Chapter – IV

Far From the Madding Crowd

In Far From The Madding Crowd Hardy chooses a woman as a central character and he defines her not according to patriarchal assumptions of ideal woman. Bathsheba is depicted with the subversive aspirations for social, political and cultural equality in the society. She challenges the male-dominated corn market and her unconventional role threatened the masculinist ideology of womanhood. She is represented by Hardy as a proud, spirited and virile woman. She denies to be 'a man's property' through conventional marriage. But the traditional forces of the society tries incessantly to break her self-confidence as an efficient manager and imposes on her the ideology of marriage. Bathsheba courageously repulses the attempts of the society to chain her in the conventional roles. Her attempts at self-preservation and self-identity proves futile at the end of the novel and she is forced to embrace the conventional role of a wife. Hardy's conception of Bathsheba foreshadows some of the themes of 'New Woman' in the late Victorian novels. But Hardy has no idea of the issues of the 'New Woman' during his writing of this novel. However, from the beginning of his career as a novelist. Hardy explores the masculinist codes of the society that denies woman her right as a human being. In his previous novels Hardy's frustration and anger with the sexist codes of the society remain disguised under the surface of a traditional narrative voice. As Hardy gains more self-confidence and recognition as a writer his clash with the traditional society becomes more acute. He challenges the society's attitude to division of roles on the basis of gender and in his novels he deliberately tries to demolish the concept of separate spheres for men and women. Bathsheba's emancipation from the conventional role, her explicit sexuality, virile quality, strong resistance to the ideology of marriage gives her a new identity. However, the society has no space for this kind of womanhood. Hardy's definition of Bathsheba in terms of a highly independent, proud, wily woman transcends the Victorian ideal of femininity. Her spiritedness, vanity and sexual experience is disvalued as 'unfeminine ', and her activities are constantly judged from the angle of

masculine values. Her challenge to the male oriented socio-economic system brings her humiliation and loss of identity as a person. The male-dominated society breaks her independent spirit through violence and conventional marriage. The marriage codes denies her right over her property. The entire novel is seen by critics as a process of taming Bathsheba. She has to pay for her efficiency and integrity as a woman. Hardy under the apparent gloss of a pastoral novel lays bare the power structured gender-relationship in the society. He asserts that the concept of gender role as a construct of the society and Bathsheba is brought to submission for violating the gender role.

Thomas Hardy broke away from the traditional convention of representing women in the novels. This is due to the fact that Victorian patriarchal social structure underwent extreme pressure from the emergent feminist movement. This movement challenged the accepted norms of femininity. Thomas Hardy was deeply in touch with the feminist movement of his age. Hardy's acquaintance with the thinking of John Stuart Mill, Comte, Spencer and the feminist literature of his period helped him to realize the predicament of women in the society. Hardy's novels reveal the influence of these thinkers. John Stuart Mill was a champion of the 'Individual' against the tyranny of the society. Mill stressed that, 'there needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling against the tendency of the society to fetter development and if possible prevent the formation of an individuality not in harmony with society' (On Liberty, 3). Hardy accepted Mill's comment that 'protection was needed not only against the tyranny of the magistrate but also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feelings' (ibid). Mill in The Subjection of Women (1860) argued that 'subordination of one sex to the other is now one of the chief hindrances to human development'. 'Women have always hitherto been kept as far as regards spontaneous development into unnatural a state, that their nature cannot but have been greatly distorted and disguised, and no one can safely pronounce that if woman's nature left to change as freely as 'man's '(Subjection,171). For the argument that women are 'naturally inferior, suited for the domestic sphere, Mill argued that 'we cannot know what women are naturally at all .what is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing -the

result of forced repression in some direction, unnatural stimulation in others' (Subjection,136). Mill argues, 'the benefit which it has appeared that the world would gain by ceasing to make sex a disqualification for privileges and a badge of subjection are social rather than individual' (Subjection, 210). If women were given the same education and freedom as men they would surely eliminate "nearly all the apparent differences between the sexes. It would benefit men as well, since too much power makes them arrogant and spoiled" (Jane O' Grady: 1996, XX). He insists that to deprive women of the freedom which is 'ennobling' and 'inspiriting' to all humans alike, not only lessen their potentiality for happiness and fulfillment, but halves the quantity of talent available and impoverishes the whole of human kind. Mill declared with Harriet Taylor in the Enfranchisement of Women (1851) 'What is wanted for women is equal rights, equal admission to all social privileges, not a position apart, a sort of sentimental priesthood '(Enfranchiment,311). Mill says, "The moral regeneration of mankind will only really commence when the most fundamental of the social relations is placed under the rule of equal justice, and when human beings learn to cultivate their strongest sympathy with an equal rights and 'cultivation" (Subjection,210). Hardy's note books shows he was a keen reader of Mill's writings and was in full sympathy with the liberal feminist movement of his day. Hardy like the radical feminists did not believe in the conventional institution of marriage. Hardy's anti-marriage campaign culminates in Sue Bridehead. Bathsheba's inflexible attitude to Victorian ideology drew unfavourable remarks both inside and outside of the novel. The Weather bury community criticised her as 'a head-strong woman and to Henry James, 'Bathsheba is inconsequential, willful and mettlesome and we cannot say that we either understand or like her' (Nation, 24 Dec,1874). Bathsheba breaks the prescribed codes of womanhood and denies to conform to the ideal of femininity. She with her vanity, willfulness and daring sexuality does not fit into the 'angle in the house' image of Victorian womanhood. She creates moral censure from the conventional critics. Hardy being fully aware of the implication of representing subversive womanhood in the novel risked his future prospect as a novelist. The dominant ideology demanded that Bathsheba must get rid of her vanity and manliness. She must transform herself from a proud, vain and efficient woman to meek, submissive and

dependent woman without any individuality and identity. Through melodramatic events of adultery and death Bathsheba is forced to accept marriage and is lost in oblivion.

