

"ENSLAVEMENT TO FORMS": SUBJECTION AND REBELLION OF THREE OF HARDY'S WOMEN

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Susan Roberta Darling

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Throughout his career as a novelist Thomas Hardy shows concern about issues affecting women, especially their subordinate status in marriage and their subjection to the double standard of morality. As his career develops, he takes a more cogent stand on these and other subjects concerning women as evidenced by the increasing rebelliousness of his women protagonists against Victorian social conventions. This study first identifies the conventions that confined women to limited roles and kept them second-class citizens throughout much of the nineteenth century. The study then documents the increasing rebellion of three of Hardy's women protagonists: Elfride Swancourt of A Pair of Blue Eyes (1873), Eustacia Vye of The Return of the Native (1878), and Sue Bridehead of Jude the Obscure (1895).

Like women in Victorian England, these women characters are viewed by their society primarily as sexual beings. Their sexuality is central

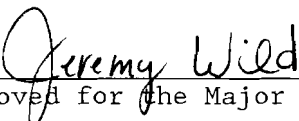
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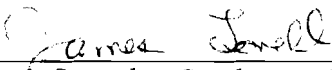
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to the novels in which they appear. For example, all three characters face the angel/whore dichotomy. These women accept in varying degrees the angel ideal which dictates that women be docile and chaste and that their only goal be marriage. Elfride Swancourt internalizes this ideal. Eustacia Vye, who wants "to be loved to madness," knows she has moved far beyond the angel ideal. Sue Bridehead makes an intelligent argument against women being forced into this role and tries to live her life accordingly but society will not allow it.

These women also rebel in varying degrees against their society's refusal to view them as intelligent people capable of being independent. They are educated women, in their society's view, but they cannot use their education to improve their stations in life. Elfride tries to be a successful writer but she faces unfair criticism from her male critic. Although Eustacia has no clear idea of an occupation in which she would be self-supporting, she rejects the limited roles open to her: teacher of children, companion, wife/mother, and mistress. Sue desires a college education available only to men and also a job in which she would have the freedom to work independently. Faced with sharply restricted professional opportunities, all of these women are or become financially dependent on men.

Hardy's awareness of how these and other Victorian social conventions affect women and his growing sympathy with women as victims of these conventions culminate in his portrayal of women characters who are intelligent and rebellious. In the end, however, convention not only denies them self-development and fulfillment but destroys them.

  
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CHAPTER ONE  
VICTORIAN WOMEN AS VICTIMS OF CONVENTION

Introduction

Hardy had a fascination with studying women characters and men/women relationships in his novels. Many of his women protagonists are remarkable in that they are strong-willed, passionate, intelligent and financially independent, unlike the typical Victorian woman. Necessarily involved in the portrayal of these independent women are the effects that Victorian social conventions have on them and, more specifically, the extent to which these women accept their society's conventions. In order to put the struggles of Hardy's fictional women in the context of the Victorian woman, Chapter One identifies the conventions that kept women subordinate during the nineteenth century.

Even though some changes occurred in attitudes and laws concerning women in the latter part of the century, throughout much of it women were second-class citizens. As will be seen, paradoxical assumptions about women were the basis for their subordinate status: women were not as intelligent as men, yet women were morally superior. On the basis of these assumptions, women were restricted to the roles of wife and mother.

Because the only goal for women was marriage, they were denied a good education and entry into the professions. If a woman received an

education, it was to prepare her to attract a husband and manage a household. If a woman was forced to be self-supporting, only a limited number of "respectable" occupations was open to her: she could be a teacher in a primary school, a governess, or a companion to the sick and old. The jobs open to lower-class women--factory worker, shop clerk, or servant,--were less respectable.

The second assumption about women, that they were morally superior, again restricted women to specific spheres. It was their duty to serve others, the poor and sick, their families, and especially their husbands. While it was the man's role to participate in the competitive, sordid business world where he might easily lose touch with his higher sentiments, it was the woman's role to make the home a bastion against the evil forces of the outside world. Thus, the woman was considered the "angel in the house."

The ideal of women as morally superior "angels" also prescribed that they be chaste. This was the basis for the sexual double standard which greatly restricted their social freedom. It was forgivable if men transgressed because they had more "passionate natures" but respectable women were not supposed to think or talk about sex. Contraception was not available because the purpose of sex for the married, respectable woman was to produce children. Since the ideal was for "good" women to be chaste and uninterested in sex, men turned to "bad" women, or prostitutes or mistresses, for sexual gratification.

These assumptions about women are reflected in the laws concerning marriage and divorce that legally sanctioned women's subordinate position. Women were denied the right to own property once they became engaged and then during marriage. They were not allowed to take legal



action. Women were also denied rights over their own persons because their husbands legally owned them. It was virtually impossible for a woman to divorce her husband because it was expensive and she must prove her husband's adultery plus other crimes, such as desertion, sodomy, bestiality or rape. A husband, however, could obtain a divorce by only proving adultery.

Many of these conventions directly affect the three women protagonists of Hardy's discussed in Chapters Two, Three, and Four. These conventions are obstacles to these women's self-development and happiness and eventually destroy them.

Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837 but even around 1800 the traditionalist ideal of women ensconced in the home and subservient to man was widely accepted in English society. Such clear sex role definitions were part of the strict guidelines of social behavior which the rising middle class established to maintain its precarious position in "polite society." This traditionalist view was reinforced by the popularity of Protestantism, with its strict moral sanctions, among the middle class early in the Victorian period. This view, however, was slowly changed by the decline of Christianity and the developing emancipation of women. Historians generally agree that the decade of 1860-69 marked the beginning of serious questioning of established social mores, including the authority of Christianity and woman's place in society. Christianity was challenged by Darwinism (the Origin of Species was published in 1859) and the new sciences of anthropology and psychology (Crow 30). John Stuart Mill's The Subjection of Women, published in 1869, increased interest in the emancipation of women.

However, despite this serious questioning of mores and reforms in other areas such as trade and working conditions, women remained second class citizens throughout much of the 19th century.

Until some changes in attitudes and laws concerning women occurred in the latter part of the century, women were denied a good education, entry into most professions, the right to hold property, and even rights over their own bodies. Two assumptions about women were the basis for their subordinate role in society: Women were not as intelligent as men, yet women were morally superior. On the basis of these assumptions, women were restricted to the role of wife and mother.

Because a woman's only goal was marriage, her education prepared her to attract a husband and then to be a proper wife. The education of the typical middle and upper-class girl consisted of "polite accomplishments" designed to make her interesting and attractive to a prospective husband. These accomplishments included music, painting, a smattering of carefully selected literature, flower arranging and the like, and sometimes a foreign language. She also learned sewing and needlework and perhaps other domestic skills to prepare her to manage a household once she was married. Girls of this class were either taught by their parents or governesses or sent to boarding schools. In 1864-68, the Schools Inquiry Commission found boarding schools girls' education "fragmentary, multifarious, disconnected; taught not scientifically as a subject, but merely as so much information and hence, like a wall of stones without mortar, it [falls] to pieces" (qtd. in Crow 150). However, boys of this class were given a secondary and college education. Their college education, which, in addition to the humanities, included mathematics, science, and economics, prepared them for a possible pro-

profession. The education of lower-class children was essentially equal for boys and girls in that schools were established for them by the government and churches. These schools, however, were poorly attended, and fewer girls went than boys.

Only in slow, plodding steps during the latter half of the Victorian Era was a college education comparable to men's available to women. In fact, there was strong opposition to women obtaining a college education, as shown in this excerpt from an anonymous article in a series published in a Conservative weekly, Imperial Review, in 1867-68. This piece is entitled "True Colleges for Women":

It is difficult to treat with gravity this preposterous proposal of a University career for the potential wives of Englishmen without being betrayed into an indignation such as, nowadays, is never effective and is not infrequently ridiculous . . . . Home, and home only [is] the 'True College' for girls. We are treading on delicate ground and must needs pick our way daintily. Nevertheless, we need not shrink from saying that the congregation of young girls at a certain age, either in boarding school, true colleges, or any other gregarious establishment . . . is a downright forcing of minds which ought, for the moment, to be kept as dormant as possible. By minds we do not mean intellects; we mean what everybody who is acquainted with human nature will understand. (qtd. in Crow 198-99)

One of the first colleges open to women, Queen's college, was founded in 1818 to provide better training for governesses since many were incompetent. A women's college was established at Cambridge in 1869 and Oxford in 1879, but it was not until 1920-21 that women were allowed to

receive degrees from these institutions. In 1880 a true college education, not just governess training, was available to women when the University of London was opened to them and they could receive degrees.

Even after the establishment of women's colleges, there was still strong opposition from both men and women against higher education for women. Mrs. Lynn Linton, author of many articles against women's rights published in the Saturday Review, also wrote The One Too Many, a novel about women students at Girton college who are characterized as women who flirt, drink, smoke, swear and know and talk about unfit subjects (Crow 327). And Stopford Brooke, a clergyman and professor at Queen's College, felt that the better part of women's nature suffered in their pursuit of higher education. According to him, educated women looked with contempt on self-sacrifice, sentiment, imagination, beauty and art, and the "higher passions of the ideal or of the religious life" (Crow 327).

Along with the prejudice against women obtaining a college education was the prejudice against their entering the professions. Women were thought not to have the intellectual or managerial capacity to participate in the nation's increasingly complex mercantile economy (Altick 51). The upper and middle-class woman, even if she was well-educated, was not supposed to work. In an era when hard work and utility were valued, many middle and upper-class women were encouraged to be "decoratively futile" (Altick 51). These women were symbols of the wealth and status of their husbands. However, many women were involved in philanthropy, helping the sick and poor. Indeed, a few of these philanthropic pursuits such as nursing became professions later in the century. But throughout much of the era the only jobs open to upper and

middle-class women, when circumstances forced them to work, were as teachers in primary schools or governesses, both of which had low pay and prestige. Some women tried, and were successful at, professional writing but they encountered the male critic's prejudice against women writers. Many women writers, among them George Eliot and Anne and Charlotte Brontë, wrote under pseudonyms to avoid undue criticism. An example of such prejudice is Robert Southey's letter of March 1837 to Charlotte Brontë warning her against making a career of writing: "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties the less leisure she will have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation (qtd. in Basch 108).

While it was not respectable for upper and middle-class women to work with their hands, such work was a necessity for most lower-class women in order to help support their families. The lower-class in general provided cheap labor for jobs in shops and as house servants and the more hazardous jobs in mines, factories, and sweat shops. Women and children were paid even less than men. Even after the Factory Acts improved conditions for women working in mines and textile mills, deplorable conditions still existed in trades such as dressmaking, nail-making, matchmaking, and piece-working. One abuse brought to public attention was the match-tipper's hazard of "phossy jaw," a form of necrosis caused by the phosphorus they handled (Altick 57). Some lower-class women supplemented their incomes by becoming prostitutes, or prostitution became their only means of support.

