

Marriage, Vocation and the Individual A Feminist Approach to Thomas Hardy's The Return of the Native.

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الملخص

الزواج، الواجبات، والفرد دراسة من المنظور النسوي في رواية توماس هاردي

" The Return of the Native " " عودة المواطن "

تجسد كثير من الشخصيات النسائية في روايات " توماس هاردي " نموذج المرأة في العصر الفكتوري: المرأة المطيعة التقليدية من ناحية، والمرأة المتحررة من ناحية أخرى. لم يوضح "توماس هاردي" في رواياته كيف يجب أن تكون المرأة، ولكنه أشار إلى الضغوط التي تتعرض لها من قبل المجتمع الإنجليزي؛ لتطبع نفسها مع صورة للمرأة التقليدية. حيث يركز هذا البحث على كشف فكري الزواج وواجب المرأة في رواية "توماس هاردي" "عودة المواطن" ؛ لمعرفة كيف تعامل مع فكرة العلاقة بين الرجل والمرأة كمفكر ومدافع عن نظرية المساواة بين الجنسين، وهو موضوع مهم يتطلب مزيداً من البحث.

ABSTRACT

Many female characters in Thomas Hardy's novels distinctly demonstrate the Victorian stereotypes of women: the conventional, obedient housewife or the defiant, liberated dreamer. Hardy does not illustrate how women should be, but rather how society forces women to adapt to the accepted perception.

The objective of this paper is to expose the themes of marriage and vocation in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*. In fact, Hardy's overall treatment of men-women relationship within a general feminist or rather thinker's perspective is a topic demanding much closer attention than it has received.

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Introduction:

It is a common place of literary criticism that Thomas Hardy's novels emphasize the operation of social causes on individual destinies and vice versa. Hardy's ideas "arise out of a desire to better the conditions if the way can be found". (Slack, 1995:47). This shows a great sympathy with any movement that advocates equal rights; but he suggests that women might never be able to achieve equality because of the wrong, unalterable laws of nature "Against the will of a community", writes Ruth Danon, "an integrated life is virtually impossible to sustain." (Danon, 1985:133).

The reality prevails that Hardy is not firmly decorous in his treatment of matters relating to sex and human desire. In his latest novels, he became blatantly more critical of the English community and its conventions. In fact, Hardy's assault on conventional marriage as a proper custom that burdened women, and of the divorce laws which discriminated against women established his understanding that women are human beings capable and of self-fulfilment. Anne Mickelson identifies Hardy as something of a feminist because of his sympathetic awareness of the different adversities suffered by women historically. (Mickelson, 1967:78).

At this point, however, it is important to remember that his realistic understanding of the actual conditions of women's life in society goes hand in hand with a highly moralistic interpretation of life which colours his perception. Thus, the fruit of his ardent nature, early training and his serious reading which "reflected the climate of advanced opinion of his own time." (Slack, 1959:41-2).

The themes of marriage and vocation relate directly to two categories: individual destinies and the public sphere. While both marriage and the choice of vocation appear to relate only to the private world of the individual destinies, in reality both serve as a kind of bridge between individual hopes and expectations and the larger concerns of social and moral life. For Thomas Hardy the proper choice and pursuit of vocation are indeed a major, if not the most crucial criterion of an individual's social and moral worth. Nor is marriage less important in placing the individual within the larger framework of communal relationships. The success, or conversely, the failure in finding a meaningful vocation or in establishing a happy marriage relation, not only has implications in terms of individual happiness or unhappiness and fulfilment but also relates to the well being or otherwise of the community at large. In the case of women, however, the issues of vocation and marriage are given a new angle by the fact that the only vocation then open to women was marriage.

Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* demonstrates a discontented passionate woman searching for fulfillment in the dreary surroundings of Egdon Heath, where the inhabitants are steeped in the older traditional ways of life. Eustacia Vye is the dominant female character of the novel and the one considered to be the restless and passionate dreamer who dismisses the opinions of society. She is mysterious by nature and seems to have some interaction with virtually every other character in the novel. She has "Pagan eyes, full of nocturnal mysteries.....Assuming that the souls of men and women are visible essences, you could fancy the colour of Eustacia's soul to be flame-like."(p.54).

Only men had access to the sphere of public affairs where the question of vocation can rise. Women could gain access to the world of social activity only through the medium of marriage. Richard D. Altick observes, "She was to cultivate fragility, leaning always on the arm of the gentleman who walked with her in a country lane or escorted her into dinner" (Altick, 1974: 53). This is the motive which attracts Eustacia to get married with a man who seems to be equipped to help her to gain access to that world whether of yearning, freedom or wealth.

