The Position of Women in Thomas Hardy’s Poetry

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Abstract

The thesis is entitled *The Position of Women in the Poetry of Thomas Hardy*. The dissertation is an examination of the conditions of women in the Victorian society, more specifically how the Victorian writer Thomas Hardy represented them. This dissertation is conducted by focusing on Simon de Beauvoir’s theory *The Second Sex* about the place of women in society and their perception by the opposite sex. As most other Victorian writers, Hardy was concerned with the ‘Woman Question’. His works reveal his profound sympathy for women and their struggle to realize their desires and ambitions, both inside and outside the home, in a patriarchal world. The dissertation therefore concentrates on Hardy’s presentation of his female characters mainly the fallen women in his poems and their relation with men who dominate and oppress them, and whom they had to face in order to free themselves from the social and sexual conventions of the time. In their representation of women, nineteenth-century writers were influenced by the Victorians’ ideology concerning women in society. A well-known fact, is that the English society was patriarchal and restricted women to domesticity as they were expected to endorse and preserve the good qualities and virtues. They were expected to be pure in order not to be despised by society. However, Hardy created women different from the stereotyped woman who was supposed to be the “angel in the house”. It is evident that Thomas Hardy was well known to a wide public thanks to his Wessex novels that brought him an immense fame. It is also well known that through his career as a novelist, Hardy was figured among the feminist writers. The problematic that has been carried in this research is to investigate the reasons behind Hardy’s shift to poetry though being well admired for his novels and whether he kept his sympathetic and feminist portrayal of women in his poetry. This research will show his position as a poet towards women. By focusing on a feminist approach to Hardy’s female characters, we have found out that as a poet, Hardy pursued his feminist position towards women since he sympathizes with the plight of women and due to his representation and portrayal of the female characters in the poems.

The work is divided into three chapters. Chapter one sketches the general historical background of the era entailing the life of Victorians in general and that of women in particular. The chapter includes diverse aspects of life including social, economic and cultural dimensions. The aim of this chapter is to spotlight on the life of women and their struggle to get rid of oppression, get their rights and improve their conditions. Chapter two, provides a further discussion of the conditions of women by referring to some writings especially those written by prominent Victorian writers and poets that focus on women and how they portrayed women. The aim through it is to demonstrate Hardy’s position towards women among his contemporaries. The third and last chapter of the dissertation centres on the analysis of some of Hardy’s poems that deal mainly with subjects related to women. The aim of the chapter is to reveal Hardy’s vision of women and his position towards them as clearly indicated by his poems. To conclude, the dissertation makes it clear that Thomas Hardy shifted to poetry, his favoured vocation to run away from the critics that harshly attacked his novels since he considered poetry as a safer medium to transmit his feminist ideas. This is made clear after the analysis of some poems that proved to be either an extension or a kind of comment on the novels. Hardy’s ideology about women in his poetry is not divergent from that of his novels. He is a poet who sympathized with women and sought to change people’s view to them especially the wronged or fallen women.
I- Introduction

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) is one of the most famous figures in the Victorian nineteenth century literature. He wrote many novels that earned him great fame and made him admired by many readers. In fact, though Thomas Hardy was always interested in writing poetry that was his favoured vocation, he preferred to write novels since the poems he submitted to publishers were at each time rejected. He considered the art of writing novels as a ‘trade’ and thought he would earn much money through writing novels than he would if he became a poet (Pollard Arthur, 1969:324).

Throughout his career, Hardy knew moments of victory and brilliance but also moments of decline, drawbacks and despair. Helmut E. Gerber wrote about the progress of Hardy’s career and divided it into periods of failure and success. He said that Hardy’s works were sometimes highly admired and praised by the general reader; but, at other times, they failed to attract the reader and thus became a target to fierce critics.

In fact, Hardy lived in a society known by its rigid laws and harsh treatment of women. The latter were expected to fulfil their mission as good housewives, submissive wives, sincere and pure and have nothing to do with politics, philosophy or sciences for such subjects were only destined for men. In fact, the seed for such ideas was the fear of women’s awareness of their oppression that would lead them to react and ask for equal rights and treatment. As a matter of fact, these stereotypes about women still existed even when women began to engage themselves in activities outdoors; they worked in farms and factories side by side with men and then indoors they did the housework and took care of the children.

In most of his works, Hardy dealt with many themes and subjects like the subjection of ‘women’ and issues related to them. ‘Sexuality’ was amongst the themes that have already been dealt with by other writers. What was new was the way in which
Hardy tackled it. He did not only deal with ‘sexuality’ and ‘prostitution’ that were considered offensive themes at that time and subjects that could not be discussed between males and females, but rather wrote ‘taboo-breaking’ works that were at first scorned and rejected by many the Victorian society since they caused public agitation (Avery Simon and Rebecca Stott, 2003: 185). Indeed, he went further so that he was among those who represented tempted women as ‘new’ and ‘pure’. This is shown when he described the seduced heroine of his novel *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* as a “pure woman” despite her illegal relation with Alec d’Urbervilles owing to her intention to support her poor family.

The year “1980s witnessed radical advances in the theorisation of the study of literature” like psychological, Marxist, materialist and so on. “Hardy’s texts were at the centre of these theoretical movements, including one that came to prominence in the 1980s, feminism” (Harvey Geoffrey, 2003:145). Critics dealt with many issues among them, Hardy’s portrayal of the Victorian family, the different social classes and the conditions under which Victorians lived and the hardships and problems that were undergone by them.

The fact of Hardy being called ‘feminist’ was due to the way women are portrayed in his novels. Though indulging in any sexual intercourse was abhorred in the Victorian society and women were called either ‘prostitutes’ or ‘fallen women’, Hardy gave another image for them. Most of Thomas Hardy’s works including prose and verse present women as attractive, sexual and pure women even if they were considered as fallen women. Thomas Hardy sympathized with the social position of women. As a matter of fact, his “intelligent and sympathetic portrayal of women is informed by his perception of the inextricable entanglement of gender and class issues,” (Geoffrey Harvey, 2003: 34) which means that he observed how women’s rights were restricted and sometimes denied at that time.
What Hardy did, is that through his novels, “he championed the struggle of the strong, intelligent, sexual woman to achieve selfhood and social freedom” (Ibid34). Such ideas caused upheavals, for though other writers of his time dealt with issues related to gender, they never dared to represent the prostitute as a pure woman. For this reason, some of Hardy’s works especially The Mayor of Casterbridge (1885) received harsh criticism. This paved the way to the emergence of Hardy ‘the poet’, the profession for which he had cared since an early age.

Though Hardy was well-known as a novelist and well-admired by readers, he decided to put an end to this career and cope with poetry. It was in fact difficult for those who knew and admired him as a ‘novelist’ to be acquainted with the ‘poet’ (Williams Merryn, 1976:132). The question to be asked herein is what were the reasons behind Hardy’s shift to poetry? Did he turn to it since he admired it from the beginning or just ran away from critics and his being called ‘feminist’. Did Hardy forget about defending women and sympathizing with them or did he keep the same ideas even as a poet? In a word, what is the position of women in Hardy’s poetry?

It is necessary to review different critics who were concerned with the study of Thomas Hardy to see what they have said about Hardy’s portrayal of women and also to see how critics studied the poetry. Among the critics, we cite Marry Jacobus (1975). The latter made an enquiry about Hardy’s position towards women through analysing two of Hardy’s works that are Jude the Obscure and Tess of the D’Urbervilles. She found out that through the way of his portrayal of women, Hardy gave a new and different view of women and in a certain way he altered his society’s perception and treatment of females especially in terms of sexuality. To sum up, She said that “textual changes which Hardy introduced offer a valuable insight into Victorian society’s control of female sexuality” (Harvey Geoffrey, 2003:182).
On her part, Elaine Showalter (1979) showed that Hardy sympathizes with his feminist characters. In her analysis of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Showalter revealed the importance and influence of female characters on man. She stated that the female characters are considered as “the estranged and essential complement of the male self” (Quoted in Ibid: 45) by showing that on the one hand, they are alienated and denied their rights and seem to be insignificant, on the other hand, they are essential beings and have a strong impact on men’s destiny and life. Michael Henchard sold his wife and daughter as if they were useless items, but later on, the incident changed the course of his life and made him a different man.

Among other critics, we find Penny Boumelha who is a prominent female critic of Hardy. She wrote a work entitled *Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual and Narrative Form* (1982). Through her study of Hardy’s novels, she found out that he is unable to take up a clear decision concerning his position towards gender. She examined Hardy’s works such as *The Mayor of Casterbridge, Tess of the D’Urbervilles, Jude the Obscure* and other works. She concludes that most of Hardy’s novels have a tragic ending for women but she admitted that it was the first time for Hardy to shape an intellectual woman in his novel *Jude the Obscure* through the heroine Sue Bridehead and Tess, a fallen woman represented as “a pure woman” (Ibid 1994:184).

Patricia Ingham (1989) states that Hardy’s women are unlike the Victorian women since they act differently. She claims that women in Hardy’s works try to create a new sense for themselves by denying and resisting male’s oppression (Ibid 1994: 185). Rosalind Miles declares that Hardy admires the physical side of his heroines (Mitchell Judith, 1994:158). Rosemarie Morgan (1988) argues that women in Hardy’s novels assert their presence through resistance to men affirming that Hardy criticized the Victorian society, which does not recognize the importance of women” (Ibid 1994:}
Among other critics, we can also mention Katharine Rogers, John Good who pointed to Hardy’s idiosyncratic and different way of presenting his female characters despite the common Victorian model of woman of that time. It follows that the majority of critics praised Hardy’s representation of women in his novels while some others pointed to the ambiguity of his portrayal of the female characters according to different circumstances.

As far as poetry is concerned, the literature review shows that even though Hardy wrote a ‘bulk’ of poems, only few critics took notice of them and analysed the poems ‘seriously’. Most critics were only concerned with his novels, some did not even mention him as a poet while others argued that it would have been better for Hardy if he pursued his career as a novelist instead of shifting to writing verse. Even the few critics who wrote books about Hardy’s poetry affirm that he managed to make a place for himself amongst the well-read novelists but could not in fact manage to do the same thing among poets in his late career. There are only some critics who appreciated the poems, but in general, readers as well as critics would be more satisfied to read more Wessex novels by Hardy than read his poems that were considered ‘odd’.

Among the critics who studied Hardy’s poetry, we can mention U.C.Knoepflmacher. The latter applied the Freudian approach to sexuality and stated that when Hardy’s wife died, he felt towards her as he felt towards his mother. He also argued that Hardy’s feelings were kept inside, but it was revealed with the death of his first wife Emma who inspired him (Harvey Geoffrey, 2003: 189). The same idea is shared by Craig Brown in his article entitled Guilty Pleasure; How Hardy Was Inspired by the Wife He Betrayed’. When Emma died, Hardy longed for her since he knew that he could no longer be with her.
In his work, J.O. Bailey (1970) states that readers as well as critics most often fail to understand Hardy’s aim as a poet and thus wrongly interpret him. Bailey made a link between Thomas Hardy’s poems and his personal life. In order to clarify and interpret Hardy the poet, he made an investigation about him through visiting places which were mentioned in his poems and also questioning people who knew Hardy and were acquainted with him to find out facts and biographical elements that were part of the poems.

Samuel Hynes (1961) aims at a stylistic study of Hardy’s poems including their style, diction and form. He claims that Hardy’s poems reveal some weaknesses. To sustain this view, he refers to some critics such as H. C. Duffin, W. R. Rutland and other ones whose attention was all poured into Hardy’s fiction rather than his poetry. Samuel Hynes then moves to speak about the influence of William Barnes on Hardy’s poetry and the similarities that exist between the two. Hynes states that the tone of Hardy’s poems is “nostalgic, ironic, pessimistic—a tone in its way moving and effective in individual poems, but at the same time severely restrictive and, in the end humorous” (Hynes Samuel, 1961: 4). For Hynes, the reason behind misunderstanding Hardy’s poems lies in his being reticent about his personal life, the fact, which “helped to create a false impression of his carrier in poetry which is not yet dissipated” (Ibid: 16).

Another critic who is concerned with Hardy’s poetry was James Granville Southworth. In his book *The Poetry of Thomas Hardy*, he makes a thematic study of Hardy’s poems and tried to make an assessment of the poet’s technical methods. He states that some critics even those who conducted a research on Hardy’s poetry preferred his novels. To sustain his idea, he alludes to Edmund Blunden, one of the few critics who liked Hardy’s poems more than his novels (Ford Boris, 1958: 404).
Referring to the subjects of Hardy’s poems, James Granville Southworth sustains that “love, in fact, interested him above all other subjects—love and woman—and he has explored almost every possible phase and has wrought permutations and combinations on each.”(James Granville Southworth, 1947:24). Southworth also affirms that due to the “breadth and scope of Hardy’s subject matter” (Ibid) the readers fail to understand and interpret his works.

In her article “Hardy and nineteenth-century poetry and poetics”, Linda Shires says that if Hardy “had composed no poetry at all he would still be remembered as a key Victorian writer” but he “considered himself first and foremost as a poet just as he considered poetry the most important of literary genres” (Shires Linda, 2004: 255). For such reason he put an end to his profession as novelist and gave all his time to his vocation as a poet. The result is that he produced more than 900 poems and made “numerous metrical and stanza forms, coined his own words, experimented with combining levels of diction such as archaic words or regional dialects with the king’s English, and held a learned understanding of the English poetic tradition” (Ibid: 255).

Linda Shires suggests possible areas of research as the visuals that the poet used as commentary. She also draws the readers’ attention to Thomas Hardy’s use of “the broken key” and what he meant by it. Shires makes an analysis of Neutral Tones which according to her demonstrate “the poetry of unknowing and of belated awareness” (Ibid : 262). She analyses other poems in relation to photography and also in relation to the gothic in culture, art and architecture. Then, she moves to speak about the division or the two sides of Hardy’s poems that she called “double poems”, the quality that was first attributed to the poet himself due to his ambivalence.

Another critic of Hardy’s poetry was John Powell Ward. The latter studies the aesthetic of imperfection in an article entitled “Hardy’s aesthetics and twentieth
century poetry”. For John Powell Ward, “one can discern various aspects of this imperfection theme in Hard’s poetry” (Powell Ward, John, 2004: 283). He refers to a set of poems like, “Nature’s Questioning”, “God Forgotten” and other ones. For him, themes like the “too late”, the “not knowing”, and the “impotent kiss” all along with other features like fate sustain the idea of imperfectness. Through the literature review above, it may seem quite sustainable, the fact that Hardy the poet is in general less appreciated by critics than Hardy the novelist.

Thomas Hardy’s critics dealt with his novels arguably because of their preference for the genre of the novels. They concentrated on the analysis of Hardy’s opinions and views on feminism, pessimism, religion and other themes in relation to his novels. Those few critics who examined his poetry studied the stylistic or formalistic side of the poems. Only some aimed to study the content. Most of them argue that Hardy turned to poetry to contemplate and mourn his dead wife and to run away from the criticism levelled at his novels.

What I have observed in my review of literature is that Hardy’s poetry is neglected and not given the attention it deserves despite of being regarded amongst the most brilliant poets. I have also observed that critics have not examined the real reasons behind his abandonment of novel writing. They affirm that Hardy was annoyed by the bitter criticism that he received and that after he ‘secured’ his living as a novelist, he turned to poetry. They also state that the poems are autobiographical since they record Hardy’s life. To my knowledge, no critic linked the content of his poetry to the reason of his shift. My intention through this modest work is not to contradict or counter those critics’ point of view; but to defend the position that the contents of his poems remain the same as those of his novels, mainly his commitment to the woman
question. In the present work, I would try to study the poems to find Hardy’s position towards women by referring to a feminist theory.

The degraded conditions of women led some of those who aimed to improve their conditions to rise against the social institutions and denounce all those who contributed to that state. They constructed the ‘feminist movement’ that was first started by a group of women to ask for their rights and later on enlarged to include women all over the world to organize themselves into movements and associations to react against men whom they accused of being the oppressor and the cause of their misery.

Radical feminism is a feminist movement that sought to change women’s conditions. As the name suggests, radicals aimed to achieve a radical transformation so that women can benefit from the same rights as men. One of their persistent ideas concern prostitution. They opposed the existing theories of that time in affirming that prostitution does not degrade all women because there could be many reasons for women to be so (Sarah Bromberg: 1997). They provided some reasons why women could be prostitutes.

They affirmed that some women became prostitutes against their will because of poverty and if they had an alternative, they would leave this profession. Being uneducated and poor, the woman may also be tempted by prostitution as a means to earn her living. Some women are sometimes victims of abduction and rape contrary to other women who became prostitutes voluntarily since they lack moral character. There may be women who are neglected by their parents or the society and since they need to get attention, they turn to prostitution which means to find a lover who would be attracted by them. Moreover, mental or physical disorder may lead to prostitution but
other times we find that some women are naturally prostitutes. Some women may also use their beauty in prostitution to earn money. The last category contains high personalities in society including artists, politicians, writers...who can no more control themselves and are willing to make an adventure.

Radical feminists asserted that prostitutes might enter into this profession due to one of the above-mentioned reasons. Hence, people’s view towards prostitutes should be changed. In fact, they reversed things and instead of abusing women, they accused men of being the oppressors. Radical feminist affirmed that prostitution is another form of oppressing and degrading women. Instead of denouncing women, people should sympathize with them since they are the victims of this violent act (Ibid).

Among feminist critics, we can cite Simone de Beauvoir who explored this issue in her work *The Second Sex* (1949). Simone de Beauvoir argues that men and women had never shared life equally and that if women lived under males’ domination, it is only due to their inactive resistance and the will of some women to remain the ‘other’ since they fail to change their conditions. For De Beauvoir, women’s agitation and way of claiming their rights was not strong and efficient enough to ensure and get rights beyond those that were offered to them. De Beauvoir explains that women’s inability to react and their acceptance to keep on living as they are is due to the fact of their being dependent upon males and their satisfaction to remain the ‘other’ and keep their emotional life.

In addition to their being a ‘productive force’, women are also regarded as a sexual partner and an ‘erotic’ object for men, a role which ‘la femme féminine’ enjoys playing to gain males’ attention. The modern woman instead is the one who tries to equal man and have the same status as him. To this end, she strives to reach the position of man through hard work and by cultivating herself through education (de
In fact, as de Beauvoir states, so much is expected from the woman that she gets depressed and turns “à l’immoralité parce que la morale consiste pour elle à incarner une inhumaine entité: la femme forte la mère admirable, l’honnête femme, etc. dès qu’elle pense, qu’elle rêve, qu’elle dort, qu’elle désire, qu’elle respire sans consigne, elle trahit l’idéal masculin (Ibid: 115). Simone de Beauvoir adds that men sought to show their maleness at the expense of degrading, oppressing and making women inferior (Ibid: 487). De Beauvoir then moves to speak about a new relationship which should exist between the two sexes that is friendship, that is to say, share ideas, exchange opinions and be a partner instead of just playing the role of housewives. It is only when women succeed to bring changes on the social and cultural levels that the new woman could emerge.

Simone du Beauvoir (1949) deals with the category of women who are considered as prostitutes in a chapter entitled “Prostituées et hêtaïres”. She refers to Church men and Mandeville who state that there should exist some women who would be considered as ‘sewer’ and sacrifice themselves to ‘conserve’ and save the other portion of women. It means that she sympathizes with prostitutes and considers them the victim of society. For this, she says that “La prostituée est un bouc émissaire; l’homme se délivre sur elle de sa turpitude et il la renie. Qu’un statut légal la mette sous une surveillance policière ou qu’elle travaille dans la clandestinité, elle est en tout cas traitée en paria.” (De Beauvoir Simone, 1949: 247). This means that the man exploits the woman and uses her to satisfy his sexual desire but at the end discharges all his hatred on her.

Like the other feminists, Simone de Beauvoir, relates the degeneration and degradation of any woman to the bad conditions that she had to undergo. She says “En
vérité, dans un monde où sévissent misère et chômage, dès qu’une profession est ouverte, il y a des gens pour l’embrasser…c’est là un processus économique rudimentaire et universel…ce métier est encore un de ceux qui paraît à beaucoup des femmes le moins rebutant ” (Ibid : 248). This means that the difficulty for some people especially women to find a resource from which to get an income paves the way to other means that seem to be more effective.

De Beauvoir goes further so that she parallels the position of the so-called prostitute with that of the married woman and sustains Marro’s idea that the position of the prostitute is similar to that of the married woman. She justifies this by saying that the sexual act for both prostitute and wife is a ‘service’ and that the two live under the’ dominance of the male. The difference between the prostitute and the married woman is the question of motherhood as “La maternité n’est respectée que chez la femme mariée; la fille mère demeure un objet de scandale et l’enfant est pour elle un lourd handicap” (Ibid: 17). The illegitimate child is in fact in many societies

“un tel handicap sociale et économique pour la femme non mariée qu’on voit des jeunes filles se suicider quand elles se savent enceintes, et des filles-mères égorger le nouveau-né; un pareil risque constitue un frein sexuel assez puissant pour que beaucoup de jeunes filles observent la chasteté prénuptiale exigée par les mœurs.” (Ibid: 457).