The ideal vocation for Victorian women of all classes, however, was wife and mother. This ideal came from the middle-class traditionalist

view that women should be sheltered in the home and subservient to men. Women were viewed as weaker physically and intellectually but at the same time invested with moral superiority, which is the second major assumption which made Victorian women subordinate to men. This assumption of women's moral superiority, conversely, was founded on the belief that women are imperfect if not completely evil (Basch 3). The Christian belief, especially through Saint Paul, of women as easily corruptible and having a propensity for corrupting men, was influential in Victorian society. According to this belief, because women are morally weaker, they must constantly fight to overcome their faults through religious devotion. The Victorian ideal of women as moral guardians of society was therefore based on the view that women can be truly admirable only when they overcome their moral weakness by devoting themselves to serving God and humanity and thus attaining moral superiority. Women were constantly reminded that they were to be on guard against moral failure. Mrs. Sarah Ellis, author of popular books on the proper social behavior of women, reminded her readers in The Daughters of England, 1845, to avoid the typical feminine faults of selfishness, indolence, and vanity by cultivating "habits of industry, feelings of benevolence and Christian meekness" (qtd. in Basch 4).

This virtuousness in women was insisted upon and idealized, indeed, idealized to the point where women were viewed not as humans but angels. This idealization was similar to the medieval courtly love tradition in which women were also idealized. Coventry Patmore's famous poem, "The Angel in the House," defined and glorified the innocent, moral, unearthly being that women were to aspire to be and men were to woo and marry:

Her disposition is devout,  
 Her countenance angelical;  
 The best things that the best believe  
 Are in her face so kindly writ  
 The faithless, seeing her, conceive  
 Not only heaven, but hope of it. (Bk. I, Canto III)

This idealization of women, however, enforced on them strict social behavior and confined them to the "woman's sphere" of home, family, religion, and philanthropy. Women were not to aim at self-development but self-renunciation. Their main function was to serve, and to serve especially their husbands. Mrs. Ellis wrote in her essay, "Behaviour to Husbands," which appeared in her book The Wives of England, Their Relative Duties, Domestic Influence, and Social Obligations, 1843, that a wife was to be

. . . supremely solicitous for the advancement of her husband's intellectual, moral, and spiritual nature. She should be 'a companion who will raise the tone of his mind from low anxieties, and vulgar cares and will lead his thoughts to expatiate or repose on those subjects which convey a feeling of identity with a higher state of existence beyond this present life.' (qtd. in Houghton 351)

While the man's role was to participate in the competitive, sordid business world where he might easily lose touch with his higher sentiments, it was the woman's role to make the home a bastion against the evil forces of the outside world. The home was a sanctuary of peace and innocence to which the man could escape and be the sole authority. The woman lived a sheltered life, only venturing out when she offered

her help to the sick and poor. She was also busy with her children which tended to be abundant because of increased knowledge of medicine and sanitation, lowering infant mortality, and the unavailability of contraception.

This rigid stereotyping of roles is stated by the king in Tennyson's poem The Princess, 1847:

When man wants weight, the woman takes it up,  
 And topples down the scales; but this is fixt  
 As are the roots of earth and base of all;  
 Man for the field and woman for the hearth:  
 Man for the sword and for the needle she:  
 Man with the head and woman with the heart:  
 Man to command and woman to obey;  
 All else confusion. (Part V, 434-441)

Women were endowed with the power to ennoble and inspire others but this revered position "was the fruit of subjection and submission" (Basch 6). Ruskin wrote in "The Crown of Wild Olive" that "A true wife, in her husband's house, is his servant; it is in his heart that she is queen . . ." (The Works of John Ruskin 491).

The ideal of women as angels or priestesses and the home as sanctuary was reinforced by the need of many individuals for a moral foundation in the face of religious questioning. Because of the internal corruption of the Anglican Church, Darwin's theory of evolution was drastically diminished Man's place in the universe, and the over-all rise of criticism of established authority (so typical of Benthamism), Christian theological dogma lost much of its hold. A more secular religion which included the ethics of Christianity was a replacement for



some people. The family was the source of the highest emotions. Women were chaste and devoted to serving others and men protected and cherished their families.

The ideal of women as morally superior "angels" greatly restricted their social freedom. The "angel" ideal strictly prescribed that a woman be chaste. It was also the ideal for men to be chaste but it was generally accepted that men have more "passionate natures" and so it was forgivable if they transgressed. Therefore, women, unmarried and married, were subject to a double standard of morality concerning sexual conduct. Young unmarried women were strictly chaperoned. It was the mark of good upbringing if a girl came to her husband ignorant of sex. A woman who had "fallen" from her "pure" state was not likely to become the wife of a respectable man since she could not possibly be the protectress of his moral and spiritual values. "Respectable" ladies were not supposed to think or talk about sex. While it was a married woman's duty to produce children, she was not supposed to, "by nature," have any sexual passion and was considered indecent if she did. Nor would a respectable woman ever hear of contraception because it was the "harlot's habit." The medical profession refused to have any part in making contraception available. One doctor resigned from the London Dialectical Society because it "had discussed the propriety of assigning to medical men the intimated function of teaching females how to indulge their passion and limit their families" (qtd. in Crow 280).

This seeming confusion on the question of women's sexual passion--either they have none or are overly passionate--stems from the enormous Victorian effort to overlay the belief that women have a voracious sexual appetite and a desire to seduce men with the ideal that women are

morally superior. Basch points out the "mutation of the Eve myth into the Mary myth, of temptress into redeemer, implied a fundamental process of desexualization of the woman, who was bit by bit deprived of her carnal attributes . . ." (8). Thus the dichotomy of women being seen by men as either totally "good" (symbolized by Mary, a lily, and an angel) but sexless, or "bad," (symbolized by Eve, a rose, or a she-devil), is especially strong in Victorian society.

Since the ideal was for "good" women to be chaste and uninterested in sex, men turned to "bad" women, prostitutes or mistresses, for sexual gratification. Contributing to the market for prostitutes was the fact that many Victorian couples waited to marry until the young man had enough money to establish himself firmly in the middle class. There was no doubt that the future bride would not enter into a sexual relationship before marriage. Therefore, a large market for prostitutes existed in Victorian England and because of the lack of jobs for women there was a large supply of prostitutes. Victorian English society, however, tended to place the cause of prostitution on the prostitute's "wantonness" rather than acknowledge the deplorable economic condition of lower-class women. Bracebridge Hemyng, author of a description of London prostitution, which was part of Henry Mayhew's four volume study entitled London Labour and the London Poor, published in the 1860's, . . . believed, along with many other Victorian respectables, that female operatives--in which definition he included almost all women working for a living from milliners to ballet girls--were by their nature unchaste and in the habit of prostituting themselves either for money 'or more frequently for their own gratification.' (Cross 226)

This double standard of morality is reflected in the laws concerning marriage and divorce, laws which legally sanctioned women's subordinate position. Once a woman became engaged, all of her property automatically became her fiance's. Once she was married, her property remained his and anything she earned or was given became his too. Moreover, upon marrying, she lost the right to take part in any legal action: she could not sign a contract or lease, or collect debts, or sue for any reason. If her husband spent all of her money, or deserted her and kept drawing on her resources, she had no legal recourse. (It was not until 1870 that the Married Woman's Property Act gave a wife the right to her own earnings, investments, inheritance, and gifts.) A man also legally owned the persons of his wife and children and was free to beat, imprison, or to do anything else he cared to do with them. A small degree of protection came in 1857 when the Matrimonial Causes Act made divorce easier to obtain. Before the Act, divorce was only possible by an act of Parliament for each case and cost about £800 or £900. Obviously this was only for the very rich and of course a wife, not owning any property, could not bring suit against her husband. After 1857 divorce was cheaper but still upheld the double standard. A man could ask for a divorce on the grounds of his wife's adultery but a wife could divorce her husband only if she could prove adultery plus "cruelty or desertion or the crimes of sodomy, bestiality, or rape" (Crow 158). The widely held belief that a wife's adultery was more serious than a husband's was based on the fact that "spurious offspring" could gain inheritance. It was not until 1929 that the grounds for divorce were made equal for men and women.

These conventions in Victorian society that kept women in a subordinate position also affect the three fictional characters, Elfride Swancourt, Eustacia Vye, and Sue Bridehead, discussed respectively in Chapters 2, 3, and 4. Like women in Victorian England, these characters are looked upon by their society primarily as sexual beings. These characters rebel against their subordinate role and struggle to be viewed as thinking beings. The extent to which they rebel is in direct correlation with Hardy's growing awareness of how these conventions affect women.

These characters' sexuality is central to the novels in which they appear. For example, all three face the angel/whore dichotomy. Elfride is viewed as an angel by her two suitors, Smith and Knight, until they learn that other men have fallen in love with her. Though she is still a virgin, they see her as a fallen woman and therefore unmarriageable. Eustacia is considered a fallen woman by conventional standards, which are expressed through Diggory Venn and the Yeobrights, because of her unsanctioned relationship with Wildeve. Her husband Clym Yeobright tries to fit her into his idea of a chaste, schoolteacher-wife but then views her as unworthy to be his wife when he learns that Wildeve had visited Eustacia after her marriage. And Sue too, is first seen as a pretty, sweet angel by her lover, Jude. He wants to possess her by marrying her but she refuses to be forced into legally binding herself to him. Society then views her as a fallen woman when it learns that she and Jude live together but are not married.

These three women accept in varying degrees the angel ideal. Elfride dearly wants to be the submissive, chaste wife of Knight. Eustacia wants "to be loved to madness" but knows she cannot fit into the

angel ideal. Sue makes an intelligent argument against women being forced into this role and tries to live her life accordingly but society will not allow it and she too "falls into the enslavement of forms."

The threat of economic ruin hangs over these women because of their fall from respectability. Society will not accept them in any role other than chaste young women and then wife/mother so that when they step outside the norm they have no acceptable position in society.

Nor are these women allowed to support themselves because of the opposition to women obtaining an education and entering the professions. Elfride, Eustacia, and Sue are educated women in their society's view but they cannot use their education to improve their stations in life. Elfride tries to be a successful writer but her ruse of assuming a man's pen name is seen through by her male critic and she faces unfair criticism of her novel by, ironically, the man she falls in love with. Eustacia and Sue have even gone beyond the typical girls' education and have training to become teachers. Eustacia has no clear idea of an occupation for herself in which she would be self-supporting but she rejects the limited ones open to her: teacher, companion and wife/mother. Sue is not content with the extent of her education and desires a college education available only to men. She therefore befriends a university student and reads his books and gleans some of his education from him through conversation. She is the only one of these women characters who is self-supporting, though in a menial task, but she later becomes dependent on Jude. She is also turned away from a teaching position and helping Jude with masonry, because she is a social outcast. When she and Jude are in financial difficulties, she again **must** take on a menial task.

Eustacia and Sue are also affected by the divorce laws, which are unfair to women. For Eustacia, who is trapped in a marriage to a husband who despises her, divorce is not an option. She must wait for Clym to reclaim or divorce her, since she is unable to bring proceedings against him. Sue is able to obtain a divorce from Phillotson only because of his kindness in releasing her. Phillotson obtains the divorce by claiming Sue's adultery.