Under such conditions of marital servitude, it is but natural, as J.S. Mill has commented that society should make marriage compulsory for women by closing all other avenues for suitable employment. This is necessary, Mill adds, not so much because women are averse to marriage as such, but "lest women of spirit and capacity should prefer doing almost anything else, not in their own eyes degrading, rather than marry, when marriage is giving themselves a master, and a master too of all their worldly possessions." (Altick, 1974:53). The only professions then thought suitable for women, that of governess or school teacher, as they were within domestic ambit, had such connotations of servitude and exploitation as would make them the last resort of impoverished gentlewomen, rather than an honourable way to freedom and self fulfilment. In the case of Thomas Hardy's heroines, even marriage seems preferable to this. In *Jude The Obscure*, the seventy young women at Melchester Training School are modern young ladies training to go out into a man's domain, but they are still deeply unprotected :

They formed a pretty, suggestive, pathetic sight, at whose pathos and beauty they were themselves unconscious, and would not discover till, amid the storms and strains of afteryears with their injustice, loneliness, child bearing, and bereavement, their minds would revert to this experience as

to something which had been allowed to slip past them insufficiently regarded. (Hardy,1995:126).

It is, thus, natural that Thomas Hardy should attempt to reconcile his perceptions of women's actual position in society, his own conception of a superior social and moral existence, and the natural aspirations of women, by seeking a redefinition of the concept "women's duty" (Wolstonecraft, :57) that the feminists were doing. He sought to "represent reasoned revolt against established Anglicanism" (Madox, 1937:120). and to add the higher ideal of service to society or some higher ideal as religion, art or intellectual achievement .

The spirit of self sacrifice and long suffering passivity which went with the traditional concept of "woman's duty" is certainly not native to Thomas Hardy's spirited heroines. If they do eventually have to submit to women's lot it is in more active spirit of a deliberately 'chosen' renunciation, achieved through struggle and effort.

It is against this background that the so called "Queen of Night" (Hardy,1995:55). in *The Return of the Native* can be set. The common element here is the high spirited woman rebelling against the constrictions of her prescribed 'woman's lot' and seeking a life of wider personal freedom than customarily granted to women.

As a task of his egalitarian attitude, Hardy demonstrates no complete woman in his novels; like men, women fall short of perfection. D.H.Lawrence appreciated Hardy's redefinition of sexual conduct, and his enthusiasm over the egalitarian issue. For Lawrence's celebration of sexuality and personal affairs was a continuation of the earlier attempts of Hardy. He criticized Hardy for siding with society in the battle between the individual and society, although Lawrence felt Hardy's secret agreement was always with the individual against society. Lawrence observes, "Eustacia, Tess, or Sue were not at war with God, only with society. Yet, they were all cowed by the mere judgement of man upon them, and all the while by their own souls they were right....which the weakness of modern tragedy, where transgression against the social code is made to bring destruction, as though the social code worked our irrevocable fate." (Lawrence, 1936: 240).

In fact, a thorough reading of Hardy's fiction will expose an underlying current of tenderness and affinity for human beings especially for women, in their attempts and battle against natural and social laws. *The Return of the Native* is perhaps the strongest example of Hardy's demonstration of the struggle of women to establish their identities. Eustacia Vye rebels against the traditional view of women and revels in romantic dreams of Paris and

passion. Throughout the novel she continues searching for her identity. When she realizes she cannot escape her disastrous marriage or experience the excitement available in Paris, she suddenly dies, illustrating the futility of becoming someone other than one's true self. But being too responsive to conventional conception and discretion, Hardy was made to pay a little attention to customs and taste, or to conceal his true emotion. Hardy evidently deplored the pressures enforced upon him by imperative censorship and magazine editors. He observes:

Life being a physiological fact, its honest portrayal must be largely concerned with, for one thing, the relations of the sexes, and the 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. To this expansion English society opposes a well-nigh insuperable bar. (The Science of Fiction, 1967:127).

Therefore, Thomas Hardy's, convictions on the nature and function of women, can be compared to those of the advocates of woman's rights like Mary Wollstone and J.S. Mill. Their views are unanimous in seeing that women's degraded position in society is responsible for a degeneration in women's character and moral nature. Further, J. S. Mill is unequivocal in pointing out that the inequality and injustice in man-woman relations not only distorts woman's nature but also debases man's. (Mill, 1912:245).

In his treatise *The Subjection of Women*, Mill has thoroughly analysed the evil psychological consequences of women's subordinate position in society in general and the marriage institution in particular, both as regards men and women. This is necessary as women's aspirations begin to move outside the narrow confines of the domestic environment, and this has to be accommodated within a larger perspective. Women's aspirations have to be set in relation to emancipation, self-determination or simply moral cognisance.

In his novels, Hardy develops several love-affairs and matrimonial troubles to display his recognition of the hardships the patriarchal structure imposed upon women. He represents Sue's unwillingness to marry Stem as much from her fear of powerlessness as it does from her fear of sex. He depicts firmly unconventional women like Bathsheba Everdane, who rejects to become a man's estate as a wife, a defenceless passionate Eustacia who was bound to a limited and confining heath. Similarly, Hardy

caustically introduces male sadism in characters like Alec, and Angel Clare. Likewise, Henchard's treatment of his wife and daughter as a saleable commodity is harshly condemned.

