SOMETHING GOOD COMES OUT OF WESSEX:
Feminist Voices in Thomas Hardy

by

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B.A. The University of Victoria, 1985

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTERS OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Department of English

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

October 1992

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Date Oct. 12, 1992
Abstract

Hardy is often maligned by feminist readers for his portrayals of women who are punished for their refusal to submit to the patriarchal law. However, far from reasserting anti-feminist notions of women and womanhood, Hardy uses his heroines to challenge the patriarchal structuring of a society that does not recognize women's words, women's passions, or women's possibilities. Bathsheba, Tess, and Sue confront the issues of language, sexuality, and marriage from a feminist perspective, and force the reader to recognize the artificiality of the systems which uphold man as the center of a society in which woman is other. Within Far From the Madding Crowd, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, and Jude the Obscure, subversive voices speak up against the stereotypes within which women are contained and break down "the letter" of patriarchal laws which artificially characterize women as sexless and in need of the protective embrace of husband and home. Given their own voices, with which to express their own feelings and desires, these three heroines speak out against the sexist language, the stereotype of the "pure" woman, and the necessity of marriage; and though they are eventually silenced, their voices have been heard, and the reader must recognize their right to speak and to live independent of the bounds of the patriarchal law.
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FFMC  
Far From the Madding Crowd

JO  
Jude the Obscure

TD  
Tess of the d’Urbervilles
Introduction

Over and over again, Thomas Hardy demonstrates his awareness that woman's roles in Victorian society are artificially created. Born into a patriarchal society which is designed to maintain the male at the centre of social life, "women develop a split in [their] consciousness between self-perception and perception by others" (Boumelha 35); this split makes them vulnerable to the patriarchal influences which place them in roles at the margins of this society. Any failure to correspond to the patriarchal definition of "female" means the woman's own failure to be "normal" (Koppelman 113-114) according to the patriarchal definition of that word. Though men are simply projecting "attributes of weakness and masochism" (Selden 138) onto women, socialization establishes that these be taken as true feminine qualities which women must accept as their own. In doing so, women also accept that they are innately different from men and belong in a sphere of existence designated as feminine by the patriarchal culture.

The woman's sphere in Victorian society consisted of the "world of birth and death, of food and love, of comfort and blood--a very basic world" (Murray 15). Seldom was woman expected to take part in the strictly masculine "tales of discovery, of travel, of work, of exploration," (Morgan x), and any woman who did so was branded as unnatural. Literature reflected these beliefs and, in the novels of the period, it was primarily heroes, not heroines, who were "seeking fulfilment and growth, and...confront[ing] difficult personal and social conflicts" (Holly 39). Such stories were seldom told of women whose entire existence and purpose in life centred upon providing domestic comfort for their searching, growing, working, discovering men. Woman's place was to be what man wanted her to be, not to find a purpose in life beyond her role as chaste wife and mother,
and any woman who was left without a husband or children had no place in a society which offered women no roles as individual, independent human beings.

However, with the nineteenth century came an increased recognition of the Woman Question, and a demand for Victorian women to "redefine their sexual natures...[to examine] women's place in society at large, with a reconsideration of the female role in literature and life" (Miles 151). In the 1860s, women actively began to campaign for political equality, and the right to live a life independent of the patriarchal ideal of womanhood. By the 1880s, "many of the social limitations which paradoxically had provided the material coded into literary stereotypes of 'ideal' womanhood had changed" (Ingham 61), and writers began to challenge the portrayals of the intelligent woman as "neurotic, unfeminine, deviant" (Holly 39), showing a bubbling of discontent and growing awareness that she was dependent upon her husband, who kept her only as long as she pleased him and could legally turn her out into the street any time he chose. (Murray 21)

The New Woman was born: a more independent, educated, experienced woman wanting to live her own life and make her own decisions. The literature snapped up this new image of womanhood and used her "as a source of artistic inspiration" (Cunningham 19), though often not in a very positive way. Many "New Woman" heroines ended up with nervous disorders or nervous breakdowns as a result of their weariness in the face of disillusionment and their inability to fight the deeply entrenched values of Victorian society (Cunningham 49-50).
Despite much opposition from a society comfortable with its patriarchal structure, a feminist movement had established itself by the end of the century and was spreading the realization that "if women could set aside the assumptions about their own nature...and forge ahead towards any goal they may choose, there was no limit to their possible achievements" (Cunningham 8). At the centre of this movement is the realization that women are a distinct group, alienated and oppressed by the patriarchal system (Donovan xi), which saw man as the self and woman as other. For the newly hatched feminist, "woman is self and man other" (Schumacher 35). Recognizing that conventions within the patriarchal culture are designed to favour the male point of view, feminism questions "women's relation to language" (Showalter, *The New Feminist Criticism* 9), analyzes "power relations between the sexes" (Kauffman 183), and attempts to "express women's experience" (Kauffman 183) in a world which denies a woman an experience outside of that recognized by patriarchal stereotypes.

