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THOMAS HARDY AND SENSATIONALISM

SANAE UEHARA

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
SCHOOL OF ENGLISH
IN THE FACULTY OF ARTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM
FEBRUARY, 1993



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ABSTRACT

Thomas Hardy and Sensationalism
Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts
by Sanae Uehara
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Thomas Hardy launched his career as a novelist by writing a sensation story in *Desperate Remedies*. Although he abandoned sensationalism in the next novel, he returned to sensation elements in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*; and after this, he continually exploited these elements in fiction. In this thesis, seven novels covering almost the whole of his career are analysed in order to show his progress and the sensation elements which contributed to this development. Chapter 1 discusses the sensation tradition in English fiction, the sensation novel and sensationalism. Chapter 2 moves into *Desperate Remedies*; it examines the influence of sensation fiction on this novel. It also shows Hardy's personal interests--his concerns for marital and sexual problems and taste for striking stories--which had much to do with his persistent employment of sensationalism. In Chapter 3 *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and *A Laodicean* are discussed. While he made good use of sensation elements in the former, he failed to do so in the latter. Chapter 4 deals with *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *The Return of the Native*. This chapter illustrates his advance: he came to develop sensation elements into useful narrative devices contributing to plot, theme or character. It also demonstrates that by means of these elements he could tackle marital problems, a theme which he expounded upon with more intensity in his later fiction. The final chapter is devoted to *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. It shows that he explored fully the marital and sexual issues he had treated with increasing fervour. He was able to do this, for by the 1890s he was extremely adept at handling sensation devices.



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INTRODUCTION

In 1922 J. W. Beach cast new light on the study of Thomas Hardy (1840--1928): he discovered that there were striking similarities between Hardy's first published novel, *Desperate Remedies* (1871), and *The Woman in White* (1860) by a sensation novelist, Wilkie Collins (1824--89).¹ W. R. Rutland's detailed study of the novel in 1938 supported Beach's discovery. Rutland asserted that Hardy studied Collins's novel very closely to write *Desperate Remedies*; and justified his argument by the presence of *The Woman in White* in Hardy's library at Max Gate.² Since Beach's and Rutland's pioneering studies of Hardy from a viewpoint of the novelist's borrowing from Collins, it has been agreed that *Desperate Remedies* was indebted to Collin's novel.³

According to Sir George Douglas, Hardy in the early 1880s dismissed his first published novel as a crude sensation novel.⁴ Hardy also confessed that he had

¹ J. B. Beach, *The Technique of Thomas Hardy* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1922), 23.

² W. R. Rutland, *Thomas Hardy: A Study of His Writing and Their Background* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1938), 142--46.

³ See Lawrence O. Jones, "Desperate Remedies and the Victorian Sensation Novel", *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 20 (1965--66), 35--50; Paul Ward, "Desperate Remedies and the Victorian Thriller", *Thomas Hardy Yearbook* 4 (1974), 72--76.

⁴ According to Sir George Douglas, Hardy "was wont to treat [*Desperate Remedies*] cavalierly, speaking of it as a 'sensation novel' of the Miss Braddon school, which in the early 'eighties implied reproach, if not contempt". This is quoted in Lawrence Jones, "Hardy's Unwritten Second Sensation Novel", *Thomas Hardy Annual* 2, ed. Norman Page (London: Macmillan, 1984), 30.

employed sensationalist techniques "merely to attract public attention".⁵ Curiously enough, he continually created sensational episodes in fiction. Some of them are: Knight's clinging to the cliff in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873); Boldwood's murder of Sergeant Troy in *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874); the tragic end of Eustacia Vye in *The Return of the Native* (1878); the fire of the castle in *A Laodicean* (1881); Tess's murder of Alec in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891); and Little Father Time's murders and suicide in *Jude the Obscure* (1895). This suggests that Hardy was interested in the sensational throughout his career; that sensation elements constitute prominent and significant characteristics of his fiction. Therefore, it must be meaningful to look at the ways he exploited such elements in his works.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the sensation elements in Hardy's fiction and demonstrate that they contributed to his development as a novelist. In the present study seven novels covering almost the whole of his career are interpreted in terms of sensationalism. The main focus is on the process by which he came to develop sensation elements into extremely useful narrative devices to write his novels.

In approaching this topic, it is indispensable to start by examining sensationalism. Chapter 1 begins with a general discussion of the sensation tradition and sensationalism; and turns to the three prominent

⁵ Hardy's note. See Florence Emily Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840--1928* (London: Macmillan, 1962), 85. This biography was prepared by Thomas Hardy himself and based on notes and letters which he kept systematically for many years.

sensationalists, namely, Wilkie Collins, Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1835--1915) and Mrs. Henry Wood (1814--87) and their works. These three writers are chosen from a great number of the sensationalists for two reasons. Firstly, all three had established their fame as popular novelists by the early 1860s and were so distinguished from the other sensationalists. Secondly, they wrote the most influential best-sellers in the 1860s when Hardy was trying to be a novelist. As we shall see, they were interested in the lives of women; by means of their sensational stories, they focused on varied problems the women faced in an essentially male-dominated society. Hardy was to follow a trend set by those writers.

Chapter 2 moves into Hardy's first published novel and examines the influence of sensation fiction on *Desperate Remedies*. This chapter is also concerned with his various personal interests--his taste for striking stories, concerns for marital and sexual problems, concept of art--which had much to do with his persistent use of sensationalism.

Chapter 3 focuses on the way in which Hardy used sensation devices in his two minor novels, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and *A Laodicean*. This chapter shows us that while he made good use of the devices in the former, he failed to do so in the latter.

Chapter 4 is devoted to Hardy's earlier two major novels: *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *The Return of the Native*. This chapter demonstrates his advance in handling sensation devices: by means of them, he was able to create

rich visual imagery, which contributed to the great merits of his fiction. He also managed to develop sensation elements into useful devices to treat marital unhappiness and estrangement in fiction.

The final chapter examines Hardy's later two major novels: *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. By the time he wrote these books, he was determined to challenge established mores to explore fully marital and sexual matters. He believed that they were of great importance to people's lives, and had, therefore, to be treated with frankness. It is by means of sensation devices that he was able to tackle these problems.

* * *

Before starting the first chapter, I should mention briefly the problems of literary influence: I am going to analyse the influence of sensation fiction on *Desperate Remedies* in the second chapter. Critics have for many centuries discussed the influence of one writer upon a later one, who is considered to adopt the subject matter or the elements of craft which he finds in his predecessor. In *The Anxiety of Influence*, Harold Bloom challenges traditional views of literary (in particular poetic) influence. He states that it does not mean a direct borrowing of features found in earlier authors.⁶ According to Bloom, a poet's attitudes towards a father-

⁶ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 7.

poet, or precursor are ambivalent: like those in Freud's theory of the Oedipal relation of son to father, the "belated" poet loves and admires him but simultaneously hates him and has a sense of fear that there is little imaginative space for himself.⁷ He tries to preserve his own sense of autonomy and priority by reading a father-poet defensively, and distorting it unconsciously.⁸ Nonetheless, he cannot help embodying the malformed father poem in his own work when he attempts to write an original poem.⁹ Originality is best understood here not as a radical novelty but as revision of or divergence from that which is already written. Bloom recommends that critics should practice "antithetical criticism", which means that they should learn to read any poem as its poet's deliberate misinterpretation of a precursor poem.¹⁰

While poets suffer from "the burden of the past",¹¹ on the surface novelists, says Roger Sale, seem "able not to have or need much sense of tradition".¹² Yet they also try to escape from "the clutches of the earlier".¹³ They search for originality and attempt to find their own "voices".¹⁴ Good examples of this attempt are "experimental" novels such as James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922)

⁷ Bloom, 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 30--31.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 14--16.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 93--96.

¹¹ The phrase is from Walter Jackson Bate's *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (1970).

¹² Roger Sale, *Literary Inheritance* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 3--4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 198.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 198.

and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927).¹⁵

In the discussion of the influence of sensation fiction on *Desperate Remedies*, I shall try to preserve these emphasises on the attitudes of the writer towards his precursor--that is, Hardy's response to Wilkie Collins or the sensation novel pattern, and his struggle to find his own "voice". I am indebted to Bloom's and Sale's analysis of complex feelings that one writer may have towards his precursor.

¹⁵ Sale, 199--200.

CHAPTER 1: THE SENSATION TRADITION AND SENSATION FICTION

In the 1860s a steady stream of novels poured from the pens of Wilkie Collins, Mrs. Henry Wood (1814--87) and Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1837--1915). In the prospectus of "The Sensation Times" in 1863, *Punch* claimed that these novelists devoted themselves to:

Harrowing the Mind, Making the Flesh Creep,
Causing the Hair to Stand on End, Giving Shocks
to the Nervous System . . . generally Unfitting
the Public for the Prosaic Avocations of Life.¹

As soon as their novels became very popular, reviewers started to call them "sensation novels". Although they flourished for only a decade or two and died away quickly, sensation novelists produced best-sellers when young Thomas Hardy was trying to launch his career as a novelist. In fact, sensation fiction was so influential that he was to write *Desperate Remedies* following the sensation novel pattern.

The first part of this chapter examines the sensation tradition, and some features of sensation fiction which was to influence Hardy's first published novel. The second section moves on to the discussion of three sensation novelists, namely, Collins, Wood and Braddon, in order to examine their respective characteristics.

¹"Prospectus of a New Journal", *Punch* (9 May 1863), 193.

1. 1. The Sensation Tradition, Sensationalism and Sensation Fiction

In the early 1860s, reviewers began to use the phrase, "sensation fiction". It was a new term, but not exactly a new genre of fiction. Sensation meaning terror, horror, excitement and suspense had been already significant in English fiction since the publication of the first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). In the novel Harace Walpole ventured a revolt from "a strict adherence to common life".² He deliberately ignored proximity to every day life: the novel is a tale of aristocrats living in an ancient and foreign castle in mediaeval times. Prince Manfred, the tyrant of Otranto, is determined to have an heir to Otranto. This leads him to divorce his devoted wife, to persecute his son's fiancée Isabella, and ultimately to stab his daughter by mistake. In the course of the narrative Walpole explored the supernatural (ghosts, mysterious appearances, living statues), making use of Gothic trappings such as dramatic thunder, a secret passage and twisting stairways in an ancient castle.

His revolt from "a strict adherence to common life" was followed in varying ways by other Gothic novelists at the end of the eighteenth century. Among prominent Gothic novelists Matthew Lewis is particularly important in connection with the sensation novel. In *The Monk* (1796) he focused on disturbing aspects of human nature, sadistic tendencies and sexual passion. As we shall see, he

² The second preface to Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1764), reprinted in *The Works of Horatio Walpole Vol. II* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, n. d.), 7.

anticipates Mary Braddon, who explored sexual impulses and desires.

Scott carried on the popular taste for terror, horror and sensation. In the Waverley novels he gratified the taste of a public reared on Gothic novels by writing historical and adventure stories. In *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), for instance, he constructed the plot out of the Porteous riots of 1736. The novel opens with the riots and moves on to the story centred on Effie Deans and her half-sister Jeanies. Effie is charged of child-murder, and tried. Her half-sister refuses to give the false evidence which would secure Effie's acquittal. As a result, Effie is sentenced to death.

This novel shows us that striking episodes can provide not only a thrill but also the intense feeling of character. By means of the dramatic trial scene, Scott presents the inner conflict of Jeanie, who wonders if she should save her sister or should refuse to do evil in the name of good: "Jeanie was silent, and looked deadly pale It was . . . the natural hesitation to extinguish the last spark of hope that remained for her sister".³

The Newgate novelists of the 1830s and 1840s followed the sensation tradition. They created horror and terror through the precise detail of low life and criminal classes of England. As Winifred Hughes points out, the setting of Newgate fiction is no longer a "wildly exotic" foreign country or an ancient castle, but a place which the reader knows very well; Newgate fiction represents "the beginning

³ Sir Walter Scott, *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818, rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1912), 274.

of a new kind of sensationalist appeal--an appeal not to the terror of the unknown . . . but to the even more terrifying terror of the familiar".⁴

By the middle of the nineteenth century sensation elements were widely prevalent in English fiction. The Brontë sisters, Charles Dickens, Mrs. Gaskell and George Eliot often relied on sensation elements. Of these novelists Dickens is the most significant in relation to sensation fiction: he used many techniques which sensationalists were to exploit. Take *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) for example. The story which centres on the murder of Reuben Haredale is a type of the story to be found in sensation novels of the 1860s. Barnaby's father, the steward Rudge, murders Reuben Haredale and the gardener. Rudge deceives people into believing that he and Haredale were killed by the gardener. Reuben's brother, however, discovers Rudge is the very person who murdered his brother and blackmailed Mrs. Rudge. In the novel Dickens uses techniques which were to be popular among sensationalists: the plot-motif of "the return of the supposedly dead husband" and the narrative device of "double characters" (Rudge and the gardener). In doing so, Dickens manages to capture the reader's attention throughout.

Bleak House (1853) also anticipates sensation fiction. Lady Dedlock hides her secret (her love affair with Captain Hawdon) and marries Sir Leicester. Tulkinghorn, Sir Leicester's lawyer, learns her secret and blackmails her. Lady Dedlock leaves her home secretively, disguising

⁴ Winifred Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar: Sensation Novels of the 1860's* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 8.

herself by wearing the clothes of a brick-maker's wife. She sends her surrogate, the wife, to the open country to lead her pursuers astray, and commits suicide. Sensation novelists were to use the techniques Dickens employed in the novel: a series of striking episodes; the plot-motif of "the woman with a secret past"; and the narrative device of "disguises".

However, what sensationalists did with sensation devices is considerably different. As we shall see, they, by means of their sensational stories, were keen to depict women and marital and sexual problems which could arise from their lives. Dickens, however, was more reticent about these problems. I shall discuss this more fully below, but in the meantime we should note that the sensationalists of the 1860s focused on the situations of Victorian women and their problems such as marital unhappiness and the unfairness of a society which discriminated against women.

To return to Dickens. In *Bleak House* he showed himself to be adept at handling striking episodes. He developed some of them into metaphors. For instance, the death of Lady Dedlock is not a simply extravagant episode but a symbolic dramatisation of her destiny: the throwing herself down to the dirty pauper's grave-yard dramatises her downfall from "the top of the fashionable tree" to the very bottom, shame and disgrace.⁵ Sensation novelists also provide metaphors, commentaries and the intense feeling of character by means of striking episodes

⁵ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (1853, rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 57.

(although they often create such episodes mainly to hold the reader's attention).

If gothicism, the historical romances of Scott, Newgate fiction and the novels of Dickens are all ancestors of the sensation novel, melodrama may be considered its twin-sister. Melodrama was the most popular dramatic form in the nineteenth century, a form which depended on striking stage effects (e. g. bodies roped to railway lines, tempest, fire and flood) and physical violence (e. g. shooting, strangling and stabbing). Characters are undivided types, wholly good or wholly evil; the good are always rewarded and the evil are punished. Melodrama is, says Michael Booth, "a dream world" controlled by "dream justice, offering audiences the fulfilment and satisfaction found only in dreams".⁶

Some writers of sensation novels wrote melodramas. Wilkie Collins's *The Frozen Deep* (1874), was originally a drama in three acts and was produced in 1857. *The Red Vial*, from which he was later to write *Jezebel's Daughter* (1880), was also a drama in three acts and was produced in 1858.⁷ At the same time best-sellers such as Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860), Mrs. Wood's *East Lynne* (1861) and Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) were quickly adapted as plays. As Collins remarks in the preface to *Basil* (1852), the novel and drama were closely related in the mid-nineteenth century: "the Novel and the Play are twin sisters in the family of fiction . . . the one is a

⁶ Michael Booth, *English Melodrama* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965), 14.

⁷ William H. Marshall, *Wilkie Collins* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970), 51.

drama narrated, as the other is a drama acted".⁸

The contribution of melodrama consists essentially in giving its formula to the sensation novel: the reliance on physical sensation, the stock character types, the rewarding of virtue and the punishment of vice. Richard Holt Hutton, one of the grudging reviewers of the sensation novel, once stated contemptuously: "The melodrama of the cheap theatres is an acted sensational novel".⁹

Although high-brow critics like Hutton attacked sensation novels, they were read avidly by a socially and intellectually wide range of readers. In the early 1860s the most influential best-sellers were, indeed, sensation novels: *The Woman in White*, *East Lynne* and *Lady Audley's Secret*.

Behind this phenomenon there was a favourable market for lighter readings in the middle of the nineteenth century. From 1825 onwards the reduction in the price of books was the main phenomenon in the book trade:¹⁰ Archibald Constable, an enthusiast of the new concept of inexpensive books, published the first number of cheap miscellanies in 1827;¹¹ Richard Bentley and Henry Colburn started inexpensive republication of popular novels in 1831.¹²

⁸ Wilkie Collins, the preface to *Basil* (1852, rpt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), xxxvii

⁹ [Richard Holt Hutton], "Sensation Novels", *Spectator* (8 August 1868), 932.

¹⁰ Walter C. Phillips, *Dickens, Reade, And Collins: Sensation Novelists: A Study in the Conditions And Theories of Novel Writing in Victorian England* (1919, rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), 38.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹² Bentley and Colburn pioneered the so-called "Standard Novel", the 6s one-volume reprint. This series ran from 1831 to 1855. For further details, see *Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction*, ed. John Sutherland (Harlow: Longman, 1988), 58.

These cheap periodicals or novels and the circulating libraries, which distributed books all over Great Britain at cheap prices, enabled a great number of people to have access to books. By the '60s millions of people, says Walter C. Phillips, began to seek "romantic diversion from the humdrum life of the industrial epoch";¹³ they eagerly wanted stories full of exciting incidents. To meet the demands of readers, novelists concentrated on writing sensational stories, whose title promised amusement and excitement.

Railway stalls also contributed to the flourishing of the sensation novel. The railway was introduced in England in 1825, and it grew quickly in the nineteenth century. A railway stall started providing books which relieved dullness of a long journey. The stall offered customers books, "something hot and strong, something that [might] catch the eye of the hurried passenger, and promise temporary excitement".¹⁴ The sensation novel was a product of commercial demands for lighter literature.

*

The most prominent feature of sensation fiction is, of course, its sensationalism. Sensationalism can be explained from at least four different perspectives: plots, narrative devices, episodes and diction.

Firstly, the sensational derives from plot. Take Braddon's *Aurora Floyd* (1863) for example. *Aurora Floyd*

¹³ Phillips, 56--57.

¹⁴ [H. L. Mansel], "Sensation Novels," *Quarterly Review* 113 (1863), 485.

hides her past (her marriage to her father's groom); she believes that her husband has died and marries another; the first husband, however, unexpectedly returns only to be murdered. Aurora's efforts to hide her past makes the reader curious about what her secret is. The re-appearance of her first husband creates not only surprise but also suspense. Because of his evil nature, the reader knows that her first husband will hatch a plot to injure Aurora's happy married life. The reader becomes interested in her fate. Further suspense occurs when he is murdered. Braddon presents the events in such a way that she hopes the reader will be beguiled into assuming that Aurora is the murderess. All appearances and also the reader's knowledge of her motives lead to this assumption. And yet, when the truth turns out, she is not guilty. As this example shows, the plot of the sensation novel is normally centred on a secret or secrets.

