

**CONFRONTATION AND COMMITMENT: THE EMERGENCE
OF THE NEW WOMAN IN SELECT NOVELS OF GEORGE
ELIOT, GEORGE GISSING AND THOMAS HARDY**

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
award of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

English

By

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Supervised By

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Preface

The Victorian age was an age of contradictions. It was the age of material affluence and political domination over half of the globe. On the other hand, it was also the age of steep conservatism, particularly regarding women. The Victorian patriarchal society neatly divided women into two distinct categories: the Madonna and the whore----the former to be enshrined within domestic responsibilities, the latter only fit for having a fling with. With sparse education and limited job options with meagre salaries, Victorian women could not dream of having financial independence. Neither did they have legal or social rights at par with men. Altogether, they led a miserable, non-existent existence.

From the middle of the nineteenth century, some awakened and aware women began to raise their voices against this suffocating situation. Prominent suffragists like Barbara Leigh Bodichon , Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *et al.* encouraged their less courageous counterparts to endeavour to attain their proper position in society. Literature, the most faithful mirror of any society, began to present courageous and unconventional heroines with aplomb. These “New” women heroines were starkly different from the “Old”, i.e. traditional, conservative heroines of yore. The main objective of the present researcher has been to trace the arduous journey of the Victorian women, from docile and domesticated creatures to firebrand individualists, whose actions and reactions could easily be termed revolutionary in their times.

It is customary to acknowledge the major debts in any research work. At the outset, I would like to thank the Almighty for providing me the will power and the opportunity to carry out this doctoral thesis. Without the blessings of God, I could not accomplish this task. In this journey, I have received invaluable support from many people, without whose contribution, this research work could not take the present shape.

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08.06.2020


Rituparna Chakraborty

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Abstract

The Victorian Age is named after Queen Victoria, and it roughly extends from her accession to the throne in 1837 till her death in 1901. However, it is very rarely that historical time divisions coincide with literary periods. Eminent literary historians viz. David Daiches and Walter Allen consider Victorian era to be from 1832 (the year Reform Act was passed, and Sir Walter Scott, considered to be of the Romantic Age, died) to 1887, the year commemorating the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria's rule.

The Victorian Age was an era of material affluence, political consciousness, democratic reforms, industrial progress, scientific advancements, educational expansion and empire building, as well as of social unrest and religious uncertainty, as charted by David Daiches (298). The age witnessed many changes in the social, political, economic and intellectual spheres that were reflected in the literature of the period. A large number of reading public welcomed the creations of the poets, novelists, essayists, and social reformers, says Robin Gilmour (232). It was a period of unprecedented intellectual and scientific temper. The influence of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* and C. Lyall's *Principles of Geology* was so huge that common people assiduously collected pieces of rocks for geological examination. As Robin Gilmour asserts, "Never before, and not even in the troubled nineteenth century, had there been such rapid change in the social fabric of England, and never before had literature been so closely in league with the forces of social life" (233).

On the other hand, the Victorians were rigid followers of age-old traditions and conventions. In their domestic life, they upheld the authority of their parents, especially the father, over their children. Particularly, the Victorian women occupied an inferior or secondary position in every walk of life. They had scarce education, and even lesser chances of working and earning. While the upper and middle class women had to remain confined

within the four walls of their homes, the conditions of the working, lower class women were pathetic. They worked in factories or industries for more than twelve hours a day in insalubrious conditions on meagre wages (Gilmour 277). For middle class women, the only job option was that of a governess, which David Daiches describes as a “dubious position -- being neither a member of the household nor a servant” (387). Women had no rights on any property, neither parental nor spousal; they could not divorce their abusive/unfaithful husbands, and in case the husband divorced his wife (which was much easier), she could not claim the custody of her children. They had a miserable, non-existent existence (389).

The first woman to voice her concern against this suffocating situation was Mary Wollstonecraft. Her book, *A Vindication for the Rights of Women* that she wrote in 1792, in response to *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* written by Thomas Paine in 1791, discussed the urgent need for women to break the centuries-old-shackles of silence and subordination and fight for their rights (Boumelha 189).

Wollstonecraft, notes Boumelha, strongly influenced some Victorian women to organise movements to claim equality with men, on social, political, and domestic fronts. Harriet Martineau, Frances Power Cobbe, Emily Davies, Barbara Leigh Bodichon, Josephine Butler, and Millicent Garrett Fawcett were the pillars of the suffragist movement that championed women’s rights and concurrent responsibilities (193).

Due to the continuous confrontation of women with the garrotting patriarchal traditions, gradually, some social and legal changes began to take place. Under the dynamic leadership of the Liberal Prime Minister William Gladstone, the British Parliament framed some women-friendly acts, viz. “Conjugal Rights Act” (1881); “Married Women’s Property Act” (1882); “Infant Custody Act” (1884); and “New Matrimonial Causes Act” (1887) (Gilmour 289). As these cardinal acts made the women’s lives a little easier, they also precipitated the already

charged environment for the New Woman to arrive, both in society and literature (Lerner 180).

The earnest and sincere commitment of women to the legitimate cause of gaining equality with men found strong support from a man --- John Stuart Mill. Mill, in his article “The Subjection of Women”(1869) “boldly challenged the long-established assumptions about women’s subordinate roles in society, which....gave a giant momentum to the nascent movement” (Boumelha 200). With the advancement of science and technology, as well as the advent of industrialization, the “Woman Question” slowly, but steadily, gained momentum enough for the eminent thinkers to mull upon it. With the advent of the typewriter, job avenues widened further. A large number of women began to learn typewriting and equipped themselves for office jobs. The empowered women, being educated and earning, were fast becoming strong competitors to the privileged sections of the economic marketplace (Ardis 156). At the same time another phenomenon came to the fore: “The rate of marriage declined steadily in the second half of the nineteenth century, and at the same time, an increasing number of liberated and educated women (who were later to be called “New Women”), began to shake the very foundations of paternalistic society when they questioned the supposed bliss of the institution of marriage itself (Diniejko 3).

Gradually, the educated Victorian women began to grow conscious of not only their social and political rights, but also of fashionable clothes and cosmetics and decoration of their homes. As they became socially awakened individuals, conversant in polite manners and social etiquettes, they also began to participate in national economy, both as workers in factories and industries, and as consumers. However, the unprecedented economic growth had its flip side—it gave rise to an unforeseen sexual liberty even among women. At the other end of the spectrum, there appeared (in the fictions) the New Women who voluntarily opted for motherhood out of wedlock. The most notable among them were Herminia Barton, the

heroine of Grant Allen's best-selling novel, *The Woman Who Did* (1894); and Sue Bridehead, of *Jude the Obscure* by Thomas Hardy (1896). These heroines represented the "beginning of a shift in social attitudes regarding gender relations, marked by a steady move away from the pattern of patriarchal male supremacy and female dependence towards the modern pattern of gender equality" (Diniejkó 5). The unprecedented openness about sexual liberality was shared by some (fictional) men too. Everard Barfoot of *The Odd Women* by George Gissing (1896) prefers to have "free union" with Rhoda Nunn, rather than marrying her legally. Man-woman relationship began to take drastically new turns as "the daughters of educated men" (Woolf 45) began to emerge.

Literature, the most faithful mirror of the society, presented this New Woman, who "challenged the traditional male dominance, forcing men to re-define gender roles" with gusto (Ledger 227). Gail Cunningham defines the New woman as "a significant cultural icon, departed from the stereotypical submissive and docile Victorian woman...She was intelligent and emancipated, independent and self-supporting. The New women were not only middle-class female radicals, but also factory and office workers" (235). An increasing number of women were eager to break the shackles of dependence upon their male relatives and forge an independent identity for themselves by working and earning. "The New Woman was arriving, both in society and literature, with visible force" (Lerner 180).

The New Woman novels mostly portrayed nonconformist or rebellious women, who fought against the traditional patriarchy and questioned the traditional codes of conduct and double standards of sexual morality. Gail Cunningham says: "The New Woman novels were directly linked to contemporary debates surrounding the Woman Question, and to the various polemics, within which they were produced and meditated. Several New Woman novelists were themselves the contributors to the discussions on New Woman in the newspaper or periodical" (214).

The origin of the term New Woman is disputed. It appears to have been coined around 1884. “Sarah Grand” (Frances Elizabeth Bellenden Clarke) published an article in 1884, “The New Aspect of the Woman Question” in *The North Atlantic Review*, from which “Ouida” (Maria Louise Rane) “extrapolated the soon-to-become-famous phrase, New Woman, for the title of her easy, published in the same year, in the next issue of the same journal” (Cunningham 216). Both the writers attacked the sexual double standards of the Victorian age, which demanded impeccable chastity from the wife but none from the husband. Cunningham further elaborates the salient qualities of the New Woman: “The New Woman, a significant cultural icon of the of the fin de siècle, departed from the stereotypical Victorian woman. She was intelligent, educated, emancipated, independent and self-supporting” (220). At the same time, one has to remember, “she was basically a journalistic phenomenon, a product of discourse”, and hence “to some extent, the history of the New Woman is available to us textually” (196).

The New Woman was, according to Lyn Pykett, “by turns a mannish Amazon and a womanly woman; she was either oversexed or undersexed; she was anti-maternal or a super mother; she was man-hating or self-appointed saviour of benighted masculinity.....she was a radical reactionary, she was the agent of social regeneration, or symptom and agent of social decline” (11). The New Woman novelists were mostly women. However, a few male authors viz. Thomas Hardy, George Gissing, George Moore also contributed to the genre. In their works, these authors opposed the portrayal of the ideal womanhood epitomised by William Makepeace Thackeray’s Amelia Sedley in *Vanity Fair* (1847) and Charles Dicken’s Esther Summerson in *Bleak House* (1852) (213). At the same time, they questioned the conservative male-dominated society and the conventional assumption that marriage and motherhood were the most desirable avenues open for women. The New Woman genre of writers fought to reinvent the relations between the sexes and called for honesty regarding sexual peccadilloes.

They urged real life women to be professionally qualified so as to be able to earn themselves.

At the turn of the century, the New Woman ideology started to play a prominent role in evolving social etiquettes that led to the redefinition of gender roles, overcoming male dominance and strengthening movements for women's rights. Some of the most prominent New Woman novelists were Olive Schreiner, Sarah Grand, Mona Caird and George Egerton, who received both bouquets and brickbats from both female and male readers.

Olive Schreiner (1855-1920) is regarded as a path breaker of the genre of New Woman fiction. Her only work, *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), that greatly inspired other New Woman writers, lambasts the conventional gender roles and creates an assertive heroine who is capable of taking care of herself.

Sarah Grand (pseudonym of Frances Elizabeth Clarke, 1854-1943) was an active feminist and a member of the Woman Writer's Suffrage League (261). Her all three novels, *Ideala* (1888), *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) and *The Beth Book* (1897), narrate the stories of women who have been ensnared into deceitful marriages. Grand was not against the institution of matrimony in principle, but she denounced women's ignorance about their men's debauchery and hypocrisy. She believed that venereal diseases that were often suffered by wives mainly originated from men's "unbridled promiscuity and licentiousness" (Stubbs 262).

Mona Alison Caird (1854-1933) detailed the horrors of loveless marriages and vehemently condemned the conventional ideal of male supremacy and female subordination in her article "Marriage" published in 1888 in the *Westminster Review*. Her only novel, *The Wings of Azrael* (1889), deals with the husband's insensitive and heartless treatment of his wife (Boumelha 215).

George Egerton (Mary Chavelita Dunne, 1859-1945) is regarded by Patricia Ingram as “the paradigmatic figure among the New Woman writers” (176). In 1893, Egerton published a collection of short stories, *Keynotes*, which questioned the Victorian views of the perpetually submissive female. Her second collection of short stories, *Discords*, focus on the themes of motherhood, women’s independence and autonomy (177).

Undoubtedly, the New Woman was one of the prime facets of social and cultural change. She was “a real, as well as a cultural phenomenon. In society she donned the roles of a social reformer, a poet, or a playwright, who predominantly addressed women’s issues” (Ledger 120). In literature, her thoughts and desires reflected the attitudes of the society in general. Countless women could identify themselves with Ibsen’s Nora (*A Doll’s House*) or Hardy’s Grace Mulberry (*The Woodlanders*), the heroines who actually broke or strove to break the shackles of domesticity.

The socio-political condition of England was so strangulating for women till the middle of the nineteenth century that some women, the awakened and the aware ones, could not but raise their voices against the suffocating situation. In this context, the appearance of the New woman, breaking the age-old fetters of domesticity and docility, perhaps became inevitable. This is what the researcher has endeavoured to explore in her thesis: to analyse the heroines of the six novels selected as New Women, who ride over the tide of conventions and emerge victorious, in stark contrast to the “old” women who internalised patriarchal traditions and became abject, voiceless victims of those traditions.

The researcher has discussed how each of these six heroines -----Maggie Tulliver (*The Mill on the Floss*, George Eliot), Gwendolen Harleth (*Daniel Deronda*, George Eliot), Monica Madden (*The Odd Women*, George Gissing), Marian Yule (*New Grub Street* , George Gissing), Tess Durbeyfield (*Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy), and Sue Bridehead (*Jude the Obscure*, Thomas Hardy) is starkly different from the other heroines of the times,

who were either angelic, like Amelia Sedley of William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, or badly exploited by the seducer, like Hetty Sorrell of George Eliot's *Adam Bede*. George Eliot, George Gissing, and Thomas Hardy broke the conventional pattern of "fallen", exploited heroines and created "New" heroines who are ready to embrace every trouble that they have to confront in their committed struggle for gaining their own foothold in a highly conservative society which put all sorts of constraints on women and tried to curb them in every possible way. They represent the deep sympathy that their creators had for women. These heroines react with vim to the social milieu that assiduously endeavoured to relegate women to the fringes. All the three novelists have given more prominence to the heroine, and not the hero, in these novels, a feature that was revolutionary in itself. This research is an endeavour to probe how strongly the three novelists believed in equal rights and opportunities for women, and how successfully they have created their heroines, in these novels, as strong, independent-minded women, who are not afraid to swim against the tide of conventions, but zealously cling to their commitment of ensuring a dignified life for themselves.

Chapter I

The Emergence of the New Woman in Victorian England

Feminism is a movement for upliftment of women. It is concerned with woman power, issues, challenges and problems against the male dominated society. Since antiquity, the male had been a domineering force. Being superior biologically, the male ego acquired control and predominance in all spheres of activities such as ritualistic performances, politics, and religious practices, which pushed women to a place of utter subordination. The majority of the modern thinkers and critics hold that women occupied an inferior status since the dawn of civilization. In the tribal societies also women occupied a subordinate place as men were the fighters and had the primary responsibility of protecting their family and children. In literature and in art, the secondary status of women is explored explicitly. In *The Bible* male superiority is emphasized: Eve is described to have been created from the ribs of Adam. John Milton in *Paradise Lost* carried the idea even further when he chanted, “He for God only, she for God in him” (168). In all medieval paintings and old rituals this inferiority of Eve is depicted. Aristotle also held that woman is inferior to man. The medieval thinkers were greatly impacted by Aristotle, who wrote in *Poetics*: “The slave is wholly lacking in the deliberative element, the female has it though it lacks authority, the child has it but it is incomplete” (21). Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summae Theologiae*, held women responsible for the “original sin” and believed that man has the power to assert that “the inferiority of woman lies not just in bodily strength but also in intellect” (28). Aquinas came under the influence of Aristotle’s reproductive biology in his explanation of the relation between the man and the woman. He followed the active (perfect) principle to the passive (imperfect) principle. Aristotle regarded the sperm as “the formative agent, -- the mother only supplied the raw material to be incorporated to the developing child” (123). Duns Scotus was another

medieval thinker who excluded women from active participation in the church activities, believing that “Christ did not want women to play an active role” (24). The subjection of women is an undisputed fact of history.

The history of feminism is the record of the movements and ideologies that vied for equal rights for women. While the causes, goals and intentions have been different in different parts of the world, most western feminist historians agree that any movement that attempts to improve women’s conditions anywhere in the world should be considered as feminist movements, even if they do not use the term themselves. Some historians use the term to describe twentieth century feminist movement only. They use the word “protofeminism” to describe the earlier movements. Jennifer Baumgardner explains: “The term “protofeminist” is applied to a person (in a philosophical tradition anticipating modern feminist concepts) who lived in an era when the term “feminist” was unknown, i.e., prior to the twentieth century” (97).

One of the pioneers of twentieth century feminist movement, Simone de Beauvoir wrote, “The first time when we see a woman take up her pen in defence of her sex was when a French woman, Christine de Pizan wrote “*Epitre au Dieu d’ Amour*” (“*Epistle of the God of Love*”) and “*The Book of the City of Ladies*” at the turn of the fifteenth century” (125). However, Elaine Hoffman Barash, a modern feminist historian, considers Plato as the first feminist, who “argued for total political and sexual equality for women some twenty four centuries ago” (99).

Modern western feminism is divided into three time periods, or “waves”. First wave feminism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century focussed on women’s suffrage, legal inequalities, women’s right to education, better working conditions, and abolition of gender-based double standards, particularly regarding morality and chastity. “The term “first wave” was coined retrospectively, when the term “second wave feminism” was used

to describe a newer feminist movement that fought social and cultural inequalities beyond basic political inequalities.... Feminists did not recognize separate waves of feminism until the “second wave” was so named by journalist Martha Lear”, wrote Jennifer Baumgardner (98).

Second wave feminism spans the period of feminist movements from the early nineteen sixties through the late nineteen eighties that regarded cultural and political inequalities as closely linked. The movement tried to make women aware that even on social and political level, their lives are controlled by the patriarchal norms of a tradition-loving society. As first wave feminists focussed on primary rights such as suffrage, second wave feminists focussed on other cultural equality issues, such as gender discrimination on various fronts.

Third wave feminism started in the early nineteen nineties in retaliation to what some women considered as failures of the second wave and tried to challenge the second wave “essentialist” definitions of femininity, that over-emphasized the experiences of white, upper / middle class women. Third wave feminists often challenge second wave paradigms that all movements are universally good for women. “They also fought to hasten social acceptance of female sexual freedom and encouraged sexual liberation for women, (i.e. sex for pleasure, with multiple partners, if desired)”, writes Elaine Hoffman Barash (103).

The fourth wave of feminism is a comparatively current development of the feminist movement. Jennifer Baumgardner identifies fourth wave feminism as “starting in 2008 and continuing into the present day” (109). Kira Cochrane defines the fourth wave of feminism as “a movement that is connected through technology” (98), while Diana Diamond defines it as “a movement that combines politics, psychology and spirituality in an overarching vision of change” (125).

There are several other types of feminism that are recognized by the theorists. Socialist Feminism began in the nineteen sixties and seventies as “an offshoot of the feminist movement that focuses upon the interconnectivity of patriarchy and capitalism” (Lapovsky 34). In 1972, the CWLU group published a pamphlet *Socialist Feminism: A Strategy for the Women’s Movement*, which is considered to be the first publication to use the term. Socialist feminists argue that ‘liberation can only be achieved by working to end both the economic and cultural sources of women’s oppression’ (Buchanan 21). They do not agree with the Radical feminists’ assertion that the patriarchal social structure is the fundamental cause of women’s oppression. They assert that women are incapable of exerting their independence owing to their financial dependence on men. Thus socialist feminists regard financial dependence as the chief cause of women’s subordination to men; and attempt to “integrate the fight for women’s liberation with the struggle against other oppressive systems based on race, class and economic status” (Lapovsky 35). They examine how gendered division of labour of each historical era is determined by the economic system of the times. Thus, socialist feminists specify how “gender and class work together to create distinct forms of oppression for women and privilege for men,” (Kollantai 43). The feminist writer and scholar, Sarah Evans, opines that “the socialist feminist movement has lost its base in the west due to the common narrative which associates socialism with totalitarianism and dogma” (21).

Marxist Feminism is a subtype of feminist theory which considers the social tenets of private property and capitalism to be the root cause of gender inequality and oppression. According to Marxist feminists, “private property gives rise to financial inequality, dependence, political and domestic struggle between the sexes, and is at the root of women’s oppression in the current social context” (Clara Fraser 78). Friedrich Engels is internationally regarded as the founder of Marxism, and Marxist feminists refer to his

analysis of gender oppression in his famous book. *The origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884). Engels argues that a women's subjugation is not caused by her biological disposition, but by her social environment; and that "man's efforts to achieve their demands for control of women's physical and sexual faculties have gradually strengthened and become institutionalised in the nuclear family" (Kollantai 145). Through a Marxist historical perspective, Engels demonstrates that the phenomenon of women's sexual purity (but not of men's) is a major concern everywhere in the world. Every society puts paramount importance on women's chastity and virginity before marriage and submission and obedience to the husband after marriage. This automatically implies that all financial matters are handled or even mishandled, by the man only, while the wife is expected to be merely a passive spectator. Silvia Federici informs that *Radical Women*, a Marxist feminist organisation, bases its theory on Marx and Engel's analysis that the subjection of women is the primary requirement of an economic system that is based on private property (256). Marxist feminists believe that the economic structure of society is the underlying cause of sexism, racism and other forms of oppression, contends Evelyn Reed (167).

Black Feminism is a school of thought that believes that "sexism, class oppression, gender identity and racism are inextricably bound together", according to Shirley Anne Williams (57). The Black Feminist movement started as a protest against white women's supremacy in every sphere, even as victims of patriarchy. Joy James notes that the movement continued to expand as black activists and intellectuals formed organization viz. National Association of Coloured Women (NACW) and National Council for Negro Women (NCNW) (156). Black Feminism gained further prominence in the eighteen sixties, when even the Civil Rights Movement excluded black women from leadership positions and the mainstream feminist movement predominantly focussed on issues that

impacted middle-class white women only. Sojourner Truth's famous speech, "Ain't I a Woman?" delivered at the Black Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1881, showed how "the issues discussed in the conference were issues that primarily impacted white women" (Kimberley 60). *A Voice from the South*--- a book by Anne Julia Cooper --- is generally regarded as one of the first pieces of literature that deals with various issues from a black feminist perspective (Angela Davis 25). Davis goes on saying that in the nineteen seventies and nineteen eighties, "Black Feminists formed various groups which addressed the role of black women in both black nationalism and second wave feminism" (26). Proponents of Black feminism (viz. Bell Hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, et al) argue that black women are positioned within structure of power in fundamentally different ways from white women. Among the tenets that issued from this movement are Alice Walker's "Womanism" and "Historical Revisionism" with increasing focus on black women (Zakin 98).

Third World/ Post Colonial Feminism is a form of feminism that started in response to feminist movements that focussed solely on the experience of western women. This movement brings to the fore the fact that all forms of oppression, that stem from colonialism, affect non-white, non-western women of the post-colonial world equally savagely (Weldon 67). "It originated in the nineteen eighties as a criticism of feminist theorists in developed countries, pointing out the universalizing tendencies of mainstream feminist ideas, and arguing that women living in non-western countries are misrepresented" (68). Post colonial feminists also endeavour to include the ideas of other third world feminist movements into mainstream western feminism. Third World Feminism "stems from the idea that feminism in third world countries is not imported from the first world, but originates from internal ideologies and socio-cultural factors" opines Laxmi Jayawardena (145). It is a relatively new stream of thought, developing

primarily out of the work of post colonial theorists viz. Edward Said, who analyse and evaluate different colonial and colonised countries and their indigenous cultures. This particular strand of feminism “promotes a wider viewpoint of the complex layers of oppression that exist within any given society” (Lewis 125). Post Colonial Feminism began primarily as a critique of both western feminism and post colonial theory, but later became a method to analyse and address key issues within both fields (126). The salient post colonial feminists like Andre Lorde, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Bina Bose, Sushmita Chatterjee *et al* do not agree that women from all over the world form a universal group, rather they reject the idea of global sisterhood. Their intention is “to reduce homogenising language coupled with an overall strategy to incorporate all women into the theoretical milieu” (Chatterjee 157).

Queer/ Lesbian Feminism focuses on “mismatches between sex, gender and desire” (Lois, 37). Italian feminists Teresa di Laurentis coined the term “Queer Theory” in 1990. Heavily influenced by the works of Lauren Berlant, Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and others, “Queer theory builds both upon feminist challenges to the idea that gender is part of the essential self and upon gay/lesbian studies’ close examination of the socially constructed nature of sexual acts and identities” (Annamarie Jagose 235). Queer Theory probes the concepts of homosexuality that developed in the twentieth century so as to place the “queer” into historical context, analysing the pros and cons of contemporary arguments. The term “queer” marks a break and a continuity with the notion of gayness emerging from gay liberationist and lesbian feminist models, viz. Adrienne Rich’s *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Evidence*” (Gayle Rubin 312). During the nineteen eighties and early nineteen nineties there were a considerable number of lesbian/ gay activities, which ultimately gave rise to as queer theory (313). Queer Theory is rooted in gender and sexuality. Due to this association, notes Annamarie Jagose, “a debate

emerges as to whether sexual orientation is natural or essential to a person, as an essentialist believes, or if sexuality is a social construction and subject to change” (160). Queer theorists “identify processes of consolidation or stabilization around some other identity labels (e.g. gay/ lesbian) and construe queerness so as to resist it”, observes Gayle Rubin (212).

Feminism represents a socio-economic movement, demanding legal and political rights for women. The term denotes the movement for women’s equality, legal rights, and about women living on equal terms with men, and not clubbed down by culture or tradition into a subservient role. It is a movement of the women, by the women, for the women, for emancipation from male oppression. Feminism is an expression of resentment at the unjust treatment meted out to any woman. In literature, it refers to any mode that approaches a text with foremost concern for the female characters. The feminists have raised their voice against several inequalities--- legal, social and economic restrictions on the basic rights of women can be traced throughout history. Now -a -days, more and more women writers are articulating anxieties and concerns focussing on women’s issues, which transcend all limits of nationality, race, creed, etc. Women writers echo the feeling of women’s marginality and express their revolt against the male dominant society, trying to give voice to the unvoiced anguish of silently suffering, subjugated women.

Janet Radcliffe Richard observes – “The essence of feminism has a strong fundamental base that is intended to mean that there are good reasons for thinking that women suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex” (3). It is historically true that women have been subject to abject exploitation and victimisation. The tide began to turn, although very slowly, from Renaissance onwards. The radiance of enlightenment brightened women’s lives too. For the first time in recorded history, women began to be socially and politically aware and became eager to assert themselves. The upper class

women became conscious of the advantages of education, which also enhanced their sense of sartorial fashion. Their consciousness about physical beauty and personal charm formed a firm step towards their self-regard and self-respect. The emergence of humanism, along with overall economic prosperity and rebirth of interest in classical Greek and Latin literature, goaded not only men, but also women of higher classes to join institutions imparting advanced knowledge. Empowered and emboldened by education, women began to be socially and politically aware and could see the world beyond the precincts of the four walls of their homes. The wide array of Shakespearean heroines—Portia, Viola, Rosalind – remarkable for both beauty and brain—were eulogised by Mrs. Anne Powell Jameson (Stubbs 145). These graceful girls, who were equally aware of their rights and responsibilities, can be regarded as the precursors of the New Woman of the Victorian age.

From the seventeenth century onwards, women began to be increasingly aware of their rights. Though not directly involved in politics, their importance in the family and local community increased steadily. Some of them even submitted a petition to the noted political leader, Oliver Cromwell, expressing their frustration regarding their secondary position in society “...we have for many years chattered like cranes and mourned like doves, but we are far from liberty” (qtd. by Elaine Hobby 16). Though the petition “earned nothing but scorn and quick dismissal” (17), their struggles to find their own footing attracted the attention of modern cultural historians, viz. Janet Richards, Elaine Hobby Carol Barash, *et al.*

The conservative British society did not welcome spirited and fiery women, but their negativity could not douse the emergence of women writers of remarkable calibre: Amilia Lanyer, Mary Wroth, Margaret Cavendish, Mary Astell, Aphra Behn, Fanny Burney. Amilia Lanyer was a celebrated poet who interpreted *The Bible* from a feminist

point of view in her collection of poems, *Salve Deus Rex Judaerum* (1611). Mary Wroth in her prose romance *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* (1621) depicted Pampilia as the New Woman who is confident enough to chart the terrain of her life herself. Margaret Cavendish sent a team of all-women scientists to the North Pole in her best-seller science fiction, *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World* (1645). Incidentally, this is the first ever British Science fiction. Aphra Behn depicted witty, rebellious and sexually liberated women in her eminently successfully play, *The Rover* (1677), in which Helena, Florinda, and Angelica “exhibit the initiative and daring reserved for cavaliers” (Barash 87). Mary Astell in her three radical essays: *A Serious Proposal to the ladies for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest* (1694); *A Serious Proposal to the ladies, Part II* (1696); and *some Reflections upon Marriage Occasioned by the Duke and Duchess of Mazarin's Case* (1700) boldly punctured traditional orthodox ideas by arguing that “women are actually manoeuvred to accept their secondary, submissive role to men” (qtd. by Stubbs 149).

In the next century, the consciousness about women's rights reached a new cornerstone with Mary Wollstonecraft's treatise, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), which she wrote in response to Thomas Paine's *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1791). Her intention, as she declared in the Preface, was “to inspire a revolution in female manners” (qtd. by Stubbs 153). Her mission appeared to be so extraordinarily revolutionary that Horace Walpole snubbed her as “a hyena in petticoats” (Hobby 123). However, such attacks could not dissuade other women writers from their aim of creating “the New Woman of the times” (Epstein 78). Frances (Fanny) Burney in her novel *Evelina, or A Young Women's Entry into the World* (1796) depicted Evelina, a seventeen year old illegitimate girl, keen to get “her rightful access to power, money, title, family and name” (Epstein 98). These pioneering writers inspired other women to develop

rationalism and critical sense as powerful tools to curb social inequality. It became apparent that women were increasingly striving to “come out of the dull earth of ignorance”, and hated to be “kept like birds in cages to hop up and down in homes, not suffered to fly abroad to see several changes of fortune”, to be “despised and laughed at, ... [being] shut out of all authority” (Margaret Cavendish, qtd. by Broadbank 245). These spirited women tried to puncture the traditional image of women as servile and sacrificing, an image popularised by some male writers. Coventry Patmore’s collection of poems, “The Angel in the House” (1854) was a cornerstone of British culture that was eulogised by the intellectual stalwarts of the day, John Ruskin and Thomas Carlyle (Gilmour 241). Ruskin wrote in *Of Queen’s Gardens* (1865) --- “... in her purity and capacity for sweet ordering, The Angel in the House is to sanctify her home as a refuge for the men folk..... after their encounter with the troubles of the world al day’ (qtd. by Boumelha 164). Women were expected to be pure till marriage, and after marriage, they were expected to be obedient wives who would happily respond to their husband’s carnal desires as and when asked for. Sue Bridehead, the heroine of Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*, rues this very fact- “the compulsion to give myself to this man (her husband, Richard Phillotson) is what galls me most” (213). They were not even expected to enjoy sex, -- that was supposed to be exclusively a male prerogative. What Dr. William Acton stated way back in 1857 – “...the majority of women are not troubled by sexual feelings of any kind” (qtd. by Boumelha 165) was believed almost wholeheartedly by the patriarchal society. Gendered ideals of sexual purity of respectable women helped to “enshrine a sexual double standard, which was counterbalanced by a cultural fascination with the ‘fallen woman’” (Stubbs 216). Incidentally, the term ‘fallen’ was applied to any woman who had sexual experience outside legal marriage. Countless Victorian novelists made this “fascinating creature [the ‘fallen woman’] the pivot of their works” (Ingram 108). Thus

there were Hetty Sorrell (*Adam Bede*, by George Eliot, 1859); Lyndall (*The Story of an African Farm*, Olive Schreiner, 1888); Esther Waters (*Esther Waters*, George Moore, 1890); and the most “fascinating creature” of all Tess (*Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy, 1892). Literary fascination apart, the average Victorian woman was expected to follow the conventional “career” of marriage and motherhood. They were to be enclosed and enshrined within the four boundaries of their homes, who would never dare to transgress against set gender distinctions.

Slowly, some women began to rebel against the suffocating situation. “The emergence of the New Woman, breaking the cocoon of the “old” woman, perhaps became a historical necessity” (Stubbs 167). Florence Nightingale preferred the exhausting life of a hospital administrator and nurse in the war field itself, than the comforts of a confining home. Passionate debates and discussions began to take place on the issues of marriage and divorce laws, women’s right to property, children’s custody, educational and employment opportunities, female suffrage – all of which came to be known as “The Woman Question”; the term “feminism” being not coined by then (Boumelha 160). Women’s rights and responsibilities, problems and privileges were endlessly debated. “The desire for equality with men on social and political fronts took the form of organized movements by the women who raised “the woman issue” in public debates, in print media, and during election rallies” (Gilmour 289). The “Women Question”, first raised by Mary Wollstonecraft in her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792, strongly influenced some mid and late Victorian women to break centuries- old shackles of silence and subordination and discuss it vociferously. In the eighteen fifties, Harriet Martineau relentlessly continued the Woman Question discourse in her writings. She encouraged upper-class women to get a good education and make themselves financially independent by taking up a profession. Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna dealt with the topic in her book *The*

Wrongs of Woman (1856). Tonna criticised the highly exploitative nature of employment of (lower class) women in various industries and factories: long working hours, insalubrious working conditions, meagre salary, unwanted attention of the employers being the order of the day. Elizabeth Gaskell and Frances Trollope urged middle-class women to actively take part in public events for whom the only job option was that of a governess, and that too, was not a coveted one, “A governess could expect no security of employment, had minimal wage, and had an ambiguous status, somewhere between servant and family member” (Stubbs 240). This precarious condition of the governesses, who were mostly unmarried middle class women, perhaps goaded Charlotte Bronte and William Makepeace Thackeray to explore the trials and tribulations of governess in their novels, *Jane Eyre* (1848) and *Vanity Fair* (1849), respectively.

Several Victorian feminists, viz. Frances Power Cobbe, Emily Davies, Josephine Butler, Millicent Garrett Fawcett, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon *et al* continued relentlessly the Woman Question debate in their crusade for women’s fundamental rights : the right to higher education, property (father’s/husband’s), employment and the right to vote. The consequences of the campaigns, though slow and delayed, were positive. Some new women-friendly acts were framed by the British Parliament under the dynamic leadership of the Liberal Prime Minister, William Gladstone: “Conjugal Rights Act” (1881, by which husbands could not satisfy their carnal desires forcibly, without the consent of their wives), “Married Women’s Property Act” (1882, which enabled women to own their parental, and also their husband’s property, in case of widowhood); “Infant Custody Act” (1884, enabling women to have the custody of their infant children in case of divorce); and “New Matrimonial Causes Act” (1887, which enabled women to get divorce from their husbands (Gilmour, 290). As these cardinal acts made the women’s lives a little easier, it also precipitated the already charged environment for the New

Woman to arrive, both in society and literature (Gerda Lerner 180). In 1878, the University of London started granting B.A. degree to girl students, By 1880, two women colleges were opened at Oxford: Somerville College and Lady Margaret Hall College(181). With the advancement of science and technology, as well as the advent of industrialization, the Woman Question slowly, but steadily, gained momentum enough for the eminent thinkers to mull upon it. Justin McCarthy wrote in *The Westminster Review*: “The greatest social difficulty in England today is the relationship between men and women” (qtd. by Barash 214). John Stuart Mill, in his essay *The Subjection of Women* (1869) came forward to earnestly and vigorously support women in their quest for their rights, giving a big support to the activists. “The principle which regulates the existing social relation between the two sexes --- the legal subordination of one sex to the other is wrong in itself..... it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other” (Mill 13). The concept of gender was adopted in order to emphasize the social construction of masculinity and femininity and social ordering of relations between men and women: “..... the subjection of women to men being a social custom, any departure from it quite naturally, appears unnatural” (Mill 18).

Unmarried adult girls were considered a social threat in the England of mid-and-late nineteenth century. The phenomenon was noted and discussed by William Rathbone Greg, who, in 1862, published an essay, “Why are Women Redundant?”. He discoursed, with earnest anxiety, that “according to statistics, there were, in England and Wales, in 1851, 1,24,800 women in the prime of their life, i.e. between the age of twenty and forty years, who were unmarried, out of a total number of rather less than 30,00,000.” (qtd. by Lerner 187).

Greg foresaw a miserable existence of “celibacy, struggle and privation” for the unmarried girls and, as a solution, he suggested that they may be sent to the British colonies, where single men would happily marry them: “To transport the half million from where they are redundant to where they are wanted, at an average rate of fifty passengers in each ship, would require 10,000 vessels or at least 10,000 voyages. Still, as 350,000 emigrants have left our shores in a single year before now, and as we do not need and do not wish to expatriate the whole number at once, or with any great rapidity, the undertaking, though difficult, would seem to be quite possible” (188).

Nevertheless, Greg himself noted a significant drawback of his plan. The colonies generally required marriageable women from the working-class, who could work shoulder to shoulder with their husbands. But more often than not, the “redundant” women hailed from the middle and upper-class. Greg noted with genuine concern that a large number of upper-class young English women “really and deliberately prefer the unsatisfying pleasures of luxury and splendour to the possible sacrifices of married life” (188).

Andrew Diniejko adds: “The rate of marriage declined steadily in the second half of the nineteenth century, and at the same time, an increasing number of liberated and educated women (who were later to be called New Women), began to shake the very foundations of paternalistic society when they questioned the supposed bliss of the institution of marriage itself” (3).

Another eminent scholar, Sally Ledger, notes that as per 1881 census, there were 9,00,000 more females than males (234). The very number of unmarried women, many of whom worked along with men in factories and industries threatened the traditional image of women as dependent on and protected by men. With the advent of the type writer, job avenues widened further. A large number of women began to learn typewriting and equipped themselves for office jobs with the job of the governess no more being the only

viable job option for middle class women (Ardis 134). Some women, like George Gissing's Rhoda Nunn and Mary Barfoot (*The Odd Women*), ran training centres for women willing to learn typing. The empowered woman, being educated and earning, were fast becoming strong competitors to the privileged sections of the economic marketplace (156). Throughout the 1880s there was a series of strikes by factory workers "in an attempt to improve their conditions, the most famous of them being the strike of the female workers of a match factory in Birmingham, in 1888, popularly known as "Match Girls' Strike" (159). Though not every "Novissima" of "The Shrieking Sisterhood" (epithets frequently used for the New Woman) was a "Girton Girl" (Grant Allen's heroine of *The Woman Who Did* (1894), Herminia Barton, was a graduate of Girton College) they were, in general, conscious of their rights (Ledger 190). The professionally qualified women physicians, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and Sophia Tex Blake, certainly challenged the bourgeois male hegemony, both in economic and intellectual frontiers (Ledger 191). The well-established centuries—old class and gender barriers began to crumble, much to the chagrin of the conservative patriarchs.

Gradually, the educated Victorian woman began to grow conscious of not only their social and political rights, but also of fashionable clothes and cosmetics and decoration of their homes. As they became socially awakened individuals, conversant in polite manners and social etiquettes, they also began to participate in national economy, both as workers in factories and industries, and also as consumers. However, the unprecedented economic growth had its flip side—it gave rise to an unforeseen sexual liberty, even among women. Michael Foucault in his *The Birth of Biopolitics* (1979) has discussed how in Victorian era sex was not censored, as commonly believed, but was "the subject of obsessive discussion as a central discourse of power bent on regulation, rather than suppression" (120). The near-ubiquitous occurrence of pre/extra marital affairs could

not be “regulated” through “obsessive discussion”, though. The single/unwed mother, a rather disturbing phenomenon in the society, was regularly represented in literature and art. Barash mentions a particularly moving painting of the outcast mother painted by Richard Redgrave (“The Outcast”, in 1861), in which a stern patriarch is seen driving out his “fallen” daughter, along with her infant baby, from his home, without listening to the sobs and pleas of his wife and other children (178). Another painting by Fred Walker, “The Lost Path” (1863) depicts a young woman, in all probability an unwed mother, desperately clutching her baby to her bosom, is walking all alone, on a snow-covered road.

At the other end of the spectrum, there appeared (in the fictions) the New Woman who voluntarily opted for motherhood out of wedlock. The most notable among them were Herminia Barton, the heroine of Grant Allen’s best-selling novel, *The Woman Who Did* (1894); and Sue Bridehead, of *Jude the Obscure* by Thomas Hardy (1896). These heroines represented the “beginning of a shift in social attitudes regarding gender relations, marked by a steady move away from the pattern of patriarchal male supremacy and female dependence towards the modern pattern of gender equality” (Diniejkó 5). The unprecedented openness about sexual liberality was shared by some (fictional) men too. Everard Barfoot (*The Odd Women*, George Gissing, 1896) prefers to have “free union” with Rhoda Nunn, rather than marrying her legally. Man-woman relationship began to take drastically new turns as “the daughters of educated men” (Virginia Woolf, 45) began to emerge. One such “daughter”, Grace Melbery, an educated girl, seriously mulled divorcing her adulterous husband, Edgar Fitzpiers, and re-marrying her childhood sweetheart, Giles Winterbourne (*The Woodlanders*, Thomas Hardy, 1887). Such thoughts were unimaginable even a decade ago. “Women, as a rule in general, accept their lot as they are, but for the first time in his life, he George Melbery, Grace’s father] asked why”

Thomas Hardy wrote in *The Woodlanders* (295). Surely, “the New Woman was arriving, both in society and literature, with visible force” (Lerner 180). The last two decades of nineteenth century witnessed a new phenomenon – an increasing number of women were eager to break the shackles of dependence on their male relatives and forge an independent identity for themselves by working and earning.

The New Woman had good depiction in late Victorian novels. According to Lyn Pykett, the New Woman fiction consisted mainly of those works that fit W.T. Steed’s description of the “novel of the modern woman” : they are novels “by a woman, about women, from the standpoint a woman” (qtd. by Pykett 12). These New Woman novels mostly portrayed nonconformist or rebellious women, who fought against the traditional patriarchy and questioned the traditional codes of conduct and double standards of sexual morality. Gail Cunningham says: “The New Woman novels were directly linked to contemporary debates surrounding the Woman Question, and to the various polemics, within which they were produced and meditated. Several New Woman novelists were themselves the contributors to the discussions on “New Woman” in the newspaper or periodicals. Thus the New Woman fiction was sometimes reviewed at par with sociological works, as if it were part of a seamless discourse on the topic” (214).

The origin of the term New Woman is disputed, but it appears to have been coined around 1884. “Sarah Grand” (Frances Elizabeth Bellenden Clarke) published an article in 1884, “The New Aspect of the Woman Question” in *The North Atlantic Review*, from which “Ouida” (Maria Louise Rane) “extrapolated the soon-to-become-famous phrase, “New Woman” for the title of her essay, published in the same year, in the next issue of the same journal” (Cunningham 216). Both the writers attacked the sexual double standards of the Victorian age, which demanded impeccable chastity from the wife but none from the husband. Cunningham further elaborates the salient qualities of the New Woman: “The

New Woman, a significant cultural icon of the of the fin de siècle, departed from the stereotypical Victorian woman. She was intelligent, educated, emancipated, independent and self-supporting. The New Women were not only middle-class female radicals, but also factory and office workers” (220).

The New Woman overtly challenged the dominant sexual codes of the era, leading to “a feeling of fear” that she “posed a threat to the institution of marriage itself” (Ledger 227). Challenging the male dominance, she forced men to consider women’s rights, to re-define gender roles. At the same time, one has to remember, “she was basically a journalistic phenomenon, a product of discourse”, and hence “to some extent, the history of the New Woman is available to us textually” (196). Naturally, the figure committed to topple the apple cart of traditional mores, was often ridiculed in press and popular fiction. Mrs. Margaret Oliphant in her article “The Anti-marriage League” deplored “the disposition to place what is called the ‘sex question’ above all others as the theme of fiction.... has been proved to be the most damaging in the world as a subject for thought and for the exercise of imagination” (qtd. by Ledger 203). The novelists who especially earned her wrath were Thomas Hardy and Grant Allen, whose heroines, Sue Bridehead (*Jude the Obscure*) and Herminia Barton (*The Woman Who Did*) respectively, vociferously oppose legal marriage. It was the association of the “New Woman” and “free union” (in the language of Everard Barfoot of George Gissing’s *The Odd Women*) that led to the branding of any rebellious woman as sexually promiscuous (Lerner 217). Sally Ledger asserts —“The New Woman was a very fin-de-siecle phenomenon. Contemporary with the new socialism, the new imperialism, the new fiction and the new journalism, she was part of cultural novelties which manifested itself in the 1880s and 1890s” (87).

The New Woman was often the object of ridicule in the press, usually portrayed as riding a bicycle in bloomers while smoking a cigarette. Lyn Pykett has distinctly

documented her equivocal depiction : “The New Woman was by turns a mannish amazon and a womanly woman, she was oversexed or undersexed, she was anti-maternal or a super mother, she was man-hating or self-appointed saviour of benighted masculinity, she was radical or reactionary, she was the agent of social regeneration, or symptom and agent of social decline” (11).