Simone de Beauvoir ends by revealing that though women work to better their conditions and gain much attention, there still exist différences between males and females. As a matter of fact, their inferiority, weaknesses, affections and eroticism are included in their innate characters which differentiate them from men. To sum up, though women cannot be at the level of men due to différences in their character, they can at least construct camaraderie and establish brotherhood.

I have relied on Simone du Beauvoir’s theory for it suits my aim. To be more
explicit, the theory is a detailed study of feminism and all the factors and causes that lead to the degradation of the place of women. In addition to this, du Beauvoir deals with the category of the fallen women and the conditions of the married women. When we read Hardy’s poetry, we find out that amongst the subjects that attracted his attention and which are greatly dealt with in most of his poems is the subject of fallen women.

This dissertation is an attempt to a close examination and study of Thomas Hardy’s poems. Many works and dissertations that deal with Thomas Hardy are concerned with Hardy the novelist. Despite the fact that his poems are admired, only few critics have examined them. In this work, I shall endeavour to study some of Hardy’s poems to show his position towards women and eventually explain his turn to poetry. What I am aiming at is to reach the conclusion that though Hardy wanted to run away from critics who figure him as a feminist, he still held ideas about feminism in his poems. I would make this idea clearer by analysing some poems to provide evidence and show women’s position.

Thomas Hardy says that he liked poetry more than prose because he could express himself freely without being subject to critics as had been the case in prose. This is shown when he said in his personal writings that it is more secure for the writer to express himself in verse since critics would not be able to grasp the meaning and intention of the poet. He justified his idea by reference to Galileo. The latter, according to Hardy would not have faced the same troubles and fate if he told about his theory in verse (Williams Merryn, 1976:132). Hardy felt he was misunderstood by both critics and readers. For this, he decided to abandon prose and take poetry as a means “to communicate unconventional ideas and powerful feelings” (quoted in Harvey Geoffrey,
This means that Hardy made of poetry a refuge to escape from the different critics.

The subjects of his poems consist of war, love, life, religion, prostitution and so on. While reading them, the reader feels as if he was reading novels since they “provide an abundance of people and incidents and perceptions” without forgetting the fact that the poems “are the work of a man who is also a novelist” (Ford Boris, 1961: 156). Most of his poems were love poems to recall his earlier days with his wife and also to show regret for having abandoned her. Some of Hardy’s poems share the same subject matter as his novels. For instance, the poem entitled *Tess’s Lament* reminds the reader of the heroine of Hardy’s novel *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* as it shows a maiden mourning her separation with her lover and regretting the happy days that she spent in the farm among her friends just as Tess D’Urbervilles’ story with Angel Clare and her friends in the farm where she lived.

My work will be divided into three chapters. In the first chapter, I will provide a historical background to try to explain the extent to which Hardy was influenced by the themes of his time. More precisely, I will spotlight on the Victorian people, the general conditions in which they lived and their beliefs and thoughts. I will focus on women and how they were perceived and treated at that time. I will speak about their persistent struggle and efforts to reach equality and be recognized as an active and essential entity in society.

In the second chapter, I will mention the most prominent writers of the era, their preoccupations and the literary works that dealt with the subject of women and the conception of the ideal woman. I will focus on a category of women who were regarded as ‘ill-repute’ or ‘prostitutes’, how they were seen and portrayed by the society and by
novelists and poets in general and then by Thomas Hardy. This literary background is necessary because it places Hardy’s poetry within a tradition. It is the differences and similarities that can show the extent of his commitment to women. I will devote the largest portion of my work to the third and last chapter. I will select a set of poems and try to analyze them. By doing so, I will be able to reveal Hardy’s vision of women and their position in his poetry.
References


II- Chapter One

The Historical Background of the Victorian Era:

Introduction:

James Granville Southworth clearly affirmed in his book The Poetry of Thomas Hardy that the “knowledge of his age is important if we are to understand what the poet felt he could rightly assume on the part of his reader without the necessity of elaboration” and also the knowledge of “what traditional beliefs were accepted or being questioned” (James Granville Southworth, 1947: 3). It means that before dealing with works of any writer, it is necessary to make an investigation about the period in which the writer lived as well as its people, their education and the current and common beliefs, traditions, laws, and prohibitions of the author’s time in order to understand the writer’s aim, and interpret his works fairly. Hence to consider it judicious to supply a general background of the era in which Thomas Hardy lived and give some hints of his own life so that we would be able to better interpret and understand Thomas Hardy and his position and view of his society. More particularly, how his society treated and viewed women and how Hardy in turn, portrayed them in his works.

The Victorian era was a period of great advancement and flourishment. There occurred great changes in many fields that affected the standard of life. A well known fact was that the Victorian age “was enormously long and that there were significant changes in almost every aspect of politics, law, economics, and society” (Mitchell Sally, 1996: xiii). The era was called Pax Britannica, which means a great and powerful empire. It was a period of the Industrial Revolution, which changed the economical and social conditions of people. The era was also a period of enlightenment where many scientists, theorists, artists, philosophers and writers emerged publicizing new theories and thoughts that changed people’s insight towards many beliefs.
Historians related the Victorian era to the beginning of Queen Victoria’s reign that lasted about thirty-six years that started from 1837 until 1901. The age knew colonial expansion from which England earned profits and a great wealth.

**The Industrial Revolution and its Effects on the Social Life**

The Industrial Revolution “marks the most fundamental transformation of human life in the history of the world recorded in written documents” (Hobsbawm E. J, 1968: 13). It refers to the shift of society from a rural and commercial state to an industrial and modern one. England relied on more complex and elaborated machinery and means of work. Many changes occurred during the era such as agricultural, manufacturing, and transportation which in turn had strong impacts that were widespread in all aspects of society (Engels Frederich, 1845:50). The Industrial Revolution created a new universe to the Victorians in the sense that they moved to work in factories and mines with advanced machinery instead of working in fields or using traditional means.

However, in a certain way, the Industrial Revolution created distinct social classes. First, the Bourgeoisie class which was wealthy and dominant and on the other hand, the middle class and working class that underwent various social problems. However, the revolution was not the sole reason behind dividing society into rich or poor classes. As a matter of fact, the position that any member of the society held, “did not depend on the amount of money people had-although it did rest partly on the source of their income, as well as on the birth and family connections. Most people understood and accepted their place in the class hierarchy” (Mitchell Sally, 1996: 17).

In his novel *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy sustained this idea through Tess’s father Jack Durberfield. The latter was told by the parson that the D’Urbervilles family was once so respected, rich and powerful and that he himself descended from
that upper class family. After hearing the story, the father’s behaviour changed towards his neighbours. This fact made him walk arrogantly among people and claim that he is a descendent of a wealthy and well-known family. Despite his poverty and poor living conditions, Tess’s father behaves as a noble man and recommended people to call him ‘Sir John’.

What the Industrial Revolution did is that it worsened the situation of the poor by putting the possession of wealth in the hands of the few and through the exploitation of the workers. The latter were not treated as humans but were rather reduced to mere machines and considered as their owners’ property to be managed as they desired. The Industrial Revolution also introduced new issues such as the exploitation of children and women who were “a main source of labour in the factories” (Briggs Asa, 1999). The masters privileged women and children since they were less demanding and more obedient. They were given much more inferior wages compared to men (Porter Roy, 1982:93).

As mentioned above, the Industrial Revolution was not the reason behind people’s bad conditions because poverty and inequality had always existed. The revolution “did bring to public attention, in the most startling way, evils that had always existed”. As critics said:

There had always been overcrowding, there had always been drunkenness; there had always been sweatshops in cellars, and exploitation of children in industry. But now, they existed on so colossal a scale that awareness of them had become unavoidable (Walter Allen, 1991: 144).

Through literary works, Victorian writers denounced those worse and pitiful conditions by depicting the different abuses of society and expressing their own views and worries especially as regards women and children’s working conditions.
Before the Industrial Revolution, women were expected to work at home and take care of their children. Sometime, they used to work in farms, in digging, picking cotton or milking cows. However, with the Industrial Revolution, the need for labour increased and thus they moved to work in factories, in mills and mines. In fact, women and children constituted the majority of the working force. They were regarded as cheap and submissive labourers since they worked for several hours in worse conditions to get at last very low wages. Being less demanding was the reason that pushed owners of factories to provide work for them.

The fortunate women could at least become maids and work for rich families. Others worked as governesses for rich children whereas others worked outside in miserable conditions during the day and inside the house in the evening washing, cooking, cleaning and doing other tasks. An additional duty of women during the Industrial Revolution was giving birth to many children. In fact, during that era, workforce was so required that women were expected to bear many of them. The worst of all was that some women were obliged to work during their pregnancy and then right after giving birth to their children.

**Emergence of New Concepts and Ideas**

The Victorian society is a society of contradictions and controversies. The period denoted at the same time “exploitation and class division, sexual repression, hypocrisy” and “values of hard work and self-help, moral certainties about family life, and a wide variety of arrangements intended to solve public problems” (Mitchell Sally, 1996: xiii). In fact, though the era was known as the period of Enlightenment, the laws and regulations that governed peoples’ life especially that of women were tyrannical and oppressive. To be more explicit, society was divided into unequal social classes.
and people were treated unequally and held different ideas and ways of reasoning from one another in the sense that some were educated whereas others were ignorant.

The Victorians could be distinguished through their “manners, speech, clothing, education, and value” the distinct classes lived in different places so that “each class had its own standards; and people were expected to conform to the rules for their class” (Ibid: 17). While enlightenment called for equality between all the members of society, in practice, the contrary happened. For instance, on the one hand, the poor were marginalized, treated harshly and were considered as servants for wealthy families. On the other hand, though men and women were members of the same society, they did not hold the same position and did not receive the same rights or even the same treatment as men.

The Victorian period as mentioned above was a period of contradictions and controversies. It was also an age of doubt and scepticism. There appeared scientists and philosophers who questioned concepts that were earlier part of people’s beliefs and religion. Such concepts included the origin of human beings as well as the foundation of family. For instance, the scientist Charles Darwin with his revolutionary theory of evolution *The Origin of Species* greatly influenced people’s thoughts. Darwin questioned and contradicted the religious belief which stated that man was created completely by God by affirming that “there was no divine origin for species, so there was no divine origin for man, in fact, man was just another species, a highly developed ape” (Butler, 1986: 20). Darwin’s theory stated clearly that the survival is only for the fittest and the strongest.

This was used by some people as a justification for their exploitation of others since they were stronger and more powerful and thus apt to dominate. It was also used to justify men’s dominance over women who were seen as fragile, emotional and
unable to govern themselves. The theory also made the poor think of all possible ways like revolting to earn money, in order not to be swept by the rich. The influence of such concepts is apparent in the works of some Victorian writers. For example, “As Robert Schweik argues, Hardy was influenced by the evolutionary theories of Darwin” (Geoffrey Harvey, 199, 2003).

In his Das Capital, Karl Marx published in 1867, discussed the issues from which society suffered and asked for a new distribution of the community’s wealth. He explained that people should have a new and different conception of society. He also affirmed that society was governed by a patriarchal system that reduced the position and value of women in the society. Marx stated that capitalism should be eliminated so that women can be released from oppression and reach equality. Marx argued that society was influenced by the capitalist system which divided it into classes. He regarded women’s oppression as a form of class oppression and referred to the patriarchal system of society which leads to the oppression and degradation of women. All those new theories and new ideas contributed to overturning the Victorian society and raise people’s suspicion.

Like Darwin, Thomas Hardy “presses man and nature together in his Darwinian mould” “instead of setting human beings against a separate background of nature”. He was “aware of the struggle for life taking place equally in both spheres and he works out a kind of applied Darwinism whereby the laws of evolution are seen to operate on man on the same way they operate on nature” (Ibid). Many poems written by Hardy reveal man’s shaken beliefs in his divine origins and his doubt of God’s sovereignty. His poem entitled The Impercipient, illustrates this point through revealing that “faiths by which my comrades stand/ Seem fantasies to me,” (Hardy, 1926: 59).
In *Nature’s Questioning*, the poet seems to ignore who might be the creator of this great universe and ‘wonders’ why people were born to suffer and submit to an unknown God. This suspicion is shown through enquiries like

We wonder, ever wonder, why we find us here!
“Has some Vast Imbecility, 
Mighty to build and blend,
But impotent to tend,
Framed us in jest, and left us now to hazardry?”
“Or come we of an Automaton 
Unconscious of our pains?...
Or are we live remains
Of Godhead dying downwards, brain and eye now gone?
(Hardy Thomas, 1926: 59).

In *God-Forgotten*, the speaker represented himself as a messenger sent to God by the human race “to win Some answers to their cry” (Ibid: 112). However, he was deceived by the painful fact which is that God told him he has “no remembrance of such place” (Ibid) when god said “it lost my interest from the first” (Ibid) which means that he has forgotten all about human kind and doesn’t even know whether he created such a race or if it still exists or it extinguished throughout the years since he had not heard their cries.

In another poem entitled *The Bedridden Peasant To An Unknowing God*, the speaker accused God of neglecting his own creatures and being responsible for men’s sufferings because after creating them, he discarded them to live in “”helpless bondage” ( ibid: 113). The poet exposed the different hardships to which humanity is exposed; they are either “lame, starved, maimed, or blind” (ibid: 114). For such reason, the poet prays God and asks him to cure him and his race, as well as show them the ‘mercies’ that are not yet ‘shown’. The same subject is developed in many other poems such as “*God’s Education*”, “*By The Earth’s Corpse*” and other ones. Through the poems, Hardy portrays life in the Victorian era and reveals its religious uncertainties, doubts, troubles and worries.
The Victorian era got this name in reference to Queen Victoria who reigned from 1837 till 1901. Some historians expand the period to include The Reform Bill of 1832 when a reform act was passed. The latter paved the path to the beginning of a democratic government because since then, electors, landowners or men from upper classes were not the only ones who could vote but even those from middle classes. However, the Bill used the term “male” the basis on which women’s existence as a social entity was denied. This added to worsening their conditions since women were regarded as the property of their fathers and then the property of their husbands once married. In fact, women had no right to inherit. A woman could possess property as long as she is not married because her husband would take possession of it as soon as they got married. This included even the custody of children which went to the husband in case of divorce. Another Reform Bill was added in 1867. Troy Benjamin Disraeli aimed to change the content of the law by substituting the word ‘person’ by ‘man’ the fact that led to more degradation of the women’s conditions since society was governed by a patriarchal system.

The Queen was an ideal of the Victorian woman whom the other women had to emulate. She was not only a strong and powerful monarch but also a devout wife to her husband prince Edward and a devoted mother to her nine children. She was obedient and loyal so that after the death of her husband, she spent the rest of her life mourning him and wore black clothes. She even refused to appear in public places except in few occasions when it was necessary. The Queen emphasized the fact that society should be governed by males and that women should be under the protection and care of men. The woman had only to please her husband, comfort and make him feel at ease at home. In a word, she had to make the house as a ‘place of peace’ for the husband where
he would forget the hard moments and the troubles he experienced during the working day.

Since males governed the Victorian society, no woman held an important position at that time. Women were in fact considered “to be men’s shadows” (Roy Porter, 1982:22). It was believed that “men and women were naturally different in capacity, and so ought to play distinct social roles. Anatomy determined destiny, and men were destined to be on top” (ibid: 23) whereas women were destined to serve and obey them. In his article, Winifred Gallagher (2004) said:

Victorian men ruled the world. Even in the home, women’s power was primarily confirmed to social spaces such as the drawing room, a formal place for the important business of receiving callers and impressing them with status symbols—the hostess fern collection, for example of her piano.’ (Winifred Gallagher: 2004: 117+)

In fact, women were seen as weak, fragile, and dependent on men who were more powerful and wise and thus expected to protect, guide and handle their affaires. A common conception of the Victorian woman was that she should be innocent, submissive, obedient, and dutiful. In a certain way, the Victorian woman was seen as a ‘saint’ and her body should always be protected and kept pure. She was considered as the ornament of the house and as a sunbeam since she was expected to please, relieve any member of her family who was distressed and in need for any support.

In the Victorian era, education depended on children’s “sex and their parents’ financial circumstances, social class, religion, and values” (ibid: 165). The children of lower and upper classes attended different schools and received different types of education. The condition of women in the educational sphere were not satisfactory. It is remarkable that the number of educated girls was very few compared to that of boys since parents saw no need to educate girls, for they were only expected to manage their
houses after marriage and thus prepared them for that aim at home. As a matter of fact, women were not allowed to get education and if they got it, it would not be the same as that of men so that theirs should be limited and based on fields concerning household management. It was affirmed that a woman had nothing to do with political or economical matters and instead should be oriented towards spheres that were more appropriate for them like domestic duties. An idea was held that a woman’s brain was too weak to bear the learning of difficult subjects like science, physics or mathematics and so on. A woman’s place was her house. Her duties were to take care of her beauty, her children as well as entertain and obey her husband.

Before being married, the woman had to be educated in certain matters that would benefit her to construct a happy and well organized family. She could get special education and training in subjects that are related to household management such as cooking, singing and playing musical instruments. Any woman ignorant of these tasks (playing the piano for instance) would be considered unaccomplished. If any woman was willing to take another sort of education it would be only the learning of languages like French or Italian and that was only to enable her to provide an initial education for her own children.

Women were forbidden to hold certain jobs, taking part in any political activity or expressing themselves in public. They should only obey, submit and act according to the will of men. Many writers aimed to draw women’s attention to their interests by advising her to concentrate on her house and family instead of being involved in trifle matters as education. In a word, “it was inadvisable for them to appear to be more intelligent than their husbands, even that were the truth of the matter” so “wives learned not to contradict their husbands too frequently, and above all in public” (Perkin Joan, 1989: 258). In this context, Sarah Ellis stated that “In the case of a highly gifted
woman, even where there is an equal or superior degree of talent [than that] possessed by her husband, nothing can be more injudicious, or more fatal to her happiness than an exhibition of the least disposition to presume such gifts” since this would lead to the destruction of her life and her marriage (Quoted in Perkin Joan, 258: 1989).

Thomas Hardy was clearly against his society’s current beliefs and views. He portrayed attractive female characters who could stimulate the attention of males by their character and education. For instance, in *Jude the Obscure*, Jude loved Sue Bridehead because she was different from Arabella. What made her different was her civility and intellectuality. He saw that women should not be prevented from reading and being educated. For instance, in *Tess D’Urbervilles*, the heroine Tess blamed her mother after being seduced by her cousin Alec D’Urbervilles affirming that her fate, would not be so, if she was warned about such danger or if she was educated for being able to read stories about women who were the victims of seduction.

**Women and Victorian Laws**

Women were not only prevented from education, they were also prevented from getting rights that could help them to defend themselves in case they married a usurping husband. To illustrate this fact, we go back to 1795 to refer to the story of the German princess Caroline Brunswick who married her cousin the prince of Wales George IV. The latter married the princess not out of love but it was an arranged marriage to settle his debts. George IV despised his wife and mistreated her. He deserted her just after giving birth to their first daughter princess Charlotte. Princess Caroline was denied the right to see her daughter and was sent away to Blackheath. Despite the unfairness of her husband, only some people sympathized with her and were willing to offer help in court. Instead, “she was blamed for not being more tactful, more sentimental, more subservient to her husband’s wishes” (Ibid: 36). It was only
after years of bitter fighting that she was able at last to get some of the rights she was
deprived of.

The fact of restraining women’s rights and considering them inferior was not
only uttered by men but even by women like Queen Victoria. The latter regarded
women’s requests for rights as being “wicked” (Quoted in Perkin Joan, 1989: 41). She
claimed that it is unwise if not a sort of madness on the part of women to try to ‘unsex’
themselves and seek equality with men since it was God’s will to differentiate the two
sexes. She affirmed that men are naturally females’ protectors. Women were perceived
as weak, emotional, ignorant, and inferior, hence, they were considered unfit to take
part in any social or political activity since they were unable to take serious decisions.

Queen Victoria was herself frightened by the idea of marriage since she thought
that would restrict her liberty. However, her marriage brought her immense satisfaction
and happiness. She constructed a well-structured and happy family. She was in
complete harmony with her husband prince Albert that the couple “achieved a
partnership in marriage” (Ibid: 43). Under Queen Victoria’s reign, “the institutions both
of monarchy and of marriage were regarded as stable props of society” (Ibid: 44). The
Queen’s successful marriage “made her unable to understand that other people might
be unfortunate” (Ibid). To be more explicit, her successful marriage blinded her eyes
from seeing the worse living conditions of women and their being ill-treated by men for
she judged that all women were as contented as her in their relations with their
husbands.

