Narrow Accommodations: The Restrictions of Convention and Criticism on Thomas Hardy and his Heroines

by

Tamara Lee Kyte

B.A., University College of Cape Breton, 1996

Thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts (English)

Acadia University
Fall Convocation 1999

Table of Contents

Abstract

This thesis examines the harsh restrictions placed on nineteenth-century women, as reflected in three of Thomas Hardy's heroines. It also examines the restrictions placed on Hardy's writing by both nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics. Hardy interrogates nineteenth-century constructions of femininity such as the ideology of separate spheres, madonna/whore iconography, and female morality. Through this interrogation, he seeks to create a less conventional definition of femininity. Many feminist critics cite the harsh treatment of Hardy's heroines as evidence of Hardy' s misogyny; examination of textual evidence reveals the opposite to be the case. Hardy handles Tess Durbeyfield's sexual misfortune with both candor and sympathy; he approves of Sue Bridehead's radical repudiation of both marriage and conventional ideology; and he allows Bathsheba Everdene to surmount prejudice and personal tragedy to emerge as a survivor. In this thesis I have found that many feminist readings of Hardy are problematic, as they often exclude valuable textual evidence in favor of a particular feminist stance. Close readings of the novels prove Hardy sympathetic to the plight of nineteenth-century women, as evidenced in the honest and unique portrayal of Tess, Bathsheba, and Sue.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the Acadia English department, many of whom provided instruction, encouragement, or a conversation in the doorway; to Dr. David Baron, who was here in the beginning and was brave (foolish?) enough to stick around until the bitter end; and to Dr. Paul Milton, who made me get my act together, always found the good amidst the bad and the ugly, and was convinced that I knew how to write even when I was not.

A big thank-you to Johanna, Peter, and the kids, who provided a surrogate family; love and gratitude to Mom (special thanks for not selling me to the gypsies!), Harley, Paul, Kelly and Lisa, the family who loved me, challenged me, believed in me, and always thought I could do it; to the friends who helped get me here, and paid attention to the expensive, long-distance ramblings of a lowly graduate student because they loved me.

And finally, to the friends I found here; you have held my hand and walked with me this far. You have given me more than I can say, even the courage to walk without you.

Introduction

Both nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics have invested much time on the novels of Thomas Hardy. Many feminist critics have turned to Hardy as either source of hope or of frustration, excited by the wilful and independent heroines he creates, yet troubled by what is often seen as harsh treatment of these female characters at Hardy's hands. However, just as Hardy's contemporaries' concern with convention proved problematic to him, current criticism can prove equally problematic. By focusing too narrowly on a particular aspect of the novel, often the whole is not done justice. In this thesis I will interrogate some feminist readings of Thomas Hardy and show how narrow restrictions inhibit interpretation of Hardy's novels, specifically Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Jude the Obscure and Far From the Madding Crowd, just as restrictions inhibited nineteenth-century women, Hardy's women, and Hardy himself. Conventional ideologies act both culturally and critically to restrict a society, an author, and the women he writes about.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, Victorian life was changing dramatically in the struggle between progress and tradition. While Hardy certainly has much in common with other nineteenth-century authors such as George Eliot, Charles Dickens, and even Jane Austen in his interrogation of social norms, he also shares much with those who follow such as twentieth-

century naturalist Theodore Dreiser. And while the differences are certainly great, there is also an echo of kinship between Hardy's Tess and Dreiser's Sister Carrie.

Writing about unconventional women in an unconventional manner during a period when women were expected to live virtually every aspect of their lives within the confines of convention is not easy, especially when the author is expected to write within these confines. Yet this is exactly what Hardy managed to do during his career. An examination of heroines such as Tess Durbeyfield of Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Sue Bridehead of Jude the Obscure, and Bathsheba Everdene of Far From the Madding Crowd provides an illustration of this. They have evoked anger, sympathy, and bemusement on the part of readers and critics -- much the same emotions Hardy himself evoked in his critics.

In a thorough discussion of Hardy's works, it is valuable to also discuss the author himself. Born on June 2, 1840 in Upper Bockhampton, Hardy began his career as an architect before turning to writing. Though he would become one of the most discussed authors in history, the early Thomas Hardy was not nearly so noteworthy. Michael Millgate suggests that Hardy was characterised by those who knew him as "an obscure young architect with few professional prospects, somewhat countrified manners, an unprepossessing appearance, and a not especially striking personality" (Introduction 1: vii). It is strange to think that this very undistinguished young man would soon make a very distinct impression on Victorian society.

Every discussion of Hardy seems to create more questions than answers;

in his introduction to Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, Millgate remarks that

> Hardy's profound reserve – rooted in his personality, his upbringing, his class-consciousness, his sense of professional decorum—made him, and makes him still, one of the most elusive of literary figures. Even the most diligent comparison of 'one text with another' seems to throw little illumination upon the central enigma of his long career: that a man who took such risks and issued such challenges as a novelist and poet should in his own life have been so discreet, so unsure, so self-defensive. (Introduction vii)

Hardy is often thought an elusive author, a very private man in a very public profession. He seems to have felt very strongly about his work and taken the critical reaction to it quite personally. Millgate hypothesises that "far from being an aggressive advocate of rigid social and philosophical positions he was, in all but his earliest and latest fiction, extremely hesitant and ambiguous in his handling of ideas, and reluctant to venture into the areas of politics and social policy" (Career 24). However, this elusiveness may be Hardy's attempts to manoeuvre around and escape the rigid conventions of his time. Hardy had much courage in his willingness to write about controversial topics, yet this does not mean that he was unaffected by critical opinion. Though he fought against censorship, he was also keenly aware that literary critics affected his career both financially and creatively.

Harsh criticism made publishers uneasy; they in turn rejected Hardy's manuscripts until he had altered them sufficiently. Thus, being subject to social

strictures made him identify all the more strongly with the female characters he wrote about. Rosemarie Morgan says that "[S]uch perpetual censure, such unremitting condescension on the part of the critics, such a sense of suffocation, frustration, and humiliation must surely have intensified what is in my opinion his acute sensitivity towards, and sympathetic insight into, the plight of women curbed and bound to 'fit' the world of men" (xvi). Hardy was often curbed and bound to fit, and he fought against these restrictions.

These struggles are evident in his writing, in the boldness and seeming inconsistencies of both character and situation, and lead many critics, both current and contemporary, to label him a misogynist. Hardy himself felt that his "novels have suffered so much from misrepresentation as being attacks on womankind" (Letters 1: 250). Perhaps due to Hardy's refusal to create the perfect woman, he was viewed as unsympathetic, when, in truth, his response to and acknowledgement of the darker, more painful situations of women's experience prove him just the opposite.

The subject of women was a topical issue in Hardy's day; in fact it was known as "The Woman Question." The ideology of separate spheres, the popular madonna/whore iconography, and changing legislation such as divorce and women's property laws all testify to this. Each of these nineteenth-century conventions set-up expectations which women were expected to accommodate.

The ideology of separate spheres advocated very distinct duties for men and women: the woman's sphere was that of domesticity, involving the management of hearth and home; the male sphere was the public realm,

involving all other aspects of life. It was he who dealt with a career, politics and social interaction. The notion that women were to strive for domestic perfection became iconographical in Coventry Patmore's The Angel in the House. Shirley Foster says that "Patmore's and [John] Ruskin's attitudes towards feminine roles have gained such notoriety that it is easy to overlook the fact that the ideology was current much earlier in the period" (5). The ideology itself, in both thought and practice, was already widely prevalent, it was simply that authors like Patmore and Ruskin gave voice to it.

These attitudes gave rise to the division of women into two polar groups. The ideal woman, the madonna or angel, fulfilled all patriarchal expectations and strove to create domestic bliss. The fallen woman, or whore, was immoral, corrupted and corrupting, and, of course, sexually active. Given the hopelessly lofty madonna ideal, it did not take much for women to fall short of that goal and be labelled "whore."

In his poem "The Ruined Maid," Hardy interrogates this polarisation with humour. A country girl meets a woman, Amelia, whom she used to know and wonders at her distinguished appearance. Amelia explains that since she's been "ruined," that is become a prostitute, she has prospered. The woman marvels at the change, remarking "Your hands were like paws then, your face blue and bleak/ But now I'm bewitched by your delicate cheek" (13-14). Hardy finds no fault whatever with the "ruined" maid nor her lifestyle, he makes no moral judgements and directs no disgust or outrage at the "whore." The only object of criticism seems to be the harsh and bleak conditions in which she lived prior to

her "ruin." He is satirising the entire construct of ruined femininity by presenting Amelia as a woman who fits the definition of whore, and demonstrating how Amelia does not conform to this narrow definition.

The separate spheres ideology and "Angel in the House" icon had a great impact on the view of marriage in the nineteenth century:

> [B]ecause so much importance was attached to the roles of wifehood and motherhood, marriage was deemed the apotheosis of womanly fulfilment, alternatives to which were regarded as pitiable or unnatural. Emotional and psychological pressures on women to marry were thus added to the social and economic ones of earlier periods when it was understood that pragmatism would be a primary consideration of female matrimonial aspirations. (Foster 6)

Not only was the woman forced to rely on marriage for financial security and social status, but also her very identity as a woman seemed to depend upon it. Because such high stakes were involved in nineteenth-century marriage, the state of matrimony came to be questioned in a manner that it never had before. As A. James Hammerton notes, "[S]anctioned by law, and signifying the undisputed power of husbands and fathers over wives and children, 'patriarchal marriage' met its clearest challenges in nineteenth-century legislation, reforming such crucial areas as child custody, divorce, and married women's property" (Hammerton 270). Legislation concerning the married state became the site of gender debate. Because marriage was a contract between the sexes, the marriage contract most clearly represented current thinking on gender issues.

There were certain expectations of both husband and wife based on sex delineated in this contract.

Many question Thomas Hardy's attitudes toward women. Some feminist critics tend to view Hardy as either sinner or saint, proud defender of female honour or villain willing to pitiably abase women to serve his own creative needs. Judith Mitchell wonders, as many do, "How does a female reader -- particularly a modern feminist reader -- read Thomas Hardy? Does she applaud his feminism? Deplore his sexism?" (Mitchell 172). She further observes that " feminist critics seem undecided whether to accept Hardy with distaste or to reject him with reluctance" (172). Given the often misogynistic climate of the nineteenth century, certainly some traces of this misogyny would appear in his works. In this context, Hardy's stance is certainly open to question. However, the answer lies in what Hardy was merely reporting as a reflection of the current climate, and that which he stood behind.

As Shirley Stave suggests, in a discussion of fictional women and their authors,

> Hardy's women often spring to mind as examples of intelligent, psychologically believable characters who have been created by a writer not only sympathetic to the situation of women in Victorian society but also surprisingly understanding of the subtle dynamics of sexual politics. (Stave 23)

Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Jude the Obscure, and Far From the Madding Crowd each feature such a woman. These women, saddled with all the conventional

expectations of being a woman in the nineteenth century, have widely disparate personalities. Hardy resists the temptation to use types in discussing the effect of societal conventions and strictures on women. Rather than using narrowly defined types, Hardy seeks a wider definition of femininity. Each character is endowed with individual traits and varying reactions to the difficult and painful situations in which they often find themselves. With dramatically different outcomes for each character, the novels demonstrate the unique struggles that take place within a common social environment.

These unconventional women are often more complicated and engaging than their male counterparts. Apparently Hardy thought so too, as both he and others often describe him as being "in love" with his female characters. In a letter to Sir George Douglas about Tess, Hardy wrote, "I am so truly glad that Tess the Woman has won your affections. I, too, lost my heart to her as I went on with her history" (Letters 1: 249).

Some wonder whether he was a critic of current social situations or simply another author reifying current patriarchal ideology; perhaps the very heart of the difficulty is this either/or proposition that is far too limiting. Margaret Higonnet points out that "Hardy's texts ... have been censored for their sexual content, admired for their frankness, decried as misogynist, and described as feminist" (Higonnet 5). It is difficult to believe that one author can be described in so many contradictory terms.

Hardy pondered the identity of the author of a particularly scathing review of Tess. He wrote to Edmund Gosse, "I hardly think the writer can be a woman --

the sex having caught on with enthusiasm, as I gather from numerous communications from mothers ... and from other women of society who say that my courage has done the whole sex a service" (Letters 1: 255). In this entire gender debate, it is interesting to note the widespread acceptance of the novel among women rather than men; at least the majority of Hardy's correspondents on the subject implied this. Writing and gender were often controversial issues in the Victorian era, as is indicated by the many female authors -- Mary Shelley, the Bronte sisters, George Eliot -- who wrote under male pseudonyms. In a letter to a Mrs. Harrison, Hardy wrote "and expressed sympathy with the particular difficulty faced by women writers in handling matters of which they were conventionally supposed to be ignorant" (Biography 325). As a male author, Hardy was in a better position to write more freely, relatively speaking, about frankly feminine issues such as female sexuality, pregnancy, and marriage.

Hardy bridled most at what he felt the more "prudish" criticism of his work. Such critics Hardy termed "The Grundyists." Hardy applied this term to those who most narrowly criticised and condemned him for his explicit treatment of many issues. Indeed, the presence and influence of the Grundyists incensed Hardy:

> Hardy's irritation with the baleful presence he identified as Grundyism had earlier found overt expression in the essay, 'Candour in English Fiction,' published in the New Review for January 1890: 'It is in the self-consciousness engendered by interference with spontaneity, and in aims at a compromise to

> square with circumstances, that the real secret lies of the charlatanry pervading so much of English fiction.' (Career 282)

Hardy blamed the Grundyists for stifling the creativity of Victorian writers. It was because of their meddling influence that many writers, including himself, were forced to bowdlerise and mutilate their manuscripts.

With every new novel, Hardy seemed "to have been capable of persuading both his editor and himself that the story envisaged would not actually transgress ... the unwritten conventions governing" publications of the time (Career 291). However, "as each new story took shape it proved to dwell not incidentally but centrally upon questions of sexuality and technical immorality almost certain to provoke criticism and complaint" (291). Did Hardy wish to defy Victorian norms, or was he simply so confident in the worth of his writing that he did not consider negative reaction? Millgate believes that "Hardy's peculiar difficulties with his editors were largely the product of his own indecision, of a characteristic reluctance to take firm positions" (292). What lay behind the harsh criticism Hardy encountered was the current Victorian ideology in general, as it pertained to women in particular. Because Hardy himself did not subscribe to such narrow attitudes, he continually underestimated the extreme narrowness of others.

Much of the criticism Hardy received centred on the way in which he characterised his heroines. The characters and Hardy himself were often viewed as highly immoral. In 1881 Charles Keegan Paul, a contemporary of Hardy's, had this to say about Hardy's female characters:

> They are all charming; they are all flirts from their cradle; they are all in love with more than one man at once; they seldom, if they marry at all, marry the right man; and while well-conducted for the most part, are somewhat lacking in moral sense, and have only rudimentary souls. (quoted in Career 320-21)

This dismissive assessment of Hardy's female characters fails to take into account the variation among his heroines.

Hardy's vision of the literary enterprise did not include the creation of characters that were to be moral guidelines. This is evident in his views on William Makepeace Thackeray, which he espoused in a letter to Mary Hardy:

> He is considered to be the greatest novelist of the day -- looking at novel writing of the highest kind as a perfect and truthful representation of actual life -- which is no doubt the proper view to take. Hence, because his novels stand so high as works of Art or Truth, they often have anything but an elevating tendency, and on this account are particularly unfitted for young people -- from their very truthfulness. People say that it is beyond Mr. Thackeray to paint a perfect man or woman -- a great fault if novels are intended to instruct, but just the opposite if they are to be considered merely as Pictures. (Letters 1: 5)

From this statement it is evident that Hardy felt much of the art in writing came from a realistic depiction of situation and character. Far from moralising and chastising the women he writes of, he sympathetically and realistically discusses

how societal constraints operate on an individual's right to choose her own life and live accordingly.

