

The Male Bias of Language Gender Hierarchy: Hardy's Bathsheba Everdene and His Vision of Feminine Reality Reconsidered

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Abstract. This paper attempts to offer a fresh reading of a key passage in *Far from the Madding Crowd* (Ch. 51) in which Bathsheba addresses Boldwood, in his relentless pursuit of her to consent to an engagement to marry him, saying "It is difficult for a woman to define her feelings in language which is chiefly made by men to express theirs ..." Two previous interpretations of the passage read into it classical gender oppositeness and attribute to Bathsheba standard prevarication, equivocation, and the logic of emotion. Nothing could be less true. It is more to the point to say that the purport of Bathsheba's sentence constitutes a gesture of defiance and a demand for recognition of a voice and an identity. Bathsheba refuses to accept a patronising language devised by man, imprisoning her within his own linguistic freedom. She is egalitarian in her sentiment. Further, the stance the two critics take in their estimate of Bathsheba does not square with her role in much of the novel. Her abundant vitality, strong will, managerial ability, and her braving convention in competing professionally with men in the marketplace, make her years ahead of her time. Further, Bathsheba's defiant speech gains added significance when considered in the light of Mill's insistence in "The Subjection of Women" that women "have a voice." One wonders in fact whether it is quite as simple as one of the critics claims that in Hardy's terrain the differences between the sexes run deep. Hardy probably went further than any previous novelist in transcending the limitations of traditional male and female roles. There is no reason to think that the censures that Hardy drew upon himself were occasioned exclusively by his disparagement of women. It was rather his highly advanced views, outrageous propriety, that brought down upon him a good deal of disapproval. Again, the sweeping statement ... "The same causes do not produce the same effects in women as in men," thus interpreting character by gender, cannot bear scrutiny.

'I have always this dreary pleasure in thinking over those past times with you — that I was something to you before *he* was anything, and that you belonged *almost* to me. But, of course, that's nothing. You never liked me.

'I did; and respected you, too.'

'Do you now?'

'Yes.'

'Which?'

'How do you mean which?'

'Do you like me, or do you respect me?'

'I don't know — at least, I cannot tell you. It is difficult for a women to define her feelings in language which is chiefly made by men to express theirs....'(1)

In an article titled "Menander's Mirror: Bathsheba Everdene," (1945) C. Morgan⁽²⁾ has this to say on the above exchange:

It seems to be an axiom with Hardy that women are essentially different from men. Not only are they different for reasons deducible from the differences of physical nature, but different in root and in soul. The same causes do not produce the same effects in women as in men; the virtues and vices have in them not only different consequences but altogether different meanings, so that a word applicable to men may be totally misleading when applied to women. When Boldwood asks Bathsheba: 'Do you like me, or do you respect me?' she answers: 'I don't know — at least, I cannot tell you. It is difficult for a women to define her feelings in language which is chiefly made by men to express theirs.' It is one of the most revealing sentences in all Hardy's works. It explains, perhaps, why so many feminists of the old school, who based their claim for equivalence upon likeness, almost upon identity, and whose symbol was therefore mannishness, saw in Hardy an enemy. For him the difference ran so deep as to require for its expression a different language....

While interpretations of Bathsheba's character are as divergent as the richly imagined depths of her nature, such a reading, nonetheless is open to question. It is a case of seeing what one wishes to see. We would be misled in our reading of the novel through assuming that Hardy simply maligns Bathsheba and speaks here of the classical gender oppositeness. Bathsheba's argument defies rather than effects hierarchical differentiation.

Another interpretation by which Bathsheba is partly ill-served is that set forth by Lionel Johnson. In the course of his brief survey of the characters of men and women in Hardy's novels, he comments that Bathsheba's statement "recalls the quaint sagacity of Clarissa in observing that 'the men were the framers of the matrimonial office.'"³ Sor far so good. However, he misses the point when he goes on to explain that "Mr. Hardy expresses well that dissatisfaction with the refractory strictness of language, which distresses a women, when she would speak, not the logic of thought, but the logic of emotion: she has all manner of real convictions, hidden deep in his consciousness, but only explicable by hints and suggestions, which sound like

(1) Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd* (The Greenwood edition: London, 1964), pp. 404-405. Subsequent citations of Hardy's novel are from this edition.

(2) *The Times Literary Supplement*, 10 February, 1945.

the shifts of a prevaricator.”⁽³⁾ This is well within the patriarchal ideology. There is hardly room for attributing to Bathsheba here linguistic prevarication, indeterminacy, duplicity, or emotionality — standard charges against women. Her answer is immediate and unequivocal; she means what she says. At one point in the novel we are told, “As usual with decided characters, Bathsheba invariably provoked the criticism of individuals Her emblazoned fault was to be too pronounced in her objections, and not sufficiently overt in her likings” (p. 171). And it is Boldwood — “a hotbed of tropical intensity” (p. 138) — not Bathsheba, who is passionately prodigal of love. Hardy is explicit about the turbulent emotional peak in the conclusion of the novel — it is he who is destroyed by love.

It is rather more to the point that the implication of Bathsheba’s key sentence (“It is difficult for a women to define her feelings in language which is chiefly made by men to express theirs.”) indicates protest, as women in her view are linguistically oppressed and men enjoy a privileged discourse position. We should also understand her demand in its self-affirming sense. Her sense of selfhood and inner direction which are uppermost in her mind are under threat. Spurred by the assumption that Troy is dead, the love-thirsty Boldwood, who has so far lived cocooned in his misogyny and hostile withdrawal from women, presses his love over Bathsheba’s lack of it. He doggedly exhorts her to consent to an engagement to marry him at some future date. That she is unattainable redoubles his love. Such a marriage is unthinkable for her as was the earlier proposal from Oak. The extent of Bathsheba’s feeling for him cannot go beyond pity: “Hence her pity for the man who so persistently loved on to his own injury” (p. 403). His sad situation is a reminder to her of her earlier folly in sending the valentine: “You know, Gabriel, this is what I cannot get off my conscience — that I once seriously injured him in sheer idleness” (p. 409).

