A STUDY OF THE HEROINE IN CERTAIN VICTORIAN NOVELS.

by

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PREFACE

During the reign of Queen Victoria was seen the gradual emergence of the emancipated woman. The idea that women were innocent beings who must be kept from real knowledge of the world died hard, however, and to the end of the era there were many who repudiated the very concept of emancipation whether in literature or life. Coupled with the chivalrous, idealistic concept of womanhood was Victorian respectability, and it is not surprising that in the earlier Victorian novels we see clearly the idealistic concept of women and the effects of the cult of respectability.

To illustrate my theme, of the gradual change in the concept of the novel heroine which naturally kept pace, more or less, with the progress the emancipation of women was making, I have chosen one novel from each of seven great Victorian novelists whose works span the whole era. The only exception I have made is with Charlotte Brontë. In her case the heroines of two of her novels are discussed mainly because she is the first Victorian novelist to sound a note of protest against the then conventional concept of the heroine.

G.J.A.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTORY

During the long reign of Queen Victoria the novel attained unprecedented popularity. This was the age of some of the greatest of English novelists, and yet we cannot strictly speak of the Victorian novel, for as Lord Cecil points out, "there is no Victorian novel in the sense of a school with common conventions and traditions conterminous with the reign of Queen Victoria." (1) The earlier novelists are still of the 18th century tradition, while from George Eliot and her successors we have the philosophical and psychological novel. Dickens, Thackeray, and their lesser contemporaries were the successors of the eighteenth century novelists and continued their tradition, but there is at least one difference. "The novel of the nineteenth century was female; as fully as the novel of the eighteenth century was male." (2) Thus Chesterton, who says that while no woman could have written Roderick Random, the same could not be asserted of Esmond. The preceding century had been characterised by much coarseness and brutality. There were different standards for men and women and this is reflected in many of the novels of that age. The ideal woman was pure and refined and also forgiving, like Fielding's Amelia, while William Booth or Tom Jones can be taken as fairly representative young men, and Squire Western as a fairly typical country gentleman. Gradually the ideal of respectability spread, and the same purity was expected of the Victorian men novelists as was expected of the numerous new women novelists. Whatever the actual facts might be, no early Victorian novelist could describe a hero like Tom Jones, while the heroines continued to be idealised, pure young women in the tradition of Amelia and Sophia Western.

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(1) DAVID CECIL, EARLY VICTORIAN NOVELISTS, London, Constable & Co., 1935, Chap. 1 p. 5.

(2) G.K. CHESTERTON, THE VICTORIAN AGE IN LITERATURE, London Home University Library, 1936, Chap. 2, p. 104.

The early Victorian novelists regarded themselves as public entertainers, who must please their readers, by far the greater majority of whom were the newly enfranchised middle classes. Dickens, Thackeray, Mrs. Gaskell, and their contemporaries were "at one with their public to a quite remarkable degree." (1) They were identified with their age and were it's spokesmen as the later novelists never were. The social abuses which Dickens and Mrs. Gaskell attack were already beginning to trouble many of their public, but they never attack the home and the sanctity of marriage which they and their readers held in the highest esteem. The Victorians idealised the woman and the home and the heroines of the earlier Victorian novels reflect this.

The heroine of Dickens, the ideal of woman expressed by Tennyson in The Princess (1847) are perfect examples of the Victorian concept of the woman; a combination of superior domestic servant and saint. Mrs. Gaskell also in Cranford shows the elderly ladies of a pre-Victorian age accepting their position in the home, eschewing all male pursuits. Her heroines are very varied, but apart from Ruth, are respectable; moreover, Ruth had a very poor reception. None-the-less Ruth had its progeny; Wilkie Collins' The New Magdalen, Trollope's The Vicar of Bullhampton, and Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles. Even Thackeray, the realist, off-sets his Beatrix and Becky with Lady Castlewood and Amelia. The two latter ladies and Thackeray's other saintly heriones, such as Helen Pendennis, are not faultless, however, and therefore escape being really conventional, perfect heroines. Despite their faults and the fact that they are not as interesting as ;their more worldly sisters, Thackeray seems to approve of them. Ray, speaking of Amelia Sedley, says that even if her inadequacy is granted, "one must still insist that to regard Vanity Fair as primarily the story of Becky Sharp is to place the novel in a false and impoverishing perspective." (2)

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(1) WALTER ALLEN, THE ENGLISH NOVEL, London, Phoenix House, 1954, Chap. IV, p. 133.

(2) G. Ray, THACKERAY, THE USES OF ADVERSITY, London, Oxford University Press, 1955, p. 425.

Amelia, Rachel Castlewood, Laura Bell and Helen Pendennis are, on the whole, conventional women, motherly and saintly. They may be too indulgent mothers or capable of jealousy at times, but Thackeray is indulgent towards such faults. Moreover Beatrix and Blanche Amory, though worldly and heartless are not really wicked, and even Becky has some redeeming traits, though perhaps one tends to over-emphasise them because they are so memorable in her worldly, selfish life. Thackeray attacked the snobbery of his age, introduced heroines like Becky, and complained "since Tom Jones it has been forbidden to draw a picture of a man," but his heroines like Amelia Sedley and his heroes like George Osborne and Pendennis, who are weak and unthinking, but by no means new Tom Joneses, show that Thackeray did not really break away from the conventions of his age. While some deplored his picture of Becky, Thackeray seemed to be on the side of the good and respectable and his readers no doubt shared Charlotte Bronte's opinion of him as one of the foremost moralists of the day.

Vanity Fair appeared in numbers in 1847-8, just after the publication of Jane Eyre. Both novels were well received, but the Governess heroine of Charlotte Brontë's novel was criticised far more severely than Becky Sharp ever was. Jane states her love for Rochester and when a teacher at Lowood cries, "I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer."(1) Here for the first time in the English novel is presented the modern view of woman and her position in society. Jane impresses upon Rochester that she is his equal in mind and soul. There were many who admired the novel but many agreed with the criticism in The Quarterly Review (1848)

> ".....Altogether the autobiography of Jane Eyre is an anti-Christian composition...... We do not hesitate to say that the tone of mind and thought which has overthrown and violated every code human and divine abroad, and fostered

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(1) JANE EYRE, (The Heather edition) Chap. 10, p. 102.

Chartism and rebellion at home, is the same which has also written Jane Eyre." (1)

But although Charlotte Brontë was most sensitive to critism, she continued in Shirley and Vilette to depict heroines who were not content to be mere dolls. They are the equals, in mind and soul of the men they marry.

In 1850 a writer in The Leader complained, "Women have made an invasion of our legitimate domain; they write dramas, they write treatises ....My idea of a perfect woman is one who can write, but won't." (2) While in 1869 The Quarterly Review stated, "The duties of women do not to any extent lie in the intellectual direction..... The sphere of women is home." (3) Nevertheless the feminist movement grew, and although women did not get the vote, they got the local franchise, and colleges for women were opened at London, Cambridge and Oxford Universities.

George Eliot started writing novels in 1859. Her novels are philosophical and heroines like Hetty Sorrel, who murders her child, and Maggie Tulliver and Dorothea Brooke, who are not content to be women who only talk of clothes and never think for themselves, are very different from Amelia Sedley or Agnes Wickfield. George Eliot, however, had a large public, although she had her critics. This was not the case with Meredith, but his unpopularity was not due to his presentation of women. In fact his first popular success told the story of a truly modern woman. Diana Warwick won many admirers amongst the critics and general readers, for by that time the 'New Woman' had appeared. There were still many, however, who held that intellectual concerns were not those of a woman; her place was the home, and to them Diana could not appeal. Those women who smoked in public and with men were attacked. Mrs. Lynn Linton attacks them and the 'wild

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(1) "The Quarterly Review" (1848) on Jane Eyre, quoted Barton and Sitwell, Victoriana, London 1931, p. 31.

(2) Quoted by Janet Dunbar, The Early Victorian Woman, London 1955 p. 132.

(3) Quoted by Barton and Sitwell, Victoriana, p. 105.

women' in 1891,[1] yet some years earlier this champion of respectability herself had been asked to "tone down one of the love scenes in her novel Realities"[2] Even less likely to appeal to readers holding that women must remain in the home and not try to share any of the privileges of men were Hardy's last heroines, Tess and Sue. Hardy makes a seduced girl, a murderess, a tragic heroine, while Sue Bridehead, the heroine of his last novel, is a complex mixture of intellect, passion and religion, and leaves her husband to live with her cousin who has left his wife himself.

Throughout the era blows were struck against Victorian ideals and beliefs. The ideal of the woman as a saintly mother and wife, untroubled by intellectual and political ideas was one of the ideals that was challenged. The best women novelists, Mrs. Gaskell, Emily and Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, cannot bring themselves to produce Agnes Wickfields. Of the women novelists Mrs. Gaskell is the least revolutionary, but in the novels of the other great women writers of the age there is a restiveness and a certain turbulence. Wuthering Heights must always stand alone, and this is not the place to try to assess it, but it can be asserted that here is the work of a restive passionate spirit.

> "It is to some extent true that all these great Victorian women had a sort of unrest in their souls. And the proof of it is that (after what I will call the healthier time of Dickens and Thackeray) it began to be admitted by the great Victorian men." [3]

Chesterton notes the unrest in the souls of these women and that Meredith and Hardy are affected by it. Why there should have been this unrest he does not venture to say; but he asserts that no one else knows either. Perhaps he is right to suggest that it was due to the male neglect of the military spirit while the woman felt she

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(1) see "The Wild Women As Social Insurgents" in NINETEENTH CENTURY OPINION, edited by Goodwin, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1951.

(2) K. Tillotson, NOVELS OF THE EIGHTEEN-FORTIES, Oxford, O.U.P. 1954 Part 1, p. 61.

(3) Chesterton, THE VICTORIAN AGE IN LITERATURE, Chap. 2, p. 115

was still running her mortal risk.' (1) Perhaps the mere fact of having a woman as ruler had something to do with it. Be this as it may, the unrest is there. Whether the time of Dickens and Thackeray was healthier is a moot point. No doubt the era closed less confidently than it began, but few modern readers would wish to criticise the more enlightened view which made heroines like Tess and Diana Warwick possible.

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(1) Chesterton, THE VICTORIAN AGE IN LITERATURE, Chap. 2, p. 116

CHAPTER II

. GENTLE AMAZONS.

It is fitting that this study of the heroine in the Victorian novel should start with Cranford, for although it was published in the second decade of the era,[1] we have in this work an echo of the preceding age. As one reads Cranford Jane Austen springs to mind for both style and subject matter remind one of the great novelist of genteel provincial society. Cranford is a novel without a hero, and really without a central heroine. Miss Matty is the principal character of the work, but the other ladies appropriately play almost as important roles; appropriately, because Cranford is a town of ladies, who all consider themselves as good as one another, even one suspects, as good as the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson, for all that they acknowledge her as the leader of their little society. Miss Matty, however, is beloved by all, and when she is in misfortune, they one and all unite to help her.

Miss Matilda Jenkyns is a quiet, unassuming, refined, old lady, who, like all the other ladies of her acquaintance, is still living in the preceding age. Cranford, even though it is near noisy, commercial Drumble, and is, in fact, connected to it by the odious railway, is content to move slowly. Fashions change slowly and so when the cage comes to Cranford Miss Pole and Mary Smith cannot believe that it is an article of dress.[2] Miss Matty, like all her friends, is conservative in dress, but she is none-the-less interested in clothes. Great care is taken when she and Mary go to see the silks and materials for a new dress, and on one memorable occasion Miss Matty even requests Mary to get her a sea-green turban, something like Queen Adelaide wears. She is quite disappointed when Mary brings her a lavender cap, but says perhaps she should not have expected anything so fashionable as a turban from the Drumble shops. Miss Matty, too, is a dutiful sister and would always base her opinions on what Miss Deborah Jenkyns thought. When Miss Jenkins died, Miss Matty even tried to get everyone to call her Miss Matilda,

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(1) First published serially 1851 -53.

(2) See short story, "The cage at Cranford", p. 245 of World Classic edition of Cranford.

"My dear, I'd rather you did not call me Matty.
She did not like it; but I did many a thing she did
not like, I'm afraid - and now she's gone." (1)

Furthermore Miss Matty is truly well-bred, and is above the snobbishness of Mrs. Jamieson and the rather pushing ways of Miss Pole. When Mrs. Jamieson comes to hint that her friends should not call on her sister-in-law, Lady Glenmire, both Mary and Miss Pole are affronted, but Miss Matty first fails to understand and then when she does, she is not hurt and is quite composed; "Mrs. Jamieson was indeed the more flurried of the two." (2) Later Mrs. Jamieson does invite them to meet Lady Glenmire and while Miss Pole is quite ready to go though she has been the chief abuser of Mrs. Jamieson and even of her ladyship, Miss Matty wishes to decline. Only a long lecture on "forgive and forget" makes Miss Matty change her decision. She is certainly the least snobbish of all the Cranford ladies. Mrs. Jamieson, of course, is insufferable in this respect, but the other ladies are also guilty. They are delighted to meet Lady Glenmire and look down on Mrs. Fitz-Adam, only admitting her to their circle as they feel they must relax a little if ever they are to make any new acquaintances. It is only Miss Matty who worries over the little tiffs between people in Cranford and she it is who is commissioned to take the Gordon's belated invitation to Mrs. Fitz-Adam, whose existence was not known to the Gordons. (3)

Like other ladies of Cranford Miss Matty is kindly. She is also a loyal friend. We learn that as a girl she often visited the cottages of the poor and later when Signor Brunoni returns as the ailing Sam Brown, Miss Matty sends the sedan chair for him and plays with his little girl. She and her friends could not be more kind; "indeed, it was wonderful to see what kind feelings were called out by this poor man's coming among us." (4) As for her friendship we see how

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(1) Cranford, (World Classics edition 1934) Chap. 3, p. 35

(2) Cranford, Chap. 8, p. 106.

(3) Cranford, Chap. 14, p. 238.

(4) Cranford, Chap. 9, p. 157.

Miss Matty accompanied by Mary and Miss Pole brave the dangers of Darkness Lane to be with poor Mrs. Forrester on her wedding-anniversary day.

Perhaps, however, one incident above all gives us the best insight into Miss Matty's character. On the occasion that the young man at Mr. Johnson's refuses Mr. Dobson's note, Miss Matty as a shareholder in the bank quietly insists on giving him her five sovereigns. She feels this to be the right course and nothing can stop her. Miss Matty's action is quite in character; she may be a rather foolish old lady but she is a truly good woman capable of nobility. Altogether her conduct in misfortune is a lesson. She is naturally upset at first, but she never reproaches Deborah who had invested their savings in the Town and Country Bank. She immediately sets about retrenching and tells Mary,

> "I'm willing to do anything that's right and honest; and I don't think, if Deborah knows where she is, she'll care so very much if I'm not genteel; because, you see, she'll know all, dear. Only let me see what I can do, and pay the poor people as far as I'm able." (1)

It is misfortune that shews not only Miss Matty but all her friends in the best light. We realise their love for Miss Matty and their essential kindness. Mrs. Forrester indeed, though she cannot give much to the little secret fund that Miss Pole has thought of, is actually giving up more than a twentieth part of her tiny income. Mrs. Fitz-Adam, too, we discover has admired Miss Matty since girlhood. As Mary's father says, "See, Mary, how a good innocent life makes friends all round." (2)

Mrs. Gaskell may not plumb the depths of character-drawing with Miss Matty or anyone else in Cranford, but she sketches both their joys and sorrows. Her characters may be faintly amusing but there is also another side to them. So Miss Matty, we learn, has had her sorrows.

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(1) Cranford, Chap. 14, p. 214.

(2) ibid. p. 213.

First of all there was the disappearance of Peter, and we learn also of her love affair with Mr. Holbrook. Like many another girl of her age, parental and family disapproval prevented her marriage, but this never sours her life or causes her any bitterness, though she remains faithful in heart all her life and is strangely agitated when she meets her former lover years later. When Thomas Holbrook dies, Miss Matty is deeply upset, but does all she can to hide her feelings, never guessing indeed that Mary knows her secret. Her effort at concealment, in fact, causes a slight tremulous movement of her head and hands. On the evening of Mr. Holbrook's death being made known, Miss Matty, despite her (and Deborah's) horror of followers, tells Martha she may keep company, if she desires, with some respectable young man. "'God forbid!' said she, in a low voice, 'that I should grieve any young hearts.' " (1)

Altogether Miss Matty, until the return of Peter, has many sorrows and misfortunes in life, but once when talking to Mary about keeping a diary stating what one had expected each day to be and what was the actual case, she says, " 'It would be to some people rather a sad way of telling their lives' -(a tear dropped upon my hand at these words) -'I don't mean that mine has been sad, only so very different to what I expected.' " (2)
She accepts what comes and makes the best of life and is such a gentle, kind woman that everyone is attracted to her. Thus when she loses her money, all rally round, but when once again Mr. Peter's return re-establishes her in comfort, Miss Matty is still beloved by one and all and so the novel concludes with Mary Smith saying, " 'We all love Miss Matty, and I somehow think we are all of us better when she is near us.' " (3)

"Cranford is in possession of the Amazons;" apart from Miss Matty there are many other ladies who play a large role in the novel and deserve to be numbered among its heroines. Though Miss Matty is the central character of the book, the hostess of Mary, the lady around whom they all rally in misfortune, Mrs. Jamieson is, in fact, "as became her

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(1) Cranford, Chap. 4, p. 60
(2) Cranford, Chap. 11, p. 161.
(3) Cranford, Chap. 14, p. 242.

honourable station," the leader of Cranford society, while Miss Jenkyns, when she was alive, was its unacknowledged leader and manages to dominate to a great extent the first two chapters of the book; indeed her influence can be discerned throughout the story. There are several other ladies, however, and they are most interesting and deserving of description. Miss Pole, for instance, plays a large part in Cranford. She is an intimate friend of the Miss Jenkynses and is a woman of decided opinion. She often leads the attacks on men but from her remarks on the idea of someone who was not a widow marrying Mr. Peter, we gather that she was not at all adverse to matrimony. We are told by Mary in the chapter on the Conjurer (Chap.IX) that Miss Pole was said to have once given chase to the rector. However, when we know Miss Pole she is, publicly at any rate, against matrimony, and so is loud in her condemnation of Lady Glenmire and Mr. Hoggins. Miss Pole is, moreover, the first to hear the news of this engagement; nor are we surprised for she was in the habit of rambling around the town collecting bits of news, indeed it was in this way that she had her little adventure with Signor Brunoni.

