

CHAPTER 7

Jude the Obscure (1895)

Hardy comments in his 1912 Preface to *Jude the Obscure* that an unnamed German reviewer had described Sue Bridehead as 'the first delineation in fiction of . . . the woman of the feminist movement – the slight, pale "bachelor" girl – the intellectualized, emancipated bundle of nerves that modern conditions were producing. . . '. He adds, 'Whether this assurance is borne out by dates I cannot say' (p. 30). This is a characteristic piece of obfuscation. It is as well to note, first, that Sue is no way representative of any discernible movement, although organised feminism had already appeared in fiction, for example, in, E. L. Linton's *The Rebel of the Family* (1880), Henry James' *The Bostonians* (1886), and George Gissing's *The Odd Women* (1893), all of which, in any case, predate the publication of *Jude*. Sue belongs not to feminism as such, but to the literary tradition of the New Woman; and here again, she is in no sense a precursor. Hardy certainly knew of at least some of the large number of writers, both new and established, dealing at the same period with just that topic. It is evident from his letters that he was personally acquainted with some of these writers – Sarah Grand and Ménie Muriel Dowie, for instance.¹ He received a letter about *Jude* from George Egerton, and he wrote to the editor of the *Contemporary Review* in 1890 to introduce an article about marriage by Mona Caird, remarking that he believed there to be 'nothing heterodox in it'.² Hardy had read at least some of the works in question: he thought *The Heavenly Twins* over-praised,³ and copied extracts from Egerton's *Keynotes* into his notebook.⁴ In 1892 he wrote at some length to Millicent Garrett Fawcett about the portrayal of sex in contemporary fiction:

With regard to your idea of a short story showing how the trifling with the physical element in love leads to corruption: I do not see that much more can be done by fiction in that direction than has been done already. You may say

the treatment hitherto has been vague & general only, which is quite true. Possibly on that account nobody has profited greatly by such works. To do the thing well there should be no mincing of matters, & all details should be clear & directly given. This I fear the British public would not stand just now; though, to be sure, we are educating it by degrees.

He adds that he has read a recent novel ostensibly on the subject, Lucas Malet's *The Wages of Sin*, and found it 'not very consequent, as I told the authoress'.⁵ He was certainly aware of Grant Allen, probably the most widely read and influential of the 'woman question' writers, whose aspirations to martyrdom and posturings of high moral seriousness led a contemporary to describe him hyperbolically as "'the Darwinian St. Paul'".⁶ Allen's works led to a kind of industry of rebuttal and parody; in the year of the publication of *Jude* alone, his *The Woman Who Did* spawned *The Woman Who Didn't* by 'Victoria Crosse' and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* by 'Lucas Cleeve', while *The British Barbarians. A Hill-Top Novel* provoked H. D. Traill's parody, *The Barbarous Britishers. A Tip-Top Novel*. In *The British Barbarians* Allen refers very favourably to *Tess* as a work "'of which every young girl and married woman in England ought to be given a copy.'"⁷ Hardy returned the compliment by sending him a dedicated copy of *Jude The Obscure*.⁸ There are few similarities between Allen's fiction and Hardy's, but their attacks on marriage have points in common, such as the Owenite idea that unchastity is sex without love, whether within or outside marriage, and the position that marriage as an institution crushes individuality and makes a legal obligation of "'what no human heart can be sure of performing"⁹; further, Grant Allen's 'monopolism', the jealous and exclusive annexation which marks patriotism, property, capitalism and marriage,¹⁰ bears some relation to Hardy's "'save-your-own-soul-ism"', the common characteristic of possessive parenthood, class-feeling and patriotism, all "'a mean exclusiveness at bottom'" (p. 288).

The New Woman – by no means identical with the feminist, but clearly a relative – had, indeed, become almost a cliché by 1895. One 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 New Woman, so rife of late'.¹¹ Meanwhile, H. G. Wells, in a review

in February 1896, is able to assert confidently that 'It is now the better part of a year ago since the collapse of the "New Woman" fiction began.'¹² Far from being a pioneer, Sue Bridehead comes in company with a crowd of 'intellectualized, emancipated bundle[s] of nerves' (p. 30). This is not, of course, to suggest that she is commonplace. I shall be considering Sue Bridehead in some detail later, but there are significant differences which mark her out from the type of the New Woman and which should at once be pointed out. A contemporary account of the 'new convention in heroines' describes the characteristic New Woman:

The newest is beautiful, of course, in a large and haughty way. She is icily pure. . . . She despises the world, and men, and herself, and is superbly unhappy. In spite of her purity she is not very wholesome; she generally has a mission to solve the problems of existence, and on her erratic path through life she is helped by no sense of humour.¹³

This is a caricature, but those features which are being exaggerated and distorted remain clearly identifiable. Sue Bridehead, with all her hesitations, evasions and tentativeness, has none of this messianic sense of purpose which distinguishes her contemporaries, and in fact she consistently refuses to speak for women as a group, posing herself always as a special case. A further difference is made more evident by this description, from the same source, of the hero with whom the free union is to be contracted:

He is always a young man of excellent birth, connected with the peerage, and has literary or artistic tastes. He has had a reckless past, but it has done him no harm. . . . He is all passion, and coolness, and experience, and gentlemanly conduct.¹⁴

As this quotation suggests, the New Woman and the free union are, in 1890s' fiction, firmly rooted in the upper middle class; the social hazards to which these women are exposed are of the nature of being ostracised by the wives of bishops. The marryings and unmarryings of working-class characters are more characteristically seen in the brutal and condescending stories of writers such as Henry Nevinson or Arthur Morrison.¹⁵ *Jude the Obscure* is unique in its siting of Jude and Sue at the conjuncture of class and sexual oppression.