The New Woman novels often openly criticised the miserable condition of women in society as a whole and in marriage in particular. “The novels regarding nonconformist or rebellious women became a springboard for a public debate about gender relations that had previously been taboo”, asserts Penny Boumelha (211). These novels depicted heroines who struggled against the favourite Victorian male concept of woman as “Angel in the House” and dared to challenge the traditional decorums and moral ethics. They openly dealt with sex and marriage, and women’s demands of gratification and contentment. Several of these novels vehemently critiqued the idea that domestic sphere was a woman’s only proper domain. The women authors portrayed the miserable condition of women in traditional nuptials which allowed conjugal rape, mandatory motherhood and double standards of sexual chastity which demanded physical purity only from women but none from men. Many heroines of the New Woman novels are shown to experience traditional marriage as “a degrading and oppressive institution, because women suffered inferior status and were often victims of domestic violence and other threats” (Stubbs 254). As Gail Cunningham has shown, in traditional fictions, “innocent and ignorant heroines” had to face dire sufferings which came from venereal diseases, “the result both of their own sexual ignorance and of the past sexual excesses of their husbands.” (112). “Constant ill health for themselves – and the even greater horror of giving birth to children with congenital syphilis – served for the New Woman novelists of the 1890s, to show why existing marriage was impossible and why masculine sexual

privilege and female sexual ignorance had to come to an end” (Boumelha 154). The New Woman writers focussed on the major area in which women felt most oppressed: marriage. While a few women writers (viz. Olive Schreiner) championed free love (i.e. live-in relationship), some male writers suggested life-long maidenhood for independent and strong-willed women who wanted entry in the public sphere, viz. Rhoda Nunn of George Gissing’s *The Old Women*. Patricia Stubbs has discerned two main types of the New Woman novels: the “purity school” novels and the “Sue Bridehead” type novels: “the former were less radical and emulated bold and independent women characters, like Benjamin Disraeli’s *Sybil*, Charlotte Bronte’s *Shirley* and Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Margaret Hale*. The latter presented the intellectual, emancipated, and androgynous women with modern neuroses, like Sue Bridehead in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*” (257). However, both types of novels depicted the sufferings of women in marriage and in society, with the attitude of the heroines to the monogamous relationship being the only difference. The “purity school” novels did not reject marriage outright, although they vociferously criticised the oppressive nature of conventional matrimony. The second type of the New Woman novels downright deplored the customary nuptial as “repugnant and emphasised the sexual double standard and male degeneration” (Boumelha 212).

The New Woman novelists were mostly women. However, a few male authors also contributed to the genre. They campaigned for a re-evaluation of women’s contribution in marriage and society and criticised the various social inhibitions clamped upon women. In their works, these authors opposed the portrayal of the ideal womanhood epitomised by William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Amelia Sedley* in *Vanity Fair* (1847) and Charles Dickens’s *Esther Summerson* in *Bleak House* (1852) (213). At the same time, they questioned the conservative male-dominated society and the conventional assumption that marriage and motherhood were the most desirable avenues open for women. The New

Woman genre of writers fought to re-invent the relations between the sexes and called for honesty regarding sexual peccadilloes. They urged women to be professionally qualified so as to be able to earn themselves. At the turn of the century, New Woman ideology started to play a prominent role in evolving social etiquettes that led to the redefinition of gender roles, overcoming male dominance and strengthening movements for women's rights. "The discourse on gender relations took place alongside developments in labour relations (increased feminisation of the labour force), divorce legislature, education for women, single motherhood, sanitation and epidemiology as well as female consumer culture", and the New Woman quickly had "advocates among the aesthetes and decadents" (Ledger178).

Some of the most prominent female New Woman novelists were Olive Schreiner, Sarah Grand and George Egerton, who received both bouquets and brickbats from both female and male readers.

Olive Schreiner (1855-1920) is regarded as a path-breaker of the genre of New Woman fiction. Her only work, *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), that greatly inspired other New Woman writers, lambasts the conventional gender roles and creates an assertive heroine who is capable of taking care of herself. It also deals with "sexual initiation, premarital sex, freethinking, transvestism and gender identity, rejection of marriage, women's inequality and search for personal freedom" (Stubbs 260).

"Sarah Grand" (pseudonym of Frances Elizabeth Clarke, 1854-1943) was an active feminist and a member of the Woman Writer's Suffrage League. Her all three novels, *Ideala* (1888), *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) and *The Beth Book* (1897), narrate the stories of women who have been ensnared into deceitful marriages. Grand was not against the institution of matrimony in principle, but she denounced women's ignorance about their men's debauchery and hypocrisy. She believed that venereal diseases that were often

suffered by wives mainly originated from men's "unbridled promiscuity and licentiousness" (261).

Mona Caird (Mona Alison, 1854-193) detailed the horror of loveless marriage and vehemently condemned the conventional ideal of male supremacy and female subordination in her article "Marriage" published in 1888 in the *Westminster Review*. Her only novel, *The Wings of Azrael* (1889), deals with the husband's insensitive and heartless treatment of his wife (Boumelha 215).

"George Egerton" (Mary Chavelita Dunne, 1859-1945) is regarded by Patricia Ingram as "the paradigmatic figure among the New Woman Writers" (176). In 1893, Egerton published a collection of short stories, *Keynotes*, which questioned the Victorian views of the perpetually submissive female. Her second collection of short stories, *Discords*, focus on the themes of motherhood, women's independence and autonomy (177).

The predominant male authors who pursued the New Woman theme were George Gissing, Grant Allen, George Meredith, and Thomas Hardy.

George Meredith (1828-1909) penned an influential New Woman novel, *Diana of the Crossways* (1885) about a strong-willed and educated upper-class young woman who refuses to be the abject victim of a humiliating and degrading marriage. It "became an inspiration for a number of New Women in their struggle for emancipation at the turn of the century" (178).

George Gissing's (1857-1903) *The Odd Women* (1893) deals with the subject of "redundant women in the 1880" (Stubbs 214). The novel, while depicting the miserable financial condition of non-earning single women, also underlines the fact that the traditional patriarchal society finds it rather difficult to come to terms with financially independent and empowered women.

Grant Allen (1848-1899) wrote a hotly debated novel, *The Woman Who Did* (1895). It supposedly had a “bold” theme—free-love in lieu of legal marriage (215). The story of the Cambridge-educated heroine, who refuses to marry her lover, but gives birth to his illegitimate daughter, was hard for the conservative society to accept ungrudgingly. The novel prompted two parodies in quick succession: “Lucas Cleeve” (Adelina G.I. Kingscote, 1868-1908) wrote *The Woman Who Wouldn't* and “Victoria Cross” (Annie Sophie Cory, 1868- 1952), wrote *The Woman Who Didn't* (217).

Thomas Hardy, who appreciated some of the New Woman writers (Sarah Grand, George Egerton and Grant Allen), portrayed a memorable heroine in his last novel, *Jude the Obscure* (1896) (Ingram 188). Sue Bridehead, an educated and enlightened New Woman, cares two hoots for the society and lives life in her own terms. Like the New Woman genre of women writers, Hardy also objected to the Victorian view of indissolubility of the institution of matrimony, even if it becomes a trauma for one or both the spouses. It was a revolutionary proposition, that did not find many takers. Rather, the novel was vehemently criticised by many readers.

Undoubtedly, the “New Woman” was one of the prime facets of social and cultural change. She was “a real, as well as a cultural phenomenon. In society she donned the roles of a social reformer, a poet, or a playwright, who predominantly addressed women’s issues” (Ledger 120). In literature, her thoughts and desires reflected the attitudes of the society in general. Countless women could identify themselves with Ibsen’s Nora (*A Doll's House*) or Hardy’s Grace Mulberry (*The Woodlanders*), the heroines who actually broke or strove to break the shackles of domesticity.

In the words of Gerda Lerner, “Feminism is not always a movement, for it can be a level of consciousness, a stance, an attitude, as well as the basis for organized effort” (119). The feminist consciousness is the awareness of female subjugation by the

dominating males leading to women's secondary status and consequent suppression/oppression. The New Woman novelists deliberately departed from the "marriage plot" (marriage almost invariably meant suppression of the female self and buoying up of the male ego) and portrayed heroines who were sexually active, at their own free will. Such radical divergence from age-old traditions naturally caused huge furore. A contemporary critic, Max Nordeau, denounced "the abandonment of tradition, feminization of men and the increasingly mannish nature of women; which he regarded as "The Dusk of Nations" (qtd. by Cunningham, 211). Incidentally this is the first chapter of his book, *Degeneration* (1882) (212). Even some established lady novelists could not welcome the unconventional heroines. Mrs. Mary Augusta Ward believed that the New Woman was "a threat against the sacred institution of marriage and motherhood" (Stubbs 310). But the emergence of the New Woman became a reality who could not be brushed aside or put under the carpet. Over a hundred novels were written between 1883 and 1890, making her the heroine, the most prominent heroines being Hardy's Sue Bridehead and Grant Allen's Herminia Burton. "Ouida", "Sarah Grand", Rhoda Broughton, Elizabeth Lyn Lynton, John Winter *et al* were established novelists of their times who dealt with this theme (Boumelha 225). They forced the orthodox Victorians to reconsider their archaic views and beliefs regarding women's identity and position in society. In the eighteen eighties and eighteen nineties, the "Woman Question" was a vital and vigorous issue discussed relentlessly in British newspapers and periodicals. Many female suffragists, authors, educators and artists voiced their views on the issue vociferously (237).

However, post-1895, New Woman fiction declined markedly. On 21 December 1895, *Punch* gloated: "THE END OF THE NEW WOMAN: the crash has come at last" (Stubbs 217). "But as a rebellious figure in real life and as a prototype for virtually every feminist movement that followed, the legacy of the "New Woman" lives to this day"

(Boumelha 201). Any woman who wants equal with men and expresses her desire in word and action is considered to have the ideas on which the entire feminist movement is based (202).

The “New Woman fiction emerged out of Victorian feminist rebellion and boosted debates on such issues as women’s education, women’s suffrage, sex and women’s autonomy. It disappeared with the first-wave feminist after World War I” (Diniejko 5). Nevertheless, it had a long-lasting impression on people’s minds, and probably on the lives of many women in England. The New Woman fiction augmented “major changes in women’s lives, including their increased mobility away from family scrutiny (riding a bicycle, travelling alone), shorter and lighter clothing, interest in gynaecology, resistance to enforced marital sex, insistence on the availability of birth control information and the right to vote” (Pykett 121). One of the most vital influences of the New Woman fiction was the endeavour to recalculate man-woman relationship, particularly in matrimony.

Let us take a brief glimpse at the New Woman heroines of the selected novels.

Maggie, the heroine of George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* (henceforth referred to as *The Mill*) (published 1860), is regarded by everyone around her as “the small mistake of nature’ (*The Mill* 42) right from the time the reader encounter her, as a nine-year old child. From her early childhood she shows remarkable individuality, never playing the model obedient and docile girl like her cousin Lucy Deane. Unlike Lucy’s, Maggie’s complexion is dark, her hair and eyes black (Lucy’s hair is golden and eyes are blue), her dress unkempt (Lucy’s dress is always property pressed), much to the chagrin of her mother, and inviting endless criticism from her aunts. Her elder brother, Tom, is the cynosure of all eyes. His father decides to “give him a good dedication [sic]” (*The Mill* 56), but for the “over- ‘cute” (acute, intelligent) (*The Mill* 59) Maggie, the village school suffices. She

never gets due recognition for her intellectual prowess from her family, which refuses to see beyond physical attributes, but that does not deter her to have opinions of her own. As she grows up, she openly refuses to obey the diktat of her father and brother not to have any friendship with Philip (his father being the enemy of her father), but develops a steady friendship with him. When she falls in love with Stephen Guest and elopes with him, she refuses to marry him, on the ground that he is engaged to Lucy, knowing full well the criticism that she would receive from “the world’s wives” (for “eloping and returning unmarried”) (*The Mill* 387). She is probably the first heroine to refuse a man. She has the courage to decide the course of her life herself, without submitting to the shackles imposed by the traditional, conservative British society of nineteenth century England. Maggie dies at the age of nineteen, but in her extremely short life she never surrenders herself to the accepted codes of patriarchy. She is the New Woman, who dares to defy conventional male hegemony.

Gwendolen Harleth is the heroine of George Eliot’s last novel, *Daniel Deronda* (henceforth referred to as *DD*) (published 1876). This twenty-one-year old fatherless girl dominates over her timid mother and four step-sisters by dint of her native intelligence and arrogance, along with her outstanding beauty. She refuses to be “dominated by anyone – man or woman” dares to gamble recklessly and lose all her money and jewellery, gets “irritated” at Deronda’s tacit disapproval of her gambling and redeeming her necklace (*DD*123,125) . When suddenly they become very poor, she refuses to take the “situation” (job) of a governess and instead marries the super-rich Henleigh Grandcourt, a man much older to her, who offers to take care of her impoverished paternal family financially. But soon after marriage, this young wife of “indomitable spirit” finds it “impossible ... [to be] dominated over” by her control freak husband, and openly rebels against him at every possible opportunity, much to the chagrin of Grandcourt (*DD* 235). Barely three months

after her marriage, Grandcourt dies in an accident, leaving her free to remarry and start life anew. But she decides to dedicate herself to the service of the poor and unhappy people, to such an extent that would make “them happy that you were born”, as Deronda encourages her (*DD* 835). Gwendolen is the New Woman who looks beyond personal happiness and decides to stay single, without the support of a man, at a time when to borrow a phrase from Thomas Hardy’s novel, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, women would “bend on their knees and thank God for the love of an honest man” (Hardy 214) was the accepted norm.

Monica Madden is the heroine of George Gissing’s 1894 novel, *The Odd Women* (henceforth referred to as *TOW*). To escape abject poverty and extremely strenuous work as a shop assistant, she marries the rich Edmund Widdowson, a man double her age, without dreaming that her spousal home would turn out to be a prison for her. She demands freedom to “meet new people, make new friends”, which her husband sternly and steadfastly refuses (*TOW* 136). The traditional man does not recognise the New Woman until it is too late. When the irritated and frustrated wife takes the unthinkable step --- leaves her control-freak husband and goes to live with her two unmarried elder sisters, even though she is pregnant. She never gives up her legitimate demand for freedom from domestic and social constrictions and restrictions, for a life of individual autonomy.

Tess Durbeyfield is the heroine of Thomas Hardy’s penultimate novel, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, published in 1892 (henceforth referred to as *Tess*). Tess is superbly strong woman, who steers the wheel of her herself, instead of being the pathetic victim of men. She refuses even to face Alec, let alone beg him to marry her, after he impregnates her. She boldly confesses her “past” to Angel on her wedding night, even before her marriage is consummated and accepts his decision of abandoning her, simply because she is not a virgin as he imagined her to be, with quiet dignity. She never asks her in-laws for any support, though she lives in abject penury even after her back-breaking work as a labourer

in Flintcomb-Ash farm. When she becomes totally unable to support her penniless paternal family, “the waiters on Providence” she gives herself to Alec, in lieu of his financially supporting her destitute family (*Tess* 262). But the moment Alec dares to speak disrespectfully about her “absent husband” she stabs him to death with the kitchen knife (*Tess* 378). When she is caught by the police and is hanged to death, she says “quietly” “I am ready” (*Tess* 418). Such super human mental power is unthinkable in an age when women were considered to be merely men’s vassals. Tess is the New Woman who comes out of the four walls of her mother’s house to earn and support her family, and chart the terrain of her life herself.

Sue Bridehead, the heroine of Hardy’s last novel *Jud the Obscure*, (published 1895), (henceforth referred to as *Jude*) is called “Promethean in character” by the critic Ian Gregor (42). Another eminent critic, Penny Boumelha, ranks her as “the first” among the contemporary New Woman heroines (287). She makes two men ---Jude Fawley and Richard Phillotson – dance to her tune exactly as she wishes them to do. She refuses to marry Jude, which he accepts, she marries and divorces Phillotson, which he accepts, she co-habits Jude and bears him children, but never agrees to marry him, which he accepts, and finally she abandons him and re-marries Phillotson, a decision which again both the men accept. The highly conservative and traditional Victorian society could barely come to terms with such “an unforeseen creature” (Boumelha 289). Sue is the quintessential New Woman who vociferously declares that the days of meek subordination of women are over, now it is the turn of the men to play the second fiddle.

Marian Yule is the twenty-three year old daughter of the aspiring “literary man”, Alfred Yule, in George Gissing’s 1881 novel, *New Grub Street* (henceforth referred to as *NGS*) the British Museum (library) to collect information on the topics he writes about. Though highly educated, she is not, like her father, contemptuous of her uneducated

mother of lowly origin, but rather shields her from her father's rude abuses, at a time when women opposing men was unthinkable. She refuses to break down when Jasper Milvain ditches her to marry a rich widow, Amy Reardon. Remaining single, she takes up the job of the editor in a journal and supports her nearly-blind father and uneducated mother. Marian is the New Woman who has the right balance of head and heart, -- she supports her parents financially and emotionally at a time when women were expected to be economically dependent on their father/ husbands and never have an identity of their own.

Chapter II

The Making of the Novelists: George Eliot, George Gissing, Thomas Hardy

George Eliot

Mary Anne Evans was born at South Farm, Arbury, 22 November 1819 to Robert and Chirstina Evans, in Nuneaton, Warwickshire. Her father Robert Evans was successful agent for the Newdigate family, who was bred to his father's trade to carpenter and could, among other things, estimate within a few feet, the amount of timber a tree would provide, survey and build road, was shrewd judge of land values, had responsibility in mining and transportation of coal through the Coventry Canal. His won farm on-the estate, he managed easily. His physical strength was legendary. Her mother's family, the Pearsons, belonged to that kind of Protestantism that George Eliot describes with so much humour as the religion of the Dodson family (Haight 22).

With her two elder siblings, Fanny and Robert, Mary spent the first year of her life on the farms of Arbury Hall, where her father worked as an estate manager. Eventually her parents had four more children, of whom only Isaac survived. Her parents were hardworking people, who left indelible marks on her. In 1824, her brother Issac was sent to city school and Mary Anne, along with her sister Chrissey, went to Miss Lathom's boarding school, when she was five years old (23).

Mary Anne, like Magie Tulliver, was closely attached to her father, while her mother preferred to deal with Chrissey, whose behaviour delighted the Pearson aunts (the Dodson aunts in the novel *The Mill*). Many critics believe that Chrissey is the model of Lucy, the traditionally docile and conventionally beautiful girl who is polar opposite to Maggie (Frederick 32). Mary Anne was described as "a queer, awkward girl, who sat in corners and shyly watched her elders" (Haight 24). Perhaps she herself was the prototype of Maggie, "the small mistake of nature" (*The Mill* 25). Like Mr. Tulliver, Maggie's "dear

father” (29), Mr. Evans was held in great affection by his daughter (26). During her drives with him, she got acquainted with the beliefs, the prejudices, the experiences and the common sense that make up the character of rural people. Religious tradition and social conventions are many times introduced in her novels under the form of dialogue “which bears the stamp of the knowledge that she inherited from her father” (Frederick 36).

Mary Anne was an avid reader right from her childhood. Her earlier reading included *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and *Aesop’s Fables*, among others. Sir Walter Scott’s *Waverley* was her particularly favourite novel (Haight 44).

In 1828, she was sent to a boarding school, at Nuneaton. There she had Miss Maria Lewis as a governess and friend for the period of fourteen years. Miss Lewis had a kind heart and good sense of humour and she was deeply imbued with evangelical earnestness. She had a vast influence on Mary Anne (48).

At the age of thirteen, she was sent to Miss Franklin’s School in Coventry, whose headmistresses were daughters of a Baptist minister. One of the first things Mary Anne learned at that school was a new pronunciation of the English language; she subsequently left off speaking the broad Midland dialect which appears very often in her novels under the form of dialogue and gives so much local colour and vividness to her novels. The new spelling of her name “Marianne Evans” probably reflects her studies of French. Under the influence of Miss Rebecca Franklin, she made her first acquaintance with Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Cowper, Byron, among others. Robert Evans did not worry about his daughter being influenced by Evangelicalism; he himself was a regular church-goer, but never troubled his mind about religious doctrines. Mary Anne found by the side of Miss Lewis the affection she missed in him (56).

The Evangelicalism that Miss Lewis included in Mary Anne was not harsh. Nevertheless, Mary Anne was of an impressible temperament and was struck by “the

conventional beginning of the religious life.... the conviction that one was utterly sinful and could be saved from hell only by accepting the atonement of Christ” (Uglow 18). She always considered herself as belonging to the Church of England (19).

When her mother died in 1836, Mary Anne went to keep house of her father. During the years she lived at her Griff farmhouse, her religious zeal was far from wavering. She read much religious literature, but her interest in reading fiction did not diminish. In the period between 1839 and 1841, her belief in evangelical dogmas began to crumble. Her Evangelicalism began to cool under the influence of Isaac’s conversion to Catholic doctrine (25).

Nancy Henry points out: “Mary Ann’s gift to pointed speech was mother-wit, in the true sense, while her consciousness, her capacity, and her faculty of taking pains, which is a large factor in the development of genius, came more directly from her father” (35).

Unfortunately, after the death of her mother in 1836, Mary was forced to end her formal education and return home. The shadow of this incident is seen in her second novel, *The Mill*, where Maggie is forced to leave her school when her father becomes seriously ill after losing his lawsuit to Wakem. However, for Mary Ann, “the bright side of this consequence was, thanks to her father’s strong position at Arbury Estate, she was able to get access to the local library where she could educate herself to the fullest” (Uglow, 52). At a time when most girls could not afford higher education both for financial conditions and the constraints of a sternly patriarchal society (her heroine, Maggie Tulliver, is deprived of higher education exactly for these reasons), “Eliot’s father decided to spend money in her scholarly pursuits, because he thought she was not beautiful enough and therefore had very little prospects of marriage” (Uglow, 56).

When Mary Ann was twenty one years old, she met the American Poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson and the German theologian, David Frederick Strauss. She translated Strauss's book, *Leben Jesu Kritisch Bearbeitet* 1846 (79). A few years later, in 1854, she translated Ludwig Feuerbach's work, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (1852), into English, which was known as *The Essence of Christianity* (144). By this time she was very much against conventional religiosity and refused even to go to the church and that caused great tension with her father, who was a regular church-goer (81).

After her father's death in 1849, Mary Ann went to Geneva with her friends, Charles and Care bay. While her friends came back to England, Mary stayed back in Geneva, sharing the roof with an artist, Francois d' Allen Durade, though the affair ended unhappily. He painted a portrait of her, which described her as "... her head was massive, her features powerful and rugged, her mouth large, the jaw singularly square for a woman, the complexion pale and not fair, and the general structure heavy" (Frederick 145).

After finally returning to England with a broken heart, Mary Ann moved to London and started serious writing career. Her friend, poet John Chapman, offered her the post of an assistant editor in his journal, *The Westminster Review*. She spent in this occupation almost three years, and had "numerous affairs with men of position and distinction" (Henry 188).

In 1851, Mary Ann met George Henry Lewis, a philosopher and critic. He was legally married to Ann Jarvis and had four children by her. Though he did not divorce her, Mary Ann began to have an illicit relationship with him openly. This caused a huge scandal, and Mary's family severed all connections with her but she was adamant (Uglow 191). Barbara Hardy believes this incident of her personal life cast a shadow on the character of Gwendolen Harleth in her last novel. *Daniel Deronda* (1876), where Gwendolen, in spite of knowing Henleigh Grandcourt has two children by Lydia Glasher,

marginalizes the unfortunate woman and marries Grandcourt herself, only to escape abject poverty, without feeling the least attraction for him (122). No matter how much condemnation and criticism this scandalous relationship caused in the society, Mary Ann cared two hoots for society as well as for Anne and her four children and continued the illegal situation for about twenty five years, till Lewes's death in 1878.

While being in this relationship George Eliot (by now she had adopted this male pen name) started her serious writing career and wrote her first collection of short stories, *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858), followed by her novels: *Adam Bede* (1859); *The Mill on the Floss* (1860); *Silas Marner* (1861); *Romola* (1862); *Middlemarch* (1871); *Felix Holt* (1874); and *Daniel Deronda* (1876). She also wrote some poems, viz. "Agatha" (1869), "Armguard" (1871), "Stradivarius" (1873), "Arion" (1874), etc. She wrote some articles, the noteworthy among them being "Three Months in Weimer" (1855), "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" (1856); "The Natural History of German Life" (1857); "The influence of Rationalism" (1865); Review of John Ruskin's *Modern Painters in Westminster Review* in April, 1856, "Impressions of Theophrastus" (1870), etc. (Ashton 21).

However, Eliot's status as a female literary figure was (and still is) "complicated by her notoriety as an adulterous partner of George Lewis, after whose name, she wanted to be addressed as Mary Anne/ Marian *Lewis*, not Mary Ann/ Marian *Evans*" (Haight 141).

The last year of her life she again spent in another highly controversial relationship when she married John Cross, a man "more than twenty years younger than her" (145). She died a few months after her marriage, of kidney failure, at the age of sixty one. She was buried next to Lewis in Highgate cemetery (Ashton 90).

Eliot had three major influences in her life ---- that of Ludwig Feuerbach, Baruch Spinoza, and Rue Auguste Comte, She translated Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*

(from German) into English in 1854. Feuerbach favoured a humanistic approach to Christianity that replaced the Divine with man, rejecting the idea of a spiritual entity called “God”. Eliot embraced this idea, believing that God is created by man to fulfil his needs, which is possible only through love, the unifying force of humanity (Haight 98).

Spinoza also influenced Eliot a good deal. He believed that every man has innate God-like qualities and should realize that their actions affect others. Consequently, Spinoza stressed tolerance and inclusiveness, and believed that everyone has a moral responsibility to strengthen these qualities. Eliot “could not agree more” with Spinoza (Leavis 145).

The third influence was of Comte, who founded positivism and believed that knowledge is derived from experience through interactions with society. He was a realist favouring proven, scientific knowledge over idealistic, intuitive knowledge. He was also not a believer in the divine but maintained that each man has the moral duty to be the Good Samaritan to his fellow beings. Eliot vetoed Comte’s idea and remained a staunch positivist throughout her life (Haight 100).

The long critical tradition of Eliot’s works started with a favourable appreciation during her life time, followed by a depreciation from which her reputation has suffered. Henry James in *The Atlantic Monthly* (October 1866) wrote: “Of all the impressions..... which a re-perusal of George Eliot’s writings has given me, I feel the strongest to be this -- -- that.... the author is in moral and aesthetics essentially a conservative. What moves her most is the idea of a conscience harassed by the memory of obligations” (Holmstorm and Lerner 164). Edward Dowden in *The Contemporary Review* (August, 1872) wrote: “we fell in reading Eliot’s books that we are in the presence of soul...”; R.H. Hutton, while discussing “George Eliot’s heroines”, wrote in *The Spectator* (12 February 1876): “..... many of the women of this novelist will be the delights of English Literature as long as the

language endures... she is always earnest about her women”; the anonymous reviewer in *The Westminster Review* (July 1878): “We regard George Eliot as one of the greatest story-tellers, one of the greatest masters of the art of peopling the world of thought with veritable men and women...”; W.J. Courthope (*The Quarterly Review*, January 1879) gives George Eliot “a higher place” compared to Jane Austen. Alexander Allardyce in *Blackwood’s Magazine* (February 1881) wrote: “A great genius arose to save for us the pictures of a state of society that has now passed away.”; the anonymous reviewer in *The Contemporary Review* (March, 1882) said: “...two passages in George Eliot’s novels contain more adequate suggestion than of what some have found the most elevating of human communion than we know in the whole of fiction besides” (All the reviews are quoted by Holmstorm and Lerner 165-172).

However, the tide began to turn in the twentieth century. Ford Madox Ford blamed her for being more of a moralizer than an artist. Edmund Gosse accused her of pedantry, Percy Lubbock criticized her “telling” mode of narration, E.M. Forster regarded her novels as “ponderous”, David Cecil held that she “could not let her imagination have its head.... Her intellect was always at its side..... diverting her from its course”, George Levine found her “guilty of intellectual overloading” (qtd. by Rignall 80-90). It was only in 1948, when F.R. Leavis in his *The Great Tradition* re-evaluated her novels as mature work, Eliot began to receive serious critical attention. Marxist critics viz. Arnold Kettle and Terry Eagleton affirmed that Eliot did not believe in “potential social change” and was rather an “idealist” whose fiction tried to deal with the conflict between romanticism and individualism. Feminist critics like Kate Millet were annoyed that her heroines “did not achieve any revolutionary accomplishment” and denounced the Victorian writer’s “social conservatism and resistance to feminist practice” (123); Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar hold that Eliot was “anti-feminism incarnate” and that she “resorts to pledges of deference

and doctrines of feminine renunciation that are directly at odds with her own aggressively pursued career” (446). Lee Edwards believed that Eliot “refused to celebrate that world she forced into existence when she stopped being Mary Ann Evans and became George Eliot instead” (qtd. by Rignall, 145-158).

Following the publication of Gordon S. Haight’s *George Eliot: A Biography* (1954), which revealed Eliot’s background, new historicist studies began to spread and focus on her “interactions with contemporary cultural, intellectual and political movements such as evolutionary science, positivism, and the early stages of women’s movement” (Rignall 90). However, modern critics differ in their interpretation and evaluation of Eliot. In stark contrast to Arnold Kettle and Terry Eagleton, Avrom Freishman traces and discusses the evolution of Eliot’s ideas which have “constantly been developing” and views Eliot as “a progressive writer who believed in both personal and social change” (125). Rignall asserts that Eliot belongs to European literary traditions and highlights the crucial role played by European thought, culture and literature in producing her fiction. Nancy Henry tackles the issues of nineteenth century British colonialism, imperialism and emigration in Eliot’s *Literature*. She digs into specific biographical details such as Eliot’s involvements in colonial investments, her reviews of colonial literature and the emigration of her beau’s sons --- the Lewes boys to Canada --- to interpret her works. Nancy Henry establishes the connections between Eliot and literary modernism, demonstrating that she actually had a lot in common with twentieth century authors. From Darwinism, the role of the narrator, realism and symbolism, post-colonial criticism and racism, to the anticipation of modernism, Henry reveals an unconventional and modern reading of the Victorian writer (42).

The ongoing scholarly debate about Eliot and her works brings to light the versatility of Eliot and the wide range of her interests and establishes her securely not only as a Victorian novelist, but also as one who is relevant even today.

George Levine calls George Eliot's world a "deterministic world": "She believed that circumstances and conventions imposed by society control events in an individual's life and that the newly discovered laws which apply to science and nature are also applied to man, since man is a creature of the natural world" (62). However, she also believed in the conflicts between inmate desire and practical reality to be inevitable, and that the individual is himself responsible for his own choices and his acts. In her novels set in nineteenth-century rural England, Eliot's gifted heroines develop through certain psychological experiences, beginning with egoism and progressing through suffering the crisis, and resignation, until they achieve altruism. Doing their duty does not bring the young women happiness. As Virginia Woolf pointed out, "save for the supreme courage of their endeavour, the struggle ends unsatisfactorily" (100).

George Eliot's fictional world is complex. She felt that she was free to exercise her own will and to be responsible for her actions. This feeling was in harmony with her emphasis on the importance of the individual. An excerpt from one of her letters indicates the intensity of her feeling: "Every fresh morning is an opportunity that one can look forward to for exerting one's will. I shall not be satisfied with your philosophy until you have conciliated necessitarianism with the practice of willing strongly, of willing to will strongly, and so on, that being that you certainly can do and have done about a great many things in life" (qtd. by Rignall 173).

George Eliot earnestly believed in the infallibility of the laws or universal causality, she believed equally strongly in the freedom of her own will and in her

responsibility for her own actions. Determinism and freedom of choice, in her powerful mind, reinforced each other (Fleishman 89).

George Eliot passed through several important crises in her lifetime. The first one was when she was strongly influenced by Evangelicalism. Later on she became dissatisfied with the Calvinist dogma of self-renunciation (92).

Her new scepticism and interest in rationalistic determinism gave rise to another moral crisis, the quarrel with her father, who demanded her attendance at church services. As a compromise, she pursued her studies of Biblical criticism and also attended church, informs Barbara Hardy (156).

The years she worked as an editor at the Westminster Review were ones of marked intellectual unrest and she was in touch with the most controversial theories of the modern age. She assimilated evolutionary theories, mainly the belief in the historical evolution of man. Among the philosopher it was Spinoza who helped to give her a more liberal outlook and freed her from the lasting, gloomy Calvinist trend of her personality. In her early writings we see the growing emphasis upon the human side of the utilitarian philosophy and Feuerbach's religion of humanity, both of which contributed to the development of the doctrine of altruism present in her early novels (Ashton 234).

George Eliot's realism is moral. George Eliot is not only interested in showing man's everyday life, she uses realism to illustrate the moral and psychological problems that result from the conflict between the character's will and the pressures from the outside. Within this conflict between the individual and the external forces, which may be moral or amoral, there is a corresponding process of education that shows the novelist's moral view of life as process of moral growth (Henry 87).

Basil Willey derives the conclusion that George Eliot's mind was an amalgam of the conservative and the reformatory. In her conservative bent, she was a religious writer who

“identified the laws of affection with religion” (10). He quotes George Eliot: “We would consider our early religious experience as a portion of valid knowledge, and cherish its emotional results in relation to objects which are either substitutes or metamorphoses of the earlier” (20).

In “The Authority of the Past in George Eliot’s Novels”, Thomas Pinney claims that “The basis of George Eliot’s conservatism was piety towards her early experiences that grew out of affection, imagination and reverence rather than formal argument. But she was a conservative through a reasoned analysis of human society too” (81).

This conservative tendency illustrates the ethic of fellow-feeling and altruism, which is the ultimate religious end of her early novels. The education of the race is possible as an outcome of a process of maturation of the individuals, who learns to “reverence the life of the past as a guide for the present (83).

F.R. Leavis, in *The Great Tradition*, distinguishes between the two different types of society that are present in *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede* as opposed to the analysis of the social world of *The Mill*. While the former works take a panoramic view of a leisurely rich pastoral world, the latter is a sarcastic picture of provincial life (79).

George Eliot based her theory of morality in fiction on the whole sensitivity of the reader: “My function is that of the aesthetic, not the doctrinal teaching—the rousing of nobler emotions, which make mankind desire the social right, not the prescribing of social measure, concerning which the artistic mind is not the best judge” (qtd. by Rignall 213).

She believed that “a scene, a character, or action truly observed will carry with it its true value” (215). The artist who is free from any orthodox restraint “quietly follows the stream of fact and life; and waits patiently for the moral process of nature as well as we all do for the material processes” (127).

The same kind of moral earnestness with which she pursued her religious inquiries and which led her to her change in religious outlook, is present in her development as a novelist. As Joan Bennett shows, “Mary Anne Evans was soon to accept the view that self repression was not a good in itself, but only as it served some discernible end; that is, for her, only as it promoted the welfare of other” (312).

Basil Willey thinks that Mary Anne’s moral certainties were unaffected by her change of doctrine. The reconciliation with her father, worked out by her brother, the Brays and Miss Rebecca Franklin, and the years she spent by his side in his old age and sickness, were a positive experience in the development of her spirit of self-sacrifice and fellow-felling that resulted in the late attitudes in life that demonstrated her moral excellences (156).

Her regular, day- to- day life was intellectually satisfying to Mary Anne, since she effectively used it in reading and writing (Henry 212). The first work of translation was done then: Strauss’s *Life of Jesus*. It took her three years to complete, but it was an excellent experience of sustained writing. The next thing she did was to translate Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1846), which she abandoned, as was her translations of his “Ethics” (1854), based on the assumption that “the only mode of making Spinoze accessible to a larger number is to study his books, then shut them up and give an analysis” (235). Her interest in Spinoza’s work was shared by G.H. Lewes, who published an essay on Spinoza in 1836, the same year in which Mary Anne was introduced to his works (237).

According to Joan Bennett, probably Marian, who “was quickly responsive to expressed affection; she needed to love and be loved,” was emotionally attracted by Chapman. Bennett suggests that John Chapman “May have supplied some aspects of

Stephen Guest in *The Mill*, he had in common with him at any rate, coxcombry and good looks” (215).

It was Herbert Spencer who first perceived Marian’s creative gifts. But it was “her lack of self-confidence, which led her in those days to resist any suggestion that she should write novels” says noted Eliot scholar, G.S. Haight. Due to Marian’s romantic nature, she usually fell in love with those she admired intellectually and this probably happened with Spencer also. But Spencer did not intend to marry, as he wrote to his father: “On the whole I am quite decided not to be a drudge; and as I see no probability of being able marry without being a drudge, why I have pretty well given up the idea” (qtd. by Rignall, 145).

Marian accepted that because in her nature the extreme elements, the moral and the rebellious, the ascetic and the romantic coexisted. Instead of writing fiction, she devoted her intellectual capacity to the editing of *The Westminster Review* and the writing of articles and reviews. In the period between the translation of Strauss’s book and Feurebach’s she contributed a review to *The Westminster*, concerning R.S. Mackay’s “the Progress of Intellect” in 1850 (Asthon 145).

Marian was first introduced to George Henry Lewes in September, 1854. In July, 1854, she and Lewes left England for Germany, creating a situation that even her liberal friends were not likely to accept, because Lewes was married man. Joan Bennett finds that “despite the social difficulties that ensued and the financial anxieties of the early years, the union with Lewes marked the achievement for Marian Evans of emotional equilibrium (71).. Even her secluded life after she came back from Germany with Lewes, contributed to create a strain in George Eliot’s mind, when she adopted a liberal outlook that was checked by her moralism.

George Eliot wrote in her essay, "The Morality of Wilhelm Meister," poetic justice is a scheme by which "rewards and punishments are distributed according to those notions of justice on which the novel-writer would have recommended that the world should be governed if he had been consulted at the creation" (qtd. by Rignall 150).

The novelists of the Victorian era too, along with the contemporary scientists, gradually began to look at the terrestrial phenomenon from a scientific, and not a religious angle. While portraying everyday reality in their works, "they found that virtue and vice has an almost scientific value", says Joan Bennett (84).

In one of her letters, Eliot wrote about the dilemma in regard to the didactic preaching that poetic justice had to represent: "I think aesthetic teaching is the highest of all teaching because it deals with life in its highest complexity. But if it cease to be purely aesthetic – if it lapses anywhere from the picture to the diagram – it becomes the most offensive of all teaching" (qtd. by Henry 211).

Eliot appears to have wanted to write a novel that would be didactic yet artistic. Her novels show that she tried to juxtapose both the didactic and the aesthetically pleasing into her work. One of her major objections to Christianity was its promise to heavenly reward for good acts, instead of urging to do good for its own sake. Also, the Christian, who considers himself superior to the non-Christian, actually advocates religious intolerance. The distinction that men want to draw between "God's Elect and the outcast sinners" of this world, George Eliot argues, far from being a necessary safeguard to morality, is itself and immoral fiction (Fleishman 213). She regarded the world as torn by a conflict between two forces of good rather than between good and evil. Till the elemental struggle between man's outer life and his inner needs, is resolved satisfactorily, "we shall never be able to attain a great right without also doing a wrong" she believed (214).

Joan Bennett analysed the influence of Hegel on George Eliot. She points out that Eliot's major heroines, Dinah Maggie, Dorothea, and Gwendolen confront the commonplace, "what they struggle for is good and what subdues them is also good" (Bennett 90). She believed that in fiction the author himself should punish the villain, instead of following the traditional convention of letting God take care of the sinners after their death. George Eliot intended to create "experiments in life", not "any formula which does not get itself clothed in some human figure and individual experience" (114).

In a rather long notebook entry Eliot asserted that the moral influence of any novel was inevitable: "But a man or a woman, who publishes writings invariably assumes the office of teacher or influencer of the public mind. Let him pretend as he will that he only seeks to amuse.... he can more escape impacting the moral taste, and with it the action of the intelligence, more than a setter of fashions in furniture and dress can fill the shops with the designs and leave the garniture of persons and houses unaffected by his industry" (qtd. by Rignal 187).

George Eliot believed that since the author hugely influences the readers, he must reflect moral realities and to evoke sympathy. She strongly believed that there is a powerful yearning for justice within every man and a desire to behave morally, in spite of pressure of circumstances and limitations of nature. This "yearning and desire she sought to evoke in her readers through her works" (Bennett 89).

Avrom Fleishman has analyzed George Eliot's fitting together of sympathy for negatively inclined characters with her stubborn conviction in the "possibility of moral betterment and moral judgement.... as a realist she recognized that men are not morally responsible for their actions; but as a moralist, who based her practice upon the potent influence upon future behaviour, she did" (118).

Thus, poetic justice functions in her novels giving her (fictional) sinner a chance to judge and reform himself in the story itself. Christianity, George Eliot was convinced, by her study of German philosophers viz. Hegel, Kant, Fichte, and Schelling, is regarding the spiritual world as progressing in gradual stages corresponding with the movements of physical nature and of history.

Immanuel Kant states in his *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (“Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals”) that the moral law is of a “sublime, absolute and unconditional character” in spite of human limitations, and that it is the end of the race that makes itself felt in the consciousness of each individual. Heel gave George Eliot the specific metaphor for her steadfast beliefs: the seed bringing forth a crop. Hegel’s theory of the progressing dialectic is expressed in a sentence that can be used to explain poetic justice in *Adam Bede*: “The seed-corn must perish if the plant is to come into being, but the plant contains all that was of the essence of the seed corn” (134).

George Eliot studied Darwin’s *Origin of Species* within days of its publication in 1859. In the same year she published *Adam Bede*. She recognized immediately physical development of species toward more complex forms does not assure success for the morally fittest or for the spiritual progress of species.

George Eliot was well familiar with the evolutionary theories of her age, including her live-in partner, George Lewis, and Herbert Spencer, their friends and possibly her one-time suitor, George Eliot came to believe in the biological inheritance of acquired characteristics and of learned mental and moral processes. The inner development of a man’s morality can be seen truth working some tiny effect towards a moral evolution in the world at large, an evolution that parallels, but is not equivalent to, the biological progress of species. Consequently, the good man or woman of George Eliot’s novels in one who is endowed with superior potential for inner moral development, but is, in the

beginning obstructed by an unsuppressed and ambitious ego, and ego that is liable to unsympathetic self-righteousness in the every degree that the character desires his own moral growth says Fleishman (99).

Thus, Adam Bede is rather rough in his first admonitions to his fellow workers and in his disgust with his father. Maggie Tulliver is proud of her intellectual superiority, Dorothea is absurdly patronizing to the lesser mortals around her, opines Barbara Hardy (98). Character after another, Godfrey Cass, Dorothea Brooke, Tertius Lydgate, Gwendolen Harleth, discover that “others suffer for their selfishness, for face-saving lies for thoughtless marriages, for over-whelming ambitions” (102).

The pattern for growth of her character is indicated in her translation of Ludwig Feuerbach’s *Essence of Christianity*, with which she said she agreed completely: “Love does not exist without sympathy, sympathy does not exist without suffering in common. What the awakened good man desires most is a mission of sympathy or inspiration, one of working toward the supreme moral progress of mankind, and the finding of that most useful purpose for his life is the highest possible reward for him” (qtd. by Rignal 161).

In general, poetic justice for George Eliot is that good is both initiated and rewarded if one possesses even the most primitive capacities:- devotion to family or the ability to sacrifice a little for the family. The broader the growth of sympathy, the wider the opportunity for doing duty to others and getting reward from others, opines Barbara Hardy (100).

George Eliot had the power to present evil as irretrievable, even if it might, at the end, result in clearing negative feelings or awakening oral consciousness in a fortunate few. The punishment of George Eliot’s partially awakened characters, is almost always appropriate to the crime and proportionate to the concomitant remorse for the crime

committed: disgrace for the hypocrite, childlessness for the child-deserter and exile from others for those who have no sympathy for others (Uglow 213).

George Gissing

George Gissing was born on 22 November 1857. He was a prolific writer, who, within a span of barely twenty three years (between 1880 and 1903 --- the year of his death) published twenty three novels and several short stories. Though writing was his passion and profession, he also worked as a teacher and private tutor to young boys of rich parents all his life (Korg 5). His novels are : *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), *The Unclassed* (1884), *Isabel Clarendon* (1885), *Demos* (1886), *Thyrza* (1887), *A Life's Mourning* (1888), *The Nether World* (1889), *The Emancipated* (1890), *New Grub Street* (1891), *Denzil Quouria* (1892), *The Old Women* (1893), *In the year of the Jubilee* (1894), *Eve's Ransom* (1895), *Sleeping Fires* (1895), *The Whirlpool* (1897), *The Torn Traveller* (1898), *The Crown of Life* (1899), *Our Friend the Charlatan* (1901), *The Private Papers of Henry Roycroft* (1903), *Will Warburton* (published posthumously in 1904), and *Veranilda* (unfinished). By *The Ionian Sea* (1901) is the sole travelogue; and his sole work of criticism is *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* (1890). He had several collections of short stories, too. They are – *Human Odds and Ends* (1898), *A Yorkshire Lass* (1898), *Brownie* (1899), *The House of Cobwebs and Other Stories* (1900), *Stories and Sketches* (1900), *The Sins of Fathers and Other Tales* (1901), *My First Rehearsal* and *My Clerical Rival* (1901), *A Victim of Circumstances and Other Stories* (1902).