Victorian women had no right to take any legal action against the husband. They
could ask for divorce only in some limited cases and for some serious reasons. For
instance a woman could ask for divorce when she was deserted or treated cruelly by the
husband. She could also ask for it if she discovered an incest committed by the
husband. Otherwise, she could do nothing but bear the injustice of her husband. As far as adultery was concerned, any woman found guilty of it, would be at once divorced by the husband and even be abhorred and disdained by her society, whereas a man who indulged in it was not treated in the same way. A betrayed wife did not have the possibility or the right to ask for divorce. Man was more suitable to take decisions and to whom society attributed the position of being a superior.

Women from the upper class were not allowed to work since they lived in good conditions. If any of them was willing to work, she could only work in some specific fields as teaching in a school. Later on, women began to occupy and held other professions such as nursing or teaching but still could not work in some specific fields. However, lower class women experienced harsh living conditions, the fact that pushed them to work and seek jobs to improve their living conditions and get out of poverty and misery. Since their level of education did not allow them to work in schools, they had to work in fields, factories or work as governesses, servants or maids in rich and bourgeois families and in other places similar to these ones.

**Women and Marriage**

Christianity regarded marriage as an obligatory process and a contract that could only expire by death. Both husband and wife should respect the contract and practise monogamy. Perkin Joan lists three reasons were behind recommending marriage: the protection of children, the avoidance of the sin of fornication and the contribution to form a mutual society, so that both husband and wife help and comfort each other to live in prosperity and adversity (Perkin Joan, 1989: 20). To highlight the importance of marriage, acts and laws were passed to insist on the importance of consulting church in each marriage.
Through marriage, women could “maintain the social status to which they were accustomed, to enjoy a life of comfort” (Ibid: 60). Most “upper-class women married men of whom their families approved and who were considered ‘suitable’” for them (Ibid). The aim of parents from choosing a partner for their daughters was to ensure for them a good reputation and opportunity by being associated to families of high rank. Marriage was in fact a bargain between the husband and the father each one trying to get profit from the product who is the woman. The reason why women search for rich and important men was to gain the respect and admiration of their society in general and their family in particular. In case the contrary happened, that is to say that the woman failed in her marriage and was divorced or deserted by the husband, she would be neglected and ignored by the members of her society and even by her family.

However, women were sometimes unable to get married. As a matter of fact, in the 1850’s, the number of men was so inferior comparing to that of women. For such reason, marriage in the Victorian era was the aim of any woman. There were a great “number of young women who could not expect to marry” (Mitchell Sally, 1996: 14). So, Victorian maidens were taught especially by their mothers the art of ‘catching’ a man. This fact was portrayed by some Victorian writers like Jane Austen who showed women as being passive expecting or doing nothing except waiting for the husband who would ensure a bright future for them and their families.

Some reasons behind that problem were the need for a number of men in the army, forcing the destitute as well as criminals to leave England and also the will of some men to leave England and adventure to new lands as Canada, Australia New Zeland and other countries to seek better life opportunities to improve their living conditions. (Fraiken Neff Wanda, 1929: 12). All of that led many women to remain unmarried; some to an advanced age while others stayed like that for the rest of their
lives. This was regarded as a problem that led many people to wonder what to do with
the superfluity of women. W. R. Greg for instance wrote an essay entitled Why are
Women Redundant in addition to Mrs. Jameson who treated the same issue in her
lecture.

The problem led some people to think of possible solutions to ensure for the
unmarried women an “honorable spinsterhood”. Among the resolutions was for women
“to emigrate with a view to marriage across the ocean” (Thomson Patricia, 1956: 115)
while some feminists thought that “it would be better to accept the situation and to
educate them to support themselves in comfort rather than to ship them off to the
colonies like superfluous cattle” (Ibid). Little by little, people began to alter their
thoughts towards spinsters and accept them as they were. Through time, they “ceased
to be figures of fun” (Ibid).

**Divorce in the Victorian Era**

It happens that sometimes a man or a woman chooses the wrong partner. This
may lead each one of them to ask for divorce though the phenomenon was abhorred
during the era. To prevent divorce, the church granted separation or as it was known
“menso et throro” which meant “from bed and board”.

Men could never accept a sin committed by their wives. Thomas Hardy
illustrates this fact in many of his poems. For instance, *The Dame of Athelhall* is about
a woman who tried to leave her husband, but changed her mind at the last moment to
hear at last her husband revealing to his friend that his wife’s departure would enable
him to engage with another woman. The man in the poem entitled *The Contretemps*,
also disowned his wife just after finding her with another man affirming that he would
find out a better wife “twice as good a bride” (Hardy Thomas, 1926:552). Generally, it
was the women who were persistent to carry on living with the man even if their
husbands were adulterous in order to look after their children. This is the case in Hardy’s poem *The Weeding Morning*, when the bride overheard her husband announcing his love to another woman. The bride, though being moved by what she heard, decided to remain with her husband. If necessary, the woman asks for separation or “memo et thorø”. In other cases, though the wife sought divorce, she could not get it and was forced to remain with the husband even out of her will due to the Habeas corpus act.

Later on, when facts about women bearing the injustice and disloyalty of the husbands were revealed, people became aware of the necessity for those women to get separated. Among the wronged women, we cite Caroline Norton. The latter suffered a great deal from her husband’s ill-treatment. She fought to get separated from her husband and also to gain the custody of her three children. She published a booklet entitled “*The Natural Claim of a Mother to the Custody of her Child as Affected by the Common Right of the Father*” (18371) where she exposed her own misery which was caused by her husband and other more dramatic stories of other women.

Another miserable woman was Nellie Weeton whose husband apparently married her to take hold of her wealth as she was rich. Nellie’s husband was cruel. It happens that he threatened to send her to a lunatic asylum if she tried to defend herself or oppose him. Those wronged women were sometimes advised or helped by powerful men in power who had been aware of the cruelties to which married women were subjected.

Male’s dominance over their wives was due to many reasons. First, because the husband was the breadwinner, “it was fit and right that a man had disposal of his wife’ property and earnings, if she had any” (Ibid: 30). In addition to this, since there should be someone to rule the family, traditionalists believed that “it was better for the
husband to be the ruler, since he was wiser, stronger and knew more of the world” (Ibid). From this, we understand that women were regarded worthless, weak and dependent on males who would ensure their living.

Once married, women completely submit to their husbands. For this, most awakened people realized that the institution of marriage was “indispensable but which in some cases, because of the inequalities of the law and the one-sidedness of the bargain, exploited and brutalized the wife and condoned the tyranny of the husband” (Ibid: 31). This fact is illustrated in Hardy’s poems in which most often, the couple discovers that the only thing that binds them together, is just the contract of marriage, without love or affections. This means that either the wife or the husband finds himself standing as an obstacle to the happiness of others. This is why women and some of their supporters aimed to engage in a struggle to pass more laws that would improve their conditions and grant them a respectable life.

**Victorian Penitentiaries for Fallen Women and Prostitutes**

As stated earlier, Prostitution was before known but during the Victorian period, it was widespread and people started to fear it since it “became a part of social consciousness” (Briggs Asa; 1983: 284). It was no more regarded as a phenomenon that touched only urban life. It was seen as a crime on which women were punished. A woman who was discovered to be a prostitute would be judged and called a “whore” in addition to her exclusion, estrangement and denouncement by her society without taking into consideration the reasons that led her to commit such illegal act or even knowing whether she was wronged or forced to commit it. The reasons behind that were different. Some women were either tricked, seduced or wronged by thoughtless and irresponsible men. However, some other women, due to the difficult row they had
to hoe, turned to be prostitutes in order to get a good income though this degraded the image of the ideal Victorian woman who had to be pure.

Through time, different institutions were established to provide shelter and protection to all unfortunate people who were enduring certain hardships in their life or who had once fallen. An institution for instance that was known as penitentiary was designed for the women who were considered as ‘whores’ or “fallen women”. A “female penitentiary was not a penal institution for the punishment of crime, but a charitable enterprise entered voluntarily by members of an outcast group, popularly known as ‘fallen women.’” (Mumm Susan, 1996: 527+). It means that the women were sent there, not to punish them for their crimes but rather to rehabilitate them and involve them again in the society after purging them of their sins. Some women were sent to penitentiaries by the authorities while others went there by themselves willing to escape the outrageous outside life.

The term “fallen women” which is generally used by Victorian people to refer to prostitutes or whores also embodies other categories of women such as “female thieves, tramps, alcoholics, and those who were described as feeble-minded” (Ibid) in addition to those who survived incest and sexual violence. Penitentiaries sought to uplift these women and convert them from being ‘fallen’, ‘dissolute’, inmates’, ‘deviant’ into ‘honest’, and ‘respectable’ women

Penitentiaries were governed by ‘nuns’ or sisterhoods. The latter were religious women who did not marry and chose to remain celibate for their whole life. These women were against the current belief of that time which stated that transgressing the sexual code that is to say indulging in a sexual relation is an ‘irredeemable’ sin. For them, these women could always have a possibility to integrate again in the society as long as they find support from members of their society. They also stated that these
women “were not essentially different from other women of the same social origins (Ibid: 527+).

Victorian people wondered about the existing relationship between a prostitute and a nun, for while the former were abominated, the latter was pure and belong to the upper class. The fact is that working in penitentiaries was not an easy task for sisterhoods so that even the experienced ones found it difficult. The fallen women “were almost invariably from a completely different social milieu, often entered as alcoholics, and fought with knives or fists on the slightest provocation” (Ibid). Nonetheless, through time, the relation between them improves. Nuns and sisterhoods felt responsible and dutiful towards the women who came to them seeking help.

Some women unwillingly fell or found themselves in the profession of prostitution. Most of them deviated due to economical reasons that is to say the bad living conditions and the misery in which they lived. Others left their homes after their mothers’ death being a target to their unbearable stepmothers. There were also those who were accused of theft. The theft did not essentially concern valuable objects, as some women were caught even because of stealing a pound, or something to eat. There were also some domestic servants and dairymaids who were victims of their masters’ rape. All those women were sent to penitentiaries that were for them as a safe shelter much better than their own homes. Once there, most of them seek God’s deliverance and find a way to redemption. They also seek to integrate again in society (Ibid: 527+).

As I have already mentioned, many reasons caused the fall of women. All of them were sent to the same penitentiary. However, through time, a necessary step which was to separate those institutions was taken. For instance, there was an institution which was only concerned with the reception of those penitents who did not transgress the Victorian sexual moral codes to take care of them. Other institutions for
differing crimes were established as well. This step was ordered by those who were working in penitentiaries and found out that the women whose offence was small should not be mixed with others who committed crimes or big offences.

Not all women went to penitentiaries seeking redemption and salvation after feeling guilty of their deeds. Some sought such places to flee the misery they experienced in the street after discovering that life was not really as they expected. On the other hand, there were some who regarded the penitentiary as a refuge, that is to say they came there just when they were ill or during winter since the bad weather limited or hindered heir work as prostitutes. When they got well, and when the weather became better they left the institution often without informing anyone about their departure going back to their former habits and profession by which they earned money.

Other women preferred to keep on living in the penitentiary for the remaining of their life. In this institution, women were taught good habits and middle class manners. They could get some training on household management and learn some crafts to enable them earn money for their living. Some even get an elementary education in arithmetic and languages. Some penitents succeeded in integrating into the society and got married after living the institution. They were in fact excused and pitted by nuns and some people for they realized that they were most often wronged and that men to a great deal have taken part in destroying those women’s life and hence should be responsible on their deeds.

**Victorian Widows**

In the Victorian society, death was seen as an event that required acceptable and decent funerals. Even people from the middle class and the poor spent too much on funerals. They thought that if they were “buried by the parish was the ultimate
disgrace” (Ibid: 162). Thus, they participate with those who gathered dues to provide “a coffin and tips for the gravediggers… meal after the burial, and bought mourning for the immediate family” (ibid). It was significant for the people who attended funerals to clad in black and wear “a crepe dress with a plain collar and broad cuffs…a crepe bonnet and veil for outdoors” (ibid).

When a married man dies, his widow had to cover her hair and parts of her face. The usual mourning period was two years. She had to wear a crape for a year and nine months. After this period, she could either continue as well as stop wearing black clothes according to her will. The Queen Victoria for instance, decided to put on black clothes till her death. A widower had also to spend the same period as the widow but they generally return to the usual life contrary to the widow to whom it was difficult to integrate again in the society. In this context, Mitchell Sally said that “widowers should wear mourning for the same period as widows, but they usually enter society much sooner” while “A widow is not expected to enter into society under twelve months, and during that time, she should neither accept invitations nor issue them” (Ibid: 163).

Thomas Hardy illustrated this point in many of his poems through widowed women mourning their husbands and refusing to do anything that could harm even their husbands or lovers’ dead spirits. The poems The Harvest Supper and The Woman in the Rye illustrate this idea through the two widowed women who feel miserable while remembering their dead husbands. They vowed to remain faithful and prevent themselves from the pleasures of life.

Women’s Agitation to Get Their Rights

Throughout the nineteenth century, women had no political rights despite the fact that there had been some movements to advance and ask for the rights of women. Later on, women’s condition began to change. That happened when acts and laws on
their favour were passed. Among the acts, we find the *Infants and Child Custody Act*, which was passed in 1839. This act gave women more rights to take care of their children in case of divorce. It stated that if parents were separated (divorced), children under the age of seven should stay with their mothers.

By 1857, women whose husbands deserted them or were cruel with them could ask for divorce thanks to the Matrimonial Causes Act even though it did not completely satisfy women since men were still privileged and given more rights so that they could ask for divorce just by proving that their wives were adulterous. In 1882, the Married Women’s Property Act secured for the woman all the property and possession she earned or inherited. The *Guardianship of Infants Act* was introduced in 1886. It made it clear that if a woman was widowed, she could gain full custody of the children. In 1891, women were no longer forced to live with a husband out of their well.

There appeared powerful and well-formed women whose consciousness led them to rise against the prejudice of society and claim their natural rights. In fact, “Middle-class women sought serious education rather than the paintings, piano playing, social graces, and general knowledge that were usual in girl’s schools. They also began trying to extend the range of women’s employment”. (Mitchell Sally, 1996: 7). Organized movements to claim women’s rights began to take shape by the end of 1840’s. This category of women included many among whom we site Barbara Bodichon who formed Women’s Suffrage Committee in 1865 to claim their rights.

Around 1872, women were being admitted to Cambridge University but unofficially. Throughout the 1876, they began to win the right to become licensed physicians (Ibid: x). Children also were touched by the reforms, so that, for the first time, government intended to do something to restrict the bad working conditions. In
1833, it was forbidden for Textile mills to employ children less than 10 years. A year later, there appeared. The Poor Law Amendment Act which offered help to those who couldn’t support themselves.

However, the laws cited above did too little in practice and did not do much for women as it was expected. The acts were in fact just words on paper since women continued to suffer and live in degraded situations. Men were still dominant over females. The cause was that society was governed by a patriarchal system. So, it was useless to amend or create acts or laws. What was necessary then was to change the system on which society relied and also change people’s sight and view towards women as being inferior. Women had to be patient and accept the few acts and the very slow change that was happening gradually on their favour since even the Queen promoted male’s control and dominance over women. In addition to this, some passive women seemed to be indifferent to their subjugation to males and were satisfied of the position they had in society and thus did not bother themselves to complain or ask for more rights.

Historians judged that the Victorian era could be divided into three distinct periods. Each of them witnessed events that contributed to its strengthening as well as to its weakening. The early Victorian age started by 1837 and ended in 1851. This first part witnessed Queen Victoria’s accession to the throne when she was still eighteen years old and her many contributions to uplift her country. The second phase referred to as the mid-Victorians. It started from 1851 until 1875, the period in which people knew stability, new reforming acts that helped to surpass some social problems. However, this stage witnessed upheavals and wars with Russia. The last phase lasted nearly twenty-six years that is to say from 1875 until 1901. It was an age of transitions in the sense that those great men whose influence was so deep on society and their
ideas were so great, died (for instance Charles Darwin, Thomas Carlyle, Anthony Trollope and other ones).

Then, there appeared a new category of artists and writers (like Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, Thomas Hardy…) who were regarded as modern artists rather than Victorian ones due to their social criticism of society and its sacred concepts and institutions (Ibid: 13). In this respect, James Granville Southworth stated that Thomas Hardy “bridges two worlds and belongs wholly to neither” (Southworth James Granville, 1947:3). This is because the writer seems sometimes to be linked to the Victorians’ morals, but other times, we sense that he “had emancipated himself from convention” (Ibid: 25).

In the introduction of The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, James Granville Southworth announced that “Hardy’s poetry furnishes us with all the biographical data we need to know. No biographer can in fact, neglect the poetry if he is to achieve a living portrait. It is a finer key to the man behind the work than are the novels. Hardy himself said that, speaking generally, a hundred lines of his poetry contained more autobiography than all of his novels” (Ibid: 4). For such reason, I judged it to be worth providing hints about the life of the poet to better understand Hardy the poet.

Many things influenced Thomas Hardy while writing poetry. In fact, the death of his first wife Emma had a great impact upon his later career as a poet so that the series named Poems of 1912-1913, were addressed to her since he felt himself guilty for deserting her. The influence of the rural life and the oral culture of the village were also clear in Hardy’s works through the depicted scenes. For instance, as a child, he witnessed two public hangings, a scene that was kept in his mind and later on analysed in a poem entitled On the Portrayal of a Woman about to be Hanged where he depicted a trial of a woman convicted of killing her husband.
This can be understood by mentioning Clytemnestra, Agamemnon’s wife who “had been false to him” (Bulfinch Thomas, 1981: 263). She killed her husband in collaboration with her lover. According to Greek mythology, Agamemnon is one of the central figures in the *Iliad*, Homer's epic poem about the Trojan War. He was the king of Mycenae. He was the leader of the Greeks in the Trojan War. While Agamemnon was commanding his fleet, they were hindered by a calm sea. A soothsayer told him that if he wanted to get advantageous winds, he would have first to please goddess Artemis by sacrificing his daughter Iphigenia. The king asked his wife Clytemnestra to send him his daughter after making her believe that she was going to marry Achilles, one of the great warriors. Agamemnon killed his daughter, the fact that led the goddess allow the ships sail. This incident arose the anger of Clytemnestra, who collaborated with her paramour Aegisthus to kill Agamemnon. We can also read other scenes in his poems about women as well as men being hanged as a punishment to their wrongdoings.

Many incidents and experiences in Hardy’s own life and that of his family shaped his career as a novelist and poet. Hardy was told the story of his grandmother who was disowned by her wealthy family due to her disapproved marriage with a servant. Hardy also heard about the circumstances of his birth. He was told that his parents’ wedding was only rearranged after four months of his mother’s pregnancy. He also knew that the early Hardys were once well-known all over Dorset but lost celebrity throughout the years. These events were as a layout to some of his novels as well as his poems.

Hardy’s reading of works produced by scientists, philosophers, and other intellectuals influenced his way of writing to a great deal. For instance, he read Herbert Spencer, Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species*, John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty* and other works. The suicide committed by his friend Moule Horace was another event that
moved him. Moreover, Hardy witnessed public hanging of two women and heard about the circumstances that drew or led sometimes some innocent women and even girls to be regarded as prostitutes. All of this was reflected through his novels and poems.

**Conclusion:**

This chapter has been concerned with the analysis of major events that characterized the Victorian era as well as the general living conditions of women. To be more explicit, it has examined the life of women in a society that was governed by a patriarchal system. It has examined marriage and divorce during the era and the laws and acts that determined their rights and duties. It has also examined a category of women identified as “fallen” and the institutions that were built to hold and rehabilitate such women known as penitentiaries. The chapter has also pointed out to the struggle of women to overcome the hardships and injustice they faced during that age. At last, it has provided a short overview of Hardy’s life. I found out that Thomas Hardy’s career as a novelist and poet was influenced by incidents, theories, ideas and concepts of his age.
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III-Chapter Two:

The Representation of Women by Some Victorian Writers and by Thomas Hardy

Introduction:

Victorian writers were mostly concerned with their society’s issues especially the woman question. Through the following chapter, we would have a general idea about some literary works that were produced by Victorian writers to find out how women were portrayed and to discover the position of the Victorian woman. This will be done by referring to Thomas Hardy.

When we speak about the writers who emerged during the Victorian Period, we can distinguish between two categories of writers: those who belong to the early Victorian Period that ended around 1870 and those belonging to the late Victorian Period. Among the prominent writers and poets that we associate with the former phase, we can cite Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892), Robert Browning (1812-1889), Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861), Emily Bronte (1818-1848), Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), Christina Rossetti (1830-1894), George Eliot (1819-1880), Anthony Trollope (1815-1882), Charles Dickens (1812-1870) and so on. Among The writers that are associated with the latter phase are George Meredith (1828-1909), Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), Oscar Wilde (1856-1900), Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), A.E. Housman (1859-1936), Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) and many other ones.
The Portrayal of Women by Some Victorian Poets

It was commonly agreed by the Victorians that woman’s place was the ‘house’. Later on, a great debate over this issue was held so that writers varied in their portrayal and representation of women. Some regarded her as being fit only to manage the household, give birth to children and provide them with an initial education whereas others viewed her as an equal of man, apt to get a fair treatment, the same education and full rights as males. The fact on which they agreed was the purity of women. Among the writers who favoured and advocated the former view of the necessity for a woman to be a “good housewife”, we can cite Lord Tennyson who treated this subject. In a poem entitled “The Princess” (1847) Lord Tennyson definitely circumscribed males and females’ duties at home as well as the spheres adequate to each one of them. He said:

Man for the field and woman for the hearth:
Man for the sword and for the needle she;
Man with the head and woman with the heart,
Man to command and woman to obey
(Quoted in Sally Mitchell, 1996:267)

The poet made it clear that the adequate place for a woman is the house to perform certain tasks whereas the man ought to be the ‘bread winner’ of his family, the one who is apt to ‘command’ and manage his family being the wiser and more experienced. Women have nothing to do but obey, be subdued and to perform certain tasks like needlework.