Bathsheba is introduced to us through the point of view of Gabrial Oak and we are involved from the very beginning in his perception of her. She is seen riding on an ornamental spring wagon and observed herself as 'a fair product of Nature in the feminine kind' (Far From The Madding Crowd 13, henceforth cited as FFMC). Hardy's comic narrative mode in the novel seeks to emphasize on the complex psychological processes of Bathsheba. Gabriel Oak casually glacing over the hedge sees the coming down the incline before him 'an ornamental spring wagon painted yellow and gaily marked' (FFMC 12). Bathsheba's unconventional personality doesnot conform to traditional womanhood. Gabriel Oak is "little piqued by the comely traveller's indifference" (FFMC14). Through his male-vision Oak finds Bathseba's expression of sexuality as a 'fault', his constant gazing at Bathsheba constructs her as a sexual object for possession and he ponders that this 'vain' self delighting woman must be brought to submission and humiliation. Hardy narrates Bathsheba's exposure to the scrutinizing gaze of a male. The society denies a self-assertive woman her right to self-preservation and her spontaneous expression of sexuality is misinterpreted as vanity. This paradigm of male dominance has been structured through the masculine vision of woman. Gabriel incessantly gazes at Bathsheba to control her sexuality and at the same time like a 'voyeur' he derives sexual pleasure from Bathsheba's vibrant sexuality. As Linda M. Shires observes:

> All events of gazing might seem to signify the same thing possession: of the female as an object. Yet because a paradigmatic event is part of a syntgam that necessarily changes its value, each event of male gazing signifies somewhat differently...Oak to be sure idealizes Bathsheba and even casts her as a divinity, a version of Venus, Ashtoreth, as well as a fleshly country girl. Initially, in the role of male investigator who gazes at woman as enigma, he stereo types her and prides himself that he can win her. Yet the value of his gazing shifts significantly as the story unfolds (Shire in Higonnet:1993,54).

Shortly afterwards Oak watches Bathsheba feed the sick cow and rises on the horses back through the plantation and leave the cattle shed. The narrator compares Oak stealthy looking at Bathsheba to "Milton's Satan first saw paradise" (FFMC 21). The narrator says :"Had Gabriel been able from the first to get a distinct view of her countenance, his estimate of it as very handsome and slightly so would have been as his soul required a divinity at the moment" (FFMC 22). Oak learns from Bathsheba's conversation that she has lost her hat. Finding the hat Oak peeps through the hole of it to enjoy Bathsheba's movements on horse back in pursuance of the hat. When Oak comes near Bathsheba's home with her hat he finds the left arm of Bathsheba being shown bare to make "Oak wish that the whole would have been revealed " (FFMC 25). Bathsheba's sexual attraction so much fascinates Oak that "she saw Gabrial's face rising like the moon behind the hedge" (FFMC 26).Rosemarie Morgan observes, "Gabriel as stealing Bathsheba's freedom by spying on her. And this has far reaching consequences. Oak's espials and subsequent humiliation of her lead indirectly to her tragic mismatch with Troy, with whom she had engaged primarily, at the level of private, lighthearted sexual exploration without guilt or shame or fear"(Morgan: 1988, 44). Oak meets Bathsheba for a fourth time when Bathsheba rescues Oak from the fire in his hut. Oak awakens to find, "the young girl with the remarkably pleasant lips and white teeth was beside him. More than this -astonishingly more-his head was upon her lap, his face and neck were disagreeably wet, and her fingers were unbuttoning his collar"(FFMC 29). Though there is no explicit sexuality in the fourth meeting of Bathsheba with Oak, the scene conveys Oak's obsession with Bathsheba's beauty and his dogged determination to break her independent and self-assertive personality. Bathsheba's absence spurs Oak to follow her at Weather bury. Oak's persistent effort to follow and subdue Bathsheba continues. He persistently follows her first as a moral commentator, then as a bailiff, and manager and finally takes control of Bathsheba's farm as the husband. Bathsheba's self-delighting sexuality causes concern in Oak's mind and he wants to dominate her body and sexuality through conventional marriage. Hardy shows Oak's shrewd movement towards his object under the guise of a devoted and constant

As a member of the dominant class Oak thinks that it his moral duty to mould Bathsheba into a conventional woman. He interprets Bathsheba's activities from the angle of a moral guardian. He expects from Bathsheba meekness, submission and passionlessness. But Hardy had no intention to represent Bathsheba as a traditional woman conforming to the prescribed roles and image. He daringly depicts her as a woman with appetite for healthy sexuality. Bathsheba's efficiency as a farm manager, her virile quality, and above all her vibrant sexuality made of the orthodox society to raise eyebrows. However, at this stage of his writing career Hardy did not intend to jeopardise his career as novelist. He tactfully imposed on the narrative structure a male voice who indicts Bathsheba's unwomanly behaviour and at the same time endorses her weakness as a woman.

Oak with his patriarchal notion of propriety considers Bathsheba's open and frank behaviour with Boldwood as something un-feminine. He, therefore, castigates her and tries to reform her bouncing vitality. Bathsheba's strong personality being unable to withstand the interference into her private affair, remarks, "I cannot allow any man to criticize my private conduct1!" she exclaimed. "Nor will I for a minute. So you'll please leave the farm at the end of the week!" (FFMC, 153). Under the guise of a devoted follower Oak moves towards his goal breaking the independent spirit of Bathsheba. It is worth noticing in the chapter " Perplexity- Grinding the Shears- A Quarrel" how Hardy metaphorically deploys the scene to foreshadow the male-violences that are to engulf Bathsheba. Under the cover of a pastoral ritual of sheep shearing Hardy symbolically shows wounding of Bathsheba by the killing weapon of the male. The shearing takes place in the great barn. Bathsheba is carefully watching the men, to see that there is no cutting or wounding of the animals through carelessness. Bathsheba complements Gabriel upon his speedy and correct fleecing of the sheep. But sudden appearance of Boldwood at the barn distracts Oak and "he watched Boldwood's manner he snipped the ship in the groin. The animal plunged; Bathsheba instantly gazed toward it and she saw the blood" (FFMC, 168). Feminist critics finds a parallel between Bathsheba's subjugation through male violence and wounding of the sheep by the weapon. To quote Linda M. Shire:

lover. Oak is a conventional male who cannot tolerate independent spirit of Bathsheba. To quote Landa M. Shires:

> Feminist critics do not judge Oak as lacking in manliness; indeed, they read him as a patriarch who would control Bathsheba, from the start, and who does so in the end. They interpret Bathsheba, in turn, as passively entangled in a sexual ideology that positions any woman in terms of her being desired but not in terms of her desiring. In their view, Bathsheba is objectified by the regard of her suitors. The woman farmer, so resistant to becoming man's property, is gazed at obsessively by Oak, taken in by the sexual aggressor Troy, humiliated first by him and then by the persistence of Farmer Boldwood, broken, and married off to Oak in a final gesture of Hardyesque taming (Shires, in Higonnet,1993, 50-51).

Hardy depicts constant threat to Bathsheba's attempt at self-exploration and self-preservation by the aggressive sexuality of the privileged male class. Hardy has shown marriage as the most powerful ideological weapon of the patriarchal society to subdue and control woman. Like radical feminists, Hardy had no faith in the institution of marriage. Marriage oppresses a woman by denying her individuality and freedom. Like a 'New woman' Bathsheba is aware of the humiliating codes of marriage that deny women their identity and right to self-presentation. Hardy has shown Bathsheba stubbornly to resist Oak's proposal of marriage and say, "I hate to be thought men's property in that way" (FFMC 38). She asserts her independent identity by declaring "I want some body to tame me" (FFMC 38). As Rosemarie Morgan observes:

> Legal and sexual discrimination apart, as surely as Bathsheba attempts to maintain her independence and prove her talents, so Oak attempts to subdue and reduce her. And it is this more insidious form of subjugation that Hardy treats most comprehensively in Far From the Madding Crowd. There is bitter irony indeed in Bathsheba's rejection of marriage on the grounds, as she tactfully puts it to Oak at the point of her own independent nature: 'I want somebody to tame me (FFMC, 35). We infer, of course, that the voluptuous girl is actually pleading for a, more virile suitor, but that she should light on the word 'tame' when in reality he owns all the 'corrective' methods for breaking her spirit entirely, is bitterly ironic (Morgan: 1988, 44).

> Other feminists have interpreted this scene by connecting it to earlier and later scenes where men bear phallic weapons: Troy's sword, Boldwood's gun. They interpret Oak's cut as directed against Bathsheba whom the ewe represents (about to be branded with her sign BE). And the words of the text here do support such a reading. It is implied that Oak is getting back at his mistress. Bathsheba. Oak tells us, knew that she was the cause of the wounding, 'because she had wounded the ewe's shearer in a still more vital part' (Shires:1993, 57).

Bathsheba is shown to be under constant pressure of her suitor's expectation of marriage. Of the three suitors Farmer Boldwood's marriage obsession after receiving the Valentine card from Bathsheba sows the seeds of future tragedy. Being unware of the traps and loopholes of the patriarchal society, Bathsheba commits the indiscretion. For her sending the Valentine card is a whimsical freak originating with Liddy. The working of chance is symbolised by the tossing of a hymn book to decide whether the recepient is to be little Teddy Coggan or William Boldwood. Bathsheba having earlier noticed Boldwood's indifference to her and wanting to test his response to her, sends him the Valentine card writing 'Marry Me' on it. As the narrator observes: "So very idly and unreflectingly was this deed done" (FFMC, 114). Receiving the Valentine card Boldwood is transfixed by it "till the large red seal became as a blot of blood on the retina of his eye" (FFMC,115). From that moment he places it in the mirror: ". . . Boldwood dozed, she took a form, and comparatively ceased to be a vision. When he awoke there was the letter justifying the dream" (FFMC,116). Before Bathsheba he had not seen any woman with interest. "To Boldwood women had been remote phenomena rather than necessary complements" (FFMC, 134) and "he had never inspected woman with the very centre and force of his glance" (FFMC, 135). As the narrator informs: "His eyes, she knew, were following her everywhere . . . . But it had been brought about by misdirected ingenuity, and she valued it only as she valued an artificial flower or a wax fruit" (FFMC, 136). Like a neurotic, Boldwood obsessively gazes at Bathsheba. In the corn market "Boldwood looked at her, not slily, critically or understandingly but blankly at gaze, in the way a reaper looks up at a passing train" (FFMC, 134). He says: "I may have been called a confirmed bachelor, and I was a confirmed bachelor" (FFMC, 145). As H.M. Daleski observes:

mentioned reasons with which she combated her objections, she had a strong feeling that, having been the one who began the game she ought in honesty to accept the consequences. Still the reluctance remained" (FFMC, 149). In the chapter 'Eventide: A Second Declaration' we find Boldwood's marriage obsession disturbs her normal life. After the shearing supper Boldwood like a obsessive pursues her. Being unable to withstand Boldwood's repeated persuasion, Bathsheba almost promises him - "I will try to love you;' she says, and says that she has "every reason to hope that at the end of the five or six weeks between this time and harvest that you say you are going to be away from home, I shall be able to promise to be your wife" (FFMC, 179).

Hardy exposes the fact of male dominance and male privileges through the narrative. Being a woman Bathsheba is always under the threat of aggressive male sexuality. Boldwood as a member of the privileged class thinks it very natural to coerce a woman sexually. This paradigm of male - dominance has been shown by Hardy throughout the novel. The social forces expose her as an object of male desire. Hardy shows an unconventional young woman's brave struggle against the male supremacy. The coercive sexuality of the masculine world destroys her challenging spirit and transforms her into a dispirited, submissive and silent woman.