Secondly, the sensational derives from narrative devices. In sensation fiction many incidents are woven together in order to produce excitement and surprise. This complexity of intrigue inevitably disregards the laws of probability and employs certain narrative devices. Examples of these devices are: accidental discoveries, unexpected encounters, hair-breadth escapes from death, hidden identities and disguises. These narrative devices are examined more fully in the discussion of Wilkie Collins.

Thirdly, the sensational is related to striking episodes which create horror and terror. Lady Audley

pushes her first husband down a well and tries to burn to death one witness and her accuser. Lady Isabel of *East Lynne* elopes with her lover and gives birth to an illegitimate child. These episodes, murders, fires and elopements, are types of the incidents which are to be found in other sensation novels. At their best, striking episodes--as we have seen in the discussion of Scott and Dickens--can contribute to the novel in terms of plot, theme or character: they can provide metaphors, commentaries and scope for the display of the intense feelings of character. At their worst, however, they are invented merely to hold the reader's attention and could be removed from the story without harming the plot at all.

Lastly, the effect of sensation is enhanced by the writers' choice of particular words and phrases. In sensation fiction the writers often create visually striking scenes to terrify the reader; and it is by means of colloquial, concrete and colourful words or phrases that they achieve it. A good example of this is the fire in *The Woman in White*:

As I got near there was a strange smell stealing out on the damp night air. I heard a snapping noise inside--I saw the light above grow brighter and brighter--a pane of the glass cracked--I ran to the door and put my hand on it. The vestry was on fire!

Before I could move, before I could draw my breath after that discovery, I was horror-struck by a heavy thump against the door from the inside. I heard the key worked violently in the lock--I heard a man's voice behind the door, raised to a dreadful shrillness, screaming for help.¹⁵

¹⁵ Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (1860, rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 535.

This scene is sensational because the reader is permitted to see the man trapped inside the vestry die. And it is by means of words, such as "horror-struck", "shrillness" and "screaming for help", that Collins gives a strong effect on the emotions of the reader.

Melodramatic formulae also characterise sensation fiction. Interestingly, sensationalists employ melodramatic formulae in their works, and simultaneously they show themselves to be dissatisfied with the stock character type and the rigid morality of stage melodrama.¹⁶ In *Lady Audley's Secret* Braddon creates a beautiful governess turned bigamist and murderess; in *Aurora Floyd* she again presents a heroine-bigamist. In *No Name* (1862) Collins presents Magdalen Vanstone, who vows vengeance and plays tricks on the man who cheated her out of her inheritance. Unlike melodramatic heroines, Lady Audley, Aurora and Magdalen are no longer victims of villains; they think, choose, initiate action and even rule others.¹⁷ Significantly, many of these women are not punished in spite of their wrongdoings. Braddon's Aurora remarried her faithful suitor happily; Collins's Magdalen is united with her lover. These examples illustrate what Michael Booth calls "dream justice" no longer prevails in sensation novels. They contain moral ambiguity, whereas moral coherence is dominant in the world of stage melodrama.

Since the late 1970s, some modern critics have pointed out the significance of these strong women in sensation

¹⁶ See Hughes, 145. She points out that Wilkie Collins broke down "the primitive moral scheme of stage melodrama".

¹⁷ The villainess in stage melodrama is usually subordinated to the villain and does not initiate action. See Booth, 20.

fiction. In her discussion of *Lady Audley's Secret*, for instance, Elaine Showalter shows how Braddon manages to appeal to "thwarted female energy", through the portrayal of her heroine: "The brilliance of *Lady Audley's Secret* is that Braddon makes her would-be murderess the fragile blond angel . . . whose indoctrination in the female role has taught her secrecy and deceitfulness".¹⁸ As Showalter remarks, Braddon's villainess transforms feminine weakness into her strength in a male-dominated society. Tania Modleski points out that the villainess of the *Lady Audley* school is an ancestor of the villain in the modern formula story (soap opera).¹⁹ In her study on popular female culture she persuasively argues the significance of soap opera, which developed the potential of sensation fiction: it speaks to problems and tensions in women's lives and smoothes over the tensions. According to Modleski, the spectator regards the villainess as "the negative image of herself" and watches her act out "her own hidden desires".²⁰ Simultaneously, however, she despises the villainess because she is "the negative image of herself" and "sides with the forces conspiring against fulfillment of those wishes".²¹ In the course of the story the spectator takes side with the villainess and her accuser at one time and enjoys "building up and tearing down the plot".²² In this

¹⁸ Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 249.

¹⁹ Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (1982, rpt. New York & London: Routledge, 1990), 94.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

²² *Ibid.*, 97.

way, the formula story, says Modleski, helps reconcile her to the monotonous and repetitive nature of her life and domestic chores at home.²³

While some modern critics, provided with tools of psychology and psychoanalysis, have investigated the significance of the sensation novel, most Victorian reviewers simply rejected it. They even attacked it partly because it has moral ambiguity, and partly because it is centred on crimes. Some reviewers, however, realised its significance. The *Christian Remembrancer*, for instance, stated:

The 'sensation novel' . . . is a sign of . . . a certain turn of thought and action, of impatience of old restraints, and a craving for some fundamental change in the working of society.²⁴

He was right in seeing sensation fiction as dangerous, for sensationalists often overstepped conventional bounds. In *No Name*, Collins attacked the property laws and justified the heroine, who exploits female sexuality and resorts to fraud in order to regain her money. In *East Lynne*, Mrs. Wood suggested many problems Victorian married women were obliged to face. In *The Doctor's Wife* (1864) Braddon pointed out the unnaturalness of a marriage contract.

It is, however, also true that these sensationalists had two contradictory impulses: an impulse to attack the old beliefs and institutions and an impulse not to deviate from conventions. A good example of this contradiction is

²³ Modleski, 97.

²⁴ "Our Female Sensation Novelists", *Christian Remembrancer*, reprinted in (Littell's) *Living Age* (22 August 1863), 352.

Braddon's treatment of female characters. On the one hand, she challenged Victorian beliefs and assumptions about women and female sexuality. Victorian women were assumed not to have sexual feelings and were regarded as asexual beings. The ideal woman was perfectly innocent and sexually ignorant. However, prostitutes were considered "different" because women in different social classes were believed to have "different psychological and physiological needs".²⁵ Therefore, female characters in Victorian literature tended to be sharply polarised: the virgin and the whore; "the angel in the house" and the *femme fatale*.²⁶ Braddon in *Aurora Floyd* challenged such assumptions about women by exploring female sexuality, which was not merely unspoken but literally unspeakable in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Braddon, however, compromised in the second half of her novel: she yielded to a literary convention and took pains to make her female character fit into the accepted category of the heroine. It was impossible for her to explore female sexuality thoroughly without offending the moral sensibilities of the English critics and readers of the 1860s. These two contradictory impulses, an impulse to overstep orthodox bounds and an impulse to withdraw from the venture, is a prominent characteristic of many sensation novels.

²⁵ Patricia Stubbs, *Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel 1880--1920* (London: Methuen, 1981), 10.

²⁶ There are obvious exceptions to this generalisation. For instance, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and *Lucy Snowe*. Since they tell their own stories, the reader has directly and easily access to their subjective consciousness and the hidden side of the female psyche.

1. 2. Wilkie Collins

Of many sensationalists Wilkie Collins contributed most to the development of the sensation genre. He established the archetype of sensation fiction in *The Woman in White*; he destroyed it in order to create a new pattern in *No Name*.

One may be puzzled at the considerable difference between these two novels. While in the former Wilkie Collins shapes the story borrowing the melodramatic formula faithfully, in the latter he shows himself to be dissatisfied with the formula and breaks it down. The radical *No Name* was published in 1862, only two years after *The Woman in White*. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that Collins's concept of the formula had abruptly changed. Rather it reveals his ambivalent attitudes toward it. As we shall see, he found the melodramatic formula as an appropriate pattern to write a mystery story with a happy ending. He, however, was also aware that it was inappropriate to point out the unfair features of prevailing morality.

The Woman in White is the archetype of the sensation novel, for it contains almost all the essential and outstanding features of sensation fiction. Firstly, the plot is centred on secrets. One night Walter Hartright is accosted by a woman dressed entirely in white, who has escaped from a mental asylum. After this incident he is engaged by Mr. Fairlie to give drawing lessons to his niece Laura Fairlie and her half-sister, Marian Halcombe. He falls in love with Laura who strikingly resembles the woman

in white. Laura, however, marries Sir Percival Glyde. In the course of the narrative, the main two secrets are gradually disclosed: the woman in white is Laura's half-sister; and Sir Percival Glyde was born out of wedlock and forged a document to have the title.

Secondly, Collins, as stated earlier, constructs the plot of this novel, borrowing the melodramatic formula as faithfully as possible. As in stage melodrama, Sir Percival Glyde and Count Fosco, the two villains, set in motion a long train of intrigues; Laura undergoes a series of agonies; Walter rescues her from the villains and marries her; the two villains are killed at the end of the novel. The orthodox moral view of melodrama and "dream justice" prevail in the novel.

Thirdly, Collins makes use of narrative devices which were to become popular among sensationalists. One of the devices is the "hidden observer". The observer is the character who watches and overhears others without himself or herself being seen. In *The Woman in White*, Marian eavesdrops on the conversation between Sir Percival Glyde and Count Fosco in the library for the sake of "Laura's honour, Laura's happiness--Laura's life itself".²⁷ Marian "creep[s] along noiselessly" until she reaches the library window; "crouch[es] down between the flower-pots, with [her] ear against the outer railing" (341). This narrative device heightens the effect of thrill and terror.

The device of mistaken identity and double characters

²⁷ Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (1860, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 340. Further quotations from the novel are incorporated within parentheses in the text.

are also used in order to enhance the effect of surprise. Sir Percival Glyde and Count Fosco get Laura confined in an asylum as Anne Catherick, while Anne, who has died of illness, is buried as Lady Glyde. Collins employs these narrative devices so skilfully and effectively that other sensation novelists followed him. In 1888 Mary Braddon retrospectively confessed that Collins was her "literary father" and that his novel had inspired her with the idea for *Lady Audley's Secret*, in which she used the motif of mistaken identity and double characters.²⁸

What characterises *The Woman in White* is a conservative outlook. This can be attributed to--as we have seen--the simple and rigid morality which Collins borrowed from stage melodrama. It can be also attributed to his religious orthodoxy, which we see behind his use of coincidence. Throughout the novel he takes pains to express his personal vision by means of accidental meetings and unexpected discoveries. When Walter Hartright accidentally encounters Marian and Laura at the grave-yard, he says: "I believe in my soul that the Hand of God was pointing their way" (396). He admits that there are some irresistible forces over which human beings are unable to control. We, however, see nothing but a ready-made religious outlook behind Collins's use of chance. He simply states orthodox religious views and simultaneously justifies his heavy use of coincidence by invoking God.

Collins's next success, *No Name*, marks a sharp

²⁸ Joseph Hatton, "Miss Braddon at Home," *London Society* (January 1888), quoted in Robert Lee Wolff, *Sensational Victorian: The Life and Fiction of Mary Elizabeth Braddon* (New York & London: Garland, 1979), 324.

contrast to *The Woman in White*. While the traditional view prevails in his earlier novel, his dissatisfaction with the melodramatic formula and its rigid morality is clearly evident in *No Name*. Magdalen Vanstone discovers that she is illegitimate when her devoted parents die. She is left penniless partly because her parents failed to correct their will and partly because the property laws allow a male relative to gain her inheritance. Being desperate she resorts to imposture and fraud in order to regain her inheritance. Being disguised, she bewitches and marries Noel Vanstone, who has inherited what is rightly hers. Although her deceptions are revealed in the end, her husband conveniently dies. Eventually Magdalen's sister Nora inherits their father's money; Magdalen marries a naval captain.

The ending of the novel is interesting in its ambiguity. On the one hand, it follows a Victorian literary convention (most Victorian novels end with either the death or the marriage of the central character). On the other hand, the ending subverts the pattern of melodrama because Magdalen is not punished in spite of her wrongdoings: "The Magdalen of 'No Name' does not go astray after the usual fashion of erring maidens".²⁹ The ending of the novel illustrates that "dream justice" no longer prevails; *No Name* is no longer a "narrated melodrama".

Collins not only breaks down the melodramatic formula but also challenges conventional morality through the

²⁹ [Margaret Oliphant], "Novels", *Blackwood's Magazine* 94 (1863), 170.

person of Magdalen. She sarcastically says after her marriage to Noel Vanstone:

I have got a place in the world, and a name in the world, at last. Even the law, which is the friend of all you respectable people, has recognized my existence, and has become my friend too!³⁰

Moral conventions had no place for her before the marriage because she was illegitimate. However, they can now accommodate Magdalen, who has entrapped her husband into marriage and looks "respectable". Here Collins points out hypocrisies which surround the concepts of respectability and illegitimacy.

In *No Name* Collins shows the situation of the woman who is forced to be independent and to struggle to survive in a male-dominated society. Magdalen becomes an outcast and must support herself financially. In order to survive in such a society and accomplish her purpose of recovering the money, she realises that she must exploit her own female sexuality and deceive Noel into marriage. In her farewell letter to her sister, Magdalen says: "I have struggled against myself till I am worn out in the effort. . . . I dare not show myself to you as I really am" (156). What she does is not right. She, however, has no alternative but going outside the law. Throughout the novel Collins justifies his heroine by placing the entire blame on "the vile law which has left [her] helpless" (280).

³⁰ Wilkie Collins, *No Name* (1862, rpt. New York: Dover, 1978), 492. A further quotation from the novel is incorporated within parenthesis in the text.

No Name, which breaks down the melodramatic formula and its morality, marks a new phase in sensation fiction. As we shall see, Braddon was to develop Collins's attempt and to write another socially subversive novel, *Aurora Floyd*.

1. 3. Mrs. Henry Wood and Mary Elizabeth Braddon

While Collins usually ended his stories with wedding bells, female sensation novelists were dissatisfied with such an ending. In *Aurora Floyd*, Mary Braddon asked her readers:

does the business of the real life-drama always end upon the altar-steps? Must the play needs be over when the hero and heroine have signed their names in the register? Does man cease to be, to do, and to suffer when he gets married?³¹

Asking these questions Braddon refused to stop her narrative at her heroine's wedding. Yet she was not the first female sensationalist to challenge this convention. Two years before the publication of *Aurora Floyd*, Mrs. Henry Wood had already explored her heroine's married life in *East Lynne*. She wrote about marriage as an unhappy and unsatisfactory state.

Mrs. Wood shapes the plot of this novel using the motif of the "woman who elopes with her lover". Lady Isabel consents to marry a middle-class lawyer, Archibald Carlyle, out of sheer terror and despair because her father has died without providing for her. Although Carlyle

³¹ Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Aurora Floyd* (1863, rpt. London: Virago, 1984), 137.

becomes a devoted husband, she gradually becomes dissatisfied with her married life. When she re-encounters her former lover, Francis Levison, she runs off with him.

Mrs. Wood provides various reasons for Isabel's marital unhappiness. One of the crucial reasons is that Isabel marries Carlyle not out of love but out of necessity. After her father's death, she is utterly penniless and is left with no alternative but marriage to somebody, who can afford to offer her a home. Although she is aware that she does not love Carlyle, she marries him for economic reasons. And this is not an unusual case, for the Victorian woman of gentle birth depended upon the economic position of her father and then of her husband.

Once married to Carlyle, Isabel suffers from the tedium of the conventional female role in marriage and family, for she has literally nothing to do. She passes her time doing nothing in particular: "she [s]ings a bit, and plays a bit, and reads a bit, and receives her visitors, and idles away her days".³² Her way of passing time matches Martha Vicinus's account of the life of the Victorian "perfect lady": "Once married, the perfect lady did not work; she had servants. . . . Her social and intellectual growth was confined to the family and close friends".³³

The problem of Isabel is that she is unable to change her life, although she is tired of it. To live up to the

³² Mrs. Henry Wood, *East Lynne* (1861, rpt. London: J. M. Dent & Son, 1988), 161. Further quotations from the novel are incorporated within parentheses in the text.

³³ Martha Vicinus, "Introduction: The Perfect Victorian Lady", *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, ed. Martha Vicinus (Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press, 1972), ix.

demands of the contemporary ideal of the "perfect lady", she has to stay within a small sphere and to suffer from the tedium of the feminine role in the family. By describing her reasons for marital unhappiness, the author points out the problems which women had: the economic dependence, the restricted spheres of action and the social demands of feminine behaviour.

Mrs. Wood, however, does not go further. Born in a respectable and wealthy middle-class home, she was a conservativist *per se*. In the second half of *East Lynne*, she starts to mould her sensational story to prevailing morality so that the novel would be accepted by reviewers with orthodox views. The latter part of the novel contains Isabel's downfall and penitence; it eventually transforms into a moral lesson. Isabel is deserted in a foreign country by her heartless seducer; is altered by scars from a train accident; suffers in the strange position of entering her former home as a governess; and finally dies of a broken heart in the arms of her husband. Mrs. Wood punishes her heroine severely: Isabel has "sacrificed husband, children, reputation, home, all that makes life of value to woman" (289); has "forfeited her duty to God, [has] deliberately broken His commandments" (289). The author shows us that a married woman who sins can only look forward to death. She preaches:

Oh, reader, believe me! Lady--wife--mother! should you even be tempted to abandon your home so will you awaken! whatever trials may be the lot of your married life, though they may magnify themselves to your crushed spirit as beyond the endurance of woman to bear, *resolve* to bear them; fall down upon your knees and pray

to be enabled to bear them . . . rather than
 forfeit your fair name and your good conscience;
 for be assured that the alternative, if you rush
 on to it, will be found far worse than death!
 (289)

Mrs. Wood's overall message is orthodox: one should follow traditional moral codes and stick to the institution of marriage. Throughout the novel she never attempts to overstep the conventional bounds of English moral susceptibilities.

A more interesting and less orthodox sensationalist was Mary Elizabeth Braddon. She was dissatisfied with stereotypical heroines and strived mightily to present women who differ greatly from their predecessors: a dangerous woman pretending to be an "angel in the house" in *Lady Audley's Secret*; a heroine behaving like a destructive woman in *Aurora Floyd*; and a wife who refuses to be an "angel in the house" in *The Doctor's Wife*.

In *Lady Audley's Secret* Braddon introduces a new type of villainess, an adventuress who masks her vile intentions under an appearance of sweetness and childlike innocence. The author is able to do this by means of the sensation plot-motif of the "woman with a secret past". Lucy Talboys seeks her fortune as a governess after her husband George has left England. She pretends to be unmarried, succeeds in fascinating Sir Audley and subsequently marries him. When her first husband returns to England and comes down to the neighbourhood of Audley court, she decides to murder him in order to protect her comfortable and happy married life. At the beginning of the novel she is depicted:

The innocence and candour of an infant beamed in Lady Audley's fair face, and shone out of her large and liquid blue eyes. The rosy lips, the delicate nose, the profusion of fair ringlets, all contributed to preserve to her beauty the character of extreme youth and freshness.³⁴

Lady Audley's initial appearance exactly matches that of an orthodox heroine: fair-hair and childlike qualities were attributes conventionally given to the heroine.