George Eliot and Thomas Hardy brought moral fervor, goodness, innocence and sexuality together in a single female character which was not only a departure from the approved and prevalent morality, but even subversion of the current codes and beliefs. Leslie Stephen for instance finds *Middlemarch* a "painful" and not a "charming" book at all, and this too for the queerest of reasons: "the light of common day has most, unmistakably superseded the indescribable glow which illuminated the earlier writing." (Stephen, 1965:146). As his comment makes clear, what Stephen finds painful is the candid analysis of Dorothea's two marriages and particularly her stance as regards them namely, that women expect satisfaction and fulfilment in marriage. Indeed, what is found painful and disturbing about her later novels is not only that she intrudes into areas tacitly considered to be out of bounds for women writers, such as politics and religion, but also that she takes up issues not, may be, very soothing to male egos, particularly of the Stephen's stamp, but of profound interests of feminists: in Stephensian phraseology "the aspirations of young ladies, who wish to learn Latin and Greek when they ought to be nursing babies and supporting hospitals" (Stephen, 1965:147).

Hardy demonstrates a collection of attractive women characters whom he provided with freedom, fortitude, perception, natural beauty and fascination. Irving Howe, observes, "Thomas Hardy was endowed with a precious gift: he liked women". (Howe, 1985:108). Many critics concluded that Hardy enjoyed the company of women, and showed no reservation about their powers: moral, intellectual, sexual and emotional. Howe adds that Hardy "liked the changefulness, sometimes even the caprice, of feminine personality, he marvelled at the seemingly innate capacity of young girls to glide into easy adaptations and tactical charms." (Howe, 1985:108).

The Return of the Native is in various ways distinct from Hardy's other novels, yet it is in continuation with his contemplation norm which concludes in *Jude the Obscure*. Eustacia appears to be representative of all Hardy's tragic heroines in finding it impossible to reconcile the external world, physically and socially, with her need for self-fulfilment and prosperity, and in consuming her existence in this conflict. Hardy introduces her as a girl whose sense of herself is threatened by the various men around her as well as a hostile atmosphere which she cannot approve nor escape from. Standing for a world that is unfriendly to women,

especially those who are desirous, ardent, confident, the heath prevents any possibility of self-assertion and freedom.

As a location where “paganism” and incantation prosper and church going is a scarcity, Egdon heath forms a type of ethical confusion where the principles of value and conduct adhered to by the main characters have to be brought from somewhere else. In the ensuing conflict with the realities of the Egdon environment, it is all too often the unfamiliar values which are renounced .

Eustacia raises ethical questions, to herself or to others, only to contravene almost instantly the principles of what she perceives to be practical, lenient, and moral. Her relationship with the heath is very complex one. The heath creates the conditions of its possibility. Eustacia’s frustration is exacerbated by her isolation: She yearns to escape from Egdon, feels herself to be its prisoner. Eustacia is far too advanced to fit in with conventional life on the heath; and on a larger scale, the heath as a dull, empty stretch of land, frustrates her. Serving as the keen eye of social propriety, Diggor Venn denies Eustacia any privacy as he keeps haunting her. He deprives her of any inner or outer space . Given another alternative, she challenges the heathmen, and the heath itself by sharing its isolation, darkness and indifferences with others. The identification between Eustacia and the heath becomes complete in her last moments, the chaos of her mind and the raging weather is identical. In this setting, she surveys the dimensions of her dilemma: to stay at the heath at this point would mean unbearable misery, but in order to escape, she would have to borrow money. The moral choice is the crux of the situation:

Could it be that she was to remain a captive ? Money: she had never felt its value before . Even to efface herself from the country means were required . To ask Wildeve for pecuniary and without allowing him to accompany her was impossible to a woman with a shadow of pride left in her: to fly as his mistress – and she knew that he loved her – was of the nature of humiliation. (The Return of the Native,1995:293).

In this plight of hopelessness, she is granted, actual to her character, a decisive revolution. Thus, the heath is established as an environment larger, older and stronger than its inhabitants. Hardy is constantly concerned to present mankind against a background of vast impersonal forces, and Egdon is a superb opportunity. This picture of Hardy’s attention

is adequate, as it stresses the relationship of the individual to one another and their relationship to their physical and natural environment.

Having been offered goddess-like features, Eustacia never deceives her creator. Her personality combines the features of Sappho with those of Mrs Siddons and is associated with among others, "Artemis, Athena, or Hera" are mingled with the stock paraphernalia of mid-nineteenth century romanticism "Her presence brought memories of such things as Bourbon roses, rubies, and tropical midnights; her moods recalled lotus-eaters and the march in 'Athalie; her motions, the ebb and flow of the sea; her voice, the Viola.'"(The Return of the Native:56). Other aspects are included: her dark beauty, an ancestry stemming both from the English aristocracy, her "smouldering rebelliousness" and desire to be "loved to madness" (The Return of the Native:58).

In her ambition, magnetism, dignity, eagerness, and indifference to others, Eustacia is like Cleopatra who might have survived had she been less ambitious. Eustacia strives for the aim she plans to achieve; to support and present other women's existence. She naturally dislikes Wildev's romantic image of her "At moments her pride rebelled against her passion for him, and she even had longed to be free. But there was only one circumstance which could dislodge him, and that was the advent of a greater man."(The Return of the Native:59) But Eustacia who eventually captures the reader's understanding becomes a sacred, frustrated and profoundly distressed woman. Michael Millgate observes "Clym's angry self-absorption; the denial of her femininity and of her social ambitions; her own appalled sense of being trapped in a hostile environment, with no alternative courses, action, no prospect of future amelioration". (Millgate,1971:134).

