and sexually provoking manner. Evelyn Hardy calls Sue "the elfin Belle Dame sans Mercie"[38] and A. J. Guerard points out

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[34] Jude, p. 349.

[35] Ibid., p. 238.

[36] Ibid., p. 208.

[37] Ibid., p. 211.

[38] Evelyn Hardy, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography, p. 251.

Sue's inconsistent attitude towards sex:

> Sue combines, with her sexlessness, and even repugnance to the "gross" sexual act, a very strong impulse to arouse sexual desire in men. She never outgrows her childhood oscillations between the tomboy and coquette.[39]

Even Sue concurs with this assessment when she states: "But I crave to get back to the life of my infancy and its freedom."[40] In a rare moment of insight, Sue admits her craving for domination over men:

> At first I did not love you, Jude; that I own. When I first knew you I merely wanted you to love me. I did not exactly flirt with you; but that inborn craving which undermines some women's morals almost more than unbridled passion - the craving to attract and captivate, regardless of the injury it may do the man - was in me; and when I found I had caught you, I was frightened.[41]

Essentially, Sue's desire to entice men sexually is the same as Arabella's desire. Underneath the mask of "repugnance" and apparent sexual distaste is the same emasculating woman, ready to shear men of their potency, and Sue ultimately fulfils this role: first with the Christminster undergraduate, then with Phillotson and finally with Jude. D. H. Lawrence saw this attribute in Sue when he remarked: "She knew her own fatality. She knew she drained the vital male stimulus out

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[39] A. J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy, p. 111.

[40] Jude, p. 139.

[41] Jude, p. 348.

of a man, producing in him only knowledge of the mind".[42]

Aspects of narrative ambivalence not only find their expression in Sue's contradictory sexual nature, but also in her curious masculine and femine characteristics and her oscillation between sadistic cruelty and masochistic guilt. Sue is as "boyish as a Ganymede"[43] and her scintillating intellect is perceived by Jude as not "quite like a girl."[44] Sue relates to Jude how she lived with a Christminster undergraduate "like two men almost"[45] and Jude is struck by "her strange ways and curious unconsciousness of gender."[46] As a child, Sue is "not exactly a tomboy...but she could do things that only boys do, as a rule."[47] and for an adult woman with a sense of sexual squeamishness, Sue was remarkably impertinent and boisterous as a child. Jude's aunt relates this incident:

> Why one day when she was walking into the pond with her shoes and stockings off, and her petticoats pulled above her knees, afore I could cry

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[42] D. H. Lawrence, "Sue Bridehead" in Hardy: A Collection of Critical Essays, edited by Albert J. Guerard, p. 73.

[43] Jude, p. 154.

[44] Ibid., p. 147.

[45] Ibid., p. 148.

[46] Ibid., p. 149.

[47] Jude, p. 114.

> out for shame, she said: "Move on, Aunty! this is no sight for modest eyes!"[48]

Hardy describes Sue as "epicene",[49] alluding to the confusion of her gender and a symbolic transmutation of Sue occurs when, dripping wet, she changes into Jude's clothes:

> Sitting in his only arm-chair he saw a slim and fragile being masquerading as himself on a Sunday, so pathetic in her defencelessness that his heart felt big with the sense of it.[50]

Ambivalence is also expressed in Sue's sadistic and masochistic oscillation. Sue cruelly asks Jude to give her away in marriage to Phillotson, and her constant refusal to allow Jude to love her, then her immediate contrary action, shows her sadistic toying with the feelings of Jude. Although in the final analysis Jude still idealizes Sue as his "pure love", he has moments of insight into nature. He calls her "ridiculously inconsistent",[51] a "flirt"[52] and "incapable of real love."[53] Jude pinpoints Sue's behaviour when he states: "You simply mean that you flirted outrageously with him... then repented, and to make reparation, married him, though

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[48] Ibid., p. 113.

[49] Ibid., p. 153.

[50] Ibid., p. 145.

[51] Ibid., p. 209.

[52] Ibid., p. 202.

[53] Ibid., p. 238.

you tortured yourself to death doing it."[54] Even in the face of this truth about herself, Sue persists in her sadistic emotional mutilation of Jude:

> But I think I would much rather go on living always as lovers, as we are living now, and only meeting by day. It is so much sweeter - for the woman at least, and when she is sure of the man.[55]

Of course the other aspect of this ambivalent portrayal of Sue is her masochistic tendencies, her virulent and persistent self-flagellation when she returns to Phillotson. Jude calls her return a "fanatic prostitution"[56] yet Sue insists in a painfully realistic metaphor: "I should like to prick myself all over with pins and bleed out the badness that's in me!'"[57] Doomed to repeat this sadistic, masochistic ritual, Sue, as A. J. Guerard points out:

> half realizes at last, that her happiness depends on reenactment of this pattern: to live with a man in an ostensibly sexless and fraternal intimacy, arouse his sexual desire, lead him on, reject him, and then do penance for the suffering she has caused...Like all such persons, she wants to subject herself to punishment and horror...[58]

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[54] Jude, p. 239.

[55] Ibid., p. 255.

[56] Ibid., p. 355.

[57] Ibid., p. 339.

[58] A. J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy, p. 111.