Far From The Madding Crowd is intended by Hardy to represent a heroine with all the characteristics of the emerging womanhood. To this end he depicts Bathsheba as virile, proud and sexually assertive. In her pride and challenging sexuality she transcends the prescribed gender role. This type of womanhood has no place in the contemporary society. Hardy in spite of himself is influenced by the prevailing code of femininity. Moreover, he writes the novel under the constant supervision of Leslie Stephen, the editor of The Cornhill Magazine. Mr. Stephen ensures that Hardy's novel may not break the prevailing decorum. He keeps a searching eye on Hardy's serial instalments and deletes the portion that he thinks indecorous to the eyes of the readers. As Patricia Stubbs informs:

> Boldwood may have a "strong nature" and so be at the opposite pole from a character such as Stephen Smith, but he nonetheless resembles him in one respect. Stephen had a tendency to "draw himself in with the sensitiveness of a snail"; Boldwood, too, prior to the valentine, has lived within his "shell", not so much in sensitive withdrawal as in the "natural reserve" of a habitual sense of "self-containment". His reserve has made him physically impassive, for no feeling moves into or out of his hard, shell-like "impossibleness", keeping him closed up like a dark tower or shut book. When Bathsheba comes into his life, the new feeling "overflows" and he then writes himself in his body, "the tablet of his soul"; powerfully lit from within, he now can read at a glance. Having sallied forth from the tower, he lives "outside his defence for the first time; or, alternatively, having shed his shell, he has "a fearful sense of exposure (Daleski: 1997, 64).

On receiving the Valentine card Boldwood's long repressed sexuality comes out like a volcano and it distorts the life of Bathsheba beyond recognition. Boldwood's obsessive sexuality takes a tragic pattern. Being exposed to male lust she finds it impossible to maintain her dignity and efficiency as a farm manager. Like a neurotic, Boldwood obsessively gazes at Bathsheba. Boldwood's abnormal psychology anticipates some of the traits of Freud's findings in psychology. Boldwood offers a unique study in pre-Freudian psychology. As Rosemary Sumner observes:

> Hardy's treatment of Boldwood shows, I think, that he was hovering on the point of suggesting that his unbalanced state of mind derives from the burying of traumatic sexual experience in the unconscious. Admittedly, Hardy does not say this with any clarity or definiteness. He is, rather, groping towards an awareness of this psychological phenomenon; as a result unrecounted contradiction in the character remain' (Sumner:1981, 48).

Boldwood conveys to Bathsheba "I have felt lately, more and more, that my present way of living is bad in every respect. Beyond all things I want you as my wife" (FFMC,145). He informs Bathsheba: "My life is a burden without you . . . . I want you - to let me say I love you again and again!" (FFMC, 145). A puzzled Bathsheba responds "I feel, Mr. Boldwood, that though I respect you much, I don't feel - what would justify me to - in accepting your offer" (FFMC,145). The narrator informs "Beyond the

A fascinating exchange of letters between Hardy and Leslie Stephen, editor of The Cornhill at the time it serialized Far From The Madding Crowd in 1874, gives us a glimpse into another magazine's policy on women, sex and fiction. Stephen wrote to Hardy saying that he had: 'ventured to leave out a line or two in the last batch of proofs from an excessive prudery of wh(ich) I am ashamed ; but one is forced to be absurdly particular. May I suggest that Troy's seduction of the young woman will require to be treated in a gingerly fashion, when, as I suppose must be tha case, he comes to be exposed to his wife? I mean that the thing must be stated but that the words must be careful- excuse this wretched shed of concesseion to popular stupidity; but I am a slave' (Stubbs: 1979, 21).

The censorial scrutiny of Mr. Stephen on Hardy's presentation of women leaves an unhealthy influence. Hardy detests any curbing influence on the growth of the characters. In an article he comes openly against the pernicious effects of censor of the editors and their activities. However, Hardy in his earlier novels has tried to evade the scrutiny of the critics by showing indirectly unconventional behaviour of his heroines indirectly. As Hardy has no belief in the so-called image of 'perfect womanhood' he depicts in B;athsheba a daring sexuality and an irresistible passion for consummation of love. In the encounter scene between Bathsheba and Sergeant Troy, Hardy shows Bathsheba's unwomanly role as a sexually hungry woman. Hardy matches Troy's flamboyance with Bathsheba's daring sexuality. Hardy shows Bathsheba's inadvertent entanglement in the destructive web of Troy's sexuality. Troy represents the destabilising forces that destroy the harmony of the rural world. He is an outsider to the Weather bury people and not conversant with their ways of life. He brings rootless modernity to the rural community. Hardy incorporates the character of Troy in the later version of the novel showing him in contrast with Boldwood's repression. Troy is shown with an instinctive capacity for understanding women's sexuality. He is licentious in nature and has already seduced Bathsheba's maid Fanny Robin. As Norman Page in Thomas Hardy: TheNovels (2001) observes:

For Hardy, however, at an early stage of his career and anxious to secure a good reputation with editors, publishers and readers, presenting Troy as the potential seducer of the heroine is a project fraught with risk. Far From The Madding Crowd was his first big opportunity to publish a novel in a leading London Magazine, and he

must have known that what he produced could make or break him. His brilliant solution to this specific problem was to write a scene that, a generation before the early writings of Freud, make powerful use of sexual symbolism' (Page : 2001, 131).

In the chapter 'Fir Plantation' Hardy symbolically presents the seduction of Bathsheba through Troy's sexual offence motivated by desire for conquest. Bathsheba meets Troy when she is making her routine check of her farmstead. Before going back to the house she hears "the noise approached came close and a figure was apparently on the point of gliding past her when something tugged at her skirt and pinned it forcibly to the ground" (FFMC, 181). Troy's spur gets hooked with gimp' of Bathsheba's skirt. The man asks Bathsheba:

'Are you a woman ?'
'Yes'
'A Lady, I should have said.'
'It doesn't matter.'
'I am a man.'
'Oh!'
Bathsheba softly tugged again, but to no purpose (FFMC, 182).