In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, we find recognition of the patriarchal order of society, and a challenging of this structure. Hardy does not accept that biological gender differences somehow enable men to be active, speaking, owning, travelling, working members of society, or that women must be passive, silent, submissive, self-abnegating, idle victims of men's whims. He continually surprises his readers with insights into the trials women must face in a patriarchal society, attacking a language which labels women from outside of themselves and forces them into taking roles designed by a patriarchal order from which they are largely excluded. Giving his heroines their own voices with which to challenge their patriarchal namers, Hardy
introduces the individual points of view of his heroines in the face of characters and narrators who struggle to see them as mere stereotypes. He addresses the issue of women's sexuality and deconstructs the notion of the "pure" woman in *Tess*. The hypocrisy of a system which assigns women a passive sexual role and at the same time makes them responsible for any and all sexual indiscretion is found to be inadequate and destructive. And Sue's questioning of her obligation to be sexually responsive to a man as a result of a contract between them explores the punitive nature of marriage from a female perspective. All three novels also question the likely bases for marriage: sexual inexperience, romantic love, and pragmatism. Hardy poses all these questions through the voices of his heroines, who challenge the power of patriarchal language, the repression of women's sexuality, and the necessity of marriage. These women struggle to explore their opportunities and limitations until they are finally and permanently silenced by the society against which they protest.

Bathsheba, Tess, and Sue all end by either conforming or dying; so attractive are they, however, and so deeply felt are their dilemmas that the reader feels no sense of justice at their endings. Adopting the shape of the traditional ballad for his novels, Hardy presents a narrative form in which the "woman's place...is usually...that of a victim of male power" (Garson 40); in doing this, he "ensure[s] that there will be no complacent acceptance of Bathsheba's reformation" (Morgan 48), Tess's execution, and Sue's "fanatic[al] prostitution" (*JO* 437), since their fates are the result of their victimization under patriarchal authority. His novels give the women room to demonstrate their individuality, voice their struggles with the language, exhibit their natural sexuality, and
oppose conventions which place them in an inferior position within patriarchal society. Presenting "real, flesh-and-blood women" (Morgan xi), these novels challenge the stereotypes and insist "on the right of every individual to exist and be judged on his[/her] own terms" (King 119). These women speak for themselves, defying the narratorial intrusions which seek to translate their experiences for the patriarchal audience, stereotyping their existence, and barring them from the man’s world they dare to try and enter. In spite of opposition, they do enter, they do speak, and they do act on their own terms, and when they are finally forced to suffer for their exertions, it is "the world that denies autonomy, identity, purpose, and power to woman...[that is] the loser" (Morgan xvi).

By recognizing the inadequacy of the patriarchal society to account for women who do not fit the narrow stereotypes, Hardy presents accounts which disrupt the beliefs of his culture with regards to women. By submitting these "ideologies to conflicting and contradictory points of view and narrative voices...[Hardy tests them] to their limits...[making] those limits apparent" (Boumelha 34) in a world which does not see any reality beyond the patriarchal centre. Bathsheba, Tess, and Sue all resist these boundaries by questioning the adequacy of the male-centred language, the reality of women’s male-defined sexuality, and the necessity of marriage and its complete control over a woman’s fate. All three of these characters struggle in a different way against the constraints which rob them of speech, sexual and emotional freedom, and independent control of their own lives. The subversive cries of Bathsheba, Tess, and Sue are the feminist voices sounding throughout these three works; voices which echo in our minds long after they are silenced.
by the patriarchal constraints governing Victorian society as Hardy perceives and presents it in his novels.
Women and Language in Hardy

Patriarchal Language

*Far From the Madding Crowd, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, and Jude the Obscure* all demonstrate that language is inadequate to express the female experience. Though the narrators of these works may attempt to apply generalizations to Hardy's female characters, the characters themselves actively resist male appropriation by speaking in their own voices. Representing the conventional views of Victorian society, the male characters in the novels attempt to classify their female counterparts with the only labels available to them in the language, but these classifications never seem quite right, and they are further challenged by the heroines themselves, who resist being silenced until they are finally overwhelmed by the patriarchal forces. Their final defeat, however, is not in vain, for we have heard their voices, and these characters make

> one of the most...significant contributions that feminist criticism may make...the understanding that the idea of sex may be seen as simply that--an idea in the mind of the writer, and not necessarily something that must be accepted as real. (Schumacher 36)