Coventry Patmore shared the same opinion in a poem entitled The Angel in the House 1854-1856. The latter was published in five parts from 1832 till 1896. Through the title of the poem, Patmore makes it clear that women have to be like angels, a
source of joy and happiness, a perfect companion who ought to ease and make life agreeable and more comfortable for their partners as well as the members of their families. He provided some qualities that should be possessed by women to reach this aim. They should in fact be as ‘angels’ and guardians who ought to guard and keep the unity of their families. They should devote themselves to their husbands and not to reproach them for any fault even if they committed an error, but instead, to blame themselves as if the ‘sin’ was made by them. He said:

Her heart to an icicle or whim,
Whose each impatient word provokes
Another, not from her, but him;
While she, too gentle even to force
His penitence by kind replies,
Waits by, expecting his remorse,
With pardon in her pitying eyes;
And if he once, by shame oppress’d
A comfortable word confers,
She leans and weeps against his breast,
And seems to think the sin was hers;
Or any eye to see her charms,
At any time, she’s still his wife,
Dearly devoted to his arms;
She loves with love that cannot tire;
And when, ah woe, she loves alone,
Through passionate duty love springs higher,
As grass grows taller round a stone. (Patmore)

The poem thus, provides us with the various qualities that should be possessed by any woman at that period to be the perfect wife and partner for the husband. Through his work, we find out that Patmore believed that any relation that binds a man and a woman should be accomplished by marriage.

Most of the women portrayed in the works of Thomas Hardy had a differing concept of marriage. For example, in the poem entitled The maiden’s pledge, Hardy depicted a woman indifferent to marriage as she considered it a factor that would ruin the actual love relationship that unites her with her lover. She believes that once married, the
Elizabeth Barrett Browning had started writing at an early age. She was concerned with the different issues facing women. Her work Aurora Leigh (1857) which was written in a form of a novel-poem was her masterpiece. It is about the heroine Aurora who refuses an offer of marriage from her rich cousin who is a philanthropist and social activists. In fact, the heroine Aurora refuses him because he doesn’t really value women or consider them able to succeed in a professional life. Like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Hardy treats the same idea in Tess of the D’Urbervilles. In fact, despite his richness, Tess could not fall in love with her cousin Alec D’Urbervilles because she feels that he does not really value her as a woman, but instead, he views her as an object to satisfy his sexual desire.

In the poem entitled Porphyria's Lover written in a form of monologue, Robert Browning objectifies women. The speaker in the poem portrays his beloved as being submissive, obedient and keen on her husband to the extent of “worshiping” him. She neglects herself to serve him

Murmuring how she loved me--- she
Too weak, for her heart’s endeavour,
To set its struggling passion free
From pride, and vainer ties dissever,
And give herself to me for ever.
But passion would sometimes prevail,
Nor could to-night’s gay feast restrain
A sudden thought of one so pale
For love of her and all in vain:
So, she was come through wind and rain.
Be sure I looked up at her eyes
Happy and proud; at last I knew
Porphyria worshiped me; surprise (Browning Robert)
The poem shows clearly that the lover does not care about Porphyria’s deep love and respect of him. Though he knows so well that she adores and worships him, he is so indifferent and simply says that all what she does for him is in vain. Most of the females represented in the works of Thomas Hardy instead, are rebellious, and most of them do not accept to live with a partner who does not value them. Once they feel themselves neglected, or not treated as they deserve, they rebel by showing dishonesty and immorality to their husbands.

**The Portrayal of Women by Some Victorian Novelists:**

Most of the writings that were produced during the eighteenth century shared the same plot. Elizabeth Langland stated that “one plot that shaped the rise of the novel in eighteenth-century England—a virtuous serving girl winning the love of a master vastly her social superior” (Elizabeth Langland, 1992: 290). This means that most of the stories that were written at that time mostly center on a marriage that uplifts a poor maiden from her low social class and offers her a more comfortable, happy and secure life. This fact can be sustained through different works that were produced during that era.

Jane Austen’s novel *Pride and Prejudice* is the best example to illustrate this point when Mrs. Bennet tells her husband that it would be a great achievement for them if one of her daughters succeeds in marrying the wealthy Mr. Bingley. As Nash Geoffrey remarked, most of Jane Austen’s novels center on marriage and “the choice people make for marriage partners. Especially it is about the difficulties two people have to overcome before they marry” (Nash Geoffrey, 1980: 60). This means that the novels were merely romantic, novels that deal with a love story and the obstacles that might hinder lovers to be united.
Patricia Meyer Spacks said that “Victorian novels characteristically conclude with marriages; a heroine's early life measures her worth and the man she wins provides an index of her accomplishment; in marriage she finds opportunities to exercise the woman's traditional function” (Patricia Meyer Spacks, 1972: 36-51). Through the quotation, we understand that this type of plot as well as the romantic and love stories did not completely disappear during the early nineteenth century. What was remarkable in the works produced in the nineteenth century was the depiction of Victorian cities and mode of life. Most Victorian writers were concerned with the changes that affected their society due to industrialization and sought to portray people’s conditions in their writings.

In fact, they differed from their predecessors in the sense that unlike them, the Victorian novelists confined themselves to issues related to their society and the conflicts between individuals as well as between the social classes. Through reading works produced during that era, the reader gets acquainted with Victorians, their manners and their attitudes. Writers treated various subjects; most of them wrote about their society and “they criticized it as many of their readers were doing. They voiced their doubts and fears; the assumptions of their age they fully shared” (Walter Allen, 1991: 139). Among the issues and matters that attracted their attention was the “woman question” as each writer gave a distinct place and image for the woman in both prose and poetry. There was in fact a great debate about the position that the woman was supposed to occupy.

As already mentioned, Victorian writers were classified as ‘early’ and ‘late’ novelists. What the former “have in common is a special climate of ideas and feelings, a set of fundamental assumptions” which “later novelists of the century were to question, even though the great mass of the reading public still took them for granted”
Early Victorian novelists in fact “identified themselves with their age and were its spokesman” (Ibid). They portrayed life as it was during that period, with its troubles, different hardships and social issues and its different social classes that were created as a result of the Industrial Revolution. In addition to this, they voiced people’s worries, doubts and shaken beliefs concerning the new established theories and religious beliefs. Somehow, they were tied to the laws and regulations of their society and considered any individual who breaks those laws as being sinful, wicked and morally wrong.

As most critics announced, Thomas Hardy “did not, like contemporary novelists, write about industrialization or life in big towns” he was different to those essays as he “seems to exemplify the more modern, adventurous, questioning spirit which came into literature about the turn of the century and led on directly to the work of D.H. Lawrence” (Williams Merryn, 1976: 54). Through his career as a novelist, Thomas Hardy’s novels earned him the quality of being called a feminist writer due to his portrayal of the female characters.

John Stuart Mill was remarkably known through his work *The Subjection of Women* written in 1869. Zillah Eisenstein stated that in spite of John Stuart Mill’s critic of the subordination of women, he supported patriarchal division of male and female sexual spheres in his insistence “that it is both likely and desirable that most women will continue in their domestic role, leaving income-earning activity and involvement in the public sphere to men or to exceptional single women.” (Caine Barbara, 1993: 37). It means that though John Stuart Mill called for equality among all the members of society and advocated justice and fair treatment of women, he was among those who regarded the woman especially the married one as being fit to household management and taking care of her family rather than interfering in other affairs like trying to find a
work outside to earn money because such duties are destined for males. They could just
get simple occupations like needle working, domestic service and working as a
governess.

In 1839, Sarah Lewis wrote a book entitled “Women’s Mission” in which she
suggested for women the necessity of avoiding academic education and sacrificing
their time and effort for the welfare of their families. According to her, women have to
understand and accept the reality of their being mentally inferior to men. They should
have no other preoccupation than marrying, bearing children, siding by their husbands
and constructing a happy family. She insisted that women ought to be equipped with
moral qualities and virtues and have no aim other than working for the benefit of their
beloved. In this context, she wrote:

Christian virtues . . . are more easy of practice to women than to
men, because women have fewer worldly interests, and are by
nature and education less selfish. . . . Let women begin this good
work; they are eminently qualified for the acceptance of the two
great truths of the gospel, love and self-renunciation, which
qualities are more or less placed in the hearts of all women; they
are naturally disposed to reverence, to worship, to self-sacrifice,
for the sake of a beloved object (Quoted in Allan Nigel Bell,
2007: 13).

From this passage, Sarah Lewis makes it clear that since women have no other
preoccupation in their life, they should be equipped with all Christian values and
virtues necessary for the construction of a happy family. In addition to this, they have
to renounce themselves and their rights for the sake of others. She also expressed the
same ideas in later works including The Wives of England (1844) and The Daughters of
England (1845) to sensitize women and suggest means by which a woman would keep
their husbands affectionate to them.
W. R. Greg also argued that “marriage was the despotic law of life”, (Thomson Patricia, 1956: 115) and that the woman’s aim and intent in life is to learn household management and seek a man with whom she would construct a happy and well structured family and bear offspring. He stated that “The better solution was for women to make married life attractive and pleasant for men, so that they would prefer having a wife to keeping a mistress”, (Ibid: 92). In this respect, George Gissing accused women of being the reason behind the problems that confront any family due to their unawareness of how to manage the household, their ignorance of means to attract the husband and to their inability to guarantee an agreeable and comfortable life to their husbands the fact that push some husbands to seek satisfaction elsewhere.

Charlotte Brontë’s “heroines, unique among their nineteenth-century sisters, are by and large physically plain, a quality that removes them at once from the usual objectification of beautiful women.” (Mitchell Judith, 1994: 30). From the quotation, we understand that Brontë differed from her predecessors by challenging earlier writers’ model of beautiful and attractive women. Instead, she portrayed unattractive heroines who succeed at last to earn the respect and love of the hero who is either handsome or belongs to a high social rank. The heroines of Charlotte Brontë’s novel possess moral as well as intellectual qualities that make them attractive in the eyes of the male characters.

Brontë’s novel *Jane Eyre* deals with a young woman called Jane working as governess who succeeded to gain the respect and love of her master thanks to her enlightened personality, her affectionate heart and simplicity. Though being unattractive, poor and with no connections, the heroine could win the heart and admiration of her master Mr. Rochester who preferred her and offered to marry her instead of a wealthy woman who belongs to the same social class as himself. Indeed,
Brontë’s heroine Jane is unlike the other Victorian women, she is open-minded, cultured and courageous for being able to confront bravely some incidents that occurred in the story.

The Victorian age was “with all its ideals, a curiously puritanical age: it was easily shocked, and subjects like sex were taboo.” (Page: 180). Nonetheless, a number of writers challenged their society’s ideals and morals and treated in their writings diverse subjects including those that were prohibited. The heroine Jane in Jane Eyre for instance was told by her master about his romantic adventure with the French mistress Céline Varens though this kind of subjects were not appropriate to be discussed openly especially between males and females for they were regarded as a taboo.

However, the ending of Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre was an object of disappointment and confusion to many readers. Jane who refused Rochester’s marriage offer at the beginning claiming that she was not ready to subdue to him and later on left him after discovering that he committed bigamy through marrying two women, could not forget him especially after the accident that occurred to him which caused him a handicap. She returned to him though he was blind and decided to pursue her life with him and nurse him. Jane proved that the duty of the Victorian woman was to ensure happiness for the partner, serve and take care of him. In her book entitled “The Stone and the Scorpion: The Female Subject of Desire in the Novels of Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy”, Judith Mitchell made a parallel between Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy. She affirmed that “All three writers are significantly feminist in terms of the surface polemic of their novels, with Hardy being the most vociferously so” (Mitchell Judith, 1994:210).

Many writers and critics expressed their anxiety towards subject of ‘fallen women” and prostitution since this phenomenon was prevalent at that time. Henry
Maythew for instance treated the issue of prostitution in his work. Charles Booth also treated this issue considering it as a social problem. John Ruskin too argued that prostitution should be cleansed and that women should remain always pure, as they are in fact a perfect companion to man and a source of pleasure and satisfaction in every house. His view on women is expressed in a work entitled “Sesame and Lillies”. Josephine Butler, saw from prostitution a feminist issue and thus attacked the long established double standard of sexual morality. However, sentimental writers represented women as being not guilty but victims of prostitution. The writer Thomas Hood can be taken as an example. In his poem, “The Bridge of Sighs”, he emphasized the purity of women. Thomas Hardy did not share the same idea with these writers. In *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, Hardy expressed clearly his view on fallen women while describing Tess as being a pure woman though she committed a sin.

Elizabeth Gaskell was among the women who were concerned with the ‘woman question’. Many of her works reveal her position as a feminist writer. In one of her novels that bore the name of the heroine *Ruth*, she represented a fallen woman as being innocent. Josephine Butler “recalled the reading of Mrs. Gaskell *Ruth* as a key event in her evolution as a feminist activist” (Caine Barbara, 1993: 30). Ruth, who did not have a family or anyone who could orient and advise her fell as a victim of a rich lover who abandoned her before the birth of an expected child. Fortunately, she was consoled and assisted by a non-conformist minister and his wife with whom she lived peacefully. However, once her secret had been revealed, she was rejected and condemned by her society. Ruth found comfort beside her child who brought her joy.

Gaskell’s novel *Ruth* was “a powerful attack on the sexual double standard, showing how the whole burden of it fell on hapless women, and demonstrating the cruelty and unfairness of existing moral and social beliefs. It offered a picture of
unrelieved gloom as far as women were concerned: despite her youth and innocence, rehabilitation for Ruth was not possible” (Ibid: 31). However, the novel was criticized because “The ideas were set forth with such candour that to many they appeared as revolutionary doctrines; the question of the comparative importance of sins, for instance, was raised by Mrs. Gaskell” (Thomson Patricia, 1956: 135). The novel was also considered as being unfit to be a subject of discussion between the members of the family.

Like Elizabeth Gaskell’s novel *Ruth*, in which she insists, “that it was the man who was morally culpable. Ruth's essential purity and goodness are not in any way diminished by her liaison, whereas her seducer continues to show himself in all the situations in which we meet him as weak, self-indulgent, irresponsible, and even dishonest" (Caine Barbara, 1993: 31), Thomas Hardy did the same thing in his work *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*. In fact, Tess is depicted all through the novel as being girlish, and an innocent creature whose innocence and purity were ruined by Alec D’Urbervilles. The latter instead, is shown as a pitiless and tricky person who was aiming all the time to seduce Tess.

Another of Gaskell’s novels was the one written in 1854 entitled *North and South*. The latter treats the impact of the Industrial Revolution as it deals with the struggle between classes that were the wealthy class that possesses all the necessities of life and the poor or the lower class who were exploited by the owner of the cotton factory Mr. Thornton. Though the novel treats such a serious topic, Gaskell did not neglect the subject of women for she demonstrated their image and position in the Victorian society. Mr. John Thornton’s sister Fanny is represented as an ideal Victorian woman who is accomplished and behaves as a gentlewoman. She can play music and embroider well. She is an obedient woman for when her brother asks her to accompany
her mother and visit the Hales, she accepted not because she was willing to do that but just to obey her brother.

As the other Victorian women, Fanny Thornton is well aware that an ideal and accomplished woman was the one who can perform certain duties. This is shown when Fanny was so astonished to learn that Margaret Hale had no piano and commented that it is almost regarded as the necessities of life and that it is abnormal for a woman to exist without a piano. She also conforms to the model Victorian woman when she accepted a marriage offer from a man in spite of being older than she is just because he is rich and thus could afford a relaxed and comfortable life for her.

On the other hand, the heroine Margaret has a completely different character. She is not accomplished as she was described in the novel but she is a strong woman trying to help, reconcile and mediate between the hopeless and exploited workers who undergo all sorts of social problems and their exploitative master Mr. Thornton. Margaret Hales tried to establish a new relation between the master and his employees. She was trying to convince John Thornton to change his behavior towards his workers as he would win them not by force or mistreatment but through discussing with them, listening to their troubles and trying to understand and comfort them.

In 1859, Henry G. Jebb wrote a novel entitled *Out of the Depths* in which the heroine Mary Smith was formerly a woman whose living was earned through prostitution. Later on, Mary became a changed woman who was able to restore and regain her formal place in society. She even “becomes respected as a village school-mistress and is about to marry a wealthy farmer” (Quoted in Thomson Patricia, 1956: 142). Her suitor asks her persistently to accept his offer of marriage telling her “Why should you thrust from you what seems to be of God's especial sending, to remove you perhaps out of all temptation, and to graft you again into that society which you once
fell away from . . . If God has wiped away your soul's sins shall not man erase the memory of your body's sins? ’ ” (Ibid: 143). This means that Henry G. Jebb affirms that fallen women have an ultimate opportunity for redemption and integrating again in the society.

Allan Grant was a Victorian novelist whose position towards feminism was controversial. In his novel The Woman Who Did, he “advocated free union of the sexes against what he depicts as the slavery of marriage” (Allan Nigel Bell, 2007: 134). Like Sue Bridehead in Thomas Hardy’s Jude the Obscure, who was totally against marriage, the heroine Herminia Barton illustrates well this idea through engaging in a relation with a man and giving birth to an illegal child. However, “as the novel continues his heroine becomes increasingly like the women her creator is supposed to be attacking” (Ibid: 135). He even “believed that childbearing was women’s main duty in life” (Ibid). This was the reason behind criticizing him as “being very far from being feminist” and that he is “an enemy of the women’s movement” (Ibid: 135).

Isabella Beeton wrote a manual entitled Book of Household Management in 1861 in which she compared women’s duty in managing the house to the management of a general to his army for the aim and mission of both the general and the woman is to organize and manage well in order to establish and insure order, stability and success. Isabella Beeton gave instructions and recommendations for women that could enable them to construct a well-organized and happy family. The instructions were mainly directed to women teaching them how to dress, how to instruct the servants of their house to do their tasks perfectly, how to organize their time and how to assist their husbands to establish and maintain their social relations and statue.

In many novels written by Charles Dickens among which we cite David Copperfield, Dickens revealed his view of the woman especially the fallen women and
the reasons and circumstances that might lead them to fall. In this novel, Charles Dickens sustained the opinion of those who thought that woman is for the ‘hearth’ through the portrayal of two female characters of the novel each having a distinct personality. They are Agnes Wickfield and Dora Spenlow. While the former is “the ideal mate for a young middle-class gentleman” since she “typifies the angel-in-the-house by demonstrating piety, domestic efficiency, submissiveness, self-denial, and subservience” (Ayres Brenda, 1998: 13), the latter differs from her for she is a rebellious woman in addition to being unable to manage her house. This fact led to the disturbance of David's public life since he feels discontented and uncomfortable at his house.

Dora is not an angel in the house. Indeed, instead of ensuring happiness, comfort and delight for her husband as was the duty of wives at that time; she made him wretched and miserable. She could not fulfill her duties as a good housewife; she could not manage to transform the house into a refuge where her husband could find peace and contentment away from the busy and tiresome public life. Though the couple married by love, David reveals his uncomfortable state at home. Dora’s ignorance of household management was due to the fact that she grew up in wealthy family, surrounded by servants who were serving her and providing her with all what she needed. It is also, due to the death of her mother when Dora was young. In fact, it was the duty of mothers to instruct, teach and prepare their daughters to be good housewives.

Dora knew that she could not offer a comfortable life to her husband and that she was a ‘burden’ for him instead of being a relief. Dora’s fate through the story was to die and thus pave the way to David to marry Agnes, a model and ideal Victorian wife who could fulfill her wifely duties and hence succeeded to transform her house
into a place of peace and comfort. Through Dora’s death, Dickens affirmed that the
woman who does not comply with the Victorian moral values and virtues has no place
in the society. However, David once observed that he "should be enraptured by this
woman (Agnes) because she is the perfect example of womanhood” but he could not
forget his dead wife Dora whom he missed (Quoted in Ayres Brenda, 1998: 13).

Other novels written by Dickens reveal his views about the woman. Most of his
works typify the idea of the angel in the house by representing female characters and
heroines whose personality corresponds with that of the angel presented by Tennyson’s
poem The Princess. For instance, we cite Biddy, the heroine in Great Expectations who
is highly admired and loved by her husband due to her skillful management of her
house and her remarkable intelligence. Esther Summerson in Bleak House illustrates
this point, too. In short, Dickens shows that the man together with the woman should
cooperate and work together so that each one of them ought to bear responsibility and
perform his tasks perfectly to achieve contentment in their matrimonial life.

