

Sue Bridehead, "The Woman of the Feminist Movement"

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Curiously enough, I am more interested in the Sue story than in any I have written.

Sue is a type of woman which has always had an attraction for me, but the difficulty of drawing the type has kept me from attempting it till now.¹

Hardy's fascination with Sue Bridehead has been shared by many readers, some of whom feel she takes over *Jude the Obscure* from Jude. She is complex to the point of being irresistible, mystifying, or for some exasperating. She seems to Yelverton Tyrell, writing in 1896, "an incurably morbid organism," and to Desmond Hawkins, more than half a century later, "just about the nastiest little bitch in English literature."²

Sue Bridehead will be more fascinating than frustrating to those who can find a thread that makes her windings worth following, and who can recognize in her mazes something more than the uniqueness of neurosis. Tyrell asks, "Why dwell on this fantastic greensickness?" Albert Guerard answers for the "minute responsibility" of Hardy's characterization, and Michael Steig argues her psychological coherence in clinical terms. Havelock Ellis and Robert Heilman carry the argument for our interest beyond the psychological consistency of what looks odd in Sue, to its representative importance.³

¹Hardy's letter to Florence Henniker, Aug. 12, 1895, in *One Rare Fair Woman, Thomas Hardy's Letters to Florence Henniker, 1893-1922*, ed. Evelyn Hardy and F. B. Pionion (Coral Gables, Florida, 1972), p. 43; his letter to Edmund Gosse, Nov. 20, 1895, in *Thomas Hardy and His Readers, A Selection of Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Laurence Lerner and John Holstrom (London, 1968), p. 123.

²*Jude* was published serially in 1894-1895, as a book in 1895. Citations are from the Harper publication of the standard edn. (from the 1912 Wessex edn.), edited with a fine introduction by Robert Heilman. I cite Hardy's other novels in Macmillan's Library edn., giving for each the date of publication in book form. Tyrell, "Jude the Obscure," *Fortnightly Review*, 65 (1896), 860; Hawkins, *Thomas Hardy* (London, 1950), p. 17. A. Alvarez' dismissal is so thorough that he says *Jude* has no heroines, reducing Sue and Arabella to aspects of Jude—see "Jude the Obscure," in *Hardy, A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Albert Guerard (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1963), pp. 117, 115. By contrast, V. J. Emmett calls Sue more interesting than Jude and perhaps Hardy's most complex character—see "Marriage in Hardy's Later Novels," *Midwest Quarterly*, 10 (1969), 340, 337.

³Tyrell, p. 860; Guerard, *Thomas Hardy, The Novels and Stories* (Cambridge, Mass.,

Clearly Hardy thought Sue represented a type, however brilliantly individualized. She herself says that she is not such an exception among women as Jude thinks, particularly on the subject of marriage. She also says that she and Jude are not alone in their peculiarities (pp. 300, 327). An important passage in Hardy's postscript of 1912 to the preface of *Jude* pinpoints Sue's type as "the woman of the feminist movement—the slight, pale 'bachelor girl'—the intellectualized, emancipated bundle of nerves that modern conditions are producing" (p. 50). By including it in his postscript, Hardy seconds the opinion of a German critic who wrote to him on Sue's feminism. No one seems to know who this German critic was. In fact the passage has been pretty much ignored. Some contemporary reviewers, such as Tyrell, classed *Jude* with "the fiction of Sex and the New Woman." And Hardy seems to have seen the novel in similar terms. When he contemplated dramatizing it, his projected titles were "the New Woman" or "A Woman With Ideas." But this view of the novel fell rather quickly from sight. Only recently has it begun to reappear, as in Lloyd Fernando's *New Women' in the Late Victorian Novel* and A. O. J. Cockshut's *Man and Woman, A Study of Love in the Novel*. An essay by Mary Jacobus recognizes the conflict between Sue's desire to be an individual and the "femaleness that breaks her" but sets the struggle in rather narrowly personal terms so that her feminism remains disconnected from a wider Victorian framework. A similar lack of contemporary ideological framework causes Kate Millett to doubt Sue's coherence as a character because in her the new woman is at odds with the "frigid woman." I think that to place Sue in relation to Victorian thought on the woman question is to reveal the coherence of this "woman of the feminist movement," whose daring and precise logic of emancipation also produces its rending tensions. The feminism by which Sue frees her brilliant individuality makes her a "frigid woman" at the same time that it keeps her in constant peril of the "femaleness that breaks her."⁴

Most criticism may have steered clear of feminist analysis of the novel because it is widely agreed that Hardy was doctrinaire in no

1949), p. 109; Steig, "Sue Bridehead," *Novel*, 1 (1968), 260-266; Ellis, *Savoy* rev. (Oct. 1896), in *Thomas Hardy and His Readers*, pp. 142-143; Heilman, p. 39.

⁴Tyrell, p. 858; Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy, His Career As a Novelist* (New York, 1971), p. 312. Fernando's treatment is brief but provocative in "Hardy: The Fiction of Sex and the New Woman" (University Park, 1977), pp. 142-146; Cockshut's overemphasis on the hedonist side of feminism causes him to find Sue wanting and *Jude* ultimately antifeminist (London, 1977), pp. 124-130; Jacobus, "Sue the Obscure," *Essays in Criticism*, 25 (1975), 321; Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York, 1969), pp. 130-131.

cause or philosophy. He himself disclaims in a letter to Edmund Gosse that *Jude* is simply a problem novel on the marriage question. While not an avowed feminist, he knew something about feminist ideas. For instance, he quotes Tennyson's *Princess* in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886). His library contained such examples of late-century new-woman fiction as Olive Schreiner's *Story of An African Farm*, Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins*, and Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did*. He sympathized with certain feminist views. If the divorce issue is not all there is to *Jude*, it is part. Hardy also knew and cared about certain women who were touched by the cause.⁵

His first wife Emma was interested in women's rights, but the two models usually proposed for Sue Bridehead are Tryphena Sparks and Florence Henniker. While Robert Gittings' biography of Hardy shows that Tryphena Sparks must have been at least what Victorians called a "strong-minded woman," Florence Henniker was the more demonstrably an "enfranchised woman." Hardy's letters characterize her in these terms. One letter indicates that he plans to get the *Subjection of Women*. This directly implies Mrs. Henniker's feminist interests and their influence on Hardy. However, she was apparently not cut to any stock pattern. Hardy says that he is surprised at her agreeing with Mill. This response is difficult to interpret. But it seems of a piece with his disappointment that a woman in some senses "enfranchised" should be in others conventional, for instance in her religious beliefs. A woman emerges contradictory in her views—like Sue—with the contradictions of a new type. Florence Henniker herself wrote fiction, and one of her heroines called forth Hardy's admiration—"the girl . . . is very distinct—the modern intelligent mentally emancipated young woman of cities, for whom the married life you kindly provide for her would ultimately prove no great charm—by far the most interesting type of femininity the world provides for man's eyes at the present day." This sounds like Sue's type. The heroine's mistake, the conventional marriage, reflects what for Hardy was the similarly mistaken conventionality sometimes shown by her creator and, presumably, prototype.⁶

⁵Hardy's letter of Nov. 20, 1895, in *Thomas Hardy and His Readers*, p. 123; J. Stephens Cox, "The Library of Thomas Hardy," in *Monographs in the Life, Times, and Works of Thomas Hardy* (Guernsey, 1969), pp. 201, 202.