The two critics view Bathsheba as prevaricator, but they do not say that Boldwood is authoritative and coercive. Desperate at being shut out from acceptance by Bathsheba, Boldwood takes advantage of the superior stature their male-female relationship affords him. He coerces her to act towards him as man wants her to be, to parrot his language. She has to choose between two alternatives: “Do you like me, or do you respect me?,” as if woman’s duty is to be fond and/or respectful. He puts words into her mouth. But Bathsheba is not an echo figure. The sentence has the sense of command: the dominating tone inherent in it imparts to the two verbs an

(3) *The Art of Thomas Hardy* (London 1894; rev. edn. 1928; reissued 1965), p. 196. It should be noted that the book was published before Hardy’s image of woman received accretion by the portraiture of Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure*. However, the positive remarks about woman in the book are many. Among these one may cite the following: “A certain manliness in such perfect women gives them a curious grace of courage: and they shape their sorrows into finer forms, than do men”; Hardy’s “fertility of imagination is greatest, when the fortunes of a woman’s soul are his study”; “It is true, that he has now and again allowed himself satire, to which the ill-disposed may impute an element of contempt: but the contempt, if it be there, is contempt of men” (pp. 200-201).

imperative force. The catechism he puts her through would hardly be asked unless he is doubtful of a reply in the affirmative. There is very little reason for him to believe that her feelings towards him are other than cool:

“On your side, at least, there is no passion or blamable haste — on mine, perhaps, there is. But I can’t help seeing that if you choose from a feeling of pity, and, as you say, a wish to make amends, to make a bargain with me for a far-ahead time—an agreement which will set all things right and make me happy, late though it may be—there is no fault to be found with you as a woman” (p. 406).

Boldwood sees Bathsheba as adjunct, as the extension of his own desires. Witness his possessive phrase “you belonged *almost* to me.” He expects her expression to run in conventional style. Expectations leave no scope for woman to have a mind of her own and to say what she feels. One here is reminded of Tess’s rejoinder to a cynical remark by Alec, “Did it never strike your mind that what every woman says some women may feel?” (p. 97). Significant in this regard is Virginia Woolf’s observation that “Now men are shocked if a woman says what she feels.”⁽⁴⁾ For long Bathsheba has a deep sense of belonging fully to herself. She refuses to accept an alienating language (an instrument of domination) of man’s making,⁽⁵⁾ that renders woman speechless by imposing meaning on her and constraining the articulation of her nature. Man, patronisingly, wants her to be confined to one domain: that of an existence where love is the be-all and end-all of her life. She wants a language that is free from masculinist bias and which does not pin her down to an identity imposed from without. The implication is also that woman has a right to love spontaneously, not merely in answer to man. The egalitarian and liberationist note is hard to miss in Bathsheba’s protest.

The interpretation I am advancing is corroborated by reference to an analogous passage advancing the theme of language in *The Hand of Ethelberta*. In commenting on her meek sister’s remark — “honesty [is] the best policy” — the self-assertive Ethelberta, who knows the truth of the world around her, protests against male imperialism within the use of language, and sayings which are received authorities. She deals out an enlightened advice to her sister against mindless confidence and the given self, and urges her to be her own *raisonneur*:

(4) Virginia Woolf, “Speech, Manuscript Notes,” *The Pargiters*, ed. Mitchell A. Leaska (London, 1978), p. 164.

(5) No Wonder, in their *A Grammar of the English Tongue* (1711) Brightland and Gildon describe English as “our Native and Masculine Tongue.” Quoted in Elizabeth S. Sklar, “Sexist Grammar Revisited,” *College English*, 45, No. 4 (April, 1983), 357.

'So it is, for the man's purpose. But don't you go believing in sayings, Picotee: they are all made by men,⁽⁶⁾ for their own advantages. Women who use public proverbs as a guide through events are those who have not ingenuity enough to make private ones as each event occurs' (p. 151).

The passage serves as a break from tutelage; it is a feminist protest — that would win Bathsheba's approval — against engulfment in restrictive and self-serving masculine logic. It indicates the inefficacy of the language, or rather the alinguistic character of women. A dialectically kin passage, necessitating women's subversion of male presumptions, is that exchange between Captain Harville and Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*. Anne pointedly laments man's domination of education and appropriation of writing, and his manipulation of phrases to suit his own ends:

'I do not think I ever opened a book in my life which had not something to say upon woman's inconstancy. Songs and proverbs, all talk of woman's fickleness. But perhaps you will say, these were all written by men.'

'Perhaps I shall. — Yes, yes, if you please no reference to examples in books. Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove anything.'⁽⁷⁾

Virginia Woolf's remarks on the "feminine sentence" as distinct from the "male sentence" are perhaps pertinent here. She argues that the sentence current in nineteenth-century fiction was "a man's sentence" and that of all women writers Jane Austen did not write entirely from the heart and was able to devise a sentence "proper for her own use."⁽⁸⁾ Additionally, in the words of a critic:

The central issue in much recent women's writing in France is to find and use an appropriate female language. Language is the place to begin: a *prise de conscience* must be followed by a *prise de la parole* ... In this view, the very forms of the dominant mode of discourse show the mark of the dominant masculine ideology. Hence, when a woman writes

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- (6) Ibsen has a similar remark in "Notes for the Modern Tragedy," written before *A Doll's House*: A woman cannot be herself in the present day, which is exclusively masculine society, with laws framed by men and with a judicial system that judges feminine conduct from a masculine point of view. (Quoted in Donald Clive Stuart, *The Development of Dramatic Art* (N.Y., 1931), II, 146. See also Halvdan Koht, *The Life of Ibsen*, 2 Vols. (N.Y., 1931), II, 146.
- (7) *The Novels of Jane Austen*, Vol. V, ed. R.W. Chapman (Oxford U.P., 1965), p. 234.
- (8) *A Room of One's Own* (N.Y. 1929), p. 133. See also Herbert Marder, *Feminism and Art: A Study of Virginia Woolf* (Chicago, 1968), pp. 121-22; and Carolyn Heibrun, *Towards Androgyny: Aspects of Male and Female in Literature* (London, 1973), p. 76.

or speaks herself into existence, she is forced to speak in something like a foreign tongue, a language with which she may be personally uncomfortable.⁽⁹⁾