Still, it is a difficult task to say definitively what Hardy's thoughts on women are. There have already been volumes of material written on this very question, far too much to discuss in this limited space. In general I have chosen to take a feminist stance, though I do not subscribe to any one feminism in particular. Rather, I wish to argue an idea as opposed to a particular methodology. In his fiction, Thomas Hardy sought to widen the parameters of acceptable or moral female conduct. The female characters who confront issues of marriage, economics, and love are not angels who always take the societally prescribed moral high ground, nor are they disgustingly immoral demons. While these may seem only artistic distinctions, Morgan disagrees: "[T]he Victorian conceptual bifurcation of woman (madonna and whore) may seem to the modern mind to be primarily iconographical, but it carried sufficient influence within society to generate its likeness in form: notably the concept of two types of women, one fit for sex and the other for wife" (Morgan xii). Hardy's understanding of both women and societal constraint gave him a unique understanding of the female situation that is evident in his novels, allowing him to write outside the box of common literary device. I engage with feminist critics not to further a methodology but to explore an idea. It is simply that feminist critics of all persuasions are the ones who are typically interested in exploring these issues. It will be my approach to consult historical evidence, other critical opinions, and ultimately Hardy's works themselves. To obtain a varied sample of female

protagonists, it seemed that Far From the Madding Crowd, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, and Jude the Obscure offer a wide enough range of unique heroines.

His novels take shape from his social acuity, and the women he creates reflect this. What many see as contrariness and capriciousness on the part of his female characters is better interpreted as the frustration and difficulties suffered by characters pulled in many directions. Their choices are rarely choices at all; rather they are forced to choose among physical, emotional, and financial survival -- each choice tending to be mutually exclusive.

While it would be inaccurate to label this thesis a defence of Thomas Hardy, it certainly looks to offer justification. In the eyes of many he will remain a misogynist, an author who writes intriguing women and subsequently silences them in one way or another out of some Freudian guilt or fear or hatred, just another symbol of a deeply patriarchal Victorian male. However, it is my contention that if one examines all the convergent forces that attend Hardy's novels, his advocacy is unquestionable. In any discussion there is room for debate, but the weight of textual evidence supports Hardy as one sympathetic to and vocal about the female predicament; Hardy does not silence these women he gives them voice.

Thomas Hardy is not a misogynist; in fact, he is more feminist than many of his contemporaries. Even radical feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft, an influential predecessor of the nineteenth century, are problematic by current standards. Rather than disregarding him as either misogynist or pure feminist,

perhaps we should view him as more complex. He was certainly an advocate for women, yet imperfect in this role.

In the spirit of defying convention, I do not deal with the three novels in chronological order. I choose to deal with Tess of the d'Urbervilles first as she is likely the most widely known of Hardy's characters. She is certainly the most earthy and sensual of his female characters. Jude the Obscure's Sue Bridehead is in many ways a pronounced contrast to Tess, and it seemed wise for her to follow Tess. Sue is likely the most educated female character and certainly the most severe in terms of absolute abhorrence of sexuality. The two are also the most severely dealt with of the heroines; Tess is hanged as a criminal, and Sue suffers a complete mental collapse. To bring balance, there is Far From the Madding Crowd's Bathsheba Everdene. In some ways an amalgam of the two, hers is the happy ending not possible for Sue or Tess. And while chronologically she comes before either Tess or Sue, her successful career belies the notion that Hardy destroys his female characters.

Chapter One of this thesis looks at Tess of the d'Urbervilles and examines popular characterisations of and critical responses to the novel. As a sexually ruined woman who is not considered ruined by her author, Tess occupies a unique place in fiction. Characterisations of Tess as passive victim overlook her strength and independence; characterisations of her as immoral and corrupt overlook her generosity and honesty; characterisations of Hardy as misogynist and spoiler of Tess belie his overt sympathy and advocacy of her. In light of both author and text, the character of Tess Durbeyfield is complex and rigid definitions

are problematic.

Chapter Two belongs to Sue Bridehead of Jude the Obscure. Investigation of Sue reveals a complicated sexuality that subverts any notion of Sue being simply a frigid Victorian woman. Sue's attempts to defy conventional expectations of marriage are in direct opposition to conventional standards. Hardy supports Sue's fight and does not break her, as many believe; rather, he deplores a society that would break a spirit such as Sue's.

The final chapter deals with Bathsheba Everdene. While Far From the Madding Crowd raised some eyebrows, it was one of the most popular and socially accepted novels that Hardy wrote. Bathsheba, too, struggles with social convention in her attempt to run her own farm and find love. Hardy has probably earned more criticism from current feminist critics who view the final marriage as a taming of the independent Bathsheba than from even the Grundyists. However, a close look at the novel reveals the marriage as a deserved fulfilment for Bathsheba. Hardy does not tame or belittle Bathsheba; she is still very much her own agent. She is not contained within the domestic sphere she simply chooses to marry.

Hardy does not have a habit of confining or taming his female characters, rather he points to existing confines and attempts to widen them. Some characters are able to find more satisfactory endings than others, true. However, an honest portrayal could not deny the often brutal results, like Tess' death and Sue's breakdown, that seem to be the logical consequences given the status of women in late nineteenth-century England. It is not the heroines Hardy indicts in

his more tragic novels, it is the conventional society that creates these tragedies that receives his contempt.

Chapter One

Tess of the d'Urbervilles has created controversy since its publication over a century ago. The nature of Tess' femininity, her debasement, and her ultimate destruction have provoked unending debate among both casual readers and scholars alike. Characterisations of Tess are often polarised: immoral seductress or innocent child, she has both her defenders and detractors.

While Hardy is obviously investing in serious subject matter, in exploring the effects of convention on the individual, he is also at play in literary terms. Through Tess, he interrogates and explores the idea of the "fallen woman," he creates Tess in terms of the ethereal imagery of the goddess and the angel, yet he never wants Tess' humanity forgotten. Hardy creates Tess' story and in the end justifies her career and his own characterisation of her purity.

Shirley Stave observes,

> Something about her haunts the imagination; she is at once child and woman, strong and fragile, masterful and timid. In her, myth and history fuse. We are presented, on the one hand, with a very tangible English cottage girl and, on the other, with a goddess figure of immense stature. She exists in time while she remains timeless. (Stave 101)

I believe that this is an apt description of the way many see Tess. Of Hardy's heroines, she is one who truly "haunts the imagination." She is more than a

single type; her complexity and individuality make her unique. One of her great challenges is "resisting classification"(Morgan 98) by both critics and her male counterparts. While Alec, Angel and the Grundyists try to stereotype her, "[T]o Hardy, though, she is complex, diverse, unique: fierce and gentle, regenerative and destructive, trusting and suspicious, philosophical, mystical and sexy" (Morgan 98). Tess' passionate nature often provokes passionate response.

Contemporary critics were scandalised by many aspects of Tess' character, notably her evident sexuality. In reference to the early critical response, Margaret Higonnet contends that "[T]extual evidence reveals that the Tess of the early versions of the novel was even more blatantly sexual than the final one; Hardy was forced to bowdlerise his manuscript to make it more acceptable to a Victorian public" (103). Despite Hardy's editing, Tess' obvious identity as a sensual and sexual creature raised many eyebrows in Victorian England.

Tess' sensuality is evoked at the outset; the narrator's introduction of Tess places her not merely in a natural setting, but a celebration of Nature, no less. It is the local women's club's May-Day walk "to uphold the local Cerealia. It had walked for hundreds of years, if not as a benefit club, as a votive sisterhood of some sort; and it walked still" (Tess 8). Tess participates in an exclusively female celebration of Ceres, the goddess of agriculture. It is an ancient pagan ritual that the women continue, linking the female not only with the natural, but also with the pagan.

The first image of Tess is often referred to, yet worth mentioning again to

situate our subject. It is an evocation of a uniquely physical and sensual woman:

> She was a fine and handsome girl - not handsomer than some others, possibly - but her mobile peony mouth and large innocent eyes added eloquence to colour and shape. She wore a red ribbon in her hair, and was the only one of the white company who could boast of such a pronounced adornment. (10)

There are numerous points to be taken from this image. Tess is a beauty, with a very natural tint to this beauty. She participates in a celebration of nature, and while her "peony mouth" is from the natural world of flora, its redness acts as a signifier of Tess' sexuality. Her eyes are innocent and eloquent, yet the red ribbon crowning her dress of white hints at a bloodied or injured innocence. It is a strange duality with Tess that she is associated with a goddess, suggesting the ethereal and the divine, yet Ceres is the goddess of all that is earthly and natural. The red ribbon may also serve to interrupt any ethereal vision that Tess' white dress may conjure up; to remind the reader that this vision in white is no transcendental goddess, but blood and flesh woman.

Tess is in accord with nature, and she is shown to be so throughout the entire novel. Nothing is more indicative of this than imagery of Tess at work in the field. The narrator offers a beautiful scene of men at work afield:

> But those of the other sex were the most interesting of this company of binders, by reason of the charm which is acquired by woman when she becomes part and parcel of outdoor nature, and is not merely an object set down therein as at ordinary times. A

> fieldman is a personality afield; a fieldwoman is a portion of the field; she has somehow lost her own margin, imbibed the essence of her surrounding, and assimilated herself with it. (77)

Here, Hardy illustrates the beauty of the female connection to nature. Tess takes part in her role as earth goddess, a devotee of Ceres and a human Demeter. She is part of this scene, "gathering the corn with both hands against her knees, and pushing her left gloved hand under the bundle to meet the right on the other side, holding the corn in an embrace like that of a lover" (78). Michael Millgate also points to this passage in which "Tess's method of binding corn is evoked with a precision which serves not only to describe the actual conditions of work for 'fieldwomen' but also to celebrate Tess herself as the performer of actions at once so ancient, so skilful, so suggestive of natural fecundity -- and so precisely suited to her name, said in the standard Victorian work on Christian names to mean 'carrying ears of corn' or 'the reaper'" (Career 269). This exemplifies Hardy's ability to invoke literary conventions without being reductive. While we are aware of Tess' characterisation as goddess, we never forget that she is in fact Tess, a woman with her own earthly history.

Shirley Stave is primarily concerned with Tess and the other female characters of Hardy as goddesses. She suggests that "[E]ven critics who do not deal primarily with the mythic implications of the novel will make claims such as Katharine Rogers does when she refers to Tess as the 'least human' of the Hardy women characters" (101). Yet in many ways just the opposite is true. It is hard to deny that it is Tess' *earthly* beauty that Angel responds to. As she sits

milking a cow, her head pressed against its brown flank, Angel muses upon "how very lovable her face was to him. Yet there was nothing ethereal about it; all was real vitality, real warmth, real incarnation" (Tess132). It is this "real incarnation," Tess *in the flesh* who excites him. There is also an image of Tess crumbling curds prior to their being placed in vats, where, "amid the immaculate whiteness of the curds Tess Durbeyfield's hands showed themselves of the pinkness of the rose" (154). In addition to having her hands plunged into a vat of curds, "her arm, from her dabbling in the curds, was as cold and damp to his mouth as a new-gathered mushroom, and tasted of the whey" (154). There is nothing unearthly about this image. The sight, scent, and feel of Tess to Angel are very natural, revolving around the animal and the vegetable.

This identity as sexual woman does not accord with the angel/madonna figure so prevalent in the Victorian era. If one accepts the categorical polarisation of women, and Tess does not belong to the angel/madonna category, that leaves one choice only: she must then be the fallen woman or whore. This is just the sort of categorisation Hardy bridles against. He abhors the notion of typing women according to their sexuality. This is the product of "Hardy's less-than-typical Victorian view of female sexuality: his complete lack of puritanical censure, his complete faith in the healthy, life-giving force of free unrepressed sexual activity" and "his complete commitment to active, assertive, self-determined women" (Morgan x). While it may be overstating the case somewhat to talk of Hardy's views in terms of superlatives such as this, it is obvious he does not condemn Tess for her sexuality.

Perhaps, in reference to Tess' sensuality, we ought to now consider the two men who act as sexual agents in Tess' life: Alec d'Urberville and Angel Clare. Tess' first meeting with Alec contains quite obvious foreshadowing of events to come. Rather than giving her strawberries he has picked, he forces her to take them into her mouth directly from his hand. He burdens her with berries and roses, cramming them into her basket and her bosom, until she makes quite a display. As she falls into reverie on the events that have transpired, "looking downwards a thorn of the rose remaining in her breast accidentally pricked her chin ... she thought this an ill omen -- the first she had noticed that day" (Hardy 36). Alec forces these emblems of cloying sexuality upon Tess, which cause her actual physical injury. Tess appropriately views this wound as a bad omen, as signification of the greater harm Alec's fanatical attraction to her will eventually produce.

Although Angel Clare proves a less than satisfactory mate for Tess, his sensuality is certainly less harmful than Alec's. Hardy creates a parallel to this scene that highlights the difference between the two male characters. As Tess and Angel are riding to town in a wagon, "the blackberries hung in heavy clusters. Every now and then Angel would fling the lash of his whip round one of these, pluck it off, and give it to his companion" (162). Angel's offer of the berries is different from Alec's. Instead of physically forcing them on Tess, he gently hands them to her.

Tess' sexuality brings up the infamous scene in The Chase, in which Tess is either raped or seduced by Alec. Gayla Steele points to "Hardy's deliberate

ambiguity" (101) as the source of confusion. She believes that he is purposefully obscure as to the nature of what takes place between Tess and Alec, but believes also that "his compassion is evident as he cloaks her weeping figure in pity and fog, efforts that failed nevertheless to shield Tess from Grundyism's wrath" (101).

Various methods have been employed to clear up the confusion on this matter. William A. Davis, Jr. confronts the issue from a legalistic point of view. He first points out that Hardy explicitly states that Tess is asleep and there is no verbal response when Alec initiates sexual contact. Davis states that, "[T]o an alert Victorian reader, however, these details would have confirmed rather than introduced the idea of rape" (223). Davis finally contends that

> [S]eduction has mainly moral implications, while rape has mainly legal ones. Hardy, I believe, wanted Tess's sexuality and the matter of her purity to be considered in the minds of his readers rather than argued ... in a fictional court of law. To have Tess's status as a 'pure' victim following the rape amplified in a court scene would perhaps settle the question of her purity too easily, and Hardy does not want that. Instead, he uses the expansiveness afforded by the novel form (rather than a single scene) to argue for a definition of female purity that includes Tess's sexual nature and her sexual responses to men. (228)

Whether or not one agrees with Davis' perspective on the rape/seduction and Hardy's motives, his point about Hardy's wanting the definition of female purity

less narrow makes sense. A less rigidly defined notion of female purity, and femininity in general, is something that, at least artistically, Hardy seems fundamentally concerned with.

What does matter is despite Tess' sexual misfortunes and illegitimate child, Hardy took pains to call her "a pure woman." Hardy tells Roden Noel that "[R]eading over the story after it was finished, the conviction was thrust upon me, without any straining or wish for it on my own part – rather, indeed, with some surprise – that the heroine was essentially pure – purer than many a so-called unsullied virgin: therefore I called her so" (Letters 1:267). Hardy had not only written and published for public consumption such raw, coarse material, but he then dared to call it pure. It is one thing to merely write a novel about a whore and murderess, quite another to publicly vindicate her.

The issue of purity may have more to do with honesty than virginity for Hardy. Tess has proven herself morally upright "in spite of" her fall. She refuses money from both Alec and Angel, and is honest with Angel about her past despite dire consequences. When Joan laments the foolishness of telling Angel the truth, Tess "felt the wickedness of trying to blind him as to what had happened" and declares "[I]f - if - it were to be done again -- I should do the same'" (225). This basic honesty and determination encourages the reader to sympathise with Tess even though some of her other choices may be unwise. Shirley Stave believes that "[I]n effect Tess's scrupulous conscience deprives her of the instinct to survive which is shared by Joan and Arabella. Once again it is the genuinely moral woman who suffers" (67). It is a "combination of sexual

vigour and moral rigour that makes Tess not just one of the greatest but also one of the strongest women in the annals of English literature" (Morgan 85). By Victorian standards of morality she is sexually corrupt, the mother of an illegitimate child, yet her sense of fairness and responsibility belie these facile distinctions.