> "She had a way too of demurely popping hither and thither into all sorts of places to gratify her curiosity on any point - a way which, if she had not looked so very genteel and prim, might have been considered impertinent." (1)

Another amusing trait of Miss Pole is her supposed braveness. She is not afraid of the robbers whom they all believe are infesting Cranford, or so she says, yet she hangs up one of Mr. Hoggins' hats in her house and although she says she would enjoy her house being broken into, she flees on the first alarm "with her plate". "I am come to throw myself on your hospitality, Miss Matty," (2) says Miss Pole and no one likes to exalt over her when they discover she, too, shares in "the weakness of humanity." With Miss Matty, Miss Pole braves the dangers of Darkness Lane at the time of "the panic" to go to visit Mrs. Forrester and once there is most scornful of her hostess' belief

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(1) Cranford, Chap. 9, p. 123

(2) Cranford, Chap. 10, p. 137.

in ghosts and the claim of Jenny, the maid, to have seen one in Darkness Lane. When the ladies return home however, Miss Pole begs Mary not to leave her, and clutches her tightly and when they get to the lane she manages to get the chair-men to go by another route, ostensibly to prevent Miss Matty being jolted by the lane's rough pavement.

Miss Pole indeed has her foibles, and she may be a bit too ready with her tongue but she is also kind-hearted. She is one of the principal agents in removing the sick Signor Brunoni to Cranford and beinging him back to health and it is Miss Pole who thinks up the plan to help Miss Matty when the bank fails. The ladies of Cranford meet in her house to contribute their secret mites and Miss Pole shews great delicacy in insisting to Mary that the contributions be secret, "in consideration of the feelings of delicate independence existing in the mind of every refined female."(1) It is at times such as these, such as when Captain Brown is killed, that Miss Pole can be counted on to shew both kindness and good sense.

Mrs. Forrester can perhaps be regarded as another of the heroines of Cranford. She is a most engaging character and although she never assumes the importance of Miss Pole, let alone Miss Matty, she is never-the-less sufficiently described for her to live always in our memories. She is the poorest of the ladies of Cranford, and lives in a tiny house with a charity schoolgirl as maid. Her dress is shabby but with the aid of brooches and her lace she manages to keep up appearances. Anyhow, a new cap and an array of brooches is all that is necessary in Cranford and is all the preparation the ladies make to meet Lady Glenmire. They quite forget their old gowns, though Miss Pole honours that occasion by wearing seven brooches and Mrs. Forrester wears her precious lace. In a burst of confidence she even fells 'her ladyship' how the cat once swallowed it when it was soaking in milk. The resourceful Mrs. Forrester could not afford to give up this treasured lace without a struggle. She gave the cat some current jelly containing tartar emetic

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(1) Cranford, Chapter 14, p. 207

and so regained her precious lace. Mrs. Forrester may be poor but she was after all born a Tyrrell and was allied to"the Bigges of Bigelow Hall" and was the daughter and widow of an officer. This she and her friends never forget even though her circumstances may be changed, making "elegant economy" an absolute necessity in her case. Still Mrs. Forrester is not proud, she is willing to visit Mrs. Fitz-Adam, the former Mary Hoggins; after all "she had always understood that Fitz- meant something aristocratic."(1)

Indeed we may be inclined to smile at Mrs. Forrester, at her superstitions, and her fear that conjuring was not quite right, but she is a lovable character none-the-less. She is kind to the sick Signor Brunoni, she, a descendant of Sir Walter who shot King Rufus, can take dainty dishes of her special bread-jelly to Sam Brown, a conjurer. And when misfortune comes upon Miss Matty, Mrs. Forrester gives up more than a twentieth of her tiny income. Trembling as if revealing a crime the old lady tells Mary just how small her income is, revealing this as she does not want her little contribution to be thought a reflection on the love she has for Miss Matty.

Cranford indeed as A.B. Hopkins says is full of humour and pathos; it has penetration and subtly observes human kind.(2) The story is narrated bt Mary Smith who is only a visitor to Cranford and who is younger than the ladies of the town; she is, however, very fond of all of them. The narrator is then, both apart from and a part of Cranford. She likes the inhabitants but sees their idiosyncrasies and narrates both their sorrows and their joys. Humour and pathos both are seen in the lives of Miss Matty, Miss Pole and Mrs. Forrester. They have their little faults, they keep up pretences, but they are good and kind and endear themselves to Mary Smith and to the reader. Miss Matty and Mrs. Forrester have their sorrows and difficulties, but they remain cheerful. So, too, the other ladies of Cranford capture our imagination; Mrs. Jamieson, fat and pompous, but not unlikeable, Miss Betty Barker who, "although a retired milliner" is no democrat and understands the

(1) Cranford, Chap. 7. p. 96
(2) see A.B. Hopkins, ELIZABETH GASKELL, London, John Lehman, 1952, Chap. 6.

difference of ranks. Even Miss Jenkyns who only appears in the first two chapters, though she is often mentioned later, is cleverly brought to life. She is a strong minded woman and may be fond of her own way, and her own opinions, but she was kind to Miss Jessie, generous to Thomas, the lame shoemaker,-postman, and she was furthermore an excellent daughter to her father.

These then are the ladies of Cranford, who live in the preceding age, ignoring or forgetting the noisy, commercial world around them. The ladies Mrs. Gaskell describes, while from the same class, are poles apart from a Jane Eyre. They have more in common with Agnes Wickfield and Esther Summerson, though Miss Pole and Miss Jenkyns would probably like them to be a little less self effacing.(1) Nor are they like Mrs. Gaskell's other heroines. Mary Barton, for example, the heroine of Mrs. Gaskell's first novel, is a poor Manchester girl, whose desire to be rich and to be a lady lies at the bottom of so much of her troubles, or Ruth, are completely different. The ethical and emotional tone of <u>Ruth</u>, the urgency, the despair, the social conscience seen in <u>Mary Barton</u>, these are not seen in <u>Cranford</u>. There is indeed emotion in the work, but all is restrained and suffused with touches of sly humour and pathos. Mrs. Gaskell has captured forever in it the provincial life of her girlhood. She describes a way of life all Englishmen must love, a life, a society, and an ideal of womanhood which even then were beginning to die away.

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(1) Unlike all the other heroines to be discussed, the heroines of this novel of retrospect are old women, not young girls with life before them.

CHAPTER III

COMPLEX HEROINES IN CHARLOTTE BRONTE.

The novels of Charlotte Bronte show an intensity of feeling which is quite absent from Cranford, and the ladies of that novel are very different from the heroines of Jane Eyre and Shirley. For Miss Matty and her friends gentility and respectability are all important. They are essentially passive, accepting vicissitudes, trying to live as they and their families have always lived. If they become poor, poor they remain rather than give up their claims to gentility, and they hide their poverty as well as they can. The ladies of Cranford are old and not starting life as are Charlotte Bronte's heroines, none-the-less, Miss Matty, for instance, has not changed much. As a girl she gave up her lover because her father and sister disapproved. She could not break away. Miss Matty and her friends accept their role in society without question. Miss Deborah Jenkyns, who would have no wish to be thought a man's equal, (for she knows she is his superior), is no more than the most forceful of these ladies. She has, like them, her own decided opinions and is quite a martinet, but she is also kind and essentially feminine, and the other ladies, if a little less well-informed and a little gentler, are variants of the same type; ladies in straitened circumstances who cling to their position in the social scale, and who hold their own over lesser folk, by a mixture of kind condescension, warm-heartedness and forcefulness. But Jane Eyre, Shirley Keeldar and Caroline Helstone are women who are not so willing to just accept what happens and to fall in with everyone else's belief in what is best and right. Caroline indeed, in many ways is conventional, but she has a mind of her own as well, and throughout Shirley plays almost as important a role as the heroine who gives her name to the novel. She may not be so colourful a personality as Shirley, but she is no mere cipher, and despite their many differences, these two friends are alike in their determination to do what they think right despite the opposition of others. They live their lives against a background of machine-breaking and social unrest, yet they are really apart from it. Their problems are not so intricately bound up with social problems as are Mary Barton's in

Mrs. Gaskell's vivid social novel. But, like Mary Barton, Shirley must make her choice between marrying for love or for a position, although for Shirley the choice is never as important as for Mary Barton. Somewhat similarly Jane Eyre has to make her choice between Rochester and Rivers, a choice which will affect the whole course of her life.

Let us now study Jane Eyre with its heroine whose plainness and unconventionality, together with her lowly station, controverted contemporary ideas of what a heroine should be. Jane is a plain, unwanted orphan who, from her Charity school, goes as a governess to Thornfield where, as is well known, she meets the romantic, "novelettish" Rochester and falls under his spell. Jane loves Rochester deeply; furthermore she has had no love and little friendship until Rochester gives her his love and she cannot blame him for his deception nor for his request that she remain at Thornfield. Should she stay or go, and where is she to go? Her choice is a difficult one indeed. She has nowhere to go and no one to whom she can turn. Jane may be an independent spirit, who even as a girl can pluck up courage to tell her Aunt Reed what she thinks of her, but we can see that she yearns for love and protection. She tells Mrs. Reed

> "You think I have no feelings, and that I can do without one bit of love or kindness; but I cannot live so;" (1)

Like all Charlotte Bronte's heroines, save Shirley, Jane is poor, and Rochester offers her security and position, but that is nothing to her. Like every one of Charlotte's heroines, like Charlotte Bronte herself, Jane obviously wants a husband whom she both loves and respects; "she would gladly acknowledge the mastery of a man she could love and respect." (2) But Jane has another characteristic common to Charlotte Bronte's other heroines; she is deeply religious and has strong moral principles. She can forgive the dying Mrs. Reed and she cannot accede to Rochester's

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(1) Jane Eyre (The Heather edition) London 1949, (hereafter abbreviated as J. Eyre.) Chap. IV, p. 45.

(2) L. and E.M. Hanson, The Four Brontes, London, O.U.P. 1950, Chap. XII p. 100.

request that she remain, when the secret of his marriage is discovered. During this time of trial she turns to God most sincerely. Even before she has the added burden of Rochester's plea to her to remain, she has prayed, "Be not far from me, for trouble is near; there is none to help."(1) Jane flees from Thornfield and is eventually befriended by St. John Rivers and his sisters. She becomes a village school-mistress, and in Chap. XXXI we see her reflecting on her new lot. She realises that the illiterate country pupils may be just as intelligent and sensitive as the best-born, yet she feels degraded, that she has sunk in the social scale. She asks herself,

> "Which is better? - To have surrendered to temptation; listened to passion; made no painful effort - no struggle - but to have sunk down in the silken snare; fallen asleep on the flowers covering it; wakened in a southern clime, amongst the luxuries of a pleasure villa: to have been now living in France, Mr. Rochester's mistress; delirious with his love ....fevered with delusive bliss one hour - suffocating with the bitterest tears of remorse and shame the next - or to be a village schoolmistress, free and honest, in a breezy mountain nook in the healthy heart of England." (2)

A new and lonely life has opened for Jane, in a lowly position, but she endeavours to make the best of it. Soon another burden is added to her load. Rivers wishes her to marry him, and stresses that it is her duty. Jane realises his worth but she cannot forget Rochester. Even when he had seemed to be courting Miss Ingram, Jane had still loved him.

> "I had learnt to love Mr. Rochester; I could not unlove him now, merely because I found that he had ceased to notice me - because I might pass hours in his presence and he would never once turn his eyes in my direction." (3)

So now when she is sure that Rochester loves her, and she still loves him, even though he is married, how can she accept Rivers even if he is a fine man, a man who offers her a noble life of service to others. By this time however, Jane has come into her inheritance, which she has so generously

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(1) J. Eyre, Chap. XXVI, p. 346

(2) J. Eyre, Chap. XXXI, p. 419

(3) J. Eyre, Chap. XVIII, p. 216.

shared with the Rivers family, so St. John's proposal, to which she nearly accedes, offers Jane a life of far less comfort than she could have in England.

It is characteristic of Jane that while she refuses St. John's proposal of marriage, she is willing to go with him to India as an assistant in his missionary work. His sisters approve of the idea of the marriage, but think it madness for Jane to go to India, especially if she is not married. Jane, however, cannot forget her only love, and yet she can see that a vocation as a missionary may be hers. Eventually she returns to Rochester, summoned to him by some telepathic appeal which came just as she was about to accept Rivers. She returns to Thornfield without reflecting on propriety, just as she did not reflect when she proposed to go to India as helper sister to Rivers. At the last moment Jane is diffident of approaching Rochester's house but she summons her courage and approaches to find it a blackened ruin. When she learns that Rochester is alive, though blind, and near at hand, nothing can stop her. She returns to him; he is now free to marry, and his blindness is no obstacle to her love. Yet still she calls him sir; she may be independent now, and he may be maimed, but she still looks up to him, her "Vulcan." The man whom she loves, esteems, and feels to be strong even when he is maimed, though he holds a higher station in life and is much older than her,is Jane's choice. Rivers, though younger and better looking, may win her esteem and friendship, but he does not win Jane's love.

So Jane Eyre marries where she loves. Even though many might say the marriage was ill-advised, Diana and Mary Rivers, knowing Jane, approve of it, as do Rochester's servants who agree,

> "She'll happen do better for him nor ony o't'grand ladies.... If she ben't one o' th' handsomest, she's noan faal, and varry good-natured; and i' his een she's fair beautiful, onybody may see that." (1)

Jane Eyre, however, does not sound any opinion before she marries, she follows her conscience. In this as throughout her life, she is determined to do what she thinks is right. She retaliates to the

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(1) J. Eyre, Chap. XXXVIII, p. 524.

brutality of John Reed as a child, rather as Oliver Twist turned on Noah, regardless of the consequences. She is emboldened to accuse Mrs. Reed of her unkindness and inhumanity, and she leaves Thornfield rather than yield to temptation. Both as a child and a woman she shews herself someone with a mind of her own. She will not be a despised ill-treated dependent; she may be plain and poor, but Jane feels she has a right to love and happiness. So May Sinclair can call Jane Eyre a novel characterised by overt and audacious passion.(1) Diana and Mary Rivers can sympathise with Jane, as can Miss Temple, but people like Mrs. Reed find her too violent. Her "sharp feelings and rapid changes of mood"(2) capture our interest, but when Jane Eyre first appeared, the heroine was not to the taste of many and they complained, as later Harriet Martineau was to complain of Villette, of the novel's unmistakable note of passion.

When one turns to Shirley, one discovers a novel of larger scope and intention than Jane Eyre. Criticisms of the latter work were no doubt in the author's mind, and in addition the novel was written during a time of great personal suffering. The work is unequal but nevertheless interesting. The first of its two heriones to be introduced is Caroline Helstone who is in many respects a conventional heroine. She is pretty, quiet and religious, "in trouble she framed many a prayer after the Christian creed; preferred it with deep earnestness."(3) From the outset it is clear that Caroline loves Robert Moore though she is careful not to reveal it. When he is cold and seems to be interested in Shirley, Caroline gives herself up to good works, but she is sore at heart and pines away. Eventually she does marry Robert Moore, the man she has always loved and esteemed, who has taught her and helped form her opinions. Caroline is not, however, a sort of Agnes Wickfield. For one thing her character and sufferings are far better drawn, and in addition she can shew firmness of mind and purpose. Caroline, when she feels she has no hope of winning Robert, tries to remain active and to hide her suffering; she

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(1) M. Sinclair, Introduction to VILLETTE, London, Dent, 1946, p.14.

(2) HANSON, op.cit. Chap. XXIII, p. 224.

(3) SHIRLEY (Heather edition) London, 1949. Chap. XX "Tomorrow" p. 342.

decides that rather than stay at home with little to do she will go as a governess. Here we have a reflection of the independence of Charlotte Bronte, and in the reaction of Caroline's uncle to this plan, we have expressed the general opinion ofthe folly of this idea. Mrs. Pryor on the other hand can understand what prompts Caroline, but, nevertheless tries to dissuade her. Mrs. Pryor, like her creator, has had experience of the life of a governess and knows its difficulties.(1) Shirley too thinks Caroline foolish. "Better be a slave," says she. Their attitude is not only one of common sense, it reflects Charlotte's own experience. She felt she had to go out as a governess but she never liked it, and she could write to Emily,

> "There is such a thing as seeing all beautiful around you..... and not having a free moment or a free thought left to enjoy them in. The children are constantly with me, and more riotous, perverse, unmanageable cubs never grew." (2)

Caroline may be quiet and ladylike, but love causes her to break conventions. When Mrs. Yorke perversely refuses to allow Caroline to see her sick cousin, Martin Yorke smuggles her in to see Robert. She also finds the courage to rebuke Mrs. Yorke for interfering with her and her relations with her cousins, Robert and Hortense Moore. Rose Yorke shrewdly sums up both Caroline's and Shirley's characters, when at the conclusion of this scene she states,

> "No Miss Helstone is not my mother's match - for she allows herself to be vexed; my mother would wear her out in a few weeks. Shirley Keeldar manages better. Mother you have never hurt Miss Keeldar's feelings yet. She wears armour under her silk dress that you cannot penetrate." (3)

Shirley Keeldar indeed, is by no means so sensitive and introverted a woman as Caroline. Mrs. Gaskell tells us that Shirley "is Charlotte's representation of Emily," but she must be a very idealised representation.

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(1) vide Shirley, Chap.XIII, pp. 235/6

(2) Muriel Spark (editor) The Bronte Letters, London, Peter Nevill, 1954, No. 31, pp. 76/7.

(3) Shirley, Chap. XXIII, "An Evening Out", p. 395.

Shirley, like her original, may have a great love for her dog and may be capable of withdrawal from all about her, but as Margaret Lane says,

> "Shirley is less a portrait than a romantic figure in which Emily's outline has played a determining part. She is the shell of Emily carefully polished." (1)

She, like Caroline, is independent, and far more readily than Caroline will give her opinion. Normally the soul of hospitality, Shirley in Chapter XV, turns Mr. Donne from her house when he criticises her donation to his school fund and goes on to criticise her beloved Yorkshire. The dismissal is quiet but firm. Shirley had been very generous to the poor of her district and was conscientious about her duties as a land-owner and was always willing to take advice, but Donne's presumption is too much.