Nevertheless, the novel was certainly perceived by its con-

temporary readers as being part of a trend, and, despite Hardy's disclaimers of writing about the marriage question,¹⁶ his sense of participating in a continuing debate is evident in, for example, the argument of Phillotson and Gillingham over "domestic disintegration" and the collapse of the family as the social unit (p. 247), or in this rather didactic interchange after a discussion of marriage:

"Still, Sue, it is no worse for the woman than for the man. That's what some women fail to see, and instead of protesting against the conditions they protest against the man, the other victim . . ."

"Yes – some are like that, instead of uniting with the man against the common enemy, coercion" (pp. 299–300).

It seems that, with the advent of 'Ibsenism' and the problem play, the marriage question and the New Woman novel, Hardy was able for the first time in a major work to place the examination of sexual relationships openly at the centre of his novel, and to make the tragedy turn on marriage, instead of displacing it with the more traditional materials of tragedy, as he had done earlier. Whatever Hardy's account of the genesis and composition of *Jude*, which he describes in a letter to Florence Henniker as 'the Sue story',¹⁷ there can surely be no doubt now that, as Patricia Ingham has shown, Sue Bridehead and marriage are the very impulse of the novel, not an afterthought.¹⁸

Nor is this the only area of *Jude's* contemporaneity. It can be seen as attempting to superimpose the sexual and marital preoccupations of the 1890s upon the intellectual concerns of the 1860s, Hebraism and Hellenism and Mill's liberal individualism.¹⁹ There is obviously some truth in this, though Mill's name is not in itself a sign of being fixed in the past; it is a recurring name on the reading lists of the New Woman, though more often for his *Subjection of Women* (of which Hardy somewhat ambiguously remarks in September 1895 that 'I do not remember ever reading [it]')²⁰ than for *On Liberty*. At the same time, the novel is very much abreast of contemporary currents of thought. The 'deadly war waged between flesh and spirit' to which Hardy refers in his Preface (p. 27) had taken on a new significance in the latter part of the century, as the Darwinian notion of an extremely complex material world in constant change challenged the hitherto dominant form of the

duality by reversing the priorities. The new dualism – materialist, certainly, but often mechanistic – makes physiological organisation the determinant, with consciousness a kind of subsidiary product – an idea which underlies Hardy's image, recurrent in his poetry, of the mind as an evolutionary mistake. Such a privileging of the biological led easily into a scientificism in social theory – in the positivist investigations of the Fabians, for example, in Social Darwinism, and the associated manifestations of the 'science' of eugenics, claimed alike by reactionaries like Max Nordau (*Degeneration*, published in English translation in 1895), radical feminists like the American Victoria Woodhull Martin (editor of *The Humanitarian* (NY) from 1892), and socialists like Edward Aveling. This is the period in which sexuality moves decisively from the area of moral discourse to that of scientific discourse. The relative downgrading of the mind and, hence, of the intellectual surely enters into the 'simple life' philosophy of Edward Carpenter and his associates, as well as giving apparent support to the irrationalism and pessimism of Schopenhauer, for whom (as sometimes for Hardy) human consciousness and the scientific laws of the universe are inherently at odds. The signs of these ideological currents are easily seen in the dominant literary modes of the period, as the three-decker novel gives way to the fleetingly poised moment of the short story, and as the 'scientific' fictions of naturalism become prominent, with their avowedly organicist aim of dissecting a society as though it were precisely analogous with a human body.

This same sense of the ceaseless shiftings and modifications of the apparently stable material world can be related to the ascendancy of the philosophies of relativism and pragmatism, where the petrified social categories of morality and knowledge are felt to be in contradiction with the intricacies and flexibilities of personal experience. *Jude the Obscure* is heavy with this sense: Sue cannot associate her inner life with the Mrs Richard Phillotson she has outwardly become (p. 223); Phillotson's dilemma over Sue is compounded by his feeling that his 'doctrines' and 'principles' are at odds with his 'instincts' (p. 246); and Jude's "'neat stock of fixed opinions'" is torn away from him by his experience, leaving him "'in a chaos of principles'" (pp. 336–7). One of the novel's most painful

ironies is the way that the desire for education is undercut by its inadequacy and irrelevance to the experiences of all the central characters. The tension between 'private' experience and the cold, superficial generalisations of the public language which alone is available to articulate that experience comes to dominate the novel. "I can't explain" becomes a kind of motto – a variant on one of the senses of the novel's epigraph, 'the letter killeth' – and is used by both Sue and Jude, particularly in relation to sex (Sue's half-hearted attempt to give Little Father Time the truth about the expected child; Jude's failure to account to Sue for his casual night with Arabella), highlighting the irreconcilability of individual sexual experience and its public discourses, whether scientific or moral. Sue and Jude take divergent paths with regard to language and the literary culture. Sue moves into silence; in her two last appearances, she stops her ears to avoid hearing Jude, and clenches her teeth to avoid addressing Phillotson. Jude, however, moves into a kind of sardonic or parodic quotation in which the language of culture becomes a commentary on his own life in a quite original way – the anthem 'Truly God is living unto Israel', the last quotation from Job with its choric, amen-like punctuations of 'Hurrah!'. The two are caught at the point where their courses diverge in an exchange which appears only in the serial text: when they overhear two clergymen discussing the eastward position for altars Jude exclaims "What a satire their talk is on our importance to the world!", and Sue replies, "What a satire our experience is on their subject!"²¹ These two processes of distancing from language and literary culture are mimicked in the form of the novel and its place in Hardy's work. The end of *Jude* is a most sardonic imposition of the twin conventions of novel closures, the happy marriage and the death of the hero, and offers by way of apparent summing-up Arabella's reinstatement of the romanticised truisms of a love as strong as death and the two lovers as halves of a single whole.²² *Jude* is also Hardy's last novel, and so is followed, in this respect, by silence.