Throughout Hardy's novels, we find a concern with language, and the ambiguity of language, a concern that is evident in the titles of all three of the novels we will be examining. The title of *Far From the Madding Crowd* is taken from Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard," a poem which discusses the quiet, unfulfilled potential of the rural man living away from "Th’ Applause of list’ning Senates" (line 61) and confined to the "cool sequester’d Vale of Life" (75). The title of the novel suggests
that it too will be depicting the quiet, rural existence that is examined in Gray's churchyard, but the lines which follow Grey's use of "Far from the madding Crowd" (73) are also important to an understanding of Hardy's novel:

Far from the madding Crowd's ignoble Strife,
Their sober Wishes never learn'd to stray;
Along the cool sequester'd Vale of Life
They kept the noiseless Tenor of their Way. (73-76)

Though Gray's poem is meant to describe rural men-folk, our interpretation of these lines in relation to the novel applies them more to Hardy's female protagonist, and ironically, to her difficulty in noiselessly accepting the sequestered life of the Victorian woman. If we associate Bathsheba with these lines, we find a questioning of the desirability of Gray's picture of rural life and the life of the Victorian woman. Right from her first refusal to pay the required toll, to her "astonishing" performance on the horse and her decision to be her own bailiff, Bathsheba attempts to control her own destiny, and will not leave herself prey to "dumb Forgetfulness" ("Elegy" 85), but stirs up the quiet countryside with talk of her "strange doings" (FFMC 157).

The subtitle of Tess of the d'Urbervilles is equally ironic, since the much-discussed designation of Tess as a "pure woman" clearly challenges the reader's understanding of the fallen woman and recognizes society's role in classifying women according to labels which are questioned throughout most of the novel. Tess and Angel both struggle with the question of Tess's purity: Tess being ironically sure that Angel is "the one man on earth who had loved her purely, and who had believed in her as pure" (TD 378), while
Angel himself cannot view her as spotless, though he does come to forgive her for what he perceives to be her impurity. The novel repeatedly questions the significance of calling Tess "pure," and this leads us to distrust the ways in which language is used to construct meaning.

Sue Bridehead’s complete exclusion from the title of *Jude the Obscure* silently underlines her even greater obscurity, as she is given more prominence than the title of the novel would suggest. Her exclusion here mirrors her isolation as a woman trying to be herself in a society which demands a certain level of conformity from its members, and silences even the most articulate dissenters—as Sue is eventually silenced. Sue’s exclusion from even the label of "obscurity" shows just how obscure her life is as a woman who refuses to play the manipulating games at which Arabella shows such skill, and which would give Sue more power than her attempts to live as Jude’s comrade in a world which can only view her as his mistress.

Hardy’s attention to language reflects, consciously or unconsciously, the concerns of feminist critics; it goes beyond a mere examination of how women are portrayed in fiction to include an investigation of language and sexism in language. According to Cameron, this concern with language involves three themes or concerns:

- the theme of silence and exclusion from language; the theme of ‘naming’ or representation, in which the meaning of gender is constructed and contested; and the theme of behavioral differences in language, their relation to male dominance and female culture. (3)
These "themes" are all relevant to a discussion of Thomas Hardy's novels, for these works question the exclusion of women from men's discourse, challenge the patriarchal method of naming, and are suspicious of behavioral differences inscribed in the language in which both men and women have to communicate.

**Difficulties in Defining Her Feelings**

*Far From the Madding Crowd* introduces the problem of woman's inability to communicate in a patriarchal language. Unlike her descendant Sue, Bathsheba does not disregard the values of the male-centred society in which she lives but struggles to exist within the narrow confines imposed upon her by this society and its language. Though rebellious by nature, she has no plans to become a "mannish" trailblazer and she certainly does expect that some day she will settle into the role of good Victorian wife, though she at first has no interest in being "thought men's property in that way" (*FFMC* 78).

Young Bathsheba, however, is not yet prepared to accept her circumscribed place, and her inability to conform to the roles expected by Oak, Boldwood, and the country folk in her employ, makes her an anomaly. Though she is grudgingly granted the "right to be her own baily if she choose" (*FFMC* 159), she is constantly forced to take part in power struggles with the men who desire to possess her. Oak, for example, corrects her work ("You don't hold the shears right, miss...hold [them] like this"(183)), "watch[es] her affairs" (212) without her knowledge, and takes it upon himself to defend her honour, as when he declares, "'Now--the first man in the parish that I hear prophesying bad of our mistress, why' (here the fist was raised and let fall, as Thor might have done)" (158).

Though outwardly Bathsheba is accepted as the "woman" farmer her uncle trusted she
could be, she is not given the respect she would have been given as a man in this position, but is still seen as a sexual object, even by her social inferiors, such as Mark Clark: "I say, let her have rope enough. Bless her pretty face--shouldn't I like to do so--upon her cherry lips!" (157). But Bathsheba's major problems are a result of her inability to keep "the noiseless Tenor of [her] Way," to be silent in a world which demands her to be mute as well as ineffectual.

