The changing role and portrayal of 'the individual' in historical context in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice and Emma, George Eliot's Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda, and Thomas Hardy's The Mayor of Casterbridge and Tess of the d'Urbervilles

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The changing role and portrayal of 'the individual' in historical context in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*, George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*, and Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

by

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT........................................................................................................ 3
DECLARATION.................................................................................................. 5

CHAPTER 1: Introduction.............................................................................. 6

CHAPTER 2: Defining The Individual In Historical Context...................... 22

CHAPTER 3: The Early Nineteenth Century
   Portrayal of the individual in harmony with society .......................... 38
   Section I: Jane Austen, dedicated to tradition .................................... 38
   Section II: Individual acceptance of the social and moral imperatives in *Pride and Prejudice* .................................................. 47
   Section III: Creating a harmonious society out of chaotic individuality in *Emma* ................................................................. 61

CHAPTER 4: The Mid-Nineteenth Century
   Personal desires and the society's demands: portrayal of the changing relationship between the individual and the community ...... 83
   Section I: The conditions of Victorian society up to the 1870s ........... 83
   Section II: George Eliot: reconciling Determinism and the individual's freedom to choose ................................................................. 98
   A: Portrayal of the struggle between individual ambition and ideals of duty to society in *Middltemarch* ........................................... 107
   B: Portrayal of the individual who is isolated from society in *Daniel Deronda* ................................................................. 126

CHAPTER 5: The Late Victorian Years
   The portrayal of the individual at odds with the society ..................... 145
   Section I: Victorian society in the latter years of the nineteenth century ................................................................. 145
   Section II: Thomas Hardy: portraying individuals who transgress society's rules ................................................................. 155
   A: The portrayal of an individual isolated from society by passion and impulse in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* ..................................... 163
   B: Portrayal of the individual's inner struggle with nature and society in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* ............................................. 180

CONCLUSION.................................................................................................. 202
BIBLIOGRAPHY............................................................................................ 212
In an analysis of six novels published in the nineteenth century, the thesis examines the changing role and portrayal of the ‘individual’ in Victorian fiction. Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Emma* (1816), George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1872) and *Daniel Deronda* (1876), and Thomas Hardy’s *Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) and *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891) are analysed in depth. The discussion focuses on how the social and historical context shapes the development of theme, character and plot in the novels, especially focusing on literary conceptions of character as an individualistic being within the wider framework of society. The emphasis is on the characters’ engagement with their society, and how the portrayal connects with the social and historical context.

The development of the novel as a literary form is examined in the light of literary history. The thesis discusses the relationship between recorded history and the development of literary characters. It analyses how the concept of the individual evolved: how the process enacted itself from traditional identity to one which is slowly revealed and unfolded within the text. It investigates the differences between the ideas of character identity as a given property, or identities which are formed and developed throughout the course of the novel, in their historical context. The characters’ relationships to their social worlds and its demands, and the process by which a character acquires subjectivity and involves him or herself in the social life of the society is investigated, in the light of the rapidly changing Victorian society.
The eighteenth-century social inheritance is established, locating the origins and catalysts of change and how the nineteenth-century society's immediate ancestors formed, and were formed by, their social world. The sociological and historical framework of the Victorian world is examined and related to the portrayal and development of individuality. A vital consideration is the pervasiveness and rapidity of social change in the nineteenth century, to an extent previously never experienced by any society. The progression and effects of this change through the century are interpreted through the writers' portrayal of individuals. The tidal movement of ideas between progression and traditionalism, between character and fate will be charted through the century. The thesis questions how much freedom of choice, or the illusion of it, affects the unfolding concept of the individual.
DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature

Date 6/5/96
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the novel was the dominant literary art form in England throughout the nineteenth century. This thesis is a socially based study of character portrayal in the nineteenth-century novel, focussing on certain aspects of its evolution and the relationship of the novel to historical events in England during the last century. In particular, the novel is perceived as representing the dominant middle classes of English society at this time, and pre-eminent in this culture was the ideal of 'the individual'.

This ideal had been evolving in philosophical, political and religious ways most pointedly since the Restoration in the seventeenth century, and, in economic ways, since the industrial revolution in the eighteenth century began to gain momentum. During the eighteenth century, the advent and rise of the novel seemed to distil many individualistic ideals, even, ironically, in the novels of writers ostensibly opposed to the Romantic veneration of the individual, such as the anti-Jacobin writers of the 1790s. The selected novels will be examined in the historical context of the nineteenth century, and, especially, the Victorian era. The motivation for analysing the novels in the light of historical developments is found in Miller's (1991:149) statement that the study of literature in history "responds to a need to make the study of literature count in the real world".

As a literary form whose antecedents are readily traceable over the last two and a half centuries, the novel can be viewed as an innate part of industrial society. Its conventions of narrative and realism allow it to influence, and to be influenced by, the society of which it is
a product. Kent (in Monaghan, 1987:88) describes this as a "sort of paradox". He points out that novels, by concentrating on a few realistic particulars and conforming to readers' general expectations, become seen as a "generality in themselves". He states that this assumes the "Aristotelian" superiority of the general over the particular, and that, in this way, novels become products of, as well as influences over, the society from which they arise. Consequently, developments in the novel and its evolution can be examined in their historical and social contexts, without accepting novels simplistically as factual historical documents. Instead, they are seen as highlighting and engaging various aspects of history in the way Miller describes (1974:457-9). The thesis will focus on diverse features of Victorian history as they are manifested in fictional works of the time. Miller (1991:153) also discusses the importance of literature's "performative" power, its ability to effect changes, no matter how seemingly insignificant, and its "constative" power, which is its manner of providing knowledge and making statements about the world. Both these aspects of literature are acknowledged throughout this analysis, as the concept of the individual is examined, along with how it is related intrinsically to the novel and to the rise of bourgeois society. According to Miller's proposition, the strength of the novel's performative and constative influence makes its study relevant and intriguing, involving many threads of social, political, and economic history. The nature of the relationship between the individual and society will be examined as portrayed in a number of Victorian novels which are seen as important from both the historical and literary perspectives.

By analysing six novels published at different periods in the nineteenth century, the thesis will examine the changing portrayal of the individual in fiction. The novels to be studied are Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Emma* (1816), George Eliot's
Middlemarch (1872) and Daniel Deronda (1876), and Thomas Hardy’s The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886) and Tess of the d’Urbervilles (1891). The main premise upon which the thesis is founded is that novels cannot be analysed by separating them from their social and historical context. Rockwell (1974:3) writes succinctly that literature is not merely a “crystallisation of private fantasy”, but that it is a “product of society”. Harvey (1965:16) states that the truth of a novel resides not merely in its internal consistency but in its relationship to life.

Miller (1991:152-3) takes this theory a step further, in his premise that works of literature do not simply reflect, or are not simply caused by, their historical contexts. He believes they have “a productive effect in history... [because] the publication of those works was itself a political or historical event that in some way or another changed history”. In this light, the nature of the novel’s existence and its interplay with society becomes more complex.

Politi (1976:36) finds that the novel, in its progression from the middle of the eighteenth century to the latter part of the nineteenth century, became the “repository” of social history. Monaghan (1981:1) identifies the more “sophisticated sense of the nature of the literary work” which has informed social and literary criticism in the last ten years, in which the aim has been not simply to annotate works of fiction but to “possess” (1981:2) them more deeply. This is possible through having a deeper sense of social and aesthetic value and the importance of the novel’s historical location. Wright (1987:2) very emphatically establishes the need to consider the novel as a fundamental element of society’s history and development by stating “all literature belongs to history”. He describes history and fiction as patterns, similar but not identical, superimposed on events perceived, selected and arranged in some order (1987:3), which inevitably depict the time in which they first are
"brought into being" (1987:5). Hunter's judgement (1990:5) of the historicity of fiction summarises these points. He affirms that New Historicism places the novel in cultural history's broader context, and that an ahistorical approach would undermine the importance of a novel's "cultural basis".

Charting the portrayal of the individual involves comparing how each protagonist fares in regard to the many and often contradictory demands of the contemporary society. Analysing the portrayal of the individual revolves around one of the most striking paradoxes of the Victorian society, namely, the society's veneration of and respect for bourgeois individuality, and its insistence on the most rigid conformity and conventionality being shown by its members. The significance of this paradox will be discussed further in the thesis, in the light of its manifestation in the selected novels. The remainder of the introduction will outline briefly the historical context of the novel's development in the latter part of the eighteenth century, up to the time Jane Austen begins publishing her novels. The second chapter will analyse the growth of individualist attitudes in their historical context and will attempt to locate and explain the genesis and development of bourgeois individualism. The third chapter will examine the two novels by Jane Austen in the light of how individuals achieve a place in society, and how the existing society maintains its hegemony. The reassertion of social roles and the status quo are portrayed against a background of great political and social upheaval. Within this society, individuals are portrayed as lively, intelligent and perspicacious, but willingly bound by the rules of the benign, stable patriarchy. Many aspects of individuality are related to the influence of contemporary Romantic ideals, such as faith in personal emotion and intuition, and the importance of the individual's conscience and values. Jane Austen's portrayal of
individuality provides evidence of an ambivalence toward Romantic attitudes, even though she was engaged with the anti-Jacobin debate of the late eighteenth century.

The fourth chapter will concentrate on the novels written by George Eliot. It will mainly be concerned with the two female protagonists and their internal conflicts where the sense of individuality struggles for sovereignty with the powerful, restricting demands for conformity of the dominant society of mid-Victorian England. Of concern are the protagonists' social positions, their struggles against the restrictions of the Victorian society, their contention with the conflicting dictates of desire and conscience and their eventual acceptance or rejection of the Victorian society. The author as narrator will be considered, in the light of being the emotional and intellectual link to the wider social and historical influences from which the novels arise, along with the novelist's scrutiny and judgement of the protagonists and their actions and motivation.

The analysis of George Eliot's works will discuss how she strove to reconcile the ideal of individual choice with deterministic philosophy. Intriguing contradictions in George Eliot's portrayal of the individual's interaction with society will be highlighted, along with an explanation of how such complexities contribute to the changing nature of the novel and reflect the nature of the society in middle to late Victorian England. In the years between the early nineteenth century to the time of George Eliot's novel-writing, historical events indicated a movement from absolute to relative conceptions of morality, which is one of the prime considerations of the thesis. Many instances of both domains of morality are present in George Eliot's novels, and it will be possible to chart the shifting focus of moral ideals in the later part of the century in the novels of Thomas Hardy.

George Eliot's fragile reconciliation of the power of individuality with a deterministic
philosophy is also explored in the light of contemporary Victorian attitudes, where, again, a stable and conservative society most often succeeds in reasserting its hold over humanistic ideals of individualism.

Thomas Hardy's novels will be the focus of the fifth and final chapter, in which the late Victorian period is highlighted. The chapter examines the portrayal of the individual who is at odds with the dominant society: the individual who transgresses its written and unwritten laws. The society's ultimate control over individual freedom of will is maintained through a complex network of rewards and sanctions which effectively manipulate an individual's actions to maintain the social and economic status quo. Hardy portrayed the struggle between the natural individual and the hypocritical values of the late Victorian society. His novels reflect the disparate and contradictory moods which co-existed in the late nineteenth century, such as atheism and Evangelicalism, socialism and utilitarianism, the extremes of poverty and wealth, and confusion over women's status and position in society. Where the work of the two earlier novelists was mainly concerned with the reconciliation of the individual with the society, Hardy's works depict the person who is unable to settle or find a harmonious life within a society which is hostile to the nature of the individual. The hostility is seen in the punitive nature of the conservative society's attitude towards individuality, and in the assiduous application of a secular code of morality.

Rockwell (1974) asserts that the main type of portrayal of the individual in fiction is that of the successful male bourgeois protagonist. The individualistic, subjective approach of the nineteenth-century novel, the 'happy endings', and the "so-called realism" (1974:85) lead to the perception that the individual and his personal choices dominate the novel, and,
further, that only these choices can lead to true happiness. The pervasive, and powerful, concept of the bourgeois individual in nineteenth-century English culture deserves detailed examination from an historical perspective, especially where the novels depart from such portrayals. Contradictions are just as indicative of the quality of the Victorian society, as it was a deeply paradoxical community encompassing great extremes of philosophy, economics, religion and social structures.

As foreshadowed, the thesis will seek to explain the interesting paradox that arises from the omnipresent concept of the powerful, self-reliant Victorian individual. It becomes apparent in many novels of the nineteenth century, including those under discussion, that Victorian society’s respect for the individual is tempered by many restrictions. In the novels, individuals must not move outside certain societal boundaries if they wish to avoid the society’s censure. The simultaneous veneration and restriction of individuals is an interesting shaping principle in Victorian novels. The normative influence of novels can be examined in this light; Miller (1968:63) points out that the novelists speak for the collective rather than the individual consciousness, and transmit ideals to which individuals aspire but can rarely actually reach. This is often the way novels portrayed characters: the striving bourgeois individual was the mainstay of Victorian fiction and a model for behaviour for the middle classes. To survive and prosper they acknowledged and maintained group solidarity through promoting individual success. Nevertheless, individuals submitted to the community’s social demands at the expense of the individual’s emotions and desires.

This thesis will also examine how the veneration of individuality was almost completely reserved for men, and how the restrictions are most often applied to women in the Victorian society. The position of women in the nineteenth century embodied acutely
the paradoxical and contradictory respect for the individual in the abstract. The demands for conformity and group solidarity in reality meant that most middle class women submerged their individuality in the domestic and social sphere, relinquishing personal needs and ambitions for fear of society's potent punishment: social ostracism. As the nineteenth century progressed, the absolute moral standards became increasingly relative as doubt and questioning of traditional standards flourished and grew more widespread. The multiplicity of varying religious, philosophical, scientific and sociological views provided the impetus for the increasing awareness of the relativity of all values and attitudes that previously had been held as unchanging and sacrosanct.

The conclusion will draw on all aspects of the analysis, synthesising the various findings of each chapter and formulating a variety of suggestions for further study.

Butler (1987) establishes a paradigm for analysing the novel's engagement with the ideas of the contemporary society. She concentrates on the contributions of novels to debates prevailing at the end of the eighteenth century, focussing on a number of Jacobin novels, and Jane Austen's anti-Jacobin themes. Butler locates the works of authors in their sociological and ideological frameworks, as well as covering their general reception by the public. The diverse and contentious society at the turn of the eighteenth century is reconstructed for the purpose of detailed criticism of Austen's works as they stand in the Jacobin/anti-Jacobin polemic. The incipient ideas of individual rights and civil freedom in the Jacobin principles provide a key point of departure for the thesis' examination of individuality in the novel.
Smith's proposal (1984), that the strength of the novel's relation to society necessitates a study of writers in a wider historical context, provides much of the impetus for the thesis. The vigorous realism of the novels in question and their engagement with historical issues outside the aesthetic concerns of fiction require closer analysis to track the relationship between the evolving society and the portrayal of the individual. Smith is concerned with the social dimension and purpose of novels, and the degree of scrutiny to which authors subject both external society and fictional characters' behaviour. These issues will form the basis for extending the analysis to determine how the individual does or does not contest the predominance of the middle class English society. Smith (1984:40) also makes the pertinent suggestion that social change and changes in people's conceptions of their society relate to changes in the novel's content and form. The development of the novel, the individual who is seen as an innate element of the novel, and the evolution of society are linked in fundamental ways.

Graver's (1984) discussion of the ideals of community which changed throughout the nineteenth century to incorporate new ideas of freedom and individual choice is important when considering the authors' attempts to reconcile, in their writings, the various elements of the rapidly changing society of the Victorian era. The portrayal of changing ideals is apparent, in one sense, in the many differences between the societies depicted by Jane Austen, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy. Jane Austen's novels synthesise and regenerate the positive elements of the dominant rural gentry, depicting the maintenance of the existing order with minimal disruption or change. George Eliot strives to assimilate the many elements of the fluid and shifting industrial Victorian society in a portrayal of individuals in a harmonious community. Since society's and the individual's needs do not
always coincide, this sometimes results in contradictions in her novels. Thomas Hardy's portrayal of tragic outcomes in his novels depicts a society wholly at odds with the individuals who struggle within unreasonable constraints, in a society in which there is no possibility for a superficial blending in fiction of its disparate elements.

Graver (1984) concludes that previously fixed social realities were shifting towards more individualistic perspectives. How this phenomenon evolved, and how the changes affected the literary portrayal and concept of the individual will be examined. The novels portray the struggle between the individual's desire and the society's values, and between the individual 'spirit' and the power of collective society. The portrayal of events such as Elizabeth Bennet's and Emma Woodhouse's subjugation to the conservative and pedagogic male points of view, Dorothea Brooke's marriage to Will, Gwendolen Harleth's marriage and ambiguous fate, and Tess Durbeyfield's and Michael Henchard's tragic fates reflects the light of historical and social change.

Watt's work (1974) on the advent of the novel and ideals of individualism in the eighteenth century is generally accepted as the seminal text in this field of study. He focuses on the part played by the form of the novel in encouraging an emphasis on one, or very few, protagonists. The conventions of realism are viewed as the other formal conditions which indirectly led to the novel's evolution into a literary form almost solely concerned with an individual's experience and environment. As others have also noted (Rockwell, 1974; Williams, 1974; Tomlinson, 1976; Politi, 1976), Watt points out the reorientation in novels from being judges of an individual's "conformity to tradition" (1974:13), to being the portrayal of the attitude that truth and integrity are matters only for the individual to decide upon, often in direct conflict with the ideals and traditions of the
society. The thesis will test this premise to discover if it operates in the novels of the nineteenth century. Watt states (1974:15) that novels assert "the primacy of individual experience", and that the novelist's purpose is to produce an overtly "authentic" rendition of that experience (1974:27). He is referring to the condition of novels just prior to the point at which the thesis begins its historical survey of the late eighteenth century. It is a useful point from which to embark on an examination of the literary portrayal of individuals throughout the following century.

The most significant contribution of Watt's analysis to the thesis is his historical linking of the novel's form and content to the rise of the bourgeois classes in England. The many economic and sociological aspects of this connection are enumerated in detail (1974:35-59), so there is no need for further reiteration of these events. The importance of this phenomenon is that the novel unfailingly was identified with, arose out of and depicted events in middle and upper class life at the turn of the eighteenth century. Rockwell (1974:91) identifies the novel as the "prototypical bourgeois art form", calling it undeniably an expression of bourgeois norms, in the way that warrior societies of the past found expression in epic poetry, or city-states in the dramatic tragedies of crime and punishment. The thesis will begin at this point in the novel's history and trace the portrayal of the individual to the turn of the nineteenth century.

Flanders (1984) also stresses, like Watt (1974), that the developing individualism is an innately economic process but, again, it is important to take into account many other influences causing traditional social forms of order to change. He shows that it is not the influence of the individual, per se, that dominates English bourgeois culture, but the influence and power the individual gains through the "acquisition of property" that has any
effect on society (1984:21). In a novel such as *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, one is able to note the logical converse of this, as an individual loses significant power, influence and status with the loss of property. One of the limitations of Watt's discussion is his description of developing individualism based mainly in economic terms. While the idea of the individual as an economic entity constitutes a large part of the discussion about nineteenth-century bourgeois individuality, there are many more elements encompassing a wider scope of human experience that need examination. Changing ideas of individuality did not arise solely out of new economic conditions; religious schism, political turmoil, philosophical debate, attitudes to sexuality, and levels of education all played a role in the evolving concept of the individual.

Tomlinson (1976:13) states that characters in novels “live the lives their characters and personalities demand”. This statement assumes that the sole determinant of a protagonist’s behaviour is his or her psychological constitution, but it is only partly true. The thesis will examine other societal influences on a character’s behaviour and how external compulsion or coercion can be just as powerful as motivation for behaviour. Characters in novels were not, at this time, discrete objects floating freely in and out of society. They were products of the authors, and of the authors’ societies. Characters also live the lives their societies demand, as well as the lives their personalities, consciences, and other internal psychological influences demand. Portrayals of the individual depend on the protagonist’s place in society, and not on character as an independent entity. As Watt pointed out (1974:92), Crusoe’s isolation served to highlight the need for relationships with other people which the novel embodies. One of the absorbing dichotomies of the novel is
just this portrayal of the supremacy of independent bourgeois individuality concurrently with an equally convincing promotion of conformity to the group’s behaviours.

Politi (1976) discusses the thematic changes which lead away from traditional forms of literature towards the novel in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She notes the change in the concept of mimesis and fiction which arose in literature: instead of uncovering “eternal fixities” (1976:36), fiction became the embodiment of social, historical and moral change. The “fixed” ethical structure of the eighteenth century (1976:31) developed into the shifting utilitarian morals of the Victorian era. She, too, discusses the importance of the ‘realistic’ mode of novels, the process by which readers gradually come to ‘know’ individuals rather than “pre-existing models” (1976:38). One of the influences of this development, the rise of the science of psychology in the nineteenth century and its relation to the content and themes of contemporary fiction, is described by Politi (1976:38):

If fiction was to reveal anything, it was precisely this complex mechanism of the human psyche operating in and trying to determine its relation to a social environment of equal multiplicity and complexity.

The social context of the individual’s development is inseparable from the development itself, and this is one of the thesis’ fundamental convictions.

The incessant nature of societal change from the time of the industrial revolution onwards influenced the novelists who lived and worked in the context of an unstable and dynamic society, which was liable to regular, if not constant, redefinition and reorganisation. The thesis examines the notion of the individual itself as an evolving, transforming ideal for which there are not necessarily any fixed truths or morals, and follows the progression from absolute morals to relative ideas about the self and the individual in society. Tavor (1987:200), in discussing the transition to the nineteenth-
century novel, describes its eighteenth-century predecessor as the "social-moral novel", which uses a Manichaean dichotomy to describe people's conduct in a relatively stable and secure society. This is the social environment in which the thesis begins its analysis. The novels written later in the nineteenth century will be examined in the light of the changing "social-moral" concept of the individual. The change to perceiving society as relatively unstable and insecure is an important aspect of the historical and social context of the novels.

Brown (1979:5), too, identifies in this period a transitionary phase in the novel's and society's moral development. She states:

The eighteenth-century novel, derived from allegory and romance, still sought to define social experience in relation to an absolute.

As the nineteenth century progressed, novels increasingly depicted the changing ideals of the nineteenth century, during which the individual comes more often to be seen as the "judge" (Brown 1979:5) or measure of social experience. Given the growing awareness and acceptance of the diversity and individuality of human nature, the individual as the 'yardstick' of morality is not a stable measure. This feature is another of the many contradictions that appear in the nineteenth-century novel's portrayal of individuals; often its assumptions of homogeneous values and morals did not ring true with its portrayal of the relative nature of human motivation and the influence of external circumstances on behaviour. Thomas Hardy's subtitle for Tess of the d'Urbervilles, "A Pure Woman", reflects this relativity, as does George Eliot's ambivalent portrayal of Gwendolen Harleth's and Rosamond Vincy's motives for marrying. Even though they are depicted as free agents
of choice, Eliot is careful to describe the influence of their environments and external events, portraying these forces as the main impetus for their decisions and behaviour.

Flanders (1984) acknowledges the many social and political changes in the eighteenth century which led to greater individual freedom and the rise of ideals such as the 'fundamental rights of man' (sic). However, he cautions against a too-encompassing view of these changes, and points out that, after all, the freedom and liberty were only achieved by those owning "significant amounts of property" (1984:8), whose interests were also protected by the state, which in turn depended on the maintenance of this status quo. It is also important to highlight that this freedom was mainly the province of males, under whose power women were socially and legally bound. The inherent contradiction between the ideal and the real is an important consideration, since it encompasses the paradox of middle class individuality co-existing with conformity and class solidarity.

Flanders (1984:30) states that the idea of the individual has not been a static concept, but has undergone changes in a social context which have transmitted to the novels, of which individuals are a vital part. The relatively new ideal of the primacy of individual experience and interpretation over the collective is raised again in discussing nineteenth-century novels and their presentation of individual identity as a "concatenation of variables, what one has experienced" (Flanders 1984:30). The portrayal of the individual is, outwardly, a historical and literary phenomenon, and, implicitly, the results of the writers' accumulated experiences and perceptions. The individual develops in fiction as one who moves from being subject to absolute values and responsibilities, to a position of relative morality where the individual conscience is the arbiter of morality. The normative dimension of fiction undergoes a transformation from conservative didacticism, in novels
such as those published in the early nineteenth century by Jane Austen, to the challenging and non-conclusive representation of the contradictory morality of Victorian society found in novels by Thomas Hardy at the end of the century. The complexity of society's interrelation with the novels, however, is such that the power of individual choice and conscience is constantly qualified even as it is esteemed and valued. The interaction between the individual and society usually results in the reassertion of society's power in confining the freedom of the individual, in both overt and subconscious ways.

Respectable middle-class Victorian society maintained separate spheres based on gender, dividing the economic world of men from the domestic world of women. The reality of the untenable social and legal position of women in the nineteenth century will inevitably be drawn into the analysis because most of the affirmations about the rise of the individual and the supremacy of the middle class refer to male individuals when questions of power and instrumentality arise. The institutionalised and systematic relegation of women to an inferior and passive sphere of society was a direct influence on the nature of their experience and portrayal as individuals. Brown (1979:5) highlights the paradoxical nature of the society's values:

We see the social and moral necessity for a democratic individualism that nonetheless meant powerlessness and alienation for the heroine, perhaps for women in general.

Over the nineteenth century, the traditional, stable identity of character in fiction was transformed into a dynamic and often mercurial concept of individuality. The pervasiveness and rapidity of social change in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the nature of the novel as a fundamental element of middle class life, and changing attitudes towards the individual, will provide the grist for the discussion.
CHAPTER 2
DEFINING THE INDIVIDUAL IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The idea of the individual as a self-aware, socially aware, independent being, with certain 'inalienable' rights and unlimited affective and intellectual potential is one usually taken for granted in the twentieth-century perception. It is therefore worthwhile as a preamble to the discussion to trace a brief history of the development of the concept of the individual up to the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Jane Austen first had her novels published.

The basic evolutionary change in thought was probably, as Willey describes (1962:53), the gradual movement away from the seventeenth century idea of a social order which was divinely ordained and unalterably fixed. Williams (1962:7-9) describes the greatly diversified nature of the middle classes in eighteenth-century England, with many levels of social position and status. The flexibility of such social conditions and the fluidity of the social structure provided the scope and possibility for the rise of individuals. Previously, according to Marshall (1973:56-57), the predominantly rural English society had been governed by ideals of authority and obligation on the part of the aristocracy, and duty and observance of tradition on the part of labourers and tenants. However, these communally based ideas were steadily broken down by the social changes brought about by the increasingly powerful middle classes, as well as other capitalist developments, such as urbanisation and the precedence of commercial over community interests (Marshall
1973:Chapter 4; Royle, 1987:93-94). Inherent in these changes is the importance that the individual was assuming in the community. As Willey notes (1962:101), men were beginning to be seen as independent political and economic beings, in search of wealth, power and position. Miller observes (1968:34) that later Victorians saw the social system as made up of disparate human elements, each with its own “centre and meaning”, and Pugh (1994:57) states that

Victorian Britain resounded to the triumphs of improvement through individual endeavour... [the message that] the progress of society - and its decline - rested upon the vigour of its individual members.

With these observations in mind, it is possible to note the changes in the portrayal of individuals reflected in novels.

Stone (1977:150) describes the changes which evolved in the complex and hierarchical society in England in the seventeenth century, and he groups the various factors influencing these changes into those which led to a growing introspectiveness, and those which led to a demand for personal autonomy and the rights to self expression and privacy (Stone 1977:151). He notes the significance of the emerging values of the eighteenth century which began to place individual rights above those of the society or the family (Stone 1977:151). The developing importance of personal reflection and introspection was concurrent with a growth of tolerance for differences in others (Stone 1977:152, 177), and acceptance of the ideal that each person is unique and valuable (Stone 1977:172).

Williams (1962:134) notes that the evangelical revival of the mid eighteenth century was important to the growth of individualism, and is echoed by Marshall
One of the main evangelical beliefs was the importance of the individual conscience (Stone, 1977:153) and the close personal communion with God which the religion required. Another, according to Royle (1987:297), was the preaching of all people's "spiritual equality" as a "startling truth". Brown (1979:19) claims that there was also increasingly more stress placed on marriages based on mutual affection and personal choice of partner, a very different and more individualistic idea, compared with the marriage undertaken traditionally for reasons such as securing property or status. Blewett (1981:78) also notes the changes in parents' attitudes, from the late seventeenth century onwards, leading to the acceptance of affection as a necessary ingredient in a marriage. Stone (1977:154) asserts that the increase in literacy amongst middle and lower classes, through increased access to education in the later part of the eighteenth century, nurtured the growth in contemplation and self-analysis which was part of the new awareness of the individual's unique perception. Access to novels, diaries and autobiographies increased people's exposure to literature oriented toward the individual (Marshall 1973:128).

Many writers agree on the nature of the change in the content of the majority of novels. From superficial tales of adventure or romance they were transformed into novels about the importance of self-exploration, personal love, autonomy and individual success (Williams, 1962:158; Rockwell, 1974: 85-86; Stone, 1977:156). Duckworth (1971:10) points out that fiction in the eighteenth century generally accepted the status quo and defined individualism within society's existing boundaries. This, according to Duckworth, reflected traditional faith in a "divinely"
ordained society (1971:13), a faith which was giving way in the transitional period at the junction of the two centuries, to individualistic values (Duckworth 1971:16) and ‘character-oriented’ fiction. Smith (1984:61) calls conceptions of character in novels before those of Jane Austen “undernourished”. Jane Austen’s characters exhibit varying and often contradictory or unpleasant, as well as admirable, traits, rather than serving as traditional archetypal models of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ behaviour. With their realistic names and plausible lives, they were characters rather than caricatures. Novels written later in the century, such as those by George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, had developed to a stage where personal choice, love, emotion and traits of character became the prime movers of plot and action as the characters provide the main impetus for plot advancement in the later novels.

Rockwell (1974:93) discusses how the norms of success and individualism in novels are related to the emphasis on “scientific truth and the legitimisation of individual sense-impressions” in the eighteenth century. The individual apparently was being presented as the main arbiter of morality; personal choice and the freedom to choose were the most important considerations. Rockwell summarises this idea (1974:138) in concluding that the norm of bourgeois individualism is that honour comprised firstly what the protagonist felt to be honourable, rather than what the society valued. However, the thesis will show that the individual’s honour was actually defined and controlled by society. The novels show how the individual’s and the society’s honour merge in compromises the characters make to survive and prosper, such as Elizabeth Bennet’s ‘realisation’ of Darcy’s true worth and goodness, and the mediation of Dorothea Brooke’s intellectual ideals by her assumption of the
traditional woman's role of marriage and motherhood. If they do not compromise, the individuals suffer physically or morally, in the ways Tess Durbeyfield and Michael Henchard suffer, and are eventually destroyed. Gwendolyn Harleth's situation is interesting; she suffers even though she chooses the only viable alternative offered for her survival. Simultaneously, she is almost destroyed by her refusal to compromise her own sense of 'honour', but eventually she is redeemed in society's eyes when she succumbs to Daniel's idealistic standards of honour and truth, as shown in her concluding letter to him in which she promises to strive to meet his approval.

Even though the emotions and desires of the principal character seem to attract the most attention in nineteenth-century novels, it is usually implied that a protagonist is following the highest truth by remaining faithful to the conviction of duty to society. Those who do not are 'punished' for transgressing society's written or unwritten rules, in the way Lydia Bennet, Dorothea Brooke, Gwendolyn Harleth and Tess Durbeyfield are variously penalised for their deviations from mainstream expectations. However, where Jane Austen's highest truth is selfless duty to others in society, George Eliot tempers this by acknowledging concurrently the individual's needs for truth to the self, whilst deferring to the equally important needs of society's values. Thomas Hardy's individual duty becomes the antithesis of the society's, as society is portrayed as a pernicious destroyer of an individual's ideals and truth if they do not coincide with society's 'moral' demands. The similarity between the novels of the two earlier writers is that most of the individuals are portrayed ultimately as contented in doing their duty; conversely, Hardy's individuals are more often
unhappy in doing what is seen as their duty while the self's needs and desires are ignored. Tess Durbeyfield is arguably the most representative character of this type.

The most significant change in thought during the eighteenth century, according to Stone (1977:159), was the “reorientation” towards the secular pursuit of happiness and the increasing confidence in a human being’s ability to change the world for his or her own ends, rather than the passive resignation to God’s will fostered by earlier religious teachings. Willey (1962:62) describes the growth of a secular and scientific spirit at this time, a belief that morality should be based on the impulses of human nature rather than on the threats and promises of punishment and reward in the hereafter.

Stone (1977:171) points out the growing importance in upper class society, as never hitherto seen, of ideas of personal and bodily privacy, manners, “delicacy” and “civility” towards the end of the eighteenth century. This significant shift towards attitudes of tolerance and respect for others constitutes a milestone in perceptions towards individuality. Harvey (1965:24) also acknowledges this development, pointing out that the “core” of such beliefs is the growing realisation throughout the nineteenth century of the individuality and diversity of humanity, and, importantly, the belief that such differences and variety are beneficial in themselves.