Jude the Obscure is Hardy's final double tragedy. In his previous versions of the double tragedy of a man and of a woman, the woman's tragedy has resulted from her sexual nature, while the man's has been more involved with intel-

lectual ideals and ideological pressures. There has been a polarity of nature and culture which has meant that the protagonists have rivalled one another for the centre of the novel, pulling it in different directions and making it hard for him to use marital or sexual relationship as the crucial point of the divergence. In *Jude*, however, Hardy gives for the first time an intellectual component to the tragedy of the woman – Sue's breakdown from an original, incisive intellect to the compulsive reiteration of the principles of conduct of a mid-Victorian marriage manual – and, to the man's, a sexual component which resides not in simple mismatching, but in the very fact of his sexuality. There is no sense that Jude and Sue inhabit different ideological structures as there is in the cases of Clym and Eustacia, or even Angel and Tess. Indeed, for all the emphasis on the 'enigma' of Sue's logic and motivation, there is an equal stress – and this is something new in Hardy – on her similarity to Jude. The fact of their cousinship, besides contravening the exogamy rule and so adding an incestuous *frisson* to their sense of an impending and hereditary doom, serves to highlight their similarities;²³ there are episodes which quite openly draw attention to this, either by careful counterpointing of plot (Jude, in his distress, spending the night at Sue's lodging, balanced by Sue, in hers, spending a night in Jude's room) or by means of images such as that of Sue's appearance in Jude's clothes as a kind of double. Again, the discussion between the two after Jude's impulsive visit to the hymn-writer turned wine-merchant points up their own sense of sameness between them; and Phillotson justifies his action in letting Sue go partly in terms of "the extraordinary sympathy, or similarity, between the pair. He is her cousin, which perhaps accounts for some of it. They seem to be one person split in two!" (p. 245). Their lives follow a very similar course. Both make a mistaken marriage as a result of sexual vulnerability, as is evident in an interesting ms. revision: when Jude, on his first outing with Arabella, visits an inn, he sees on the wall a painting of Samson and Delilah, a clear symbol of his male sexuality under threat; but the picture had originally been a painting of Susannah and the Elders, a symbol of female sexuality under threat, which corresponds very closely to the roles of Sue and Phillotson (ms. f. 44). Both Sue and Jude escape these first marriages, become

parents, lose their jobs, their children, and their lover. Yet Sue is destroyed, while Jude is even at the end able to talk of dying “game” (p. 394). Jude offers explanations for this phenomenon – ‘The blow of her bereavement seemed to have destroyed her reasoning faculty’ (p. 368) – and raises questions about it – “What I can’t understand in you is your extraordinary blindness now to your old logic. Is it peculiar to you, or is it common to woman? Is a woman a thinking unit at all, or a fraction always wanting its integer?” (p. 359). Sue’s actions and reactions are constantly faced, whether by Jude, by the narrator, or by Sue herself, with this alternative: either she must be peculiar, or she must be representative of her sex.²⁴ It is worth noting, in passing, that this alternative is one which certain critical readings continue to enforce upon the text; a recent example can be found in John Lucas’ argument that ‘we need more in the way of women than the novel actually gives us’ in order to judge whether Sue is to be seen as a ‘pathological case’ or as a ‘representative woman’.²⁵ This apart, it is noticeable that Sue’s life follows almost exactly the course of the ‘after-years’ marked out for the female sex in the earlier and notorious passage about the ‘inexorable laws of nature’ and the ‘penalty of the sex’: that is, ‘injustice, loneliness, child-bearing, and bereavement’ (pp. 160–1). It seems to me that Sue is to be seen as a representative of her sex in this sense alone, that her sexuality is the decisive element in her collapse. It has become a critical reflex to refer to Sue Bridehead as sexless or frigid, whether as an accusation of her, in the Lawrentian tradition, or as an accusation of Hardy, as in Kate Millett.²⁶ There is much in the literature of the New Woman that appears to support such an assumption: their concern with the double-standard, for instance, takes almost invariably the form of a demand for male chastity, and some of the more successful problem novels, such as Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins*, turn on the terrible injuries wreaked on women by libidinous and venereally-diseased husbands. *Jude* itself provides some evidence for this argument also, in Sue’s rather absurd wish “that Eve had not fallen, so that . . . some harmless mode of vegetation might have peopled Paradise” (p. 241), or in the numerous revisions in which Hardy removes expressions referring to Sue’s warmth and spontaneity and substitutes references to her reserve or cool-

ness. In one scene, for instance, her reply to Jude’s worries that he may have offended her reads thus in the serial text: “‘Oh, no, no! You said enough to let me know what had caused it. I have never had the least doubt of your worthiness, dear, dear Jude! How glad I am you have come!’”. In the first edition, however, she is considerably less affectionate and spontaneous: “‘O, I have tried not to! You said enough to let me know what had caused it. I hope I shall never have any doubt of your worthiness, my poor Jude! And I am glad you have come!’”. As she comes to meet Jude, the serial text runs: ‘She had come forward so impulsively that Jude felt sure a moment later that she had half-unconsciously expected him to kiss her.’ The revised text, on the other hand, reads: ‘She had come forward prettily; but Jude felt that she had hardly expected him to kiss her.’²⁷