Similarly, Shirley resents the presumption of her uncle, Mr. Sympson, in trying to tell her whom to marry. She replies to his exhortations and commands to take care,

> "Why? What shadow of power have you over me? Why should I fear you? ...... Before I marry, I am resolved to esteem - to admire - to love."(2)

Shirley has most decided views on matrimony and so rejects Sam Wynne as uneducated and unfit for her. She even rejects Sir Philip Nunnely, to her uncle's consternation and displeasure. When her uncle questions her about this, Shirley once again shews her annoyance at interference. She endeavours to keep calm, however, and says she has refused Sir Philip as he is too young for her, their dispositions are not compatible and, though amiable, he is not her master. With him she feels her happiness would not be secure. Shirley in fact loves Louis Moore, and has long loved and admired him. This is obvious from the scene which culminates in the poor, proud tutor's proposal to and acceptance by Shirley. He is a man who has what she requires in a husband, a master in whose presence she will "feel obliged and disposed to be good",(3) who will claim her love and even her awe. For her, title, wealth, pedigree, are not enough without

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(1) Margaret Lane, The Bronte Story, London, Heineman, 1953. Chap. XIV. p. 230.

(2) Shirley, Chap. XXVII, p. 454.

(3) Shirley, Chap. XXXI, p. 532.

"a measure of sound, solid practical sense."[1] Louis Moore, like his brother, has good sense, ;he also loves Shirley and wins her love and esteem. His brother might have Shirley's esteem but not her love nor did Robert love her, and so his proposal had been scornfully rejected. But Louis really loves Shirley, her money is not an attraction to him, and so despite opposition, she marries the tutor. He may be a man whom her uncle despises and her cousins ignore, but Shirley sees his worth. Mr. Sympson earlier asked his niece angrily, ",,,will your principles permit you to marry a man without money - a man below you?"[2] and she had replied to the second part of the question, "Never a man below me," but declined to answer the first question. Shirley, of course, is right, she need not let questions of wealth stand in her way when she has found a man of worth like Louis Moore, and this is understood by her friend Caroline, even though the worldly-wise, like Mr. Sympson, think the marriage imprudent, almost, in fact, indecorous. Her uncle and the neighbourhood would have thought it imprudent for her to marry her tenant, the bankrupt foreigner, Robert Moore, but his brother is surely an even less eligible match. But Shirley marries Louis, and acts correctly for we see that she gains great happiness.

Shirley then, is a young woman with a will and opinion of her own. She is also generous and is not so retiring as Caroline. Caroline hated to have people wait on her, Mrs. Pryor's attentions being the only ones she would receive, but she would work for the poor, which Shirley could not bring herself to do. Shirley would try to alleviate their lot, and would sympathise with their hardships, but nevertheless she was quite decided that their machine-breaking was wrong. She admired Moore's firmness and his determination to protect his mill. Her conduct at the time of the attack is revealing.[3] She is prepared with a pistol to defend Caroline and the parsonage, and goes forth with Caroline to see what is happening at the mill, despite the dangers. She thinks Moore has acted quite rightly in defending his property and later tells Mr. Yorke so, but when medical aid is required for the wounded, Shirley

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(1) Shirley , Chap. XXXI, p. 532

(2) Shirley, Chap. XXI, p. 535.

(3) see Shirley, Chaps. XIX and XX.

quickly rallies to Moore's assistance, chiding Mrs. Pryor for not sending it sooner. Like her daughter Caroline, Mrs. Pryor is most sensitive and she is very upset; Shirley, realising how she has hurt her, soon apologises for her shortness. Shirley is a woman who can rise to meet an emergency. She is also frank and communicative; she will say what she thinks right, just as she will act as she thinks right. Shirley is indeed communicative and frank but she does not go to extremes. So we learn when she returns from her holiday and is told that Mrs. Pryor is Caroline's mother, she had suspected as much for some time. Caroline is amazed that her usually communicative friend should have kept her suspicion to herself, not even giving a faint hint of it, and Shirley says,

> "I may be communicative, yet I know where to stop. In showing my treasure, I may withhold a gem or two - a curious, unbought graven stone- an amulet, of whose mystic glitter I rarely permit even myself a glimpse." (1)

Caroline, and we too, get a new glimpse into Shirley's complex character.

The two heroines of Shirley are indeed full and rounded characters. Excellent foils to one another, together and apart they are interesting. In looks and in social position they may be more what was expected of a heroine than Jane Eyre was, but, like her, they are not cut to a conventional pattern. Their love stories have not, it is true, the intensity and passion that Jane's has, but Shirley makes just as unconventional a match. All these are, moreover, women with definite views on some points, and all, even the reticent Caroline, will say what they think, even if it means braving a Mrs. Reed, a Mrs. Yorke, or a Mr. Sympson. Shirley at one stage in the novel says to Caroline,

> "If men could see us as we really are, they would be a little amazed; but the cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women: they do not read them in a true light: they misapprehend them, both for good and evil: their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend. Then to hear them fall into ecstasies with each other's creations, worshipping the heroine of such a poem - novel - drama,

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(1) Shirley, Chap. XXVI, p. 435.

thinking it fine - divine! Fine and divine it may be, but often quite artificial - false as the rose in my best bonnet there. If I spoke all I think on this point; if I gave my real opinion of some first-rate female characters in first-rate works, where should I be? Dead under a cairn of avenging stones in half an hour."(1)

Surely here we have Charlotte Bronte herself speaking; we know that she wanted "a germ of the real" in her novels. In Shirley and Jane Eyre we have real, living female characters. All three are different but in all three there is a certain common note of rebelliousness; with Caroline it is never, even when she answers Mrs. Yorke, as fiery as with Jane and Shirley, but it is clearly there. In all three as well, there is a spirit of independence.

Unlike Jane Eyre (and Villette), Shirley is not the autobiography of the heroine, but none the less Charlotte Bronte is very much present in the novel. There is an extraordinary intensity of sensibility in both the works we have considered, and their author is not detached when writing of her heroines as Mrs. Gaskell is in Cranford. It is indeed a great change from the world of Cranford to the worlds of Jane Eyre and Shirley. In the two novels of Charlotte Bronte whose heroines we have discussed, there is nothing of the leisureliness and peacefulness of Cranford, nor are the heroines passive, gentle, uncomplaining ladies. Caroline, no doubt, would love Miss Matty and approve of her sensibility, but would she not find Cranford too quiet; would she not rather go and earn her keep as Jane has to do? Moreover, Mrs. Gaskell does not probe deeply into the lives and loves of her characters in Cranford, even in Mary Barton she goes deeper, but she does not at least present an idealised Agnes Wickfield or a grown-up Little Nell. Charlotte Bronte, however, is no doubt essaying to shew us women as they really are. So we are told of the thoughts, the miseries, the joys and hopes of Jane, Shirley and Caroline. The intensity of the love Jane has for Rochester, the struggle she has against temptation, the very struggle she has to make her way through life, are put before us, and it is this that captures our interest.

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(1) Shirley, Chap. XX "Tomorrow", p. 343

She has no beauty or position, she is not a sweet little woman, she must make her way into our affections as she must make her way through life. Shirley, on the other hand, presents us with not quite such unconventional female characters, but as we have seen, they too, like Jane, are unwilling to fit unthinkingly into some niche which their friends and relatives think suitable. And Shirley ends by making a match that her uncle, and, without doubt, Victorian society, would think romantic but imprudent. But it is neither; she has found a man whom she can acknowledge as master, (and this seems to be the quest of all Charlotte's heroines), and as she feels sure her happiness is secure with him, we realise she is right to marry him. So all three heroines shew a new and at this date unusual independence and determination, and yet we may conclude remembering that all three marry men much older and experienced than themselves, men of character and determination, to whom they are willing to submit, whom they will not only love but esteem and respect.

CHAPTER IV

ONE OF DICKENS'S LITTLE WOMEN.

One could never imagine Dickens's heroines acting as Jane Eyre and Shirley do; the passions, the rebelliousness of Charlotte Bronte's heroines would never be those of the angelic young girls whom Dickens makes his heroines. With older women, or women of the lower classes Dickens shews his powers of caricature and exaggeration, but with the young wife or bride-to-be, Dickens never takes any liberties. Consequently, as David Cecil says,

> "If he sets out to describe a character unexaggeratedly in a plain straighforward style, a virtuous young girl like Agnes Wickfield, for example, his imagination never goes to work at all; and the result is for once extremely lifeless." (1)

The early Victorians idealised their wives, especially young wives, and Dickens is no exception; his heroines must be sweet and adorable, he cannot, in writing of them, exaggerate any foible or eccentricity for fear of disrespect to the domestic angel. One could scarcely imagine Dickens making a Jane Eyre or a Ruth the heroine of one of his novels; only in his late novels, Hard Times and Great Expectations, does one discover heroines who are not of the Agnes Wickfield sisterhood. "The better angel of my life"(2) good and true, is David Copperfield's tribute to Agnes, and Esther Summerson, to whom this Chapter is devoted, is very much like Agnes. These, with Mary Graham and Rachael in Hard Times are of a sisterhood, good, motherly women. It is always dangerous to generalise too much, however, and so whatever is said of Esther is not necessarily true of Dickens's other heroines. Nevertheless, apart from Estella and Louisa Gradgrind, Dickens's heroines fall into two not altogether dissimilar types; those like Agnes Wickfield and those like Dora or Ada Jarndyce, who are also sweet, simple and pretty, but have not got the home-making qualities and good sense of the others. But whatever their dissimilarities all of Dickens's young women characters are pure and enchant all whom they encounter. Dickens, in fact, has a chivalrous attitude to them even when they have some fault, whereas

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(1) Cecil, EARLY VICTORIAN NOVELISTS, Chapter II, p. 34.

(2) DAVID COPPERFIELD, (Everyman edition) Chapter LX, p. 801.

older women, even when good and kind like Miss Trotwood, are caricatured and made amusing. All the same it is these older "guyed" women whom the reader really remembers vividly, not so much the conventional heroines, who if they do have faults, like Dora, are made engaging and sweet. Bernard Darwin in his biography of Dickens says that when David first met Dora at Norwood, "she was surely engaging."(1) This may be, but such a woman may become a Flora who horribly disillusions her former lover. Ada, of course, loses Richard, and anyhow shews rather more sense in her married life than one might expect, and Dora dies young before David has any chance to tire of her. Most of the heroines, however, are from the Agnes Wickfield mould; she, "Little Nell, Rose Maylie, Little Dorrit and all that race of children having something of the 'little mother' about them"(2) are, according to Darwin, based on Mary Hogarth. They are angelic, charming, and while their looks may not be those of a Dora, are pretty and above all they have lovely natures. Esther Summerson is akin to these women, and Dickens in the summary of the characters of Bleak House, tells us that she is "a prudent and wise woman, and a self-denying friend."

From the moment that Esther is introduced we realise that she has a loving, "beautiful" nature. She wishes to love her stern, forbidding God-mother and she wishes to make herself beloved by her and the equally stern servant, Mrs. Rachael. Once Esther goes away, however, and begins her career as a protegee of Mr. Jarndyce, she establishes herself in everyone's affections. In fact, the only persons who are not completely captivated by Esther are Mrs. Jellyby, who would only be interested in busy philanthropists, and Mrs. Woodcourt, who feels that Esther is not a really suitable match for her son, the descendant of Morgan ap-Kerrig, and even Mrs. Woodcourt finally comes to love and admire "Dame Durden"(3) Everyone turns to Esther with their troubles; Ada and Rick confide in her; Charley and Jo experience her kindness. Lawrence Boythorn, after a few minutes' acquaintance with Esther, talkes of her "forethought for everyone about her"(4) and later he puts his house at her disposal when

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(1) B. Darwin, DICKENS, A SHORT BIOGRAPHY, London, Duckworth, 1933, Chap. III, pp. 33 & 34.

(2) Darwin, op. cit. p. 44.

(3) BLEAK HOUSE, (Everyman edition) London, Dent, 1949, Chap. LXIV, p. 818.

(4) BLEAK HOUSE , Chap. IX, p. 114.

she is convalescent, insisting that she must accept or he will demolish it.

We have already seen what devotion Esther can inspire in Ada and Caddy, and what influence she can have with even a selfish old man like Mr. Turvydrop, when she falls ill. Esther and Charley have been nursing Jo, and Charley catches his fever. Esther, in turn, falls sick, after she has nursed Charley through her illness. Here Esther's good sense comes out. She insists that Charley forbid Ada and the others access to her room and is quite inflexible. As she says to her guardian later, it was "only for the best"(1) and then he goes on to tell her how miserable they have all been. Caddy and even Miss Flite have been terribly upset, and once again we realise how everyone loves Esther.

In fact, Esther wins the love and esteem of her guardian to such an extent that ;he proposes to her. This, moreover, was not Esther's first proposal, for already the odd Mr. Guppy had been captivated by her and also by the suspicion that he may be able to advance her interests. Guppy's proposal Esther gently and courteously declines, but after some deliberation she accepts Mr. Jarndyce's, although she really loves Allan Woodcourt. Earlier, on her recovery from her illness, Esther had confessed that she had thought and hoped that the young surgeon loved her, but since her looks were gone she was glad that he had never spoken of marriage to her.(2) Gratitude, a sense of duty and admiration for his goodness lead Esther to accept her guardian. "To devote my life to his happiness was to thank him poorly," (3) she tells us and later when Woodcourt returns she learns that he does indeed love her.

> "O, too late to know it now, too late, too late. That was the first ungrateful thought I had. Too late," (4)

says Esther, but she will not go back on her word to Mr. Jarndyce. In fact, soon afterwards she tells her guardian she is ready to become mistress of Bleak House. He, however, has guessed her secret and releases her, and promotes her marriage to Allan Woodcourt, saying,

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(1) BLEAK HOUSE, Chap. XXXV, p. 467.
(2) ibid, pp 477 &478.
(3) BLEAK HOUSE, Chap. XLIV, p. 582.
(4) BLEAK HOUSE, Chap. LXI.

"I had no doubt of your being contented and happy with me, being so devoted; but I saw with whom you would be happier. That I penetrated his secret when Dame Durden was blind to it, is no wonder; for I knew the good that could never change in her, better far than she did."(1)

And so, rather like Agnes, after many trials and difficulties, Esther finally marries the young man she has always admired and loved in secret.

Unlike Dickens's other heroines, Esther Summerson is not described by an omniscient Dickens, who relates her life, what she is like and what her looks are, as he does with Kate Nickleby and Madelaine, or Mary Graham. Nor is Esther presented through the eyes of her lover, a character in the novel, as are Agnes Wickfield and Estella. Esther herself relates those sections of Bleak House that deal with her story and the story of the Jarndyce family. Naturally this alone gives Esther some prominence in the tale. Of course the narrator need not be a prominent character in a novel, but Esther is; at first she may be only playing second to Ada, but, taking Bleak House as a whole, she is its heroine. With a character like Esther, this narrative technique seems a little risky. Esther can describe her own feelings and thoughts and bring us close to her, but there is one difficulty and in trying to overcome it Dickens only succeeds in alienating the reader somewhat from Esther. She is a sweet, sensible girl who is always being praised. In Bleak House Dickens never shews us directly what others think of Esther without her necessarily having to add to what is said, since all the praises and speeches of the others are recorded in Esther's narratives. Thus whenever she relates what someone has said in praise of her, Esther appends some remark of wonder at their kindness or their determination to bring her on. How otherwise could Dickens preserve our belief in her sweet simplicity and goodness? So, for example, when Boythorn speaks of Esther's forethought for others, she adds in parenthesis - "They all encouraged me; they were determined to do it."(2)

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(1) BLEAK HOUSE, Chap. LXIV, p. 817.

(2) BLEAK HOUSE, Chap. IX , p.114

But such similar self-depreciatory remarks from the outset are not only appended to reports of praise from others. Thus early in Chapter III, when Esther first starts her narrative, she says,

"I was brought up, from my earliest remembrance - like some of the princesses in the fairy stories, <u>only I was not charming</u> - by my godmother." (1)

Such remarks, although necessary if we are not to think Esther a little swollen-headed, are annoying because they are too self-depreciatory. Luckily they are not too frequent, and furthermore, she often reports long speeches, such as that, already mentioned when Mr. Jarndyce releases her from her engagement to him, without any comment. The reader realises that such words of praise must be included in Esther's narrative if the story is to progress, and our knowledge of the different characters increased, but Esther's remarks jar none the less.

Esther is the good little woman, and these self-depreciatory remarks are to be expected, even if they are annoying. What is even less credible, but necessary if her unruffled, sensible angelic character is to be preserved, is Esther's response to Guppy's actions when she has lost her looks. He stresses that he can never propose to her again and even gets her to state before Caddy that there was no engagement between them. Esther is not the least annoyed as surely anyone would be. Even though she may be glad to be rid of him, her calmness and her saying, "I must do Mr. Guppy the further justice of saying that he looked more and more ashamed," (2) seem too much for one to accept. Later when he proposes again Esther still does not shew any indignation or annoyance, but passes the matter off. It is true that she says just before she sees Guppy for the last time, "I always associated something ludicrous with the visitor," (3) but one cannot help thinking that she would have become rather annoyed with him by this time. However, even the ridiculous and

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(1) <u>BLEAK HOUSE,</u> Chap. III, p. 14 (emphasis my own.)

(2) <u>BLEAK HOUSE,</u> Chap. XXXVIII, p. 519.

(3) <u>BLEAK HOUSE,</u> Chap. LXIV, p. 819.

rather unpleasant Guppy cannot ruffle her. This may be rather unreal, but it is necessary in her role as a sensible, good, little woman.