Bathsheba's defiant speech gains added significance when considered in the light of John Stuart Mill's "The Subjection of Women."⁽¹⁰⁾ The essay was perhaps in Hardy's mind as he wrote the dialogue. That Hardy owes some debt to Mill may not be doubted: "My pages show harmony of view with Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, Hume, Mill, and others, all of whom I used to read more than Schopenhauer,"⁽¹¹⁾ and he pays a particular deference to Mill as he remarks, "we students of the date [1865] knew [Mill's "On Liberty"] almost by heart."⁽¹²⁾ At the core of Mill's argument in the essay is that women, whom he judges in unreservedly positive terms, have traditionally been treated like slaves, given the fact that "the laws are made by their masters" (p. 488). "All men," he observes, "have therefore put everything in practice to enslave their minds ... All the moralities tell [women] ... to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections" (p. 444). While stressing the inhibitions saddling women, he laments that they are uniformly subjected to "an education of the sentiments rather than of the understanding" (p. 532), and that woman is forced to be "at the beck and call of somebody, generally of everybody" (p. 516). As a consequence, Mill insists that women should "have a voice" (p. 488) (both in the literal — i.e. voting — and implied meaning of the word), and he gives special prominence to this issue, seeing in it a means of self-protection due to women. He finds the patriarchal grounding of language most menacing, and advances the argument that "If women lived in a different country from men, and had never read any of their writings, they would have had a literature of their own" (p. 511). Mill notes the importance of a female discourse when he observes that few women "dare tell anything, which men, on whom their literary success depends, are unwilling to hear," and that it is necessary for women to become "more free-spoken, and more willing to express their real sentiments." The message the essay conveys is that only when women have "free development of originality," can the depth of their own nature be seen (pp. 456-57).

The reading I offer seems to work favorably in conjunction with Bathsheba's character structure and role in the novel: an active, rather than a reactive one. Hardy

(9) Carolyn Burke, "Report from Paris: Women's Writing and the Women's Movement," *Signs* 3 (Summer, 1978), 844; Quoted in Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," *Critical Inquiry*, 8, No. 2 (Winter, 1981), 190-91.

(10) *On Liberty, Representative Government, The Subjection of Women*, ed. Millicent Garrett Fawcett (Oxford U.P., 1966), p. 488. Page references in the text are to this edition.

(11) As quoted in Carl J. Weber, *Hardy of Wessex: His Life and Literary Career* (rev. ed. London, 1965), pp. 246-47.

(12) Florence Emily Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928* (London, 1972), p. 330. Hereafter referred to as *Life*.

endows her with abundant vitality, mobility, initiative, business sense, and strong will rare in the world of the prudish seventies. Trespassing gender boundaries, she arrests interest in the first half of the novel by capably managing her farm and exhibiting the resources necessary to the task, as well as breaking with convention in competing professionally with men at market. The metaphor of queenship (p. 103) suggests (irony aside) that she is monarch over farmers. Henry James held a particular repugnance towards the aggressive side of Bathsheba's nature. To him, "She is a young lady of the inconsequential, wilful, mettlesome type which has lately become so much the fashion for heroines."⁽¹³⁾ Struck largely by the question of Bathsheba's independence, J.W. Beach terms her "the first of the series of independent Shakespearean women capable of taking strong hold upon life and meeting men upon something like an equal footing."⁽¹⁴⁾ "Appearing five years before Ibsen's *A Doll's House*," the novel deals with — as H.B. Grimsditch comments — "none other than our familiar friend 'the new woman.'"⁽¹⁵⁾ As she herself admits, she is "too independent" (p. 34). She is exasperated with the wedlock ideal (throughout the early part of the novel), as she worries about the effacement of female identity within marriage. She is marked off from other belles whose mission in life is to attract eligible beaux, Following the vicissitudes she is placed in when love exercises its metamorphic power over her making a disastrous mess of her life, Hardy analyses her attitude in a lengthy, ironically couched, passage that shows her not seeking to make herself agreeable to men and not surrendering her personality:

Until she had met Troy, Bathsheba had been proud of her position as a woman; it had been a glory to her to know that her lips had been touched by no man's on earth — that her waist had never been encircled by a lover's arm. She hated herself now She had never taken kindly to the idea of marriage in the abstract as did the majority of women she saw about her. In the turmoil of her anxiety for her lover she had agreed to marry him; but the perception that had accompanied her happiest hours on this account was rather that of self-sacrifice than of promotion and honour. Although she scarcely knew the divinity's name, Diana was the goddess whom Bathsheba instinctively adored. (p. 315).

Bathsheba makes her own choices and develops her own judgement. When Oak induces her to agree to marry him by drawing a picture of a Victorian "angel of the house,"⁽¹⁶⁾ hearthside harmony, and the explicit promise of refinements and babies, she frankly comments that she values her independence more than the attractions of marriage; she is better off single:

(13) *Nation* (24 Dec., 1874); reprinted in *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, ed. R.G. Cox, pp. 30-31.

(14) *The Technique of Thomas Hardy* (Chicago, 1922; reissued N.Y., 1962), p. 56.

(15) *Character and Environment in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* (London, 1925, reissued N.Y., 1962), p. 161.

(16) John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* (London, 1865), pp. 147-48.

‘a marriage would be very nice in one sense. People would talk about me and think I had won my battle, and I should feel triumphant, and all that. But a husband — ... I shouldn’t mind being a bride at a wedding, if I could be one without having a husband’ (p. 33).

The link established between her and the female deity, the chaste huntress, is not an arbitrary one. Again, Boldwood’s feverish offer of marriage in which she has no cares, completely dependent on man acting as shelterer and provider, does not (as he himself) attract her in the least. Like a courtly lover he has the intentions of serving his lady with patronage:

‘I will protect and cherish you with all my strength — I will indeed! You shall have no cares — be worried by no household affairs, and live quite at ease, Miss Everdene ... You shall never have so much as to look out of doors at haymaking time, or to think of weather in the harvest’ (p. 146).

Bathsheba’s claim for assertiveness makes her give the edge to the right to make up her mind. She says that she cannot answer Boldwood and must have time to think over his proposal by the only terms meaningful to her (p. 147). She tells Oak that in the territory of the affections she hold herself accountable only to her own standards:

‘When I want a broad-minded opinion for general enlightenment, distinct from special advice, I never go to a man who deals in the subject professionally. So I like the parson’s opinion on law, the lawyer’s on doctoring, the doctor’s on business, and my businessman’s — that is, yours — on morals.

‘And on love -----’

‘My own’ (p. 410).