Hardy attests to his desire to widen the narrow parameters of female characterisation. In his preface to the fifth and later editions, he discusses Tess' unique place in literature and the pursuant reactions for and against:

> This novel being one wherein the great campaign of the heroine begins after an event in her experience which has usually been treated as fatal to her part of protagonist, or at least as the virtual ending of her enterprises and hopes, it was quite contrary to avowed conventions that the public should welcome the book, and agree with me in holding that there was something more to be said in fiction than had been said about the shaded side of a well-known catastrophe. (xvii)

It would normally be fatal because after such events the character would no longer be fit, and thus the story should end. Hardy defies this by making Tess' "fall" the beginning of her career rather than the end.

Shirley Stave theorises that the absence of Tess' guardian angel is to emphasise that such a Christian notion "is inappropriate in a Pagan primeval wood, while the sexual act is not; nor is Tess' abundant sexuality out of place in such a setting" (103). I would argue that there is something very inappropriate

about this sexual act. If it were condoned, Hardy's narrator would hardly wonder

> Why it was that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive; why so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus, the wrong man the woman, the wrong woman the man, many thousands of years of analytical philosophy have failed to explain to our sense of order. (Tess 65)

Whether the reference to sensitive, feminine tissue is actually referring to Tess' flesh, or Tess as a person it would seem that if this were a natural, consensual act the pattern traced would not be referred to as "coarse". Whatever the case, Alec has still manipulated and ruined Tess. Tess "had no fear of him now, and in the cause of her confidence her sorrow lay" (67). He has done his worst so there is no longer anything to fear.

Perhaps little can be gained by vacillating over the rape/seduction issue in Tess. In either case, he was still criticised:

> What Hardy regretted was the open declaration of interest, the invitation to controversy, not the interest and advocacy itself. Nothing is more remarkable in the novel than the extraordinary passion with which Tess is described and justified, and the 'pure woman' formulation only serves to make explicit what is everywhere implicit – that Tess's personality makes it impossible to accommodate her within any of the conventional categories

> suggested by the crude facts of her situation and story: the helpless female victim of stage melodrama, the betrayed maiden of the popular moral tract, the seduced country girl of innumerable ballads and anecdotes of oral tradition. (Career 268- 9)

Quite simply, Tess is a unique woman. While it is true that as a literary character she is confined within the borders of the literary world, she cannot be reduced to a type or trope.

Through Tess' unique career, Hardy comes to the defence of women who share her experience. Hardy despises the negative characterisation of such women, as is seen in his criticism of Henry Fielding. In a letter to Edmund Gosse he says

> I can never forgive him ... for regarding her [Molly] as a grotesque creature, a slut, &c. -- & my impression is that the shadowy original (or originals) of Molly were town girls with whom F. came into sensual contact, dressed up in peasant clothes; & no cottager. (Letters 2: 200)

Hardy clearly deplores the treatment of these women and their seducers. He does not regard the women in any negative manner.

Tess' sensuality is evident in her relationship with the natural world. Though Tess is depicted as akin to nature, the incident with Alec leaves her feeling isolated, as if she represents a defect in the harmony of the natural world. Tess senses this natural harmony and is ashamed to intrude on it, as she feels that her sin makes her unworthy to participate in nature. Tess feels voices

hostile to her, but these are products of her own imagination,

> a cloud of moral hobgoblins by which she was terrified without reason. It was they that were out of harmony with the actual world, not she. Walking among the sleeping birds in the hedges, watching the skipping rabbits on a moonlit warren, or standing under a pheasant- laden bough, she looked upon herself as a figure of Guilt intruding into the haunts of Innocence. But all the while she was making a distinction where there was no difference. Feeling herself in antagonism she was quite in accord. She had been made to break an accepted social law, but no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly. (Tess 76)

Tess is utterly demoralised by the taint she believes she represents. What she does not understand is that the only transgression she has made is against the laws of civilisation. Nature holds her in no contempt; she is still nature's child and is no creator of discord therein. She is first described as innocent, and in the eyes of nature she maintains that innocence. Despite this, she feels that she is the very embodiment of Guilt, defiling the Innocence that surrounds her by her mere presence.

If it is clear that Tess has only lost her innocence according to social law, then the implication is that the laws of civilisation are wholly synthetic and artificial. It is equally clear that whatever transpired between her and Alec, Tess is not to bear the blame. The phrase "she had been made" bears the

connotation that she was forced into the commission of this sin. Again, this wording indicates a lack of compliance on Tess' part, lending credence to the idea that Tess was raped rather than seduced by Alec. Even if it were seduction, Hardy clearly impugns this manipulation and violation of Tess' innocence. Also the idea of "an accepted social law" gives little import to the law. The idea seems to be that it is merely a blindly accepted law, that the actual merit of the law has never been considered.

Tess' depiction as innocent in the incident with Alec is a notion which many resist. Nina Auerbach proposes that "Hardy's Tess also seems vindicated by the narrator from having fallen at all ... she is allowed an implausible degree of innocence and passivity in her affair with Alec, suggesting that according to Victorian sexual ethics the true sin lies less in the act than in willing one's own fall" (169). I really doubt if this adequately represents Hardy's intent, and I wonder if her degree of innocence is truly that implausible. When Alec taunts her by saying every woman claims ignorance in such a situation, Tess' anger rises: "My God! I could knock you out of the gig! Did it never strike your mind that what every woman says some women may feel?" (68). Alec's mistake is in thinking of Tess as conventional, as "every woman;" her responses do not comply with Alec's expectations.

Tess is less passive than uncertain and naive in the incident with Alec. She is not sure what is happening, and is trying to maintain her precarious employment while being uncomfortable with Alec's advances. It is important to Tess to retain her job not for her own reasons, but because she is aiding her

family in difficult financial straits -- a predicament for which she feels responsible. I also do not think it is "according to Victorian sexual ethics" that intent to commit sin matters more than willingness to do so. Rather, Hardy's insistence on Tess' innocence is a repudiation of Victorian sexual ethics.

It is also important to realise that the person who is supposed to warn Tess of these things – her mother -- fails to do so. Stave, in her discussion of pagan goddesses, maintains that "[T]hroughout the novel, Hardy aligns Paganism with matriarchy by emphasizing Tess' bond with Joan" (108). This feminine, matriarchal bond is apparently indicative of female unification and power. Stave seems almost to blame Tess for rejecting "her previous counsellor, her mother, having turned her back on the matriarchal bond" (119). But it is Joan who first turns her back on Tess, and sacrifices her in the name of ambition. As the other children attempt to tease Tess into going with Alec "to be made a lady of,"

> Her mother chimed in to the same tune: a certain way she had of making her labours in the house seem heavier than they were by prolonging them indefinitely, also weighed in the argument. Her father alone preserved an attitude of neutrality. (Tess 39)

It is her mother who pressures Tess most fiercely into going with d'Urberville. When Tess finally relents, "Her mother could not repress her consciousness of the nuptial Vision conjured up by the girl's consent" (39). This passage seems to repudiate Elisabeth Bronfen's blame of a patriarchal influence. She believes that the May Dance does indeed represent the "ill omen" that worries Tess; but that it

"also signifies that she has already been chosen by the dead, who speak through the father's name, that she has been summoned away from the May Dance of marriage, children and old age to enter the dance macabre" (Bronfen 75). It is not solely the father's name that sacrifices Tess, but the mother as well. Tess is "The child/woman who has been tricked out by her 'witless' mother as a maiden sacrifice to her family's ambition" (Steele 98).

Stave does recognise the fact that Joan is "perfectly well aware that her daughter and Alec might become sexually involved" (6). However, she defends this by maintaining Joan falsely assumes "that the norms of her community hold in the world at large, she believes that if Tess becomes pregnant, Alec will of course marry her" (6). She also makes the mistake of assuming that the norms of her community hold with Tess, that Tess will of course marry Alec. Whether or not this is so, Tess rightfully reproaches her mother for hiding the truth from her:

> "Oh mother, my mother!" cried the agonised girl, turning passionately upon her parent as if her poor heart would break. "How could I be expected to know? I was a child when I left this house four months ago. Why didn't you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why didn't you warn me? Ladies know what to fend hands against because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance o' learning in that way, and you did not help me!" (Tess 72-3)

Auerbach further offers that "her affinities with burgeoning nature, her incorrigible will to renewal and joy, seem to exempt her from a fallen woman's guilt and

sorrow" (169). Tess is absolutely demoralised and grief stricken by these events. Upon her return home, she remains secluded in her room most of the time and only ventures out at twilight. She becomes a solitary figure who is ashamed to be seen, in both social and natural settings. Tess' grief knows no bounds; for a time, she can see only that she is unfit and deserves to be outcast. She begins a new life at Talbothays dairy, but she still carries the weight of her shame. She does not have "capacity for renewal and joy," merely the will to survive. As she begins to feel affection for Angel Clare, she is tormented by the knowledge that she can never have him because she is ruined and would, in turn, ruin him.

Auerbach's discussion focuses on several literary fallen women, and acknowledges Hardy's "radical" proposition of Tess as being morally upstanding in spite of her "sin." However, she qualifies this by stating that

> Tess seems from another perspective the most pitiably abased of all our fallen women. With all her supposed purity, perspective and language insinuate images of a somewhat unsavory and guilty thing ... Despite Hardy's ambivalently protective commentary, the reader is infected by Tess's own unremitting sense of sin. (171)

It may seem quite plausible that Hardy was ambivalent about Tess and his other female characters, but this is by no means a certainty. The images of guilt are not sincere, they are indicative of Tess' own imagined guilt. Societal dictates lead Tess to feel that she is guilty, while Hardy clearly defends her. It is more that Tess is infected with society's sense of her sin than that the reader is infected. Hardy takes exception to the manner in which society inflicts this guilt

on women who have been victimised in one way or another. Hardy's representation of Tess's guilt demonstrates the horrific circumstance that may be inflicted on a guiltless person by conventional dictates.

One can hardly deny that "[T]he theme of Tess' victimisation is enforced throughout the book in terms of scenes and images" and through her "geographical wanderings across the face of Wessex, flying like a hunted animal from one refuge to another almost always less satisfactory and safe" (Career 268). There is no safe harbour for Tess; each place she turns for solace holds only pain and censure.

Tess is made to pay for her own injury, for the crime committed against her. The nature of the injury, as for many of Hardy's women, is sexual -- a crime written on the body that cannot be erased or forgotten. The language of Tess' violation indicates this, and Tess' body becomes the record of Alec's violation. His act is forever imprinted on the delicate tissue of her body and is a living memory of it.

Tess' body records the incident with Alec in another, uniquely feminine, manner: Tess gives birth to a child. Nature records the truth even if people do not. Just as Alec's child is a tangible reminder of his crime in Tess, Troy's child acts as confirmation of his guilt in Far From the Madding Crowd.

Tess' child, whom she baptises on his deathbed "Sorrow," is the evidence of Alec's trespass against her. Hardy writes of the child as "that bastard gift of shameless Nature who respects not the social law' (84). The female body will not be controlled by social law; it will not be silenced. Sorrow is the proof brought

forth by Tess' body, that testifies to the coarse path traced upon it by Alec. Tess' is "the anger of the exploited body, of a maternity whose pleasures have been fatally contaminated by rape" (Higonnet 21). It is obvious that Tess is indeed angry about what has happened to her, anger that she expresses verbally to Alec and "will find expression finally in violence" (Higonnet 21). These conflicting emotions are also evident in her treatment of the child. In the harvest scene she moves between dispassion, and passionate kissing of the infant.

There has been much talk of late of the female body and the male gaze upon that female body. There seems to be agreement that there is a wealth of meaning to be gleaned from the male gaze, and what the female will do to either ensure or avoid this attention. For example, Elisabeth Bronfen believes that Tess' murder of Alec is ultimately a bid to achieve her own death in order to keep Angel's gaze. She supposes that Tess "realizes that by some fateful logic the price she must pay to ensure Angel's gaze is that of establishing a one-to-one correspondence between her body and the corpse he buried in effigy" (81). But perhaps Tess murders Alec not to ensure Angel's gaze, but to affirm her own agency.

Far from being merely tossed about by society, like the innocent child some believe her to be, Tess exhibits remarkable will and determination. Rosemarie Morgan believes "[M]uch has been made by critics of the passive Tess who yields to circumstance and fate," (Morgan 84) and she disagrees with these critics. Like Morgan, I wish to "resurrect Hardy's original strong Tess from the blurred stereotype of the sexually passive fallen woman" (85) and discuss her

agency in addition to her victimisation. For example, one of Tess' first exchanges shows her rebuking her companions for mocking her father, declaring "Look here I won't walk another inch with you, if you say any jokes about him!" (Tess 10). This is also a first glimpse of the proud Tess, whose "pride would not allow her to turn her head again, to learn what her father's meaning was" (10). It is established that Tess is a proud and passionate young woman.

Her passion and pride are never more evident than in her baptism of Sorrow. Fearing for her child's soul, she takes it upon herself to perform the rite denied to her by the child's illegitimacy:

> Her figure looked singularly tall and imposing as she stood in her long white nightgown, a thick cable of twisted dark hair hanging straight down her back to her waist. The kindly dimness of the weak candle abstracted from her form and features the little blemishes which sunlight might have revealed – the stubble scratches upon her wrists, and the weariness of her eyes – her high enthusiasm having a transfiguring effect upon the face which had been her undoing, showing it as a thing of immaculate beauty, with a touch of dignity which was almost regal. (83)

The beauty and dignity of Tess' character allows the reader to view this baptism as divinely spiritual, rather than sacrilegious. Tess steps outside of the role of sinner conventionally assigned to her, and becomes divine. Tess' character is such that rather than shouting her down for blasphemy, the parish priest attempts to console her, affected by "the dignity of the girl, the strange tenderness in her

voice" (85). Hardy allows a sinner such as Tess to perform a religious rite, which points to his "scorn of a cultural ideology that fosters, under the mantle of Christianity, both the myth of the fallen woman's guilt and the guilt of unbaptised innocents" (Morgan 102). Hardy holds a religion and a society that would condone such false guilt in contempt.

This will and pride of Tess is, like her sensuality, a quality that is evident throughout the text. Pride first takes her to d'Urberville. Feeling responsible for the death of the horse that her family depends on, she consents to take the position offered to her by the faux d'Urbervilles. While "Tess's pride made the role of the poor relation one of particular distaste to her" (Tess 29), it is also true that "[T]he oppressive sense of the harm she had done led Tess to be more deferential than she might otherwise have been" (29). While Tess' proud nature rebels against the thought of begging her wealthy relations for money, her sense of responsibility demands that she find some way to redress the harm she has caused.

Similarly, Tess' pride contributes to the arduous conditions in which she lives for the duration of the novel. This sense of honour prevents Tess from accepting assistance from Alec. She can never pretend that she cares for him in order to make her own life easier: "Perhaps, of all things, a lie on this thing would do the most good to me now; but I have honour enough left, little as 'tis, not to tell that lie" (69). Tess' mother confirms not only the strength of Tess' conviction, but the uniqueness of it when she exclaims "Any woman would have done it but you, after that!" (72). Most women, not necessarily for ease merely but even survival,

would have married in such a strait; Tess, however, does not.

It is also apparent that the refusal to lie affects her interaction with Angel, that guile and deceit would benefit and honesty only harms. After her confession, Angel pleads with Tess to dismiss it as a lie or say she has gone mad. His desire for it to be untrue is such that "He looked at her imploringly, as if he would willingly have taken a lie from her lips, knowing it to be one, and have made of it, by some sort of sophistry, a valid denial" (208). However, Tess simply repeats, "It is true" (208).