Bathsheba found the man to "whom she was hooked was brilliant in brass and scarlet. He was a soldier. His sudden appearance was to darkness what the sound of trumpet is to silence" (FFMC, 182). Hardy symbolically uses the scene to foreshadow Bathsheba's entanglement with Troy's sexuality. As Richard Carpenter observes:

At the same time, but less obviously the spur like the sword a traditional symbol of cruel male potency is entangled inextricably with the soft tissues of the dress, which as Hardy is fond of pointing out (accurately or not), is to a woman not merely a piece of clothing but an extension of her personality. Hardy is saying symbolically that Bathsheba will be connected with Troy through sex rather than through the romance of respect she could expect from her other lovers, and that she is to be dominated phallically as D. H. Lawrence would say, by an aggresive male (Carpenter:1964 , 88 - 89).

Hardy focuses on the insubstantiality of the relationships of Bathsheba and Troy: "The lantern radiated upwards into their faces, and sent over half the plantation gigantic shadows of both man and woman, each dusky shape becoming distorted and mangled upon the tree-trunks till it wasted to nothing" (FFMC, 183). When Troy opens the lantern and "looked hard into her eyes when she raised them for a moment' Bathsheba looked down again, for his gaze was too strong to be received pointblank with her own" (FFMC, 183). The narrator observes: "Gloom the genius loci at all times hitherto, was now totally overthrown, less by the lantern light than by what the lantern lighted. The contrast of this revelation with her anticipations of some sinister figure in sombre grab was so great that it had upon her the effect of a fairy transformation" (FFMC,182).

To Bathsheba Troy's 'brilliance' is connected with his "brass and scarlet" of his uniform. H. M. Daleski finds that it is the vibrating sexuality of Troy that dazzles Bathsheba:

> What emanates from him is a sexual vividness and brightness, as is underscored when the phallic spur finally becomes apparent. To be open to such brightness, it is implied, is liberating: 'when Troy takes in what has happened, he says to her, "you are prisoner miss" (215); the rays of the lantern that revealed this to be the case are said (in an image that otherwise would be incongruous) to "burst out from their prison" when the lamp is opened (Daleski: 1997 69).

A skilled seducer Troy continues his persuasions of Bathsheba with his 'winnowing tongue'. Little did Bathsheba perceive that the dashing soldier whom did she met at the darkness of night is "a walking ruin to honest girls". As the narrator informs, "Troy was a man to whom memories were an encumbrance and anticipations a superfluity" (FFMC 187). "He was moderately truthful towards men, but to women lied like a Cretan" (FFMC 188). He believes that "in dealing with womankind the only alternative to flattery was cursing and swearing. There was no third method"(FFMC, 189). "Treat them fairly and you are a lost man, he would say" (ibid). Troy with his flattery and insincere admiration of Bathsheba woos her. From Bathsheba's response the practised seducer perceives that "the seed which was to lift the

foundation had taken root in the chink: the remainder was a mere question of time and natural changes" (FFMC, 194).

Bathsheba's sexual awakening is depicted by Hardy in the scene of sword-exercise. The scene is laden with sexual symbolism. Troy with his sword exercise fascinates and dominates Bathsheba. Troys sword exercise is a kind of seduction that Hardy imcorporates in the novel. Troy with a view to knowing whether Bathsheba has "pluck enough", at first starts with a "preliminary test" and tells her that if she is afraid, he cannot play the sword Troy's sword exercise makes her " murderous and blood thirsty"(FFMC, 206). Troy deftly wields the dangerous weapon controlling it with keen eyes. To demonstrate his skill in swordmanship Troy uses his sword to cut a lock of hair of Bathsheba and he splits a caterpiller into two. When Bathsheba learns that the sword is sharp like a razor she shudders, "I have been within an inch of my life, and did not know it!" (FFMC, 209). Troy compliments her courage: "Bravely borne! ... you didn't flinch a shade's thickness. Wonderful in a woman!" (FFMC,208). In this scene Hardy emphasizes Bathsheba's sexuality. As the narrator informs: "Bathsheba's adventurous spirit was beginning to find some grain of relish in these highly novel proceedings. She took up her position as directed, facing Troy" (FFMC, 207). As his "reflecting blade flashes" taking "beams of light" from the sun, the atmosphere is transformed to Bathsheba's eyes. She is "enclosed in a firmament of light and of sharp hisses, resembling a sky full of meteors close at hand" (FFMC, 208). Bathsheba 'felt powerless to withstand or deny him. He was altogether too much for her, and Bathsheba seemed as one who, facing a reviving wind, finds it blow so strongly that it stops the breath' (FFMC, 210). Hardy's sexually assertive heroine is shown equally responsive to male sexuality. But Hardy's woman expresses her sexual feeling in such euphemistic terms that it passes unaware by the reader. Bathsheba's presentation contradicts with the conventional pattern of femininity. However, she could not free herself totally from the norms of idealized femininity. As the narrator informs:

> That minute's interval had brought the blood beating into her face, set her stinging as if aflame to the very hollows of her feet, and enlarged emotion to a compass which quite swamped thought. It had brought upon her a stroke resulting, as did that of Moses in Horeb, in a liquid stream - here a stream of tears. She felt like one who has sinned a great sin. The circumstance had been the gentle dip of Troy's mouth downwards upon her own. He had kissed her (FFMC, 210).