Bathsheba's inability to remain silent, and her ignorance of the seriousness of words, initiate her troubles. By sending words intended for a "chubby-faced child" (146) to the stern Boldwood, she neglects to take into account how the context of these words changes their meaning. The stamp with which she seals the valentine she remembers as "some funny one," but she "can't read it" (147), and does not recognize the seriousness of what she presents in jest; though her "feminine meaning is flippant...Boldwood [will read] it literally as an injunction to marry her" (Ingham 24). As a member of the female gender, Bathsheba lacks the rationality associated with the male, and instead possesses the emotionality of the female which is lacking in a man's world. As a result, she communicates in terms of tone and emotional intention, and is less attentive to the literal meanings which are so much a part of the more logical man's world in which Boldwood is trying to communicate. Bathsheba makes light of words which are more serious than she is aware because her feminine meaning lies more in the frivolous intent of her epistle and less in the literal meaning conveyed to one who can read only the words. Her meaning is not made clear in the language alone, and she finds herself in an impossible dilemma when Boldwood proves to have difficulty "notic[ing] tones" (FFMC 285); indeed
she is silenced by her fear of doing further inadvertent harm by apologizing for what she has seen as only a "childish game of an idle minute" (259):

if he thought she ridiculed him, an apology would increase the offence by being disbelieved; and if he thought she wanted him to woo her, it would read like additional evidence of her forwardness. (169)

She has been trapped by words that have meanings she is not ready to accept as her own when used in contexts that she does not understand, and is left with no words to use in her own defence.

As she matures, Bathsheba grows to respect the import of words and acknowledges her "thoughtless...wicked" (412) attempts to use them, but, as she tries more carefully to avoid misunderstandings between herself and the men in her life, she must finally admit that the words are not hers to manipulate at all; they are the creation of something outside of her understanding of the world: "It is difficult for a woman to define her feelings in language which is chiefly made by men to express theirs" (FFMC 412). What she is expressing in 1874, is what Kate Millett asserts almost a hundred years later in 1970: "Because of our social circumstances, male and female are really two cultures and their life experiences are utterly different" (31). Bathsheba’s communication problems reflect the difficulties women face in a patriarchal culture which marginalizes them. Excluded from the ordering of society, women have no reason to feel responsible to this order; they exist outside of it and of the language used to convey its meanings:
Lacking any social or legal obligations to regard language as contract or a public representation of themselves, lacking even any code of honor which would make them...loyal to their own words, women characters can blatantly dramatize the volatile relationship between identity and language.

(Childers 333)

This "volatile relationship" exists as a result of the fact that women have been left out of the creation of a language which has been developed to represent the experience of the male, a language that expresses a dualism of presence and absence, of subject and object, structur[ing] everything our culture considers thinkable; yet women cannot participate in it as subjects as easily as can men because of the powerful, persuasive way in which the feminine is...said to be on the object’s side of that dyad.

(Homans 4-5)

The ordering of society has been male, and, as a non-male, female is the other, something existing outside of the phallocentric culture. Being separated from the centre of society by virtue of gender, the female is excluded from the experience of the male and is relegated to the margins of this experience. This means that woman is excluded from the creation of a language designed to represent the patriarchal experience, and that "the word that women writers and their female characters most often bear is the word of their own exclusion from linguistic practice" (Homans 33). This feminist idea is being expressed quite vividly through Bathsheba's struggle with men's words. Separated from her male counterparts by her position as a woman, Bathsheba is "denied the full resources of
language" (Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" 23) to communicate in a way that Boldwood would understand.

**Hardy's Men and the Inadequacy of Language**

This is not to say that the men are necessarily at an advantage within the patriarchal state of affairs, for the multiplicity of possible meanings within language causes many problems for the men in *Far From the Madding Crowd* as well. Boldwood, for instance, finds that "he [can]not read a woman. The cabala of this erotic philosophy seemed to consist of the subtlest meanings expressed in misleading ways" (*FFMC* 173). In his inability to communicate properly with Bathsheba, Boldwood ascribes to her his own inadequate perception of her meanings and he does this to his own as well as to Bathsheba's detriment. Coming from two different experiences, these two characters have no way to communicate properly. No matter how carefully Bathsheba tries to choose her words, Boldwood will hear only *words*, for context or "tones" (285) are beyond his ability to notice, leaving him perpetually unable to read Bathsheba, for whom emotional tenor is more immediately important than literal sense. He is as much trapped in his male view of the world as Bathsheba is in her female point of view, as neither provides a complete picture of the world. By adhering to "the letter," Boldwood misses much meaning that is not accounted for by words alone, and is therefore left desperate and inconsolable.