Furthermore, Braddon's villainess values "domesticity" like the conventional heroine. She is a sweet and faithful wife with whom Sir Audley is perfectly satisfied. She is also a graceful hostess, presiding over Audley Court:

She looked very pretty and innocent, seated behind the graceful group of delicate opal china and glittering silver. . . . The most feminine and most domestic of all occupations [making tea] imparts a magic harmony to her every movement . . . The floating mists from the boiling liquid in which she infuses the soothing herbs . . . envelop her in a cloud of scented vapour, through which she seems a social fairy . . .

(146)

In *Lady Audley's Secret* Braddon mixes up the accepted categories of heroine and villain: her villainess is a pretty innocent looking, childish girl, who behaves like an "angel in the house". Through the portrayal of Lady Audley, a murderess and bigamist, Braddon challenges the contemporary characterisation of the heroine.

The portrayal of a villainess behaving like an innocent heroine is subversive; and as dangerous as this is, probably, a heroine behaving like a *femme fatale*. In

³⁴ Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862, rpt. New York: Dover, 1974), 35. Further quotations from the novel are incorporated within the parenthesis in the text.

Aurora Floyd, her second success, Braddon depicts the heroine of the title as a temptress. Aurora Floyd secretly marries her father's groom in Paris only to realise her error in doing so. Soon she leaves him and returns to England. There she learns about the death of her husband (which turns out to be false later). She is engaged to Talbot Bulstrode but is unable to confess her secret (the marriage in Paris). He, however, gradually suspects that she might be hiding something, and breaks off the engagement. Later she marries John Mellish, a faithful Yorkshire squire.

Unlike the fair and passionless Lady Audley, Aurora is a dark beauty with sexual and violent passion. She exerts a sexual charm over her first husband and contributes to his death; she involves the dashing captain, Talbot Bulstrode, and John Mellish in love entanglements. Her sexually dominating power and violent passion are implicitly expressed in words in which she is described: "Eastern empress",³⁵ "Cleopatra" (40), "Medusa" (227), "Hecate" (232), and "Nero's wife" (275). Aurora clearly shows her violent and passionate character in the scene in which she horse-whips a half-witted servant:

Aurora sprang upon him like a beautiful tigress, and catching the collar of his fustian jacket in her slight hands, rooted him to the spot upon which he stood. . . . Taller than the stable-man by a foot and a half, she towered above him, her cheeks white with rage, her eyes flashing fury, her hat fallen off, and her black hair tumbling about her shoulders, sublime in her passion. The man crouched beneath the grasp of the

³⁵ Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Aurora Floyd* (1863, rpt. London: Virago, 1984), 35. Further quotations from the novel are incorporated within parentheses in the text.

imperious creature She . . . rained a shower of blows upon his clumsy shoulders with her slender whip . . . Her tangled hair had fallen to her waist by this time, and the whip was broken in half-a-dozen places. (116)

The episode became notorious. W. F. Rae sarcastically stated: "An authoress who could make one of her sex play the chief part in such a scene, is evidently acquainted with a very low type of female character, or else incapable of depicting that which she knows to be true".³⁶ The reviewer failed to realise that Braddon was attempting to explore passion, impulse and violence, and to portray a heroine with these disturbing qualities. Such aspects of human nature were rarely associated with the nineteenth-century heroine. By giving Aurora these attributes, Braddon created an original type of heroine: a violent, destructive, yet, attractive woman.

Towards the end of the novel, however, Braddon's heroine degenerates from a *femme fatale* into a conventional heroine who needs male protection. Involved in bigamy and murder, Aurora becomes utterly helpless. Leaving her home, she asks her husband's friend for his advice and protection; she cries on the shoulder of her forgiving husband, who has searched for her. The final chapter depicts her transformation: Aurora as a model mother, "bending over the cradle of her first-born" (384). This reveals a tension in the novel, a tension between an impulse to explore female sexuality and disturbing aspects of human nature, and an impulse to withdraw from the

³⁶ [W. F. Rae], "Sensation Novelists: Miss Braddon", *North British Review* 43 (1865), 190.

attempt. Although she suggests the existence of the irrational and the value of female sexuality, Braddon does not examine them fully.

In spite of this compromise, *Aurora Floyd* is an interesting book: Braddon in the novel makes an attack on rigid prevailing morality. At the beginning of the novel, Talbot Bulstrode suspects that Aurora might be hiding her past, and insists on knowing the truth. Braddon presents him as a diabolic figure in his persistence:

There must be no secret between my wife and me; and the day that a secret, or the shadow of one, arises between us, must see us part for ever. Rise from you knees, Aurora; you are killing me with this shame and humiliation. (88)

Saying this, Bulstrode mercilessly deserts Aurora. Clearly Braddon does not agree with him. Through this episode, she states the importance of an ethic based on generosity rather than rigid moral codes.

The most radical of all the novels Braddon wrote in the 1860s is *The Doctor's Wife* where the plot-motif of "the woman who complains of her married life" occurs. Isabel Sleaford marries George Gilbert, a country doctor, who is satisfied with a provincial existence. His doctor's duties occupy him all day long and she is left to herself. Gradually, Isabel despairs of her monotonous life and of the uninspiring husband. Avoiding to face the reality of unhappy marriage, she begins to be absorbed in reading novels; neglects domestic duties as a wife; and has illicit feelings for Roland Lansdell, a rich squire and poet.

In the novel Braddon, again, creates a female

character who abandons the old norms of feminine behaviour. Isabel who is complaining of her married life and neglecting her duties is not an "angel in the house" but a disgruntled wife.

The significance of this novel is that it anticipates late Victorian novels which deal with the "woman question" more overtly. Firstly, Braddon focuses sharply on marital unhappiness and estrangement, which were to be important themes in English fiction later on in the nineteenth century (e. g. the works by George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and "New Woman" novelists). In *The Doctor's Wife* the heroine realises that her marriage is a fatal mistake and thinks: "How was she to bear her life in that dull dusty lane--her odious life, which would go on and on for ever, like a laden barge crawling across dreary flats upon the black water of a canal".³⁷ Although it has not been widely acknowledged, Braddon is one of the first female writers to treat the theme of ill-conceived marriages in English fiction.

Secondly, Braddon questions the value of marriage through the character of Roland Lansdell. On realising that there is no true understanding between Isabel and her husband, the poet passionately cries:

I have seen them together, and know the meaning
of that grand word 'union' as applied to them.
All the width of the universe cannot divide them
more entirely than they are divided now. They
have not one thought in common. (224)

³⁷ Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *The Doctor's Wife* (1864, rpt. London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., n. d.), 206. Further quotations from the novel are incorporated within parentheses in the text.

Here Lansdell suggests the unnaturalness of a marriage which permanently binds together people who do not understand or love each other. In addition, he seeks a free union with Isabel, ignoring moral conventions. He says: "I see only the right of two free souls, who know that they have been created for each other" (226). *The Doctor's Wife* is, indeed, strong stuff for a mid-Victorian English novel: it is concerned with a free union, which was not discussed in fiction in the early '60s.

In her letter to Bulwer-Lytton, Braddon admitted that she had borrowed from Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856), which caused a scandal in France. Her primary intention was to write a novel after the style of Flaubert. Braddon, however, had to compromise with her intention, adapting *Madame Bovary* for the English readers of the 1860s. Her compromise is evident in the final part of the novel. Firstly, Isabel, unlike Flaubert's Emma Bovary, does not commit adultery. The heroine must be innocent; hence, Isabel is appalled at the discovery that Lansdell wants her to elope with him. Secondly, although Isabel did not commit adultery, Braddon had to punish her for her illicit feelings for Lansdell, so as not to offend the English critics and readers. At the end of the novel she is left alone after the death of her husband and lover. As Robert Lee Wolff points out, it was utterly impossible to write an Anglicised *Bovary* to satisfy herself, while simultaneously telling Flaubert's story without offending the critics and readers.³⁸ The novel clearly shows Braddon's dilemma: her aspiration to write a novel to satisfy herself and her

³⁸ Wolff, *Sensational Victorian*, 163.

desire to please middle-class English readers.

Although Braddon's primary intention is not realised fully, the first part of the novel illustrates that she was aware that the lives of human beings were governed by old beliefs and institutions. She possessed a modern spirit and suggested a new relationship between man and woman.

It should be clear by now that, although the female sensationalists, Braddon and Mrs. Wood, were often reviewed together, they were very different. While Mrs. Wood was in perfect accord with the *status quo*, Braddon was dissatisfied with it, and more often than not, overstepped conventional bounds. They were, however, in similar in that they were keen to depict women, and the problems they were obliged to face simply because they were women. Thomas Hardy was to follow a trend set by these sensationalists: by means of his sensational stories, he was to focus more sharply on the process by which women suffered from marital and sexual problems and struggled against confining social structures and conventions.

CHAPTER 2: THOMAS HARDY AND SENSATIONALISM

When Thomas Hardy was writing his first published novel, *Desperate Remedies* (1871), the sensation novel was still flourishing and widely read. Among novels published in the late '60s and the early '70s were Braddon's *Charlotte's Inheritance* (1868), Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868) and *Man and Wife* (1870). In addition, some sensation novels were adapted as plays: *East Lynne* was produced at the Alfred Theatre in 1870;¹ *The Woman in White* at the Olympic Theatre in 1871;² and Charles Reade's *Griffith Gaunt* (1866) at the Theatre Royal in 1871.³

The first section of this chapter is solely devoted to *Desperate Remedies* which Hardy wrote after the style of Wilkie Collins; it identifies the major sensationalist elements in the novel, then Hardy's response to the sensation novel pattern. He made conscious efforts to write a sensation novel, but simultaneously attempted to search for originality, which created a tension in his first published book. The second part of this chapter moves on to a significant link between Hardy's concept of novel-writing and his employment of sensation elements. As we shall see, he always thought that a story must be something striking to give pleasure to the reader. In addition, he found sensation devices appropriate to deal

¹Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama 1660--1900 Vol. V: Late Nineteenth Century Drama 1850--1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 671.

² *Ibid.*, 318.

³ *Ibid.*, 536.

with marital and sexual themes, which were to be extremely important in his novel. As a consequence, he employed sensationalism and created striking events in his fiction throughout his career.

2. 1. *Desperate Remedies* and the Sensation Novel

In 1867 young Thomas Hardy returned to Dorset after having spent five years as an assistant architect in London. Here in Dorset he began his first novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*, and completed it in the following year. Although Chapman and Hall promised him that they would publish the novel, George Meredith, reader for the firm, strongly advised Hardy either to rewrite the story or to write another novel "with a purely artistic purpose, giving it a more complicated 'plot'".⁴ Meredith made this suggestion because he found Hardy's novel "a socialist novel";⁵ he was afraid that the young writer would be attacked severely by the conservative reviewers. Later Hardy confessed that the story was "a sweeping dramatic satire" of the upper-class, "the vulgarity of the middle class, modern Christianity, church-restoration, and political and domestic morals in general".⁶ After the interview with Meredith, Hardy decided to put the first novel away altogether and to start writing a completely new novel.

The young writer, however, went much further than Meredith had suggested. The result was *Desperate Remedies*

⁴ F. E. Hardy, 62.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

which has a very intricate plot. Edward Springrove, an architect, and Aeneas Manston, a dashing young man, both fall in love with Cytherea Graye. But Springrove is already engaged to another woman; and Manston, the illegitimate son of Miss Aldclyffe, is secretly married. Miss Aldclyffe, who was once in love with Cytherea's father, employs Cytherea as her companion and schemes for her son and the girl to marry. These entanglements lead Manston to murder his wife Eunice, to conceal her body and eventually to commit suicide.

As stated earlier, since Beach's and Rutland's studies of *Desperate Remedies*, commentators have generally agreed that Hardy used Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* as a textbook to write his first published novel. They have pointed out the striking similarities between *Desperate Remedies* and *The Woman in White*: an illegitimate child (Aeneas Manston or Sir Percival Glyde); a guilty secret (Manston's murder of his wife or Sir Percival Glyde's forgery); the confusion of identity of one woman for another (Eunice Manston and Anne Seaway or Laura Fairlie and Anne Catherick); and a confession which elucidates all remaining mysteries about a crime (Manston's last Will or Count Fosco's letter).⁷ Hardy wrote *Desperate Remedies* to a popular recipe, which was "perfected, if not invented, by Wilkie Collins".⁸

It is true that on the surface Hardy wrote in *Desperate Remedies* a sensation novel after the style of

⁷ See Beach, 23; Rutland, 142--43; and Roy Morrell, *Thomas Hardy: The Will and the Way* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1965), 46.

⁸ Rutland, 141.

Collins. However, the younger writer tried to escape the clutches of the sensationalist and the sensation novel pattern; he attempted to find his own "voice". Hence, there is a tension between the conscious efforts to follow the sensation novel pattern and his impulse to search for originality.

This tension is seen in the depiction of the central characters of *Desperate Remedies*. On the surface, they are moulded to fit the types of sensation fiction of Collins's school. The virtuous heroine Cytherea and the brave hero Edward Springrove are temporarily separated by the evil plots of the villainess Miss Aldclyffe. The villain Manston tries to win Cytherea by ardent wooing.

Yet, Hardy's characters are more complex than those of *The Woman in White*. The crucial difference between them is that while Collins's characters are asexual, Hardy's, either evil or good, have sexual feelings and passion. This is particularly the case with his female characters. Miss Aldclyffe, for instance, falls in love with Cytherea and is unable to suppress her lesbian feelings for her younger companion: "The instant they were in bed Miss Aldclyffe freed herself from the last remnant of restraint. She flung her arms round the young girl, and pressed her gently to her heart. 'Now kiss me. . .'"⁹ Cytherea is also depicted as a woman with sexuality right from the beginning. In chapter 3 where Cytherea is with Springrove on a boat, she starts imagining:

⁹ Thomas Hardy, *Desperate Remedies* (1871, rpt. London: Macmillan, 1976), 106. Further quotations from the novel are incorporated within parentheses in the text.

that he was going to clasp his arms round her. The sensation grew so strong that she could not run the risk of again meeting his eyes at those critical moments, and turned aside to inspect the distant horizon . . . (70)

She even experiences a "pleasure from his touch" (72) after his "warm breath fanned and crept round her face like a caress" (71).

The tension between Hardy's desire to write his own drama and the efforts to write a sensation novel is even more clearly seen in the plot of *Desperate Remedies*. In chapter 8 Miss Aldclyffe schemes for Cytherea to meet Edward Springrove's fiancée and Mr. Springrove; she does this deliberately to make Cytherea give up Edward. Miss Aldclyffe also makes her younger companion meet Manston hoping that they will fall in love with each other. On the surface the chapter follows a typical sensation novel pattern in which the hero and the heroine should be temporarily thwarted in their love by the evil machinations of the villain.

Simultaneously, however, the eighth chapter reveals Hardy's attempts to search for originality. There are occasionally incongruous sections that have nothing to do with his sensation story but imply some elements to be found in his future works. For instance, the author introduces country people and the description of agricultural labour which are to be the hallmark of his fiction. Clerk Crickett, third husband of scandal-loving Mrs. Crickett, tells a humorous story:

Well do I call to mind what your poor lady said to me when I had just married. 'Ah, Mr.

Crickett,' says she, 'your wife will soon settle you as she did her other two: here's a glass o' rum, for I shan't see your poor face this time next year.' I swallowed the rum, called again next year, and said, 'Mrs Springrove, you gave me a glass o' rum last year because I was going to die--here I be alive still, you see.' 'Well thought of, clerk! Here's two glasses for you now, then,' says she. 'Thank you, mem,' I said, and swallowed the rum. Well, dang my old sides, next year I thought I'd call again and get three. And call I did. But she wouldn't give me a drop o' the commonest. 'No, clerk,' says she, 'you are too tough for a woman's pity.' (148)

Here Crickett not only provides a comic relief but also contributes to setting a lively atmosphere by speaking a Dorsetshire dialect: "Well, dang my old sides", "she wouldn't give a drop o' the commonest". This episode prefigures Hardy's fuller presentation of rustic characters. In his fiction they provide comic relief, serve to express wisdom in their tales, and give comments on the central characters. In addition, the rustics talk about old customs, superstitions and tales (as Crickett does), which are directly associated with the past. They are personification of old ways which were rapidly disappearing or had already disappeared.

In the next scene Hardy focuses on agricultural life of Carriford village:

'We are only just grinding down the rather-ripes and griffins,' continued the farmer, in a half-apologetic tone for detaining by his cider-making any well-dressed woman. 'They rot as black as a chimney-crook if we keep 'em till the regulars turn in.' As he spoke he went back to the press, Cytherea keeping at his elbow. 'I'm later than I should have been by rights,' he continued, taking up a lever for propelling the screw, and beckoning to the men to come forward. (149)

Hardy is adept at describing agricultural labour and country speech. Documentation of labour ("grinding down the rathe-ripes and griffins", "he continued, taking up a lever for propelling the screw") and colloquial speech ("They rot as black as a chimney-crook if we keep 'em till the regulars turn in") provide a strong sense of reality and local colour. They enable Hardy to paint agricultural life vividly.

The eighth chapter also includes the Hardy theme of a conflict between the old way of life and the new. Hardy, born in 1840, saw the drastic changes in Dorset. The railway reached Dorchester in 1847. By the 1860s it "had absorbed the whole stream of traffic" (145); the new way of life was spreading and the old was disappearing. Hardy was keen to record those changes in his fiction. In *Desperate Remedies* he suggests a contrast between the old and the new through the person of Cytherea:

'The railways have left you [Mr. Springrove] lonely here,' . . . when they were indoors. Save the withered old flies, which were quite tame from the solitude, not a being was in the house. Nobody seemed to have entered it since the last passenger had been called out to mount the last stage-coach that had run by. (150--51)

There is a strong sense of conflict between the old (the stage-coach) and the new (the railway) here. Although the picture of the conflict is a fragment here, this scene anticipates Hardy's more mature descriptions of the conflict in his future novels, such as the sharp contrast between the old fashioned Henchard and the modern corn-merchant, Donald Farfrae, in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

The problem of *Desperate Remedies* is that it consists of two completely different elements, elements of sensation fiction and of Hardy's own drama, which are hardly blended. The readers may feel as if they were reading two books at one time, for these two remain apart from the beginning to the end.

There are, however, at least two sections in which these two threads are beautifully woven together. They are the organ scene which comes immediately after Cytherea's visit to Mr. Springrove's, and her "too-late" encounter with Edward at the wedding in chapter 13.

First is the organ scene. On her way back to Knapwater House, a dramatic thunderstorm starts and Cytherea is obliged to take refuge in the house of Manston, "an extremely handsome man" with "penetrating and clear" eyes (154). Outside the house, the thunder, lightning and rain have "increased to a terrific force" (156). While she is afraid of "the elemental strife of light and sound" (158), he is utterly indifferent to the external circumstances and starts playing the organ. He never flinches at the furious storm and is completely absorbed in his performance. His superhuman concentration is associated with something demoniacal. Cytherea, who is frightened at first, is thrilled and then charmed by this satanic creature's powerful touch of the organ. She is fascinated by him:

new impulses of thought came with new harmonies, and entered into her with a gnawing thrill. A dreadful flash of lightning then, and the thunder close upon it. She found herself involuntarily shrinking up beside him, and

looking with parted lips at his face
 She was in the state in which woman's instinct
 to conceal has lost its power over her impulse
 to tell; and he saw it. Bending his handsome
 face over her till his lips almost touched her
 ear, he murmured . . . (158)

In spite of the fact that she loves Edward Springrove, she is mesmerised, fascinated and dominated by Manston's masculine power. Her instinctive attraction to him is something she has neither expected nor desired.