⁶Emma Hardy marched in a suffrage parade in 1907 and wrote a letter to the *Nation* on the topic in 1908 according to Gittings, *The Older Hardy* (London, 1978), pp. 120, 140. Tryphena Sparks was a woman of Hardy's past by the time he wrote *Jude* but was part of its inspiration, as the preface says he began it after a woman's (her) death. According to Gittings she was very much a self-made woman. He says we cannot know if she sacrificed Hardy in favor of her teaching career. Hardy became involved in correspondence and no doubt emotionally with Florence Henniker in 1893, when he was

Lloyd Fernando contrasts *Jude* to other new-woman fiction of the period whose heroines' perfection is made out of theories, not psychological probability.⁷ Hardy shows how and why Sue Bridehead is a free woman but a repressive personality, sophisticated but infantile, passionate but sexless, independent but needing men, unconventional but conventional, a feminist but a flirt. He observes her with such undogmatic exactness, with such pure fascinated tenacity, that he shows us how this "bundle of nerves" works, and how her nerves go wrong.

Sue Bridehead wants to free herself of the worst of a woman's fate. Hardy outlines that fate in the section on the young women at the Melchester Training School:

they all lay in their cubicles, their tender feminine faces upturned to the flaring gas-jets . . . 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. (p. 183)

Hardy gives two versions of the reason for women's hard lot. One is social. When Sue compares a bride to a sacrificial heifer, Jude answers that women should not protest against the man but against the conditions that make him press her (p. 328). But the narrator charges masculine nature itself when he says that Sue is ignorant of "that side of [men's] natures which wore out women's hearts and lives" (p. 218). Hardy is able to have his sexual disaster both ways by piling one on top of the other. When Sue says "it is none of the natural tragedies of love that's love's usual tragedy in civilized life, but a tragedy artificially manufactured" (p. 257), he implies that, even take away the artificial, the natural tragedy would still remain.

The tragedy begins with sex. Hardy describes the students in the Melchester School with tender nostalgia: their hurry to shed the temporary immunity from the "deadly war" of passion provided by their "species of nunnery" only gives them longer to regret its loss (p. 47, 182). The young women are preoccupied with last year's seduction, young men who may turn out not to be cousins, late hours, and interesting delinquencies. They are safe, but restless, in the blockaded sexuality of their college regimen:

writing *Jude*. They saw Ibsen played; they read "Epipsychidion"; he called her a Shelleyan type—see Gittings, *Young Thomas Hardy* (London, 1975), pp. 218, 156, 219, and also Hardy's letters of July 16, 1893, Sept. 3, 11, 1895, May 26, 1911, in *One Rare Fair Woman*, pp. 15, 45-46, 147, and also pp. 1, 4, 14.

⁷Fernando, pp. 129-133, 143.

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. (p. 183)

Hardy's position is clear. Women suffer by the operations of sexuality—injustice, loneliness, child-bearing, and bereavement. Children bring suffering, Mrs. Yeobright says to little Johnny Nunsuch in *The Return of the Native* (1878). Mother woe is one's personal suffering and the knowledge of having given birth only to suffering. *The Well-Beloved* (1897), written just before *Jude*, expresses another liability of motherhood, that it stunts as well as afflicts. Mrs. Pine-Avon illustrates the rule that the "advance as girls [is] lost in their recession as matrons." Why? "Perhaps not by reason of their faults as individuals, but of their misfortune as child-rearers." By the same token marriage offers no great advantage to a woman. Hardy thinks it is wrong for Florence Henniker's advanced young heroine to marry. There is an interesting late letter recounting the news of his sister-in-law's successful confinement. He responds to the glad tidings with an opposite sentiment: "if I were a woman I should think twice before entering into matrimony in these days of emancipation when everything is open to the sex."⁸

The Training-School students enjoy temporary immunity from sexual disaster. Enforced from without, it is, with all of its repressiveness, yet a haven to be missed later. Sue Bridehead enjoys a more sustained immunity, though still inherently and tragically unstable, enforced from within. Hers is sexual self-repression in the interest of personal emancipation, not doctrinaire in its expression in the novel but capable of analysis in the context of nineteenth-century feminism.

Sue is a woman seeking self-determination. A strong phase of her personality is contained in the phrase, "I shall do just as I choose!" (p. 197). She often does it, buying the forbidden statues, leaving the school, throwing over Phillotson and Jude turn and turn about. She says she wants "an occupation in which I shall be more independent" (p. 147). She quotes Mill on liberty.

Her model of freedom comes from childhood. However, old Miss Fawley's intriguing account of Sue as a girl pictures her not in the full

⁸*Well-Beloved*, p. 170; Hardy's letter of Oct. 27, 1918, in *One Rare Fair Woman*, p. 182.

freedom of infancy but in moments of crucial consciousness of the threats to freedom, so that the childish Sue comes across more as a rebel than a free spirit. She was a good student and accomplished in other ways. "She could do things that only boys do, as a rule." But she was "not exactly a tomboy," partly it seems because she was already aware of gender and its divisions. She would suddenly refuse to play the boys' games. Yet she defied the limits placed on girls. She, who could hit and slide into the pond with the best of the boys, was once cried shame upon by her aunt for wading into that pond with her shoes and stockings off. She answered with twelve-year-old awareness of sexual roles and rebellion against them: "Move on, aunty! This is no sight for modest eyes!" (pp. 154-155).

Jean Brooks is one of the few critics willing to comment on the meaning of Sue's childhood. She compares her infantilism, her longing for childhood, with Catherine Earnshaw's, calling it "a death-wish longing."⁹ In my view neither Catherine nor Sue exhibits a death-wish so much as a life-wish. They hark back to a time before the split into sexual and thereby limited beings. Catherine comes to grief by being made a lady of, losing Wuthering Heights, the moors, Heathcliff, her heaven. For an androgynous union as of brother and sister in the panelled bed at the Heights is substituted the division and violence of adult love. Catherine dies in childbirth.