Even in *Jude the Obscure*, our perceptive hero is usually unable to understand the woman with whom he is said to have an "extraordinary affinity, or sympathy" (*JO* 295). Though he genuinely tries to listen to and understand Sue, Jude is often completely unaware of her meaning, and is not prepared to admit this weakness: "I know your
meaning,' said Jude ardently (although he did not). 'And I think you are quite right'" (JO 156). On so many occasions "Jude [is] in danger of attaching more meaning to Sue’s impulsive note than it really was intended to bear" (210); so many times "he [feels] that he [does] not even now quite know her mind" (224). Sue herself asserts that Jude is too straightforward to understand her (265); she is as aware as Bathsheba of the communication problems inherent in a language which denies women a means to fully communicate their experience. But without words to express her meaning, Sue is left silent, and unable to explain her predicament to Jude.

Many male characters also recognize the inadequacy of words as well as the women do. Gabriel Oak is astute enough to recognize that there are words "as full o’holes as a sieve" (FFMC 421) for women, but Jude, in his study of Greek and Latin, has a much more complex understanding of language and its weaknesses:

[He] had meditated much and curiously on the probable sort of process that was involved in turning the expressions of one language into those of another...an aggrandizement of rough rules to ideal completeness. (JO 71)

Though "in his innocence" (JO 71) Jude had supposed that the acquisition of language must be a relatively straightforward and simple process, he learns early on that this is not the case, that "the words of the required language [are not] always to be found somewhere latent in the words of the given language" (JO 71). Yet though he is sensitive to this deficiency in language, he remains unable to decipher his heroine’s meanings any more than he can readily translate Latin into English through a simple knowledge of the problems of translation. Just as the words of another language are not acquired through
some simple "law of transmutation" (71), feminine "meanings" may not always be found in the words available: there is no simple means to translate feminine feelings into patriarchal words. Jude further comes to realize that words themselves are not absolute or straightforward, for the intention behind them is of great import to their meaning: "If Sue had written that in satire, he could hardly forgive her; if in suffering—ah, that was another thing!" (JO 226). This is something Boldwood will never learn because of his inability to listen to the woman he loves. Rigidly content with his own understanding of the world and single-mindedly determined to possess one who does not desire possession, Boldwood will always remain blind to Bathsheba's difficulties with language, dismissing her complaints in the face of his greater desire:

Don't blame yourself—you were not so far in the wrong as you suppose.

Bathsheba, suppose you had real complete proof that you are what, in fact, you are—a widow—would you repair the old wrong to me by marrying me?

(412-413)

Unlike Jude, who sincerely listens to Sue, Boldwood is too concerned with his own words to heed the concern in Bathsheba's voice. He misses the tones which tell the true meaning of words Jude knows are not absolute unto themselves.

So much cannot be conveyed in mere words, and this then leads to a questioning of the very power given to words to create realities, especially states "foreign to a man's nature" (JO 323) like marriage. Sue and Jude eventually agree that making their love "permanent" by way of a written contract does not legitimatize their relationship, and so they continue to exist beyond "the letter" of the patriarchal law. It is only when Sue
submits to this "letter," and allows herself to be subject to the patriarchal view, that Jude realizes words have the power to do much more than appropriate a person's experience: "the letter killeth" (468) when one allows one's individual experience to be overwhelmed by the generalizing power of language. The literal meanings so valued by the logical minds associated with the masculine principle can be fatally destructive in a world which is not so literal, for, in attempting to fit all experience into the limited number of classifications at its disposal, the letter creates a reality which does not truly exist. The shades of meaning not easily recognized by patriarchal language are disruptive to an order which demands that reality be organized into readily identifiable categories. It is these shades, which are difficult to identify within a language not designed to recognize them, that Hardy's women are asking their male counterparts to acknowledge. When Sue submits to society's view of her, she allows the letter to categorize her according to its own inadequate labels; she allows her individuality and her point of view to be killed by the letter. This knowledge is what Sue leaves to Jude, though too late.

The Role of the Narrator

But if the male characters have trouble understanding the unfamiliar points of view of Bathsheba, Tess, and Sue, at least one persona should have a strong enough grasp on the "reality" of the women presented in the novel to ease the reader through texts swimming in ambiguities, and that is the narrator. According to Ermarth, the viewpoints of all the character in a novel are limited, but these "can all be coordinated by the narrator into one homogeneous medium and so potentially into one single world of concerns" (4). The narrator is given access to the private mind and motivations of each of the characters,
and usually submits this information to the gaze of the reader in a coherent, unambiguous way. By using generalizations about women to explain their behaviour, Hardy's narrators attempt to present this coherent picture. Bathsheba's narrator, for example, is continuously applying generalized concepts to Bathsheba in order to objectify her to the male gaze: "[i]t was a moment when a woman's eyes and tongue tell distinctly opposite tales" (FFMC 192); or, "[w]omen are never tired of bewailing man's fickleness in love, but they only seem to snub his constancy" (FFMC 212).