Throughout her narrative, Esther stays before us as a personification of sense, goodness and patience. But there are some occasions when she seems to speak out of character. Thus while Esther is convalescent Miss Flite comes to see her and tells her of Allan Woodcourt's bravery during the ship-wreck. Miss Flite feels sure he will receive a title, but Esther says she doubts it,

> "it was not the custom in England to confer titles on men distinguished by peaceful services however good and great; unless occasionally, when they consisted of the accumulation of some very large amount of money." (1)

Miss Flite replies in astonishment,

> "...all the greatest ornaments of England in knowledge, imagination, active humanity, and improvement of every sort, are added to its nobility,"

and Esther comments cynically, "I am afraid she believed what she said; for there were moments when she was very mad indeed." (2) It might be argued that here is a very human Esther speaking, an Esther who regrets that her beloved will never get the honour he deserves, but this is not the calm, kind, angelic Esther. This is one occasion when Dickens is plainly intruding and making Esther speak for himself,(3) and these are his views about the aristocracy. We cannot reconcile these views easily with Esther, who is always before us as "Dame Trot" and "little woman", who triumphs and comes through her sorrows to eventual happiness.

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(1) BLEAK HOUSE, Chap. XXXV, p. 477.

(2) ibid.

(3) Another occasion when Dickens intrudes is seen in Chap. V. As Johnson points out, when Esther visits Krook's shop for the first time she sees the rags as Counsellor's gowns, the bones as those of legal clients picked clean - This is not the observation of a young girl. See E. Johnson, CHARLES DICKENS, London, Gollancz 1953, vol. II, Part Eight, Chap. II, p. 766.

Dickens is often justly accused of being too sentimental.[1] He has indeed an idealistic view of woman, unless he is caricaturing them. This is evident in his treatment of Esther, but with her it is not, on the whole, too excessive. She is not presented as sentimentally as Little Nell or even Agnes Wickfield. Furthermore the scene in which Lady Deadlock reveals that she is Esther's mother,[2] although theatrical and sentimental, is not quite as theatrical and sentimental as the conversion of Scrooge, while Esther's reactions to her mother's death and the description of the finding of her body are once again rather melodramatic, but nothing to the death of little Paul Dombey, for example. Esther finds her mother dead near her father's grave. Immediately she breaks off her narrative to continue it in the next chapter with just a brief mention of the almost inevitable illness she suffers after the death of her mother.[3] Dickens's whole presentation of Esther although indeed idealistic and rather sentimental does not go too far. Some of the scenes with Ada are a trifle annoying, Esther always calling her "my pet" and"my darling", while Esther's ingenuous little remarks of wonder at everyone's kindness are also irritating. However, in the one scene when sentiment and emotion might have run away with Dickens, he manages to describe Lady Deadlock's difficult confession to Esther without being over sentimental or crudely melodramatic.

Her birth, her illness, the death of Lady Deadlock and her early harsh upbringing, these are trials from which Esther emerges with her character unwarped. She is consistently presented by Dickens as a prudent little woman to whom everyone can turn and who comes bravely through her sorrows. Selflessness is her chief characteristic and this we see best at the time of her illness. It is then also that we see how many friends she has won. A psychologist might say that it was most natural for an unwanted, sensitive child to crave for love, but

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(1) see, for example, H. Kingsmill, THE SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY , London, Wishart, 1934, Chapter II, p. 59.

(2) BLEAK HOUSE, Chapter XXXVI, p. 485.

(3) BLEAK HOUSE, Chapters LIX and LX.

such an early upbringing as Esther had might have easily killed her desire to help others and win their esteem. Dickens, however, makes Esther, with her pleasant nature and usefulness, win friends all through life. In Chapter III[1] we learn that at her School, not only the teachers and pupils grieved at Esther's departure but even the old gardener came to say goodbye and give her a nosegay of geraniums. Then from the time that she wins over the Jellyby children, tidies her room in their house and even washes Peepy, we have little more to learn of Esther's character. She is kindly and useful to a remarkable degree and is ever grateful to Mr. Jarndyce, and she never changes. In the very last few pages of the novel we have the old Esther saying,

> "The people even praised Me as the doctor's wife. The people even like Me as I go about, and make so much of me that I am quite abashed. I owe it all to him, my love, my pride! They like me for his sake....." [2]

Esther is still busy and happy winning everyone's affection, and surprised by everyone's praises, but in addition, there is her quiet regret at the loss of her looks, and her inevitable disbelief at Allan's assertion that she is prettier than she ever was. As is to be expected, Esther, rather like Agnes, finds eventual married bliss, living in contentment with Allan, her children and the widowed Ada, whose little son Richard thinks of Esther as his second mother.

Of all Dickens's heroines, perhaps excepting Little Nell, Esther is the most developed, although she is also an idealised type. However, perhaps because she narrates her own story, we do feel we know her, and that she is alive. Esther is fairly typical of the idealised wife and mother of the Victorians and like Florence Dombey, or Agnes Wickfield, or Madelaine Bray, retains a sunny, loving nature all her life and eventually marries an industrious, good-looking young man, whom she has long loved. There are occasions when Esther's self-control and sense of right seem super human, such as when she goes ahead with her marriage

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(1) BLEAK HOUSE, p. 26.

(2) BLEAK HOUSE, Chap. LXVII, p. 837.

to her guardian, when she loves Allan and knows that he loves her. However, as Mario Praz points out, "in sexual relationships, the novelist Dickens is the champion of the strictest orthodoxy",[1] and all his heroines are perfect, angelic, rather helpless women.(2) Even unusual women like Edith Domby and Louisa Gridgrind, who are full of suppressed emotion and resentment, never go too far. They leave their husbands but do not form any adulterous relationships. Idealised women like Esther, on the other hand, will always have to act with propriety and never give rein to emotion too freely. So Esther will marry Mr. Jarndyce from a sense of gratitude and duty, banishing her love for Allan. Luckily her love for the young man is guessed by her benevolent guardian, and he selflessly gives her up to Allan Woodcourt. Hugh Kingsmill calls Esther "an improved variant of Agnes Wickfield"[3] and it is true that she is very like Agnes, an idealised, good little house-keeper, motherly and always thinking of others. She, however, plays rather a more prominent part in Bleak House, than Agnes ever does in David Copperfield. Bleak House is acknowledged as one of Dickens's best constructed novels, but it does contain some characters whom Dickens has drawn before. Esther is one of these, but she is a variant on Agnes, and while essentially she may be the same, at least her position in the novel as narrator, intimately bound up with most of the characters, gives her an extra interest that Agnes never has. Moreover, the very fact that we get annoyed at her constant perfection and at her being called "Dame Trot" and "little woman",[4] shew that she does not fail entirely in interesting us. None the less, Esther and heroines like her are too idealised to capture the imagination of the modern reader.

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(1) M. Praz, The Hero In Eclipse In Victorian Fiction, trans. A.Davidson, London, Oxford University Press 1950, p. 127.

(2) M. Praz, op. cit. pp 135 & 136.

(3) H. Kingsmill, op. cit. p. 147.

(4) Dickens used to call Catherine "dearest darling Pig" and "dearest Titmouse", see Johnson, op.cit. vol. I, Part II, p. 125.

CHAPTER V

THE HEROINES OF VANITY FAIR.

Mention Vanity Fair, and immediately Becky Sharp comes to mind, and certainly if there is any heroine of this novel one is inclined to say that she is Becky.[1] But Vanity Fair is really a novel without any central character, and it is in this perhaps that Thackeray differs most from contemporary novelists. He sub-titled his work "a novel without a hero" but as Lord David Cecil says

> "this does not just mean that it has a heroine instead; it means that there is no character through whose eyes we are supposed to survey the rest of the story and with whose point of view we are meant wholly to sympathise" [2]

There is, however, an ostensible conventional heroine, Amelia Sedley. With her Becky is contrasted rather as Lady Castlewood and her worldly daughter Beatrix are contrasted in The History of Henry Esmond. Thackeray, as has often been pointed out, constantly reminds the reader that he is manipulating the characters; as Mario Praz says, Thackeray gives a picture of the Victorian age, but he "has photographed a mirror and, together with the people and the things in the room, has photographed himself." [3] Vanity Fair is no exception, and Thackeray himself, in the introduction, talks of his characters as puppets. We are constantly reminded of each character's faults, foibles, or virtues; they live through Thackeray. Becky, however, to some extent rids herself of her strings, but even with her the reader is constantly told just what she is, and cannot altogether forget her creator. With Amelia also this is the case. Thackeray presents her virtues and faults and constantly obtrudes to comment on them and, for the greater part of the novel, to champion Amelia.

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(1) Ernest Baker says of Vanity Fair, "though Thackeray did not add 'without a heroine' (to the title), that too is almost as clearly implied" - The HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL, vol. 7. London, Witherby 1936, Chap. VII, p. 357.

(2) Cecil, EARLY VICTORIAN NOVELISTS, Chap. III, p. 80.

(3) Praz, op. cit. Chapter on Trollope, p. 261.

Amelia Sedley may be called the conventional heroine of Vanity Fair. She is good, kind and motherly. The novel itself was a break with convention, without the usual hero and plot of earlier novels, but Amelia is in the tradition of Fielding's Sophia Western and Dickens's Mary Graham. Despite the fact that Amelia has faults and is uninspiring, and that early in the novel Thackeray says, "she is not a heroine"(1) throughout the novel she is treated as such and he later calls her "the heroine of this work." (2) Furthermore, her creator champions her and when, in Chapter XII, she is called "a fade and insipid", Thackeray says this is a compliment. Here Thackeray the sentimentalist is triumphing over Thackeray the satirist. That Thackeray was a sentimentalist besides being a satirist has been noted by several critics.(3) He loved both his wife and his mother dearly and consequently we are not surprised at his idealisation of the mothers and wives in his novels, such as Lady Castlewood, and Lady Jane as well as Amelia. The latter indeed, it would appear, was based on his wife, Isabella Shawe. Writing to Mrs. Brookfield, Thackeray had first said that she and his mother had been Amelia's originals, but later he writes to her,

> "After all, I see on reading over my books that the woman I have been perpetually describing is not you nor my mother but that poor little wife of mine." (4)

Even the scenes in Brussels when Amelia is nearly demented on her separation from George Osborne, are based on actual fact. Towards the very end of the novel, as Amelia grows older (and so, no doubt, is drawn less from Isabella Shawe), Thackeray becomes rather more critical of Amelia. In a letter about Amelia, we see that while Thackeray was under no illusions about Amelia, he thought her a sweet little woman,

> ".....if I had made Amelia a higher order of woman there would have been no vanity in Dobbin's falling in love with her, whereas the

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(1) VANITY FAIR, (Collins's Pocket Classics) London, no date, Vol.I, p. 13. (hereinafter abbreviated as V. Fair.)

(2) V. FAIR, Vol. I, Chap. II, p. 18.

(3) see, for example, J.Y.T. Greig, THACKERAY, A RECONSIDERATION, London, O.U.P. 1950, and Praz, op.cit. p. 191, also Kingsmill (op.cit. p. 70) says "Thackeray, for example, was alternately cynical and sentimental."

(4) G.N. Ray, THE BURIED LIFE, London, O.U.P. 1952, p. 31, and THE LETTERS AND PRIVATE PAPERS OF WILLIAM MAKEPIECE THACKERAY, London O.U.P. 1945.

impression at present is that he is a fool for his pains, that he has married a silly little thing and in fact has found out his error, rather a sweet and tender one however, quia multum amavit."(1)

Pretty, kind and loving, Amelia has none of the wit and accomplishments of her friend Becky. However, she is a good daughter and wife and a fond if foolish mother. Her jealousy of Becky's powers over George is natural and forgiveable, especially as she tries to hide it. We are only sorry to see her so devoted to the worthless young Osborne. Her constancy may be admirable but he is not worth it.

Amelia, like Lady Jane and unlike Becky, is a doting mother and she adores her little Goerge. When she can no longer provide for him, as she and her parents have no money, she gives him up to her coarse, unbending father-in-law, Mr. Osborne. Although she hates to have to do this, she makes the sacrifice for her son's sake. Before this step, however, Amelia has more than once quarrelled with her mother over young George's upbringing. Mrs. Sedley sees that her daughter is a fool over the boy, but she is unjust when she accuses her daughter of selfishness at the end of Chapter XLVI, for Amelia never knew quite how improvident her parents were. Amelia had turned down once before a proposal from old Mr. Osborne to bring up George and to make her an allowance so long as she gave up the child. The allowance would continue even if Amelia were to remarry. "I marry again! I take money to part from my child! Who dares insult me by proposing such a thing" (2) is Amelia's response to this suggestion and she bowed Mr. Osborne's lawyer out of the room like a "tragedy queen."

A flash such as this, or as seen when Amelia champions Becky against Dobbin, enlivens the young widow. But the modern reader is probably inclined to agree, though from different motives, with the Misses Dobbin in finding her "a namby-pamby milk-and-water affected creature." (3)

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(1) TIMES, 17th July 1911, quoted Baker, THE HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL, Vol. 7, Chapter VII, p. 358.

(2) V. FAIR, Vol. II, Chap. XLVI, p. 129.

(3) V. FAIR, Vol. II, Chap. XLIII, p. 93.

Thackeray himself, as Professor Ray says, finds her passivity a handicap and is forced to admit that it "is not much of a life to describe."(1) However, the men do not seem to find Amelia unattractive and uninteresting. George Osborne loved her as much as he could love anyone beside himself, and the officers of his regiment also admired her. Dobbin, who is in some ways the hero of the novel and certainly the most upright character in it, adores her for years before he eventually wins her. To make her happy he urges Osborne to marry Amelia. It is he who buys her the piano and when the news of Napoleon's return comes, Amelia is first and foremost in his thoughts.

> "He was ashamed of himself that Amelia was always the first thing in his thoughts (always before anybody - before father and mother, sisters and duty - always at waking and sleeping indeed, and all day long)" (2)

At length Dobbin's devotion is rewarded and he wins Amelia.

She is then, the romantic heroine of the novel, and is perhaps not to modern taste, even if Victorian men were inclined, like Dobbin, to idealise their women. Thackeray's attitude is perhaps a little pussling. Although he makes Amelia pretty and virtuous and calls her his heroine, there are occasions when he shews a certain irritibility with her towards the end of the novel. He concludes Chapter LXVI, for instance, when Amelia has dismissed Dobbin, "As for Emmy, had she not done her duty? She had her picture of George for a consolation." (3) As Professor Ray says Amelia has the good qualities of Isabella Shawe and also her deficiencies; her narrow mental horizon and tearfulness.(4) As Vanity Fair progresses, Amelia and Thackeray's wife are not so closely quoted and "perhaps the mature woman in her middle thirties who rejects Dobbin on his return from India no longer brought Isabella to Thackeray's mind."(5) For most of the novel, however, Thackeray champions Amelia although he does describe her faults. She is not as perfect as Agnes Wickfield. Amelia is jealous of Becky when she is first married, she is long blind

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(1) Gordon N. Ray, THACKERAY, THE USES OF ADVERSITY, Chap. 14, p. 425.

(2) V. FAIR, Vol. 1, Chap. XXIV, p. 253.

(3) V. FAIR, Vol. II, p. 365.

(4) Ray, THE BURIED LIFE, p. 31.

(5) ibid, p. 35.

to Dobbin's worth and while motherly and hard working she is not like Becky, a successful manager in times of poverty; her attempts at earning extra money shew her innocence, her naivety, but are quite useless.

However, it is not Amelia but Becky who is the outstanding woman in Vanity Fair. Rebecca Sharp is an adventuress, determined to make her way in the world. Frank Chandler calls her "the subtlest of anti-heroines" in "the most powerful (story) in the range of picaresque fiction." (1) Her first actions give us an immediate clue to her character. She worsts Miss Pinkerton and flings the famous dictionary out of the carriage window. Becky is a rebel and someone who does not forget or easily forgive a wrong. She herself says, "I'm no angel," and Thackeray tells us, "Miss Rebecca was not, then, in the least kind or placable"(2) and he goes on to tell us that it is not surprising that the world used her ill, for it was reflecting her own face. We then learn of the poverty of Rebecca's childhood and of her unhappy dependent position in Miss Pinkerton's school. It becomes clear that Becky fears poverty and wishes for comfort in life and, even more important, for independence. So she lays siege to Jos Sedley, Amelia's fat and pompous but wealthy brother. Largely owing to the interference of George Osborne, who is courting Amelia, Becky's chances with Jos are ruined. She realises this, just as she has seen through young Osborne's vanities, and she does not forget it. She meets him a little later at Miss Crawley's when she is a governess in the Crawley family and has her revenge. She enquires after his sisters, patronises him and says what an honour it would have been to have become his sister-in-law. Becky concludes with some questions as to his grandfather, and says, "you can't help your pedigree!"(3) It is only later when she is safely married, and wishes to keep in with Osborne and his bride, that she asks his pardon. In fact, later she has an intrigue with him, although she despises him and is supposed to be a good friend of his wife, Amelia.

Becky, from an early age, as has been stated, was determined to get on in the world. At school

> "the happiness, the superior advantages of the young women round about her, gave Rebecca inexpressible pangs of envy." (4)

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(1) Chandler, quoted by Ray, THACKERAY, THE USES OF ADVERSITY, p. 423.
(2) V. FAIR, Vol. I, Chap. II, p. 17.
(3) V. FAIR, Vol. I, Chap. XIV, p. 153. (4) V. FAIR. Vol. I, Chap. II,

She feels she is as good as the earl's grand-daughter or the Creole heiress. So Becky planned ahead and "took advantage therefore, of the means of study the place afforded her." [1] She loses Jos Sedley on her appearance in society, and goes off to be a governess to Sir Pitt Crawley's daughters. There, at Queen's Crawley, we see her making herself useful to and liked by all whom she feels can help her. Lady Crawley, however, who is weak and unimportant, she does not bother to win, although she is invariably polite to her. We see the little hypocrite flattering Mr. Pitt, the elder son, claiming that her mother was a French emigree, and winning the friendship of the wealthy and worldly Miss Crawley. The old lady is almost as bad as Becky and delights in hearing Becky abuse the company once they have gone. When Miss Crawley falls ill, it is Becky who is called in to nurse her, much to Mrs. Bute Crawley's annoyance. (This lady has found out all Becky's history from Miss Pinkerton and later uses her knowledge against the little adventuress). Becky completely captivates Miss Crawley. Doubtless, she likes the rich old lady and feels she may be a valuable and useful friend, but when we learn that she has married the dashing reprobate, Rawdon Crawley, Miss Crawley's favourite, we realise how important the winning of the old lady's friendship was to Becky. This secret marriage was a mistake. It is true that Rawdon was to be Miss Crawley's heir and was of good family, but all Becky's wiles never win the pair their old aunt's favour. Furthermore, Sir Pitt himself proposes to Becky once his wife has died. Here was wealth and a title offered her, and Becky, already married, has to refuse. "She wept some of the most genuine tears that ever fell from her eyes," [2] as she refused Sir Pitt and told him she was already married. From then on, for many years she and Rawdon never have much money and are constantly in debt. They live by their wits and manage to be quite comfortable. Small gifts from the new Sir Pitt and from Lord Steyne, together with the patronage of these two noblemen, manage to keep their creditors quiet. Nevertheless, for a long time they do not mix in good society until their brother, Pitt, and his wife, Lady Jane, and later Lord Steyne introduce them into it. However, Becky compromises her reputation, if not her virtue, with Lord

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(1) ibid.