With respect to Angel's desertion of Tess, Hardy's narrator points out that if she "had been artful, had she made a scene, fainted, wept hysterically, in that lonely lane ... he would probably not have withstood her" (222). It is not in Tess' nature to behave in such a way, though "[P]ride, too entered into her submission" (222). Margaret Higonnet sees this as refusal on Tess' part to subscribe to typical and expected female behaviour. In refusing to make a scene, Tess "rejects the body language conventionally assigned to women" (Higonnet 22). After her confession, "she rejects the feminine hysterics and 'feminine' strategy of intimacy that might have enabled her to hold Angel" (Higonnet 22). Shirley Stave further offers that "Tess' pride – dignity if we will – is often read as a flaw in her character, especially in this scene" and this is indicative of "the double standard that characterizes a patriarchal culture" (Stave 102). The pride with which Tess accepts Angel's conditions "is seen as unnatural, and therefore reprehensible in Tess" but "would be admired in a man" (102). This double standard condemns Tess on all fronts.

Tess is a strong-willed woman, but she is only able to act as her own agent to a limited extent. Shirley Stave assigns her the mythical power of the goddess, especially in her encounters with Alec. She suggests that

> Tess' physical presence is so strong that one glance at her completely unravels Alec... It is this same power, inexplicable and even terrifying, that leads Alec to insist that Tess swear never to tempt him. Finally, it is this power, a power not permitted women in history, that leads Tess to her mythic death, since it is what allows her to avenge herself in a very unambiguous way on Alec by killing him. (Stave 102)

Tess' beauty certainly influences the men around her, but it is not equivalent to actual power, and I for one do not wish to legitimate Alec's claim that he has no control, that Tess is somehow responsible for his behaviour. If Alec's claim were in fact true, we would then have to declare him innocent to some degree, and I am not prepared to do that. To allow that would be to almost endorse "the wretched sentiment which had often come to her before, that in inhabiting the fleshly tabernacle with which Nature had endowed her she was somehow doing wrong" (Tess 271). What clearer statement can we have of the ridiculous nature of sexual politics than when Tess feels guilty for simply inhabiting a female body?

It is also more a lack of power that leads Tess to her death. She is unable to secure income and lodging for her family, due to her reputation. She finally surrenders to Alec's offer so that her family may live better, which precipitates the ill-timed reunion with Angel, leading to Alec's murder and so on.

It is important to realise that the reason the proud Tess finally submits to Alec is for her family. Alec's mention of her brothers' and sisters' hardship touches her "in a weak place," and he must realise that "[H]e had divined her chief anxiety" (Tess 307). It is not, as Stave proposes, that "her sexual drives lead Tess back to Alec ... Given that Tess never liked Alec's personality to begin with and that nothing in the text suggests her earlier opinion of him has changed, one must assume that Tess has been attracted back to Alec by his sexuality" (Stave 105). Alec uses emotional blackmail to seduce Tess back to him. It is clear that it is not physical desire, as Tess barely acknowledges her own physical existence, let alone any needs she may have. Upon seeing Tess at Sandbourne, dressed by Alec in fashionable clothes, Angel

> had a vague consciousness of one thing, though it was not clear to him till later; that his original Tess had spiritually ceased to recognise the body before him as hers – allowing it to drift, like a corpse upon the current, in a direction dissociated from its living will. (Tess 333)

She seems as though she is already dead; a corpse with little remaining of the former Tess.

Perhaps one of the most difficult concepts to reconcile is that of Tess as murderess. Does Tess murder Alec in a fit of legitimate female rage, or has Tess simply gone mad? Stave proposes that "[F]inally, in murdering Alec, an act which to Angel suggests a lack of 'moral sense', Tess reveals a moral sense at odds with Christianity, one older, more primitive, more Pagan" (Stave 108-9).

She here explains Tess' act not as immoral, simply moral in a different light; the murder of Alec is even required by this morality. However, this feminine justice makes little sense in the context of Stave's earlier comments. As it is her contention that Alec and Tess engaged in consensual sex in the Chase, and that Tess returns to Alec to satisfy her own sexual appetites, then what on earth has Alec done wrong that his murder is justified?

What is obvious is that the final loss of Angel through her reunion with Alec is what precipitates the murder. However, Tess' motive is not simply, as Angel supposes, "the strength of her affection for himself" (339), but perhaps pride also. She tells Angel that she "owed it to you, *and to myself*" (italics mine 338). Though her actions lead to her own death, through them she escapes the corpse-like existence she is living as Alec's mistress.

Whatever one may feel about the manner in which it manifests itself, it is clear that Tess' dignity remains. She is not simply the acquiescent child that many believe her to be, making no decisive choices; nor is she the stereotypical female sacrificing all for the man she loves. Far from being an act of total self-effacement, in many ways the murder of Alec becomes an act of self-assertion for Tess. It is a way of reclaiming some of what has been taken away by her surrender to Alec.

Chapter Two

If, as Hardy suggests, Tess was received with an unwarranted degree of moral outrage, it was nothing compared to the reaction to Jude. While Hardy himself may have thought the novel "somewhat overburdened with the interests of morality" (Letters 1:103), his critics certainly did not. The Bishop of Wakefield went so far as to publicly burn a copy of the book, which Hardy found "amazing -- or amusing" (1:125). Hardy took this in stride, remarking that "theology and burning (spiritual and temporal) have been associated for so many centuries that I suppose they will continue allies to the end" (1:125). Apparently the bishop was unconvinced by Sue's contrite penance and capitulation to Christianity at the end of the novel.

Sue Bridehead is often described as frigid, hysterical, asexual, and brittle. However, her keen intellect and logical abilities belie these inaccurate and incomplete descriptions. Sue, perhaps due to her position as a woman, is much more aware of social hypocrisy than the naive Jude. It is this acute awareness that contributes to many of Sue's unconventional behaviours and attitudes. And though she struggles admirably against the restrictions placed upon her, she cannot fully escape their influence. Though she rails against an unjust society, she is still a product of it and must live within it. Sue is a strange blend of propriety and rebellion, a civilised and decorous girl who attempts to be her own agent in a society that strictly forbids this.

As the previous discussion of Tess took her affinity with nature into

account, a discussion of Sue must discuss her civility. Where Tess's femininity is part and parcel of her depiction as natural, Sue's femininity is of a different sort, having more to do with propriety, manners, and fashion. Where Tess has a beauty and carriage drawn from the natural world, Sue is much more cosmopolitan. Jude's first impression of her is that

> she was light and slight, of the type dubbed elegant. That was about all he had seen. There was nothing statuesque in her; all was nervous motion. She was mobile, living, yet a painter might not have called her handsome or beautiful. But the much that she was surprised him. She was quite a long way removed from the rusticity that was his. How could one of his cross-grained, unfortunate, almost accursed stock, have contrived to reach this pitch of niceness? London had done it, he supposed. (Jude 137)

Jude's dismayed reaction to Sue is encapsulated in these lines; it speaks to the beginning of his infatuation with her. What is most arresting about her is that she exists as she does; he cannot believe such a refined woman emerged from his family. He had likely thought she would be of more coarse country stock, perhaps like Arabella. However, Jude finally supposes that London had wrought this transformation from "accursed stock" to metropolitan woman. From the beginning, Sue does not fit with Jude's expectations. To some degree he is correct in his estimation, for later Sue's rigid civility and the influence of convention will ultimately destroy her.

Sue is often considered the most extreme and complex of Hardy's

heroines, and will likely continue to be considered thus. Michael Millgate supposes that "[T]he character of Sue, at first sight one of the most innovatory aspects of the book, is in some respects only a more extreme, much franker treatment of a type Hardy had portrayed many times before" (Career 320). One may certainly wonder what a city girl like Sue has in common with women like Bathsheba and Tess. Perhaps further discussion will offer some insight into the character of Sue Bridehead.

Actually, some critics maintain that Sue, as a character, is not so unusual at all, that she is based on the New Woman of the late Nineteenth Century. Penny Boumelha maintains that the "New Woman -- by no means identical with the feminist, but clearly a relative -- had, indeed, become almost a cliché by 1895" (Boumelha 136). She further offers that "[O]ne contemporary reviewer remarks of Jude that 'If we consider broadly and without prejudice the tone and scope of the book, we cannot but class it with the fiction of Sex and the New Woman, so rife of late'" (136). Some characteristics of the New Woman include opposition to institutions like marriage and the Church, as well as a certain lack of sensuality. This aversion to the sexual can hardly be surprising considering the amount of subjugation involved in marriage and pregnancy, which are the fall-out of sexual experience. Kate Millett confirms that Sue shares in this ideology of the New Woman, "repelled by sense, for Sue is not only the New Woman, but by a complex set of frequently unsympathetic defenses, at times convincing, and at times only a rather labored ambivalence of Hardy's own -- she is the Frigid Woman as well" (130). While it is tempting to class Sue as "frigid,"

there are episodes that point to Sue as a sensual woman.

Conventionally thought of as asexual, Sue defies this distinction. At the Agricultural show she fervently presses her face toward the flowers, in a sort of dreamy ecstasy. Rosemarie Morgan feels that Jude disrupts this sensual interlude by questioning Sue on whether or not she is happy with him. This throws Sue back into the intellectual world, which Morgan believes is what Jude actually wants. In this portrait of Sue, she is "less ethereal than exhilarated, less frigid than refrigerated, and less wanting in sexual responsiveness than in a sexually responsive lover" (Morgan 152). Morgan's attitude suggests that it is perhaps Sue, not Jude, who is the more sexually frustrated. Sue certainly shares some common interests with The New Woman, but she defies definition as such. Sue is modern in her repudiation of marriage, yet she is not the frigid, unsensual creature typified by the New Woman.

Millett argues that Jude is "torn between two women who are incomplete beings. Arabella is at one pole, utter carnality" (Millett 130). Millgate discusses Arabella Donn and her contrapuntal nature in the text: "Arabella herself, with her sexuality, her vulgarity, her instinct for survival, is richly imagined and created, and her role is deliberately played off against Sue's in a manner reminiscent of the oppositions between Alec and Angel in Tess and between Grace and Marty in The Woodlanders" (Career 323- 4). In contrast to the first image of Sue, there is this of Arabella:

> a fine dark-eyed girl, not exactly handsome, but capable of passing as such at a little distance, despite some coarseness of skin and

> fibre. She had a round and prominent bosom, full lips, perfect teeth and the complexion of a Cochin hen's egg. She was a complete and substantial female animal – no more, no less. (Jude 81)

It cannot be much clearer that Arabella is animal in contrast to Sue's more idealised character. The use of the pig's pizzle, an utterly sexual and vulgar means of garnering Jude's attention, and her description as female animal define her from the outset as lewd and base, "attracting his attention from dreams of the humaner letters" (81). Even Jude in his naivete realises "[I]t had been no vestal who chose *that* missile for opening her attack on him" (84). However, for all her repute as "natural female animal," Stave effectively points out that "[V]irtually her only natural attribute is her sexuality; however she exploits that quality, seeking not pleasure but respectability in the form of a marriage" (Stave 128). Arabella is very much aware of this sexuality and what she has to gain by exploiting it. Penny Boumelha notes "it is not surprising that, while Sue's sexuality all but destroys her, Arabella's is the very guarantee of her survival. She, neither enigma nor conundrum, is clear-sighted about her means of economic survival, and barters her sexuality accordingly" (Boumelha 151). While Arabella certainly seems to enjoy her role as "a conqueror of men, a vaginal trap" (Millett 132) and the ensuing conquests, it is always clear that her primary goal is survival.

If Arabella stands at one pole, "At the other pole stands Sue -- pure spirit" (Millett 130). Gayla Steele maintains that "Jude's dualism separates women into the Victorian opposites of the virgin and the whore: Sue Bridehead the aesthete; Arabella Donn the libertine, the polarisation of types causing complete

disfunction [sic] in one and magnification of predatory instincts in the other" (Steele 116). Yet it is not only Jude who separates them, but to some extent literary convention: "They are the familiar Lily and Rose, but Sue is a lily with a difference -- she has a brain" (Millett 130). It does seem as though both literary and Victorian convention demand the use of dichotomy in the treatment of Sue and Arabella. However, this is far too simplistic.

For all her ethereal qualities, Sue is not "pure spirit." Even Jude, admittedly responsible for idealising Sue, discusses her in decidedly physical terms. He encounters Sue after spending the night with Arabella, and compares "the delicate lines of her profile, and the small, tight, apple-like convexities of her bodice, so different from Arabella's amplitudes" (Jude 245). Jude is here perusing Sue and viewing her in frankly physical terms. Sue may not be quite the earthy creature that is Arabella, but she certainly garners physical attention from Jude.

Despite his contention to the contrary, the fact that he is making observations about both women's breasts is evidence that he does indeed regard Sue in an animal, sexual way. Here Jude's own contrariety, a trait he routinely attributes to Sue, is evident. Jude is not the only one who views Sue as more than ethereal; Rosemarie Morgan points out that "it is not so much the visibility as the palpability of female sensations that, with Hardy's women, gives expression to their physicality" (Morgan ix). It is not physicality alone that endows Hardy's heroines with physical presence, but the manner in which he effectively conveys female predicaments. With regard to this, "Even the so-

called 'ethereal' Sue Bridehead has palpable flesh- and- blood presence" (Morgan ix). So despite the contention of Jude, and others, that Sue is some "aerial being" (Jude 278), she is in fact a quite tangible woman. Yet Hardy's narrator then describes her as an "ethereal, fine-nerved, sensitive girl, quite unfitted by temperament and instinct to fulfil the conditions of the matrimonial relation with Phillotson, possibly with scarce any man" (281). Sue's aversion for the sexual is one of many complex aspects of her character, a character that is both physical and aerial.

Sue's disconnection from her own sensuality and sexuality is illustrated in the episode with the statues. Sue excitedly purchases images of Venus and Apollo from a vendor. Following her hasty purchase, she begins to wonder what she is to do with these pagan and sensual images. In order to hide them, she wraps them up in all manner of leaves and growths she finds on the path "so that what she carried appeared to be an enormous armful of green stuff gathered by a zealous lover of nature" (Jude 141). The irony is that far from being a "zealous lover of nature," Sue is merely using this foliage to hide what she feels is a very inappropriate purchase. Not only are these artefacts representations of the sensual, they are pagan gods. Sue "entered with her heathen load into the most Christian city in the country by an obscure street running parallel to the main one" (141). It is obvious that she is ashamed of what she has done and fears censure of some sort if she is found out. Sue is justified in her fears as Miss Fontover destroys the statues when she discovers them.

As pagan deities, they offer a glimpse at Sue's impulsive and sensual

side. Yet the sensual implications of classic Greek gods is much different than the vulgar sexuality of Arabella. As the god of poetry, Apollo is much more in keeping with Sue's artistic and intellectual side. These figures represent an "odd contrast to their environment of text and martyr" (Jude 143). Much like Sue herself, they are out of place in such a restrictive environment. As the repressive Miss Fontover crushes the statues, Sue will ultimately be crushed under the weight of both Christian and nineteenth-century convention.

As an educated woman who reads philosophical tracts and deplores Christianity, Sue would like to claim that she that she has achieved a position outside of typical societal constraints. However, this is belied by the manner in which she clings to all that she supposedly despises. On their trip to the country, Sue muses, "I rather like this ... Outside all laws except gravitation and germination"(190). Here Sue attempts to identify with nature, to maintain that she is indeed comfortable within natural process. However, Jude questions her statement: "You only think you like it; you don't: you are quite a product of civilization" (191). Jude had earlier supposed that London made Sue what she was, and he here reiterates that stance. Sue is very much affected by societal convention, though she attempts to rebel against it. In one exchange, Jude probes this aspect of Sue's personality:

> "You seem to me to have nothing unconventional at all about you."
>
> "O, haven't I! You don't know what's inside me."
>
> "What?"
>
> "The Ishmaelite."

"An urban miss is what you are." (Jude 192)

Sue was a rather rebellious child, and she never seemed to have any compunction about doing just what she chose. Through his aunt and her neighbour, Jude learns "what an odd little maid" (161) Sue was as a child. His aunt recalls a time that "she was walking into the pond with her shoes and stockings off, and her petticoats pulled above her knees, afore I could cry out for shame, she said 'Move on, aunty! This is no sight for modest eyes!' " (160-1).