A catalog might be made of brilliant girl children of Victorian literature who stand to lose by growing up and do. Many say that Jane Eyre and Maggie Tulliver are less at their ends than their beginnings. Jane is rather diminished to a happy marriage with her "master." Maggie embraces self-renunciation and death. A classic instance of a fascinating girl's growing up to be a not-very-interesting woman is Paulina Bassompierre in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*. In the brilliant opening chapters the six-year-old Polly threatens to take the novel away from its heroine, she is so complex, bizarre, above all so individual. But she comes to learn that she must bear a great deal at the hands of men, her father and her eventual husband, because she is a girl. She profits by the lesson, and the result is a happy marriage and the forfeiture of our attention in favor of the unhappy and unmarried Lucy Snowe. One of the most consistently engaging and admirable female characters of Victorian fiction, whose interest lies in her capability, not its defeat, is Alice. She is intelligent, resourceful, strong-minded, aggressive in a polite way that pleases by contrast to the outrageousness of the creatures she meets. She will stand no nonsense at the end

⁹Thomas Hardy, *The Poetic Structure* (Ithaca and London, 1971), p. 267.

of *Wonderland* and wins her game at the end of *Looking-Glass*. Lewis Carroll is often suspiciously regarded for liking little girls. The liking was eccentric insofar as it tended towards exclusiveness, but is it in itself incomprehensible? May not girls have something that they lose in growing up, especially in growing up to be Victorian ladies? Carroll said that he ceased seeing much of a child-friend after about the age of twelve because in most cases she ceased to be interesting. This may be taken as a comment on Carroll or on the girls. It is usually taken the first way, but I think the second way may be equally illuminating. It sheds an indirect light on Sue Bridehead's desire to "get back to the life of my infancy and its freedom," "to remain as I began" (pp. 181, 191).¹⁰

Her method is to remain a virgin. The account of her relationship with the Christminster undergraduate is an important outline of the method. Contact with this young man represents educational "advantages" for Sue, opportunity beyond the usual girl's education. Jude says to her, "you don't talk quite like a girl,—well, a girl who has had no advantages" (p. 189). This is because of her exposure to masculine learning, to books that she would never have gotten hold of without the undergraduate. Sue chooses to be part of a wider world, instead of being cut out of it as out of the boys' games.

In this sense she follows the line of what George Moore calls in his *Drama in Muslin* one of the two representative types of emancipated woman in the later nineteenth century. This is the woman who gravitates toward men more than ever before because masculine contact, in contrast to her constrictive feminine circle, means "light, freedom, and instruction." Yet in another sense Sue belongs to the apparently opposite type of Moore's analysis, the woman who rejects men because of their reduction of women to merely sexual beings.¹¹ Sue attempts a daring and dangerous combination of gravitation and rejection. This is her method. She says that she owes all of her advantages to a certain peculiarity that has shaped her life. It is that she has no fear of men and can mix with them freely. She removes the sexual

¹⁰Florence Becker Lennon, *Victoria Through the Looking-Glass, The Life of Lewis Carroll* (New York, 1945), p. 189. One might say that this desire is not particular to Sue as a girl, perhaps even expressing a romantic nostalgia for childhood crossing gender lines. But whatever remains in Hardy of a romantic tradition is drastically modified by his grim view of nature, including human nature. His children are not Dickens' Oliver Twist, Sissy Jupe, or Paul Dombey. They tend more towards sadly perplexed Johnny Nunsuch or hopeless little Father Time. True, children aren't usually in such a bad way as grown-ups. Therefore young Jude doesn't want to be a man. In this he resembles Sue, but as the shared and definitive feature of the disaster of growing up is sex, it lays low in different ways for men and women.

¹¹*Muslin* (1886), Carra ed. (New York, 1922), pp. 176-177.

barrier by as much as possible removing the sexual element from the relationship. This she does by repressing sexual invitation in herself. "Until [a woman] says by a look 'Come on' he is always afraid to, and if you never say it, or look it, he never comes" (p. 190).

I say that Sue represses her sexuality in an almost deliberate effort at widening her opportunities, but this analysis depends on her having sexual impulses to repress. I think she does, though many would not agree. Gosse says that "the *vita sexualis* of Sue is the central interest of the book," but later critics usually locate the interest in her *lack* of a sexual life. She is often taken at Jude's estimate on those occasions when he calls her sexless, a disembodied creature, incorporeal as a spirit, though it is to be noticed that he takes it all back when, for instance, she shows sexual jealousy over Arabella. Hardy explains in a letter to Gosse that Sue's oddity is sexual in origin, but not perversion and not entire lack. He says that her sexual drive is healthy as far as it goes but weak and fastidious. Michael Steig and Mary Jacobus are in the minority in giving her a significant sexual side. Wayne Burns says that critics have been led astray in denying it by the classic analysis of D. H. Lawrence.¹²

Lawrence finds the woman in Sue Bridehead atrophied. He does not find her completely defunct. However he does assume that she was born thus atrophied, whereas I think it makes a difference that Hardy gives strong evidence of an originally passionate nature self-restrained and so debilitated.¹³ This is the force of her purchase of the statues of Venus and Apollo, her reading of Swinburne, her interpretation of the Song of Solomon as a paean to "ecstatic, natural, human love" (p. 195). She says herself that she loves Jude "grossly" (p. 434), and Arabella, who knows about these things, has the last word in the novel when she says Sue will never find peace outside of Jude's arms. It is true that Hardy's picture of Sue's sexual basis is so complex that it sometimes seems contradictory. For instance, one perplexing passage says she is "unfitted by temperament and instinct to fulfill the conditions of the matrimonial relation with Phillotson, possibly with

¹²Gosse, "Jude the Obscure," from *Cosmopolis* (Jan. 1896), in *Thomas Hardy and His Readers*, p. 123; Steig, 260-266; Jacobus, 315; Burns, "Flesh and Spirit in *Jude the Obscure*," *Recovering Literature*, 1 (1972), 13.

¹³Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy*, in *Phoenix, The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. Edward D. Macdonald (London, 1936), p. 496. Lawrence says that Sue was born with the female atrophied, almost male. He speaks in terms of innate sexual categories that may put one off, defines the female as the still point and axle, the male as the active agent, the wheel, etc. However, if one disregards Lawrence's special definition of female when he says the female is atrophied in Sue, and understands this in the broader (and less sexist) sense of an atrophied sexual nature, then his analysis begins to make notable sense.

scarce any man" (p. 260). This seems to imply inborn coldness; but then again is it sexual relations as such that instinct unfits her for, or their conditions, that is, their enforced nature in marriage? Also the ambiguity of the "possibly" is increased by the fact that two pages before Sue has kissed "close and long" with Jude, running spontaneously to meet his embrace and leaving it with "flushed cheeks."

I think when Hardy describes Sue at the Melchester School as "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" (p. 175), we may understand both the under-brightness and the discipline as sexual in nature. Central to the treatment of the Training School is its powerful but repressed sexual charge. But unlike the other young women's discipline, Sue's is not only externally laid on. Hers is also a matter of herself neither saying or looking "Come on." The likeliest way to accomplish this over the long run would be to stop *feeling* "Come on."

A number of critics say that beneath her unconventionality Sue is really conventional. Heilman and Emmett call her sexual standoffishness a giveaway of ordinary Victorian prudishness. Millett suggests the same thing. But it is not ordinary. There was more than one tradition of female chastity. The ordinary one may be represented by the rule in Charlotte Yonge's complete Victorian lady's guide, *Womankind*—that a young lady must exercise self-restraint since "in almost all men there is a worse part which makes them willing to incite a girl to go as far as she will with them, and is flattered at the approaches to indiscretion which all the time make her forfeit their respect."¹⁴ Less ordinary is the specialized version of certain feminists. In fact Victorian feminists were responding to the same thing that Victorian prudes were—the noticeable disadvantages of being seen in a sexual light by men.