At the end of the novel she justifies her proposal to Oak by telling him, “I was the first sweetheart that you ever had,” but she does not stop there and continues “and you were the first I ever had” (p. 455) — a remark that suggests a covert pride, besides its truth-telling. However tried and schooled in adversity, she still feels her own identity aright. There is also the rational, logical side to her nature. One should notice her tidy-mindedness, clarity of thought, concreteness, and conclusiveness as revealed in her detached, closely reasoned argument with Boldwood. She openly points to the inequality of love; there is no hedging or tentativeness:

‘I don’t love you, and I much fear that I never shall love you as much as a woman ought to love a husband. If you, sir, know that, and I can yet give you happiness by a mere promise to marry at the end of six years, if my husband should not come back, it is a great honour to me. And if you value such an act of friendship from a woman who doesn’t esteem herself as she did, and has little love left, why I — will —’. (p. 407)

Viewed in this perspective, her argument with Oak (against the persistent proposal of marriage) is remarkable for its unapologetical forthrightness, and consecutive

thinking. Her intellect coolly analyses the situation and tidily catalogues the reasons of her objection arguing through particulars, and advises him to make an economically advantageous match:

‘Mr Oak,’ she said, *with luminous distinctness and common sense*, ‘You are better off than I. I have hardly a penny in the world — I am staying with my aunt for my bare sustenance. *I am better educated than you* — and I don’t love you a bit: that’s my side of the case. Now yours: you are a farmer just beginning, and you ought in common prudence, if you marry at all (which you should certainly not think of doing at present) to marry a woman with money, who would stock a larger farm for you than you have now’

Gabriel looked at her with a little *surprise* and much *admiration*.

‘That’s the very thing I had been thinking myself!’ he *naively* said (p. 35; my italics).

Bathsheba finally convinces Oak and supplies him with an objective. Indeed, he lacks her evident sophistication and sense of proportion; her logical approach wins her his admiration. (She, however, has given insufficient thought at his worthiness.) Bathsheba exemplifies in her own person the falsity of the assumption that women are inferior to men in sustaining an argument. The narrator occasionally interjects telling judgements, more positive than negative, about her reasoning capacity — leaving little doubt where she stands:

[She is] a woman with some good sense in reasoning on subjects wherein her heart was not involved (p. 135). An Elizabeth *in brain* and a Mary Stuart *in spirit*, she often performed actions of the greatest temerity with a manner of extreme discretion. Many of her thoughts were perfect syllogisms ... (p. 149; my italics). Bathsheba, though she had too much understanding to be entirely governed by her womanliness, and too much womanliness to use her understanding to the best advantage (p. 214). her noon-clear sense (p. 231).

A premium is put on Bathsheba’s robustness (she “never used to cry,” p. 336; and she asks “for no sympathy,” p. 447); also on her strong personality and, above all, on her untameableness (“Don’t think I am a timid woman,” she tells Oak, p. 289, “she was not a shy girl by any means,” p. 19, but on the contrary “too wild,” pp. 30, 418).⁽¹⁷⁾ Her wilful and rebellious character achieves special prominence in the remark that her charm “belong[s] rather to the demonian than to the angelic school” (p. 156). Hardy shows her tenacious of will and having enough mettle to stand up under pressure and to perform puzzling “deeds of endurance” (p. 437) on different occasions. For example, following Troy’s murder she comports herself admirably suppressing her passions; she does not immediately give way to swooning. Her reaction contrasts significantly with that of the female guests who were in a mess “huddl[ing] aghast against the walls like sheep in a storm”. (pp. 436-7). She gets on

(17) See also pp. 203, 342, 344.

quickly with the task at hand: carefully preparing the body for burial. The surgeon is dazzled with her fortitude in her crisis and offers a panegyric to her: “She must have the nerve of a stoic!” (p. 440). Her revelation to Boldwood founds her strength in childhood — “An unprotected childhood in a cold world has beaten gentleness out of me” (p. 233). Hardy intimates her identification with mannishness in the following exchange with Liddy, her maid:

‘And, dear miss, you won’t harry me and storm at me, will you? because you seem to swell so tall as a lion then, and it frightens me! Do you know, I fancy *you would be a match for any man* when you are in one o’ your takings.’

‘Never! do you?’ said Bathsheba, slightly laughing, though somewhat seriously alarmed by this *Amazonian* picture of herself. ‘I hope I am not a bold sort of maid — mannish?’ she continued with some anxiety.

‘Oh no, not mannish; but so *almighty womanish* that ‘tis getting on that way sometimes. Ah! miss,’ she said, after having drawn her breath very sadly in and sent it very sadly out, ‘I wish I had half your failing that way. ‘Tis a great protection to a poor maid in these illegit’ mate days!’ (pp. 226-7; my italics).

The Amazonian image (which both terrifies and attracts Bathsheba) seems an adequate correlative of her condition. Liddy’s wish, in the context in which it appears, accurately registers her lack of her mistress’s extraordinary capabilities.

But to say only this about Bathsheba stands in need of supplementation. Hardy’s mixed feelings about her character are made apparent. Her infatuation with her mirrored beauty in the opening scene of the novel (before the events of the narrative are set in their circumstantial hot course) shows that she is susceptible to blandishments that inflate her vanity. The red color she appears in, in the same scene suggests her capacity for passion. The thoughtless loss of her heart to Troy shows that she cannot tell appearance from reality, and undercuts her claims to lack of interest in marriage. This is a cause for some irony at her expense. However, one should hasten to say that this development is her own doing, not a result of coercion. Beach suggests that “It is the strong and the weak in her nature taken together that make her so very real.” He goes on to say “Ad yet it is her strength that gives her special interest.”⁽¹⁸⁾ Alternately tough and tender, Bathsheba can exhibit cool reason’s guidance and overpowering strength of passion. She moves fluidly between two shifting opposites: her desire to be free — “*I hate* to be thought men’s property,” (p. 32) — and her fear of her independence — “I want somebody to tame me; I am too independent,” (p. 34). It is ironical that her strength enhances her capacity to love:

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 who has never had any strength to throw away (p. 214).

(18) *Ibid.*, p. 58.