The neighbour says of Sue

> She was not exactly a tomboy, you know; but she could do things that only boys could do, as a rule. I've seen her hit in and steer down the long slide on yonder pond, with her little curls blowing, one of a file of twenty moving along against the sky like shapes painted on glass, and up the back slide without stopping. All boys except herself; and then they'd cheer her, and then she'd say, "Don't be saucy, boys," and suddenly run indoors. They'd try to coax her out again. But 'a wouldn't come. (162)

This recollection outlines Sue's early exhibits of eccentricity and her longing to take part in "male" activities. She obviously feels that she should not be excluded on the basis of her gender. However, she also seems to feel afraid of or intimidated by the boys when they show a particular interest in her. In response to their advances, she flees. This is a precursor to Sue's flight from the advances of both Phillotson and Jude; she mentally distances herself from Jude, while she makes an actual physical escape from Phillotson. Indeed, she does

prefer to physically distance herself from men; after she sends Jude away in the wake of a disagreement, she leans out her window to him. At this distance, "[N]ow that the high window-sill was between them, so that he could not get at her, she seemed not to mind indulging in a frankness she had feared at close quarters" (265- 6). Millgate refers to Sue's "policy of permitting the exchange of endearments only at times when she is beyond the range of immediate sexual assault ... the 'bride' in Sue is fatally inhibited by the 'head,' by intellectuality and a revulsion from the physical" (Career 320). Sue definitely feels as though she is in danger when she is physically proximal to a man, and this proximity induces no desire stronger than the desire to flee.

Hardy seems to understand this desire for flight, for escape from the expectations of society, as his portrayal of the girls ensconced at the training school shows:

> 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, child-bearing, and

> bereavement, their minds would revert to this experience as to something which had been allowed to slip past them insufficiently regarded. (194)

This image is not a narratorial construct alone, but may be a reflection of Hardy's sympathies. Millgate confirms that Hardy "found pathos in the spectacle presented by such a community of young women: 'Their belief in circumstances, in convention, in the rightness of things, which you know to be not only wrong but damnably wrong, makes the heart ache'" (Biography 315). Here Hardy himself attests to his dislike of this institutionalisation of convention, and his approval of the narrator's opinion of Sue's school is evident. After she has been at the school for a time Jude observes that Sue "had altogether the air of a woman clipped and pruned by severe discipline, an under-brightness shining through from the depths which that discipline had not yet been able to reach" (Jude 184). While Sue has certainly been curbed by her experience in the training school, she is still "a woman-poet, a woman-seer, a woman whose soul shone like a diamond" (426). This societal pressure has not yet been sufficient to rob Sue of this.

Also worth noting is the inclusion of child-bearing in a list of unpleasant "female" experiences such as injustice, loneliness, and bereavement. It is almost to say that the female lot is one of horrible injury, that her entire life is marked with suffering. Even child-bearing, conventionally supposed to be the summit of the female experience, is instead just as horrid as the rest of it. This proves true for Sue, as we see her humiliation during pregnancy and grief at the loss of her

children.

Perhaps it is this knowledge, this certainty of the horrible nature of the female lot, that causes Sue to disconnect from her own sensuality. She finds the notion of sexual contact abhorrent, and goes to extremities to avoid it. At one point, Sue actually leaves the bed she shares with Phillotson prior to his arrival, and intends to sleep in the clothes closet. When he finds her, the door is pulled shut, as "[S]he had fastened it inside with a piece of string, which broke at his pull. There being no bedstead she had flung down some rugs and made a little nest for herself in the very cramped quarters the closet afforded" (Jude 283). In addition to simple discomfort, Sue is willing to endure possible suffocation and nesting spiders to avoid him: "'What must a woman's aversion be when it is stronger than her fear of spiders!' he said bitterly" (284). Sue makes it quite apparent that she has no desire for sexual contact with Phillotson, and is willing to go to great lengths to avoid him.

If Phillotson ever doubts the extent of Sue's aversion, even given the above incident, she demonstrates it still further. After arranging to sleep separately, Phillotson mistakenly enters Sue's bedchamber. Upon her detection of Phillotson in the room, she springs up, "staring wildly" (289). Before Phillotson divines her purpose, she had run toward the window, "mounted upon the sill and leapt out. She disappeared in the darkness, and he heard her fall below" (289). Though her semi-conscious state may provide some explanation, it is equally obvious that Sue's fear of and disgust with sexual contact supersede any other considerations. This flight from Phillotson, coupled with her night spent in the

closet, is testimony to her supreme aversion.

Rosemarie Morgan feels that "if Sue fears her own sexuality this probably originated in her infancy in being taught to hate her mother and in identifying with the father who both hates the mother and rejects the mother's daughter" (Morgan 128). However, there is sufficient reason for Sue's trepidation in the societal context outlined, without making attributions about Sue's relationship with her father.

As one who is so involved in the construction of Sue's sexuality, it is important also to look at Jude's sexuality. Elizabeth Langland feels that Jude's sexuality is as problematic for him as Sue's is for her: "although the rhetoric of the novel presents Jude's weakness for women as a fault, it also insists on that 'weakness' or susceptibility as important evidence of manliness. When Jude fails to live up to other discursive formulations of his masculinity, this one never fails him" (Langland 36). In this way, Jude becomes as much a victim of convention as Sue. Jude's philosophical nature and quest for enlightenment place him outside of conventional norms. Langland notes the "tension between Jude's need to be the man his culture demands and his desire to locate a more fulfilling existence outside custom and convention" (39). To some extent this may be characterised as a feminine goal: to escape the dictates of convention in favour of a more self-directed life. Jude identifies with Sue on this level, yet as a man he still has a wider berth than she. Despite his enlightened nature, it is Jude who asks Sue to assent to his wishes on sexuality and marriage.

It is clear from these incidents that Sue wishes to be her own sexual

agent, to be autonomous with respect to sexual concerns. While some may find Sue's behaviour untenable, Hardy does not. He staunchly defends Sue on these grounds, stating in a letter to Edmund Gosse that "there is nothing perverted or depraved in Sue's nature" (Letters 1:99). He even praises her by contending that "one of her reasons for fearing the marriage ceremony is that she fears it wd [sic] be breaking faith with Jude to withhold herself at pleasure, or altogether, after it; though while uncontracted she feels at liberty to yield herself as seldom as she chooses" (1: 99). Sue recognises that once married she no longer has control over her body; wanting to be fair to both herself and Jude, she feels that not entering into the marriage contract is the best manner to ensure this control.

Hardy's position here undermines critics who feel that he fails to support Sue. Millett feels that "[H]e never commits himself to Sue as he did to Jude, and insists on seeing her obliquely or at a distance" (131). On the contrary, Hardy is quite committed to Sue and, as one who struggles against convention himself, identifies all the more strongly with her. Morgan supports this, feeling that Hardy "adopting a more openly heterodox stance than he had felt permissible in earlier works, stands openly and defiantly behind her" (Morgan 111).

Sue makes it clear as she leaves Phillotson that she wishes to be independent and under contract to no one. Sue tells her husband that she wishes to live with Jude when she leaves him. Phillotson inquires, "[A]s his wife?," to which Sue responds "[A]s *I choose*" (italics mine 286). Here again we are faced with the question of agency; Phillotson mistakenly believes that Sue wants merely a different husband. She does not; she wishes to live according to

her own lights. This statement of self-assertion reminds me, to some extent, of Tess. Just as Tess does not murder Alec for Angel's sake alone, Sue does not leave Phillotson only for Jude but for herself.

Sue's position on marriage is radically different from Arabella's. Sue believes that love only suffers after such a contract, while Arabella believes that love (and certainly lust) only provides a means of securing that contract. Shirley Stave sees Arabella's stance as necessary, that "Arabella acts in self-defense, as she must in a sexist, patriarchal society, but the cost of her acting is her soul. Her defense...is morally indefensible, but it reveals her understanding of the powerlessness of women in Victorian society and her own drive for survival" (Stave 128). Arabella's actions in her own interest show a knowledge of sexual politics, but she is hardly a protofeminist. Sue is interested in sexual politics but is not the morally reprehensible woman that Arabella is. Sue's responses, while the opposite of Arabella's, reveal *her* understanding of the powerlessness of women in Victorian society. Arabella's securing of Jude for her husband is a calculated plan on her part; it is her intent to establish her position as a married woman and manoeuvre some sort of power from this position. Arabella's modus operandi is about gaining advantage, to use the current power structure to get what she wants. As she says later to Sue, "[L]ife 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" (Jude 335). Sue's thinking is to avoid the marriage question entirely, and so avoid the domestic restrictions imposed upon a wife.

Having established Sue's aversion to marriage, we must then confront the fact that she does actually wed Phillotson. It is obvious from her diatribes against marriage and her aversion to Phillotson that she has no desire to marry. How we are to reconcile a woman so adamantly opposed to convention turning around and fulfilling such a very conventional dictate, and one to which she is particularly opposed, is a matter for debate. Jude attributes this contrary behaviour to what he terms Sue's "perversity," as he says "the perverseness that was part of her" (186). Perhaps the reason is best explained by Sue herself, as she explains that she wanted to defy convention, "[B]ut I was a coward -- as so many women are -- and my theoretic unconventionality broke down" (284). This is one example of the contradictions inspired by the tug between society and self within Sue.

Sue is constantly contradicting herself in this manner. In a conversation with Jude, she proclaims, "[M]y life has been entirely shaped by what people call a peculiarity in me. I have no fear of men, as such, nor of their books" (201). Not much later she wonders what Phillotson will think of her spending the night with Jude, as Phillotson "is the only man in the world for whom I have any respect or fear" (209). In the next breath, she again contradicts her statement with "I don't care for him! He may think what he likes -- I shall do just as I choose!" (209). It is obvious that Sue is torn between living up to conventional expectations and being her own agent. She cares what Phillotson thinks yet she wants to be able to behave in a manner of her own choosing and is frustrated by this. It is equally clear from her attempts to flee Phillotson's sexual advances that she does have a fear and aversion to him.

Sue has made it repeatedly clear on several occasions that she finds typical attitudes of marriage, love, and sex ill-suited to her own philosophy. After Jude confesses his marriage to Arabella, Sue muses that "if I had done such a thing it would have been different, and not remarkable, for I at least don't regard marriage as a Sacrament. Your theories are not so advanced as your practice!" (222). Here Sue questions Jude, who often refers to her "perversity," about his own inconsistencies with regard to marriage. In fact, it is after this admission of Jude's that Sue marries Phillotson and admits her own difficulty in reconciling theory and practice. Sue further deplores the fact that peoples'

> views of the relations of man and woman are limited, as is proved by their expelling me from the school. Their philosophy only recognizes relations based on animal desire. The wide field of strong attachment where desire plays, at least, only a secondary part, is ignored by them. (223)

If Sue truly does believe in this more ideal version of love, it becomes even more difficult to accept her marriage to Phillotson. The news catches Jude completely off-guard, and is fittingly pursuant to his vague remark "he felt that he did not even now quite know her mind" (224). As he further speculates on the subject, he affirms that "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" (225-26). Due to the scandal caused by her and Jude at the school, it would make sense for anyone to do as Sue does – except Sue.

Why? Because it is apparent that she is utterly opposed to marriage and convention. Even as she is making arrangements to be married to Phillotson,

she is railing against it; she comments in a letter to Jude, "it seems to me very humiliating that a giver-away should be required at all ... 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!" (226). Sue's bitterness toward both religion and marriage are here evident, yet she goes through with the wedding to Phillotson. Later in the novel, as she and Jude are about to embark on one of many failed marriage attempts, she comments that "[T]he flowers in the bride's hand are sadly like the garland which decked the heifers of sacrifice in old times!" (355). This extends Sue's previous imagery of woman as chattel, to woman as an object of sacrifice, linking with Tess' sacrifice of herself at Stonehenge. It also sadly prefigures Sue's move from rebelling against female sacrifice to offering herself as one.

Jude's inability to understand Sue leads him to wonder about women in general, and he attempts to form some sort of general theory from his observations of her. As they stand in church during the wedding ceremony, it occurs to Jude that Sue may be marrying Phillotson out of cruelty both to herself and to him. He supposes that "[W]omen were different from men in such matters. Was it that they were, instead of more sensitive, as reputed, more callous, and less romantic; or were they more heroic?" (231). Elizabeth Langland offers that "Sue both is and is not a typical woman depending on Jude's psychosocial investment in her. At those points when he fears he will lose her, he tends to brand her typical of her sex to distance himself from his need for her" (Langland 39). Jude is somewhat inconsistent in his characterisation of Sue as

either typical or unique; however, at the point when he is actually on the verge of losing her, he does not label her typical.

He further wonders, "[C]ould it be that Sue had acted with such unusual foolishness as to plunge into she knew not what for the sake of asserting her independence of him, of retaliating on him for his secrecy?" (Jude 231). This first statement seems plausible, as we have seen Sue's willingness, perhaps even the necessity, to assert independence by acting contrarily. Thus, it would not be surprising that she would attempt to define herself in this manner. However, Jude further muses that "[P]erhaps Sue was thus venturesome with men because she was childishly ignorant of that side of their natures which wore out women's hearts and lives" (231). On the contrary, to be like Sue, the opposite must be true. Sue is keenly aware of this "side" of men, and this awareness contributes to her unusual behaviour. In an odd way, it is Sue's fear of just this, and her attempts to prevent this, that lead her to just the life she wants to avoid.

Yet, here is Sue married and presiding over a schoolhouse. She cannot understand how she has become a very proper wife, overseeing a very proper school. Especially as she feels 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 the 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. (266)

Here we see the schism between societal notions of Sue and Sue's notions of herself. The strict conceits of society are much too narrow and unyielding to contain all that is Sue Bridehead.

If it is difficult for Sue to think of herself as being Phillotson's wife, it is even more so for Jude. In particular Jude finds it difficult to assimilate his ideal Sue with a married Sue now subject to the fulfilling of physical "wifely duties." He realises that Sue had been

> living largely in vivid imaginings, so ethereal a creature that her spirit could be seen trembling through her limbs, he felt heartily ashamed of his earthliness in spending the hours he had spent in Arabella's company. There was something rude and immoral in thrusting these recent facts of life upon the mind of one who, to him, was so uncarnate as to seem at times impossible as a human wife to any average man. And yet she was Phillotson's. How she had become such, how she lived as such, passed his comprehension. (245)

Indeed, it "passes" Sue's own comprehension as well.

Much has been made of Sue's physicality, or rather seeming lack thereof. Kristin Brady proposes that

> The narrator, even as he constructs his women in opposition to the standard norm of woman as the weaker vessel, reverts all the more

> strongly to that same cultural imperative; like Sue Bridehead, his most hysterical symptom, he ultimately submits to the oppressive codes he has set out to challenge. This discordance in Hardy's narrative does not negate altogether their more direct interrogation of the position of women in Victorian society. (Brady 90)

Brady is correct in identifying this irony in Hardy, indeed in any author who chooses to question societal norms; that difficulty of having to use these typical norms as a foil for other ideas, and, by so doing, have the effect of reinforcing the prevailing ideology. In order to deconstruct these ideas, one first has to set them up so that they may then be torn down. This sort of work was seen in the prior reference to "The Ruined Maid," in which Hardy first sets up Amelia as a whore in order to interrogate and satirise the entire concept of the whore or ruined woman.

However, Brady does not feel that Hardy succeeds in problematising these ideologies, simply in reinforcing them. Brady points to Jude as a prime example of this, and sees Hardy as contributing to the notion of woman as the weaker vessel. She states that

> the novel's damning critique of Victorian sexual relationships is finally displaced by an appeal to woman's biological weakness, for it is Sue Bridehead's female 'nature' itself, even more than social forces, that ultimately ... causes her to embrace exactly the oppressive conventions that she had earlier so eloquently attacked. (94)

She also maintains that

> [T]he loss of reproductive and nurturing activity destroys Sue's intellect, causing a hysterical reversal that exceeds all her earlier inconsistencies. The idea that motherhood is necessary for female mental stability is thus reinforced by the pathetic decline of Sue Bridehead -- caused not by external social forces but by an irresolvable conflict between her own perverse nature and her weak female body. (99)

But if Sue had not suffered mental collapse as a result of her extreme grief, we would then argue that this was her perverse nature reacting *against* motherhood or some such thing. Why should not Sue collapse at the reality of Father Time killing the other children and himself, and the subsequent loss of the child she's carrying?