It is a commonplace of male literary treatment of emancipated women in the century to picture them like Tennyson's Princess Ida, walled off from the masculine world in a sort of convent-college of militant chastity, over whose gates stands written, death to any man that enters. It is a scientific commonplace to infer, like Herbert Spencer, flatheadedness in intellectually advanced women. The image of the new woman who rejects men appears often in the journals, for instance in the anti-feminist *Saturday Review*, which in an article of 1896 opposes the granting of university degrees to women because "it ministers to the new aspiration of some women for 'living

¹⁴Heilman, pp. 29, 34, 45; Emmett, p. 344; Millett, p. 133; Yonge (1877), 2nd. edn. (New York, 1882), p. 155.

their own lives'—that is, in fact, getting rid of the fetters of matrimony and maternity." I will cite George Moore again on this emancipated type:

women who in the tumult of their aspirations, and their passionate yearnings towards the new ideal, and the memory of the abasement their sex have in the past, and still are being in the present, subjected to, forget the laws of life, and with virulent virtue and protest, condemn love—that is to say, love in the sense of sexual intercourse—and claim a higher mission for woman than to be the mother of men.¹⁵

There may be a question whether this reflects mainly masculine pre-suppositions or new women as they actually lived and thought. This is also the question where Hardy gets Sue. We should turn to what some of the feminists themselves said.

A classic illustration of feminist ambivalence about sex is Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Wollstonecraft lavishes outrage on the demeaning of women as the sexual objects of men, so that their whole training is towards the arts of enticement at the expense of every other reasonable human endeavor. Wollstonecraft was herself a passionate woman, tempestuous even; she attempted suicide twice for deserted love. She expresses as little attraction to the Houyhnhnms as the Yahoos. She defends healthy physicality in women—an appetite that is not puny and ladylike, unconstrained exercise in sport, dancing even to the point of hot faces and sweat. "Women as well as men ought to have the common appetites and passions of their nature, they are only brutal when unchecked by reason." But the point is that they ought to be checked. A heavy emphasis of the *Vindication* is to devalue passionate love. It is a romantic interlude and not the sine qua non, to be made the object of a woman's whole life. Wollstonecraft insists on the extremely short life of passion, cooled in weeks or months to be replaced by rational married comradeship. "In a great degree, love and friendship cannot subsist in the same bosom." She is in a hurry to get to the friendly stage and to dilate on its virtues. "A master and mistress of a family ought not to continue to love each other with passion." Since Wollstonecraft and virtually all feminists after her lay the blame for a woman's oppression and incapacity on her rearing first and foremost

¹⁵Tennyson, *The Princess* (1847); Spencer, *Principles of Biology* (1864, 1867) (New York and London, 1910), II, 512-513; "University Degrees for Women," *Saturday Review*, 81 (1896), 392; Moore, pp. 176-177. See also James' *Bostonians* (1885), Gissing's *Odd Women* (1893), Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1898), and Mrs. Humphrey Ward's *Delia Blanchflower* (1914).

as man's sexual object, it is no wonder that many of them feel some reservation about sexuality, at the very least demoting it from the top rank of importance. So Wollstonecraft devotes a chapter to modesty, she praises Diana, she is disgusted by women's habits of bodily intimacy, she is very sensible of the "gross" and "nasty," and sounds distinctly puritanical. She does not denounce motherhood. In fact she says it is a woman's noblest function and that instead of being trained for the harem she should be trained for the nursery. But a number of later feminists wanted to escape both. For instance, in her *Morality of Marriage* Mona Caird says, "the gardener takes care that his very peach-trees and rose-bushes shall not be weakened by overproduction . . . valuable animals are spared in the same way and for the same reason. It is only women for whom there is no mercy." She asks, "do we not see that the mother of half a dozen children, who struggles to cultivate her faculties, to be an intelligent human being, nearly always breaks down under the burden, or shows very marked intellectual limitations?" Such feminists had twice as much reason for sharing Wollstonecraft's low estimation of sex, and their position helps to explain Sue Bridehead.¹⁶

A valuable book by J. A. and Olive Banks treats later nineteenth-century feminist doctrine as part of an investigation of *Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England*. Its discussion of feminists' sexual attitudes helps explain their silence on birth control, controversial in the 1870s. The Banks conclude that silence meant non-support, the reason being suspicion of contraceptive methods for offering further sexual license to men, to which women owed so much of their oppression. Feminist journals like the *Englishwoman's Journal*, the *Englishwoman's Review*, and the *Victorian Magazine* were not silent on another controversial issue of the 1870s and 1880s. This was Josephine Butler's campaign against the Contagious Diseases Act, which took prostitutes under state regulation and enforced their medical examination in order to stem the spread of venereal disease. The Act was seen by most feminists as condoning the double standard by treating men's philandering as a venial sin, a mere hygiene problem. The law was considered offensive since it detained prostitutes while their customers went free, and offered no guarantee against indiscriminate detention. The Banks illustrate the feminist position by citing a speech in favor of the Act's repeal that attacks "the

¹⁶1892, ed. Charles Hagelman, Jr. (New York, 1967), pp. 197, 122, 64—Wollstonecraft does hope for love without abasement in "some future revolution of time" (p. 182); Caird, *The Morality of Marriage and Other Essays on the Status and Destiny of Women* (London, 1897), pp. 312-313.

assumption that indulgence is a necessity of man." The attitude held after the Act fell. A writer in the early twentieth-century *Freewoman* finds "sex-intercourse—otherwise subjection to man" and concludes that "women are forced to crush down sex, but in doing so, they are able to use the greatest dynamic, passion, for the liberation of women." According to the feminists, the solution to the problem of venereal disease, among other problems, was chastity for men, as women already practiced it. The Banks sum up this line of thought with the suffragist slogan, "Votes for Women and Purity for Men." One of their most bizarre evidences of feminist antagonism to sexuality is a poem by Ellis Ethelmer, "Woman Free" of 1893, which looks to the equalization of the sexes for respite from menstruation by removal of its cause, men's undue sexual demands on women.¹⁷

Some did support both contraception and women's rights. George Drysdale's *Elements of Social Science, or Physical, Sexual, and Natural Religion* argues the benefit of "venereal exercise" for women and men alike, to be enjoyed without Malthusian disaster by the use of birth control. He says that maladies of sexual frustration are in fact worse for a woman (from iron deficient blood to hysteria). She needs relief even more than a man because she is, under "our unfortunate social arrangements, far more dependent on love than man." We can see the feminism in the phrase "unfortunate social arrangements," and also foresee the parting of the ways between him and other feminists. His argument for sexual fulfillment partly concedes to the "unfortunate social arrangements" that make a woman's life destitute without it. The opposite tack is to minimize the need for love so as to reduce women's dependence on men in this as in other ways. The latter line of thought represents the feminist mainstream according to the Banks.¹⁸

Feminist uneasiness about sex could be more or less encompassing. A review would have to include in addition to Wollstonecraft's asceticism, Margaret Fuller's denial of the Byronic axiom that love is a woman's whole existence and her glorification of virginity in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, and Christabel Pankhurst's salvaging in *The Great Scourge and How to End It* of the one valuable lesson—chastity—from women's history of subjection. J. S. Mill identifies the wife's duty of submission to her husband's desire as the ultimate form of slavery.¹⁹

¹⁷Banks (New York, 1964), p. 110—citing Mr. Fowler's speech of May 21, 1873—and p. 111. E. Noel Morgan, "The Problems of Celibacy," *Freewoman*, 2 (1912), 234.