Hardy had a fascination with studying women characters and men/women relationships but his portrayal of women matured as he better understood to what extent social forces worked to keep them subordinate. Throughout his career, his nobles showed concern with two important issues affecting women and relationships: his rejection of the "traditional demands for purity in women" and his cynicism about marriage (Cunningham 81). Even when his heroines possess "typical feminine" faults, which most of them do, they have his full support when they are trapped in a bad marriage and/or are victims of the sexual double standard. His stand on these subjects became stronger in his last three major novels:

In The Wonderlanders a great deal is said in favour of divorce and against the discriminatory marriage laws; Tess of the D'Urbervilles is a powerful indictment of the double moral standard; and even Hardy himself, who often went to almost mendacious lengths in his attempts to dissociate his novels from contemporary problems, was forced to concede that Jude the Obscure at least 'involves' the marriage question. (Cunningham 80)

The more cogent stand on these subjects in his later novels coincided with factors in his personal life and the growing interest in

England of the "New Woman." Hardy, who questioned the viability of marriage in many of his novels, refrained from giving his personal views on the subject, perhaps because of his own strained marital relationship. While he was writing Jude, his relationship with his wife Emma was becoming increasingly difficult, exacerbated when she made her grievances against him public (Millgate, Biography 391). In 1894, however, Hardy did make his views known. When asked by the New Review about his opinion on premarital sex education for young people, he suggested that perhaps the problem was broader:

As your problems are given on the old lines, so I take them, without entering into the general question whether marriage, as we at present understand it, is such a desirable goal for all women as it is assumed to be; or whether civilization can escape the humiliating indictment that . . . it has never succeeded in creating that homely thing, a satisfactory scheme for the conjunction of the sexes. (qtd. in Cunningham 85)

And two years later in a letter to his close friend Florence Henniker, he was even more pessimistic: "Seriously, I don't see any possible scheme for the union of the sexes that would be satisfactory" (qtd. in Cunningham 86). Hardy was also influenced by the pervading interest in the "new" emancipated woman in the later 1800's. He had read many "New Woman" novels about women protagonists who seek emancipation from the marriage market, the double standard, and limited educational and professional choices. He even copied passages from George Egerton's (Lady Clairmonte) novel, Keynotes, into his notebook at the time he was writing Jude. He was also in contact with authors of "New woman" fiction, among them George Gissing, George Meredith, Florence Henniker, and Grant

Allen. In the "freer atmosphere" of the 1890's, Hardy "brought his earlier interests into sharper, and perhaps more fashionable, focus" (Cunningham 94).



## CHAPTER TWO

## ELFRIDE SWANCOURT

A Pair of Blue Eyes is one of Hardy's first complete studies of the recurring theme of "how male visions of a woman corrupt, compromise, and finally destroy her" (Lucas 127). In this novel, the social forces that confine women to limited roles are active but the characters and the narrator do not give them as much overt consideration as in later novels, especially Jude the Obscure. Rather, A Pair of Blue Eyes is more a study of how the characters' flaws, which stem from their strict adherence to convention, bring about the downfall of the protagonist, Elfride Swancourt.

Elfride is, in many ways, the forerunner of Hardy's later women protagonist. Her situation at the beginning of the story is similar to that of other women characters at the beginning of theirs. As Millgate points out, Elfride is one of the first young women characters whose "parents fail them through selfishness, insensitivity, or death." These women must confront their problems without "parental help or in the face of actual parental opposition" (71). Elfride's mother is dead. Parson Swancourt, Elfride's father, imposes his social climbing aspirations on her, which restricts her choice of suitors. This also necessitates her attention to propriety in terms of social behavior. She is strictly censured by her father when she does not behave appropriately. He sees her as a commodity to buy the Swancourts a higher position in society.

Elfride also has personality traits which later heroines possess. She has coquettish moods, she loves flattery, and she is evasive and vacillating. These "typically feminine" traits, though unflattering, can be read as survival techniques used by a woman in a society in which women's only goal is marriage. Her flirtatiousness attracts suitors and her vacillation from one man to another occurs because she sees the latter as a better protector. Her evasiveness stems from her fear that she will be rejected.

Unlike most of Hardy's heroines, Elfride also possesses traits typical of the ideal "good" Victorian woman. She serves others, such as ministering to her father when he is ill and spending time with the neighboring children, the little Lady Luxillians, who call her their "little mama." She is docile, usually obeying her lovers' and father's wishes. She has a strict sense of propriety. She is accomplished in the "feminine" pursuits of a middle-class lady: directing the household servants, tending flowers and houseplants, and playing the piano. She is also subject to self-destructive romanticism which Lisa Gerrard, in her study, sees as the "actual position of many middle class women in the second half of the nineteenth century: the superficial education, the absence of meaningful work, and the narrowness of daily activities give rise . . . to the obsessive fantasizing and self-delusion . . ."

(1). Elfride, being a middle-class woman and living in an isolated place, has few responsibilities and little to do so she has time to indulge in romantic fantasizing. She reads romances and even writes a medieval romance of her own. Even though it is not explicit in the beginning of the novel, it becomes evident that Elfride accepts marriage as her only goal so her role is to passively wait for a man, a knight,

so to speak, to come and marry her. She is unsophisticated in matters of love because she has not yet been in a love relationship before she meets Stephen Smith.

Elfride finds her knight in Stephen Smith, the architect's assistant restoring her father's church. She is unintimidated by him because he is near her age, good looking (pretty almost), and lacks the cynical, sophisticated air she expected from a London man. She is also attracted to him because she thinks he is of an acceptable social rank, one at least equal to the Swancourt's.

Just as Elfride projects her ideal of "knight" onto Stephen, he projects his ideal of "lady" onto her. He sees her as a vision on the evening of their first meeting, embodying the ideal Victorian woman: beautiful, accomplished, and angelic (pure):

Miss Elfride's image chose the form in which she was beheld during these minutes of singing, for her permanent attitude of visitation to Stephen's eyes during his sleeping and waking hours in after days. The profile is seen of a young woman in a pale gray silk dress with trimmings of swan's-down, and opening up from a point in front, like a waistcoat without a shirt; the cool colour contrasting admirably with the warm bloom of her neck and face. The furthestmost candle on the piano comes immediately in a line with her head, and half invisible itself, forms the accidentally frizzled hair into a nebulous haze of light, surrounding her crown like an aureola. Her hands are in their place on the keys, her lips parted, and trilling forth, in a tender diminuendo, the closing words of the sad apostrophe:

'O Love, who bewailest  
 The frailty of all things here,  
 Why choose you the frailest  
 For your cradle, your home, and your bier!

Her head is forward a little, and her eyes directed keenly upward to the top of the page of music confronting her. Then comes a rapid look into Stephen's face, and still more rapid look back again to her business, her face having dropped its sadness, and acquired a certain expression of mischievous archness the while; which lingered there for some time, but was never developed into a positive smile of flirtation. (13)

The passive voice with which this passage begins and ends indicates that the narrator, Stephen, and Elfride herself participate in making this vision. The narrator participates in that he postulates that to envisage the beloved [forming "a mental picture of especially in advance of realization" (Webster's 9th ed. 417)], is inherent in the beginning of a romance. In the previous paragraph he states that "Every woman who makes a permanent impression on a man is usually recalled to his mind's eye as she appeared in one particular scene, which seems ordained to be her special form of manifestation throughout the pages of his memory" (13). Stephen participates in that he has an ideal woman in mind and projects this ideal on Elfride. Elfride encourages Stephen's vision by her mild flirtatiousness. Stephen is also attracted to Elfride because she is of a higher social rank than he. He later tells his mother, "To marry her would be the great blessing of my life--socially and practically, as well as in other respects. No such good fortune as that, I'm afraid; she's too far above me. Her family doesn't want such country lads as I in it" (69).

Stephen wants to possess Elfride because he views her as an exquisite object, far above him and difficult to reach. He does not need to know her as an individual because his vision of her is what he wants. This attitude is evident in the scene in which Elfride asks Stephen what he loves her for and he lists her physical attributes: "Perhaps, 'twas for your neck and hair . . . etc." (47). She replies, "Ah, that's pretty to say; but I don't care for your love, if it made a mere flat picture of me in that way . . ." (47). She presses him further and he says laconically, ". . . I ought not to think about you if I loved you truly" (47). Elfride does not know that he is referring to the difference in their social rank since she is unaware of his lower rank. Stephen knows that their engagement will bring trouble to Elfride because her father will never agree to it, but he persists in wanting her.

Elfride shows her concern for class distinction when Stephen tells her that his father is the local stonemason and his mother ran a dairy. She tells him, "I don't see how happiness could be where drudgery of dairy-work had to be done for a living--the hands red and chapped, and the shoes clogged . . . . Stephen, I do own that it seems odd to regard you in the light of-of- having been so rough in your youth, and done menial things of that kind" (56).

Stephen, too, is mildly disillusioned with Elfride when she admits that she has had an admirer, a local farmer. She tells Stephen that she would not have married Farmer Jethway because "he was not good enough, even if [she] had loved him" (59). Stephen understands that she means Jethway was socially beneath her. He says, "A large farmer not good enough--how much richer than my family!" (59). The narrator implies

that Stephen adheres to the Victorian double-standard to a mild degree because he is upset that she has had a previous admirer, and Elfride accepts this convention: "Women accept their destiny more readily than men. Elfride had now resigned herself to the overwhelming idea of her lover's antecedents; Stephen had not forgotten the trifling grievance that Elfride had known earlier admiration than his own" (60).

Elfride clings to the relationship because of her need for a "knight" even though she knows that she is above Stephen in intelligence, sophistication, and social standing. She continues to declare her love for Stephen even in the face of her father's prohibition against the engagement after he learns of Stephen's social rank. She and Stephen agree to elope.

Stephen's ineptitude in arranging the elopement, in addition to other shortcomings that she has perceived, cause Elfride to decide not to go through with it. She is exceptionally nervous about the elopement because of her fear of her father. At one point of her lone journey to meet Stephen, she considers turning back, saying to herself, "Still, if I had a mama at home I would go back!" (86), as she realizes that she does not have a close relationship with anyone but Stephen. When she meets Stephen, he informs her they will have to travel much farther to London because the marriage license he obtained is good only in that county. Elfride's nervousness increases because she had planned to travel home the same day, keeping the marriage secret from her father. When they arrive in London, Elfride tells him, "O Stephen, I am so miserable! I must go home again--I must--I must! Forgive my wretched vacillation. I don't like it here--nor myself--nor you!" (89). John Lucus sees Elfride's "pull back from commitment" as instinctual because

she is "emotionally and intellectually more mature" than Stephen (131). She still agrees, however, to marry him later after he has made his fortune in India because she still craves her connection with him.

This connection lasts until Elfride meets and falls in love with a man whom she believes is greater than Stephen, Henry Knight. Elfride is intrigued with Knight even before they actually meet. She had heard Stephen praise his intellect since Knight was Stephen's mentor. After Stephen leaves for India, Elfride's novel is published and, ironically, Knight reviews it anonymously. The review is a patronizing which perturbs her. In it, Knight says that he would be pleased to find something new in the romance but, "instead of this we found ourselves in the hands of some young lady, hardly arrived at years of discretion, to judge by the silly device it has been thought worth while to adopt on the title page, with the idea of disguising her sex" (116). He then says that the only talent of the young lady is "a style of narration peculiar to herself, which may be called a murmuring of delicate emotional trifles, the particular gift of those whom the social sympathies of a peaceful time are as daily food" (117). He also says she ought to stick to descriptions of "domestic experience" (117). He obviously is more interested in criticising the author than the book.