And her sexuality gives the novel its tension. A related point is the new consciousness and adjustment that Bathsheba acquires towards the close of the novel, consequent to her suffering mortification, “the severe schooling that she had been subjected to” (p. 382). The movement from the transitory, whim-based, relationship with Troy to the estimation of a mate in Oak, her faithful admirer, and the relative loss of her imperiousness involve a redefinition of values. She is affected with a sense of pain at the course her life has taken, and she has learnt more sense to ally herself with the demands of a coarse (or “prosaic,” p. 456) reality. Sad events have somehow broken her spirit: “Her original vigorous pride of youth had sickened” (p. 373), and “Her exuberance of spirit was pruned down” (p. 382). She is physically weaker, less able to function in the outdoor world than she was before. With the taxing of her energies, she is no longer Bathsheba; to Liddy she has been physically aging, “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!” (p. 445), and “it seemed to herself that she never could again acquire energy sufficient to go to market, barter, and sell” (p. 452). The narrator’s stance here is predominantly that of the judgmental observer. It is Oak who can help her out, and she submits to necessity that impels her to seek his aid. We should not assume, however, that Bathsheba has run out of her will and romantic self-affirmation. In betrothing herself to Oak, she continues to display, well into maturity, an unconventional sensibility: “it seems exactly as if I had come courting you — how dreadful!” (p. 456). We may go a little further to wonder whether Hardy is working out a possibility for casting a shadow over the “good-fellowship” (p. 56), that is economic and sensible rather than romantic. In this recognition, the wintry, plaintive setting against which the wedding takes place — “A Foggy Night and Morning — Conclusion” (p. 458), “a damp disagreeable morning” (p. 461) — makes most sense. Further negations, entailing an elegiac tone, pile up: along with the parting qualifying reference “love which is strong as death” (p. 457), Poorgrass makes a useful comment, not without pointed humor: “it might have been worse” (p. 464), and it is taken for granted that Bathsheba “never laughed readily now” (p. 463).

So much for Bathsheba. One wonders in fact whether it is quite as simple as Morgan thinks that in Hardy’s terrain the differences between the sexes run deep. Hardy probably went further than any previous novelist in transcending the limitations of traditional male and female roles. While a woman may be assertive, a man can be as tender and sentive as Shelley⁽¹⁹⁾ the prototype, almost the archetype, of the

(19) Hardy explicitly remarks that Angel is “Shelleyan” (*Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, p. 247). The relationship of Sue and Jude is described as “Shelleyan” (*Jude the Obscure*, p. 279). J. Hillis Miller remarks in his introduction to the New Wessex edition of the *The Well-Beloved* that “the Shelleyan and Platonic theme of the perfect lovers, two halves of a single androgynous whole ... is central in *The Well-Beloved*, but is already fully present in *Tess*.” For Shelley’s influence on Hardy, see particularly: *Life*, pp. 118, 192-93; Phyllis Bartlett, “Hardy’s Shelley,” *K-SJ*, 4 (Winter, 1955), 15-29 and “Seraph of Heaven’: A Shelleyan Dream in Hardy’s Fiction,” *PMLA*, 70 (Sept., 1955), 624-35. See ==

nineteenth-century idea of the “feminine” man. The point is made that woman is not the lesser mate for man, they are perhaps “the two halves intended by Nature to make the perfect whole.”⁽²⁰⁾ (Talking about halvedness, it is well to remember that Hardy, especially in the poetry, likes times that are neutral — half light and half dark — and the color that is in-between — grey.) The emphasis is on complementariness and wholeness, not on antithesis and diversity — the stereotypical cultural gender distinction. “*Camaraderie*” and “comrades” are two words that assume particular nificance in *Far from the Madding Crowd* (p. 456) and *Jude the Obscure* (pp. 314, 408). (It is true that Hardy’s novels interconnect.) In *The Well-Beloved* Pierston “had know Avice Caro so well of old that his feeling for her now was rather comradeship than love” (p. 10). The essential identity of man and woman is suggested in a passage about Springrove in *Desperate Remedies* — Hardy’s earliest published novel:

Echoes of himself, though rarely, he now and then found. Sometimes they were men, sometimes women his cousin Adelaide being one of these; for in spite of a fashion which pervades the whole community at the present day — the habit of exclaiming that woman is not undeveloped man, but diverse, the fact remains that, after all, women are Man-kind, and that in many of the sentiments of life the difference of sex is but a difference of degree (pp. 200-1).

The *donnē* in the rejected argument is the disjunctive “diverse,” indicating unlikeness, and on “not ... man” which gives identity to man. Hardy implies the compatibility of the two sexes, not their alientation — and sees women as all mankind of unspecified gender. Rather than speaking of discrimination, Hardy points to similarity — the difference is only a mere matter of degree. Here we return to Mill who observes that “what is now called the nature of woman is an eminently artificial thing.”⁽²¹⁾ The statement also invites the surmise that Hardy had in mind Tennyson’s view as demonstrated by the hero of *The Princess*:

also W. Rutland, *Thomas Hardy: A Study of his Writings and their Background* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1938), pp. 14-15, 288-89; Weber, pp. 51, 234; F.B. Pinion, *A Hardy Companion* (London, 1968), pp. 213-14; *Thomas Hardy: Art and Thought* (London; Macmillan, 1977), ch. 13.

(20) *Life’s Little Ironies*, p. 215. About the first meeting of Tess and Alec Hardy Comments: “Enough that in the present case, as in millions, it was not the two halves of a perfect whole that confronted each other at the perfect moment; a missing counterpart wandered independently about the earth waiting in crass obtuseness till the late time came” (*Tess of the d’Urbervilles*. p. 49). In *Jude the Obscure* Hardy remarks on the love between Sue and Jude Thus: “That complete mutual understanding, in which every glance and movement was as effectual as speech for conveying intelligence between them, made them almost the two parts of a single whole” (p. 352). In *The Woodlanders* we read, “Marty South alone, of all the women in Hintock and the world, had approximated to Winterborne’s level of intelligent intercourse with Nature. In that respect she had formed his true complement in the other sex, had lived as his counterpart” (p. 399). See also J. Hillis Miller’s remarks in the previous note.

(21) *Ibid.*, p. 451.

For woman is not undeveloped man,
 But diverse: could we make her as the man,
 Sweet Love were slain: his dearest bond is this,
 Not like to like, but like in difference.
 (Pt. VII, 11.259-62)

The prince seems to be endorsing conventional sex differentiation.