¹⁸Drysdale (1854), 14th edn. (London, 1876), p. 169.

¹⁹See Fuller (1845), introd. Bernard Rosenthal (New York, 1971), p. 177; Pankhurst,

Hardy explicitly says in a letter to Gosse what he felt he must leave circumspectly implied in his novel, that part of Sue's reluctance to marry is her reluctance to relinquish the right to "withhold herself at pleasure, or altogether." This is behind Sue's aversion to being "licensed to be loved on the premises" (p. 300). As Fernando points out, the link between women's rights and the right over one's own body expressed in withholding it casts Sue in a distinctly feminist light.²⁰

Certainly she speaks of sex and marriage as the opposite of freedom. When she finally sleeps with Jude it is giving in, being conquered, being caught (pp. 307-308). She doesn't want to have children. She wishes "some harmless mode of vegetation might have peopled Paradise" (p. 267). A bride, to her, is the heifer brought to the sacrifice (p. 328). Jude reflects this attitude when he greets her, newly married to Phillotson, as a woman still free, with an individuality *not yet* squashed and digested by wifedom (p. 232).

Living fifteen months with her undergraduate friend, Sue remains as she began. Jude congratulates her on her innocence, but she responds rather unexpectedly. She says that she is not particularly innocent. In fact, she has a bad conscience about her method. She says a "better woman" would not have held off (p. 192). Sue is uneasy about her inhibition of sexuality. This ambivalence again shows her distance from merely ordinary attitudes on female purity. Neither is she a feminist programmatically heart-whole in her principles because she is simultaneously a believer in "ecstatic, natural, human love."

Her division roughly reflects the division in feminist theory, which had its hedonist along with its stronger ascetic impulse. For instance, Wollstonecraft's writings after the *Vindication* show her recognition of the strength of female passion, however heavily fraught with problems, and there were a few true erotic enthusiasts among the advocates of free love discussed by Hal Sears in *The Sex Radicals, Free Love in High Victorian America*, though the larger number of them stressed a woman's right of refusal, restraint, abstinence, continence, and varieties of quite stringent sublimation. A good spokesman for the feminism of erotic liberation is Edmund d'Auvergne in the *Freewoman*. Where Christabel Pankhurst endorses chastity in the cause of women, d'Auvergne finds it a male imposition and thinks Penelope should

The Great Scourge and How to End It (London, 1913), p. 132; Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (1869), ed. Alice Rossi (Chicago and London, 1970), p. 160.

²⁰Hardy's letter of Nov. 20, 1895, in *Thomas Hardy and His Readers*, p. 123; Fernando, p. 143—however, feminist fastidiousness was less "unwitting" than he says.

have enjoyed herself with the suitors as Odysseus did with Circe and Calypso.²¹

"Better women" would have slept with their house-mates. Though it seems to be altogether necessary, holding out is not altogether good, which is why Sue Bridehead reflects about her life with the undergraduate, "men are—so much better than women!" (p. 191). There is an irony in her method of liberation. It allows her to mingle freely with men and to share their advantages, eliminating the barrier of gender by as much as possible eliminating gender. Sue is "almost as one of their own sex" (p. 190). Almost but not quite. It is significant that she is described as boyish, dressed in Jude's clothes, a Ganymede (p. 196). The liberating strategy makes her in a sense a boy rather than a man. It rules out exactly that aspect of masculinity that makes men "better."

Throughout the novel Sue suffers oddly excessive guilt culminating in her desire at the end to prick herself all over with pins to bleed the badness out (p. 385). I think the double source of her bad conscience can be traced to her relation with the undergraduate which prefigures that with Jude. She combines Moore's two types of liberation, to live with men and to escape them. This program involves injury to herself and to the man. She stunts her own nature and frustrates her lover.

There is evidence that Sue knows that sexual repression means loss as well as gain. She is defensive against people's idea that she is sexless—"I won't have it!" (p. 192). On occasion she seems to regret her coldness, even to Phillotson—"I am so cold, or devoid of gratitude, or so something" (p. 280). She suspects that Jude will hold her in "contempt" for not loving Phillotson as a husband. She feels some "shamefacedness" at letting Phillotson know of her incomplete relations with Jude (pp. 254, 294). She shows herself the reverse of proud when she says, "I know I am a poor miserable creature. My nature is not so passionate as yours" (p. 282). She knows she makes others mis-

²¹See Wollstonecraft, *Letters to Imlay* (1893-1895), in *Posthumous Works*, ed. William Godwin (1798) (London, 1879), *Godwin and Mary, Letters of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft* (1896-1897), ed. Ralph Wardle (Lawrence, Kansas, 1966), *Maria, Or the Wrongs of Woman* (1898), introd. Moira Ferguson (New York, 1975). Ellen Moers in *Literary Women* (Garden City, New York, 1976), pp. 146-151, finds this later work the "living" Wollstonecraft, but she ignores Wollstonecraft's continuing dismay over love; also, the virginal *Vindication* had more following among 19th-century new women. The lush eroticism of Angela Heywood, writing in *The Word*, is the exception to the rule according to Sears (Lawrence, Kansas, 1977), pp. 172-175—in contrast, for example, to the abstinence except for procreation of the free-love Alphaists and the continence and preference for foreplay and sublimation over orgasm of the Dianists; d'Auvergne, "The Case of Penelope," 2 (1912), 265-266.

erable as well. She helps kill the undergraduate, wounds Phillotson in career and spirit, tortures Jude—"O I seem so bad—upsetting men's courses like this!" (p. 280).

Sue attempts a compromise. But to mitigate the first sort of injury is the more certainly to impose the other. That is, the more she allows her sexual nature to survive in self-protective permutations, the more vulnerable she makes her lover. Bad conscience is a distinguishing feature of her attempt to live a free woman. The compromise is essentially Platonic in theory, or more specifically Shelleyan. She enunciates it in the passage on her life with the undergraduate. "Some of the most passionately erotic poets have been the most self-contained in their daily lives" (p. 192). This justifies both eroticism and self-containment. It is a doctrine of sublimation quite Freudian in its assumption of the importance of sexual drive to higher mental or spiritual attainments. Implied also is the perpetuation of the drive by obstacle and deflection, so that it is not quelled by satiation. This idea runs all through Hardy, as brilliantly demonstrated by J. Hillis Miller in *Thomas Hardy, Distance and Desire*.²² The theory of augmenting desire by distance gives Sue part of her brief against marriage. If married people were forbidden each other's embrace instead of locked into it by contract, she says, "there'd be little cooling then!" (p. 300).

The concrete illustration of Sue's Platonic/Shelleyan love theory is her fondness for windows. Her escape from the Training School window seems to represent sexual liberation, since she goes to Jude's lodging, but the jump from Phillotson's bedroom window represents quite another kind, one which Jude comes to experience himself in a milder version when Sue sends him to sleep by himself. The two modes resolve into Sue's favorite disposition of the sexes, making spiritual love with a window in between. Jude and Sue have a tender talk through a window at Marygreen (p. 256), and their interview at Shaston becomes more tender once Jude is outside the casement. She says, "'I can talk to you better like this than when you were inside' . . . Now that the high window-sill was between them, so that he could not get at her" (p. 247).