During the industrial revolution, a significant result of the many social and economic changes was, as Stone (1977:174) and Royle (1987:96-97) note, the appearance and rise to eminence of the prosperous middle class. This class valued self-reliance and autonomy of choice as paths to financial and social success, combined with strong tendencies towards prudence, dedication to work and high
moral standards (Royle 1987:96-97). This is the socioeconomic class from which the main impetus towards individualism and self-reliance arose. Theorists such as Adam Smith contributed to the changing perceptions of the individual in an economic sense (Stone 1977:161), convincing many people that the individual’s uncurtailed pursuit of success would ultimately bring good to all. The increasing prosperity of many more people than ever before (Williams 1962:18) encouraged ideas of possessiveness and the individual’s unassailable right to his own property. Williams (1962:9) also makes the salient point that many of the entrepreneurial leaders of the industrial revolution came from “humble beginnings”, evidence that individual ability was beginning to be seen as more significant than inherited status.

Social change was greatly accelerated by the events in France from 1789 onwards, according to Williams (1962:146-147), and resulted in the rapid surfacing of ideas of liberty, rationalism and radicalism, such as Thomas Paine’s “Rights of Man” (1791-2), and the writings of such men as Godwin and Holcroft around the turn of the eighteenth century. The pressure for the extension of the franchise in England, the expanding middle class population and the unstable fortunes of the monarch (Williams 1962:146-50) created a volatile environment in England in the period leading up to and during the Napoleonic Wars. The Jacobin movement, as Williams describes (1962:151), with its emphasis on natural rights, the power of reason, and optimism for the supremacy of the individual over a corrupt and oppressive society symbolised the culmination of the changes in thought up to the time in which Jane Austen begins writing. The social climate in which Jane Austen lived and wrote was debating issues such as those in William Godwin’s “Political
Justice" of 1796 (Steeves 1965:298): that character is a product of circumstances; that the rule of reason must prevail over other concerns; that birth should not impart unfair advantages or disadvantages to a person; and that the institutions regulating society are actually instruments supporting privilege, inequality and the oppression of the lower classes.

The collocation of literary and historical concerns is made possible by three primary observations: that the middle classes became the dominant social, economic and cultural power in nineteenth-century England; that the novel is a reliable representation of reality; and that the novel is the individualist literary form of the bourgeois class. In the case of the first assertion, it is not the intention to dwell on a detailed socio-historical analysis of the reasons for the rise to cultural and economic hegemony of the middle class. Many writers (such as Thompson, 1988, and Pugh, 1994) document the complex interplay of economic and political events that led to this result, and it is sufficient for the thesis to acknowledge the historical part played by the 'revolutionary' English middle class, thrusting into and indelibly altering the existing society. Marshall's (1973:89) perspicacious evaluation of the social effects of this change is more useful than a simple description of the change:

Between the closing decades of the eighteenth century and the mid nineteenth century the Industrial Revolution had been accompanied by a social revolution of striking character... Georgian England thought in terms of status when describing an individual's place in society, Victorian England in terms of class... In the earlier period the stress is on birth and the relationship of the individual to those above and below him in the social hierarchy; in the later the stress is on the solidarity of the economic group to which he belongs.
Royle (1987:83) also makes this distinction, and stresses how the “economic dimension” became the most important consideration in determining class. This is highly pertinent when one considers the role played in the novels by the harsh facts of economic survival. In most cases, it is the motivation of much of the plot.

Class and status, as well as economic power, are vital concerns for most of Jane Austen’s characters, as evidenced in their awareness of the many grades of class and status between such people as the Phillips, the Gardiners and the Lucases in *Pride and Prejudice*, or the Bates, the Coles, the Martins and the Eltons in *Emma*. In *Middlemarch*, the acquiring and spending activities of such families as the Vincys, the Bulstrodes, the Garths and the Lydges receive much of the novel’s attention, as do their relationships as a class. By the time Thomas Hardy is writing, the solidarity of the middle classes is such that outsiders like Tess and Michael are systematically excluded, with ultimately tragic results for the individuals. Their downfalls are seen primarily in the economic terms of poverty and low class status. It is as if the economic hardship were both the cause and the result of their so-called transgressions against middle class morals. This sort of connection was common in the Victorian society which equated wealth and class with high moral standards and behaviour, and poverty with evil, dissipation and moral bankruptcy.

The values of the middle classes became the accepted norms of behaviour in nineteenth-century England, shaping the cultural, political, economic and religious life of the country (Marshall, 1973:116;131). One of the main implications of this was the bourgeois concern with personal achievement and financial success and the way it affected perceptions of the individual. Rockwell (1974:91;94) points out that
financial success equated in Victorian society with success in love and personal life, but a distinction needs to be made between masculine and feminine ‘success’. A nineteenth-century man achieved success by the accumulation and bequest of wealth and property; a woman’s success, however, was seen in terms of marriage and motherhood. It was measured by the wealth and importance of her husband, and her ability to produce children to perpetuate the family name. These very different measures, applied to men and women in the nineteenth century, affected the novel’s portrayal of individuality and success. Unmarried or childless women like Miss Bates are viewed with pity or scorn; Gwendolyn Harleth’s only career is seen as making a brilliant marriage; Dorothea Brooke’s ultimate fulfilment is portrayed in her happy and fecund marriage to Will, rather than in her intellectual or charitable achievements. Thomas Hardy later turns this attitude to irony, as Tess’s experience of motherhood becomes her nemesis. Most of the male heroes fit the bourgeois requirements of financial independence and/or dedication to work, such as Mr Knightley, Mr Darcy, Daniel Deronda, Mr Grandcourt, and Donald Farfrae. Mr Lydgate, in Middlemarch, fails economically early in his career, mainly because he neglects his work for the love of a woman, who, concurrently, is the main reason for his financial troubles. Later, Hardy’s irony in The Mayor of Casterbridge is that Michael’s bourgeois struggle for wealth, independence and society’s respect leads him to a tragic and lonely pauper’s death, as Tess’ marriage into the middle classes also leads ultimately to her untimely death.

The second assertion, that the novel is a reliable representation of reality, accepts that the binding element throughout the exegesis is the historical and social
background of the nineteenth century; the constantly unfolding and changing events are the powerful influences which help form the novels, and are in turn also affected by the performative power of the novels. Wright (1987:1), in his introduction, succinctly captures the essence of the interdependence of historical and literary analysis, stating that:

each work in speaking for itself speaks also for its age in that each embodies more fully its age's possibilities, and each sketches the lineaments of that age.

Jane Austen's novels resist the social changes, and depict the struggle against the changes wrought by the industrial revolution. George Eliot, too, writes of changes in political and industrial life, and attempts to assimilate and ameliorate the effects of the monumental social and political transformations. Thomas Hardy portrays the moral and social dysfunctions of the society, sketching the limitations of the social order rather than the possibilities, and revealing the lost potential and the damage done to individuals by society's dictates.

Wright (1987:5) asseverates that:

[Novels] are constructions of the worlds that their authors imagine, based on what they discern, necessitating many kinds of selection, omission, emphasis, rearrangement; and examination of the public and private dimensions of these narratives should reveal a picture of the time in which each has been brought into being.

The details of the times provided are what the authors feel are relevant to the novels' progression. This is the key to the selectivity of a novel; information is provided as necessary, and is not intended to recreate an exhaustive portrait of a society. Jane Austen's novels depict certain events during a month or a year in
characters' lives who are bound by family ties or simply physical proximity. The
details she employs are those necessary to her intentions: the portrayal of individuals
in harmony with their societies and themselves, at a time when turbulent events were
destroying the equanimity and accord of the existing society. George Eliot depicts
certain momentous events in both the social and personal lives of her characters,
governed, too, by a temporal progression. Political and industrial events, such as
the First Reform Bill and the coming of the railway, form counterpoints to the lives
of individuals, but merely their description is not the purpose of the novels. Thomas
Hardy's novels also utilise details of external events in this way, and the purposeful
selection of what is presented usually serves to focus the novel on the individual
rather than on the event, supporting the idea of the novel as individualistic literary
form. His portrayal of the society's harsh treatment of Tess and Michael focuses the
reader's attention and sympathy on their characters, rather than on the structures of
the society that destroys them.

Some comment is necessary at this point on the question of 'Realism'. The
novels chosen for the thesis are all composed in the realist mode, but obviously this
does not mean that they are accepted as utterly 'realistic' reflections of everything in
reality. As Wright (1987:9) states, "realism is a convention", and, consequently, it
should be noted that it has certain attributes, advantages and limitations, as any
literary convention does. Briefly, according to Abrams (1981:153), realism involves
a deliberate selection and representation of material by an author in order to
"render" characters and situations so as to provide the reader with what are
apparently real experiences. The importance of this quality of novels to the thesis is
that the novels are analysed in the light of being representations, or renderings of reality, rather than factual mirrors held up to reflect society indiscriminately. Wright (1987:9) points out the apparent contradiction in realism, in that it simultaneously "authenticates" what it presents, whilst calling attention to its own limitations as a highly selective form of expression. The selective perception and presentation on the part of the authors has an important effect on the novels from the thesis' point of view. An individual's highly selective awareness of the world is one of the fundamental concerns of novelists, since the very form of the novel is the epitome of an individual's perception. The psychological ability to sift through a myriad of irrelevant information to focus on what is, or seems, immediately important to oneself is the underlying affirmation that leads to the literary acknowledgment of the primacy of the individual spirit.

The third assertion, that the novel is characteristically the bourgeois individualist form, arises from the fact that nineteenth-century novels are often concerned with the effects of society on individuals (Larkin, 1977:5-6), and it is the individual who usually features most predominately. The impetus of many nineteenth-century novels is the portrayal of an individual's character and emotions, and his or her search for self-fulfilment. Jane Austen was the daughter of a rural, self-supporting clergyman. George Eliot was one of the daughters of an estate manager, a man who was very much the bourgeois self-made individual. Thomas Hardy was the son of a professional architect, and did himself complete an apprenticeship and work for a while in that profession. Their backgrounds provided these writers with the experience of the bourgeois, born and bred in middle class,
upwardly mobile, relatively prosperous households. One can trace to these circumstances many of the roots of these writers’ concerns: the experiences of individuals, their interaction with society, their prosperity or otherwise, their morals and motivations. The novels differ in how individuals attain self-fulfilment: whether it is in concert with the dominant society’s needs, or whether the individual’s needs predominate. Another indication of the writers’ ‘bourgeois’ perceptions is that none of the characters achieves success or fulfilment in opposition to the society’s demands. The main protagonists in Jane Austen’s and George Eliot’s novels achieve varied measures of middle class success in marriage, wealth and offspring. Those who do not achieve this in George Eliot’s and Thomas Hardy’s novels, who are antagonistic towards or incapable of perpetuating the dominant values and morals, are destroyed.

The novels by Austen and Eliot are complex attempts to affirm the individual’s rights to freedom and autonomy within a reassurance and re-affirmation of the dominant bourgeois ideals, such as the mediation of Elizabeth Bennet’s, Emma Woodhouse’s and Dorothea Brooke’s lively intellects by marriage and acceptance of their ‘feminine’ roles, Daniel Deronda’s fairytale conclusion of the Daniel/Mirah relationship and Fred Vincy’s reformation into a hard-working and devoted husband in Middlemarch. It is not until Thomas Hardy’s works are analysed that any real revolt against the Victorian bourgeoisie is in evidence, as seen in the exposure of the sexual double standard and its hypocrisy in Tess of the d’Urbervilles or the empty rigidities of class and ‘moral’ standards which hasten
Michael Henchard's downfall. Even then, Thomas Hardy offers no alternatives, but only portrays the tragic effects of such a situation.

The historical form of the novel originates in the ideals of bourgeois individualism. According to Abrams (1981:67), the form of a work is its "organising principle". In this sense, therefore, the precise definition of form can alter according to a critic's perspective, but Abrams' concise description is adequate as a starting point. He proceeds to elaborate on the concept of form as the "emotional 'power'" that shapes, synthesises and controls the novel (1981:68). In this sense, the form is the principle by which the author structures and patterns a work, the rationale for the way its components are rendered for the reader. The organising principle of the majority of Victorian novels was the overwhelming interest in the individual; the examination of feelings, motivations, and behaviour was the structuring principle of the novels. The form of the novel will, therefore, be defined by its relation to bourgeois individualism. Society's changing perception and portrayal of the individual will be seen as the organising or shaping principles for novels in the nineteenth century. Translated into Politi's terms (1976:13) of the world model and the mind model which shape the novel, nineteenth-century novels reveal a world model in which the middle classes reigned culturally and economically, in which the new industrial order had become established and in which the solidarity of the middle and upper classes was paramount. Paradoxically, the mind model of the middle classes also displayed reverence and veneration for the male 'individual' over his class, a homage to bourgeois individualism which influences the form of the novels written during this time.
Miller (1968:xi) also accepts 'form' as the inner structuring principle of a work, or its spiritual and cultural patterning. For him, the individual in an interpersonal and social context is the primary focus of Victorian fiction (1968:2-5). This perspective offers some explanation of the apparent paradox of the middle class society which relied on its fellowship and oligarchical solidarity whilst placing its members on competitive pedestals. One of Miller's (1968:2) most perspicacious observations of the essence of Victorian fiction is that it relies on "consciousness of other's consciousness", that people in the novels are only aware of themselves in relation to other people. The solidarity of the middle classes relies on this awareness for its strength and the mutual dependence of the members; yet this very awareness of solidarity enables individuals to be venerated and eulogised within the confines of the dominant class. This is the qualifying element: individuals are permitted a certain amount of freedom and latitude in Victorian society, but definite boundaries are drawn around this individualism which limit its scope. All the novels in this discussion reveal various aspects of society's limits to individuality; they provide evidence that throughout the nineteenth century society restrained individuality, and placed limits, both overtly and insidiously, on the full expression and self-fulfilment of an individual.
CHAPTER 3

THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY:
Portrayal of the individual in harmony with society

Section 1:

Jane Austen, dedicated to tradition

An examination of Jane Austen’s portrayal of individuals leaves one, finally, with the impression of how much in harmony they are with each other and with their immediate community, or society. This is an understandable result when one considers that her novels are, to a large extent, concerned with portraying accord and unity between individuals, and how this was to be achieved. It is remarkable when one considers what Rickword (in Ford, 1982:15) observed, which was the overwhelming sense, and, indeed, the reality of immanent change in all areas of human experience and activity. Tavor’s opinion (1987:202) is that “Jane Austen is concerned with directing and defining the behaviour of a new class of ladies and gentlemen”, and, although the gentry class was not ‘new’, to a large extent the economic and social conditions were new. Brown’s (1979:152) more precise observation is that Jane Austen was involved in promoting the way “civilised existence” “replenishes and stabilises” itself. The “perfect happiness of the union” (Emma:440) between Emma and Mr Knightley is a microcosmic instance of the general felicity to be achieved by a society whose members are in pleasing accord. Whilst Jane Austen’s conservative attitude may seem contradictory in such turbulent
times as the turn of the eighteenth century, Rickword (in Ford 1982:16) highlights that for the conservative mind the state of the world, nevertheless, "apparently" was "permanent". A critic, such as Evan (1987), who attempts to elucidate Jane Austen's radicalism is mistaken, because, as Bradbury (in Ford 1982:173) states, the novels of Jane Austen depict a "carefully ordered", hierarchical and conventional society.

Smith (1984:69) describes the process whereby eighteenth-century novelists began to grasp the idea of society emerging with a life of its own, with laws distinct from those governing individual human lives. For Jane Austen, however, the society's laws and those governing individual lives needed to harmonise. Smith (1984:70-71) identifies that society was starting to be sustained by "secular dignity", locating lives within the web of human relationships, rather than in an externally imposed religious network. The fulfillment of individual aspirations in accordance with society's requirements is the main guiding principle of her novels.

To achieve such a delicately balanced outcome, personal qualities of forebearance, tolerance and patience, a strong sense of duty and propriety, and dedication to upholding the existing society of 'right-thinking' people are those invariably rewarded and applauded in her novels. According to Park Honan (1987:300), the Regency period was characterised by "a heritage of style, wisdom and political moderation" (emphasis added). These qualities are continually upheld by Jane Austen as the most admirable and noble traits to which individuals may aspire, which signifies her great respect and deference for custom and tradition. In his Preface, Duckworth (1971:x) describes how one of the positive virtues of Jane
Austen's individuality is to remain loyal to "inherited principles of behaviour". Brown (1979) and Park Honan (1987) agree that Jane Austen accepted the values of upper class English gentry as "nonhistorical absolutes" (Brown:1979:153). Park Honan (1987:295) calls it "a Tory's respect for needful traditions" (emphasis added), since for Jane Austen it was not a question of choice; to her way of thinking, society's traditions and their preservation were wholly necessary, and more to be upheld before the threat of the political and economic upheavals of the late eighteenth century. Bradbury (in Ford 1982:176) describes the "high degree of consensus about behaviour" and how such agreements on absolute standards helped to reinforce society's values.

The society most often portrayed in Jane Austen's novels, the small and close-knit community of English rural gentry, relied upon such qualities on a larger and more general scale to maintain acceptance of, and therefore the peace and unity of, its stratified, hierarchical, but interdependent classes of people. Harding (in Ford 1982:36) describes the time during which Jane Austen was writing as a transitionary period when Romantic ideals of individualism began to permeate people's beliefs about personal experience. However, even though many of what are known as Romantic qualities are explored in her principal female characters, it is plain, as Brown (1979:157) maintains, that Jane Austen was deeply concerned with the quality of social existence, and believed in people's interdependence, valuing social cooperation before individuality. Jane Austen was interested in portraying "collective survival as well as individual security and fulfilment" (Brown 1979:157). Duckworth (1971:26-27) also describes how Jane Austen focused more on the
relations between individuals, rather than on the relationship between an individual and God, as had been the case in the Puritan religious doctrine and experience.

The qualities of the individuals portrayed as most attractive and desirable are those which perpetuate and sustain the structure of the rural society at the time. It is pertinent at this point to note Wright's (1987:46) comment that the perfection of *Emma* is proof of Jane Austen's awareness of the imminent "disintegration" of the gentry society she depicts. He also describes her detailed knowledge of and heightened awareness of events such as the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. According to Wright (1987:46), "her response was to shore the props of a society" the nature of which was changing drastically. Butler (1981:99) stresses how the status and influence of the gentry class to which Jane Austen's family belonged was threatened at this time. The two decades spanning the turn of the eighteenth century saw change and upheaval in Western European society on an unprecedented scale, embodied in such events as the French Revolution, the ongoing Industrial and Agrarian Revolutions in England (Williams, 1962); public violence against mechanical innovation (Tomlinson, 1976:15); agitations for human rights (Williams, 1962; Marshall, 1973:131; Gallagher, 1985:12); and discontent with and questioning of the role and function of the monarchy and aristocracy in Britain (Royle, 1987). Jane Austen's portrayal of individuals against this background is conservative, yet looks forward to later nineteenth-century novels, in the way that James Thompson (1988:8) identifies. He claims that Jane Austen was representing character as the bourgeois individual within the ideology of a capitalistic society, yet her strong ties with tradition, ancestry, and social status
distinguish the events and characters in her novels. Butler (1987:165) calls Jane Austen a “committed conservative”, opposed to the cultivation of “spontaneous personal impulse” without the imposition of society’s rules of order. However, Jane Austen’s links with tradition were certainly not the result of ignorance or blindness to external events. Park Honan (1987:296) shows clearly how the whole Austen family, and not least its female members, was actively aware of political, social and economic events of the day. Butler (1981:103), too, clearly demonstrates how well known current affairs were to Jane Austen and the rest of her family.

Tavor (1987:201) states that Jane Austen begins the moralist and realist tradition of the nineteenth-century novel, the first novelist to depict that moral duties can be taught and learned. Brown’s point (1979:5) is more apposite; she holds that Jane Austen continued the tradition of the eighteenth-century novel insofar as it was in transition at the turn of the century. She maintains that Jane Austen sought to define social experience in relation to absolute values, and only gradually came to use the individual as the “yardstick” (Brown 1979:5) of morality. Jane Austen’s position in this transitional period in the novel’s history is important, since this foreshadows the development of relative morality in the novel’s treatment of individuals later in the nineteenth century. Duckworth (1971:10) also discusses Jane Austen’s relation to eighteenth-century novels. He locates the structure of her novels in that of the eighteenth-century novel, which followed the progress of the socially secure individual who passes through a period of isolation to be eventually reinstated in the prosperous mainstream of the society. It is important to note that, for Jane Austen, the remarkable individuals are always assimilated into the society.
In a time of social and economic revolutions, Jane Austen portrays individuals who strive to maintain the civility and elegance of English country gentry. In this society, each has his or her place, high or low, with concomitant duties and obligations, as described by Marshall (1973:56), which must be fulfilled if the society is to be perpetuated. Their striving may be conscious or unconscious, but the strength of long-held associations and teachings ensures that outstanding characters like Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse eventually submit unquestioningly to the demands of their dominant society. Trickett (in Grey, 1986:299) describes it as “the patrician tradition of responsibility and honour” embodied, in the novels, in Mr Darcy and Mr Knightley, and Butler (1981:105) also identifies how traditional social responsibility is placed before the “new individualism” of the Romantic era.

In contrast to the Romantic ideals, Jane Austen focuses on the role of the individual in sustaining and invigorating the existing community, rather than the exceptional individual who rises above the common mass of society. Jane Austen focuses on the solidarity of the gentry because, as Brown (1979:18) observes, since the minor gentry were most threatened by the changing economy and society, the nexus of social change at the time was located in the gentry classes, rather than the aristocracy or the working classes. Jane Austen averts the threat through the actions of such characters as Elizabeth and Emma. They promise to infuse much-needed spirit, intensity and vigour into the powerful but depleted estates of Pemberley and Donwell Abbey, representative of the ruling gentry of England, to ensure their rejuvenation and survival. James Thompson (1988:9) describes the
thematic dichotomy in Jane Austen's novels as one of “inherited code” versus “the morality of improvement”. The significance of this point is that the ‘successful’ heroines subscribe almost unquestioningly to the ‘inherited code’.

Marshall (1973:57) writes of the need of the upper classes to “replenish” themselves. Jane Austen linked the growing importance of the ideal marriage of mutual affection with the rejuvenation of the old order. Elizabeth and Emma invigorate the moribund gentry society with their youthful vitality, but this is portrayed as the fulfilment of their own individual aspirations and spiritual need. By portraying the simultaneous fulfilment of both affective and financial needs, Jane Austen presents heroines who understand the personal and economic significance of their decisions, making the achievement beneficial to the whole society as well as to themselves. In Jane Austen’s novels, the individual is applauded for not over-reaching the bounds of duty and obligation, for his or her willing subjugation of personal choices to the dictates of society. Elizabeth “checks herself” (PP:380) and refrains from teasing Mr Darcy, for fear of offending; significantly, it is she who uses her strength of will and influence with Mr Darcy to persuade him to reconcile with Lady Catherine (PP:395), thus healing a potentially damaging breach in the gentry society. Emma is appropriately ashamed of her unmannerly treatment of the socially and intellectually inferior Miss Bates (E,340), when reminded of her social duties by Mr Knightley, as she also regrets her social neglect of Jane Fairfax (355). These actions show both characters to be conscious of the needs of the civil society over those of personal desire. Paris (1978:15) maintains that “[Jane Austen] places a high value on individual achievement: but before he (sic) can be happy, a person
must first be good”. For this author, something could only be good in an individual if it was also beneficial for the society in which he or she lived. It is apposite to note how many of the qualities of Jane Austen’s heroines depict Romantic ideals of self assertion. However, the influence of their individuality invariably is tempered by society’s unavoidable claim over the individual.

Park Honan’s description of the symbolic importance to Jane Austen of the harmony of the dance unites the many threads of individuality and society portrayed in the final accord of Austen’s novels:

Dancers and onlookers at a ball were a community; and since everyone enjoyed a ‘set’, the dance might suggest the necessary and proper functioning of a larger social community. Those who always flouted its rules would show the failure and harm of wilful egotism; a dancer succeeds only when her rhythms and style are in perfect accord with the harmony of the music, and then feels no unpleasant constraint, but rather thrives and creates a share of the community’s beauty by attending to the needs of the whole. The dance for Jane Austen suggested the individual’s proper relation to society and the artist’s functions in that society. (1987:87)

This is a complete and perspicacious metaphor for the way in which individuals assume their social positions in Austen’s novels. Early in the respective novels, both Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse ‘flout the rules’ and see the ‘dance’ spoiled somewhat by their ‘egotism’. They both ‘succeed’ when they bow to the superior harmony of the music, or dominant society, and are both satisfied with the ‘pleasant constraint’ which establishes their respective places in the wider community. Their roles are clearly defined, and they fulfil them by acknowledging and accepting their ‘proper relations’ to their societies.
Jane Austen's dedication to tradition finds much of its expression in the presentation of estates like Pemberley and Donwell Abbey. The positive nature of their depiction leaves no doubt as to their significance to the novels' conservative themes. The presentation of the two principal landed estates in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* serves to emphasise the hereditary power and importance of the gentry. Both are portrayed in glowing, complimentary terms, and are seen as islands of stability and order, while humanity is embroiled in its schemes of love and ambition.

Metaphorically, the orderly and well-kept estates are signifiers of the fixed moral order of the society, and even nature. The land, and the tradition and heritage for which it stands, define the boundaries within which the wayward characters eventually find their rightful positions. It serves the purpose of drawing the attention of overly individualistic characters like Elizabeth and Emma away from themselves back toward the society of which they are part. The land, like the dance, is a symbol of the established certainties of gentry life and society as perceived by Jane Austen; the cultivation and 'improvement' of the built landscape reflects the refinement and civility sought in human society. Where taste, cultivation and restraint were the watchwords in the improvement of the land, so were such qualities seen to be necessary in personal actions and relationships where appearances provided the key to acceptance and prosperity. The peaceful, well-ordered estate, dominating the life of local society, provided a core of unchanging stability in a time of exceptional change.
Section II:

Individual acceptance of the social and moral imperatives in *Pride and Prejudice*

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet's individuality is expressed wholly within the bounds of what Jane Austen portrays as the superior civility and morality of society. Page (in Grey, 1986:265) describes Jane Austen's attitude in this regard as "confidence in some positive standard of correctness", the positive standard being what upholds the upper class gentry society. Brown (1979:160) is more emphatic, claiming that, for Jane Austen, the boundaries of the society she depicts are absolutes, "the actual and concrete condition of personal and social existence". Elizabeth's talents are employed by the author to portray the positive results which accrued from following the rules governing duty, selflessness, obligation, respect for tradition, taste and sense. Elizabeth's praiseworthy virtues are those which promote and protect the interests of the gentry society. Her sense of right conduct is clear in her unheeded advice to Mr Bennet regarding Lydia's trip to Brighton (*PP:258*), and also in her unresentful ability to admit heartily her error and change her opinion accordingly to adjust to new information. Paris (1978:106) highlights the importance in the novel of elegant manners and civility, the need to observe "proper" forms of behaviour and to learn to behave and feel as one "ought". Elizabeth relinquishes her emotional prejudice against Mr Darcy, in favour of what is seen to be his better nature in his assiduous fulfilment of his duties. She represses her dislike for his unpleasant arrogance and rudeness, because she discovers the
extent to which he carries out his role as dutiful brother, landlord and heir to a magnificent estate:

The respect created by the conviction of [Mr Darcy’s] valuable qualities, though at first unwillingly admitted, had for some time ceased to be repugnant to [Elizabeth’s] feelings; (PP:284)

Quinlan (19965:60-1) highlights the increasingly censorious nature of society, its need to regulate manners and behaviour and its growing esteem of civility and elaborate courtesy. Elizabeth does not flinch at reviewing and revising her opinion of Mr Darcy, when she feels he has justified it, and after she has visited Pemberley. Part of the thrust of her moral education, according to Butler (1987:212), is that it “rebukes” the contemporary Romantic faith in the paramount importance of individual perceptions and feelings, and indeed is anti-Jacobin in its refutation of a reliance on personal judgement and emotional impressions (Butler 1981:100). The most important part of Elizabeth’s education and maturity, for Jane Austen, is that she overcomes her pride in her “unreliable subjective consciousness” (Butler, 1987:213) and realises that rational and objective acceptance of society’s values of right and wrong is the way to find happiness.

Elizabeth is unselfish and dutiful, and exercises discretion and discrimination in her taste and personal opinions, as shown in her painful sensibility of Lydia’s blithe flouting of social and moral codes (Ch 51). In these situations, she is portrayed unfailingly as ‘right thinking’. When Elizabeth fails to exercise these qualities, she makes precipitous assumptions about Mr Darcy and Mr Wickham. She is then seen in an unfavourable light, in the way that those who are self-centred,
and arrogantly disregarding of duty, obligation and right conduct, are portrayed. Instances of unseemly and indecorous behaviour which are not tolerated by the narrator of *Pride and Prejudice* include Lydia’s careless letter to Mrs Forster on her elopement (*PP*:307), the exposure of Mr Wickham’s “extravagance and general profligacy” (*PP*:234), Mr Bennet’s “continual breach of conjugal obligation and decorum” (*PP*:262), Mrs Bennet’s improper reaction to news of Lydia’s ignominious marriage, not “humbled by any remembrance of her misconduct” (*PP*:320), and the Bingley sisters’ insincerity and shallow discourtesy.

The turmoil and upheaval of the ongoing economic, social and political change of the time were mortal dangers to the society Jane Austen portrayed in her novels. Of great importance to the gentry and upper classes was their need to maintain and promote their position, solidarity and status, but Jane Austen would have added that they, too, had duties to fulfil that accompanied their privileges. Williams (1974:6) observes that during the period of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, English society was progressing toward a social code which placed “greater emphasis on the moral bearing of the individual”, a result of the diminishing hold of institutions such as the Church and the aristocracy which previously had dictated society’s consuetudes. Jane Austen’s work depicted the results of this shift in awareness. However, the emphasis in her novels is on how the moral bearing of the individual affects the society as a whole, rather than just the individual concerned, as a Romantic view would have it. Consequently, Elizabeth’s lively and intelligent individuality is carefully bounded by ‘necessary’ (but not, for her, unpleasant) constraints, if the ‘dance’ is to continue harmoniously without the
harmful irruption of individual egotism. Elizabeth curbs her impulses to pass ironic comments on the inconsistencies and vanities she witnesses, and she demonstrates a “respect for society’s opinion where matters of real moral substance were concerned” (Siefert, 1977:73). As Duckworth (1971:118) identifies, a satisfactory conclusion is reached only when Elizabeth recognises that individualism must accept its “social limits”, and when Darcy agrees that “tradition without individual energy is empty form”. There is a great difference between this portrayal of individuality and the intense subjectivity of the Romantic period, as described by Butler (1987:164), where the governing idea, aesthetically, was that subjective individualism was the only path to happiness. Harding (in Ford 1982:54) describes the conflicting ideals of the time, one valuing controlled rationality, the other encouraging heightened personal emotions and expression.

In his Introduction to the 1972 Penguin edition of *Pride and Prejudice*, Tanner remarks that:

> The point is that Jane Austen was brought up on eighteenth-century thought and was fundamentally loyal to the respect for limits, definition and clear ideas which it inculcated. (45)

Constraints were required if the familiar and self-perpetuating social and economic structures were to be maintained: complaisance, civility, respect for superiors, respect for taste and elegance, and deference to the claims of class and sex. The interesting fusion in Jane Austen’s novels, especially *Pride and Prejudice*, is that:

> She makes it seem as if it is possible for playfulness and regulation - energy and boundaries - to be united in fruitful harmony, without the one being sacrificed to the other. (Tanner, 1972:46)
Williams (1974:10) believes that Jane Austen was able to balance individuality and society by deploving sentimentality and overly impassioned subjectivism, in favour of rational sense and virtue. Her reverence for a rational approach to life made it synonymous with virtue. Butler (1987:166) describes how the climax of anti-Jacobin novels was the protagonist’s resolve to follow only rationality and reason in the future, and both Elizabeth and Emma make such resolutions. The ‘fruitful harmony’ gained by Elizabeth is achieved only after she submits willingly to the social ‘boundaries’ which the dignities of the position of Mrs Darcy would necessarily impose. These limits are seen, however, as coinciding with her own wishes and are therefore, to her mind, not a sacrifice at all. Park Honan’s (1987:295) comment reveals the importance in Jane Austen’s novels of curtailing potentially chaotic freedom: “Pride and Prejudice is concerned with the problem of the individual’s freedom within needful traditions and restrictions of society” (emphasis added). However, ‘freedom’ is not really a problem for either heroine, since both espouse fully the society’s demands of them. As Polhemus (in Grey, 1986:68) writes, “Jane Austen’s comedy is a witty celebration of potent individualism embracing the world”, and, in turn, the society “loves and cherishes the individual”, as proved in the conclusions of both Pride and Prejudice and Emma.

Paris (1978:97) states that Pride and Prejudice recognises the importance of social considerations, but that it also stresses the need for an individual’s personal fulfilment. Jane Austen resolves this seemingly polarised dilemma by depicting those actions which safeguard and promote gentry society as inherently fulfilling.
Elizabeth’s marriage mitigates any possible risk that she may upset the status quo. Paris (1978:101) points out that “at the end, Elizabeth is no longer an anomaly in her world”. She accepts the role the society has pre-ordained for her, that of dutiful wife, mother, and mistress of the estate, and finds these roles to be exactly those to which she had always aspired. Even though, as Butler (1981:98) acknowledges, the principal females have strong and rational characters, the novels negate female initiative and, thematically, are reactionary.