It is simplistic, however, to equate such changes with a total absence of sexual feeling, or with frigidity. They should be seen, rather, as her response to the complexities and difficulties of her sexuality and its role in her relationships than as a straightforward denial of it. Hardy subjects Sue’s sexuality to some of the same ironies which undercut Diana Warwick’s sexual self-possession in *Diana of the Crossways*, and for some of the same reasons. It is intimately connected in both cases with the woman’s sense of selfhood, and the reserve is, to quote John Goode, ‘not a “defect” of “nature”, but . . . a necessary stand against being reduced to the “womanly”’.²⁸ A refusal of the sexual dimension of relationships can seem the only rational response to a dilemma; in revolt against the double bind by which female-male relationships are invariably interpreted as sexual and by which, simultaneously, sexuality is controlled and channelled into a single legalised relationship, Sue is forced into a confused and confusing situation in which she wishes at one and the same time to assert her right to a non-sexual love and her right to a non-marital sexual liaison.²⁹ It is the conflict of the two contradictory pressures that makes her behaviour so often seem like flirtation. Diana Warwick is a victim of the same dilemma, for her unconventionality and intelligence lead her to despise the taboo placed on friendships with men, and yet any and every sexual advance, whatever the state of her feelings toward the man, is felt as at once an insult, a threat, and an attack. ‘The freedom of one’s sex’ is a double-edged concept.

In the case of Sue Bridehead, her diagnosis of marriage as constraint implies as its apparent corollary the equation of non-marriage and freedom. The myth of the free individual subject leads her to see her life, provided it lies outside sexual coercion, as an affair of personal choices freely made. Telling Jude of her unhappiness, she does not perceive the irony in his repetition of her phrase:

"How can a woman be unhappy who has only been married eight weeks to a man she chose freely?"

"Chose freely!"

"Why do you repeat it?" (p. 227).

Her tragedy takes in part the form of her gradual confrontation with the fact of her non-freedom, with the knowledge that she is no less constrained and reduced by her denial of her sexuality than by Phillotson's legal or Jude's emotional demands upon it. She must learn that sexuality lies to a large degree outside the control of rationality, will, choice. The serene confidence with which she tells Jude of her sexless liaison with the undergraduate and draws from it the general conclusion that "no average man – no man short of a sensual savage – will molest a woman by day or night, at home or abroad, unless she invites him" (p. 167), is a fantasy of freedom and control which she will not willingly surrender. Hardy states in a letter to Edmund Gosse what the novel itself also implies, that it is irrevocable sexual commitment which she fears and abhors, and that she has attempted to retain control of her sexuality by a straightforward restriction of her sexual availability:

"One point illustrating this I could not dwell upon: that, though she has children, her intimacies with Jude have never been more than occasional, even when they were living together. . . , and one of her reasons for fearing the marriage ceremony is that she fears it would 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" (*Later Years*, p. 42).

The final, ironic twist is that when she can no longer fail to recognise the limitations upon her freedom – the moment is clearly marked for us in her identification of the three commandments of the "something external" which ironically mock the Hebraic Ten Commandments (p. 347) – she simply re-makes the equation in reverse, preserving the polar

opposition of marriage and non-marriage. In her re-marriage with Phillotson, she subjects herself fully to the legalistic and Hebraic codes of the ideology of marriage.

Sue, then, undergoes an exploration of the limits of a liberationist impulse, the demands of a Millian individualism, not in terms of biological destiny (although, at a time when contraception and abortion were still very limited of access and widely abhorred, the biological 'destiny' of motherhood is a very formidable 'given' indeed), but in terms of the impossibility of the free individual. This is, in a sense, a response to certain feminist and anti-marriage novels of the period, where the conversion of marriage into a civil contract varying in individual circumstances (as in *Mona Caird*), or the levelling 'up' of the double standard (as in *The Heavenly Twins*), or the replacement of marriage by the free union (as in *The Woman Who Did*), are seen as potential guarantees of the freedom of women; symptoms of the oppression of women are taken for the very structures of that oppression, and a perspective of equal rights is seen as not merely a necessary, but a sufficient programme for liberation.

Nevertheless, there is a very important sense in which Sue is right to equate her refusal of a sexual relationship with her freedom, in that it avoids the surrender to involuntary physiological processes which her pregnancies entail. It is in this respect that women are at the very junction of the 'flesh and spirit'; the point where mind and body are in potential conflict – this is the crucial area of that dominance of the material over the intellectual in the duality which is characteristic of the ideology of the period. It is Sue, and not Jude, who is the primary site of that 'deadly war waged between flesh and spirit' of which Hardy speaks in his Preface (p. 27).³⁰ In Jude, the two are constantly juxtaposed, the dominance of his sexuality displacing the dominance of his intellectual ambitions and vice-versa in a continuing series. Jude's sexuality is a disruptive force in a way that it has not previously been for Hardy's male characters; there is no question here – except in Jude's tortured self-questioning after the death of his children – of a predatory male sexuality destroying a weaker and more vulnerable female through her sexuality, but rather of a sexual nature in itself disturbing, partly because it is so largely beyond the conscious

processes of decision and intention. When Jude first meets Arabella his intentions and wishes are overmastered by his sexual attraction toward her; the phrase used in ms. is 'in the authoritative operation of a natural law' (ms. f. 36), but this is cancelled and a less scientific phrase finally substituted – 'in commonplace obedience to conjunctive orders from headquarters' (p. 63). It is this episodic 'battle' of Jude's which gives the novel its similarly episodic form, in which there is a repeated pattern of the abrupt confrontation of his inner life with his material situation: his meditation over the well is broken by the strident tones of his aunt (p. 35), his sympathies with the hungry birds are interrupted by Farmer Troutham's clacker (p. 39), and his recitation of his intellectual attainments is answered by the slap of a pig's penis against his ear (p. 61); from this point on, the dons of Christminster temporarily give way to the Donnes of Cresscombe. Jude's attempt to unite the two through his marriage founders with the significant image of Arabella's fingermarks, hot and greasy from lard-making, on the covers of his classic texts. His wavering thereafter between the two women enacts the alteration of dominance within himself. Points of crisis and transition are marked by Jude's personalised *rites de passage*: his burning of his books, auctioning of his furniture, removing his pillow from the double bed, and so on.³¹