Paul Delany calls Gissing the “epitome of the tortured Victorian artist”, whose life was replete with tertiary syphilis and an early demise in 1903, at the age of forty-six (19). His most famous novels – out of the twenty two he wrote – *New Grub Street*, *The Odd Women*, *The Nether World* – are sustained attacks on the repressions of the day, howls of

pain of a man born into the wrong era (20). Gissing's promising future was destroyed by his class and women issues, -- issues that led him to marrying a prostitute. His second marriage was with a deranged lower class woman. These marital misadventures added to the heap of perpetual misery that Gissing was already living through; so much so that his biographer, Jacob Korg commented, "we might adopt the phrase "he lived a Gissing life" to denote one of relentless toil and pain" (72). Gissing had to wade through all sorts of struggles:-- with swindler publishers, emphysema, the highly polluted London air, lack of literary success almost all his life and "a general absence of any empathy towards other human beings except himself" (74). Despite gaining the friendship of literary stalwarts viz. Thomas Hardy and H.G. Wells, Gissing's "arrogance and anti-social nature made his life miserable" (84). However, Pierre Coustillas thinks that Gissing "became poor by bad judgement and badder luck" (32). George Orwell, who considered Gissing to be Korg both believe that everything about his later life was determined by the twin disaster of imprisonment and bad marriages.

Dennis Richard says, "George Gissing.. is normally regarded as a man of slums, or on the margins, or may be a cynical observer of the nouveau riche, but never a Bloomsbury academic or intellectual..... And yet Bloomsbury featured prominently in both his own life and his work" (1). Gissing obtained his reader's ticket for the British Museum Reading Room in November 1877, a day after his twentieth birthday (30). In *NGS*, we find a close parallel where Edwin Reardon applies for his reader's ticket after his twenty-first birthday. "The British Museum was central to Gissing's Life in London, both as a source of heat, light and running water to an impoverished writer, as well as a site for researcher, to a classical scholar" (1). Reardon finds it "a blessed refuge,..... when he must else have sat in his windy garage with the mere pretence of a fire' (*NGS* 120). Reardon's feelings about "the reading room was his true home, its warmth enwrapped him kindly, the

peculiar odour of its atmosphere—at first a cause of headache – grew dear and delightful to him” (113) were most probably of Gissing’s own. The distinctiveness of the reading room’s environment also features in the person of Mr. Quarmby, whom Jasper Milvain describes as “a dweller in the valley of the shadow of books” : “Mr Quaranby laughed in a peculiar way, which was the result of long years of mirth-subdued laugh in the Reading Room..... His suppressed laugh ended in a fit of coughing—the Reading – Room cough” (177).

Gissing himself was a regular visitor to the reading room, where he read about diseases, working class conditions etc., voraciously for finding material for writing articles for magazines. His Marian Yule has the same routine something quite uncommon for women in those days.

For a few years --- from 1891-1893 – Gissing was absent from the museum, when he lived in Exeter after his second marriage with Edith. But he found the absence of the library, the sole source of factual information, impossible to bear, and by August 1893 he was back in the museum, researching for advertising materials for *In the Year of the Jubilee* (Coustillas, 103). His friend, Morley Roberts commented: “What a strange passion was his for London, and especially for the British Museum and its great library. Once he wrote to his doctor friend, Henry Hick ‘I dare not settle far from London, as it means ill-health to me to be out or reach of the library world’. In Devon he found the lack of the British Museum and his literary world too much for him....” (qtd. by Jacob Korg 46).

In *NGS*, Edward Reardon works in the Museum “on a mass of notes he had made in a reading of Diogenes Laertius” (*NGS*139) in the vain hope they will make an article in a popular literary magazine, while the earnest realist Biffen goes to the Reading Room “to consult the shelves of medical literature”, before visiting several chemists’ shops to acquire the necessary ingredients for his intended suicide (201). The reading room also

features in *The Private Letters of Henry Roycroft*, which many critics consider to be his thinly disguised autobiography (Delany 20). Gissing paints the British Museum as a place for social functions. Marian Yule is regularly propositioned by struggling authors wanting to ingratiate themselves to her father, the literary editor, and also by Jasper Milvain, in front of the reference shelves. Gissing took his sisters, and his wife Edith, to the library after they came back to London from Exeter (Cousillas 127)

While many of Gissing's trips to the British Museum were made from lodgings in various parts of London, and especially from his flat at Cornwall Mansions where he lived for six years, he also occupied lodgings at various times in Colville Place, Huntley Street and Gower Place (Coustillas 219). After nearly a year in Colville Place, in September 1878 Gissing moved with his first wife, Nell Harrison (whom he married in October 1879) to a single room at 31 Gower Place. But before long they had to move on account of Nell's "unseemly" behaviour – her heavy drinking, and worse her frequent prostitution that she carried on to get money for her drinks (Korg 199). This experience Gissing used, partly in *Workers in the Dawn*, where Arthur Golding moves to a single room in a Gower Place lodging, where the landlady, Mrs. Pettindund, and her entourage of husband and grown-up children "squandered" their income "in surfeit and vice" and were "oblivious to any sense of their mental and moral debasement" (169).

Gissing again shifted his home, this time to 70 Huntley Street. In course of time he received an inheritance of 300 pounds which had been due on his twenty first birthday the previous year (Korg 187). Now he moved to 35 Huntley Street, taking two rooms in the house of Moss Sageman, a tailor and spent the inheritance on publishing his first novel, *Workers in the Dawn*, in 1880 (Korg 201).

Two years later, in 1892, after moves to Islington and "the West End" (i.e. the northern fringes of Notting Hill), ostensibly to be nearer the pupils he was teaching (as

house-tutor), the Gissings returned to Gower Place, for Gissing “longed for the neighbourhood of life and bustle and noise”, where he expected to be “settled here for some years” (Coustillus 36). But once again his anticipation of a permanent home was to prove unfounded. Nell had already been sent away once, in 1881, to Hastings, on account of her illness, but she returned to Gower Place soon after he moved in. One day, while shopping, she collapsed in convulsions and again on the way home. On the very next day, Gissing arranged for her to go to live with two ladies at Buttersea, at a considerable cost. “All these eruptions had made it embarrassing to stay” and he moved again, first “to Marylebone, then in Cornwell Mansions, and then to Chelsea” (Delany 313).

After Nell’s death, Gissing married Edith Underwood. He brought her the wedding ring at a shop in Tottenham Court Road. He set up his home in Exeter, where he lived till his death at the young age of forty six, in 1903.

A sincere Gissing scholar, Peter Coustillas, has broadly summed up the three phases of Gissing’s career, the years 1888 and 1897 being crucial ones in that his journeys to Italy each time foreshadowed new developments in his many sided literary production as a novelist, short story writer, critic and scholar bent on exploring historically and spatially the main cities of the Greco-Roman World. Gissing was a very capable linguist with a thorough knowledge of Latin and Greek; as well as praiseworthy command of French, German, Italian and Spanish based on spoken practice, and great familiarity with the literatures in these four languages. Coustillas further stresses that the writer was a very observant traveller, who visited or at least lived for a time in America, France, Italy Greece Switzerland, Germany (which he left rather abruptly after a few days in 1898, finding the militaristic atmosphere unbearable) and Spain. The Scandinavian countries he could not visit, but thoroughly read Ibsen, Jacobsen and Bjornson.

A pacifist and anti-imperialist throughout his life, but particularly so at the turn of the century when the interest of England, France and Germany collided, he was labelled a “Little Englander” by the pro-war parties at the time of the Boer War. After his death, Coustillas goes to record, Gissing was, more than once, considered a good prophet who had predicted large scale European conflicts. His elder son was killed in the battle of the Somme in July 1916 (Korg 321).

In retrospect, agree the scholars, Gissing is seen to have sided with humane, honourable forces. He generally condemned all forms of oppression and arbitrariness, whether political, social, or religious. His work is generally acknowledged as that of a supremely honest and scrupulous artist, as that of a humanist who would neither follow blindly nor welcome the allegiance of fellow writers. George Orwell was one of his staunchest admirers, and many believe he adopted the first part of his pseudonym from his guru. Gissing has been translated into a dozen languages. He is generally regarded as “an apostle of culture as well as an agent of emancipation and progress” (Delany 45). Gissing revealed the evils of industrialization and urbanisation as no one else has done before him. He dealt realistically with the suffering and frustrations caused by poverty. The indignities, which the slum conditions inflicted on human spirit and their deleterious effect on character and moral, have been realistically presented. Gissing’s realism may be better understood in his own words: “Realism signifies nothing more than artistic sincerity in the portrayal of contemporary life it merely contrast with the habit of kind which assumes that a novel is written to please the people, that disagreeable facts must always be kept out of sight that the human nature must be systematically flattered and the book must have a plot that the story should end on a cheerful note and all the rest of it.” (qtd. by Korg, 189).

However, except in his earlier novels what Robert Selig calls Hogarthian beginnings, Gissing’s realism varied slightly. He wrote to Thomas Hardy on 30 June

1886, “In literature my interests begin and end, I hope to make my life and all its acquirements subservient to my deal of artistic creation” (*Collected Letters*, ed. Mattiesen 17). In later novels Gissing revised both his theme and style. He is more analytical, critical and artistic. He does not show the direct influence of Zola and Hogarth as we see in his earlier novels (Delany 109).

Toward the end of the century when *The Emancipated*, *NGS*, *Born in Exile*, *The Whirlpool* were written as a reaction to the rigid Puritanism that was underway, though there had been no change in the underlying emotional and economic facts of bourgeois civilisation. In *The Whirlpool*, through the character of Harvey Rolf, Gissing shows moral obligation of parents to children. The new middle class starting touching as the older aristocratic standard of manners as is model.

Like Dostoevsky's hero Raskolnikov (*Crime and Punishment*) many characters in Gissing, particularly Peak (*Born in Exile*), Amy Reardon (*NGS*), Monica Madden (*TOW*) feel themselves free from the claims of morality, family affection and friendship. They seem to have carved their own values to safeguard their interest. The shifting from conventional lack of morality, family affection and friendship. They seem to have carved their own values to safeguard their interests. The shifting from conventional lack of morality is made conspicuous by Peak's defying of Christianity and conventional social norms. In a letter to his brother Gissing wrote that his “most characteristic works are studies of classless intellectuals” helplessness in the face of hostile social forces whose only chance of survival is to make a world within a world” (*Collected Letters*, ed. Mattiesen 45). Thus we find Jasper Milvain of *NGS* who adopts cheap means to earn money in literary field, jilts Marian because her father becomes insolent, and marries the widow Amy Reardon, without any moral conflicts. On the other hand, Monica Madden (*TOW*) who sought only financial security while marrying the elderly Widdowson, ends

up in getting separated from him, being unable to bear his absolute control over her life any longer. Once her desires are thwarted by her husband's domination, she tries to discard her disastrous marriages, but is not wholly successfully in her attempts. Gissing makes her the natural opposite of Amy Reardon, a woman who goads her writer husband, who does not compromise with cheap commercialization, to earn money by writing anything that sells well, even if they are cheaper stuff. Amy represents the change in the values of the society where "comforts of life, good flats and other luxurious things" (NGS 189) occupy supreme values. To this end any means is justified. The change in the value system has been bought by industrial and artistic culture. Selig has rightly commented: "Yule, Reardon and Biffen are viewed as victims not simply of a mechanical society, but of an inappropriate education that has ill-equipped them for altered conditions of the new age" (59).

In 1883, Gissing wrote a "preface" to a novel (which only reached the printers but was never published): "This book is addressed to those to whom art is dear for its own sake, also to those who possessing their own ideal of social and personal morality, find themselves able to allow the relativity of all ideals whatever" (38). Gissing at this time was getting over his worst poverty and settling down to regular literary production 'I am by degrees getting my right place in the world. The world is for me a collection of phenomena, which are to be studied and reproduced artistically.... the works of the artist, work in what material he will remain sources of health to the world", he wrote in a letter to his brother in November 1885 (qtd. by Mattiesen 165). Around this time he started to write *Demos: A Story of English Socialism*. For writing this novel Gissing deliberately prepared himself. He wanted to present "a full-scale picture" and required "inside" knowledge as he wrote in the same letter, and for a time being moved behind closed doors so as to be able to express as he wrote the "full reality of the worker's revolt" (166).

Gissing was highly influenced by the positivist thinking of Auguste Comte, whom he read under the influence of Richard Congreve, a philosopher and a disciple of Comte (Delany 122). Comte led the “crumbling of established religion and agnosticism through his positivist thinking” in the Victorian England (Daiches 344). Victorian age encouraged the examination of the traditional religious and moral attitudes. Stalwarts like Leslie Stephen, Thomas Henry Huxley, John Stuart Mills, Herbert Spencer shook the very core of intuitive religious belief when they questioned the very existence of God through their vigorous rationalism. Gissing, like every young man of the time, was highly influenced by these intellectuals’ ideas and thoughts. He wanted man to emulate divine qualities of love, forgiveness and tolerance, while not directly repudiating the idea Divine itself. Curiously, though, he considered empirical science to be “a darkening force to contaminate man’s vision and harden his heart” as he wrote in a letter to his brother (Coustillas 220). However, he was never averse to the truth reckoned by scientific enquiry and curiosity and as a scholar asserts, “he even excels Mark Rutherford and George Moore” (Korg 236).

A typical Gissing protagonist is born class-conscious. The deep-rooted sense of class, which has so much influence on the speculative and practical life of his characters, is manifested in various forms. They broadly represent two classes viz. working class and the middle or lower-middle class. Besides he has painted the lives of the people whom he euphemistically calls the ‘unclassed’. Gissing in the preface to the second edition of *The Unclassed* (1884) wrote:- ‘By unclassed. I meant not, of course, ‘declasses’..... all the prominent persons of the story---- male & female ---- dwell in a limbo external to society (xiii).

The term ‘class’, in Gissing’s novels is not to be confused with Marxist definition of class. According to Marx, society as a whole is splitting up into two camps, into two great classes that directly face each other---- Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. For Marx only

two classes existed that of 'exploiters' and the 'exploited', Moreover, he sees class in terms of economic 'mode of production' and 'production relations'. To Gissing class is more a group or cluster of people sharing common social, economic and cultural attributes. John Halperin defines class in Gissing's novels as 'one's financial and social position determines one's class not essentially one's natural class' (Halperin 189). Gissing emphatically accepts the notion of class in the novel and quite clearly the notion of class antagonism. John Goode says in Gissing's novels, more "important are the implications in terms of the class struggle" (216).

Gissing presents a rich array of qualities when it comes to the portrayal of women characters. The most striking fact about heroines in the nineteenth century novels is that they are overwhelming from upper or middle class. There were very few working class women represented in literature. Merryn Williams notes, "the heroines can be divided into few easily identifiable groups-on the side heroines, on the other side fallen women, and towards the end of the century, "new: strong-minded woman" (34). Gissing's most of the women characters conform to these types. His gallery of women's portraits consists of variety as well as qualitative richness. Women in Gissing's novels may be seen to form several types. They may be identified as ideal woman (Marian Yule in *NGS*); selfish women (Amy Reardon in *NGS*); and women with revolutionary temperament (Rhoda Nunn in *TOW*). Most of them are socially conventional. Some of them, viz. Monica Madden (*TOW*) are young and ambitious but without money. They are fighting against their destinies to attain social, material and spiritual emancipation. John Halperin comments: "They are provided with qualities of beauty and character which make them independent" (35).

Gissing was an acute social observer. The Victorian society was undergoing a sea-change in its last two decades, especially its position and attitude towards women. As

women increasingly began to give more importance to education and financial independence and not on marriage as the sole “career” anymore, he portrayed them faithfully in his works. In *The Whirlpool* and *The Odd Women* marriage seems to be an anathema for the women not because they reject it in the modern fashion but it has become so painful that they choose to remain spinsters. This change in the attitude of the women in the middle-class society was obvious in the nineties and Gissing has rendered it powerfully to focus on the failures of the society. Rhoda Nunn and her group are not failures as women, they represent the failures of a social system, which forces them to spinsterhood. The malevolent dictatorship of the husband, the silent suffering of women, and their self-sacrifices, i.e. all the cherished values that went well with the Victorian notion about the role of women and their status were lauded as virtues no more. Gissing faithfully presented the changing attitudes of women. These attitudinal changes among women were due to the spread of education, growth of awareness and a sense of professionalism. One like-minded friend of Rhoda, Mary Barfoot, represents a more modest approach to social change. Her address to woman as an invader is a strenuous opposition to Ruskin’s idealised view of women. She says, “I want to do away with that common confusion of the words womanly and womanish, and I see very clearly that this can only be affected by an armed movement, an invasion by women of the spheres, which men have always forbidden us to enter” (*TOW* 135). This “invasion” of educated women, she argues, will prove beneficial to the husband the useful to the society as a whole. It will eradicate the evils perpetuate on women in the name of their angelic image. The change, which occurred during the period of transition in the Victorian age, has been portrayed through the lives of his female characters. Gissing tries to emphasize that in spite of all liberty, reason, and love for self-independence marked by these women the womanly virtues cannot be discarded. It is unethical, socially undesirable but also positive. One

finds the women committing breach of conduct sometimes survive but they are driven to either madness or death. In the cases of survival of Amy Reardon, the selfish wife in *NGS* Gissing ironically shows that selfish woman are successful because the society itself has been trapped by the evils and corruption of morality. Obviously enough Gissing advocates for the preservation of unprejudiced values of womanly virtues rather than womanish. Some of the basic ingredients of reforms for the emancipation of women, which he holds necessary, are education, self-awareness and liberty as Mill propounded. To him the basic postulate of women's emancipation lies on the pivot of education. Gissing's women belonging to upper middle-classes (Sidwell, Emily Hood, Emmavine, Norman etc. and working class women (Thyrza, Ida Starr, Clara Hewett) show their interest in books for self-enlightenment. The frequent references to Ruskin, Carlyle, and Bronte sisters show that they don't only pursue reading as pastime but learning and imbibing lesson too. In *In the year of Jubilee*, Nancy's getting hold of a book on advertisement makes her ambitious as a respectful glamorous career. This also speaks of their awareness to contemporary developments.

Gissing's portrayal of woman places a lot of emphasis on their desire for greater liberty. Restlessness prevails over his women characters in pursuit of freedom and individual rights. There is strong desire for liberty: liberty from the burden of tradition, liberty from the bondage of slavery of marriage, liberty from the exploitation in the labour market and above all from the inhuman encroachments on spirit. Gissing as a moralist like Mill thought that reasonable exercise of freedom is necessary not only for preserving virtues but for the emancipation of women too.

While it may seem logical to end rather than begin by examining Gissing's dire views on modern society, knowing the reality and extent of his pessimism about change, progress, and the value of human hope short of death, determines the boundaries within

which analysis of his fiction is profitable. The important question is, does Gissing think the best thing for humans to do is give up and wait for the end, whatever that may be? Faced with this question about his fiction, one may say no. Regardless of his criticism of modern culture, Gissing is no bleak fatalist. However, his fictive world produces serious, complex interruptions of any idea of a movement toward human happiness greater than transient relief. The paradoxical position implies a recurring hope, however faint, that he continually challenges. If hope can survive, it will have to earn its place. In this way, Gissing does not have to believe that life can be improved for the lowest classes or those who cannot fit into their 'rightful' places in the middle class. He has only to accept the inevitable, the logic of circumstances that leaves some in possession of their lies. Will Warburton, in the eponymous novel (1901), finds himself defrauded and de-classed but nevertheless recovers his equanimity and sense of balance toward the past and an acceptance of the present. Korg states, "At the end of the novel Warburton is moving away from his upper-class friends, and there is the clear suggestion that he is well rid of them" (225). One wishes to label this as an-Gissing-like, but it merely transcends or shifts aside ideology. Similarly, in *The Private papers of Henry Ryecroft*, Gissing gives Ryecroft a legacy and peace of several years and then lets him die. Ryecroft appears to find himself blessed in his escape from the drudgeries of the writing life for even that short time. By this time, not only the content but also the little of Gissing's essay "The Hope of Pessimism" begins to assume a sense of clarity. A real, if chastened, idea of hope results from an acknowledgement of vision of human life.

Although it may not be progress, Gissing does not portray any Luddite leftovers acting on the edges of labour unrest. This is a significant change from the early part of the nineteenth century when breaking the looms offered a possible surcease from an advancing industrialization. Accommodation and incorporation are surely the watchwords

in the 1880s and 1890s. In fact, Gissing dramatizes no serious threat to the industrial world. Its wealth permeates the society and pre-empts, if not silences, alternative discussions of social change. To Cobb in *The Paying Guest* moves into the realm of the needed expert who, if not the manager, is vital to his firm's success. The lower class and the lower-middle class are not only the operators of the machinery, as happened during and after the Luddite outbreaks, but they also become its technicians and engineers. Gissing makes Cobb a generic electrical worker, though Mrs. Mumford thinks of him as "the electrical engineer, or whatever he was" (39) who functions more importantly as a symbol than a specific instance of expertise. Mr. Higgins, Louise Derrick's lower middle-class stepfather, is "rich" (14), with a business address of Fenchurch St., the city and thus connected with the growing wealth of the country. Although he pays for Louise's sojourn with the Mumfords, the action centres on Louise Derrick's fruitless attempts to flee her class and / or Tom Cobb's ardour. Gissing matter-of-factly gives Cobb success for the modern man without surprise at the outcome.

A fundamental consideration on the subject of progress is whether it is inevitable. Is the nineteenth century shift or change under the pressure of scientific and technological innovation battering society? Ideas on free will and determinism come to time, and if the latter rules, would man have any say in the event, whether the result is considered good or bad? Richard Mutimer's inheritance in *Demos* transforms Wanley into New Wanley than Mutimer is in their creation? Gissing's use of the hackneyed device of all will to move the plot may have more significance than is usually the case since its importance lies not so much in its effects on Eldon's financial prospects but rather on the effects on technology's inevitable march to social dominance. Gissing appears to reverse the century's determining forces and suspend technology from its position of mastery. Dicken's images of technological harm in *Hard Times* (1854) Coketown with its air and water pollution and

the general adaption of that city, in its pervasive drabness, to the factory, train and scientific educational methods lies upended in Wanley Valley's newly recreated, pristine environment. Gissing makes Eldon most enthusiastic in his planned, complete eradication of the mines and the works. Eldon tells Adela: "I shall sweep away every trace of the mines and the works and the houses, and do my utmost to restore the valley to its former state..... for my own part, in this little corner, at all events, the ruin shall be delayed. In this matter I will give my instincts free play. Of New Wanley not one brick shall remain unchanged. I will close the miens, and grass shall again grow over them; I will replant the orchards and mark out the fields as they were before" (338).

The emphasis in *NGS* on the train that thunders under the bridge on which Jasper Milvain and Marian Yule stand is not so much as an industrial product with all the suggested effects of the factory system but rather as a contemporary symbol of force and energy. To the young Jasper and Marian, looking to the future and interested in one another, the train symbolizes their different expectations from life.

In *NGS* and *In the Year of Jubilee*, Gissing also employs the London Underground, the telegraph, and electric lighting. In *TOW*, the recently invented typewriter figures in the plot as a means to achieve female emancipation. Rhoda Nunn's estimation that, "It takes a good six months' work to learn for any profitable use", acquiring efficiency on the typewriter is an opportunity that women can take to achieve independence in a male-dominated world (*TOW* 39) . Rhoda Nunn says: "My first engagement here was a shorthand writer to the secretary of a company. But he soon wanted someone who could use a typewriter. That was a suggestion. I went to learn typewriting and the lady who taught me asked me in the end to say with her as an assistant. This is her house and here I live with her. (23-24).

Gissing uses some of these technological products in a positive way and some in a negative one but does not generally invest the product with the negative or positive qualities. The smoke and dirt from the Underground not electrified until the early 1900s (Saint and Darley, *The Chronicles of London*, 223) counterbalance the ease and speed with which one moves around the city. In a striking scene between Jessica Morgan and Samuel Bramby in *In the Year of Jubilee*, Gissing describes the underground with ethos of Homer's Virgil's and Dante's images of the underworld (Coustillas 259). The news that Reardon receives in London of his son Willy's illness in Brighton is not made worse by the telegraph's quick transmission of it, (439) nor does the train that rushes him to Brighton, as sick as he is, convey negative overtones. Marian Yule, in the same novel, complains of the harsh effect on her eyes of the British Museum Library's electric lighting, but the problem may lie as much in Marian's physical and emotional condition as in this new means of illumination: "But then flashed forth the sputtering whiteness of the electric light and its ceaseless hum was henceforth a new source of headache. It reminded her how little work she had done today: she must force herself to think of the task in hand. A machine has no business to refuse its duty. But the pages were blue and green and yellow before eyes; the uncertainty of the light was intolerable. Right or wrong she would go home and hide herself, and let her heart unburden itself to tears" (*TOW* 108).

Gissing's emphasis on the social effects of science distances the reader from the factory and the laboratory. While he employs no affective images of machinery as Dickens does in *Hard Times* such as the machine as lumbering elephant or in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841) as Little Nell and her grandfather escape from Qulip through an industrial landscape of glowing fires, the ominous spread of London portends a new world spawned by technology that increase wealth as it sometimes debases society. Admittedly nostalgic,

Gissing's fiction displays a desire for something more than the world not only fast approaching but already mutating under the new orders of hegemony.

Research regarding Gissing continues till date. In 2015, Walfhard Stahl reports the discovery of an incomplete serialization of *NGS* in Polish from 30 January to 29 April 1892 (qtd. by Coustillus 244). It appeared irregularly in only eight chapters in *Gazeta Noradowa (The People's Gazette)* and the text is heavily abridged. Copies of periodical can be found in the Austrian National Bibliothek in Vienna and in the Bibliotheka Jagiellonska in Krakow. Adelel Berger is the author of the translation into German. Though Gissing knew about the German translation, he probably never heard of the Polish translation of his novel (Delany 213). However, one of his early novels, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, was banned in Japan shortly before World War II, a news that was published in New York Times (20 April 1938) – “Japan Curbs Reading: John Stuart Mill, Bertrand Russell, George Gissing on School Ban List” (245).

Thomas Hardy

Thomas Hardy was an English poet and England's foremost regional novelist, whose most impressive novels are set in “Wessex”, an imaginary country in south-west England.

Thomas Hardy was born on 2 June, 1894, in Dorset, England. He was the eldest of the four children of Thomas Hardy (Sr.) and Jemima Hand. Both were old-established Dorset families. Hardy inherited from his father a love for music and from his mother, a love for reading. Though rather delicate in childhood, by the age of eight, he was able to enter the village school in Bockhampton. After one year, he left it to enter a Non-Conformist School in Dorchester and learnt French, German and Latin from the books he found in this School (Millage 29). However, when the headmaster of this school opened “The Academy”, a more ambitious school in the town, Hardy went with him. This man

was a talented Latinist and aroused in Hardy a deep reverence for the classical writers, which was to have a marked influence in his works (Page 40).

Leaving school in 1856, at the age of sixteen, Hardy became a pupil of an architect and church-restorer, named John Hicks, who practised in Dorchester. Under Hick's tutelage, Hardy learnt much about architectural drawing and restoring old houses and churches. During this time Hardy read widely, with a view of a taking Holy Orders, with his friend Horace Moule, a learned scholar, who was to have a profound influence on Hardy (Millgate 31). Moule presented several books to Hardy, including *The Origin of Species* by Darwin, which radically changed Hardy's view on life. Some scholars assert that the characters of Henry Knight in *A pair of Blue Eyes*, Angel Clare in *Tess* and Father Time in *Jude* are based on Moule (Pinion 35). With Moule, Hardy visited her art galleries of London, and learnt to appreciate the finer nuances of the paintings. He was highly influenced by Coleman Hunt's painting of Jesus Christ with a lantern, titled "Light of the World" and in *Far from the Madding Crowd* (published. 1874), he depicted a scene where Gabriel Oak is seen with a lantern in his hand (Page 56). Hardy met another scholar, Henry Barslow with whom he had several intellectual discussions, including infant baptism. These discussions later inspired Sorrow's personal baptism by Tess in Hardy's penultimate novel, *Tess* (published 1892) (42). As an adolescent, he became acquainted with and influenced by the poet William Barnes, who also lived in Dorset (Millgate 39). Another huge influence on Hardy was John Stuart Mill, whose *Subjection of Women* Hardy almost knew by heart. Thus he makes Sue Bridehead, the heroine of Hardy's *Jude*, quote Mill verbatim in her arguments with Phillotson regarding marriage and divorce. Hardy was also substantially knowledgeable of rural superstitions (Page 59). Hence the entry of the weather forecaster in *The Mayor Casterbridge*; or of Susan Nunsuch in *The*

Return of the Native, who, believing Eustacia Vye to be a witch, makes a wax doll of her and burns it to ward off her “evil influences” (Millgate 45).

In 1862, when Hardy was twenty two years old, he left Dorchester for London and there began apprenticeship under a well-known architect, Arthur Bloomsfield, as a draftsman, having the job of designing and restoring old dilapidated buildings and churches. He stayed with Bloomsfield till 1867, when deterioration in health forced him to return to Dorset and he once again worked with Hicks (Pinion 56).

During the years in London, Hardy had begun seriously to write poetry, but “failing to find a niche for himself, he turned to fiction” (Page 58). During 1867-68, he wrote his first novels, *The Poor Man and the Lady*, which was never published, and he destroyed the manuscript. However, with the encouragement of the famous writer George Meredith, he wrote his first published novel, *Desperate Remedies* in 1871 (Millgate 52).

In 1874, Hardy married Emma Lavinia Gifford. Between 1871 and 1895, he wrote fourteen novels. His novels were first published in serial forms in magazines, which became popular in both England and America. His novels are: *Desperate Remedies* (1871), *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The hand of Ethelberta* (1876), *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Trumpet Major* (1880), *A Laodicean* (1881), *Two on a Tower* (1882), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1862), *The Woodlanders* (1887), *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891), *Jude the Obscure* (1895), and *The Well-Beloved* (1897, first published as a serial in 1890). Of these, the most famous are the six “Wessex” novels: *Under the Greenwood Tree*, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *The Return of the Native*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *The Woodlanders* and *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (Pinion 109). “Wessex” is the place where the actions of his novels occur. Dorset is the “core” of “Wessex” of the novels, which, according to Hardy, is “practically identical with the Wessex of history, and includes the

counties of Berkshire, Wilts, Somerset, Dorchester and Devon” (178). The last two novels, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* caused a furore in the conservative British society. Tess, an adulteress and murderess, in addition to being a “fallen” woman, could not be accepted by her readers as “a pure woman” as claimed by her creator in the sub title of the novel. *Jude*, a novel that showed the “deadly conflict” (Hardy vi) between the spiritual and the carnal and portrayed the heroine as an unwed but unashamed mother, prompted so harsh criticism as to force Hardy to stop novel writing altogether and turn to poetry for the rest of his life (Millgate 178). Even the unstinted complements of the famous Victorian essayist, Havelock Ellis, who lauded both the novels, could not bring Hardy to the foray of novel writing once again. Ellis called *Jude* “the greatest novel in England for many years”, which “demonstrated a fine self-restraint, a complete mastery of all the elements of an exceedingly human story” (qtd. by Cox 275).

Hardy’s collections of short stories are : *A Group of Noble Dames* (1891), *Wessex Tales* (1890), *Life’s Little Ironies* (1892), *A changed Man and Other Stories* (1893). His poetry collections are: “*Wessex Poems and Other Verses* (1898). *Poems of Past and Present* (1901), *Time’s Laughingstock and Other Verses* (1909), *Satires of Circumstances* (1914), *Moments of Vision* (1917), *Human Shows, Far Phantasies, Songs and Trifles* (1925), *Winter Words in Various Moods and Metres* (1927) (Pinion 110).

The two plays by him are *The Dynasts, An Epic Drama of the War with Napoleon* (Part I, 1904, Part II, 1906 and Part III, 1908); and *The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall at Tintagel in Lyonesse* (1923) (115).

In 1910, Hardy was awarded other Order of Merit. On 27 November, 1912, Mrs. Emma Hardy passed away. In 1914, Hardy married his secretary, Miss Florence Emily Dugdale. From neither of his wives he had any children. After his death on 12 January

1928, his ashes were placed in Westminster Abbey with full state honours, and his heart was buried in the churchyard in Stintford, near his birthplace, as he had wished.

The earliest, most significant and perennial influence on young Hardy was that of his beloved mother Jemima Hardy, a woman of strong character who had the keenest love for literature. She motivated Hardy to read Dryden's *Virgil* and Johnson's *Rasselas* when he was very young, of barely eight years of age. Learning was in Hardy's genes. Florence Emily Hardy testifies that "he was able to read before he could walk" (3). His mother inspired him to develop passionate love for the classics and *The Bible*.

From the very beginning, Hardy, a "precocious child" showed some signs of maturity in his behaviour (35). His biography, *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, written by his secretary (and later his second wife, Florence Emily Hardy) provides sufficient anecdotes to prove that he was inherently very sensitive. That Hardy developed a habit of introspection and rumination at this tender age is evident from his "reflecting on his experience of the world so far as he had got" and then wishing "not to grow up", to borrow the phrase from his last novel, *Jude* [13].

From the very beginning, Hardy had decided, in the words of Rutland, that "his destination was to be different from the members of his family" (38) Even as a child, he had the innate confidence that he was born to reach the zenith. It is remarkable that his was not the normal education, shaped for utilitarian ends. He never studied the subjects which the son of a mason could easily put to use (Pinion 40). In 1858, he was articled to John Hicks, a Dorchester architect, who encouraged Hardy to read great classics in Latin. In Dorchester, Hardy came in contact with the great Scottish poet, Robert Barnes (1801-1886), who left an ever-lasting impact on his mind. Barnes was the first poet whom Hardy came to know intimately and who lent him an ear in solving "Knotty points in dispute" regarding classics and Latin (Rutland 41). He gave Hardy some poetic works of George

Crabbe (1754-1832) to read, which made “an appeal” to his “emotions” for which Hardy remained ‘indebted’ to George Crabbe “throughout his life” (Pinion 45). By the time Hardy was sixteen, he had read *Iliad*, *Aeneid* and *Old Testament* thoroughly, which prove his extraordinary eagerness for studies and his unquenchable thirst for knowledge. Florence Emily Hardy refers to “the peculiarity of his inner life’ at this stage, call it “academic” and writes that he had been living “a triple existence, unusual for a young man – a life twisted for three strands ---- the professional life, the scholar life and the rustic life” (48).

F.B. Pinion states this period of architectural tutelage is a vital stage in the intellectual expedition of Hardy’s mind. His fellow apprentice, Henry Bestow, had lengthy discussions with him on Philosophy and religion. These discussions, along with his massive scepticism helped him out grow the narrow doctrinal world of traditional Christianity and opened out before him a wider horizon. It was during these years (1862-67) that Hardy completed his read Darwin, Spencer Huxley, Mill and Comte intensively and thus kept abreast of the most current currents of thoughts and ideas. This also helped him to grow an inquisitive attitude toward God, religion, nature and the cosmos, states Florence Emily Hardy (97). It was this earnest interest in scientific investigations and advance thoughts of the time which got embedded into his mind and goaded him to evolve his own concept of the Evolution of Consciousness. As a result of these readings, influences and impressions of various stalwarts among whom Comte, Darwin and Spencer are outstanding, Hardy’s views regarding traditional Christianity and the origin of man underwent a sea-change (Millgate 108). The publication of Darwin’s two books--- *The Origin of Species* in 1859 and *Essays and Reviews* in 1860 evoked Hardy’s enthusiastic response and he found himself in a state of intellectual awakening. Darwin’s theory of

evolution confirmed Hardy's own evolutionary ideas and he became one of the earliest acclaimer of *The Origin of Species* (Millgate 89).

The role of Hardy's close friend, Horace Moule, in Hardy's intellectual formation was decisive and perennial. It was Moule who encouraged Hardy to debate and discuss modern thoughts with him and introduced him to the evolutionary ideas of the contemporary intellectuals. Under Moule's mentorship, Hardy became a serious and regular reader of the Journal, *Saturday Review*, in which Moule published essays and articles on science and religion. He introduced Hardy to all the radical, philosophical and theological writings of the times. It was in Moule's company that Hardy's uncommonly sharp native intellect began to deduce his own concepts and ideas. The impact of Horace Moule on Hardy's intellectual formation was so indelible that Irving Howe comments: "Upon Hardy the effect of Horace Moule was to crack, once and for all, the surface of orthodoxy, thereby opening him to the harsher battering of outright scepticism" (45). In fact Moule stirred Hardy's exceptionally powerful brain by introducing him to Comte's philosophy. He gave Hardy a copy of Comte's *A General View of Positivism* translated by J.H. Bridges (46). Florence Emily Hardy highlights the profound impact of Comte on Hardy's evolutionary perceptions in his life and stresses how some of Comte's expressions "passed into his vocabulary" imperceptibly. She explains the reasons that "he had lately been reading Comte's Positive Philosophy". Hardy was greatly influenced by Comte's analysis of the concept of altruism, that confirmed his own melioristic ideas. He believed the higher impulses of man would, in due of time, lead to the world's amelioration by bringing about a positive change in people's attitude. That Hardy vetoes Comte's positivism as having "the germs of a true system" becomes evident from his diary entry, dated 29th November, 1880. For him, Comte's Positive Philosophy came to serve as a collection of the true laws governing the natural functioning of society. As such, Hardy's

own convictions were confirmed and fortified by Comte's ideas that a positive system can help man confront the harsh realities of life through sympathetic attitude and evolved thinking.

Apart from Comte, another significant impact on Hardy's thinking was that of Charles Darwin. Darwin's postulates clarified and confirmed Hardy's ideas regarding evolution and growth of human consciousness. If one considers Comte's *Positive Philosophy* (published 1853) to be the first step to Hardy's introduction to evolutionary philosophy, the second significant stage started with his attentive reading of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (published 1859). As a result of Hardy's reading of Darwin, his views got scientific confirmation that it was not God but the ever-evolving impulses and ideas in man that lead to the amendment of the world. The comments of F.B. Pinion highlight the significance of Darwin's impact on Hardy: "The evolutionary ideas of Darwin proved no less that revolutionary for Hardy and helped him feel confirmed in his view" (66). Florence Emily Hardy testifies that "as a young man, he had been among the earliest acclaimers" of *The Origin of Species* (67). Hardy was so much impressed and influenced by Charles Darwin that he "attended his funeral in Westminster Abbey" when he died on April 26, 1882 (68). Darwin's book became, as Norman Page puts in pertinently, "the gospel" of Hardy (59).

The famous novelist, George Meredith, who himself was "a staunch believer in the progress of race and the upward march of humanity", guided Hardy on the subject of writing novels (Pinion 48). It is in this context that Hardy's stay in London proved to be a crucial turning point, says Michael Millgate (291). In 1880, Hardy became the member of the prestigious Seville Club where all the literary, scientific and intellectual luminaries used to gather. There he got introduced to, George Smith, Aldous Huxley, Matthew Arnold, Browning, Tennyson, J.R. Lowell and others. Thus, through the contact with the

brightest minds of the time, Hardy advanced towards achieving a mature vision of life and finally, came out to be, in the words of Pinion, “an independent thinker” (51) This period proved to be that of his most rapid intellectual development that prepared him for the venture of creative writing. He found himself in the vortex of advanced ideas through his interaction of thoughts with these intellectuals (Pinion 56)

Till date, Hardy remains one of the most widely-read English novelists, and his works till draw the attention of innumerable scholars and critics. One of Hardy’s earliest critics, Lionell Johnson opined, way back in 1894, “Hardy chooses to present the play of life, tragic and comic, first of all, in a definite tract of country of England. Secondly, he takes for his chief characters, men of powerful natures, men of the country, men of little acquired virtue in mind or soul, men disciplined by the facts and by the necessities of life, as a primitive experience manifests them. He brings upon the scene women of various natures, less plainly marked in character than the men, but nearer to stronger and finer men, in the depth of their souls” (qtd. by Cox 98). D.H. Lawrence, while commenting on the works of Hardy, describes “typical characters” like Michael Henchard, Jude Fawley, Gabriel oak, etc. as “aristocrats and individuals” and “against the mess”, as “a man of distinct being, who must act in his own particular way to fulfil his own individual nature rather than a selfish, greedy person” (45).

Hardy was a social novelist, concerned with the vital issues of the day, viz. education of the working class and marriage laws (*Jude*), agricultural conditions (*Tess*), and so on. “The trouble is, one never gets the sense that Hardy believes that reform in these areas will improve the human condition more than fractionally”, says Patricia Stubbs (133). Stubbs also notices that Hardy’s female characters are repeatedly depicted as the centre of his novels’ fictional world.... When writing about women, Hardy took a keen

interest and created beloved, tender characters, such as Eustacia Vye and Tess Durbeyfield” (135).

H.C. Duffin notes: “It is not Hardy who treats his women cruelly, but life --- life as hardy saw it. What Hardy could do to his women he did – he made them full of beauty, interest, fascinating and lovable qualities of all kinds, and let them (generally) to play their parts well. His estimate of women is high, but tempered and conditioned by keen observation of the realities round him..... Hardy is not a misogynist, but a true lover of every deed” (168).

John Holloway shared Duffin’s views on Hardy’s attitude towards women: “As a writer of novels, Thomas Hardy was endowed with a precious gifts: he liked women” (108). It was his affection for women that made him an early feminist, Holloway believes.

Talking about Hardy being “an early feminist” (Holloway 108), one might quote Penny Boumelha, a noted Hardy scholar: “Hardy was not a pioneer in the debate on women’s rights and marriage laws in the press and Parliament in the 1880s and 1890s, but he was certainly part of the dialogue. Because of his willingness to address sensitive issues regarding social expectations and sexually, Hardy was soon depicted as a willing conscript in the so-called “Anti-Marriage League” of moral sceptics and social critics identified in the 1890s as crusading conservatives” (119). She goes on to add, “Character after character experiences desires as force overmastering individual will..... Stunned, mesmerized, dizzied by desire, these characters act under the power of a kind of natural law that at once motivates and undermines the making and unmaking of their socially ratified relationships” (121). Thus, from Cythrea Gray of his first novel, *Desperate Remedies*, to Sue Bridehead of the last novel, *Jude*, Hardy “demonstrates the evolution of women’s emergence as independent-minded individuals as well as the destructive repercussions created by a society unwilling to embrace a natural element that cannot be

easily contained or controlled” (Ingram 215). Rosemarie Morgan asserts that Hardy “took advantage of the changing attitudes regarding sexual issues” in the last two decades of the nineteenth century: “... his writing tends to empower readers to a sense of omnipotence and consequently, to an emotional generosity and compassion for the human struggle in perspective” (145). Hardy was “... keenly aware of the radically changing world at the end of the Victorian era as well as the struggles women faced I their evolution from a subservient role to the empowered ‘New Woman’ figure” (Stubbs 176). The “New Woman” was a phrase that described an economically independent woman who stood socially and educationally equal among men. In this sense, Bathsheba Everdene of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, who is the owner and manager of Weatherbury farm, is the first Hardyian ‘New Woman’ heroine, educated and financially independent, besides being dazzlingly beautiful. However, unlike “Sarah Grand” (Marie Frances Chavelita Clairmonte), a minor English novelist of the 1890s, Hardy “held no feminist agenda --- Only a respect for strong women and disgust for a world that expected them to be submissive and silent” (Ingram 217). The author of one of Hardy’s biographies, Claire Tomalin, perhaps phrased it best when she titled her book “*Thomas Hardy: The Time-Torn Man*” (emphasis mine). Tomalin asserts that Hardy was “both fascinated and fearful of the “New Woman”, i.e., the man born in 1840 had strong social moorings that could not topple his fascination for the new role that his contemporary women were increasingly donning.

Nothing his sensitivity to the social upheavals and his novel’s ongoing revisions until the end of his life, Rosemarie Morgan asserts that Hardy can be described as a Janus faced man, who could neither overcome the past fully nor could close his eyes to the emerging future vis-à-vis women. In her introduction of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Morgan states that his writing “tends to empower readers to a sense of omnipotence and

consequently, to an emotional generosity and a compassion for the human struggle in perspective (xxv).

Patricia Ingram agrees with Rosemarie Morgan that Hardy “took advantage of the growing acceptance of sexual topics to write more boldly of his true feelings regarding sexual maturity” (xx). Hardy had firsthand acquaintance with the economic hardships suffered by rural women as well as their pragmatic attitude towards sexual peccadilloes. This knowledge about the rural society, coupled with his acquaintance with educated and cultured women in London, “encouraged the development of strikingly unconventional conceptions of women and sexuality in his novels” (124).

Mary Jacobus attributed Hardy’s “compassionate identification with his heroine with an authorial allegiance to a living, breathing, sentient woman who evades extraordinary standards of Judgement” (321). She asserts that Hardy does not idealize Tess, but rather, he “humanizes” her; and asserts that Sue’s “tormented consciousness haunts more than Jude’s bitter oblivion, because Hardy’s most intense feeling is with the loser” (322).