When Knight visits the Swancourts, at Mrs. Swancourt's invitation, Elfride meets the man with whom she has been preoccupied. She is awed by what she sees as his superior intellect, but she soon becomes frustrated with his criticisms of her and wishes to turn them into admiration. Knight displays his chauvinism in this particular criticism: "That a young woman has taken to writing is not by any means the best thing to hear about her." Elfride asks what is and he replies, "Well

. . . I suppose to hear that she is married." Elfride asks, what, after she is married, and he says, "Then to hear no more about her. It is as Smeaton said of his lighthouse: her greatest real praise, when the novelty of her inauguration has worn off, is that nothing happens to keep the talk of her alive." Elfride replies, "But of course it is different quite with men" (124-25). The chess game between them is also indicative of Elfride's desire to impress and Knight's condescending manner. She challenges him to a game, knowing that she is a good chess player "for a woman" (her father says) but she is vexed when she realizes that Knight is letting her win, just as she did Stephen when they played. Elfride challenges Knight to game after game, trying to beat him and becomes so intent that she takes ill. Millgate sees the chess game as "at once an image and an actual battleground of sexual contest [that] operates as a cogent dramatic device" (68-9). After being mastered by Knight, Elfride tries even harder to please him.

Elfride's desire to gain Knight's admiration becomes even stronger as she falls in love with him. This is evident in the scene in which she asks to see Knight's notebook and therein reads Knight's chauvinistic impression of young women's behavior based on his observation of her. Consequently, she is upset that he views her as childish and tries to parry: "But it is well known . . . that the slower a nature is to develop, the richer the nature. Youths and girls who are men and women before they come of age are nobodies by the time that backward people have shown their full compass." He rejoins, ". . . you must not take it for granted that the woman behind her time at a given age has not reached the end of her tether. Her backwardness may be not because she is slow to develop, but because she soon exhausted her capacity for



developing" (140-41). He then comments on the "unquestionably beautiful heads of hair" of the ladies whose portraits hang in the room. Elfride seizes on this opportunity and asks, "Which color do you like best?" and he answers "dark," contrary to her own. She presses him further for a compliment, asking what color of eyes he prefers; he answers "hazel," contrary to hers (141). Her thirst for a compliment from him on her appearance contrasts with her dismay at Stephen's praise of the same. Elfride had taken Stephen's infatuation for granted and looked for his deeper reason for his love yet she looks for any compliment from Knight, however superficial, knowing that he will not praise her for her intellect, prudence, or other qualities.

Knight has become, in Elfride's eyes, the better "knight," a stronger, more capable protector. The narrator compares Knight's place in her affections to Stephen's:

Love frequently dies of time alone--much more frequently of displacement. With Elfride Swancourt a powerful reason why the displacement should be successful was that the new-comer was a greater man than the first. By the side of the instructive and piquant snubbings she received from Knight, Stephen's general agreeableness seemed watery; by the side of Knight's spare love-making, Stephen's continual flow seemed lackadaisical. She had begun to sigh for somebody further on in manhood.

Stephen was hardly enough of a man. (203)

He is also of a higher social rank than Stephen, making him more attractive to her and definitely more acceptable to her father and step-mother.

Even though Knight seems to Elfride to be the perfect "knight," she perceives the danger in choosing for her protector someone who has such conventional, strict views of women. In addition to his disregard of women's intellect and strength of character, she notices his insistence on sexual purity in women. This is foreshadowed in the novel by comparisons of Knight to Hamlet. Knight's brow is described as being "sicklied o'er by the unmistakable pale cast," an allusion to Hamlet and his obsession with chastity. Comments of Knight's such as, "I have been rather absurd in my avoidance of women," and "I have never given a woman a kiss in my life, except yourself and my mother," (235) prompt Elfride to tell him that she has never been kissed. Her intense longing for Knight as the greater man and her fear of his censure of her relationship with Stephen force her to keep that relationship secret.

Elfride's belief that her strength of character and virtuousness are inadequate to Knight's standards causes her to act insecurely. Instead of being confident in her intellect (proved by her literary accomplishment and arguments with Knight), courage and resourcefulness (her saving Knight when he fell off the cliff), and her sexual purity (she returned home a virgin from her failed elopement with Stephen), she becomes increasingly uneasy with herself as her relationship with Knight progresses. These better qualities are replaced with her emotional and intellectual dependence on Knight. The narrator points out, "She never once held an idea in opposition to any one of his, or insisted on any point with him, or showed any independence, or held her own on any subject" (239). She is content to be an object, an adjunct to him as shown in her pride when she receives earrings from him: she tells him,

"I like ornaments, because I want people to admire what you possess, and envy you, and say, 'I wish I was he'" (224).

Elfride's insecurity leaves her defenseless against Knight's probing questioning about her previous involvement with men. He asks her if she has had a lover and she tries "desperately to keep the color in her face" and is evasive, admitting that she has had an admirer but will not say to what extent she loved him. Her reluctance to tell incites Knight to more brutal questioning until she confesses she had been engaged. Her sense of shame convinces Knight she has done great wrong. She tells him, "I would gladly have told you; for I knew and know I had done wrong. But I dare not; I loved you too well. O, so well! You have been everything in the world to me--and you are now. Will you not forgive me?" (271). When she admits that she had been away to London alone with her former lover, he is certain that they had had a sexual relationship.

The strength of Knight's obsession with his ideal of sexual purity in Elfride is in proportion to his disgust with her when he thinks he has uncovered her unchaste affair. Rosmary Sumner also notices that Knight's browbeating of Elfride throughout the relationship is indicative of his unconscious hostility towards her which now reveals itself (124-5). He breaks their engagement immediately after his discovery. The narrator comments on his lack of justice and tolerance:

It is a melancholy thought that men who at first will not allow the verdict of perfection they pronounce upon their sweethearts or wives to be disturbed by God's own testimony to the contrary, will, once suspecting their purity, morally hang them

upon evidence they would be ashamed to admit in judging a dog.

(271)

Knight's disgust is caused partly by his fear that Elfride, being, as he thinks, more sexually experienced, would show up his sexual inadequacy. Even before he wrings the "confession" from her, he is upset by her admission of a previous admirer:

A flush which had in it as much of wounded pride as of sorrow, passed over Knight as he thought of what he had so frequently said to her in his simplicity. 'I always meant to be the first comer in a woman's heart, fresh lips of none for me.' How childishly blind he must have seemed to this mere girl! How she must have laughed at him inwardly! He absolutely writhed as he thought of the confession she had wrung from him on the boat in the darkness of night. The one conception which had sustained his dignity when drawn out of his shell on that occasion--that of her charming ignorance of all such matters--how absurd it was! (247)

Based on this and other examples of Knight's insistence on sexual inexperience, George Wing conjectures that Knight fears sex. Wing says of Knight: "His pride and perverted joy lie in a form of ownership and he wishes to keep his anticipated property burnished and unused--even, the improbable implication is, by himself" (13). This is reinforced by the narrator who says, "Perhaps his lifelong constraint towards women, which he had attributed to accident, was not chance after all, but the natural result of instinctive acts so minute as to be undiscernible even by himself" (260). And Elfride also senses this sexual fear. She tells Knight, "Ordinary men are not so delicate" (260).

Knight's determination to reject Elfride persists when she goes to London to his quarters at Bede's Inn to ask his forgiveness, resulting in complete loss of self-worth. She debases herself before him:

I am afraid that if--you lose sight of me--something dark will happen, and we shall not meet again. Harry, if I am not good enough to be your wife, I wish I could be your servant and live with you, and not be sent away never to see you again. I don't mind what it is except that! (274)

And Knight, ignoring her distress, is struck only by her indiscretion in coming to Bede's Inn. He thinks to himself:

Then came the devastating thought that Elfride's childlike, unreasoning, and indiscreet act in flying to him only proved that the proprieties must be a dead letter with her; that the unreserve, which was really artlessness without ballast, meant indifference to decorum; and what so likely as that such a woman had been deceived in the past? He said to himself, in a mood of the bitterest cynicism: The suspicious discreet woman who imagines dark and evil things of all her fellow-creatures is far too shrewd to be deluded by man: trusting beings like Elfride are the women who fall.' (276)

Knight's strict adherence to convention blinds him to Elfride's suffering: he cannot reach out to her as a human being.

In accepting her society's dictate that her only goal is marriage, Elfride neglects her self-development to become the adjunct of a man. With the combination of lack of close relationships and lack of a worthwhile pursuit or even profession, she has little to give her a sense of self-worth. Even though she is intelligent and ambitious, her accep-

tance of the marriage goal is so much a part of her make-up that she crumbles when her "knight" rejects her. She has nothing to support her; her life is empty. She does not have the strength of character and practicality of a Mrs. Smith who had to run her own dairy. Mrs. Smith herself had realized that Elfride, being of a higher social class and aspiring higher through marriage, lacked support if this fragile world of the "marriage market" fell apart. She had commented to Stephen when she learned he wanted to marry Elfride that if Elfride had "learnt to make figures instead of letters when she was at school 'twould have been better for her pocket; for as I said, there never were worse times for such as she than now" (71).

Because of her loss of self-worth and her father's censure for her rash behavior, Elfride returns to her father's house and takes ill. She wishes she were dead. Her father, as her maid reports, "was bitter to her and harsh upon her" (307). She accepts Lord Luxellian's marriage proposal because, as she told her maid, she would "do anything for the benefit of [her] family, so as to turn [her] useless life to some practical account" (306). Soon after her marriage, she dies in childbirth.

The meeting between Stephen and Knight at the end of the novel in which they accuse each other of ill-using Elfride, shows their jealousy and immaturity. They leave their meeting, each determined to rush to Elfride to propose marriage, unaware of her fate. They catch the same train and continue their ludicrous argument of who is the better man for her to marry. This posturing brings into relief Elfride's tragedy. Even after they learn she is dead, they are more incredulous at the fact that she married: "'False,' whispered Knight," and Stephen replies, "'and dead. Denied us both. I hate "false"--I hate it!'" (305). They

still cannot see what part they played in the tragedy, as is made evident in this speech of Knight's:

She is beyond our love, and let her be beyond our reproach.

Since we don't know half the reasons that made her do as she did, Stephen, how can we say, even now, that she was not pure and true in heart? . . . Can we call her ambitious? No.

Circumstance has, as usual, overpowered her purposes--fragile and delicate as she--liable to be overthrown in a moment by the coarse elements of accident. I know that's it,--don't you?

(305)

Knight can still bring her faults under examination but neither he nor Stephen can see their own faults. They blame the tragedy on "circumstance."

Elfride's internalization of her society's conventions which dictate that she be docile and chaste and that her only goal be marriage brings about her downfall. She is unable to defend her actions against Knight's charge of sexual impropriety because she herself believes that she has acted wrongly. Her belief that her life will only be worthwhile if she marries the "right" man causes her to crumble when Knight rejects her. She loses all self-esteem because she has no emotional support nor sense of self-worth outside of a love relationship.

A further implication of this theme of society's dictate that women's reason for being is wifedom is that they are always financially dependent and therefore under the control of a man. After she is rejected by Knight, she must live with her father and step-mother who disapprove of her behavior. She then has the choice of continuing to live there or to marry Lord Luxellian, whom she does not love. She has

not been encouraged by society in general or her family to be independent.