(2) V. FAIR, Vol. I, Chap.XIV, p. 156.

Steyne and loses all. For many years she wanders a poor gambler on the continent. Finally she meets Jos Sedley again and settles down with him, getting hold of all his money. Still later, calling herself Lady Crawley, Becky settles at Bath and leads an exemplary life.

The famous scene in which Colonel Rawdon Crawley finds his wife with Lord Steyne takes place in Chapter LIII.(1) Becky has been at the height of her career. She is accepted in society and has got money from Lord Steyne, but cannot spare any to save her husband from imprisonment for debt. He finds the bank note from Lord Steyne and the jewels which Rebecca has secretly obtained and coupled with the compromising position in which he finds her, Rawdon's love crumbles, and never again does he see her.

Yet Becky was quite fond of her big husband. Even at the moment that he is attacking Lord Steyne and rebuking her, "she admired her husband, strong, brave, and victorious."(2) However, it would seem that she can never feel deeply, not as Amelia can. When Rawdon goes off to war with his will made and, "something like a prayer on his lips for the woman he was leaving"(3) she is unaffected and can even think of becoming a French Duchess. This, however, is but another manifestation of her selfishness, but later Thackeray tells us,

> "Rebecca was fond of her husband. She was always perfectly good-humoured and kind to him. She did not even show her scorn much for him; perhaps she liked him the better for being a fool."(4)

Gradually Becky shews her contempt for Rawdon more and more as she becomes more ambitious and worldly and he becomes more respectable. The influence of Lady Jane Crawley over him is all to the good. She is very like Amelia, and during the period that Becky is naturally cut off from Amelia, it is Lady Jane who forms the contrast with Becky.(5) Lady Jane naturally likes little Rawdon, whom his father adores. Becky, on the other hand, never thinks of the child, and thinks her husband is a fool over him.

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(1) V. FAIR, Vol. II, p. 206 et seq.

(2) ibid, p. 207.

(3) V. FAIR, Vol. I, Chap. XXX, p. 318.

(4) V. FAIR, Vol. II, Chap. XXXVII, p. 39.

(5) Not always to Lady Jane's advantage, Becky, for example, is a better cook.

However, when they are all at Queen's Crawley for Christmas, Becky in her role as good little wife and mother, kisses her son before Lady Jane and the ladies.

> "'You never kiss me at home, Mamma,' he said; at which there was a general silence and consternation and a by no means pleasant look in Becky's eyes." (1)

Her husband overlooks her coldness towards the child as he does so many of her other faults; indeed he is hardly in a position to cast a stone. However, finding Becky with Lord Steyne and that she could have procured his release from Mr. Moss is too much. "I am innocent," Becky declares, but we can never be sure for Thackeray comments,

> "Was she guilty or not? She said not; but who can tell what was truth which came from those lips." (2)

Becky, we learn, was not particularly beautiful but Lord Steyne was by no means the first man she captivated. She was small and slight but had attractive eyes.(3) It was these eyes that captured the Reverend Mr. Crisp while she was still at Chiswick. Later she captivates Jos and even George Osborne, besides Rawdon, his father and even his brother. Men always flocked round her, as we see at Gaunt House. The ladies there remain cool, but Becky could even win over Lady Steyne with Mozart, or Lady Southdowne by taking her medicine and reading her tracts. But sooner or later she is found out or is dropped, even the quiet Lady Jane refuses to have Becky in her home, and finally even her constant friend, Amelia, turns from her when they meet at a charity fair (Chapter LXVII). By different means, flirtation, mock piety, pretended motherliness, or charm, or pretended humility, Becky could win over anyone, but she is always found out or does something which chills her friend or acquaintance. Thackeray shews what complications and troubles Becky's deceits can bring, but although all her earliest acquaintances finally shun her, he closes Vanity Fair with Becky comfortably settled about Bath and Cheltenham, where

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(1) V. FAIR, Voll II, Chap. XLV, pp. 118 & 119.

(2) V. FAIR, Vol. II, Chap. LIII, p. 208.

(3) V. FAIR, Vol. I, Chap. II, p. 19

although she has her enemies, there are many who "consider her to be a most injured woman."

Becky is indeed a vain, ambitious, worldly woman. She is a hypocrite, a liar, a bad mother and a bad wife. She defrauds tradesmen and even poor Miss Briggs; yet there are redeeming features. Thackeray is realist enough to give his knaves some good points and his good characters some faults. Among Becky's good points is her spirit, but this is not always entirely commendable, for it shews her vanity and temper. Nevertheless Becky flinging the dictionary out of the carriage window is a delightful scene and we admire her for it. This scene is perhaps unrealistic, and Trollope remarks,

> "no school-girl who ever lived would have thrown back her gift-book, as Rebecca did the 'dixonary' " (1)

Be this as it may, and even if Amelia and Thackeray disapprove, we rather admire the action. Becky is talented too, she can sing and draw well, and speak French perfectly. In addition she has a sense of humour. Even as a child, Becky was a mimic and would imitate and make fun of Miss Pinkerton and her sister, and later she would make fun of Lady Southdown and the Crawley's guests. But she can laugh at herself also. When she and Rawdon, on a hint from Miss Crawley, return to town they get only £20 and not the two hundred pounds they hoped for.

> "Though it told against themselves, the joke was too good, and Becky burst out laughing at Rawdon's discomfiture." (2)

She also laughs at being forced to take Lady Southdown's medicine. But Becky's burst of generosity and friendliness when she encourages Amelia to write to Dobbin and to forget her unfaithful husband is the most redeeming act of her life.

Becky, despite this act of kindness is a worldly, unscrupulous woman, who after "ups and downs" finally becomes rich and lives comfortably. Apart from a few admiring remarks from Rawdon and Lord Steyne, and they eventually turn from her, those who express an opinion on Becky have, for the most part, scarcely anything good to say. Some, of course,

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(1) A. Trollope, <u>THACKERAY,</u> London, Macmillan, 1902, Chap. III, p. 95.
(2) <u>V. FAIR,</u> Vol. I, Chap. XXV, p. 276.

like Mrs. Bute Crawley, are activated by malice, others are over -virtuous, like Lady Southdown, or disillusioned and shocked like Lady Jane. Even Amelia finally realises what Becky is and keeps away from her.

The little adventuress is full of vice. Taine says of her, "nothing is more fit to inspire aversion;" (1) she is odious and scarcely intelligible. But one cannot quite agree with Taine. Her actions are in character and although she is bad we are captivated by her and do not dislike her, just as she captivates the other characters in the novel. One can understand to some extent a spirited, talented girl making up her mind to succeed in the world at all costs. She is unscrupulous and utterly selfish and shews vindictiveness occasionally. Her treatment of Lady Bareacres in Brussels, for example, is spiteful but human. Many a person would do, or like to do, the same and refuse his horses to someone who had snubbed him, (2) or would only sell them to please the noblewoman. Becky's treatment of her son and her swindling of Miss Briggs are, however, quite inexcusable. Furthermore, when Thackeray makes Becky box her son's ears when he listens to her singing, this is out of character, for while she might dislike him as Lord David Cecil says, "she would have been pleased that anyone should enjoy her singing". (3) Becky's flirtation with George Osborne is also shameful. But at least she tries to put this right when she reveals it to Amelia later, in order to induce her to accept Dobbin.

Becky, according to Ray was drawn from life; several women were in Thackeray's mind, especially Theresa Reviss, adopted daughter of his friend, Mrs. Buller, (4) and a certain Mlle. Pauline, a French governess. (5) Becky is indeed false, selfish a covetous and Thackeray does not let us forget it. But he has endowed his unusual heroine with vivacity, with and impudence, and we, like the readers of his day, pronounce her capital.

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(1) H.A. Taine, HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE, Vol. II, London, Chatto & Windus, 1892 (trans. H. van Laun) Book V, Chap. II, p. 393.

(2) V. FAIR, Vol. I, pp. 342 & 343.

(3) D. Cecil, EARLY VICTORIAN NOVELISTS, Chap. III, p. 98.

(4) Ray, THACKERAY'S LETTERS, Vol. I, p. clvii.

(5) Ray, THACKERAY, THE USES OF ADVERSITY, pp. 125 & 126.

So when Becky has her little triumph and goes to Court, feeling she could bless the people out of the carriage window, we laugh at, but half sympathise with her and even though she has far worse failings and gets worse as she grows older, the scheming, resourceful little woman still dominates our imaginations.

These then are the two heroines whom Thackeray presents in Vanity Fair. He shews us their faults and virtues, but does not make any final judgment, that is left to us, and yet that Thackeray is sermonising is clear throughout the novel. None the less although he is the moralist, commenting on and manipulating the characters, he is also one of the audience. He is ' "philosophical frequenter of Vanity Fair" who addresses his fellows as "brother wearers of motley".' (1) One of Thackeray's readers, a Mrs. Procter, writes to Abraham Hayward of Vanity Fair,

> "the characters are neither devils nor angels, but living, breathing people. ....Amelia Sedley is charming; she is not an angel, only a good, true, kind-hearted girl." (2)

It was the inclusion of Amelia and her idealisation, together with the moral tone Thackeray adopts now and again that pleased those who wanted Thackeray to be amongst the "angels". Charlotte Bronte dedicated the second edition of Jane Eyre to Thackeray, "the first social regenerator of the day."(3)

Vanity Fair is sub-titled, "A Novel without a Hero," and its heroine, so called, is Amelia whose life is not one of conventional idyllic happiness; even her marriage to Dobbin does not bring complete happiness. Becky on the other hand comes through triumphant after many vicissitudes. The novel, then, is quite different to Bleak House or Nicholas Nickleby (save in the latter's picaresque aspect), where virtue finally triumphs and evil is most definitely vanquished. Furthermore, Amelia despite her important role in the novel, is quite outshone by unscrupulous but captivating Becky. Both, for greater realism, are endowed with faults and virtues, but Amelia is the good doll dancing for us, and Becky is the

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(1) G. Ray, THACKERAY, THE USES OF ADVERSITY, Chap. XIV, p. 411.

(2) Ray, THACKERAY'S LETTERS, Vol. II, pp. 312 & 313.

(3) JANE EYRE, (Heather ed.) pp. 8 & 9.

worldly puppet. They are both interesting, especially Becky, but their roles are to a great extent determined, even though Thackeray has let them develop by themselves. So he can end Vanity Fair,

"Ah! Vanitas Vanitatum! Which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied? - Come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out." (1)

Thackeray, we know, wished to teach a 'dark moral' in Vanity Fair. Novels of this type with two contrasted women characters had been popular in France in the eighteen-thirties, and we know that Thackeray read at least one, Soulié's Les Memoirs du Diable, and called it a corrupt book.(2) Thackeray did not wish Vanity Fair to be this, nor did he wish it to be merely a satirical and amusing attack as is The Book of Snobs. He wished to be a satirical moralist, and Vanity Fair, by commentary on and exposure of vice would teach the reader.(3)

It has been argued by some, (Taine for example), that Becky has too many vices and unpleasant characteristics. She does have many, but she has a few good points as well. She is lively and witty and so she is alive and is not a caricature rogue like Barry Lyndon. Amelia, on the other hand, who is meant to balance Becky and who Thackeray said, "has been carved and dressed with the greater care" (4) is a pale shadow beside Becky, and today we feel that she is marred by too much idealism and sentimentality in her portrait. None the less, while Becky remains Thackeray's greatest heroine, vice and worldliness, the vanities of society, are exposed and are successfully satirised.

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(1) V. FAIR, Vol. II, concluding lines. (p. 384.)

(2) Praz, op. cit. p. 200

(3) see Ray, THACKERAY'S LETTERS, Vol. II, p. 282.

(4) VANITY FAIR, "Before the Curtain" p. 6.

CHAPTER VI

MARRIAGE AND ASPIRATION.

Mary Ann Evans (1819 -80) was a contemporary of the novelists discussed so far, but her novels were only written in the latter part of her life,(1) and mark the opening of a new phase in the growth of the English novel.(2) George Eliot was a serious and intellectual woman and was not content to write novels whose sole aim was entertainment. They were to be serious and to be works of art. In 1871 the first volume of her great novel Middlemarch appeared. This novel is sub-titled "A Study of Provincial Life," and this gives one a good idea of the novel's scope. It is a far more elaborate work than any of the other works whose heroines have so far been dealt with, and Dorothea and Rosamond are two most fascinating female characters. Middlemarch has often been regarded moreover as a feminist manifesto; Dorothea being regarded as a St. Theresa manqué a woman of intelligence and ideals who ends up as a mere wife. That this is true, no one would deny, but one discerns only a moderate feminism. George Eliot shews none of the passionate intensity and feminism to be discerned in Charlotte Bronte, where even when, as in Shirley, she writes in the third person, there is great intensity and one constantly feels the presence of the author. Certainly Marian Evans is to be seen in Dorothea but the author's personality does not obtrude. George Eliot, in fact, writes in the third person, but unlike Trollope, for example, she describes from within; characters are presented not only as they appear to others, but we are told of their secret hopes, thoughts and aspirations. So Bulstrode and Casaubon can gain not only our interest but our sympathy. Altogether this means the reader gets a far deeper knowledge of most of the characters than is possible when all characters are presented purely objectively or where, as in Cranford, the narrator, although one of the characters, remains necessarily detached, being unable to state much more than what he or she perceives. Thus not only is Middlemarch a broad canvas presenting a study of provincial life, but the characterisation also is

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(1) George Eliot's first work of fiction, Amos Barton, appeared in 1857.

(2) G. Saintsbury, THE ENGLISH NOVEL, London, Dent, 1913, Chap. VII, p. 250.

complex and detailed. Skillfully fused, we have the complementary stories of Dorothea and Casaubon and of Lydgate and Rosamond. Numerous characters and sub-plots surround these two main themes, but with this we cannot deal here. It may be noted, however, that not only have we Dorothea and Rosamond to contrast and compare with one another, but that each young lady has within her own circle someone with whom her friends and the reader may compare her. Dorothea has her sister, Celia, and Rosamond, Mary Garth who eventually becomes her sister-in-law.

As George Eliot commences Middlemarch with a portrait of Dorothea Brooke, let us start this study with her. The Prelude prepares us for the description of the ardently religious, idealistic Miss Brooke. Dorothea is a young woman of ideals and ideas, which she holds despite what others may say or think. Like St. Theresa, she wishes to serve mankind, to reform, to achieve something, but she has little opportunity in her position; a well-to-do provincial country girl of early nineteenth century England. From the moment she meets Casaubon Dorothea is disposed to venerate and idealise him. Here she saw a man to whom she could devote herself, a man whom she believes has a great soul, and after their first meeting, "the reasons that might induce her to accept him were already planted in her mind."(1) Dorothea is indeed idealistic; she lacks Celia's common sense. She sees Casaubon as a Milton or a Locke, a great man whom it would be a privilege and joy to serve. The idea that Casaubon might wish to make her his wife fills Dorothea "with a sort of reverential gratitude" (2) She is quite blind to Sir James' suit, only seeing him as a future brother-in-law who will be guided by her in plans for improving his tenants' cottages. Celia has never been deceived, however, and eventually tells Dorothea that Sir James is contemplating marriage with her, the elder not the younger sister. Dorothea can scarcely believe it, but circumstances seem to bear Celia out. She is very angry and is still vexed when her uncle brings her Casaubon's letter of proposal. As we know, Dorothea is already disposed to accept Casaubon, and with little hesitation she does accept, rejecting with scorn her uncle's suggestion that Sir James is a

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(1) MIDDLEMARCH, (World Classics ed.) London, O.U.P. 1953, Chap. III, p. 19.

(2) ibid p. 24.

more suitable match. When Dorothea reads Casaubon's letter she falls on her knees and essays to pray. She is filled with solemn emotion, and thinks of the large duties to which she can now devote herself.

> "How could it occur to her to examine the letter, to look at it critically as a profession of love? Her whole soul was possessed by the fact that a fuller life was opening before her....she was going to have room for the energies which stirred uneasily under the dimness and pressure of her own ignorance and the petty peremptoriness of the world's habits." (1)

As Mr. Brooke and the rector point out, the marriage cannot be called a bad one, though there is a disparity of age which even Mr. Brooke had mentioned to his niece. Dorothea had replied, however,

> "I should not wish to have a husband very near my own age. I should wish to have a husband who was above me in judgment and in all knowledge." (2)

This speech is faintly reminiscent of Shirley, but Dorothea in actual fact is not too willing to submit to her husband's judgment. She respects his learning and wishes to assist him, but does she not also wish to improve her own knowledge,

> "but it was not entirely out of devotion to her husband that she wished to learn Latin and Greek. Those provinces of masculine knowledge seemed to her a standing ground from which all truth could be seen more truly." (3)

Dorothea, then, marries with mixed motives, and even on her wedding journey begins to be somewhat disillusioned. She is sobbing, though she could not say why, when Will Ladislaw calls, and it is he who first makes her doubt the value of her husband's research, a doubt which a later speech of his only strengthens. At their last interview in Rome, Will in a somewhat light manner states that Casaubon's work may well be out of date and useless. Dorothea is both angered and sad, and they part a little coldly, though Dorothea warmly commends Will's determination to

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(1) MIDDLEMARCH, Chap. V, p. 41.

(2) MIDDLEMARCH, Chap. IV, p. 37

(3) MIDDLEMARCH, Chap. VII, p. 63

return to England to achieve something. "She has obstinacy and pride enouth to serve instead of love, now she has married him," (1) observes Will to himself as he rises to go.