Thus, Hardy insists that Eustacia must be demolished but not beaten by alien elements to which she never surrenders. She insists to live as an individual at whatever cost. "The rebellious sadness that was rather too apparent when she sat indoors without a bonnet was cloaked and softened by her outdoor attire, which always had a sort of nebulousness about it, devoid of harsh edges anywhere; so that her face looked from its environment as from a cloud, with no noticeable lines of demarcation between flesh and clothes" (The Return of the Native:214).

Hardy tries to introduce his heroine troubled and handicapped, by limited life, and a patriarchly established fact. Eustacia is not allowed to cross the boundaries of the heath. Yet, harsh atmosphere, prevented ambitions and consumed life, are conventional to Eustacia. Egdon heath presents the circumstances to Eustacia's disapproval and confrontations "The place became full of a watchful intentness now; for when other things sank

brooding to sleep, the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen” (The Return of the Native:5). The heath wakes, listens, seems to be waiting for something. Egdon had a powerful influence on Eustacia’s character moving her to love and to hate, to despair and to the philosophic mind. Coming from an urban environment, she discovers Egdon a restricted and restricting location and thus hideous to her. “She hated the change;she felt like one banished; but here she was forced to abide.” (The Return of the Native:57).

In her strive to achieve her desires, she destroys the confining ideas enforced upon her. The stages of Eustacia’s increasing desperation can almost be charted by the degree and nature of her involvement in such environment. She did not understand her surroundings, and so did not revel in them, but instead she fought against them, attempting to flee toward a more adventurous and exciting life. Her participation in the mumming play of St George seems to have a particular significance. John Paterson has suggested that the play enacts in miniature that “defeat of the pagan and the triumph of the christian” (Millgate,1971:153) which he observes as the central to the novel as a whole. Her participation in this play within –a novel is in one hand a complaint against the rejection of liberty to women and on the other an affirmation that it is only a powerful determination and longing which can disdain traditional demeanour and deportment. Her departure represents the reality that death is better than being “a trapped bird”.

In fact, Eustacia estimates her love instinct and aspiration more than the traditional system of principles. She is not born with powerful sexual passions, but she is driven into this condition by the belief that has restricted her to entirely emotional and lustful sources of fulfilment. In Eustacia’s mind, the search for another passionate love must continue in order for her to seek the “the blaze of love” she desires so intently(The Return of the Native:58) Eustacia not only holds a romanticized view of love, but also entertains an idealistic view of the world outside Egdon Heath. Because she feels so trapped and isolated on the heath, she believes the worlds of Budmouth, Paris, and even America hold the promise of excitement and perfection. Showalter’s comment in this connection is appropriate, “denied participation in public life ; women were forced to cultivate their feelings and to overvalue romance”. (Showalter, 1977:79). Thus, Eustacia is not permitted to wallow in any extramarital sexual activity. She appears to be, “as innocent as the sweetest babe in heaven!”(The Return of the Native:272).

Hardy is eager to disclose that Eustacia is the fire of passion, "To be loved to madness such was her great desire. Love was to her the one cordial which could drive away the eating loneliness of her days"(The Return of the Native:58) Sensual pleasure or self-indulgence is not considered as Eustacia's main goal. In fact, she fights for her existence, liberty and a convenient career . She struggles to obstruct others from framing her fate. Her nature proves that, she is stronger than Wildeve, for she captivates and declines him in accordance with her tendency. She even threatens to pull out the legacy of passion she has presented upon him, "I had given you up, and resolved not to think of you any more".(The Return of the Native:52)Thus, the belief that women are the "weaker sex" is eroded by Eustacia in her relationship with Wildeve for whom she has no genuine affection, but puts up with his defects, "I determined you should come, and; you have come ! I have shown my power . A mile and half hither, and a mile and back again to your home—three miles in the dark for me . Have I not shown my power?" The Return of the Native:54). Eustacia aspires to observe the life as men observe it . She will confront it, resist,and decline Egdon heath's delimitation of woman conventionality .

Examining her character as it exists in his own intellect, Hardy comes to the opinion that she is a matchless person , and one whose character comes to insights so greater than those assessable by "casual glances" that she calls for more premeditated conduct than usual. Hardy knows, as Henry Charles Duffins observes, that "the story hangs upon her personality, as a lunar landscape upon the light of the enchantress moon." (Duffin, 1991:87). Eustacia appears to be a motionless figure on vast and gloomy Egdon. Celestial imperiousness, desire, rage, and enthusiasm had established to be somewhat thrown away on Egdon heath. Her strength was restricted, and the awareness of this restriction had distorted her progress "Egdon was her Hades, and since coming there she had imbibed much of what was dark in its tone, though inwardly and eternally unreconciled there too. Her appearance accorded well with its smouldering rebelliousness, and the shady splendour of her beauty was the real surface of the sad and stifled warmth within her."(The Return of the Native:56). Eustacia is encircled by the Egdon population. With the exception of the boy Charley, she has no companions on the heath, as she is looked upon as a distracting force that confronts the firmness of existence on the heath. Miller observes that Hardy "attempted to make her like the "colossal" heath itself a source of the aesthetic experience of sublimity for the reader." (Miller,1981:130). Her union with Clym which ought to be closer to the heath-community, further leads to an alienation as they live away from the others. When Clym advises