Elfride Swancourt, with her innocence, capriciousness, and deep desire to be loved, is a charming woman but her meek acceptance of Victorian social conventions and her loss of self make her pathetic. She does not have the strength to try to break out of the limited roles prescribed for women. She does not have the impact that later heroines have because she does not rebel against her situation as Eustacia Vye does nor question women's place in society as Sue Bridehead does.



## CHAPTER THREE

## EUSTACIA VYE

The Return of the Native is a midpoint in Hardy's career as a novelist regarding his awareness of and concern for the limitations which Victorian society imposes on women. Eustacia Vye rebels against these limitations by not accepting the typical roles open to women in her society. Her rebellion, although passionate, is frustrated because her desired role is vague and unrealistic. Further frustrating her desire is her attempt to break out of these limited roles through the conventional means of depending on men. The men she depends upon, Clym Yeobright and Damon Wildeve, fail her, Clym because his conventional expectations of her conflict with her own aims and Wildeve because of his weak nature.

In a novel in which Victorian conventions play a large role in destroying the female protagonist, it is interesting to note that the setting, Egdon Heath, is a wild place where the native inhabitants are not greatly affected by these conventions. Because of its isolation, the conventions of the rest of Victorian England have not taken root. Also, Christianity has never had a strong hold on the inhabitants. John Paterson, in his essay on The Return of the Native, notes that the peasant community of Egdon has an "anti-Christian character:"

The bonfires they build in their first appearance have their antecedents in a barbaric Druidical and Anglo-Saxon past. As

mummers they reenact the old folk-play, the St. George play, whose Christian veneer scarcely conceals the pre-Christian fertility rite. As participants in the ancient ritual of Maypole-day, they celebrate a vitality older and stronger than Christianity. 'In name they were parishioners,' Hardy notes with evident satisfaction, 'but virtually they belong to no parish at all.' (17)

The natives of Egdon, unaffected by many typical Victorian mores founded in Christianity, have a sense of ethics and morals stripped of "civilized" veneer. They are wary of strangers and new ideas. Eustacia is feared by some because of her "foreignness" (she is not a native and is truly foreign in that she is the daughter of a Greek bandmaster and an English woman from Budmouth, a sophisticated seaside resort). Boumelha points out that Eustacia is also feared because she "poses a particular threat to the women of the community, being disruptive by virtue of her unfocused sexuality. She is not . . . bound by legal, or even emotional, ties to any one sexual partner." (53). "On Egdon, [where] coldest and meanest kisses were at famine prices . . ." (96), a highly individualistic and passionate woman is disruptive to the usual mating and marrying patterns of the small heath community. Finally, Eustacia is seen as evil by some of the natives. Susan Nunsuch even goes so far as to make a wax effigy of Eustacia to ward against her "evil."

The Yeobrights and Eustacia, by wealth and education the "aristocrats" of the heath, seek to maintain their separateness from the peasant community but are nevertheless affected by conventions which have strength outside that community. These conventions are standards that Mrs. Yeobright, especially, lives by and which she imposes on her son

Clym and niece Thomasin. For example, Clym received a good education and, at his mother's encouragement, went to Paris to become a diamond merchant, thus conforming to the Victorian ideal of a successful gentleman. Mrs. Yeobright also tries to guide Thomasin according to convention. She forbids the banns against Thomasin's marriage to Wildeve, a failed engineer now running a public house, because of his lower place in society and his rumoured reputation with women. At Thomasin's persistence in wanting to marry Wildeve, Mrs. Yeobright agrees to the marriage but insists they be married in another parish to save the family embarrassment. When Thomasin returns home unmarried because of Wildeve's mistake in obtaining a marriage license for the wrong parish, Mrs. Yeobright urges Thomasin to marry him for the sake of appearances, which Thomasin eventually does with the help of her aunt's maneuvering of Wildeve. Boumelha also sees that "Tamsin's behaviour is at once governed and sustained by an awareness of the judgement of others" (52). Thomasin remains subject to convention throughout the novel.

Eustacia Vye, the Romantic rebel, rebels against convention. Leonard Deen says that "She is a romantic (she is the whole history of romanticism) seen romantically" (122). Hardy compares her to Artemis, Athena, Hera, Heloise, and Cleopatra, imbuing her with their power, passion, pride, capriciousness and mythological greatness. Eustacia's beauty is described in romantic language: "Her presence brought memories of such things as Bourbon roses, rubies, and tropical midnights; her moods recalled lotus-eaters and the march in 'Athalie'; her motions, the ebb and flow of the sea; her voice, the viola" (94). Her scorn at having to live on the heath is described as "smouldering rebelliousness" (94).

In addition to her rebelliousness at being trapped on the heath, Eustacia rebels against convention in varying degrees. She shows her nonconformity in small ways: she does housework on Sundays when everyone else rests, she sings psalms on Saturday nights and reads the bible on weekdays, "that she might be unoppressed with a sense of doing her duty" (97). More important, Eustacia does not conform to the conventions that most women living in England between 1840 and 1850 (when the story takes place) were expected to do. She rejects the traditional view of love; "fidelity in love for fidelity's sake had less attraction for her than for most women: fidelity because of love's grip had much" (96). Her attitude is evident in her relationship with Wildeve. She does not consider him a possible mate or protector, as Elfrida Swancourt does her suitors, but rather she enjoys the passionate, vacillating nature of the relationship. She tells him, "Indeed, I think I like you to desert me a little once now and then . . . . Don't you offer me tame love, or away you go!" (109). Her affair with him is also highly unconventional because it is not the chaste relationship proper for an unmarried couple. In the 1895 version of the novel, Hardy makes clear their sexual relationship: Eustacia says to Wildeve, "I have had no word with you since you . . . deserted me entirely, as if I had never been yours body and soul so irretrievable!"\* Moreover, early in the novel Eustacia makes clear that she will not accept the typical occupations available to Victorian women, even though doing so would make her financially

\*In the 1912 version, this fact was less obvious but nevertheless present. Because of editorial censorship aimed at not offending Victorian sensibilities, the "body and soul so irretrievable" part is left out.

independent, allowing her to leave the heath she hates. When Diggory Venn, who seeks to loosen her hold on Wildeve, offers her a job in Budmouth as a companion to an old sick woman, she replies, "It is to wear myself out to please her! and I won't go" (119). It also becomes evident that Eustacia does not see herself in the ideal role of Victorian woman as wife and mother. Later in the novel, she rejects the role of schoolmistress. Her dream is to move in polite society, perhaps the salons of Paris, where her beauty and wit would be admired.

Even though Eustacia is presented as the Romantic, rebellious heroine, she is simultaneously presented in more realistic terms as a young, lonely, discontented woman with no way to fulfill herself. She is economically dependent on her grandfather but they have little in common and therefore do not have a close relationship. She is intelligent, educated, beautiful, and ambitious but with no purpose to turn these qualities to. Because she rejects the usual occupations of Victorian women, she has little to do. The narrator informs us that Eustacia fantasizes to fill this nether-world she lives in:

And so we see our Eustacia--for at times she was not altogether unlovable--arriving at that stage of enlightenment which feels that nothing is worth while, and filling up the spare hours of her existence by idealizing Wildeve for want of a better object. This was the sole reason of his ascendancy: she knew it herself. At moments her pride rebelled against her passion for him, and she even had longed to be free. But there was only one circumstance which could dislodge him, and that was the advent of a greater man. (98)

Eustacia the romantic heroine is also the romantic girl with un-  
 formed, naive, schoolgirlish dreams. Like Elfride, Eustacia indulges  
 romantic fantasies which are ultimately destructive. Eustacia sees  
 herself as having "emotional power over other individuals [which] is the  
 only kind of influence she can exercise . . . . Her attraction towards  
 Wildeve is partly determined by the eroticism of the power which his  
 relative passivity allows her to imagine that she holds over him"  
 (Mumelha 56). In this passage she is absorbed with this illusion of  
 power even though Wildeve responds to the fire because it is a prear-  
 ranged signal:

[I] thought I would get a little excitement by calling you up  
 and triumphing over you as the Witch of Endor called up Samuel.  
 I determined you should come; and you have come! I have shown  
 my power. A mile and a half hither, and a mile and a half back  
 again to your home--three miles in the dark for me. I have not  
 shown my power? (91)

Eustacia's goal of being a fine lady in sophisticated society is  
 another example of her romantic fantasizing because the goal is vague  
 and unrealistic. Eustacia, being a woman and financially dependent,  
 does not have the freedom or means to realize her plan. Her romantic  
 theme seems attainable to her, however, when she learns that Clym  
 Rotheright, who has become successful in Paris, that glittering "centre  
 and vortex of the fashionable world," as Eustacia thinks of it, is  
 coming to Egdon to visit his mother. Eustacia immediately fantasizes  
 that Clym and she are a good match because she overhears the opinion of  
 some of the local men that she and Clym are "of one mind about niceties  
 or certain, and learned in print, and always thinking about high doc-

trine . . . . They'd look very natty, arm-in-crook together . . . if he's at all the well-favored fellow he used to be" (133). Soon after, Eustacia has a dream in which she is dancing with a knight in armour whose face is hidden by a visor. He starts to remove his visor to kiss her and "his figure fell into fragments like a pack of cards." She awakens and says, "Twas meant for Mr. Yeobright!" The narrator tells us that Eustacia "was by this time half in love with a vision" (143). Despite her dignified, smouldering rebelliousness, Eustacia, like Elfride, hopes that a man, a knight, will fulfill her life.

Eustacia's assertiveness in procuring Clym as her "knight" who will take her away from the heath to a splendid life is revealed in her taking the part of the Turkish knight in the mummer's play of St. George. She does this so that she may go to the Yeobright's Christmas party to catch a glimpse of Clym. Once she is there, she realizes that her boy's costume obscures "the power of her face. . . , the charm of her emotions. . . , the fascinations of her coquetry. . . ," (168) yet Clym notices that the Turkish knight is unique and ascertains that she is a woman. The narrator compares Eustacia to Aphrodite in a similar situation: "When the disguised Queen of Love appeared before AEneas a preternatural perfume accompanied her presence and betrayed her quality" (166).

Despite strong signals to the contrary, Eustacia believes that Clym is the man who can fulfill her life and consequently she falls in love with him. In her illusion of him as her "knight," she does not realize how strong is his determination to stay on the heath and be a "school-master to the poor and ignorant, to teach them what nobody else will" (198). He proposes to her, believing that her dreams of Paris will

vanish and she will make a good schoolmistress and she accepts, believing that she can convince Clym to return to Paris.

This marriage of two idealists at cross-purposes is doomed from the beginning. It is complicated by the fact that soon after the marriage Clym goes partially blind, forcing him to abandon his plan for starting a school and to take up furze-cutting, the occupation of the heath peasants. Clym, a man who held much promise, is perversely content with his menial occupation and unconcerned that he is forcing his wife to live an isolated, mean life. Therefore, not long after her marriage, Eustacia realizes that her "knight" has fallen far short of her expectations, like the knight in her dream who falls into fragments. Clym will not take her away from the heath. Millgate places the blame of the failing marriage on Clym:

Clym forces his bride into a situation which blankly affronts not only her ambitions but her most fundamental sensitivities as a young and beautiful woman. His physical blindness becomes emblematic of his whole personality. By persisting in the work of a furze-cutter--financially dispensable, socially degrading in Eustacia's eyes, and physically exhaustive--Clym prepares the ground for those characteristically impulsive actions which drive the couple finally apart. (139)

Eustacia is also sexually disappointed in the marriage (Boumelha 60) as is evident in her argument with Clym:

And how madly we loved two months ago! You were never tired of contemplating me, nor I of contemplating you. Who would have thought that by this time my eyes would not seem so very bright



to yours, nor your lips so very sweet to mine? Two months--is it possible? (276)

Because of her disappointment in her marriage, Eustacia is again attracted to Wildeve who is also unhappy in his marriage with Thomasin. They accidentally meet at the gypsying and they dance ecstatically in the moonlight: "The enchantment of the dance surprised her. A clear line of difference divided like a tangible fence her experience without it. Her beginning to dance had been like a change of atmosphere; outside, she had been steeped in arctic frigidity by comparison with the tropical sensations here" (283). The contrast between how she feels with Clym and how she feels with Wildeve is painfully clear to her.