Hardy stresses the spirit of camaraderie and harmonious co-operation of male and female rather than their opposition and combat. Among the finest moments in the novels are those in which the two sexes sustain each other and reciprocate responsibility, and which allow us a view of mutuality of interdependence. Work motivated by love is the mediating agency. In the great storm scene, a climatic moment in the novel, Oak and Bathsheba work arduously together to save her ricks. A telling moment in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is when Elfride, mustering her intelligence, saves Knight from danger when he loses his foothold and hangs on the edge of the cliff above the sea. She is not just a helper, a prop — she makes a rope from her underclothes; and Knight tells her to check each knot. This is a reminder of complementary male-female powers which are equally and mutually necessary to survival. Sue joins Jude on their livelihood scheme as a solution to poverty. At the Kennetbridge fair she sells the cakes and gingerbreads that he bakes. At Talbothays Dairy, a coherent locus, Angel professes his love for Tess while they are milking in the hot days of summer. We watch Giles and Marty, in the intimacy of love, plant the fir trees. Hardy's remark on Marty's physical vitality is much telling:

She was a heroic girl, and though her outstretched hand was shill as a stone, and her cheeks blue, and her cold worse than ever, she would not complain whilst he was disposed to continue work.⁽²²⁾

The individual facts of Hardy's person and life exhibit his constant fascination with women's society. Indeed, women represented no small matter for him: Mrs Henniker, Julia Augusta Martin, Lady Jeune, the Duchess of Manchester, Lady Londonderry, Mrs. Campbell, Rebekah Owen, and "other 'noble dames' whose tea-tables and dinner – parties and theatre-halls [he] was taking increasing delight in gracing".⁽²³⁾ His humane disposition made him a lot willing to be benevolent to loose loose girls.⁽²⁴⁾ In *Tess* the sympathy accorded the "Woman [who] Pays" is extreme.⁽²⁵⁾ Further, as H.C. Webster notes, Hardy

(22) *The Woodlanders*, pp. 73-74.

(23) Weber, p. 214.

(24) See *Life*, pp. 265, 214.

(25) Bernard J. Paris has argued that "in defending Tess's purity, Hardy has employed a 'confusion of many standards', and the result has been self-contradiction. The argument from intention presented Tess's will as good but her acts as bad. The argument from nature as norm presents her acts as good—or, at least, innocent—and her intentions as—what?" ("A Confusion of Many Standards: Conflicting Value Systems in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*," *NCF*, 24 (1969), 64.

maintained that it was unjust to make marriage the only career open to women and favoured women's suffrage when suffragettes⁽²⁶⁾ were generally viewed as annoying oddities. He complained of the unrealistically sheltered education young girls received at teacher's training colleges. He asserted that the peculiarity of the conditions of life of actresses justified their being judged by a separate code of morals. He approved a woman's resolve to go by her own rather than her husband's name.⁽²⁷⁾

This is perhaps the place to note that the "Committee of the Women's Progressive Society" proposed in 1892 to elect Hardy Vice-President, as a letter to Alice Grenfell makes clear.⁽²⁸⁾ This is not accidental — what would provoke the committee's request other than their feeling that in his work he does not condemn women to an enemy status? There is evidence that Hardy regarded women-suffrage with favor. In a letter to Mrs. Fawcett he writes:

I have for a long time been in favour of woman – suffrage I am in favour of it because I think the tendency of the woman's vote will be to break up the pernicious conventions in respect of women, customs, religion, illegitimacy, the stereotyped household (that it must be the unit of society), the father of a woman's child (that it is anybody's business but the woman's own).... slaughter-houses (that they should be dark dens of cruelty), and other matters which I got into hot water for touching on many years ago.⁽²⁹⁾

There is no reason to think that the censures that Hardy drew upon himself were occasioned exclusively by his disparagement of women. It was rather his highly advanced views, outraging propriety and causing a considerable rumpus, that brought down upon him a good deal of disapproval. Appalled by his misreaders, Hardy speaks out loud that they are grossly incorrect: "no satire on the sex is intended in any case by the imperfections of my heroines."⁽³⁰⁾ As a recent critic has pointed out:

Hardy's despair at being misread by an audience who held him responsible for isolated statements instead of reading them as existing in a controversial relationship with the rest of the text is well known ... As the movement of the novels and the women characters

(26) Webster notes that in a letter to Mr. Nevinson (August 5, 1909), Hardy said that he had favored "woman's suffrage for a long time." Emma Hardy walked in a "woman-suffrage parade" in 1907. (See Evelyn Hardy, *Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography* (London: Russell and Russell, 1954), p.149).

(27) *On a Darkling Plain: The Art and Thought of Thomas Hardy* (Chicago U.P., 1947, rpt. 1964), pp. 193-94. See also *Life*, pp. 235, 226, 227, 202, 204, 246.

(28) See *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 1, 1840-1892*, ed. Richard Purdy and Michael Millgate (Oxford: Univ. Press, 1978), p. 266.

(29) Unpublished letter in the Fawcett Library dated 30 Nov., 1906; quoted in Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 115.

(30) Weber, p. 94.

initiate a confrontation with the statements made about women within the novels, they indicate how all of Hardy's critical statements can be read as occasional thoughts rather than consistent convictions.⁽³¹⁾

The battle fought out in the columns of the long line of reviews is so well known that it is unnecessary to rehearse it here. Hardy was written down on account of the "coarseness" of some of the scenes in the novels, his depiction of marriage as menacing, and his defiance of convention. *Jude the Obscure* prompted an outburst of angry reviews. Mrs. Oliphant's notorious article entitled "The Anti-Marriage League"⁽³²⁾ stacked the deck against Hardy for intending in his novel "an assault on the stronghold of marriage, which is now beleaguered on every side." In her earlier review of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, she expresses disapproval of his portrayal of Angel Clare on the grounds that

He is truly worthy of the name, being the most curious thing in the shape of a man whom we think we have ever met with — at least out of a young lady's novel. We can at our ease gently deride David Grieve for being feminine, for he is the creation of a lady. But before Mr. Angel Clare we stand aghast. What is he? Had he, too, been framed by a woman, how we should have smiled and pointed out his impossibility!⁽³³⁾

Hardy was justified to offer in the "Explanatory Note to the First Edition" an apology for the novel against the "too genteel reader, who cannot endure to have said what everybody nowadays thinks and feels."

Hostile criticism came down heavily on "indecentcies," ironically from liberal women; it is somewhat confusing that ardent feminists were perfect conservatives in defending the conventional perspective. One may cite as evidence the dedicated suffragette Mrs. Fawcett who mounted an assault on Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* for its dismantling of marriage and what this encompasses — family demolition.⁽³⁴⁾ Mary Wollstonecraft, the eighteenth-century feminist herself, was taken to task by several leading nineteenth-century feminists.⁽³⁵⁾ George Eliot's unwedded union with G.H. Lewes was furiously vilified by feminists before others. In a letter to a friend, Anna Jameson, one of their number, finds most shocking George Eliot's immoral goings on, being "very *free* in all her opinions as to morals and religion."⁽³⁶⁾ In the cause of stressing woman's domestic mission, Emily Faithfully, another

(31) Mary Childers, "Thomas Hardy, The Man Who 'Liked' Women," *Criticism*, 23 (1981), 324.