Kate Millett argues that Sue is the 'victim of a cultural literary convention (Lily and Rose)' that cannot allow her to have both a mind and sexuality.³² The very persistence with which Jude attempts to bring Sue to admit her sexuality into their relationship suggests that this is too simple an account of the self-evident contrast of Sue and Arabella. Hardy seems to have been making conscious use of the convention *within* the figure of Sue; her name means 'lily', and there is symbolism in the scene in which Jude playfully forces her into contact with the roses of which she says "I suppose it is against the rules to touch them" (p. 308).³³ It is interesting to note, by the way, that in the year of *Jude's* publication, Hardy was collaborating with Florence Henniker on a story where the heroine's name, Rosalys, seems consciously to draw together the two symbolic traditions.³⁴

For Sue, mind and body, intellect and sexuality, are in a complex and disturbing interdependence, given iconic

representation in her twin deities, Apollo and Venus, which she transmutes for Miss Fontover – prefiguring the later collapse of her intellect and repudiation of her sexuality – into the representative of religious orthodoxy, St. Peter, and the repentant sexual sinner, St. Mary Magdalen. Further, there are the complementary images of Sue as 'a white heap' on the ground after her desperate leap from her bedroom window (p. 242), and as a 'heap of black clothes' on the floor of St. Silas after the death of her children (p. 358); as victim of her sexuality and as victim of religious ideology, she is the arena of their conflict. Her intellectual education throughout the novel runs alongside her emotional involvements: the undergraduate who lent her his books and wanted her to be his mistress; Phillotson who gives her chaperoned private lessons in the evenings; and, of course, Jude, with whom she spends much of her time in discussion. But in each case, sexuality is a destructive, divisive force, wrecking the relationship and threatening the precarious balance in Sue's life between her intellectual adventurousness and her sexual reserve. Her relationship with Jude involves her in the involuntary physiological processes of conception, pregnancy and childbirth, and these in turn enforce upon her a financial and emotional dependence on Jude which destructive for both of them.

Sue, then, is at the centre of this irreconcilability of 'flesh' and 'spirit'; yet she is constantly distanced from the novel's centre of consciousness by the careful manipulation of points of view. A variety of interpreters interpose between her and the reader – Phillotson, Widow Edlin, even Arabella; but chiefly, of course, Jude. There is a kind of collusion between him and the narrator, which is most evident in the scene of Jude's first walk round Christminster, when he sees the phantoms of past luminaries of the university; the actual names are withheld from the reader as if to convey the sense of a shared secret between narrator and character. This collusion enables us to follow the movements of Jude's thoughts and actions – the narrator's examination of his consciousness is authoritative. Sue, on the other hand, is, as John Bayley remarks, consistently *exhibited*;³⁵ she is pictorialised, rendered in a series of visual images which give some accuracy to Vigar's descriptions of the novel as employing a "snapshot" method.³⁶ Sue's consciousness is opaque, filtered

as it is through the interpretations of Jude, with all their attendant incomprehensions and distortions; it is this that makes of her actions impulses, of her confused and complex emotions flirtation, and of her motives 'one lovely conundrum' (p. 156).³⁷ The histories of Jude and Sue are, in some respects, remarkably similar, and yet she is made the instrument of Jude's tragedy, rather than the subject of her own. In a sense the reader's knowledge of her exists only through the perceiving consciousness of Jude, and so it is that after his death, she is not shown at all; Arabella takes on Jude's role of interpreting her to us. The effect of this distancing is to give what is openly a man's picture of a woman; there is no attempt, as there is with Tess Durbeyfield, to make her consciousness and experience transparent, accessible to authoritative explanation and commentary. She is resistant to appropriation by the male narrator, and so the partiality of the novel is not naturalised.

It is often said that Sue's 'frigidity' brings about not only her own tragedy, but also – and in this view more importantly – Jude's.³⁸ In fact, this tragedy follows upon not merely the sexual consummation of their relationship, but Sue's assimilation, through her parenthood, into a pseudo-marriage. Once she has children, she is forced to live with Jude the economic life of the couple, and gradually to reduce her opposition to marriage to formalism by pretending to marry Jude and adopting his name. It is motherhood – her own humiliation by the respectable wives who hound her and Jude from their work, Little Father Time's taunting by his schoolmates – that convinces her that "the world and its ways have a certain worth" (p. 368; this is an insertion in the first edition), and so begins her collapse into "enslavement to forms" (p. 405). For the anti-marriage theme of the novel is not entirely concerned with legally or sacramentally defined marriage, though these play a significant role, and it differs again here from most of the contemporary New Woman fiction. In most cases (as in Grant Allen, for example) it is merely the legal aspect that is attacked, while a 'free union' which duplicates the marital relationship in every respect but this is seen as a radical alternative. Even for a radical feminist theorist like Mona Caird, it is the inequality of the terms on which the contract is based that is the root of the problem:

The injustice of obliging two people, on pain of social ostracism, either to accept the marriage-contract as it stands, or to live apart, is surely self-evident. . . . [I]f it were to be decreed that the woman, in order to be legally married, must gouge out her right eye, no sane person would argue that the marriage-contract was perfectly just, simply because the woman was at liberty to remain single if she did not relish the conditions. Yet this argument is used on behalf of the present contract, as if it were really any sounder in the one case than in the other.³⁹