Bathsheba being unware of the traps and crosscurrents of the patriarchal society and succumbing to the tremendous pressure for marriage takes Troy hastily as her life partner. And the narrator says: "Bathsheba loved Troy in the way that only self - reliant women love when they abandon their self-reliance" (FFMC, 211). Bathsheba's foolish infatuation leads her to Troy, we are told that his "deformities" lie "deep down from a woman's vision" while his "embellishments" are "upon the very surface" (FFMC, 212) is chiefly responsible for the failure of his marriage with Bathsheba. Bathsheba painfully observes that her hard earned money is squandered by Troy in gay prusuits. Troy is incapable of loving any woman. He gets sadistic pleasure by subjecting a woman to suffering. He marries Bathsheba only to exploit and humiliate her. Bathsheba is subjected not only to Troy's aggressive sexuality but also to the prevailing laws of matrimony which deprive her of her right to property. What has Bathsheba earned in her own right is assigned to her husband upon marriage. As Lee Holcombe observes: "In the eyes of the common law, married women had no identity apart from their husbands. As the saying went, in law husband and wife were one person when property was concerned, this meant in practice that a husband assumed legal possession or control of all property that belonged to his wife upon marriage"(Holcombe: 197 ,4).

In this novel Hardy presents a bleak vision of marriage. This vision gets bleaker in each of his successive novels. He believes that marriage in its current institutionalized form must be abolished. A woman loses her identity and autonomy embracing traditional marriage. Victorian institution of marriage 'circumbscribes her ways of thinking, ways of behaviour and ways of her thought'. (Morgan, 1988). Troy is described by Hardy as a sexual adventurer' and soon after the marriage Troy's tragic desertion of Fanny and her

consequent death in the Casterbridge Workhouse comes to light, bringing to Bathsheba an intensity of suffering. Hardy shows similarity of two women in thier victimisation. Fanny becomes vulnerable to sexual exploitation of Troy due to her poor socio-economic condition. She as a destitute woman and finally 'a fallen woman' takes the occupation of a seamstress. As Linda M. Shires observes:

> As a fallen woman, Fanny is the figure who presented the most trouble to Leslie Stephen and the conservative Cornhill. Fanny is also the problem of the book and Hardy certainly knows it. He will retell a story like hers in Tess of the D'urbervilles where he takes the entire novel to do it justice. In this novel, Fanny's plight as a woman, a fallen woman, an educated woman, a woman deluded by Troy's romance a poor woman, and an ill woman, is never dealt with adequately by any character, by the narrator, or by any ideology in the book (Shires: Introduction to FFMC, 2005, xxix).

But I think. Shire's observation regarding Fanny's presentation is not true. Hardy as a novelist strongly detests the prevailing literary norms of representing the plight of fallen womanhood. Though Fanny fails to occupy a central place due to her compromised past, she is omnipresent in the novel. Like Tess's struggle Hardy imparts Fanny's struggle a kind of heroic dignity and it is unparalleled in the contemporary novel. Hardy exposes the psychological and ideological inequities of the patriarchal values through the sufferings of Fanny Robin. Joseph Allen Boone observes:

> For the double standard by which even innocent female victims of male sexual violence are made to suffer fates worse than those of their seducers attests to the ideological and psychological inequities buried in a cultural standard of male superiority. The woman who willingly lapses from a moral code that upholds the sanctity of marriage, of course, suffers the worst punishments. She threatens, indeed an even more damaging exposure of the contradictions embedeed in the social order first, because she co-opts the male prerogative of desiring, and second because her very existence outside the accepted male-female hiearchy recapitulated in marriage disporves its universal applicability (Boone: 1987, 101).

Hardy depicts failed marriages in this novel. Bathsheba loses her identity and autonomy choosing traditional bond of marriage. Moreover, when

she discovers that" Troy keeps another woman's coil of hair in the case at the back of his watch" (FFMC 303). Bathsheba's impression that Troy still has connection with Fanny comes true. Her disillusionment with marriage is given by the narrator:

> Directly he had gone, Bathsheba burst into great sobs - dry - eyed sobs, which cut as they come, without any softening by tears. But she determined to repress all evidences of feeling. She was conquered; but she would own never it as long as she lived. Her pride was indeed brought low by despairing discoveries of her spoilation by marriage with a less pure nature than her own. She chafed to and fro in rebelliousness, like a caged leopard; her whole soul was in arms, and blood fired her face . . . 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 . . . That she had never by look, word or sign seriously encouraged a man to approach her-that she had felt herself sufficient to herself, and had in the independence of her girlish heart fancied there was a certain degradation in renouncing the simplicity of a maiden existence to become the humbler half of on indifferent matrimonial whole, were facts now bitterly remembered (FFMC, 305-06).

In the chapter 'Fanny's Revenge' Hardy parallels the sufferings of Bathsheba and Fanny Robin who is linked to Bathsheba as a maid of her farm and through her relationship with Troy. Hardy incorporates parallelism of events in the novel to focus on the plight of these two women. As Judith Bryant Wittenberg observes: "Appropriately since both Fanny and Bathsheba are victims of the same predator, Hardy suggests similarities between the two. In moments when Bathsheba confronts romantic predicaments, she is described as a "robin" (30,218). And both women are shown in moments of desperation "unfemininely" running after a man in order to clear up a misunderstanding" (Wittenberg in Subash Chandra, 2000, 70).

Bathsheba's sense of brutalisation becomes intense when the true relationship between Fanny and Troy is revealed to her. Bathsheba has suspected that Troy's profligacy is the cause of Fanny's death. She along with her maid Liddy goes to Oak's cottage and tries to find more about Fanny.

Bathsheba opens the lid of the coffin and finds there Fanny's dead child: "conclusive proof of her husband's conduct" (FFMC, 330). On Troy's coming near the coffin of Fanny, Bathsheba asks Troy about her marital status and she listens to Troy's declaration of love for dead Fanny. Hardy narrates Troy-Bathsheba marriage:

> What Troy did was to sink upon his knees with an indefinable union of remorse and reverence upon his face, and, bending over Fanny Robin, gently kissed her, as one would kiss an infant asleep to avoid awakening it. At the sight and sound of that, to her, unendurable act, Bathsheba sprang towards him. All the strong feelings which had ben scattered over her existence since she knew what feeling was, seemed gathered together into one pulsation now. The revulsion from her indignant mood a little earlier, when she had meditated upon compromised honour, forestallment, eclipse in maternity by another, was violent and entire. All that was forgotten in the simple and still strong attachment of wife to husband. She had sighed for her self-completeness then, now she cried aloud against the severance of the union she had deplored. She flung her arms round Troy's neck, exclaiming wildly from the deepest deep of her heart- "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! - You will Frank kiss me too !" . . . . "I will not kiss you !" he said pushing her away (FFMC,333-34).