her that she should hate not people but what made them, "There is no use in hating people-if you hate anything,you should hate what produced them". Eustacia replies "Do you mean Nature? I hate her already".(The Return of the Native:156). Thus, the more her community declines her, the more she becomes determined in refusing and confronting it. Consequently her hopes, revolt, and agony are intensified. Therefore, the hostility, and conflicts imposed by misconception and loneliness, mark and rule her life from the beginning till her tragic death .

Eustacia desires to destroy the confining codes, inflicted upon her to disclose the life she is destituted of . Such episodes as the mumming play and the wild dance at East Egdon suggest "A dissatisfaction so thorough going amounts to a denial of life itself." (Deen, 1960:211).

Self-determination, powerful desire, and sexuality are the only means with which Eustacia battles against the social codes. To defend itself against these elemental forces, the patriarchal community respects, and promotes the unresisting, obedient and passive woman over the forceful and strong one .

Eustacia is deprived of the interests that would have elevated her attitude as a single woman or as a marriage partner. Accordingly, her social and economic limitations and confining atmosphere represent the rock upon which her marriage will break.

Thomasin, as Hardy emphasises, is the "good heroine", and her temper of compliance and fortitude offer a contrast to Eustacia's defiant passion. Andrew Entice observes , "always the innocent victim, she bends with each blow of fate, accepting and waiting." (Entrice, 1979:87) Thomasin is forced to say firmly. "I am practical woman now. I don't believe in hearts at all." (The Return of the Native:130) Thomasin symbolizes the ideal partner: agreeable,devoted, never asking or forming enormous claims on existence .

Thomasin's sexual difference intensifies Wildev's sexual adventurism. She is a dutiful housewife, but she is not sexually seductive. This instance demonstrates the conflicting and false environment of man-made laws "Lack of sexual passion," Richard D.Altick insists, "was universally accepted as a biological fact." (Altick,1974:54). Man expects that a woman should not be 'epicurean' or lustful, and when she accepts these directions, he deserts her .Hardy uses Thomasin's physical characteristics to display her gentle "womanly" qualities. Thomasin's arrival from Angelbury, alone and unmarried, further stirs the action of the novel and creates a clear view of her passivity. As Joseph Warren Beach states, "It takes nothing more than the return of Thomasin from town unwed to set going the whole series of dialogues which make up the substance of the first book" (Beach, 1962:91).

Within these first eleven chapters of book one, Thomasin reveals her true purpose for marrying: it is not for love but for her family reputation.

A word often associated with Thomas Hardy's Eustacia Vye is passion. She is often represented as being in a state of yearning. "She thought of it with an ever-growing consciousness of cruelty, which tended to breed actions of reckless unconventionality, framed to snatch a year's, a week's, even an hour's passion from any where while it could be won" (*The Return of the Native*:58) Here, however, Thomas Hardy only expresses an objective fact of the woman situation in her society; that the existing states of women should be so incompatible with their own inner promptings and hopes. For the majority of women it was natural that their aspirations for self-fulfilment should take a disembodied form. A woman's energy and spirit have no clear directions, given either by society's or her own expectations, if it happens to move away from the preordained channels of the home and family life. Her energy is frittered away in vague hopes and passions before it runs to destruction. For women then, the problem of finding fulfilment in life through personal activity assumes major proportions giving the limitations of choice and the constraints under which she has to move in the only vocation thought suitable, marriage.

Hardy's heroines are not the species to agonize and be silent. They show a constant rejection to any masculine possessed system that may dominate them. They examine the convention of marriage and family, and the utilitarian principle on which they are reclined. Sue does not want to marry because it is foreign to a man's nature to go on loving a person when he is told that he must and shall be that person's lover, she says, "Some women's love of being loved is insatiable; and so, often, is their love of loving; and in the last case they may find that they can't give it continuously to the chamber officer appointed by the bishop's licence to receive it" (*Jude The Obscure*,1995:188). In fact, Sue's chief anxiety is with equality. Her opposition to the institution of marriage flows as much from her fear of hopelessness as it does from her fear of sex. Thus, Hardy introduces Sue into his fiction as a free-thinking woman, for whom marriage is not the most desirable goal. Sue believes that the institution of marriage is obsolete' she observes, "In fifty, a hundred years, the descendants of these two will act and feel worse than we." (*Jude The Obscure*:277). Her essential protest to marriage is that it would deprive her of her personal freedom as it prefigures her final subjection and yielding. Sue locates sex and marriage in opposition to liberty. In her association with the undergraduate, she eliminates the sexual menace, as much as possible by erasing sexuality from their relationship. At the beginning of their relationship Jude is able to

reveal Sue's rejection of sexual intimacy "But you, Sue, are such a phantasmal, bodiless creature, one who-if you'll allow me to say it-has so little animal passion in you, that you can act upon reason in the matter, when we poor unfortunate wretches of gross substance can't." (Jude The Obscure:244). Sue managed to subdue her sexuality so as not to be regarded as a mere sex object, on the contrary she wants to broaden her chances in life, and become an active part of a larger universe. The contrast between Eustacia and Sue is clear. Eustacia unlike Sue, uses her sexuality and physical magnetism in her search for freedom and redemption. Duffin observes, "the one, in whom spirit governs, leaving flesh to play a purely ancillary part; the other - who is the first as a burning forest is to a star—whose flesh, glorious and exultant, has absorbed her soul, and has blood-red passions of its own." (Duffin, 1971:139).