A character like Lydia’s is the antithesis of Elizabeth’s; her disruptive and subversive influence unremittingly causes pain and discomfort to others, for which she is never repentant, nor is she aware of what she does, being “always unguarded and often uncivil” (PP:167). Her selfishness and her irrational immaturity, to Jane Austen, are her most unforgivable faults, as seen in the pain she causes her more sensible relatives upon returning home after her wedding (PP:Ch 51). This is an important distinction; Elizabeth, conversely, is continually aware of the effects she has on other people, and the effects they have on her, as in her encounters with Mr Darcy:

Elizabeth could not help observing... how frequently Mr Darcy’s eyes were fixed on her. She hardly knew how to suppose that she could be an object of admiration to so great a man; and yet that he should look at her because he disliked her, was still more strange.

(PP:96)

Even in a moment of heightened emotional awareness and sensibility, Elizabeth is able to reflect on plausible reasons for Mr Darcy’s interest in her:

In spite of her deeply-rooted dislike, she could not be insensible to the compliment of such a man’s affection,... she was at first sorry for the pain he was to receive; till, roused
to resentment by his subsequent language, she lost all compassion in anger.

\(PP:221\)

It is only when she submits to the irrational passion of anger that she can commit the serious wrongs of incivility and rudeness toward Mr Darcy which she later deplores. In most situations she maintains an objective and disinterested perspective. Her first rational thoughts were of the unmistakable benefits of marriage to such a man as Mr Darcy. Elizabeth’s faults are manifest when she relies solely on her subjective impressions rather than objective rationality (Butler, 1975:207-208), as in her errors of judgement of Darcy and Wickham. Yet her inherent rationality is apparent later in the novel, when, in a period of heightened emotions, Elizabeth is still objective enough to scold herself for silliness:

Darcy had walked away to another part of the room. She followed him with her eyes, envied everyone to whom he spoke, had scarcely patience enough to help anybody to coffee; and then was enraged against herself for being so silly! \(PP:351\)

This ability to chide herself provides her with the solid grounding for correcting her mistakes of judgement and becoming what Jane Austen considers is a sound and deserving member of society.

Elizabeth’s level of self-consciousness is high, and this is important for Jane Austen, since one can only fulfil the necessary duties and obligations if one has such an ability to place one’s own needs below others' in importance, as well as knowing how to behave in a civil and rational manner in spite of personal aversions or affinities. Elizabeth knows the importance of at least being civil to such a man as
Mr Darcy, as she "blush[es] for her mother" in his presence (PP:89), and, despite her dislike of him, can feel "severe shame" at his "merited reproach" of her family's indecorous behaviour (PP:237). Such a trait was of vital significance in a society dependent upon mutual obligation, civility and propriety. Elizabeth displays remarkable civility and forebearance in all her encounters with Lady Catherine and Miss Bingley, because she adheres to strict social conventions, even though the former exhibits "dignified impertinence" (PP:200) and the latter is "proud and conceited" (PP:63). It is only through the portrayal of such characters that Jane Austen criticises the ruling classes. She does not denigrate the aristocracy per se; it is when they neglect the duties which accompany their privileges, or show snobbery based on their status (Daiches 1961:754) that she finds fault with them, as individuals, not as a class.

Elizabeth is at all times aware of her position in relation to other people. Miller (1968:5) states that the main structuring principle in nineteenth-century novels is people's relations to each other. When he writes that "the Victorian novelists assume that each person lives within a field generated by the presence of other people" (Miller 1968:13), Jane Austen's attitude must be considered a precise forerunner to the Victorian sensibility. Interpersonal relationships form the substance of her novels; the society is built on interdependence and mutual comprehension. Tavor (1987:203) notes that Jane Austen surrounds each event with layers of opinion: those of the characters involved, the characters outside and the narrator. These can overlap or even contradict each other, but this strategy quite effectively depicts the sense of the inter-related society. When the layers start
to fall away, and the individual becomes the primary focus of interest and sympathy through the predominance of her point of view, the beginnings of the Victorians' interest in the individual may be seen. In *Pride and Prejudice*, as well as in *Emma*, however, Jane Austen continues to portray the individual who inherently is not more important than any other member as simply a part of the larger society.

Another element of this portrayal is that, although some self-analysis is an important facet of Elizabeth's character, the novel's main concern is not with the individual's introspection and meditation. Primarily, it is concerned with people interacting in a community, their attitudes toward each other, and the results when their behaviour endangers the harmonious maintenance of their relationships and interdependencies. Elizabeth's roles as daughter, sister, niece, and eventually fiancée, inform her understanding, perceptions and behaviour. This awareness of her social roles imparts self-assurance and confidence to her bearing, as in her sparring with Lady Catherine in Chapter 56, but it also means that she has what Park Honan calls the "critical and inhibiting self-consciousness of the times" (1987:163). To recall the dance metaphor, however, Jane Austen's main theme is that, for society to continue in harmonious accord, this self-consciousness is a very necessary quality in its members. It enables them to maintain their complaisance and civility, and to follow the 'right' movements of the dance without disruption. Paris (1978:103) stresses how the delicate balance is maintained in Jane Austen between the individual's need for fulfilment and expression, and the society's demands on attitude and behaviour. He claims that her treatment of marriage, manners and personalities in *Pride and Prejudice* is an attempt to balance, in her
characters, the need for social responsibility with the need for self-expression and individuality. For Jane Austen, the balance is really struck and maintained in her judiciously compatible and affectionate marriages; as Paris states (1978:103), "marriage serves as both social institution and avenue for personal satisfaction".

From the point of view of the humanistic individualist, the unfortunate aspect of marriage, for both Elizabeth and Emma, is that it is "a rather undramatic kind of freedom for an aspiring, talented heroine" (Siefert, 1977:121). For Jane Austen the Tory traditionalist, the two principal characters both accept society's chastening influence on their characters, and embrace the forces which limit their individuality because it is their duty. In spite of her talent and intellectual ability, however, Elizabeth is still "obliged to develop within a fixed milieu" (Honan, 1987:308). She must be what the other people in the society determine, regardless of her individuality and strength of character. Jane Austen's mitigation of Elizabeth's potential disruptiveness is to make her submit willingly to the society's dictates.

In comparison with those who prove unable or unwilling to reflect on their own actions and motives, Elizabeth's ability to change ensures her ultimate reward. It is important for this discussion that her punitive treatment of herself relates to those thoughts and actions which jeopardise the society's harmonious functioning. Her decision invariably is to accept the superior claims of the society, whether in manner, action or opinion. Self-analysis is therefore seen as positive when its outcomes coincide with the wider needs of the society, rather than the individual's needs. Such a reason is not the same as the Romantic assertion of the self as important for its own sake. Paris (1978:105) points out that Elizabeth increasingly
is attracted to Mr Darcy when she learns of his diligent fulfilment of his social responsibilities to his household. Elizabeth is rewarded for her acceptance and veneration of the traditional prestige and dignity of the landed gentry, however much she may gently satirise their manners and their pride. Her satire is never harsh or venomous; rather, it is a gentle sting with no lasting harm to the recipients.

'I am perfectly convinced by it that Mr Darcy has no defect. He owns it himself without disguise.'

(PP:102)

Her conscious efforts to subdue her impetuous and lively nature, in order to remain 'civil' and well-mannered during trying interviews with such people as Lady Catherine (PP:198), and during Mr Collins' proposal (PP:148-50), are part of her desire not to flout the rules of the dance, to regulate her own impulses to the rhythms of the society's music and thereby maintain harmony and accord in the 'ballroom' of society. For these efforts, Elizabeth is richly rewarded according to the society's standards. The festive atmosphere of the novel's conclusion, the restoration of peace and harmony through marriage which crowns romantic comedy is the key to Jane Austen's comedy. Park Honan (1987:308) claims rightly that "Reality may be baffling and elusive and full of ambiguities, but it submits to comedy's order". Comedy's order is also Jane Austen's order, when, as in Pride and Prejudice and Emma, the needs of the society retain their supremacy over those of the individual. Siefert (1977:68) calls Elizabeth's marriage a "signal of triumph", but it is vital to emphasise that the triumph belongs to the society over her individuality.
Elizabeth is unable to exercise any influence on any of the main crises in *Pride and Prejudice*, such as Bingley’s shabby treatment of Jane, Darcy’s exposure of Wickham, Lydia’s trip to Brighton, her mother’s behaviour toward Darcy, or Lydia’s elopement. Her individuality is asserted in her *reactions* only; the limits to her instrumentality are drawn by the society according to her class and sex, and she remains within them. In each of these events, Elizabeth must be content to witness and lament at what she perceives, but cannot turn or direct the action. This is especially evident in the case of Lydia’s elopement, when Elizabeth can only turn helplessly to her Uncle Gardiner for assistance and advice (*PP*:297). Siefert (1977:131) calls this the “constructive limits” which were placed on the intellectual and effectual outlets of the ‘talented’ woman.

Paris (1978:107) discusses the way the society achieved a balanced control of personal freedom and expression through the code of manners which governed all forms of behaviour and social intercourse. Duckworth (1971:132) discusses how it was equally as important for the society to obtain the collective commitment and support of individuals, without which the forms would disintegrate. Jane Austen’s portrayal of “older ideas of rational control of emotion” (Harding in Ford 1982:52-3) is the way in which she felt that individual energies could be channelled into the appropriate social context. This was far more preferable than a random expression of disparate individual pursuits which could dissipate and weaken the collective power of the society. This channeling process is seen in effect in the way Elizabeth’s individualism is tempered by the writer. The author’s portrayal and
mitigation of energetic individuality is for the good of both the individual and the society, since for her they are symbiotically bound in their need for survival.

As Polhemus (in Grey, 1986:68) states, “Jane Austen makes marriage the aim and end of her fiction”. It is at the point of fusion between social and personal life, as well as in her portrayal of advantageous marriages, where Jane Austen demonstrates individual submission to the needs of the society. As Duckworth (1971:178) describes it, marriage serves to “close the gaps and cement society”. Marriage, for Elizabeth, is the main arena in which her energy, talent and individuality are controlled and regulated by the fixed social role prescribed for her. The fact that her husband is a wealthy landowner at the social pinnacle of the society means that her role is extremely significant and highly prescribed. As Mrs Darcy, she would be required to fulfill many concomitant duties. Consequently, the sense of awe and privilege with which she accepts the offer of marriage, in spite of herself, is necessary to imbue it with an air of importance and dignity. The attractions of an alliance with a member of the gentry are immediately apparent to Elizabeth when she sees Pemberley’s well-maintained beauty:

She had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste... she felt, that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!  

(PP:267)

The appealing side of Mr Darcy’s character, and his irreproachable moral stature, are linked to his dignified and orderly management of his estate, and the growing awareness of this has a very strong influence over changing Elizabeth’s opinion of him for the better. She discovers that he has never done anything but his duty, and
often far more than that, and gradually Mr Darcy is more endeared to her by such evidence of his conscientious nature, than he is by his personal charms.

What praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant? As a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many people's happiness were in his guardianship... Every idea that had been brought forward by the housekeeper was favourable to his character. (*PP*:272)

The effects of visiting Pemberley and meeting Mr Darcy in his own environment are to make Elizabeth fully realise the truth about his character and his relationship with Mr Wickham. The sight and presence of the estate is no minor part of the influence over her opinion. Her admiration for its ordered beauty helps to smooth away the previous conflict, and provides for her an unassailable reason for curbing her individuality within the bounds required by the society. Jane Austen uses the landscape, in the form of the majestic estate, to represent a microcosm of the society within which Elizabeth willingly submits to the dominion of the society over the individual.
Creating a harmonious society out of chaotic individuality in *Emma*

In *Emma*, the metaphor of the dance applies no less strikingly. The reader is again conscious of an overwhelming sense of duty, obligation, forebearance and civility. Brown (1979:163) applauds Jane Austen's portrayal of individuals in harmony with their social surroundings. She does not describe the constraints of civility and self-deprecation as limits on individuality, but claims that "the adjustments people make to preserve social harmony are not failures but successes of the spirit". Bradbury (in Ford 1982:172) is more guarded in his description that Emma's potential is neither totally curtailed, nor allowed to blossom unhampered. Mutuality of obligation within the social hierarchy is portrayed as an integral element of both the society in Highbury, and of the larger English society. The microcosmic relationship between John and George Knightley signifies the greater obligations and duties of all members of society:

> John Knightley made his appearance, and 'How d'ye do, George?' and 'John, how are you?' succeeded in the true English style, burying under a calmness that seemed all but indifference, the real attachment which would have led either of them, if requisite, to do every thing for the good of the other. *(Emma:90)*

Polhemus (in Grey, 1986:65) stresses this aspect of Jane Austen's fiction, describing the "complementary" nature of moral and material values, and the absence of "social and class guilt". He goes on to describe how the "buoyancy" of the society at the
time could allow for the often conflicting desire for material success and prosperity, and high intellectual and ethical standards. These high standards, however, are not perceived by Jane Austen to be at all restrictive or suffocating; she depicts them unfailingly as beneficial to both society’s and the individual’s well being.

In a similar tone and manner to that of *Pride and Prejudice*, abstract ideals of duty and morality are embodied in the metaphor of the beautiful landscape, significant in itself as representing the land which was so important to the status and position of the gentry in England:

> It was a sweet view - sweet to the eye and the mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort, seen under a sun bright, without being oppressive.  

(E:325)

The subtlety of the prose, with its gentle cadence and judicious repetitions, imparts the sense of the inevitability of the natural order being maintained. The landscape is used by the author to impress upon the ungovernable individual the importance of adhering to the many unwritten dictates regarding one’s duties toward society. In acknowledging the imposing beauty and symbolic omnipotence of the cultivated estate, Emma acknowledges that her unruly individuality must submit, willingly, to be bounded by the needs of the wider community. Like Mr Darcy, Mr Knightley is an excellent manager of his land and estates, as well as being unassumingly generous and quietly dutiful. They consider everything and everyone, and neglect nothing in their roles as masters of great estates and first in their society. The implication is that these men will also ‘manage’ their lively and individualistic wives in a similar manner. Like Elizabeth, Emma’s attention is focused by her consciousness of the land, and through her appreciation of it grows her awareness that she must submit
herself to the needs of the society as symbolised strikingly in the Donwell Abbey estate.

She felt all the honest pride and complacency which her alliance with the present and future proprietor [of the estate] could fairly warrant, as she viewed... its suitable, becoming, characteristic situation... its ample gardens... and its abundance of timber... which neither fashion nor extravagance had rooted up... Emma felt an increasing respect for it, as the residence of a family of such true gentility... These were pleasant feelings, and she walked about and indulged them... 

Like Pemberley, much of the praise for Donwell Abbey relies on the fact that it has not changed with fashions or trends, but has maintained the dignity of its traditional setting and cultivation. The *permanence* of its "prosperity and beauty" (E:326) is an integral part of its significance for Emma, and for Jane Austen. That both Elizabeth Bennet and Emma are capable of appreciating both the beauty and moral significance of these estates signifies that they are ready to take up their ordained places in society, even though it means curtailing their individuality.

The elements of mutual duty and civility are portrayed as the foundation and sustenance of the community, the novel's crises are all focused around the unfavourable results which occur when these are forgotten or neglected. Bradbury (in Ford 1982:174) stresses the vital importance of "links of kinship and common social duty". With such a social environment in mind, it is possible to observe how Emma's unbridled "freedom" is a problem (Duckworth, 1971:148). Brown (1979:125) claims rightly that in "Emma, Jane Austen insists on the necessity and finally the benevolence of social cooperation" as a means of protecting the Harriets and Miss Bateses of the society. It also protected those with vested interests in the
status quo, such as the Knightleys, the Westons and, of course, the Woodhouses. Any deviations from the rules of conduct are mainly committed by Emma; since she is so important a member of the society, "first in consequence" and "looked up to" by all in Highbury (E:5), her social negligence affects a great many people. One of the main themes developed in *Emma* is the importance of knowing and executing the minutiae, however trifling, of one's social obligations and civilities, at whatever cost to one's own selfish desires. Duckworth (1971:155) concurs in highlighting the importance of those in authority fulfilling their social duties; their commitment is necessary to the society's maintenance, as other classes are, in turn, necessary for their lifestyles and social supremacy.

As in *Pride and Prejudice*, one character is the main fulcrum around which the events occur, and it is this person's growth to maturity and self-knowledge which provides the impetus for the didactic themes of the novel. As Williams (1974:14) states, the subject of *Emma* is the heroine's development of a "more moral bearing".

The concentration by the novelist on the individual is marked, yet her place in and duty to society are equally clearly defined. Emma's misdeeds and mistakes arise when she is not cognisant of, or tries to flout, the rules of obligation and the social hierarchy which dominate the gentry society of which she is a leading member. Her mistakes are therefore serious, and symbolically it is more important to society's stability that she realise and rectify her errors. Her rank and consequence make this necessary, otherwise the society would not be able to maintain its harmony and unity, because she sets the example of behaviour, as Mr Knightley points out. Brown (1979:102) asserts that "Emma... is... firmly connected to her world". Because of
this, her inappropriate matchmaking between the socially inferior Harriet Smith and such men as Mr Elton and Mr Frank Churchill, her neglect of her social duties toward the poor and inconsequential, like Miss Fairfax and Miss Bates, and her complicity (albeit unknowing) in Frank Churchill’s deception of Highbury society are actions which, although evidence of lively intellect, imagination, energy and instrumentality, threaten the peace and accord of the community by disrupting accepted norms and standards. Emma’s attempts to make inappropriate matches are notably improper, considering the role played by marriage in the preservation of families and fortunes. Richetti (1982:19) highlights the role of marriage in Jane Austen’s novels, showing why Emma’s matchmaking could never succeed:

...happy marriage is a special destiny, and the discovery of the right partner transforms individuals and integrates character and society in new, hope-filled ways. (emphasis added)

Emma’s behaviour has a different appeal for some modern readers; her ability and intelligence are enviable and attractive, whilst her bold behaviour threatens subversion and chaos in an established and precariously interdependent community. However, to Jane Austen, such a threat needed to be defused, and Emma’s deference to Mr Knightley’s chastisements and high principles successfully removes the latent threat of her behaviour and makes her more admirable to Jane Austen. As Siefert (1977:80) and Bradbury (in Ford 1982:172) note, Emma consciously limits her spontaneity to conform to social expectations. Her willingness to marry Mr Knightley is proof of her commitment and gladness to be involved fully in her society (Bradbury, in Ford 1982:172). Sales (1983:34) makes
the pointed observation that Mr Knightley's high morals and his "good sense and
unimpeachable integrity" are linked explicitly to his economic and social position.

To this can be added that these qualities are also linked to his position as a man.

Thus the idea of the inherent value of the existing society is embedded in the novel,
through the narrator's implicit admiration of Mr Knightley and everything he
represents.

Throughout the novel, judgements are passed, usually by Mr Knightley, on
the conduct and moral standards of various characters, such as Emma, Mr Churchill
and Miss Fairfax; there is an implicit absolute of 'right' conduct against which
behaviour is measured, of similar nature to that which is evident in Pride and
Prejudice. The absolutes of 'right-thinking' conduct and behaviour form the limits
to individual expression and development. All characters are aware that they will be
held to and judged according to the society's standard; an ongoing concern relates
to what is expected of each person, expectations which are derived from the
unwritten absolute standards of comportment and behaviour, the "strict rule of
right" (E:363). Siefert (1977:7) claims rightly that both Emma and Elizabeth
Bennet sought and attained a "poise", an acceptable compromise, between their
emotional and intellectual aspirations, and society's expectations. They would not
have been able to exist otherwise in the society. As women with moral and
intellectual talent, they could not have survived emotionally without accepting the
compromise between what they were capable of, and how they had to live.

Emma's level of self-awareness oscillates between extremes. She is usually
supremely self-confident and assured, complacent in her perception of herself and
those around her, satisfied that she has superior knowledge and understanding when often, ironically, she is most mistaken. She cries to Mr Knightley:

'I know that such a girl as Harriet is exactly what every man delights in... Were you, yourself, ever to marry, she is the very woman for you.' (E:57)

In the comical episode with Mr Elton, she is deluded to the very moment he proposes to her in the carriage:

'After such behaviour, as I have witnessed during the last month, to Miss Smith... to be addressing me in this manner - this is an unsteadiness of character, indeed, which I had not supposed possible!' (E:118)

As Butler (1987:250) points out, the essence of Jane Austen's portrayal of Emma is that the nature of the subjective narrative shows the individual's consciousness to be unreliable. The portrayal of her character is an indictment of the potential chaos to be caused by relying on such Romantic ideals as the supremacy of emotional perception and imagination over rational thought. The extremity of her errors invariably involves her having the wrong impression about people. Jane Austen shows successfully that one is unable to judge reliably when only depending upon personal perceptions, as many other 'rational' factors need to be taken into account.

These factors constitute the society's unwritten rules of class, status, wealth and sex that are necessary to perpetuate and maintain its power and structures.

The opposite point on the continuum of Emma's moral development is when she has achieved truer knowledge of herself and others, through an often painful process of realisation, leading from the revelation of Mr Elton's true feelings, Mr Churchill's real situation, and Mr Knightley's final confession of his love for her.
Intrinsically honest and clear sighted, once she admits something, Emma cannot deny even unpleasant thoughts when she is being honest with herself:

Her own conduct, as well as her own heart, was before her in the same few minutes. She saw it all with a clearness which had never blessed her before. How improperly she had been acting by Harriet! How inconsiderate, how indelicate, how irrational, how unfeeling had been her conduct! What blindness, what madness had led her on! It struck her with dreadful force...

(£:370)

She can eventually admit candidly to Mr Knightley of her various blind mistakes of understanding: “at that time I was a fool” (£:431). As in Elizabeth Bennet’s situation, the important fact is that Emma is able to recognise her follies of pride, and humbly accept the truth of the situation and the fault of her own wilfulness. She feels deeply Mr Knightley’s reprimand on Box Hill:

[Her feelings were] combined only of anger against herself, mortification and deep concern... She was vexed beyond what could have been expressed - almost beyond what she could conceal. Never had she felt so agitated, mortified, grieved, at any circumstance of her life... How could she have been so brutal, so cruel to Miss Bates! How could she have exposed herself to such ill opinion in any one she valued!

(£:340)

The result is as Morgan (1980:24) asserts: that the “moral of the story is not that Emma should think less of herself but that she should think more of the world”.

Harding (in Ford 1982:55) observes that Jane Austen was preoccupied with the “moral basis of social relations”. The reader’s sympathy with her character is never impaired; in thinking highly of Emma, the reader also thinks well of the society of which she is part and product, the world of the English gentry of the early nineteenth century. Emma’s willingness and ability to scrutinise herself, and make amends for...
the sake of duty and right conduct are very important to the maintenance of peace and stability in the community; if she had stubbornly refused to accept she was in the wrong, according to the society’s rules, the resulting disturbance could have had the potential for demolishing the tranquillity and harmony of their society. Emma is Jane Austen’s example of the “dangers” of unmitigated individualism (Duckworth, 1971:7), dangers which were clearly apparent to the conservative mind in late eighteenth-century England. The more mature self-assurance Emma attains towards the novel’s conclusion is a deeper and more lasting quality, because of her acceptance of Mr Knightley’s and the society’s strict rule of right. Brown (1979:163) again takes a positive view of the way in which individuals are moulded according to the society’s need. She states that “Generally, the self that refuses to accommodate to others, particularly to those closest, is the degraded self; the self that succeeds in accommodating is spiritually expanded”, and, inevitably, in the novel Emma is rewarded with society’s approval and adulation, as well as her own awareness of implicit ‘rightness’.

... she was really in danger of becoming too happy for security.-What had she to wish for? Nothing, but to grow more worthy of him, whose intentions and judgment had been ever so superior to her own. Nothing, but that the lessons of her past folly might teach her humility and circumspection in future. (E:432)

Emma is often gravely wrong in her surmises about other characters; most of the novel’s action turns on her almost complete lack of awareness about these people’s true feelings and desires. Her worst sin is portrayed as her extreme subjectivity, her “inability to make objective assessments” (Duckworth, 1971:159)
because of her injudicious reliance on emotional impulse rather than rational thought. Emma risks causing chaos in her conservative society because her reliance on her own judgement "disregarded... tradition" (Harding in Ford 1982:53). During her interference in Harriet and Robert Martin's relationship, she says complacently:

'Mr Martin is a very respectable young man, but I cannot admit him to be Harriet's equal; and am rather surprised indeed that he should have ventured to address her.' (E:54)

Of Mr Knightley's assertion that Mr Elton would never think of marrying Harriet, she thinks the former mistaken, and the latter overwhelmed by "strong passion" for Harriet (E:61). She completely misconstrues Frank Churchill's nervous behaviour in her presence when he visits prior to his first departure from Highbury:

'It was natural for him to feel that he had cause to sigh. He could not believe her to be encouraging him... - He was more in love with her than Emma had supposed; (E:235)

Of course, it is revealed later that he was simply debating whether to tell her of his secret engagement. Mr Knightley's astute guess at the connection between Frank and Miss Fairfax is deprecated by Emma:

'... they are as far from any attachment or admiration for one another, as any two beings in the world can be. That is, I presume it to be so on her side, and I can answer for its being so on his. I will answer for the gentleman's indifference.' (E:317)

Her most trying and blatant misconception is her belief that Mr Knightley wishes to marry Harriet, which results in her most acute emotional suffering (E:389). Many of her errors occur when she permits a wish to overwhelm what she knows to be reality:
Mr Elton was the very person fixed on by Emma for driving the young farmer out of Harriet's head. (E:30)

Her impossibly favourable conception of the unknown Mr Churchill is equally a product of her own fantasy:

'My idea of him is, that he can adapt his conversation to the taste of everybody, and has the power as well as the wish of being universally agreeable... having that general information on all subjects which will enable him to follow the lead, or take the lead, just as propriety may require...'

(E:135)

On witnessing Frank Churchill bringing Harriet home after the encounter with the gypsies, her imagination is immediately set to work to envisage a relationship where one does not exist:

Such an adventure as this, - a fine young man and a lovely young woman thrown together in such a way, could hardly fail of suggesting certain ideas to the coldest heart and the steadiest brain. So Emma thought, at least... How much more must an imaginist, like herself, be on fire with speculation and foresight!

(E:302)

These examples demonstrate Jane Austen's "general view that strong impulses and intensely emotional states should be regulated and controlled... for the sake of one's companions in society" (Harding in Ford 1982:58).

Butler's (1975:258) analysis of Emma is apposite: she states that in this novel, "All forms of inwardness and secrecy tend to be antisocial. There is a moral obligation to live outside the self", and this is one of the fundamental differences between Jane Austen's ideals and those of the introspective Romantics. In Emma, most, if not all of the problems are caused by those who keep secrets: mainly Emma, but also Frank Churchill, Mr and Mrs Weston, Jane Fairfax, and even Mr
Knightley. Secrecy, and its implications of subjectivity and selfishness, is therefore viewed as pernicious, because it works against open communication among members of society. Emma’s moral growth entails the rejection of subjective secrecy in favour of an “objective mentality” and “reliable, external evidence and impartial reasoning” (Butler, 1975:258, emphasis added). In short, the individual’s opinion and perceptions are seen as faulty and unreliable in the face of rational objectivity, to which it must defer. This face is symbolised in the character of Mr Knightley, who, as Bradbury (in Ford 1982:177) indicates, is “rational and mature”, and who knows the importance of duty, courtesy and social obligations.

On different levels, Emma is very much aware of social obligations, of her duties incumbent on her “position relative to others that is necessary to proper conduct” (Williams, 1974:16; emphasis added), but unaware of her own motives in flouting them. Ironically, her susceptible awareness of her own social and financial consequence blinds her initially to an understanding of others’ positions, and her duties toward such people as Mr Elton, Harriet, or Miss Bates. In Mr Elton’s case, it was Emma’s duty to ensure she did not encourage him with too open manners:

Emma was obliged in common honesty to stop and admit that her own behaviour to him had been so complaisant and obliging... as... might warrant a man of ordinary observation and delicacy, like Mr Elton, in fancying himself a very decided favourite. (E:123)

In Harriet’s situation, Emma abused her duty to gentry society by giving Harriet ideas beyond her lowly station in life, using circumstantial evidence to fabricate a genteel background for her (E:56). In Miss Bates’ and Miss Fairfax’s situations,
Emma violated many unwritten rules of duty, obligation, deference and civility, culminating pointedly in the disagreeable incident on Box Hill (*E*:339).

...[Emma] knew she was considered by the very few who presumed ever to see imperfection in her, as rather negligent in... not contributing what she ought to the stock of [the Bates'] scanty comforts. (*E*:137)

It is interesting to note that Emma is aware fully of the potential hypocrisies and insincerity of her position; she recognises the forms and contracts of the society, and is intelligent and aware enough to despise them, albeit secretly. This cognisance shows her to be a highly perceptive and analytical being, able to identify her own emotions, and aware, as Trilling (in Ford 1982:154) observes, that the spirit in Jane Austen’s society is not free but is constrained by society and circumstance:

Emma was sorry;—to have to pay civilities to a person she did not like [Miss Fairfax] through three long months!—to be always doing more than she wished, and less than she ought! (*E*:148)

Jane Austen’s lesson here is two-fold. One is that overweening pride in the individual’s self assurance can potentially be dangerous to the stability and peace of the wider society, by blinding the protagonist to the self awareness required to carry out the vital, if apparently trivial, duties and obligations which bind and reinforce the whole society. The other is that Emma, in spite of the power of her personality, is able to embrace her submission without hesitation. Another perspective on this point holds that, for Emma, maturity means learning about and realising “the limits of self” (Morgan, 1980:27). She learns about these limits partly through learning to accept others’ shortcomings, and partly through the realisation of faults of character within herself.
Paris (1978:15) maintains that in Jane Austen it is the individuals who make themselves unhappy, consequently making society unbearable, rather than the other way around. This is certainly the case in both *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice*; the society’s values are the known absolutes and it behoves individuals like Emma and Elizabeth Bennet to conform to these demands before they can achieve happiness or fulfilment. Emma invariably is ashamed of her ‘unworthy’ thoughts; they make her miserable, and it is only as she proceeds to make amends that she regains her equanimity and good cheer.

It was a dislike so little just... that she never saw Jane Fairfax the first time after any considerable absence, without feeling that she had injured her; *(E:148)*

Her realisation of her errors leads her eventually back to the path of ‘right conduct’, where, after her different shocks and mortifications, she is able to appreciate fully the benefits of maintaining the *status quo*, and the harmony of the social ‘dance’. This ability to acknowledge the superiority of society’s demands is portrayed as the individual’s best quality. Morgan (1980:38) maintains that in *Emma* “individuals have an inner life apart from other people’s wishes for them”, which must be honoured. However, on an ideological level, Jane Austen equates this ‘inner life’ with the society’s life, portraying the needs of the two as coinciding, as in the cases of the marriages of both Emma and Elizabeth, which benefit both individual and society.

As Brown observes (1979:112), “Highbury is made up of individual[s]... Yet, however different the traits of personality and class, they are taken into a functioning society and reshaped by inner organising forces”. These forces can be
likened to the movements of the ‘dance’ in Park Honan’s metaphor (1987:87). They regulate and organise Jane Austen’s society, providing the absolute standards of manner and morality. The real threat of Emma’s behaviour, underlying the seemingly trivial *faux pas* she commits, is her potential threat to these societal standards. Because she is an important member of the conservative gentry society, the threat of her unbridled individuality potentially is more destructive of the *status quo*. As Quinlan (1965:70-3) asseverates, the anti-Jacobin feeling in England was such that the extreme result of uncurtailed individuality was seen as revolution. In Emma’s case, she is thoroughly displeased with her conduct, and this is what reconciles her to the demands of the society.

‘My blindness to what was going on, led me to act by them in a way that I must always be ashamed of.’ (E:386)

McMaster (in Grey, 1986:142) states that moral education in Jane Austen is “the learning that matters most”. Learning about one’s place in society, and about the ability to judge and regulate one’s own behaviour is certainly significant in Jane Austen, because it ultimately assists in sustaining the society.

...but what a connexion [in Harriet] had she been preparing for Mr Knightley - or for the Churchills - or even for Mr Elton! The stain of illegitimacy, unbleached by nobility or wealth, would have been a stain indeed. (E:438)

Emma’s true self-awareness is dependent upon her becoming aware of others around her, in their ‘correct’ stations and callings, all contributing to the unity and beauty of the dance. Emma, like Elizabeth, is glad to have her ‘faults’ against society corrected, since it makes her, in her own view, a more worthy member of the society whose stability depends upon people behaving correctly. Brown
(1979:161) sees a rigour in the mutuality of Jane Austen's depiction of society, in the way her "novels unabashedly assume human interdependence". For Jane Austen, self-fulfilment is not possible in isolation. As Duckworth (1971:9) observes, for Jane Austen "society is the proper context of individual behaviour", and therefore a protagonist's fulfilment can only come about in a social environment.