Gayla Steele reinforces this stance, the idea that Sue's nature is weak and perverse, by stating that "[S]ue, the most incomplete of the two feminine entities, is frigid and brittle; she breaks emotionally under societal pressures and the horrifying deaths of her children" (118). Sue's breaking under these circumstances is entirely understandable. I sense it would be difficult to find a woman who would not. She would be more frigid if she did not break down in the face of such devastation. I suppose Arabella remains sufficiently intact; however, her loss is not as great as Sue's and I have already established her as lacking in deep character. This is why I find it surprising that Steele feels that she is the more complete of the two female characters in the novel. Arabella may be more substantial in a more earthy, bodily manner, but that is all; her lack of strong

emotion makes her very incomplete. She does not seem to be in any way the complex woman that Sue is.

It is odd that Phillotson, as the cause of Sue's dread, seems in many ways more radical and humane than both Jude and Sue. He does, after all, acquiesce to Sue's wish that she be let to live with Jude. In his conversation with Gillingham about marriage as a social unit, he says, "I don't see why the woman and the children should not be the unit without the man" (Jude 295).

Though she refuses sexual intercourse with the student, Phillotson, and Jude, Sue does not wish to be thought of as "sexless." To prevent Jude from seeking out Arabella, Sue finally relents and agrees to be intimate with Jude -- with a declaration of "Very well then -- if I must I must" (332). At which point she says to Jude "I am not a cold-natured, sexless creature, am I, for keeping you at such a distance?" (332). Jude manipulates Sue into having sex with him by threatening to go to Arabella, which is hardly in keeping with his admiration for her as a purely ethereal being. Perhaps this reflects Stave's contention that "Jude's thinking reflects the societal assumption that a sexual woman is a fallen woman, while a chaste woman is pure – in other words, that a woman's morality is solely dependant on her sexual behavior" (Stave 147). If this is true, Stave is correct in asserting the difficult straits in which this places Sue. For if Jude admires her as ethereal, and she assents to commit a "gross" act with Jude, she loses his admiration. Yet, if she does not, she also loses him. Sue is in a double bind here: if she is sexual she is fallen, if she is not she is "cold-natured" and "sexless." It is obvious that Sue cannot win in such a bind. Jude seems to

believe this at some level as well, for he later says that he belongs to that band of "men called seducers" (Jude 418). He feels that Sue was "a refined creature, intended by Nature to be left intact. But I couldn't leave you alone!" (418).

Of all the disturbing things about Sue, the most disturbing is her utter capitulation at the end of the novel. After the death of the children, Sue fanatically reverses all her previous attitudes. Shortly after their deaths, Sue the unconventional sceptic, blurts to Jude "We must conform!" (Jude 417). Sue has decided that they must abandon their unconventional ways in the face of God's vengeance: "All the ancient wrath of the Power above us has been vented upon us, His poor creatures, and we must submit. There is no choice. We must. It is no use fighting against God!" (417). This is a sharp change from the Sue who would rather jump out of a window than submit to Phillotson. She further tells Jude "I am cowed into submission. I have no more fighting strength left; no more enterprize. I am beaten, beaten!" (417). Jude has not been fighting as hard as Sue has, and perhaps this is why he has some strength left when she does not.

Most telling is the role reversal between Jude and Sue. In the beginning, Jude is the naive believer in church and convention. But now

> One thing troubled him more than any other; that Sue and himself had mentally travelled in opposite directions since the tragedy: events which had enlarged his own views of life, laws, customs, and dogmas, had not operated in the same manner on Sue's. She was no longer the same as in the independent days, when her intellect played like lambent lightning over conventions and

> formalities which he at that time respected, though he did not now. (419)

It is now Sue who places an absurd amount of weight on the convention that heretofore she had openly defied. She is broken and "renounces all hope of bucking the system and in giving up she becomes a collaborator who can out Victorian the Victorian slave-wife" (Millett 133). While I cannot say I view Sue as a collaborator and a slave-wife, she has definitely tired of fighting. It is at this point that Sue determines to go back to Phillotson and make the ultimate sacrifice in giving herself to him sexually. While Jude sees this as utterly lacking in the logic so characteristic of Sue previously, Millett would disagree with him. She believes that "Sue is only too logical. She has understood the world, absorbed its propositions, and finally implemented the guilt which precipitated her self-hatred" (Millett 133).

If the scene of the once proud Sue prostrate before the Latin cross is difficult to bear, her submission to Phillotson is too much. Sue's decision to be Phillotson's "true wife" includes the fulfilment of sexual expectations. But more than this, it is her attempt to punish herself in the most severe way she knows how for the death of her children. After Sue seeks entry to Phillotson's room, "lifting her bodily, [he] kissed her. A quick look of aversion passed over her face, but clenching her teeth she uttered no cry" (Jude 478). This image of Sue, forcing herself to follow through with an act that she finds repulsive, is not easily forgotten.

Kate Millett expresses the complex nature of Sue Bridehead when she

acknowledges that

> It is difficult to understand whether Sue is the victim of circumstances, principally those of her own social indoctrination and stronger than any truth that she might acquire on her own, or the victim of a cultural literary convention (Lily and Rose) that in granting her a mind insists on withholding a body from her, or finally, whether she is simply the victim of Hardy's irascible pessimism and the heavy-handed tragic device which poleaxes her hopes by hanging her children. (133)

While many of Sue's reactions, her devastation at the loss of her children for one, are not surprising for a woman in her situation, Sue's status as a literary figure invests extra meaning in these actions. Sue is affected not only by societal conventions, but literary conventions as well.

Perhaps what happens to Sue is best described by Arabella. After a chance meeting with Phillotson, she chastises him for letting Sue go so easily. Arabella asserts that

> She'd have come round in time. We all do! Custom does it! it's all the same in the end! ... You were too quick about her. *I* shouldn't have let her go! I should have kept her chained on – her spirit for kicking would have been broke soon enough! There's nothing like bondage and a stone-deaf taskmaster for taming us women (389).

It is precisely as Arabella says – Sue's spirit is broken from kicking. It is not that she is brittle or weak, but just the opposite. Sue has been fighting for so long

that she has no strength left. Perhaps someone who had not spent her energy in defiance of societal restrictions would have had the strength to withstand Sue's loss, but Sue does not.

Chapter Three

From her overt sexuality and entanglements with many suitors, to her efficiency and acumen in the management of her own property, Bathsheba Everdene decidedly flouts social convention. In a society that tends to dismiss female capabilities, she is a wilful and determined woman whose awesome strength has evoked much discussion. Though on the surface the two seem radically different, Bathsheba may be compared to Sue Bridehead: "Each was unorthodox by Victorian standards of femininity; less than conventional, and, in the amalgam, less than feminine" (Morgan 155). "Less than feminine" may seem an odd manner in which to describe Bathsheba, especially as she is introduced driving a wagon "laden with household goods and window plants" (Hardy 9). That she is "ornamented in front by pots of geraniums, myrtles, and cactuses, together with a caged canary" (9) suggests the domestic, and therefore the feminine -- at least according to the Victorian ideology of "separate spheres." As Bathsheba will later prove, any assumption that she is confined to the domestic sphere is entirely erroneous.

The most notable aspect of Bathsheba's debut is the display of vanity that so assaults Gabriel Oak as he watches her. She admires her reflection in a looking glass, and smiles at what she sees:

> It was a fine morning, and the sun lighted up to a scarlet glow the crimson jacket she wore, and painted a soft lustre upon her bright

> face and dark hair. The myrtles, geraniums, and cactuses packed around her were fresh and green, and at such a leafless season they invested the whole concern of horses, waggon, furniture, and girl with a peculiar vernal charm. What possessed her to indulge in such a performance in the sight of the sparrows, blackbirds and unperceived farmer who were alone its spectators ... nobody knows. (Far 9)

Like Tess, Bathsheba is marked by crimson. As Tess wears a red bow in her hair that contrasts the white of her appearance, Bathsheba's crimson jacket marks her in contrast to the verdant elements around her. Bathsheba's actions have aroused much discussion among Hardy's critics. Many feminists have blasted Hardy for saddling Bathsheba with what the narrator terms "woman's prescriptive infirmity" (10). In Oak's estimation, "she has her faults ... And the greatest of them is -- well, what it is always ... Vanity" (11). This of course links Bathsheba to the biblical Eve, the archetypal woman whose vanity led to the fall of man.

First, the source of this commentary ought to be considered -- Gabriel Oak. Bathsheba's quiet admiration of herself is no worse than Gabriel's surreptitious observation of her. If Bathsheba has her faults, Gabriel Oak certainly has his own, not the least of which is voyeurism. So, here we see an assessment of the female through a flawed male perspective. Perhaps Hardy himself is here balancing the scales by pointing to Oak's voyeurism in tandem with Bathsheba's vanity.

Even if this is vanity, it does not lessen Bathsheba's value as a strong and admirable woman. Male characters, such as Troy, possess vanity, which counters its characterisation as a strictly *female* infirmity. Considerations such as these cause one critic to posit that, "as Hardy presents the case, these so-called innate feminine qualities are not so much gender-determined as determined by preconceptions of gender" (Morgan 155). Also, Bathsheba is not merely a gender type, she is a character. If Hardy were to design all of his female characters as entirely flawless archetypes, we would likely have little interest in his work or respect for his skill as a writer. Hardy's aim is not to constantly reproduce the same female-type, but to create complex and intriguing women who share many issues but are distinct as characters unto themselves. They are all embroiled, to one degree or another in a constant struggle for agency in Victorian England, and all are socially and sexually controversial. Yet, Hardy has an ability to create diverse and complicated female characters whose commonalties do not reduce them to types.

In any case, Bathsheba's vanity does not detract from her strength and stance as an important character. Hardy never intended for Bathsheba to be written as perfect in any way: in a letter to Katharine S. MacQuoid, Hardy reveals that "I myself, I must confess, have no great liking for the perfect woman of fiction, but this may be for purely artistic reasons" (Letters 1:33). This statement is revealing in so far as it speaks to Hardy's concept of art requiring imperfection. We may also couple this with his obvious awareness of and concern for social issues and see how realism so forcefully informs Hardy's art. Hardy feels

passionately about writing in this way, but "zest is quenched by the knowledge that by printing a novel which attempts to deal honestly & artistically with the facts of life one stands up to be abused by any scamp who thinks he can advance the sale of his paper by lying about one" (Letters 2:206). While being truthful and honest about the suppressive and damaging nature of many social, largely patriarchal institutions, he never moulds his characters to social agenda. While his heroines are certainly much invested with the pressures and expectations of Victorian society, each is still clearly her own woman.

This disdain for "the perfect woman of fiction" is evident in many of Hardy's heroines. He does, however, make specific reference to Bathsheba:

> I had an idea that Bathsheba, with all her errors, was not devoid of honesty of this kind: it is however a point for readers to decide. I must add that no satire on the sex is intended in any case by the imperfections of my heroines, those qualities being merely portrayed in the regular course of an art which depends rather on picturesqueness than perfect symmetry for its effects. (Letters 1:33)

Of course he is correct in defending Bathsheba's flaws, irregularities, or whatever one may wish to term them. Bathsheba would not be nearly as interesting a woman or character without these traits.

Counted among Bathsheba's flaws, at least at the time of publication, is the "less than feminine" characterisation mentioned by Morgan. This quality serves her quite well at times. Discovering the baily Pennyways in the act of

stealing from her, "[S]he fleed at him like a cat -- never such a tomboy as she is" (57); Bathsheba requires no one to rescue her from this thief and the singularity of her actions causes her to be categorised as somehow male. This characterisation is akin to that of the young Sue, who is considered tomboyish for her participation in typically male activities. Both Bathsheba and Sue confound those around them with their exploits, exploits usually carried-out by men.

If those around her were abashed at these actions, what she does next is even more amazing. She informs the men that she has fired the bailiff, "and that I have formed a resolution to have no bailiff at all, but to manage everything with my own head and hands" (64). In response to this announcement, "[T]he men breathed an audible breath of amazement" (64). This is simply unheard of, for a woman to manage such matters, to take charge of her own farm. Bathsheba is quite outside her sphere.

Bathsheba's arrival in the cornmarket at Casterbridge is "the first public evidence of Bathsheba's decision to be a farmer in her own person" (73), and demonstrates her strength and savvy as a businesswoman in a man's market. While Tess presents a striking image as a harvester of corn, Bathsheba presents an equally striking figure as one who trades in this crop. Her entrance captivates the other dealers in the market:

> Among these heavy yeomen a feminine figure glided, the single one of her sex that the room contained. She was prettily and even daintily dressed. She moved between them as a chaise between carts, was heard after them as a romance after sermons, was felt

> among them like a breeze among furnaces. It had required a little determination -- far more than she had first imagined -- to take up position here, for at her first entry the lumbering dialogues had ceased, nearly every face had been turned towards her, and those that were turned rigidly fixed there. (73)

Here Bathsheba presents a stunning image, one of beauty and determination as she "takes up position" as one who would do business with these men. Yet it is not solely Bathsheba's beauty that makes an impression, for she proceeds to prove herself as a farmer as well. As the day progressed, "she ultimately acquired confidence enough to speak and reply boldly ... and by degrees adopted the professional pour into the hand" (73). In addition to adopting these practices, Bathsheba "always allowed her interlocutors to finish their statements" and "[i]n arguing on prices she held to her own firmly, as was natural in a dealer, and reduced theirs persistently, as was inevitable in a woman" (74).

Bathsheba's stunning appearance gives the men and the reader much to consider. Something about Bathsheba "suggested that there was potentiality enough in that lithe slip of humanity for alarming exploits of sex, and daring enough to carry them out" (74). It is this representation of Bathsheba as bold and daring that caused many to see her as the "less than feminine" heroine already spoken of. In this light, "Victorian accusations of misogynism are perhaps understandable, since it was profanity to many that Hardy's great heroines did not personify moral perfection ... the pedestal role he conscientiously abjures" (Morgan 156). Perhaps this has something to do with

Hardy's characterisation of Tess as "pure woman." Like Tess, Bathsheba has imperfections and weaknesses in judgement, but she is nonetheless a worthy character.

There is a passage in which Liddy asks Bathsheba not to rage at her "because you seem to swell so tall as a lion then, and it frightens me! Do you know, I fancy you would be a match for any man when you are in one o' your takings?" (155). Liddy is here stating what the reader already knows -- that Bathsheba is fierce enough, when she has a mind, to intimidate any man. While Bathsheba is amused by this picture of herself, it also slightly unnerves her. She is "somewhat seriously alarmed by this Amazonian picture of herself" and worries "I hope I am not a bold sort of maid -- mannish?" (155). I think Bathsheba is here begging a deeper question about what it means to be feminine. Just as Sue wants to live as she chooses and not be thought "sexless," Bathsheba wants to direct her own life and her own affairs, yet does not want to be "mannish."

Liddy does a fine job of explaining how Bathsheba can be all that she wants yet not be "mannish" when she responds, "O no, not mannish; but so almighty womanish that 'tis getting on that way sometimes" (155). Bathsheba is such a strong female presence, that at times she seems to possess male qualities simply because they aren't typically female. This is a quality Liddy envies, because it is "'a great protection to a poor maid in these illegit'mate days!" (155). Bathsheba's extreme will and passion are a source of awe and admiration to the quiet Liddy.

Paradoxically, these attributes simultaneously protect and endanger

Bathsheba. It is just because she possesses such great passion that she falls for Troy as recklessly as she does, for "Bathsheba loved Troy in the way that only self-reliant women love when they abandon their self-reliance. When a strong woman recklessly throws away her strength she is worse than a weak woman who has never had any strength to throw away" (147). And yet, without her strength of will she would have perhaps suffered a fate more like that "poor maid" Fanny Robin. While there is certainly a difference of will between the two characters, Bathsheba's personal independence is also a product of her financial independence. As a landowner and woman of means, Bathsheba can afford to be more bold in her decisions.