In fact, Eustacia's sexuality is not to be considered as a feature of a vulnerable woman but as a mark of strength. The fact that she has been able to fascinate Clym—the most refined man of high ideals in the novel—underlines the real force of her individuality, her success over conventional principles, and the baselessness of Clym's ideas. In this connection, Millgate comments, "By persisting in the work of furze-cutter—financially dispensable, socially degraded in Eustacia's eyes, and physically exhausting—Clym prepares the ground for those characteristically impulsive actions of Eustacia's which drive the couple finally apart." (Millgate, 1971:139). According to Millgate's opinion, Clym can be defined as a man whose reasonable and sentimental aspects are constantly in collision. This collision in his personality makes him function increasingly in repugnant ways, and this accelerates his deterioration. Similarly, Clym's personality and educational project are received by the Egdon community with a scepticism, "He had been a lad of whom something was expected. Beyond this, all had been chaos. That he would be successful in an original way, or that he would go to the dogs in an original way, seemed equally probable" (The return of the Native:141).

In the rising conflict with the realities of the Egdon community, it is all too often Clym's exotic principles which are renounced. However, he brings agony to all people close to him. Eustacia yearns to escape from Egdon. She feels herself to be its prisoner:

Now, Eustacia's dream had always been that, once married to Clym, she would have the power of inducing him to Paris.... Yet Yeobright was as firm in the contrary intention as if the tendency

of marriage were rather to develop the fantasies of young philanthropy than to sweep them away (The Return of the Native:199-200).

Old Mrs Yeobright also dies on the heath, and Clym feels that he is responsible for her death. "I cannot help feeling that I did my best to kill her." (The Return of the Native:256). It's only after his mother's death that he seems finally to understand that it is she and not Egdon or its people whom he had really loved and for whom he had returned.

Against his mother's and later his wife's powerful objection, he decides not to return to Paris where he has a job as a successful Parisian jeweller. His feeling of a penetrating disharmony between his principles and the "glittering splendours with wealthy women and titled libertines." (The Return of the Native:148). leads him to leave Paris and his job and return to the Egdon heath he has known and loved since childhood, there to become "a school master to the poor and ignorant, to teach them what nobody else will." (The Return of the Native:147). His teaching scheme collapses, theoretically, his goals are dignified and valuable; but are not functional on the heath. In seeking to educate and ameliorate its citizens he can, at best, teach them away from the heath, as he himself had been taught earlier: the heath itself, as he discovers, provides no job other than furze-cutting. Mrs Yeobright says that "After all the trouble that has been taken to give a start, and when there is nothing to do but to keep straight on towards affluence, you say you will be a poor man's schoolmaster. Your fancies will be your ruin." (The Return of the Native:147). But Clym is too idealistic to recognize that the rustics need material comfort before achieving spiritual contentment. In his study of suicidal tendencies in Hardy's major characters, Lawrence J. Starzyk observes that Clym Yeobright's "social prospects and dreams of humanistic amelioration are frustrated in large measure by his physical and intellectual blindness" (Starzyk,1972:428) and also because of his narcissistic nature.

He wants to uplift mankind rather than recognize the very entity of his life or that of Eustacia. Moreover, an unworldly man like him obviously deceives himself and reveals his unworldiness when he permits himself to be captivated by perceivable beauty like that of Eustacia. Apparently, he seeks a helpmate for his educational ambitions, and it is also an escape into beauty. Stave explains: "Clym assumes marriage will relieve him of the distress of passion and will provide him a helpmate in his mission to educate the Egdon folk." (Stave,1995:60). However, his blind fascination for Eustacia's physical beauty drives him to ignore the real Eustacia, simply to take possession of her body. For example, we are informed that he is not

unconscious of the reality that Eustacia “made no conditions as to his return to the French capital, this was what she secretly longed for in the event of marriage, and it robbed him of many an otherwise pleasant hour.”(The Return of the Native:168). He does not have any relevant explanation for speculating that she would correspond to his principles or to become a perfect wife. Ironically, the teaching scheme has been advanced as the chief justification of his marriage. When he asks Eustacia whether she would assist him in his ambition to establish his project, she answers, “I cannot endure the heath, except in its purple season . The heath is a cruel task master to me .”(The Return of the Native :156). Later on, she plainly informs him “To be your wife and live in Paris would be heaven to me; but I would rather live with you in a hermitage here than not be yours at all”(The Return of the native:167). Clym perceives adequately well that Eustacia’s dislike for the heath is as profound as his love for it. “Take all the varying hates felt by Eustacia Vye towards the heath, and translate them into loves, and you have the heart of Clym”(The Return of the Native:146). Mrs Yeobright also predicts the failure of their marriage, she says “I hate the thought of any son of mine marrying badly.”(The Return of the Native:170).