This stereotyping is often challenged, however, by subversive voices which deny any neat formula of feminine behavior to account for female voice and action. It then becomes the narrator's job to undermine these revolutionary voices in order to "reduce the struggles of...the female characters to the stereotypically female and thus to undermine the reader's regard for them as individuals" (Wittenberg 53). Though Henery Fray may assert that a strong enough woman has no need of a man to fight her battles (FFMC 201), and Liddy may assure her mistress that she "would be a match for any man when [she is] in one o' [her] takings" (FFMC 255), the narrator, in an attempt to keep Bathsheba in the place of object in the phallocentric order, will admit Bathsheba's strengths only to belittle her:

When a strong woman recklessly throws away her strength she is worse than a weak woman who has never had any strength to throw away....Weakness is doubly weak by being new. (FFMC 243)

Hardy's narrator manipulates the reader's understanding of the characters in order to fit their experience into the sphere of the male reader who is less willing to grant Bathsheba
uncharacteristic feminine strength than to accept feminine weakness: "She strove miserably against this femininity which would insist upon supplying unbidden emotions in stronger and stronger current" (FFMC 260).

What is missing from this type of analysis of the narrator's role is an acknowledgement of the fact that the female characters are given an opportunity to voice their points of view, causing ambiguities that make us question the validity of the narrator's generalizations, and perhaps all generalizations about women. Though many instances of generalization place Hardy's women in the role of "[t]he [w]eaker" sex (JO 194) or the "standard woman" (TD 89), these stereotypical expectations of female thought and behaviour are challenged by the contradictory viewpoints coming from the women themselves. Some of this dissension is difficult for even the narrator to resolve or undermine, as a result of the women's ability to speak and act for themselves. In the face of their assertions, the narrator must confront the inability of his language to account for these women, and is left with Jude's task of "divining rather than beholding the spirit of the original, which often to his mind was something else than that which he was taught to look for" (JO 74). The resulting ambiguities may be seen as the consequence of a want of lucidity and thematic stability, but in reality they result from a struggle with a language that is simply not sufficient to convey the reality of these women outside of the male gaze. Ermarth asserts that "where the narration allows contradictory viewpoints to exist side by side without resolution, the representational illusion falters" (6), and I would have to agree. Hardy's narrators do falter when attempting to present the male representational illusion, and in the process they are demonstrating the inadequacy of this "illusion" to
account for all the viewpoints. This further allows a feminist, almost deconstructive directive to dictate the telling of the stories, especially in Tess, as label after label is questioned and discarded until there are no words left to describe her. She is both post-lapsarian Eve with Alec (36), and the innocent pre-fall Eve to Angel (128); she is "temptress" (317) yet still "good woman" (314); she is fallen woman, yet is "unsmirched in spite of all" (317). Tess is unaccounted for by the male experience of woman, and in presenting her in this way, the novel tears down the walls of difference between the two sexes, and introduces readers to the fact that woman is no less an individual than man, and that gender differences themselves are merely ideas, not objective realities.

**Women's Own Voices**

Men have always told stories from within the patriarchal framework which places them at the centre of society, so it is not surprising that from as early as the writing of the Bible, "it is men who speak for [women], and of them" (Murray 17). Hardy, however, allows women voices of their own, thereby forcing readers to listen to a point of view they may not have been asked to acknowledge before. Though the male narrator and other male characters may attempt to impose meaning on their female objects, the reader is not expected simply to accept their view of things, but is asked to consider the heroines' actions, gestures, and words before passing judgement on them. Bathsheba's hasty use of words, and her indiscreet actions do more to demonstrate her individual emotional immaturity and her ignorance of social correctness than any weakness inherent in her gender:
Why, if I'd wanted you I shouldn't have run after you like this: 'twould have been the forwardest thing! But there was no harm in hurrying to correct a piece of false news that had been told you. (FFMC 78)

Bathsheba speaks for herself, not for women in general, and there are no narratorial intrusions to contradict her. In fact, when Bathsheba speaks, the narrator's voice is hardly to be found at all, for her "clear voice" (298) allows no challenge. Her words are all her own, and stand alone to present our heroine as the individual she is, with faults all her own.

Bathsheba cannot, of course, completely ignore the expectations of the patriarchal society. Though small subversive utterances echo throughout the novel in her own voice, though they one minute ring out rebelliously against the roles imposed upon her, the next minute she must admit her inevitable compliance with the patriarchal order: "I hate to be thought men's property in that way, though possibly I shall be had some day" (FFMC 78). Though she instinctively rejects subjection to the male gaze, she must still live within its constraints, and when she is not being accused of "woman's folly" (262) by Boldwood, "the instability of a woman" (301) by Oak, or miserable feminine emotionality (260) by the narrator, Bathsheba berates herself for possibly appearing "a bold sort of maid--mannish" (255). At some level Bathsheba must identify with her "caged canary" (53) who is also allowed to sing, but only from within the bars of its man-made prison.