Her solution is to propose a more flexible and personalised contractual relationship. Jude and Sue experience the same sense that predetermined social forms, however they may be for other people, cannot suit "the queer sort of people we are" (p. 299); they regard themselves unequivocally as the argument from exception, despite various intimations that they are simply precursors of a general change of feeling. It is curious that this argument contradicts the general tendency of the attack on marriage, for if they are exceptional in their relationship, it is in their 'perfect . . . reciprocity' (p. 221), their "extraordinary sympathy, or similarity" (p. 245). Their Shelleyan vision of themselves as twin souls, two halves of a single whole, is a version of Romanticism which is in conflict with the attack on marriage as enforcing a continuing and exclusive commitment; the same contradiction is apparent in Shelley's *Epipsychidion* itself, an important source for *Jude*.⁴⁰ Sue and Jude see themselves as giving freely just this kind and degree of commitment, embodying in a 'purer', because unconstrained, form the very ideal of marriage; indeed, they often talk of their relationship precisely as a marriage, and refer to each other as 'husband' and 'wife'. Other relationships of this kind are perceived by them as invariably gross and degrading – the cowed and pregnant bride who marries her seducer "to escape a nominal shame which was owing to the weakness of her character", the boozy, pock-marked woman marrying "for a lifetime" the convict whom she really wants "for a few hours" (pp. 297–8). Their own relationship, however, they perceive as refined and singled out, its sexuality as merely the symbol of its spirituality. But, in the course of the novel, they are forced to recognise that their relationship is not transcendent of time, place, and material circumstance, as they have tried to make it; their Romantic delusion gives way, leaving Jude cynical, but in Sue's case leading on into the ideology of

legalised and sacramental marriage that her experiences have led her to respect. Ironically, it is a debased Romantic version that concludes the book, through Arabella's final statement that "She's never found peace since she left his arms, and never will again till she's as he is now!" (p. 413). Sue comes to see in Phillotson her husband in law, as Tess comes to see in Alec her husband in nature; the logic is only apparently opposite, for in both cases it is underpinned by that sense of the irrevocability of commitment which is inculcated by the ideology of marriage. *Jude* illustrates how a relationship conceived by its protagonists as in opposition to marriage cannot help becoming its replica – that it is in the lived texture of the relationship that the oppression resides, and not in the small print of the contract. The 'alternative' relationship proves ultimately no alternative at all, for its material situation presses upon it to shape it into a pre-existing form. Jude and Sue escape none of the oppressions of marriage, but they incur over and above these the penalties reserved for transgressors against it. There is no form for the relationship to take except those named and determined by the very form that they seek to transcend: unless it is marriage, it is adultery or fornication. It is in this sense that Jude comes to see that he too is one of "that vast band of men shunned by the virtuous – the men called seducers" (p. 352).

In a sense, then, *Jude the Obscure* offers a challenge to contemporary reformist feminism. It challenges in particular the notion of the home or the love-relationship as a protected zone, beyond the reach of existing material and ideological structures, which could be reformed by individual acts of will and intention. Jude comes finally to see himself and Sue as martyred pioneers: "Perhaps the world is not illuminated enough for such experiments as ours! Who were we, to think we could act as pioneers!" (p. 360). They show rather the unimaginable nature of female-male relations as they would exist outside the economic and ideological pressures which wrench the relationship back into pre-determined forms of marriage, just as Hardy's novel is wrenched back finally into pre-existing fictional forms; but it is part of the strength of *Jude* that it makes visible the violence of those wrenchings, and gives a sense of the energy which cannot be wholly contained within those forms. The novel points, too, to the crucial role of parenthood, and so

of the nuclear family, in enforcing the marital model, for it is when Little Father Time arrives that the relationship is forced to adapt, economically and in appearance, to the conventional marital couple. There are two references, very radical in their time, to the necessity for socialised childcare, though without challenging the existing sex-role division. In the first, Phillotson tells Gillingham that "I don't see why the woman and the children should not be the unit without the man" (p. 247); in the serial text, he argues in more detail that "I don't see why society shouldn't be reorganized on a basis of Matriarchy – the woman and the children being the unit without the man, and the men to support the women and children collectively – not individually, as we do now."⁴¹ Later, Jude raises the same question when confronted with the possibility that Arabella's son need not necessarily be also his:

"The beggarly question of parentage – what is it, after all? What does it matter, when you come to think of it, whether a child is yours by blood or not? All the little ones of our time are collectively the children of us adults of the time, and entitled to our general care" (p. 288).

It is interesting that, although in 1892 Hardy had written to Alice Grenfell that he did not support women's suffrage,⁴² by 1906 he had changed his mind, largely on the grounds that women would take on a more progressive role in introducing socialised childcare:

... the tendency of the women's vote will be to break up the present pernicious convention in respect of manners, customs, religion, illegitimacy, the stereotyped household (that it must be the unit of society), the father of a woman's child (that it is anybody's business but the woman's own except in cases of disease or insanity).⁴³

In the light of this, 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 barter her sexuality accordingly. She runs an ironically parallel course to Sue Bridehead's in her rejection of one husband and finding of another, her (temporary) sublimation of her sexuality into religiosity, her loss of her child, and her eventual return to her first husband. Her education, carried out largely by her work-mates, parallels and undercuts the more formalised self-

education of both Jude and Sue, forming part of the collision in the novel between 'dogma', 'doctrines', 'principles' – in short, formal education – and 'instincts', 'impulse', 'inclinations' – the complexities and contingencies of personal experience.