Stepping beyond, or neglecting, the duties and obligations of one's role, as Emma often does at times, threatens the accepted rhythms of the social dance, and places in doubt the right of the erring individual to remain part of the dance whose rules she has flouted. By accepting and nurturing the designated figures of the dance, the individual wins the right to remain part of its wholeness and beauty, which, according to Jane Austen, is the individual's function. Morgan (1980:38) asserts that in *Emma*, the powers of the individual's intellect find their "proper objects in the world outside the mind" (emphasis added). This is a vital part of Jane Austen's portrayal of the 'proper' fusion of an individual's personal needs with those of the outside world. The individual is at all times subject to the society's dictates; introspection or self-indulgent meditation, as idealised by those of the Romantic school of thought, takes second place, if it has a place at all. Butler (1987:274) reads in *Emma* a scepticism on Jane Austen's part toward the elements of the "inner life" of the individual, such as imagination and intuition. A momentary, but telling, illustration of the opposition between Romanticism and rationalism occurs in the earlier novel *Sense and Sensibility*, as Edward Ferrars discusses ideas
of what is picturesque with Marianne Dashwood. The steady, rational Edward states

'I like a fine prospect, but not on picturesque principles. I do not like crooked, twisted, blasted trees. I admire them much more if they are tall, straight and flourishing. I do not like ruined, tattered cottages... I have more pleasure in a snug farmhouse than a watchtower.' (SS:46)

Earlier, he prosaically had seen only a muddy path where Marianne saw a dramatically beautiful view stretching into the distance. Invariably, Jane Austen's portrayal of rationality shows it to be superior to emotion and imagination.

All aspects of Emma's life are expressed within, and informed by, the tenets of the gentry society. Wright (1987:44) believes that the meaning and force of Emma lies in the "sense of boundedness, definition, even restriction" in the novel. She is subject to the tenets of Mr Knightley's, and the society's standards of morality, about which he never fails to take the opportunity to lecture her:

'There is one thing, Emma, which a man can always do, if he chooses, and that is, his duty;' (E:132)

Paris (1978:69) observes that Mr Knightley represents "good examples and rebukes"; in this light, it is important to note that he is also the dominant figure in her life.

'I will tell you truths while I can... and trusting that you will sometime or other do me greater justice than you can do now.' (E:340)

It is Paris (1978:88) again who points out that Mr Knightley is the "omniscient observer" of Emma's actions, and that he is therefore the impetus and motivation for her to suppress all "unacceptable impulses" (emphasis added).
...but [Emma] had the consolation of knowing that her intentions were good, and being able to say to herself, that could Mr Knightley have been privy to all her attempts of assisting Jane Fairfax... he would not, on this occasion, have found any thing to reprove. (F:355)

Society’s most effective power over the individual is that of withholding its approval (Paris, 1978:89), and for Emma, this power is embodied in Mr Knightley. Without his approbation, Emma is helpless and powerless, because she values his favourable opinion. The society is seen, therefore, as having power over the individual because he or she wants and needs the society’s good opinion, which is the case unequivocally in all Jane Austen’s works.

Jane Austen wrote of the perpetuation and regeneration of gentry society, not the decay, and consequently strong invigorating individuals like Emma and Elizabeth are seen to embrace the society, because their young vitality and acceptance are needed to carry on the tradition to the next generation and beyond. Brown (1979:7) discusses how, in Jane Austen, the “selection of spouse is of crucial importance to the society, for the individual is the agent of a social purpose” (emphasis added). This is an accurate summation of the way in which Jane Austen perceives the individual; not as a subjective isolated being in his or her own right, but as irrevocably part of the wider society. The ‘social purpose’ is of paramount importance for Jane Austen. Where individuals are agents of disruption, such as Wickham and Lydia, or even Frank Churchill and Emma in their own way, the threat is soon mitigated by social considerations. Mr and Mrs Wickham become beholden to their relatives for their subsistence; Mr Churchill and Emma are
appropriately shame-faced and contrite about their socially ‘disruptive’ behaviour, and both go through a ‘public’ apology and absolution.

Butler’s (1975:264) reasoning is that Jane Austen “does not believe in the truth of the unaided subjective process”, as opposed to the ideas of the Romantics, and therefore an objective, rational narrator must provide the balancing ‘truth’ to the individual’s unreliable subjective truth. The didactic purpose of *Emma* is fulfilled in the realism of the heroine’s error and redemption process, while the separate integrity of the narrator substantiates this by providing the commentary and final arbitration, which accord with the conservative society’s standards of morality and right conduct. Butler (1987:260) writes that *Emma*’s theme is the characters’ struggle to achieve knowledge of “fixed and permanent” truths external to the individual. Brown (1979:125) asserts that “in *Emma*, Jane Austen insists on the necessity and finally the benevolence of social cooperation”. Emma’s maturity is attained when she, too, can recognise and accept the validity and inviolability of each person’s role in the wider society, since social homogeneity is neither possible, nor desirable for the gentry society built on demarcations of privilege and servitude.

Morgan (1980:48) believes that Emma’s “moral vision grows out of relations to people”. This is an accurate observation of the quality of her maturation; it is generated through her realisation of people’s social mutuality.

Brown (1979:24) describes how the individual’s needs for fulfilment and happiness are met by the social groupings, cooperation and marriages in Jane Austen. The significance of this observation is that, instead of failing or limiting the individual spirit, social harmony and interdependence actually free it, by controlling
and regulating all members in their ‘rightful’ social position. Butler’s (1975:293) observation reflects this; she states that Jane Austen’s heroines are “schooled in accepting social pressure, rather than freedom from it”, and that the author, as a moralist, expounds the necessity of “self mastery and subordination” (1975:296). This self-mastery is symbolised in their commitment to marriage, which Bradbury (in Ford 1982:185) calls the “essential commitment of the Austen universe”. Brown (1979:24) outlines other critics who claim that Elizabeth Bennet fights social restraint, and who “ignore her eager self criticism”. According to Brown (1979:24), the critics also ignore her “pleasure in social life, and her need for personal happiness and meaning that social life can provide”.

Jane Austen, far from portraying the rebellious individual searching for the meaning of subjective fulfilment, portrays the individual in happy concert with his and her society, and able to find meaning and fulfilment because of this harmony. Jane Austen’s portrayal of individual life implies that each person has an innate sense of morality, and an inner need for society’s order. Duckworth (1971:14) points out that Jane Austen believed in a society with a “natural moral order” which transcended human hypocrisy and corruption, and that concepts such as “honour” and “prudence” had fixed meanings and morals. The novels portray individuals who also subscribe to and need these absolutes to order and regulate their lives. Butler (1987:299) describes Jane Austen’s desire to “place the individual in a preordained moral framework”, and this is achieved in the harmony which characterises all her novels in their conclusions. The balance is achieved and maintained in Jane Austen
between individuality and society through this assumed need, and its ultimate fulfilment in a morally sound and stable society.

Jane Austen's novels evince the incipient shift from moral absolutes to the subjective, relative standards of morality portrayed in later nineteenth-century novels. Brown (1979:19) observes that “Broadly stated, the structure of Austen's novels records the shift from a tradition-directed to an inner-directed society”. She states, as does Duckworth (1971:23-24), that Jane Austen moved gradually toward the “nineteenth-century mode” (1979:5) of making the individual the measure of social judgement and experience, especially in a novel such as Persuasion, although this is not as much in evidence in Pride and Prejudice and Emma. These novels are rather more concerned with “explor[ing] the territories of experience in which individuals come together and learn how to survive through cooperation” (Brown, 1979:23). Jane Austen portrays the “inner cohesiveness” (Brown, 1979:23) of individuals, the drive that binds them within their society and helps them to sustain it. Duckworth (1971:8) recognises that, whilst much of Jane Austen's plots may tend toward the individual's isolation and subjectivism, in the end there is always a "rapprochement" between the society and the individual. Butler (1987:166) asseverates that Jane Austen's novels are about the “general and ethical” rather than emotional or subjective truths. The evolution of plot and form in novels written later in the nineteenth century shows the movement away from this principle toward a more subjective and relative morality and aestheticism, one where the individual's psychological domain is the driving energy rather than the larger structures of the society. It remains, however, that the portrayal of the individual in Jane Austen's
novels retains the legacy of reason, conservatism and reaction, rather than subjective
Romanticism, and society's needs are always paramount in the novels. Daiches
(1961:752-3) asserts that, for Jane Austen,

    Society is kept going by its members continually
    compromising between the individual impression and desire
    on the one hand, and public tradition and duty on the other.

Jane Austen's themes and character portrayals reinforce the hegemony of the
existing society in spite of great external political and economic upheaval. As
Bradbury (in Ford 1982:176) states, to a conservative mind such as Austen's, the
future was seen to be more or less like the present.
CHAPTER 4

THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY:

Personal desires and the society's demands: portrayal of the changing relationship between the individual and the community

Section 1:

The conditions of Victorian society up to the 1870s

The main aim of this thesis is to examine the ways in which individuals were portrayed in prominent examples of prose fiction of the nineteenth century, and how the portrayals both reflected and transmitted society's values and attitudes to the idea of the individual. The most significant influence on the perception and portrayal of individuals in the Victorian period was the development of a dualism in middle and upper class Victorian life and thought. The dualism lay in the development of interrogative attitudes between 1840 and the 1870s, which also was the period of greatest Victorian social complacency and optimistic conservatism. The works of many intellectuals and writers in this period were characterised by expressions of a great deal of doubt, pessimism and questioning in relation to many facets of society. Writers such as Mill, Huxley, Carlyle and Spencer, as well as contemporary novelists, examined and questioned the roles of entrenched institutions and beliefs,
which had significant effects on people's concepts of their lives and their selves. This resulted in two seemingly conflicting strands of individualism: one embodied the ideal of the ambitiously driven, self-sufficient and independent economic man, the quintessential Victorian bourgeois individual; the other was the contented, conforming, middle-class individual, who was part of the strength of the solid middle stratum of society. These two strands are woven around and between three significant social forces of the time: the utilitarian laissez-faire ideology, with its belief in free trade and the right of unrestricted market forces; the reforming and pragmatic State interventionist school of thought, with the belief that individuals should be free to develop within a properly regulated and legislated society; and the increasing number of proponents of humanism and individual freedom, who feared for the integrity of the individual spirit in the age of mass production and industrial power. The cultural paradox which arose during the Victorian period, the veneration of individual spirit and achievement, and the concurrent dominance of a restrictive atmosphere of middle class conformity, will be analysed in this chapter as it is manifested in the novels of George Eliot. This paradox can be seen in the society's separation of men's and women's spheres of experience. Victorian society encouraged men to exercise their individuality and develop themselves physically, intellectually and financially, while women were expected to conform to a rigid set of social constraints under pain of social ostracism, such as the treatment
George Eliot experienced because of her relationship with George Lewes.

Jane Austen's novels had been written and published well before the advent of the Victorian era. She had depicted the individual as an organic part of a social hierarchy which, as Royle (1978:83) describes, had linked together those people who lived on and of the land through an age-old system of deference and paternalism. A significant shift in thinking occurred as the nineteenth century progressed to economically based 'class' solidarity, away from importance attached to the old ties of birth and status in the rural hierarchy. The nature of the society changed from being an interdependent squirearchical rural community, to being an urban, industrially dominated society of rigid class divisions, a change described both by Royle (1987:83) and by Marshall (1973:89). The ideals and values of bourgeois individuality developed from within the middle classes, who praised outstanding individuals who, by their 'own' effort and hard work, enriched their families and their class, and furthered middle class cultural hegemony and economic power.

Another profound influence on the portrayal of the individual at this time was the extent and magnitude of economic change, and the consequent effects on social, cultural and intellectual life throughout the Victorian period. Relative civil peace was achieved through the precipitate but timely steps taken by the government towards acknowledging responsibility for the well-being of its citizens, and the
vestigial movement towards the ideal of a society with collective duties and mutual responsibilities. Wood (1982) and Best (1971) describe the introduction of an unprecedented amount of legislation during this period which improved living and working conditions in the burgeoning towns and factories.

Social and political change was continuous throughout the nineteenth century in Britain. Many factors contributed to the Victorian society's moral struggle between the attitude which placed great emphasis on the integrity and pre-eminence of the individual, and the attitude which stressed the social responsibility of individuals to each other and to the wider society. Increasingly, the government assumed responsibility for providing, or legislating for factory owners to provide, rudimentary education for workers, especially children. The Factory Acts of 1833 and 1844 required factory owners to provide part-time schooling for young children, and reforms in the 1870s made it possible for many more children to attend schools (Best 1971:153-155). As a result, there arose an increasing number of Mechanics' Institutes and such like for the self-improvement also of adult working people, along with more classes and meeting groups, such as Sunday schools, being run by religious denominations (Best 1971:153,169,211). Chapman (1968:54-6) points out that, with the general growth in the population's literacy, came the fostering and dissemination of a wide range of reading matter and ideas previously inaccessible to many people. Cottom
asseverates that nineteenth-century liberals believed that through education individuals “became responsible for themselves in a radically new way”. During this period, however, women’s formal education remained limited and concentrated on ‘ornamental’ abilities such as music, drawing and dancing. Some progress was made toward improving practical education for women in the latter half of the century, through the efforts of such people as Barbara Bodichon, a friend of George Eliot’s, but advancement was slow (Dyhouse 1978:179).

In the three decades up to the 1870s, prosperity in Britain blossomed: the increasing population, the spread of the railway, increased manufacturing, colonial expansion, and general industrial and agricultural advances (Wood 1982:175-8; Larkin 1977:76) meant that this was a period, overall, of great economic success, although there still remained the extremes of rich and poor which had always existed (Wood 1982:168; Larkin 1977:79). Significant social benefits accrued to society from these improvements (Wood 1982:97), since with the improved ability to satisfy more of the immediate material needs of many more people than ever before, the opportunity arose for the individual to develop a spiritual and intellectual life.

As emphasised early in this chapter, the nineteenth century saw the rise to economic and cultural power of the ‘middle classes’, who believed an individual (man) could rise by hard work “within the class system” (Royle 1987:105). The benefits of the new prosperity were felt
mostly by the middle class, those whose wealth came from trades and
industry, manufacturing, government administration, and colonialism, and
their position was “consolidated” in the middle of the century (Wood
1982:182). The Great Exhibition of 1851 marked a shift from pre-
Victorian attitudes, and illustrated the society’s final emergence from
eighteenth-century thinking to the point where ideas of social and
political power included the middle class (Wood 1982:171). The
hegemony of middle-class ideals at this time, as listed by Royle
(1987:106), is testimony to the truth of this observation, ideals such as
faith in capitalism and the free market, and belief in the morality of
individual effort. Middle-class thinking was deeply involved with the
ideology of the individual: the ideals of self help, hard work, piety and
sobriety were synonymous with middle-class solidarity and bourgeois
individuality. The inherent contradiction in the class ideology is part of
the paradoxical attitude of the Victorian middle classes: the veneration of
individualism which was concurrent with the restricting demands of a
conservative conformist society.

Wood (1982:86) points out the significance of electoral reform in
1832, in that, even though little changed materially, the reform was
effective in sweeping away old “assumptions and prerogatives” for ever,
as the first step towards universal suffrage. These reforms are evidence
of the growing belief in the right of each person having an individual say
in the government of the country. The secret ballot, especially, enhanced
and reinforced the ideal of male individual integrity and the freedom to have and to act upon one's own opinion and beliefs. State intervention, however, increased in all facets of life in the second half of the nineteenth century. Wood (1982:125-126) outlines how more money and effort were put into providing state education, how controls and changes were implemented in Church finances, how the regulation of industry increased, and how there was a tentative start to regulate public health.

There was "no denying" (Wood 1982:125-126) a general tendency towards recognising the State's duty to protect its citizens, which existed alongside the bourgeois beliefs in capitalism and the individual.

Alongside the prosperity, the Victorian social and political arenas were not free from doubt and scepticism. Chapman (1968:40) describes the dilemma of the governing classes, for whom ideological complications arose in trying to extend state protection and control of the individual, whilst overtly praising and attempting to foster that individual's freedom. Many feared the institutionalisation which accompanied government interventionist policies which "seemed inimical to the free and responsible choice of the individual" (Chapman 1968:355). However, since unbridled individuality, as manifested in unfettered capitalism, undoubtedly was the source of more human suffering and hardship than previously ever experienced, it was plain that a degree of state regulation was necessary for the general health of society. This seemed to be the heart of the dilemma for the Victorians:
pragmatically having to acknowledge the need for state regulation, whilst emotionally and economically desiring to assert the power and freedom of the middle class individual.

Religious ferment during this period also revealed the influence of the new spirit of questioning and individual exploration, as described by Wood (1982:106). Royle (1987) also describes the contention within the Church of England during the Victorian period. Gradually, the monopoly of the Church over people’s perceptions of morality began to diminish, leaving relatively more responsibility with individuals for the assertion of personal conscience. Chapman (1968:271) encapsulates the nature of the change in his comment that

The sphere of Christian influence had narrowed and was no longer assumed to include and measure every secular activity.

The patterns of thought about religion were changing radically, and, as a result, so, too, were people’s attitudes about the power or the right of the established Church to control, or even influence, their lives and behaviour.

In considering the paradox of the Victorian attitude towards conformity and individualism, it is interesting to note the influence of Evangelicalism, a strong force among the middle classes, which translated into a "pattern of social attitudes" (Wood 1982:188) and demanded conformity under the threat of social and spiritual penalties. In identifying the power of society’s covert system of ‘rewards’ and ‘punishments’, it is pertinent to mark the potency of social attitudes as motivation for people’s
behaviour. In her late teenage years, after a High Anglican upbringing, Mary Ann Evans became devoutly Evangelical (Uglow 1987:18-22; Taylor 1989) and had, therefore, an intimate knowledge of puritanical motivations and attitudes, and the power of religious belief to imbue an individual’s life with meaning (Uglow 1987:24) and help him or her become part of the ‘community’. She suffered what Chapman (1968:271) describes as the “anguish of mind” which afflicted many Victorians on their paths to unbelief (Taylor 1989:34), and her novels provide evidence of her belief in a “religion of humanity” (Paris 1962) which for many years replaced traditional mystical religion for her. The Victorians were confronted with “great waves of doubt” (Chapman 1968:50, 271) when it came to considering the ultimate truth of the Bible and the tenets of Christianity, as the status and credibility of the sciences and medical practices increased. It is in this light that many began to turn to the spirit and conscience of the individual as the source of truth and moral judgement.

Developments during this period are characterised by the general shift toward accepting new ideals of individual responsibility and the collective duties of society, such as the duty of employers to employees, and the duty of the State to its citizens. Society began gradually to become less complacent about and accepting of harsh poverty and deprivation. Chapman (1968:77) describes the growing sense of social responsibility, combined with the ideal of the benefits of utilitarian self help. Chapman (1968:42) describes Mill’s belief that individuals were responsible towards
both self and others (emphasis added). It is during this period that socialism became prominent as a political and social force, as it incorporated firm ideals of collective responsibility, and was the impetus that awakened the middle-class conscience to widespread social injustice (Chapman 1968:254).

The Victorians were optimistic that the human heart was "essentially good" (Chapman 1968:132), and that the hope for society's development lay in "the responsible and informed individual" (Chapman 1968:351). Wood (1982:191) points out that Mill pleaded strongly in his work On Liberty (1859) for the individual's right to speak and act as he (sic) wished if it was not prejudicial to others. However, it is apposite to stress that the foundation of his theory was that the individual's duty equally was to both the self and the nation (Chapman 1968:48; emphases added). Having read Mill's works, George Eliot's philosophy and religious outlook was thus "confirmed", according to Pinion (1981:63).

In the work of other prominent writers and thinkers of this time one can note the concurrent streams of collectivism and individualism flowing through their ideas. The common ideal was that society's health was dependent on the health of its individual members, a belief which is evident in George Eliot's novels. John Ruskin believed that a better social order could be achieved through the cultivation of art and people's individual potentialities (Best 1971:266), because, as Chapman (1968:212) points out, he believed all three elements were interdependent for their well-being. Best (1971:258) calls Herbert Spencer an apostle of the doctrine of free choice
and identifies this as the “heart” of Victorian thinking. Chapman (1968:41) describes the influence of Victorian ‘individuality’ in business and philosophy, and characterises it as the widespread Victorian acceptance of “Carlylism”, the belief that “it is on the individual that the duties of society ultimately rest”. Matthew Arnold urged against extreme individualism as harmful to one’s fellows (Chapman 1968:225). Significantly, he also believed in the role of the state as a benevolent force which could ameliorate the destructive effects of selfish individualism and improve society as a whole by removing social injustices and inequalities (Chapman 1968:225).

The common attitude of this generation of the mid-Victorian period was an acceptance of social responsibility and of the need to act upon it, an attitude which evinced increasing respect for the rights of the individual (Chapman 1968:218). By the 1860s and 1870s, the period when George Eliot began writing fiction, an individual’s duty was seen to be stretching farther than for one’s “own heart” (Chapman 1968:214). However, as Fraser (1986:229) observes, “certain tensions” in artistic and theological thought which existed early in the nineteenth century “continued to manifest themselves throughout the Victorian period”. The result was that there was no clear or unequivocal view on the position of the individual and one’s rights and duties; even within the works of a single writer such as George Eliot, the struggles between “rebellion and reaction” and “individualism and authority” (Fraser 1986:229) are apparent.
The prominence of the novel and its penetration to many levels of society made it a cultural force which both shaped opinion and which was moulded by public tastes. Chapman (1968) regards the prose works of such authors as the Brontës, Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Dickens and Anthony Trollope as the 'voices' of the Victorian times, expressing both the hopes and fears of the society. Wood (1982:190) states that, without prose literature, England would have been culturally "bleak". He points out that it was in novels and poetry that the contemporary spiritual crisis and doubt were expressed during this time (Wood 1982:190). Chapman (1968:207-8) describes the Victorian fear that individuals were being starved of something more important than physical needs, that the individual spirit was being destroyed in the mass production and mechanical routine of an industrial society. Prose fiction, therefore, took on new seriousness of purpose in the absence of powerful drama during Victorian period; novels were interpreting existence and experience, and analysing the motivation for, and the consequences of, choices, action and patterns of behaviour, states Chapman (1968:321, 332-3). Novels were inseparable from contemporary expressions of individuality; their form and thematic emphasis developed in conjunction with the changing portrayal of the individual, and, as will be seen with the works of George Eliot, by the 1870s had developed into an individualistic vehicle for the portrayal of the unique presence of its protagonist.
During the nineteenth century, Victorian society denied women any recognised or sanctioned participation in intellectual, political, economic and public life. Poovey (1988) discusses the significant ramifications of the distinct separation of commercial and private spheres, and their basis in imputed gender differences. Houghton (1957:343) describes the way Victorians idealised pure womanhood and the sanctity of the home, and Poovey (1988:4-6) analyses the institutionalised social stereotypes which were cultivated, the contented matron, the virginal bride, the dissipated fallen woman, the barren spinster. Millet (1969) discusses how the assumption of male dominance was fundamental to the separate spheres idea, based on gender, which placed women in the untenable and contradictory position of physical and intellectual inferiority, whilst idealising them in the abstract as morally superior. The sexual double standard was the result of the Victorian society’s rigidly different ideological demands on men and women, demands which were ultimately at odds with themselves, based as they were in misconceptions and untruths. Poovey’s (1988) explanation is that the images and stereotypes of “feminised morality” sustained the appearance of middle-class moral rectitude “without inhibiting production” (Poovey 1988:10) because men could return to their homes each night, sloughing off the day’s dealings and morally rejuvenating themselves in the presence of their wives and daughters. George Eliot was keenly aware of the social injustices under which all women laboured (Haight 1968:146; Taylor 1989), and it is significant to note the two main
protagonists of the novels under discussion are women, although, interestingly, neither of the novels is named after them. The strength of the 'morality' promulgated in George Eliot's novels, especially in regard to the portrayal of women, becomes one of the marked aporia in her works when her own professional situation and personal lifestyle are considered, and, to an extent, reflects the omnipresent Victorian cultural paradox of individuality/conformity.

Closer analysis of women's circumstances in the novels *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* follows, and it becomes apparent that the dualism referred to earlier in this section is strikingly evident in their lives. Where the Victorian society venerated the individual male spirit and achievements, there was an equally powerful and concurrent demand for the submission of women to the narrowest of spheres and most limited of domains. Although the nature of the dualism seems to conflict when applied only to the society's expectations of men, the ability of these two strands to co-exist is apparent in the Victorian separation of male and female spheres. Many of the themes of George Eliot's novels are informed by this dualism and its arbitrary differentiation between men and women.

It is clear that the latter years of the Victorian society encompassed great social and moral paradoxes. In the midst of great material plenty existed physical and spiritual poverty and intellectual doubt; powerful but contradictory social movements, such as utilitarianism and individualism, flourished; the established Church lost ground to agnosticism while
dissenting sects flourished. The translation of the larger societal movements into the moral and emotional dilemmas of the individual is apparent in novels of the time. George Eliot's engagement with the morality and humanity of the era in which she wrote is plainly evident in the complex characterisations of individuals in her novels. They provide further support for the argument that society's traditional absolutes were increasingly being recognised as relative perceptions.
Section II:
George Eliot: reconciling Determinism and the individual’s freedom to choose

A brief discussion of Deterministic ideas will be carried out because of their great influence on the works of George Eliot. Larkin (1977) examines the social and intellectual change across England and Europe in the nineteenth century which fostered Determinism in realist novels of the time, and finds its source in the increasingly widespread belief in environment and heredity as shaping forces. A significant element of Determinism was the attitude that free will and choice were no longer valid, or indeed possible, in a world where society’s conditions were changing rapidly, and personal control was dissipating as swiftly.

Determinism had a powerful effect on George Eliot’s personal philosophy, although her singular deterministic ideas were “modified” because she believed that one was partially responsible for one’s actions, and that, through moral awareness and consideration for others, the ‘right’ choices could be made (Halperin 1974:186). Although, according to Larkin (1977:94), Eliot accepted that a person’s behaviour was ‘determined’ by many hereditary and environmental factors outside the self and that “he (sic) is not an autonomous moral agent”, she did believe that an individual could nurture a sense of morality and awareness (Larkin 1977:94). Part of this moral awareness meant that the individual would also have to recognise the
fact that there would be certain forces over which one could have no control. She believed that individuals could act responsibly towards themselves and society, exercising their moral awareness, and their feelings of fellowship and good will (Larkin 1977:94). In this way

her double vision of subjective experience and objective reality enabled her to give moral significance to life, without turning her back on the material realities of existence. (Larkin 1977:95)

This dichotomy of idealism and pragmatism is a distinctive feature of her novels.

George Eliot believed firmly in humanity's innate fellow spirit, mutual respect and sympathy for each other. In a letter to Mrs Senior in 1870, she wrote:

One lives by faith in human goodness, the only guarantee that there can be any other sort of goodness in the universe. (Haight 1955, V:83)

She believed society could only change through the efforts of individuals, in what Larkin (1977:91) describes as her "meliorist" approach, which eventually would change the whole society for the better. Asserting this interdependence between individuals and society meant seeking settlements in her novels for characters within communities, where they could fulfil both their inner needs and their duties to society.

George Eliot’s determinist stance arose out of the conditions of the society in which she lived, and out of her knowledge and experience of the rapid social and industrial changes occurring throughout Britain and Europe. Dodd (1990:110-111) shows how close a knowledge Marian
Evans had of rural and industrial turmoil, and how aware she was of the societal changes and their implications for individuals. Her letters reveal a close engagement with the progress of contemporary events, and her travels imparted a wide perspective to her vision. Changes in the way England was governed, the developing economy and the accompanying social changes, both beneficial and pernicious, tended to remove the impetus of 'choice' from the individual's own circle of influence. Increasing state intervention, the paternalistic attitude of the civic authorities and the growing bureaucracy and increasingly powerful employers, described by Tomlinson (1976:103), influenced the livelihoods and lifestyles of many people. Graver (1984:1) emphasises that any effort to reinvigorate communal values would have needed to take into account such changes as these, as well as the other massive economic and industrial changes. George Eliot’s novels take these influences into account, and eventually reaffirm a 'traditional' ideal of community. The successful resolutions she finds for her characters rely on their resettlement into a community from which they had been isolated, and there are many compromises and much resignation involved in reaching these settlements.

During the nineteenth century, amongst those whom Cottom (1987) calls the liberal intellectuals, there developed feelings of revulsion against the post-industrial mass society and the unmitigated spread of capitalism. Men such as Carlyle, Spencer, Ruskin, and Mill, along with novelists like George Eliot, after the 1850s were championing the causes of the individual spirit,
freedom of choice and the importance of social duties towards one's fellow humans. Employers advocated untrammeled individualism in the market because it benefited their profits; philosophers, intellectuals and novelists advocated the importance of the freedom of individuals to live as they chose without harming others, along with society's collective responsibility to its members and mutual responsibility between individuals. According to Halperin (1974:187), George Eliot was resolute that "the redemption of humanity may be found in the feelings of individuals for one another". In her social morality, a 'good' person was one who contributed to the general well-being of society (Larkin 1977:93), and people's attitudes were defined by Eliot according to how they were disposed towards others (Larkin 1977:94). Miller (1968:31-33) makes the highly apposite point that by confronting the "death of God", Victorian novelists turned to people's interpersonal relationships in the search for selfhood and meaning. In this light, George Eliot's faith in humanism and its expression in her novels become more apparent. Paris (1962:419) describes how the natural vigour of humanity evoked in George Eliot a faith in the worth of human existence, faith which previously had been placed in religion. Marian Evans greatly respected the work of Thomas Carlyle; Dodd (1990:144) points out that she accorded fully with his idea that "history revealed human interdependence and the impossibility of isolation", a theme which is borne out in both Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda.
Houghton (1957:1-2) claims that the traditions from which the Victorian era had separated itself were those of the Middle Ages. He includes Christian orthodoxy and the rule of the church, veneration of royalty and nobility, the acceptance of fixed social classes with concomitant rights and duties, and the supremacy of the rural economic structures as the mainsprings of medieval traditions from which Victorian economic and political spheres diverged. George Eliot’s moralist stance arises from faith in such traditions. She wanted to define and regulate moral judgment during a time which seemed in many ways to be degenerating morally, evidence of which she saw in atheism, ruthless economic rationalism, and the inhuman treatment of the poor and working classes. She witnessed the disappearance of rural village life, and the encroachments of urbanisation and industrialisation which destroyed the old ties of social interrelation and interdependence with the land. Graver (1984:2) makes the connection that she tried to transform religious faith into a stronger belief in the power of social ties and mutual sympathy. Paris (1962:423) observes that the morality and sense of rectitude of her characters are determined by how much they feel part of “corporate existence”: if they fail to reconcile with the community, they have failed utterly. He stresses that George Eliot’s novels value social feeling and identification with the group over and above personal gain (Paris 1962:423).

One distinction which needs to be highlighted is that the ‘freedom to choose’ usually referred to only to men’s freedom. Women during this period
bore a magnified burden of constraint on their physical, emotional and intellectual freedom, existing under stringent limits imposed by society’s institutions such as the church, the legal system, and the state, as well as under the society’s strict customs and habits. The novels by George Eliot under examination depict this burden, and two particular women’s struggles to overcome its limitations on their individuality. Levine (1962:278) defines that ‘freedom of choice’ for George Eliot meant the capability of choosing in accord with one’s motives and understanding, but, noticeably, he refers only to men. The social position of women was such that it prevented them, in subtle and covert ways both physical and psychological, from achieving such a state of self-understanding. Levine’s (1962:279) summary of the situation is that George Eliot’s “heroes” (sic) come to understand their dependence and their littleness in the wider society and are obliged to accept this. There is, however, a deeper discontent that manifests itself in the conclusions to Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda, and it relates to the fates of the women. Adam (1965:142) identifies that these novels evince a sense of frustration and curtailment of potential, but does not link it specifically with the fates of Dorothea Brooke and Gwendolen Harleth. The mitigation of their emotional and intellectual potential is where the profounder frustration lies, frustration with the limited role set out for the Victorian woman by the society. In order to be part of and to settle within this society, it is imperative that they accept this role, and these two novels eventually conclude with both women’s acceptance.
The struggles with conscience and desire, suffered by Gwendolen and Dorothea, embody precisely the conflict between deterministic ideas and George Eliot’s portrayal of individual freedom and choice. The double burdens they bear of their humanity and of their sex depict more poignantly and more graphically how “moral judgements of the traditional sort can have no place in a world where the decisive factors lie outside individual control” (Larkin 1977:94). Under such strictures it was not possible for women to fulfil their individuality in the same way that men could. From this perspective, the paradox is apparent: the enthusiastic veneration and celebration of individualism was valid only for male achievement. Women could not, according to the society, attempt in the same ways to fulfil their ambitions, their role lay in the woman’s sphere of domesticity, submission and self-sacrifice to the needs of others.

The portrayals of Gwendolen and Dorothea are those of individuals where desire and ambition struggle, albeit futilely, for sovereignty. While these two characters try initially to break free from the society’s restriction, Dorothea through intellectual achievement and charitable works, Gwendolen through emotional domination and self indulgence, they must find eventually a mitigated achievement and contentment in settling within their communities. Cox (1963:37) describes it as finding a “new relationship” with the society, but in fact it is a palliated position in which their intellects and emotions are diminished. Thus their potentially idealised fates are tempered with stoical pragmatism, an attitude which it is important
to highlight in George Eliot's works. For this writer, the way to reconcile Determinism with freedom of choice was to balance ideals with reality.