In the novel Hardy suggests Cytherea's helpless passion again and again. Her instinctive jealousy, for instance, appears in her encounter with Miss Hinton, Edward's fiancée:

The two rivals had now lost their personality quite. There was the same keen brightness of eye, the same movement of the mouth, the same mind in both, as they looked doubtfully and excitedly at each other. As is invariably the case with women when a man they care for is the subject of an excitement among them, the situation abstracted the differences which distinguished them as individuals, and left only the properties common to them as atoms of a sex.
 (143--44)¹⁰

Hardy's presentation of Cytherea raises the problem of human being's instinctive irrationality which she is unable to control. As soon as she lets her instincts overcome her reason, she becomes an atom of a sex rather than an individual: sexual passion subsumes individuality. Through the portrayal of Cytherea, Hardy suggests that human beings are not at the summit of creation but are equally controlled by Nature's law.

¹⁰ The passage is similar to the scene with the milkmaids in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* ("The Rally", chapter 23).

To return to the organ scene. On one hand, the episode is a typical melodrama: it contains a thunderstorm, lightning, the satanic creature Manston. On the other hand, it is a Hardy drama: as in *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, he shows the female character who lets her instinctive irrationality overcome her reason. What characterises the organ scene is that he superimposes melodrama on his own drama; those two threads are woven together.

The second example is Cytherea's wedding. This episode involves a pattern, which is similar to that of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Cytherea is temporarily separated from Edward. At first, she resists Manston's advances. But later she reluctantly accepts his proposal of marriage, for her brother falls ill and she must support him and herself financially. When she marries Manston, Edward comes back:

He stepped closer, and went on, 'You know what has taken place? Surely you do?--my cousin is married, and I am free.'

'Married--and not to you?' Cytherea faltered, in a weak whisper.

'Yes, she was married yesterday! A rich man had appeared, and she jilted me. . . .I came to you to ask once more if. . . .But I was too late.'

'But, Edward, what's that, what's that!' she cried, in an agony of reproach. 'Why did you leave me' (256)

Like Angel Clare later, Edwards returns to his lover only to know that he is "too late". The motif of a "too late" encounter, which Hardy was to use in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, appears here.

Hardy again superimposes the elements of melodrama on his own pattern. According to stage melodrama or sensation fiction, the hero and the heroine should be temporarily separated from each other. She should be left, unprotected at the mercy of the villain. When she reluctantly accepts his proposal of marriage, the hero should come back. There is a parallel between melodrama and Hardy's story.

What characterises the episode of Cytherea's wedding is, however, not this superimposition but Hardy's contradictory response to the melodramatic plot. On one hand, he relies on it heavily. On the other hand, Hardy rejects the happy ending of melodrama. According to it, Edward should return and rescue Cytherea in the nick of time. But he shows up at her wedding and knows that he is "too late". Hardy exploits the pattern of melodrama, while simultaneously refusing to follow it faithfully in order to show "life's little ironies". As we shall see, this contradictory response is to be one of the distinct characteristics of his later novels, particularly *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*.

After Cytherea's marriage to Manston, Hardy's attempt to search for originality gradually disappears. He abandons the story of the "too late" encounter, which has the potential for tragedy. He turns *Desperate Remedies* in a certain direction so that the "too late" encounter is not really too late: Edward soon learns Manston's crime (bigamy), rescues his lover from the villain and subsequently marries her. In addition, the author begins to concentrate on creating a series of sensational

incidents simply to capture attention and keep the reader's interest: Manston's murder of his wife, his concealment of her body, its eventual discovery, Manston's suicide and Miss Aldclyffe's death. The central characters also degenerate from complex three-dimensional beings into the conventional types without sexuality.

It is evident that the sensation elements which dominate the second half of the novel mar Hardy's first published novel as a whole. At this stage he was unable to use sensationalist techniques effectively; he relied too heavily on the representation of physical violence. Seventeen years after the publication of *Desperate Remedies*, the novelist stated:

A 'sensation-novel' is possible in which the sensationalism is not . . . physical but psychical. . . .The difference between the latter kind of novel and the novel of physical sensationalism--i. e., personal adventure, etc., --is this: that whereas in the physical the adventure itself is the subject of interest, the psychical results being passed over as commonplace, in the psychical the casualty or adventure is held to be of no intrinsic interest, but the effect upon the faculties is the important matter to be depicted.¹¹

The young writer of 1871 was probably incapable of such discriminations. Yet, the organ scene and the "too-late" encounter episode look forward to Hardy's future novels where "the effect upon the faculties" of characters and "the psychical results" of certain incidents or adventures become increasingly important. Hardy learns to discriminate between physical and psychical sensationalism

¹¹ F. E. Hardy, 204.

and to employ melodrama more appropriately.

2. 2. Thomas Hardy and the Sensation Elements in His Fiction

In 1889 Hardy retrospectively commented on *Desperate Remedies* in a depreciatory tone:

The following novel, the first published by the author, was written nineteen years ago, at a time when he was feeling his way to a method. The principles observed in its composition are, no doubt, too exclusively those in which mystery, entanglement, surprise, and moral obliquity are depended on for exciting interest . . .¹²

He also confessed that he used sensationalist techniques merely to "attract public attention"¹³ and that they were "against his natural grain".¹⁴ He even dismissed his first published novel as a crude sensation novel and "quite below the level of *The Poor Man and the Lady*, which was the unfortunate consequence of Meredith's advice to 'write a story with a plot'".¹⁵

In his next published novel, *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), Hardy abandoned sensationalist techniques. What he wrote was the love story of Dick Dewy and Fancy Day along with a series of rural scenes which provide the background to their affair. The novel is a light pastoral romance set in Mellstock, a fictional place based on the Stinsford-Bockhampton area. This shows a sharp change in direction.

Lawrence Jones, however, asserts that Hardy was

¹² Thomas Hardy, "Prefatory Note" to *Desperate Remedies*, 35.

¹³ F. E. Hardy, 85.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

planning to write another sensation novel immediately after the publication of *Desperate Remedies*.¹⁶ According to Jones, Hardy was encouraged by the reviewers of the *Athenaeum* (1 April 1871) and the *Morning Post* (13 April 1871); this led him to write an outline for a second sensation novel on 17 April 1871.¹⁷ The outline shows us that the story is concerned with triangular love affairs and includes some features of sensation fiction such as clandestine meetings, a secret marriage, bigamy and suicide.¹⁸

Yet, Hardy was obliged to give up the idea of writing a second sensation novel after being attacked severely in an article by John Hutton, the reviewer of the *Spectator* on 22 April 1871. The reviewer claimed that *Desperate Remedies* was "disagreeable, and not striking in any way";¹⁹ that "the intricacies of the plot show no transcendent talent for arrangement of complicated, apparently irreconcilable, but really nicely-fitting facts".²⁰ The attack from this respectable reviewing weekly struck Hardy deeply. Years later he confessed that the "bitterness of that moment was never forgotten; at the time he wished that he were dead".²¹

¹⁶ Jones, "Hardy's Unwritten Second Sensation Novel", 31--32.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 39 (note 10).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 31--32. As Jones says, the outline is included in Hardy's *Old Mrs Chundle and Other Stories with The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall*, ed. F. B. Pinion (London: Macmillan, 1977), 117--18.

¹⁹ [John Hutton], *Spectator* (22 April 1871), reprinted in *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, ed. R. G. Cox (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

²¹ F. E. Hardy, 84.

Hutton attacked the young writer's sensation story but did not overlook the writer's strength. He approved the rustic characters and scenery in *Desperate Remedies*:

there is . . . an unusual and very happy facility in catching and fixing phases of peasant life, in producing for us not the manners and language only, but the tone of thought . . . and the simple humour of consequential village worthies and gaping village rustics. So that we are irresistibly reminded of the paintings of Wilkie, and still more, perhaps, of those of Teniers . . .²²

Responding to the *Spectator's* review, Hardy reached a conclusion that "a pastoral story would be the safest venture", and wrote a story of rural life, *Under the Greenwood Tree*.²³

Hardy, however, did not abandon sensationalism altogether. In *A Pair of Blue Eyes* he returned to sensation elements; the novel includes many melodramatic episodes such as the heroine's elopement with her lover, the falling of the tower, the hanging above the cliff and so on. In addition, most of his novels modulate into melodrama: the reappearance of the supposedly dead husband, the revenge-murder and the last-minute escape from the execution in *Far from the Madding Crowd*; the fire of the castle in *A Laodicean*; the wife-sale in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*; the death of the heroine's illegitimate child in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*; and the murder-suicide in *Jude the Obscure*. This suggests that Hardy was interested

²² [Hutton], 3--4.

²³ Hardy's letter to Malcolm Macmillan (17 August 1871) in *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy Vol. I: 1840--1892*, eds. R. L. Purdy and Michael Millgate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 12.

in the sensational throughout his career as a novelist.

As stated earlier, sensation elements were already prevalent in Victorian fiction by the time young Hardy started writing. Many eminent Victorian writers--the Brontës, Dickens, Mrs. Gaskell, George Eliot--often employed the melodramatic mode in their novels. They realised that melodrama was a convenient device for novel-writing: it provides commentary and metaphor; it also heightens emotion and situation. Like many other writers, Hardy found melodrama indispensable to his writing activities.

Yet, Hardy did not make use of sensation elements simply because many other writers did. He realised that sensation devices--e. g. irregular (bigamous) relationships, free unions, illegitimate children, confession of secret love affairs--were extremely useful to explore marital and sexual themes, which were to be great concerns in his fiction. As I have shown, sensationalists explored female sexuality; created new types of women; pointed out many problems Victorian women faced (marital unhappiness, women's economic dependence and restricted sphere of action), and suggested free unions. They were able to focus on the "woman question" by means of their sensational plots. As we shall see, Hardy developed the potential of sensation plot-motifs and went further: he not only dealt with marital and sexual problems but also attacked unfair features of society which thwarted Victorian women's lives.

In addition, Hardy was personally keen about the sensational, for he believed that a "story must be

exceptional enough to justify its telling".²⁴ And he was convinced that:

The real, if unavowed, purpose of fiction is to give pleasure by gratifying the love of the uncommon in human experience, mental or corporeal.²⁵

The sensational, which derives from adventures, violence or emotional agony, is obviously concerned with "the uncommon in human experience". It provided Hardy with the framework in which he was able to attain his "purpose of fiction".

Furthermore, Hardy's concept of art affected his use of sensation elements. In the late 1880s he stated that the "'simply natural' is interesting no longer,"²⁶ and:

Art is a disproportioning--(i. e. distorting, throwing out of proportion)--of realities, to show more clearly the features that matter in those realities, which, if merely copied or reported inventorially, might possibly be observed, but would more probably be overlooked. Hence 'realism' is not Art.²⁷

Trying to find an alternative to realism, he realised that exaggerated melodrama would be an appropriate mode of expression, a mode to "show more clearly the features" in realities.

In order to develop this mode, Hardy drew the sensational from many sources. In *The Return of the Native*, for instance, he draws on classical tragedy. In doing so, he attempts to elevate his story to the level of high tragedy.

²⁴ F. E. Hardy, 252.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 185

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 229.

Hardy was also interested in striking and strange local tales with a touch of the occult, which circulated or had used to circulate among country people. *The Return of the Native* contains the superstitions of stabbing a needle to exorcise a devil and of burning a wax effigy to cast it out: *The Mayor of Casterbridge* includes the visit to a weather prophet or white witch and the skimmington ride (a public demonstration of disapproval with the conduct of lovers); and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* has many ballads and the legend of the Turberville coach (which develops into the story of the d'Urberville coach).

In addition, Hardy loved the factual bizarre and shaped episodes based on extraordinary incidents in local newspapers. For instance, the shocking wife-sale in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and the blood dripping from the ceiling in "The Herons" in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* are both based on newspaper reports. According to Michael Millgate, Hardy read the *Dorset Country Chronicles* in the preparation for the two novels and came across the cases of wife-selling²⁸ and the description of the blood dripping from the ceiling.²⁹ It is these newspaper reports that enabled Hardy to create episodes with a sense of confidence.

One may say that it is not unusual for a writer to make use of newspaper reports. (Wilkie Collins shaped the plot of *The Woman in White* out of the court case found in newspapers.) Hardy is, however, unique in that he often

²⁸ Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist* (New York: Random House, 1971), 241.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 265.

employed local material--local tales, incidents, superstitions--which he collected by reading the *Dorset Chronicle* and heard from people. It is this local material that enabled him to paint vividly and colourfully the life of "Wessex".

In retrospect Hardy regarded the sensational *Desperate Remedies* as a false first step, a wrong attempt to write a novel "against his natural grain".³⁰ The writing of sensation fiction was, in fact, the right first step in his career as a novelist: he employed sensation elements, which were to be significant narrative devices in his novels. By means of them, he was to create his imaginary Wessex, providing local colour, and to explore the process by which his characters suffer from marital and sexual problems.

³⁰ F. E. Hardy, 85.

CHAPTER 3: THE SENSATION ELEMENT IN HARDY'S MINOR FICTION

So far we have observed that Hardy was personally interested in striking stories and never entirely abandoned sensationalism. Now we are left with some questions: did Hardy really come to employ sensation elements effectively after his failure in *Desperate Remedies*? If so, how did he make use of these elements in his fiction? And if not, to what extent did he fail to use them?

This chapter attempts to answer these questions, focusing on Hardy's two minor novels, namely, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873) and *A Laodicean* (1881). Among his minor works these two are examined here as they are particularly significant in terms of sensationalism. *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is the book in which Hardy returned to sensation devices. *A Laodicean* is a sister of the sensational *Desperate Remedies*; both of them are categorised by the author as "Novels of Ingenuity".¹

¹ See "General Preface to the Wessex Edition of 1912". Here Hardy classifies his novels and short stories into three groups. (1) Novels of Character and Environment: *Under the Greenwood Tree*, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *The Return of the Native*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *The Woodlanders*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Jude the Obscure*, *Wessex Tales* (1888), *Life's Little Ironies* and *A Few Crustered Characters* (1894); (2) Romances and Fantasies: *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, *The Trumpet-Major* (1880), *Two on a Tower* (1882), *The Well-Beloved* (1897), *A Group of Noble Dames* (1891); and (3) Novels of Ingenuity: *Desperate Remedies*, *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876), *A Laodicean*.

3. 1. *A Pair of Blue Eyes*

When the serialisation of *A Pair of Blue Eyes* started in September 1872, Hardy had not decided an ending, he says, nor even planned what the later chapters were to be like.² This may account for a lack of balance in this novel: almost all the important events take place in the latter part of the story; Henry Knight, although a central figure, does not appear until the story is one-third through. The tone of the novel also reveals the author's inadequate preparation. It persistently alters and is uncertain. The novel opens with a light romance between boy and girl and moves to a more serious drama of love and betrayal, and then to the abrupt tragi-comical conclusion (the death of the heroine and the comic description of two men on their embarrassed train journey).

In spite of these flaws, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is an interesting book: it shows Hardy's advance in handling sensation devices. In *Desperate Remedies* he was hardly able to unite melodrama with a story of what he really wanted to write. In *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, however, he dramatises his subject, the theme of the deserted heroine, by means of the plot-motif of "the woman with a secret past". Elfride Swancourt, the owner of "a pair of blue eyes", has to hide her love affairs when she falls in love with a writer, Henry Knight. She is unable to confess her past, for she is afraid that her lover will never forgive her earlier attachments to Felix Jethway and Stephen Smith.

² F. E. Hardy, 91.

In the meantime, Knight gradually suspects that his lover might be concealing her past love affairs. He tries to discover her secret, while she makes every effort to keep it. When he learns about her abortive runaway marriage, he deserts her.

A Pair of Blue Eyes reminds us of *Aurora Floyd*: in the novels both Braddon and Hardy suggest the importance of moral tolerance by means of the plot-motif of "the woman with a secret past". As we have seen in the discussion of *Aurora Floyd*, Braddon did not believe in prevailing moral and sexual codes; nor did she agree with Talbot Bulstrode, who blames Aurora for hiding a secret past and breaks off his engagement to her. Like the sensationalist, Hardy points out in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* the significance of an ethic based on sympathy rather than on rigid morality. He does this by presenting the heroine's struggles for happiness and subsequent failure in a society where there were strict demands for woman's purity and the smallest mistake could be fatal for her.

To recognise the similarities between Hardy and Braddon is not to imply that what he is doing with the sensation plot-motif is not original at all. In his novel Hardy searches for originality; by means of this motif, he focuses on the difficulty of mutual understanding. This was not a central theme in the sensation novel, but it was to become a recurrent topic in his own fiction.

Like *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is a story about lovers' misunderstanding and separation. A serious misunderstanding occurs because Elfride tries to

avoid the revelation of her secrets. She gives Knight ambiguous replies simply because she does not want to lose him. He, unable to understand her feelings, accuses her of secretiveness and demands to know all about her life. It is not until this moment that she realises that the woman he has loved is not her real self but an image of his own making, a maiden of spotless purity:

Am I such a--mere characterless toy--as to have no attrac--tion in me, apart from--freshness? Haven't I brains? You said--I was clever and ingenious in my thoughts, and--isn't that anything? Have I not some beauty? I think I have a little--and I know I have--yes, I do! You have praised my voice, and my manner, and my accomplishments. Yet all these together are so much rubbish because I--accidentally saw a man before you!³

This anticipates the confession episode in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*: like Angel Clare, Knight is enslaved by fixed ideas of what a woman should be, and will not try to understand Elfride's point of view. When Knight learns about her elopement, he leaps to the conclusion that she must be a fallen woman. All she can say is: "If you only knew me through and through, how true I am, Harry" (335). In the novel Hardy emphasises the importance--but difficulty--of mutual understanding through verbal communication.

In addition to the appropriate use of the sensation plot-motif, Hardy makes another important advance in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*: he is more adept at handling striking

³ Thomas Hardy, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873, rpt. London: Macmillan, 1976), 317. Further quotations from the novel are incorporated within the parentheses in the text.

episodes. In *Desperate Remedies* many sensational episodes are there mainly to capture the reader's attention. Some of them could be easily removed. In *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, however, the most striking scenes (the chess game episodes, the macabre graveyard scenes, the hairbreadth escapes from death or the obsession of the earring) are significant, for they are presented as parallel motifs and establish unity. For instance, Smith and Knight in turn play chess with Elfride and sit on Jethway's tomb in the churchyard. They also walk on foot while she rides to her destination on horseback: on the first occasion she is with Stephen and loses her earring; on the second she finds it with Knight. There is a parallel between Elfride and Knight as well. At one time he rescues her from falling from the tower; at another time she rescues him hanging above the cliff. Parallelism is maintained until the end of the story, giving it a symmetrical construction.