Thackeray is a writer who sympathized with his female characters. Through his
works, he “perpetuated the myth of wonderful woman and undeserving man” (Thomson
Patricia, 1956: 92). Like Thomas Hardy, he presented women who “seem as
independent in their attitude to men and marriage as the most progressive of feminists”
(Ibid: 91). For instance, Laura Bell, the heroine of one of the novels refused an offer of
marriage just because she was not satisfied of the way in which the offer was presented
to her. Thackeray portrayed his female characters as being ‘good’ women (Allen

It was said earlier that later Victorian writers did not only portray and depict
people’s conditions or convey their fears but also questioned beliefs that were held by
people as well as the earlier writers. George Eliot “has been described as the first
modern English novelist” (Walter Allan, 1991, 218). Most critics agreed on the fact that George Eliot was against the ‘woman question’ due to her “scornful attitude toward the women's movement of her day, but also because of a perceived patriarchal stance in her work” (Mitchell Judith, 1994:85). While studying her works, we find that “On the surface, her heroines never evolve beyond submission, seemingly adhering to the conventional domination/submission pattern” however on the other side, “these characters are far from conventional Victorian romantic heroines” (Mitchell Judith, 1994: 92).

In one of her novels entitled \textit{Adam Bede} (1859), Eliot tells the story of Adam Bede, an honest carpenter who fell in love with the pretty Hetty Sorrel who was working as a dairymaid in a farm. The latter was in love with Captain Arthur Donnithorne who apparently was planning to seduce her through his frequent visits to the farm. At last, after he had succeeded to seduce her, he left the country leaving her to face a melancholic lot. Being hopeless to realize that she was pregnant, Hetty decided to accept Adam’s offer of marriage. However, she changed up her mind and instead decided to search for her seducer. The conditions became so worse to Hetty; she could not find Arthur and thus left her poor child to die in a wood. Hetty’s deed was revealed and thus she was imprisoned and sentenced to death. Though Adam was so affected and disappointed when the news of his beloved reached him, he decided to help her. but later on, he was introduced to a woman who was as honest and sincere as him and the couple married later on.

The events of the story reminds us of Thomas Hardy’s \textit{Far From the Madding Crowd}. Like Hetty, the heroine of Hardy’s novel Bathsheba Everdene refused an offer of marriage from a gentleman farmer called Boldwood and did not care about farmer Gabriel Oak’s deep feelings and love to her. Instead, she felt in love with a soldier called Sergeant Troy though the latter proved to be dishonest, tricky and an
irresponsible man who ruined Bathsheba’s life and led to the death of Fanny Robin, a poor innocent girl whom he lured to marriage.

Through the events of the story, we realize that George Eliot condemned Hetty’s deed. She could not comprehend or justify her wrongdoing. Instead, she blamed her of being imprudent and irresponsible. She outlined a tragic end to Hetty due to her transcendence of the Victorian’s moral values. Most feminist critics agreed on the fact that she could not justify the woman who commits a sin so that “in her fiction she had to mortify women beautiful as she herself was not. She could not, one feels, forgive sexual passion. Hetty has to suffer because she has fallen a victim to it herself and arouses it in others” (Ibid: 222). The writer also wondered how men who “are such clowns” could trick certain women (Ibid: 141).

George Eliot “could find no excuse, no real atonement. It was the doctrine of the irretrievable that she preached” (Thomson Patricia, 1956: 141). In his book George Eliot, Jan Jedrzejewski stated that “Eliot’s women who are prepared to rebel, or at least to assert their independence, are inevitably punished, either literally, like Sorrel and, in a different way, Maggie Tulliver, or metaphorically, like Armagart or Alcharisi” (Jan Jedrzejewski, George Eliot, 2007: 130). The narrative that Eliot followed was that of women being tempted, and then fall as victims to seduction, the fact that would bring about their decline and at last punishment most of the time by death as a fate and a price women would pay for being irresponsible and unwise.

In Lord Ormont and His Aminta (1894), George Meredith depicts a heroine who rebels against her stern husband and escapes to live with her lover, Matthew Weyburn. Such novels make it clear that women were aspiring to gain freedom and fair treatment from the part of men. Another Victorian writer was George Egerton who wrote a novel entitled Keynotes (1893). Egerton presented a heroine who was torn between her
conservative husband and a stranger who offers her the love and regard that was lacking in her relation with her husband.

**Thomas Hardy the Novelist and Women**

If we examine some of Hardy’s major novels, we find that he was among the writers who sought to depict “the new woman” with new conceptions, new ideas and conduct. His heroines were represented as being rebellious against the constraints of their society, strong, hardworking, intellectual and enlightened women. Hardy’s works provoked a large debate so that they became a subject that arose a fierce discussion as they sometimes led to bitter criticism and to people’s resentment, the fact that annoyed him.

Hardy witnessed how women were treated and the conditions in which they lived. He was aware that the Victorian society restricted women’s spheres concerning education, economy, and politics. In fact, women were denied many rights even sexual feelings (Harvey Geoffrey, 2003: 34). While taking no notice of the man who commits sexual offences and justifying them, the woman who engages in any sexual activity was disdained and perceived by society as a ‘fallen’ woman though the two engaged in the same deed and committed the same error.

Women were always the scapegoat whenever a sexual relationship was discovered between the two sexes without taking into account the reasons that pushed them to do so. However, for some Victorian women, prostitution was often regarded as the unique refuge in order to escape poverty, misery and oppression, that is to say, they engaged in such sexual acts knowing that this would be the unique way that could enable them to earn their living.

Through his works, Hardy made an overt attack on some beliefs and traditions held by society. For instance, in *Jude the Obscure*, he condemned the institution of
marriage through Jude’s illegal relation with Sue who objected marriage tie with Jude and believed that it is a free relation and not marriage that would bring happiness for them. In The Mayor of Casterbridge, he criticized the concept of ‘family’ through depicting an awful scene in the opening of the novel, which was a wife and daughter’s sale by a drunken husband. Hardy also treated capitalism and its negative impacts on society. The aim of the writer through creating such stories is to show the deficiencies of the Victorian society and its hidden aspects contrary to how it was exposed by others.

Thomas Hardy’s female characters are completely different from the stereotyped Victorian women. They are unconcerned with the restrictions and customs of their society. For instance in Jude the Obscure, Sue is represented as a modern and a free woman. In fact:

Possesses a contradictory personality. A determined individualist who fears marriage as a degrading form of social prostitution, she is deeply narcissistic and neurotically insecure, which results in a farcical vacillation. Having flirted with Jude, enjoyed the games with authority represented by her Training School, and opted for a conventional marriage with a man she does not love. (Geoffrey Harvey, 2003: 90).

For this, Jude the Obscure was called by people "Jude the Obscene" due to its overt treatment of sexuality.

**Conclusion:**

In this chapter, we have taken a glance at some Victorian writers and poets and at some of Thomas Hardy’s works. We can say that like his contemporaries, Hardy sought to advertise for the ‘new woman’ who is free from the conventions and restrictions of society. However, he differs from them because of his overtness and explicitness in dealing with matters. In Tess of the D’Urbervilles for instance, he did not let the reader judge whether Tess is innocent or guilty. He clearly affirmed that she
is a ‘pure’ and an innocent girl whose misfortune was all due to the selfishness and irresponsibility of Alec D’Urbervilles. On the other hand, through his novels, he criticized harshly the institution of marriage which he considers as nothing but a snare that can lead to the unhappiness and misery of either the husband or the wife. He also criticized the concept of the ideal family that was sacred for Victorians. The following chapter will be concerned with the study of some of Thomas Hardy’s poems
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IV- Chapter Three

Introduction:

Hardy’s novels were a subject of study to critics who provided different critical interpretations and viewpoints. During his career as a novelist, Hardy was figured as a feminist writer. At a late age, he abandoned his vocation as a novelist and started to write poems though at a certain period of time, his novels were greatly read and highly admired by readers who preferred him as a novelist rather than as a poet. He wrote hundreds of poems, lyrics and an epic about the Napoleonic War entitled ‘The Dynasts’.

The subjects of his poems were various; most of them were addressed to his dead wife Emma Gifford noticeably the sequence that consists of twenty-one poems entitled Poems of 1912-1913 in which he mourned his wife Emma and recalled all the memories and souvenirs that bound them together from their first meeting, their estrangement after marriage and at last, his recognition of the emptiness of his life after losing her.

Thomas Hardy’s Turn to Poetry

As stated earlier, though Thomas Hardy was well known and well admired as a novelist, he “considered himself first and foremost a poet, just as he considered poetry the most important of literary genres” (Linda Shires, 2004, 255). In fact, he affirmed that he is more attached to poetry than prose and that the latter was just a means to earn his living since he knew that prose was more read than poetry at that time. He even believed that he can express himself more freely in verse. In this context, the critic Lance St John Butler wrote:

Hardy was able, in verse to express his idiosyncratic view of things in a more schematic and less realistic manner than he was obliged to adopt in his fiction. He was able, for example to bring
in ghosts voices of the dead, God himself, talking birds and other symbolic figures and mouthpieces which he could hardly introduce suddenly in the midst of his realistic novels and stories” (Lance St John Butler, 1986: 119).

From the quotation above, we understand that Hardy could reveal or express without any restraint ideas and emotions in verse, the thing that was difficult to be achieved in prose.

However, readers as well as critics were reluctant to read Hardy’s poetry as they judged that it would be preferable for him to keep on writing prose than verse since he did well in the former. The critic James Granville Southworth avowed that “Thomas Hard’s poetry has never lacked readers; but it still remains largely unknown to the reader familiar with his novels” (Southworth James Granville, 1947: 3). For this, Granville asserted that Hardy really gained a well established a position for himself among the outstanding writers, but he failed to secure the same position in poetry (Ibid).

As said earlier in the introduction, some critics announced that Hardy turned to poetry since he was deeply moved by what was said about him as his works noticeably Jude the Obscure were “assaulted as immoral, by the critics, rejected by the lending libraries, condemned by the church, burned by an Anglican bishop” (Bradbury Malcolm, 1993: 33). All that had a great pressure upon him and his career as a novelist. Though the writer aimed to show his indifference to criticism and tried to hide his real feelings and annoyance, he did not manage to withstand it. In this context, Eugene Williamson states:

no one has ever been able to believe Thomas Hardy's occasional claims in his autobiography that he paid little attention to what critics had to say. Indeed, there is scarcely one personal characteristic better attested in the book and more widely agreed on by scholars than Hardy's hypersensitivity to criticism,
especially to adverse criticism. That he often took criticism ungracefully seems undeniable; that he was nearly always protective of himself and his writings, all too evident. Long after he had attained the status of a classic, he seemed unable to forget harsh critiques (Eugene Williamson, 1985: 348).

Hardy felt that his novels were not given the estimation and assessment they really deserved. Hardy wonders why criticism was “limited by its bias against an established novelist's turning to poetry as his primary artistic medium” despite the fact that he “had been writing poems for over thirty years before he published his last prose fiction, some of these critics tended to think of the volumes of his poetry as representing a clumsy experiment by an untried hand in a new and unfamiliar art "at the eleventh hour" of his life. Not surprisingly, this bias greatly limited their power to respond to the intrinsic worth of the poetry itself” (Ibid: 111). So, “from 1895, to his death in January 1928, Hardy concentrated on poetry, the form in which he felt happiest, and here he did some of his finest work” (Ibid: 43).

The Poetry of Thomas Hardy

The Collected Poems by Thomas Hardy was published in 1926. It comprises more than nine hundred poems that treat various subjects and topics. The poems were sometimes described as being ‘odd’. The book is divided into entitled volumes and each one contains a number of poems. The titles of the volumes are: Wessex Poems and Other Verses (1898), Poems of the Past and Present (1902), Time’s Laughingstocks and Other Verses (1909), Satires of Circumstances Lyrics and Reveries (1914), Moments of Vision and Miscellaneous Verses, Late Lyrics and Earlier (1922) and at last, Human Shows-Far Phantasies. In each volume, Hardy develops and treats specific ideas and topics. For instance, the volume of poems of 1912-13, is a "sequence of twenty-one elegiac lyrics that he wrote and published just after the death of his first wife, Emma” (Morgan. William W, 1947, 496). Wessex Poems “is an uneven volume, comprising a
variety of subjects including history (the Napoleonic Wars), love, loss of religious faith...aging...bereavement...” (Geoffrey Harvey, 2003: 40) and many other themes including his longing for his dead wife Emma whom he ignored and estranged when she was still alive.

In his preface to *Poems of the Past and Present*, Hardy said that the theme of this volume is “dramatic or impersonative even where not explicitly”. He stated that it “comprises a series of feelings and fancies written down in widely differing moods and circumstances, and at various dates” (Hardy Thomas, 1926: 75) so that some poems were written earlier than the novels but were not published till the end of Hardy’s career as a novelist. We realize thus that Hardy’s subjects are general including his own life and experiences. He also dealt with subjects like life, fate, destiny, divinity, nature and so on.

Another theme is that of indifference to women during their life and the late realization and the desire and longing for them when they are no longer present. Many poems illustrate this theme. For instance, the poem *In the Moonlight*, portrays a man mourning his dead wife whom he neglected when still alive and considered her unimportant comparing to the other women he knew. One day, a passer-by found him in a desperate state near the dead woman’s grave. He told him that behaving like that might awaken the dead woman’s phantom. The mourner answered:

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“Why, fool, it is what I would rather see
Than all the living folk there be;
But alas, there is no such joy for me!”

“Oh—she was one you loved, no doubt,
Through good and evil, through rain and draught,
And when she passed, all your sun went out?”

“Nay: she was the woman I did not love,
Whom all the others ranked above,
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In the poem entitled *The Rambler*, Hardy remembers things and regrets about the fact of not being able to see and feel of them until it is late. He says:

> I do not see the hills around,
> Nor mark the tints the copses wear;
> I do not note the grassy ground
> And constellated daisies there.
>
> The tones around me that I hear,
> The aspects, meanings, shapes I see,
> Are those far back ones missed when near,
> And now perceived too late by me (Ibid: 252)

It means that Hardy feels the sweetness of things once he can no longer view or get them. In the poem *The Faded Face*, the speaker wonders how he could not observe the beauty of the woman he loved or realize to which extent he loved her. He says:

> How was this I did not see
> Such a look as here was shown
> Ere its womanhood had blown
> Past its first felicity?—
> That I did not know you young,
> Faded face,
> Know you young
> Why did time so ill bestead
> That I heard no voice of yours (Ibid: 420)

Again, Hardy accused time of being responsible for his sufferance because it revealed his inner feelings only after it was too late for him. He was not able to see and discover
the womanhood or feel the sights of the one he loved when she was young until her face faded.

This was the case with Hardy himself. He did not know the worth of his wife until he lost her. All the inside feelings and love towards Emma awakened. When still alive, he estranged her and left her die alone despite the love story that once united them before being married.

To sum up, as Samuel Hynes stated, “nature itself is never the point of Hardy’s poems; the point is man’s efforts to find his place in a nature which is indifferent to him” (Hynes Samuel, 1961: 115). On reading Hardy’s poetry, we feel that he was determined by some ideas like “infidelities of all possible kinds, the inevitable loss of love, the destructiveness of time, the implacable indifference of nature, the cruelty of men, the irreversible pastness of the past” (Ibid: 4). This led also to consider him as a pessimist poet.

In the poems, “like his contemporaries, Hardy set about to find a poetic diction adequate to his personal needs. He drew, as others did, upon the broad sources of language: the idioms of common speech; the vocabulary of special groups—architectural terms, for example; archaisms; old words in new or rare senses; regionalisms; and coined words and compounds” (Ibid: 90). Most critics agreed on the fact that the language of the poems is ‘odd’, ‘quirkish’ and ‘uncouth’. Terri Witek affirmed that “The rhythmic principle of Thomas Hardy’s poetic universe is repetition” which is observed by most writers (Witek Terri, 1990: 119). For such reason, Hardy the poet was less admired because his poetry was misunderstood and thus, neglected and criticized by most critics and readers who affirmed that Hardy expressed himself more clearly in his novels than poetry.
Concerning Hardy’s style, we can say that it is “unmusical and often harsh, and that this harshness is a function of manipulation of syntax, sound and diction so as to defeat lyric fluidity and to restrict the movement of the verse to a slow, uneven, often uncertain pace” (Hynes Samuel, 1961: 60). In fact, Hardy did not give much importance to the stylistic side of his poems but rather focussed on transmitting ideas and feelings so that his “poems seem awkward, halting, and often ungrammatical. The language ranges from the dialectal to the technical, and is full of strange, tongue twisting coinages. The sentences move crab-wise across the page, or back toward the subject of the verb” (Ibid: 57). He considered “choosing a meter as a kind of contract” (Ibid: 76) and thus was interested on transmitting ideas rather than giving much importance to the stylistic side.

The settings of most of the poems I have dealt with in this dissertation illustrate the subject of the “fallen women’ or prostitution. Most of the poems that are dealt with are set either in big towns or in the countryside. The events took place in open fields or in harbours or bridges that are safe places for lovers to arrange assignations and trysts. This can be illustrated through the setting of many poems like *The Contretemps, At Wynyard’s Gap*, in *A Trampwoman’s Tragedy*, *In the Days of Crinoline, In Plena Timoris* in addition to many other poems. There are also poems that are set in fields or woods or houses to describe the daily life of the Victorian women and their efforts outdoors and indoors.

**Intertextuality Between Thomas Hardy’s Novels and Poems**

On studying Thomas Hardy, the reader familiar with his prose and verse observes some similarities and parallels between the two genres. To be more explicit, one cannot help thinking about or bringing to mind scenes from the novels when reading the poems and vice versa. The critic C. M. Bowra stated that “Hardy’s poetry
in no mere appendage to his novels, but it is closely related in a special way, or rather, they are closely related to it” (Bowra C. M, 2009: 3). However, we cannot judge which genre influenced the other or which of them was first written because Hardy was writing novels and at other times was writing poems that were published at a later age of his life.

Thomas Hardy himself stated in the preface to his book *Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy* that many of the poems “were written long ago, and others partly written. In some few cases the verses were turned into prose and printed as such, it having been unanticipated at that time that they might see the light” and that “the dates attached to some of the poems do not apply to the rough sketches given in illustration" (Hardy Thomas; 1926: 3). Thus, critics argued that some poems were taken as the base and were transformed into novels whereas some others are considered as commentary or extension to the novels.

In his article entitled *Verse and Prose Parallels in the Work of Thomas Hardy*, R. W. King aimed to clear up this point by suggesting corresponding scenes that can be found between the novels and the poems. He referred to J. L. Bradley who pointed to resemblance between Hardy’s poem *Beyond the Last Lamp (Near Tooting Common)* (296) and the novel *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*. The former corresponds to a scene in chapter thirty five when Tess and Angel Clare were observed by a stranger walking together in a desperate state after Angel Clare had heard from his beloved that she was seduced by Alec D’urbervilles.

R. W. King asserted that “About half of the parallels are with poems first printed in Wessex Poems” (King R. W, 1962: 54). He pointed to other parallels including the poem entitled *In Time of “The Breaking of Nations”* and his novel *Desperate Remedies* so that he said that the “fifth and sixth lines of the poem are very
like a microscopic précis of several pages in Desperate Remedies, the novel he was writing during the winter preceding the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War” (Ibid). The ballad *Valenciennes* can also be assimilated to the novel *The Trumpet-Major* (1880) as Hardy himself pointed to this poem adding to its title a note saying “By the Corp’l Tullidge, in “The Trumpet Major” (Hardy Thomas; 1926: 15) which means that the two are related to each other.