If Sue's project for liberation is in good part one of inhibited sexuality, it by no means aims at total extirpation, or total rejection of men. The reasons are that she needs men for the advantage they offer, the undergraduate's books, for instance, and just as important, she needs them for their sexual stimulus. This sounds paradoxical for the

²²Cambridge, Mass., 1970.

repressive Sue, but the more repressed she is, the more stimulus does she need, for sublimation must have something to work on. I think Lawrence shows the finest insight of anyone who has written on Sue Bridehead when he says that she needs Jude to arouse the atrophied female in her, so as to stimulate the brightness of her mind.²³

Jude calls her a flirt (p. 246), which she is, and the novel is a classic formulation of flirt psychology, all the more remarkable for linking the flirt to the feminist. If we think these roles mutually exclusive, as Cockshut does, we are cast back on the idea that Sue is not a new woman but an ordinary old one after all. This misses a lot. Heilman's is a good analysis of Sue as coquette. He observes that the coquette wants to attract and yet remain unobtainable. He gives the reason that she needs to exert power.²⁴ It seems to me that this is validly observed from a man's point of view, Jude's say, who feels his helplessness under a woman's sway, and it may be part of the picture on the woman's side too. It is commonly said that flirts use men, but less commonly said what they use them *for*. I think a great deal of Sue's use of men comes from her feminist double bind. She needs to keep alive in herself a sexuality in danger of being disciplined all the way down to the source.

Men may feel that a woman triumphs in the power of frigidity by remaining untouchable while making a man know his own vulnerability, but it should also be understood that she may freeze in her own cold. She may need, even desperately, for a man to warm her. Masculine impotence is widely understood to spawn in the sufferer psychological complications of the most fascinating pathos. Feminine impotence is usually understood as the man's suffering more than the woman's. But Hardy goes a great deal beyond the usual, that is, beyond the masculine perspective. He shows the impulse behind Sue's "love of being loved," which is the more insatiable for her own difficulty in loving (p. 246, 284). This impulse owes less to the power of the strong than to the need of the much weakened.

In *Jude the Obscure*, more than in any of his other novels, Hardy investigates the potential liability of the doctrine of distance and desire, that is, of desire stretched to farther and farther distances from

²³Lawrence, p. 497.

²⁴Cockshut, p. 129; Heilman, p. 32. An interesting version of the coquetry as power-move idea is Anne Z. Michelson's in *Thomas Hardy's Women and Men* (Metuchen, N. J., 1976), pp. 124-148. She links it loosely with Sue's being a modern woman, who sees men as figures of power and imitates them by exerting power herself. Michelson comes to the common, grudging conclusion that Sue is not very independent after all, in this case imitative, no rebel. She is more sensitive than most though to the insecurity felt by the apparently invulnerable flirt.

direct satisfaction, so that it begins to attenuate, until it is in danger of losing itself. The novel also examines what such a loss would mean. Sue Bridehead is like a reinvestigation from the inside of Marty South of *The Woodlanders*, published seven years before (1887). Marty and Giles Winterborne enjoy the most serene love in the book because it dispenses with sex. In *Jude Hardy* still depicts passion as virulent, and so Sue defends herself against it. But the novel also shows, intimately, dismayingly, what it would mean to try to be like Marty South, "a being who had rejected with indifference the attribute of sex for the loftier quality of abstract humanism."²⁵

Sue's inhibition of sexuality, though not beyond her uneasy consciousness, is beyond her control. Hardy shows that it is there to be drawn out, but only if Jude takes the initiative. "By every law of nature and sex a kiss was the only rejoinder that fitted the mood and the moment, under the suasion of which Sue's undemonstrative regard of him might not inconceivably have changed its temperature" (pp. 200-201). He does not kiss her, and his acquiescence in her sexlessness reinforces it in her.

However, her attenuated sexual nature does remain alive in alternative and bizarre forms. There is her jealousy, which proves to Jude that she is not; after all a sexless creature (p. 319). There is her disgust, which she cherishes in an odd way. The only thing worse than her shrinking from Phillotson would be to get used to him, for then it would be "like saying that the amputation of a limb is no affliction, since a person gets comfortably accustomed to the use of a wooden leg or arm in the course of time!" (p. 254). To feel repugnance is at least not to accept being an amputee. The oddest form of Sue's rerouted sexuality is her device of provoking pain in order to feel pity, as when she makes Jude walk up the church aisle with her just before she is to marry Phillotson. She later says that her relation to Jude began in the wish to make his heart ache for her without letting hers ache for him (p. 393). But Hardy shows that her feeling is really much more complicated. In fact, Sue goes out of her way to induce in herself pain, long-suffering, and pity. In so doing she is "an epicure in emotions," satisfying her "curiosity to hunt up a new sensation" (pp. 215-216). Far from triumphing in lack of feeling, Sue strains after sensation of some sort. Since she does not feel desire directly, she invents original and "perverse" substitutes.

A curious technique for stimulating sensation in herself is to pose obstacles which will produce pain, which she can then pity. What

²⁵P. 443.

makes this curious is that the obstacles are sometimes social conventions that she does not believe in. For instance, she plans to punish Jude by letter for making her give way to an unconventional impulse and allow a kiss. Of course she is usually highly unconventional, on both the subject of religion and the subject of marriage, so that in theory it should not matter to her that the future parson kisses a woman who is not his wife. Yet she turns around to make it matter, according to the extraordinary logic that "things that were right in theory were wrong in practice." This is not simple illogic but a quite orderly psychological maneuver for the production of sentiment: "Tears of pity for Jude's approaching sufferings at her hands mingled with those which had surged up in pity for herself" (p. 260).

It is important to understand Sue's unexpected invocations of convention. These have led some to think hers an unconventionality of the surface only; according to this interpretation her prostration to the letter of the law at the end is simply a true showing of the ordinary stuff she has been made of all along. A woman's succumbing to convention is a repeated idea in Hardy, as in "The Elopement": "in time convention won her, as it wins all women at last."²⁶ He gives several explanations for Sue's succumbing. One does support the view that she has a conventional stratum to fall back on, when courage or reason fails, or circumstances become too strong. That is, Phillotson explains her return to the idea of the indissolubility of marriage by her soaking in Christminster sentiment and teaching (p. 398), in spite of all she has said against them. There is in this sense some credence to Lawrence's analysis that Sue is the product of ages of Christianity in spite of her proclaimed paganism. Sue herself often blames her timidity for the breakdown of her theoretic unorthodoxy. Jude questions whether the demise of her advanced views is accountable to a defect in women's reason: "Is a woman a thinking unit at all?" (p. 391). Later he attributes the narrowing of her views to the way that "time and circumstances" operate on women (p. 440). Hardy seems to accept Jude's idea of "strange difference of sex"; he calls women "The Weaker" himself. But in what sense weaker? Of course one way of answering would be as Jude implies, that men's views enlarge while women's narrow in adversity because men are made of stronger stuff. Another way of answering would be, less that men are stronger than that "time and circumstances" are less strong against them, which turns out to be the case in the novel. "The woman mostly gets the worst of it, in the long run!" says Jude. "She does," says Sue (p. 394).