Diggory Venn and Mrs. Yeobright set themselves up as moral police, intervening in Wildeve's and Eustacia's affairs. Venn, early in the novel, tries to convince Eustacia to let Wildeve go so that Wildeve will marry Thomasin. Venn spies on Eustacia and Wildeve throughout the novel and even tries to prevent Wildeve from visiting her by holding a gun on him. Mrs. Yeobright, using less violent means, accuses Eustacia of being a "hussy" and of accepting money (the misdirected inheritance meant for Clym) from Wildeve after her marriage to Clym.

Eustacia begins to fear social censure once she is married and especially once her interest in Wildeve is renewed. She knows she is trapped in her marriage to Clym and to complicate matters she still feels loyal to him while being attracted to Wildeve. She feels the pressure of social censure, specifically Mrs. Yeobright's. When Wildeve visits Eustacia at her home for the one and only time in the fateful "Closed Door" scene, she is loyal to Clym but admits the marriage is disappointing: "Many women would go far for such a husband . . . . I

married him because I loved him, but I won't say that I didn't love him partly because I thought I saw a promise of life in him" (303). When Mrs. Yeobright knocks on the door, Eustacia asks Wildeve to leave because, as Eustacia tells him, "I have a bad name with her, and you must not be seen. Thus I am obliged to act by stealth, not because I do ill, but because others are pleased to say so." She then tells Wildeve that they must not meet again (304).

When Clym discovers that Eustacia did not open the door to his mother who later died that day, he blames Eustacia for her death. "He does not stop to inquire into the real circumstances . . . (which are vastly less damaging to Eustacia than he supposes), but assails his wife with coarse abuse" (Grimsditch 123). He dashes her desk to the floor in search of love letters from Wildeve, and insinuates she is an adulteress. The letters he does find from Wildeve are innocent.

Clym's obsessive love for his mother leads him to accuse and reject Eustacia. For the remainder of the novel he retreats from society, immersing himself in his Oedipal-like grief for Mrs. Yeobright. Millgate too, recognizes that Clym's grief is excessive: ". . . in the extravagance of his remorse he treats her memory with almost religious devotion, her words with the sanctity of revealed truth" (138).

Eustacia then is completely trapped on the heath and married to a husband who abhors her. She cannot divorce him because she does not have the money, and, as a Victorian woman, must prove his adultery plus cruelty, desertion, or other crimes. She then goes to her grandfather's house, her only hope being that Clym will reclaim her.

Wildeve offers Eustacia an escape by proposing that they leave their marriages and go away together since he has recently inherited some

money. But Eustacia does not consider being his mistress to be a much better situation:

'Can I go, can I go? she moaned. 'He's not great enough for me to give myself to--he does not suffice for my desire! . . . If he had been a Saul or a Bonaparte--ah! But to break my marriage vow for him--it is too poor a luxury! . . . And I have no money to go alone! And if I could, what comfort to me? I must drag on next year, as I have dragged on this year, and the year after that as before.' (371-72)

Eustacia is completely trapped by convention: she cannot obtain a divorce nor does she, as a woman, have money or freedom to leave the heath to live on her own. She is also alone: her husband is estranged from her, her grandfather is unconcerned, and Wildeve, lacking the strength of character she desires, can offer her only a humiliating (socially and emotionally) future as his mistress.

Given Eustacia's refusal of the limited occupations open to her combined with the ruin of her marriage, her only solution is death. Millgate recognizes that there is no future for her:

This is the pathos and the irony of Eustacia's situation: that her aspirations are novelettish and impossibly grandiose does nothing to lessen the bitter sense of discrepancy between those aspirations and her actual opportunities. The Eustacia who finally gains the reader's sympathy is not a type of Promethean rebelliousness but a frightened, frustrated, and deeply disappointed woman, the sources of whose fear, frustration and disappointment are presented specifically and in intensely human terms: Clym's angry self-absorption; the denial of her

femininity and her social ambitions; her own appalled sense of being trapped in a hostile environment, with no alternative of action, no prospect of future amelioration. (134-35)

The question of whether Eustacia's drowning in the weir is an accident or suicide is not answered in the novel but suicide is likely because of her contemplation of it earlier in the novel when she looks for a long time at her grandfather's pistols.

Unlike Elfride's death, Eustacia's is tragic because Eustacia has never compromised and remains the romantic rebel to the end. Eustacia, directly before her death, stands on the Rainbarrow in a storm and rages against destiny:

'How I have tried and tried to be a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me! . . . I do not deserve my lot!' she cried in a frenzy of bitter revolt. 'O, the cruelty of putting me into this ill-conceived world! I was capable of much; but I have been injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond my control! O, how hard it is of Heaven to devise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to Heaven at all!' (370)

Even though ". . . Eustacia fails . . . we are never asked to accept the achievement of [her] spiritual expansion through submission to another human being" (Kennard 71). Unlike other Victorian novels which end with the heroine supposedly maturing by succumbing to convention, The Return of the Native presents a woman with the strength and intelligence to rebel even though it kills her. Eustacia's face in death becomes even more beautiful and stately and ". . . the expression of her finely carved mouth was pleasant. . . . The stateliness of look which had

been almost too marked for a dweller in a country domicile had at last found an artistically happy background" (393). In rebelling against "a society which denies the beautiful, the educated, the courageous and the individual woman like Eustacia the power to determine her positive potential . . ." (Mikelson 70), Eustacia sets herself apart from women who do not challenge convention or eventually succumb to it.

Eustacia, unlike typically "good" Victorian women such as Elfride and Thomasin, does not accept the limited roles offered to women in her society. Even though she has no clear vision in which she sees herself as independent, she rebels against the fact that she is not allowed to direct her own life. Sue Bridehead, like Eustacia, does not accept the role of chaste unmarried woman and then wife and mother. Sue, however, analyzes social conventions and finds that they threaten her independence and development as an individual. She then attempts to live outside of them.

CHAPTER IV  
SUE BRIDEHEAD

Sue Bridehead is the most advanced of Hardy's women characters. Victorian society poses many of the same problems for her as it does for Elfride and Eustacia but Sue reacts to these problems with a more finely tuned intellectual and emotional sensibility. Sue goes farther in seeking self-determination by trying to break out of the limited roles that her society gives women. She speaks for women in general because she has given much thought to women's relationship to their society, especially in marriage, and has voiced these opinions more than any previous woman character in Hardy.

Sue's powerful intellect combined with her "frail, delicately balanced" nature (Hardwick 69) have caused some critics to label her "by turns an enigma, a pathetic creature; a nut, and an iceberg" (Millet 133-4). The most famous criticism is D. H. Lawrence's account of Sue as "no woman" but a neurotic creature whose "male principle" dominates the "female principle" in her.

That which was female in her she wanted to consume within the male force, to consume it in the fire of understanding, of giving utterance. Whereas an ordinary woman knows that she contains all understanding, that she is the unutterable which man must forever continue to try to utter. (509)

In defining her desire, Sue is more "masculine" than the typical woman.

She tries to define herself as a human being, not just as a woman as her society defines "woman."

In his response to Lawrence, John Goode explains Sue's attempt to define herself as disturbing to some critics:

What is unforgivable about Sue is her utterance, her subjecting of experience to the trials of language. Lawrence, underneath the hysterical ideology, seems very acute to me, for he recognizes that Sue is destructive because she utters herself-- whereas in the ideology of sexism, the woman is an image to be uttered. That is to say, woman achieves her womanliness at the point at which she is silent and therefore can be inserted as 'love' into the world of learning and labor; or rather, in Lawrence's own terms, as the 'Law' which silences all questions. (101)

Sue must "utter" or define herself because she refuses to be defined by a male dominated society which allows women only to be the unmarried virgin, then wife/mother, or, "fallen woman." She has no model or support for this attempt at self-definition, so her efforts are stumbling, prompting critics to see Hardy's characterization of her as muddled. What Hardy has done, however, is to give us a complete and coherent picture of a woman trying to define herself, as Lawrence and Goode suggest. Kathleen Blake also sees Hardy's characterization of Sue as coherent: "I think that to place Sue in relation to Victorian thought on the woman question is to reveal the coherence of the 'woman of the feminist movement,' whose daring and precise logic of emancipation also produces its rending tensions" (704).

The "rending tensions" which Sue faces spring from her desire to be an individual and not "woman," i.e., not one whose life is directed by a man who legally owns her. Her society, however, has no place for a woman as an independent, active organism, but only woman as image. Sue's struggle for independence is complicated by the fact that she desires a love-relationship with a man, including sex, but society dictates that such a relationship be sanctioned by marriage and the sexist laws that are included therein. Thus Sue's seemingly mad vacillation between encouraging and rejecting a relationship with Jude is explained by her dual desires for love and independence which her society cannot reconcile.

Sue is the most perceptive and outspoken of Hardy's women characters on the position of women in Victorian society. She alone considers what she would be losing upon entering into a relationship with a man whereas Elfride and Eustacia consider what they gain. Elfride has only blind devotion for Knight, to the point of negating her individuality because her desire for his regard is so consuming. Her desire is only to be loved by what she sees as a superior (dominant) man. Elfride is not aware of the fragility and ultimate destructiveness of her dependence on the love of the "right" man to fulfill her life. Eustacia wants not only love from a man but she wants him to give her a life off the heath in a more glamorous and cultured society. Though Eustacia does not lose her identity to the extent that Elfride does, she still works within the confines of the "knight" image of men. Like Elfride and Eustacia, Sue wants love but not at the cost of her independence. She does not expect a man to complete her life, including providing economic security which is part of the "knight" expectation. (She says she wants



"an occupation in which I will be more independent" (83).) Sue's refusal of the traditional roles in men-women relationships, i.e., woman as dependent and submissive, man as provider, is part of the reason why Jude is attracted to her, especially after he had been trapped into marriage by the scheming Arabella. But Sue's avoidance of a sexual relationship is confusing and painful to him. He does not understand that Sue wants to be allowed to have a platonic relationship with a man without being pressured into a sexual relationship and she also wants the freedom to have a sexual relationship if she chooses without the loss of her independence. Penny Boumelha explains this double bind:

A refusal of the sexual dimension of relationships can seem the only rational response to a dilemma; in revolt against the double bind by which female-male relationships are invariably interpreted as sexual and by which, simultaneously, sexuality is controlled and channeled into a single legalized relationship, Sue is forced into a confused and confusing situation in which she wishes at one and the same time to assert her right to a non-sexual love and her right to a non-marital sexual liaison. It is the conflict of the two contradictory pressures that makes her behavior so often seem like flirtation. (143)

One of the reasons that Sue ventures into the world of men in unconventional ways is to gain the intellectual stimulation and education otherwise denied her. Sue's method of doing this was to establish a relationship with a young man, a university undergraduate, when she was eighteen. When Jude asks her how she has come to have read "queer"

books\*, "Lempriere, Catullus, Martial, Juvenal, Lucian, Beaumont and Fletcher, Boccaccio, Scarron, De Brantome, Sterne, De Foe, Smollett, Fielding, Shakespeare . . . (117), Sue tells him that she entered into "a friendly intimacy" with a young man. "I have no fear of men, as such, nor of their books," she tells Jude (117). This undergraduate asked Sue to live with him and she agreed but as she tells Jude, "when I joined him in London I found a different thing from what I meant. He wanted me to be his mistress, in fact, but I wasn't in love with him-- and on my saying I should go away if he didn't agree to my plan, he did so" (117). At the end of fifteen months, however, the undergraduate became ill, claiming that Sue's "coldness" was killing him. He later died.