Kate Millet agrees with Hardy’s concern for women: “Heartsick at the world’s cruelty or worse, indifference, Hardy solaced himself by creating feminine softness and constancy. He found a recurrent consolation in rendering with loving exactness, through the mediation of these imaginary women, the sensations of the castaway” (27).

Hardy’s novel writing career ended in 1895, after the publication of his last novel, *Jude*. It almost coincided with the close of the Victorian era. But even today, after more than a hundred years, he remains at the centre of discourses by various critics, which only goes to show the spell his characters, particularly his women characters, cast. He seemed strangely aloof from, yet keenly aware of the changing social attitudes and women’s

struggles to explore their individual identity as the Victorian era looked forward to the modern times.

Hardy is known for his depictions of nature and women of all social classes in the Victorian era. He remains one of the most influential writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He was both saddened and enraged by the hypocrisy of moral standards established by the Victorian patriarchs, and wrote of the damaging consequences suffered by women directly. He also explored in his novels the negative impact of society's harsh judgement on women's sexuality, marriage and desire. Decades before the phrase The New Woman, originated, Thomas Hardy was writing of strong, independent minded women determined to live life on their own terms, viz. Bathsheba Everdene, Eustacia Vye Viviette Constantine, Paula Power, et al. The New Woman was not new to Thomas Hardy; she was the emergence of a phenomenon long suppressed and shifted by the antique conventions and traditions of Victorian society.

In his novels, Hardy was torn between his desire to portray women as capable and intelligent, while preserving his own essentialist ideas. Through his works, he offered his women a voice reflecting their eagerness to shatter the shackles of conventionality. One of his most famous heroines, Bathsheba Everdene, best articulates women's difficulty in expressing themselves. In her desperate efforts to dissuade Farmer Boldwood from his obsessive marriage proposal in *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874), Bathsheba exclaims, "It is difficult for a woman to define her feelings in a language which is chiefly made by men to express theirs" (308). The growth and development of the empowered woman with a voice of her own was a gradual process, which can be interpreted as a reflection of Darwin's theory of evolution, believes Patricia Stubbs (271). It takes time and a good deal of effort to create an environment in which women could live with recognition and equality.

The emergence and evolution of the New Woman, and a sense of female empowerment, are common themes in most of Hardy's Wessex novels. He was keenly aware of the radically changing social norms at the end of the Victorian era as well as the obstructions women had to confront to evolve from a subservient role to an empowered New Woman figure.

Hardy was born at the height of English rule, in 1840, and he lived to see its decline, dying in 1928 at the ripe old age of eighty-eight. He was steeped in Victorian ideals of societal structure on one hand and on the other demonstrated an acceptance and understanding of the changing expectations of human nature in modern times. At the time of his birth (1840), it was considered wanton for a woman to expose her ankles in public, and at the time of his death (1928) "...flappers were dancing the Charleston" (Ingmar 213). The author of one of his biographies, Claire Tomalin, rightly calls him "The Time-Torn Man".

A quiet, unassuming man, Hardy challenged the rigid code of Victorian moral standards in his writing. Each of his novels grows progressively more revealing, highlighting the hypocrisy and futility of the era's double moral standards and oppression of women, culminating in the revolutionary storylines of his last two works. Through his factorial characters, Hardy dares his readers to reflect upon the damaging consequence of social expectations on all humanity and especially on women.

Kristin Brady points out that Havelock Ellis "summarized as aspect of Hardy's writing that was endlessly intriguing to the Victorian readers: here was a male writer offering a style of writing and of plot construction that was considered to be exclusively female" (95). Hardy, in a letter to Millicent Garrett Fawcett, a prominent suffragist, who was planning to publish a pamphlet devoted to the views of eminent men on the issues of women's suffrage, wrote that "I have for a long time been in favour of women-

suffrage..... because the tendency of the woman's vote will be to break up the present pernicious conventions in respect of manners, customs, religion, illegitimacy, the stereotyped household". He adds that by asserting themselves, women "will loosen the tongues of men who have not liked to speak out on such subjects, while women have been their helpless dependants" (qtd. by Cox 192).

Havelock Ellis a renowned social reformer, physician, and expert on human sexuality, wrote an appreciation of Hardy's work in 1882 when *Two on a Tower* was first published. Ellis noted that Hardy's work demonstrated such a deep understanding of the female mind that many readers thought that the author was a woman. Ellis wrote, "the minute observation, the delicate insight, the conception of love as the one business of life, and a singularly charming reticence in its delineation, are qualities which, if not universally characteristic of woman's work in fiction, are such as might with propriety be attributed to it—at all events from an *a priori* standpoint". (qtd. by Cox. 169). Reviewing the characteristics of Hardy's creations from his first published novel, Ellis noted the evolution of the characters, particularly the heroines. He commented that Hardy's insight into the female psyche made the author not only an artist but a psychoanalyst as well. He called the Hardyian heroines "simple, charming untamed children of Nature" (170). The untamed element in a child of nature is embedded in majority of Hardy's female protagonists. For example, Bathsheba Everdene who "observed herself as a fair product of Nature in a feminine direction" (*Far from the Madding Crowd* 6), is also the same young woman who "was going to be a governess once, only she was too wild" (25). Ellis re-read Hardy's works in 1896, following the publications of *Tess* and *Jude*. He extolled both the works, calling *Jude* "the greatest novel in England for many years" (qtd. by Cox 172). He argued that the book demonstrated "a fine self-restraint, a complete mastery of all the elements of an exceedingly human story" (173). He lambasted Hardy's critics for accusing

him of writing with sexually-charged sensationalism, reminding that previous works once regarded as scandalous, such as *Tom Jones*, *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, were later revered as classics of English literature. Ellis also addressed the evolution of Hardy's writing: "The progress of his art has consisted in bringing this element of nature into ever closer contact with the rigid routine of life, making it more human, making it more moral or more immoral. It is an inevitable progression" (qtd .by Cox178). Acknowledging the author's genius, Ellis was among the foremost critics to recognize accurately. Hardy's contribution to the feminist movement and the creation of the New Woman.

Nothing his portrayal of strong-minded women defying traditional expectations in their struggle to gain recognition and respect, another contemporary critic joined Ellis in his favourable commentary on Hardy's works. In his critique, *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, R.G. Cox includes Coventry Patmore's observations regarding Hardy's portrayal of the New Woman. Ironically, the author of "The Angel in the House," the series of poems which depict the ideal wife and mother as selfless and devoted, and which subsequently became a cornerstone of Victorian culture, believed there was something positive in Hardy's rebellious heroines. Cox observes that Patmore held the unconventional opinion that an entirely proper and pure Victorian woman was not necessarily happy fulfilled. By denying her negative emotions, she risked inhibiting her potential to fully embrace love. Patmore noted, "It is in his heroines, however that hardy is most original and delightful.... Each has the charm of the simplest and most familiar womanhood, and the only character they have in common is that of having each some serious defect, which only makes us like them more.... He [Hardy] is too rich in human tenderness not to know that love never glows with its fullest ardour unless it has something dreadful to forgive" (148).

Like Ellis, Patmore believed that it was their partial failure to adhere to social and moral conventions that Hardy's heroines are most human, most natural, most likeable.

However, not all contemporary critics shared Ellis's and Patmore's positive perspectives on the women in Hardy's works. Most of the reviews, particularly regarding his later works, were harsh and hostile. The conservative critic and author, Mrs Margaret Oliphant, wrote an article, titled "The Anti-Marriage League" in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1896, one year after the publication of Hardy's last novel.. She asserted that Hardy's male characters were victims of "seductions of sirens" and "remorseless ministers of destiny, these determined operators, managing all of the machinery of life so as to be secure in their own way" (qtd. Cox 260). Oliphant further stated, "we rather think the author's object must be having glorified women by the creation of Tess, to show after all what destructive and ruinous creatures they are, in general circumstances and in every development, whether brutal or refined". Oliphant's criticism of Hardy's works was typical of Victorian Society stern social code: women should be subservient to men, compliant and without complaint. Otherwise, they become "sirens" taking control of the "machinery of life," who should be virulently avoided, if not completely destroyed. Though Mrs. Oliphant reflected the majority opinion, perspectives on the New Woman's role in society were gradually changing. The rigid patriarchs began to reconsider where they stood vis-à-vis the marriage question and the role of women in general. Hardy's unconventional heroines were part of that process (Boumelha 271).

Hardy somehow accepted the negative reviews in 1891 after *Tess* was published, but the torrent of abusive comments that followed the publication of *Jude* in 1895 proved more than he could bear, and he decided to give up novel writing altogether (Florence Emily Hardy 318). The end of his career as a novelist coincided with the close of the Victorian era. Regardless of his personal opinion regarding society in general and women

in particular, his works were used as augmentative argument in the Women's Rights Movement. Feminists of the era quoted works to explore viewpoints regarding marriage laws, divorce proceedings, suffrage and women's equality in education and career opportunities (272). After the publication of *Tess* in 1891, Hardy was requested to become the Vice President of the Women's Progressive Society, an invitation he politely refused: - "While he valued women, he held no aspirations to promote their political agenda", asserts Patricia Stubbs (245). This was a fountainhead of contention with his wife, Emma, who remained active in the suffragist movement until the end of her life (Florence Emily Hardy 342). In 1894, she wrote to her friend Mary Haweis that her husband's interest in women's suffrage was "nil" and that he cared "only about the women he invented... others not at all" (Tomalin 251). Hardy's wife was dissatisfied with his near-nothing participation in the women's movement, and was she was even more disgusted that he "cared deeply for his fictional heroines" (257).

Feminist critics of the 1970s cited the works of Thomas Hardy in support of women's liberation. Mary Jacobus attributed Hardy's compassionate identification with his heroine with an authorial allegiance to a breathing, sentient woman [which] evades external standards of judgement" (321). Jacobus contented that Hardy did not attempt to idealize Tess, but rather, he humanizes her, not hesitating to portray her as having feelings of intense passion that ultimately leads to Alec's murder.

Jacobus also made a similar observation about his depiction of Sue: "Hardy is imaginatively generous towards both sides of the struggle, but as always his most intense feeling is for the loser..... Sue's tormented consciousness haunts us more than Jude's bitter oblivion" (324). In 1978, Penny Boumelha agreed about Hardy's genuine concern for women. She wrote, "Heartsick at the world's cruelty, or worse, indifference, Hardy solaced himself by creating feminine softness and constancy. He found a recurrent

consolation in rendering with loving exactness, through the mediation of these imaginary women, the sensations of the castaway” (27). This comment recognizes Hardy’s awareness of women’s struggles; he created them as real women whose needs and passions are viewed as natural rather than destructive forces. Thus Jacobus and Boumelha join Ellis and Patmore, across the centuries, in recognizing Hardy’s writings as advocating for women.

However, Emma Tennant, a feminist critic, compares Hardy with the monster Minotaur in wait to devour his victims, “substituting voyeurism for consumption” (qtd. by Cox 120). Tennant suggests that Hardy held an “incestuous obsession with his own creation.... His is the male controlling imagination that devours woman in its lair: Monster eats the Muse” (123). The radically different assessments of Women’s studies regarding Hardy’s heroines amply demonstrate the paradoxes of a man who seemed strangely aloof yet keenly aware of changing social mores and women’s ground-breaking positions at the turn of the century.

One of the most eminent exponents of liberal feminism was John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). Mill was a nineteenth-century British philosopher and the writer of “On Liberty” (1859) and “The Subjection of Women” (1869), who is identified by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar as the most arduous representation of feminism in nineteenth century Britain (34).

It is clear that Hardy felt great affinity with Mill. In a letter to Ernest Brennecke in 1924, Hardy wrote that, “My pages show harmony of view with Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, Comte, Hume, Mill and others” (qtd. by 386). In 1865, when he was a young man, Hardy met Mill, who was speaking to the public in London. On 21 May 1906, the 100th anniversary of John Stuart Mill’s birth, Hardy wrote a letter about Mill that was printed in *The Times*. In this letter Hardy writes that Mill is one of the profoundest thinkers of the last

century and said that he knew Mill's treatise "On Liberty" "almost by heart" (Florence Emily Hardy 140). Thus he makes Sue Bridehead, the revolutionary heroine of his last novel, *Jude*, recite Mill almost verbatim in her arguments and debates with Jude and Phillotson.

The affinity between Mill and Hardy may be related to the question of women. Gilbert and Gubar argue that "in his novels, Hardy, like John Stuart Mill, attacks the subjection of women, making a powerful case against the hypocritical mores that compel a woman to make an advantageous marriage in order to better her life, and against standards that view a seduced woman as a 'fallen' one" (5). Hardy's critics almost unanimously consider Mill as one "of those writers who most notably influenced Hardy" (6).

In their writings, Hardy and Mill comment on the current condition of society and suggest how the world ought to be. They attempt to give people a new perspective on the lives and relationship between men and women, and women's appropriate position in society. Hardy, in a letter to the novelist and dramatist Arnold Bennett wrote, "I think better of the world, as a meliorist. The instinct of self-preservation and an ultimate common-sense at present obscured, will I think hinder the evils foretold from arising" (qtd. by Pinion 132).

The various critical views on Hardy's works, spanning the course of more than a century, reflect the ambiguities that were dominant in the author himself. He has been accused of being a misogynist as well as lauded as an advocate for women, especially the downtrodden ones. This "time-torn man" (to borrow the name of Claire Tomalin's biography of Hardy) was both attracted and repulsed by the aggressive New Woman, who appeared both in fictional and real life, who could neither be suppressed nor easily accepted; but had to be given the position, however grudgingly.

Chapter III

Rebels with a Cause: Maggie Tulliver and Gwendolen Harleth

The Victorian era was massively conservative. The role of women in the Victorian era was confined to giving birth to children and taking care of the house, while men enjoyed the economic and political power. The perfect, ideal wife, according to the Victorian moralists, was one who was her husband's property. Women who deviated from this narrow definition of ideal wife were branded as virile. One such woman was George Eliot, who provoked a huge hue and cry by dint of her unconventional lifestyle. But she was not the person to deviate from her chosen path due to public outcry, but continued her illegal liaisons with impunity. From an author of such strong convictions, it is only to be expected that her heroines would be strong enough to confront the restricting atmosphere of their homes and of the society at large, giving a clarion call to their real-life compatriots to struggle against male hegemony.

George Eliot believed in "social efficacy and truth in art" (qtd. by Pinney 32). She highly appreciated John Ruskin's "doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, especially in its human manifestations", which deserves "reverence" ; and that "what is beyond the self is essential to personal and social equilibrium" (371). In her famous article, "The Natural History of German Life", she wrote: "...a picture of human life such as a great artist can give, surprises even the trivial and the selfish into that attention which is apart from themselves, which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment" (270).

However, Eliot also conceded that it is impossible to express complete truthfulness of life by any kind of artist---- "painter, poet, or novelist", since life is much more complex than any artist can express it in any art form. Hence Eliot "resorts tosuggest a

determination to be as full and faithful in narrating experience as possible”, though she insisted that “realistic novels are peculiarly authentic because their conventions of reading and writing assume an unusual concentration upon circumstantial and psychological detail (281). She evidently assumed that certain features of experience are relatively constant, particularly “the perennial human nature” to which it appeals, and that art could “discriminate” between what is “vital” in life and its “more transient forms” (262).She asserts that “we get interested in the stories that life presents to us through diverse orders and modes of presentation” and that “narrative structures rationalise and reinforce associative processes” and thus “imitate or repeat fundamental tendencies in the mind” (321).

George Eliot’s fiction aspires to a full description not only of the circumstances of life but also of its impact upon individual consciousnesses. Her emphasis is upon the interconnectedness of “external conditions and internal conditions”, of “mind and circumstances” (287). This relationship was, she believed, a particularly appropriate subject for the novelist, because this particular genre is capable of analysing both psychological and social mores.

Gordon S. Haight, Eliot’s most renowned biographer, informs that Eliot was “always suspicious of sudden social change and political intervention, kept aloof from the public campaigns of her times that were held to improve women’s lives, expressed her reservation about the consequences of women’s education when her close friend, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, the noted suffragist, took large initiative to set up Girton College in Cambridge for women’s education in 1869” informs her (178). He and goes on to add : “ For man many people, both then and now, Eliot’s ambivalence is doubly odd given that

she chose to live her own life, scandalously living with a married man with children” (179).

In both *The Mill on the Floss* (henceforth referred to as *The Mill*) and *Daniel Deronda* (henceforth referred to as *DD*) George Eliot depicts the time she herself lived in-- mid-nineteenth century. Both the novels portray how in these highly conservative times, the sternly patriarchal society ruthlessly relegated women to the fringes. Women were socially and psychologically oppressed by the male dominant social set-up, and any attempt to rise above the oppressive forces were curbed mercilessly. Both Maggie and Gwendolen discover, to their utter dismay, that they are vehemently denied their individual existence in society. They must be dictated what to do, ordered what not to do, and guided at every step by the male members of the family. Being conscious of themselves more than the average woman, both rebel against the suffocating atmosphere to get a foothold of their own.

The Mill, published in 1860, is generally considered to be George Eliot’s most autobiographical novel, in which the protagonist, Maggie Tulliver, is endowed with some of the characteristics of her author. Like Maggie, Eliot had been criticised from her childhood for not being blonde, her acute intelligence went unrecognized, her independent opinions regarding religion and spirituality drew flak, and her romantic liaisons with several men and particularly her live-in relationship with a married man, George Lewis, created a furore in the conservative England of mid-nineteenth century. Maggie undergoes almost all these negative experiences in her short life of nineteen years (Haight 100). Right from her childhood (at the beginning of the novel she is nine-years old) Maggie displays uncommon courage, which is regarded as disobedience by her family, especially by her aunts. She disobeys her mother’s instructions to “brush [your] hair” “wear a clean

pinafore” “do patchwork” “don’t throw down your bonnet there, take it upstairs” “change your shoes” “do, for shame”, etc. (*The Mill* 25, 27, 30, 36, 42). She, more often than not, is “out of hearing” before her “plump, fair, healthy and dull-witted mother” can “finish her remonstrance” (*The Mill* 20, 25). While Mrs. Tulliver is exasperated with her daughter to no end, Mr. Tulliver, Maggie’s father, always “takes her side” (*The Mill* 46). He confidently asserts that his darling daughter is “a straight, black-eyed wench” and not “half an idiot” as his wife calls her; tells her to “cut off short” [Maggie’s] dark heavy locks” when Mr. Tulliver complains her hair won’t curl, all I can do with it”, and “laughs audibly”, drawing “a feeble remonstrance” from his wife – “you encourage her in naughtiness” (*The Mill* 26).

Tom, Maggie’s elder brother, who is three years senior to her, calls her “Miss Spitfire” on several occasions (*The Mill* 37, 42, 52, 65). Though Maggie has a very deep attachment with her brother, she is often “naughty” with him too, as Tom goes on listing:- “you licked the paint off my lozenge-box.. let the boat drag my fish line down when I’d set you to watch it.... you pushed your head through my kite...” (*The Mill* 47). She even forgets to feed Tom’s rabbits and the poor creatures die of starvation. Tom is justifiably very angry, but Maggie’s genuine repentance and bitter sobbing ultimately melt his heart to forgiveness and thus “ended the sorrow of his day” (*The Mill* 55).

“Poor Maggie’s life is a “troublous” one, as her creator remarks repeatedly (*The Mill* 7, 42, 51, 65, 80 92, 178, 191, 245). Her three maternal aunts admonish her constantly, find fault with everything, even with her physical appearance – her black eyes, black hair and dark complexion, all of which she inherits from her father, while Tom inherits his mother’s physical traits—fair and blonde, with deep blue eyes. She is constantly, compared and vehemently criticized for her unruly behaviour) with her cousin Lucy, a blonde, fair, blue-eyed girl, who is obedient and docile, though only one year

younger to Maggie. The family members, who refuse to look beyond physical attributes, never discuss about giving these two girls a full formal education. Even Mr. Tulliver, who is well aware of Maggie's uncommon intelligence, knows that she can "read and write like a parson" and "do Maths and Latin better than Tom" (*The Mill* 24), decides to "give Tom a good eddication [sic] and make him a scollard [sic]" (*The Mill* 48), because he feels that "an over-^cute [acute] woman is no better than a long-tailed sheep --- she'll fetch none the bigger prince for that" (*The Mill* 24). Thus right from her childhood she is relegated to a backward, inferior position in relation to Tom, who too readily asserts his superiority over her in everything. Maggie keenly feels the "disadvantages and deprivations she has to face in a man's world" (Haight 52). Mr. Stelling, Tom's school teacher, makes her feel that "women are silly and of no consequences" (*The Mill* 36). While she struggles to hear "a word of appreciation", all she gets in "constant criticism" for her looks and behaviour (Booth 13).

Incessant negativity will have its damaging consequences. Maggie's vehement frustration for being constantly jeered at reaches its nadir the day the three aunts and uncles come to their home and the aunts shower their snide remarks about her hair. In utmost irritation, Maggie "runs to her mother's room upstairs, followed by Tom", takes out "a large pair of scissors from a drawer" and to Tom's curious question: "What are they for, Maggie?", she answers by "seizing her front locks and cutting them straight across the middle of her forehead" (*The Mill* 74). She then asks Tom to "cut it from behind for me", which he does with pleasure, and soon Maggie "stood cropped in a jugged, uneven manner, but with a sense of clearness and freedom" (75).

Barbara Hardy feels that "the only way by which Maggie can get some recognition for her right to freedom is by harming herself" (49). When she comes down to dinner after a little while, she becomes the cynosure of all eyes, as one relative after another goes on

hurting her nonchalantly. Tom “laughs and jumps around her, slapping his knees” (*The Mill* 75), Uncle Glegg exclaims, “what little (girl) is this?”, and Aunt Glegg thunders, “fie, for shame!..... little girls as cur their hair, should be whipped”, Aunt Pullet remarks, “she’s more like a gypsy”, and her mother laments, “she’s a naughty child.... She’ll break her mother’s heart” (*The Mill* 76). Nobody considers the impact of their harshness to the little sensitive soul. Unable to withstand this volley of rebukes, “Poor Maggie ran to her father, hid her face in his shoulder, and burst into land robbing” (76). Only Mr. Tulliver gives her the affection the little heart is yearning for. He pats his “darling wench” and says “soothingly, ‘Niver [sic] mind, you were right to cut it off if it plagued you” (77).

Rosemary Ashton notices the typical Victorian mindset in Mr. Tulliver, who supports his daughter wholeheartedly in small affairs, gives her freedom to do anything with her personal appearance, but cannot dream of giving her a proper education and subsequently, financial independence. All he can think about her is to “get her settled in a good marriage’ (92). Neither can Maggie demand to be properly educated, in spite of knowing that “father ‘ll take your side” (*The Mill* 77); she must remain satisfied with Tom’s old books and the village school she attends, while Tom is sent to an expensive boarding school far from home, “her own moorings in the patriarchal society being too strong to overcome” (Beer 87). George Levine, a prominent Eliot scholar, criticises Eliot for denying Maggie “the advantage of education” in the “autobiographical novel” in spite of she herself being a highly educated woman (104).

Eliot endows Maggie with uncommon courage, though. A few days after the hair cutting incident, Maggie does something even more “punishable” (as per Aunt Pullet) – she runs away from home and reaches the tents of a group of gypsies. A gypsy man drives her back home on a donkey. On the way they meet Mr. Tulliver, who was returning home too, on horseback. As Maggie runs to her father, she confesses that she “ran away because

Tom was so angry with me, I could not bear it” (*The Mill* 122). Mr. Tulliver assuages the battered little soul by saying, “Niver [sic] think of running away.... What’d father do without his little wench?” and “spoke his mind very strongly when he reached home” (*The Mill* 123). In the stubbornly patriarchal Victorian society, it is the father and not the mother, who lends a shoulder to the daughter to cry upon. Barbara Hardy believes that it is this bedrock support that Maggie gets from her father that actually gives her strength to be independent and courageous, because she knows, whatever happens, “father’ll take your side” (*The Mill* 74) as Mr. Tulliver openly promises “with sincere affection”, says Mary Jacobus (99).

As Maggie grows up, she displays remarkable maturity that is unexpected at the tender age of thirteen. When Mr. Tulliver loses his lawsuit with Mr. Waken and loses his cherished Dorlcote Mill (where he has “stayed for your generations”) the family falls into dire financial straits (*The Mill* 236) s . As a result Tom is withdrawn from Mr. Stelling’s school and there is no question of Maggie attending even the inexpensive village school. They have to sell most of their belongings to pay off the debts, and Mr. Tulliver gets “very ill” after “falling off from his horse” and “knows nobody but me”, as Maggie tells Tom (*The Mill* 206).

On hearing about the disaster, the aunts and uncles flock in, but all they do is to “find fault with my father”, as an indignant Maggie blurts out (218). She “hurls her defiance at uncles and aunts----- “Why do you come if you don’t mean to do anything for my poor mother--- your own sister?” and goes on declaring, in a “vehemently cross tone”- - "Tom and I don’t ever want to have any of your money” (218). Naturally, “in a case of aberration such as this, comment presented itself as an expedient than any answer” “ ‘she’s beyond everything in boldness and thanklessness’ said Aunt Pullet derisively”,

while Aunt Glegg and aunt Deane too, do not lag far behind spewing venom against the hapless family (219).

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar feel that “Maggie’s obstinacy is the only way to maintain her own integrity in the face of coercion” (78). The uncles and aunts represent the patriarchal mindset whose “dominant ideology was to deny women their access to power” (Millet 49). Maggie’s independence of thoughts and the courage of speak out her mind can never be appreciated in such a situation. She is snubbed every time she differs from the ideas of the male members of her family, but she never lets herself to be brow-beaten into servile silence (Banerjee 12). When Mr. Tulliver gets a little better, begins to work as Wakem’s manager in the Dorlcote Mill. Thus he is able to stay in the same home, but the humiliation of being a servant, from the owner of, the mill, galls him deeply. One day he orders Tom to take pledge – “... what Wakem’s done to your father, you’ll make him and his feel it, if every the day comes” and sign his name, in the family *Bible*. Tom agrees too readily, Mrs. Tulliver gets too frightened to intervene, only Maggie tries to remind her father that “It is wicked to curse and bar malice” but the lone voice of sanity falls upon deaf ears (*The Mill* 267). While her father declares decisively “it is not wicked”, her brother orders her to “Hush..... I will write’ (*The Mill* 268). The patriarchal society that denies women every access to power, will not be subservient to female voice, however sane or logical that voice may be (Gilbert and Gubar 91). Tom, in addition to being an obedient son, has also a personal axe to grind -- he immensely dislikes Wakem’s son,, Philip Wakem, an academically bright but hunchbacked boy. Philip was Tom’s schoolmate, but the two boys never became friends. Tom had been jealous of Philip’s academic acuteness and other finer accomplishments like his ability to play the piano, sing, or paint, while Philip was envious of Tom’s athletic build. Thus Tom becomes ‘a willing tool in his father’s hands to wish ill for the Wakems’ (Banerjee 13).

Maggie, who is about fifteen years old by this time, however, has her own head above her shoulders. She does not share her family's hatred to the Wakems. When she meets Philip unexpectedly after all these years in the Red Deeps, the jungle near her home where she goes for an evening walk daily, she is unabashedly happy. She finds a great mental affinity with him, though he is five years older than her. She reads the books he lends her, and enjoys discussing music, art and literature with him. None of her family members—the “sullen” father, the “dull-witted” mother, or the “radamanthine” brother is even aware of her aesthetic and intellectual cravings, let alone fulfil them (*The Mill* 271, 24, 314). In Philip she finds her soul-mate and enjoys his company, though, by this time she has “given up being discontent because I couldn't have my own will”, as she confesses to him (302), and that she has “given up books except a very, very few” (303). Philip immediately gives her “from his pocket a small volume”, *The Pirate*, which Maggie cannot wait to read. But she controls her desire and gives it back to him, saying – “it would make me in love with this world again... it would make me long for a full life” (304). Knowing full well the financial crisis that her family is passing through, she “starves” her mind, as Philip says (306). She reiteratively asserts that “full life is not for me... because I should want too much”, though Philip vehemently rejects her opinion as “narrow asceticism” (307).

Joan Bennett analyses how a very young girl (Maggie is barely seventeen years old now) thinks of surrendering all pleasures of her life at a time when it is time to enjoy life most, simply for her family's dire financial straits well as her father and brother's vicious feelings towards the Wakems (86). So, in order to maintain domestic peace, she has to give up any thought of filling up her mental vacuum through friendship with Philip Wakem (87). “An inward conflict” begins to form in her mind: -- “she might have books, converse, affection But the severe monotonous warning came again and again that she

was losing the simplicity and clearness of her mind.. she was throwing herself under the seductive guidance of illimitable wants” (*The Mill* 324). Bennett observes how a girl as young as Maggie, “whose life has just began to unfold”, thinks of “renunciating pleasure” and “whip herself to asceticism” (193).

Maggie finally “resolves” to say “an affectionate farewell to Philip” and says, with “both sadness and firmness” that they “... must give each other up.. I could not see you without concealment.... And if our secret is discovered, there would be nothing but misery ... dreadful anger [of her father and brother] (*The Mill* 325), knowing full well that her narrow-minded family members would easily overlook her sacrifice of personal pleasure, but will create a furore if she indulges in.

Philip is both sensitive and clear-sighted to see her “unnatural life devoid of anything but duty” (Wayne Booth 18). He repeatedly forbids her to “carry on this self-torture” (*The Mill* 325). He has more “regard and concern” for her than her blood relations as he says to Tom (*The Mill* 356). But Maggie has made up her mind. Also, “the thought of his being her lover never entered into her mind (329).

While George Eliot herself pleads with her readers not to “think too hardly of Philips” (328), Maggie does not meet him till “the following April, nearly a year after” (331). The grit and determination that this young lady shows is commendable, as various Eliot scholars point out (Beer 99; Ashton 263; Haight 144). After such a long gap, she is ‘even more clear about herself’ (Ashton 264), and can candidly say, “I have never thought of your being my lover” (*The Mill* 332). The hurt lover rebukes her severely calling her “self-conquest” “the culture of monomania”, promises to “wait another year... if you will only give me the first place in your heart”, but Maggie “turned away and hurried back home”, though she throws a parting consolation “I should like to make your life very happy” (*The Mill* 334).

Maggie is a sensitive and kind girl, who is “anxious not to leave some painful impressions on Philip’s mind” (Beer 334). To this end she behaves kindly and politely to him, but makes it very clear that to her family comes first, she cannot dream of hurting her father, to whom “..... Wakem was like a disfiguring disease of which he was obliged to endure” (*The Mill* 336). Rosemarie Ashton observes Maggie’s “remarkable filial attachment” which forms the basis of her “moral moorings and self-renunciation” (124). Tom hammers exactly on this soft corner when he threatens her, “You will cause him the blow of knowing that you are a disobedient, deceitful daughter” (*The Mill* 339). Maggie asks, “trembling, ‘does my father know anything?’”. To her immense relief Tom answers in the negative but his next words: “You use deceit towards me” make her “flush with resentment” (338). Her courage (negatively described as “boldness”) by her aunts that was evident from her earliest childhood, has only increased with time. Though she is well conscious of her “clandestine meetings” with Philip, she “haughtily” declares that she does not “wish to use deceit” (338). Her “honest, candid open nature has never been appreciated by her family members” (Mary Jacobus 54). At this critical moment also, there is no exception. Tom jeers at her, but his “severity gave her a certain fund of defiance” (338). “Quiet defiance” usurps her “haughtiness” as she “quietly” confesses that they have first meet “a year ago”, Philip told her that “he loved me” and that she told him “that I loved him too” (*The Mill* 339).

Tom is understandably “thunderstruck cannot fathom how to rein in this far from orthodox lass” (Bennett 134). He fails to appreciate Maggie’s candid truthfulness, rather interprets it as “shamelessness” (134). The patriarchal mindset cannot gauge a woman’s independent will or action. A woman, perforce, has to go by the diktats of the male members of the family, without having the least iota of independent desire – Tom cannot come out of this conventional attitude towards women. “The masculine hegemony

which denies a woman her independent existence/ opinion” (Aksca and Gunez 44) reaches its zenith when he gives Maggie the “alternative of choosing” – “You will never have another meeting or speak another word in private with Philip Wakem, or you refuse, and I will tell father everything” (*The Mill* 339).

Maggie’s sharp mind zeroes in on the word “private” and she replies, “I give you my word not to meet him or write to him again “*without your knowledge*” with “quiet dignity” (*The Mill* 340, emphasis mine). Tom, in his “indignation” and “derision” (339) fails to realize the true import of her words. He marches along with her to the Red Deeps, meets Philip and insults him viciously, being mean enough to ridicule his deformity. Maggie, as expected, cannot remain a mute spectator – she has “some feelings for Philip” (340). She has resolved to give up the pleasure of simple friendship, but not her dignity and humanity. All her “pent-up, long fathered irritation turn into vehemence” as she vehemently chides Tom, pointing out that his behaviour is “unmanly” “detestable”, “despicable”, while “proudly” refusing “to defend [my] self” (341). Both Rosemary Ashton and Gillian Beer appreciate the courage, grit and determination that this teenage girl displays, at a time when the idea of male dominance was at full swing and women expressing their independent opinion was an unthinkable phenomenon (Ashton 222; Beer 39). Her “resentment” at her “coarse and narrow minded brother” catalysing the “forced separation from Philip” results in her violent burst when she says that she herself has “feelings that you would be better for if you had them” (*The Mill* 342). At the same time, she also experiences “relief” in this “forced separation”, The clear, honest, candid mind which flinches at any thought of deceit, finds that “deliverance from concealment... welcome at any cost” (345). But the honesty, the clarity, the sensitivity towards others—these sterling qualities go unnoticed, unneeded by Tom (and the Victorian society at large, largely because she is a woman. Gilbert and Gubar argue that by fighting to find her own

voice in the face of server coercion from Tom, she simply brings the surreptitious to the fore (78). Her grit, which seems “obstinacy” to Tom, is “the only way to maintain her own beliefs” believe Gilbert and Gubar (79).

Three weeks later, Mr. Tulliver dies on the very day he pays the creditors every penny he owned. But before death, he gets the satisfaction of whipping his arch enemy, Mr. Wakem, and bidding Tom to “get back the old mill” (*The Mill* 354). At his death bed, Maggie asks, with “unspeakable anxiety” – “.... dear father, you forgive him?” to which he utters and emphatic “No”, crushing Maggie’s all hopes of reconciliation with the Wakems (355). The girl who earnestly believes “hatred and malice” to be “wicked”, has to reconcile with the idea that there will always be bad blood between the Tullivers and the Wakems. The lone voice of love and positivity is repeatedly subdued and snubbed by negative minds, every resemblance to female dominance is ruthlessly nipped in the bud, but still, can never be forced to surrender to unjust male will. Thus one finds Maggie and Philip meet again after two years, this time by Lucy’s contrivances, and Maggie has the same friendly feelings that she felt for him earlier.

Maggie who is now nineteen years old, and works as a school teacher in a town far away, comes to St. Oggs to spend the vacation with uncle Dean and Lucy. Lucy, who is going to be engaged soon with Stephen guest, the young handsome son of a rich businessman, wants to have Maggie the same marital bliss that she herself would experience soon. To this end she invites Philip to her house. Maggie immediately goes to Tom and says, “I promised, you not to see him without telling you, I am come to tell you that I wish to see him” (386).

Booth notes the enormous sense of truthfulness that Maggie displays, when she could have easily avoided Tom and met Philip, openly, in Lucy’s house (187). But the strong soul that will not play hide and seek, says directly, “..... you can’t judge for me”,

her every word bearing the stamp of self-confidence (*The Mill* 387). She reminds him that “our natures are very different” (386) and repeats that before she goes away “to another situation soon, [I] should like to be friends with him again” (387). She knows her mind clearly, she knows what she wants. She is never hesitant to assert herself when Tom says anything that hurts as well as hardens her (Beer 148). But her “previous emotion about Philip almost effaced” when she meets Stephen Guest, Lucy’s suitor, at her house (374). When Stephen, frankly charmed by this “black-eyed beauty” gives her “a very deep bow”, she blushes to the roots of her hair, but finds “the new experience very agreeable” (374). Eliot takes care to remind the reader that so far a girl, who has never been introduced to urban folk, is rather easily thrown off her feet by the first handsome, able-bodied, non-relation man she meets—“Had Maggie been a thoroughly well educated young lady, with a perfectly balanced mind, who had all the advantages of fortune, training and refined society”, things would have been much different (379). On the other hand, Stephen, in spite of having the advantages of money, education and refinement, cannot turn a blind eye to the natural (not cultured) charms of “this tall, dark-eyed nymph with her jet black coronet of hair” (371). Both of them are well aware that he is Lucy’s suitor and as such must not forge any bond (Aksca and Gunez 150). Maggie tries her best to smother her germinating attraction towards Stephen, but does not succeed entirely. Jacqueline Banerjee feels she is not competent enough to forge her own identify, “having been made half helpless by her attraction towards him” (39). Beer also feels that she is “unequipped” to deal with the situation (149). Though Lucy brings Maggie and Philip together and romantically plans a double wedding (she and Stephen, Maggie and Philip), Maggie decides “to go very soon to a new situation’ (*The Mill* 381). She tells Philip, to his eager question, that “there is nothing to hinder our being friends, Philip, while I am here”, but knows in her mind that “the thought of Philip being her lover never entered her mind”

(383). At the same time, the conscience-stricken girl cannot hide from herself the fact that both she and Stephen are trying their best to smother their affection for each other (Aksca and Gunez 156).

Things reach their zenith when Maggie “elopes” with Stephen -- i.e. goes boating with him and forgets everything until it is very late. With a storm approaching, Stephen believes that they cannot return that night, and are forced to take a big ship and spend the night on the deck, with Maggie fast asleep and Stephen keeping watch throughout the night. In the morning when the ship reaches Mudport, they alight and go to a nearby hotel, where Stephen asks Maggie to marry him. Maggie steadfastly refuses him, saying that they “must part”, though keenly feeling “that the parting could not be effected suddenly, she must rely on a slower appeal to Stephen’s better self” (*The Mill* 465). “There is no seduction, but in Maggie’s masochism, she feels guilt”, says Barbara Hardy (221). The boat trip makes public the feeling that she tried her best to smother. She never really agreed to pamper her feelings and accept Stephen, thinking how that will hurt her dear cousin Lucy as well as hurt Philip’s feelings. Stephen ultimately is forced to let her go, “but still a sense of irrevocableness of her deed haunts her” (222).

Maggie comes back to St. Oggs after five days, having taken the wrong coach and falling ill due to severe stress, being forced to take rest. Stephen does not return to England, but goes to Holland directly from Mudport. Nobody appreciates her huge self-sacrifice—how she turned her back on worldly pleasures goes unnoticed. Tom closes his door on her—“The world must know that I feel the difference between right and wrong” (*The Mill* 475). St. Oggs society is aghast that she returns alone without “a post-marital trousseau, without husband—in that degraded and outcast condition” (480). In short that she refuses to play accordingly to the rules of the society, is what troubles everybody. This courageous girl should conform, is felt by not only Tom but the world at large. Even the

kind Dr. Kenn advises her “to take a situation at a distance” (485). Maggie is treated like dirt that will pollute the entire society. But her “old proud fire flashes out – “I will not go away because people say false things about me”, she declares (486). The world’s harsh judgement once again raises her spirit of resistance, as it formerly did against Tom’s roughness regarding Philip (Bennett 214). Ashton opines that the so-called “elopement” is symbolic of the strong sexual passion that draws the two together, but it also acts as the “cathartic agent by cleansing from Maggie’s mind her nascent attraction/ love for Stephen” (82).

Maggie loves both Philip and Stephen, but cannot accept either of them wholeheartedly. “The reader is evidently invited to form some kind of judgement about the quality and significance of each relationship and each participant” (Aksca and Gunez 151). Probably this is the effect Eliot is seeking to produce, -- her repeated references to Philip “poor crooked little body” throughout the text seem to specify discreetly, but precisely, why Maggie finds Stephen’s “supple Body” and “strength” “so attractive” (*The Mill* 401). However, Stephen’s advantage over Philip is not erotic only; the manliness that Philip lacks and Stephen enjoys is social and financial too – “Stephen can provide her with wealth, ease and refinement” as Maggie wishfully thinks (382).

Maggie makes the supreme sacrifice when she denounces Stephen. Not only she refuses material comfort, but also her reputation and even her home (she has to live with her childhood acquaintance, Bob Jakin and his family, along with her mother, who comes out of Tom’s house to be with her “unhappy child” since Tom “wash[es] his hands off her” (476). But nobody blames Stephen, “young men are liable to sudden infatuous attachments... he is at the mercy of a designing *bold girl*” (481, emphasis mine). The fact that repeatedly comes to the fore is that Maggie’s “unwomanly boldness” in the root cause of all her troubles (482). A woman who refuses to play by the rules of the society can

expect nothing better than “snide remarks” of “the world’s wives” and “open castigation” of Aunt Pullet (483, 486). Eminent critics like F.R. Leavis and Terry Eagleton are perplexed that Maggie falls for a “shallow, egoistical, and naively self-approving” Stephen Guest (Leavis 218). Eagleton goes a step further and describes Stephen as “coxcomb”, taking a cue from Eliot’s own description of him as “Lucy’s half-ardent, half sarcastic lover” (Eagleton 40; *The Mill* 285).

Throughout her very short life (Maggie dies at nineteen) Maggie tries to break through the “meshes of the boring, monstrous, humdrum routine, commonplace, conventional social pattern into which she has been born and with which she is expected to enter into subservient terms” (Beer 28). It is with all these aspects that she feels most painfully out of harmony. “The pent-up poetry in her soul beats its luminous wings against conservatism, of the long established provincial society within which she is confined” (Eagleton 346). However, George Levine notes the source of problems as “conflicts between loyalty and old commitment and acceptance of new ones” (78). Thus her inability to forget Philip and Lucy, and to accept Stephen. However Levine considers Stephen to be “too unequal to Maggie” (31) and Ashton feels that her susceptibility to the allure of Stephen is largely product of “the narrowness of her mind” (82). In other words, had Maggie got the advantage of higher education and exposure to the larger world, she would not have found Stephen so adorable.

From the very beginning Maggie is confronting not only the expectation of her society, but also of her gender. Thus she is removed from adult male conversation of Mr. Stelling and Mr. Tulliver Tom’s education and relegated to do domestic duties with her mother. Her refusal to adhere to the domestic constraints finds her being “identified with the difficult and the devilish, swept aside of her family home (124), Despite her academic capability and high intelligence, she is pushed aside to make way to her brother’s

education, even though Tom is “slow with his tongue... reads but poorly” (*The Mill* 36). Tom has the advantage of “a good eddiction” [sic] simply because of his gender, though his father is acutely conscious of the “topsy-turvy nature of things... stupid lads and ‘cute (acute, intelligent) wenches” (38).

Maggie’s “final rescue” from the world which is too harsh to her comes only with her sudden accidental death (478). Three days of incessant rain makes the river floss flood the town of St. Oggs. Maggie rows a boat to rescue her mother and brother. Tom comes to her boat (their mother was staying with Lucy) and their little boat capsizes in the face of a huge current, drowning and killing then instantly. They are buried “in the Dorlcote Churchyard... near the Dorlcote Mill... it was visited at different moments by two men who both felt their present joy and keenest sorrow where forever buried there” (510).

Almost everybody – the common reader and the discerning critic – is disappointed with the abrupt ending of the novel, which is really absurd; the flood kills only the brother and the sister, while “every man and woman mentioned in this history was still living” (509). For Leavis, “the ending has no symbolic or metaphorical value... it is only the dreamed of perfect accident that gives us the perfect opportunity for the dreamed- of heroic act’ (47). Barbara Hardy feels that the flood comes as “a *deus ex machina* an appearance of an arbitrary concluding rush” (36). Eliot places Maggie in such a situation where from the only and perhaps the easiest escape route is death. Stephen writes to Maggie (from Holland) and implores her to accept his marriage proposal, Maggie finds it impossible to accept him – “you will come back to *her*”, she says to herself (*The Mill* 503, emphasis mine); but cannot help pondering, “Am I to fall and repent again?” – has life other trials as hard for me still? (504). Just at this critical juncture, when she is mulling, “how long it will be before death comes” (503), death comes to snuff out her “so young, so healthy life” (503). Eliot certainly does not want to give her heroine “a long but loveless

life” (502). So, the “unwomanly bold” girl, who decides to “bear it all till death” with supreme courage, is “rescued” from her worldly pains and sufferings (502). The abrupt and absurd ending does leave an unsatisfactory note in the readers’ mind.