Furthermore, the striking episodes in this novel have increasing psychological importance. As stated earlier, when Hardy was writing *Desperate Remedies*, he relied too heavily on physical sensationalism. But in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, he focuses more on "the effect upon the faculties" of characters,⁴ and the psychological results of incidents and adventures. A good example of this is the (second) chess scene. The episode is not melodramatic in an ordinary sense: unlike a storm, fire, murder or last-minute rescue, it is not physically sensational. It is, however, psychologically exciting. In the first chess

⁴ F. E. Hardy, 204.

scene Elfride is a better player and sympathetically allows the inexperienced Stephen to win. In the second the situation is entirely reversed: she is ruthlessly beaten and then patronised by Knight who has intended to let her win. Here the author suddenly changes from the past to the present tense in order to enhance the dramatic effect:

Ten minutes pass: he [Knight] takes another pawn and says, 'Check!' She flushes, extricates herself by capturing his bishop, and looks triumphant. He immediately takes her bishop: she looks surprised.

Five minutes longer: she makes a dash and takes his only remaining bishop; he replies by taking her only remaining knight.

Two minutes: he gives check; her mind is now in a painful state of tension, and she shades her face with her hand. . . .

Five minutes: 'Checkmate in two moves!' exclaims Elfride.

'If you can,' says Knight.

'O, I have miscalculated; that is cruel!'

'Checkmate,' says Knight; and the victory is won. (184)

Throughout the chess game scene, Elfride continues to resist Knight's domination out of her wounded pride, and tries to beat him. She is, however, secretly delighted in his power over her and is attracted to him because he has dominating power which the young Stephen lacks. Her subconscious desire to be dominated is clearly revealed when she confesses that it is "infinitely more to be even the slave of the greater than the queen of the less" (228).

Traditionally a chess game has been associated with sexual domination and subordination. Thomas Middleton made use of the symbolism of chess in *A Game at Chess* (1624), a play in which the struggle between England and Spain,

between Protestantism and Catholicism, is described as a chess game. In the play the heroine, the White Queen's Pawn (Church of England) succumbs to Catholicism until she is nearly raped by the Black Bishop's Pawn, her Jesuit confessor. In Hardy's second chess game scene traditional sexual symbolism is implicit.

The literally cliff-hanging episode in chapters 21 and 22 is not only physically sensational but also intellectually exciting, referring to theories of evolution. Knight has accompanied Elfride to the cliff from which she plans to watch the ship bringing her lover Stephen back home. When Knight and Elfride sit on the cliff top, his hat is blown. He tries to get it back only to slip down to the edge. He clings to the cliff, a hairbreadth from death:

opposite Knight's eyes was an imbedded fossil, standing forth in low relief from the rock. It was a creature with eyes. The eyes, dead and turned to stone, were even now regarding him. It was one of the early crustaceans called Trilobites. Separated by millions of years in their lives, Knight and this underling seemed to have met in their place of death. . . .

Time closed up like a fan before him. He saw himself at one extremity of the years, face to face with the beginning and all the intermediate centuries simultaneously. Fierce men, clothed in the hides of beasts, and carrying, for defence and attack, huge clubs and pointed spears, rose from the rock, like the phantoms before the doomed Macbeth. . . . Behind them stood an earlier band. . . . Huge elephantine forms, the mastodon, the hippopotamus, the tapir, antelopes of monstrous size, the megatherium, and the myledon--all, for the moment, in juxtaposition. (222)

Here is a moment when Knight realises the ephemerality of

human beings in the context of geological ages. Human beings are nothing but a species of the whole creation and they are a trivial part of its entire history. The cliff scene is one of the many scenes where Hardy offers his personal vision of the human species: others include the thunder scene in *Far from the Madding Crowd* where Gabriel Oak realises that man is small in front of "an infuriated universe";⁵ the opening chapters of *The Return of the Native* in which there is a sharp contrast between the eternity of Egdon Heath and the trifling existence of human beings; and *Two on a Tower* where Hardy places an emphasis on the ephemeral triviality of man in relation to "the stellar universe".⁶

What characterises the powerful cliff episode in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is that Hardy deliberately ignores plausibility. Knight is alone with his vision like the observer in front of the cinema screen, and the world around him is temporarily blotted out. Hardy restricts the narration of the scene to Knight's point of view and shows us only what he sees. His vision consists of incredible figures that cannot exist in life: "Fierce men" appear and disappear in a flash; next moment, however, "the mastodon" appears and disappears. These figures are shown like a series of moving slides.

In the scene Hardy deliberately abandons plausibility in order to "intensify the expression of things".⁷

⁵ Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874, rpt. London: Macmillan, 1975), 223.

⁶ Thomas Hardy, preface to *Two on a Tower* (1882, rpt. London: Macmillan, 1976), 29.

⁷ F. E. Hardy, 177.

Showing slide-like pictures swiftly, he vividly makes visible in a moment the entire history of human beings and their ephemerality.

As we have seen, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is Hardy's first serious attempt to transmute his concerns--the significance of moral tolerance and the difficulty of mutual understanding--and his concept of human life into a drama. As Richard Taylor points out, this novel shows "Hardy's growing commitment to the novel as a vehicle for ideas as well as entertainment".⁸

Hardy's seriousness is also seen in the portrayal of the heroine: he is more ambitious than ever before to create a complex woman, depicting the hidden side of the female psyche. Unlike her predecessors (Cytherea and Fancy Day), Elfride desires to dominate men.⁹ She wants to be appreciated and praised for her intelligence, and exerts power over Stephen. When he cries, "you are my queen. I would die for you, Elfride!" (81), she is exalted because she is "ruling a heart with absolute despotism for the first time in her life" (82). While she behaves like a queen towards Stephen, she behaves like a slave to Knight, who is more mature and intelligent. Elfride does not realise that a "slight rebelliousness occasionally would have done [Knight] no harm" but "she idolize[s] him and [is] proud to be his bond-servant" (305). Her relations

⁸ Richard H. Taylor, *The Neglected Hardy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 39.

⁹ Albert J. Guerard points out that Elfride is Hardy's first female character who desires power and he regards her as "a minor Eustacia Vye" or "a Queen of Night". See his *Thomas Hardy: The Novels and Stories* (1949, rpt. New York: New Directions 1964), 135.

with the two men reveal that her inner self is split into two (and that she lacks experience).

Furthermore, Elfride is a mixture between the conventional and the unconventional. She is vain of her good looks (particularly her "pair of blue eyes"), fond of ornament and fickle. These characteristics seem to place her firmly on the side of convention. However, she can be unconventional, for she does not value the old norms of feminine behaviour. Her unconventionality is seen in the cliff scene: she strips to make a rope from her clothes (this is undoubtedly unorthodox) and rescues Knight by her quick thinking. According to a conventional, say, melodrama, the courageous hero should rescue the heroine in jeopardy. But in the cliff scene it is Elfride who rescues Knight and plays a masculine role. Elfride anticipates Hardy's later heroines such as Bathsheba Everdene, Eustacia Vye, Paula Power or Sue Bridehead, who challenge the prevailing and rigid ideas of feminine ideal and behaviour.

A Pair of Blue Eyes has traditionally been dismissed as Hardy's minor fiction, but the novel deserves more attention than it has received. He skilfully presents his subjects by means of sensation devices, which he was to continually adapt and develop. In addition, he creates the complex character of Elfride from whom some of his later heroines are directly derived. In terms of novel-writing technique and the portrayal of character, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* forms the basis of his major fiction.

3. 2. *A Laodicean*

It is generally agreed that Hardy's eighth novel, *A Laodicean*, is his poorest work. This has been attributed to his illness. Hardy fell ill in October 1880 when he had written only the first thirteen chapters. Bleeding internally, he was "compelled to lie on an inclined plane with the lower part of his body higher than his head".¹⁰ In spite of this, he was determined to finish the novel, partly to fulfil his contract with *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, and also "in the interests of his wife, for whom as yet he had made but a poor provision in the event of his own decease".¹¹ From November onwards he started dictating to his wife Emma "from the awkward position he occupied" and completed it.¹²

As a result, *A Laodicean* contains some serious flaws. Firstly, Hardy failed to fulfil the promise of the opening chapters; a conflict between an earnest and aggressive Baptist minister and the open and free Paula Power, the heroine, suggests a more interesting psychological development of the plot than is actually achieved. Secondly, Hardy lost control of the novel particularly in "Book the Fourth" and "Book the Fifth" where he describes the European tour at excessive length. He visited the Continent before writing *A Laodicean* and relied heavily on memory and travel notes.¹³

¹⁰ F. E. Hardy, 145.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹² *Ibid.*, 146.

¹³ See F. B. Pinion, *A Hardy Companion: A Guide to the Works of Thomas Hardy and Their Background* (London: Macmillan, 1968), 37.

Nevertheless, *A Laodicean* should not be ignored when the sensation elements in Hardy's fiction are discussed. His eighth novel contains them in a richer form than any other Hardy novel with the exception of *Desperate Remedies*. Paula Power is a daughter of the wealthy railway contractor who bought Stancy Castle. Her father was a strict Baptist, and his dying wish was that Paula should submit to immersion of baptism in sight of the congregation. She earns her title "a Laodicean", a person who is lukewarm in her faith, by withdrawing from immersion on the brink of the baptismal tank. William Dare, the illegitimate son of Captain de Stancy, introduces himself at the Castle as an amateur photographer, concealing his true identity. He plays a series of tricks on Paula and her lover George Somerset to estrange them. Later her uncle, Abner Power, joins his schemes. *A Laodicean* includes secrets and a series of intrigues involving the villains.

The central theme of this sensation story is a clash between the old and the new. The setting and characters are pressed into its service: Stancy Castle and the Stancys symbolically stand for mediaevalism; the railway and the Powers stand for modernism. The heroine Paula is complicated as she is a mixture between the two. She is the daughter of a railway contractor who bought an ancient castle; she is modern in her use of telegraphy but is attracted by mediaeval architecture and aristocrats; and she is unable to choose a modern architect when she is courted by an aristocrat. Paula represents symbolically the main theme of the novel, a "clash between ancient and

modern".¹⁴

The problem of *A Laodicean* is that many of the sensational intrigues do not assist the development of the theme of the novel. William Dare's series of attempts--estranging Paula and George by using a telegram and faked photography--are interesting enough, but they do not directly related to a discussion of ideas or the problems of conflicting ideologies.

The story which centres on Abner Power is even less acceptable. He is implausible and hardly comes alive. He is a grotesque monster in the form of a human being with evil intentions.

His visage, which was of the colour of light porphyry, had little of its original surface left; it was a face which had been the plaything of strange fires or pestilences, that had moulded to whatever shape they chose his originally supple skin, and left it pitted, puckered, and seamed like a dried water-course.
(240)

As Barbara Hardy points out, Hardy seems to have forgotten his rule of novel-writing: "human nature must never be made abnormal, which is introducing incredibility. The uncommonness must be in the events, not in the characters . . .".¹⁵

In addition, the plot concerning Abner Power is not blended with the rest of the story. His association with a revolutionary political party in Europe and invention of

¹⁴ Thomas Hardy, *A Laodicean* (1881, rpt. London: Macmillan, 1976), 184. Further quotations from the novel are incorporated within parentheses in the text.

¹⁵ Barbara Hardy, "Introduction" to *A Laodicean*, 22; the quotation is from F. E. Hardy, 150.

bombs have no relationship to the novel. They could be removed without harming the plot. Although melodrama can be justified, it remains true that many striking and grotesque episodes in *A Laodicean* are fruitless in terms of theme, character and plot.

One of the exceptions is the episode in which Captain de Stancy secretly observes Paula doing her gymnastic exercises. Here she is "bending, wheeling and undulating in the air", "sometimes ascending by her arms nearly to the lantern, then lowering herself till she [swings] level with the floor" (184). Captain de Stancy is stuck by her "healthful sprightliness" (185).

This episode is important in terms of plot and theme: the captain falls in love with Paula; and this is the beginning of her difficult choice between the captain and George, which metaphorically shows her inner conflict between mediaevalism and modernism.

To show the captain's infatuation for Paula, Hardy employs the narrative device of the hidden observer(s) which many sensation novelists often used in order to create sensation and suspense. What Hardy is attempting here is complex: Captain de Stancy watches Paula taking the exercises without himself being seen; and William Dare secretly sees the captain being attracted to her. In other words, Paula's hidden charm is described from the viewpoint of the captain; and the process by which he falls in love with her is seen from Dare's point of view:

Dare withdrew to some little distance, and watched Captain de Stancy's face, which presently

began to assume an expression of interest. . . . Captain de Stancy felt that, much as he had seen in early life of beauty in woman, he had never seen beauty of such a real and living sort as this. . . .

'A fermentation is beginning in him,' said Dare, half pitifully; 'a purely chemical process; and when it is complete he will probably be clear, and fiery, and sparkling, and quite another man than the good, weak, easy fellow that he was.' (184--86)

This narrative device produces psychological excitement: the reader shares a secret (a hidden aspect of Paula) with the captain, and then his secret (his infatuation for her) with Dare. By means of this psychologically sensational episode, Hardy shows us the process by which the captain is attracted to Paula.

The episode also brings out an unconventional side of Paula: her disbelief in the prevailing ideas of woman's delicacy. She points out the importance of "the physical training" or "the physical development of her sex" (182) and quite often takes gymnastic exercises. And it is her "healthful sprightliness" (185) that attracts Captain de Stancy.

It is well-known that physical activities, travelling and exercise were forbidden to Victorian women, for they were assumed to be sickly weak and delicate.¹⁶ Invalidism was regarded as a part of their charm.¹⁷ These tendencies were observed even before the Victorian era. As early as 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft deplored these tendencies and pointed out that it was essential to strengthen woman's

¹⁶ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830--1980* (London: Virago, 1987), 57.

¹⁷ On invalidism, see Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 121--44.

body in order to improve her social status: "the woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will . . . become the friend, and not the humble dependent of her husband".¹⁸ However, it seems to have taken many years for women to start enjoying physical activities which had been extremely restricted. It is in the 1860s and 1870s that many novels began to feature heroines who enjoy physical freedom: Braddon's Aurora Floyd loves to ride and falls in love with her father's groom; Mrs. Gaskell's Molly Gibson in *Wives and Daughters* (1866) enjoys riding; George Eliot's Gwendolen in *Daniel Deronda* (1876) also loves to ride and hunt.

Although heroines who rode on horseback were beginning to be common by the time Hardy wrote *A Laodicean*, a heroine who took gymnastic exercises in a boy's costume was still uncommon and original. Hardy attempted to create a new type of woman who enjoyed real physical activities, being free from cumbersome feminine clothes and ultimately free from restraint.

After this episode Hardy begins to concentrate on basing *A Laodicean* on an over-simplified melodramatic pattern. He makes efforts to hold the interest of the reader by a never-ending sequence of striking events: Dare's blackmail and threat; exposure of his intrigues; discoveries of Captain de Stancy's past and Dare's identity; and the fire at Stancy Castle. *A Laodicean* recalls his first published novel: Hardy relies too heavily

¹⁸ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), reprinted in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft Vol. V* (London: William Pickering, 1989), 98.

on the representation of physical violence in the latter part of both novels.

As we have seen, Hardy is unable to employ the melodramatic mode in *A Laodicean* effectively, and this contributes to the weakness of the novel. On the other hand, his appropriate use of sensation devices enhances *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. The novel looks forward to his major fiction in which he employs these devices more skilfully and freely.

CHAPTER 4: HARDY'S DEVELOPMENT OF THE SENSATION ELEMENT IN HIS MAJOR FICTION (1)

Now that we have observed the way Hardy uses sensation devices in his lesser novels, it will be interesting to see how he employs them in his major fiction. This chapter discusses his two earlier novels, *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) and *The Return of the Native* (1878). An examination of the novels will reveal his tremendous advance as a novelist; it will also show that it is sensation devices that contribute to his development. By means of them, he is able to create rich visual imagery. Even more important, he comes to tackle marital problems, a theme which is expounded upon with more intensity in his later fiction.

4. 1. *Far from the Madding Crowd*

When he was writing *A Pair of Blue Eyes* in 1872, Hardy received an invitation from Leslie Stephen, the editor of the *Cornhill*, to write a serial story for the magazine.¹ Stephen had read *Under the Greenwood Tree* and thought "his descriptions admirable".² Hardy replied that he had "a pastoral tale" already in mind, which turned out to be his first major novel, *Far from the Madding Crowd*.³

In writing this novel, Hardy seems to have responded

¹ F. E. Hardy, 95.

² *Ibid.*, 95.

³ *Ibid.*, 95.

to the demands of both the reader and the editor, taking a middle way between the over-complicated intricacy of *Desperate Remedies* and the simple placidity of *Under the Greenwood Tree*. He attempted to weave the elements of melodrama and pastoral romance into the fabric of *Far from the Madding Crowd*.

The novel received a large number of reviews. Most reviewers praised the descriptions of farming life at Weatherbury in South "Wessex". The *Spectator* said: "The details of the farming and the sheep-keeping, of the labouring, the feasting, and the mourning, are painted with all the vividness of a powerful imagination".⁴ On the other hand, some reviewers had reservations about the sensationalism in this novel. The *Westminster Review*, for instance, made a damaging attack:

. . . in *Far from the Madding Crowd* sensationalism is all in all. If we analyse the story we shall find that it is nothing else but sensationalism, which, in the hands of a less skilful writer than Mr. Hardy, would simply sink the story to the level of one of Miss Braddon's earlier performances.⁵

It is true that *Far from the Madding Crowd* is packed with striking episodes. The novel, however, is no more a mere melodrama than Braddon's work is. As we shall see, Hardy in this novel for the first time treats serious marital problems. And significantly, it is by means of the sensation devices--which the *Westminster Review* criticised

⁴ R. H. Hutton, *Spectator* (19 December 1874), reprinted in *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, 21.

⁵ Unsigned review, *Westminster Review* (January 1875), reprinted in *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, 33.

--that he is able to do this. In other words, he employs the sensation plot-motifs of "the return of the supposedly dead husband" and "the woman who complains of her married life"; and by means of them, he ventures to examine the heroine's marital unhappiness. Bathsheba Everdene is independent and strong-minded; but becomes the perfect prey for the dashing soldier Troy. She marries him impulsively and recklessly. Soon she realises her error in doing so and becomes dissatisfied with her married life. Troy is, however, apparently drowned; Bathsheba becomes free and promises Farmer Boldwood at a Christmas party to marry him in the future. There her husband Troy unexpectedly returns to claim her, as if an unhappy married life haunted her.

The last one-third of *Far from the Madding Crowd* is concerned with Bathsheba's infatuation and subsequent unsatisfactory marriage. In chapter 39 ("Coming Home--A Cry") which comes after her marriage, Hardy first suggests that something is wrong with her married life by saying "her voice [is] painfully lowered from the fulness and vivacity of the previous summer".⁶ She tells Troy that she regrets her "romance has come to an end", to which he sarcastically responds, "All romances end at marriage" (283). Her married life with him is filled with disillusionment. Bathsheba learns about his involvement with Fanny Robin, when she sees him possess a lock of the girl's blond hair. She becomes jealous and asks her

⁶ Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874, rpt. London: Macmillan, 1975), 273. Further quotations from the novel are incorporated within parentheses in the text.

husband many questions about Fanny. Then he cries: "don't be so fitful and jealous. You knew what married life would be like, and shouldn't have entered it if you feared these contingencies. . . . If you repent of marrying, so do I" (284--85).