The suspicion that Casaubon is not quite the scholar everyone thinks, together with his coldness and touchiness, which are the result of his own insecurity and secret jealousy, destroy Dorothea's hero-worship of her husband, but soon compassion for him takes its place. This is partly effected by his illness. When Will revisits Lowick and talks of Casaubon's disinclination for anyone to overlook his work, Dorothea is no longer immediately indignant,

> "and now when she looked at her husband's failure, still more at his possible consciousness of failure, she seemed to be looking along the one track where duty became tenderness." (2)

This feeling of compassion reaches its climax on the night that Dorothea waits up for her husband, whom she knows has consulted his doctor, Lydgate. He stays up late aloof, sad and lonely and is surprised to find Dorothea waiting for him,

> " 'Come my dear,' he says, 'You are young and need not to extend your life by watching'
>
> When the kind quiet melancholy of that speech fell on Dorothea's ears, she felt something like the thankfulness that might well up in us if we had narrowly escaped hurting a lamed creature." (3)

Dorothea feels a compassion for her husband and for his poor aspirations. Thus, after a struggle she is only saved by his death from a rash promise to carry out his wishes and do whatever he desires. Once his will, which expresses his jealousy of Ladislaw is published, she feels quite free, and has no intention of completing the "Key", and later she gives up her inheritance itself to marry Will.

We are aware for some time, that Dorothea is attracted by Will, even at their second meeting his merry laugh can draw a response from her, and from

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(1) MIDDLEMARCH, Chap. XXII, p.238.

(2) MIDDLEMARCH, Chap. XXXVII, p. 390.

(3) MIDDLEMARCH, Chap. XLII, p. 459.

then on she shews a great interest in him and his career. Will Ladislaw is a rather flat and unsatisfactory character, and one is a little surprised that he can attract Dorothea. Moreover, Dorothea takes an exceptionally long time to realise she loves him. It is not until she gets home, after surprising Rosamond and Ladislaw in a rather compromising situation, that she moans out, "Oh, I did love him!" (1) He, of course, has long worshipped Dorothea. The second time he sees her, Dorothea's hair is like a halo, and his friend says she looks like a Madonna. Later at Naumann's studio, when she sits for Santa Clara, Will feels disposed to fall and kiss her robe.(2) In the very first chapter George Eliot herself states that Dorothea might be taken for the Blessed Virgin as she appeared to the Italian painters. There is indeed an element of idolisation in Will's, and even George Eliot's, attitude to Dorothea, but this is counteracted by the realism with which she is presented. Her long association with Ladislaw, even when the will has beeh published, her eventual marriage to Will, cannot be called idealistic. She finds she loves Will and learns from Rosamond that he loves her also. So they marry despite the objections of everyone, even of the ineffectual Mr. Brooke. Celia learns from her sister that she is determined to marry Will of whom she is very fond, and that she could only understand if she could feel with Dorothea.(3)

Thus we see Dorothea become the wife and help-mate of Will Ladislaw, who rises to be a member of Parliament and an ardent reformer. At least Will is not the provincial coxcomb that Stephen Guest is. Maggie Tulliver in The Mill On The Floss is attracted by Stephen, although she is an idealistic, sensitive girl who is far his superior, and once again in Middlemarch, George Eliot makes a heroine who has much of her creator in her, find a rather shallow young man attractive. We are a little disappointed but we cannot quarrel seriously with the realism of George Eliot's portrait.

"Certainly," says Eliot, "those determining acts of her life (i.e. her two marriages) were not ideally beautiful. They were the mixed

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(1) MIDDLEMARCH, Chap. LXXX, p. 842.

(2) vide MIDDLEMARCH, Chap. XXII.

(3) vide MIDDLEMARCH, Chap. LXXXIV.

result of young and noble impulse struggling amidst the conditions of an imperfect social state, in which feelings will often take the aspect of error, and great faith the aspect of illusion."(1)

Dorothea is a potential St. Theresa; she is potentially a great heroic figure, but events and various little personal failings intervene. Neither of her two marriages, as George Eliot points out, are ideal, but they are quite understandable. The second marriage too, which jars some, as Joan Bennett remarks, "is not meant to be the fulfillment of Dorothea's dreams," but it "is an improvement on the first, because its basis is an appreciation of the man as he is."(2) It is based on this appreciation, and on a mutual love, understanding and respect.

There is no such similar basis to the marriage of Rosamond Vincy and Lydgate, on the other hand. This is a marriage that we can compare with Dorothea's first marriage, for it is a union of two very dissimilar persons who have no deep love for one another. Both Rosamond and her husband are selfish. Rosamond has been to Mrs. Lemon's school and has there mixed with girls better born than herself. She dislikes the young men of Middlemarch and tries to forget that her grandfather was an inn-keeper. Even before she has met Lydgate, Rosamond is interested in him. When we first see her she is complaining of her brother's slothfulness, and her mother's use of the word "tetchy", and she soon tells her mother, "I shall not marry any Middlemarch young man."(3) Rosamond is finicky and refined and could not bring herself to marry a Ned Plymdale, but Lydgate, who comes from a good family, who talks well and is an obvious gentleman, seems just the husband she could wish for. Dorothea interests Lydgate when he first meets her, but she is not his "style". He is attracted by women with beauty and charm and as Rosamond has these and is, moreover, decided that he is a suitable husband, it is no wonder indeed that the two are soon engaged and married. Both marry for selfish reasons; Lydgate sees his wife as a doll, an acquisition, Rosamond sees him as a means of raising her social status, and is delighted with his titled relatives. The couple have little in common. Rosamond will not, cannot understand

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(1) MIDDLEMARCH, Finale, p. 896.

(2) Joan Bennett, GEORGE ELIOT, HER MIND AND HER ART, Cambridge, The University Press, 1948, p. 176.

(3) MIDDLEMARCH, Chap. XI, p. 101.

her husband's medical ambitions and unchecked (to begin with) by him, she lives beyond their means. Soon they are in debt and this only drives them further apart. Rosamond is cold and amazed when her husband requests her not to interfere, and rebukes her for writing to his uncle for money. After this Lydgate is implicated in the Raffles affair and the two are even further estranged. From the time of the ill-advised letter to Sir Godwin, Rosamond feels victimised, while Lydgate even before this feels "a half-maddening sense of helplessness."(1) She leaves him for home, and only returns when, with Bulstrode's loan, the debts are paid, but then comes further trouble, for Lydgate falls under the odium with which everyone is regarding Bulstrode. This Rosamond learns from her father, just when life had seemed to be getting better.

> "The shock to Rosamond was terrible. It seemed to her that no lot could be so cruelly hard as hers - to have married a man who had become the centre of infamous suspicions." (2)

Unlike her aunt, she feels no sympathy for her husband, she thinks only of herself. Lydgate realises she knows all, but the understanding and trust he hopes for are not forth-coming, all she can do is to re-urge her plan of leaving Middlemarch and of settling down in London where he can have a fashionable practice.

From Rosamond's point of view her lot is hard. The husband who was to bring her glory brings her debt and shame, and at this crisis her father is unable to help her. She never thinks of blaming herself; she has always acted with propriety. But a further shock is in store for Rosamond. When Dorothea calls to see her and to talk of Lydgate and the confidence she has in him, Rosamond and Will are together clasping hands as Rosamond is telling her whole sad story. Naturally Dorothea withdraws hastily and Will, who loves Dorothea, feels he now has less hope than ever. The two stand motionless for a while, Rosamond being more gratified than annoyed. She knows Will has received a blow,

> "but she had been little used to imagining other people's states of mind except as a material cut into shape by her own wishes."(3)

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(1) MIDDLEMARCH, Chap. LXV, p. 713.
(2) MIDDLEMARCH, Chap. LXXV, p. 811.
(3) MIDDLEMARCH, Chap. LXXVIII, p. 834.

Will tells Rosamond he can never explain to Dorothea at her expense and goes on to say,

> "No other woman exists by the side of her. I would rather touch her hand if it were dead, than I would touch any other woman's living."(1)

These words cause Rosamond to almost lose "the sense of her identity" and she seems to be waking into some new terrible existence. She does not feel a chill repulsion as with Lydgate, she does not feel justified. "What another nature felt in opposition to her own was being burnt and bitten into her consciousness." (2) Will's words and despair affect Rosamond greatly, for the first time she forgets self and is left feeling miserable. The next day she is still upset when Dorothea calls again, and she is prepared to be reserved if Dorothea has come about Will. Then follows an excellent scene in which Dorothea speaks of Lydgate, and the good opinion she and her friends share of him. This naturally cheers Rosamond and Dorothea goes on to tell her how Lydgate needs his wife, ending,

> "How can we live and think that anyone has trouble - piercing trouble - and we could help them, and never try." (3)

Rosamond is moved and she, after a while, brings herself to say that Will does not, and never has loved her, but loves Dorothea. So Dorothea helps Rosamond through her time of trial, a time when selfish little Rosamond learns for a while to think of others, and she, in turn, helps Dorothea. But Rosamond is soon more or less her old self again. She has had a terrible experience but she returns to the shelter of her husband;

> "Lydgate had accepted his narrowed lot with sad resignation. He had chosen this fragile creature, and had taken the burthen of her life upon his arms. He must walk as he could carrying that burthen pitifully." (4)

Rosamond paralyses Lydgate. As Sir Leslie Stephen says, "it is Rosamond's function to do exactly what is most antipathetic to her biographer." (5)

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(1) ibid, p. 835.
(2) ibid, p. 836.
(3) MIDDLEMARCH, Chap. LXXXI, p. 852.
(4) ibid, p. 857.
(5) L. Stephen, GEORGE ELIOT, London, Macmillan 1902, Chap. XIV, p. 203.

She gets her way in the end, for Lydgate gives in and starts a successful social practice alternating between London and a Continental watering place. He always considered himself a failure and always spoke well of Dorothea which caused Rosamond the mildest bit of playful jealousy. But she had got her way, and when he dies young, Rosamond marries a pliable, successful doctor and continues her pleasant life. To the end Rosamond had been able to frustrate Lydgate by stratagem, and when she marries again she considers her happiness 'a reward'.

> "She did not say for what, but probably meant that it was a reward for her patience with Tertius, whose temper never became faultless, and to the last occasionally let slip a bitter speech which was more memorable than the signs he made of repentance." (1)

Indeed, frail Rosamond continued and increased her sway over Lydgate and after her one little indiscretion and time of sorrow, continued placidly to ask for and get her way.

Rosamond is certainly a very different character to the ardent Dorothea, with her religious and intellectual problems. Rosamond is a beautiful selfish girl who, in reality, destroys Lydgate in getting what she wants, and yet never realises what she is doing to her husband. However, as George Eliot shews us, Rosamond's own mind and feelings as well as her behaviour and effect, she is comprehensible and we cannot really dislike her. She is a most interesting character, and we are amazed at George Eliot's ability to enter into the character and feelings of two such different women as Dorothea and Rosamond. Dorothea indeed, like Maggie Tulliver in the earlier <u>The Mill On The Floss</u>, has much of her creator in her, but Rosamond is an entirely different woman in character, temperament and outlook, as well as position. Cross indeed tells us when speaking of his wife's creation of Rosamond, "Of all the characters she had attempted, she found Rosamond the most difficult to sustain." (2) But she does manage to sustain her and to keep her alive with no hint of caricature, without a single false note. George Eliot calls Rosamond "a fragile creature," a burden on Lydgate, and this she certainly is. Delicate and pretty to look at, she has a poor character; selfish,

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(1) <u>MIDDLEMARCH</u>, Finale, p. 892

(2) J. Bennett, op.cit. p 169.

incapable of seeing another's point of view, determined to quietly get her way. This "fragile creature" destroys Lydgate, but he chose her. When he first met Dorothea he did not realise her true worth.(1) He has his spots of "commonness", he likes people to know of his birth and talents, likes to be surrounded with elegance, and he likes to make himself agreeable to the charming Miss Vincy who can talk pleasantly and play the piano delightfully. He never bothers to find out what she is really like; she is a charming acquisition. Rosamond too, never gave Lydgate a thought save in relation to what he could do for her. He later learns what she is like and realises that she will never understand his ambitions, that she will for ever be a drag on him. They are never really one and, of course, this is most obvious at the time of the death of Raffles which brings so much odium on Bulstrode and then on Lydgate. We can understand Rosamond's hurt bewilderment but we both understand and sympathise with her husband's sorrow at finding his wife incapable of really understanding and loving him. It is at this period that Dorothea is seen at her best and that Lydgate comes to see her worth. She too has suffered and has come to be more perceptive of what others feel. Fairly early on in the novel George Eliot states that man lacks a keen vision and does not see much beyond himself. We "walk about well wadded with stupidity", and perhaps man could not bear it if he had too "keen a vision and feeling of all ordinary human life." (2) Rosamond only once, in the memorable scene with Will Ladislaw, feels with another, but Dorothea on the other hand loses more and more of her wadding. She can sympathise with her husband, she realises how difficult matters may be between Rosamund and Lydgate, and when she first visits Rosamond she finds her alone with Will, clasping his hand. No wonder after this she replies to Celia's questions about what has happened, "Oh, all the troubles of all people on the face of the earth." (3)

In Middlemarch one can thus see that George Eliot has created two unique and interesting heroines. Rosamond, one might say, does not deserve this title strictly speaking, rather she is Lydgate's evil angel. But that is not so, she may be forever his encumbrance, she may have set her heart on marrying him, without any thoughts but for herself, but while we

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(1) vide MIDDLEMARCH, Chapter X.

(2) MIDDLEMARCH, Chapter XX, p. 207

(3) MIDDLEMARCH, Chapter LXXVII, p. 833.

find her frustrating, like her husband, we realise that she cannot change or be changed and that he will have to carry her through life, giving in to her or neither she nor he will know any domestic happiness. "The best girl in the world! He will be a lucky fellow who gets her," (1) people said of Rosamond. How untrue. Still even though he comes to admire Dorothea, Lydgate, no doubt, would not have found with her, in all possibility, much more happiness. He might have found more understanding, for after her first marriage and her widowhood Dorothea does indeed gain in understanding. She, however, falls in love with the gay and lively Will Ladislaw, and aids him in his public duties. This may not be an ideal marriage, but it brings both of them happiness. Certainly Will from his meeting with Dorothea in Rome, can rouse her and even make her laugh. Dorothea indeed, is on the whole too grave and serious for so young a person and in this one particular she has a trait in common with Rosamond Vincy. Both lack a sense of humour. Rosamond is clever, but lacks humour, but perhaps her chief cleverness lies in that she never attempts a joke. Life for Rosamond, as for Dorothea, is serious. The great difference is that while Rosamond is only ever concerned with herself and living elegantly amongst cultivated fashionable people, Dorothea has the selfless, ardent seriousness of a reformer. At first, she is a little too ready to reform, to judge, to act, but she learns from experience and she ends her life having achieved nothing great, though she might have done. Instead, she allows herself to become merely the helpmate of a man whom, whatever we might think of him, she admires and loves. Like Lydgate she never achieves what she desired and in conclusion one might note that while it is perfectly permissible and inevitable that one will contrast Rosamond and Dorothea, it is even more natural and more interesting to contrast Dorothea and Lydgate and to see what effect marriage has on these two persons who have such possibilities and capabilities.

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(1) MIDDLEMARCH, Chapter XVI, p. 177.

CHAPTER VII

THE FLECKED HEROINE OF REALITY.

Even though George Meredith was born nearly a decade after Mary Ann Evans, his first novels were contemporaneous with hers. Like George Eliot's, his novels shew a break with the traditional novel, but never had the popularity of her works. Intellectual and philosophical, their openings to this day daunt many a reader. Diana of the Crossways (1885), one of his later novels did achieve popularity, owing perhaps to its happy ending, "a conclusion acceptable to the middle-class public," (1) and also to the fact that it bore a close resemblance to a scandal in high society.(2) Diana of the Crossways sold well and Meredith's other works were re-read, but fame had come late. Perhaps his best and most representative novel, The Egoist, had appeared earlier in 1879. Besides giving an excellent character study of the egoistical Sir Willoughby Patterne, this novel has one of Meredith's most delightful heroines, Clara Middleton. Like Sir Willoughby's first fiancée, Constantia Durham, Clara discovers what Sir Willoughby is after their engagement, but she does not run away. She will not accept his ideas and petitions to be released from the betrothal. Clara Middleton refuses to "be the man she was to marry. She preferred to be herself with the egoism of women." (3) Clara has her faults, but her struggle for independence is accompanied by a development of character. The Egoist is, of course, a psychological study of Sir Willoughby, his values and those of society are exposed. Sir Willoughby has an ideal of women, "the common male Egoist ideal of a waxwork sex." (4) Clara, however, realises what Sir Willoughby is and cannot conform to his ideal. In The Egoist thus, we see Meredith asserting women's rights; their right not to political and professional equality as in Beauchamp's Career, but to spiritual independence.

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(1) J. Lindsay, GEORGE MEREDITH, HIS LIFE AND WORK, London, The Bodley Head, 1956, Chap. 24, p. 268.

(2) Diana was based on Hon. Mrs. Norton who was falsely accused of betraying a political secret. Meredith endowed her with brains. Lindsay, op.cit. p. 262.

(3) THE EGOIST, (Surrey edition) London 1912, Vol. I, p. 54

(4) THE EGOIST, p. 178.

In his lecture on the Comic Spirit[1] given not long before The Egoist was published, Meredith stated that pure comedy which provides a sane sense of proportion can only exist where there is mental equality between men and women. Where this is not the case all the tragic elements are present. Sir Willoughby Patterne is intelligent, and is flawless by the standards of society but he is an "egoist;" no sensible, self-respecting woman could endure to live with him because of his possessiveness and complacency. Yet if Clara leaves him she will be thought a jilt. Clara's problem, therefore, is not simple, and her father is no help at this crisis in her life. Eventually she is freed of Sir Willoughby and marries the scholarly Vernon Whitford. Nevertheless, Lionel Stevenson is right in calling the novel a "grim exploitation of the horrors of incompatibility."[2] Similarly Diana and Mr. Warwick are incompatible, and Clara with her faults, her struggle for independence, is, in many ways, the prototype of Diana Warwick.