(32) *Blackwood's Magazine*, 159 (January, 1896), 135-49; Cox, pp. 256-62. In addition to *Jude*, the article deals with Grant, Allen's *The Woman Who Did*, *The British Barbarians*, and Menie Muriel Dowie's *Gallia*.

(33) *Blackwood's Magazine*, 151 (March, 1882), 464-74; Cox, pp. 203-14.

(34) *The Contemporary Review*, 67 (May, 1885), 625-31.

(35) See Katherine, M. Rogers, *Feminism in Eighteenth-Century England* (Illinois U.P., 1982), p. 3.

(36) *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (Yale U.P., 1954), II, 231.

feminist, wrote in 1863, “No one disputes that household management and the nurture of children are good true womanly work. No one wants to take women from homes where there are home duties to perform.”⁽³⁷⁾ This definition of gender in terms of polarities is in essence the same as the articulation of sexual difference by the feminist Mary Astell, in her *Essay for the Defence of the Female Sex* (London, 1706).⁽³⁸⁾ This shows, in Elaine Showalter’s words, that “women themselves were in no position economically or legally to advocate radical change in the marriage system; the feminist critique of marriage, with very few exceptions, was reformist, not abolitionist.”⁽³⁹⁾

If Hardy’s aim is, as Morgan (flagrantly derogatively) claims, to stress the need for a different language to demarcate rigidly sex differentiation and the subordination of woman to man, one might expect that he favors the existence of two moral codes — one for men and another for women. Yet there is a great deal of evidence to the contrary. In *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* Hardy upholds a single sexual standard. He focuses attention on the double standard of male convention that has condoned Angel’s slippage the “eight-and-forty hours’ dissipation with a stranger” in London,⁽⁴⁰⁾ while attaching stigma to Tess for a similar incident: “Then shall the man be guiltless; but the woman shall bear her iniquity.”⁽⁴¹⁾ Hardy has worked out striking similarities between Tess’s case and Angel’s. She survives her chastity — which conventional writers would allow only to men. One may see an appeal for an equal status in Eustacia’s declaration to Wildeve about Clym, “I began a new system by going to that dance, and I mean to stick to it. Clym can sing merrily, why should not I?”⁽⁴²⁾ Which puts Eustacia in the same boat with Grace whose retaliation in kind shows herself to be her injurer’s equal — she tells Fitzpiers, “I don’t see why you should mind my having had one lover besides yourself in my life, when you have had so many.”⁽⁴³⁾

(37) See J.A. and Olive Banks, *Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England* (Liverpool; Univ. Press, 1964), p. 41; quoted in Eric Trudgill, *Madonnas and Magdalens: The Origins and Development of Victorian Sexual Attitudes* (London; Heinemann, 1976), p. 272.

(38) She writes: As the one sex (i.e. the male) is fortified with Courage and Ability to undergo the necessary Drudgery of providing Materials for the Sustenance of Life in both, so the other is furnished with the Ingenuity and Prudence for the orderly Management of it (p. 18).

Quoted in Katharine Eisaman Maus, “Playhouse Flesh and Blood”: Sexual Ideology and the Restoration Actress.” *ELH*, 46, No. 4 (Winter, 1979), 614.

(39) In a review of Jenni Calder’s *Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction*, *NCF*, 32 (June, 1977), 94.

(40) *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, p. 286.

(41) *Jude the Obscure*, p. 384.

(42) *The Return of the Native*, p. 336.

(43) *The Woodlanders*, p. 418.

Again, Morgan's sweeping statement — "The same causes do not produce the same effects in women as in men,"⁽⁴⁴⁾ thus interpreting character by gender, must be regarded with caution. One could argue that women demonstrate defective traits that Hardy allows frequently enough to men, and this is worth emphasis in this context. If there are only few explicit statements by the narrator denigrating men, still their fallibilities are dramatised. There is no denying that jealousy is one of woman's specificities,⁽⁴⁵⁾ and Bathsheba in particular is jealous of the dead Fanny. She passionately abases herself before Troy: "Don't don't kiss them! O, Frank, I can't bear it — I can't! I love you better than she did: kiss me too, Frank — kiss me!" (p. 344). But surely this attribute has no recognisable sex in Hardy. In the anguish of Boldwood's passion for Bathsheba, jealousy runs amuck. Lacerating jealous possessiveness takes violent and unshakeable possession of him, leading to a revenge that strains credulity. It is specially noteworthy that he is capable of growing "hot down to his hands with an incipient jealousy" (p. 135). His is an extreme nature that can be set afire: "His equilibrium disturbed, he was in extremity at once. If an emotion possessed him at all, it ruled him" (p. 137). Boldwood is not alone in his jealousy. Knight and Angel also belong to the jealous throng. They are driven by angry jealousy which dooms to disaster both Elfride and Tess. "With all the rapidity of jealous sensitiveness, [Knight] pounced upon some words [Elfride] had inadvertently let fall about an earring which he had only partially understood at the time."⁽⁴⁶⁾ And does Henchard

(44) Albert Pettigrew Elliott is also most responsive to the weaker side of women. In his chapter on women in *Fatalism in the Works of Thomas Hardy* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1935), he writes, "They respond to the same basic situations in entirely different ways." He goes on to say, "Soon after Hardy's books began to appear, many critics, especially women, accused him of attempting to calumniate the female sex" (p. 90). It is the same as Morgan's view. However, he adds that "Hardy did not detest Woman at all." What brackets the two critics is their traditional approach to Hardy. Recently a few studies appeared which reassessed Hardy's work from a virtually new perspective. Among these one may mention: Anne Z. Mickelson, *Thomas Hardy's Women and Men: the Defeat of Nature* (N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1976); John Lucas, *The Literature of Change: Studies in the Nineteenth-Century Provincial Novel* (Sussex, 1977); Liloyd Fernando, "New Women" in the Late Victorian Novel (Pennsylvania: State Univ. Press, 1977); Geoffrey Wagner, *Five for Freedom: A Study of Feminism in Fiction* (London, 1976); Roy Morrell "Some Aspects of Hardy's Minor Novels," in *Budmouth Essays on Thomas Hardy*, ed. F.B. Pinion (The Thomas Hardy Society: Dorchester, 1976); Kathleen Blake, "Sue Bridehead, the Woman of the Feminist Movement," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 18 (Autumn, 1978), 703-26; Barbara Hardy, "Introduction" to the New Wessex edition of *A Laodicean* (1975); Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1978); Rosalind Miles, "The Women of Wessex," in Anne Smith ed., *The Novels of Thomas Hardy* (London: Vision, 1979); Penny Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Woman: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982).