Through her marriage to Troy, Hardy also shows us how a woman became a man's property in Victorian society. Before marriage, Bathsheba is her own mistress and has a right to inherit her uncle's property. After marriage, however, she loses her independence. According to law, she is now her husband's property. Hence, what she used to own is automatically transferred to him.⁷ All she can do when Troy spends her money is to implore him not to do so: "O, Frank, it is cruel; it is foolish of you to take away my money so" (273).

Her marriage to Sergeant Troy typifies Hardy's disenchantment with marriage. At this stage, however, he does not fully explore the theme of unhappy marriage. He knew that this would lead to a dangerous subject, a polemical attack on the institution of marriage. In order to avoid this, Hardy in the novel uses a certain conventional device so that his heroine can be united happily with her faithful lover. According to this device, the heroine's husband should be removed from the story and she should be free. Hence, Troy is murdered by Farmer Boldwood. Bathsheba is released conveniently, yet, legitimately. In the end she is entitled to the marriage

⁷ In 1870 the first Married Women's Property Act became law, but it was not until 1882 that they acquired complete control of their income. See Merryn Williams, *Women in the English Novel 1800--1900* (Basingstock: Macmillan, 1982), 6.

to Gabriel Oak.

As we shall see, Hardy later abandons this easy solution. He refuses to compromise and focuses on the reality of perpetual marital incompatibility in *The Woodlanders* and *Jude the Obscure*. In the meantime we should note that *Far from the Madding Crowd* provides the foundation on which these later novels are built.

Far from the Madding Crowd also reveals Hardy's advance in the portrayal of characters, particularly the heroine. Of all his heroines, Bathsheba Everdene is the most complex and vivid so far. On one hand, she is traditional: she is fickle, flirtatious and vain. At her first appearance on market day, she is pleased with being the centre of attention. She, however, resents the indifference of Farmer Boldwood. She playfully sends him a valentine saying "Marry me" and becomes triumphant to attract his attention.

On the other hand, she is unconventional: she is strong-minded, self-reliant and independent. When she inherits her uncle's estate, she proposes to manage the farm herself:

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. . . . I shall be up before you are awake; I shall be afield before you are up; and I shall have breakfasted before you are afield. In short, I shall astonish you all. (111--12)

As she declares, Bathsheba courageously enters a man's

world of business and commerce; she demonstrates that she is practical and efficient. Oak is amazed "at the rapidity with which the unpractised girl of Norcombe [has] developed into the supervising and cool woman here" (83). Her choice of agricultural business is surprising: farming was not a "respectable" occupation for the middle-class woman in the nineteenth century when her first duty was considered to be a wife.

Bathsheba is Hardy's first heroine to rebel against established mores and question accepted notions of marriage. She confesses that before marriage she did not take "kindly to the idea of marriage in the abstract as did the majority of women she saw about her" (286). After marriage she suspects that she might become "the humbler half of an indifferent matrimonial whole" (286). She is anxious to be regarded as a full-valued person instead of "the humbler half". Bathsheba prefigures Sue Bridehead, who questions the value of marriage and sees her own life as valid in itself.

Bathsheba, however, abandons temporarily her independence and self-reliance when she is seduced by Troy. He awakens her sexual nature (which I shall discuss below). Hardy tells us that "Bathsheba loved Troy in the way that only self-reliant women love when they abandon their self-reliance. When a strong woman recklessly throws away her strength she is worse than a weak woman" (207).

After facing the reality of an unhappy marriage, Bathsheba regains her self-reliance, but changes greatly. Traditionally, her change has been considered as a positive

sign. According to the traditional view, she was at first thoughtless and self-centred; but trial has lessened her faults and created an admirable woman of character. Peter J. Casagrande, for instance, has stated that Bathsheba "develops through misfortune and suffering from a vain, egotistical girl into a wise, sympathetic woman".⁸

But this is only one side of Bathsheba's transformation. At the end of the story we see that she is no longer capable of joy and sensation ("she never laughed readily now" (400)). She is no longer an active and bountiful woman. Her companion Liddy mentions her mistress' great change: "Her eyes are so miserable that she's not the same woman. Only two years ago she was a romping girl, and now she's this!" (387). Bathsheba has entered the man-made world of business, facing the problems of farm life--the death of sheep, the thunder storm and so on--and she has searched for happiness and love, learning that a marriage can be a fiasco. Through these trials, she is transformed into a woman without vigour and passion. The final chapter of *Far from the Madding Crowd* shows her metamorphosis: Bathsheba as a dutiful wife "pouring out a cup of tea" (399) for her husband. The former "Queen of the Corn-market" (191) is quite content with confining herself to the "doll's house". As we shall see, it is not until *The Return of the Native* that Hardy creates a more rebellious woman. This volcanic woman refuses to stay within a small sphere and struggles to escape from it.

⁸ Peter J. Casagrande, "A New View of Bathsheba Everdene", *Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Dale Kramer (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1979), 50.

In addition to his treatment of marital themes and presentation of the heroine, *Far from the Madding Crowd* shows Hardy's advance as a novelist. By the time he wrote the novel, he realised that both narrative and thematic statements could be made effectively through symbolism. In the novel Hardy produces rich visual imagery on a large scale to reflect situation and feeling; and he does this by means of melodramatic episodes.

In *Far from the Madding Crowd* melodramatic episodes, in which the description takes on the significance of symbolism, are more numerous than ever before. As we have seen, his earlier novels also contain images designed to make narrative and thematic statements, such as the cliff and chess game episodes in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. Yet it is not until *Far from the Madding Crowd* that Hardy manages regularly to create imagery and employ it in a search for symbolic effects. A good example of this symbolism is the famous sword practice scene in which Bathsheba is seduced by Troy. Here Bathsheba watches his quick movement of a sword and the blade flashing in the setting sun:

In an instant the atmosphere was transformed to Bathsheba's eyes. Beams of light caught from the low sun's rays, above, around, in front of her, well-nigh shut out earth and heaven--all emitted in the marvellous evolutions of Troy's reflecting blade, which seemed everywhere at once, and yet nowhere specially. These circling gleams were accompanied by a keen rush that was almost a whistling--also springing from all sides of her at once. In short, she was enclosed in a firmament of light, and of sharp hisses, resembling a sky-full of meteors close at hand. (204)

"These circling gleams" around Bathsheba form a striking

contrast with the darkness of the night on her first encounter with Troy, where it is said that "the meeting should be about to occur in the darkest point of her route, even though only just outside her own door" (183). This contrast emphasises the brightness of light in the sword practice scene. Also, the phrases, "a firmament of light" and "a sky-full of meteors" bring a strong sense of brilliance. Extraordinarily bright flashes cause her to be dazzled. She is dazzled by this bright flashing and ultimately by Troy himself.

In this highly symbolic seduction scene Troy does not flatter Bathsheba, let alone seduce her in a conventional fashion: his powerful and masculine performance evokes a sexual response in her. Being "overcome by a hundred tumultuous feelings" (205), feeling "powerless to withstand or deny him", she realises that he is "altogether too much for her" (206). Hardy skilfully uses this melodramatic episode to portray in metaphor her infatuation with Troy.

The sword practice scene is worthy of comparison with the chess game scene in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. These two are similar in that they both portray the heroine's seduction; but Hardy's use of language is different in each scene. Here in the sword practice scene, he combines a vivid description of the sword exercise with the metaphor of light. It is the combination of description with metaphor that enables Hardy to present the situation in a heightened manner. This differs considerably from the chess game episode where he engages in narratives without such combination: "[Elfride's] mind is now in a painful state of

tension, and she shades her face with her hand. . . .
 Elfride arose and turned away without letting him see her
 face" (184).

The episode in which Gabriel and Bathsheba cover the
 ricks in the thunder also shows Hardy's dexterity in
 handling a melodramatic episode. In this scene the
 lightning becomes brighter with each flash, after the
 two start working together:

Heaven opened then, indeed. The flash was
 almost too novel for its inexpressibly dangerous
 nature to be at once realized, and they
 [Bathsheba and Gabriel] could only comprehend the
 magnificence of its beauty. It sprang from east,
 west, north, south, and was a perfect dance of
 death. The forms of skeletons appeared in the
 air, shaped with blue fire for bones--dancing,
 leaping, striding, racing around, and mingling
 altogether in unparalleled confusion. With
 these were intertwined undulating snakes of
 green, and behind these was a broad mass of
 lesser light. (264)

In "a perfect dance of death", "the forms of skeletons",
 "blue fire for bones" and "undulating snakes of green", the
 sky is depicted vividly, colourfully and metaphorically,
 with words which are immediately associated with death.
 Suddenly, the world surrounding Bathsheba and Gabriel is
 itself transformed into the world of death. In the next
 moment he is nearly struck by the lightning:

one of the grisly forms had alighted upon the
 point of Gabriel's rod, to run invisibly down
 it, down the chain, and into the earth. Gabriel
 was almost blinded, and he could feel
 Bathsheba's warm arm tremble in his hand--a
 sensation novel and thrilling enough . . . (264)

The very moment that Gabriel feels Bathsheba's warmth is

also the moment that he makes contact with life and this world. At this point, this world and the world of death are juxtaposed: life and death clash in a moment. The clash between the two builds a vibrant tension into the scene. Here Hardy powerfully manipulates colour and light to create in a word-picture of outstanding strength and vividness, a single momentary picture of life and death. We see again the strong connection between the visual elements and narrative statements.

In the next moment, Hardy tells us that Gabriel's thrilling sensation dies away. A revelation comes to him: "love, life, everything human, seemed small and trifling in such close juxtaposition with an infuriated universe" (264). Hardy's vision of human life--the ephemeral triviality of human beings before the awesome power of nature--emerges here.

The thunder scene symbolises Bathsheba's and Gabriel's need for each other. They are able to save the grain by their combined efforts, on the basis of which they later establish "good-fellowship--camaraderie" (395). After they have worked together, Bathsheba starts to rely increasingly upon Gabriel's judgment and confesses why she recklessly married Troy. Gabriel also realises that they have become much closer than before. The episode has the effect of directing the reader's attention to their growing relationship.

What characterises *Far from the Madding Crowd* is that sensational scenes with symbolic and visual effects are more numerous than before. They include Bathsheba's night

encounter with Troy and the scene where the gargoyle pours out its vengeance on Fanny Robin's grave. Hardy's first major novel is a tapestry full of rich imagery and woven symbolism.

Furthermore, Hardy is very careful not to be over-melodramatic and keeps a good balance: he introduces by turns a calm scene and a sensational scene, or comic relief of the rustics and a startling incident. A typical instance may be seen in the striking contrast between chapters 43 and 44. Chapter 43 is very melodramatic: Bathsheba opens Fanny Robin's coffin at night and learns about her husband's perfidy. Antithetically, chapter 44 includes no dramatic episodes and the tone is in a low key. It focuses upon the process by which Bathsheba regains her health. It starts with individual sounds she notices under the tree:

A coarse-throated chatter was the first sound.
 It was a sparrow just waking.
 Next: 'Chee-weeze-weeze-weeze!' from another
 retreat.
 It was a finch.
 Third: 'Tink-tink-tink-tink-a-chink!' from the
 hedge.
 It was a robin.
 'Chunck-chuck-chuck!' overhead.
 A squirrel.
 Then, from the road, 'With my rat-ta-ta, and my
 rum-tum-tum!'
 It was a ploughboy. (311)

Since her mind is empty, she first notices the phenomena of the outer world, not as a whole but as pieces. The sounds of the birds, the squirrel, the boy, therefore, come to her ear in fragments. She hears the sounds passively and then stares at a morning mist, "a noisome yet magnificent

silvery veil" (312). She looks at the various coloured fungi and realises that the place where she passed the night is truly dismal. The slow but firm movement of her attention--from individual sounds to the mist, from the mist to the fungi--suggests that Bathsheba is beginning to evaluate the external world and to regain her health. In this way, Hardy shows her emotional recovery, maintaining a good balance in the novel.

In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Hardy is able to achieve compositional control, which contributes to the merits of this novel. This is in contrast with *Desperate Remedies* and *A Laodicean* in which he loses control entirely in the second half of the book.

4. 2. *The Return of the Native*

The Return of the Native, which appeared in *Belgravia* in 1878, was far more ambitious than anything Hardy had previously written. He attempted to achieve a formal and structural parallel with Greek tragedy:⁹ the limitation of the action to the time of a year and a day and to the narrow space of Egdon Heath; the community of rustic people which are a rough equivalent of the Greek chorus; and the original plans of the novel in terms of five books in imitation of the five acts of classical tragedy.

A similar ambitiousness marks Hardy's use of sensation elements. In the novel he draws these elements not only from a common body of convention but also from others: local customs, superstitions and classical tragedy (he

⁹ F. E. Hardy, 422.

alluded to *Prometheus Bound* and *Oedipus Rex*).¹⁰ Even more important, he shows himself to be extremely adept at handling these elements. He employs striking episodes, the narrative device of the hidden identity and the plot-motif of "the woman who elopes with her lover"; and transforms them into extremely useful narrative devices influencing the development of character, plot and theme. By means of them, he presents the heroine from many perspectives, and shows her drama--her married life, struggle with Egdon Heath and desperate attempt to escape from it. In doing so, he also attempts to dramatise his notions of life and tackle the problem of marital unhappiness.

Hardy opens his novel with a description of the isolated and barren Egdon Heath, which casts a powerful spell over the dwellers. Then he introduces the heroine, Eustacia Vye. His narrative demands conflicting attitudes towards her, for he sees her in many lights. He presents her as a grand heroic character alluding to classical tragedy and comparing her to a goddess: "Eustacia Vye was the raw material of a divinity. On Olympus she would have done well with a little preparation. She had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess".¹¹ Hardy also tells us there are rumours that she is a witch. (Susan pierces Eustacia with a long stocking-needle and burns her wax effigy, believing that the young woman is a witch.) At the same time, however, Hardy presents Eustacia as a

¹⁰ Hardy may have drawn on Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound", for Shelley was his favourite poet.

¹¹ Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (1878, rpt. London: Macmillan, 1975), 89. Further quotations from the novel are incorporated within parentheses in the text.

vain, arrogant and lazy daydreamer.

From the outset we see his attempt to portray the heroine from varied perspectives: in her first appearance, he shows Eustacia as a heroic character, and then as a woman of the magic folklore. In order to do this, Hardy makes use of the narrative device of the hidden identity. By means of this device, he manages to portray the heroine in a striking manner, creating suspense and sensation. In the scene Eustacia (whose identity Hardy hides) stands on a grave on the summit of Rainbarrow, the highest hill in Egdon Heath. Diggory Venn, the reddleman, sees her from a distance: "There the form stood, motionless as the hill beneath. Above the plain rose the hill, above the hill rose the barrow, and above the barrow rose the figure" (41). As other people approach the grave, the mysterious figure leaves.

The imagination of the observer clung by preference to that vanished, solitary figure, as to something more interesting, more important, more likely to have a history worth knowing than these new-comers, and unconsciously regarded them as intruders. But they remained, and established themselves; and the lonely person who hitherto had been queen of the solitude did not at present seem likely to return. (42)

Here Hardy restricts the narration to Venn's point of view. He becomes the "lens" through which we see. The figure is before him, but he is unable to tell us who the person is, what the person is about to do on the grave. He is too far way. In this way Hardy introduces her, thus creating suspense and sensation.

In this episode Hardy also attempts to elevate Eustacia to the level of a grand heroic character. She stands on the summit of Rainbarrow and does not mix with other people. This symbolically means that she exists on a higher level of significance; she is "queen of the solitude". Significantly, she is on the grave, which foreshadows her death at the end of the story. Hardy carefully composes this scene with heroic and tragic implications.

One remarkable feature of this scene is the solemnity of tone, which Hardy has not managed to create previously. *The Return of the Native* is his first attempt to write a serious tragedy. (So far he has written only one story which ends with the death of the heroine, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*; but its tone is lighter and sometimes with a touch of ironic comedy.) He manages to create a serious atmosphere suggesting Eustacia's tragic end.

Not until some thirty pages after Eustacia's appearance does the reader know what the woman (whose identity Hardy still hides) is about to do on Rainbarrow. An anonymous rustic says that she has lit a bonfire: "Well, what a fess little bonfire that one is, out by Cap'n Vye's! 'Tis burning just the same now as ever, upon my life" (74). In a technicolour film, it would be a stunning moment: there is a striking contrast between the darkness of the sky and the red bonfire. And it is at this moment that we associate the woman (Eustacia) with Prometheus. She is a prisoner trapped by Egdon, which she roams restlessly, yearning for freedom. Her yearning is manifest in the

fire she sets as a beacon of her desire and rebellion. By comparing her to Prometheus, Hardy elevates Eustacia above local people, and emphasises her "Promethean rebelliousness" (45).

In the next moment, however, Hardy tells us that heath folk consider her as a witch. A rustic says: "the lonesome dark-eyed creature up there . . . is a witch" (75). Another tells of her: "I'd be very glad to ask her in wedlock . . . and take the risk of her wild dark eyes ill-wishing me" (75). In the scene Hardy gives us two different pictures of the heroine: Eustacia, who yearns for freedom like Prometheus; the "dark-eyed creature" like a witch.

As the story continues, Hardy also admits that Eustacia is impractical and wastes her ability in an idle way. Mrs. Yeobright is a mouthpiece for him here. When she quarrels with her son, she passionately cries: "I have never heard that [Eustacia] is of any use to herself or to other people" (196); "She is lazy and dissatisfied" (208). Throughout the novel we see Hardy's ambivalent attitude towards Eustacia: his recognition of wasting her ability and his compassion for her imprisonment in Egdon and her frustration.

What characterises this frustrated woman is her spirit of revolt. For instance, she ignores the social norms of female behaviour. Before marriage she was Wildeve's lover; after parting with him she goes out for a walk at night to search for excitement. After her marriage she goes dancing with him, leaving her blind husband at

home. Finally, she decides to run off with her former lover. Eustacia's rejection of the conventional female role and the feminine ideal is implicit in her masquerading as the Turkish Knight in the Christmas mummings' play: she wears men's clothes and acts like a man.

Eustacia's defiance is seen most clearly in her rebellion against Egdon. "There is a sort of beauty in the scenery, I know; but it is a jail to me" (114). After spending a happy and carefree childhood in the seaside resort of Budmouth, her "imprisonment" on Egdon is intolerable. She says, "'Tis my cross, my shame, and will be my death!" (107). She not only foreshadows her death but also expresses her rebellion against the heath. As we shall see, Hardy dramatises her desperate attempt to escape from the heath by means of the sensational storm scene.

It is to be away from her "Hades" (90) that Eustacia decides to marry Clym Yeobright, the returning native. In portraying their marriage, Hardy again tackles the problems of ill-conceived marriage. And it is by means of the sensation plot-motif of "the woman who elopes with her lover" that he is able to do this.¹² Eustacia marries Clym, hoping that she is able to bend his will to hers, but fails to do so. He loves Egdon which she detests; he is too absorbed in his plans to open a school for the heath

¹² C. Heywood points out similarities between *The Return of the Native* and *The Doctor's Wife* by Braddon. In both cases, says he, the heroine is a romantic and dreamy woman; and becomes dissatisfied with her husband who is absorbed in his occupation and does not understand her. See Heywood, "The Return of the Native and Miss Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife*: A Probable Source", *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 18 (1963--64), 91--94; and "Miss Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife*: An Intermediary between *Madame Bovary* and *The Return of the Native*", *Revue de Littérature Comparée* 38 (1964), 255--61.

folk to understand her. When she becomes desperate, she decides to leave Egdon with the help of her former lover, Damon Wildeve.