In this scene we observe Frank is earnestly is in love with Fanny and her child. Hardy depicts acute mental agony that Troy inflicts on Bathsheba. Troy observes: "This woman is more to me, dead as she is, than ever you were, or are, or can be" (FFMC 334) .And then he calls Fanny his "very very, wife". He heartlessly tells Bathsheba "You are nothing to me - nothing. A ceremony before a priest does not make .a marriage. I am not morally yours" (FFMC 335). As Penny Boumelha analyses: 'While Fanny is obviously and straightforwardly a victim, the situation rendered more complex by the counterpointing of her life with Bathsheba's explicitly remarked in the novel, which leads eventually to a temporary reversal of their status. Bathsheba, the legitimate wife, is spurned and deserted, and becomes the outcast' (Boumelha: 1982, 44).

Bathsheba being overwhelmed by extreme grief and anxiety takes refuge in a brake of fern. "She would think of nothing better to do with her

palpitating self than to go in here and hide" (FFMC, 336) There she spends the night in this 'thicket' and awakens next day with a freshened existence and cooler brains . She finds that 'the deceptions and fantasies of her life which dissolves into the fresh realities of the ordinary everyday world' (Vigar: 1974, 108). Bathsheba wants to escape from the dominant patriarchal society. She has lost her independent spirit and virility and discovers that dead Fanny and her dead child is her rival. She cannot ascertain her real position in the society. She is neither a mother nor a true wife of Troy. She holds an anomalous position in the society. Bathsheba suffers from a crisis of identity. A new feminist sensibility dawns on Bathsheba. Her womanliness is questioned in the narrative. As Lind M. Shires observes:

> It is highly significant that Bathsheba runs away. Seeing the representation that Troy would attach to Fanny and seeing herself, Bathsheba no longer recognizes the woman she is. The scene of the corpse, through Troy's intervention, becomes one of a misrecognition of femininity. 'If she's - that, -what-am-I?' cries Bathsheba with despair and indignation '(43.345) Not seeing her femaleness in view of her femaleness, she does not know who she is. Yet she will find out (Shires, in Higonnet, 1993,60).

After the desertion of Troy Bathsheba finds herself in a new reality of gendered oppression. As a deserted wife she becomes an object of gossip. Hardy throws light on the plight of the deserted wife. She become vulnerable to sexual manipulation, as Boldwood tells Bathsheba, "Bathsheba suppose you had real complete proof that you are what, in fact, you are-a widow-would you repair the old wrong to me by marrying me"? (FFMC 391). Bathsheba, as a deserted wife can only wait till Troy returns. She cannot take decision about her future. Her position becomes rather anomalous in the society. She is neither married nor single Bathsheba feels , "A runaway wife is an encumbrance to everybody, a burden to herself and a byword- all of which make up a heap of misery greater than any that comes by staying at home-though this may include the trifling items of insult, beating, and starvation"(FFMC,340-41).

Under the apparent gloss of a pastoral novel, Hardy depicts contemporary realities confronting a self-assertive, intelligent and efficient woman. Bathsheba is denied the right to preserve her identity as a woman. Bathsheba's transition from an independent, spirited and self-assertive womanhood into a guilt-ridden, shameful submissive and meek one is narrated by Hardy. Violent sexuality of Troy and Boldwood destroys her vibrant personality. The plot of the novel has been arranged in such a way that an advanced womanhood is forced to embrace Victorian ideology. Instead of encouraging her efficiency as a woman farmer the society infuses a death wish into her. Through melodramatic climax of the novel Hardy shows the death of Troy at the Christmas Party given by Boldwood. Boldwood's expectation of Bathsheba surges back at the sudden disappearance of Troy. Becoming hopeful of gaining Bathsheba, Boldwood arranges a christmas party coerces her into a promise of their future engagement. At the sudden appearance of Troy at the party, Boldwood losing balance of his mind shoots Troy to death. Bathsheba through bitterness and sufferings of life loses her zest for it. On the final crisis of Troy's death Rosemarie Morgan observes, "Each male suitor is furnished with a killing weapon or a cutting blade. Moreover, each enjoins Bathsheba to his own action in handling the same. She is thus drawn inexorably into the web of male brutality and sexual domination that constitutes the darker world of 'Far From The Madding Crowd" (Morgan:1988, 53). The violence at the Christmas party clears the way for Oak to chain Bathsheba through the bonds of conventional marriage. The closure demonstrates that Bathsheba offers to renew her courtship to Gabriel. Hardy at the end of the novel reverses the situation of earlier courtship of Oak. Bathsheba repentant, spiritless and shorn of her vanity comes to Oak's cottage to request him to help her in farm management. Hardy painfully depicts Bathsheba's loss of efficiency as a farm manager. "She was bewildered too by the prospect of having to rely on her own resources again; it seemed to herself that she never could again acquire energy sufficient to go to market, barter and sell" (FFMC, 435). The closure of the novel shows ultimate reassertion of male ideology when Bathsheba surrender to the code of conventional womanhood by marrying Oak. Hardy's reconciliation with the Victorian convention ended the novel with an

apparently happy union between Bathsheba and Oak. In earlier period of his writing career Hardy could not be totally radical in his representation of woman. Hardy intending not to offend the editor of the Cornhill Magazine Leslie Stephen compromised with the Victorian code and he could not be totally radical in his representation of woman. As Rosemarie Morgan, in Cancelled words (1992) observes: "Mr. Stephen kept a hawks eye on Hardy's writings and provided Hardy with a short course in Grundian conventions literary prudery and decorum that are deeply engrained in him but not in Hardy" (Morgan:1992,13).