Despite this warning and Eustacia’s honest attitude, Clym steadily sticks to his purpose of marrying Eustacia as he looks upon her as a seductive sexual target who can meet his sexual desires and impetuous passion. Therefore, his choice of Eustacia as a wife is chiefly directed by her physical beauty, the only thing he estimates in her but he conceals this aspiration by assuming that she will easily desert her yearning for Paris, and demonstrate a good vocation . Further, he not only neglects what he observes and discovers, but retains a plan to ambush Eustacia. For instance, in the beginning, Yeobright gives the reaction of being undisturbed when Eustacia confesses having had a love-relationship with another man. She says “I love another man once and now I love you.”Clym answers “In God’s mercy don’t talk so, Eustacia.”(The Return of the Native:165) The traditional masculine Clym re-emerges very soon after marriage. Betrayed by the specious meaning of Wildeve’s existence and Eustacia’s rejection to open the door for his mother, he charges her with infidelity and of his mother’s death. Although he is closest to his mother, he is constantly at odds with her. He refused and despised his mother in order to secure Eustacia’s physical beauty. Dale Karmner observes that Clym’s “failure to understand that his pursuit of private happiness goes against his self-conceived societal role forestalls his intentions before even he can decide

upon the most basic implementation for them . Thus, he presents a character less unified than Eustacia.” (Kramer,1975:64).

Although Eustacia is partially to be blamed for his mother’s death, yet, it is his calling out “mother” in his sleep which misleads her into thinking that he is awake. Though he breaks off with his mother, he remains innately committed to her; though he pretends to adore Eustacia, yet, he loves his ideas more than her; though he appears to have a few aims, he expresses great happiness at having found something to do at last . Determined to keep all the three (mother , Eustacia and his aims) incompatible make-believes alive, he succeeds only in destroying them . Hardy comments on the predicament Clym puts himself in :

Three antagonistic growths had to be kept alive :
his mother’s trust in him, his plan for becoming
a teacher, and Eustacia’s happiness. His fervid
nature could not afford to relinquish one of these,
though two of the three were as many as he could
hope to preserve. Just when his mother was
to tolerate one scheme he introduced another still
bitterer than the first, and the combination was
more than she could bear .(The Return of the Native:168-9)

Clym remains alive after a sequence of crushing adventures because he has learned to give up his yearning for private satisfaction which has been cultivated into idealism. Rudyard Kipling observes, “ Most of Hardy’s lovers are shown to irradiated in the first flush of feeling – but the radiance will not last.”(Kipling: 2002) Towards the end of the novel, he is not only weak and physically blinded, but seduced and distressed. One observes that Clym’s idealism is completely egoistic, devastating rather than productive. Richard Benvenuto observes “His isolation from a world that he wants to return to and the guilt and self-pity that isolates him make Clym tragic-his own tragic victimization.” (Bevenuto, 1971).Clym’s return to a location where he has no duty to achieve appears in social terms to be intractable, regressive and almost turning aside from existence; his mother constantly observes it thus. Instead of feeling joy for the contentment of her husband during his blindness, Eustacia only considers the effect on herself, and she openly reveals her self-consuming pride:

If you had never returned to your native place,
Clym, what a blessing it would have been for
you!...It has altered the destinies of---,
Three people :

'Five', Eustacia thought, but she kept that.(The Return of the Native:227)
 Initially, this is the effect of Clym's self-assertion, and of that obstinacy in him which his idealism assists only to accentuate. He defied and denied Eustacia's desires in order to achieve his personal ambitions. On the other hand, Eustacia is a distressed character who strives to evade the hostility of the heath and its environment. But the more she fights to avoid the antipathy of the heath, the further it dominates her. She is dwarfed and paralyzed as a mortal, and is incapable to promote her own identity as a result of the conventional as well as educational elements. She wails in painful agony, "How I have tried and tried to be a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me !I do not deserve my lot !"(The Return of the Native:293). She marries Clym to save her body and soul from hostile environment around her. Therefore, Eustacia's temptation to Clym is spontaneous, even inescapable for she marries him in belief that she would be able to convince him to leave the heath, for she is quite aware of the fact that once a girl is married, she becomes the man's estate, and is made to satisfy his desires. But Eustacia's hopes are shattered by her husband's insensitivity .

Whatever their social rank is, in the eyes of the heath-men, women were inferior citizens. Of more immediate concern to heath-women were the other legal and social disabilities. In predicament of divorce, a woman has no place to endure an independent life, because she is economically weak. In these circumstances of a virtual absence of choice for women in the matter of marriage or vocation, the prevalent ethic of duty, and high endeavour to which Eustacia Vye herself subscribed, are bound to create a problem for ambitious women. When her life with Clym is devastated, and the recently established plight becomes excruciating to her she cries out in despair :

All persons of refinement have been scared away from me since I sank into the mire of marriage. Is this your cherishing—to put me into a hut like this , and keep me like the wife of a hind ? you deceived me—not by appearances, which are less seen through than words. But the place will serve as well as any other ---- as some where to pass from--- into my grave .(The Return of the Native:273).