Arabella is always connected with both sexuality and fecundity. The scene of her first meeting with Jude, even more overtly symbolic in the texts of the serial and first edition, is suggestive of a literal seduction. In this earlier version, Jude is timorous, picking up the pig's penis with the end of his stick, and averting his eyes while he offers it to Arabella. She responds in this way: 'She, too, looked in another direction and took the piece as though ignorant of what her hand was doing.'⁴⁹ In subsequent editions, this is replaced by her 'sway[ing] herself backwards and forwards on her hand' (p. 63)! After this, the scene of the actual seduction seems redundant; it continues, however, the emphasis on breasts which frequently accompanies Arabella's appearances in the novel.⁴⁵ The egg which she is hatching between her breasts introduces the idea of fertility into the self-evident sexuality of the scene. She is a kind of surrogate mother for the orphan Jude; at his unexpected re-meeting with her in the bar, he reacts as though he had been 'whisked . . . back to his milk-fed infancy' (p. 217). Yet it is Sue who becomes a mother, not only of her own children, but also of Arabella's son, while Arabella herself, for all the implied multiplicity of her sexual involvements, never plays a maternal role. This is crucial, given the way in which this role precipitates Sue into her "enslavement to forms" (p. 405); and there is a hint that it is not simply coincidental that Arabella's sexual 'freedom' is preserved. Before her marriage to Jude, she meets Physician Vilbert; she 'had been gloomy, but before he left her she had grown brighter' (p. 80). Since the idea of obliging Jude to marry her has been her intention from the outset, it is unclear whether she has obtained from the physician a simple piece of advice – pretend to be pregnant – or whether, pregnant in fact, she has got from him some of those "female pills" which he had earlier asked the boy Jude to advertise in payment for the grammars he never brings (p. 52). 'Female pills' was at this time a widely-understood euphemism for abortifacients. Arabella, then, is perhaps able to safeguard herself from the consequences of her sexuality, at least in the form of unwanted children, and

so to resist some of the more urgent economic and ideological pressures which push women back into nuclear family units.

A. O. J. Cockshut considers *Jude the Obscure* a refutation of contemporary feminist thought, and Sue Bridehead an illustration of Hardy's pessimism about women's attempts to defy the inexorable, 'natural' limitations of their sex; he concludes that 'The attempt to turn Hardy into a feminist is altogether vain'.⁴⁶ He is right, I think, in seeing the novel as in conscious dialogue with both feminist and anti-feminist fiction of its time; but his interpretation of the novel's role in this dialogue is, surely, entirely mistaken. Sue's 'breakdown' is not the sign of some gender-determined constitutional weakness of mind or will, but a result of the fact that certain social forces press harder on women in sexual and marital relationships, largely by virtue of the implication of their sexuality in child-bearing. Even among the apparently radical New Woman novelists, there is widespread agreement that motherhood is a divinely – and biologically – appointed mission, providing the widest and purest field for the exercise of the 'innate' moral qualities of the woman. In some anti-feminist novels – such as *A Yellow Aster* – it is the approved agent of the rebellious woman's recuperation into the fold of happy docility. Only Mona Caird⁴⁷ and Hardy, among the more widely-read novelists dealing with this issue, draw attention to its coercive role in the reproduction of the nuclear family unit. *Jude the Obscure* poses a radical challenge to contemporary reformist feminist thought in its understanding that the "something external" which says "You shan't love!" also and at the same time says "You shan't learn!" and "You shan't labour!" (p. 347).

But it is not only its challenge to the existing social and ideological formations of the period that makes *Jude the Obscure*, in Eagleton's phrase, an 'unacceptable text'.⁴⁸ It is a novel that threatens to crack open the powerful ideology of realism as a literary mode, and throws into question the whole enterprise of narrative. 'The letter killeth' – and not only Jude. Tess, too, is destroyed by letters: the text-painter's flaming sign, Joan Durbeyfield's letter of advice, Tess's own misplaced written confession, the various appeals and denunciations and warnings dispatched to Angel in Brazil. It is wholly fitting, then, that Angel should finally track down Tess once more by following

the directions of the local postman! Sue Bridehead, on the other hand, is progressively reduced from a challenging articulacy to a tense and painful silence that returns her to the fold of marriage – a conclusion which ironically duplicates the death of Jude. Writing comes increasingly to resemble an instrument of death, for the women in particular. From the fatal 'letter' of fiction, Hardy will turn to the 'letter' of a poetry that memorialises.