Daniel Deronda (henceforth referred to as *DD*), George Eliot’s last novel, was written between January 1873 and June 1876. While writing this novel the two people who highly influenced Eliot were the Jewish-born Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza, and Ludwig Feuerbach. Eliot translated in Spinoza’s *Ethics* in 1856 and Feuerbach’s *Essence of Christianity* in 1854 (Haight 54). Feuerbach’s philosophy, “the influence of which is integral to all her novels, hinges upon ‘the moral [...] qualitative, critical distinction between the I and the thou’ or the self and the other” (55). This is especially true about *DD* because the novel “magnifies such a relationship on a national --political scale, as shown by the distinction made between Jews and non-Jews” remarks Rosemary Ashton (78). Ashton further states that Eliot is most explicitly indebted to Feuerbach’s influence in *DD* because of her focus on “fellow-feeling”: “in seeking to counter anti-Semitism by encouraging her readers to embrace Jewish people as her “fellow-men”, Eliot enforces a double imperative. Firstly, she demands further tolerance and greater sympathetic understanding of Jews, whose influence on culture and intellectual life extends her beyond England or Continental Europe. Secondly, she renders this experience of increased sympathy paradigmatic to furthering our sympathetic interaction with all people suffering oppression as a result of their identity” (79).

DD is Eliot’s last novel. It was published in parts over eight months from January to September 1876 and, “being a new work by the author frequently referred to as ‘England’s greatest living novelist’, it attracted many critical notices”, informs Kathleen Blake (45). Reviews of novel’s early instalments were initially enthusiastic, but once the

'Jewish parts' were published the criticism was anything but measured (46).

Unfavourable criticism of *DD*, notably that of Henry James, repeatedly voiced objection to Eliot's overly idealised characterisation of many of the Jewish Characters and especially of the novel's namesake. Henry James in his article "Daniel Deronda: A Conversation" states that "Gwendolen is a masterpiece" and sees the Jewish characters as "shadows" lacking any human traits (qtd. by Haight 145). His exasperation with the Jewish characters and themes was only a sample of the Gentile negative response to the book. In this article, he sees the English part of the book as a success and its Jewish part as a failure (Haight 46). The anonymous critic in *Figaro* remarked: "George Eliot Would not have spoiled her book had she made the hero a Christian" (47), while the Roman Catholic publication, *The Tablet*, scathingly wrote: "Deronda's acceptance of Judaism as a religion is *revolting*... we do not conceive to what rule of duty she has sacrificed her readers' feelings their sympathy and the reality and unity of her loveliest characters" (48). The reviewers unanimously considered the Jewish section of the novel to be totally unnecessary, and vouched for only the Gwendolen plot.

On the other hand, the Jewish critics adopted a different view. James Picciotto in his review, "Deronda the Jew", thought that characters is real and the novel succeeded in subverting established images of the Jew as "a swindling financier" and "a money-lender" (Rignal 78). The criticism waged against the Jewish part of the novel among the English critics is in stark contrast with that of the Jewish critics. From a Jewish standpoint, the book was seen as a milestone in the history of literary representation of Jewish characters in English literature (79). The reaction of her reading public and critics depicted a strong anti-Semitic feeling and created resistance to her attempts to fight racial prejudices. The Jewish characters are incorporated in the narrative as part and parcel of its emotional and humane affiliations.

Eliot was aware of the criticism *DD* could face because of its Jewish element. She anticipated the negative reaction of critics and readers. She wrote in a letter to Harriet Bucher Stowe: “As to the Jewish element in “*Deronda*”, I expected from first to last in writing it, that it would create much stronger resistance and even repulsion that it has actually met with. But precisely because I felt that the usual attitude of Christians towards the Jews is – I hardly know whether to say more impious or more stupid when viewed in the light of their professed principles—I felt urged to treat Jews with such sympathy and understanding as my nature and knowledge could attain.” (qtd. by Ashton 182).

Eliot expressed her dissatisfaction with the way readers and critics tried to cut the novel in two parts. It was the inclusion of the “Jewish parts” that gained predominance from the author. Eliot wrote in a letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe: “There is nothing I would care more to do, if that is possible, than to rouse the imagination of men and women to a vision of human claims in those races of their fellow men who most differ from them in customs and beliefs” (184). It might be easily assumed that Eliot believed it was more important for a reader to be awakened about the Jews, treated as outcasts, than to admire *DD* as a literary work.

DD never catered to the popular public taste. When F.R. Leavis famously described it as “consisting of two separate halves”, he was almost summarizing the critical appreciation that the book received ever since its publication. By comparing the “magnificent achievement of the good half” to the “astonishing badness of the bad half” Leavis voiced the common reader’s dissatisfaction with the book’s “lack of unity” (74). He suggested a new title for “the good part of *DD*,”: “*Gwendolen Harleth*” and memorably remarked that the entire ‘Jewish’ section should be deleted and the novel renamed *Gwendolen Harleth* (76).

Leavis's criticism is inconsistent with Eliot's expressed belief in the novel's unity. Kathleen Blake informs that as early as in 1876 Eliot complained to Barbara Leight Smith Bodichon about reader who "cut the books to scraps and talk of nothing but Gwendolen," and added: "I meant everything in the book to be related to everything else there" (qtd. by Blake (120. "The sharp contrast between the notion of unity on the one hand and the feeling of a split between plot lines on the other has been an issue of critical debate every since, and an unresolved one, mostly due to the fact that literary critics never agreed on what "unity" in a fictional text is supposed to denote", opines Gillian Beer (56). The general readers have always been discontent about *DD*'s bipartite structure ever since its publication.

In her essay, "Notes on Form in Art" (1868), Eliot defines unity as that in which "not part can suffer increase or diminution without a participation of all other parts in the effect produced and a consequent modification of the organism as a whole". (qtd. by Blake 214). Blake believes that "The resemblance between Eliot's definition of formal unity and Aristotle's definition of plot unity points at her notion of the novel as a wholeness [.....] which may be broken up into other wholes, i.e. formal unity *and* plot unity" (213).

Numerous critics regard *DD* as a novel which "tests the limits of sympathy... while they frequently draw on cosmopolitanism or nationalism to frame Eliot's ethics of sympathy, this seldom involves discussion or even mention of Feurebachian Philosophy" (Ashton 85). Gillian Beer remarks, "the action of sympathy fills up all the empty spaces where a private subjectivity might come to exist" for Eliot, becoming Jewish legitimizes Deronda's otherwise puzzling selflessness" (90). Rosemary Ashton claims that *DD* emphasizes 'the danger of excessive sympathy to its donor [...] at least as strongly as its positive effects on its recipient' (186). More recently, George Levine's focus on "cosmopolitan ethics" suggests that "Eliot demonstrates in *DD* that a wholly impartial

ethics ultimately works simply to subsume differences within a universal homogeneity” (179). However, all critics agree that Eliot’s ethics were greatly shaped by her reading and translation of Feuerbach’s *Essence of Christianity*.

George Eliot’s earlier novels primarily focus on the daily social life of ordinary people, but her last work goes much further than that. *DD* critiques “national problems, such as the emergence of decadence in the last decades of Victorian England, the aristocracy and the Jewish question” (Eagleton 185). Levine believes that though narratives of Daniel and Gwendolen were considered separable by the critics, their reading together operates as a dual critique of mid-Victorian Britain: the Gwendolen narrative focuses on imperialism, decadence and materialism, while *Deronda*’s narrative explores “the Jewish question”, Judaism and Zionism Mordecai (183). On the other hand, Gwendolen, the hugely self-centred girl has to struggle merely “to go on living” (*DD* 846) a life that is sans spouse, sans family, or of any definite mission like that of *Deronda*.

The novel’s main events take place in 1865. It opens in *medias res* as the narrator contemplates the concept of a beginning in fiction. The narrative starts in the middle when the two protagonists of the novel, Daniel *Deronda* and Gwendolen meet in a German casino but do not get to know each other because Gwendolen has to rush back home. Chronologically, their encounter takes place at a relatively developed stage and the narrator moves backward to relate the previous events. The meeting that has taken place between the two major characters of the novel fulfils a crucial structural function whereby the two parts of the novel are connected.

George Eliot presents Gwendolen rather suddenly. Unlike Maggie Tulliver, she is not presented in the novel from her childhood. The reader’s first glimpse is at a twenty one year old beautiful woman who is totally engrossed in gambling, in a bar in Lehrbonn, a fictitious town in Germany. “From the beginning of the novel the reader is made aware

that Gwendolen's 'wealth' is in her beauty and her attitudes, which will probably bring her a fine husband" (Uglow 98). The story begins with Deronda's noticing her at the gaming tables, trying to decide what she is. The omniscient narrator then probes the soundness of Deronda's judgement by reviewing Daniel's observations about the other gamblers. The reader's and Daniel's judgements are expected to be the same. "The whole gambling arena is being judged in moral terms in Deronda's mind. Deronda's first conclusion is that the dynamism and unrest evident in the girl is something evil", says Gillian Beer (124).

Gwendolen soon senses that she is not getting universal admiration, at least one viewer's opinion about her is negative. In the ensuing nervousness she loses both her composure and her luck. So far she had been the centre of attention and had glorified herself to be in complete of the situation. Her ambitions had been especially to acquire the 'divine' image of the gambler who successfully controls his fate: "... she had visions of being followed by a cortege who would worship her as a goddess of luck and watch her play as a directing augury. Such things had been known of male gamblers; why should not be a woman have a like supremacy?" (*DD* 39). Deronda's implicit criticism upsets this vision of herself, "and makes her realize that the control she exercised was that of a superior person in an inferior crowd" (Uglow 97). Thus Eliot does something unheard of (in fiction) so far---- she portrays a female gambler, at a time when all was expected from a woman was an unquestioning obedience to the male hegemony, without the furthest dream of stepping into a male domain viz. gambling in a public casino, in full view of onlookers, all of whom are men. Gwendolen's "lust for gambling reveals what moves her: she wants power and the unquestioning allegiance of a group of people... she seems to thrive on the uncertainty of action of the gambling table and the sense that she actually is controlling her destiny" (100). Eliot presents Deronda as a restraining moral force and

Gwendolen is portrayed as one who is “willing to compromise her morality to achieve her goal” (Beer 126).

The story then moves in a flashback to the year just previous to this scene, and tries to probe the causes of Gwendolen’s moral uncertainty that Deronda instinctively sensed in the gambling table. Affection for her family (her widowed mother and her brood of numerous step sisters) is not strong in her and the narrator attributes this to her lack of a permanent home right from her birth (*DD* 22). Gwendolen’s mother, though twice married, never had an independent establishment, till the death of her second husband, Captain Davilow, when she moved to Offendene “simply for its nearness to Pennicote Rectory” where Mrs. Davilow’s sister’s family, the Gascoignes, live (*DD* 23). The cause for their previous lack of a permanent home and their final acquisition of one, lies in the character of her stepfather, Captain Davilow. Gwendolen only gradually senses the unhappiness of her mother’s married life with Captain Davilow. He had lived with his family in a “brief and fitful manner for the past nine years, and they were not too saddened at his death” (*DD* 24). Their lack of mutual conjugal affection becomes evident to her as she grows up. When Gwendolen casually asks her mother why she remarried after the death of her first husband, with whom she had been so happy, Mrs. Davilow’s shocked response is a recognition of Gwendolen’s total lack of affection: “You have no feeling, child!” (*DD* 34). Nancy Henry states that Mrs. Davilow “evidently married for her love the first time, and is weakness the second. The second one is all too familiar: it was made on at least one side for money, and the husband controlled all material good” (50).

George Eliot presents Gwendolen at a crucial juncture in her life, when she has to decide her future, and perhaps realizes that marriage is the only option available to her. The reasons why Gwendolen must and will marry lie in the kinds of assumptions which her family and society have made about marriage. One of the primary purposes of the

move to Offendene is to launch Gwendolen in local society. She has been educated to have certain accomplishments, viz. singing and acting, but not much of academics. Jennifer Uglow correctly labels her education as “marriage oriented” (121). Still, Gwendolen does not direct her talents toward marriage. Her idea of marriage, that she has formed from observing the couples around her, inclines her to consider marriage as “rather a dreary state, in which a woman could not do what she liked, had more children than were desirable, was consequently dull and became irrevocably immersed in humdrum” (*DD* 68).

This highly negative concept of marriage includes all the important criticism which the nineteenth century feminists were levelling at it: “It was boring, restrictive and even enslaving, produced a family difficult to support and rear and was generally unfortunate”, says Jennifer Uglow (135). Gwendolen is one of the few Victorian heroines to express such attitude. For most of the middle-class young women, marriage was “a romantic goal which at least gave them a greater degree of importance in society” (Beer 99). Gwendolen wants more than love or social importance from marriage. Eliot portrays her as “a curious kind of romantic indolence, in which she is perpetually adored and courted in the chivalric manner – in which she is treated as a queen... She meant to do what was pleasant to herself in a striking manner, or rather, whatever she could do so as to strike others with admiration and get in that reflected way a more ardent sense of living, seemed pleasant to her fancy” (*DD* 78). Clearly, the pragmatic, realistic side of marriage is beyond her wildest dreams.

This attitude towards marriage is what is mirrored in the society around her. Her rich neighbour, Catherine Arrow point is also on the lookout for a husband. Only, her wealth ensures that she gets plenty of eligible suitors. However, Catherine marries the talented but poor Kleisner, the handsome German musician, in defiance of her family.

But Gwendolen will not marry for love, but for money. Rex Gascoigne, her first cousin, fell for the beautiful girl before she met the elderly, but super rich Henleigh Grandcourt. Since Rex was not rich enough to give her a life of ultimate luxury, he is summarily rejected by the mammon-worshipper, who reacts to him with “a curious enactment of shrinking from her own romantic dreams” (*DD* 108). Rex offers to gratify her every wish, but Gwendolen’s rejection of him “demonstrates how her lack of feeling also is connected to her opinions about sex, and being made love to” (Jacobus 65). She shies away from Rex also out of revulsion of the physical side of romance: “Besides, she objected, with a sort of physical repulsion, to being directly made love to. With all her imaginative delight in being adored, there was a certain fierceness of maidenhood in her” (*DD* 110). Here again, we find the author presenting another negative element in the character of her heroine--- her lust for money, for material comfort, in an age when women were supposed to be self-sacrifice incarnate, who would not even dream of any personal pleasure/comfort that money can buy.

Curiously, Grandcourt’s negative approach to love-making strangely wins Gwendolen’s approval of him. He never tries to shower her with affection, never tries to come close to her. In a nutshell, he does nothing to unsettle her “physical repulsion” to romance (*DD* 110). At the same time, his attentions flatter her ego. Thus the unusual courtship advances to its climax, --- she feels him to be the most suitable husband possible, thinks that he will allow her more personal freedom after marriage than she has had before. She would have the independence of spending money as per her will; would visit places. In short, she dreamt of having freedom from the social and financial restrictions that she had to endure in her maiden life. However, before taking the final plunge, without attaching much importance to his past relation with his erstwhile fiancée Lydia Glasher and her illegitimate children by him, she solicits the opinion of her family

in order to persuade herself. Her uncle tells her that she should marry the super rich man who will look after her mother and her brood of stepsisters. Her family also do not consider seriously his past life—his intimate association with Lydia Glasher, with whom he had two children. Thus money and material comfort take the centre stage in Gwendolen-Grandcourt marriage. This almost mercenary nature of marriage, and that too on the part of the wife, is again an unforeseen situation. But Eliot is portraying a New Woman, who is not angelic (like the heroines of conventional novels), but a human being of flesh and blood, who has both positive and negative traits, whom her husband (and the readers) would have to accept.

Gwendolen met Mrs. Lydia Glasher, Grandcourt's mistress, and her two children by him, through the initiative of Mr. Lush, Grandcourt's personal secretary, before she accepted his proposal of marriage. Hearing Lydia's story, her shocked reaction was: "I believe all men are bad and I hate them", (*DD* 154). She then hurriedly left England and went to Leubronn, Germany, "to flee as much from the idea of marriage as from the individual" (Uglow 101).

Gwendolen returns to Offendene when her mother urgently calls her back, with the disconcerting news that they lost all their property "in a financial misadventure" (*DD* 209), with dire poverty staring at them. As the eldest daughter, the responsibility of running the family falls on her young shoulders. Not being much educated herself ("passed two years at showy school" [*DD* 23]) she has only two options of income—either to be a governess or a school mistress, as her uncle Gascoigne suggests (*DD* 90). Both options are anathema to her. "Thus fact, as well as opinion says that she must marry in income" (Uglow 103).

Gwendolen's innate impulse is to avoid marriage and she decides to test her singing and acting talent. She has a sense of power within herself to determine her own

future (Henry 78). She believes she can sing and act in plays to such a high level that she can easily support her family by being a professional actress on stage. To this end, she asks the opinion of Catherine Arrowpoint's husband, Herr Klesmer, the talented German musician.

Klesmer unflatteringly advises Gwendolen on her "talent": he declares that real success comes to only those who have approached music and acting with utmost devotion. His criticism of Gwendolen applies to all ordinary girls like her: she has not been properly trained and the deficiency cannot be overcome by her "small talent" (Henry 79). Klesmer allows that she might achieve a little success on stage if she accepts the truth--- that she is nothing more than "a gifted amateur in search of a husband" (*DD* 198). Klesmer's advice makes Gwendolen realize that she has no prospects other than fulfilling her role as dutiful daughter and perfect wife; it is "her only marketable talent" (80). She now understands, for the first time how badly she craves for a luxurious life, and how much she enjoys fond male gazes. She is stunned to realize what really her prospects are what she can do and what she is" (Jacobus 69).

To extricate herself and her family out of the miserable poverty staring at their face, Gwendolen is forced to accept Grandcourt's proposal of marriage, though she tells her mother "loftily, "I must decide for myself... My life is my own affair" (*DD* 235). She accepts Grandcourt's proposal with "evident hesitation" wanting "to have the pleasure of refusing him" (*DD* 294). He does not even hold any aesthetic attraction for her: "... there was not the faintest smile on his face as he looked at her, not a trace of self-consciousness or anxiety in his bearing... it was perhaps not possible for a breathing man wide awake to look less animated... Grandcourt's bearing held no rigidity, it inclined rather to the flaccid. His complexion had a faded fairness; his long narrow eyes expressed nothing but indifference... He spoke with a fine accent, but with a certain broken drawl as of a

distinguished personage with a distinguished cold on his chest.” (*DD* 158). However, Gwendolen harbours a physical revulsion toward sex much like Hardy’s Sue Bridehead. Thus she finds it easy to accept Grandcourt, who promises aridity and coldness (and not physical/ emotional warmth). Grandcourt himself holds no particular emotion for Gwendolen, no excitement at the prospect of marriage with this beautiful girl. Everything ‘bores’ him, his only particular interest is “to be master of a woman who would have liked to master him” (*DD* 169). His choice of Gwendolen as his bride (and rejection of the wealthier Catherine Arrowpoint) is motivated by a powerful, spontaneous wish “to be completely master of this creature—this combination of maidenliness and mischief” (*DD* 171). In fact Gwendolen’s dire financial plight improves her marital prospects, as Grandcourt knows that his economic status will only enhance his authority as a husband. Gwendolen herself is aware of the actual nature of her marriage with Grandcourt and why she cannot reject him: “she seemed to herself to be, after all, only drifted towards the tremendous decision – but drifting depends on something besides the currents, when the sails have been set beforehand” (*DD* 309).

At the time of proposing, Grandcourt adopts the pose of an ardent lover to a girl playing hard-to-get, but in hindsight, Gwendolen realises that the scene had been the enactment of a contract, the terms of which were framed by her: “there had been a tacit part of the contract on her side – namely, that she meant to rule and have her own way” (*DD* 308). To this end, she accepts Grandcourt, despite having promised his mistress Lydia Glasher that she would not marry him and therefore become an obstacle to the inheritance of Lydia’s son. Grandcourt knows about Gwendolen’s meeting with Lydia at Cardell Chase through Mr. Lush, the man responsible for its arrangement, but is “ignorant about his wife’s sense of contractual obligation to his mistress” (Henry 88). Grandcourt’s incomplete knowledge about his wife’s conscience renders his mastery over her

“imperfect” (*DD* 399). To his last breath, he neither realises that a happy marriage is based on mutual love and respect, not on “mastery” over the spouse; nor the fact that his young, charming wife cannot be bend into submission to his will.

Eliot further undermines Grandcourt’s assurance in his psychological power by revealing the partiality of his knowledge about his wife’s psyche: “ He had correctly understood one half of Gwendolen’s anticipation that she has to swallow her pride and be subservient to his wills and wiles, but her remorseful half regarding her meeting, promising, and breaking the promise to Lydia “was as much out of his imagination as the other side of the moon. There is no escaping the fact that want to sympathy condemns us to a corresponding stupidity. Mephistopheles thrown upon real life and obliged to manage his own plots, would inevitably make blunders” (*DD* 402).

Although Mephistophelian in his ability to abuse the fears and weaknesses of others (particularly women), Grandcourt’s perceptions are rendered “stupid by his lack of sympathy with those he oppresses” (Henry 90). He can fathom the idea that Gwendolen might hate the prospect of becoming a mother because she despises him, but he cannot perceive that she does not want a son because of a guilty conscience. Gwendolen feels that to have a child herself would have been consenting to the completion of the injury to Lydia she had been guilty of (91). Her husband fails to attribute her dread to the fear of bearing a son who would override the claim of young Henleigh to Grandcourt’s estates. Even Gwendolen herself does not seem to realise at the time that her guilt about having a child with Grandcourt “was a sign that she had put Deronda’s advice into practice by using her fear as a safeguard against moral compromise and as a catalyst for her moral redemption” (Beer 98).

The Mediterranean yachting trip, which Grandcourt intended as an opportunity for him ‘to feel more securely that [Gwendolen] was his to do as he liked with’, ends in his

drowning at the Bay of Genoa (*DD* 456). Her marriage ends unexpectedly early with the death of her husband during their trip to Italy. Elaine Showalter correctly concludes that the author's awareness of her gender identity "recruits the power of Nemesis to destroy male oppressors (109). By imposing his "will like that of a crab or a boa-constrictor," Grandcourt had been 'pinching' and 'crushing' Gwendolen to the point of paralysis (*DD* 458). Gwendolen views his death as a *willed* murder—by failing to cast out a line to save him, she feels that she had intentionally 'resisted his will' thus 'kill[ed] him in [her] thoughts (Beer 100). The 'white hand of his' which she feared 'was capable... of clinging round her neck and threatening to throttle her' is now a dead hand, but it is just as capable of strangling her as it was when alive (*DD* 410). Her burden of guilt enhances the prospect of strangulation, feels Gillian Beer (101).

After the drowning of her husband, Gwendolen suffers a nervous breakdown. The death of Grandcourt causes her mental collapse. When she meets Daniel in her hotel room, her speech is disjointed and her sentences are discontinued. What she conveys in a "fragmentary way" reflects her psychological distress and confusion (Rignal 179). Those disconnected utterances are intervaled by 'silence', 'tears', 'sinking voice', 'whispering' and 'sobbing', 'quivering lips' and 'tremor' the narrator informs us (*DD* 670). At this time, the figure of Deronda comes quite close to that of a counsellor or psychiatrist, rather than a priest, as he listens to Gwendolen and tries to talk her through the difference between the realities of the mind and the outer reality, feels Kathleen Blake (149). Beer also considers him more of a psychiatrist because – applying some form of a cathartic cure method – he realises her failing grasp on the present, the haunting presence of the past and his endeavour to bring her back from the brink of total collapse and madness (211).

Kathleen Blake opines that Gwendolen's liberation is signified not by her release from the grasp of her husband's psychological tyranny, but by her decision partially to

accept the terms of Grandcourt's will (213). While she is at first hesitant towards claiming any provision, Deronda comforts her by saying that she ought not to feel as though taking the money were "a crime towards one who is dead" (*DD* 498). Following his advice, Gwendolen decides not to limit the amount she accepts to eight hundred a year, the amount which had been given to her mother while Grandcourt lived, but accepts the full two thousand pounds annually for her mother's and her own use. What she rejects is residence at Gadsmere, a remote coal-mining district. She is assisted to achieve this end by Grandcourt's uncle and legal guardian, Sir Hugo, who, on hearing about Grandcourt's will and the disgrace which it inflicted on Gwendolen by its "conspicuous publishing of her husband's relation to Mrs. Glasher's is moved to suggest an alternative" (*DD* 500). He offers to help Gwendolen to lease Gadsmere "on capital terms" to a man engaged in the coal-mining industry (*DD* 501). After her mother reveals that Offendene, the house she lived in before her marriage, is empty, she finds her own alternative to the life which her husband had planned for her. Gwendolen's resolution to live at Offendene with her mother and sisters marks a crucial turning-point in her movement from egotism (Blake 67).

At the beginning of the novel, no home seemed adequate to her queenly desires and needs. Chapter 3 opens with the narrator's declaration: "Pity that Offendence was not the home of Miss Harleth's childhood, or endeared to her by family memories! A human life, I think, should be well rooted in some spot of a native land, where I may get the love of tender kinship for the face of earth.... a spot where the definiteness of early memories may be inwrought with affection and kindly acquaintance with all neighbours, even to the dogs and donkeys may spread not by sentimental effort and reflection, but as a sweet habit of the blood." (*DD* 54).

Now, it is no longer "a quiet home which had once seemed a dullness to be fled from", Offendene promises to be a "spot of Native land" with which Gwendolen can

learn to achieve a “tender kinship” (*DD* 654). Eliot feels that this home-coming would enable her to acquire some of the “sweet habits of the blood” (i.e., familial affection) which she has sadly lacked. After Grandcourt’s death, Gwendolen begins to pin her hopes on Deronda, who might pay her more attention and admiration. But his and hers lives run on totally different tracks. While she has no connection with his Jewish identity, he has none with Offendene, either. Without having any common ground, they can be nothing more than good friends. However, Gillian Beer considers his function, like that of Klesmer, to be of “a mentor, in this case, a moral one” (90).

The ending of *DD*, in which the newly married Daniel and Mirah set out to reclaim the Promised Land, is all the more poignant for its inconclusive nature. *DD* is the only novel of George Eliot that is left open-ended. Gwendolen’s future is not sketched in specific terms; the reader know only that she intends “to live”, as she assures her terrified mother (*DD* 810). Probably now she will be able to value her own paternal family for its true worth. The possibility that she will eventually marry Rex still remains, “It seems as if George Eliot could not resist a last romantic fling.... Having denied her readers a Deronda-Gwendolen marriage, George Eliot must provide some hints of a romantic ending (Blake 91). However, these possibilities are not inked by the author herself. At the end of the novel Gwendolen is left alone, though she finds greater relief being widow than she ever had as a wedded wife. Now she must learn to live by herself, accept herself with all her faults and follies, and decide how she can make the best use of her life, before thinking about second marriage as the ultimate fulfilment. George Eliot thus empowers the woman who is by now chastened and mellowed by her marital experiences.

Gwendolen gradually becomes conscious of her limitations, first as a singer and actress, then as a wife. She has to introspect and recognize herself fully before she can even mull a second marriage. Kathleen Blake argues that her character development

“brings about her gradual ethical redemption, as she is shown to be increasingly capable of Feuerbachian “fellow-feeling” (98). The climax of this is foreshadowed when she and Grandcourt are sailing in the Mediterranean Sea. At this point, she already harbours capability for fellow-felling: “She had a root of conscience in her, and the process of purgatory had begun for her on the green earth: she knew that she had been wrong” (*DD* 649). While these setbacks are shattering blows to her ego, Gwendolen is able to ‘affirm her own nature, make her nature objective to herself precisely through living through these events’ (Ashton 234). She earnestly attempts to overcome her problems by clinging to Daniel’s judgement: “she had learned to see all her acts through the impression they would make on Deronda: whatever relief might come to her, she could not sever it from the judgement of her that would be created in his mind. [...] and amid the dreary uncertainties of her spoiled life the possible remedies that lay in his mind, nay, the remedy that lay in her feeling for him, made her only hope (*DD* 673).

When Daniel’s Jewish identity is known to her and any possibility of their being married is absolved forever, that she is finally able to truly understand and follow Daniel’s advice to “Look on lives besides your own..... try to care for what is best in thought and action --- something that is good apart from the accidents of your own lot’ (*DD* 646). “In a reiteration of Feuerbach’s contradiction, Daniel and Gwendolen’s friendship is closest and most sincere at the time of parting” (Henry 178); as Gwendolen says, “it shall be better with me because I have known you” (*DD* 710). After Grandcourt’s sudden death Gwendolen neither dies in grief nor asks Daniel to marry her. On learning that Daniel is going to marry Mirah, she sobbingly promises: “You have been very good to me... I will try --- try to live...” (*DD* 809). After he departs, she assures her terrified mother: “Don’t be afraid. I shall live. I am going to live. I mean to live” (*DD* 810). The inner strength surfaces to lend her the courage to live a life without the support of a man by her side.

Gwendolen is Eliot's major contribution to the psychological study of characters in fiction. Gwendolen could be seen as both a victim and threat in Victorian times (Ashton 56). Despite her unscrupulous decision to marry Lydia's lover and the father of her children, Gwendolen is a redeemable character. "La Madonna Pia is transformed through her suffering in the hands of her husband into a symbol of redemption, and is idealised in the minds of people and immortalised in one of the most moving four verses of Dante's *Purgatory*" (Henry 231). Her invocation bolsters the recurrent comparative dimensions as instrumental motifs in the structuring of the novel. They form "a deep undercurrent against what Gwendon's calls her 'wickedness' and a clear indication of her high moral ground and future redemption", feels Gillian Beer (75).

Gwendolen Harleth is the heroine of Eliot's who "most directly confronts the narrowness of a woman's prospects and most profoundly challenges them" (Blake 291). When she discusses the miserable situation of women with Grandcourt, she says that "we women can't go in search of adventures... we must stay where we grow, or where the gardeners like to transplant us. We are brought up like flowers, to look as pretty as we can, and be dull without complaining" (*DD* 135). She is also "cruel and obstinate" and believes these weaknesses are the result of "boredom" – "That is my notion about plants," she says, continuing her analogy. "...they are often bored, and that is the reason why some of them have got poisonous" (*DD* 135). She herself understands that she is cruel and unkind to the unfortunate woman, Lydia Glasher, when she breaks her promise to her not to marry Grandcourt. This wrong and most selfish decision makes her reflect on her own faults. It also makes her aware about the sufferings of others, viz. her mother and her spurned lover, Rex Gascoigne. In particular, she realizes the pain and humiliation of the hapless women who are maltreated by their men folk. Though she is portrayed as a selfish and shallow woman at the beginning of the narrative, through her almost imperceptible but

steady relationship with Daniel Deronda, Gwendolen experiences an “inward revolution” (Ashton 93). She determines to live a better life by looking beyond herself, -- by selflessly supporting those who need her sympathy. In her last meeting with Daniel, she almost begs him to guide her, but does not depend upon him emotionally. Rather, she wants to have him as a friend who can show her the right and the wrong. “I want to be good,” she says, “not like what I have been” (*DD* 816). She married simply for the sake of herself, -- in the lust to live a luxurious life in spite of herself being penniless. Little did she anticipate that luxury will come at a huge expense. Thoroughly chastened, now she wants to retract from her selfish ways and live for others instead. Daniel’s friendship ushers in this remarkable change in her. She now can connect with the unfortunate Lydia and understand her deprivations and humiliations at the hands of Grandcourt. This connection, caused through a cold and domineering man, in a sense, “emulates Eliot’s own connection with her heroines”, asserts Gillian Beer (245). Rosemary Ashton also feels that Eliot has a deep kinship with her heroines in all her works (178).

George Eliot vividly discusses the dominant social mores of the times, when the subjugation of women, who were expected to surrender in silent servitude to men was thought to be the natural course of life; when it was considered proper for women to be disciplined by their fathers before marriage and by their husbands after marriage; were supposed to be totally obedient daughters and wives, to stay at home and take care of their numerous children, i.e., to spend their entire life pleasing others, without having any desire of their own. Being true to the society she lived in, Eliot depicts the situations of his heroines authentically. But she does more than keeping them tied to the constraints of social restrictions. Thus Maggie Tulliver and Gwendolen Harleth are two heroines to reckon with because of their committed confrontation with the constricting constraints. Few women possessed the courage and resilience to revolt against the prevailing situation

and carve a life of their own. Maggie and Gwendolen are two such rare women. Though from a very early childhood Maggie's looks are constantly criticised, her acute intelligence never appreciated, she is dictated at every step by Tom, she never surrenders to their dominance and gears herself up to meet their expectations. She virulently rages and rebels against the society that denies her personal identity and considers her to be a creature born to be unquestioningly subservient and servile to the male dominance. She vehemently rejects gender-based expectations and anticipations of her relatives, and of the society at large. Her open rebellion against Tom's repressive commands regarding Philip Wakem is the hallmark of her unusual character. Maggie is the New Woman, characterized by her rebelliousness that arises out of her clear sense of gender discrimination. Her character is in strong contrast with the "old" (i.e. traditional) women like her mother and her aunts, who, steeped in conventional domesticity, exemplify how the majority of women accepted social mores and modes complacently and lived their shackled lives calmly and quietly, without forming any ripple of protest.

Gwendolen is a more complex character than Maggie. She confronts and challenges the narrowness of women's prospects more openly than the former. She bitterly tells Grandcourt, before her marriage with him, "We women cannot go in search of adventures.....we must stay where we growand be dull without complaining" (*DD* 135). But even for this awakened and conscious woman, there is nothing but endless bickering with her husband who would not grant her personal space at any cost, but must strangle her with his unreserved domination. This cruel marriage opens her eyes to the plights of other women, particularly her widowed mother, her unmarried step-sisters, and Grandcourt's spurned mistress, Lydia Glasher, making her more bitter and intolerant towards her brutish husband. But through these confrontations, she gains the confidence that she has her own life beyond untimely widowhood. She decides to "live" and "be

good” to the people around her, and not commit suicide, she promises her “terrified mother” (*DD* 877).

Thus, if one considers the characters of Maggie and Gwendolen, one finds that George Eliot has developed two truly formidable heroines, who were much advanced of their times. Through their constant, committed struggles against the restrictions and limitations placed upon them, they become the harbingers of social change, however slow. The tradition-loving patriarchs had to sit up and take note of these two New Women, who were not ready to be puppets in the hands of men, but desperate to script their own lives themselves, through all odds.

Chapter IV

In Quest of Freedom: Monica Madden and Marian Yule

The predominant disposition of the early and mid Victorian era was intensely moralistic, rigid and puritanical. The domestic sphere confined women to domestic servility, barring her from education and participation in public activity. The material and social affluence and scientific advancement, which altered the lives of people to a large extent, did less to empower women or absolve her from patriarchal dictates. Maintaining middle class household was no minute task or a prestigious issue; it only meant servility and drudgery. The limitations and restrictions imposed upon women did not give them the autonomy to transgress the patriarchal boundaries.

George Robert Gissing was one of the few men who, though born in a time of lopsided gender bias, felt genuine sympathy with the women who struggled to change the gender dynamics and eke out a dignified existence for themselves in the male-dominated society, which conceded women only a secondary status, a mere shadow of men. Gissing so earnestly wanted the oppressed women to lead a better life that he married a prostitute, and again a factory worker, after his first wife's early death. Realizing that women's empowerment was still a far cry, Gissing did what an artist could do----- create rebellious, empowered women in his fictions, who could show a ray of hope to the real-life women readers. Thus both Monica Madden of TOW and Marian Yule of NGS are starkly different from the conventional heroines of the contemporary novels.

This incredibly courageous and large-hearted man was born on 22 November 1857 at Thomas Willer Gissing (1829-1870), was a chemist from a family of Suffolk shoemakers, who died when he was thirteen. With the sad demise of his father, George lost his main guiding force in his intellectual development. This was the first of several

unfortunate circumstances which dogged his entire life. His father's death had a profound effect on him and his outlook on life. His mother's name was Margaret Bedford (1832-1913). Gissing had four siblings; William, Algernon, Margaret, and Ellen (Poole 3).

Gissing's parents belonged to the lower-middle class. He was acutely aware of the social disadvantages this involved (Poole 11). However, despite his humble origin, Gissing turned out to be an excellent student. He was an ardent reader who took advantage of the extensive school/ college libraries. Though amiable and bookish in nature, he was quite popular and made many friends while attending Back Lane School, Wakefield. He wrote poetry and won prizes several times. He was placed twelfth in the Oxford examinations in 1872 and won a scholarship to Owens College (now the University of Manchester). In 1876 he graduated from the University of London where he was placed first in both English and Latin (Poole 21).

Gissing could have achieved further scholarly success, but met with disgrace when, whether naïve, lonely or both, in 1875 he fell in love with a prostitute, Marianne Helen Harrison, "Nell" (1858-1888). He tried to support her financially, though he could barely do so, and was caught stealing money from other students' for this purpose. The punishment for him was one month of hard labour at Bellevue Prison in Manchester. Expelled from Owens and greatly humiliated, his confidence in himself and hopes of ever achieving happiness were severely jolted (Korg 24).

Gissing's mother sent him to the United States to start anew with letters of recommendation in hand. It turned out to be a difficult period of adjustment, impoverishment, hard work and misery. These bleak experiences are often reflected in his novels (Korg 25).

Gissing was barely able to support himself with his writing while he was in Chicago. His first fiction, *The Sins of the Fathers*, was published in the *Chicago Tribune*

in 1877. In 1878 he returned to England and once again met Nell, and they got married on 27 October 1879. Desperately trying to earn money to support himself and his wife, who was an alcoholic, he tried his hand again at writing. His first book, *Workers in the Dawn* did not sell much and he had to turn to tutoring two rich young boys for bare survival, notifies Jacob Korg (30). To add to his misery, his brother, William, with whom he had a very close relation, died of consumption in 1880 (34).

Gissing was unlucky in both personal and financial life. He and Nell stayed married only for five years. His private tutoring provided a measly income. Nevertheless, he could never abandon writing. His second novel, *The Unclassed*, published in 1884, received favourable critical acclaim. He produced a book every year, in spite of making no profit (Coustillas 57).

On 29 February 1888 Nell Harrison died, at the early age of thirty, in a Lambeth slum, and Gissing was summoned to identify her body. Soon afterwards, he travelled to Italy, France, Naples and Greece (Coustillas 59).

On 25 February 1891 Gissing married another uneducated young woman, Edith Alice Underwood, (1867-1917) a stonemason's daughter. However, his marriage to Edith is marked by a clear sighted understanding of his nature and needs: "This loneliness is killing me. I can't tolerate it any longer. In London I must resume my old search for some working girl who will live with me. I am too poor to marry an equal and cannot live alone"; he wrote in a letter to his brother, Algernon (Coustillas 61).

In the same letter, he went on writing:- "I know that my danger, if I become connected with a girl of low position is very great; I am weak in these matters. But then, there is no real hope of my marrying a better girl, no real hope whatever! I say it with the gravest conviction" (61).

The pain of solitariness expressed here is clearly seen and admitted and matrimony is clearly need-based, giving the sense of performing an essential act (Kirk 98).

Gissing and Edith had a son, Walter, on 10 December 1891. In the period of 1891 to 1897 his literary career bloomed a little. Many, mostly unsigned reviews written during that period in the contemporary literary magazines of the times, such as *The Court*, *Illustrated London News*, *Saturday Review*, *Spectator* etc, began to recognize the author of *New Grub Street* and the four novels that quickly followed it: *Born in Exile*, *The Odd Women*, *In the Year of Jubilee* and *The Whirlpool* (Coustillas 82). By this time, Gissing had become acquainted with Clara Collect, who would later become a dear friend and support his literary activities for many years (Poole 78).

George and Edith had their second son, Alfred, on 20 January 1896. Along with joy, Gissing had misery also -- Edith descended into madness. Next Year (1897), he himself suffered from a serious bout of lung illness, and he left his family for a six-month trip to Italy for cure. This journey became the inspiration for his travel book, *By the Ionian Sea* (1901). While staying in Rome he wrote *Veranilda*, which was published posthumously in 1904. He wrote some prefaces for Charles Dickens's works, viz. *The Pickwick Papers*, *Bleak House* and *Oliver Twist*. He also wrote a critical work --- *Charles Dickens: a Critical Study* -- around this time. By this time he had befriended two literary stalwarts Henry James and H.G. Wells. He usually spent his Sundays with Morley Roberts, his long-time friend, whom he had met at Owens (Poole 85).

In 1898 Gissing met a young French Lady, Gabrielle Marie Edith Fleury (1868-1954), who ventured to translate his *NGS* in French. In 1899 he married her. This third wife proved to be culturally equal and affectionate. By this time he had been estranged from Edith, who was shifted to an insane asylum in 1898. Gissing moved to France with Gabrielle. His next novel, *The Crown of Life* (1899) is partly inspired by his love for

Gabrielle (Korg 99). In 1901, on the advice of an English doctor, he stayed for six weeks in a Sanatorium at Nayland, Suffolk. This was the last time he would visit England. Nevertheless, his personal correspondence attests to his nostalgia for his native country when he went back to France. Gissing's semi-auto biographical novel, *The Private Life of Henry Ryecroft* was published in 1903, the year he passed away, at the young age of forty-six, after several months of severe illness, at his villa in Ispoure, St-Gean-Pied-De-Port, France, on 3rd December (Coustillas 110). His friend H.G. Wells had visited him just before his death (Donelley 145). In 1912 his old and loyal friend, Morly Roberts wrote a semi-biography of Gissing, *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*. Roberts depicts Gissing the man, whom he portrays as a fascinating but flawed man, and not on Gissing's fiction, which he regards as misguided and marginal (Halperin 178).

George Gissing is among the most powerful “novelists of transition” from Victorian to the modern age, believes John Goode (119). In his novels Gissing presents the most perturbing socio-economic, socio-cultural and political situations of his times. He also depicts the social changes, which were taking place in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Thus, Gissing's novels serve as a bridge between Victorian and modern literature (320).

Gissing is essentially a clear sighted realist and a humanist. He is a critic of Victorian manners and the social, economic and political conditions of the age that tended to suppress the weak. He charged the arrow of his satire against existing social and moral values, commercialization of art and materialistic culture (Halperin 187). Gissing's indictment of social inequalities, economic exploitations, low standard of cultural achievements and the subjugation women express his denunciation of the conventional Victorian values. Pierre Coustillas, an erudite Gissing critic, wrote: “To me it is clear that Gissing was a moralist, an apostle for a new morality. His criticism of the Victorian way

of life, of Victorian education and manners is an index to his ideals in all fields of existence, social, political, cultural and economic (190).”

Gissing was essentially a realist in his presentation of social and moral values, opines Donnelley (150). He depicted the stark and the dark realities of society in his novels. In his later novels viz. *NGS* (1891), *In the Year of Jubilee* (1894), *The Whirlpool* (1897) and *The Crown of Life* (1899) he portrayed the evils of industrialization and urbanization with unprecedented vigour. He dealt realistically with the sufferings and frustrations caused by poverty (156). The indignities, which the slum conditions inflicted on human beings, bringing out the rawest corners of their hearts, have been realistically presented. Gissing’s realism may be understood better in his own words: “Realism signifies nothing more than artistic sincerity in the portrayal of contemporary life -- it merely contrast with the habit of mind which assumes that a novel is written to please the people, that disagreeable facts must always be kept out of sight, that the human nature must be systematically flattered, that the book must have a plot, that the story should end on a cheerful note, and all the rest of it” (qtd. by Matthiesen 14).

On June 1886, Gissing wrote to Thomas Hardy, “In literature my interests begin and end; I hope to make my life and all its acquirements subservient to my ideal of artistic creation” (qtd by Matthiesen 16).

Gissing’s first published novel, *Workers in the Dawn* (1880) depicted lower-class London life as witnessed by a young idealist. His next novel, *The Unclassed* was published in 1884. Neither of the works gained any popularity. He achieved some success with *Demos: A Story of English Socialism* (1886), *Isabel Clarendon* (1887) and *A Life’s Mourning* (1888). His darkest work, *The Nether World* came out in 1889. These were gloomy and lonely days for Gissing, who had little conjugal comfort (being married to lower-class women): “On my way home at night I often have an anguish of suffering in

the thought that I can never hope to have an intellectual companion at home”, he wrote to his brother once (Korg 145).

In his grim portrayals of the socio-economic issues of the day including industrialization and destitution, Gissing belonged to the school of naturalism, opines John Goode (121).

Gissing’s earlier thinking (in the eighteen eighties) was shaped by his reading of Comte under the impact of Richard Congreve (1818-1899), a philosopher, and a disciple of Comte, the effect of which is vivid in Gissing’s novels of early eighties (125). This may be substantiated with Gissing’s own words. In a letter dated 18 June, 1880 to his brother Algernon, he wrote: “First and foremost, I attack the criminal negligence of governments which spend their time over matters of relatively no importance, to the neglect of the terrible social evils which should have been long since sternly grappled with. Herein I am mouthpiece of the Advanced Radical Party” (qtd. by Matthiesen 82).

Gissing was also profoundly influenced by contemporary intellectual milieu. Comte’s positivistic influence, the clash between agnosticism and established religion had a deep impact on the young man. Jacob Korg analyzes: “As a thoughtful youth and an avid reader, Gissing was aware that the established ethical doctrines were deeply discussed by the blade of scientific inquiry and science seemed to suggest the possibility of a sympathetic code of morality that is based on its own principles” (68).