Through the portrayal of Eustacia's and Clym's marriage, Hardy suggests the folly of establishing human relationships on false visions. Eustacia falls in love with her vision of him instead of himself: she regards him as a knight to set her free. Once she is married to Clym, however, she is obliged to face a bitter reality: he is not a knight but a furtze-cutter on the heath. She cries bitterly to Mrs. Yeobright: "if I had known then what I know now, that I should be living in this wild heath a month after my marriage, I--I should have thought twice before" marrying him (255). Clym also falls in love with his vision of Eustacia. "She is excellently educated, and would make a good matron in a boarding school" (208). He is blind to her desires, passions and ambitions, and hardly realises that she is not interested in teaching. As Michael Millgate points out, Clym's physical blindness becomes "emblematic of his whole personality".¹³

The significance of establishing human relationships on the truth is a recurrent theme in Hardy's fiction. As we have seen, he in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* suggests the importance of mutual understanding between lovers by presenting Henry Knight, who falls in love with the false vision of Elfride Swancourt. Hardy attempts to dramatise this theme again and again; as we shall see, it is culminated in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

The Return of the Native is, however, unique in that

¹³ Millgate, 139.

Hardy presents the process by which a marriage is marred by the struggle between the heroine and her mother-in-law. Mrs. Yeobright's attitude to Eustacia is unequivocal. She tells of the young woman: "One not much to my liking" (180); "Miss Vye is to my mind too idle to be charming" (196). She later condemns her daughter-in-law as "a hussy" (209), and cries, "You are blinded, Clym. . . . It was a bad day for you when you first set eyes on her" (209).

Hardy presents the crisis of the struggle by means of the "Closed Door" episode, one of the most melodramatic scenes in this novel. As many critics have pointed out, Clym in this scene "help[s] to kill" (315) his mother, playing out his role as Oedipus (although in this case, the sex of the parent is female).¹⁴ He sleeps on the floor and is unaware of his mother's visit. Eustacia, when she hears the knock at the door, looks out of the window. She is seen by Mrs. Yeobright, but does not open the door: she assumes that Clym will open it. To Mrs. Yeobright, her daughter-in-law's action is nothing but a deliberate and hateful denial, and she believes that her son has also rejected her: "'Tis is too much--Clym, how can hear to do it! He is at home; and yet he lets her shut the door against me!" (293). This shocking revelation and rejection, together with the heat on the heath, end by killing Mrs. Yeobright before she can reach home. When her son learns that he has, though unintentionally and

¹⁴ See, for instance, Leonard W. Deen, "Heroism and Pathos in *The Return of the Native*" (1960), reprinted in *Hardy: The Tragic Novels*, ed. R. P. Draper (London: Macmillan, 1975), 127; John Paterson, "An Attempt at Grand Tragedy" (1966), reprinted in *Hardy: The Tragic Novels*, 109.

unconsciously, helped to kill her, he endures the anguish of Oedipus: "my thoughts go through me like swords. O, if any man wants to make himself immortal by painting a picture of wretchedness, let him come here! . . . I cannot help feeling that I did my best to kill her" (314).

It is in this episode that we see Hardy's notions of life. According to Hardy, some forces (in the form of coincidence) operate in this world without conscious design and nobody can control these impersonal forces. In the scene Wildevve happens to be at Clym's house on the very day when Mrs. Yeobright comes to be reconciled with her son; Clym happens to be sleeping and does not hear the knock at the door. Although Hardy claims that coincidence itself is an indifferent force, yet with Eustacia, Clym and his mother, it seems more malignant: if Mrs. Yeobright's arrival at her son's house had not coincided with Wildevve's, if Clym had not been sleeping, if Eustacia had not mistakenly thought her husband awake, Mrs. Yeobright would not have died. If she had not died on the heath, Clym would not have accused Eustacia and she would not have left him.

The death of Mrs. Yeobright, rather the cause of it, drives Eustacia and Clym apart in mutual bitterness and antagonism. She is determined to leave the "hearth" and the heath. In the sensational storm scene Hardy shows himself to be extremely adept at showing Eustacia's despair. She proceeds to Rainbarrow:

Skirting the pool she followed the path towards Rainbarrow, occasionally stumbling over twisted furtze-roots, tufts of rushes, or oozing lumps

of fleshy fungi, which at this season lay scattered about the heath like the rotten liver and lungs of some colossal animal. (356)

By means of grotesquely physical words ("the rotten liver and lungs of some colossal animal"), Hardy expresses the chaos of her mind more effectively and succinctly than would be possible by lengthy explanation. Then, he shifts his focus from vegetation to Eustacia surveying the dimensions of her dilemma: to stay on the heath would mean unbearable misery, yet she has no money for going away; "To ask Wildeve for pecuniary aid without allowing him to accompany her was impossible", yet "to fly as his mistress . . . was of the nature of humiliation" (357). Bemoaning her lot, Eustacia reaches the nadir of her despair. She cries, "How I have tried and tried to be splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me!" (357).

The ending is interesting: it is a mixture between Hardy's ambition and compromise. On one hand, he shows himself to be ambitious enough to refuse a conventional happy ending and to present the heroine's (abortive) elopement. By the time he writes this novel, he is well aware that the ties of an ill-conceived marriage cannot be conveniently broken as it happens in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. In *The Return of the Native* he does not choose an easy way out: the rebellious Eustacia leaves her husband.

At the same time, however, Hardy compromises. He stops his narrative not with Eustacia's adultery but with her death. This is the weakness of the novel: the moment she dies, the problem of unhappy marriage tails off.

Neither Eustacia nor Clym faces the reality of everlasting marital unhappiness and estrangement.

As we shall see, Hardy later refuses to compromise: in *The Woodlanders* and *Jude the Obscure* he directly explores what would happen if a marriage broke down, but neither partner died. He did this in spite of the fact that he might incur the wrath of Victorian critics and readers. In fact, this is exactly what did happen, for he, as we shall see, dealt with the perpetual problem of marital incompatibility and questioned the value of the institution of marriage. This was the result of the long process of Hardy's serious efforts to tackle marital problems. Significantly, the efforts began in the 1870s when he wrote *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *The Return of the Native*.

CHAPTER 5: HARDY'S DEVELOPMENT OF THE SENSATION ELEMENT
IN HIS MAJOR FICTION (2)

One distinct feature of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895) is the tremendous importance of sexual and marital themes. Although they had always been significant in Hardy's fiction, they achieved the most overt centrality in these two works. This is partly because he wrote these novels in the 1890s: this was the period when the marriage question and the idea that women were victims of the moral and sexual double standards were very much in the air. The feminist movement to overthrow the double standards had become a distinct social phenomenon. Women were beginning to have "a strong sense of [their] own importance, usefulness, and responsibility" and long to "strengthen the cause of right and justice".¹ The marital and sexual problems faced by Victorian women in the 1890s became so much a matter of discussion that it was almost impossible for any serious writer to ignore these issues. Clearly Hardy was such a writer.

In addition, he, by the 1890s, became utterly exasperated at Mudie's tyrannical censorship which had prohibited English writers to violate established sexual and moral codes. Hardy was anxious to treat sexual matters with frankness:

Life being a physiological fact, its honest
portrayal must be largely concerned with
. . . the relations of the sexes, and the

¹ Nat Arling, "What Is the Role of the 'New Woman'?", *Westminster Review* 150 (1898), 576.

substitution for such catastrophes as favour the false colouring best expressed by the regulation finish that 'they married and were happy ever after,' of catastrophes based upon sexual relations as it is.²

In order to present an "honest portrayal of life", Hardy was determined to break down the sexual taboo in literature. An examination of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* will show us that he employed sensation devices in order to explore marital and sexual problems more directly than ever before.

5. 1. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* Hardy returns the plot-motif of "the woman with secret past", which he employed some twenty years before. In discussing *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, I have tried to show that by means of this motif he suggested the difficulty of mutual understanding. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* he uses the motif again, but shows himself to be more adept at handling the motif. By means of it, he focuses more sharply on the importance of establishing human relationships on the truth and not on illusion; he attacks more directly the unfairness of moral and sexual double standards. In addition to this, Hardy makes good use of striking episodes: he shapes these episodes out of local material (local incidents, ballads and legends) so that he is able to paint "Wessex" life vividly. By means of them, he provides a strong sense of

² Thomas Hardy, "Candour in English Fiction", contribution to a symposium in the *New Review* (January 1890), reprinted in *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings*, ed. Harold Orel (London: Macmillan, 1967), 127--28.

reality and local colour, which contributes to the merits of this novel.

Like other woman-with-a-secret stories, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* moves from the heroine's seduction to her efforts to confess her past to her new lover. Tess Durbeyfield visits the d'Urbervilles in order to claim kin and ask for financial assistance for the sake of her poor family. She meets Alec d'Urberville, who is to take advantage of her and seduce her.

It is in Tess's encounter with her seducer that Hardy introduces one of the significant themes in this novel: the importance of establishing relationships on the truth and not on false visions. As we shall see, he is able to do this by linking observation and (mis)understanding. In Tess's encounter with him, Alec offers strawberries and

He watched her pretty and unconscious munching through the skeins of smoke that pervaded the tent . . . she innocently looked down at the roses in her bosom . . . 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.³

Alec first secretly sees her mouth and then her bosom. He is struck by "a luxuriance of aspect" and "a fulness of growth". He is right in recognising Tess's erotic quality and feminity. He is, however, unable to interpret her as a whole. He colours the object of vision by his own sexual

³ Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891, rpt. London: Macmillan, 1975), 66. Further quotations from the novel are incorporated within the text.

desire, regarding her merely as a sex object. This misinterpretation anticipates his subsequent action: he acts on his own sexual desire and attempts to possess and exploit her.

After the fateful incident in the Chase, Tess meets Angel Clare and falls in love with him. His vision of her is a striking contrast to Alec's. On seeing her, Angel thinks that she is "a fresh and virginal daughter of Nature" (148). He regards her as "Artemis" and "Demeter" (158) as if he were idealising her. As his feelings for her develop, it is apparent that he loves an image of his own making rather than Tess herself. In the confession episode Tess protests to him, "I thought, Angel, that you loved me--me, my very self! If it is I you do love, O how can it be that you look and speak so?" (255).

Tess's tragedy is that neither Angel nor Alec sees her true self. They identify her with two polarised images of women: Angel regards her as "goddess"; Alec as "temptress". Both images distort Tess. The two men attempt to have relationships with Tess based on the false visions of her. In the novel Hardy places an emphasis on the difficulty--but significance--of establishing human relationships on the truth.

In Tess's confession episode Hardy also focuses on the unfair features of prevailing morality. Before marriage Angel has had an affair in London and confides in Tess:

I did not mention it because I was afraid of endangering my chance of you, darling. . .

I was going to tell you a month ago--at the time you agreed to be mine, but I could not; I thought it might frighten you away from me. I put it off; then I thought I would tell you yesterday, to give you a chance at least of escaping me. But I did not. (251)

This is obviously a parallel to Tess's situation. Once she tries to confess her past to Angel but she fails to do so, for "her instinct of self-preservation [is] stronger than her candour" (217); on the morning of the wedding, she asks Angel to listen to her "faults and blunders" (239) in order to give him "a chance at least of escaping" her.

After carefully constructing circumstances, Hardy shows us Angel's selfishness and the unfairness of sexual and moral double standards. While Tess is willing to forgive his past, he is struck dumb learning about her affair with Alec. Angel considers himself to be deceived: "the woman I have been loving is not you. . . . Another woman in your shape" (255). Although he is intellectually liberated from orthodox Christianity, he is all the more dependent on Christian ethics and prevailing morality. He regards his past as "folly" (252), while accusing Tess of impurity. Angel is "the slave to custom and conventionality" (290).

Significantly, Tess is also trapped by sexual and moral double standards. Being accused, she reaches a conclusion that Angel is right and accepts his decision to go away: "I have thought over what you say . . . It is quite true all of it; it must be. You must go away from me" (270). Tess allows Angel to consider his affair as something trifling but her past as a great "sin". In Tess

of the *d'Urbervilles*, Hardy attacks conventional morality, with its strict demand for purity only in women, which inevitably leads Tess to accept desertion, to suffer from poverty and eventually to return to Alec whom she does not love at all.

In the final stage of the novel, Hardy presents Angel's transformation. After removing himself from the society in which he has been raised, Angel comes to realise the "beauty or ugliness of a character lay not only in its achievement, but in its aims and impulses" (363) and is able to accept Tess. At this stage, a happy ending looks possible. Hardy, however, refuses the melodramatic happy ending in which the hero comes back to rescue the heroine from the villain in the nick of time. Angel returns to Tess only to discover that she has become Alec's mistress:

'Tess!' he said huskily, 'can you forgive me for going away? Can't you--come to me? How do you get to be--like this?'

'It is too late!' said she, her voice sounding hard through the room, her eyes shining unnaturally. . . . 'He has won me back to him.'

(400--01)

Tess's re-encounter with her husband could have been joyous, but it turns out to be full of despair because he has come back "too late". The moments of joy can be turned to bitterness by time.

This "too late" re-encounter is not Hardy's mere caprice. Throughout the novel he places the tremendous importance on time and attempts to show a flaw in the natural order of things. He remarks, "the call seldom produces the comer, the man to love rarely coincides with



the hour for loving" (67). Tess meets Angel at the club dancing at Marlott before she is seduced by Alec. As she later considers, Tess could have avoided her tragedy, if Angel had danced with her and fallen in love with her. She re-encounters Angel at Talbothays and loves him "too late". In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* this motif is so significant that Hardy even thought of "Too late, Beloved!" as a title for the novel.⁴

A "too late" encounter is a recurrent motif in Hardy's novels. As I have shown, Edward Springrove in *Desperate Remedies* shows up at his beloved Cytherea's wedding and knows that he was "too late". We have seen that Hardy does not use the motif effectively there: a "too late" encounter is not really too late. Springrove soon learns that Cytherea's husband has committed bigamy; rescues her from the bigamist and marries her.⁵ Although the motif has the potential for tragedy, it miscarries. By the time he wrote *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Hardy was well aware of its potentiality and employed the motif more appropriately.

Hardy in this novel is adept at transmuting his concerns into a drama. The quality of the novel, however, comes not only from themes but also from setting (landscape and the description of "Wessex" life) and characters. As many critics have observed, the locale of each incident in this novel is appropriate to the action taking place in it. The description of the setting and the season add depth and

⁴ Juliet Grindle and Simon Gatrell, "General Introduction" to *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891, rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 3.

⁵ Springrove later learns that he has rescued Cytherea from a murderer instead of a bigamist, for Manston married her after killing his first wife.

significance to the events unfolding at that time. The most striking example of this is the period of Tess's recovery and happiness in Talbothays which suggests fertility and fecundity. Her growing love for Angel coincides with the advancing season: "The seasoned developed and matured. . . . Rays from the sunrise drew forth the buds and stretched them into long stalks, lifted up sap in noiseless streams, opened petals" (156). As Tess's plight grows more tragic, however, the weather turns more bitter; fertile valleys are left behind for the starve-acre land of Flintcomb-Ash. Throughout the novel the description of nature and season are integral in reflecting situation, and the feeling and emotion of Tess.

In order to paint the life of "Wessex" vividly, Hardy constructs this novel out of local material: newspaper reports, the Turberville coach legend and local ballads. According to Michael Millgate, two of the most sensational events in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*--the death of Prince (the Durbeyfield horse) and the blood dripping from the ceiling of "The Herons"--are based on actual incidents found in the *Dorset County Chronicle*.⁶ In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* the death of Prince takes place in the first phase. Tess sets out on the fateful journey in the early hours of the morning to deliver beehives. She soon falls asleep, but is awakened by an accident in which the mail-

⁶ Millgate, 265. According to him, Hardy's "Facts" notebook "records no less than three stories of night collisions found in old copies of the *Dorset County Chronicle*, and in one of these . . . a waggoner is asleep when the shaft of his vehicle pierces the breast of the lead horse of an oncoming coach"; the blood dripping from the ceiling was in "the cutting . . . glued into a copy of the novel" which Hardy gave his second wife.

cart has killed her old horse: "A hollow groan, unlike anything [Tess] had ever heard in her life, came from the front, followed by a shout of 'Hoi there!'" (57). She is shocked at the "huge pool of blood in front of her" (57).

On the obvious level Hardy creates this episode in order to give us a picture of the life of the haggler's family in Wessex. Tess's father engages in old-fashioned haggling in the face of new methods of transportation and distribution. His poor health combined with a few drinks make him unable to take bees to market. Tess decides to go herself and causes an accident which immediately means the loss of the family's livelihood: "the very shiftlessness of the household rendered the misfortune a less terrifying one to them than it would have been to a striving family, though in the present case it meant ruin" (58). It is this situation that brings about Tess's tragedy: she is persuaded into leaving her home and going to Trantridge where she is deflowered.

Hardy also develops this sensation episode into a narrative device suggesting Tess's fate: she sees the "huge pool of blood" and regards herself "in the light of a murderess" (59). This anticipates her murder of Alec in "The Herons": "The oblong white ceiling, with this scarlet blot in the midst, had the appearance of a gigantic ace of hearts" (404).

The striking story of the Turberville coach also provides local colour and functions as metaphor. Hardy knew the Turberville connection with the Wool Manor (the Wellbridge Manor of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*) and its

legend.⁷ According to the legend, "none can see the ghostly coach of the Turbervilles by those who have Turberville blood in their veins".⁸ In Hardy's novel this is transformed into a more shocking one:

It is that this sound of a non-existent coach can only be heard by one of d'Urberville blood, and it is held to be of ill-omen to the one who hears it. It has to do with a murder, committed by one of the family, centuries ago. . . . One of the family is said to have abducted some beautiful woman, who tried to escape from the coach in which he was carrying her off, and in the struggle he killed her--or she killed him-- I forget which. (377)

The legend has more bearing on the story than merely ill omen. It gives the reader a clue that Tess will be involved in a murder: Alec d'Urberville, though he is a sham one, will take her to "The Herons"; Tess d'Urberville tries to be free and kills him, playing out a victim-murderer role.

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* melodramatic episodes, which are constructed out of local material, are numerous. They include: an old superstition of a cock crowing in the afternoon which signifies impending evil; a ballad which makes Tess fancy that Angel's gift of wedding clothes might betray her by changing colour and so on. These episodes contribute to setting atmosphere and directing the reader's attention to Tess's tragic end.

When all is said, however, we must look at Tess: she powerfully dominates the novel from the beginning to the end. One remarkable feature of Hardy's portrayal of Tess

⁷ Millgate, 264--65.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 264.

is his outspoken treatment in female sexuality. He goes out of his way to mention her sensual nature again and again in the novel, by referring to her lips or mouth: "rosy lips" (65), "holmberry lips" (80) and "flower-like mouth" (119).