George Eliot's solution to the struggles between self and society is that the individuals find fulfilment when they reconcile themselves with the communities from which they had become isolated. Dorothea's and Gwendolen's main reason for isolation was their desire to fulfil their ambitions, which conflicted with their consciences, or duty, as women. Their isolation ends when they relinquish their ambition and accept their prescribed places in their societies. Graver (1984:10) believes that George Eliot tried to regenerate the community by encouraging a change in consciousness, like the changes undergone by Gwendolen and Dorothea in the depths of their anguish which bring them to accept their places in their communities. Similarly, Larkin (1977:96) also believes that George Eliot portrays the individual's duty as a responsibility to take one's rightful place in the society. Because George Eliot could not see any satisfactory solution to the inequalities imposed on women by the community (Mews 1969:119), she offers this re-absorption into the society as a way of reconciling her characters' ambitions with the deterministic influence of the rigid Victorian society where their paths are already laid. Gwendolen's ultimate fate, however, is different from Dorothea's, providing evidence of an evolution, over time, in George Eliot's portrayal of the individual.

Woman as an individual for George Eliot was not yet able to overcome the influence of her circumstances enough to enable her to
exercise her free will and achieve her ambitions. An incident in Mary Ann Evans' youth graphically illustrates the need for compromising ideals with pragmatism. After a long and bitter dispute with her High Church father, with whom she still resided, when she admitted to her disbelief, she eventually agreed to "token church attendance" (Taylor 1989:45) in order to retain her home and livelihood with him. Taylor (1989:45) points out that, although she could keep her ideas intact, Mary Ann felt disgusted with herself over the compromise. She knew, however, that a home with her father was the only acceptable option at the time, and was prepared to live with it until a more satisfactory arrangement could be found. Like the young Mary Ann, the only way a woman could survive in the society was through a compromise between her selfhood and individuality on one side, and the community's demands on the other.
A: Portrayal of the struggle between individual ambition and ideals of duty to society in *Middlemarch*

The personal, social and economic circumstances in which a woman existed in the Victorian community were the opposite of those in which men lived and worked. Because of this environment, those women who struggled to achieve their ambitions beyond the domestic sphere were involved in a concerted battle to reconcile their personal desires with the society's version of their 'duty'. Their ambition eventually relents under pressures of either social, emotional or financial natures, and the society achieves the conformity of its members. However, in *Middlemarch* this is by no means portrayed as a negative result, and the forces which demand duty and obedience are depicted as ultimately benevolent, serving the interests of both the community and its members.

In *Middlemarch* the community and the individual are portrayed in a symbiotic relationship, and, in order to maintain this relationship, George Eliot portrays a view of morality where benevolence and fellow feeling are the most admirable traits of the individual, and those qualities which strengthen the community are those most valued. Dalal (1989:37) describes how the "structuring principle" in the novel is "[moral] progress entailing transcendance of egoism", resulting eventually in "self realisation". Those who do not, or cannot, rise above the desires of the ego are those who do not know or understand themselves, and, therefore,
in the author’s eyes, cannot properly fulfil their duties to the community. Mr Brooke’s worst fault, in the eyes of his critics in Middlemarch (Middlemarch: 393, 418), is his neglect of his duties as landlord, a role in rural and feudal societies which meant far more than just a collector of rents. The placid Mr Garth’s strongest disapprobation is reserved for Mr Brooke’s indifference, “It drives me almost mad to see mismanagement over only a few hundred acres,” (M: 440) and the narrator’s treatment of the latter is more unfavourable in his bungled confrontation with Mr Dagley than in his ignominious attempt at an election speech. Old Mr Featherstone’s miserable lonely death is the result of his own cupidity and caprice (M: 362), and, similarly, Mr Bulstrode’s anti-social selfishness and greed are punished severely (M: 666).

Ranged opposite such misanthropists are Tertius Lydgate, Mary and Caleb Garth, and Dorothea Brooke, outstanding examples of people who place others before themselves, even to their own disadvantage. In times of duress, Mr Lydgate is “saved from hardening effects by the abundant kindness of his heart and his belief that human life might be made better” (M: 183), and he blames only himself for his marital troubles.

Dorothea’s nature is channelled into “the reaching forward... towards... the least partial good” (M: 235), and her oft-expressed desire is

‘...to make life beautiful... everybody’s life... It spoils my enjoyment of anything when I am made to think that most people are shut out of it’. (M: 251-2)
Part of her love for Will is that she believes he cares "that justice should be done to everyone" and she imbues him with her own motivation for doing good (M:586). Mary Garth is impatient with and scornful of "selfish people [who] think their own discomfort of more importance than anything else" (M:287), and her father is remarkable for his inherent trust in the goodness of others (M:264). These characters are portrayed most positively and sympathetically. They choose to become assimilated into the communities from which their ambition had separated them, and thus the value of a stable society is vindicated at the cost of their individuality. The importance of stability was still uppermost in the minds of the middle and upper classes who were anxious about revolution as late as in the 1860s (Houghton 1957:54-57). Even when the threat of actual revolution had faded, there remained through the latter part of the nineteenth century the terrible divisions between rich and poor, and the constant fear that the lower classes would rise against the prosperous middle class (Houghton 1957:58).

George Eliot was intimately acquainted with the work of Feuerbach. His belief that humans derived "vitality and humanity" from society, and that relationships are essential as part of man's (sic) vitality (Dodd 1990:185-6) are also a part of George Eliot's philosophy, along with the conviction that consciousness of the self was united to the consciousness of another person (Dodd 1990:185-6). Cox (1963:31) stresses George Eliot's strong belief in an inherent human tendency toward fellowship and mutual benevolence before individual ambition, and this is characterised most
vividly in Dorothea. The narrator praises Dorothea because “She longed for work which would be directly beneficent like the sunshine and the rain” (M:516). Only through such selflessness could a mutually beneficial and stable society be achieved, an idea which hearkens back to the Middle Age traditions of social duty and economic cooperation (Houghton 1957:1-2).

Paris (1962:424) discusses George Eliot’s conviction that the best result of suffering is to help one behave so as not to cause suffering to others, and this is plainly evident throughout the action of Middlemarch when comparing Dorothea with Rosamond. In a moment of crisis in her marriage, the former resolved to submit herself to the unjust demands of her husband, through a sense of duty and compassion. When she had done so, Dorothea “felt something like the thankfulness that might well up in us if we had narrowly escaped hurting a lamed creature” (M:465). In contrast, Rosamond’s self-absorbed egotism is never fully overcome, even when her husband strives to reach out to her, and she becomes a “burthen” to him (M:858). In a similar way, Mr Casaubon’s self-centred perception is harmful to his marriage. His egotism makes him tread blindly on Dorothea’s feelings, “not in the least noticing that she was hurt” (M:113) as he is absorbed in his own inadequacies and conceit (M:Chapter 42). The contrast between Dorothea and the characters of Rosamond and Mr Casaubon always serves to place her in a sympathetic light. The author’s commitment to such ideals is clearly illustrated in the motto that was written for “The Lifted Veil” in 1873:
Give me no light, great heaven, but such as turns
To energy of human fellowship;
(Haight 1955,V:380)

It is apparent, as Tomlinson (1976:112) observes, that George Eliot’s characters are portrayed as being at their best when they care for or are responsible for others. There are no clearly drawn lines in *Middlemarch* between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ characters, as all have the potential to be both unselfish and generous. Even Mr Bulstrode has sympathy generated for him because he cares for Mrs Bulstrode in their troubles, and Mr Lydgate’s arrogance is mitigated by his situation. Dorothea constantly is associated with saintly benevolence and selfless care for others: “‘I cannot bear to think that there might be something which I did not know, and which, if I had known it, would have made me act differently’” (M:322). George Eliot wrote to Sara Hennell in 1871 that “the beauty of nature” was found in “duty and human pity” (Haight 1955,V:133). At their worst, characters like Rosamond and Mr Casaubon are portrayed as aloof from and uninterested in the other people with whom their lives are involved. Even Dorothea, early in her married life, is capable of being “cutting and irritating” because her immature egotism makes her “blind to [her husband’s] inward troubles” (M:232). The difference with her is that, unlike either Rosamond or Mr Casaubon, she is able to open herself to pity and compassion for others as her moral awareness develops. Mary Ann Evans also went through a similar process of moral development, as she shed the churlish and selfish introspection of the Calvinistic religion of her youth and opened out her
awareness of her own and others’ emotional needs, (Taylor 1989: Ch 4&5).

Her avid reading of Rousseau (Dodd 1990:101,149) enforced the realisation that awareness of one’s unique individuality helped to open one’s perspective to the common lot of humanity. Even in the depths of her misery, Dorothea still musters the strength and resolution to hide her own pain and distress and to make a “second attempt to see and save Rosamond” (M:848). The reader unquestionably is drawn into sympathy for her as she struggles between ideals of duty and faith to her own desires and needs, “shut[ting] her best soul in prison” (M:464).

George Eliot’s literary reconciliation between a deterministic view of the world and a belief in the individual’s freedom to choose is achieved through resignation to, and acceptance of, reality on the part of the individual. Her early Puritansim and Calvinism (Taylor 1989:27) helped to inculcate a strong sense of duty in her, and, later, her detailed knowledge of, and influence by, German deterministic thought, injected a solid secularism into her ideal of the individual’s duty to the society. While some of the passion of a religious sense of duty is imparted to her ideals, the pragmatic agnosticism of her secular ideas informs the compromise she achieves between choice and Determinism. The tone of this letter to John Walter Cross in 1873 conveys George Eliot’s commitment to her beliefs:

Every community met to worship the highest Good ... the very nature of such assemblies being the recognition of a binding belief or spiritual law which is to lift us into willing obedience and save us from the slavery of unregulated passion or impulse.

(Haight 1955,V:448)
The spiritual law to which she refers is the law of unselfishness and benevolence towards others. With these qualities motivating behaviour, a person can reconcile Determinism with the freedom to choose because they are able to make the right choices, thus escaping from the tyranny of purely self-centred desire.

The constraints which were endured by most women in Victorian society were concentrated embodiments of the dilemma between a belief in Determinism and a belief in free choice. Most critics speak of how 'men' must learn to accept limitations on individuality in a Deterministic world, but the most poignant portrayals of restricted individuality in George Eliot's novels are those of the women. Their fates lie in a mitigated form of contentment, and in resigned acceptance of their lots. In spite of her energy and enthusiasm, Dorothea is always talked out of her plans and 'fads' by the men around her. Her ardent nature is gradually compressed into the mould of the narrow domestic sphere. Tomlinson (1976:115) draws an apposite comparison:

However spirited and independent by nature the heroines ...may be, their position in life forces them into a kind of idleness and subjection that even Lydgate, for instance, is not subjected to. Whatever its frustrations and restrictions, Lydgate's life has ...wider boundaries than the house and home that Rosamond [and] Dorothea [are] bound to.

Their ambitions are expected to be fulfilled in domesticity and self-sacrifice, as their personal needs are subsumed by the more important demands of the community, which requires them to curtail their desires to fit the domestic
sphere. George Eliot’s choice of an epigraph for the very first chapter (M:29) encapsulates the Victorian society’s attenuation of women’s abilities and ambitions:

Since I can do no good because a woman,
Reach constantly at something that is near it.

_The Maid’s Tragedy:_ BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER

Dorothea’s most lauded talents are those which help her to be the helper of others; the narrator never tires of praising her earnest desire to be of assistance to others, and thereby make the world a better place: “she had the ardent woman’s need to rule beneficently by making the joy of another soul” (M:396). Dorothea’s oft-repeated cry in one form or another is that “it always seemed to me that the use I should like to make of my life would be to help some one who did great works” (M:399). George Eliot’s own frustration with the dilemma of the intelligent and ambitious woman is only expressed directly in the very last pages of the novel:

Many who knew [Dorothea] thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be known only in a certain circle as a wife and mother. But no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done... (M:894)

Even here, the writer uses the qualifying statement “what else that was in her power”, acknowledging the helplessness of striving against the powerful ties of the community. The individual, and especially the woman, in George Eliot’s works is not perceived as a complete being without belonging to a community.
Williams (1974) describes how George Eliot turns the acceptance of limits into a positive feature of character. Such a reversal is vital to her themes, since it makes the individuals more pliant members of the community and more willing to shape themselves to the roles predetermined for them by their position in the society:

The acceptance of pain, the need for resignation, the possibility of failure and bitterness such as comes to Lydgate or to Gwendolen Harleth is always set side by side with the meaningfulness which can follow an understanding of the fact that freedom is achieved by accepting the factors and impulses which shape and limit our nature from within. (Williams 1974:182)

Counterpointed to this is the knowledge, as Adam (1965:142) identifies, that in these two novels there is a tangible sense of frustration and curtailment of potential, because it is acknowledged that social circumstances are in control, rather than the individual's desires. Even though Dorothea's giving and sacrificing nature is apotheosized, there is sadder undertone, too, in George Eliot's conclusion to the novel that is foreshadowed in the Prelude:

Here and there a cygnet is reared uneasily among the ducklings in the brown pond, and never finds the living stream... Here and there is born a Saint Theresa, foundress of nothing, whose loving heart-beats and sobs after an unattained goodness tremble off and are dispersed among hindrances, instead of centering in some long-recognisable deed. (M:26)

Cox (1963:29) states that the "conflict between duty and passion" is embodied in Dorothea, and it is during her first marriage that this conflict is highlighted. Significantly, her inner struggle results in her resolve to
suppress her own needs and desires for greatness so that she may 'serve' Mr Casaubon, "she who... shut her best soul in prison... that she might be petty enough to please him" (M:464). Dorothea's nobility of character is emphasised in her conscious submission to duty, even though it becomes repugnant to her. "Neither law nor the world's opinion compelled her to this - only her husband's nature and her own compassion, only the ideal and not the real yoke of marriage... yet she was fettered" (M:523). Marian Evans witnessed the prolonged unhappiness of her much-loved sister Chrissey, bound to a marriage in which there was neither joy nor relief (Uglow 1987; Taylor 1989). The undisguised admiration for Dorothea's character which suffuses Middlemarch is George Eliot's praise for one whose choices are noble because they maintain the traditional bonds and duties to the community before the self.

George Eliot's heroines are never portrayed in complete isolation as individuals, for they are dependent on the society for their sense of selfhood, and cannot exist separately:

But anyone watching keenly the stealthy convergence of human lots, sees a slow preparation of effects from one life on another, which tells like a calculated irony on the indifference or the frozen stare with which we look at our unintroduced neighbour. (M:122)

The movement of Middlemarch is "unravelling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven" (M:170). This interdependence is by no means undesirable, however, since, for George Eliot, it was the basis and the strength of society. Mason (1971:421) quotes
a memorandum written by George Eliot on Comte, as she looked forward to "a new dependence of individual on individual, across the eroded divisions of class from class". The themes of her fiction constantly portray the benefits of such a dependence when it is mutually rewarding and binding for the whole society. Pinion (1981:64) points out that one of the most influential Positivist mores, for George Eliot, was the belief in the ability to achieve social justice through developing a humanitarian society.

Cox (1963:22) asseverates that George Eliot believed that only "gradual development in individual moral awareness" can lead to an improved society. This belief is apparent in the moral growth and expansion of awareness in certain characters, qualities which are portrayed in a positive light as evidence of moral development. Dalal (1989:41) describes how Dorothea adjusts her life to the necessities of reality through her gradual attainment of maturity and self-understanding. The acceptance of different qualities of individual moral vision signifies the shift from an insistence on absolute moral standards to a more individualist, relative moral awareness.

For George Eliot, however, the emphasis is still directed toward how it can be of benefit to the community. Cox (1963:26) claims that "the true solution" to Dorothea's ambitious yearning is a life devoted to kind, but insignificant, deeds which help others, and that the best result of her suffering is the awareness it awakens in her for other people's feelings. It is only with moral awareness that the individual can make the choices which
make the society a better place. For Dorothea, these choices are always those which bring benefits to others, even at her own cost.

The idea of some active good within her reach, 'haunted her like a passion', and another's need having once come to her as a distinct image, preoccupied her desire with the yearning to give relief. (M:817)

She cries to Rosamond, "'How can we live and think that any one has trouble - piercing trouble - and we could help them, and never try?'" (M:853). Rosamond is unable to achieve any moral awareness, since she is too deeply sunk in her egotistical nature: "she had been little used to imagining other people's states of mind except as a material cut into shape by her own wishes" (M:834). Rosamond remains locked in her unfruitful egoism, isolated and imprisoned: "her little world was in ruins, and she felt herself tottering in the midst as a lonely bewildered consciousness" (M:837).

Such moral and emotional isolation, like Mr Bulstrode's, is George Eliot's most strict punishment for those who deliberately shun their duty to their fellows.

Early in the novel, Dorothea, too, is guilty of such egocentrism, "She was as blind to [Mr Casaubon's] inward troubles as he to hers" (M:232), but soon begins to awaken to what is external to herself, and what is within other people. Mr Casaubon, however, never frees himself from the prison of his ego, and causes great anguish as a result. Dorothea cries out, having striven to please him, to no avail, "'What have I done - what am I - that he should treat me so? He never knows what is in my mind - he never cares. What is the use of anything I do?'" (M:463). George Eliot writes of
the difficulty with which a person must realise that others have “an
equivalent centre of self, whence the lights and shadows must always fall
with a certain difference” (M:243). During the crisis between Rosamond
and herself, Dorothea has developed to where “she forced herself to think of
it as bound up with another woman’s life” (M:843), which entails that depth
of moral awareness of others for which George Eliot presses throughout her
works. Dorothea “said to her own irremediable grief, that it should make
her more helpful, instead of driving her back from effort” (M:846), and such
a selfless assertion was the highest moral achievement for George Eliot.
She implies that awareness of others “frees” the individual, as she describes
the liberating effects of Dorothea’s moral growth:

It was not in Dorothea’s nature... to sit in the narrow cell of her calamity, in the besotted misery of a
consciousness that only sees another’s lot as an accident of its own.
(M:845; emphasis added)

Literally, Dorothea’s vision and awareness open out to the world and to the
myriad of other human consciousnesses:

...she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance. She was a
part of that involuntary palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a
mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining. (M:846)

By subordinating what are seen as her relatively petty desires to the general
good, Dalal (1989:68) agrees that Dorothea’s consciousness “opens out to
make contact with other people”.

119
As the landscape of great estates was used by Jane Austen as a metaphor for the unchanging moral order of society, George Eliot also uses the tranquillity and beauty of the rural landscape as a tool in the shaping of her characters' moral awareness. After her night of anguish, it is the view of the peaceful morning countryside that helps to reawaken and soothe Dorothea:

She opened her curtains, and looked out towards the bit of road that lay in view, with fields beyond... On the road there was a man with a bundle on his back, and a woman carrying her baby; in the field she could see figures moving - perhaps the shepherd with his dog. Far off' in the bending sky was the pearly light; and she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men... (M:846)

The landscape, as a presence in itself, with its denizens quietly going about their rightful business, and its associations with her own place and duty in the 'large' world, helps to reinforce the "dominant spirit of justice" (M:846) in her nature. Earlier in the novel, she had recourse to the land as a way to escape from the vexations of her uncle's society and hurries into the park on a "beautiful breezy autumn day" (M:49) that she may be alone to think. For the same reason, she prefers to walk alone through the woods into Middlemarch to see Rosamond after the meeting with Mr Ladislaw (M:848). The rural landscape, for George Eliot, is a symbol of the interdependence of the community, both for people's physical and emotional well-being. The benevolent associations of the metaphor fortify its strength as a refuge, and its power to invigorate a spirit as weary as Dorothea's. In this light, it also rejuvenates Fred Vincy's character. His apprenticeship as
an estate manager under Caleb Garth, and later his management and purchase of Stone Court brings much-needed direction and worth to his life, and helps to unite him with Mary. The rural landscape in this novel is a complete metaphor for George Eliot’s ideal communion of individual and society: in the correct use and improvement of the land, her characters find fulfilment and serenity.

Cox (1963:17) points out that in George Eliot’s works “character becomes not an absolute but something that moves through time and is constantly changing”. Dorothea is a striking portrayal of the mobility of human nature, as her character grows and blossoms during the novel’s course of events and their effects on her. Her desire to do good and her ability to learn from suffering provide the impetus and the route to greater moral insight and development. Because she is capable of changing to adapt to new knowledge and new insights, her character grows and develops in the course of the novel. On hearing of the codicil to Mr Casaubon’s will:

She might have compared her experience at that moment to the vague alarmed consciousness that her life was taking on a new form, that she was undergoing a metamorphosis.  

(M:532)

Instead of hardening or growing embittered, Dorothea learns substantial lessons from her experiences, and because she applies resolutions unselfishly, she becomes a better person. She can confide to Will:

‘Sorrow comes in so many ways. Two years ago I had no notion of that - I mean of the unexpected way in which trouble comes, and ties our hands, and makes us silent when we long to speak.’  

(M:589)
One of the most admired results of Dorothea's moral development is the way it allows her to help others more. Mr Lydgate draws strength from her faith in him:

The presence of a noble nature, generous in its wishes, ardent in its charity, changes the lights for us: we begin to see things again in their larger, quieter masses, and to believe that we too can be seen and judged in the wholeness of our character.  

(M:819)

The growth in moral vision and insight is part of the general movement towards relative understanding, acknowledging the scope of human possibilities and the validity of individual perception of truth. However, part of this understanding requires that she ultimately must bow to the community's idea of truth, and indeed part of her moral growth lies in her accepting that she must compromise her ideals in favour of a Victorian woman's duty. George Eliot believed wholeheartedly in the undeniable bonds of duty which lay between individuals. After Dorothea begs the hitherto aloof Mr Lydgate to advise her how to help her ill husband, he becomes aware of this bond:

For years after Lydgate remembered the impression produced in him by this involuntary appeal - this cry from soul to soul, without other consciousness than their moving with kindred natures in the same embroiled medium, the same troublous fitfully-illuminated life.  

(M:324; emphases added)

Peace and prosperity in Middlemarch are dependent upon each individual's fulfilment of the duties of their roles; most of the unhappy situations in the novel are portrayed as the result of neglected duties, such as the failing marriages.
Cox (1963:8) discusses Raymond Williams’ assertion that the nineteenth-century novel dealt with “‘finding a place and making a settlement’”. *Middlemarch* concludes with a number of settlements, as all the characters find a place within the traditional and accepted structures of the community. Even though Dorothea’s ‘settlement’ is a compromise of her original aims, she appears to be content with her lot and thus the novel ends. The mixture of pragmatism and idealism in George Eliot’s novels is thrown into relief from this perspective, as the fate of the ambitious and idealistic character is always “a return to traditional family and social duties” (Cox 1963:33). It is one of probably only two possible conclusions, given the power of the community to punish and ostracise wayward members; the other fate would have to have been like Maggie Tulliver’s in *The Mill on the Floss*. In spite of her friends’ reaction when Dorothea marries Will, the strength of the community ties hold firm to enable equilibrium to be restored, “the way in which the family was made whole again was characteristic of all concerned” (*M*:894), and Dorothea’s son goes on to inherit the Tipton estate (*M*:895). The landscape in this case has also become a reward for those who fulfil their duties to society.

Both Miller (1968:121) and Cox (1963:31) stress the significance of Dorothea’s realisation that she “was a part of [the world’s] involuntary palpitating life” (*M*:846) and that she cannot remain separated from it. Dorothea’s married life with Will is fruitful and involved and, therefore, highly approved. “Dorothea could have liked nothing better, since wrongs
existed, than that her husband should be in the thick of a struggle against them, and that she should give him wifely help" \((M:894)\). Her final role in *Middlemarch* concurs with the ideal of the Victorian woman as helpmeet, moral guardian and domestic angel, forever assisting, but never eclipsing, her husband’s achievements. Dalal (1989:67) emphasises the fact that Dorothea accepts an attenuated life, in that

...by marrying Will Ladislaw, [she] regulates her conduct in accordance with the generally accepted pattern of social behaviour and succumbs to those demands of society which are always more powerful than individual urges.

Graver (1977:214) claims erroneously that Dorothea is *not* integrated into Middlemarch society in the novel’s conclusion, and that she is a subversive character. The fact is that her second marriage is highly conventional, in the romantic portrayal of their union and in her domestic role. George Eliot’s *Finale* signifies clearly that Dorothea is in no way distinctive or radical, but is absorbed by the community and drained of her intellectual potential by the myriad trivial requirements of domesticity, however benevolent they may be.

In spite of her apparent satisfaction, the poignancy of Dorothea’s fate is that “Her full nature... spent itself in channels which had no great name upon the earth,” and that she “lived faithfully a hidden life” \((M:896)\), having chosen to accept a settlement within the community and abandon her ambitions. A profound sense of sadness is subtly conveyed in the *Finale* by the way in which the point of view shifts from an intimate insight into her emotions to a distant perspective of Dorothea, so that the reader, having
been apprised of Dorothea’s most intimate thoughts up until this time, is now unaware of her true feelings. Her sense of selfhood ultimately is insignificant to the wider community which needs her compliance, not her originality. The drawing back to an omniscient narrative voice imparts distance, and increases the Darwinistic sense of inconsequence for the fate of the individual, as long as the community is vindicated. George Eliot was tempering idealism with pragmatism, portraying individualistic characters who accept unchangeable realities, and therefore, as Tomlinson (1976:103) believes, “Middlemarch demonstrates an acceptance, rather than a rejection, of modern society”. The problems she perceived arising from individuality, which could not be accommodated by the society, were solved by a return to rural community values and traditional morality, which comprised duty, interdependence and mutual social obligations. For George Eliot, in Middlemarch, the struggle between individual ambition and ideals of duty to society results in a clear vindication of the power and value of the society before the individual. Reconciliation equates with resignation, as talented individuals choose to accept a compromised existence and remain part of the community.
B: Portrayal of the individual who is isolated from society in

_**Daniel Deronda**_

The conclusion of _Middlemarch_ portrays a society in which the individuals have, one way or another, reconciled themselves to the common interest and have placed what they see as their duty to that interest before their personal desires and ambition. The portrayal of individuals is very different in _Daniel Deronda_. The characters in this novel tend to be isolated, and have either to struggle to find a place in the society, or eventually reject the mainstream Victorian society.

George Eliot wrote _Middlemarch_ in the early 1870s and _Daniel Deronda_ was written in 1876. Although relatively short, the time lapse between the writing of each novel is significant for it shows a change in her portrayal of individuals: the novels show how the characterisations reflect her attitude to the changes she perceived in the late Victorian society. The characters in _Daniel Deronda_ eventually are reconciled to a community, albeit to differing extents, and not without assistance from George Eliot's own optimism and faith in the power of human fellowship. Later novels by other writers show little or no possibility of reconciliation when society is so much at odds with an individual's aspirations and needs. Tomlinson (1976: 114) describes _Daniel Deronda_ as a step between nineteenth-century novelists and later writers such as Joseph Conrad, Henry James and D.H. Lawrence, and Thomas Hardy must also be added to this list.
Daniel Deronda depicts how the individual can become separated from traditional societal ties and bonds of duty, but this novel also shows how the society itself has reneged on its duty towards its members, and how it is harmful for the individual spirit. Gwendolen Harleth is portrayed throughout the novel as a wanderer, with no stable roots or ties in the traditional sense. George Eliot's belief in the beneficial aspects of such ties, for both the society and the individual, is clearly expressed in the novel as follows:

A human life, I think, should be well rooted in some spot of a native land... a spot where... early memories may be inwrought with affection, and kindly acquaintance with all neighbours... But this blessed persistence in which affection can take root had been wanting in Gwendolen's life.

(DD:16)

One of the main advantages of such bonds, for George Eliot, is that they are based in a love of the land. As seen in Middlemarch, the rural landscape, with its accompanying associations, has the power to soothe and pacify the disturbed individual spirit. George Eliot sees the force of its traditions and its metaphorical and actual solidity as the sources of its ability to succour the troubled soul:

A human life... should get the love of tender kinship for the face of the earth, for the labours men go forth to, for the sounds and accents that haunt it, for whatever will give that early home a familiar unmistakable difference amidst the future widening of knowledge...

(DD:16)

Offendene becomes the surrogate for such a home to which Gwendolen may return. As opposed to the "purgatorial" coal mines of Gadsmere, she
sees the country around Offendene as a blessed release from the jungle of
London society and her feelings of guilt:

She saw the grey shoulders of the downs, the cattle-specked fields, the shadowy plantations with rutted
lanes where the barked timber lay for a wayside seat, the neatly-clipped hedges... All that experience of a
quiet home which had once seemed a dullness to be fled from, now came back to her as a restful escape, a
station where she found the breath of morning and the un reproaching voice of birds... (DD:651-2)

The romanticised portrait of the rural scene is the foil to the materialistic,
pernicious social set in which she has been living. Its associations with the
old ties of pre-industrial Britain are what imbues the rural landscape with
such potency. When Gwendolen finally reaches Offendene, she recovers
herself “beyond her mother’s hopes” (DD:682), and feels as though “she has
risen out of a “pit of darkness” into the “sweet air and daylight” (DD:682).

The narrator feels great pity for Gwendolen’s rootlessness, and its effects on
her fate, especially when, implicitly, she is compared with Mirah Lapidoth.
The latter character, too, is a wanderer, but is reunited with the community
through Daniel, the Meyrick family, and her brother. Her embrace of
human fellowship and mutuality, her openness to the sympathy and
benevolence of others, is what ensures her place in society. Gwendolen is
emotionally isolated and, for much of the novel, deliberately screens herself
off from any involvement with other people. The novel depicts the process
by which she does become part of the wider community, and by which she
learns to open her heart and mind to the existence and emotions of other

128
she ultimately gains "insight into the true nature of things in the world" by allowing herself to become part of the community.

Smith (1984:210) asserts that George Eliot's "search for rootedness... is... profoundly a part of the very texture of her thought", and is reflected in her characters' journeys toward moral awareness which enables them to be reconciled with what she believes are their true places within a community, whose unity, like that of the Victorian society, has momentarily been destroyed. The narrator's early regret that Gwendolen had had no settled home in her childhood, to which she could attach strong affections and stable emotional bonds (DD:16), is vindicated later in the novel in Gwendolen's longing for the quietness and repose of Offendene as "a restful escape... after following a lure through a long Satanic masquerade" (DD:652). The 'roots' to which Smith (1984:21) refers above are, for George Eliot, invariably based in the medieval rural society, and a love for the land and its peaceful beauty forms no small part of those roots.

Gwendolen's reconciliation is not with the deleterious, competitive social set of the late Victorian years, which was made up of "evil spirits" in "human mummmery" (DD:652). She is reconciled with an ideal of a simple rural community, where peace and fulfilment are found in the duties and considerations of humans for their fellows.

However, where there is a faint dissatisfaction in the narrator's tone perceived in the conclusion to Middlemarch, the discontent is far more apparent in the unsettled conclusion of Daniel Deronda. In spite of George
Eliot’s optimism in the final scene, she displays less faith in the community’s benevolence and its sincerity in caring for its members. The picture of the shallow, materialistic Victorian society is set in opposition to the portrayal of a settled medieval-type rural community, built on ideals of mutual social duties and the economic interdependence of its members. The former’s foundation is based on material rather than moral grounds, and traditional values have been corrupted by materialism, godlessness, and social hypocrisy. George Eliot portrays this decay most markedly in Daniel Deronda in her depiction of the ruthless marriage market and the middle- and upper-class society’s denigration of women as objects to be married off to an appropriate ‘buyer’. Gwendolen is a pitiable symbol of the outcomes of this society. She is portrayed ironically by the narrator, “with all the fine equipage necessary to carry about her poor uneasy heart” (DD:504). Another symbol of the decaying and amoral society, as Adam (1965:136) also observes, is presented in the hypocrisy of its treatment of Grandcourt, compared with the ostracised Lydia Glasher:

No one talked of Mrs Glasher now... she was a lost vessel after whom nobody would send out an expedition of search; but Grandcourt was seen in harbour with his colours flying, registered as seaworthy as ever. (DD:287)

It is significant that Mr Gascoigne turns a deaf ear to rumours of Grandcourt’s relationship with Mrs Glasher (DD:77-78), thus leaving the innocent Gwendolen to discover the secret in a more disturbing and harmful way. The social machinations of this community work in a detrimental
fashion on Gwendolen, driving her away from, rather than towards, human connections, and are very different from the benevolence of the community of spirit in *Middlemarch*. This is the main difference between the communities depicted in these two novels. The former is a more traditional, almost medieval rural society, which draws its members together and binds them with ties of interdependence, fellowship and the ‘religion’ of humanity. The latter is modern, godless and materialistic, which tends to drive people into fruitless isolation and spiritual loneliness. Many scenes in *Daniel Deronda* occur in cities and casinos, potent symbols of the negative side of materialism and the worship of Mammon. Houghton (1957:77) describes the changed perception of the industrial society, where, because all men *(sic)* were now theoretically free individuals, they had lost the sense of being an integral part of a “Christian-feudal organism” where each had his place, rights and duties. The Victorian society now perceived itself as a collection of separate individuals motivated solely by self-interest. Such a society was abhorrent to a writer like George Eliot who believed, as she wrote to Alma Stuart in 1875, that “the best state is that in which every man feels a wrong done to another as if it were done to himself” (Haight 1955, VI:112).