TOW tells the tale of women’s emancipation from their traditional bondage in the patriarchal world. With the rise of feminist criticism in the nineteen seventies, *TOW* once again received critical acclaim after many years of oblivion. Gissing and genuine sympathy for oppressed people, especially women, who were badly suppressed by the patriarchal and highly conservative Victorian society. In one of his letters, he wrote that his goal in life and career was “to bring home to people the ghastly condition (material,

mental and moral) of our poor classes, to show the hideous injustice of our whole system of society, to give light upon the plan of altering it” (qtd. by Matthiesen, 83).

Gissing was much dissatisfied with the “ghastly condition” of the oppressed classes, particularly of women, and aspired to change it by his efforts (Korg 118). In order to save women from their wretched condition, the young idealist tried to rescue a street walker, and a factory worker by marrying them. In the novel *TOW*, he tried to bring home the fact that women can gain independence, financial and otherwise, by pursuing professional careers like typists and stenographers.

Due to his unconditional support to the cause of women’s emancipation demonstrated in this novel, Gissing received much acclaim from twentieth century critics. Arlene Young expresses her profound admiration for Gissing’s radical feminist Rhoda Nunn, because she “sees white-collar work as liberation from traditional ‘feminine’ avenues of employment (viz. governesses and factory workers, teachers and seamstresses); represents the modern and liberated women, the one less bound by traditional gender norms” (135). Young goes on to say that Rhoda “suggests a hope of a brave new world for the independent working woman” (136).

Gissing is extolled by several critics for his creation of heroic women who fight against patriarchy. The sphere assigned to women by society was unnaturally confining . Gissing “takes the ‘odd’ women, women in rebellion against the social order, seriously. He knows these women are heroic and deals with them as such” says Adrian Poole (219). Also, Gissing is acclaimed for his artistic sensibility in the novel, Young says, “Gissing achieves in *The Odd Women* a unique boldness of vision and an unusual effectiveness of artistic presentation, which are the related aspects of the same causes. It is transcendence of his intensely personal involvement with his fiction which often limited his artistic imagination” (139). With the rise of feminist criticism in the 1970s Gissing enjoyed

notable popularity among feminist critics (viz. Arlene Young, Mabel Donnelly, *et al*) because of this novel.

However, not all critics agree regarding Gissing's attitudes towards women and marriage in the novel. Although he painstakingly stresses the importance of women's emancipation and independence, he is often criticized on the grounds that his attitudes towards women still "smell of patriarchy" (Poole 220). As Patricia Johnson asserts, "*The Odd Women* resolves the contradictions that it represents. It is the representation, subversion and affirmation of social, psychological and sexual realities" ... The struggle of feminism within an established patriarchal system must be influenced by the beliefs and practices of what it seeks to change" (120). Thus, according to Johnson's argument, despite their efforts to free themselves from patriarchy, women themselves are the products of patriarchy.

Robert Selig believes that Gissing fails to free himself completely from patriarchal moorings and emphasizes the importance of having money. Selig calls Gissing "an ambivalent feminist, because of his own self-centred obsession with money and social position, which, he felt, should have descended, by right to his own intelligent male self" (17). Also, some critics point out that though Gissing tries to rectify the injustice done to women by patriarchal society in *TOW*, these experiments abjectly fail. Gail Cunningham opines, "Gissing's experiments seek to contest and subvert the dominant patriarchal ideology that defines the 'normal' profession for a woman as marriage and hence their only proper means of economic support and emotional fulfilment" (232). Based on these unfavourable opinions, one can conclude that the most controversial part in *TOW* is that, in spite of his sympathy towards women and his efforts to emancipate the downtrodden by offering them careers as clerks and typists, he is a follower of patriarchy because he still carries patriarchal thinking with him.

The very title of this novel, *The Odd Women*, may seem “odd” to the first time readers. As Gissing defines the meaning of “odd” through Rhoda Nunn, “odd” refers to the status of women being extra or surplus, instead of its normal meaning, being strange. When Monica asks Rhoda whether she resents marriage, Rhoda tells Monica the true state of women in Victorian England: “Do you know that there are half a million more women than men in this happy country of ours?” (*TOW* 64). She goes on to define these “half a million more women” as odd women—no men to make a pair with them. The pessimists call them useless, lost, futile lives”(65). Obviously; from the definition of “odd” it emerges that the “oddity” is related to marriage. Because they are unable to find a husband these women become extra, redundant in the eye of patriarchy. It seems that the only goal for women is to get married. There is no other purpose than that for women’s existence. Besides, the original definition of oddness or strangeness, in the eye of patriarchy, remains still applicable. If women fail to find a spouse they will be considered strange. Thus, though “odd” can be defined as either “redundant” or “strange”, marriage remained women’s only natural calling in Victorian England.

Several male characters in the novel are true believers of Ruskin’s idealism that women should be rooted at home and be protected by men. Monica’s father, Dr. Madden, a widower, is one of them. He is a typical Victorian man who firmly believes that it is men who should support women. For him, it is out of question that women should work to support themselves financially: “The thought of his girls having to work for money was so utterly repulsive to him that he could never seriously dwell upon it” (*TOW* 33). In his opinion, it is men’s duty to be the breadwinner of the household. In a talk with his elder daughter, Alice, about how he has made some financial arrangements for them, he comments, “Let me grapple with the world; for, as the old hymn says, ‘tis their nature to.’

I should grieve indeed if I thought my girls would ever have to distress themselves about money matter” (*TOW* 31).

Dr. Madden’s ideal may seem perfect—men should grapple with the world, and women should be set free from the worry of money matters. However, it does not occur to him or to the Ruskin followers that the real fact can be otherwise. The problem arises when the breadwinner, the so-called financial supporter of the family, suddenly expires without leaving sufficient financial resources for their women to “grapple with the world” (31).

This is exactly what happens to Monica and her sisters when Dr. Madden all of a sudden dies and does not leave behind sufficient financial resources to support themselves. Monica and her two elder sisters – Alice and Virginia -- find themselves in a quagmire from which they find it extremely hard to extricate themselves. These thirty –four and thirty-two year old “odd” women have not been trained sufficiently to face the harshness of the world, because under Victorian domestic ideology, they should stay within their home and be guarded by their men. They are neither given proper education nor any professional skill that will enable them to earn their living. Thus, when the father dies, they become terribly vulnerable to the outside world and are placed in a miserable financial situation. Domestic ideology having equipped them only with a knowledge of household affairs, they are not professionally competitive in the job market. Alice and Virginia can only work as a governess and a reading companion to an upper-class lady. These are the only jobs that are deemed suitable for women, because they profess nurturing and caring, which exactly correspond to the presumed motherly nature of women. But to their utter dismay, they discover that these two jobs are horrendously low-paid: “Alice obtained a situation as nursery governess at sixteen pounds a year. Virginia

was fortunate enough to be accepted as companion by a gentlewoman at Weston-super-Mare; her payment, twelve pounds” (*TOW* 40).

Such a measly amount can barely support a person for an entire year. The lowest income of a male character in the novel is seventy pounds. Even a male shop assistant earns one hundred and fifty pounds annually. Because of their meagre income, Alice and Virginia have to spend as little money as possible to survive. They even have to bring down their food expenses to only four pence a day, surviving only on rice with butter, pepper and salt. Since they lack enough money to buy proper food these two sisters’ health deteriorates drastically. Alice has frequent headaches and fever and is often bed-ridden, while Virginia often faints and has to resort to alcohol to revive herself. Actually, these miserable women are dying a slow death. Realizing that they have to carry on with only four pence a day, Virginia asks in utter frustration, “Is such a life worthy of the name?” (*TOW* 44). Since such a life is so miserable, marriage, especially to someone rich, seems to be the only choice for women without financial strength, a condition that applies specifically to Monica, the 21 year old youngest daughter of Dr. Madden, a beautiful, cheerful girl.

Monica too, like her sisters, has to work too support herself after the financial pillar of the family is no more. She works as a shop assistant in a draper, a behind-the-counter work that was deemed to be a decent job for middle class women, because it did not involve manual labour, which was considered suitable only for lower-class people. But that did not make it an ideal job. The working conditions were notoriously horrible. It can best be summarized by Clara Collet’s report submitted to the Royal Commission on Labour about the employment of Women in 1893, which Gissing himself quotes in his novel: “The constant supervision of the shop-walker, the patience and politeness required to show to the most trying customers, the difficulty of telling the truth about the goods

without incurring the displeasure of the managers, the long standing hours, the closed atmosphere even in well ventilated shops when crowded with customers, the short time for meals, the care required to keep things in their right places to make out accounts correctly, the dull evenings with gaslights and high chances of dismissal without prior warning or explained reason all tend to render the occupation of the shop assistance most trying to the nerves and injurious to health” (59).

In addition to long and tiring working hours and insufficient meals, meagre salary was also another disadvantage of working as a shop assistant. But still, there were too many girls striving for limited vacancies. In a discourse about the working conditions of shop assistants, Monica exclaims to Rhoda, “if only you knew how terribly hard it is for many girls to find a place” (*TOW* 62). Naturally, with so many applicants, the employers always had a recruiting pool to select from so that they could reduce the salary to a very low level.

With her measly income, Monica cannot support herself well by working as a shop assistant and the terrible working conditions begin to have a toll on her health. As her elder sister, Virginia, comments to Rhoda, “She [Monica] is worked to death” (*TOW* 50). Since the working conditions of shop assistants are miserable, Monica realizes that she must find another alternative, such as marriage. Otherwise, her future life will be hopeless. For her, marriage is a good option because seeking marriage as a haven from all ills was happily sanctioned by contemporary views. Gissing himself was aware that “the majority of shop assistants look upon marriage as their one hope of release, and would “marry anybody to get out of the drapery business”. (Halperin 117).

But, Monica will not randomly pick man simply for the sake of marriage. Economic luxury is her priority when it comes to choosing a husband. When she is proposed by her colleague, Bullivant, she ruthlessly asks, “How would it be possible for

you to support a wife?" (*TOW* 60). Her sound financial sense gazes him as an unattractive man because of his unsatisfactory income and she flatly refuses his proposal. She requires a rich husband who can instantly redeem her from her wretched condition of being enslaved as a shop assistant.

Compared to Bullivant, Edmund Widdowson, a man in his early forties but with an annual income of six hundred pounds a year, seems a better candidate as Monica's husband for a number of reasons: "With that amazement and rapture would any one of her shop companions listen to the advances of a man who had six hundred a year! Yet Monica did not doubt his truthfulness and the honesty of his intentions.... As things went in the marriage war, she might esteem herself a most fortunate young woman. It seemed that he had really fallen in love with her; he might prove a devoted husband. She felt no love in return; but between the prospect of a marriage of esteemed and that of no marriage at all there was little room for hesitation. The chances were she might never again receive an offer from a man whose social standing she could respect" (*TOW* 91).

Thus she "mortgages herself in lieu of an easy and comfortable life because matrimony to her is like a gamble of life or death in which she does not have too many choices" (Halperin 119). It does not occur to her that their marriage might be the beginning of a disaster for both of them. When she informs her roommate, Mildred Vespers, of the news that she is going to marry Widdowson, Mildred correctly predicts the misfortune that their marriage will cause: "You must let *me* tell the truth as well. I think you are going to marry with altogether wrong ideas. You will do an injustice to Mr. Widdowson. You are marrying him for a comfortable home – that's what it amounts to and you'll repent it badly someday—you'll repent" (*TOW* 131).

Mildred clearly states the real reason of Monica's with Widdowson—a marriage not based on love but on utility, that is, Monica exploits Widdowson's money to find an easier, more comfortable way of living.

Mona Caird, a New Woman novelist in the 1890s, probed the real reason of such mercenary marriages when she wrote: "It is a folly to inveigh against mercenary marriages, however degrading they may be, for a glance at the position of affairs shows that there is no reasonable alternative. We cannot ask every woman to be a heroine and choose a hard and thorny path when a comparatively smooth one, (as it seems), offers itself, and when the pressure of public opinion urges strongly in that direction" (qtd. by Gissing 139).

Even Monica herself is aware that she does not truly love Widdowson. To Mildred's chiding she replies, "He [Widdowson] has made me love him" (*TOW* 131). Such a reply conveys the message that she is obliged to love Widdowson; is obligated to love him in return for his offering her a comfortable life. She is not emotionally connected with Widdowson. Within a loveless marriage, it is predictable that their union will end up in misery. Also, another facet of their marriage is that Monica and Widdowson are incompatible in their personalities. Mildred has already pointed this out to Monica that "he's too old. Your habits and his won't suit" (*TOW* 132). Actually, Widdowson is twice as old as Monica. Owing to such huge age difference, they do not share many common interests. Widdowson is an extreme introvert who prefers to stay at home rather than go out and have enjoyable time with friends and relatives. He confesses to Monica that he is not a sociable person at the time of his new acquaintance with her: "I don't easily make friends; as a rule I can't talk to strangers. I keep so much to myself that/ those who know me only a little think me surly and unsociable" (*TOW* 117).

In contrast to Widdowson being an unsocial man, Monica is a cheerful girl who loves to make friends than stay indoors. When on a vacation to a summer resort, she tells Widdowson that they ought to travel more often with the money and leisure they have instead of staying at home all day: “Think of the number of people who live a dull, monotonous life just because they can’t help it; how they would envy us, with so much money to spend, and free to do just what we like! Doesn’t it seem a pity to sit there day after day alone?” (*TOW* 177).

Owing to their disparate personalities, conflicts between the couple become unavoidable. The root of their conflict is that Monica claims more freedom in her relationship with Widdowson, who miserably fails to understand that a girl, who has been working for five years and earning her own upkeep, cannot be kept under this thumb simply because she has tied the knot with him. She has left her job, but not her “independence of mind and being” (Young 60). Her assertion for her personal space irks him, even though early in their courtship Monica stated categorically, “I will see you once every week. But I *must still be perfectly free*” (*TOW* 98, emphasis mine).

After they are married, Monica asserts her freedom to go outside home wherever she desires to. In their discussion of how to improve their relationship, she boldly states what she desires: “I would like to make more friends, and to see them often. I want to hear people talk, and know what is going on round about me. And to read a different kind of books; books what would really amuse me, and give me something I could think about with pleasure. Life will be a burden to me before long, if I don’t have *more freedom* (*TOW* 179, emphasis mine). But Widdowson miserably fails to appreciate his wife’s real needs and forgets that she, as a human being, is also entitled to possess freedom. He tries to refute her by resorting to the age- old patriarchal dogma that men and women are different and thus women cannot enjoy as much as freedom as men.

To counteract her husband's fallacy, Monica makes her most daring request—equality in the husband-and-wife relationship. “I can't see that makes any difference. A woman ought to go about just as freely as a man. I don't think it's just. When I have done my work at home, I think I ought to be every bit as free as you are—every bit as free. And I'm very sure, Edmund, that love needs freedom if it is to remain love in truth” (*TOW* 179).

With the fear of losing Monica looming large in his heart, the insecure husband makes a plan: they would move to a country mansion that will automatically inhabit his freedom-loving wife within the domestic sphere. Naturally, Monica regards this plan as her total imprisonment by Widdowson: “You have no confidence in me and you want to get me away into a quiet country place where I shall be under your eyes every moment” (*TOW* 210).

Monica is undoubtedly a New Woman, who knows her mind and has the courage to speak it out. Elaine Showalter states: “Gissing takes the feminist cause seriously, his women talk, argue and think hard about the political and psychological issues that still concern us today. *The Odd Women* takes up the issues of gender and class (Monica is decidedly of a lower financial class than Widdowson)... the prospects of marriage as a union of equal partners... It is a gripping psychological analysis of the conflicting expectations of women and men” (12).

Monica is not like Rhoda Nunn, who never marries, but devotes herself fully to the cause of upliftment of destitute “odd” (i.e., not “even” through marriage) women. She gets married, is fully aware of her domestic responsibilities, and is quite willing to do household work and other wifely duties. But she never bows to her husband's illogical demand of “only staying indoors” and “be the world to each other” (*TOW* 213). In retaliation to his unnatural possessiveness, she is “driven to declare that if women had fair

treatment, both inside and outside their homes, there would not be much difference between the sexes” (Young 167).

But, as Michael Collie so acutely observes, “to abandon the idea of “nature” terrifies a weak person like Widdowson, who gets his primary self-esteem from clinging to notions of sexual supremacy” (14).

Widdowson is highly insecure. He is afraid of appearing helpless or incompetent in any way before his young wife. He cannot speak French and therefore he gives up the idea of going to France, a trip that Monica was looking forward to with eager anticipation, and the cancellation causes her a huge disappointment and makes the gap between them a little wider. He believes his masculinity depends on his being strong, confident and decisive. It never occurs to him that Monica does not permit him to be the decision-maker of her life. The more he tries to control her, the further she moves away from him (Poole 168).

Eventually, realizing that Widdowson will not lift his surveillance, Monica gives him the ultimatum: “I can only say as I have said before, that things will never be better until you come to think of me as your companion, not as your bondwoman. If you can’t do this, you will make me wish that I had never met you and in the end I am sure it won’t be possible for us to go on living together” (*TOW* 212).

Thus, to Monica, marriage becomes an even more miserable condition than that of working as a shop assistant : “She thought with envy of the shop-girls in Walworth Road; wished herself back there. What unspeakable folly she had committed!” (*TOW* 212). Now she fully realizes the prophetic truth of Mildred’s caution. However, though she is miserably trapped marriage, she cannot accept it to be her final destiny. She is the New Woman, who desperately endeavours to find an exit from the bond that galls her incessantly, ruthlessly. “I sincerely believe that an educated woman had better become a domestic servant than try to imitate the life of a man” these words uttered by Widdowson

categorically explains his views to her in the early months of their marriage (*TOW* 168). Due to his fixed obsession about women's need for male guidance, Widdowson forfeits the chance of saving his marriage. He is blinded by his prejudices against women without realizing that it only widens the chasm between him and Monica. When he eventually senses the basic problem of their marriage, it is too late to retrieve their relationship. In his musing on the trouble in their relationship, Widdowson finally realizes: "We are unsuited to reach other. We do not understand one another. Our marriage is physical, and nothing more. My love—what is my love? I do not love her mind, her intellectual part... *Monica's independence of thought is a perpetual irritation to me.* I don't know what her thoughts really are, what her intellectual life signifies" (*TOW* 247, emphasis mine).

Due to his folly and egoism, their marriage is finally irredeemable. Widdowson himself destroys his own marriage. Had he only appreciated his wife's "independence of thought", his marriage would not have hit the bedrocks. Out of a sense of false insecurity and the fear of losing Monica, he always keeps his vigilance on her. When she goes outside, he morbidly panics that she no longer loves him and will leave him forever. He miserably fails to understand that the more he tries to bind themselves together and confine Monica within the domestic sphere, the more he is driving her away from him (Showalter 21).

It is freedom that Monica always wishes to maintain in her marriage. The embodiment of such a desire is evinced in her constant movement from one place to another within London. Thus she defies the "socially coded modes of behaviour" assigned to women by patriarchal ideology, according to which women's sphere of mobility is within their home (Halperin 184). To refuse to comply with the socially moulded codes of behaviour, Monica moves like a nomad in London, giving herself the new identity is that she is the New Woman who moves freely as any man.

Monica's courage is not only seen in her constant mobility, but also in the fact that she moves from place to place without any chaperone, in direct conflict with the norm of Victorian femininity. The stern patriarchs deemed it highly inappropriate for women to be seen in public places all alone. If a solitary woman was seen to appear in public places, she could hazard the suspicion of being a "public woman," "a streetwalker," i.e. a prostitute (*TOW* 36). Therefore, during their initial acquaintance, when Monica told Widdowson that she has to go home by train, "Widdowson cast a curious glance at her. One would have imagined that he found something to disapprove in this" (*TOW* 92). Kathleen Bailey Lineham remarks, "It was the emergence of women in the modern city which threatened that patriarchal construction of the Victorian metropolis as masculine public space, and which problematizes the idea of (definitively male) *flaneur* as a symbol of modernity" (98).

Thus Monica emerges as a bold, independent New Woman, who discards the contemporary norms and conventions far behind (Young 46).

When Monica's marriage with Widdowson is on the verge of total breakdown, Bevis, a handsome, young wine merchant, gets acquainted with her and easily wins the admiration of the love-starved woman. However, he does not have the proper respect towards her. He asks her to come his home "all alone" and lies that his sisters "desire" he "company", (*TOW* 216). Monica, now frustrated beyond measure with her husband, succumbs to the lure of a break from her miserable life. But to her intense shock, she finds that Bevis's sisters are not present in his home to serve as chaperones. There is no one else there except an unmarried man, Bevis, and a married woman, Monica. She mulls whether it will be proper for her to stay there under such a circumstances: "in this little set of rooms it was doubtfully permissible for her to sit *tete-a-tete* with a young man, under any excuse" (*TOW* 217). But Monica, a rebel against the norm of Victorian femininity, decides to cast

aside such a suspicion that might put her into moral depravity by defending herself against the charge of impropriety: “What wrong was she committing? What matter that they were alone? Their talk was precisely what it might have been in other people’s presence... The objections were all cant, and cant of the worst kind. She would not be a slave of such ignoble prejudices” and carries on a “tete-e-tete” with him (*TOW* 219).

Monica ultimately falls in love with him, though their relation remains strictly platonic. Soon Bevis departs for France, and she finds herself pregnant. But she does not give the news to Widdowson. By this time she is so overwhelmed with frustration that she leaves him and goes to live in his country house in Clevedon, taking her two elder sisters, Alice and Virginia, along. Widdowson after knowing everything from his sisters-in-law, sends her a monthly allowance, that she easily accepts-- “...it is for the baby... *his* baby.. I am entitled to his money in my condition”, she explains to Virginia. But she never allows him to visit her. In due course she gives birth to girl and dies soon after, leaving her new born and her troubled life behind.

In her short life, Monica experiences many ups and downs, through which she grows from a fun-loving sales girl in a shop to a loyal but assertive wife who knows her mind only too clearly (Goode 213). She repeatedly asserts that freedom is her birthright and dares to risk the wrath of her narrow-minded husband to whom the idea of woman’s freedom is anathema. Ultimately she walks out on her husband, but not from her insistence for personal freedom and independence. The “old” (i.e. conventional, submissive) wife would not have dreamt of deserting her husband at an age when most women would bow down on their knees and thank Heaven that she has been able to enter into matrimony; but the New Woman places her own conviction above societal conventions. She remains committed to her cause ---of having requisite freedom and dignity as wife. Her courage is appreciated both by Alice and Virginia, and even by the firebrand feminist Rhoda Nunn.

Such (literary) News Women acted as “torch-bearers to thousands of Victorian women, who were not antagonistic the idea of marriage, but who were not ready to be valets to their husband’s wills and wiles either” (Cronin 93).

The title *NGS* is directly derived from the encyclopaedic entry “Grub Street” in Samuel Johnson’s dictionary which was published in 1755, where it is described to have become a symbol for the so-called hack-writers, “impoverished writers with little talent” (qtd. by Gissing 5). The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides the same definition, giving examples which feature works of Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* and Alexander Pope’s *The Dunciad* (Poole 45). It was *The Dunciad* by Alexander Pope which first featured the image of Grub Street on the basis of the incorporated entry in Johnson’s dictionary: “Originally the name of a street near Moorfields in London much inhabited by writers of small histories, dictionaries and temporary poems; whence any mean production is called “*grub street*” (Johnson 1163).

Thus the title, with its direct allusion to the entry in Johnson’s dictionary, is a telling or “loaded name” (Goode 59). These loaded names “include those fictional and non-fictional names around which certain historical or cultural associations have occurred in the context of a particular culture” (60). Gissing expects the reader of *NGS* “to understand the extra layer of meaning he incorporates in the novel by means of the allusive title which must fix the attention of the reader on the theme of the novel” (Goode 60).

Through the character of Milvain, Gissing explains that the hack writers of the new world write that the new generation reads. In the first chapter of *NGS*, Jasper Milvain remarks: “He’s [Reardon] behind his age; he sells a manuscript as if he lived in Sam Johnson’s Grub Street. But our Grub Street of to-day is quite a different place: it is

supplied with telegraphic communication, it knows what literary fare is in demand in every part of the world, its inhabitants are men of business, however seedy” (5).

As long as their works sell, the modern writers are prepared to deliver to the readers whatever they take a fancy to, whereas the writers of the old stamp, in their desire to write “significant” themes, eventually tag behind the popular writers and eventually perish (Halperin 70).

A perfect example of this sort of “old stamp” writers is the father-daughter duo, Alfred Yule and Marian Yule. They are a man and a woman of letters, both of whom spend a lot of time in the reading room of the British Museum in London, perusing articles and critical reviews for magazines, but without receiving the literary recognition they long for. In the fast-paced world of business they just cannot catch up. “*New Grub Street* correctly predicted that the commercialization of culture would produce charlatans” (Rawlinson 211). But this crass commercialization does not goad Marian to discontinue her academic pursuits. Rather, she finds the books to be the sole solace in the darkest hour of her young life of twenty three years.

The allusive title sets the tone for the novel. *New Grub Street* now does not harbour the writers of the old stamp who consider literature to be an art. In the mercenary world where literature is fast becoming a trade, the reasonably talented artists – Edwin Reardon and Harold Biffen – in sharp contrast to the tradesmen Jasper Milvain and Edward Whelpdale --- find it extremely difficult to survive. They have to weather severely hard circumstances, which negatively influence their creativity. The lack of money and prosperity forces them to live a life without hopes of any further artistic improvement. *NGS* successfully depicts the increasing awareness of the writers in the late nineteenth century regarding art and the role of its creator.

Adrian Poole identifies the themes of the novel to be “Art, business, success, failure, inclusion, exclusion, innovation in publishing, and cultural power” (144). The theme which, however, reigns supreme is the necessity of money. It is the need of it that decreases one’s creativity drastically.

Of the several reviews on *NGS* some are fair and some others were mere “vicious attacks” (qtd. by Coustillas 15).

Gissing’s documented reaction to the review by Arthur R.R. Barker in *The Academy* – the document is a letter he sent to his brother reads : “A much fairer notice was in *The Academy* – a thing which surprised me. The writer speaks very plainly of what the story deals with, and goes on to say that there is promise of good work... I wanted you to be sure that I am quite skin-hardened. I know precisely the value of my work and can read very calmly these adverse reviews. There will be more of them yet” (qtd. by Coustillas 23).

A contemporary review by Walter Besant, that appeared in *The Author* in 1892, reads: “From my own knowledge, I can testify to its truth. I know them all, personally, two or three of each Mr. Yule – Jasper – Edwin and the fidelity of Mr. Gissing’s portraits makes me shudder” (qtd. by Coustillas 24).

Virginia Woolf, whose article ‘The novels of George Gissing’ that appeared in *The Times Literary Supplement*, on Jan 1912, is a significant contribution to the study of Gissing. It explores the psychological treatment of situations and characters in his novels. She emphatically states that Gissing did not write for art’s sake rather he created some of “the living and thinking” characters. She further asserts that his novels have both the essential qualities of a great work, viz. “life and completeness, and a novel with this quality it can never perish” (qtd. by Coustillas 23).

The 1967 edition of *The Gissing Newsletter* published an article on “Names in *New Grub Street*” by P.F. Kropholler. Kropholler remarks that Gissing, unlike most contemporary authors (Charles Dickens for example) did not use telling names for his characters. Although telling names are different from real names or similar to real people, it is quite clear that Gissing is not overtly defying a specific publisher or paper in *NGS*. “It is wise of him, because the authors of that time had bleak and precarious position, as Gissing presents in the novel” (qtd. by John Goode 168).

NGS was published in 1891 (Korg 213). It is largely the “fictive depiction of an anxiety which loomed large over the literary world in England giving the overt or covert impression that the ‘tyranny’ of the readership was strangling authors” who did not readily cater to the public taste (Poole 24). It deals with the literary careers of a group of characters. The unsuccessful novelist, Reardon, cannot and will not change his ‘style’, in spite of the threat of starvation and Biffen is comfortable to live in direst poverty, but will not re-write his unpublished novel according to popular taste. Fate and social relations have imposed upon these artists the burden of poverty, as Reardon tells his wife Amy: “Society is as blind and brutal as fate. I have no right to complain of my own ill-fortune; it’s my own fault (in a sense) that I can’t continue as well as I began; If I could write books as good as the early ones I should earn money. For all that, it’s hard that I should be kicked aside as worthless just because I don’t know a trade” (*NGS* 160).

The story takes place in nineteenth century London, and more specifically, in the smoky parts of the city in which most writers of little success or talent lived in poor, small lodgings and garrets. A little research into the literary market of that time reveals that this place indeed existed in the form in which it is described in the novel (Rawlinson 91).

NGS is an examination of the pathetic condition of the late nineteenth-century-not-so talented writers. The novel focuses on the changing public demands of a newly created

literary market and the challenges these changes have brought forth for the author. In *NGS*, authors have to choose a career of either accommodating the newly published “quarter- educated reader; or, strive for the excellence represented by the classical masters of Greece and Rome” (Donnelley 141). These radically opposing choices are personified in two writers within the novel: Whelpdale and Biffen. Whelpdale acquiesces to popular taste, and produces literature to please school students and makes a living from it. On the other hand, Harold Biffen portrays the uncompromising author who dedicates himself entirely to the artistic value of his writing, but cannot earn his living. While the Commitment of Harold Biffen warrants recognition, Whelpdale “embodies a creative mainstream professional who abides by the rules of the market and at the same time, results the sinister practices of the cutthroat, sell out writer” (Korg 266). Whelpdale’s literary talent may not be as high as Biffen’s but his determination and sound practical sense are worthy traits to admire. Korg informs that Gissing’s friend Morly Roberts was a model for the character of Whelpdale (267).

The question of art and the artist is also there: Reardon starts his career with a gradual climb to success but he does so as an amateur author. Once he chooses to make writing his full-time occupation, once he understands that the crucial point about his work will be its saleability, he is unable to produce anything of worth. The “professional” writer over comes the “creative” one. He moves from writing two volume novel to essays and to a one volume story. This symbolises the failure of his art to resist external pressures. He loses confidence in himself gradually. With the anxiety of writing badly that he feels so acutely all he does is to wallow in self pity and self criticism. The maintenance of high standards becomes a constant refusal to accept what he creates as possibly worthwhile: “There were floating in his mind five or six possible subjects for a book, all dating back to the time when he first began novel-writing, when ideas came freshly to him. But scarcely

had he done a chapter or two when all the structure fell into flatness... For months he had been living in this way; endless circling, perpetual beginning, followed by frustration (*NGS* 145).

The language itself reflects internal life of the mind- its moments of energy, the sudden loss of confidence and again the quick resurgence of vitality. Reardon is criticised by the scholars for his lack of determination for his superfluous sensitivity for the absence of the practicality regarding the real world. He is unable to turn things to his own advantage. He flatly rejects Milvain's offer to help him with a favourable review and refuses to attend the appropriate social functions. A sort of pride motivates him to be aloof but it is a pride "based not on strength but on weakness" (Goode 98). How he approaches the literary market is suggested by his attitude to the buyer who comes to purchase his books: "Perhaps the offer was a fair one; perhaps it was not, Reardon had neither the time nor the spirit to test the possibilities of the market; he was ashamed to betray his need for haggling. "I will take it", he said, in a matter of fact voice. (*NGS* 219).

"This degree of carelessness borders on the irresponsible this making it easy to see why Reardon fails", says Dennis Richard (101).

Biffen achieves a little success, when his realistic novel is finished and published. *NGS* thus, is not simply a description of the literary arena at the end of the nineteenth century from the view point of a man who is unable to flourish, but is rather "a cross-examination of the issues characteristic of the changing society and cultural conditions of the time" (Poole 167). The crucial question (regarding Gissing's description) is not his mimetic accuracy but his capability to identify the significant tendencies and explore them and the significant choices that are to be made. Biffen's natural cheerfulness and sincere dedication to his art, together with the fact that his book does materialise, indicates that

Gissing earnestly that Gissing believed that situation could improve and that an absolute pessimism wasn't fitting (168). Gissing wrote to Thomas Hardy in a letter:

“Yes, I know too well the dangers of writing too fast and I fear I shall not be able to shun it altogether. It is my misfortune to be obliged to make literature a business – a very poor one is sooth – yet it shall go hard with me but I will follow your example and give my books that individuality which comes of their being heartfelt” (qtd. by Matthiesen 191).

Good literature, Gissing considered, could be produced in spite of his economic hardships (Rawlinson 107).

In *NGS* the social changes that were occurring, the passing of domination from classic to Journalism is shown, as Arlene Young has indicated, in the rivalry “between the slow, pedantic, uninspiring Yule and the up and coming Fadge” (29). It is clear that Gissing's aim is not to deplore the new by comparison with some ideal past, so he creates Alfred Yule as an “obviously inadequate figure”, opines Peter Keating (121).

NGS's fineness comes from its openness to the attitudes and responses to the new public. Though there is despair, there is also a tolerant acceptance of the situation. Although Gissing's sympathies are plainly with the sincere and sensitive artist, he is not unsympathetic to Whelpdale's mercenary qualities but appreciates the cleverness of his ideas and the quickness of his mind. “Gissing laughs with his character, and at the gullibility and stupidity of the people he wants to exploit” (Halperin 122).

For Milvain, there is no one-dimensional attitude either. His cultivation of a style of disarming frankness, his charm and intelligence are adequately given their due importance. Although he is always talking about other people in abusive terms, he is himself not without integrity altogether. Thus there is no question of him neglecting his sisters. His ardent desire for success is not based on greed. He has an intense desire for the possession of luxuries but there is a lurking fear of failure the knowledge that the

alternative of success is penury. In an early conversation with Marian Yule, he says: “Poverty is the root of all social ills; its existence accounts for the ills that arise from wealth. The poor man is a man labouring in fetters. I declare there is no word in our language which sounds so hideous to me as ‘Poverty’” (*NGS* 211).

What this indicates is “suggested symbolically when he approaches his mother’s house” (Halperin 125). Strolling in the garden he stands to observe: “... a poor worn-out beast, all skin and bone, which had presumably been sent there in the hope that a little more labour might be extracted from it if it were suffered to repose for a few weeks” (*NGS* 133). The image suggests the extent to which Milvain recognises what the absence of money signifies. But he accepts reality ungrudgingly, for him this acceptance is merely the starting point. He is mainly characterised by the author through his role of a manipulator – of his sisters, of Marian, of his own talents. Hailing from a lower-middle class provincial background, trying to build his career in a capital city, he has carefully cultivated a style of energetic brashness. Although he talks about the masses in contemptuous terms, essentially he is one of them a fact that he himself does not recognize. In conversation with Biffen and Reardon he makes no attempt to touch upon their serious interests, himself lacking in superior intellectual tastes. His voice is captured superbly by Gissing: “His pushiness, his tone of self-confidence, his incisiveness and the enjoyment he derives from the sound of his own voice” (*NGS* 145).

When he deserts Marian, a desertion he seems to drift into simply because she is not rich, that finally reveals the failure of his humanity. Milvain is a victim of his ambition to succeed and has no feeling for anyone or anything except money.

Milvain thus, is far from a simple creation. His ability to succeed, to cater to the public what they want to read, has significant implications for his own ego. “He is not a

simple cynic who is able from a distant position to exploit the low level of mass taste; he manipulates and is manipulated at the same time” (Poole 236).

NGS is also concerned with what can be termed as an intellectual’s relationship to reality. His growing sense of alienation from society his peripheral position, the increasing professionalization of his role, obviously created some fundamental psychological and emotional difficulties (Goode 65). He is compelled, increasingly in his state of estrangement from society, to introspect and examine himself and his position. Some of the possible implications are suggested by drilling: “Sometimes as you meditate upon yourself in your individuality, insisting upon that individuality for the moment or for an extended time, your fellow beings do not seem very real to you. They do not exist sufficiently” (*NGS* 189).

Alfred Yule is shown to be man obsessed by the petty rivalries of the literary world. He laps up Milvain’s information regarding two contradictory reviews with an extravagant glee. Yule is unable to communicate in any natural way with other people. He suffers from an intense self-pitying bitterness through which he regards the world, driven by an ambition that has little relation to the actualities of life. He barely has any genuine contact with reality. In this light Yule’s blindness can be taken to have a symbolic connotation for it represents the extent to which he has lost his ability to understand the real world. It can also be regarded, perhaps as a sign of a new humility and responsiveness. When he leaves Marian after informing her about the loss of her inheritance: “He was dismissed and went quietly away” (*NGS* 310). “His blindness as is the case with King Lear, can lead him to see better” (Keating 246).

Yule is hugely dependent on his daughter, Marian, for his work, which in turn makes Marian hugely different from other contemporary women. Her work is not manual but intellectual, involving the reading about other people’s lives, and taking notes. She

spends her days in the British Museum (library). She is the New Woman who thinks beyond domesticity, and works shoulder to shoulder with men in the literary market, a domain that was predominantly male dominated (Donnelley 143). That her father cannot do without her support speaks volumes of the importance of her work. In the “valley of the shadow of the books” she toils tirelessly (NGS 50). Marian’s efforts are intended for a fairly cultivated minority. She is the intellectual woman, almost equal to men, in her capacity for reading and writing (Johnson 60). A man’s (her father’s) dependence on her shows how she can handle the pragmatic and the pedantic with equal ease. She is kind and considerate to her illiterate mother, for whom her learned father has nothing more than contempt and shouts at her harshly on the slightest pretext or for the most trivial reason, but almost always in the absence of Marian. Whenever Marian finds her mother unjustly insulted, she shields her mother and vehemently rebukes her father in no uncertain terms. A woman standing up to a man, and that man too her own father, was an unimaginable context for the majority of the Victorian women (Jacobus 125). But Marian is the New Woman who sees eye to eye with men, whenever there is injustice. Unlike her illiterate and helpless mother, she is not prepared to take her father’s unfair chidings without a murmur of protest. “Education empowers her to fight for the basic dignity that any woman deserves”, observes Mabel Donnelley (146).

To this bookworm, Milvain proposes marriage. The eagerness, with which Marian responds with her whole person, is well depicted. This makes her “much more than an intellectual” (Kranidis 198). She is rendered a woman of flesh and blood, who is not blind to the charms of conjugal life. She has strength of will and independence of mind, falls in love with a man who seemingly has the same academic tastes. She too dreams of having a contented life with husband and children. Gissing makes it amply clear that Marian is not a “bone-dried intellectual” enamoured only with books, but is willing to tie the nuptial knot

with the suitable man (Johnson 65). Unfortunately, Milvain ditches her, learning that Reardon's widow, Amy has inherited a large sum from her uncle, and Marian has had no such luck. But even at this crucial juncture, this brave twenty-three year old girl does not succumb to emotional frustrations. She speaks with Milvain quietly, without betraying an iota of her despondence. She keeps her head high, her voice calm, and directs her feet to the British Museum, and finds her own sphere in the company of books. The New Woman cannot be shattered easily, least of all by a money-minded charlatan who fails to appreciate her integrity and sincerity.

John Goode opines that Gissing, "in trying to make up for the fact that he has made Reardon so much less than a cultural hero has to turn on the reader for being too philistine" (136). Gissing however, does not think that writers like Reardon will not make it in the new world. Though the critics point out that the novel is characterised by a sort of Darwinian belief that only the fittest can survive in the literary market (141).

Gissing narrates in *NGS* the unsuccessful novelist, Edward Reardon's luckless struggle with the new mode of literary production: "The one-volume story which he had calculated would take him four or five weeks was with difficulty finished in two months" (*NGS* 154). Reardon explains the situation to Milvain in terms of needs to be met: "For anyone in my position, said Reardon, 'how is it possible to abandon the three volumes? It is a question of payment. An author of some repute may live on a yearly three-volume novel—I mean the man who is obliged to sell his book out and out, and who gets from one to two hundred pounds for it. But he would have to produce four one-volume novels to obtain the same income, and I doubt whether he could get so many published within the published within twelve months'" (*NGS* 265). This is the obvious reason why in *NGS* the penniless Reardon, writes three-volume novels and is unable to produce single-volume ones.

Gissing presents a world that has “no pity [for] a man who can’t do or produce something it thinks worth money” (*NGS* 198). The savage nature of the literary world is “blind and brutal” (*NGS* 199) tearing those down who cannot fight to survive within it. The previous ideal of the respected writer sitting in his study pouring over every sentence of his work is replaced with the struggling workman practicing writing only to cater to the popular taste. The anxiety of “household costs that mount steadily while his pen races frantically over the paper towards the publisher’s cheque” (*NGS* 158) became a serious point for the professional writer who must not think of only his work, but also his ability to support himself and his family. This was an issue that Gissing personally constantly worried about himself (Korg 89). As power shifted from the writer to the reading public and their fickle tastes, the writer must apply himself to demand of the reader. David B. Eakin, in his essay “The Unmasking of the Artist,” writes, “As a result of the influence of industrialization, extension of educational opportunities ... rise of the cheap press and the literary agent... the role of the writer... changed drastically” (qtd. by Kirk 60). The growing number of lesser-educated readers and their demand for cheap but captivating literature alienated the traditional writer from his audience.

This demand for specific types of literature created a trade market rather than an artistic expression. The modern writer was no longer the autonomous individual writing with a sense of authority, but a commercial writer seeking profit and livelihood. Robert D. Butterworth explains that society in the late nineteenth century only allowed the professional to work “as long as society views [that] particular profession in ... tolerable light” (qtd. by Kirk 65). If the reading public does not like the writer then he is abandoned and the popular demand is supplied by other writers. But, the semi-educated public that the author of the nineteenth century had to please was not predominately intellectual readers. They were Board School graduates, whom Whelpdale describes as “quarter-

educated” (*NGS* 260). Rather than crafting literature that elevates the mind of the reader, forcing them to work through the story, the novelist is tied to the reader’s taste, however low that is and must write to their liking. The taste of the common reader was mostly established by the middle-class and the lending libraries. Jacob Korg explains that lending libraries focused primarily on the interest of the “unmarried daughter of a refined middle-class family” (155). This coterie clientele incredibly influenced the publishing industry. The lending libraries’ need to satisfy the mass readers required them to order hundreds of books from the publisher and thus making their decision to select a novel highly influential (156).

Gissing’s portrayal of the literary world in the late nineteenth century is as ruthless as it is accurate. The importance of the writer’s merit and his ability to sell his work blend and mix together to create an art work that has lost the sanctity of the literate of past times, when the writers and not the readers, called the shots. The rising semiliterate public morphed the writer’s role, and alienated the artist from the society he had to satisfy. Gissing attempts to reproduce those struggles imposed on the author in *NGS* and allows his readers “to align themselves how they choose with the reality of a mass literary market” (Halperin 150). Biffen’s stubbornness and originality are embraced by the true reader. The ambition of Whelpdale can be admired and his ability to overcome the odds is powerful. “While Gissing was certainly not trying to establish one wrong and one right path within his story. Nevertheless it is clear that there is something to be said for the man who was ready to try it all, fail several times, but finally succeed” (Goode 98).

One area of concern of *NGS* is the intellectual’s relation to actual experience. A deep involvement in books might lead to a deep alienation from life, and literature itself can become a substitute for reality, thinks Goode (200). *NGS* renders a society in which real feelings and relationships have become quite challenging. “Communications on the

institutional level has expanded but on the personal level they have diminished” (Poole 145).

NGS is a very fine work. Writer’s own attitude to the literary world, based on his own experience and observation, are embedded in a fiction that is able to incorporate the flux and fluidity of reality. He is no more using his art to discover or project himself, it is no more the expression of his unresolved conflicts as thinker, artist and individual. Rather it is the cool acceptance of his condition that allows him to analyse and explore the difficulty of being an intellectual in a non-intellectual society and assess the emotional and psychological implications for the self (Rawlinson 167). The range and depth of comprehension that the novel demonstrates makes it a crucial text in the background of an altering time and significance of culture in the society of the late nineteenth century (Poole 168).

The omniscient narrator of *NGS* through the eyes of different characters, does not give an entirely satirical or sociological critique on society, rather he tells the story of individuals who have to live off their pen. Even the immoral characters like Milvain and Whelpdale eventually successfully work their way up. Thus, *NGS* is a universally appealing novel for many writers who may or may not experience the triumphs and tribulations as Gissing’s characters (Goode 198). In writing *NGS*, Gissing was drawing upon a sense of the artist opines Adrian Poole, that was later to be more fully articulated by Joyce and Mann, among others (189).

Gissing’s portrayal of women places a lot of emphasis on their desire for greater liberty. Restlessness prevails his heroines, Monica Madden in particular, in pursuit of freedom and individual rights. There is a strong desire for liberty: liberty from the burden of tradition, liberty from the bondage of slavery of marriage, liberty from the exploitation in the labour market, and above all, from the inhuman encroachment on spirit. Gissing, as

a moralist like Mill, believed that reasonable exercise of freedom is necessary not only for preserving virtues, but for the emancipation of women too.