The same thing was done in his poem *In a Wood* when Hardy wrote down the title “From *The Woodlanders*” which means that the poem corresponds to the novel *The Woodlanders* or that it refers to the novels. R. W. King then drew a parallel between *Jude the Obscure* (1895) and *Midnight on the Great Western*. In the fifth part of the novel, Hardy described the journey of Jude and Arabella’s son Little Father Time when he was sent by his mother Arabella to join his father Jude. The poem also describes a journey made by a little boy and depicts his loneliness and grieves being alone in the train. He says:

```
What past can be yours, O journeying boy
Towards a world unknown
Who calmly, as if incurious quite
On all at stake, can undertake
This plunge alone? (Hardy Thomas; 1926:483)
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We understand that Hardy knew what an awful life and an unknown future were expecting the little child or that he was thinking of Little Father Time’s tragic end in *Jude the Obscure*.

Critics called Hardy’s novel *Tess of the D’ Urbervilles* (1891) ‘Tess of the Hardy’s’. There are a number of poems according to King that suggest areas of parallel. For instance, the poem *We Field-Women* parallels a scene in chapter forty three describing Tess and her friend Izz working hard at Flintcomb-Ash Farm. In the poem
too, a woman describes her daily life and work in a farm. The poem Tess’s Lament as W. R. King affirmed, do not correspond to any scene in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* though carrying the name of the heroine Tess. Nevertheless, the poem in a certain way can be related to the novel, that is to say, it describes Tess crying her misfortune after her tragedy.

We can say that the above mentioned parallels between Hardy’s poems and novels are just among the few examples, because if we pay a closer attention we would find more striking parallelism. In short, as some critics stated earlier, the poems deal nearly with the same issues that were treated in the novels and are written in the same tone, so that critics said that they can be considered as a kind of extension or commentary upon the novels.

To sum up, we refer to the critic W. R. Rutland who affirmed that “the poetry is just a commentary upon the novels” (Quoted in Hynes Samuel, 1961: 13). Another critic who is Lance St John Butler stated that “Hardy’s poems circle in an ever changing pattern round a number of well-organized motifs and topics, and they are the same motifs and topics, on the whole, that we have discovered in our discussion of his fiction” (Butler Lance St John, 1986: 117). To sum up, we can say, that Hardy’s subjects that were treated in the poems, do not really differ from the subjects of the novels.

**Analysis of Some of Thomas Hardy’s Poems**

Thomas Hardy had written nearly nine hundred poems and treated different themes. In this dissertation, I aim to limit my analysis to poems that focus on women and treat subjects that are related to them. However, this doesn’t mean that these are the only poems that deal with women. As a matter of fact, the one can’t deal with all that great number of poems in a single chapter. Thus, I have chosen among the poems
some of those that seem to be more suitable to fulfil the already stated task. The poems that are selected in this part mainly convey Hardy’s opinion and attitude towards women.

**Women and Honour**

The *Ruined Maid* is a conversation between two country girls who were former friends. One of them is called Melia. Through the conversation, we grasp that Melia was ruined the fact that led to her radical transformation into a respectable and prosperous woman who fits for “high company” (Hardy Thomas, 1926: 145) as stated by her companion. We learn that once in the farm, before being ruined, Melia experienced a miserable life so that she used to be clad in ‘tatters’ and worked in “digging potatoes, and spudding up docks” (Ibid) till life became for her as a “hag-ridden” due to melancholy and megrims (Ibid). After being ruined, she underwent a sweeping transformation. We come to know this through her friend’s bewilderment and astonishment of the state she reached. She wore beautiful clothes as “bracelets, bright feathers...little gloves” (Ibid).

On her part, Melia feels proud of herself and of what she did while saying “O didn’t you know I’d been ruined” (Hardy, 1926: 145). She is delighted at her current state and answered her friend that it’s in that way that ruined women dress. She also tells her that this category of women “never do work” (Ibid). The country girl thus wished to become like Melia for she told her:

> “You used to call home-life a hag-ridden dream,  
> And you’d sigh, and you’d sock; but at present you seem  
> To know not of megrims or melancholy! __  
> I wish I had feathers, a fine sweeping gown,  
> And a delicate face, and could strut about Town!” (Ibid: 146)
The country girl wished to be as Melia even after knowing about her ruin. Melia told her not to expect such a thing as long as she is not ruined.

Even the title of the poem *The Ruined Maid* seems ambiguous as it contradicts its content. On the one hand, ‘ruined’ is a word which means a state of complete destruction and devastation and as the title suggests, it refers to a maiden who lost her virginity. On the other hand, while the reader is expecting through the poem to hear the sufferance of the maid, we learn that Melia’s ruin leads her not into devastation and misfortune, but into welfare as she moved from a hard and tiring life into a more comfortable one. It is a well-known truth that during the Victorian era, a fallen or ruined woman is disdained and scorned by society including the members of her own family. Nevertheless, the country girl calls Melia ‘my dear’, admired her and hoped to lead the same life as her.

Through the poem, Thomas Hardy altered things. We see that what happens with Melia and the country girl is the opposite. As one could expect, Melia ought to be ashamed of her deed and suffer due to her ruin. However, instead of being like that, she tells her friend that “one’s pretty lively when ruined” and that “some polish is gained with one’s ruin” (Ibid). The country girl who ought to be satisfied of not being ruined and that she is still a maiden admires Melia and repents the fact of not being like her. The ruined maid made it clear to the country girl that she can never expect to become like her if she remains as she is. She told her “My dear – a raw country girl, such as you be, Cannot quite expect that, you ain’t ruined,” (Ibid 146).

While reading the poem, we understand that after her ruin, Melia left the countryside and moved to live in town. Through the poem, we understand that there are many other girls like her for she says ‘we’. Such women at that time were called prostitutes or fallen women. Prostitution was regarded as a social evil that threatens
society. However, through the conversation, we discover that prostitution is considered as a single way for some women to gain their living, get out of poverty and improve their social conditions at the expense of degrading themselves and losing their dignity and self-respect.

As Simone Du Beauvoir explained in *The Second Sex*, the hard living conditions undergone by some people especially women, may urge them to choose the profession of prostitution being the easiest and the most accessible work. This is what happened to Melia, who according to the poem endured many hardships in the field digging potatoes and wearing roughen clothes. It was only after being ruined, and moving to live in the city that her life changed completely and could at last enjoy the sweetness and beauty of life.

The poem can be compared to Hardy’s novel *Tess of the D’ Urbervilles* for the writer added a note to the title of the novel saying “a pure woman” though Tess behaved wrongly. Like Melia, Tess too was seduced by a rich man who promised to make her wealthy and help her family. In contrast to the title that describes her as pure and innocent girl, Tess accepted to keep on meeting Alec, her seducer since she had no other alternative. Both Melia and Tess had experienced harsh living conditions and came to realize that prostitution would be the best means through which a proper life would be earned.

In *The Contretemps*, a man tells about an incident that happened to him. The man said that he arranged a meeting with his mistress in a ‘harbour-bridge’ so that no one can suspect or find them. Once there, he clasped with a woman whom at first he thought the one he was waiting for. Shortly afterwards, he came to realize that he was mistaken for the woman was just another one who was seemingly there for the same reason as him.
While the two engaged in a discussion, the woman’s lover appeared followed by her husband. The four were in a strait situation for everything was unpredictable and happened in a hurry. The husband was the first to withdraw after disowning his wife and saying to the two other men that he ‘washes’ his “hands of her” (Hardy: 1926: 552). He went away leaving her with the two other men. The lover also withdrew being convinced that his mistress planned a meeting with another man than him. The man was left with the woman

From the woman’s words, we understand that the reason behind her ‘tryst’ is her “being so sorrily wed” (Hardy: 1926: 551) which means that her marriage was an unhappy one and thus wanted to ‘fly with’ another man with whom she would fell herself valuable. Her husband seems to be cruel and oppressive. This can be understood from his behaviour, for as soon as he saw his wife there, he reacted immediately saying “I wash my hands of her” and that he could find “twice as good a bride” (Ibid) though himself was there probably to meet his mistress. The man does not scorn her but instead, sympathized with her when saying “we twain hearts caught in one catastrophe” (Ibid). women always pay the price for the illegal relations though the mistake is shared.

Prostitution was well spread during Hardy’s time this is shown in the poem when the man said “my assignation had struck upon/Some others’ like it I found” (Ibid: 552). The poem stated one among the many reasons that according to Simone Du Beauvoir can push certain women to seek a lover. It is ill-treatment, under-estimation and disrespect from which some women suffer. For such reasons, oppressed women despise their husbands and seek a partner who would care for them and value them as they really deserve.
Women and Maternity:

As it has already been stated, Victorian women were recommended to be honest, sincere and pure. They should preserve the purity of their bodies by not engaging in illegal relations to avoid the disdain, humiliation and the misjudgement of their society. However, we find that some women of the poems transgress their society’s regulations and break the code of behaviour by engaging in secret relations. Unfortunately, most of these women find themselves in difficult situations when being pregnant and then renounced by their lovers because the Victorian society did not forgive such offence and blame women for it.

In the poem *A Sunday Morning Tragedy (circa 186-)* a woman tells the tragic end of her daughter whose fate was to die bearing a child in her womb. The woman says that her daughter was a flower-fair girl and that “Men looked and loved her as she grew” (Hardy Thomas, 1926: 188). The maiden was at last won by a man who made her “thrall to him” (Ibid). After a while, the man abandoned the maid who “bore a secret time would tell” (Ibid). She grew miserable and in a moment of despair told her mother about her pregnancy. The mother found herself in a distraught situation for she knew that society would blame her because the deed “is so scorned in christendie” (Ibid: 189). Hence, she began to look for an urgent solution to amend her daughter’s misdeed.

The first thing she did was to ‘plead’ the lover to marry her daughter to right his deed and “save her from her misery” (Ibid: 188). However, since the man was poor, he “frowned, and swore he could not wed” (Ibid). He seemed indifferent and unwilling to marry the woman saying rudely that “poverty’s worse than shame” (Ibid). The woman was so despaired that she sought a ‘subtle’ shepherd whom she instructed to fetch an ‘herb’.
The man brought one and told the woman that he sometimes uses such herbs to cure his ‘flock’ and that “‘tis meant to balk ill-motherings” (Ibid: 189). At hearing the shepherd’s words, a “hope waxed strong” (Ibid) on the mother’s face. She was relieved as she judged that in giving her daughter the herb, she will put an end to her misfortune for the “scandal shall be slain” and thus, she will “give all whispering tongues the lie” (Ibid) because she considers the incident as something “that lours upon her innocency” (Ibid). She went straight home to her daughter to give her the herb that would end her misery.

After taking the herb, the poor young woman felt ill. Her health began gradually to deteriorate and she ‘faintly breathed’. Few days later, some friends of the girl’s lover and some neighbours rushed into the woman’s house announcing happily the lover’s intent to marry the girl whose “banns were called in church today” (Ibid: 190). After a short time, the lover followed them asking to see his bride. He told the woman in murmur that since he heard the news of the girl’s pregnancy, he had been thinking all the time of the necessity of mending the wrong deed. The mother called her daughter but there came no answer from her. She went straight to her room “and there she lay—silent, breathless, dead” (Ibid: 191). The herb thus killed both the infant and the mother.

As Du Beauvoir stated, maternity is only respected in married women and that an illegal child is scandalous and is considered as an obstacle and handicap for his mother. The poor woman died after taking the herb brought by the shepherd in her attempt to kill the foetus. In fact, she knew that she would not bear people’s sight towards her and that she will be disdained and criticized by them. For this, she wanted to save her honour by slaying the unborn child, the act that caused her death too. Again, Hardy
showed how women were the only victims to the follies and irresponsible deeds on which men are responsible, too.

Another poem entitled *In the Restaurant* depicts how women suffer when they discover their pregnancy because they are well aware of their fate under the double standards of their severe society. In this poem, the woman is addressing her lover and trying to convince him about the necessity of being engaged to avoid people’s comments, as “the child will come as a life despised” (Ibid 396). As expressed in *The Second Sex*, pregnant women are viewed negatively by their society when being unmarried. The woman knows well her fate; this is why she tells her lover about her fears. She said:

> “O you realize not what it is, my dear,  
> To a woman! Daily and hourly alarms  
> Lest the truth should out. How can I stay here,  
> And nightly take him into her arms!  
> Come to the child no name or fame,  
> Let us go, and face it, and bear the shame.” (Ibid 396).

*The Wedding Morning* is another poem that tells the story of an unfortunate bride who comes to discover the real feelings of her husband in the morning of their wedding. The woman called on her husband without informing him. The husband, who was unaware of her presence there, was speaking to his beloved telling her that he would be more satisfied to marry her instead of the one he is going to marry. At first, the dignified bride decided to leave her husband saying “I would give him to Carry,/ And willing to see them wed” (Hardy Thomas, 1926: 573). However, the woman changed her mind, saying:

> “But how can I do it when  
> His baby will soon be born?  
> After that, I hope I may die. And then
She can have him. I shall not morn!” (Ibid)

What led the woman to take such decision was that she thought about the baby she was expecting and knew that marriage should be accomplished to avoid people’s disdain and condemnation. As explained in Simon Du Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, pregnant women are respected only if being married, if the opposite happened, this would make them an object of disdain and humiliation. This is the case with the woman of *The Weeding Morning* who decided to get engaged just because of her expected child and then planned to let her husband live with his beloved and not be an obstacle in their way.

As it was common in the Victorian society, a sinful woman was punished and scorned by the members of her society. Through the poem *The Husband’s View*, we are told the story of a woman who had once committed a sin and thus fled her country in order to escape people’s disdain and sight towards her. She sought a place where none knew her so that she could begin a new life. Once there, she received an offer of marriage from a man who admired and regarded her as the only woman who could ‘fulfil’ his dreams. The woman who was willing to make a new start observed the man’s care of her, his kindness and honesty and thus decided to accept his offer. She lived with the man in happiness and for a while seemed to forget her agony and the reason of her escape.

However, the coming days, persuaded the woman that she could not get rid of her former life and memories. Her past haunted her and she found it difficult to adopt herself into a new life pretending innocence while she knew that the secret she hid would change her husband’s view towards her. She was tortured by the idea that the “cause of the flight hidden from” (Hardy Thomas, 1926: 232) her lover and was terrified by the dreadful thought of the reality that could be revealed one day or
another. She spent sleepless nights thinking of the probable consequences of her deed in case her husband discovered her past. Her misery was far greater when the ‘fruit’ of her deed came prematurely. For her, this fact could raise her husband’s suspicion towards the coming infant.

To her great surprise, the woman realized that, her lover “have known” the truth “all the time” (Ibid: 233) but remained silent and pretended to ignore his wife’s past. The man knew that the woman suffered from the experience and that what happened for her was indeed a ‘misfortune’. Instead of blaming the woman, the man felt sorry for her as he called her “sweet Nan” because he understood that the woman in fact did not commit a ‘crime’ but rather was wronged.

The husband told his wife that the incident was “a useful thing” (Ibid) for maids in the sense that it makes them understand the world and experience the bitter and merciless life. He also told her that they are in need “of sons for soldiering” (Ibid). We can thus relate the poem to the radical feminists’ view that stated that women should not always be blamed for prostitution because they are most often the victim of this terrible and dreadful experience and that men are also responsible.

**Women and Desire**

Thomas Hardy represented the woman who “is longing with a mad impulse for larger, freer life. He can sympathize with the girl who is fully aware that from every reasonable point of view she is better off in the country, yet longs to madness that she might participate in the follies of the town” (Southworth James Granville, 1947: 59). The poet in fact seemed to sympathize with such women and understand their inner conflict. This is represented in poems like *From Her in the Country* where the maiden on one side wanted to stay in the beautiful and quite countryside but on the other side
had a strong desire to go to town where she will be able to share in its foolishness and be free.

The woman in *From Her in the Country* tells about her inner dilemma of either living in town or in the countryside. In fact, she thought about the “crass clinging town” (Hardy Thomas, 1926: 217) where all is dim, noisy and worthless. On the other hand, she was thinking of nature’s beauty and attractiveness with its splendid natural landscapes and tried to convince herself that “one little bud is far more sweet” than “all man’s urban shows” (Ibid). She wished to feel herself as a “rural maid” but, alas! The desire to strut in town was stronger. She “was longing to madness” of the city with its “din and sin” (Ibid). Through the poem, we recognize that though the woman was willing to escape the city and go back to the countryside, she could not do so for she had a strong desire to remain in the sinful town, which is full of vice and corrupted people.

*A Beauty’s Soliloquy during Her Honeymoon* is a soliloquy of a woman who laments herself about her marriage with a man she considers unfit to gain her. In fact, the woman discovers but too late her fairness and charm. The woman’s grief began when she accompanied her husband to spend their honeymoon in the Grand Hotel where “all looks bend on” her “in homage” (Hardy Thomas, 1926: 763). There, the men were staring at her and admiring her “radiant rareness”.

She knew that she could use her beauty as an arm to “catch the world’s keen eyes” for she “was a peach for any man’s possession” (Ibid). The woman wonders why nobody told her before how attractive she was so that she would prevent her unworthy marriage with a poor man. The lady affirmed that if she “had guessed her powers” (Ibid) before indulging in that marriage, she would not “lease” herself to be the
“chattel” of such a “dull” man but instead rely on beauty to realize her ends and catch a good husband who is worth possessing her.

The poem *A Trampwoman’s Tragedy* tells the tragic story of a woman whose fate was to live alone after the tragic end of those she was living with. The woman travelled from Wynyard’s Gate going northward way. She was accompanied by her fancy man, her mother Lee and her little child John. As it was depicted by the woman, the journey was long and tiring, the travellers were extremely exhausted as “the sun-blaze” was “burning on” their backs and their “shoulders sticking to” their packs (Hardy Thomas, 1926: 182). At last, they reached “Marshall’s elm” a place where the land seemed to her as a “royal realm” so that no “finer sight” can ever be found as the one she is admiring (ibid: 183).

The tragedy started when the woman’s lover wondered whether little John was his own son or the other man’s child. To get rid of his suspicion, he asked his wife. Despite the fact that the lover was the child’s father, the woman wanted first to annoy her husband by playing a trick aiming to make fun of him. She nodded to him confirming his thought by affirming that it was not his offspring. The truth was that the jealous man has been observing the woman’s behaviour towards the infant and found out that she was too caring about him and thus got the wind up after hearing that. Acting in a mechanical way, “he sprung, and with his knife” killing the child (Ibid 184). The innkeeper after hearing the incident declared about it and thus the lover was hanged for his mistaken deed.

The trampwoman was thus left alone after the death of her mother Lee. The dead man’s ghost was still appearing and sought to know if the died infant was his son. To relieve the dead man’s spirit, she told him the truth to which the ghost smiled and disappeared. The miserable woman was left alone “haunting the Western Moor” (Ibid:
The tragedy was thus, due to the woman’s desire to amuse by making a fool of her husband.

The poem *Imagining*, depicts a woman dreaming and imagining herself a ‘lady’ with all the comforts and luxuries that any woman could have like clothes, beautiful house, servants, gardens and so on. Unfortunately, her lot was so different because “she found herself a striver, / all liberal gifts debarred/ with days of gloom, and movements stressed” (Ibid: 493). All her dreams were smashed when she married a poor farmer who could not fulfil her dreams. Nevertheless, the woman continued to dream of the possibility of living a more decent and respectable life though knowing so well that what she desires “can never be” true (Ibid: 493).

Simon Du Beauvoir stated in the Second Sex, that some women know well that they have to cope with their society’s traditions and customs, keep their purity and honesty, side with their husbands and be as a partner to them. Yet, they diverge once they find themselves incapable of being the expected honest and pure woman and wife because she has her own dreams and wishes and she wants to lead a freer and more comfortable life. This is what urges them to immorality, disloyalty and betraying the male’s conception of her. The women portrayed in *From Her in the Country*, *A Beauty’s Soliloquy during Her Honeymoon*, *A Trampwoman’s Tragedy* and in *Imagining* too, are unable to control their inner desire for freedom and the longing for a luxurious life.

**Women as Victims of Social Conditions and Social Institutions**

As feminist critics argue, some women found themselves as prostitutes unexpectedly due mainly to economical conditions and the harshness of social laws of the society. The poem *The Coquette, and After* illustrates this fact. The speaker deplores the fact that women are always blamed and are the bearers of injustices though
the fault was shared between a man and a woman. The speaker clearly portrayed facts about his society while saying:

For long—the cruel wish!—I knew
How men can feel, and craved to view
My triumph—fated not to be
For long! . . . The cruel wish I knew
That your free heart should ache for me!
At last one pays the penalty—
The woman—women always do.
My farce, I found was tragedy
At last! —one pays the penalty
With interest when one, fancy-free,
Learns love, learns shame. . . Of sinners two
At last one pays the penalty—