Hardy's attempt to create a "sensuous" betrayed woman is worth noting. Writers of the mid-Victorian period-- Dickens and Mrs. Gaskell--wrote about the fallen woman; but were able to arouse sympathy for her only by portraying her as almost asexual.⁹ Otherwise, the Victorian audience would think that she was a prostitute by nature; and that all the blame should go to her. In order to avoid this, these novelists did not mention the physical attributes of their fallen women. Little Em'ly, Lady Dedlock and Ruth do not display much of sexuality.

By contrast, Hardy suggests contradictory, enigmatic sexual feelings and responses in portraying Tess. Unlike other betrayed women, Tess says that she never loved her seducer: "I have never really and truly loved you, and I think I never can" (107). Nevertheless, she did have an affair with him and stayed with him for "some few weeks" (104) as a mistress. One may say this unusual relationship between Tess and Alec started with a rape (her near-rape takes place off stage, and Hardy does not tell us if it is a case of seduction or rape). But whether it began as a rape or a seduction, she did stay with Alec for a couple of weeks after the incident in the Chase. When she decides to

⁹ On the fallen woman and her lack of sexuality, see Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1978), 29; Nina Auerbach, "The Rise of the Fallen Woman", *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 35 (1980--81): 49.

leave him, Tess says:

If I had gone for love o' you, if I had ever sincerely loved you, if I loved you still, I should not so loathe and hate myself for my weakness as I do now! . . . My eyes were dazed by you for a little . . . (105)

Although she is not outspoken, what she says is fairly clear: Tess did not love Alec but in spite of herself she was sexually attracted to him; because of this enigmatic feeling, now she hates herself. As Kristin Brady perceptively remarks, Hardy attempts to convey to his Victorian reader women's mysterious duality: the "bewildering combination" of sexual fascination and hatred.¹⁰

Significantly, Hardy depicts Tess's transformation. After being deflowered, she recovers sufficiently to work on the farm and falls in love with Angel Clare. This, again, marks a sharp contrast to a traditional fallen woman. Normally, the betrayed woman keeps loving her seducer (or even if she stops loving him, she will not love another person). This is essential to arouse sympathy for her. If she loved another, the reader would think that she is morally at fault: a woman was believed to love only one person in her life. (Henry Knight in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* regards Elfride Swancourt as "impure" on the grounds that she has loved more than one person.)

Clearly Hardy does not agree with this. In the harp-playing scene he depicts the process by which Tess, now recovered, shows herself to be sexually attracted to Angel:

¹⁰ Kristin Brady, "Tess and Alec: Rape or Seduction?", *Thomas Hardy Annual* 4, ed. Norman Page (London: Macmillan, 1986), 130.

"Tess was conscious of neither time nor space. The exaltation which she had described as being producible at will by gazing at a star, came now without any determination of hers" (150--51). Unconscious of herself, she moves gradually closer to Angel and shows her sexual fascination and exaltation with "her cheeks on fire" (151).

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Hardy gives sexual attributes--erotic, enigmatic aspects--to the heroine and creates a new type of fallen woman. In doing so, he insists that female sexuality and essential purity are not mutually exclusive. How the reader reacted to this "fallen woman", who shows contradictory sexual feelings and responses, is easily imagined. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* was read by thousands of Angel Clares or Henry Knights, who were enslaved by Victorian fixed ideas of what a woman should be.

5. 2. *Jude the Obscure*

Jude the Obscure is an ambitious novel: Hardy raises questions about such things as elite educational institutions, social classes, prevailing morality and the conventions of marriage. He does this, presenting the process by which Jude Fawley and Sue Bridehead fail to fulfil their hopes. The first part of the novel is concerned with Jude's life: his inner conflict between sexual impulses and aspiration for a university education, his subsequent failure to study at university and unhappy marriage to his first wife. The second half of the novel focuses on Jude's and Sue's struggle to have a morally

honest union outside of marriage and on their ultimate defeat.

In order to dramatise these subjects, Hardy makes good use of sensation devices. As we shall see, it is by means of a sensation plot-motif that he explicitly expresses the unnaturalness of marriage contracts which bound together ill-matched couples and questions the value of marriage. It is through striking episodes that he presents Jude's inner conflict between sexual passion and aspiration for study and suggests the unfairness and cruelty of moral conventions, which crush the lives of Sue and Jude.

In *Jude the Obscure* Hardy employs the sensation plot-motif of "the woman who elopes with her lover". As we have seen in the discussion of sensation novels, Mrs. Wood employs this motif in order to show the significance of established moral codes and marriage. Hardy, however, uses this motif in order to make an attack on the institution of marriage.

Hardy's arguments concerning marriage are twofold. The first one is, as he remarks in the preface to this novel, "a marriage should be dissolvable as soon as it becomes a cruelty to either of the parties--being then essentially and morally no marriage".¹¹ This is dramatised through the marriages of two ill-assorted couples. Jude meets, desires, and marries the sensual Arabella Donn, who traps him into marriage by making him think that he has got her pregnant. He realises his mistake in marrying her only too late. He sees that

¹¹ Thomas Hardy, the "postscript of 1912" to the preface of *Jude the Obscure* (1895, rpt. London: Macmillan, 1975), 29.

Their lives were ruined . . . by the fundamental error of their matrimonial union: that of having based a permanent contract on a temporary feeling which had no necessary connection with affinities that alone render a life-long comradeship tolerable.¹²

Jude's cousin, Sue, makes a similar mistake: she marries impulsively and recklessly the middle-aged schoolmaster Phillotson, whom she does not love at all. Sue begins to consider her marriage as "adultery" (239) since she has sexual contact with a man she does not love. She decides to leave her husband and goes to Jude.

Hardy was always interested in what would happen when a marriage broke down. Bathsheba, Thomasin, Eustacia and Clym all experience marital unhappiness and estrangement. But in each case the unsuitable partner dies and the other is released, often marries again. (Eustacia is an exception: she dies in the end and Clym is set free.) In *Jude the Obscure*, however, Hardy rejects this kind of an easy way out. Both Jude and Sue face the reality of perpetual marital incompatibility (they are released once but go back to their previous spouses in the end). Through the portrayal of two ill-matched couples, Hardy places an emphasis on the unnaturalness of marriage contracts which bound together Arabella and Jude, or Sue and Phillotson; Hardy insists that such ill-conceived marriages should be dissolvable.

As Merryn Williams points out, Hardy moves on to the second argument after Jude's and Sue's divorces.¹³ Now

¹² Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 93. Further quotations from the novel are incorporated within parentheses in the text.

¹³ Merryn Williams, "Hardy and 'the Woman Question'", *Thomas Hardy Annual 1*, ed. Norman Page (London: Macmillan, 1982), 50.

that Jude and Sue are set free, they are able to marry each other. Sue, however, starts a new argument: she does not want to marry Jude, for marriage is "an iron contract" (273), which extinguishes his tenderness for her, and hers for his. She also insists that marriage is a "vulgar" institution, "a sort of trap to catch a man" (285). Hardy confirms her views by presenting Arabella. The latter uses various tricks--false hair, artificial dimples, hiding an egg between breasts, fake pregnancy--in order to deceive Jude into marriage.

Hardy's attack on the institution of marriage upset many reviewers and readers. What they found even more shocking was, however, his direct exploration of sexual problems in life. For instance, R. Y. Tyrrell criticised the novel, for it "is steeped in sex".¹⁴ Mrs. Oliphant stated that nothing could be "coarsely indecent as the whole his history of Jude in his relations with his wife Arabella"; that the novel is full of "grossness, indecency, and horror".¹⁵

In *Jude the Obscure* Hardy deliberately treats sexual matters with frankness, for he, as noted earlier, believes that life is "a physiological fact".¹⁶ In order to present life as it is (instead of as it should be), he explores sexual elements in his fiction. He did this, although he knew that it would shock Victorian audiences. Indeed, what characterises *Jude the Obscure* is Hardy's moral honesty and

¹⁴ R. Y. Tyrrell, a review on *Jude the Obscure*, reprinted in *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, 293.

¹⁵ Oliphant, "The Anti-Marriage League", *Blackwood's Magazine* 159 (1896), 138.

¹⁶ Thomas Hardy, "Candour in English Fiction", 127.

courage to examine sexual matters.

In this novel Hardy focuses on "a deadly war waged between flesh and spirit".¹⁷ Jude's "deadly war" starts in the striking episode where Arabella throws a piece of pig's flesh in order to attract his attention. In the scene Jude is walking home from work, mentally adding up his accomplishments of the past few years, and dreaming of going to Christminster: "Christminster shall be my Alma Mater; and I'll be her beloved son, in whom she shall be well pleased" (61). Then

something smacked him sharply in the ear, and he became aware that a soft cold substance had been flung at him, and had fallen at his feet.

A glance told him what it was--a piece of flesh, the characteristic part of a barrow-pig, which the countrymen used for greasing their boots, as it was useless for any other purpose.
(61--62)

Here Hardy first focuses on Jude thinking of Christminster and suddenly shifts his focus to the pig's offal. He does this deliberately in order to bring a strong sense of symbolic contrast between "spirit" (Jude's aspiration for a university education) and "flesh".

Next moment, Hardy again shifts his focus to Arabella:

She whom he addressed was 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 . . . (62)

Hardy first shows us Arabella from a distance and makes it

¹⁷ See the preface to *Jude the Obscure*, 27.

clear that she is, though not unusually beautiful, attractive. This done, he emphasises her erotic quality, moving his focus to her "round and prominent bosom" and her "full lips".

As many critics have pointed out, this episode is striking and hardly conventional: Arabella throws pig's pizzle, which is immediately associated with sexuality, at Jude. In doing so, she deliberately attracts his attention, and even more important, she makes him aware of his sexual desires, which will conflict with the aspirations for study.

One distinct feature of this episode is the lightness of tone. We hear three girls making fun of him: "Ha, ha, ha! Hoity-toity!" (61). We also see them laughing at him: "'Pooh! I don't care for him!' And they laughed and continued their work, without looking up" (62). While we sympathise with Jude, we simultaneously sense mockery in his being smacked with pig's genitals in the midst of his Christminster dream. We also smile at one of the girls' comments on Jude: "he's as simple as a child. I could see it as you courted on the bridge, when he looked at 'ee as if he had never seen a woman before in his born days" (66).

Irony is manifest in this episode. It comes from two different lights in which Hardy sees Jude. He presents a "noble" Jude and a "weak" Jude. On one hand, Hardy shows his nobleness: he works hard, helps his aunt, and teaches himself. On the other hand, Hardy reveals his weakness: he is easily seduced by Arabella, who is not worthy of him.

By means of this episode Hardy illustrates Jude's duality.

Jude's further conflict between "flesh" and "spirit" is dramatised by his relationships with two completely different types of women, Arabella and Sue. While the former is the symbol of flesh, the latter symbolically stands for "spirit".¹⁸ Jude regards Sue as "a phantasmal, bodiless creature" (274), and tells of her: "you spirit, you disembodied creature . . . tantalizing phantom--hardly flesh at all; so that when I put my arms round you I almost expect them to pass through you as through air" (259).

Interestingly, it is not the voluptuous Arabella but this phantasmal Sue who is surprisingly frank about her sexual life and points out sexual problems. Before marriage, Sue confesses to Jude that she once lived with a Christminster undergraduate without sexual contact: "We shared a sitting-room for fifteen months" (168); "But I have never yielded myself to any lover, if that's what you mean! I have remained as I began" (168). After marriage, she also talks with frankness about her physical relationship with her husband: "What tortures me so much is the necessity of being responsive to this man whenever he wishes" (230).

Significantly, Sue's confession about her sexual life with Phillotson is immediately linked with the problem of sexual incompatibility. She confides in Jude that she does not mind living with Phillotson as a friend; but has a strong repugnance against him as a husband: "it is a

¹⁸ Robert B. Heilman points out that Sue's "original role . . . is that of counterpoint to Arabella: spirit against flesh, or Houyhnhnm against Yahoo". See Heilman, "Hardy's Sue Bridehead", *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 20 (1965--66), 307.

torture to me to--live with him as a husband" (229). Later she refuses to share the bedroom with him; stays overnight in a closet. In this way Hardy dramatises the problem of sexual incompatibility, which society refused to acknowledge.

Through the portrayal of her married life, Hardy also implies that Victorian marriage involves a master-and-slave relationship. When the husband enters the bedroom, his wife is expected to show sexual readiness. If, however, she shows hesitancy about sex, she is morally wrong. In *Jude the Obscure*, Arabella tells Phillotson that he should not have let Sue go; that he should have kept her "chained on" until "her spirit for kicking" (328) would be broken. He is not a tyrannical husband and does not resort to such cruel punishment. He, however, thinks that Sue is selfish to resist him and neglects a wife's duty. He accuses her: "you are committing a sin in not liking me" (239). Sue's jumping out of the window is a sign not only of her aversion to her husband but also of her unwillingness to accept the marriage contract and prevailing ideas about the relationship between man and wife: if she accepted them, Sue, like a slave, would have to lose her rights over her own body.

Hardy's debate on the value of marriage and female sexuality is, however, complicated within the novel by his presentation of Sue's neurotic tendencies. From the beginning to the end she is never willing to have sexual relations with men: she lives with an undergraduate in London without such contact; she shows physical aversion to

her husband and flees from him; and it is not until Arabella reappears that she allows Jude to sleep with her. What she seeks is to spiritually commune with men without a sexual consummation: she regards sexuality as "gross". Her concept of sexuality clearly reveals that she is unable to be liberated from prevailing morality. Sue's inner self is split into two: an unconventional "New Woman" versus an orthodox Victorian woman. This contradiction provides an explanation for her later retreat into orthodox beliefs.

After Little Father Time's suicide and homicide, Sue breaks down and returns to her husband. She physically submits herself to him:

Placing the candlestick on the chest of drawers he led her through the doorway, and lifting her bodily, kissed her. A quick look of aversion passed over her face, but clenching her teeth she uttered no cry. (403)

This is a bitter and ironic version of melodrama. In melodrama the erring wife goes back to her husband repenting her sin, and dies peacefully in the arms of her forgiving husband.¹⁹ In Hardy's novel Sue also returns to her forgiving husband; but she is held in his arms only to suffer greatly. Her physical submission to Phillotson brings nothing but "the death of her deepest self".²⁰ Here Hardy states bitterly this as the result of what moral conventions have approved.

Throughout the novel Hardy attacks the hypocrisy and

¹⁹ See Booth, 154--55. Here he says that there was a melodramatic pattern in which the fallen wife returns to her forgiving husband and dies in his arms.

²⁰ Mary Jacobus, "Sue the Obscure", *Essays in Criticism* 25 (1975), 322.

cruelty of prevailing morality. Moral conventions can accommodate Arabella who traps a man into marriage and manages to look respectable. But they have no place for Sue and Jude, who are trying to pursue a morally honest union outside of marriage. Their loss of place is expressed in symbol by means of the episode where they are turned from lodging-houses in Christminster: "we haven't any to let" (339); "I can't let you have the room" (340). Society utterly refuses to accommodate Jude and Sue.

In 1895 *Jude the Obscure* caused a tremendous sensation. As we have seen, the novel made a polemical attack on conventional morality and the institution of marriage. Moreover, Hardy's novel opened the door to the bedroom and showed the inside, which had been taboo for many decades.

CONCLUSION

We have attempted to demonstrate Hardy's progress as a novelist, and the sensation elements which contributed to this development. As we have seen, once he knew how to use these elements appropriately in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, he improved his techniques and demonstrated that they could enhance his novels. An examination of *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *The Return of the Native* has shown Hardy's tremendous advance: by the time he wrote these novels, he was able to transform these elements into extremely useful devices influencing the development of plot, theme and character. These two novels have also revealed that his growing awareness of marital problems, a theme which was expounded upon with more intensity at the later stage of his career. In the discussion of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, we have seen that Hardy skilfully made use of sensation elements in order to explore marital and sexual themes. In doing so, he also pointed out social injustices.

It is well-known that Hardy had been dissatisfied with society and interested in social reform since he was young. In his first novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*, he boldly attacked upper class, "the vulgarity of the middle class, modern Christianity . . . and political and domestic morals".¹ This rejected story was, said he, written

¹ F. E. Hardy, 61.

"with a passion for reforming the world".² As noted earlier, he gave up the idea of attacking society at this stage. Hardy, however, finally fulfilled his aim in his later fiction: he made an undisguised assault on moral and sexual double standards in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*; he also made a polemical attack on the vulgarity of prevailing morality and the institution of marriage in *Jude the Obscure*. After publishing these novels, he might well have a sense of fulfillment.

In October 1896, however, Hardy suddenly terminated novel-writing and decided to devote himself to poetry. His decision has often been attributed to the result of the critical reception of *Jude the Obscure*. The *Athenaeum* simply dismissed the novel as a "bad book";³ Jeannette Gilder, a critic for the *New York World*, bitterly stated: "Aside from its immorality there is coarseness which is beyond belief";⁴ the Bishop of Wakefield, who was provoked by Hardy's novel, threw the book in a fire;⁵ Hardy's wife strongly objected to the novel;⁶ and even his close friend, Edmund Gosse, told him in public that *Jude the Obscure* was "the most indecent novel ever written".⁷

Undoubtedly, Hardy was deeply hurt by the critical

² F. E. Hardy, 61.

³ [B. Williams], *Athenaeum* (23 November 1895), reprinted in *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, 249.

⁴ F. E. Hardy, 279.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 277.

⁶ There are some legends and rumours about Hardy and his first wife during and after the publication of *Jude the Obscure*. One of them is that Emma visited Dr. Richard Garnett of the British Museum and asked him to suppress her husband's novel. See Robert Gittings, *The Older Hardy* (London: Heinemann, 1978), 81.

⁷ Thomas Hardy's letter to Gosse (14 July 1909), quoted in Gitting 80.

reception of this novel. It is, however, doubtful that he gave up novel-writing simply because he was denounced severely. Among many opinions, Terry Eagleton's explanation is persuasive:

With *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy had brought his long exploration of the human condition of his society to a point of mature complexity . . . after that point, there was nowhere else for him to go.⁸

We have seen that Hardy in these novels struggled to present the "honest portrayal of life", discarding a happy ending with "a false colouring".⁹ In order to do this, he was determined to treat taboo subjects with frankness, although he was aware that it would incur the wrath of Victorian audiences. Hardy presented the process by which central characters suffered from marital and sexual problems and their lives were thwarted and crushed by social systems, injustices and conventions. After this achievement, "there was", to borrow Eagleton's words, "nowhere else for him to go".

It is interesting to recall that it was in order to prevent Hardy from raising social issues that George Meredith told him to write a novel with "a complicated 'plot'".¹⁰ As noted in Chapter 2, Hardy followed Meredith, and wrote the sensational *Desperate Remedies*. Hardy, however, came to point out bitterly unfair features of

⁸ Terry Eagleton, "Introduction" to *Jude the Obscure* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 13.

⁹ Thomas Hardy, "Candour in English Fiction", 127.

¹⁰ F. E. Hardy, 62.

society in his later fiction. It is ironical, yet interesting, that it was the very sensation devices that enabled him to challenge moral and literary conventions, and to jolt Victorian readers into an awareness of social injustices at the final stage of his career.

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