Jude cannot understand and is depressed by what he terms Sue's "curious unconsciousness of gender" [i.e. sexuality] (118) after she tells him of this relationship. John Goode refutes other critics who believe that Jude has cause to be agitated by what they see as Sue's terror of sex: "the only terror in this seems to me to be Jude's--the sense that there must be something unnatural in a woman who won't give way to a man she doesn't love" (105). Jude does not realize how attractive the undergraduate's world of books, ideas, and company were to her, how she could readily enjoy the undergraduate's company without feeling sexually attracted to him. Sue tells Jude, "We used to go about on walking tours, reading tours, and things of that sort--like two men almost" (117). In her relationship with the undergraduate, Sue claimed the right to have a platonic relationship with a man rather than the

\*"Writers notable, by Victorian standards, for their frankness or indecency" (Norton critical ed. of Jude the Obscure 118).

traditional one in which she would be treated more as a sexual than a thinking being. She realizes that men see her in a sexual light and that her "holding out" on them causes them pain. Jude's remarks to her about her relationship, "But some women would not have remained as they began," and Sue replies, "Better women would not. People say I must be cold-natured,--sexless--on account of it. But I won't have it [people thinking that of her]!" (118). Despite her guilt at causing men pain and "people's" opinion of her as sexless, which she believes untrue, she remains true to her nature by not succumbing to a sexual relationship with someone she does not love.

In the beginning, Sue's and Jude's relationship seems a repetition of Sue's and the undergraduate's but Sue's basis for her relationship with Jude is different. Her main reason for being attracted to the undergraduate was his instructive company, and Jude offers a similar attraction. But she can be and is much more assertive as a thinker with Jude than with the undergraduate. For example, they talk about Jude's ambition to go into the clergy and Sue influences Jude to question his religious conviction. She tells him of her respect for intellect and reason over religious dogma which clouds one's view of reality. She calls Christminster" a place full of fetichists and ghostseekers!" (120). She tells Jude that she has only contempt for the ecclesiastical synopsis at the head of each chapter in the Song of Songs: "I hate such humbug as could attempt to plaster over with ecclesiastical abstractions such ecstatic, natural human love as lies in that great and passionate song!" (121). She had made herself a new New Testament by rearranging the books in chronological order to, as she explains "make it twice as interesting as before, and twice as understandable" (121).

During this intimate conversation it is evident that they are falling in love. They express admiration for each other in a highly-charged emotional atmosphere. Sue's moods range from tearful, to confident, to friendly when talking to him. She tells him ". . . you are good and dear" (120) and he says ". . . I shall always care for you!" Sue replies, "And I for you. Because you are single-hearted, and forgiving to your faulty and tiresome little Sue!" (122). Jude is also impressed with her knowledge and recognizes it as superior to his. He thinks to himself:

If he could only get over the sense of her sex, as she seemed to be able to do so easily of his, what a comrade she would make; for their difference of opinion on conjectural subjects only drew them closer together on matters of daily human experience. She was nearer to him than any other woman he had ever met, and he could scarcely believe that time, creed, or absence, would ever divide them. (122)

Jude is the rare man who would make a good companion for Sue because the more he gets to know her, the more he values her individuality. They also have many things in common which make them close: they are cousins, they are both orphans, raised by the same aunt, though at different times, they both try to overcome external obstacles to acquiring an education, and neither has close friends or family.

Sue and Jude have a genuine affinity for each other but a profound tension exists between them because Jude presses for a sexual relationship and Sue must repress her sexuality in order to retain her independence. Sue needs Jude emotionally, causing her to be friendly and even speak of love but at the same time she must be somewhat distant towards

him so as not to encourage physical contact. As many critics have noted, Sue is the most forthcoming towards Jude when they are physically separated: she is more loving and direct in her letters to him than she is in person and they have some of their tenderest conversations when they are separated by a window sill.

Because Jude and Sue have such an affinity for each other, Sue is deeply hurt when she learns that Jude has been married all along. She calls him cruel and she withdraws her hand when he tries to take it and "regards him in estranged silence" (132). She is jealous that Jude has loved another woman as is evident when she says, "I suppose she--your wife--is--a very pretty woman even if she's wicked?" (132). She is described as a "heart-hurt woman" who "attempts to keep herself free from emotion" (133) but she cries and despite her words, it is obvious she loves Jude: "I am--not crying--because I meant to--love you, but because of your want of--confidence!" (133). She tells Jude, "Ah--you should have told me before you gave me the idea that you wanted to be allowed to love me!" (133). In direct reaction to this news, Sue agrees to marry Phillotson.

In Jude's reaction to Sue's letter informing him of her impending marriage, both Jude and Hardy show awareness of Sue's (and other women's) disadvantaged position in society in being looked upon as a piece of goods. Sue is considered a "used piece" of goods because she and Jude have been seen together and this news reaches the authorities at Sue's training school. Jude cries:

O Susanna Florence Mary! . . . You don't know what marriage means!

Could it be possible that his announcement of his own marriage and pricked her on to this . . . ? To be sure, there seemed to exist these other and sufficient reasons, practical and social, for her decision; but Sue was not a very practical or calculating person; and he was compelled to think that a pique at having his secret spring upon her had moved her to give way to Phillotson's probable representations, that the best course to prove how unfounded were the suspicions of the school authorities would be to marry him off-hand, as in fulfillment of an ordinary engagement. Sue had, in fact, been placed in an awkward corner. (135)

Jude realizes that his attentions to Sue have caused her to be seen by society as a "loose" woman and that now Sue's conventional choices of what to do with herself are limited.

Sue goes through with the marriage only to find out her original instincts about marriage are her true feelings. Her contempt for the institution itself is clear in this note she writes to Jude right before her marriage:

I have been looking at the marriage service in the Prayer-book, and it seems to be very humiliating that a giver-away should be required at all. According to the ceremony as there printed, my bridegroom chooses me of his own will and pleasure; but I don't choose him. Somebody gives me to him, like a she-ass or she-goat, or any other domestic animal. Bless your exalted views of woman, O churchman! (135)

Sue's views on marriage are reaffirmed by her personal experience as a wife or as Mary Jacobus puts it, ". . . she no longer expresses a femi-

nism that is only intellectually related to herself" (309). One aspect of marriage that Sue cannot reconcile herself to, as she says in a speech to Jude, is the loss of identity women suffer within the institution:

I have been thinking . . . that the social moulds civilization fits us into have no more relation to our actual shapes than the conventional shapes of the constellations have to real star-patterns. I am called Mrs. Richard Phillotson, living a calm wedded life with my counterpart of that name. But I am not really Mrs. Richard Phillotson, but a woman tossed about, all alone, with aberrant passions, and unaccountable antipathies . . . . (162)

Her objections to marriage become more personal as she realizes a few weeks into the marriage that she cannot bring herself to have physical contact with Phillotson. She likes him "as a friend" but says "it is a torture to me to--live with as a husband!" (168). As with her undergraduate friend, Sue refuses to enter into a sexual relationship, despite pressure to do so, because she does not feel love or attraction towards him. Elizabeth Hardwick notes that, for Sue, "hypocrisy, especially in matters of feeling, is to her a sacrilege" (72). And Kathleen Blake sees Sue's stand on sexuality and marriage as being "in the interest of personal emancipation" (707). Hardwick says:

Hardy explicitly says in a letter to Gosse what he felt he must leave circumspectly implied in his novel, that part of Sue's reluctance to marry is her reluctance to relinquish the right to 'withhold herself at pleasure, or altogether.' This is behind Sue's aversion to being 'licensed to be loved on the

premises' . . . the link between women's rights and the right over one's own body expressed in withholding it casts Sue in a distinctly feminist light. (715)

Even though Sue's sexual repugnance of Phillotson is not recognized by "the world in general . . ." (168), Phillotson himself recognizes it and grants her the divorce she wants. She is convinced of her "torture" after she jumps out of the window when he enters her bedroom one night. The "world in general," however, views Phillotson's decision to let Sue have her way as crazed. Phillotson's friend Gillingham acts as the Greek chorus, espousing society's view on Phillotson's indulging his wife's "whims." Gillingham says to Phillotson, "But if people did as you want to do, there'd be a general domestic disintegration. The family would no longer be the social unit" (183). And he soon after says, "I think she ought to be smacked, and brought to her senses-- that's what I think!" (184). Phillotson loses his teaching position because of his decision. Arabella, in her conversation with Phillotson later in the novel, points out that he would have been perfectly within his legal right to restrain Sue and implies that indeed, this is a common practice:

She'd have come round in time. We all do! Custom does it! . . . I should have kept her chained on--her spirit for kicking would have been broke soon enough! There's nothing like a bondage and a stone-deaf task-master for taming us women. Beside, you got the law on your side. Moses knew . . . 'Then shall the man be guiltless; but woman shall bear her iniquity.' Damn rough on us women; but we must grin and put up wi' it! (252)



Arabella accepts but does not like the fact that her society is set up by and for men.

Sue, however, cannot accept this situation. She quotes Mill to Phillotson, "She, or he, 'who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation'" (177). Though Phillotson does not fully understand her philosophy, he does recognize Sue's suffering and the "extraordinary sympathy, or similarity" between Sue and Jude (182). Phillotson compassionately agrees to the divorce and is able to obtain one because he, as a man, need only claim his wife's infidelity. She had led him to believe that her relationship with Jude is more than platonic. Ironically, Phillotson uses the laws that favor men to give Sue what she wishes.

Sue's position of retaining her independence by avoiding a sexual relationship becomes even more precarious when she goes to live with Jude. Jude presses her for a physical relationship as had her undergraduate friend and Phillotson, but she was not tempted to enter into a sexual relationship with them as she is with Jude. Sue loves Jude, and is physically attracted to him, contrary to how she felt about the other two men. Some critics, Desmond Hawkins among them, believe that Sue is sexually perverse in her abstaining from a sexual relationship but she does respond to Jude physically. She responds to Jude hesitantly early in their life together because of fear of losing her independence. When she first goes to Jude after leaving Phillotson, she tells him, "My liking for you is not as some women's perhaps. But it is a delight in being with you, of a supremely delicate kind . . ."; she admits an

attraction to him: "You did kiss me just now, you know; and I didn't dislike you to, I own it, Jude" (190-191).