NOTES

- 1 *One Rare Fair Woman: Thomas Hardy's Letters to Florence Henniker 1893–1922*, ed. Evelyn Hardy and F. B. Pinion (London, 1972), pp. 3 and 46.
- 2 Egerton's letter, dated 22 November 1895, is referred to in *Thomas Hardy's Correspondence at Max Gate: A Descriptive Check List*, ed. Carl J. Weber and Clara Carter Weber (Waterville, Maine, 1968), p. 56. Hardy's letter about Caird is 'To Percy Bunting,' 13 January 1890, *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy: Volume I 1840–1892*, ed. R. L. Purdy and Michael Millgate (Oxford, 1978), p. 208.
- 3 *One Rare Fair Woman*, p. 8.
- 4 Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (London, 1978), pp. 105–6.
- 5 'To Millicent Garrett Fawcett,' 14 April 1892, *Collected Letters*, p. 264.
- 6 William Robertson, *The Novel-Reader's Handbook: A Brief Guide to Recent Novels and Novelists* (Birmingham, 1899), pp. 1–2.
- 7 Grant Allen, *The British Barbarians: A Hill-Top Novel* (London, 1895), p. 94.
- 8 Richard Little Purdy, *Thomas Hardy: A Bibliographical Study* (London, 1954), p. 91.
- 9 Grant Allen, *The Woman Who Did* (London, 1895), p. 41.
- 10 *Woman Who Did*, pp. 182–90.
- 11 Robert Yelverton Tyrrell, *Jude the Obscure*, *Fortnightly Review*, 65 (1896), 858.
- 12 [H. G. Wells], 'Jude the Obscure,' *Saturday Review*, 82 (1896), 153.
- 13 'Novel Notes,' *Bookman*, 6 (1894), 24.
- 14 'Novel Notes,' 24.
- 15 For a representative selection, see *Working Class Stories of the 1890s*, ed. P. J. Keating (London, 1971).
- 16 E.g. 'To Florence Henniker,' 10 November 1895, *One Rare Fair Woman*, p. 47.
- 17 *One Rare Fair Woman*, p. 43.
- 18 Patricia Ingham, 'The Evolution of *Jude the Obscure*,' *Review of English Studies*, 27 (1976), 27–37 and 159–69; a decisive refutation of John Paterson's 'The Genesis of *Jude the Obscure*,' *Studies in Philology*, 57 (1960), 87–98.

- 19 Ward Hellstrom reads the novel in terms of Arnold in 'Hardy's Scholar-Gipsy,' in *The English Novel in the Nineteenth Century: Essays on the Literary Mediation of Human Values*, ed. George Goodin, Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, No. 63 (Urbana, 1972), pp. 196–213; while William J. Hyde reads in terms of Mill, in 'Theoretic and Practical Unconventionality in *Jude the Obscure*,' *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 20 (1965), 155–64.
- 20 *One Rare Fair Woman*, p. 46.
- 21 'Hearts Insurgent,' *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, European ed. 30 (1895), 594.
- 22 Cf. Alan Friedman, 'Thomas Hardy: "Weddings Be Funerals"', in *The Turn of the Novel* (New York, 1966), pp. 70–1.
- 23 Cousin, or bother and sister, relationships were widely used in feminist fiction to contrast the treatment and expectations and experiences of sex-differentiated pairs; e.g. in Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh* (1856), and Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893).
- 24 Cf. John Goode, 'Sue Bridehead and the New Woman,' in *Women Writing and Writing about Women*, ed. Mary Jacobus (London, 1979), pp. 100–13.
- 25 John Lucas, *The Literature of Change: Studies in the Nineteenth-Century Provincial Novel* (Hassocks, Sussex, 1977), pp. 188–91.
- 26 D. H. Lawrence, 'Study of Thomas Hardy,' in *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. Edward D. McDonald (1936; rpt. London, 1961), pp. 495–510; and Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (London, 1971), pp. 130–4.
- 29 *Harper's*, European ed. 29 (1895), 576; and *Jude the Obscure* (London, 1895), p. 161.
- 28 John Goode, 'Woman and the Literary Text,' in *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (Harmondsworth, 1976), p. 242.
- 29 See her comments on p. 186 ("Their philosophy only recognises relations based on animal desire") and p. 222 ("they can't give it continuously to the chamber-officer appointed by the bishop's licence to receive it.").
- 30 Cf. Geoffrey Thurley, *The Psychology of Hardy's Novels: The Nervous and the Statuesque* (St. Lucia, Queensland, 1975), p. 191.
- 31 Cf. William H. Marshall, *The World of the Victorian Novel* (London, 1967), pp. 404–24.
- 32 *Sexual Politics*, p. 133.
- 33 Cf. Mary Jacobus, 'Sue the Obscure,' *Essays in Criticism*, 25 (1975), 304–28.
- 34 'The Spectre of the Real,' in *In Scarlet and Grey: Stories of Soldiers and Others* (London, 1896), pp. 164–208.
- 35 John Bayley, *An Essay on Hardy* (Cambridge, 1978), p. 201.
- 36 Penelope Vigar, *The Novels of Thomas Hardy: Illusion and Reality* (London, 1974), p. 193.
- 37 Cf. Elizabeth Langland, 'A Perspective of One's Own: Thomas Hardy and the Elusive Sue Bridehead,' *Studies in the Novel*, 12 (1980), 12–28.
- 38 E.g. Shalom Rachman, 'Character and Theme in Hardy's *Jude the*

- Obscure*, 'English, 22, No. 113 (1973), 45-53; and T. B. Tomlinson, *The English Middle-Class Novel* (London, 1976), pp. 121-4.
- 39 Mona Caird, 'The Future of the Home,' in *The Morality of Marriage and other Essays on the Status and Destiny of Woman* (London, 1897), p. 117.
- 40 For an interesting account of the Shelleyan motif in the novel, see Michael E. Hassett, 'Compromised Romanticism in *Jude the Obscure*,' *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 25 (1971), 432-43.
- 41 *Harper's*, European ed. 30, 125.
- 42 'To Alice Grenfell,' 23 April 1892, *Collected Letters*, p. 266.
- 43 'To Millicent Garrett Fawcett,' 30 November 1906, Fawcett Library, London.
- 44 'The Simpletons,' *Harper's*, European ed. 29 (1894), 80. The serial title was changed to 'Hearts Insurgent' in subsequent instalments.
- 45 E.g. on pp. 62, 64, 93 and 197.
- 46 A. O. J. Cockshut, *Man and Woman: A Study of Love and the Novel 1740-1940* (London, 1977), p. 129.
- 47 See *The Daughters of Danaus* (London, 1894), pp. 341-2.
- 48 Terry Eagleton, 'Liberality and Order: The Criticism of John Bayley,' *New Left Review*, No. 110 (1978), 39.