The woman—women always do
(Ibid: 126-127)

The speaker makes it clear that the consequence of any sin, though committed by both men and women, is always borne by one who is the woman. As it is clearly stated, both are sinners but while one of them who is the man is ‘fancy-free’, the other ‘pays the penalty’. This is all due to the social laws and institutions, which excuse the man and condemn the woman.

The poem entitled The Market-Girl treats the bad living conditions that some miserable Victorian women had to confront. It also gives hints of how some women found themselves in the profession of prostitution unpredictably and unwillingly. The speaker in this poem tells us about his experience with the market girl. The latter was obliged to go to the market to sell her “honey and apples and brunches of garden herb” (Hardy Thomas, 1926: 224) as she had no other way to earn her living. The poor maid stood hopelessly in the ‘causey kerb’ waiting for someone to buy her wares. Unfortunately, no one was willing to purchase anything. The maid was so distressed
that she was ready to sell her wares as well as ‘herself’ just to get little money to live with.

The speaker who was observing the poor maiden guessed how needy was that woman and thus decided to take advantage of the maiden’s poor situation. He crossed his way ‘chancing’ to her and trying to make it seem as if that happened accidently. The man pretended to feel sympathy towards the woman saying to her “poor maidy dear! ---and will none of the people buy?” (Ibid). The speaker concluded his story by saying that he ‘found that though no others had bid, a prize had been won’ by him (Ibid). The man in fact relied on the maiden’s distress and poor conditions to reach his objective that was to satisfy his sexual desire. As Simone Du Beauvoir stated, economical reasons may well be the reason for some women to fall into the profession of prostitution.

The poem In Plena Timoris deals with the story of lovers who planned to meet each other as usual over the parapet-stone. The couple “laughed and leant” and hold each other’s arm (Hardy Thomas; 1926: 706). The tryst was suddenly interrupted by a man coming upon them with haste. The latter informed the lovers that he had witnessed an accident somewhere and asked them to accompany him. The three reached a canal and realized that somebody was sinking. One of the men rushed to rescue the victim. Shortly afterwards, to their amazement, the men appeared with a dripping body of a woman.

The man reported to the lovers the story of the dead woman. He told them that she had a lover “Who at one time used to meet her” there “Until he grew tired” and decided to put an end to his assignations with the woman (Ibid: 707). The latter could not accept the bitter reality of her being forsaken. She continued to revisit the place expecting to find her lover waiting for her. The waiting lasted for long “till hopeless
despair began” (Ibid). The wretched woman had no alternative choice than putting an end to her useless life. She drowned herself in the place that was once a shelter to her trysts.

The woman who was there with her lover witnessed the tragedy in full. Her “heart shuddered; it seems as if to freeze her” (Ibid). She was moved by the end that the dead woman drew to herself. She was fully aware that what happened to that woman might probably happen to her since their story is the same. She got really despaired and “Dim dreads of the future grew slowly to seize her” (Ibid). She outlined the same fate for herself since she was tracing the same path. For a while, she despised her lover and viewed him as the dead woman’s lover. This is clear when she “dropt” her arm from his “as they wandered away” (Ibid). From the poem, we learn that women alone bear and suffer from the consequences of prostitution in case they are abandoned by their lovers and left alone to confront the merciless and unforgiving society. These poems illustrate Du Beauvoir’s description of women as being the “sewer” and the “scapegoat” who bear the impacts of any illegal relation.

Women and Marriage

Thomas Hardy regarded the institution of marriage “as a snare and a tyranny- - as the fell destroyer of love and its delights” (Brennecke Jr Ernest, 1924: 125). In many poems, Hardy shows marriage as a relation that leads sometimes to the suffering and agony of either the husband or the wife and other times both of them. In the poem entitled Wife and Another, the poet represented the mistress as the scapegoat, being ‘powerless’ and expecting a child from a married man who cannot break the marriage tie that binds him to his legal wife. Fortunately, the legal wife could comprehend and sympathize with the mistress who will soon offer the man an offspring. She knew that
she is standing between the couple as an obstacle that hinders their joy together. She avowed:

Then, as it were, within me
    Something snapped,
As if my soul had largened:
    Conscience-capped,
I saw myself the snarer—them the trapped.
    “My hate dies, and I promise,
Grace-beguiled,” (Hardy Thomas, 1926: 247)

Being childless, she decided to trace her own path and leave the couple construct their own family. She knew that the unique relation that unite her and the husband was not love but the marriage contract.

Things were reversed in The Burghers as it was the husband who found himself standing as an obstacle in the way of his wife and the man whom she truly loves. When the husband was told about the unfaithfulness of his wife and her trysts with a secret lover, he decided to kill them both with a ‘blade’ to revenge his lost dignity. However, in a moment, he was amazed by the two lovers’ behaviour, each one of them was trying to sacrifice his life to save his partner. Hardy depicted the husband’s unexpected reaction saying:

Blanked by such love, I stood as in a drowse,
And the slow moon edged from the nigh,
My sad thoughts moving thuswise: “I may house
And I may husband her, yet what am I
But licensed tyrant to this bonded pair?
Says charity, do as ye would be done by.”... (Ibid: 21)

The husband freed his wife and asked her take all her belongings and ‘wherewithal’. Yet, the woman had only taken her usual dresses and told her former husband that she
and her fancy man had nothing to live with but they would face life together though their hands “will earn a pittance week by week” (Ibid). Hardy is thus criticising the institution of marriage which is according to him a kind of contract that binds two souls sometimes without love and affection that might be found in an illegal relation between lovers.

In Thomas Hardy’s poems, most married women undergo difficult life so that some of them engage in secret relations with lovers with whom they feel their feminety and importance. In addition to this, like a prostitute who waits for her lover to come, a wife also waits the arrival of her husband who leaves her alone and seeks amusement and entertainment elsewhere. In *A Wife Waits*, Hardy portrayed a tormented wife whose husband goes each night to “dance in the club-room” where “the tall liquor-cups foam;” (Hardy Thomas, 1926: 225).

Before marriage, the husband Willy aimed to convince the woman to accept him. He promised to remain faithful and never love any woman but her. The woman thus accepted to share her life with him. Nevertheless, he soon forgot the oath and made her suffer. Again, we see that the couple loved each other before marriage but after it, their happiness was not accomplished and instead of being happy together, the contrary happened since the man started to ignore his wife. This reminds us of the woman of *The Maiden’s Pledge* who refused to get engaged with the man she loved knowing that after marriage, her lover will no more care about her as he used to do when they were lovers.

*The Bride Night Fire (A Wessex Tradition)* was written around 1866 and printed in 1875. The poem tells the tragedy of a woman after her unhappy marriage. It happened that the woman had a lover with whom she spent joyful moments “at junketings, maypoles, and flings” (Hardy Thomas, 1926: 63). However, the joyful days
were quick to pass as the woman’s uncle forced her to marry their neighbour Sweatley out of her will. Despite her anguish, the marriage was finally celebrated and “the pair took their homealong ride” (Ibid). The lover Tim Tankens found himself lonely and “mourned heart-sick and leer / To be thus of his darling deprived” and so he “roamed in the dark... And a’most without knowing it, found himself near / the house of the tranter, and now of his dear” (Ibid: 64). So the lover stayed in the field in despair looking at his darling’s house.

Once they reached their house, the bride was so wretched and deceived thinking of how her fate might be with a man she scorns. The husband entered the room carrying a candle. The latter kindled and in few moments, a fire spread all over the place and thus destroyed the hut. The woman’s lover who had been there observing the house, rushed to rescue his ‘Barbee’. Suddenly, he saw her approaching in a distressed and miserable condition. At his sight, the woman was so moved and started to cry. She told her lover about her husband’s mischievous deeds. The two thus decided to depart together towards the lover’s lodging leaving the burning cottage where the husband was.

There, the woman lived on the tallet while “Tim bringing up breakfast and dinner and tea” (Ibid: 66) wearing her lover’s garments. After a while, news of the tragic end of the couple began to spread. The uncle regretted his misdeed and prayed God to have mercy on him. Everybody began to wonder about the bridegroom’s fate. They went to his burnt house to search him. Then we are informed of “the painful nature of the bridegroom’s end in leaving only a bone behind him (Florence Emily Hardy, 1930: 80). Tim’s neighbours began to suspect the presence of Sweatley’s wife in the lodging and thus started to murmur. To silence the tongues, the lover went to church to announce his will to marry his Barbee. Neighbours laughed at Tim and
mocked reminding him that he will marry the woman ‘after Sweatley’. The woman stood in front of the crowd declaring her virginity saying “I stand as a maiden to-day” (Ibid).

As Du Beauvoir explained, women who are not happy or satisfied in their marriage may betray their husbands and abandon everything to search a lover who would value them and know how to treat them kindly and tenderly. In fact, even if a woman marries a rich man, she would not care about the wealth if she is not treated kindly. For instance, the woman portrayed in On Martock Moor married a rich man, but she doesn’t care about the luxurious life that she lived with her husband and preferred her lover who had nothing to offer her. She said:

--I had what wealth I needed, 
   And of gay gowns a score, 
   And yet I left my husband’s house 
   To muse upon the moor 
   O how I loved a dear one 
   Who save in soul, was poor! 
Oh how I loved the man who met 
   Me nightly on the moor. 
I’d feather-beds and couches, 
   And carpets for the floor, 
   Yet brighter to me was, at eves, 
   The bareness of the moor.(Ibid: 785)

The woman thus differs from the other women with her rejection to luxury, comfort and wealth. She is not like those who seek a husband who could provide a comfortable life to her and instead prefers the one who could provide her love, tenderness and understanding. She is a new woman in the sense that she seeks equality and good treatment rather than wealth.
Women and Freedom

In the Victorian era, women were neither allowed to get the same education as men nor expected to exercise certain professions. It was generally agreed that a woman’s expectations in life should be limited and not go beyond constructing a family, bringing up children and offering them a good education. Therefore, most Victorian women regarded marriage as their sole intent in life. They had to marry at a certain age in order not to be regarded or described as a spinster. Each woman had to be an accomplished wife so that she could ‘catch’ a good gentleman who would uplift her to a higher position.

However, Thomas Hardy had a different point of view. This is shown through his portrayal of women different from their contemporaries. He “saw that a woman does not always conform to the masculine idea that she lives for love alone” (Ibid: 71). In some of his poems, we observe that women act according to their own will and sometimes react and stand against man’s abuses and at other times prefer to remain single instead of being engaged to a man. In the Maiden’s Pledge, the poet presents a maiden who refused to marry. She is different from the other women with her indifference to the customs and beliefs of her society and her carelessness about how others might see or think of her.

The maiden had a suitor but later informs him about her worries and uncertainties concerning marriage. She tells him that she is not willing to marry for she is satisfied and happy to keep on their current relation as lovers since she senses his care and great love for her. She says:

    I do not wish to win your vow
    To take me soon or late as bride,
    And lift me from the nook where now
    I tarry your farings to my side! 

96
I am blissful ever to abide
In this green labyrinth—let all be,
If but, whatever may betide,
You do not leave off loving me (Hardy Thomas, 1926: 578).

She tells him that as lovers, “the yellowing years will not abate” her “largened love and truth” to him (Ibid: 578). She declared that wedding might fade and ‘abate’ their love. In fact, the woman knew that if the lover takes her as a bride, he would no more care about her since she becomes his own ‘property’ whereas if they remain lovers, he will always desire her and seek to be with her.

The woman in this poem reminds us of Sue Bridehead, the heroine of Jude the Obscure who did not accept Jude’s offer of marriage. Despite her great love to Jude, Sue refused to marry him and believed that marriage will transform their love into a curse for them. In fact, Sue said that marriage would end their love and put an end to their sincere feelings towards each other. Therefore, we can say that Sue and the woman in The Maiden Pledge differ from the Victorian women in the sense that both share the rejection of the society’s belief of the sacredness of marriage as the only tie that can lead to happiness and satisfaction and keep the unity of the family. The females in these two works illustrate Simone Du Beauvoir’s idea that women should not be feminine or rely on men to support them but they ought to have other objectives in life than marriage. They should not just submit and accept the norms, laws and traditions of their society that are dictated on them by men. Instead, they ought to defy and to struggle to make the necessary change and improve their situation and equal men.

Another female character who is indifferent to marriage, is the woman represented in the poem entitled At the Altar-Rail. As the speaker says, he knew a
woman at a dancing-room, with whom he agreed to marry after knowing and being acquainted to each other. The expected day of marriage arrived, and the groom was waiting his bride at the altar, while suddenly a telegram reached him. It was sent by the woman informing him that she doesn’t intend to accomplish this marriage. She told him:

‘It’s sweet of you dear, to prepare me a nest,
But a swift, short, gay life suits me best.
What I really am you have never gleaned;
I had eaten the apple ere you were weaned’”(Ibid: 395)

During the Victorian era and the periods that preceded it, women were mostly haunted by the idea of ‘catching’ a husband in order not to be called a ‘spinster’ or to ensure a more secure life with a respectable husband. However, what we observe in the poem is that the woman does not care about marrying and constructing a nest with a man as most other Victorian girls would desire. For her, leading even a short but joyful life will be better for her. Therefore, she chose to remain lonesome so that she could better enjoy life. This woman can be considered as a modern woman since she is different from her contemporaries.

The poem entitled Beauty, portrays a woman who does not want the admiration and compliments of others. She affirms that such compliments harass her to the extent of hating her beauty because her appearance does not reflect her real identity and inner side. She said:

O do not praise my beauty more,
In such word-wild degree,
And say I am one all eyes adore;
For these things harass me!
But do for ever softly say:
As mentioned earlier in the work, Victorian women were considered as an ornament and thus, beautiful women were praised and admired more. However, when reading the poem, we learn that instead of being content of her beauty, as most other Victorian women would be, this woman considers her beauty as a source of dissatisfaction and discontent. She is willing to be admired and considered as a ‘friend’ rather than praised for being beautiful.

Women and Faithfulness

In his poems, Thomas Hardy represents different categories of women. On the one hand, he portrays faithful and honest women who can never deceive their husbands whatever were the circumstances they face. They undergo all the difficulties and hardships of life with bravery. Even after the death of their husbands or in their absence, they remain faithful to his dead spirit. On the other hand, he portrays unfaithful wives who are ready to betray their spouses at a first occasion offered to them. They never care about their reputation or that of their husbands. They just endeavour to satisfy their needs and other times to seek affection and care in case they lack them from their husbands.

Among the female characters that belong to the former category, we find the woman in The Last Leaf. The latter is a poem that represents an ideal Victorian woman who is a faithful and loving wife. This ideal woman is in fact the one who depends on her husband and waits for him. Whatever she faces, she never forgets or betrays him. The woman’s husband was planning a voyage. Before living, he asked his wife to wait
him. He pointed up to a tree and promised his wife to come back when the last leaf falls from it.

Since the first day of the man’s departure, the woman started to observe and count the leaves. Summer was over, and then came October and November and the woman still waiting passionately the last leaf to fall. To her great relief, the last leaf fall down, the fact that assured her the near arrival of the husband. However, years went by without getting any news from the husband. One day, a figure appeared and it was her husband. Instead of blaming him for his long absence without sending any news of him, the faithful and passionate wife addressed him “with a smile she reminded him” of the vow that he made before leaving her. As it has been a long time since he left his family, the husband did not remember anything about the vow (Hardy Thomas, 1926: 710).

Hardy shows the faithfulness of some women in the poem *The Woman in the Rye*. The latter deals with a woman who condemned herself to live in a dripping rye after her husband’s death. In fact, the woman considers herself as being responsible because in a moment of anger, she wished him dead. Thus, as a punishment, she made up her mind to pursue her life lonely and in darkness. The women of the two previous poems reinforce Beauvoir’s idea about the category of the women who like to remain the other and be feminine.

While speaking about some women portrayed in Hardy’s poetry, James Granville Southworth asserted that “when such a woman marries she loves deeply; when widowed she sorrows in the same way. If a widow, she listens unconcernedly to the ranging gale, knowing that it can no longer frighten her because of her concern for her husband” (Southworth James Granville, 1947:70). For instance, in the poem entitled *The Harvest Super (Circa 1850)*, Nell who was singing and dancing in
celebration of the harvest feast, suddenly heard the voice of her husband who died for about a month. He seemed miserable to see his wife dancing with other men. She heard him blaming her as he wondered how she could entertain in that way while he was lying underground. Nell suddenly refrained from what she was doing. She vowed saying “Nevermore will I dance and sing” and “never wed” (Hardy Thomas, 1927: 746).

In *Wives in the Sere*, Thomas Hardy shows a submissive and careworn wife who aims to please and relieve her husband. In *A Wife Waits*, he portrayed a woman waiting the return of her husband while he spends his time with another partner forgetting about his wife and his vow before marriage to keep on loving her. The wife said “Will’s at the dance in the Club-room below / Shivering I wait for him here (Hardy Thomas, 1926: 225). In *A Woman’s Trust* another loyal and devoted wife is represented.

As for the other category who are the unfaithful women, we cite the woman portrayed in the poem entitled *In the Days of Crinoline*. It tells the story of the Vicar’s unfaithful wife who betrays her husband with another man while giving the impression of being modest, naive and innocent. The woman goes out pretending to put on a “tilt-bonnet on her head” (Hardy Thomas, 1926: 372) the thing that relieved the husband who was busy in gardening thinking that no one would even care about his wife or look at her since her appearance is “too dowdy, for coquetries” and so continued to “hoe at ease” (Ibid). As soon as the woman got far away her husband’s view and “passed into the heath/ and gained the wood beyond the flat” (Ibid) she drew beneath her clothes “An ostrich-feathered hat” (Ibid) and put it instead of her dowdy bonnet that she was putting.
She goes happily towards the woods where she planned a meeting with her lover. The two lovers “plunged into the wood untraced” and stay there till “the sun had quite gone down (Ibid). At the evening, “The hat and feather disappear, / The dowdy hood again was donned” (Ibid). She came back to her home pretending innocence as if has done nothing wrong. The husband being unaware of his wife’s deed, kissed her and praised her simplicity.

As radical feminists stated, some women may well become prostitutes due to a lack in their moral character. Others may turn to it since they feel themselves neglected and thus want to get attention from others. We can say that the vicar’s wife too lacks honesty since she betrayed her unfortunate and reticent husband. We can also say that the vicar does not pay enough attention to his wife since he considered her dowdy that is to say unfashionable and dull to attract the attention of others. The wife thus felt that she was unvalued by her husband and so wanted to turn to someone who would know her worthiness.

*At Wynyard’s Gap* tells the story of an unpredicted meeting that gathered a man with a woman. The two were on horseback seemingly the woman was expecting to see the hounds. The man informed the woman that the hounds had just gone towards Pen Wood. The man suggested to the woman to get off the horse and accompany him to see a beautiful view. The woman accepted the proposal and went away living the two horses behind after joining them together. While the two were enjoying the landscapes, the horses escaped. They went after them till they reached a place called Wynyard’s Gap, an isolated inn at the middle of the forest and asked someone there to fetch the horses. The woman enquired about the reason of constructing an inn in such a place, the man replied that it is “favourable to lovers in distress, / when they’ve eloped, for instance, and are in fear / of being pursued. No one would find them there” for the
place is for “Romantic things. Meetings unknown, unseen” like their own meeting (Hardy Thomas, 1926: 712).

The man and the woman found themselves as two strangers unknown to others. To this, the man asked his companion to pretend as being husband and wife “to silence tongues” and “gossipers” who found them there “At night...and seem as shown Staying together” (Ibid: 715). The woman agreed to play the role of a fancy woman and decided to wait “till some vehicle comes” or stay there “till the morning” since “the floods are high, -and night-farers have warning” (Ibid: 713). The man was flustered while seeing a vehicle approaching because that altered their arrangement to spend the night together.

From the above poem, we can sense the woman’s will and readiness from the beginning to follow the man since she got off the horse and left it behind to follow him. Though being married and later on affirmed that she has a little child, the woman responded to the man’s flattery and asserted that he is handsome. She was even inclined to spend the night in that isolated inn and admitted that love making “would have grown stronger” if they “had stayed on” there “much longer” (Ibid: 714). The woman in this poem fits the category of women described by Du Beauvoir as being unable to remain faithful and keep on their mission as good and submissive housewives and thus deviate to immorality.

Thomas Hardy portrayed an awful crime in The Mock Wife that was committed by a woman. The grocer who is on deathbed is willing to see his wife and kiss her before he leaves the world. The dying man in fact ignores the bitter reality that it was the woman whom he “craved her kiss” (Ibid: 729) who was “charged with shaping his death” (Ibid: 728). He was “witless that his young housemate was suspected of such a crime” (Ibid) of poisoning him. He thought that “his pangs were but a malady of the
“time” (Ibid). All the watchers and neighbours sympathized with the miserable man who “begged there piteously for what could not be done” (Ibid: 729) and condemned the woman.