When Arabella returns on the scene and Jude decides to see her, Sue sees her as a sexual threat and realizes "that the price she pays for with-holding herself is insecurity--that the complement of personal freedom must be self-reliance" (Jacobus 314). She is not prepared to give up her relationship with Jude as shown in her desperate entreaties to him not to go: "O' it is only to entrap you, I know it is!" (208) and then, "I have nobody but you, Jude, and you are deserting me! I can't bear it; I can't!" (210). Sue then sees her only way to keep Jude is to do as he wishes: "She ran across and flung her arms around his neck. 'I am not a cold-natured, sexless creature, am I, for keeping you at such a distance? I am sure you don't think so! Wait and see! I do belong to you, don't I? I give in!'" (210).

Arabella clearly recognizes that a woman's security lies in her "giving herself" to a man and legalizing the relationship. This is her way of survival. She "trapped" Jude into marriage by claiming to be pregnant. Elizabeth Hardwick explains that Arabella's upbringing has encouraged her to believe that men must be trapped by sex into becoming providers: "Arabella's driven poverty, the crude urgings of an unenlightened family, the scheming habit of the other poor girls in the village have severely limited her vision" (69). Not surprisingly, the sensitive, intellectual Sue who has been striving for independence is appalled at the vulgarity of Arabella's practical philosophy of marriage. Arabella advises Sue to "make it legal" when she understands that Sue and Jude are now lovers:

Life with a man is more business-like after it, and money matters work better. And then, you see, if you have rows, and he turns you out of doors, you can get the law to protect you, which you can't otherwise, unless he half runs you through with a knife, or cracks your noodle with a poker. And if he bolts away from you--I say it friendly, as woman to woman, for there's never any knowing what a man med do--you'll have the sticks o' furniture, and won't be looked upon as a thief.

(213)

This makes clear what Sue has been fighting against: her security traded for legally giving up her independence, and she cannot bring herself to go through with the marriage to Jude which he sorely wants.

She does respond to Jude physically, nevertheless, after the consummation of their "natural" marriage, showing that she is not a cold, sexless creature. She returns "his kisses in a way she had never done before" (211). Their happiness is evident in the scene where they admire the roses at the Agricultural Exhibition. Sue says, "But I suppose it is against the rules to touch them--isn't it, Jude?" He replies, "Yes, you baby," and playfully gave her a little push, so that her nose went among the petals" (235), symbolizing Sue's sexual initiation. Mary Jacobus describes how this scene is evidence of Sue's sexual awakening:

The rose which compliments the lily in Sue had been brought into flower by Jude; it is he who gives her the playful push into contact with her own sensuous nature, making her fully and joyously responsive here. The 'cultural literary convention (Lily and Rose)' has been realistically blurred. (316-17)

Sue is not labeled as either the lily-virgin or the rose-whore but an individual, a woman in love. This is a more humane, realistic description than Elfride Swancourt is given by the narrator and her lovers. Different too, is that Sue, unlike Elfride and Eustacia, is allowed to have a fulfilling love relationship. The narrator says that Sue and Jude "seemed to live on in a dreamy paradise" for a few years (215).

Their paradise is ultimately shattered by what Penny Boumelha calls the ". . . involuntary physiological processes of conception, pregnancy and childbirth, and these in turn enforce upon her [Sue] a financial and emotional dependence on Jude which is destructive for both of them" (147). Sue's security has turned to dependency. In Jude, Hardy no longer blames the woman's suffering and infliction of suffering on others on the woman's fickleness or selfish aspirations but on her "physiological processes" combined with the gin of social mores. Hardy believes that women are at a greater disadvantage because they are forced to be dependent and therefore subordinate to men because they are the childbearers. This view is put forth earlier in Jude where the narrator describes the young women at the Melchester Training School that Sue had attended:

. . . they all lay in their cubicles, their tender feminine faces upturned to the flaring gas jets which at intervals stretched down the long dormitories, every face bearing the legend "The Weaker" upon it, as the penalty of the sex wherein they were moulded, which by no possible exertion of their willing hearts and abilities could be made strong while the inexorable laws of nature remain what they are. They formed a pretty, suggestive, pathetic sight, of whose pathos and beauty

they were themselves unconscious, and would not discover till, amid the storms and strains of after-years, with their injustice, loneliness, childbearing and bereavement, their minds would revert to this experience as to something which had been allowed to slip past them insufficiently regarded. (111-12)

The women in the training school, a "species of nunnery," are protected for the time being from the "sexual disaster" (Blake 707) which will end their time of relative independence and education. Sue, unlike the other girls, consciously tried to avoid this fate, and later, when she is in a sexual relationship, refuses to marry. Sue's sexual repression, however, has weakened with Jude and she now is a victim of the social trap.

Sue and Jude must live the economic life of the family with their two children and Little Father Time, the child of Jude and Arabella whom Arabella left with the couple when she returned with her second husband. The family lives an impoverished, nomadic existence because the people in each successive town eventually find out that Sue and Jude are not legally married. Little Father Time is taunted by his schoolmates and Jude is turned from work. These social pressures, ". . . reduce Sue's opposition to marriage to formalism by pretending to marry Jude and adopting his name, . . . and that gradually convinces her that 'the world and its ways have a certain worth' and so begins her collapse into 'enslavement to forms'" (Boumelha 148).

These social forces press harder on the family until tragedy occurs, breaking the relationship of Jude and Sue. When they go to Christminster, they cannot find lodgings because they have so many children and Sue is pregnant. Little Father Time realizes the children

are the reason for their difficulties. He gets angry at Sue for having "a-sent for another" child: "How ever could you, mother be so wicked and cruel as this, when you needn't have done it till we was better off, and father well!--To bring us all into more trouble!" (264). Sue feels guilty about her pregnancy, especially at Father Time's accusation. She tells him, "It does seem--as if I had done it on purpose, now we are in these difficulties! I can't explain, dear! But it--is not quite on purpose--I can't help it!" (264). Little Father Time then hangs the two children and himself as soon as they are alone, leaving the note, "Done because we are too menny" (266). Kathleen Blake sees Father Time's action as an extension of Sue's guilt:

I think the catastrophe he brings about is not coincidental, because he acts out what Sue already feels, that she should not have had children. Having them is something she tells little Jude she must be 'forgiven' for . . . Sue explains that a 'law of nature' brought them to birth . . . , and in killing them and himself he repudiates this law of nature. (724)

Sue's enslavement to the social forms she has fought against all along becomes complete after this catastrophe because it is the final point in the string of incidents which have made her feel guilty and anxious about her and Jude's unconventional lifestyles. She tells Jude that she believes she belongs to Phillotson because they were legally married. She also turns to Christianity. Many critics see Sue's reaction as inconsistent but it is clear, as evidenced by the text, that after the beginning of her sexual relationship with Jude she has followed a pattern of joy followed by penance (Burns 16). She felt anxious because she had compromised her independence and then the added respon-

sibility of raising children in the impoverished and unstable life-style they led increased her guilt. She sees the death of her children as retribution exacted by a vengeful God for her "unlawful" joy. She tells Jude, "I have thought that we have been selfish, careless, even impious in our courses, you and I. Our life has been a vain attempt at self-delight. But self abnegation is the higher road. We should mortify the flesh--the terrible flesh--the curse of Adam!" (273). She realizes that she, as a woman, cannot escape the natural laws (pregnancy) and social pressures (ostracism because she is not married). Penny Boumelha says that these cause Sue's return to, what is for her, retrograde philosophies: "Sue's 'breakdown' is not the sign of some gender-determined constitutional weakness of mind or will, but a result of the fact that certain social forces press harder on women in sexual and marital relationships, largely by virtue of implication of their sexuality in child-bearing (153). Sue's penance is complete when she returns to Phillotson, "giving herself" to him legally and physically.

When Sue embraces these conventions, Jude asks her, "What I can't understand in you is your extraordinary blindness now to your old logic. Is a woman a thinking unit at all, or a fraction always wanting its integer?" (278). This question is posed to Sue throughout the novel. John Goode explains the implications of this question:

What is important is that this question should be asked; it poses for Sue only one of two possibilities--that the nature of her blindness to her own logic must be explained either by her 'peculiarity,' or by her belonging to womanhood. Either way she is committed to being an image, and it is this that per-

vades the novel. Nobody ever confronts Jude with the choice between being a man or being peculiar. (102)

Jude does not realize what a strain Sue has been under in living the unconventional life they have chosen. The killing of her own children by Jude's son, whom she has included in the family, and the subsequent publicity of their unconventional life, make Sue realize that they cannot continue. This strain compels Sue to believe she must repent. Goode points out that these are obvious reasons for Sue to embrace retrograde philosophies but that the emphasis in the novel is on Jude's predicament: "But of course we don't consider it [Sue's reaction] naturalistically, because we don't ever ask what is happening to Sue; because it is rather a question of Sue happening to Jude" (104).

Although Hardy's stated theme of "flesh versus spirit" refers to Jude's distraction from his pursuit of education and the clergy, it also applies to Sue. Her aim of being an independent individual is deflected by her relationship with Jude. His desire to possess her draws her into a sexual relationship, then motherhood and dependency.

To a certain extent Jude, like society, cannot accept Sue as an individual; she must be wife and then mother. He is attracted to her even before he meets her because she represents the "spiritual" as opposed to the "carnal" Arabella. Thus Jude first sees Sue as such an image; a saintly, beautiful, passive woman who would be sympathetic to his aims. He sees a picture of her at his Aunt's house; "a pretty girlish face, in a broad hat with radiating folds under the brim like the rays of a halo" (63). Soon after, in Christminster, he first observes her in person at her job as she illuminates a Church text and thinks, "A sweet, saintly, Christian business, hers!" (71). He pursues



her as part of his spiritual ideals: ecclesiastical training, education, and a partner who could ". . . supply both social and spiritual possibilities" (74). Soon after he meets Sue, he is impressed by her learning and forward-thinking opinions but he wants to possess her legally and physically, making her wife and mother. In this desire to possess Sue, he is also a victim of his society's attitude toward women.

Finally, Jude and Sue do not so much struggle against each other as against society's mores. Jude the Obscure is a tragedy in which Jude and Sue try to live together on their own terms but society will not let them. They perceive their love for each other as all that is needed to form their relationship. Once their bond is also physical, society further disapproves. Randall Williams agrees that Jude and Sue are victims of convention:

Hardy does not dogmatise about the right or wrong of passion; he simply represents its potency in human life. The importance given to passion in his philosophy necessitates his consideration of the sex question . . . the grim aspect of the problem, however, is portrayed in Jude the Obscure. The two unhappy marriages of Jude and Arabella and of Phillotson and Sue afford ample scope for a detailed treatment of the sex question to a philosopher who has seen the short-comings of our social laws. . . . These two disastrous marriages, together with the subsequent free union of Jude and Sue with its tragic results, provide the sociologist with material revealing the havoc which social conventions on the one hand, and the violation of them on the other hand, may and indeed do, create. The reactionary force of social legislation, more especially of our marriage

law, is one of the principal causes of this 'tragedy of unfulfilled aims.' (141-42)

Sue's tragedy is that society forces her into roles in which she is not an individual. Once her brief, happy "free union" with Jude is shattered, she sees no choice but to obey convention and lose herself.

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