²⁶ Hardy, from *Satires of Circumstance* (1914), in *Collected Poems* (New York, 1958), p. 355.

In giving so many accounts of what weakens Sue, Hardy comes across as less dogmatic than any isolated passage may suggest. He is true, in the aggregate, to a complexity in her character beyond the simple explanations that he has his characters, as it were, try out on her. Above all, he shows that even when Sue appears to act conventionally, she often does so out of the most unconventional of motives. This makes inadequate the idea that she exposes at the end an ordinariness that has only been covered over with daring theories. Sue may be overpowered, she may fall short of her promise, she may buckle to the letter of the law, but she is never ordinary. Just as her sexual repression comes from her feminism, more than from the Victorian commonplace of feminine purity which it externally resembles, so does much of her behavior represent tactics in a highly individualized feminist program, sometimes just when it looks the most externally conventional.

We have seen how Sue uses convention unconventionally to induce sensation. Another way she uses it is to shield herself from sex, for reasons very much her own, as we have also seen. For instance, she goes to visit Phillotson in his illness after she has left him. He shows signs of warming from friend to husband, and Sue, in her "incipient fright" shows herself ready to seize on "*any line of defense* against marital feelings in him" (p. 294, my emphasis). She claims her own wickedness in leaving, so that he can't possibly want her back. There is no question of her believing this; she grasps at it willy-nilly. Another instance of Sue's self-defense with any odd weapon that comes to hand is her tortured reasoning to show why she cannot marry Jude. She invokes the letter of the law in its very finest print. Her argument goes like this: since she did not commit adultery with Jude, her divorce from Phillotson was obtained under false pretenses; it is no divorce, so she cannot marry Jude, which she clearly does not want to do for personal reasons quite other than legal (p. 298).

Sue's contradictoriness has depth and coherence. It represents an impressively original experiment in life and freedom. It also fails of its own divisions. Lawrence comes closest to explaining how this is, though his explanation must be disentangled from his sometimes offensive definitions of what it means to be a woman or a man, and from his idea that Sue was born with an unhealthy overbalance of the masculine. He recognizes that Hardy is concerned with something more complex than the pioneer's defeat by the simple retribution of an outraged society. He proposes the analysis that the pioneer breaks down through inability to bear the isolation. But I think he goes beyond this too, by suggesting that Sue's breakdown inheres in her very method of pioneering. He says, "It was a cruelly difficult posi-

tion. . . . she wanted some quickening for this atrophied female. She wanted even kisses. That the new rousing might give her a sense of life. But she could only *live* in the mind . . . She could only receive the highest stimulus, which she must inevitably seek, from a man who put her in constant jeopardy.’²⁷

This accords with my own view. Sue’s method of emancipation is sexual repression, but by no means total repudiation of sex or men. In addition to wanting what men have to offer intellectually, she needs men to keep alive the driving force of feeling, sexual at its root, recognized as essential in her Platonic/Shelleyan theory of sublimation. A man stimulates her sexual nature, which she directs into relatively safe channels, jealousy, disgust, and epicurean emotions, thereby evading the worst of the “inexorable laws of nature” for women. But the safety is precarious because the man must feel desire direct, to satisfy her “love of being loved.” He is always there with his desire, reminding her of the comparative debility of her own, and of the injury she causes in leaving him unsatisfied. She feels guilt on both counts. She feels herself a kind of stand-out to the life force which she values and needs in him, even though she knows it would also sweep her away from her individuality and her freedom. The man is always there, always insisting, which she wants, but he is also blaming her, as it is clear Jude does. In spite of his protestations of love to her as an incarnate spirit, when he sees his chance, he presses for what he really wants by complaining of the “poor returns” he gets from her on his love (p. 306). Using Arabella’s reappearance he pressures Sue into sleeping with him. Her balance is precarious because it rests upon a difference between what she feels and what Jude feels, a difference at the same time necessary to her purposes and dangerous to them. She “gives in,” she sleeps with him, and the balance is upset.

Yet Sue and Jude are happy together for a certain unspecified number of years. Hardy moves very quickly over this period, which leaves some readers in doubt of their happiness. Neither Lawrence nor Heilman can believe that Sue could have adjusted to a normal sexual relationship.²⁸ Though the picture remains sketchy, I think it is important for an interpretation of Sue to take Hardy at his word: “that the twain were happy—between their times of sadness—was indubitable” (p. 329). Sue’s reservation is overcome, as charmingly symbolized by Jude’s pushing her face into the roses at the Great Westsex Agricultural Show, which she had thought the rules prohibited her to touch. “‘Happy?’ he murmured. She nodded.”

²⁷Lawrence, pp. 497-498, and see n. 13.

²⁸Lawrence, p. 506, Heilman, p. 17.

The flower scene represents a return to "Greek joyousness" (pp. 337-338). Sue explains later that they lived according to a new theory of nature—to "make a virtue of joy . . . be joyful in what instincts she afforded us" (p. 379). She says that with whatever coolness on her side her relation with Jude began, she did get to love him after Arabella's arrival pushed them together, and that this love is passionate we gather from the way she returns his kisses even after she has renounced him to return to Phillotson. Arabella notices that if she is cooler than Jude, "she cares for him pretty middling much" (p. 333). Sue is able to love and she does. She puts her Platonic theory behind her and lives for a time by a new code. Yet Hardy shows that the self-protectiveness of the old code was against real dangers, which descend upon Sue when she abandons it, making her revert to an extreme version of the sexual renunciation which had been her original position. But now instead of being self-creative, it is self-destructive.

The liability of love is made flesh in children. Sue is not ashamed of her passion during her happy time with Jude, especially since she still protects her freedom from being married and licensed to be loved on the premises. But she does question the result of passion. Since the woman bears the children, she bears the question more heavily. This is especially true for this pair, since Sue has more of herself—a star to Jude's benzoline lamp—to lose (p. 440). When Father Time first calls Sue mother, she begins to feel herself "getting intertwined with my kind." She feels she must give over "struggling against the current" (p. 320). Sue is someone who had tried to live by Mill's doctrine—"who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation" (p. 265). For her, to give up the struggle is to give up her higher faculties. The children make compromise necessary, to which Sue and Jude add compromise on the compromise, so that they give up some of their own freedom without providing their family complete respectability. They can laugh when Jude is fired for carving the ten commandments while breaking the seventh, but laughter is less possible when looking for lodgings for a family of five when the landlady wants to know, "Are you really a married woman?" (p. 370). Sue must either be true to her principles by saying she isn't, or to her children by saying she is. Given the social structure, children represent a conflict between personal liberty and concession to one's kind. But Hardy goes beyond blaming society. Sue says, "it seems such a terribly tragic thing to bring beings into the world—so presumptuous—that I question my right to do it sometimes!" (pp. 352-353). Her guilt at bearing children seems well-founded in view of the Hardy world that awaits them—in Phillotson's summary, "cruelty is the law per-

vading all nature and society" (p. 359). The joy-in-instinct theory of nature by which Sue had tried to live is revealed as partial through the crucial episode of little Father Time's murder/suicide.