The nexus of this ambivalent portrayal of Sue resides in the fact that despite her incapacitating sexual problem and the suffering she brings to Jude and Phillotson, Sue remains, at least to Jude, an intensely charming character. Even Jude, who once accused Sue of having virtually no passions, yet being a flirt, says: "Your natural instincts are perfectly healthy; not quite so impassioned, perhaps, as I could wish; but good, and dear, and pure."[59] Jude, though, has the excuse of his idealization of Sue for his blindness of her sexual problem, but what of Hardy himself? In a letter to a friend, Hardy discusses Sue's character:

> There is nothing perverted or depraved in Sue's nature. The abnormalism consists in disproportion, not in inversion, her sexual instinct being healthy as far as it goes, but unusually weak and fastidious...and one of the main reasons for fearing the marriage ceremony is that she fears it would be breaking faith with Jude to withhold herself at pleasure, or altogether, after it, though while uncontracted, she feels at liberty to yield herself as seldom as she chooses.[60]

Hardy's view would appear to reflect Jude's statement concerning Sue[61] and obliquely hints at the idea that Hardy

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[59] Jude, p. 339.

[60] Florence E. Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, pp. 41-42.

[61] Michael Steig points this out in his article "Sue Bridehead", in Novel I (1967-68), 263. "The question we must ask...is whether Hardy's own ambivalence between idealizing Sue (and rationalizing that she is in some sense 'sexually healthy') and seeing her as a destructive type vitiates his

may share in Jude's ambivalent perception of women. Even Sue describes her behaviour as containing "aberrant passions, and unaccountable antipathies."[62] while Hardy still maintains that Sue is sexually "healthy".

Again, as in Tess's case, there is strong ambivalence residing in one character, that of Sue. Sue's portrait as that of a passionless woman, is no less of an attempt by Hardy to reconcile his ambivalence than in the case of Tess, the sexual woman sympathetically portrayed yet ultimately destroyed. The effort by Hardy to render Sue as a sexless yet captivatingly charming character is belied by her single-handed destruction of three men and reveals essentially, beneath it all, that she is regarded in the same light as Arabella: the woman who captivates and emasculates the men around her.

The theme of the deadly war waged between flesh and spirit stands metaphorically for the struggle between sensuality and spiritually, between instinct and social convention and between the social position of an individual and his aspirations. The conflict between flesh and spirit also masks the essential conflict in Hardy's mind concerning women. The spirit is Jude and his intellect and the flesh are the diverse forms of

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portrayal of her - or whether he wrought better than he knew."

[62] Jude, p. 204.

the destructive and emasculating woman embodied in Arabella and Sue. Hardy appears to be suggesting by his treatment of women that man is doomed to be manipulated by them and that women, no matter what kind, have an uncanny ability to sexually exploit man. Arabella and Sue, each with different methods, exploit Jude's weakness, his sexual passions. However, the ultimate expression of Hardy's pessimism resides in the endurance of the sexual woman, for Arabella survives the destruction of Jude Fawley's world and in a sense, her endurance signifies the final cry of victory of the sexual woman that has loomed throughout his fiction.

CONCLUSION

The quality of the fiction written by Thomas Hardy bears testimony to his creative ability. Concerned with social, psychological and moral issues, Hardy's fiction reveals a complexity that is rich with the development of multi-leveled theme and the expression of conflict. Henry James speaks of this quality in art when he states: "The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million - ".[1] Hardy's house of fiction also has many windows and this thesis has focused its attention on the treatment of women and how the portrayal of women connects with other thematic concerns in his fiction.

Women in Hardy's fiction present a threat to the males around them. Bathsheba with her independence threatens the smooth workings of community order and as well, she threatens Oak and Boldwood with her aggressive sexuality. Eustacia is akin to the dark temptress, driving Wildeve mad with passion and wrenching Clym from his books and his mother. Tess, in spite of her purity and passivity, must be cleansed of her dangerous, soiling sexuality and only then

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[1]Henry James, The Art of the Novel, p. 46.

offered to Clare as the spiritualized surrogate, 'Liza-Lu. The ambivalent attitude towards women reaches a pinnacle in the portraits of Sue and Arabella, the spirit and the flesh, each striving to destroy, however unwittingly, the sexuality or the spirituality of the protagonist Jude.

The influence of Hardy's portrayal of women on his thematic concerns resonates within his art, adding intricacy in both meaning and tone. Ambivalence found in the characterization of women reveals an ambivalence in theme as well, controlling to some extent Hardy's notion of fate, coincidence and the clash of instincts and social convention. The fear of the aggressively sexual woman, as in the case of Bathsheba and Eustacia, clearly underlies the thematic concerns of re-education through fated suffering and the opposition of two strong wills. Similarly, the attempt to portray an innocent sensibility violated by social and moral hypocrisy is predicated on an essentially ambivalent presentation of Tess. Tess exists as both prey and potentially threatening predator, as revealed by the contradictory imagery surrounding her. It is this ambivalent portrayal of Tess that qualifies her tragic status. In the case of Jude the Obscure, Hardy's struggle with the ambivalently perceived woman tends to reshape his theme of the deadly war waged between flesh and spirit. The tragedy of unfulfilled aims takes on a new and highly ironic form in this novel, for the survival of the sexual woman speaks of

an unfulfilled aim on Hardy's part, his inability to reconcile his ambivalent view of women.

The treatment of women in Hardy's fiction is indeed complex. Women appear in multifarious forms: pure, frigid, libidinous and demonic. Each portrait, from Bathsheba to Sue Bridehead, speaks of the fear and fascination which women evoke in Hardy's fiction. The portrayal of women assumes a dominating centrality in Hardy's fiction, acting as a prism through which other thematic concerns are refracted. Hardy's need to deal with this conflict helps to shape his art, for as well as the various social and moral concerns worked out in his fiction, it is always, as D. H. Lawrence points out; "this curse upon the birth in the flesh, and this unconscious adherence to the flesh."[2]

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[2]D. H. Lawrence, Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence, edited by E. D. McDonald, p. 481.

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