Gissing's portrayal of women places a lot of emphasis on their desire for personal liberty. Through his novels, he elaborately explicates the contemporary male mindset through the character of Widdowson, who strongly believes that women of all ages and backgrounds should be guided by men, a perception that is vehemently challenged and denied by Monica. Gissing makes Widdowson the representative Victorian male, an authentic mouthpiece of the contemporary conservative society. At the same time, he endeavours to make Widdowson realise the gradually changing social mores ---- that women no longer agree to wait hand and foot upon the males, but aspire a life of their own. Widdowson's miserable failure to gauze the changing times results in the abject failure of his marriage to Monica. Hers is a strong desire for liberty,-- liberty from the bondage of tradition, from the bondage of slavery of marriage, liberty from the exploitation in the labour market, and above all, from her spousal encroachment on her spirit. To this end, she wants is a little space for herself, away from monotonous domestic life. This simple wish being flatly denied by her insensitive husband, she feels suffocated as well as irritated by his lack of faith in her fidelity to him. Disgruntled and offended beyond her tolerance limits, she leaves him and begins to stay with her sisters, but never surrenders her legitimate demand for a little freedom . Her uncommon decision to desert her husband, who is neither a debauchee nor brutal to her, stunned the contemporary readers, who however, recognized the New Woman when they saw one. Monica, the New Woman, inspired countless "old" (traditional) women readers to courageously protest against all sorts of male atrocities, both in and outside family, stay committed to their cause, and ultimately achieve the much-needed personal space, in family and in society, by remaining steadfast through every confrontation.

In Marian Yule, Gissing creates an even more startling character. In an age when formal, higher education for girls was an unheard of notion, when fathers thought of “giving a good eddication”[sic] only to their sons”(to borrow a phrase from George Eliot’s novel *The Mill on the Floss*), Alfred Yule educates his only daughter to such an extent that he himself can depend upon her intellectual superiority (27), She is probably the only heroine of her times who daily goes to the British Museum (library) and takes relevant notes for her father’s writings (Jacobus 127). Education is the “supreme foundation of her life” which gives her the strength not to break down after being unexpectedly jilted by Milvain (Kranidis 90). As they part their ways, Milvain rushes to meet Amy Reardon, his new beloved, but Marian quietly goes back to the library, without any bickering, any fuss, or even expressing her shock to Milvain. As she goes home, she does not express her grief even to her mother, but displays the resilience to keep her frustrations to herself. Marian is a New Woman who can not only lead an independent existence without a man, but also is an intellectual companion to an educated man, her father. At an age when most women “would kneel on their knees and thank God for the love of an honest man” (to borrow a phrase from Thomas Hardy’s *Far from the Madding Crowd*), Marian has the courage to traverse the path of her life herself, without feeling the need of a husband to hold her hand, to be by her side (135). Because she does not feel inadequate without a man, she does not react openly to Milvain’s treachery. She neither rebels nor protests against various social ills and injustices vociferously, but her quiet and restrained attitude demonstrates her innate fortitude. Not surprisingly, this New Woman deservedly commands respect in her social circle,--- Milvain’s sisters, both Maud and Dora, rebuke their brother harshly for his betrayal to Marian only because she is comparatively poor than Amy Reardon.

Chapter V

The Paragons of Newness: Tess Durbeyfield and Sue Bridehead

The period between the 1840's and 1860's as a whole was marked by heated debates on the woman question. A woman's place in society was ensured only through marriage, and she, in addition to being a dedicated wife, had to be a devoted mother as well. She had a miserable existence as simply a child-bearer and a caretaker of the family.

Thomas Hardy was one of those rare male authors who felt for oppressed, victimised women with all his heart, though he never directly joined the ongoing suffragist movements that shook Victorian England. He was quite vocal about the double standards of sexual morality of his times that demanded pristine purity from the women before marriage, but never gave a thought to the licentious philanderers who could victimise any woman, any time, and go scot-free. Hardy neither succumbed to the prevalent idea that women should be branded "fallen" the moment she had any sexual experience outside marriage, be it a love affair or downright rape, while there would be no punitive measures for her partner, or even for the rapist. From this view point, he regarded his heroine, Tess, "a PURE woman", (the sub-title of the novel) after her seduction by Alec, or even after her co-habiting him after Angel deserts her (emphasis mine). He believed in women's freedom/right to accept or reject a man's proposal of marriage, as well as to have the right of divorcing her husband if she so desires, going against the contemporary social standpoint. To this end, Hardy first delineated the character of Grace Mulberry in *The Woodlanders* (published 1887) who wants to divorce her faithless husband, Edward Fitzpiers, and eight years later, created Sue Bridehead, who accepts and rejects, marries and divorces, her life-partners. Such ideas, in such traditionalist times were shockingly revolutionary.

Thomas Hardy was born on 2 June, 1840 and he passed away on 11 Jan, 1928. He composed most of his creations between 1871 to 1912. From 1912 till his death, in 1928, he wrote only poetry. Hardy is renowned not only as a novelist and a poet but also as a writer of short stories. He began to publish his short stories in various periodicals in 1874 and continued to do so for about thirty years. *The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid* is his sole long novella. His short stories are published in three collections. *Wessex Tales* (1888), *A Group of Noble Dames* (1891) and *Life's Little Ironies* (1894), and the remaining stories were published under the title, *A Changed Man and other stories* (1913) (Millgate 15).

In her article, *Thomas Hardy and Matters of Gender*, Kristin Brady states, "From their first publication, the writing's of Thomas Hardy have been explicitly and obsessively associated with matters of gender" (104). Indeed, in all of his works--- fiction or poetry--- gender related issues are powerfully and skilfully depicted. According to Elaine Showalter, "To a feminist critic, Hardy presents an irresistible paradox. He was one of the few male novelists, who wrote in what may be called a feminine tradition" (99).

The remarkable heroines of Hardy's major novels and the women of the shorter fictions (for example Betty Dornell, Dame the First in *Noble Dames*) speak directly to the women readers. As early as in 1878, in *The Return of the Native*, Hardy spoke about the "Irrepressible New" (regarding his heroine Eustacia Vye in the Preface of the novel), and nothing can be more irrepressible than the "New Woman".

Thomas Hardy was well acquainted with many of the minor women novelists of his day: viz. Rhoda Broughton, Katherine Macquoid, , Sarah Grand, Mary Braddon, and Evelyn Sharp (Stubbs 156). He worked with the novelist Florence Henniker on a short story, "An Imaginative Woman" (157). His knowledge of the ethos of feminist's writings in the 1880s and 1890s was extensive. "He not only commented upon, but in a sense,

helped to chart out the future course of feminine fiction” (Ingram 144). Hardy believed that the feminine self is “essentially a complement of the male self” (145). His heroines openly defy Victorian social and moral norms. By writing about sexually-charged themes at a time when subjects such as unwanted seduction, premarital sex, illegitimate children, adultery and divorce were absolute taboo, Hardy challenged his readers to realize the devastation that can be caused by hypocrisy and double standards regarding sexual morality, making many to consider him to be “among the first feminists” (Tomalin 189).

Traversing the course of six decades, the major novels of Thomas Hardy chart the evolution of the New Woman. From the docile and submissive Cythera Graye of his first novel (*Desperate Remedies* 1871) to the aggressive and defiant Sue Bridehead of his last written novel (*Jude* 1895), Hardy depicted the growth of the empowered woman, and her struggles to gain acceptance and unconditional love. With each novel, his heroines become stronger and more determined. Though Hardy himself was quiet and reserved in his personal life, he was fond of intelligent, strong-minded women. He was fully conscious of the potential power of the emerging New Woman figures. Saddened well as enraged by the hypocrisy of the moral standards of the Victorian patriarchy, Hardy directly wrote of its damaging consequences to women. He also portrayed in his fiction, the negative impact of society’s harsh judgement regarding women’s sexuality, marriage and desire. Much before the phrase “The New Woman,” was coined, Thomas Hardy was already writing about strong, independent women determined to live life on their own terms. Thus the New Woman was nothing “new” to Hardy, she was the re-emergence of a natural phenomenon long suppressed and shackled by the social conventions of Victorian England, says Penny Boumelha.(231). As Boumelha notes in her introduction to Thomas Hardy’s *The Woodlanders* (published 1887). Hardy was not a pioneer in the debate on women’s rights and marriage in the Press and Parliament in the 1880s and 1890s, but he

was very much responsive to the burning issue. Because of his willingness to address sensitive ethos regarding sexuality of women, Hardy was, posits Boumelha, “soon depicted as a willing conscript in the so called “Anti-Marriage League” of moral critics and social sceptics identified in the 1890s as crusading conservatives (xii).

Hardy, however, was not against the institution of marriage, he was against accepting marriage as an irrevocable contract, against the unnaturalness of conventions of obligatory unions as well as repression of innate sexual desires. Boumelha also addresses the “desire” found in Hardy’s novels: “A continual mutability of sexual relationship is driven by instinctive response rather than by emotional (or still less, legal) commitment... Character after character experiences desire as a force overpowering individual will... stunned, mesmerized, dizzied by desire, these characters act under the power of a kind of natural law that motivates and undermines the making and unmaking of their socially ratified relationships” (123).

Right from Eustacia Vye to Sue Bridehead, the heroines of Thomas Hardy demonstrate women’s emergence as independent, thinking individuals vigorously. They also demonstrate the destructive consequences created by a society unwilling to accommodate women’s dreams and desires. Through his fiction, Hardy gave his women a chance to voice their changing role in society. One of his most beloved heroines, Bathsheba Everdene, succinctly articulates women’s particular difficulty in expressing themselves as early as in 1874. In her effort to dissuade Farmer Boldwood from his marriage proposal to her (*Far from the Madding Crowd*), Bathsheba exclaims: “It is very difficult for a woman to define her feelings in a language which is chiefly made by men to express theirs” (308). Such radical utterances could only be uttered by a New Woman, who, despite being not labelled as one, actually embodies the courage and conviction in her own identity.

Similar to Bathsheba's determination to manage Weatherbury farm as a woman, the growth and development of the independent, expressive woman was a gradual process. The emergence and evolution of the New Woman and a sense of female empowerment, are common themes in most of Hardy's fiction, since he was keenly aware of the radically changing world towards the end of the Victorian era. "Hardy had no feminist agenda, only a respect for strong women and disgust for a world that suppressed their individuality", says Rosemarie Morgan (145). Patricia Stubbs beautifully analyses, "In an evolutionary discourse of their own, each of Hardy's novels and tales grew progressively more revealing --- from *Desperate Remedies* to *Jude the Obscure* and from *Wessex Tales* to *Life's Little Ironies*--- highlighting the hypocrisy and futility of the era's double standards and conventions that were detrimental to the growth of woman" (189).

Havelock Ellis, a noted social reformer wrote: "The progress of Hardy's art has consisted in bringing this element of nature into closer contact with the rigid routine of life, making it more human, more moral or immoral. It is an inevitable progression"(qtd. by Boumelha 278). Acknowledging the author's genius, Ellis was among the first to recognize Hardy's contribution to the feminist movement and the creation of the New Woman (279).

Like Ellis, Coventry Patmore, the author of the extensively used term to describe Victorian women as "Angel in the House", believed that it was in their failure to adhere to social conventions that Hardy's female characters are most human, most natural, most likeable (280).

However, not all contemporary critics were as positive as Ellis and Patmore about the women in Hardy's works. Most of the reviews regarding his later works were unfairly negative, particularly of *Tess* and *Jude*. The conservative Mrs. Margaret Oliphant's article titled *The Anti-Marriage League* appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine*, in 1896. She

asserted that Hardy's male characters are victims of "seductions of sirens" and that his women are "remorseless ministers of destiny, determined operators, managing all of the machinery of life in order to be secure in their own way" (qtd. by Cox, 260). Oliphant expanded further: "We rather think that author's object must be, having glorified women by the creation of Tess, to show after what destructive and ruinous creatures they are, in general circumstances and in every development, whether brutal or refined" (261).

Oliphant's virulent criticism of Hardy's works was representative of the Victorian society's rigid social code that women should be subservient, submissive and complainant to man. An aggressive woman was branded a "siren" who takes control of "the machinery of life" (Margaret Oliphant, qtd. by Cox 260). So, the New Woman figures were to be feared and avoided – if not destroyed: this was the general view. However though Mrs. Oliphant reflected the opinion of the majority prevalent at the time, perspectives on the role of the New Woman in society were gradually changing. People began to readjust their attitude on the Marriage Question and the role of women in general; and "Hardy's heroines were part of the process", asserts Marjorie Garson (21).

Tess was written when Hardy's career was at its zenith. He began preparation for it in 1888, when he was 48 years old. It began to appear in a serial form in *The Graphic*, a popular family magazine from 1889. However, the editors were very conservative and kept asking Hardy to tone down the more obviously sexual parts. They even objected to Angel carrying Tess and the other three girls over a flooded part of the road in his arms. Hardy obliged, he let Angel cart them in a wheelbarrow. Because of the constriction of family reading, late Victorian Britain was very reluctant to allow any sort of physical description of sexuality in literature (Page 219).

It usually happened in the nineteenth century that once a book had been serialized, it was then published as a three volume novel. In preparing for this, Hardy retrieved the

self-censored portion back into the book, and added the highly controversial sub-title, “A Pure Woman”. Several publishers refused to publish it. Finally, in December 1891, the firm of James Osgood & McIlvaine published it, and “Hardy had no idea just how controversial it would turn out to be” (Pinion 98). It was a stupendous success, probably buoyed up heavily by the vehement controversy over its frank treatment of sex as well as its pessimistic view of life. Within a year, more than twenty thousand copies of the book sold out. Undoubtedly, “sales were inflated by the curious public who wanted to know what the controversy was about” (Duffin 212). It was also simultaneously translated and published in several foreign languages (213).

Although *Tess* was a popular success, critical opinion was mixed, with its commentary “ranging from highest praise to deepest contempt” (Millgate 296). *The Illustrated London News* (Jan 9, 1892), wrote: “The conventional reader wishes to be excited, but not to be disturbed; he likes to have new pictures presented to his imagination, but not to have new ideas presented to his mind. He detests unhappy endings, mainly because an unhappy ending nearly always involves an indirect appeal to the conscience, and the conscience, when aroused, is always demanding a reorganization of that traditional pattern of right and wrong which is the essence of conventionality to regard as immutable. Yet more, of course, does he detest an open challenge of that traditional pattern and *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* is precisely such a challenge (qtd. by Lerner and Holmstrom 111).

The Spectator (Jan. 23, 1892) opined: “On the whole, we deny altogether that Mr. Hardy has made out his case for Tess. She was pure enough in her instincts, considering the circumstances and the class in which she was born. But she had no deep sense of fidelity to those instincts. If she had, she would not have allowed herself time after time to be turned from the plain path of duty, by the fastidiousness of a personal pride which was

quite out of proportion to the extremity of her temptations and her peril” (qtd. by Lerner and Holmstrom 112).

Both the *Anthenaeum* and the London *Times* extolled the novel, but for different reasons. The critic in *Anthenaeum* not only found the novel “much better than Mr. Hardy’s previous work,” but also praised the novelist’s creation of Tess, whom he called “a credible, sympathetic creature”. However he regretted Hardy’s excessive “use of scientific and ecclesiastical terminology.” The reviewer in *Times* was moved by the story and appreciated Hardy’s candid criticism of Victorian moral standards. On the lee side, the critic in *Saturday Review* (January 16, 1892), while identifying Tess as the most true to life character, found the other characters “stagy” or “farcical”. He objected to what he regarded as Hardy’s excessive concern with descriptions of Tess’s appealing physical beauty and considered the story improbable. He admitted that even with a poor story a good narrative technique could have saved the novel, but “Mr Hardy, it must be conceded, tells and unpleasant story in a very unpleasant way” (qtd. by Lerner and Holmstrom 113).

Nevertheless, public sentiment was such that those who disliked the novel were greatly outnumbered. In *Longman’s* magazine, Andrew Lang found the characters in *Tess* to be “far from plausible”, the story “beyond... belief”, and Hardy’s use of “psychological terminology unskilful”, but conceded nonetheless that “on all sides – not only from the essays of reviewers, but from the spoken opinion of the most various kinds of readers--- one learns that *Tess* is a masterpiece” (*Millgate* 324).

On the other hand, Robert Louis Stevenson wrote to Henry James (Dec. 5, 1892): “Well, I was mortally wounded by *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*. I do not know that I am exaggerative in criticism; but I will say that *Tess* is one of the worst, weakest, least sane, most *voulu* [forced] books I have yet to read. Bar the style it seems... to have no earthly connection with human life or human nature; and to be merely the ungracious portrait of a

weakish man under a vow to appear clever, as a rickety schoolchild setting up to be naughty and not knowing how” (Millgate 225).

According to Edmund Blunden, a noted Hardy critic, critics before 1940 seemed to “chide Hardy for many of the same points of style that later reviewers found admirable” (147). In 1940, the *Southern Review* journal celebrated the centennial of Hardy’s birth with the publication of an issue devoted entirely to the author. Earlier critics viz. Andrew Lang and Lionel Johnson, praised his ability to describe the country folk of Wessex realistically and condemned his fatalistic view of life. Duffin suggests that, beginning with the essays in the *Southern Review*, modern reviewers adore Hardy because of his pessimism; as they find Hardy’s “mismatched destinies, the darkness of the physical and moral landscapes, the awareness of dwindling energies, and the sense of man’s appalling limitations to be peculiarly modern” (151). One *Southern Review* contributor, Donald Davidson, finds in the fatalism of the novel, as well as in Hardy’s controversial closing paragraph about “The President of the Immortals”, reflections of Hardy’s innate interest in the folk ballads of his native Dorset. Davidson contends that fateful coincidences abundant in *Tess* are comparable to the supernatural occurrences that frequently appear in the ballads, and that Hardy’s closing paragraph functions as a closing statement to the novel much like a traditional ballad ending (qtd. by Lermer and Holmstorm 114). On the other hand, John Holloway does not attach much importance to Hardy’s use of coincidence, noting that the scenes that might seem unrealistic are out of necessity: “in order that their other dimensions take meaning, their relevance to the larger rhythms of the work, shall transpire.” In *Tess* the “larger rhythm,” as Holloway sees it is in repeated identification of Tess with a hunted animal and a Darwinian vision that takes Tess, much like a developing species, from formation, through adaptation, to ultimate extinction (179). Holloway cannot, thus, consider Tess as a strong figure. Similarly, Dorothy Van Ghent notes that “in

the accidentalism of Hardy's universe we can recognize the profound truth of the darkness in which life is cast, darkness both within the soul and without" (69).

Harold Bloom rightly asserts, "Hardy the novelist is a major transitional figure between the popular moralists and popular entertainer of Victorian fiction and the serious, visionary, often symbolizing novelists of today" (150). Other critics too place Hardy at the threshold of modernism. Bloom argues that this is especially true of *Tess*: "It can be asserted that Hardy's novel has proved to be prophetic of a sensibility that by no means was fully emergent in 1891. Nearly a century later, the book sometimes seems to have moments of vision that are contemporary with us." (181). Critics have also re-evaluated the novel in the light of feminist issues and women's rights. As Hardy's biographer Martin Seymour-Smith concludes, *Tess* remains a novel of riveting validity even after more than one hundred years of publication. "Tess was a *woman* who stabbed her paramour. Then, as now, in the eyes of most judges, there is one law for men who kill their wives, and another for women who kill their husbands." (182). For Seymour-Smith, Tess and her treatment by the two men in her life are at the centre of discovering the true significance of the work. He wonders: "The question raised by the novel is this: what would a woman be if she were released from male oppression and allowed to be herself?" (183).

Susan David Barnstein believes that Tess suffers because of no fault of her own (159). John Holloway asserts that Hardy's novels reject human choice and effort and whatever happens in the lives of characters is predetermined (17). Arnold Kettle postulates that the near-total-destruction of traditional peasantry plays havoc with Tess's life (24). In sum, these critics represent Tess as a powerless and voiceless woman who does not have any role in her destiny. On the other hand, Margaret Higonnet's view is that "Hardy gave his heroine an individual voice against the unnatural law and maxims of men" and

attempted to “singularize Tess in order to “differentiate her voice from stereotypes of the feminine” (120).

Rita S. Kranidis points out that some critics argue that “Hardy did not convey or even have a sufficient understanding of woman’s nature, and as a result mischaracterized women in novels such as *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*” (115), while Kristin Brady points out that Havelock Ellis “Summarized an aspect of Hardy’s writing that was endlessly intriguing to Victorian readers: here was a male writer offering a style of writing and of plot construction that was considered to be exclusively female” (95).

Hardy, in a letter to the suffragist activist Millicent Garrett Fawcett, who attempted to publish a pamphlet devoted to the views of eminent men on the issue of women’s suffrage, wrote: “I have for a long time been in favour of women-suffrage... because the tendency of the woman’s vote will be to break up the present pernicious conventions in respect of manners, customs, religion, illegitimacy, the stereotyped household” (qtd. by Garson 214). He added that “by asserting themselves, women will loosen the tongues of men who have not liked to speak out on such subjects” (215).

Merryn Williams argues that *Tess* belongs to the category of New Woman fiction because it is “offering new elements of polemic” about “sex roles” and “the double standard” (219). Dorothy Van Ghent likewise believes that “*Tess* is a possible form for the ‘new’ woman – both as a survivor and as an intelligent forerunner” (123). Rosemarie Morgan argues that *Tess* is not a passive victim but has “a vital consciousness” that showcases a capacity to be responsible for herself. She explains further: “Hardy retains, then, for *Tess*, with her emotional generosity, sexual vitality and moral strength, the capacity to rise above her fall and ultimately to redeem the man who, bearing the values and sexual prejudices and double-standards of the society, fails to rise above them in the hour of need. Nor does *Tess*’s last hour find her bereft of will, self-determination and

courage. In knifing the heart of the man who so remorselessly hunts her down, she turns her own life round yet again; but this time with readiness, she says, to face her executioner” (109).

Hardy portrays Tess as a woman who is determined to take responsibility for her actions. She does not go to the d’Urbervilles’ farm at Trantridge because of her parents’ word, but because she takes the responsibility for Prince’s death. She explains as much to her parents as the reason for going to the farm: “Well, as I killed the horse... I ought to do something” (*Tess* 58). Poverty and the economic crisis of the working class, in nineteenth century England, were rooted in industrialization. In *Tess*, Hardy depicted the impact of industrialization in the life of working-class people. George Wotton notes, for Hardy, “the Industrial Revolution was a monster that destroyed the traditions and meaning of country life” (206). Mary Jacobus agrees that Hardy demonstrated how nineteenth-century industrialization destroyed Victorian families. She argues that, in order to “amplify the ramifications of the cultural-economical changes, Hardy used fictional families to signify the basic losses suffered and experienced by the rural working class” (29).

It is because of dire poverty that Tess’s parents send her to the d’Urbervilles’ farm. There Alec exploits her in spite of her not encouraging him in any way, but pointedly telling him “...I do not love you” (*Tess* 28). In Marxist philosophy, exploitation occurs when someone is oppressed by economic circumstances. Thus *Tess* becomes the symbol of the destruction of the peasantry in the nineteenth century, as is famously posited by Arnold Kettle.

Tess displays appreciable courage to take the responsibility for events that she cannot control herself. Her father, John Durbeyfield gets so elated on hearing from Parson Tringham that he is the descendant of a “very old family..... the d’Urbervilles...of Normandy” (*Tess* 3) that he goes to the local pub “to get his strength” (4) and drinks so

much that he becomes quite unable to drive his horse-wagon to take the beehives to the Casterbridge market. The seventeen-year old Tess, the oldest of his numerous children, perforce has to undertake the job. On the way to the market a sharp shaft of a dog-cart coming from the opposite direction rams into Prince's heart, killing him instantly. After his death she feels guilty and takes the responsibility, saying "as I killed the horse, mother.... I suppose I ought to do something" (*Tess* 19). She is well aware of the fact that now she needs to shoulder the job of feeding her huge family. She never dissuades from duty. She willingly goes to Trantridge poultry farm, where her mother sends her "to claim kin", a thinly disguised plea to help them, by giving Tess a job in the farm (*Tess* 21).

At Trantridge, Tess not only gets the job of a poultry maid, but also the unwanted attention of the owner, Alec d'Urberville, who soon succeeds in seducing and impregnating her. But he fails miserably to bring her under his power. Tess rejects him downright and comes back to her parents after four months, leaving her job, much to the chagrin of her mother Joan Durbeyfield, who was expecting a grand alliance between the two families.

What the plebeian mother fails to gauze is her daughter's incredible courage to go against the current. Tess, whom her mother Joan Durbeyfield so far took to be "tractable at bottom" turns out to be of sterner stuff who contemptuously rejects Alec (*Tess* 20). She exhibited the same spirit once when Alec asked her, "Why do you always dislike my kissing you?" and she honestly replied "because I don't love you" (28). "The teenaged peasant girl showcasing more grit than most of her ilk plants the seed of deep-rooted attraction in her seducer's heart, who will reappear in her life after years, says Jean Brooks 49).

After her seduction by Alec Tess is easily capable of adapting and coping with the new situation. She does not feel broken or blemished in any way. She has a positive view

on life, rather than being a hopeless, dependent person. She not only takes the responsibility for her unconventional choices, she takes responsibility for herself. After seducing her, Alec wants to cure the wound he has caused by offering Tess money, but she strongly rejects him. "I have said I will not take anything more from you, and I will not – I cannot! I should be your creature to go on doing that, and I won't!" (*Tess* 97). She flatly refuses to be her seducer's footstool, and explores other brilliant facts of life that has nothing to do with morality or chastity.

Hardy says about Tess that for her "The irresistible, universal, automatic tendency was to find sweet pleasure somewhere.... Her spirits, and her thankfulness, and her hopes rose higher and higher" (*Tess* 98). She does not feel ashamed of being seduced, she is not ashamed of her child who is born out of wedlock, but bravely defends his rights. She names him "Sorrow", but is not ashamed of him. She takes the infant along when she goes out to work in the fields, and "suckles the infant... in full view of the peasants and labourers" (*Tess* 45), who are too "dumbstruck by the evident courage of this girl-mother to confront her (Williams 192). "The baby's offence against society in coming into the world was forgotten by the girl-mother; her soul's desire was to continue that offence by preserving the life of the child" (*Tess* 101).

Tess's family members do not feel the same way. When she wishes to call on the parson to baptise her child, her father, whose "sense of the antique nobility of his family was highest" locks the door because "no parson should come inside his door... prying into his affairs, just then, when, by her shame, it had become more necessary than ever to hide them" (*Tess* 111). But Tess is the New Woman who is not to be browbeaten to submit to patriarchal hegemony. She resists the typical patriarchal behaviour of her father by baptising her child herself in her own home, in front of her "awestruck" younger siblings (*Tess* 115).

Michael Millgate notes that as a child Hardy often heard the story of a “private baptism that took place in his maternal grandmother’s family several years ago in a similar situation” from his mother, Jemima Hardy, and the story left such an indelible mark on his mind that he used it in his novel (298).

The baby dies after a few weeks, and Tess meets the parson to ask for a Christian burial. Although it was a taboo to have a child out of wedlock, she speaks “freely” and “earnestly” without being ashamed of herself or of the infant (*Tess* 121). The parson rejects her request to bury an illegitimate child, but she ignores his denial of permission and buries the baby in the graveyard all by herself. Her innate sense of justice does not allow her to deny her child’s right of a proper burial. She baptises him, gives him a name and identity, and buries him properly. The New Woman openly defies archaic social codes and conventions. Through her Hardy hints at the changing social attitudes (Brooks 52).

When Tess’s story was serialized in the *Graphic Magazine* the baptism section, which was critical of the church and the society as a whole, was omitted by Hardy, to protect himself from censorship (Page 269). However, when it was published in the book form, Hardy added this portion. In this relation, Dorothy Van Ghent argues that Tess “subverts patriarchy by taking her child’s baptism into her own hands. She goes against her father, the vicar, and the whole church with her self-made baptism” (122). Against the backdrop of traditional convention that sexual intimacy before marriage was taboo and that women had to give up children born out of wedlock, Tess loves her child. In other words, she attempts to break down this norm of society, and wants to make fatherless children socially acceptable, though she does not succeed to change the mindset of the people around her.

A few months after the death of her child, Tess again leaves home and goes to work, this time as a dairy-maid in Crick’s dairy at Tolboothays. For Tess, the seduction

(and aftermath), although it was an event which could have led to a virtual ending of her life, was an experience that “had quite failed to demoralise her” (*Tess* 117). It rather turns into an avenue for her to protest against social oppressions and conventions. Hardy covertly refers to a kind of “innate sense and spirit in Tess that even with all of her difficulties gives her a zest for life” (Ingram 78).

At Tolbothays, Tess meets her co-worker Angel Clare, the third and youngest son of a vicar, who “professes to be above social conventions” (Van Ghent 27). Angel proposes her to marry him, and Tess accepts, albeit after much dithering because of her past and Angel marries her, taking her to be a virgin, “a fresh, untainted flower of nature” (*Tess* 151). Tess writes a letter to him narrating her past and slips it under his door, but that goes unread by him. But she cannot start her wedded life with falsehood. So, on the wedding night itself, before the consummation of their wedding, Tess tells him everything, against her mother’s express advice not to do so. Angel also confesses of having forty eight hours of “dissipation with a stranger” (*Tess* 153). Tess forgives Angel downright, but the latter rejects her after her confession. He is so shocked to hear her past that he exclaims. “The Woman I’ve been loving is not you--- another woman in your shape” (*Tess* 154). Shocked, Tess exclaims, “I thought, Angel, that you loved me—me, my very self! I love you forever because you are yourself” (*Tess* 155). Her ideal man is a person who loves her for what she is and not condemn her for what she herself does not feel guilty. She sees herself as a unique person and wants Angel to respect her personal identity and uniqueness. When Angel “called her Artemis, Demeter, and other fanciful names”, she does not like it and says “Call me Tess” (*Tess* 146). She views herself as a valuable human being, is looking for a man who will love her for what she is. She is ashamed neither of her lowly origin nor of her illegitimate son, but stands with her head high and wants the same social respect and recognition as men; but the shocked husband

cannot give a woman the same respect as a woman gives a man. So Angel leaves not only his bride, but also his country, and goes to Brazil. Tess never questions his decision, let alone plead for herself. She has “too much dignity to beg for mercy or for marital bliss” (Brady 198).

Tess once again begins to work, now as a farm—labourer in Flintcomb- Ash farm when Alec re-appears in her life. He again falls for her, and proposes to help her financially destitute family. Tess rejects him, tries to be faithful to her absent husband and writes him a letter about the troubles Alec is causing for her. Even in the difficult condition of her father’s death, which has virtually left her family homeless, she continues to look for a way to solve the problem instead of accepting Alec’s offer. The New woman resists Alec and does not easily surrender to him because she values herself, knows her worth. She finally strikes a deal that he has to provide for her family in return of her favours to him. Hardy covertly criticises male power which can compel women to sell their bodies as a means of economic survival, but overtly, depicts the incredible courage of the New Woman who knows the worth of herself and her paternal family .

Josephine Butler, a prominent suffragist activist of the nineteenth century, not only criticised the double standard of morality but also the matter of forced prostitution. She argued that “male sexual control over women’s bodies and the male-controlled legal, economic, political ideological structures” led women “to sell their body as a means of economic survival (qtd. by Boumelha 249). In the case of Tess, it is patriarchy and the economic power of Alec which finally lead her to sell her body to be able to survive. But Alec buys Tess’s body only, not her soul, not her indomitable spirit. Finally when Angel returns, Tess stabs Alec to death “to pursue her dreams and desires and defend those rights that society does not care for” (Higonet 98). Now Angel too understands her worth. He frankly confesses, “I did not think rightly of you—I did not see you as you were!” ... I

have learnt to since, dearest Tessy mine!” (*Tess* 366). In fact, at this point, Angel loves her for what she is now he gives the respect that is her due. Now he loves and supports Tess, who is not only seduced, not only a “fallen” woman as per the “grey-headed legislators of society” but is also a murderer ((to borrow a phrase from Hardy’s *Jude*) 298). Now he promises: “I will not desert you! I will protect you by every means in my power, dearest love, whatever you may have done or not have done!” (*Tess* 373). The “fallen” “murderer” is finally recognized for her intrinsic value.

Angel cannot protect Tess from the law for long, --- after a few days police arrive and arrest her to be hanged by neck till death. She surrenders without the least resistance, but by saying, “I am ready” “quietly” (*Tess* 398). Her last words “represent the maximum self awareness” (Kranidis 120).

Rosemary Morgan asserts that in Victorian England “Individuals were obliged not only to assume responsibility for their own choices, but also to take cognisance of the opinions and circumstances of others” (46)

Tess displays exemplary large-heartedness,---remains concerned for her sister’s life, even when she herself is going to be hanged. She asks Angel to marry her sister Eliza-Louisa, fondly called Liza- ‘Lu, so that she gets the coveted life of living in peace with the husband and not forced to trade herself for survival. The New Woman looks forward to a life of dignity and respect for Liza-Lu, so that Liza is not trapped within the contours of the ‘old’ (i.e. traditional) role of a helpless victim in the hands of male power. Hardy expresses his unstinted admiration for this New Woman and calls her “a pure woman” with a “poor wounded name” (the sub-title of the novel), an act which created unlimited consternation in his readers.

In the Preface to the first edition of *Jude* (1895) Thomas Hardy himself gave information about its conception and genesis. Outlining the scheme of his last novel from

his earliest notes made in 1887, he explained that the direct impulse to write this novel was “the death of woman”. Hardy most likely meant his cousin, Tryphena Sparks, to whom he was deeply attached and who passed away in 1890, leaving him in the deepest affliction (*Millgate* 345).

In Hardy’s diary, there appears an enigmatic entry dated 12 June, “One who could not go to Oxford. Suicide. There is something in this the world ought to be shown, and I am the one to show it” (F.E. Hardy 189). Six years later the idea took shape in his last novel, *Jude the Obscure*.

Norman Page affirms that Hardy was inspired to write *Jude* after reading *The Wages of Sin* (1890), a novel written by Lucas Malet (real name: Mary St. Leger Kingsley Harrison, 1852-1931—the daughter of Charles Kingsley), with whom Hardy regularly corresponded: “*The Wages of sin* shares the same plot, same character types, same scenes and even some of the language with *Jude*” (217).

However, it was in August 1893 that Hardy actually began to write the full-length version of the novel. In November 1894, *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* began its serialisation in Europe and America under the title “The Simpletons”. Thereafter monthly instalments, from January to November, 1895, were published under the title “Hearts’ Insurgents” (Pinion 294). The most controversial passages in the manuscript version were omitted or altered beyond recognition in its initial serial publication. It was published in a single volume by Osgood and McIlvaine in November 1895 under the title *Jude the Obscure* with a frontispiece etching of ‘Christminster’ (Oxford) by Henry Macbeth-Raeburn, as well as a map of Wessex (295). In 1912, Macmillan published their definitive ‘Wessex Edition’ of Hardy’s works. Hardy continued to make some minor emendations to his subsequent editions of *Jude* until his death in 1928. In 1927, it was published in the

popular format of the Modern Library, and in 1932 Harper's printed the novel in a college textbook edition (323).

The eponymous hero, Jude, a rural stonemason with intellectual aspirations, was originally called by the author Jack; and his surname also underwent changes at different stages: Head, Hopeson and Stancombe, before finally settled on Fawley. Hardy derived the surname of his hero from the name of a village, Great Fawley, in Berkshire, where his maternal grandmother, Mary Head, had lived. Jude's prototype might have been the Biblical Job, who patiently overcame all afflictions received from God with infinite patience and humility (Bloom 295). The village was also the inspiration for Marygreen, the village, where the opening chapters of *Jude* are set. Drusilla Fawley, Jude's great aunt, runs a bakery there and raises the orphaned Jude. It is also the place where Jude's cousin, Sue Bridehead, spent her childhood (297).

Although Hardy vehemently denied that *Jude* was autobiographical, it should be emphasised that the novel contains many allusions to the lives not only of the author himself but also of his relations and acquaintances. It also contains references to contemporary intellectual figures (Millgate 345). Hardy's basic conception of Jude Fawley's personality may have been inspired by his uncle John Antell, "a Puddleton shoemaker, who bitterly resented his exclusion from formal education" (Millgate 346). The character of Sue, whose full name is Susanna Florence Mary Bridehead, was partly modelled on Hardy's long-time friend, Mrs. Florence Henniker (347). Sue's full Christian name Susanna might refer to Susanna in the Book of Daniel in *The Bible*--- a righteous woman who was falsely accused of adultery. Her surname, Bridehead, by analogy to 'maidenhead' suggests her vulnerability and sexual repugnance, believes Rita Kranidis (98). It should be noted that Hardy had been interested in the psychology of a seemingly sexless female character a long time before writing *Jude*. In the novel he himself coined

the term “erotolepsy” to describe a passionate sensual desire (*Jude* 92). At the outset he wanted to write a novel devoted only to the critique of the institution of marriage and Victorian double standard regarding sexual morality, but later on he added the topics of elitist education, gender inequality and an indictment of Christianity (Page 234).

Jude was subject to extensive censorship on grounds of blasphemy and indecency when it was first published. The text of the first version published by *Harper's* magazine was heavily bowdlerised, and some of the incidents in the story varied significantly from the first edition to its final revised ‘Wessex Edition’ published by Macmillan in 1912. For example, in the serial version, Arabella does not seduce Jude; Sue and Jude do not become lovers nor have children, but more demurely, they adopt one; when Arabella returns from Australia, she does not spend a night with Jude in an inn (Millgate 335). It was probable that Hardy permitted such omissions in the serialised edition in order to not to offend the prudish readers of literary periodicals, but in the first book publication by Osgood and McIlvaine in 1895 many omissions were restored (Pinion 311).

After the publication in book form *Jude* aroused a more violent debate than did its predecessor *Tess*, because of its depiction of an unforeseen heroine, Sue Bridehead. Hardy was virulently attacked by the conservatives not only for his unsympathetic portrayal of the university system and the institution of marriage but also for the description of his female protagonists’ candid sexual desires. Contemporary readers were stunned by Hardy’s frank treatment of sexuality, particularly female sexuality. A number of reviewers charged *Jude* with immorality. The *Pall Mall Gazette* published a malicious review of the book under the title ‘Jude the Obscene’, describing it as “dirt, drivel and damnation”. The headline in *The World* ran “Hardy the Degenerate”. Jeannette L. Gilder’s review in the 8 December 1895 *New York World* asked, “What has gone wrong with the hand that wrote *Far From the Madding Crowd*? I am shocked, appalled by this story. *Jude the Obscure* is

almost the worst book I have every read... Aside from its immorality, there is its coarseness which is beyond belief.... When I finished the story I opened the window and let in the fresh air". The *New York Bookman* regarded *Jude* as "one of the most objectionable books that we have ever read in any language whatsoever". In January 1896, in *Blackwood's Magazine*, Margaret Oliphant, who was profoundly shocked for attacking the institution of marriage, described it as "coarsely indecen". Edmund Gosse, who was quite friendly with Hardy, wrote two reviews of *Jude*. The first, published in *St. James's Gazette*, began: "It is a very gloomy, it is even a grimy, story that Mr. Hardy has at last presented to his admirers". In the second review published in *Cosmopolis* in January 1896, Gosse asked: "What has Providence done to Mr. Hardy that he should rise up in the arable land of Wessex and shake his fist at his Creator?". Robert Yelverton Tyrrell, in the *Fortnightly Review* in June 1896, compared *Jude* to erotic and New Woman literature: "If we consider broadly and without prejudice the tone and scope of the book, we cannot but class it with the fiction of Sex and the New Woman, so rife of late. It differs in no ways from the 'hill-top' novels, save in the note of distinction and the power of touch which must discriminate Mr. Hardy at his worst from the Grant Allens at their best." (All the quotations are taken from the book, *Thomas Hardy and his Readers- A Selection of Contemporary Reviews*, edited by Lawrence Lerner and John Holmstorm, Pg. 317-25).

In the same year, William Walsham Howe, the Bishop of Wakefiled wrote a letter to the *Yorkshire Post* in order to safeguard his parishioners' sense of morality against Hardy's latest novel. He was so disgusted with the "insolence and indecency" of the novel that he "threw it into fire and burnt it" (325) to which Hardy added a caustic rejoinder: "Probably in his despair at not being able to burn me" (F.E.Hardy 410). The Bishop also requested W.H. Smith's circulating library to withdraw it from its collections. Hardy's

first wife, Emma, who objected to her husband's attack on the Church and marriage, was unhappy that her husband had not let her read it before publication. She disapproved of the book and wished it had never been published, inform Hardy's biographer, Claire Tomalin (259).

Of course, many readers disagreed with Emma and the Bishop, and the publishers, instead of withdrawing the novel, soon printed another edition, and within three months after the publication 20,000 copies were sold (260).

In spite of harsh criticism of many reviewers, *Jude* also received positive reviews and private praise, particularly from major writers (Brooks 227). In the October 1896 issue of *Savoy* Havelock Ellis favourably reviewed *Jude*, calling it 'the greatest novel written in England for many years' (228). In *Harper's Weekly* in July 1896, W.D. Howells wrote : "the most upsetting incidents in the book make us shiver with horror and grovel with shame, but we know that they are deeply founded in the condition, if not in the nature of humanity" (Tomalin 259). In an unsigned note for the *Saturday Review*, H.G. wells also praised the book: "There is no other novelist alive with the breadth of sympathy, the knowledge, or the power for the creation of *Jude*. Had Mr. Hardy never written another book, this would still place him at the head of English novelists'" (228).

Hardy received a letter of commendation from Mary Chavelita Clairmonte (George Egerton), herself a renowned New Woman writer; Charles Swinburne extolled in a laudatory letter to Hardy that there had been "no such tragedy in fiction since Balzac" (Pinion 248). Despite receiving such appreciation, Hardy gave up novel writing altogether and for the rest of his life, till his death in 1928, he wrote only poems. He was so deeply hurt by the vehement and virulent criticism that he frankly wrote in his diary entry of 4 Jan, 1897—"....if this goes on, there is no more novel writing for me. A man must be a fool to stand up deliberately to be shot at" (F. E. Hardy 317).

The royalty from the publication of *Jude* and his earlier novels allowed Hardy to live comfortably at Max Gate, his large mid-Victorian villa located on the outskirts of Dorchester (Millgate 340).

Jude represents a turning point in taste, a shift from the Victorian assumption that literature should be read by one and all idea that it should target a more erudite class of readers who are sophisticated, have some exposure of the world, and are unlikely to be offended by authors exploring controversial themes. H.C. Duffin, the eminent critic, believes that Hardy is “a distinctively modern author” (69). He explains that *Jude* is “the novel in which Hardy finally breaks with the conventional prejudices of the Victorian reading public and allows himself to step forward as a distinctively modern author” (69). Kate Millett agrees that *Jude* has made “a significant contribution to the literature of the sexual revolution for its savage criticism of institutions of marriage and of sexual ownership as well as its impassioned plea for easy divorce” (255).

The most breath taking character of the novel is of course, Sue Bridehead, who is the very epitome of the galaxy of New Woman heroines. Majorine Garson says: “Sue Bridehead is regarded as belonging to the New woman tradition in fiction, rather than to feminism” (184). In the postscript (1912) of *Jude*, Hardy, purporting to quote “a German reviewer”, went so far as to claim that, Sue Bridehead, the heroine, was the first delineation in fiction of the woman who was coming into notice in thousands every year – the woman of the feminist movement – the slight, pale ‘bachelor’ girl- the intellectualized, emancipated bundle of nerves that modern conditions were producing, mainly in cities as yet” (Preface to *Jude* xi).

Rita S. Kranidis agrees with Kate Millet when she says that “Hardy has often been applauded as the main liberator of female sexuality in fiction” (123). Lois Schoenfield shares the same view too: “... it would be difficult to find another book of that time which

brings to light so many important issues of the day, among them social problems that arose out of the changing urban-rural scene-including the class system, inequality of education opportunity, sexual morality, and the question of marriage' (102). Gail Cunningham supports these critics: "... the struggle of the Victorian heroine in late nineteenth-century fiction for liberation from her traditional role and personality comes to a climax in Sue Bridehead... Sue is Hardy's only real intellectual heroine.... Her opinions, attitudes and reactions combine to make her one of the best artistic representations of one of the most influential character ideals of the age" (143). Patricia Stubbs extols Sue, saying that "Sue possesses..... the complete self-knowledge and independence of spirit for which a generation of New Women had striven" (173).

Perhaps most emphatically, Ian Gregor asserts that "in Sue Bridehead Hardy dramatizes a daring and plausible try at personal liberation" (126). Ian Gregor, while acknowledging Sue's change of mind, stresses her independence which motivates her "to free herself of the worst situation of a woman's fate" (125). Not all critics are so positive about her. Jean Brooks finds Sue dithering, and says this is "perhaps because of uncertainty about how to handle the idea of a woman's sexual free will" (112). Due to this changeability, some critics viz. Lois Schoenfield tend to regard Sue as an "enigmatic figure. Rita Kranidis lends support, says that the "author is unclear about late Victorian feminist philosophy" (124). She refers to Sue as a character who lacks the capacity for self-determination because of her changeability, that detaches her from the feminist movement. She calls Sue an inadequate character who "fails in the capacity of female and/or sexual liberator" (125). She argues that while Hardy can still be credited for his frank discussions affirming the existence of female sexuality (as he does in *Tess*) and thereby enhancing the New sexualized female identity promoted by the feminists, "Sue Bridehead is sexually impotent" (125).