To execute his last wish, the man’s friends thought of a ‘hasty plan’ which was to bring another woman who would play the role of the wife since he was unable to recognize her. Accordingly, a woman accepted the mission and pretended to be the wife for that “will soothe his sinking life” (Ibid). The dying man was relieved to be told about his wife’s presence. He held her tightly and began to kiss and thank her for coming to see him. Few moments later, the man died. Six months passed, his suspected wife stood on a scaffold for trial before the public who wanted “to see her strangled and burnt to dust, as was the verdict then/On women truly judged, or false, of doing to death their men” (Ibid). At last, the woman was punished by burning her. People’s opinion differed from those who were contented of her assortment and some others who regarded her as innocent. The poem reveals the Victorians’ rigid laws concerning women, particularly those who behave illegally.

**Women and Innocence:**

The critic James Granville Southworth announced that “Hardy’s maidens are not bad girls; they are inexperienced. They have not had sufficient opportunity to learn about men while still under the paternal care. They are elemental enough to be swept away by passion, the results of which are unpredictable” (Southworth James Granville, 1947:41). In *By Her Aunt’s Grave* Hardy portrayed an innocent girl whose dead aunt entrusted her with money with which she could bring a ‘headstone’ for her tomb. The girl told her lover about the amount of money she had and her aunt’s will before she died. The man instead of encouraging the girl to buy the headstone profiteered the
money. He could easily change up the girl’s mind and convince her to give him the money.

The lover told the girl that being dead, her aunt would not know what the girl did with the money. He informed her that “There’s a dance to-night at the Lord of Hay.”(Hardy Thomas, 1927: 392) which they could attend together. The girl passively submitted and accepted to accompany the man since unquestionably she was in love with him and thus could not think ill of him or imagine that he is taking advantage of her.

While reading Hardy’s poetry, we feel that some women are bad; others irresponsible, other ones wronged or exploited while others are playful or tricky. Nevertheless, the poet never completely sides with or opposes the woman nor wholly wrongs or justifies her. In his portrayal of women, he sometimes presents rebellious, unfaithful or dishonest women while other times he portrays women who are loyal, careworn and submissive wives. But on the whole, he always justifies women and finds excuses for their immoral and wrong doings.

In the poem entitled *A Woman’s Fancy*, the poet portrayed two types of women; a carless and heartless woman and on the other hand a sensible and caring woman. The former deserted her husband and left him to die alone whereas the latter sympathized and ‘pitied’ the dead man after hearing his story from the neighbours “As if she truly had been the cause” (Hardy Thomas, 1927: 546) of his sorrows though she was just a stranger. Day after day, the woman’s concern grew towards the man so that she started to visit his grave, dreamt of him and it seemed for her as if the man enjoyed her company. Thus, she asked the neighbours to bury her in front of him. As Hardy said, “The stranger was she who bore his name there / not she who wedded him” (Ibid). we
can thus see this category of women who give up their own enjoyment just to satisfy others.

For hardy, “the betrayed girls in his poems are generally innocent, although they may act foolishly and unreasonably” (Ibid: 59). This is shown through most of the above mentioned poems. In fact even if the women did wrong things and the outcome of their deeds affected their husbands, their families or their own children, those women were always justified and excused by the poet for certain reasons. In most of the poems, Hardy justified the falling of his female characters by the fact that they were neglected or treated harshly by their husbands.

Women and Self-Respect

“Hardy may see women as frivolous, foolish, or flighty, he is also aware that they are often noble and self-sacrificing, and have refused to cheapen themselves to gain their men” (Ibid: 70). For instance, the woman in The Well Beloved illustrates this fact. At the beginning, she was persistent to convince the man to take her instead of the one he intends to marry because she loves him more and that he would live a better life beside her. She told him that “the bride remains within / Her father’s grange and grove” (Ibid: 122).

When he was trying to defend his sweetheart by mentioning her good qualities and virtues, she told him “Brides are not what they seem” and that it’s only his love to her that made her an exceptional woman in his sight. By the end, the woman was able to change up his mind. Thus, he offered to marry her. However, she rejected his offer and vanished leaving him amazed by her behaviour. The poem makes it clear that women too, may be strong enough to influence a man and lead him to change his decision.
Women and the Sense of Responsibility

At certain times, they strive to save their families at the expense of their own happiness and wellbeing. Other times, they bear the cruelties and injustice of their husbands just for the sake of their children. In the poem entitled The Dame of Athelhall, Hardy portrayed a dame who was arranging an escape with a lover but then changed her mind just to go back and save her marriage.

The dame designed to leave her husband and “challenge the world’s white glower” (Hardy Thomas, 1926: 141). She decided to cross the sea with her lover to live together far from “the loveless bed” and all the former troubles that she had experience with her husband. But in a moment, the woman’s bracelet with her husband’s image engraved on it slid down, the fact that aroused deep souvenirs since the bracelet was once offered by her husband. The wife burst into tears when she “Refurbished memories wearing dim, / Which set in her soul a twinge of teens” (Ibid: 142). She made up her mind to return home despite the promising and bright future that was waiting her.

The woman forgot the bad times and thought of nothing but “hinder household wrack” (Ibid). She observed her lover’s departure desperately but she knew she had to return to her legal place. When she reached her house, she heard her husband’s words to one of his friends. To her surprise, the husband had already been aware of her departure but was indifferent since he has already planned to get a new bride for him. He stated:

“Another her love, another my choice  
Her going is good. Our conditions mend;  
In a change of mates we shall both rejoice;  
I hoped that it thus might end!

“A quick divorce; she
It means that the wife regretted at the last moment and was ready to abandon her lover though they loved each other to mend her broken marriage though enduring sufferance whereas the man has already regarded the affair as bygone and intends to make a new start.

In One Who Married above Him, a woman leads a difficult life with her husband Steven who proved to be irresponsible and undeserving. The woman insisted to marry Steve despite his poverty. However, he goes out and leaves the wife alone at home with her children. She threatens to leave him and go to her parent’s house where she and the children would “fare better” and “may be meet less harm” (Hardy Thomas, 1926: 703).

Nevertheless, the husband did not care and defied her saying that she would not bear to live without him and that she will be back to him. One day, the wife took the children to her parent’s house and “left no fire, no light” and “has cooked” nothing “though she had fuel, and money to get some Christmas meat” (Ibid). When the husband came back, he deduced that his wife has gone. Hence, he decided to leave forever.

Later on, the wife came back but no one was at home. She waited for him but “month after month lapsed” and “other new years arrived” still no news about him came. The husband left and let no trace behind. Years after, the children grew up, some of them married and others already had offspring. The wife repented the loss of her
husband though he disappeared without even thinking about the fate of his children. She was also expecting and wishing to see him again even though he was unjust and she suffered with him.

The woman is thus unable to face or react against her husband and instead of hating him; she lamented and mourned his absence. The woman thus applies to Simone Du Beauvoir’s theory that women’s bad conditions are due to their satisfaction of their state as well as their aim to remain the other. This is shown through the women’s readiness to comeback to her house in spite of her gloomy experience with him. Hence, we find that some of the unhappy married women represented by Hardy are seeking love and care by betraying their husbands.

At last, we can see through the poems that Thomas Hardy holds and expresses the same views and ideas in his poetry as in his novels. By applying Simone Du Beauvoir’s ideas that were expressed in *The Second Sex*, we can find out that he still defends and sympathizes with women who are victims of society’s laws, conventions and principles. He also portrays heroines different from the conventional women of the society and those created in other stories.

It is also clear that Hardy is against the sacredness of some concepts and institutions like marriage by portraying unhappy and sometimes unsuccessful marriages that end dramatically. He portrayed too, unhappy families where children and women were most of the time victims of unfairness and irresponsibility of the husband and other times of the wife.
V- General Conclusion

The aim through the dissertation is the study of the position of women in Thomas Hardy's poetry and to consider the reasons behind his renunciation of novel writing and his choice of verse at a late age, though being well admired and more read as a novelist than as a poet. It is meant to reveal how Hardy dealt with “the woman question” in his poetry and whether he kept on defending, sympathising and representing women especially the ‘fallen’ ones as being pure, innocent, wronged and victims of society and its double standards.

In a word, the aim of the dissertation is to shed light on women and the position they held in the poetry of Thomas Hardy. The study was carried out under a feminist perspective. We have relied on radical feminists’ ideas, mainly those that are expressed in The Second Sex on behalf of women by the radical feminist Simone de Beauvoir whose attitudes especially towards the ‘fallen’ women are suitable to fulfil the above stated task.

The work is divided into three chapters; in the first chapter of the work, we provided a general background of the Victorian era. We have referred to a major event that changed people’s lives and conditions to a great deal, which was the industrial revolution. The latter led to the emergence of wealthy families who possessed factories and means of work but also led to worsening the poor’s living conditions and to their exploitation by the rich. We have mentioned some major scientists and philosophers whose ideas and concepts became part of peoples’ ideologies and beliefs like Charles Darwin’s idea of the survival of the fittest and strongest that was treated in his book The Origin of Species and Karl Marx’s Das Capital where he analysed the impacts of the capitalist system on society.
Then, we have moved to speak about the living conditions of women during the era. Through such study, we wanted to have an idea about the life of women in general and the category of women called “fallen women” or prostitutes in particular. Furthermore, we wanted to show clearly that the laws of the Victorian society were rigid, and that women underwent a great oppression since their rights were restricted by society, more particularly by men and even by Queen Victoria herself who advocated male’s dominance and supremacy over women for being wise, apt to command and take decisions.

We have depicted the conditions of women in different spheres. We endeavoured to show the bad living conditions in which they lived and the double standard laws that condemned women and excused men. We have then moved to show how those conditions started to change little by little thanks to women’s struggle to free themselves from the heavy chains that linked them to subjection. Such conditions in fact led to the emergence of prominent writers who differed from their predecessors in the way of depicting the daily life of people and revealing the defects and the social evils of the period. They also depicted women’s living conditions and their place and role in the society. This is the idea that was discussed in the second chapter of the work.

As stated above, the second chapter is concerned with some prominent Victorian writers who were troubled by ‘the woman question’. We intended to show the change of women’s conditions as represented by both earlier and later novelists and poets and how the latter viewed women and represented them in their major works. We have referred to some of their writings to find out how they portrayed women essentially married women, the fallen women and prostitutes. We also gave a general insight over Hardy’s novels to find out how he portrayed his heroines the fact that led to his being
called a feminist writer. The aim through this study is to show Hardy’s position among the writers of his age. We found out that like his temporaries, Thomas Hardy was largely concerned with the plight of women, but, unlike the writers of his age, the portrayal of events and the expression of ideas and opinions was done with overtness and clearness.

In the third and last chapter of this work, we have first considered the reasons behind Hardy’s abundance of prose writing and his turn to poetry which is according to most critics, his exaggerated sensitiveness towards the harsh criticism of his novels. Then, we moved to speak about the subject matter of Hardy’s poems and intertextuality between his novels and poems in order to emphasize the fact that the poet abandoned his vocation as a novelist, and yet, expressed the same ideas and dealt with the same topics in his poetry.

We have selected some of Thomas Hardy’s, poems that deal with the subject of women. We have analysed the poems and focused on the female character in them. The themes that were dealt with were various, for instance, women and honour, dignity, desire, being a victim of harsh conditions and social institution, marriage, freedom, faithfulness, innocence, self-respect and at last woman’s sense of responsibility. The women portrayed in Hardy’s poetry seem to converge with the radical feminist Simone Du Beauvoir’s ideas and description of the different categories of women in *The Second Sex*.

Through studying these different themes, we found out that as Simone Du Beauvoir affirmed that most women are victims of oppression, ill-treatment, injustice and victims of the social conditions. They are oppressed by men who consider them as an object, of which, they get rid, if they consider it worthless. For this, certain women find themselves in big troubles after engaging in illegal relationships and being
renounced by their lovers. These women undergo a great oppression when discovering their pregnancy, because as Du Beauvoir explained, maternity is just respected in married women, while unmarried ones, are victims of disdain and humiliation, the fact that may lead some to search for means to hide their pregnancy, even by killing the foetus.

However, some women seem to be contented and satisfied with their state and may sometimes behave wrongly when they accept to be an object in the hands of their partner and submit to men’s orders and requests. Some portrayed women try hard and strive to serve their male partners even by preventing themselves from enjoying the sweetness and beauty of life, just to satisfy their husbands or their lovers and make them at ease, at the expense of degrading themselves and relinquishing their rights. These are the women described by Du Beauvoir as being “feminine women” who aim to satisfy their male partners and are pleased to play a feminine role and remain ‘the other’.

Contrary to this category of women, we find others who do not accept subjugation or the fact of being neglected and not given the importance they deserve. They can no longer bear to be the ‘ideal’ and ‘perfect’ woman as projected by the Victorian society. Instead, they rebel by showing immorality and transgressing the laws and ideologies of their era and becoming dishonest women. For instance, the unhappy married women who feel themselves neglected or ignored by their husbands, may rebel through deceiving their husbands by engaging in tryst with lovers as they may sometimes decide to run away with a lover who would value and care for them more than their husbands.

Another type of women is those ones who can be called ‘new women’. The latter neither subdue and accept the injustice of society, nor go beyond morality to
revenge from their stern and tyrant husbands. Instead, they save themselves all this by refusing and denouncing the restrictive and rigid laws of their age. They behave freely and give themselves the right of enjoying life to its utmost. Some go beyond this, to refuse to marry even the men they loved. They thought that this marriage would degrade them and end the former relation that bound them with their lovers which was based on mutual love and respect. Thus, they suggest ‘friendship’ as an alternative of marriage.

We found out that the poet sympathizes with women’s plea and regards them either as being ‘inexperienced’, ‘wronged’ or as ‘victims’. Like Simone de Beauvoir, Thomas Hardy considers ‘wronged’ or ‘fallen’ women in most of the poems as being the ‘scapegoat’ and a ‘sewer’, because both man and society mistreat and wrong them. For that, Thomas Hardy revealed that both men and women should pay the penalty and assume the consequences and outcomes of their deeds, but women should not be blamed alone.

As stated earlier, Thomas Hardy’s shift to poetry was not really accepted or favoured by his readers and critics who longed to see more novels, however, later on, people began to read and esteem his poetry. In fact, he became “the most rewarding poet to read in English between Hopkins and Eliot” and his “poems 1912-13 can be compared with the finest verse of this century” (Gifford Henry, 1961: 188). He declared that “his true vocation lay in poetry” (Ford Boris, 1958: 416) and so people started to accept his turn to poetry little by little.

At last, we can say that Thomas Hardy in fact, left his vocation as a novelist and moved to writing poetry but the fact was that he still conveyed the same ideas and treated the same issues and topics in his poetry. To sum up, what we can say, is that Hardy had just changed the medium of expression to be able to convey his ideas and
opinions freely apparently because he conceived prose as being more read and thus more open to criticism than is the case with verse which is read by a limited number of people.
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Résumé

La thèse est intitulée La Position des Femmes dans la Poésie de Thomas Hardy. La recherche est un examen des conditions des femmes dans la société victorienne plus précisément la façon dont ils étaient représentés par l'écrivain Victoriennne Thomas Hardy. Cette recherche est menée en mettant l'accent sur la théorie de Simon de Beauvoir, Le Deuxième Sexe sur la place des femmes dans la société et leur perception par le sexe opposé. Comme la plupart des autres écrivains victoriens, Hardy a été concernés par la «question des femmes». Ses œuvres révèlent une profonde sympathie de l'auteur pour les femmes et leurs luttes pour réaliser leurs désirs et leurs ambitions, tant à l'intérieur et l'extérieur de la maison, dans un monde patriarcal. La thèse se concentre donc sur la présentation de ses personnages féminins principalement les «femmes tombées» dans ses poèmes et leurs relations avec les hommes qui dominent et oppriment, et qu'ils avaient à faire face afin de se libérer des conventions sociales et sexuelles du temps. Dans leur représentation des femmes, les écrivains du XIXe siècle ont été largement influencés par l'idéologie de l'époque victorienne concernant les femmes. Un fait bien connu, c'est que la société Anglaise était patriarcale et limitée des femmes à la domesticité. Les femmes devaient entériner et préserver toutes les qualités et les vertus. Ils devaient être pure afin de ne pas être méprisés par leur société. Toutefois, Hardy a créé un autre type de femmes différentes des stéréotypées femmes victoriennes qui était censé d'être «l'ange de la maison».

Il est évident que Thomas Hardy était bien connu grâce à un large public à ses romans Wessex qui lui apporta une renommée immense. Il est également bien connu que, dans sa carrière en tant que romancier, Hardy a figuré parmi les écrivains féministes. La problématique qui a été effectué dans cette recherche est d'étudier les raisons de conversion de Hardy à la poésie tout en étant bien admiré et si il a gardé son image sympathique et féministe de la femme, même dans la poésie. Cette recherche permettra de montrer sa position en tant que poète envers les femmes. En se concentrant sur une approche féministe, nous avons découvert que comme un poète, Hardy poursuit sa position féministe envers les femmes car il sympathise avec le sort des femmes.

La recherche est divisée en trois chapitres. Le premier chapitre est un aperçu du contexte historique général de l'époque Victoriennne entraînant la vie des Victoriens en général et les femmes en particulier. Le chapitre comprend les divers aspects de la vie y compris les dimensions sociale, économique et culturel. Le but de ce chapitre est de mettre en lumière la vie des femmes et leur combat pour obtenir leurs droits et leur combat afin d'améliorer leurs conditions et de se débarrasser de l'oppression. Le deuxième chapitre fournit une brève discussion de la situation des femmes en se référant à des écrits en particulier celles axées sur les femmes par d'éminents écrivains et poètes Victoriens et de leur perception et représentation des femmes. L'objectif à travers elle est de démontrer la position de Hardy envers les femmes parmi ses contemporains. Le troisième et dernier chapitre de la thèse est centré sur l'analyse de certains poèmes de Hardy qui traitent principalement des sujets liés aux femmes. Le but de ce chapitre est de montrer la vue de Hardy pour les femmes et sa position à leur égard comme l'indique clairement ses poèmes.

Pour conclure, la thèse a précisé que Thomas Hardy décalé à la poésie, sa vocation privilégiée pour fuir les critiques qui très durement attaqué ses romans depuis qu'il a considérée la poésie comme un plus sûr moyen pour transmuter ses idées féministes. Cette obtenus après l'analyse que certains poèmes se sont révélées être soit comme une extension ou comme une sorte de commentaire sur les romans. L'idéologie de Hardy sur les femmes dans sa poésie n'est pas divergente de celle de ses romans. Il est un poète qui sympathisaient avec les femmes et cherché à changer leur image en particulier les femmes lésées.
عنوان الأطروحة هو "مكانة المرأة في شعر توماس هاردي". البحث عبارة عن دراسة أوضاع المرأة في المجتمع الفيكتوري ويشكل أكثر تحديدا كيف مثّلت من قبل الكاتب الفيكتوري توماس هاردي. ويجري هذا البحث من خلال التركيز على نظرية سيمون دو بوفوار "الجنس الثاني" حول مكانة المرأة في المجتمع. كيف تنظر من قبل الجنس الآخر. كمثعم الكتاب الفيكتوريون الآخرين، أوضح هاردي اهتمامه ب"قضية المرأة". أظهرت نتائج هذه الدراسة تفاوتات مع النساء وتضاهي من أجل تحقيق أهدافهن وطموحاتهن، سواء داخل أو خارج المنزل، في عالم تعود فيه السطوة للرجل. الأطروحة تركز بالتالي أساسا على دراسة شخصيات النساء في قصائده "المذنبة" وعلاقاتهن بالرجال الذين يبينون عليهن، والذين يجب مواجهتهم من أجل تحرير أفسندهم من القيود الاجتماعية والجنسية آنذاك. في تمثيلهما للمرأة، تأثر و إلى حد كبير كتاب القرن التاسع عشر بفيديولوجيا المجتمع حول المرأة. هناك حقيقة معروفة حول المجتمع الإنجليزي وهي أن مجتمع سيطر فيه الرجل والمرأة قيد وشدة للحياة المنزلية. والواقع منها هو الحفاظ على كل الصفات الحميدة والفضول. كما وجدت أن ليس هناك من نتائج وشرを利用する على سبيل المثال عن المرأة لدراسة النص الديني. وجدنا أن كشاعر، هاردي ضع في موضع تجاه المرأة حيث أنه تعاطف مع معنى النساء. ينقسم البحث إلى ثلاثة صور. الفصل الأول يدرس الخلفية التاريخية العامة للعصر الفيكتوري تطور على حياة المجتمع بصورة عامة والمراة بصورة خاصة. الفصل يشمل جوانب متعددة من الحياة بما في ذلك الأعداء الاجتماعي، الاقتصادية والثقافية. الهدف من هذا الفصل هو تسليط الضوء على حياة المرأة وكيفية نظرتهم إلى الحياة وصولا إلى حلول حكما وصالحة التي وجدت تجاوزها من أجل تحسين أوضاعهن والتنقل من الظلم. الفصل الثاني يقدم مزيد من المناقشة لأوضاع المرأة من خلال الإشارة إلى بعض الكتابات خاصة تلك التي تركز على المرأة ككاتبات وشعراء الفيكتوريون البارزين وتصورهم لها. والهدف من خلال ذلك هو إظهار موقف هاردي تجاه النساء بين معاصريه، أما الفصل الأخير وآخر الأطروحة يركز على تحليل بعض قصائد هاردي التي تدور أساسا حول موضوعات المتعلقة بالمرأة. والهدف من هذا الفصل هو الكشف عن نظرية هاردي للنساء وموقفه تجاههن كما أشارت إليه بوضوح قصائده. وفي الختام، وضعت الأطروحة أن توماس هاردي تواصل إلى الشعر، مهتمة المفضلة من أجل الهروب من النقاد الذين هاجمون بقصاء رواياته حيث اعتبر الشعر آمن للتعبير ونلقي أفكاره المدافعة عن المرأة. تصلنا إلى ذلك بعد تحليل بعض القصائد التي تتناول موضوع المرأة و التي أثبت أن معظمها ما بثابة امتتان أو تعلق على الروايات، أبدعية هاردي عن المرأة في الشعر ورواية ليست متباينة. فهو شاعر منتحل من المرأة ويسعى إلى تغيير نظرية الناس لها وخاصة النساء المظلمات واللوائي آثرين.