A marriage between so diverged a couple has very little chance of success. The fascinating Clym whom Eustacia recognized was entirely distinct from the traditional one she married to. Marriage made her " a trapped bird" like

so many of Hardy's heroines. Clym harrows her with accusations, and this situation leads her to bring forth the scream of a distressed soul :

O, will you have done ! O, you are too relentless-
There is a limit to the cruelty of savages ! I have
held out long- but you crush me down . I beg for
mercy- I cannot bear this any longer-it is inhuman
to go further with this!If I had-killed your-mother
with my own hand-I should not deserve such a
scourging to the bone as this . O, O ! God have
mercy upon a miserable woman!... You have
beaten me in this game- I beg you to stay your
hand in pity. (The Return of the Native:273).

Seeking an outlet from her unsuccessful marriage, Eustacia drowns in a rain-swollen weir, and her lover with her ; Yeobright, who has tried to rescue them, barely survives. Yeobright lives on, a saddened man who chooses to become an itinerant preacher. In the end he loses wife as well as mother, and feels he has caused the death of both .

Conclusion:

The tragedy of Eusacia, is that shut up in the narrow world of her circumscribed lot in life, conscious only of her freedom, she is wholly ignorant of the imperative claims of the outer world of social causes represented by social attitudes, the human law and the moral law whose impact she cannot escape.

From her first appearance till her tragic end, Eustacia is agonized because she does not consent to man's desires and principles. In her tragic end, she is not beaten or overwhelmed, rather she rejoices over existence "They stood silently looking upon Eustacia, who, as she lay there still in death, eclipsed all her living phases."(The Return of the Native:311). Hardy desires her to commit suicide rather than be debased to living in a cottage with an indecisive idealist, and a blind man who, as Duffin observes "Yields little allegiance to emotion." (Duffin,1991:201). Her tragic end is a definite indication of refusal to be anything other than her individuality, of rebellion against antagonistic atmosphere beyond her command .

However, in Thomas Hardy's novels, the questions of marriage and vocation are linked to the problem of moral choice for men as for women. Thomas Hardy's emphasis on the external circumstances that determine a person's ' lot' in life does not detract from the importance given to choice in determining a person's ultimate destiny. As Morgan claims, (She[Eustacia] is prevented from coming into being in a world that denies autonomy,

identity, purpose, and power to women”(Morgan,1988:82). Because the traditional ways of society cannot accept her passionate being, she feels forced to escape. Whether her death was accidental or self-inflicted, her desire for escape is clear. Jekel explains this internal struggle of the tragic heroine:

Filled with great longings, Eustacia is a fine example of a woman who is unable to sort out her needs from her desire and who is driven to a world of fantasy and finally to destruction. Hardy has here caught with much intensity that edge moral confusion which tangles so many, but especially women who must balance their own needs with the needs (and repressions) of others. (Jekel,1986:99).

In fact, Hardy's women are never static but are always advancing through the interaction of the outward circumstances and inner compulsions and needs which determine action. Female character, moreover, is not perceived in isolation but in a complex pattern of relationships. Choice, though ultimately individual, can only be exercised in the context of this network of relationships based on complementary or contradictory impulses and ambitions working from myriad directions. In marriage, the choice will obviously be in social activity, in relation to a great number of people. In both cases, the ultimate standing and integrity of the individual in society and as an individual is at stake. As Williams reminds us, “Work and desire are very deeply connected with Hardy's imagination.” (William,1973:213). Eustacia is constantly depicted in the same image as Egdon heath suggesting not only the helplessness of Clym's project and ideas, but also their interrelationship as well.

Nothing could better describe the effect of marriage as depicted in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*. The debasing effect of marriage is evident, for instance, the dilemma of Eustacia Vye. Because she is such an impassioned and independent woman, she does not feel tied to Clym through the bonds of marriage. She can freely leave him and his bonds and seek adventure elsewhere. Thus, her case shows, if the men have illusions of pliant wives, the women will have illusions of marriage as the prospect of an enriched life. For men marriage is seen as an oasis, a refuge, a rest. For women, it is regarded as the fulfilment of their desires. In fact, both are cruelly disillusioned but women suffer more.

It is a fact that there is a genuine feminist awareness at work in Thomas Hardy's novels that finds a powerful expression in the depiction of the

injustices and sufferings of women's lot and particularly the women's sense of injustice and of their frustrations as in the cases of Sue, Bathsheba, and Eustacia. "The significant thing about Hardy," observes Raymond Williams, "is that more than any other novelist, he succeeded against every pressure in centering his major novels in the ordinary process of life and work ." (Williams,1973:211). But it is a fact that the line between his own rebellion and his immense success as a novelist reflects the paradoxes of a society where moral idealism coexist with a practical utilitarianism that can blatantly accept the worst forms of poverty and exploitation along with an apparently genuine desire for social change. It is this mixture of the best and the worst that draws us again and again to this paradoxical era .

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