Gwendolen’s empty, godless existence is only given meaning and depth when she begins to view the world and other people from a less selfish standpoint, and when she starts to make allowances for the validity and meaning of others’ feelings. It is significant, according to Halperin (1974:187), that Gwendolen’s “salvation” is engendered by Daniel, a
human, not divine, source of 'redemption' to humanity. It is clear that the
essence of George Eliot's humanism is that "the redemption of humanity
may be found in the feelings of individuals for one another" (Halperin
1974:187). This novel depicts an increasing reliance on human fellowship
for its own sake to replace the formerly religious motivation to do good for
selfish reasons. In a letter to Cara Bray in 1874, Marian Evans spoke
scornfully of religions which promoted good behaviour only as a path to
heaven, and described it as "hideous" that "those who sit in the scribes'
seats have got no farther than the appeal to selfishness which they call God"
(Haight 1955,VI:32). In quite a vehemently passionate letter to Mrs
Ponsonby in 1874, she asserts her belief in "the ideal of goodness entirely
human" (Haight 1955,VI:98). She continues in the letter:

...there is not a single man, or woman, ... who, in
considering his or her past history, is not aware that it
has been cruelly affected by the ignorant or selfish
action of some fellow-being in a more or less close
relation of life. And to my mind, there can be no
stronger motive, than this perception, to an energetic
effort that the lives nearest to us shall not suffer in a
like manner from us. (Haight 1955,VI:98)

Mews (1969:119) calls what happens to Gwendolen "punishment" because,
throughout her life, she had not considered anyone else in her actions, and
her decisions had been based solely on egoistic concerns. This is an
interesting observation because it highlights the ambivalence of George
Eliot's attitude. Gwendolen is severely punished because she has wilfully
ignored the importance of fellow feeling and each person's duty to try to do
the right thing by others as far as possible. There are many examples of her
selfishness, such as when she ignores her mother's plea for medicine in the night (DD:18), refuses to help by giving her younger sister's lessons (DD:22) and plays the "queen in exile" (DD:32-33) at great physical and emotional cost to her family. Gwendolen's character is established in the title of Book I, "The Spoilt Child", and she is portrayed as a person "whose unquestioning habit it had been to take the best that came to her for less than her own claim" (DD:283). However, George Eliot also makes it clear that Gwendolen's limited moral awareness and egoism are the causes of this behaviour, flaws which are the inevitable result of her environment and learning, and which, therefore, she could not help but display. Her life is shown to have taught her to expect such precedence:

The one point she had been all her life learning to care for was, that it had happened to her... imagine one who had been made to believe in his own divinity finding all homage withdrawn... (DD:245; emphasis added)

This observation illustrates the extent of the ambiguity of the portrayal of the struggle between determinism and the power of the individual to choose their own fate. Gwendolen is locked in the pattern of her egoism, and must choose to learn to love others. Eventually, as Dalal (1989:72) asseverates, Gwendolen does consciously "move towards the realisation of duty to others".

Daniel is the portrayal of an individual who lives this ideal. He had "a naturally strong bent towards the formation of intimate friendships" (DD:147) as a youth, and does not resent those who have more than him: "hatred of innocent human obstacles was a form of moral stupidity not in
Deronda's grain" (DD:148). His knowledge of his disadvantage in birth, rather than making him bitter and unloving, "takes the form of fellowship and makes the imagination tender" (DD:149). One of his most admirable traits to George Eliot is that he has a natural instinct to "understand other points of view" (DD:155), since, for her, such understanding is essential to be able to expand one's moral vision and awareness of other people. From a young age he was accustomed to "thinking himself imaginatively into the experience of others" (DD:436) and he constantly is aware of the effects of his conduct on other people (DD:191), as displayed in his sensitivity towards Mirah. Dalal (1989:71) believes he has this sense of "a larger life" because his identity is based on his relationships to others.

Daniel is a model who exhibits all the qualities of mutual care and fellowship which are so important to George Eliot's humanism in overcoming the limits of a Deterministic world. He has fervent sympathy, which is not extravagant, but is "continually seen in acts of considerateness" (DD:151). In friendship he "spreads strong sheltering wings that delight in spreading" (DD:154), and his desire to help others is so passionate that, at times, he is so moved as to be "ready to choose [to] know pleasure no more, and [to] live only for the stricken and afflicted" (DD:595). In Gwendolen's situation, it is only after emotional hardship, suffering and the awakening of her moral awareness that she can begin to draw from the hitherto hidden well of her feelings of human fellowship. Because she has not learned or been born with this awareness, she must struggle to achieve
it. She has to experience herself what it is like to be chilled by "neutral loftiness" (*DD*:469), to be treated as if she is of no account, and to realise that she is as dependent on others for her emotional well-being as they are on her. George Eliot's portrayal of the individual, in both Dorothea's and Gwendolen's cases, requires what Dalal (1989:47) describes as an "enlightening crisis... [which] is a prelude to self knowledge". They must know themselves if they are to know and be aware of others in their communities. After her marriage, when she visits her mother, the change in Gwendolen convinces Mrs Davilow that "her child loved her - needed her as much as ever" (*DD*:472). In Genoa, after the accident, Mrs Davilow feels that Gwendolen

was brought back to her... with a conscious cherishing of her mother's nearness, such as we give to a possession that we have been on the brink of losing.

(*DD*:646)

George Eliot portrays an innate, albeit dormant, quality in Gwendolen which ensures that she is at least capable of trying to develop her moral vision and acknowledge the importance of all people in a community. The importance, to George Eliot, of the individual and the individual's ability to improve the self, is evident in a letter to Joseph Payne in 1876 where Marian describes her intention, and her faith in the validity of human experience:

But my writing is... an endeavour to see... what stores of motive, actual or hinted as possible, give promise of a better after which we may strive... I become... [reluctant] to adopt any formula which does not get itself clothed for me in some human figure and individual experience. (Haight 1955,VI:216)
It is salient, nonetheless, to witness in *Daniel Deronda* a change, or, more precisely, a maturing in George Eliot’s attitude towards the ideal of a religion of humanity and fellowship. This shift is apparent in the increasing recognition of the validity of individual perceptions. One marked instance of this is where, from observing Gwendolen’s idiosyncrasies, the narration shifts its perspective from the individual to the general, as often occurs in the novel, relating the case of the individual to the universal ‘realities’:

...[Gwendolen] had a confused state of emotion about Deronda - was it wounded pride and resentment, or a certain awe and exceptional trust?... There is a great deal of unmapped country within us which would have to be taken into account in an explanation of our gusts and storms. (DD:235)

The change in George Eliot’s attitude moves from a strong belief in the possibility that all but the most dissipated or corrupt possess an innate benevolence and the desire and ability to do good for others, to a recognition of the relativity of morality in a deterministic world where one cannot fully be held responsible for what often is beyond one’s control.

Gwendolen is characterised by a sense of isolation and alienation from a materialistic society. In *Daniel Deronda*, George Eliot seems less hopeful for the efficacy of individual choice over a deterministic universe, and the novel rests less easily in its reconciliation between the individual’s freedom to choose, and the inevitability of unfavourable events and circumstances. As a result, the tone of many of her letters around this time suggests that she is more determined to prove that it is vital that people
should therefore make the right choices when they do have a choice. Emily Davies, in a letter of 1876, describes a conversation she had with Marian:

She thought people generally knew that there was a better and a worse thing to do... She was anxious that my friend [a teacher] should impress upon [pupils] the wide, far-reaching consequences of every action, as a corrective of the common feeling that it does not signify what we do - and on the other hand, how society reacts upon us, and how much we owe to it. People are always asking, Why should I do what is good for society?... The answer is that if it were not for the accumulated result of social effort, we should be in the state of wild beasts. (Haight 1955, VI:285)

George Eliot was trying to counter the fact that there seemed to be more evidence that the individual was a helpless pawn or a victim, as evoked in Gwendolen’s intense fear of being alone, and in the inexorable march of circumstances which determine her fate and negate her freedom to choose:

Solitude in any wide scene impressed her with an undefined feeling of immeasurable existence aloof from her, in the midst of which she was helplessly incapable of asserting herself. (DD:52)

George Eliot’s ironic title to Book III, “Maidens Choosing”, highlights the fact that Gwendolen’s ‘choice’ is not a free, unencumbered choice at all, but one to which she is driven by unhappy circumstances.

In Gwendolen’s character, George Eliot symbolises what she perceived as the increasing “spiritual dread” (DD:52) of the late nineteenth century. Gwendolen’s feelings represent the mood of the latter part of the Victorian era, a prevailing spiritual fear and loneliness in the midst of great material wealth for the middle and upper classes (Houghton 1957:77-89). Her entreaty to Daniel encapsulates the fear and emptiness beneath the
beautiful façade of a "fairy creature in silk and gems, with her hidden wound and her self-dread" (DD:482):

"What should you do if you were like me - feeling that you were wrong and miserable, and dreading everything to come?" (DD:382)

Gwendolen is an individual portrayal of the implications for society of the futility of having material wealth when the human spirit is barren and hungry. George Eliot makes it clear that religion in the traditional sense provided no solace or fulfilment for such a society, since Gwendolen's "fountain of awe... had not found its way into connection with the religion taught her" (DD:52). Instead, she finds repose in her mother's arms and in the comfort of Daniel's companionship. In moments of crisis in her own life, such as after the death of Thornie Lewes in 1869, Marian turned to George Lewes and her close friends for solace, rather than to religion. She wrote, caustically, to Sara Hennell at this time:

... it seems to me that the conception of religion as chiefly valuable for the personal consolations that may be extracted from it, is among the most active sources of falsity. (Haight 1955, V:68)

Where wealth and religion fail to provide the necessary spiritual vigour and human fellowship, the breach is filled by the faith such as Daniel has in a traditional ideal of communal humanity. Gwendolen is saved from desolation by his commitment to the power and validity of the bonds of mutuality and interdependence between people. He tells her "I believe you could never lead an injurious life... without feeling remorse" (DD:382), but his words refer to his belief in all people. When he exhorts her to "Try to
care about something in this vast world besides the gratification of small selfish desires” (DD:383), it is the expression of his entire philosophy.

However, although this is the binding theme and conclusion of *Middlemarch*, the open-endedness of *Daniel Deronda*’s conclusion is more ambivalent about the ultimate efficacy of this attitude. George Eliot leaves Gwendolen’s fate unseen, and Daniel sets off on a quest, the outcome of which is unknown. The sense of fitness and neatness that accompanies the conclusion of *Middlemarch* is absent from *Daniel Deronda*. The author retains her faith in the need for people to recognise and act upon their duties to others in the society, but in *Daniel Deronda* she seems less convinced of the universality of a ‘religion of humanity’ as a solution to the various ills of the increasingly industrialised society.

For George Eliot, the most important aspect of the portrayal of the individual is that of the development of moral growth and wider vision after a period of great suffering. Knowing oneself is part of gaining wider vision and keener moral awareness, and the solution to Gwendolen’s problems depends on how well she can achieve insight into herself and her motives. As she sets foot on the path toward her fate, she displays the potential to achieve such insight, but must learn harder lessons before being fully cognisant of a wider morality and breadth of vision:

> It was new to her that a question of right or wrong in her conduct should rouse her terror... But here had come a moment when something like a new consciousness was awaked. (DD:262)
To take her place as a responsible member of the wider human community, she must learn to shed the immature and childish consciousness of herself as the centre of the world, in favour of a more sophisticated and generous moral awareness of those existing outside the limited, and potentially isolating, preoccupation with the self. Gwendolen develops a much keener awareness of the feelings of others, which manifests itself in her new concern and respect for their feelings. This is evident in her attitude towards people like her mother, her sisters and the Gascoignes, towards whom she had previously felt only exasperation and disregard. When her instinctive impulse is to run from Mr Grandcourt to her family, she restrains herself, to her own detriment, rather than "carry distress among them" (DD:515). Her family helps her to find "mental enlargement" (DD:469), and, as she learns the value of making others happy through her own considerateness, "The seven family kisses were not so tiresome as they used to be" (DD:469). She struggles with and overcomes the pernicious demands of ego and selfishness in favour of fellowship and benevolence towards others:

She was experiencing some of that peaceful melancholy which comes from the renunciation of demands for self, and from taking the ordinary good of existence... as a gift above expectation. (DD:682)

Her aim in life now is to find out "how she could be kindest to everybody, and make amends for her selfishness and try to be rid of it" (DD:683). Gwendolen's moral growth and maturity help her to make the 'right moral' decisions. Although the themes of Daniel Deronda turn on the difficulty of making such decisions in the face of implacable fate, George Eliot depicts,
through Gwendolen, the importance of striving even more diligently to achieve a more encompassing moral awareness. Barrett (1989:158) observes that, for George Eliot, the only path to change for Gwendolen is "personal evolution", not coercion. The portrayal of character in *Daniel Deronda* hinges primarily on the will and the responsibility of the individual to change oneself for the better, because these are the only avenues by which, according to George Eliot, the individual may overcome the unfavourable influences of a Deterministic universe.

Houghton (1957:66) uses the imagery of earthquakes to describe the changes in the Victorian state of mind in the nineteenth century, rocked by scientific discoveries, where previously solid ground gave way to the new scientism, and religious debate and doubt. He describes (1957:67) how the Victorians were exposed to a series of "shattering developments", and in this regard Gwendolen is symbolic of the Victorian state of mind. From an egoistic perception of herself as foremost in the world, she is made tangibly aware of the reality of the wide world, separate from and disregarding of her own existence. Like other Victorians, she loses her sense that she is of supreme importance in the universe:

...she was for the first time feeling the pressure of a vast mysterious movement, for the first time being dislodged from her supremacy in her own world...

*(DD:689)*

In her final letter to Daniel she starts to exhibit true selflessness and moral vision. While she had been so strongly dependent upon him, she could not hope to achieve full selfhood in her own right. Breaking her tie of
dependence on his personality marks the most important turning point for any of the individuals portrayed. For George Eliot, in *Middlemarch*, the ties between individuals in a community were more adamant and demanding. In *Daniel Deronda*, the sustaining strength for individuals is found within the self, rather than in the community, a significant shift in emphasis. The conclusion of *Daniel Deronda* is marked not by a synthesis and regrouping of the community, but by the separation and dispersal of individuals in search of their own destinies, which is paralleled in the experience of the bourgeois class in Victorian society. The links between Gwendolen and Daniel are maintained spiritually, rather than by the physical proximity and commonality of interests which foster the community's links in *Middlemarch*. Gwendolen's sole tie to Daniel is that "*it shall be better with me because I have known you*" (DD:695), a tenuous yet significant bond.

There is a distinction between the novels which manifests itself, in *Daniel Deronda*, in the apparent weakening of George Eliot's belief in the beneficent nature of society. Gwendolen is left alone in the conclusion, facing an unknown fate, where the progress of Dorothea's life was neatly encapsulated in the *Finale* of *Middlemarch*. Gwendolen remains childless, where, in *Middlemarch*, the main catalyst by which Dorothea is reunited with the community is through the birth of her son. The conclusion of *Daniel Deronda* is more ambivalent, and less self-satisfied, than that of *Middlemarch*, and contains many ambiguities in character portrayals.
throughout the novel. The main difference is that *Daniel Deronda* constitutes evidence of more tolerance for the validity of the judgement of the individual's own conscience, and more acceptance of the relative nature of morality. Whereas George Eliot still maintains faith in the 'religion of humanity', and in the duties of individuals towards others in the community, this faith is ambivalent because Gwendolen and Daniel, throughout the novel, are portrayed as wanderers, with no established roots in the society nor connections to any of the traditional bonds. The former is left at the close of the novel in a suspended state of isolation, and does not make a complete return to the traditional community. Marian Evans, because of her own beliefs and way of life, was also cut off from her family and original ties, and spent much of her life travelling and changing abodes. She often expressed the desire to cease wandering and settle permanently, as in a letter to Oscar Browning in 1870:

> I suppose the time will come when you will have had enough of wandering to and fro upon the earth, as we are beginning to feel that we have.

*(Haight 1955, V:93)*

Ultimately, for the author, it is circumstances which determine the progress of life, although individuals, like Dorothea, Daniel, and, later, Gwendolen, may strive to make the right moral choices. Part of the complexity of the themes of *Daniel Deronda* is that the author retains a spiritual reliance on the ideals of traditional community values, but even *they* gradually are seen as having no instrumentality in what is becoming a corrupt and alienated society. The essence of George Eliot's equivocal attitudes towards the
struggle between the ideal of individual freedom of choice, and the power of deterministic circumstance to negate choice, is encapsulated in one of the brief discourses between Gwendolen and Daniel:

‘But you do admit that we can’t help things’, said Gwendolen... ‘I mean that things are so in spite of us; we can’t always help it...’ (DD:285)

The reply with which George Eliot provides Daniel is a result of her desire that the individual should continue to struggle to overcome the negative influence of a Deterministic world:

‘Clearly. Because of that, we should help it where we can.’ (DD:285)
CHAPTER 5

THE LATE VICTORIAN YEARS

The portrayal of the individual at odds with the society

Section I:

Victorian society in the latter years of the nineteenth century.

Most historians agree that the last three decades of the nineteenth century bore witness to a decline in the prosperity and complacency of the mid Victorian years. Harrison (1991:16) describes the economic “stagnation” of this period and Robbins (1983:50) discusses the “anxiety” felt over England’s ability to maintain its economic and international position. Pugh (1994) concurs with this view. Economically, the nation’s development slowed because it carried the “burden of established and tried techniques, [and] entrenched attitudes”, according to Harrison (1991:17). Seaman (1973:263) highlights the social and psychological change which accompanied the economic decline, how the Victorian “temper and success” began to falter and fail, and how anxiety replaced complacency. The society’s mood spiralled downward in a regressive cycle of conservatism and pessimism, as politicians, industrialists and intellectuals witnessed the social effects of their society’s reluctance to change. Pugh (1994:16) characterises the attitude of the time as “cautious and slow-moving”. The last two
decades of the nineteenth century became years of transition to a new social condition (Seaman 1973:272-79), characterised by tardiness of development and reform.

Reforms to correct injustices and exploitation were slow to be legislated and were fought all the way by industrialists and politicians with an interest in maintaining the status quo. Seaman (1973:170-79) and Drabble (1978:77-80; 89) both describe the slow progress of social, industrial and political reform, the former observing that England was “dragging” itself towards democracy (Seaman 1973:281). Pugh (1994:10-11) emphasises the “peculiarly British... anti-state ideology” and how the impulse to impede state intervention in people’s lives and businesses was largely successful. The late-Victorian mood exacerbated people’s feelings of apprehension and fear of change.

Attitudes towards class divisions were just as entrenched and just as difficult to overcome. The Victorian middle and upper classes were extremely protective of their social position. Royle (1987:354) highlights the way the education system perpetuated class divisions, and how the aim simply was to provide a rudimentary education for the working classes (Royle 1987:356). The religious aspect of class division was equally marked. Chapman (1968:272) points out how the established church was identified with the ruling classes, and was associated with “reaction and social inertia” (Chapman1968:272), for the most part treating the working classes with either condescension or disgust. Royle (1987:325-8), too,
asserts that the workers had no confidence in the church of the governing classes, and could not relate to it at all. Houghton (1957:46) states wryly that

The Victorian hymn to liberty, political and economic, was distinctly addressed to middle-class liberty.

Harrison (1991:20) quotes the social historian G.M. Young who observed that “in a mobile and progressive society, most regard was had to the element which represented immobility, tradition and the past”, the aristocracy, and Wood (1982:282) asseverates that even late in the century, the landed gentry were still in a commanding position in society. It seemed that, as the processes of social change became more insistent and more irreversible, the conservative forces became galvanised to resist such change.

A marked ambiguity was evident in the sensibility of the late Victorian society. Even where reforms were set in train, and people were more conscious of the need for a mutually responsible society, the society was still based on widespread injustices, exploitation and hypocrisy. Nowhere were these more apparent than in the virtual economic enslavement of the working classes, and the repression of women in a male-dominated society, where “the whole weight of scientific orthodoxy was brought in to support traditional views of male superiority” (Harrison 1991:158). The realities of sex and class divisions, and extremes of urban and rural wealth and poverty still existed. Harrison (1991:13) notes the publication in 1881 in London of “Progress and Poverty”, and how this work described the widespread
existence of hardship and poverty in the midst of great material prosperity and industrial progress, conditions also described by Pugh (1994:43). Harrison (1991:13) states that this publication “encapsulates both the late Victorian achievement and its limitations”. The last quarter of the century witnessed renewed interest in, and attempts to prevent and alleviate, poverty in England, as “the assumptions and certainties of mid-Victorian individualist, laissez-faire society were challenged and new possibilities of collectivist and state action were aired” (Harrison 1991:191). Separate studies by Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree around this time focused on the possible causes and exacerbation of poverty, and helped to raise awareness and instigate social change, albeit slowly.

However, even though the society was beginning to attempt to address some of the more blatant examples of institutionalised injustice in such areas as public housing and health, the workforce, and in the treatment of crime, the entrenched attitudes of the ideology were much more difficult to change. Political reform and social justice for women and the working classes were still many years away. Although his novels are often set in an earlier period than that in which he was writing, Thomas Hardy still emphasised his society’s contemporary attitudes and assumptions and was able to highlight their deleterious effects on the individual. In all his novels, the established moral and social code with its incumbent injustices and hypocrisies inevitably held sway over the individual’s desires. Thomas Hardy’s novels depicted how the social body could and did usurp the rights of personal morality,
imposing instead a pernicious and entirely subjective moral code which, rather than alleviating unjust social and economic conditions, exacerbated them.

One of the most marked social and economic changes of the late Victorian period was the economic and social decline of the rural sector. Seaman (1973:265-70) describes how the agricultural economy contracted in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and caused social deterioration in England’s rural areas. Wood (1982:284) discusses the increased urbanisation of England at this time, and Robbins (1983:57) describes the shrinking populations and standards of living in rural areas. He also highlights how the literary imagination of the time often associated the urban way of living with “degeneracy” (Robbins 1983:57) and decay. Certainly, in Thomas Hardy’s novels, the causes of human misery and the destruction of traditions are often traced literally or figuratively to the effects of urban encroachment and ‘modern’ attitudes and technology on traditional ways of thinking and living.

Robbins (1983:61) observes that the English rural society which previously had existed in an enclosed self-sufficient cycle was becoming increasingly rare, due to “the inexorable advance of urban attitudes and values”. Whilst Thomas Hardy himself was not antagonistic towards changes which brought such advantages as improved sanitation and better lighting (Millgate 1982:261), he regretted the changes which occurred in people’s ways of thinking and seeing the world, and the loss of traditions and “irrecoverable values” (Millgate 1982:253). To his mind these formed the core of the rural
character and ethos. Along with the displacement of power away from the landed gentry and aristocracy towards the middle classes, these changes helped to detract the significance and status from the land which it previously had enjoyed.

Rapid continual change remained a permanent part of life, and was accompanied by spiritual doubt and loss of faith in religious certainties. Chapman (1968:272) points to the "cumulative effect" of science, agnosticism and religious debate in affecting the late-Victorian mood, as well as the background of class conflict, economic depression and the horrors of poverty in a society which "seemed to be increasingly degenerate and hopeless" (Chapman 1968:300). He locates the religious doubt in the wider "iconoclastic assault on the whole basis of society, a questioning of traditions" (Chapman 1968:315). Harrison (1991:120) also emphasises the "mood of doubt" of the late nineteenth century, and the despair that was felt at the loss of the "old certainties" (Harrison 1991:124). Even though Thomas Hardy became associated with agnosticism, atheism and sceptical thought of late nineteenth century, Millgate (1982:38) also points out how this acceptance coexisted with an "emotional susceptibility" to the social influence of the church. Millgate (1982:247) also highlights Hardy's "strong sense of the social... value of such traditions", which is not dissimilar to George Eliot's great respect for the positive social values and feelings of camaraderie which can emanate from traditional religion. Robbins (1983:77) describes the ambivalence of many people's attitudes towards religion and
agnosticism, and describes them as having “withdrawn wistfully from Christianity” (Robbins 1983:77). For many, the question remained as to how it was possible to lead a ‘good’ life without religion (Harrison 1991:122). Thomas Hardy’s answer to this question lay in the power of the individual to be true to the self, and to show “loving-kindness” to one’s fellows (Gatrell 1993:4).

Part of the disturbance caused by scientific advances at this time was the impact of new theories of evolution. Drabble (1978:132-34) describes the disturbing and almost overwhelming effects of Darwin’s theories on Victorian sensibilities, and how it instigated feelings of doubt, despair and hopeless resignation. Chapman (1968:308) comments that it removed from humans the perception that they were at the centre of the universe. The effects of these ideas were so devastating, because, as Harrison (1991:101) points out, a religious way of thinking was central to the Victorian awareness, providing “a range of certainties and satisfactions” (Harrison 1991:101). Once these were questioned and doubted, the whole edifice upon which the certainties and complacency were built came tumbling down.

Although many of society’s social, political and religious absolutes were becoming increasingly relative, the ruling society still clung to its rigid social structure and ‘moral’ imperatives. As the momentum of social and attitudinal change became stronger, the apparently omniscient conservative social and class system reacted. The punishment for those who transgressed the unwritten rules was social ostracism. The punitive nature of the society’s
reaction was one of the most lasting aspects of Christian doctrine: the belief in a system of "rewards and punishments" (Harrison 1991:122). Even though sceptics like Sir James Fitzjames Stephen, brother of Leslie Stephen, could write in 1873 "As to Christian morals, I cannot regard them as either final or complete" (quoted in Harrison 1991:123), for most people the social aspects of reward and punishment retained their religious fervour and necessity, if not their religious content. 'Social' punishment, through ostracism, and loss of name and reputation, remained a potent threat to the middle classes in their hard-won social and financial positions. F.L.M. Thompson (1988:307) discusses the different forms of authority in the Victorian society, and distinctly acknowledges the power of "custom" and "conventions of acceptable behaviour" to control individual attitudes and actions. He (Thompson 1988:360) uses the word "enforce" to describe how the social group maintained "notions of what was acceptable and what was not acceptable conduct". The choice of verb highlights the potency of society's ability to demand conformity to its rules.

The struggle to maintain one's respectability, which mostly depended upon maintaining impossibly high moral standards, led to endemic hypocrisy in the middle and upper class Victorian society. Houghton (1957) engages in a detailed and perspicacious analysis of Victorian hypocrisy, and its source in the middle classes' fear of losing power and status in the eyes of society. He states (1957:395) that the relative newness of the middle class society made people unsure of themselves. In this environment, "conventions" and
'moral' took on an enormous degree of importance, and people tried at all costs to avoid being seen as 'different' or as having low moral standards. According to Houghton (1957:396), the first consideration in any action by those who subscribed to the system was conformity. He explains the psychological workings of Victorian hypocrisy in this way:

One, they concealed or suppressed their true convictions and their natural tastes... Second, they pretended to be better than they were... Finally, they refused to look at life candidly... Conformity, moral pretension and evasion - those are the hallmarks of Victorian hypocrisy. (Houghton 1957:394-5)

The unspoken and unwritten nature of these rules did not detract from their potency. The society, having lost its traditional social binding forces of religion and class status, turned to the middle class solidarity of its moral code for sustenance. For this code to maintain its hegemony, however, recalcitrant members of society had to be punished, and, significantly, had to be seen to be punished. The effect of this on people's behaviour is outlined by Houghton:

The proper thing to do is not only what the individual wants to do in order to belong to good society, or what he (sic) does do out of ingrained habit; it is also what he must do if he is to avoid social stigma. (1957:396)

For many people, the fear of losing respectability and a place in society was great enough for the threat of social ostracism to be a very powerful punitive force. Harrison (1991:52) also observes that the struggle always was for "social acceptance and approval" (1991:65), and that the fear always was of "social disapproval" (1991:66). In the following observation, Seaman
(1973:14) succinctly encapsulates the core of hypocrisy in the Victorian moral and social code:

In time, it came to be the [moral] code above all that mattered... If it were departed from, at all costs scandal must be avoided; for, if scandal there were, the guilty ones must be punished. And since that punishment was social ostracism, avoidance of scandal, rather than abandonment of the conduct that gave rise to it, was of primary concern.

Thomas Hardy questions the validity of this code and portrays in his novels the effects of the punishment on individuals who, unwittingly or otherwise, depart from the tenets of the code. He depicts the struggle of individuals who do not, or cannot, subscribe to the hypocrisy, who do not suppress their impulses and tastes, who do not pretend to be better than they are, and who, finally, cannot help but look on life candidly.
Section II:

**Thomas Hardy: portraying individuals who transgress society's rules**

It has been demonstrated that Jane Austen portrayed individuals as organic parts of a society in which tradition, custom and duty were paramount, for the benefit of both the individuals and the community. The analysis of George Eliot's works has centred on her portrayal of a society which declined away from traditional community values, and on the detrimental effect on individuals if they, too, turned away from the nurturing community. Her novels portray how, by exercising the 'right' moral choices, individuals can overcome the harmful influence of what she perceived had become a corrupt and materialistic society. Both these writers focus on a return to a form of traditional community which ultimately is more important than the individual's own desires.

Thomas Hardy's portrayal of individuals shifts away from the perception of society as a stable and nurturing community. His characters are subject to the influence of an indifferent and often hostile universe, and to the hypocrisy and shallow conformism of the late Victorian society. Characters like Michael Henchard and Tess Durbeyfield are portrayals of individuals whose natures are at odds with the pernicious demands of a society built on rigid convention and hypocritical morality. The reason that their natures are at odds with society is because they heeded their own emotions, impulses and passions and, rightly or wrongly, behaved accordingly, rather than following...
an external code of what was moral or immoral in society’s eyes. It will be demonstrated how, because these two characters are ‘natural’, in that they are guided by their desires and impulses rather than by the dictates of society, they cannot ‘pretend’ to be better than they are in the way society required. They cannot help but look on life candidly since they must literally struggle to survive. Their submission to their desires, rather than to society’s demands, was an abdication of self-control that was anathema to the restrained conformity of the late Victorian middle class. In this light, their punishment is inevitable.

As well as showing how the society could not accept the natural desires and emotions of the individual, reasons for which were discussed in the previous section, Thomas Hardy’s novels depicted how society also appropriated the rights of personal morality and imposed a pernicious moral code which, most often, was alien to the inner emotions and life of the individuals. He questioned the code, and portrayed the tragic effects of its punishment for those who could not sufficiently curb their natural emotions and impulses to suit its laws. As the contradictions of a society whose prosperity had been built on the near-slavery of hundreds of thousands became more widely debated and deplored, the conservative middle classes worked harder to maintain their hegemony.

It has been observed that as the ‘absolutes’ of past decades became more relative, and as change pressed more deeply on people’s lives, the conservative forces of the ruling society clung more tightly to their social and
moral system. The complex network of social rewards and sanctions, as discussed by Houghton (1957) and F.M.L. Thompson (1988), helped to keep people obedient to the social code and fearful of its censure. Houghton (1957:413) describes how all natural impulses were shunned and repressed because it was perceived by the society as the only way to overcome the 'immorality' of such tendencies. Thomas Hardy portrayed characters who do not suppress their emotions, whether they be anger, desire, sorrow or any passionate impulse, and presents them as transgressors of the uncompromising rules of the Victorian bourgeoisie. Uncompromising Darwinistic influences are also apparent in these novels. Seaman's (1973:186) understatement that the system was "kinder to the strong than to the weak" is plainly evident in Thomas Hardy's novels. Michael and Tess are seen as 'weak' because they are shut out from male middle class sources of power and cultural hegemony. It will be seen how Michael's submission to his emotions is what was seen as a 'womanly' quality, and as such drove him further from middle class power.

Collins (1990:3) identifies the eclecticism of the philosophical themes of Hardy's works, in keeping with the multifarious nature of contemporary thought, and Widdowson (in Pettit 1994:85) states that Hardy's works are "riddled with contradictory discourses". Millgate (1982:246) points to the evidence of many writers' influences on the ideas of Thomas Hardy, thinkers such as Mill, Spencer, Carlyle, and, especially, the strength of Matthew Arnold's influence. The following extract from Arnold's poem To
Marguerite, written in 1852, encapsulates much of the feeling which informs The Mayor of Casterbridge and Tess of the d'Urbervilles. A strong, inherent sense of isolation prevents Michael and Tess from any substantial sense of belonging or community:

Yes! In the sea of life enshrouded,
With echoing straits between us thrown,
Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
We mortal millions live alone.
The islands feel the encasing flow,
And then their endless bounds they know.

The final couplet describes their awareness of the external society, and their own need for love and a sense of belonging, but depicts how finally they are excluded, physically and emotionally, by a society to whom their naturalness of character is an offence that must be punished. As Houghton (1957:418) emphasises, it was a widespread practice in all contemporary art forms to highlight the ideal and ignore unpleasant realities. Individuals like Tess and Michael have basic, elemental natures without the social gloss of artificiality, but such non-conformity was despised by the late Victorian society. Part of the tragedy that Hardy portrays is that, as Collins (1990:102) realises, they know they are torn between, on the one hand, society and traditional laws, and, on the other, their instincts and the impulses which are a natural part of their characters.