Father Time is so broadly symbolic that he is rather hard to take and hard to pin down. What makes him, for one thing, Sue's and Jude's "nodal point, their focus, their expression in a single term" (p. 377)? Does he enact the interior necessity of their love's disruption and Sue's about-face, or is he only one of Hardy's supernumeraries of nemesis? I think the catastrophe he brings about is not coincidental, because he acts out what Sue already feels, that she should not have had children. Having them is something she tells little Jude she must be "forgiven" for (p. 374). Sue explains that a "law of nature" brought them to birth (p. 373), and in killing them and himself he repudiates this law of nature.

Sue had originally sought to sidestep the law, before rather than after the fact. Then for a time she had allowed herself to imagine that the law is joy-in-instinct. But it turns out to be the inexorable law of nature, as it is called in the early passage on the women students. Women live out this law intimately, in their own bodies, and it means "injustice, loneliness, child-bearing, and bereavement." "The woman gets the worst of it." Jude blames himself for having disrupted the precarious equilibrium of their relationship, which had allowed evasion of the worst of nature's law (pp. 383, 394).²⁹ Sue agrees that she should have remained as she began. Circumstances have persuaded her that she was right in her original position.

Hardy seems to support by the catastrophic fact Sue's analysis that "there is something external to us which says, 'you shan't,'" including "'you shan't love'" (p. 377).³⁰ However precarious, there seems to be some reasonableness in her original attempt to evade this external "you shan't" by means of an internally imposed "you shan't." The latter allows a semblance of volition and self-determination which harnesses instinct to safer ends, at least, than hanging.

Sue's reaction to the decimation of her family is understandable. It is a return to an extreme form of her original position, self-mastery, self-renunciation. But no longer does she try to control her fate; she places it utterly outside her own hands. She now wishes to "mortify the flesh, the terrible flesh—the curse of Adam" (p. 384). This sounds like the sexual repression she started out with, except that then she

²⁹Jude is not consistent in this position, it is true. Sometimes he rebukes Sue for being cold—"you are not worth a man's love" (p. 430).

³⁰Of course the something need not be God, as Sue comes to call it. Hardy does not support her religious reaction.

never denied the force for possible good of sexuality. The contrast can be seen in that before she counted men "better" for their desire, while at the end she counts women "superior" for never instigating, only responding (p. 392). Before she had thought that instinct could be made the drivewheel of personal development. She had not wanted to accept amputation and was glad even of disgust as a sign that the flesh could still feel its loss. The burning of the nightgown worn with Jude and the forcing of her nature to go to Phillotson represent, in contrast, a terribly complete amputation.

In trying at the end to utterly eradicate instinct in herself, she gives up all forward motion. She says she wants to die in childbirth. Spiritually, she makes her sexual nature into death, whereas before in its paradoxical way it had been life. So Sue is described as a person bereft of will. She is "cowed," feels "creeping paralysis." "I have no more fighting strength left, no more enterprise." "All initiatory power seemed to have left her." Self-suppression is now "despairing" (pp. 382, 369, 400).

Hardy says in a letter to Florence Henniker, "seriously I don't see any possible scheme for the union of the sexes that w[ou]ld be satisfactory."³¹ This attitude turns *Jude* into something quite different from a social-problem novel, since the problem goes deeper than society. It renders doubtful much optimism for what might have been had Sue and Jude not been fifty years before their time. The law of nature would still remain. To inhibit nature is not the answer. It causes some loss and some guilt. It also doesn't work very well, since instinct cannot be totally stultified if it is to remain at call for redirection. The love of being loved is actually a clamoring need. Instinct must feed on the stimulus of a lover's direct desire, with all the disequilibrium that implies. But to act on natural impulse is not the answer either. The law of nature is "inexorable," and procreation brings guilt and retribution both. Sue's precarious balance is an impressive experiment in self-creation. The experiment might have continued to work after its fashion, but the internal pressure is great, so that it is no surprise or final blame to her when the upset comes.

The German reviewer whom Hardy credits in his preface with calling Sue "the woman of the feminist movement," also says that if she had been created by a woman she would never have been allowed to break down at the end (p. 50). Not all who say that Hardy is great on women say that he is kind to them. Lascelles Abercrombie calls his treatment "subtle, a little cruel, not as tolerant as it seems." He often

³¹June 1, 1896, in *One Rare Fair Woman*, p. 52.

shows a woman character weak, changeable, and in the wrong, and he is quick, often distressingly so (the earlier the novel the more distressingly) to generalize from the woman to women, while the man is allowed to represent only himself. He characterizes women straightforwardly as "The Weaker" in *Jude*. However, I do not think this weakness comes across in the richly detailed portrait of Sue Bridehead as weakness in animal force, intellect, drive, venturesomeness, originality, or accomplishment. The explanations Hardy offers for her weakness become less definitive as they multiply. If *Jude* sometimes seems a paradise of loose ends, in Arthur Mizener's nice phrase, I think it never seems more so than when we hear that Sue's collapse comes from her indoctrination in conventions, or that women lack courage, or is it reason, or is it that they contract as men expand? No doubt a woman author, that is, a feminist woman author, would not have had Sue break down for these reasons. But I don't think they are Hardy's essential reasons either.³²

Rather in *Sue Bridehead* he dramatizes a daring and plausible try at personal liberation which runs into problems, reflective of the times but by no means yet altogether superceded, that a woman gains freedom as she gains access to a man's wider world while ceasing to be his sexual object. Sue sets about to mix with men freely, but neither to say or look or feel "Come on," rather to redirect that impulse to safer channels. But once the premise is acted on, she runs afoul of universal law, which touches women so closely, and which dictates that if it is dangerous to act naturally, so is it dangerous to inhibit nature. Sue's breakdown is not a judgment on her. It is a judgment on the way things are between the sexes according to Hardy, and that is a war that probably can't be won.

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³²Abercrombie, "Thomas Hardy," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 14th edn. (1929), XI, 192; Mizener, "*Jude the Obscure* as Tragedy," *Southern Review*, 6 (1940), 198. The waywardness of Hardy's women has often been pointed to. I like Miller's *Distance and Desire* because it shows that according to Hardy waywardness is common to both sexes in love. Not only women blow hot and cold. So do Troy, Wildeve, Fitzpiers, Pierston. The early novels are full of generalizations about women, by no means all sympathetic. In *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) Bathsheba's every act is made to display her womanhood, and her acts are very often mistakes. Troy acts badly without being made to embody lessons on masculinity. I think the course of Hardy's fiction shows a deepening and interiorization of his understanding of feminine characters. Fancy Day in his first successful novel, *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), and Sue Bridehead in his last-written are coy, whimsical, flirtatious; they sacrifice judgment to the love of being loved. But Fancy is almost entirely a stock type of charming caprice, while Sue has a center of self that Hardy must have imagined from the inside.