On the other hand, Kate Millett argues that “Hardy is to be commended for creating in Sue an intelligent rebel against sexual politics and in understanding the forces which defeat such a rebel” (134). Penny Boumelha asserts that because of the tension between “individual sexual experience and its public discourses, whether scientific or moral”, Sue’s punch line--- ‘I can’t explain’ becomes a kind of motto... particularly in relation to sex for Jude and Sue” (140). Sue never surrenders to social forces, she herself decides to desert Jude and re-marry Phillotson, leading to Jude’s death due to ill health as well as broken heart. But she never bows to social pressure and marries him, she maintains her unconventionality to the last. Patricia Stubbs says, “Hardy’s treatment of Sue Bridehead reveals that he was familiar with the feminist agenda” (210). Merlene Springer concedes that, “Sue may serve as a model of Hardy’s own view of and puzzlement over, the New Woman” (124). Harold Bloom also refers to the changeability in Sue’s behaviour and says: “like traditional tragic heroes, Sue believes that she can dictate terms and clothe herself in special immunities” (315).

During the Victorian age, upper class and middle-class women were discouraged from working outside their homes except as governess and school teachers. Thus a large number of women were forced into economic dependence upon men and sometimes they preferred to stay with the “abuser rather than face the poverty that would follow any attempt at independent life” (Cunningham 114). In stark contrast with other members of the middle class, Sue struggles to etch out a living as part of her struggle for emotional and intellectual independence. Before she marries Phillotson, Jude asks him to give Sue a job at his school, and Phillotson asks him, “Does she really think of adopting teaching as a profession?”, and Jude answers that “she is disposed to do so” (126). Phillotson warns that “her time would be wasted quite, the salary being merely nominal” but Sue accepts the job. It is important for her to curve her own individual identity. To be financially

independent is to be empowered to a large extent, and Sue is the empowered New Woman, who dictates the terms of her life herself, but first, comes out of the cocoon of comfort that is the consequence of financial support provided by any man. She prefers relative poverty to total dependence on her father/ husband. She strives to be an independent character, and a major part of this is her struggle for sexual, financial, and emotional autonomy. The Victorian suffragist campaign that aimed at emancipating women from “sex slavery”, involved questioning the double standard of sexual morality that Hardy obliquely refers to in *Tess*. One of the salient principles of these feminist campaigns was “the assertion of the women’s right to control her own body” (Millet 125). Hardy shared the same view, criticising the law of marriage in which women do not have control over their body (Springer 319). Margaret Higonet agrees, “Much like John Stuart Mill, [Sue] sees a wife’s duty of submission as akin to slavery” (111). Sue laments exactly on this point to Jude that the most abysmal part of marriage is the necessity to respond to her husband as and when he wishes. What Sue, the New Woman so clearly articulates, could not be expressed by, but only helplessly tolerated, by hundreds of ‘old’ (i.e. conventional) women over centuries. William Rutland refers to Sue’s consciousness about rights over her body, arguing that “Sue keeps the physical facts of life in constant prominence, and this heightens her consciousness of women’s right to sole control over her own body” (205).

Hardy believes that being forced to have an unwanted sexual relationship within marriage obliterates any sense of sexual and emotional autonomy in women. Sue negates the institution of marriage for this explicit reason. She calls it “barbarous” and says to Jude, “When people of a later age look back upon the barbarous customs and superstitions of the times that we have the unhappiness to live in, what will they say!” (*Jude* 270). For Sue, marriage is a hierarchical relationship when compared to friendship; it is a contract between the superior man and the inferior women. She criticises the matrimony which is

firmly stuck “within the boundaries of conformist culture” (*Jude* 305). In the circumstances in which conventional marriage is based on such a hierarchical relationship, Sue does not “regard marriage as a sacrament”, opines William Rutland (207).

Sue shocks everybody around her by her unusual behaviour. She smokes cigarettes and wears Jude’s clothes to question what Ann Ardis calls the “naturalness” of the “gender-based division of labour” (26). In this way, she attempts to strike a kind of equality between the sexes (27). Patricia Ingram states that in late nineteenth-century feminism there was a tendency towards sartorial transvestism and goes on to add that this tendency was “nicely captured by a Du Maurier cartoon in *Punch* in 1891, in which a young woman is seen wearing her brother’s shirt, tie, coat and hat... in nineteenth-century writings, the frequent recurrence of the androgyny theme, its realization in terms of transvestism, and the blurring of gender lines it expresses, suggest a deep anxiety about gender... *transvestism, for the ‘New Woman’, was a way of resisting the increasing emphasis on gender difference and the passive, home-and child-oriented stereotype* (109, emphasis mine). One of the examples that Ingram uses to support her argument is Sue, who wears Jude’s clothes. Margaret Higonet also says about cross-dressing: “one of the most important aspects of cross-dressing is the way in which it offers a challenge to the easy notions of binarity, putting into question the categories of ‘female’ and ‘male’ whether they are considered essential or constructed, biological or cultural” (110). Thus, argues Dale Kramer, that this act of Sue’s shows that, “she wishes gender boundaries to be dissolved and reconfigured” (111). Thus, Sue, the New Woman, who represents liberal ideas, attempts to cross the border of male and female gendering in *haute couture* too.

In implicitly criticising the inequality between the sexes, Hardy repeatedly shows that Sue attacks the institution of matrimony which allows a man to have dominance over his wife in every possible way. The wife always has to behave (and surrender) as per her

husband's will. Rosemarie Morgan lambasts Phillotson, saying "... Phillotson can spend until midnight "balancing the school register" [*Jude* 176] and then he can ascend to the nuptial chambers quite as easily as if sexual intercourse with his wife were just part of the day's functions" (121).

Naturally, under such circumstances, Sue considers her sexual relationship with Phillotson a "torture": "What tortures me so much is the necessity of being responsive to this man whenever he wishes, good as he is morally" (*Jude* 267). At another point, she says to Phillotson, "For a man and woman to live on intimate terms when one feels as I do is adultery ... however legal" (279). Gail Cunningham calls this "legalized marital rape" (112). At the end of the novel, when Sue decides to re-marry Phillotson, Jude calls it "a fanatic prostitution", but the New Woman knows what she is doing, and does not think twice to take the plunge a second time, without bothering about another (Jude's) shattered heart (455). Finally, a woman pays back a man in his own coin. So far, women only have been taken advantage of and then abandoned, Sue turns the tide, an act so incredible that her broken-hearted fiancé declares with vehemence that she is "not worthy of a man's love" (457).

For Sue marriage is a "vulgar" institution, "a business contract" (*Jude* 432, 439). She chooses to follow her own understanding of a relationship between men and women. She says to Jude, "Fewer women like marriage than you suppose, only they enter into for the dignity it is assumed to confer and the social advantage it gains them sometimes—a dignity and an advantage that I am quite willing to do without" (*Jude* 312).

Rejecting marriage and seeking a kind of freedom in friendship (with Jude) shows her individuality and independence, while the "old" (i.e. traditional) women "enter into" marriage, the New Woman unhesitatingly rejects it (312). Kate Millet says that Sue's attitudes toward sex and marriage provide the clearest measure of the distance separating

her ambitions and desires from social possibilities that shape her self-realization as well as her cohesive personality... Her feeling about marriage and sex derive from a sense of her independence and individuality, which seem to her threatened by sexual or formal commitment. Sue wants an identity of her own. She does not see marriage as her ultimate goal in life. She is fearful of submerging her identity in that of another or worse, of becoming a kind of chattel (220).

Robert Heilman, too, feels that Sue never espouses the idea that marriage is women's greatest ally, a concept prevalent in Victorian society, but, instead, that it kills desire and love (119). Such revolutionary ideas could be mouthed only by a New Woman, committed to her cause of freedom from all sorts of social bondage, through her constant confrontations with Phillotson, with Jude, with the society at large.

Sue recognizes that most of the time her sexuality is in conflict with the social conception of women being desire-less, lust-less personalities. She expresses this awareness when she calls herself an outcast, or "Ishmaelite" (*Jude* 127). Her husband vaguely recognizes the symptoms when he wonders that Sue prefers a closet full of spiders to the nuptial bed (*Jude* 221). Sue also realizes her own deviant behaviour, but feels that she is justified in it. After marrying Phillotson, she says, "Jude, before I married him I had never thought out fully what marriage meant, even though I knew. It was idiotic of me—there is no excuse. I was old enough, and I thought I was very experienced" (*Jude* 216). Sue knows that married people have sex, but until she marries Phillotson she has not considered what that would mean to her personally. The combat between theoretical knowledge and practical scenario stuns her; but the unconventionally bold and courageous New Woman takes an equally novel stand: she jumps out of the bedroom window than clench her teeth and perform wifely duty.

Both Sue and Mrs. Edlin refer to marriages as funerals: After her remarriage to Phillotson, she makes him promise that Phillotson would not intrude on her just as before. She makes the man realize her independent will that is not necessarily in tandem with his. Phillotson still fights to subdue her, and says “under the affectation of independent view you are as enslaved to the social code as any woman I know!” , to which Sue curtly replies, ‘Not mentally’ (*Jude* 302). She sternly “refuses to bend her knee to custom” (Heilman 121). She is not willing to surrender to male ego, is not mentally enslaved and tries her best to escape from the common fate of women. In other words, while characters like Tess’s mother are “ready and willing to subordinate her own desire to social norms”, Sue is not (89). Joan Durbeyfield and Arabella Donn provide the perfect foil of traditional women to unconventional Tess Durbeyfield and Sue Bridehead.

Dale Karger writes that Hardy “was able to exploit and undercut conventionally in *Jude the Obscure*” (73). Although Hardy exploits the conventionality for dramatic purposes, he supports the new ideas that Tess and Sue incorporate and represent. In this way, Hardy encourages people to think beyond conventions, tries to invite women to challenge the stereotyped norms and rules. Hardy’s purpose is not simply showing the oppression of women in society; he is trying to encourage women to resist social/marital oppression instead of meekly accepting it, and curve their own new identity. His most controversial heroine, Sue Bridehead, eminently does exactly that: she confronts the society head on and stays committed to her own ideas and beliefs regarding conjugal relationships.

Thomas Hardy created two supremely memorable characters in his last two novels. It is his unique point of view that has made both Tess and Sue so distinctive. *Tess* is generally regarded as a tragic tale of a “fallen” woman, and Tess as a helpless victim of patriarchy, who is more or less a passive character. Hardy’s innate respect for women

(Tess is “pure”) that turns the tide and makes Tess a supremely courageous, unthinkable determined character, a New Woman. No “old” (conventional) woman could act the way she did; no “old” man could imagine that a woman can puncture the fabric of male dominance so boldly. Even though she is hanged by the very society against which she fights her lonely battle, Tess gives a forceful message to her real-life “sisters”---- neither woman can be branded “fallen” by the society; nor be dictated about her course of action, she herself is the supreme choreographer of her own life. The contemporary women readers got the much-needed support from this comprehensively courageous fictional woman to mull about taking the reins of their lives themselves.

Sue Bridehead goes one step further than Tess. She cares two hoots about social expectations from women as she marries and divorces and remarries and cohabits and deserts men at her own free will. She challenges the basic tenets of society when she displays open contempt about legal marriage, and is unashamed of her numerous children born out of wedlock. She non-challantly ignores the verbal barbs thrown at her by her neighbours. Jude capitulates to social criticisms and ostracisms and asks her to marry him umpteen times, but she never dreams of taking any step only to conform to social customs. Her confrontations with the society only solidify her commitment to chart her life herself. Such boldness, from a woman was incredible (and unacceptable) even at the fag end of the nineteenth century. Many readers vehemently criticised the novel as immoral and obscene. But like the created character, the creator was an equally courageous man, who never edited and changed one line of his novel, but let this quintessential New Woman be mesmerising even to the twenty-first century readers. *Jude* was Thomas Hardy’s clarion call to the conservative patriarchs to wake up to the newer, changing times, and give women the regard and the position they deserve.

In both the novels Hardy successfully connected with his contemporary society, and vigorously shattered the Victorian paradigm of women's subjugation and servility to men. Particularly the last two novels left the readers disturbed and shocked. At the same time they were unable to avoid the emerging truth that women were no longer ready to be men's footstools, or mere vassals of their virility. While the male readers had to accept the changing gender roles, willy-nilly, the women readers found courage to keep their heads high like Tess and Sue even in the face of dire calamity, and script their own destiny in search of their individual identity.

Conclusion

It is a universally acknowledged fact that literature mirrors society, with all its positive and negative aspects; and that it is well-nigh impossible to find a work of literature that excludes the attitude, morale, and values of the society it deals with, since no writer can remain completely unexposed to the world around him. Many a times writers wield their pens to criticise and to correct social ills, ushering the desired change. Thus Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (published 1852) was instrumental in the abolition of slavery in the U.S.A. in 1865 (Reynolds142).. The attentive study of literature helps one to form a vivid picture of the time that is taken up as the background of the narrative---- the manners and customs, culture and education, philosophy and religion, politics and technology of the particular time. This is particularly true of novels, the most faithful mirror of society as a whole and of the time they depict in particular. Study of Victorian novels with strong feminist message arouses interest to study the extent to which modern feminism has accepted and has organized itself around the agendas which had dominated nineteenth century society, and the link between novelists and feminists can be discerned in their earnest intention to usher in women-friendly reforms. While reading these six novels, the reader forms a good idea about the Victorian England, when men insisted on pristine purity for women and expected women to accept the philandering of men, almost unquestioningly. The average Victorian woman was expected to follow the conventional "career" of marriage and motherhood, to be enclosed and enshrined within the four walls of their homes, and never dare to transgress the gender distinctions set by the society. Gradually, some women began to rebel against the suffocating situation and searched for life beyond domesticity. "The emergence of the "New" woman, breaking the cocoon of the "old" woman, perhaps became a historical necessity" (Stubbs 167). It is crucial to understand the upsurge of women's activities in the Victorian era, as the

“revolutionary movement”, as Rita Kranidis describes it, gave “impetus” to many thinkers and writers (71). The struggle for women’s emancipation, which started in the seventeenth century with awakened and enlightened women like Margaret Cavendish, Mary Astell *et al.*, got strong support from the “founder of feminism” --- Mary Wollstonecraft, reached its peak in nineteenth century (Caine 89). Passionate debates and discussions began to take place on the issues of marriage and divorce laws, women’s right to property, children’s custody, educational and employment opportunities, female suffrage – all of which came to be known as “The Woman Question”; the term “feminism” being not coined by then (Boumelha 160). Women’s rights and responsibilities, problems and privileges were endlessly debated. “The desire for equality with men on social and political fronts took the form of organized movements by the women who raised “the women issue” in public debates, in print media, and during election rallies” (Gilmour 289). The “Women Question”, first raised by Mary Wollstonecraft in her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792, strongly influenced some mid and late Victorian women to break centuries- old shackles of silence and subordination and discuss it vociferously. Several Victorian feminists, viz. Frances Power Cobbe, Emily Davies, Josephine Butler, Millicent Garrett Fawcett, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon *et al* continued relentlessly the Woman Question debate in their crusade for women’s fundamental rights : the right to higher education, property (father’s/husband’s), employment and the right to vote. The feminist agitation of the era was a noticeable feature which considerably shook the social fabric of the times. The consequences of the campaigns, though slow and delayed, were positive. As a result of continuous crusade, some new women-friendly acts were passed by the British Parliament under the dynamic leadership of the Liberal Prime Minister, William Gladstone. As these cardinal acts made the women’s lives a little easier, it also precipitated the already charged environment for the New Woman to arrive, both in

society and literature (Gerda Lerner 180). With the advancement of science and technology, as well as the advent of industrialization, the “Woman Question” slowly, but steadily, gained momentum enough for the eminent thinkers viz. Justin McCarthy, John Stuart Mill, *et al* to mull upon it. The empowered woman, being educated and earning, were fast becoming strong competitors to the privileged sections of the economic marketplace (Ardis 156). Though not every “Novissima” of “The Shrieking Sisterhood” (epithets frequently used for the New Woman) was a “Girton Girl” (Grant Allen’s heroine of *The Woman Who Did* (1894), Herminia Barton, was a graduate of Girton College) they were, in general, conscious of their rights (Ledger 190). The well-established centuries—old class and gender barriers began to crumble, much to the chagrin of the conservative patriarchs. The well-established centuries—old class and gender barriers began to crumble, much to the chagrin of the conservative patriarchs. Gradually, the educated Victorian woman began to grow conscious of not only their social and political rights, but also of fashionable clothes and cosmetics and decoration of their homes. As they became socially awakened individuals, conversant in polite manners and social etiquettes, they also began to participate in national economy, both as workers in factories and industries, and also as consumers. However, the unprecedented economic growth had its flip side—it gave rise to an unforeseen sexual liberty, even among women. The near-ubiquitous occurrence of pre/extra marital affairs could not be regulated through obsessive discussion, though. The single/unwed mother, a rather disturbing phenomenon in the society, was regularly represented in literature and art.

At the other end of the spectrum, there appeared (in the fictions) the New Women who voluntarily opted for motherhood out of wedlock. The most notable among them were Herminia Barton, the heroine of Grant Allen’s best-selling novel, *The Woman Who Did* (1894); and Sue Bridehead, of *Jude the Obscure* by Thomas Hardy (1896). These

heroines represented the “beginning of a shift in social attitudes regarding gender relations, marked by a steady move away from the pattern of patriarchal male supremacy and female dependence towards the modern pattern of gender equality” (Diniejkó 5). “The New Woman was arriving, both in society and literature, with visible force” (Lerner 180). The last two decades of nineteenth century witnessed a new phenomenon – an increasing number of women were eager to break the shackles of dependence on their male relatives and forge an independent identity for themselves by working and earning. The New Woman had a proportionate depiction in late Victorian novels. The origin of the term New Woman are disputed, but it appears to have been coined around 1884. “Sarah Grand” (Frances Elizabeth Bellenden Clarke) published an article in 1894, “The New Aspect of the Woman Question” in *The North Atlantic Review*, from which “Ouida” (Maria Louise Rane) “extrapolated the soon-to-become-famous phrase, “New Woman” for the title of her easy, published in the same year, in the next issue of the same journal” (Cunningham 216). The New Woman overtly challenged the dominant social and sexual codes of the era, leading to “a feeling of fear” among the tradition-loving patriarchs that she “posed a threat to the institution of marriage itself” (Ledger 187). Challenging the male dominance, she forced men to consider women’s rights, to re-define gender roles. At the same time, one has to remember, “she was basically a journalistic phenomenon, a product of discourse”, and hence “to some extent, the history of the New Woman is available to us textually” (196). Naturally, the figure committed to topple the apple cart of traditional mores, was often ridiculed in press and popular fiction. Mrs. Margaret Oliphant in her article “The Anti-marriage League” deplored “the disposition to place what is called the ‘sex question’ above all others as the theme of fiction.... has been proved to be the most damaging in the world as a subject for thought and for the exercise of imagination” (qtd. by Ledger 203). Sally Ledger asserts —“The New Woman was a very fin-de-siecle phenomenon.

Contemporary with the new socialism, the new imperialism, the new fiction and the new journalism, she was part of cultural novelties which manifested itself in the 1880s and 1890s” (87). The New Woman was often the object of ridicule in the press, usually portrayed as riding a bicycle in bloomers while smoking a cigarette, i.e., portrayed as one who publicly comes out of accepted and acceptable womanly roles and enjoys herself, without bothering about the people who gawk at her. The society could not accept the woman who deliberately shakes off socially-accepted womanly roles and enjoys her freedom of enjoying her life as she wants to. Lyn Pykett has distinctly documented her equivocal depiction: “The New Woman was by turns a mannish Amazon and a womanly woman, she was oversexed or undersexed, she was anti-maternal or a super-mother, she was man-hating or self-appointed saviour of benighted masculinity, she was radical or reactionary, she was the agent of social regeneration, or symptom and agent of social decline” (11). It goes to show that the conservative society could neither accept nor totally reject the changing gender dynamics completely.

The New Woman novels often openly criticised the miserable condition of women in society as a whole and in marriage in particular. “The novels regarding nonconformist or rebellious women became a springboard for a public debate about gender relations that had previously been taboo”, asserts Penny Boumelha (211). As Gail Cunningham has shown, in traditional fictions, “innocent and ignorant heroines had to face dire sufferings which came from venereal diseases, “the result both of their own sexual ignorance and of the past sexual excesses of their husbands.” (112). “Constant ill health for themselves – and the even greater horror of giving birth to children with congenital syphilis – served for the New Woman novelists of the 1890s, to show why existing marriage was impossible and why masculine sexual privilege and female sexual ignorance had to come to an end” (Boumelha 154). The New Woman writers focussed on the major area in which women

felt most oppressed: marriage. The New Woman genre of writers fought to re-invent the relations between the sexes and called for honesty regarding sexual peccadilloes. They urged women to be professionally qualified so as to be able to earn themselves. At the turn of the century, New Woman ideology started to play a prominent role in evolving social etiquettes that led to the redefinition of gender roles, overcoming male dominance and strengthening movements for women's rights. Undoubtedly, the New Woman was one of the prime facets of social and cultural change. She was "a real, as well as a cultural phenomenon. In society she donned the roles of a social reformer, a poet, or a playwright, who predominantly addressed women's issues" (Ledger 120). In literature, her thoughts and desires reflected the attitudes of the society in general. Countless women could identify themselves with Ibsen's Nora (*A Doll's House*) or Hardy's Grace Mulberry (*The Woodlanders*), the heroines who actually broke or strove to break the shackles of domesticity, at a time when women's place in society was ensured only through marriage and the patriarchal society knew full well how to enclose and entrap women within the family. The arbitrary laws that benefitted the male only, and the resultant apotheosis of the male ego, fostered by the gender-biased society, were some of the key factors in subduing women into servile subjugation. Mary Wollstonecraft affirmed that "women's terminal expectation was largely based on the image dictated by patriarchal gaze" (Caine 78).

The Women's Suffrage Movement properly begun, it is generally agreed, in 1867, when John Stuart Mill's Women's Franchise Amendment to the Second Reform Act was rejected by the British Parliament (82).

In the words of Gerda Lerner, "Feminism is not always a movement, for it can be a level of consciousness, a stance, an attitude, as well as the basis for organized effort" (119). The feminist consciousness is the awareness of female subjugation by the dominating males leading to women's secondary status and consequent suppression/

oppression. The New Woman fiction emerged out of Victorian feminist rebellion and boosted debates on such issues as women's education, women's suffrage, sex and women's autonomy (124). Emancipation of women was the driving theme of many Victorian novelists. The stalwarts like George Eliot, George Gissing, and Thomas Hardy expressed the dormant sentiments of countless women who were ruthlessly subjugated.

By 1860, Victorian society witnessed the emergence of a new representation of womanhood, that was less constrained by the Victorian norms of domesticity. Barbara Bodichon and Bessie Rayner Parkes considered women's long-flowing skirts a burden that restricted free movements, typifying "women's constraints and restraints" (Caine 92). In this relatively open era, George Eliot brought her bold and rebellious heroines.

In *The Mill*, a novel published as early as 1860, Eliot makes the heroine, Maggie Tulliver, a born rebel. Right from her childhood, she refuses to listen to her mother's constant instructions about combing her hair and wearing clean pinafores, declines to do patchwork for her aunt, Mrs Pullet (who constantly criticises her dark skin and unkempt hair), runs away to the gypsies when Tom pays full attention only to Lucy and neglects her fully. As she grows up, she rebuffs her (late) father's and Tom's strict instructions of not maintaining any friendship with Philip Wakem, though she never imagines marrying the handicapped hunchback. Neither does she dream of marrying Stephen Guest. She turns Stephen down in unequivocal terms and comes back to her parental home, ready to face the harshest aspersions and criticisms; but not ready to "go away because people are saying wrong things about me", as she boldly declares to Dr. Kenn, when he suggests that she leaves St. Oggs, at least for the time being, and let the criticisms die down (*The Mill* 372). She successfully, forcefully breaks the age-old mould of conventional, submissive, docile woman and emerges as the independent-minded, empowered woman who can chart the course of her life herself, breaking the arbitrary social rules that privileged only men.

Not surprisingly, the traditional male-dominated society finds it very hard to accept her. The societal attitude is succinctly summed up by Philip's father, James Wakem--- "We do not see what a woman does, we ask whom she belongs to" (*The Mill* 321). So Tom does not bother to know the details of the alleged "elopement", he refuses to let Maggie enter his home the moment he sees her, returning after five days. He elaborates how Lucy has fallen ill from the shock, and how Mrs. Tulliver cannot even attend her "lest she reminds her of you" (*The Mill*, 322), but, let alone ask her to tell the actual truth, sternly refuses to hear her part of the story. But he cannot bend the New Woman into submission. Maggie does not enter her parental home in spite of her mother's entreaties, but goes to stay with Bob Jakin and his family, with her mother accompanying her. She comes back to Dorlcote Mill only to rescue Tom from the flood. Here again Eliot presents an unheard of situation--- a woman coming to rescue a man, breaking the traditional image of damsel in distress who must be saved by a knight-in-shining armour. Eliot tacitly depicts how the New Women are slowly but surely coming to the front, instead of perpetually staying at the fringes helplessly. The nascent New Woman is not afraid of judgement of "the world's wives" as long as she herself knows that she has done no wrong, has committed no sin (*The Mill* 314).

None of the male characters can accommodate Maggie's independence of thought, not even her loving and ever-supportive father, who had been earnestly anxious of his "too 'cute" (acute, sharp) daughter finding a suitable husband, who would not denounce, but appreciate her intelligence and independence. Maggie is thus the New Woman who frees herself from patriarchal traditions and conventions and dares to trace the uncharted terrain of female freedom and empowerment. Neither Philip nor Stephen can cajole her into marriage, into subjection to male will. Her will power is stronger than both the men. She refuses to marry both, though she is pained to see them heart-broken. "The thought of

having Philip as her lover never entered her mind”, and it never does (*The Mill* 242). She falls in for handsome Stephen (who is in stark contrast with the hunchbacked Philip) only temporarily, unable to control her emotions fully. But she is always conscious of the hurt that her intimacy with Stephen will cause to Lucy, and she flatly refuses his marriage proposal. The New Woman is “large-hearted” (as Philip calls her) thinks beyond herself, sacrifices her own (marital) bliss to ensure another’s (*The Mill* 492) . Her sacrifice does not go in vain,—after her untimely and tragic death, both Philip and Stephen come regularly to visit her grave, though by and by Stephen marries Lucy. By this gesture, Eliot depicts covertly that the New Woman is gradually gaining acceptance and respect that is due to her, while staying committed to her cause of independence and empowerment.

Gwendolen Harleth of *DD* (published 1876) is another eminently successful creation of George Eliot. Unlike Maggie, Gwendolen is not a fully positive character, but has shades of negativity. She is not the “Angel in the House”(to borrow the term from Coventry Patmore) , but a human being of flesh and blood with whose follies and foibles the readers can easily relate to. Right at the beginning of the novel the readers find her, all alone, gambling in a casino in the (fictional) German town of Lehrbonn. This was such an incredible act that the aghast audience —Daniel Deronda among them---watch her with overt fascination and covert criticism. Even before the feminist movement started, which was “concerned primarily with gaining access for women in the public sphere”, Eliot places her heroine in a setting that was predominantly male-dominated (Kranidis 84).

At home, she is not the most respectful, obedient daughter and the fond sister to her brood of step-sisters. But, she is fully conscious of her responsibility towards her family as the oldest child at the young age of twenty-two. She is ready to support her family, only, she lacks the requisite education and/or talent to work and earn. Once she realises that the only avenue open for her to support herself and her destitute family is her

marriage to a rich man, she determinedly plods her way. She refuses to encourage the sincere but poor Rex Gascoigne and accepts the middle-aged, but super-rich Henleigh Grandcourt's marriage proposal, breaking her promise to Lydia Glasher of not marrying him. Lust for a luxurious life makes her forego all considerations for others, but then, Gwendolen is the New Woman, who will not simply suffer and sacrifice, like the "old" (i.e. conventional) woman like Lydia Glasher.

As the coveted nuptial brings her the desired luxuries, it also brings out the hidden resources of her character. Much to the chagrin and surprise of Grandcourt, who dreamt of controlling his young wife, Gwendolen emerges as a strong woman who declines to surrender to her husband's wills and wiles. She questions his decisions, dismisses Mr. Lush as Grandcourt's secretary (because of his evident sympathy for Lydia), does not heed her mother's earnest advice to be an obedient and accommodating wife, --- rather, the New Woman begins to hate her control-freak husband. It is her momentary hesitation that comes from her hatred to throw the life-line in time that actually kills Grandcourt when he trips from the yacht and falls into the Mediterranean Sea. It is true that she does not deliberately murder her spouse, but it is also true that she heaves a sigh of relief at the permanent disappearance of her tormentor. The New Woman does not fully break down at the tragic incident, but culls her inner strength and remains calm. Earlier also, she demonstrated her innate strength and dignity on the day when she neither broke down nor protested when she learnt that Grandcourt has willed almost his entire property to Lydia's (and his) illegitimate children. Though she coveted luxury once, she has innate self-respect not to hanker after money. She is the self-empowered New Woman who can hold her head high in the face of dire disappointments and tragedies. Thus she promises her terrified mother that she "will live", i.e., not commit suicide being a widow (*DD* 817). She promises Deronda that she will dedicate the rest of her life to help those who need her

assistance. The New Woman looks beyond herself and advances to assist the lesser fortunate ones, in spite of not being a fortunate person herself. Thus she punctures the fabric of conventions by declining to wallow in sorrow and lead a non-existent life for years to come. She displays exemplary courage with her decision of leading a selfless life after her widowhood, at a time when matrimony was considered to be a woman's ultimate bliss and fulfilment.

Both Monica Widdowson and Rhoda Nunn are committed believers in women's emancipation from patriarchal bondage. The main demand that Monica has, is of freedom and equality as per men. This is exactly what Widdowson gets inked at. He totally subscribes to the Victorian idealism that a woman is to occupy only private sphere, and not venture into the public domain. He realizes, himself, that his wife's "desire for freedom irritates me" (*TOW* 247). Monica feels stifled and suffocated in the constant, unwelcome supervision (i.e. control) of Widdowson over her. He is insecure, believes that if his young wife goes out of home too often, makes friends with men, she will cease to love him, but will fall for some young, attractive man. It never occurs to him that she actually hates him for suspecting her integrity, not because he is much older than her. When she says "I'll die if I don't have more freedom" he should have believed that she means it (*TOW* 256). True, Monica made a basic mistake of marrying him not for love but for his money. It is because of poverty that she refused the proposal of Mr. Bullivant, her colleague. It is also true that she did not pay any heed when her roommate, Mildred Vesper pointed out clearly that this marriage for money's sake will be disastrous for both her and him. But, such faults make the New Woman heroine a real woman, not an "angel" like the flawless heroines of contemporary novels. The New Woman has both grit and determination as well as covetousness (Monica looks forward to a luxurious life that this marriage will provide her) and selfishness (she knows full well that she does not love

Widdowson the man, but his money). But above all, the New Woman has the courage to demand freedom in marital relationship, freedom to guide her own life herself. Widdowson says that women must be “guided by men who know the world better”, a command that Monica instantly refuses to listen to, though she finds it an onerous task to dislodge the firm age-old beliefs that are enmeshed in his thoughts (*TOW* 218).

She ultimately almost rejects the institution of marriage itself when she leaves her husband and begins to stay with her elder sisters, Alice and Virginia. That she stays in Widdowson’s country house and accepts his money for her upkeep brands her as a self-centred woman in the eyes of “the world’s wives” [to borrow a phrase from George Eliot (*The Mill* 301)] does not bother her. Rather, she says that he owes his pregnant wife some responsibility. The New Woman is aware of her marital and financial rights, she also learns not to care about what others consider her. She dies during childbirth, and her new born daughter is welcomed by Rhoda Nunn, the firebrand feminist. Rhoda, in her personal life, vehemently rejects Barfoot’s proposal of “free union” not because she sanctifies matrimony, but because she will never compromise her self-dignity and live life like a man’s kept mistress. Thus Gissing portrays the New Woman successfully in *TOW*.

In the other novel, *NGS*, Gissing creates the memorable character of Marian Yule. At an age when denial of higher education to women due to gender-bias was a common practice, Marian is a highly educated girl who spends hours reading and writing. She goes to the British Museum (library) everyday to take notes on various events and personalities that her father writes about, She is thus the invaluable secretary of her father, Alfred Yule. Such a woman, totally immersed in academics, was rare in real life as well as in contemporary fiction, but Marian is the New Woman who shows her “sisters” (the real-life women) that women can very well enter successfully in the male domain, i.e. academics. She breaks the male bastion of higher qualification and immerses herself in studies. Yet,

she is not harsh and cruel like her father to her lowly, illiterate mother. She has the qualities of head and heart, and is always gentle with her mother, neither contemptuous nor condescending. Rather, she vehemently protests when her father shouts at his poor wife and consoles the hurt and humiliated mother. The New Woman has the courage to stand up to a man, protest against any injustice committed by a man and that man is her own father. A daughter shielding her mother by shouting at her father was unimaginable in the patriarchal society where women were conceived as more or less men's footstools.

Yet, Marian is not averse to the pleasures of life. At twenty three, she is open and eager for romance and matrimony. She enjoys Milvain's friendship and readily accepts his marriage proposal and looks forward to a happy future. Yet, when Milvain rejects her and marries the rich widow Amy Reardon, and Marian's dream of connubial bliss vanishes into thin air, she neither breaks down nor criticises his abominable behaviour. Milvain prefers Amy Reardon over Marian simply because of Amy's money. Marian has too much self-respect and innate dignity to argue with him and show her hurt. The New Woman will never plead with a man for her happiness. Neither will she blame/ lambast the mercenary--- she has too much sense and sophistication for that--- but go on doing what she does best --- studying. When Marian and Milvain part ways after their last meeting, she quietly goes back to the British Museum and immediately gets absorbed in a book. She silently and powerfully shows that there is life beyond marriage, that women need not depend upon men for happiness, that there is a viable alternative to domesticity,--- academics and financial independence. She preaches by example that women need not worship marriage and child bearing as the highest altar of their lives merely for the sake of staying alive, rather, they can (and should) go for a life that is beyond marital oaths and vows.

Thomas Hardy's Tess Durbeyfield is perhaps the most famous of Hardy's heroines, the epitome of women's emancipation and empowerment. In spite of being impregnated by Alec, she leaves him unhesitatingly, much to his surprise and disappointment of her family, who expected her to marry him in this condition. She is not ashamed of her illegitimate son, Sorrow, but takes the infant to the field when she works and suckles him in full public view, without caring for the onlookers' shocked comments. When the parish priest refuses to baptise the baby just because he is born out of wedlock, she performs a private baptism herself at home, in front of her awestruck younger siblings. When their unfortunate baby dies in its infancy itself and the village sexton refuses to give him a proper Christian burial, Tess herself digs a grave at the corner of her home and buries him. She gives the child the dignity and respect that is due to every human being born legitimate or illegitimate. She never cares for social mores but acts according to her own jurisdiction. She is the New Woman who finds inner strength to defy social conventions in herself. She never waits for a man to punch the stamp of legitimacy on her son. She neither feels the necessity of having a man for herself, too. She falls in love and marries Angel, but when he decides to abandon her after knowing her "past", she neither challenges his decision nor grovels at his feet for forgiveness for her "sin". The New Woman does not feel that she has committed any crime in having a liaison with a man before marriage. When Angel goes to Brazil, she goes to Flintcomb –Ash farm to labour and earn not only her upkeep, but also for her destitute family, "the waiters on Providence", as Hardy describes them (*Tess* 310). This is the New Woman who, instead of depending on men for bare survival, supports herself and her family too, with aplomb. When Alec falls for her a second time, she coolly carries out a business transaction with him--- that he must support her family financially in return of her "favours" to him. The New Woman takes the responsibility of her family and of herself, and never gives up her

inherent dignity. When Alec talks disparagingly of Angel, she instantly throws her heavy glove directly on his mouth, drawing his blood. It is an early indication that she will kill him in near future for taking her for granted. She ultimately stabs him to death and comes out with Angel when he comes back to her from Brazil. The New Woman herself decides with whom she would spend her days and on what terms. She does not lose her self-respect to the end,--- when the police comes to arrest and hang her for murder, she “quietly” says “I am ready”, never throws up a flight, never tries to escape, or scream in helpless agony (*Tess* 399) . She is ready to live and to die in her own terms, not dictated by the society who easily labels her as “fallen”. But her creator realizes her real value and calls her “a pure woman” (the subtitle of the novel) who can never be tarnished by the narrow-minded, traditional patriarchs and conventional matriarchs.

Sue Bridehead of Thomas Hardy’s *Jude* can perhaps be called the paragon of (fictional) New Women. In the highly conservative Victorian times when the unwed mother was the object of social contempt and harsh criticism, she flaunts her unwed motherhood status with impunity. She is way ahead of other New Woman heroines in terms of her actions, which may be described as selfish. She loves Jude, but will not marry him, because she hates to be “licensed to be loved on the premises” (*Jude* 289). She marries Phillotson, but prefers a cobweb-covered closet than forced connubial relations, which was almost the order of the day. She divorces Phillotson out of disgust at the “physical part” of marriage and comes back to Jude, but will not have any intimacy with him, unless, she feels threatened by Arabella’s re-appearance in Jude’s life (*Jude* 267). Then she shows her reckless courage, ---- she gradually bears Jude three children and gets pregnant with the fourth. She nonchalantly faces the barbs of the society, and sticks to her decision of not marrying Jude. Rather, she haughtily comments, “If we are happy as we are, what is it to anybody?” (*Jude* 319). The amount of courage that this New Woman has

to cock a snook at the sternly conservative Victorian England is unimaginable in today's much liberal society.

This iron woman, who lets nothing pierce her skin, breaks down when her three children are hanged by Father Time. She also loses her unborn child too, having suffered a miscarriage from the shock. But she still never goes to tie the nuptial knot with Jude. Rather, she re-marries Phillotson. She loves- and –betrays- and –marries- and- divorces- and- lives together- and- leaves -and remarries----all by her own will. This is the New Woman who will live life on her own terms, untroubled or hindered in any way by the traditional society. None finds her behaviour acceptable, neither the two men with whom she is close, nor the other characters of the novel----Phillotson's friend Mr. Gillingham, Jude's ex-wife Arabella Donn, or Phillotson's landlady Mrs. Edlin. Each one speaks out his/her mind in unequivocal terms. But "the pale, *new*, bachelor girl" who has arrived to *sway and to stay* cares the least (Hardy, Preface to *Jude*, xii, emphasis mine). She changes her mind so quickly that in all probability, she takes all others for granted. She does not bother about conventional morality and never cares what reception her illegitimate children get from the society at large. She is least bothered by the side way glances people give her and what citizens she is presenting to the country as a whole never enters her mind. She does not bother about Phillotson's hurt and humiliation when she divorces and later remarries him. She will decide, others will meekly obey----that is what she expects from everybody around her, just as men have expected from women, through ages. Even the plight of heartbroken Jude, whom she professes to love, does not move her. Otherwise, when she did marry for the second time, she would have married him and not Phillotson. She is an utterly egoistic, selfish, self-centred woman, open to criticism, but immovable in her wills. She is the New Woman, --- not angelic, but very human with her flaws and faults. But her indomitable spirit peeps from behind every negativity. The contemporary

readers were shell-shocked to find such a heroine, and Hardy was shocked to discover that the society was yet not ready to accept a heroine with own (not socially-dictated and approved) desires and decisions. She is such a strong character that after creating her, Hardy gave up novel writing altogether. Probably he could not think of a bolder, newer girl for whom he could create some even more uncharted terrains to be charted. The noted Hardy critic, Penny Boumelha, rightly describes Sue to be the quintessential New Woman in the galaxy of New Women, who vociferously declares that the days of meek submission by women to men are over, now it is the turn of the men to play the second fiddle.

The issue of women's exoneration was addressed not only by feminists but also by Victorian novelists, who tried to redefine female identity by creating radically independent heroines who struggled for individual entity.

A discussion of the six novels selected by the researcher establishes the fact all the six heroines can undoubtedly be described as New Woman. Each of them is strong-willed and independent-minded. None of the six heroines--- Maggie Tulliver, Gwendolen Harleth, Monica Madden, Marian Yule, Tess Durbeyfield, and Sue Bridehead ---- bow to the wills of their men-folk, or to the wiles of the conservative patriarchal society as a whole. In making their heroines defy most of the social and moral norms of the times, making them the paradigm for the awakened (real-life) women of their days, George Eliot, George Gissing, and Thomas Hardy created a niche by incorporating feminist ideals into their work, "signalling an entry into the eighteen nineties debate on the Woman Question" (Ashton 185). Their bold ideas and daring actions puncture the fabric of patriarchy, much to the chagrin of "the grey-headed legislators", as Thomas Hardy's Sue Bridehead satirises the conservative society so vigorously (*Jude* 215). The hostile social environment was hell-bent on denying women any identity of their own, the identity that these heroines

quest for throughout their lives, smilingly welcoming all the storms and travails that come their way. They dare to vocalize their demands, question the exclusion and violence they are subjected to. While Maggie, Monica and Tess die, Gwendolen, Marian and Sue do not lead happy lives either. But none of these young women ever dream of conforming to the unjust, illogical demands of the society and relinquish their passions and desires, including sexual preferences, in the process. Their innate strength and power come to their aid in acquiring a broader vision through greater and longer exposure to social realities. They enjoy a little bit of freedom through marginal access to education (Maggie, Gwendolen, Marian, Sue); financial independence (Monica, Marian, Tess, Sue); travel to foreign lands (Gwendolen). Each of them despises the traditional, fettered womanhood. Thus all of them win the coronet of the term New Woman so deservedly that they are discussed even today, after more than a century of their “birth” given by the three stalwarts of Victorian literature--- George Eliot, George Gissing, and Thomas Hardy.

A study of Victorian feminism and its impact on society and literature arouses interest to study the Victorian novels today from a marginalized perspective, though in today’s world women are no more such abjectly subjugated and marginalized. In this period of widening gender equality, there is an increasing recognition that female experience is as universal as male experience. Thus the readers can easily relate to the lifelong agony and anguish of Mariam (*A Thousand Splendid Suns*) who finally takes up the cudgel herself and kills Rashid to save Laila’s life; or empathise with the extreme emotional trauma that Satyavati (*The First Promise*) experiences when she discovers that her husband has married off their nine-year-old daughter Subarnalata, a shock that goads her to leave her errant husband forever. Thus the modern tale takes a turn,---women are no longer saved/rescued by men, but the enlightened and empowered women stand up for their less fortunate compatriots. Also, negative shades in women’s characters are

delineated too, instead of portraying them as innocent sufferers. Thus Celie (*The Color Purple*) leaves her abusive husband Mister, but advises her son Harpo to beat his wife Sophie into submission, being jealous of his genuine love for Sophie, something that Celie never experienced herself. Thus today's fictional heroines are as diverse as their real-life counterparts. The foundation was being laid from the seventeenth century by the awakened women viz. Margaret Cavendish, Mary Astell, *et al.*, through the eighteenth century by the founder of feminism, Mary Wollstonecraft, to the nineteenth century by the firebrand feminists, Barbara Bodichon, Frances Cobb, *et al.* The upsurge of woman-centric activities and movements of the Victorian era formed the basis of the impetus of the writers of the modern era to depict heroines who are unfettered by social constraints, and who inspire millions of women across the globe to vouch for their own identity.

The conjugal lives of George Eliot and George Gissing were highly contentious, but remain interesting even today, when, compared to the nineteenth century, the terms (and the concepts) of adultery, illegitimacy, divorce and co-habitation have almost lost the shame and stigma that were once attached to them. Even Thomas Hardy, who led a non-disputed connubial life, was surrounded by controversies regarding his attitude towards God, religion, and society. In spite of their personally controversial lives, their creations are still considered to be veritable documents of their times, and are valued all over the English-speaking world, at a time when women have achieved, to a large extent, their desired social dignity, and have acquired the proportionate sense of social responsibility.

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S. no.	Title of paper with author names	Name of journal (UGC approved)	Published date	ISSN no/ vol no, issue no, page no.
	Maggie to Mariam: A Continual Saga	International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities(IJELLH)	May 2018	2321-7065/ Volume 6, Issue 5, Page No. 206-216.
	Victims of Vicissitude: Tess and Rukmani	Research Chronicler	August 2018	2347-5021/ Vol 6, issue 8,Page No.137-143.
	Sue Bridehead: the Epitome of Anti- Marriage League.	Shodh Sanchar Bulletin	July-Sept. 2019	2229-3620/ Vol. No. 9, Issue 35(2), Page No. 1-5.
4.	Independence vs Irritation: A Study of George Gissing's <i>The Odd Women</i> .	Shodh Sanchar Bulletin	July-Sept. 2019	2229-3620/ Vol. No. 9, Issue 35(2), Page No. 168- 172.