Tess and Michael are often portrayed in elemental settings, out in the open air and countryside away from domestic or urban scenes. Tess is seen dancing on the green, walking through Blackmore Vale, milking in the
meadows, walking across miles of open country, harvesting in the fields, and eventually fleeing across Salisbury Plain. Michael, too, is seen striding across open roads and fields, overseeing his outdoor business, meeting people at Maumbury Rings, waiting out in the rain at his failed fair-day, and finally marching out of Casterbridge on foot to work in the fields again. As opposed to the way in which, as it has been discussed, Jane Austen and George Eliot used the metaphor of the landscape to regulate the behaviour of their characters, in Thomas Hardy’s novels the landscape has become a signifier of the emotional and psychological condition of the characters, subject to their passions and perceptions.

Of the novels studied in this thesis, the deaths of the main protagonists only occur in those by Thomas Hardy. The deaths in novels by Eliot and Austen are not those of the principal characters. The pessimism of the time and the despair of fulfilling human aspirations (Chapman 1968:307, 312) are reflected in Hardy’s conclusions where only death can provide a release for characters whose natures are at such odds with a punitive and unforgiving social/moral code. Williams (1976:84) quotes from Mill’s *On Liberty*, a work which Hardy knew well and which greatly influenced him:

‘Society... practices a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression... since it leaves fewer means of escape... enslaving the soul itself... Society... imposes, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them... Everyone lives under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship.’
These are the qualities of the Victorian society against which Hardy was pleading for increased tolerance and understanding of the natural qualities of the individual.

Rockwell (1974:90) discusses the novel form as primarily bourgeois, and, consequently, about getting ahead in society. Thomas Hardy, however, as Chapman (1968:329) asserts, often used the novel form to write about rural society being overwhelmed by industrial capitalism, and about the problems and meagre outlook of agricultural workers and their families. Whilst most of the other characters previously discussed have had their physical needs provided for, Hardy's characters more often are concerned with fundamental survival needs, as well as emotional conflicts. In regard to this it is interesting to note that the travelling that is done in Jane Austen's novels is usually for pleasurable purposes. In George Eliot's works, travelling usually helps to bring characters to their resolutions, or to a new beginning. Wandering characters are those who are ejected from the society, such as Mr Bulstrode or Raffles. In Thomas Hardy's novels, the characters must travel to find work to survive, and the end of Michael's and Tess' travelling signifies the end of their lives. Pettit (1994:174) discusses Hardy's portrayal of "rootless" and "itinerant" individuals, who have no sense of belonging to the community, and which results in the "vulnerability and isolation of the individual". They are vulnerable because they have no solid class backing, no 'place' in which they may find rest and solace. They are isolated from the community through their natures as striking individuals.
Michael Henchard's actions and reactions are vigorous and extreme, such as his overbearing affection for Donald, his extreme swings of mood toward Elizabeth-Jane, and his final tragic letter of renunciation. He is driven by emotional and impulsive reactions. Tess Durbeyfield is portrayed with a powerful sexual presence which disturbs the repressed sensibilities of the Victorian males around her. She, too, is a creature of impulse, who inclines to her instinct for guidance. For a society based on conformity and strict moral compulsions, their extreme natures are disturbing and disruptive, and the harshness of their punishments suits the seriousness of their transgression of the society's social/moral code.

Tomlinson (1976:113) writes that the mood of the late nineteenth century was such that there were

fears of man's (sic) being permanently and ineradicably alienated from society; [and] some fear that the universe itself may provide for such a condition of aloneness; and a sense of dislocation from the ordinary, day-to-day experience that has been up to now, ...simply assumed as the staple of man's existence.

Houghton (1957:77, 81, 85) concurs with this view, but it is Chapman (1968:331) who perceives most clearly Thomas Hardy's involvement with such feelings of despair and alienation. He writes that in spite of the novelist's pessimistic ideas and lack of faith in a universe with any meaning, there are, nevertheless, signs that in the novels, "individuals matter". Hardy despairs of the condition and values of a society which stifles individual emotion and impulse, and which enforces a deleterious moral code. He also
despairs of any hope of success in which his natural characters attempt to resist their fates. George Eliot's 'religion of humanity', which ameliorated her Determinism, has become in Hardy an acknowledgment of the impervious forces of chance and fate, the harmful effects of which no humanism can alleviate. In Hardy's view,

the rights and duties of the individual tend to become detached... from his (sic) membership of the total society. (Chapman 1968:351)

While Miller (1968) had described the nature of the mid-Victorian society and its literature as being based in the relationships between people, and characters' awareness of themselves as contiguous with society, Pettit (1994:176-7) discusses how in Hardy's works individuals are portrayed as isolated and separate, refuting the Victorian ideal of middle class solidarity and harmony. By the end of the century, the absolute values of past decades have become utterly relative, as faith in an individual's own emotional truth becomes the arbiter of morality for Hardy. Pettit (1994:173) identifies that part of the reason for this is that "the community [was] not stable, but disintegrating", and F.M.L. Thompson (1998:361) asseverates that, although "It was an orderly and well-defined society", it was "not an inherently stable one". Along with most other aspects of Victorian society, the façade of middle class solidarity and complacency was also changing, as people began questioning the nature of individuality and personal responsibility in a dynamic and shifting society.
A: The portrayal of an individual isolated from society by passion and impulse in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

The portrayal of the character of Michael Henchard is that of an individual with a wildly passionate and impulsive nature. In the context of the Victorian society in which he lived, emotional restraint and self-control were admired, and the disturbing influence of natural impulses was abhorred. Michael's inability to conform to bourgeois Victorian morality and conventionality leads to his isolation, and, ultimately, to his destruction because he cannot repress his emotions in the manner society required. The portrayal of the tragic outcomes in this novel shows how Thomas Hardy believed that people needed to find a balance between these unconscious emotions and conscious deliberation, for recklessness and impulsiveness determine Michael's fate. Eagleton (1976:162) concurs with this view, asserting that "At the centre of Hardy's vision is the perception that to live exclusively either the life of developed consciousness, or the life of the body, is tragically unfulfilling". Hardy was well versed in Mill's *On Liberty*, and Gatrell (1993:84-6) highlights one of Mill's propositions, that strong impulses are "perilous" when not properly balanced, but are positive when harnessed to duty and conscience. Thomas Hardy, too, firmly believed that there must be a balance between desire and conscience (Gatrell 1993:84). In the environment of late Victorian religious scepticism and the veneration of
science, Thomas Hardy sought for meaning in the fulfilment of individuality which encompassed the life of the emotions as well as the intellect.

In Michael Henchard's portrayal, his overwhelmingly violent affections and hostilities show that he is not aware of himself and his emotional motivations. This is displayed partly in the changeability of his moods, portrayed in the way "Henchard’s manner towards Farfrae insensibly became more reserved" (The Mayor of Casterbridge: 173, emphasis added), or when, in regard to claiming paternity of Elizabeth-Jane, "The moment... he had prefigured for weeks with a thrill of pleasure... was no less than a miserable insipidity to him now..." (MC: 199). His character is the precise opposite of the Victorian ideal of self-denial, restraint and aloofness. The prosperous bourgeois man, self-assured, disciplined and calculating, is the opposite type of character to Michael, who swears nearly every time he speaks, who does not talk but "roars" and "cries", and whose declamatory style of address gets him his own way by sheer force of personality. He knows no moderation, as his feelings are always immediately and clearly apparent. When pleased, as he was in his early relationship with Donald Farfrae, his generosity and friendly demands almost overwhelm the recipient (MC: 134, 146, 161). When melancholy, he is "unspeakably grieved" and "bowed down with despair" (MC: 358, 360). When angered, Michael is "ferocious", "savage" and "fierce" (MC: 253, 262, 340). One of the main aspects of his portrayal is his background. His raw, basic approach to life, the unpolished idiom of his speech and his almost child-like emotionality are qualities linked to his rural
working class roots, as opposed to the sophistication and refinement of the urban-based bourgeois society.

Thomas Hardy's respect for the individual is such that he argues for facing the self candidly, facing reality and merging affective cognition and intellectual ability to be able to achieve honest and dignified awareness of one's individuality. Michael Henchard is a creature of instinct, as indicated by his behaviour and the many metaphorical references to wild animals. His affections are described as "leonine" and "tigerish", he is "as wrong-headed as a buffalo", his gaiety is "fierce", and later he is referred to as the "netted lion" (MC:159,161,185,261,378). The associations with untamed animals impart to him an expansiveness which knows no boundaries, in contrast with the many limitations and confinements of conventional Victorian society. However, because he did not have the capacity to temper his emotions with rational considerations, because his instinctive reactions held too great a sway over his behaviour, he could not achieve the state of self-knowledge and awareness which Hardy advocated. He was thus doomed to be always the outsider, never able to conform to the demands of the mainstream society. Hardy depicts this physically, in the way Michael is usually shown walking away from other people. "Henchard walked away moodily... he wandered away from the crowd, cankered in soul" (MC:176,186).

For Hardy, the conventional Victorian society placed too great an emphasis on denigrating what was seen as the potentially dangerous or disruptive influence of emotion by separating the power of feelings from
everyday life and action and, ultimately, repressing them altogether. Gatrell (1993:73-4) claims that Michael is "subversive" of society's norms, and that he is potentially "dangerous" because of his "unharnessed" energies. Michael is seen as subversive because society required absolute submission to its rules, a subjection of emotion which is impossible for his character to achieve. Pinion (1968:144) highlights Hardy's sympathy with the passions and interests of humanity, and his faith in individual human nature. The middle class conservatism that required conformity and obedience to its harsh external moral code was anathema to Hardy, who portrayed characters with passionate and impulsive natures in a sympathetic light.

Millgate (1984) describes how Hardy himself suffered at the hands of conservative critics and readers who reviled his portrayal of natural individuality. Duffin (1937:82) describes how publishers derogated his work, calling it "improper", Pinion (1968:10) describes his discontent with the censorious attitude of the narrow-minded Grundyists of the day, and Florence Hardy's (1928) biography also reflects his dissatisfaction. Thomas Hardy's portrayal of Michael is of one whose nature had not been crushed and moulded to the Victorian standard, whose moral sense did not conform to the exacting norm, as seen in his sale of his wife, his relationship with Lucetta, and his impulsive lies to Elizabeth-Jane and Newson. However, even though he is portrayed with sympathy by the author, he is punished by the society by being ostracised and isolated. Hardy could not yet fathom nor
portray how, given the conditions of the Victorian society, such an individual could survive when the society had the power to punish as it did.

The Mayor of Casterbridge is a novel of social transition, but it is not a simple parable of the destruction of rural traditions by modern values. The conflicts in the novel are also symbolic of the conflict between, on the one hand, unrestrained individuality and full-blooded emotionality, and, on the other, the bourgeois Victorian code of the restrained, obedient, self-contained individual who conformed to the strict conventions of behaviour and morality. Gillie (1965:166) encapsulates Michael Henchard’s nature in his observation that “whenever he acts it is to bring the whole of himself to bear on the object, whether he is inspired by affection, resentment or remorse.” Michael’s intense nature is described at length by the narrator, his “oppressive generosity”, (MC:100), his extreme moodiness, and his passionate reactions. His association with untamed nature is established through references to his elemental qualities, describing him as “stormy” (MC:186,196), “volcanic” (MC:183,308), as having a “red and black visage” (MC:153), and the way he “blazes... hotly” and has an “inflaming soul” (MC:194,248,255,291). Dike (1952:177) describes Michael’s habit of “throwing his arms around the shoulders” of a person, a physical symbol of the undeniable spontaneity of his nature. His candid and impetuous behaviour is uncontrollable, and in the same way his physical affections and dislikes are evident. To reiterate a quotation from Houghton (1957) regarding the nature of Victorian hypocrisy, he observed that
they concealed or suppressed their true convictions and
their natural tastes... they pretended to be better than
they were... Finally, they refused to look at life
candidly... (394-5)

This description is the antithesis of Michael's character, as he is incapable of
any of these things. His feelings and tastes are there for the world to see:
when angry "his face would darken", "the anger-vein swelled in his forehead"
(MC:153,346) and when scornful he speaks with "a half sneer" (MC:173).
When an idea grips him, "The nettled, clouded aspect which had held
possession of his face... changed itself into one of arrested attention" and
when offended "Henchard showed chagrin at once - nobody was more quick
to show that than he" (MC:107,248). He cannot dissemble or equivocate;
any acts of dishonesty are not calculated or planned, but are the result of rash
impulse. His thoughts and emotions are always plainly apparent to an
onlooker.

In Hardy's portrayal of the strength of Michael's character, the
landscape itself reflects his moods and emotions. Rather than acting as a
soothing or alleviating force, the landscape is significant because it reveals,
through metaphorical association, the nature of his character. Bullen
(1986:194) discusses how Hardy concurred with Turner's idea that
landscape was imbued with meaning and significance only through human
association. This is borne out when one considers the strength of the link
between Michael's psychological and emotional state, and the conditions of
his environment. It is autumn when he and his family are first encountered,
and the decay of the season reflects his attitude towards his married life. There are dust and dead leaves everywhere (MC:70-1), the very scenery is bland and uninteresting, and even the bird’s song is “trite” and “stale” (MC:70-1). The physical atmosphere exactly matches his mood. Later, when Susan and Elizabeth-Jane arrive in Casterbridge, the season is again autumn, signalling the decay of Michael’s fortunes. The sky, on the day of his fair, becomes dark and threatening, reflecting his “gloomy”, stormy mood and aspect (MC:175, 178). In his depth of depression upon reading Susan’s letter about Elizabeth-Jane, he walks out to the most “mournful” part of Casterbridge, by the “slow, noiseless and dark” river known as the “Schwarzwasser” (MC:197), finding a perfect counterpart for his feelings in the “exaggeration which darkness imparted to the glooms of this region” (MC:198). The changeable, unpredicatable weather is like his own impulsive nature (MC:260), and, significantly, it is in the depths of winter that he reaches his lowest point of poverty and self-debasement (MC:302) in Casterbridge. After he has sent Newson away and stands morbidly considering his empty future life, the “whole land ahead of him was as darkness itself; there was nothing to come, nothing to wait for” (MC:371), but when Michael rallies with Elizabeth-Jane’s help, the season is spring (MC:378). In the circumstances of his solitary and pathetic death, the final concatenation of his character with the landscape is the most striking. He dies on Egdon Heath, in winter, in the midst of a “blasted” landscape in “what was of humble dwellings surely the humblest”(MC:407). The decay of
the cottage, the destruction over time of what once was a substantial structure, precisely depicts the progress of Michael Henchard's demise (MC:408), physically and psychologically. For Hardy, the landscape reflects and intensifies the portrayal of the individual, for its presentation is subject to the condition of the character. It is unlike the depiction of the rural landscape by Austen and Eliot, where its image and function tend to calm people's troubles and reawaken them to their duties. Hardy's use of the countryside in his imagery is to explore more deeply the nature of the individual's own perceptions and emotions, and vividly to reflect a tangible image of their characters.

The novel's conflicts arise because the Victorian society was such that it could not reconcile such intense and impulsive individuality with its need for conformity and obedience. These conflicts are the result of the paradoxical attitudes of the bourgeois society. As Karl (1960:208) states:

> Often, the conflict in a Hardy protagonist is between social convention, which restricts, and the individual need to be free, which can never be fulfilled in the terms the individual expects.

Michael continually is disappointed when his misguided generosity goes awry, or when his behaviour is misinterpreted because it is not in keeping with social convention. When he does not get his own way, he displays "the inelegance of one whose feelings are nipped and wishes defeated" (MC:132), or is "sullen... moody and silent" (MC:170-1). His own great need for love drives him to extremes of emotion, displayed in his "bitter disappointment" at
Elizabeth-Jane's paternity and the "emotional void .. that he unconsciously craved to fill" (MC:219). Through Michael's emotional tragedies, Thomas Hardy signifies that fulfilment requires the emotions to be tempered by rational consideration of realities.

While Thomas Hardy did not wish to see people restrain or suppress their emotions, he believed that individuals should be aware and comprehending enough of their own motives to prevent the calamitous results of unthinking actions. Only after selling Susan does Michael realise "he had not quite anticipated this ending" (MC:79), and he surprises himself with his lie to Newson, because it was "the impulse of a moment" (MC:366). There was no place in the rigidly ordered and regulated Victorian society for such subjugation to anarchic impulses. The catastrophic events which result from Michael's heedless behaviour occur because he knows no middle ground where emotion is tempered and channelled through rational thought. Gillie (1965:167) states that "Prudence is the principal gap in [Michael's] nature; his actions respond instantaneously to his feelings, leaving no interval for calculation or self-inquiry" (emphasis added), and the complications of his situation are "multiplied by his own reactions to them" (Gillie 1965:168). He is quick to take offence, hasty in revenge, and is himself the one most harmed because of his ignorance of his own nature.

The Victorian society was based very much on clearly defined roles and classes, and much social ire was reserved for those who stepped beyond their sphere. Enstice (1979:1) describes Michael's history as that of a "man who
could not accept his defined role in the Casterbridge world” (emphasis added). He goes beyond defined boundaries because his nature and personality cannot be confined. Hardy portrays him as a man with a very tangible presence that deliberately presses on another’s consciousness. Bullen (1986:140), too, notes the intensity of the sense of physical presence in the novel. By using very active and tactile verbs and adjectives the narrator evokes a palpable presence. Michael's impulsive personality is invoked in the way his mouth “clenches”, in his “fiery” eye, and his “roaring” (MC:74,84,168), the way he jumps, kicks and swears unreservedly, and most noticeably, in the way he uses a great deal of physical contact, which was almost taboo amongst the prim Victorian middle classes. In all these facets of his character, he lashes out beyond the prescribed boundaries of behaviour and social decorum, physically and emotionally.

Michael Henchard broke all the rules of middle classes behaviour and convention. Dike (1952:172) comments that while the battle between Michael and Donald began in the “genteel warfare of economic competition”, it resulted eventually in “physical conflict, which... is natural, uneconomic, uncivilised, outside the scope of the rules of the game” (1952:173), the rules being the social and moral code of the society. Physical force is Michael’s chosen weapon, and he is always associated with sheer brute force. Such a link shows how far he was from being part of the society; the Victorians tried desperately to rid themselves, on the surface at any rate, of any association
with vulgar physicality. Even his commercial ethos is described in terms of physical combat:

Henchard’s weapon was one which, if it did not deal ruin at first or second stroke, left him afterwards well nigh at his antagonist’s mercy. \(MC:186\)

In the portrayal of Michael Henchard, Hardy is depicting the pernicious effects of an overbearing and inflexible civilisation on a character with which it is incompatible. Dike (1952:172) highlights that:

throughout the novel we are reminded of the dangerous incongruity between Nature and Civilisation, and Henchard’s tragedy is of the kind wrought by Civilisation.

Hardy emphasises the many incongruities between nature and civilisation in his use of seemingly contradictory adjectives in relation to Michael’s character. Phrases such as “fierce gaiety”, “amatory rage”, “fond savagery”, “friendly force”, “fierce satisfaction”, and “impetuous cordiality” \(MC:261,254,310,146,133,167\) highlight the complex nature of emotion, and show how difficult it is to regulate and describe the many nuances of human emotion, especially in one as passionate as Michael Henchard. Pinion (1968:49) identifies that in Hardy’s novels “Sometimes the Primal Cause is blamed; more often, the social law” for life’s tragedies. Hardy himself is unwilling to assign responsibility definitively, but, as Collins (1990:103) observes, for Hardy’s individuals to survive, their hearts and their intellects must be in balance. Unfortunately, Michael is swayed inordinately by his natural impulses and unconsidered emotions, and is rejected by the society.
One of the reasons for Michael's tragedy is that, as he acknowledges, "it is not by what is, in this life, but by what appears, that you are judged..." (MC:p248). His appearance, to those with whom he lives and deals, is hot-tempered, impulsive and rash; he is unpolished, raw and often unpredicatable.

The Victorian society valued the polar opposites to these qualities: restraint, reserve, undemonstrativeness and self-discipline, the ability to conceal and suppress unpleasant truths and wild impulses. Although Michael did keep his one secret for eighteen years, when confronted with its exposure, he did not hesitate to admit the fault and shame, rather than, as he might easily have done, simply expelling the old furmity woman from the town as the other officials are ready to do:

"No - 'tis true.' The words came from Henchard. "'Tis as true as the light," he said slowly. 'And upon my soul it does prove that I'm no better than she!' (MC:275)

His honesty, which is impetuous and often perverse, marks Michael Henchard as unfitted for the Victorian society which required the truth to be stifled to maintain the myths upon which the stability of the society was grounded. Mixen Lane is a significant symbol of the dark, violent, amoral side of human nature which exists behind the proper façade of the society. Michael exposes these darker qualities in himself, his character being such that it cannot disguise nor ignore its own impulses. Lucetta's omnipresent fear of being found out and punished by the town society for her affair with Michael is a fear that pervades her most casual passing thought, and is a symbol which demonstrates the power of the social threat of ostracism.
Enstice (1979:32) states that the skimmity-ride is the expression of "the
town's disapproval at such a disruptive influence". The mockery signifies its
censorious attitude toward passionate and indiscreet natures like Lucetta's
and Michael's: such disregard as they display for society's rigid rules of
appearance must be castigated as an example to all. It was in the society's
interest to maintain such subjugation in its members, especially women and
the working classes, as the patrilineal and economic well-being of those who
held the power depended upon unquestioning acceptance of its rules. In the
ruling Victorian social milieu, appearances were of paramount importance to
the majority, and conformity the watchword. As Karl (1960:212) points out,
"no-one can escape [society's] approval, condemnation, or interference in his
(sic) personal life".

Part of Michael's sense of isolation from the society is that he is an
outsider to the established community, a member of the itinerant labouring
class. Karl (1960:212) emphasises Hardy's

sharp awareness of social structure, recognising that
the... outsider can... be destroyed by a demonstration of
majority opinion.

His time spent in London, as described in Florence Hardy's (1928)
biography, increased his often bitter knowledge and experience of the social
strata and laws of late Victorian society, and Pinion (1968:5) notes Hardy's
critical awareness of the society he observed in the English capital. Harrison
(1991:66) explains the power of public opinion, stating that the Victorian
middle class was "basically conservative... alternately complacent and

175
fearful". Hardy’s portrayal of the rise and fall of Michael Henchard demonstrates how it was fearful of losing its hegemony, but complacent in its power and influence. The influence of the middle class Victorian society was such that it “imposed its will regardless of the individual’s rights” (Karl 1960:212). For the society, its hold on economic and political power, its need for class solidarity and conformity, was more pertinent than an individual’s rights to act, feel and live as he or she chose.

Because he impulsively and wilfully defies the society’s social/moral code, Michael must suffer the shame of the worst punishment in the society’s eyes, that of being an outcast and an economic failure, the opposite of the self-made respectable bourgeois type of man. Even at the height of his wealth and power, Michael did not fit the mould of this type; he remained outside the boundaries of social definition. Enstic (1979:34) describes the rivalry between Michael and Donald as a bourgeois struggle for self-sufficiency, and to this can be added that it is a very Darwinistic struggle, in the way the social Darwinists would have perceived: the strong, organised middle class defeating the raw, incompetent crudeness of traditional ruralism.

Michael Henchard fails to succeed ultimately because he does not have the restrained bourgeois nature and drive to conform, because his emotions are too immoderate and impulsive, and this was seen as a weakness because it was associated with being a woman. His impassioned susceptibility to music is an indicator of this (MC:371), compared with Donald’s ability to remain brisk and matter-of-fact even when singing the most heart-rending songs. In
spite of Michael’s physical power, which is related to his wild and uncultivated portrayal, he does not have the social sophistication and economic cunning required to succeed in the bourgeois world. Dike (1952:175) identifies that the society “finds the value of a man to be what he’s worth financially... Wealth and power inspire civilised respect, not natural love”. The civilised society detached itself from natural spontaneity and did not approve or encourage the display or experience of strong emotions. Showalter (in Kramer 1979:105) relates his economic failure to the Victorian cult of masculinity, saying that “Financial success, in the mythology of Victorian manliness, requires the subjugation of competing passions”. Not only is it that he cannot subdue his violent passions and impulses that he is doomed to bourgeois failure, but it is also that he begins to learn to come to terms with his deeper ‘feminine’ self (Showalter in Kramer 1979:101) as he matures and suffers. Such a development had no part in the Victorian mythology of separate spheres, of an ideal of manliness which required impulses to be suppressed, emotions to be winnowed out, and restraint and reserve to be paramount. Donald Farfrae, the successor in all ways to Michael Henchard, has a personality which is cautious and constrained, very much in keeping with Victorian expectations, and is the antithesis of Michael’s.

Karl (1960:197) calls Michael one of Thomas Hardy’s “social deviates” who is punished for not conforming. He asseverates that “Henchard’s rashness of temperament and lack of moderation” do not explain his
character by themselves, and his thesis is that it is because he cannot *control* these qualities, because he moves at the extremity of emotional behaviour and exposes the "self-destructive demons" (Karl 1960:197) which the Victorians attempted to hide beneath a respectable exterior, that he is utterly destroyed. His character, and that of Lucetta, embody the very qualities which the ascetic Victorian society attempted to purge; in this case, they are literally purged from the society where a new order, under the rule of the quintessential Victorians, Donald and Elizabeth-Jane, is beginning its reign. Karl (1960:204) quotes Thomas Hardy's own definition of tragedy which he wrote after completing *The Mayor of Casterbridge*:

> a tragedy exhibits a state of things in the life of an individual which unavoidably causes some *natural* aim or desire of his (*sic*) to end in catastrophe when carried out. (emphasis added)

This indicates his view that the society was such that simply following natural impulses was enough to lead to tragic outcomes, in both Michael's and Lucetta's situations. Karl (1960:205) says that "Henchard's ordeal... is a peculiarly nineteenth-century one". Part of this is that by "ridding himself of a family burden, and this while drunk" he abuses two of the most precious Victorian ideals: the sanctity of the family, and the importance of sobriety and piety. Lucetta's sensuous, impetuous and indiscreet nature lead to her tragedy, as she steps over the boundaries of taboo for Victorian women, breaking the laws of sexual abstinence and fidelity.
Chapman (1968:331) states that Hardy’s “novels leave one with the certainty that individuals matter”, and believes that Hardy’s personal compassion for individuals struggled for reconciliation with his experience of the general pessimism of the time. Hardy was unhappy with both science and religion for denying the importance of individuality, for ignoring “the importance of people and what they are to each other” (Chapman 1968:331).

Bjork (1985:293) notes that Hardy specially marked a passage in John Morley’s Works, Volume II, which signifies a belief very different from the orthodox religious and social codes of morality of the time: “The moment you attempt to find a base for morals outside of human nature, you go wrong; no other is solid and sure”. His portrayal of character was such that it established the moral supremacy of the individual’s feelings over the dictates of the society, but the condition of the late Victorian society was such that this could in no way be reconciled satisfactorily for the individual. Eventually, the dominant community’s values hold sway, at the expense of the life and being of the individual person.
B: Portrayal of the individual’s inner struggle with nature and society in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*

Like Michael Henchard, Tess Durbeyfield’s nature takes her outside the boundaries of feeling and behaviour prescribed as proper by the conventions of Victorian society. Because she is a woman, her portrayal as an individual at odds with her society takes on an even more intense quality. *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* is about the depth and irrevocability of natural impulses like sexual and emotional passion, and how the manifestation of these in a woman could not be tolerated by the society’s rigid strictures.

Thomas Hardy’s portrayal of Tess repeatedly calls the reader to notice “her large and impulsive nature” (*Tess of the d’Urbervilles*:125), her “impassioned nature” (*T* :251) and the fact that she is “the deeper passioned Tess... more woman than either [of the other maids]” (*T* :194). Gregor and Nicholas (1962:141) asseverate that “The primal world... form[s] the centre of the novel”, and that “a reader’s general impression is one of deeply ‘felt life’”. The novel depicts “real vitality, real warmth, real incarnation” (*T* :208) in the character of Tess. Through the discourse in the novel which links Tess’s character inextricably with ‘Nature’, Thomas Hardy portrays an individual whose natural impulses and emotions are associated with purity, honesty and integrity, therein implicitly criticising the superficial and conventional qualities of society. Johnson (in Knoepflmacher, 1977:262) asserts that “the emphasis early in the novel is on Tess as an essentially
natural woman", and refers to the portrayal of her undeniable "naturalness and spontaneity" (Johnson in Knoepflmacher 1977:263). Many critics echo this view, and there is no need to reiterate their descriptions. The emphasis in this analysis is on the tension between what Thomas Hardy portrays as Tess's natural impulse toward passion and joy, her instinct "to snatch at ripe pleasure before the iron teeth of pain could have time to shut upon her" (T. 241), and the pernicious influence of conventional morals and standards on her character. Hardy's much-debated epithet "pure", in this context, can be seen to signify his ideal of the purity of a nature untinctured by society's conventional dictates. When Tess does become influenced by the 'artificial' social code, it triggers the inner struggle which remains with her throughout the novel, between the feelings she knows are true and pure, such as her love for Angel and her natural desires, and what she knows to be the harsh judgements of a prejudiced and unforgiving civilisation. This dichotomy of values in Tess's attitudes is also identified by Gatrell (1993:100), who affirms that "the tension in her character is one between obedience and rebellion", between "acquired conventional belief and instinctive independence of mind, and between ignorance and education". Gatrell (1993:105) highlights the pernicious effects of the society's impositions by stating that Tess is "falsely conditioned" and by describing the "effect of society's pressures and conventions upon... nature" as "destructive".

In Tess of the d'Urbervilles, the society is successful in asserting its power over the individual because Victorian society "penalised powerful
energies and desires” (Gatrell 1993:87). Significantly, however, Hardy’s portrayal ensures that her mind and spirit remain exultant and unrepentant to the end because “Most of the misery had been generated by her conventional aspect, and not by her innate sensations” (7:141). Paris (1969:65) points out the strength of Tess’s appetite for joy, and says

Hardy’s point is not simply that it could not be controlled, but that it should not be controlled, for it is the expression of nature.

Jacobus (1976) discusses the opposition of publishers to the first manuscripts of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, and Hardy’s struggle to have it published unexpurgated, which highlight the author’s harsh experience of the power of the society that wished to control the expression or depiction of natural feelings. Thomas Hardy wrote in defence in the ‘Explanatory Note to the First Edition November 1891’ that:

> If an offence come out of the truth, better it is that the offence come out than that the truth be concealed.

In the Preface to the fifth edition in July 1892, the author refers critically to “the merely vocal formulae of society” which prevented him from being able to publish his novels without a great deal of circumspection in the prose and judicious editing to suit the demands of the conservative publishers and circulating libraries. In this Preface Hardy also vents his anger at those critics of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* who were unable to associate his use of the word pure

with any but the artificial and derivative meaning which has resulted to it from the ordinances of civilisation. They ignore the meaning of the word in Nature...
Hardy was at this time, as he had been with many of his novels, frustrated by the need to submit his portrayal of what he saw as the truth to the Grundyan censors of the Victorian period, which is evidence of his "fundamental discontent" (Gatrell 1993:87) with a society that rejected the validity of passion and impulse.

As Michael Henchard's passions and emotions were too extreme for the society which, ultimately, cast him out, Tess Durbeyfield's tangible sexual appeal is too disturbing for the community in which she lived. Alec d'Urberville exclaims, although wholly unjustified, to her "'For near three mortal months have you trifled with my feelings'" (T:115). At Talbothays', Angel Clare is hypenaturally aware of every detail of her physical features (T:183). Her face constantly is the focus of his gaze (T:187) and he is "burdened inwardly by waxing fervour of passion for the soft and silent Tess" (T:207). When he catches a glimpse of her in her nightdress, he is forced to admit "'For your own safety I must go'" (T:246), and Alec also confesses that "'it is better that I should not look too often on you. It might be dangerous'" (T:388). The reaction of the puritanical element in Victorian society against such a disturbing influence as female sexuality was to try to negate it, and this was to a large extent achieved by reviling and punishing women who displayed evidence of erotic needs or desires. In Angel's case, "'Feeling had indeed smothered judgement'" (T:213) and his passion is "'volcanic'" (T:213). Such abandonment of control over one's emotions was exactly what Victorian puritanism feared: namely, that "He was driven
towards her by every heave of his pulse” (T:215) and would become a mere creature of passion and emotion rather than an upright member of the rational middle class bourgeoisie. His inner fight against the driving force of passion signifies the Victorian sensibility in this regard. Angel is driven by

the will to subdue the grosser to the subder emotion,
the substance to the conception, the flesh to the spirit.
(T:316)

By blaming Tess, and not the men themselves, for the effects of her voluptuous sexuality, society punished her for her own feelings of desire and her longing for physical fulfilment with Angel. Hardy's metaphorical association of Tess with Eve (T:186, 232) highlights the punitive aspect of these values, as the sensuous woman was blamed for 'tempting' the obedient, rational man. The effects of the insidious social conventions on Tess were to make her feel

that in inhabiting the fleshly tabernacle with which nature had endowed her she was somehow doing wrong. (T:388, emphasis added)

Tess faced the ire of the rigid moralism of Victorian society and the hypocrisy of the sexual double standard with their impossible ideals of how women should feel and act. The ideal stereotype of the asexual, angelic Victorian woman was part of the myth of femininity constructed by a society which attempted to deny all vestiges of passionate sexuality. Part of the denial was the necessity to 'punish' women who revealed natural sexual impulses and desires. Hardy's portrayal of Tess is highly evocative and intensely sexual. His descriptions of her mouth, eyes and other physical aspects are
unabashedly erotic: her “peony mouth” (T:51), “her red top lip was distracting, infatuating, maddening” (T:209), her “luxuriance of aspect” (T:82), “the brimfulness of her nature breathed from her... sex takes the outside place” (T:231), and her “ripe red mouth” (T:307) are brought to the reader’s attention incessantly. The overall effect is of a woman’s tangible sexual presence, arousing disturbing and unsuppressable feelings in the men around her, feelings which the society would prefer them to deny: The influence of her character “passed into Clare like an excitation” (T:209), and when Alec sees her again after a long absence “The effect upon her old lover was electric” (T:384). The strength of her female presence is depicted in an especially palpable manner early in her relationship with Alec, when he teaches her to whistle. Pleased with her success, “she involuntarily smiled in his face” (T:103; emphasis added). Hardy’s unusual use of the phrase suggests an almost overwhelming presence. Later, she has a similar effect on Angel, when Hardy says that her lips

again confronted him, clothed with colour and life, they sent an aura over his flesh, a breeze through his nerves, which wellnigh produced a qualm.