From the outset Diana's beauty and wit are stressed. The first chapter of Diana of the Crossways, 'Of Diaries and Diarists,' is a prelude to the novel but several examples of Diana's witty sayings are recorded. She speaks of the war of the sexes and says,

> "Men may have rounded Seraglio Point; they have not yet doubled Cape Turk,"

and of Romance she says,

> "The young who avoid that region escape the title of fool at the cost of a celestial crown." (3)

When Diana is actually presented in the second chapter, we already know something of her wit, her beauty and that she became the object of a scandal. At the ball she is surrounded by admirers amongst whom is Redworth. She is not a frivolous, unthinking beauty, however, as Sir Lukin Dunstane, her best friend's husband, discovers. She expresses Radical views, but although Sir Lukin believes a woman should be a "mute in politics," he is so charmed by Diana, that he actually makes love to her. This is a

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(1) Published later as "ON THE IDEA OF COMEDY AND THE USES OF THE COMIC SPIRIT."

(2) L. Stevenson, THE ORDEAL OF GEORGE MEREDITH, London, Peter Owen, 1954, p. 226.

(3) DIANA OF THE CROSSWAYS, (Surrey edition) London 1912, Chap. I, pp.10 &12.

momentary weakness, and we later see that Sir Lukin loves his intelligent, refined wife dearly. However, Diana is very disturbed; indeed this, it would seem, is not her first such experience. Not long afterwards she becomes engaged to Mr. Warwick, "a gentlemanly official." Lady Dunstane cannot understand the choice. Her friend might have done worse, but she had not shown any enthusiasm over Warwick when first she spoke of him, and Lady Dunstane is right in suspecting that Diana's letter announcing the engagement bore the sound of desperation and that she "had accepted him without being in love." (1) The marriage is a mistake,as Lady Dunstane realises after the first visit of the married couple, although Diana never says anything about it. Warwick cannot appreciate his wife and becomes jealous of her friendship with Lord Dannisburgh. He institutes divorce proceedings against Diana but these are dismissed. After this Diana can never bring herself to be reconciled with Warwick. She wishes to be free. Yet she is young and beautiful and soon wins the love and friendship of the young politician, Percy Dacier. She recognises but will not give in to her love for Dacier when he visits her at her French sea-side retreat. However, a little later under threat of persecution from her husband Diana is on the point of going away with Dacier. She is called to Lady Dunstane's sick bed at this crucial moment. When, some time later, Percy Dacier wishes her to be his, "body and soul", she is not willing to commit herself. This scarcely surprises us for throughout the novel Diana shews an inconsistent, rather frightened attitude to sex. "Where is the woman who ever knows a man," (2) she thinks when she receives Dacier's proposal, a proposal which she feels degrading and which she had hoped would never come. Her earlier experiences were not fortunate and now when the moment for decision comes, Diana tries to evade it.

Diana had been willing at one stage to leave England with Percy Dacier; she allowed him to call her "Tony", a name reserved for a few intimates, but when Dacier tries to get her to commit herself a second time Diana refuses. This is inconsistent but understandable. Earlier in Chapter X Diana reflects on her marriage to Warwick and her "bitter

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(1) DIANA, Chapter V, p. 65.

(2) DIANA, Chapter XXXI, p. 366

marriage" seems an imprisonment to her. She wants freedom yet she reflects that she might have found an ideal mate, "She could have loved." Her attitude shews a fear of sexual contact; although she looks for love she is rather afraid of it. Her first marriage was a step taken to protect her from proposals. It was loveless and Diana found she had no freedom. Dacier may love her, but Diana is afraid to accept him, especially as she has got into debt and thinks that his second proposal is made as a demand for payment for the secret he has told her.

All the critics agreed that Diana was a real woman. Meredith himself called her not a romantic heroine but,

> "the flecked heroine of Reality: not always the same; not impeccable, not an ignorant-innocent, nor a guileless: good under good leading; devoted to the death in a grave crisis; often wrestling with her terrestial nature nobly; and a growing soul; but not one whose purity was carved in marble for the assurance to an Englishman that his possession of the changeless thing defies time and his fellows, is the pillar of his home and universally enviable." (1)

Diana is not perfect; she is self-assertive, and inconsistent but she wins our sympathy and interest. She is witty and beautiful. Redworth thinks of her as a Madonna, when he watches her lighting a fire,

> "He thought,as she knelt there, that never had he seen how lovely, and how charged with mystery her features were, the dark large eyes full on the brows; the proud line of a straight nose in right measure to the bow of the lips; reposeful red lips, shut, and their curve of the slumber-smile at the corners. Her forehead was broad; the chin of a sufficient firmness to sustain that noble square; the brows marked by a soft thick brush to the temples, her black hair plainly drawn along her head to the knot, revealed by the mantilla fallen on her neck." (2)

Such descriptions remain with us and we tend to forget that Diana can act foolishly, so when she betrays the political secret we may be surprised and shocked like Photiades. (3) The step is rather unexpected but it is

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(1) DIANA, Chap. XXXV, p. 399.

(2) DIANA, Chap. IX, pp. 104 & 105.

(3) C. Photiadès, GEORGE MEREDITH, Paris, Armand Colin, 1910. "Admettrons - nous que sa Diane - cette jeune fille, non seulement très intelligente, mais pure, digne, fière et d'un coeur magnanine, - vende subitement à un directeur de journal, le secret dangereux que lui a confié un ami?"

not incredible or really out of character. Stress has been laid on Diana's worries over her debts, her sense of degradation. These combined with the sense of importance she feels in knowing a secret that Tonans, the editor does not know, drive Diana to sell the secret. Mixed motives impel her to divulge the secret, therefore, chief of which, according to Lindsay, is "her desire to reach equality with Percy - through money."(1) She has weaknesses and can act foolishly at times, but one does find the selling of the secret difficult to swallow, partly perhaps because one does not want to admit that Diana has faults and partly because her motives are never too clear and her attitude, once Dacier confronts her again is too innocent. On reflection one realises that Diana is by no means meant to be perfect and that she is capable of a foolish, a base action, motivated chiefly by a desire to get out of her money difficulties and to shew Percy Dacier she is an independent spirit. Here is a flaw in Diana's character, but not in her characterisation. Understandably Percy Dacier is shocked but Lindsay is right to say that this is the test of his love and understanding.(2) He fails to realise that this is a deed done in desperation and he sees only the deed, not its motives. So he turns from Diana and marries Miss Asper. It is just at this stage that Warwick dies and that Diana falls ill. When she recovers she eventually agrees to marry Redworth who has long loved her.

Lindsay sees Diana's second marriage as a flaw in the novel and also quotes a letter of Meredith's stating,

> "Diana keeps me still on her sad last way to wedlock. I could have killed her merrily, with my compliments to the public. But the marrying of her sets me traversing feminine labyrinths, and you know that the why of it never can be accounted for."(3)

If one sees Diana solely as a rebel and a woman striving to break away from conventions because she has made a foolish marriage, the second marriage is not ideal. Diana wanted her liberty, and only a little while before Dacier's marriage to Miss Asper, Lady Dunstane told Lady Wathin that Diana would make no attempt to win back Dacier;

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(1) Lindsay, op. cit. Chap. 24, p. 265.

(2) ibid p. 265.

(3) Lindsay, op. cit. Chap. 24, p. 262.

"Have no fear ...... It was freedom my friend desired." (1)
But Diana is not only seeking freedom; "she could have loved," and she could be happy with a man who would appreciate and not try to crush her personality. Warwick could not appreciate her but Redworth does. He is not like Sir Willoughby Patterne, who would force his wife to be as subservient and opinionless as his aunts. He may be a solid Englishman but he has advanced political views and has sensible views on women. He discusses problems with them, advises Lady Dunstane on the Latin she is reading, and unlike Dacier, he always retains his love and respect for Diana. Twice when Diana is at "the crossways" of her life he saves her; when she has resolved to quit England because of the proceedings, and later when he calls her to Lady Dunstane just when she is about to leave with Dacier. Lady Dunstane calls him, "one of those rare men of honour who can command their passion," (2) a man on whom Diana has stamped her spirit. This marriage then is not a foolish or an unexpected one. It is not a happy ending tacked on to the end of the novel. Diana is a woman trying to find her place in the world. Her second marriage shews her coming to terms with the world. She will give up her freedom and make a conventional marriage. But Redworth is not a second Warwick, and while he is not a brilliant man, he is sensible, a loyal friend and does appreciate Diana. This second marriage, therefore, is understandable and quite in character.

In the course of Diana of the Crossways, in addition to the psychological, emotional study of the heroine, Meredith also criticises middle-class morality which can only see a woman as wholly good or wholly bad. Society relentlessly pursues any woman who may have offended.

> "She runs, and they give tongue; she is a creature of the chase. Let her escape unmangled, it will pass in the record that she did once publicly run, and some old dogs will persist in thinking her cunninger than the virtuous, which never put themselves in such positions, but ply the distaff at home."(3)

Thus Meredith in the opening chapter, but as by this time, (the second last decade of the century), the New Woman had appeared, Diana, Clara Middleton and Sandra Belloni had admirers. There were both men and women,

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(1) DIANA, Chap. XXXVI, p. 404
(2) DIANA, Chap. XLII, p. 474.
(3) DIANA, Chap. I, p. 8

however, who were of Lady Wathin's party. A sweet innocent girl like Miss Asper was the ideal bride and intellectual women like Diana, with their dangerous influence over some men were to be avoided. Moreover, until the end of the era, it was disastrous to appear in a divorce case. Lady Dunstane knows this and tries to win over Mrs. Wathin, one of the middle-class ladies who have such power in forming public opinion. This lady never likes Diana, whose witty remarks annoy her, especially as she often cannot understand them. Nevertheless this lady, "boasts an aristocracy of morals". Both before and after the knighting of her husband, she is one of society's moral busybodies. She tries to get Diana to return to Warwick and is undaunted by Diana's coldness.

> "Our life below is short. We have our little term Mrs. Warwick. It is soon over," says she and is undaunted by the reply, "On the other hand, the platitudes concerning it are eternal." (1)

To the end Mrs. Warwick is to Lady Wathin a dangerous woman. She ought to return to her husband who is so generously willing to forgive her, and "though she might not have been wholly guilty she had bitterly offended."(2) But Diana will not conform to convention; rather as Clara Middleton had to face the prospect of being thought a jilt, Diana has to face society's opinion of her, both before and after the proceedings against her.

> "Awoman doubted by her husband, is always, and even to her champions in the first hours of the noxious rumour, until they have solidified in confidence through service, a creature of the wilds, marked for our ancient running." (3)

Even before the proceedings Diana has her champions. The upper classes are, on the whole, won over by her brave face and witty conversation. Lady Pennon can be won over with remarks like, "If I am salt in the desert, you are the spring,"(4) but Lady Wathin always remains cold and disapproving. There are some who always doubt her.

> "Diana's battle was fought shadowily behind her for the space of a week or so, with some advocates on behalf of the beaten man; then it became a recollection of a beautiful woman, possibly erring, misvalued by a husband." (5)

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(1) DIANA, Chap. XXIII, p. 267
(2) DIANA, Chap. XXI, p. 237.
(3) DIANA, Chap IX, p. 106
(4) DIANA, Chap. XIV, p. 147.
(5) DIANA, Chap. XV, p. 162,

Even Percy Dacier has doubts on occasion, but it is "moral" or "sub-stratum" London which never forgets. Diana will not return to Warwick to please such people, and she flouts their conventions further by her friendship with Percy Dacier, Lord Dannisburgh's nephew.

Her marriage to Redworth is a step that not even Lady Wathin could censure, though no doubt, that Lady might feel Redworth was making a mistake. This second marriage, however, even if it is conventional, does not mean that Diana regrets her earlier actions and is trying to placate the world. She has learnt from her experiences and does not surrender her liberty easily to Redworth. He is a man whom she can honour and love; he is also a man of whom middle-class morality can approve.

Diana of the Crossways is far more than a novel on incompatibility in marriage, or the struggles of a girl to be free of convention. It is a complex psychological study of a woman; her thoughts, her aspirations, her motives for her marriages, her motives for betraying a political secret entrusted to her, her struggle to find her way through life. The break-up of her marriage is not condemned, nor is her refusal to return to her husband. In Meredith's first novel, The Ordeal of Richard Feverel, there is understandably a coldness towards, and a condemnation of, the unfaithful wife, even though her husband is a self-opinionated man. But this novel was written at the time of the break-up of the author's first marriage. Diana is never condemned. Of course she was not to blame for the failure of her marriage, (except that entering into it as a means of escape was a mistake). Diana's friendships with Lord Dannisburgh and his nephew also are never condemned. It would be quite wrong to over-stress Diana's foolish first marriage and her conventional second marriage, to see Diana of the Crossways as a treatise on marriage or as a feminist manifesto, and to forget that Diana is a woman striving to express her personality. She has many fine qualities, but she is conditioned to some extent by society. She can act foolishly and impulsively without thinking. It is a mistake to see her merely as a woman demanding liberty, flouting convention. She is far more. Into her Meredith has put much of himself. She is a Celt, a witty conversationalist, an authoress, and made an unhappy first marriage. She is the "flecked heroine of reality," not perfect, but fascinating and alive. One of her quests is for true love from a man who can understand and appreciate her. Such a man for all his conventionality, is Redworth. Diana is "deeply

a woman" even if "dumbly a poet," and can look forward to becoming a mother. Her letters to Lady Dunstane after her second marriage leave no doubt as to her happiness but remain lively and thoughtful. Diana has her ordeal and from it she emerges to accept Redworth,

"I am going into slavery to make amends for presumption." (1)

But this time the step is not rashly taken, and this second marriage is not merely a conventional happy ending but is consistent with the "flecked" nature of reality.

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(1) DIANA, Chapter XLII, p. 478.

CHAPTER VIII

A PURE WOMAN.

Twenty years separate Middlemarch and Tess of the D'Urbervilles.(1) The novel had become a serious literary form, and the Victorian era had changed. Several blows had been struck against beliefs and ideals which once seemed sacrosanct, and no longer would a writer like Tennyson in The Princess maintain that intellectual pursuits were not really those best suited to women. While women were still denied many rights, by 1870 both Bedford and Girton Colleges were established and as Esme Wingfield Stratford points out in The Victorian Sunset,(2) the woman of the seventies was no longer a "passionless icicle," she might dress to attract men and engage in witty "back-chat". Nevertheless a heroine who was seduced and years later murders her seducer was not easily accepted, even in the "nineties."

"She deserved hanging. A little harlot;" "Poor wronged innocent," these were the opinions of the Duchess of Abercorn's friends regarding Tess,(3) and they are representative of opinion on this novel when first it appeared. Tess Durbyfield, a victim of fate, hanged as a murderess, is the last of the Victorian heroines whom we shall study in detail. Her life and death are quite different from those of the other heroines. In Ruth (1853) it is true that Mrs. Gaskell was writing about a seduced woman, but this was most unusual. As Hardy writes in his preface to the fifth edition of Tess of the D'Urbervilles, the novel is,

> "one wherein the great campaign of the heroine begins after an event in her experience which has usually been treated as fatal to her part of protagonist." (4)

Not only is Tess's history different, but she is a vividly described person, with complex thoughts and emotions, quite unlike the idealised heroines of so many of the earlier novelists. She reminds us a little of Mary Barton or Dorothea and Maggie Tulliver, in her moods of self-denial and of questioning. But Tess, unlike the other heroines discussed above,

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(1) first published 1891.

(2) E. Wingfield Stratford, THE VICTORIAN SUNSET, London, Routledge 1932.

(3) F.E. Hardy, THE LIFE OF THOMAS HARDY, 1892 -1928 , Vol II, Part I, p. 6

(4) TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES, (Pocket ed.) London, Macmillan, 1957 p.vii. (hereafter abbreviated as 'TESS')

is a victim of fate. All characters in a novel are, of course, subject to their creator's wishes and whims, but with many we are not ever-conscious of the author, as we are with Thackeray. With Hardy, however, although the characters of Tess of the D'Urbervilles, and also of Jude The Obscure, are victims of fate or of an inherited disposition, Hardy does not obtrude, he is merely narrating their stories, and seems to be unable to alter the course of their lives. Writing of Jude The Obscure Hardy says,

> "It required an artist to see that the plot is almost geometrically constructed - I ought not to say constructed, for, beyond a certain point, the characters necessitated it, and I simply let it come."(1)

The same, one feels, is true of Tess of the D'Urbervilles, and Tess and Angel are the playthings of fate, not characters manipulated by Hardy.

All Hardy's heroines are different and amongst them Sue Bridehead and Tess are outstanding. Lionel Johnson, writing before Jude The Obscure had appeared puts "the various women, Eustacia, Elfride, Grace, Elizabeth-Jane, and others of the sisterhood"(2) all together in one category, but goes on to discuss their diversity. And indeed they are all so different from one another that they can scarcely be grouped together as being of one sisterhood, save that of all being creations of one man. The early novels, Desperate Remedies (1871) and Under The Greenwood Tree (1872), hardly shew the pessimism, the "ache of modernism" of the later novels, nor are their heroines so complex. So Fancy Day is a charming girl with fancies and little faults, but neither her character, nor her life can be compared with Tess's. Fancy is a pretty, vain girl who eventually marries and settles down. Far different is Sue, full of the doubts, the beliefs, the hesitations of the end of last century. She abandons her Anglo-Catholic beliefs, but later the rebel returns after the tragic death of her children. She, like Jude whom she loves, is doomed to tragedy mainly because of the family temperament which she has inherited. Everything about her is complicated, especially her life with Phillotson and Jude Fawley. There are some who regard Sue as "just about the nastiest little bithh in English

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(1) F.E. Hardy, op. cit. p. 40

(2) L. Johnson, THE ART OF THOMAS HARDY, London, The Bodley Head, 1923 p. 179.

literature,"(1) but this is to see her as wholly responsible for her actions and this is the wrong view to take; and it also means ignoring her charming vivacity. She does not ever gain one's sympathy for long, it is true, and her flirtation with Jude and her life with Phillotson must count against her, but she is unable to help herself and one senses that she looks for happiness and perfection and never finds them. She rebels, and it seems that she is cruelly crushed, and so one can understand her final surrender and return to Phillotson. Tess, on the other hand, is a truly tragic character, and her fate arouses our pity and sympathy in a way that Sue's never does.