Troy recognises not only the personal but social differences between his two lovers. Boldwood attempts to persuade him to marry Bathsheba, ignorant that the deed has already been done, when Troy argues "I could do anything with poor Fanny Robin'" (180). Fanny's lack of social position makes her an easy target for Troy, for he is aware that he will not be held accountable for what happens to a servant girl. Troy knows this to be true and the proof is evident in Fanny's tragedy. This circumstance also informs Tess' tragedy; Alec knows that there will be little consequence to any treatment he directs at "a crumby girl" (Tess 36) such as Tess. Fanny's social position as well as her willingness to believe Troy despite his penchant for betrayal, deceit, and weakness contributes to her death.

Part and parcel of this desire for agency is the need to express, or not, one's own sensuality in any manner one chooses. Bathsheba's natural

sensuality is seen early on in her utter, pagan enjoyment of horseback riding. She takes the opportunity to throw herself back and ride full out. The association between horseback riding and sensuality is often made, and there are several examples in the Victorian era. One need only look at George Eliot's Middlemarch, in which Dorothea Brooke revels in horseback riding as a pagan, sensual pleasure. Bathsheba clearly enjoys her ride, as she secretly indulges herself:

> The girl, who wore no riding-habit, looked around for a moment, as if to assure herself that all humanity was out of view, then dexterously dropped backwards flat upon the pony's back, her head over its tail, her feet against its shoulders, and her eyes to the sky. The rapidity of her glide into this position was that of a kingfisher -- its noiselessness that of hawk. ... Springing to her accustomed perpendicular like a bowed sapling, and satisfying herself that nobody was in sight, she seated herself in the manner demanded by the saddle, though hardly expected of the woman. (17- 18)

Aside from the utter, and quite improper, delight she experiences, Bathsheba does not ride sidesaddle as a "proper" lady should. She blatantly rides astride, as men do, which is a categorical contravention of female etiquette. So, while we become acquainted with Bathsheba's passionate and sensual nature through this episode, we are also given other vital information concerning Bathsheba. She is a decidedly uncommon woman whose spirit and independence supersede societal expectation.

Her obvious ease as she almost becomes one with the horse is indicative of her sensuality and adventurousness. In addition, Bathsheba is intensely aware that her actions are socially taboo. As in the incident with the looking-glass, Bathsheba first checks to ensure that she is alone prior to assuming her unexpected horseback pose. Unobserved, she may do as she pleases. Upon discovery of Gabriel's intrusion, Bathsheba is humiliated, "[F]or, as without law there is no sin, without eyes there is no indecorum; and she appeared to feel that Gabriel's espial had made her an indecorous woman without her own connivance" (Hardy 20). It is the same for Tess; without societal law, she has committed no sin. The unreasonable demands of society categorise these actions, which are "hardly expected of the *woman*" but expected and accepted of the man, as indecorous or immoral.

These surreptitious observations of Bathsheba by Oak must have some significance. For,

> [A]s a figure of decorum and an observer of appearances, Oak's mode of regard differs substantially from Hardy's. I want to emphasise this point because critics overlook it entirely and tend to assume that the 'vanity' charge, and Oak's moralising in general, reflect Hardy's own point of view. (Morgan 36)

As I have earlier stated, critics seem to ignore that in describing a flaw of Bathsheba's, Oak is also presented as less than perfect. On more than one occasion Oak deliberately spies on Bathsheba when it is clear that she wishes to be alone and unobserved. As Oak recounts her equestrian adventures and

Bathsheba reddens, "[A] perception caused him to withdraw his own eyes from hers as suddenly as if he had been caught in a theft" (20). To some extent, he has been caught in just such an act. Just as theft is an act of intrusion, Gabriel's intrusion on Bathsheba's private moments is a kind of theft. Bathsheba is somewhat distressed by presenting this image to Gabriel, "[Y]et it was the man who blushed, the maid not at all" (19). Bathsheba has enough integrity not to be ashamed of her enjoyment. Though certainly nonplussed, she does not regret the act.

Hardy is much concerned with the pastoral way of life in his novels. For him, the pastoral is an idyllic existence, a state in which there is little separation between the human and the natural. In Far From the Madding Crowd, Hardy paints the common folk and Bathsheba's farm as an ideal setting. In Hardy's world, notions of cultural propriety and the like are intrusive and damaging. One could almost say that "Hardy's agenda appears to be to present a world in which culture ... intrudes as little as possible" (Stave 24). The natural and life-affirming rhythms of nature are only despoiled by so-called cultural concerns.

Bathsheba's sexuality becomes quite evident in her relationship with Troy, as their first encounter indicates. Her first impression of him is that of a man "brilliant in brass and scarlet" and "[H]is sudden appearance was to darkness what the sound of a trumpet is to silence" (Far 127). This brilliant image in red evokes a sort of affinity between Bathsheba and Troy, as she is likewise first glimpsed in scarlet and her appearance has a similarly dazzling effect on Gabriel.

As Bathsheba and Troy attempt to disentangle from one another,

Bathsheba becomes increasingly flustered. The reason for her discomfiture is the clearly sensual nature of the encounter, the physical contact between her and Troy. Rosemarie Morgan believes it is significant that

> The sensuality of the rendering is nowhere countermanded by a moralistic aside and the reader is left with no guidelines, no moral edification whatsoever. The Victorian critic did step in to redress the balance, to deplore what Hardy had not deplored, but for many readers the sheer delight of the moment must have passed without a single twinge of shame or guilt. (Morgan 33)

I think it is clear that Hardy is not so disparaging of female sexuality as many of his contemporaries, that Bathsheba's sexuality is an integral and exciting aspect of her character.

Like Alec of Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Troy is an example of destructive, forceful sexuality. The encounter with Troy amid the ferns is illustrative of this quality. However, unlike Tess, Bathsheba is to some degree a willing participant in Troy's manoeuvres. Troy's swordplay is an important indicator of the relationship between Bathsheba and Troy:

> In an instant the atmosphere was transformed to Bathsheba's eyes. Beams of light caught from the low sun's rays, above, around, in front of her, well-nigh shut out earth and heaven -- all emitted in the marvellous evolutions of Troy's reflecting blade, which seemed everywhere at once, and yet nowhere specially. These circling gleams were accompanied by a keen rush that was almost a

> whistling -- also springing from all sides of her at once. In short, she was enclosed in a firmament of light, and sharp hisses, resembling a sky-full of meteors close at hand. (Far 144)

This whirling confusion is fascinating to Bathsheba, much like Alec's proliferation of berries and flowers at first almost mesmerises Tess; and Bathsheba, too, becomes frightened by Troy. As Tess's prick by the thorn bodes ill, the cutting of Bathsheba's lock causes her to fear Troy. At first fascinated, this violation causes her to start: "No -- no! I am afraid of you -- indeed I am!" (145) is her distressed exclamation. This passage, often thought to signify Bathsheba's sexual fascination with Troy, also indicates Bathsheba's fear of him. While many speculate that her fear is of her own sexuality, that her panic is a response to her own ecstatic feelings, I think she is quite simply and justifiably afraid of the hidden violence in this man. While she is excited by Troy's swordplay, she is also fearful of him. Bathsheba intuits, though she does not act on this intuition, that Troy's "entire agenda in his interaction with women is the acquisition of power, either through psychological violence or through sexual game-playing, both time-honored methods of treating women in a culture that affirms male supremacy" (Stave 38).

Fanny's case is another display of destructive sensuality, as Troy's affair with her is the cause of her death. Bathsheba has her suspicions about Troy and Fanny, but Fanny's death seems to preclude any hope of discovering the truth. Bathsheba wishes aloud "[W]ould to God you would speak and tell me your secret, Fanny!" (Far 227), knowing that a glance inside the coffin will tell her all

she needs to know. Fanny's body has already testified by giving birth to a child, "the conclusive proof of her husband's conduct which came with knowing beyond doubt the last chapter of Fanny's story" (228). Fanny's death finally and fully opens Bathsheba's eyes to Troy's nature.

An important episode is that of the night spent amidst the ferns. After confronting Troy and learning the truth about his relationship with Fanny, Bathsheba is devastated and flees. In her desperation and exhaustion, she burrows into a spot where she feels safe. In the morning she wakes to find that she has spent the night just above the hollow she had visited previously with Troy. In her refreshed state, the "hollow seemed a nursery of pestilences small and great" (Far 233). Linda M. Shires supposes that

> Her disappearance into this wet hollow is fully emblematic of a return to the womb. Indeed, because it is extremely damp, she even loses her voice, the most authoritative, acculturated aspect of herself. Losing her power over language, the strong farmer is reduced to a lost infant. It is as if Hardy, who has revealed Bathsheba, in the early part of the text, to be a colorfully coy temptress and has later shown her as a willful woman in a male profession, forces her to start over again. (Shires 49)

But Hardy does not want to reduce Bathsheba. Even if this passage is indicative of a return to the womb, it is more likely that Hardy wants Bathsheba to have a fresh start. It is not apparent in the least that Hardy wants to orchestrate any belittling or taming of Bathsheba, he simply gives her some perspective.

Bathsheba does experience a sort of rebirth, and from above she realises that the bower in which Troy went to such great lengths to display his prowess is malignant, much like Troy's affections for her. The loss of her voice is linked less with a state of infancy than with Troy's influence. She tells Liddy that the reason for her loss of voice is that "the damp air from that hollow has taken it away" (Far 234). The diseased air from the hollow, Troy's diseased influence, took Bathsheba's voice away, but she is regaining it.

Boldwood is another suitor of Bathsheba's whose affections may be termed diseased. Though he is not intentionally vicious and deceitful as Troy is, his obsession with Bathsheba is equally harmful. His expectation that a Valentine with the words "marry me" acts as a firm pledge is much more immature than Bathsheba's sending it. Once ignited, his obsession with her intensifies, and he bullies her into making promises on more than one occasion. Riding home from the sheep fair, Boldwood presses her to promise her hand to him despite her pleas to let the subject drop. His intensity is so disturbing "that she almost feared him at this moment" (270). As he again begs for her promise at the Christmas party, he clasps her and refuses to relinquish it. Bathsheba is weeping in obvious distress and says, "You frighten me, almost. So wild a scheme! Please let me go home!" (287). These words echo her exclamations to Troy in the fern hollow. As the murder of Troy and subsequent discovery of "Bathsheba Boldwood's" belongings attest, Bathsheba is justified in her trepidation.

Another difference between Bathsheba and other Hardy heroines is

Bathsheba's relationship with Liddy Smallbury. Sue has no close female friends, or any friends for that matter. Tess' companions are more acquaintances, and, while there is affection between the women, their friendship is complicated by rivalry for Angel's affection. It is Liddy who brings comfort to Bathsheba after her terrible night in the swamp, Liddy who enters the dankness to rescue Bathsheba. In fact, "Bathsheba never forgot that transient little picture of Liddy crossing the swamp to her there in the morning light" (234). Nobody sent Liddy to Bathsheba, she simply knew her mistress was in distress and sought her out. In fact, this may be seen as an act of agency on Liddy's part, venturing out to help Bathsheba.

One aspect of Far From the Madding Crowd that many have difficulty comprehending is the marriage of Bathsheba to Gabriel at the end of the novel. The marriage is seen as an unequivocal denial and dismissal of Bathsheba as independent woman, safely contained within the confines of domesticity. In short, Bathsheba is finally placed in the proper sphere. Gabriel is viewed as a particularly bad choice of husband, for "[L]egal and sexual discrimination apart, as surely as Bathsheba attempts to maintain her independence and prove her talents, so Oak attempts to subdue and reduce her" (Morgan 44). Several critics view this as a taming of Bathsheba in which she is finally cowed into submission to patriarchal expectation. Rosemarie Morgan laments that the "self-delighting, adventurous woman as conceived by Hardy, but preconceptually redefined by Oak, barely survives the warping of her true nature in a world in which woman is to be shaped according to man's will" (156). This sentiment is more applicable to

Sue, who is truly warped by this world.

Linda M. Shires points to critics who see the men in Bathsheba's life as a series of patriarchal representatives each of whom contribute to the breaking of Bathsheba's spirit:

> [T]he woman farmer, so resistant to becoming man's property, is gazed at obsessively by Oak, taken in by the sexual aggressor Troy, humiliated first by him and then by the persistence of Farmer Boldwood, broken, and married off to Oak in a final gesture of Hardyesque taming. (Shires 50-51)

However this is not the only possible interpretation. Shires points out that "[T]he rest of the text does not tame Bathsheba into the domestic sphere, but rather, awards and removes, or downright denies, her access to traditional roles associated with the Victorian domestic sphere: waiting wife, widow, innocent, child bride and mother" (63). Gayla Steele admits "their reunion occurs only after Bathsheba has been chastened, a conclusion which is open to interpretation either as male bias against an independent woman, or as a stern warning: man must allow woman to grow to full maturity or risk nemesis" (Steele 40). Bathsheba certainly does mature after her fateful encounters with both Troy and Boldwood. However, I don't know that we are to read it as a "stern warning." Both Bathsheba and Gabriel have some learning to do before they can be reunited.

Gabriel, too, is chastened and humbled before he is reunited with Bathsheba. We have seen the Gabriel Oak who spies on Bathsheba in what she

considers private moments. Even after she so obviously chastises him for doing this, he continues to watch her movements in secret "and thus his sentiments towards her were deepened without any corresponding effect being produced upon herself" (23). From this one-sided relationship, Gabriel proceeds to ask for Bathsheba's hand in marriage. Only after Gabriel loses his flock and his fortune does he mature enough to be worthy of Bathsheba. Due to this "pastoral tragedy," Gabriel "passed through an ordeal of wretchedness which had given him more than it had taken away" (34). The improvement to Gabriel's character is sufficient that "the abasement had been exaltation, and the loss gain" (34). If we consider that Gabriel is a flawed character forced to undergo an ordeal to help him mature, we ought not to make Bathsheba's ordeal indicative of anti-feminine sentiments. This is not to say that Gabriel is flawed in the same manner as Troy or Boldwood. Troy is vicious and sadistic, Boldwood unstable and obsessive. It is simply that just as Bathsheba has flaws indicative of her immaturity, so does the paragon of virtue Gabriel Oak. In the face of this gender parity, or at least similarity, one may state that "his texts award and deny power of differing kinds to both sexes unpredictably" (Shires 51).

Hardy makes it clear that their reunion is based on a *mutual* affection and growth:

> Theirs was that substantial affection which arises (if any arises at all) when the two who are thrown together begin first by knowing the rougher sides of each other's character, and not the best till further on, the romance growing up in the interstices of a mass of

> hard prosaic reality. This good fellowship -- *camaraderie* -- usually occurring through similarity of pursuits, is unfortunately seldom superadded to love between the sexes, because men and women associate, not in their labours, but in their pleasures merely. (303)

Bathsheba is not selling out; it is not that as though Bathsheba is sacrificing passionate love for compatibility, it is that this compatibility is *superadded* to this love.

The entire foundation of Bathsheba and Gabriel's relationship is quite reciprocal in nature. While Gabriel may take on the role of rescuer for Bathsheba, we must not forget that Bathsheba's quick actions saved Gabriel from suffocating in his hut. As Gabriel courts Bathsheba through a series of humiliations and rejections, Bathsheba does the same for him. After Gabriel's letter giving notice of his departure, it is Bathsheba who seeks out Gabriel. She says that it would appear as though she had come to woo him, to which he responds "[A]nd quite right, too ... I've danced at your skittish heels, my beautiful Bathsheba, for many a long mile, and many a long day; and it is hard to begrudge me this one visit" (303). Bathsheba is not too proud to let Gabriel go without asking him to stay.

Rosemarie Morgan contrasts the final marriages in both Jude the Obscure and Far From the Madding Crowd by observing that "[I]n contrast to Bathsheba's muted voice as Mrs. Gabriel Oak, Sue's crushing defeat as the unhappy Mrs. Phillotson does not eclipse either her rebellious voice or her heartfelt principles: her ineluctable truths long outlive her tergiversation" (Morgan 111). But is

Bathsheba's voice really subdued once she becomes Gabriel's wife? I think this is a very important question that must be addressed.