Hardy very tactfully articulates Bathsheba's suffering, loss and isolation. Being rendered a lonely widow by the society she feels extremely helpless when Oak offers to withdraw from her farm. Bathsheba's spirit is totally destroyed by Oak's attempt to mould her into a conventional woman. She is no longer the woman that takes confidence in her own ability. As Liddy informs Coggan, "Her eyes are so miserable that she is not the same woman, only two years ago she was a romping girl and she's thus" (FFMC, 429). Hardy expresses his deep grief and anger at Bathsheba's inability to laugh and share the joys of life. Hardy's sympathy for Bathsheba's isolation, loss of vitality and lack of independence come again and again at the end of the novel. Rosemarie Morgan says:

> Oak's activity of espial unobtrusively links with denial, with the prohibition placed upon Bathsheba's growth to self- knowledge, which, is pre-figured in the proposal scene, ultimately leads to the total enclosure of her space that Oak's wedding ring signifies . . . . Hardy details her decline from glowing vigour to enervation and obmutescence - the muted utterance. It is this poetic close detailing, this thoughtful, imaginative attention to her inner life, that brings us close to the Hardy who needs and wants to give recognition and voice to Bathsheba's sorrow, pain and loss - to her truncated feminine life(Morgan: 1988, 53).

Hardy questions the marital ideal implicit in the novel. The closure of the novel refuses the happy note that Gabriel and the rustics seem to offer, rather the ending stresses on the tragic note describing metaphorically the weather condition. As the narrator informs, "it was a damp, disagreeable

morning" (FFMC 443). "The marriage celebration with its hideouss clang of music" (FFMC 444) could not cover up the fact of Bathsheba's ultimate surrender to the institution of marriage the closure of the novel allows Oak the position of a all powerful male asserting his supremacy over dispirited Bathsheba.

A voice of Bathsheba, however muted in form can be discerned in the novel. Bathsheba's repressed voice on the eve of her wedding with Oak amply demonstrates her suspension of womanly desires and aspirations. Through the device of contemporary ideology and the plot of the novel she is forced to accept the ideological role of a marginalized heroine. Her voice remains repressed under the weight of traditional narrative structure. The gap between the narrative voice and the inarticulated voice of Bathsheba shows sexual politics of Victorian language. The silence of Bathsheba demonstrates inadequate language base to air her feelings Bathsheba found it difficult to convey properly her feelings in "language which is chiefly made by men to express theirs" (FFMC,390). Bathsheba's difficulty points to the radical feminists struggle to liberate language from the clutch of male domination. The radical feminists have shown that language relates to gender identity. This identity constituted or marked in language is primarily a matter of dominance. The linguistic domination reduces women to passive victims. Men controlled language subordinates women and marginalizes them in society because they are marginal in language. Bathsheba's inability to express the reality through the language controlled by men has been so total that she seems to echo the feminist demand to wrest away languauge from male control. Perhaps Hardy wants to tell that language controlled by women shall resolve women's problem and that language will reflect perception and experiences of women. Bathsheba voices the radical feminist's concern over the male controlled language.

Though Far From The Madding Crowd was subtitled a tragi- comedy, a weak tragic vision could be discerned. Hardy wrote J.B. Priestely "tragedy . . . always underlines Comedy if you only scratch it deeply enough" (CL, VIII, 38) and we can recognise the elements of some underlying tragic vision in Far

From The Madding Crowd . Hardy's novels show a tragic attitude to the world. In Far From The Madding Crowd Bathsheba through sufferings and bitter experiences was forced to accept Oak as suitor. In spite of her sufferings and Bathsheba adjusts with Oak. Her perception about the world is now more pragmatic. The Victorian society turns her into a powerless, dependent woman.

Hardy's women characters evolve chronologically in spite of his obligations to the traditional ideology. Cytherea, Elfride and Bathsheba are represented by Hardy through comic mode. But Hardy's representation of his women in his later novels became radical. The women characters are represented through the tragic mode. In The Return of the Native, Tess of the D'urbervilles, and Jude the Obscure Hardy did not compromise with the representation of his woman characters. Such women characters become radical in these novels. As Patricia Ingham observes:

> The early novels tend with some degree of uneasiness to reflect the standard masculine (Patriarchal) prejudices built into mid Victorian fiction. As Hardy gathers self-confidence, he becomes increasingly dissatisfied with conventional ideas, specially with regard to the stereotyped 'angel in the house' image of Victorian womanhood, and there is progressive realisation of the independence and individuality of particular women, who have thoughts and desires of their own, in the sequence of heroines from Bathsheba Everdene and Eustacia. . . to Grace Melbury (quoted in Draper: 1991,22).

Hardy's heroines from Eustacia to Sue Bridehead are drawn to show a form of 'defiance'. They do not conform to the roles prescribed for them. In The Return of The Native, Eustacia Vye revolts against the suffocating world that denied her any scope of self-realisation and aspirations. In The Mayor of Casterbridge and The Woodlanders Elizabeth Jane and Grace Melbury are the victims of the codes of patriarchy. Hardy shows radical womanhood in Tess of the D'urbervilles and Jude the Obscure. For Tess's tragedy the author holds responsible society's double standard of sexual morality. Sue Bridehead, the New Woman, is a radical who struggles against the marriage

institutions. Hardy's women characters with their thoughts and desires thus question society's attitude to gender ideology.

Thomas Hardy has shown a different form of womanhood in Bathsheba. Though the author represents her in the light of contemporary ideology, yet Bathsheba already demonstrates her possibilities and potentialities. In order to show this Hardy presents her in terms of reconciliation. However, this reconciliation is replaced by a more radical standpoint in his next novels.