Tess Durbeyfield, then, is a victim of fate and although Hardy is the narrator of her history he seems unable to influence the course of events his novel is taking. And yet it must not be thought that he is insensitive towards Tess; quite the contrary, Tess is so presented that the sensitive reader is in complete sympathy with her as she is seen as the "sport" of the "immortals." She is a mere girl when she first encounters Angel Clare and is accidentally slighted by him, and only a few days later she meets Alec D'urberville. Tess had not wanted to seek out the D'Urbervilles but she felt she owed it to her family. Alec rather alarms her by his bold ways and the reader realises what sort of man he is. Yet Mrs. Durbeyfield having met him, urges Tess to go to live on the D'Urberville property. No sooner has Tess gone than her mother says, however, "I was thinking that perhaps it would ha' been better if Tess had not gone."(2) But Tess has gone and stays at The Slopes despite her uneasiness at Alec's actions. But at length comes the night when Alec rescues her from her brawling companions and then adds to Tess's debt of gratitude by telling her of the horse he has given her father. Alec is determined to have his reward and Tess becomes his victim, as many a maid before was victim of her own ancestors.

"But though to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children may be a morality good enough for divinities, it is scorned by average human nature; and it therefore does not mend the matter," (3)

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(1) Desmond Hawkins, THOMAS HARDY, London, Arthur Baker, 1950, p. 17

(2) TESS, Chap. VII, p. 61.

(3) TESS, Chap. XI, p. 93.

comments Hardy, rather like the Chorus of The Pities in The Dynasts, and he sympathises with Tess's fate as he says,

"Why it was that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive; why so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus, the wrong man the woman, the wrong woman the man, many thousand years of analytical philosophy have failed to explain to our sense of order."(1)

Tess's seduction by Alec leaves an indelible mark upon her. She tells him she never loved him or at least she would not loathe herself so much. So "maiden no more" she returns home and later goes on to become a dairy-woman in the Valley of The Great Dairies. There she meets Angel Clare again and eventually the two fall in love. There are other pretty dairymaids at Talbothays Dairy, who are just as good as Tess, if not so pensive, and they too love Angel Clare. Hardy describes the life on the farm and the love of these girls for the parson's young son so vividly that one can easily comprehend a very human Tess feeling proud that Angel prefers her. But because of her past experience she tries to interest him in the others, and praises their prettiness and skill as dairywomen, but

"self-sacrificing as her mood might be, Tess could not well go further and cry 'marry one of them, if you really do want a dairywoman and not a lady.' " (2)

She even hides the fact of her D'Urberville lineage when she hears that this may lose her Angel. And yet she does almost confess but Angel prevents her. Moreover, on the night before their wedding she writes him a confession and puts it under his door, only to discover the next morning that Angel had not got it, for in her haste she had "thrust it beneath the carpet as well as beneath the door." (3) Tess also tries to put Angel off by telling him of her lack of education and her lowly position, but this does not worry Angel. All too human, however, she does not tell Angel about Alec until they are married, and then being Tess, she ignores her mother's

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(1) ibid.

(2) TESS, Chapter XXII, p. 132

(3) TESS, Chapter XXXIII, p.272.

advice and tells Angel all. He fails her.

Tess had idealised Angel; she saw him, "as an intelligence rather than a man,"(1) She loved him because he had chosen her from amongst all the others, because of his ideas. "Tess was trying to lead a repressed life, but she little divined the strength of her vitality,"(2) when Angel Clare first began noticing her. He loves her and she idealises him and at first his treatment of her seems to her quite just. She was a fraud but she never wished to deceive him. She feels it just, when he says he loved not her, but someone she seemed to be. Eventually Tess is worn down by suffering and hardship and the renewed attentions of Alec and she begins to criticise Angel.

> "Oh why have you treated me so monstrously, Angel! I do not deserve it ..... I can never forgive you." (3)

In the end believing Alec, that Angel will never return, she returns to him.

Alec always seems to have a fatal fascination for Tess, and can arouse her as Angel never can. Desmond Hawkins says that Alec D'Urberville is like a "demon-lover" of Tess, and stresses the scene on the hayrick when Tess strikes Alec and then cries,(4)

> "Now punish me, whip me, crush me, you need not mind those people under the rick! I shall not cry out. Once victim always a victim."(5)

Whatever Tess might feel for Alec before, when Angel does return she hates Alec with an intensity that leads her to murder him. His kindnesses to her family make her hate him, for

> "they were the things you moved me by .... and you said my husband would never come back." (6)

And it is true when she cries to Alec, "O you have torn my life all to pieces." (7) And yet Alec was not all bad; at least he showed more concern

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(1) TESS, Chap. XIX, p. 163.
(2) ibid
(3) TESS, Chap. LIII, p. 477
(4) Hawkins, op. cit. Chap. XI, p. 82.
(5) TESS, Chap. XLVII, p. 427.
(6) TESS, Chap. LVI, p. 494.
7) ibid, p. 495.

for Tess, than Angel did once he had married her. However, Tess, it seems, never loves Alec, and does love Angel, even when he fails to live up to his philosophy.

It is ironical that it is Angel's arguments against religion that break Alec's evangelical faith. These arguments are repeated by Tess, and while Alec is perhaps too easily persuaded, this is not so improbable as is the fact that Tess is supposed to have grasped Angel's arguments sufficiently well to be able to repeat them convincingly. Apart from the time when she is pregnant and public opinion keeps her from church, Tess is a regular church-goer, but hers is a simple faith which, as Angel detects, is essentially Pantheistic. That Angel should make her an agnostic is not strange, but one cannot believe that she could convincingly repeat to Alec Angel's philosophical and theistic arguments.

We have to accept, however, that Tess is the modern heroine and because of her "triumphant simplicity of faith in Angel Clare"(1) has learnt his beliefs. Otherwise Tess's fits of despondency and her desire to improve herself are quite understandable. She envies Angel all he has read and seen and thought, but when he offers to teach her, she says,

> "What's the use of learning that I am one of a long row only - finding out there is set down in some old book somebody just like me."(2)

Unlike Angel, we know Tess's prior history, and we have seen that she is a sensitive girl with a sense of responsibility, a girl who has received some education. So we are not as surprised as Angel is to find her shaping sad imaginings and expressing "feelings which might have been called those of the age - the ache of modernism."(3)

Her experiences have led Tess to have the 'mal du siècle.'

At some length Tess's life and character have been described in the foregoing pages, and throughout we have said that Tess is not really able to help herself. She is a victim of fate. Her life story, however, is quite possible, for Hardy is not a crude artist, but her fate does seem cruel and unmerited. Henry Reed in an essay on The Dynasts(4) remarks on the fact that in the novels, the Prime Mover seems cruel and wanton and

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(1) TESS, Chap. XLVI, p. 414.

(2) ibid, p. 413.

(3) TESS, Chap. XIX, p. 162.

(4) H. Reed, THE MAKING OF 'THE DYNASTS', Penguin New Writing, No. 18, p.137.

cannot be presented to us as unconscious. It is a fact that Tess's life is tragic and undeserved; she is the 'sport' of the immortals. We are tempted with even more cause than the Spirit of The Pities to say,

"The tears that lie about this plightful scene
"Of heavy travail in a suffering soul,
"....................................
"....................................
"Might drive Compassion past her patiency
"To hold some mean, monstrous ironism
"Had built this mistimed fabric of the Spheres
"To watch the throbbings of its captive lives,
"(The Which may Truth forfend), and not thy said,
"Unmaliced, unimpassioned, nescient Will." (1)

But Tess is the sport of the 'immortals', not of an "unmaliced nescient Will" and while The Dynasts ends with questioning and a note of hope, there is no such note in Tess of the D'Urbervilles. Hardy concludes the novel,

"'Justice' was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess." (2)

The novel has presented a blighted world. Tess, even before she had met Alec, tells her brother, Abraham, that they live on a blighted world and agrees that they were unlucky to pitch upon it.(3) Her father and mother are shiftless, her father drinks, and they are poor and then Tess is accidentally the cause of their horse being killed. Happiness eludes Tess and even when Angel eventually returns she feels it is too late for happiness or for them to restart life, or for her to escape from Alec. "She seemed to feel like a fugitive in a dream who tries to move away, but cannot."(4) She had waited so long for Angel, and suffered so, and then hopelessly she had returned to Alec. More than ever perhaps she feels she does not belong to Angel, as she felt when she first confessed to him.(5) And then,

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(1) THE DYNASTS, Pt. II, Act VI, sc. V.
(2) TESS, Chap. LIX, p. 517.
(3) TESS, Chap. IV, p. 35 (4) TESS, Chap. LV, p. 491.
(5) "I don't belong to you any more, then, do I Angel" - Chap. XXXV, p.295.

as she later explains to Angel, a light comes to Tess and she kills Alec D'Urberville, who was the chief instrument of her misery. Perhaps it was her D'Urberville blood that led to this aberration - "if it were an aberration," as Angel reflects. And Angel Clare at least does stand by Tess at the end. She had always loved Angel and never Alec, whatever fascination the latter may have had for her, and so when Angel returns, she kills Alec and goes to Angel asking for forgiveness and tells him, "I never loved him at all, Angel, as I loved you." (1) It is, no doubt, significant that Tess's execution is impersonally described and we know she is dead as the black flag breaks on the far off prison mast, and that she is arrested in Stonehenge, a tiny figure amongst the stone pillars of a long dead cult.

So Tess's tragedy is played out, and the descendant of the D'Urberville knights is hanged. She is hanged as a murderess and yet one cannot really find her guilty. Hardy has made Tess a victim of fate, of circumstances, the 'sport' of the immortals, hence his sub-title for the novel, "A Pure Woman." But Tess is not a puppet and her life story and her friends are real. Alec, indeed is rather crudely drawn but on the whole the novel is one of the greatest realism. Scenes such as that in Chapter XXIII, when the girls discuss their love for Angel and "the air seemed to palpitate with the hopeless passion of the girls," (2) make the reader feel he is actually present and that the comment which follows is just.

"They writhed feverishly under the oppressiveness of an emotion thrust on them by cruel Nature's laws - an emotion which they had neither expected nor desired." (3)

None of the heroines of the earlier Victorian novels, not Jane Eyre, nor Becky Sharp, not even Ruth, really prepare us for Tess and the earlier novels too, often lack the realism of Tess of the D'Urbervilles. (4) And yet although Tess is seduced and becomes a murderess, her beauty and frailty are stressed, as with Hardy's other women. Hardy is still chivalrous

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(1) TESS, Chap. LVII, p. 499.

(2) TESS, Chap. XXIII, p. 139

(3) ibid.

(4) George Eliot's ADAM BEDE (1859) deals in part with the same theme as TESS, Hetty Sorrel, the girl who is seduced, and who murders her child, is not the heroine of the novel, however, and if one reads TESS immediately after ADAM BEDE one realises how far Hardy has advanced towards freedom of expression.

towards his heroines, or rather he goes further and sympathises with them as one human being to another. Lord David Cecil says that to Hardy "love was women's whole existence," and this is true of Tess. Alec she never loved, but she did love Angel, and so she can forgive him, but never can forgive Alec, whose actions deprive her of Angel's love and companionship for so long. Cecil goes on to say,

> "Woman's passiveness and frailty make her an especially poignant illustration of that frailty, that dependence on fate which is the outstanding character of the human lot." (1)

Hardy makes Tess, in some ways, the representative of mankind. Tess suffers, and her sufferings are those of mankind, in the main imposed from above. The woes that Tess has to endure are terrible to Hardy who says of Angel and the sorrows he causes his wife,

> "in considering what Tess was not he overlooked what she was and forgot that the defective can be more than the entire." (2)

Tess's sufferings and life are described with a sympathy and interest that win ours and make it impossible for us to regard her as a mere lifeless symbol. She is both a suffering individual and in the end a true representative of mankind.

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(1) D. Cecil, HARDY THE NOVELIST, London, Constable, 1943 P. 31.

(2) TESS, Chapter XXXIX, p. 340.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

Tess of the D'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure appeared in the last decade of the nineteenth century; their reception was such as to lead Hardy to give up writing novels and return to poetry. Their pessimistic tone, for one thing, was not in keeping with that of the age. Tess and Sue in addition were unacceptable to the respectable, although they had their partisans. Yet by this time there had been several telling blows struck against the Victorian sense of propriety and respectability. The best writers were not content to create heroines who were merely virtuous nonentities. At the opening of the era, only ten years after the Queen's accession, had appeared Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights and both novels were attacked by certain champions of morality.(1) On the whole, however, the earliest criticisms of Jane Eyre did not condemn it for impropriety but found it unrealistic. The cult of respectability grew stronger, however, during the fifties and sixties and in 1853 Ruth occasioned "perhaps the earliest general outcry against a novel on the grounds of propriety."(2) Over thirty years later Ibsen's "A Dolls House" was first performed in England and found no favour with the champions of propriety, who two years later, in 1891, condemned Tess of the D'Urbervilles.

Heroines like Maggie Tulliver, Dorothea Brooke, Diana Warwick, and even Becky Sharp had been accepted, but then they were not seduced like Tess who was also a murderess, nor did they live with a lover as did Sue Bridehead. The ideal of woman as a saintly domestic servant did not die easily. The typical Dickens' heroine is of this sisterhood, and so are Amelia Sedley, Rachael Castlewood and Helen Pendennis. Thackeray does show the faults of these women, however, and does more than balance them with Beatrix Esmond and Becky Sharp. In the presence of the good woman Thackeray, although a realist, falters. He indicates some of their weaknesses but does not satirise them and they remain rather lifeless idealisations. When one turns to the

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(1) Charlotte Brontë upholds her sister's use of oaths in the preface to the second edition of WUTHERING HEIGHTS (1850)

(2) K. Tillotson, "NOVELS OF THE EIGHTEEN FORTIES", Part 1, p. 58

great women novelists of the era there is much greater realism. Mrs. Gaskell's heroines are living characters. They are not, of course, rebels, passionate souls like Jane Eyre, or aspiring thwarted souls like Dorothea. The ladies of Cranford accept their place in society, and Ruth Hilton pays in sorrow for her seduction. It was in fact Charlotte Brontë who first amongst the Victorian novelists depicted the thoughts, the passions, the aspirations of a woman. George Eliot, Meredith, and Hardy writing in the later part of the century show the changing concept of the heroine so that Baker can say of The Ordeal of Richard Feveril (1859)

> "Meredith has already ranged himself on the side of woman, and states their case more temperately, and thus more persuasively than Charlotte Brontë had done." (1)

The greatest of the later Victorian men novelists did not create sentimental, idealised women.

From the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign a reaction against society novels and romance can be seen. Novels dealing with rogues or criminals like Oliver Twist (1837-8) and The Luck of Barry Lyndon (1844) are examples of this reaction, as also are novels on social problems such as Mary Barton (1848). Heroes and heroines were drawn from the middle classes and even the working class. Family life, marriage and the good wife were extolled in an age which saw respectable family life as the bulwark of society.(2) The new novels might be more realistic as they dealt with fairly ordinary people and events, but this led to 'anti-heroic' presentation of the leading characters of the novels; a tendency which Mario Praz discusses in his interesting study, The Hero in Eclipse In Victorian Fiction. It would be quite out of place here to discuss even briefly the various heroes of Victorian novels, but we can note this anti-heroic aspect in the heroines of the novels that have been discussed in the preceding pages. Even where the heroines are idealised and are half saint, half domestic servant, they are not truly heroic figures, but no more are the more realistic heroines of Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Meredith, and Hardy. Governesses, old spinster ladies, thwarted idealists like Dorothea Brooke, unhappily married

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1) Baker, THE HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL, Vol. 8, London, Witherby, 1938, p. 325.

The apotheosis of wedded love can be seen in Patmore's "The Angel in the House."

heroines like Diana Warwick are not heroic figures. They have faults and idiosyncracies, but they can be realistically presented. This is not the case with the idealised "little woman", however, and we find them rather unreal and also irritating.(1)

In all the best Victorian novels we find realism and the earlier novelists are no exception. The typical heroes and heroines of both Dickens and Mrs. Gaskell are conventional, however, but this does not necessarily make them unreal, unless they are supposed to be flawless. Dickens especially idealised his heroines and the modern reader tends to find them incredible or irritating, but his public found them quite acceptable. Thackeray also had a sentimental liking for his Amelia and his Lady Castlewood even though he saw faults in them, but he also created Becky who, from her first appearance despite her worldliness, her temper, her unconventionality, won admirers even if some found her terrible or incredible. As the century drew to a close, however, the heroines not only of the novels but also of plays were far different from the earlier heroines in the tradition of Fielding's Amelia. Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe, Ruth Hilton and Dorothea Brooke, all paved the way for Clara Middleton and Diana Warwick, and by the end of the century a climate of opinion had been created which made possible the presentation of such plays as A Doll's House, Ghosts, and Hedda Gabler, and the publication of Tess of the D'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure. A year before the last named novel appeared, Mrs. Warren's Profession was published (1894), but for years it was banned from the stage as the censor would not permit prostitution to be discussed on the stage, however seriously. The reception of Ibsen's plays like that of Hardy's last novels shews that there were still many who would condemn a work, however good, if it offended their own canons of respectability. But what is

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(1) Osbert Sitwell in his Introduction to the Oxford Illustrated edition of BLEAK HOUSE (p.viii) calls Esther Summerson "odious", "so sweet, so tenderly cocksure, so coy and sub-acid," legitimate criticism even if he does forget her kindnesses, her gratitude, and her sense of humour over Guppy.

more significant is that by the end of the era, the heroines of the new novels and the best new plays were intensely individual characters far removed from the ideal type which the public once had not merely accepted but expected.

The emancipation of women in England may owe more to the pioneering work of the great Victorian novelists than is generally realized.

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2.	VANITY FAIR	-do-	1847-8
3.	SHIRLEY	-do-	1849
4.	DAVID COPPERFIELD	-do-	1849-50
5.	CRANFORD	-do-	1851-3
6.	BLEAK HOUSE	-do-	1852-3
7.	MIDDLEMARCH	-do-	1871-2
8.	DIANA OF THE CROSSWAYS	-do-	1885
9.	TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES	-do-	1891

DAVID COPPERFIELD is listed above as reference is made to Agnes Wickfield so often. Part of DIANA OF THE CROSSWAYS appeared serially in 1884.

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