(T:209; emphasis added)

However, her worst sin in society’s eyes is that “she did not disguise her desire” (T:258), her “hungry heart” (T:204) or her “appetite for joy” (T:255).

In this way, her individuality was therefore utterly at odds with the uncompromising Victorian social conventions and attitudes towards women.
Far from disguising or concealing her sexuality, Thomas Hardy invests the very landscape with Tess’s voluptuous qualities. As in Michael Henchard’s portrayal, the land becomes an extension of the portrayal of individuality, as it intensifies and expands the depiction of the principal character. Hardy establishes the metaphysical link between Tess and her native country early in the novel. The Vale of Blakemoor, where Marlott lies, is virginal, “beautiful ... and ...untrodden”, and, like Tess, it is “fertile and sheltered” (7:48). The representation of her sojourn in the Froom Valley grows increasingly more laden with sexual metaphors as Tess’s and Angel’s relationship develops. Hardy uses nature’s seasons to depict the physical and emotional state of the young lovers, where he would not have been able to describe human desires and feelings:

The season developed and matured... Rays from the sunrise drew forth the buds and stretched them into long stalks, lifted up sap in noiseless streams, opened petals, and sucked out scents in invisible jets and breathings.  

(7:183)

The height of the sultry summer is used as the context of the climax, or turning point, in Tess’s feelings for Angel. Hardy’s images evoke distinct feelings of desire and passion, as the land is used to reflect Tess’s inner state:

Amid the oozing fatness and warm ferments of the Var Vale ... the rush of juices could almost be heard below the hiss of fertilization...  

(7:207)

As Tess grows more infatuated with Angel, the summer reaches its height of heat and humidity, what Hardy terms its “Thermidorean” quality (7:207).
The landscape and the climate serve as signifiers for Tess's emotions and desires.

Hardy also uses her environment to portray other aspects of her emotional state, and reflects many of the complexities and injustices of her situation in the physical surrounds. The "darkness and silence" of The Chase (T:119) signifies her ignorance and innocence of the danger into which she has fallen. After her first return to Marlott, the landscape seems to her to take on the accusing voices of her own inner turmoil. She fancies that the "moaning" wind (T:134) reproaches her, and that the rain expresses "irremediable grief" (T:134) at her sin. Thomas Hardy, however, uses the same surroundings to revoke this "mistaken creation of Tess's fancy" (T:135). He points out, instead, that she is actually in perfect harmony with the natural world, and is "of a piece with the element she moved in... an integral part of the scene" (T:134). Tess's purity and innocence are equated with the purity of nature, and metaphorically are depicted as an intrinsic part of it. This view is further substantiated by the way her feelings are portrayed as being uplifted by the beauty and novelty of the landscape she sees on her first journey to Talbothays (T:157). The lightness of the air, the clearness of the water and the delicacy of the colours intermingle with her desire to "find sweet pleasure" (T:157), and are symbols of her hopefulness and optimism for the future. Hardy portrays the valley as a reflection of Tess's "best face physically" (T:157). The converse of this is seen in the kind of countryside at Flintcomb-Ash. As virtually an abandoned wife, emotionally starved and
self-abnegating, the neglected “starve-acre” farm (T:360) where she works like a slave is again a reflection of Tess’s inner condition. The desolation and misery of the landscape is an outward projection of Tess’s own emotions, and the encroachments of winter are the perfect signifiers for her frozen, shrivelled emotional life (T:363). Thomas Hardy, in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, no less than in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, uses the landscape as a powerful metaphor for individuality, where the representation of environment is subject to the feelings of a character, rather than having any influence over that character. In this way Hardy depicts the distance between “civilised” society and the nature of the individual: there is no connection between the individual and “civilised” society that equates to the affinity that Hardy establishes between Tess and her natural environment.

Johnson (in Knoepflmacher, 1977:261-2) believes that if Tess could have been in touch with the emotional primeval side of her character she would not have felt guilty, because it was the social strictures she imbibed that made her feel guilty and worthy of punishment. Hardy unceasingly stresses that her censure is “based on nothing more tangible than a sense of condemnation under an arbitrary law of society which had no foundation in Nature” (T:353). Johnson (in Knoepflmacher, 1977:263) states that her recovery in ‘The Rally’ is “associated with Nature” and that it is “cyclical Nature renewing itself” (Johnson in Knoepflmacher, 1977:264), signifying that the inherent purity and strength of her nature, drawing as it did from a
natural spontaneity of feeling and emotional regeneration, enabled her to recover:

...some spirit within her rose automatically as the sap in the twigs. It was unexpended youth... bringing with it hope, and the invincible instinct towards self-delight...
The irresistible, universal, automatic tendency to find sweet pleasure somewhere... had at length mastered Tess. (7:151, 157)

The stultified values of the society, however, could not admit such a possibility. Thomas Hardy, with a strong belief in the value of unrepressed emotion and the importance of the individual, portrays a rather "pitiable" world (7:134) governed by shallow convention, which compares unfavourably with Tess's vitality and vigorous individuality. She embodies the struggle between nature and society, as a 'natural woman' in conflict with the artifices and shallow conventions of patriarchal Victorian society.

Thomas Hardy often uses the church as a symbol of the narrow and rigid morality of the time, so it is significant how the Marlott harvesters accept Tess and her illegitimate child without fuss or criticism, whereas the parson refuses to bury her baby in hallowed ground. Hardy was a critic of mechanical and outdated religion (7:128) which no longer had meaning or inspiration for many people, although he believed in the spirit of Christianity, such as kindness and charity towards one's neighbours. Pinion (1968:47) identifies that

In the sight of all the world [Tess] stood condemned... yet for Hardy she was pure of heart, with all the gifts of 'charity' which he thought the greatest of the virtues.
The church was one of the main institutions which embodied and propagated many, if not most of the society’s moral and ethical standards. Pinion (1968:167) relates how Hardy disliked the hypocrisies of the established church, its association with upper class society, and its disregard of human nature. He believed it had no real sympathy for human emotion. Pinion also (1968:172) describes how Hardy believed in “natural life, as opposed to... civilisation” and how he perceived that the Victorian society’s laws and conventions conflicted with natural human impulses and behaviour. Hardy describes Angel’s feelings on returning to dairy life from his parents’ home as being similar to “throwing off splints and bandages” (7:230), casting off the superficial and useless trappings of polite society in favour of natural humanity. Natural life for Hardy was “unwarped, uncontorted, untrammelled by those creeds which futilely attempt to check what wisdom would be content to regulate” (7:219). Bjork (1985:382) highlights that when Tess thinks Nature will condemn her for her actions, it is the pernicious society who actually condemns her. It is only “in the eyes of propriety” (7:206) that she is not considered worthy of Angel. Alexander (1987:112) states that it is “Society’s principles [which] cause [Tess] to suffer”, and attests that Hardy shows how far those pressures [on Tess] are the product of conventional attitudes which she has imbibed... Hardy makes us aware of the destructive potential of her imposed sense of guilt. (1987:122, emphases added)
It is a "social chasm" (7:119) which separates the older Tess from her virginal 'pure' self, not a difference in her own nature. She goes to church for comfort, but is sickened by the people's "whispers" (7:134) about her and cannot attend any longer. All her sufferings are the result of social disapproval and her distress at the "world's opinion" (7:150). Pinion (1968:49) quotes a note which Hardy made in 1889: "That which socially is a great tragedy may be in Nature of no alarming circumstance" and this attitude pervades his portrayal of Tess. Johnson (in Knoepflmacher, 1977:262) states that Tess is "sacrificed to the restrictions and punishments of modern society". Angel's "denial of her true... affinities with Nature" (Johnson in Knoepflmacher, 1977:275) is indicative of the Victorian society's denial of human passions and impulses as important and valid aspects of an individual's character. Hardy's implication is that society's judgement often is wrong, whereas nature provided an unaffected and intuitive standard for judging action and intention:

that tremendous force which sways humanity... was not to be controlled by vague lucubrations over the social rubric. (7:255)

In spite of this assertion, however, as Pettit (1994:186) implies, society's dictates have a far more powerful influence over human perception and behaviour because of the threat of censure and people's tangible fear of ostracism. Pettit (1994:186) emphasises how Hardy sets "individual moral standards... against the conventional standards of the community", but acknowledges the final power of the society to dictate the behaviour of its
members. Hardy implies that Angel would have been the greater man if he had relied on his own natural impulses, rather than social form, in his treatment of Tess, commenting wryly that “with more animalism he would have been the nobler man” (7:315).

In the eyes of the Victorian society, Tess’s real sin is her overt sexuality, her ability and desire to abandon herself to passionate impulse which was seen as one of the worst sins for a woman to commit. Houghton (1957:413) observes of the Victorian attitude towards sex that

One particular element in human nature that was notoriously ignored was, of course, the sexual passion, for there shame, fear, and the proprieties united to draw a veil of silence or a gloss of euphemism over the facts of life.

The cause of the veil of silence was the fear of punishment. The society manipulated individuality through the threat of punishment, emotional or physical, both of which could be and were inflicted by the society through ostracism. After her father’s death, Tess and her family are evicted from their house because of her reputation (7:436). Houghton (1957:413) highlights the hypocritical nature of the society by observing that “the motive was not virtue but the appearance of virtue, and what was condemned was not sin but open sin”. The portrayal of Tess, with her tangible physical sensuality and instinct for joy and passion, flouts these ideals and reveals their falseness, because she could not suppress her own passion and desire to match the society’s stereotype of women. Hardy’s prose was as explicit as he dared make it, and many passages in the novel are highly sensual. Tess experiences
palpitating misery broken by momentary shoots of joy

[which she] could not altogether suppress... ‘I cannot help it!’ she jealously panted. (T:241)

Her desire for Angel “ecstaticises” her “to a killing joy” (T:205), and in his arms “she sank upon him in her momentary joy, with something very like an ecstatic cry” (T:209). When she allows herself to give in to passion, “for the first time Clare learnt what an impassioned woman’s kisses were like” (T:255). He, in his turn, licks the cream from her fingers (T:232) and when he kisses her bare arm,

she was such a sheaf of susceptibilities that her pulse was accelerated by the touch, her blood driven to her finger ends. (T:239)

Her struggle, however, is always against her own desires, as she had imbibed the society’s strict morals and teachings. She tries to “lead a repressed life”, but she is unable to overcome the strength of “her own vitality” (T:181).

Ironically, Angel, as a symbol of the contradictory and hypocritical Victorian attitudes, condemns Tess for not fulfilling the society’s ideal convention of womanhood; he overlooks her natural loving-kindness, honesty and integrity in his preoccupation with the superficial ideal of a “‘fresh and virginal daughter of Nature’” (T:176). Johnson (in Knoepfmacher 1977:269) describes Tess’ “passionate, non-ethical quality of ... sensibility”, showing how far she was from the strict Victorian ideal of confined, restrained, pure womanhood. Alexander (1987:108), as many other critics also have done, outlines the workings of the impossibly unrealistic ideal of womanhood, and how the society expected real women’s feelings and behaviour to correspond
with an unreasonable, unnatural and exacting stereotype of femininity. The pervasion of such ideas and hypocrisy is highlighted when Alexander (1987:108) calls Angel’s reaction “typical of his day”. As a man, he escapes all censure for his *debaucherie*, whereas the woman must pay forever for the sin which was only so in society’s eyes. The sleepwalking scene after their marriage succinctly depicts in a very physical manner the injustice of the double standard of the society. Tess, in leading Angel back to the house, takes on herself the full brunt of the cold night and untoward situation:

Tess’s feet were quite bare, and the stones hurt her, and chilled her to the bone; but Clare was in his woollen stockings, and appeared to feel no discomfort. (7:321)

Even though he disliked the suppression of natural feelings, Thomas Hardy, as discussed earlier, did not encourage total submission to impulse, but rather believed in the development of the intellect mitigated by emotional understanding and acceptance of individual feelings. Johnson (in Knoepflmacher 1977:265) refers to Angel’s “cold application of intellect” and says how “uncongenial” Hardy would have found this. Eagleton’s observation (1976:162) is again apposite, that

At the centre of Hardy’s vision is the perception that to live exclusively either the life of developed consciousness, or the life of the body, is tragically unfulfilling.

Paris (1969:66) also highlights that, although Hardy severely criticises social conventions, he still valued “alert consciousness, foresight and restraint”, and identifies that much of the trouble in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* is caused by
abandoning self-control. Her "incautiousness of character" (T:141) and the fact that she is "a vessel of emotions rather than reasons" (T:410) mean that she is subject to her impulsive actions which often lead to harm, such as when she rides off with Alec to escape the wrath of the jealous Darch sisters.

One of Hardy's themes is that the external strictures of society, artificial and conservative, are not the appropriate guide for individual behaviour. Nature is portrayed as a better guide, when tempered with charitable and thoughtful considerations. Lodge (in Draper 1975:173) refers to the conflicts in the novel between a Rousseauistic view of vigorous life-giving nature, and the inhibiting destructive forces of society. Hardy leaves no doubt as to where he stands on this question. He states unequivocally that the moral hobgoblins by which she was terrified without reason... were out of harmony with the actual world, not she... She looked upon herself as a figure of Guilt intruding into the haunts of Innocence... she was making a distinction where there was no difference... She had been made to break an accepted social law, but no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly. (T:135; emphasis added)

Hardy's revelation of Angel's abhorrent conventionality is directed against Victorian moralism and "religious compromise", during a period when the late nineteenth-century Christians were trying to balance rationality with religious belief and failing, in the process becoming ethical idealists with no solid basis, in the way that Angel's beliefs are depicted (De Laura 1967:391-392). Hardy's view was that human faith must reside in the uniqueness and the value of the individual, not in a superficial and external value system.
Daleski (1984:83) says that it is a "tyrannous will" in Angel which forces him to stifle his natural feelings for Tess, and this will is a direct counterpart of the tyranny of the Victorian social law, the Evangelical drive to "subdue the flesh to the spirit" (Daleski 1984:83). Hazen (1971:209) affirms that Hardy demonstrates how instinct cannot be legislated away by man-made customs, as the influence of natural emotion ultimately is too powerful. His sympathies clearly lie with the emotional depths of Tess's character, rather than Angel's shallow conventionality, as Johnson (in Knoepflmacher 1977:270) asseverates:

[Angel's] Hellenism and his culture are ashes compared to the natural depths from which [Tess] draws her fidelity and determination to survive.

The profundity of her emotions and the strength of her love and endurance are the sources of her integrity and purity of purpose, qualities more powerful than the rules which superficial culture or religion can impose.

Pinion (1990:86-87) defines "the ache of modernism" in Tess of the d'Urbervilles as the conflict between Darwinism and science, and the concurrent loss of faith in Christianity. Wickens (1988:185) points out that Angel is trying to find in nature what he can no longer find in traditional mystical religion. However, like other intellectual agnostics of the time, he found that 'nature', invested for him in his image of Tess, could not bear the weight of such displaced ideals. Widdowson (in Pettit 1994:88) states that:

By disturbing and displacing 'reality'... Hardy exposes... the mystifications, naturalisations and (mis)representations by which the dominant ideology and culture sentence us all to lives of false being.
His point is that by portraying Tess as the ‘object’ of different men’s gazes, and desires, in their minds the image of her becomes more important than the reality of her as an individual. Hardy uses this phenomenon of perception as a way of signifying how the alienating and isolating power of the late Victorian society operated. Pettit (1994:175) also identifies that Tess is isolated by the evidence of her sexuality, which causes others around her to interpret her character according to stereotypes and their own desires, rather than the evidence of her own self. In this light, Tess is not seen as an individual in her own right, which Hardy advocated, but rather as a conglomeration of Angel’s or Alec’s own projections of desire and fantasy, distillations of their respective dreams of Arcadia or seduction.

Tess exhibits the fundamental conflict within an individual between natural impulse and society’s teaching. Enstice (1979:129) states that the imagery in the novel imbues Tess with the connection between nature and man (sic):

...two opposing elements struggle for dominance within her: the laws of nature and the laws of Victorian morality... the argument of natural and man-made law.

(1979:130,136)

Gregor and Nicholas (1962:130) describe the irruption of Angel into Tess’s life as “the intellectual in the world of the natural”. One of the very moving depictions of the struggle is seen in Tess trying to have her baby baptised, and then finally doing it herself; Hazen (1971:209) shows how strongly she feels the Vicar’s refusal is based on human prejudice, not divine sanction. He
points out how, after trying to accept Angel's harsh judgement of her, she bursts out in protest at its unjustness (Hazen 1971:209), a reaction which encapsulates the conflicting nature of the struggle between emotion and rationality in Tess. She fights a continual, and losing, battle with herself between impulse and social reserve. As Gatrell (1993:88) observes of Hardy's works, "individuals who try in some way to fight social convention... are destroyed in the conflict". Tess often consciously curtails what is normally her first natural instinct, such as "those sudden impulses of reprisal to which she was liable" (7:115). The ultimate display of this inner conflict is Alec's murder, when the strength of her impulse combined with her love for Angel "extinguished her moral sense" (7:475). Daleski (1984:73) points out how in the speeding gig ride with Alec on the way to Trantridge, it is only after she lets go of him that she "realises how completely she has given way to impulse", and also refers to the moment she gave in to the impulse to ride away with Alec from the hostile Car Darch (Daleski 1984:74). He (1984:79) also asserts that Tess is "prone" to abandon herself to impulse, and that she tries to "stamp out" her passionate nature, but cannot because when she tries to repress her natural feelings she is not "in harmony with nature" and is at odds with herself (Daleski 1984:82). The source of her worst troubles is her submission to impulse. Hazen (1971:208) believes that in acting as such, without the lauded Victorian "prudence", Tess invites her troubles. These views coincide with Hardy's belief that knowledge of the self and others is necessary to moderate the effects of pure impulse, that intellectual
development is necessary to fulfil one's individuality along with emotional development. Tess's tendency to let herself become dreamily detached from reality does not enable her to have clear insight into her own emotions and impulses, leading her therefore into her disastrous experiences.

Thomas Hardy's portrayal of Tess locates the importance of her individuality before the claims of society. Jacobus (1976:324) concurs with this view, asseverating that the portrayal of individuality is vital to *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, because even though she is seen as "one anonymous field-woman among others... her inner world is unique." Jacobus (1976:324) holds that "her distinction is... at the heart of the novel - its assertion of the value of any individual, however commonplace, however obscure". Hardy's concentration on rural workers as the source of characterisation is testimony to his belief that "life was to be seen [at Talbothays] of the same magnitude here as elsewhere." (*T*:214). Paris (1969:73) states that

Like Mill, Hardy sees as a fundamental source of value the importance of the individual consiousness to itself...

The feelings of the individual may not matter to the cosmos, but to him they matter supremely, and the indifference of nature in no way denies to the individual the importance which he *(sic)* gives to himself.

Pinion (1990:4), in an overview of the themes of Hardy's novels, states that in all of them, "the individual... assumes a greater importance from the human angle".

In an era of great intellectual challenge, where age-old beliefs and values were being questioned, modified or rejected, Thomas Hardy was writing
novels in which new meanings were sought for the nature of individuality and society. De Laura (1967:397) summarises the exploration that occurs in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* as a major ethical contrast... between an unspecified 'Nature', a genuine and personal ethical mode, and 'Civilisation', identified with social law, convention, and... moral and intellectual constraints.

He goes on to claim (1967:399) that the "inconsistencies of feeling and thought" in the novel, which qualities have also been disparaged by other critics, exist because Hardy had no alternative vision of a perfect relationship between the individual and society. Aitken (1987:68) states that "Real morality for Hardy is more profound, more personal... than any code of social manners", and it is in his portrayal of the importance of individuality above social strictures that an answer lies. Pettit (1994:189) summarises Thomas Hardy's morality of individuality in identifying the profundity of his "insistence upon the unique nature of each individual".

In the conclusion to *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, no satisfactory resolution is possible for Tess; she "remains a divided soul" (Aitken 1987:70), torn between convention and nature, as the essence of her individuality is unable to be accommodated by the rigid social demands of the late Victorian society. According to Gregor and Nicholas (1962:125), the difference between *Adam Bede* (published in 1859) and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is that the earlier novel concludes with the united social group, but the latter novel ends with two exiles and no clear indication of what the future holds. The
struggle between nature and civilisation in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* cannot be resolved when the two elements are so antagonistic to each other as they were portrayed in late Victorian period. The battle manifests itself in both Angel and Tess, but is experienced far more intensely in Tess's character, because of her more intense nature and also because of the position of women in her society. There was no way for Hardy to engineer a reconciliation between the individual and the society in the manner that earlier novelists had. The alienation and despair of the late nineteenth century was a more powerful influence on the portrayal of individuality, and how the individual related to society.
CONCLUSION

From this study of the six novels, one can infer that the nature of the relationship between the individual and society is one in which the desires and choices of individuals are enclosed by boundaries. The extent to which individuals are confined by their societies is portrayed differently by each novelist, as each concentrates on a varying combination of physical, intellectual and emotional limitation imposed at different times during the changing nineteenth-century society. Early in the century, in the novels of Jane Austen, individuality was portrayed within strict bounds of propriety. Personal qualities like intellect, wit and desire were carefully bounded and curtailed in the civilities and social manners of the time. Amidst the turmoil of post-revolutionary Europe and England, her novels depict the harmony that can be achieved when the individual fulfils certain rights and obligations as part of a highly structured society. Eminently rational, conservative and restrained, the outstanding individuals in Jane Austen's novels are yet dutifully concerned with roles and responsibilities between members of a society. The boundaries within which they regulate their individuality are clearly drawn, and there are very definite ideas of what is 'right' and 'proper'.

In the novels of George Eliot, the boundaries were those of the separate spheres of men and women: the lines drawn between the worldly male domain of business, politics and academics, and the confined, domestic
female sphere of household and children. Individual women with diffuse ambitions and obscure dreams of unattainable greatness were bounded by the social demands on their sex. The roles they were expected to fulfil were prescribed under the society's regimented codes of behaviour and emotion, and their struggles portray individuality which succumbs to the powerful influence of the society. The need to belong, and the desire for acceptance, subdue them, and their unlimited personal ambitions are relinquished to be replaced by acceptance of the society's values. The conflict between their desires and the society's demands is reconciled through intellectual justification, when they finally accept the need to forgo personal desires for the community's sake.

Late in the century, the boundaries which surround the principal characters depicted by Thomas Hardy are even more insistent and imperative, enclosing them within rigid class structures as well as those of sex and economics. The nature of their individuality, however, is so intense that the characters cannot help but break through the strict lines, asserting their emotions and desires in an unmistakable fashion. Thomas Hardy's portrayal of such potent individuality, however, cannot be accommodated within the late Victorian social boundaries and these individuals are destroyed, seemingly by their own emotions and actions, but in actuality by the punitive power of the restricting society.

Jane Austen's portrayal of individuality often displays ambivalence toward Romantic attitudes. The conflict in her novels between Romantic ideals and objective rationalism would be an area of interest for further
study, along with its relationship to the development of the Victorian paradox: the veneration of individuality and the simultaneous demands to conform. George Eliot's portrayal of individuality also attests to the supremacy of the society, but any pejorative associations are negated because the individuals are seen to arrive at their own decisions through a rational process of experience and choice. That their choice is to submit to the demands of the society is portrayed as a 'natural' conclusion. Even at the end of the nineteenth century, when Thomas Hardy portrays the individual as more important than the society, his novels confirm the omnipotence of the society's demands for conformity as a natural outcome of the conflict between individual and society.

An absorbing comment can be made on Jane Austen's opposition to Jacobin ideals. She used the portrayal of the individual to reassert the necessity of strict social forms and traditional institutions. She used lively, intelligent personalities as justification for the intrinsic rightness of the social status quo. Jacobin writers of the time used the portrayal of remarkable individuals as a means to examine the state of society, and most often found it lacking, as they criticised long-standing institutions and the limitations which a strict society imposed on the expression of individuality. Further investigation of this would produce valuable analysis about the type of literary and contextual relationships that existed between Jane Austen's work and that of the Romantic and Jacobin writers.

The portrayals of character and action in novels throughout the nineteenth century indicate a traceable movement from absolute to relative
conceptions of morality. Jane Austen's novels clearly delineate the unquestionable nature of the social values of the late eighteenth century, especially in regard to the social structure and its concomitant obligations and rights. George Eliot's earlier novel *Middlemarch* portrays the strong influence of traditional community values over personal desires, and re-asserts the supremacy of the social body over the individual. However, in *Daniel Deronda* the social body is portrayed as corrupt and materialistic, and the individual's desires and emotions take on a new significance. George Eliot's resolution is to hearken back to older community values, those of the rural interdependent society, rather than submit the individual to the pernicious late Victorian materialism. In this manner, the individual is still seen as part of the interwoven relationships of human society, with rights to claim and duties to fulfil. The focus of moral ideals in the later part of the nineteenth century turns more completely to the domain of the individual's perceptions and emotions in the novels of Thomas Hardy.

Austen's and Eliot's philosophies maintain that individuals should treat each other well for the sake of harmony in the community; Hardy's philosophy is that people should be treated kindly and well simply for their own sakes. At the end of the century the idea of the individual as an autonomous entity has assumed greater importance, as the traditional absolutes of the Victorian society disintegrated and past certainties were questioned and disproved. It began to be accepted that, in an unstable and, often, hostile society, an individual had only oneself to rely upon for moral guidance and choice.
Jane Austen's and George Eliot's novels are concerned with the reconciliation of the individual with the society, whereas Thomas Hardy's works depict individuals who are unable to settle within the society whose values are incompatible with the individual's emotional contentment. Jane Austen uses character to strengthen and reinforce traditional society; and portrays how individuals can retain integrity, wit and uniqueness completely within the society's boundaries of duty and obligation. George Eliot's characters are part of her scrutiny of social injustices, but, eventually, they agree that compromise is necessary in a demanding and complex society by relinquishing ambition and desire. Certain reservations are apparent in the later novel, however, and this element of dissatisfaction develops in Hardy's work into grave conflicts between the nature of the individual and the nature of society. For Hardy, the punitive nature of the conservative society's attitude towards individuality, and the rigid hypocritical code of morality did not allow for a reconciliation between the assertion of individuality and the society's demands. Thomas Hardy's characters remain homeless wanderers. They never find a satisfactory establishment or settlement. In this way he portrays a society antagonistic toward individuality, that abhors non-conformity and that punishes those who break from preordained roles and classes. Where Jane Austen's novels portray the benefits of a harmonious society, Thomas Hardy's works portray the harm done by a society which creates isolated individuals. Austen's depiction shows how irrevocably individuals are conjoined in the web of human society. Eliot's concern, also, is more focused on the links between people, rather than the
breaches. She portrays how the individual is not a whole person until the breaks are healed and the interdependence of traditional society is re-established. The characters exist for and in their societies, rather than in opposition to them. They acknowledge and maintain group solidarity rather than individual success, submitting to the needs of the community’s survival at the expense of the individual’s emotions and desires. Hardy’s theme is that the emotional and perceptual distances between individuals are so great, and are exacerbated to such an extent by the materialism and hypocrisy of the late Victorian society, that it is impossible to heal the breaches. The uniqueness of individual awareness encourages isolation and alienation, as the nature of society makes it impossible to understand fully another person’s thoughts.

Characters in Jane Austen’s novels reveal their desires and motives in what they do and say. Their interaction with others in their society is governed by conventions of civility, honour and chivalry, and all behaviour is judged by these standards. The characters do not have inner lives, insomuch that they are only concerned with behaviour and consequence in the domain of the social body. In societies portrayed by George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, where the distinctions between action and motive are less clearly drawn, behaviour is not always a true gauge of character. The latter two writers are more likely to portray individuals whose thoughts may be at odds with their actions, as they are forced to act in ways contrary to their true desires through necessity, teaching, or in response to momentary impulses. In these later works, the realm of the individuals’ inner lives is a
far more significant element of their depiction. Their perception and
judgement of other characters and events grow increasingly more important
in the novels. Pivotal events, such as turning points in the novel’s action,
more often occur in the minds of individuals. The narrators also remind the
reader more often of the uniqueness of one person’s perception, and the
utterly different cast which is thrown over events according to the
individual’s point of view. This is evidence of the increasingly relative
nature of morality. The individual is not necessarily discounted as ‘wrong’
for ignoring social conventions, and many more mitigating circumstances
which influence behaviour are taken into consideration. The extent to which
writers of fiction in the late nineteenth century accounted for behaviour
through external influences, as opposed to intrinsic motives such as
awareness of absolutes of right or wrong behaviour, could provide the basis
for further analysis in this area.

In both Jane Austen’s and George Eliot’s novels, characters are
portrayed who change fundamental aspects of their outlooks, in order that
they may accommodate themselves better to the society’s demands of them.
The principal characters are awakened to the folly of certain actions, and
undergo great mortification as they admit to their own moral stupidity.
They are quite satisfied with the result, as they know they are now better
fitted to fulfil their duties in society. Others survive great emotional suffering
and personal anguish as they learn to open their moral views, and as they
shed the self-centred aspect of their immaturity. They overcome those
aspects of their natures which isolate them from society, and become part of
the community. Thomas Hardy's 'natural' characters, however, are unable to change in such a dramatic manner because their individuality is imperative. They remain true to their emotions and desires, even though it leads them to tragic fates. In Hardy's portrayal, the tragedy to a great extent lies in the society which cannot accommodate true individuality, and which demands conformity at the expense of human nature. The portrayal of the individual shifts from that of Jane Austen and George Eliot who portray exemplary, but erring, characters who reform their ways and become part of the society, to that of Thomas Hardy whose characters' natures are too intense to be curbed by social rules, and can thus never become part of conventional society. The earlier writers signified the importance of flexibility and change in the individual, which were necessary to enable people to take their place in society. Hardy depicts the alienation and isolation of the individuals who are rejected by the society because they are not able to change their inherent natures. Natural individuality, the importance of which Hardy stresses at great length, is crushed by the imposition of principles and values of the post industrial Victorian society which demanded conformity and conventionality at a high cost to the individual.

The impression left by the conclusion of Hardy's novels is that the full assertion of individuality has no valid place in the modern society. From this point it would be a valuable exercise to continue to trace the origins of twentieth-century themes and fiction dealing with the oppression of isolated individuality. The influence of the post industrial mass culture, with its roots
in the nineteenth century, would be no small part of the discussion. The social movements in post-Victorian society, and the effects on individuality of social anonymity and personal alienation, would provide a wide field of research for the continuing evolution of the portrayal of the individual. There is an interesting dichotomy that has developed in this study: as the society through the nineteenth century grew less sure of itself, greater faith became invested in the value of individuality. As the social body shed the traditional absolutes and the props which had maintained the power and hegemony of the ruling classes, the individual increasingly was seen as the source of morality, truth and integrity. The conflict between individual and society became less that of the person who momentarily errs from the ‘right’ path, and more a struggle for supremacy in which the rights of the individual and the demands of the society are fundamentally incompatible.

The earlier Victorian novels are clear in their definitions of success and failure in society. Further study of the historical perception of these realms of individual experience would be intriguing as a comparative exercise. Analysis of the nature of the rewards and punishments, and what makes them effective for individuals could provide further insight into the nature of individuality as portrayed in fiction. This thesis has touched on the power of society to punish what it sees as erring individuals, and has posited that the fear of social ostracism is the weapon wielded by the dominant society. This element of Victorian novels could be surveyed to ascertain the extent of this power, and how far it is portrayed as influencing individual behaviour.
‘Individual’ and ‘society’ are interdependent concepts; individuals comprise the social body, and co-existence is an inherent part of human society. The nature of society is such that awareness of others, rules of behaviour and restraints on actions become undeniable conditions for existence in that society. The novels and characters analysed in this thesis are portrayals of different manifestations of the rules and restraints, along with the way the life of the individual becomes subject to these boundaries. Control and restraint have been seen to be the key aspects of the portrayal of individuality in these nineteenth-century novels, whether it has been the self-restraint of the individual, or the external restraint imposed by the society. The life of the individual is seen as being governed by boundaries, which encompass all aspects of society, including class, religion, economic status, and sex. In a complex, post-industrial society, the affective power of individuality is portrayed as an inexorable and undeniable force, but the need for the society to confine and restrain this force, ultimately, is seen as more imperative.
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Primary texts


Secondary texts


217


219


220