(45) However, we are told that Grace, on discovering her husband's illicit relationship with Suke Damsen, was almost started to find how little she suffered from that jealous excitement which is conventionally attributed to all wives in such circumstances ... [She was] possessed by none of the feline wildness which it was her moral duty to experience (p. 251).

(46) *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, p. 348.

not rage in jealousy of Farfrae? One could in fact describe Bathsheba as rash at different points in the novel. The firing of Oak and the sending of the valentine demonstrate lack of reasoning. But if she is occasionally impulsive, the men with whom her lot is joined — Troy and Boldwood — set an example of the trait. Angel is perhaps justified when he tells Izz (who self-sacrificingly speaks in Tess's favour and he shamefacedly goes back on his request), "Women may be bad, but they are not so bad as men in these things! [the susceptibility of folly and treachery]" (p. 345). Woman's unruly tendencies are not without parallels in men. Fancy, Elfride, Paula, Eustacia, Grace, and Sue show excess of passion and errant ways; but they are not much distant in quality from the Byronically passionate intriguers who range throughout the novels, such as: Manston, Troy, Bob Loveday, Wildeve, Fitzpiers, Alec, Pierston, and "The Dark-Eyed Gentleman."⁽⁴⁷⁾ We have good reason to suppose that blushing is a characteristic that knows no gender. We see Bathsheba coloring when she realises that Oak has been watching her horseback antics — "It was a time to see a woman redden who was not given to reddening as a rule; not a point in the milkmaid but was of the deepest rose-colour" (p.21). Yet earlier in the scene she is poised and collected when he stares at her, and it is he who is moved: "it was the man who blushed, the maid not at all" (p. 20). His blush foregrounds hers. Again when she runs after him to correct her aunt's information, Hardy tells us, "Gabriel's colour deepened: hers was already deep, not, as it appeared, from emotion, but from running" (p. 30). The question of clear-cut differentiation between the sexes and female inferiority is, perhaps, justifiably irrelevant. An authorial commentary on Ethelberta and Julian says it all:

She gave him a hand so cool and still that Christopher, much as he desired the contact, was literally ashamed to let her see and feel his own, trembling with unmanageable excess of feeling. It was always so, always had been so, always would be so, at these meetings of theirs: she was immeasurably the stronger; and the deep-eyed young man fancied, in the chagrin which the perception of this difference always bred in him, that she triumphed in her superior control.⁽⁴⁸⁾

The main import of the passage is, of course, Ethelberta's emphatic firmness and self-possession which are sharply reversed in Julian's meek softness and diffidence. Ethelberta has assumed character traits traditionally reserved to masculinity — roles of the "opposite" sexes are fluid and flexible. This makes no room for traditional, gendered distinctions — which cuts back to our starting point: Bathsheba's looking askance at the patriarchal determinants of language and her sense of the disparity between words and feminine reality.

(47) *The Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy* (London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 227.

(48) *The Hand of Ethelberta*, p. 127. However, Hardy hastens to add, "Yet it was only in little things that their sexes were thus reversed: Christopher would receive quite a shock if a little dog barked at his heels, and be totally unmoved when in danger of his life". The passage, then, points both ways; it shows an oscillating attitude towards both characters.

الانحياز الذكري للغة والتفاوت بين الجنسين : نظرة جديدة إلى باثشيبا افردين بطلّة رواية «بعيداً عن الجمهور الصاخب» لتوماس هاردي، وكذلك رؤيته إلى الواقع النسوي

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ملخص البحث: يهدف هذا البحث إلى تقديم قراءة مغايرة لنص أساس في رواية توماس هاردي بعيداً عن الجمهور الصاخب، والنص هو ما جاء على لسان البطلّة باثشيبا في حوارها مع بولدوود الذي أطلق العنان لهواه فجأة بعد طول سبات وأخذ يوالي الضغط على باثشيبا لحضنها بعواطفه المتأججة على قبول الزواج منه. تقول باثشيبا في سياق حديثها «إنه من الصعب على امرأة أن تفصح عن الأحاسيس التي تجول بخاطرها بلغة صنعها الرجال ليعبروا بها عن مشاعرهم». نحن أمام تفسيرين خلعا على البطلّة جملة من المعايير من بينها المراوغة وحجب المرامي بالأقنعة وكذلك الافتقار إلى الصراحة ومنطق العقل، وهي المعايير التقليدية التي تميز النساء. بيد أنه من الخطأ إغفال حقيقة أن باثشيبا — على العكس من بولدوود — لاتأخذها الأوهام العاطفية المضللة (مع بعض التحفظ لاستسلامها لغلبة تروى). وهل يمكن لمن يحسن النظر أن ينكر على باثشيبا الإفصاح والإبانة هنا كما هو واقع الحال في مواقف عديدة في الرواية؟ والذي لا ريب فيه هو أن العبارة مطبوعة بطابع الاحتجاج على الامتياز اللغوي الجائر الذي ينعم به الجنس الآخر والمطالبة الضمنية بالمساواة وتغيير الوضع اللالغوي للمرأة. بولدوود يريد أن تنطق بالكلام الذي يريده، أن تتمثل الدور الذي يُملى عليها وأن تقف موقف التلقي والاستقبال وهيئات أن تكون هي كذلك؛ وقد أغفل الناقدان من حسابها دور باثشيبا الحيوي القائم على قوة العزيمة والثقة بالنفس والبروز وخروجها عن السنن النسوية المعروفة بممارستها أعمال يمارسها الرجال وكذلك مغالبة الآلام. ويمضي البحث إلى أبعد من ذلك حيث يبين أن هاردي بدلاً من أن يؤكد على التفريق والتمييز والتضاد بين الجنسين يؤكد على القرابة والمقاربة والتواصل والمماثلة إلى حدّ الالتباس واختلاط صفات الأنوثة والذكورة وهي الأوجه الغالبة على صعيد الأدوار. ومن المشاهد الرائعة في الروايات تلك التي يتطابق فيها الحب مع العمل فالرجل يتمّ بالمرأة وهي تتم به. ولا يعصب علينا أن نتبين أن بعض الأحكام التي أوردها الناقدان صيغت بدرجة واسعة من العمومية حيث يصعب الاعتداد بها والتعويل عليها.