There is no hint that Bathsheba is less than satisfied with her choice of husband. She is so excited the night before they are to be married that she can hardly sleep. Some may interpret this nervousness in a negative manner, yet the weight of textual evidence points in the opposite direction. Bathsheba speaks to Liddy with "a mischievous smile in her bright eyes," and when telling Liddy the news "laughed with a flushed cheek, and whispered in Liddy's ear" (Far 306) which tells me that the girlish and flirtatious spirit has returned to Bathsheba. This is very much the woman who, in one of her first encounters with Gabriel, teasingly challenges him to "'Now find out my name'" (23). In fact, her renewed spirit outshines her plain clothing and the bad weather; "though so plainly dressed, there was a certain rejuvenated appearance about her: -- 'As though a rose should shut and be a bud again'" (306). This is not to say that Bathsheba has stepped backwards and become the same coquette who sent the Valentine to Boldwood, rather that she has regained her high-spiritedness. After all, the old Bathsheba would never have the forbearance to approach Gabriel as she does.

In fact, Bathsheba's marriage to Gabriel can in many ways be viewed as antithetical to Victorian domestic expectations. Hardy goes to great lengths to show that Bathsheba is misguided in attempts to adhere to many conventional notions. Following her discovery of Troy's deception, she decides that she will not leave him but remain his wife. She tells Liddy that if she is ever in a similar situation "don't you flinch. Stand your ground, and be cut to pieces. That's what

I'm going to do" (235). Bathsheba's utter investment in marriage is obviously misguided, it is here that she is reduced and belittled by Troy. It is strange that while Bathsheba is obviously misguided in believing that she belongs to Troy, it is also a testament to her will and strength that she is willing to stand her ground. This also sheds light on the incident in the bower, when she does stand her ground in the face of being torn to pieces by Troy. However now, unlike then, she is fully aware of the possible danger.

In the wake of his disappearance she is utterly demoralised by her belief that "[S]he belonged to him: the certainties of that position were so well defined, and the reasonable probabilities of its issue so bounded, that she could not speculate on contingencies" (249). This is wrongheaded in precisely the same manner as Sue's fanatical devotion to Phillotson. Yet this attitude is not surprising as evidenced in nineteenth-century divorce laws. Many women who sued for divorce, often in circumstances of great abuse, were refused. A. James Hammerton observes that "[H]omilies urging wives to seek security in submission were common place, especially during the first half of the nineteenth century. They testify to deeply held judicial beliefs in a patriarchal model of marriage" (275). Bathsheba's belief that she belongs to Troy merely because of the marriage contract is mistaken.

Why is it necessarily the case that because Bathsheba marries Gabriel she is reduced? It is unfair and short-sighted to say that unless Bathsheba remains alone she is no longer the independent and interesting woman we have come to know. Hardy has not compromised Bathsheba or his principles by

allowing her to marry happily in the end. Instead, he is presenting an alternative to the dominant sexual politics in Victorian society. Bathsheba, like both Sue and Tess, is certainly not shielded from the pressures of Victorian convention, but her resolution is hopeful. Or, quite simply, it is simply an alternate ending; a "happy" ending that counters some not so happy ones.

Unfortunately, Far From the Madding Crowd pre-dates both Tess of the d'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure. This may mean that as time wore on Hardy became more pessimistic about these more hopeful possibilities. In a letter to John Addington Symonds, he reports that

> The tragical conditions of life ... I am less and less able to keep out of my work. I often begin a story with the intention of making it brighter and gayer than usual; but the question of conscience soon comes in; it does not seem right, even in novels, to wilfully belie one's own views. (Letters 1: 190)

This assertion in defence of his "pessimism" helps illuminate some key issues in Hardy. The final marriage does not contain Bathsheba, it is just that at this point in his career Hardy is able to believe in a companionable male/female dynamic. But as time wears on he is less able to believe that with the overwhelming social pressures facing women that they will be able to be successful in their attempts at self-agency. Bathsheba, despite her many humiliations, is never truly broken. Why should the possibility of love not be available to her? She has survived disaster and emerged, albeit older, with much of the spirited independence she exhibited in her earlier moments in the novel.

Conclusion

Thomas Hardy returned to his first love, poetry, following the publication of Jude the Obscure in 1896. He eventually held his poetry in higher regard than his novels, seeming to feel, as Millgate suggests, that "prose, written out of necessity merely, was relatively inessential" (Career 351-352). However, one cannot dismiss the role that unrelenting criticism played in his choice to retire from novel writing. With each new novel receiving harsh critical response, Hardy simply tired of the constant battles with critics, publishers, and the public alike. This is hardly surprising as critical battles with Hardy's works continue even now.

It is clear that Hardy has a much greater investment in his female characters than in his male characters. It makes sense that Hardy would identify all the more keenly with his heroines; after all, while characters like Jude and Gabriel certainly have to contend with disappointment and social restriction, they are not hampered to the same extent that the female characters are. Through his experiences as an author, Hardy understood constantly having to tailor what one truly wanted to what was expected. Hardy incurred harsh criticism by writing in an open manner about female experience through his heroines and was pressured to edit frank material. However, these pressures only caused him to identify all the more strongly with his heroines, and, in turn, to write even more vocally about them.

Tess, Sue, and Bathsheba are united with each other and with Hardy in their attempts to respond to the imposition of social dictates. Each heroine defies

conventional notions of femininity, and this defiance is equally a source of strength and a source of hardship. Tess repudiates conventional feminine behaviour at every turn: she refuses to reveal her pregnancy to Alec, she refuses to allow her child to die unbaptised, she refuses to lie or engage in hysterics to keep Angel, and she finally refuses to accept an empty life with Alec. Sue's radical views on marriage likewise position her as an atypical woman. Because of her understanding of the restrictions of a marriage contract, she prefers to live unmarried with Jude. Sue wants to be with Jude, but on her terms. Bathsheba also repudiates typical femininity in the way she independently manages her affairs, despite the contention among her fellow farmers and those who work for her that a woman is ill suited to such an endeavour. Bathsheba also boldly faces the consequences of her unwise marriage to Troy, and the Boldwood's fanatical attachment to her. These characters are linked by their atypical responses to the circumstances they are faced with. Whether these circumstances are beyond their control or the result of their own choices, each heroine attempts to deal with these situations on her own terms.

In this thesis, I have attempted to redress many of what I consider to be inaccurate or unaccommodating views of Hardy's heroines. Hardy interrogates such conventions as the madonna/whore iconography, the ideology of separate spheres, and conceptions of female sexuality in the creation of narratives that surround heroines such as Tess, Sue, and Bathsheba. Women became subject to these constructions, and their lived experience became categorised in terms of these very synthetic social norms. Women were judged on whether or not their

actions were in accord with these conventions; if found wanting they were characterised as either unfeminine or immoral.

Much as women were judged in terms of constructs, so Hardy was and is. In the nineteenth century, he was measured against particular expectations of authors and found wanting. Rather than being a "good" author and offering characters who reinforced current morality, he presented characters who were often in direct conflict with current morality. The madonna/whore iconography influenced Hardy's writing as it influenced the lives of women. In accordance with expectation, Hardy was supposed to construct his female characters to suit these icons. Heroines ought to be modelled in the madonna image, and characters who fell into the category of whore by default ought to have been censured in the narrative. However, Hardy not only interrogated these notions in his writing, he sympathised with heroines who could not force themselves to adhere to these expectations. Since Hardy refused to force female characters to live up to popular morality, critical response often termed his works as lewd, obscene, and immoral.

In terms of current criticism, there is a similar difficulty. Critics often view Hardy through the lens of a particular critical methodology. In many ways, this is useful in so far as it allows a tight focus on a particular point or theme. However, it is also extremely problematic. For sometimes, in narrowing the focus, the entire view is obscured. The characters, the work as a whole, are often cut to fit a methodology that cannot fully accommodate their complexity. A critic engaged in such a concentrated reading might miss or dismiss evidence that is of equal

importance. There is also a problem when a critic begins using a work as a means to further a methodology, rather than using the methodology as a means to understand the work itself. In this case, a critic only focuses on events that seem to reinforce the particular critical stance, without thoroughly examining evidence that may belie this stance.

In my examination of critical readings of Hardy, I have reviewed various critics many of whom subscribe to a particular feminist stance. While I am also a feminist, I do not subscribe to any particular feminism. I have drawn support from some critics and attempted to argue with readings that I felt were too exclusive. Textual evidence has always been very important to me as a means of grounding critical response. Critics are adept at offering varied readings of a work, and innovative criticisms are helpful in questioning these works. However, at the end of the critical enterprise, there is still the literature itself to be considered, and a critic ought not to not be so concerned with critical response that the work itself loses importance.

This is where my particular approach asserts itself. My focus, in dealing with any critical approach, has always been the work itself. A very close reading of a text allows a reader to understand the work more completely, without focusing too narrowly on a particular event. While certain events may be more significant than others, it is detrimental to focus too heavily on any single occurrence.

For example, many feminist readings focus on the concluding episodes of Hardy's novels without taking a larger context into account. While these final

episodes are extremely important to the piece as a whole, they are best viewed in terms of all that has come before. These events are not independent of the preceding narrative, and discussing them exclusively may lead to an inaccurate reading. This is also partly where the unorthodox order of my treatment of the novels comes in to play. Many view the harsh treatment of both Tess and Sue at the end of their careers as evidence of Hardy's misogyny. As they are certainly the more tragic of Hardy's heroines, and are often produced as solid evidence of Hardy's misogyny, it was important to handle them first. Some view Tess' execution as indicative of Hardy's discomfort with her independence, sexuality, and immorality; however, given the obvious sympathy of the narrator toward Tess' plight throughout the *entire* novel, it makes more sense to view it as yet another example of Tess' unfair treatment. Likewise, many see Hardy as the one who punishes and breaks Sue, yet thorough examination of the novel *as a whole* makes it much more likely that Sue (understandably) breaks under social pressures which Hardy relates to and sees as the logical culmination of Sue's difficulties. After Sue's difficult career in which there is so much tragic struggle, it would have been absurd for Hardy to offer a comic ending to her tale.

In attempts to further the idea of Hardy as misogynist, even a heroine who is not punished, such as Bathsheba, is viewed as receiving this harsh treatment. After thorough exploration of the tragedies of both Tess and Sue, Bathsheba becomes an important foil. However, even her survival and marriage are seen as a form of breaking or taming, proof of Hardy's misogyny. But this is only true if a reader is intent on forcing Bathsheba to be a tragic figure like Sue or Tess.

Simply because both Sue and Tess have such tragic finales, it is not necessarily true that Bathsheba must also. This is where both close reading and examination of the novels outside of chronological order become an asset. A close reading of the text proves Bathsheba's marriage to be a fulfilment, not containment. Textual evidence supports the merit of Bathsheba's marriage. And, rather than portraying Bathsheba as the first in a series of heroines that become progressively more tragic, I only reveal Bathsheba at the end to countermand any notion that Hardy ultimately destroys all of his female characters. Bathsheba only becomes a tragic figure if we force her to be.

As the heroines themselves cannot help but be influenced by the conventions they seek to challenge, Hardy could not help but be influenced by the conventions he sought to challenge. For even some events that may be viewed superficially as misogynistic are altered by careful examination. It has been my desire to do this, to more fully and thoroughly examine and contextualise these three novels. In each chapter I have dealt with an individual heroine and accounted for her on her own terms, only considering critical opinion secondarily. By comparing critical opinion with what is in the actual text I have created a reading that offers Hardy's heroines as the product of a feminist writer, without sacrificing character to this reading. While both social and literary conventions are important and certainly at play in Hardy's work, Hardy does not surrender his heroines to convention and neither will I.

While it may be difficult to accept the side of Hardy that gave in to critical demands, it is equally difficult to avoid sympathising with his trials. If he were to

have refused many of the critical demands, his works would have gone unpublished. Had this happened, there would have been one less voice to speak stridently on behalf of female experience. Imperfect though it may be, this voice would be missed.

But many of these concerns may be alleviated by simply loosening the constraints we as critics ourselves impose. While many deplore Hardy's reactions to social constraint, we subject his work to our own brands of restriction. Just as a widened perspective would have allowed women in general and Hardy's characters in particular a greater comprehension, so will a widening of perspective create this room for Thomas Hardy now.

Works Cited

Auerbach, Nina. Woman and the Demon. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1982.

Brady, Kristin. "Textual Hysteria: Hardy's Narrator on Women." Higonnet 87-106.

Bronfen, Elisabeth. "Pay as You Go: Exchanges of Bodies and Signs." Higonnet 66-86.

Boumelha, Penny. Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form. Brighton: Harvester, 1982

Davis, William A., Jr. "The Rape of Tess: Hardy, English Law, and the Case for Sexual Assault." Nineteenth Century Literature 52.2 (1997): 221-232.

Foster, Shirley. Victorian Women's Fiction: Marriage, Freedom, and the Individual. Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1985.

Hardy, Thomas. The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy. Ed. R.L Purdy and Michael Millgate. 3 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1978.

---. Far From the Madding Crowd. Ed. Robert C. Schweik. New York: Norton, 1986.

---. Jude the Obscure. Ed. C.H. Sisson, ed. London: Penguin, 1978.

---. "The Ruined Maid." Victorian Poetry: Clough to Kipling. Ed. Arthur J. Carr. 2nd ed. New York: Rinehart, 1972.

---. Tess Of the d'Urbervilles. Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1993.

Hammerton, A. James. "Victorian Marriage and the Law of Matrimonial Cruelty." Victorian Studies 33 (1990): 269-292.

Higonnet, Margaret R. The Sense of Sex: Feminist Perspectives on Hardy. Urbana and Chicago, IL: U of Illinois P, 1993.

Langland, Elizabeth. "Becoming a man in Jude the Obscure." Higonnet 32-48.

Millgate, Michael. Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist. New York: Random House, 1971.

---. Thomas Hardy: A Biography. New York: Random House, 1982.

---. "Introduction." Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy. vii- xvii

Mitchell, Judith. "Hardy's Female Reader". Higonnet 172-187.

Morgan, Rosemarie. Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy. London: Routledge, 1988.

Shires, Linda M. "Narrative, Gender, and Power in Far From the Madding Crowd" Higonnet 49-65.

Stave, Shirley A. The Decline of the Goddess: Nature, Culture, and Women in Thomas Hardy's Fiction. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995.

Steele, Gayla R. Sexual Tyranny in Wessex: Hardy's Witches and Demons in Folklore. American University Studies Series IV English Language and Literature 164. New York: Peter Lang, 1993.

Works Consulted

Altick, Richard D. Victorian Studies in Scarlet. New York: W.W. Norton, 1970.

Begel, Susan. "Bathsheba's Lovers: Male Sexuality in Far From the Madding Crowd." Cox 108-128

Claridge, Laura and Elizabeth Langland, ed. Out of Bounds: Male Writers and Gender(ed) Criticism. Amherst, MA: U of Massachusetts P, 1990.

Cox, Don Richard, ed. Sexuality and Victorian Literature. Knoxville, TN: U of Tennessee P, 1984.

Green, Laura. " 'Strange [in]difference of sex': Thomas Hardy, the Victorian Man of Letters, and the Temptation of Androgyny." Victorian Studies 38.4 (1995): 523-551.

Hardy, Thomas . The Return of the Native. Ed. James Gindin. New York: Norton, 1969.

Hartman, Mary S. Victorian Murderesses: A True History of Thirteen Respectable French and English Women Accused of Unspeakable Crimes. New York: Shocken, 1977.

Kalikoff, Beth. Murder and Moral Decay in Victorian Popular Literature. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1986.

Law, Jules David. "Sleeping Figures: Hardy, History, and the Gendered Body." ELH 65.1 (1998): 223-257.

Moscucci, Ornella. The Science Of Woman: Gynaecology and Gender in England 1800-1929. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge UP. 1990.

Paradis, James and Thomas Postlewait, ed. Victorian Science and Victorian Values: Literary Perspectives. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1985.

Woodring, Carl. Nature Into Art: Cultural Transformations in Nineteenth Century Britain. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989.