Hardy's women are allowed to give expression to their own "'uncomplimentary' experience, at odds with the language of men, creat[ing] a discourse contradictory to that of the anti-feminine generalizations" (Ingham 24). According to Koppelman, "[f]or the
most part, women in our culture experience themselves and their lives in terms of and in response to masculine centred values and definitions" (113), but Hardy's novels allow their heroines to perceive themselves as something other than objects of the male gaze. That is why Tess is so disturbed by the thought of "finding out that there is set down in some old book somebody just like me, and...that I shall only act her part" (TD 124). She wants to be something other than a male-created stereotype; she wants to be acknowledged as an individual, not merely an object of the patriarchal view of the world. The women themselves are given the freedom to cry out against appropriation, preventing the belittlement of their feminine desires which results when their voices are "edg[ed]...into paraphrases or reported speech" (Morgan 91).

The Male Gaze

The eventual defeat of our heroines results from the naming process which contains women in the words that "help to structure...a sexist world [and] in which women are assigned a subordinate position" (Spender 31). In a phallocentric world structured on the presence or absence of the phallus, woman is always absent as a result of what she is missing, and she will always be dependent on those who are present, or at the centre of this order, to label and characterize her. Bathsheba will always be subject to the criticism of her inferiors who instead of respecting her power will question her judgement as a result of the gender assessment attached to her title, "woman farmer": "A headstrong maid, that's what she is--and won't listen to no advice at all" (FFMC 154). She will always be subject to anxiety over being labelled "mannah," no matter how successfully she manages her affairs in a man's world. Even those women aware of their objectified
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position cannot escape their gendered contexts, and must finally come to accept what Arabella affirms all along: it is the man's "idea of her [that is] the thing of most consequence" (JO 102).

Hardy's male characters see women as a means to fill deficiencies in their structuring of the world, and attempt to use the female to complete what they lack, even if this means creating an image of woman that is completely foreign to what woman really is (Murray 27-28). Jude, for example, feeling that he lacks the strength to resist women and liquor, makes Sue into his saviour, his "guardian-angel" (JO 429), and, in addition, seeing himself as too passionate, calls Sue "a sort of fay, or sprite" (429), one whose "heart does not burn in a flame" (429). He makes her responsible for his own inadequacies, and endows his understanding of her with elements he lacks. Who Sue really is is beyond Jude's ability to understand, especially if he must use language to attach meanings to her. In Hardy's works, the problem that men and women have with words mirrors the difficulty men have in truly characterizing woman, and accords with what the French feminists assert many years later, "that woman is not what men think she is....woman is other....in relation not to men but to the male definition of her" (Messer-Davidow 71). Though the male gaze never stops trying to characterize Hardy's women from its own limited perspective by using its ineffective system of feminine labels, the women themselves "are seen deviating from the former womanly ideal without moving into the unwomanly category" (Ingham 68). They refuse to be "accommodated by these men's words as they cross and re-cross that middle distance between the vague and the coarse" (Poole 334). Their true accomplishment in resisting classification lies in not
becoming subject to another set of stereotypes. This means that when Bathsheba takes on the role of sexual aggressor she still evades being "mannish"; when Tess proves not to be Clare's "fresh and virginal daughter of Nature" (TD 119), she does not conversely fit the category of whore; and when Sue does "things that only boys do, as a rule," she is still "not exactly a tomboy" (JO 162).

Regardless of the difficulty in classifying these characters in traditional ways, men are constantly asserting their "idea" of these three heroines, but their classifications are inadequate to describe women who do not fit into what John Mill called "a highly artificial system of cultivation" (Millett 95). Just as early feminist criticism concentrated on the limited stereotyped images of women in literature (Showalter, The New Feminist Criticism 5), so do Hardy's novels show how the labels used to categorize Victorian women fall short of any real understanding of who they are. Though Childers sees the generalizations as proof that "Hardy certainly intends to present his female characters as representative of their sex" (320), and Cunningham sees Hardy's women as "characteristically capricious, fickle and often childishly emotional...[placing] them firmly on the side of [Victorian] convention" (84), the process of labelling in these novels does not really promote these interpretations, for neither the narrators nor the male characters are successful at finding even one such name that really sticks to any of the women. Bathsheba, for example, is called a "headstrong maid" (FFMC 154), a "haughty goddess" and "Juno-wife" (423), but none of these labels is a satisfactory representation of the woman Bathsheba truly is. Those doing the naming recognize this and continue searching for new terms by which to classify her. Tess can also be used to illustrate the inadequacy
of male-invented names. By himself, Clare comes up with multiple expressions to describe her, from "fresh and virginal daughter of Nature" (TD 119), to "Miss Flirt" (179), to "a child" (188). At times, he must openly admit that his words are just not adequate to describe her as she really is:

You seem almost like a coquette, upon my life you do....They blow hot and blow cold, just as you do....And yet, dearest...I know you to be the most honest, spotless creature that ever lived. So how can I suppose you a flirt? (173-174)

Tess becomes less and less easy to describe in feminine terms, for if "prettiness [is] an inexact definition of what struck the eye in Tess" (TD 111), what is an exact definition? There are no new words with which to describe her. Bathsheba is a similar puzzle even to her narrator:

Bathsheba was no schemer for marriage, nor was she deliberately a trifler with the affections of men, and a censor's experience on seeing an actual flirt after observing her would have been a feeling of surprise that Bathsheba could be so different from such a one, and yet so like what a flirt is supposed to be. (174)

These women are presented as something other than what men expect them to be; their experience is unaccounted for by the limited scope of the male language. They do not fit neatly into the categories prepared for the "standard" woman and leave the patriarchal namers at a loss to describe them. By the time the character of Sue is discovered, both
the narrator and the male protagonist are left virtually silent and do not attempt to say much more than to admit that her "conduct was one lovely conundrum" (JO 189).

Of the three heroines we are discussing, Tess is perhaps the most subject to the process of classification by her male counterparts. The world of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is, right from the title, "pre-eminently Tess's world; events and characters have meaning primarily as they affect the 'structure of sensations' that is Tess" (Paris 77). However, critics cannot seem to agree on whether or not Tess successfully resists appropriation by the male gaze. Campbell believes that Tess cannot escape her "guilty past and her womanhood" (5), while Morgan maintains that "[o]ne of Tess's greatest psychological dilemmas...lies in resisting classification" (98). Silverman appears to take the middle road, and, while conceding that "Tess [often] functions as the surface upon which a pattern is imposed" (8), he still sees an "instability about Tess's image" that causes her to slip "constantly out of focus, often oscillating between two or more representations" (12). I would have to agree with Silverman's assertion that though there are many male figures who constantly attempt to appropriate Tess's image as the object of their patriarchal gaze, she remains somehow "detached from the looks that reach out to claim it...having her origin elsewhere" (13), in a history that is not part of the gaze which attempts to appropriate it. For Tess, both the words for the stereotypical angel and whore are inappropriate, as her essential self eludes the appropriation of Clare's patriarchal point of view. She is neither Eve to his Adam, nor the image of Magdalen (*TD* 128), but Clare's mind is too conditioned to the patriarchal view of the world to realize the import of "that
touch of rarity about her" (122), or that "it was the touch of the imperfect upon the would-be perfect that gave the sweetness" (148).

The diverse images that Clare comes to associate with Tess as a result of his inability to find a ready-made label to describe her can only further distort his understanding of her. These many images create meanings beyond what Tess could ever really be, creating "another woman in [her] shape" (*TD* 225) for Clare to love. His limited understanding of the world is incapable of recognizing her true self, and, after discovering her not to be the "pure" woman he has made her out to be, he can see her only as "fallen woman" (Ingham 72), since he has no other categories in his language in which to place her. But even Tess recognizes that his anger is not rightly directed at her: "It is in your own mind what you are angry at, Angel; it is not in me. O, it is not in me, and I am not that deceitful woman you think me!" (*TD* 227). Just as Sue is finally destroyed by adhering to the letter of the law, so is Clare's image of Tess shattered by "the letter" which does not take the spirit of an action into consideration. Despite all of his claims to a higher consciousness, Angel cannot escape thinking in terms of the male gaze and its limited understanding of female morality which marks Tess as a whore for succumbing to Alec and bearing his child, regardless of the circumstances that precipitate her action or the fact that the act was not of her free will.

Even after Clare's "strange experiences" in South America, he still struggles to comprehend Tess in terms of the male symbols of women: "the virtual Faustina in the literal Cornelia, a spiritual Lucretia in a corporeal Phryne" (*TD* 363). In this way, he tries to rationalize what he sees as her "crimes," but he still cannot get beyond attempts to
make her into the object of his patriarchal gaze. He still fails to see her as the subject of her own story, one which does not have to conform to "male desire and vision" (Silverman 27). Though he finally does admit, "I did not think rightly of you --I did not see you as you were!" (371), this realization will always be "too late," for though he may recognize his blindness, he can never overcome it from his position as other, and she will never be able to communicate her true self to him in words he can understand.

**Active Resistance**

But even if they do not succeed in communicating their feelings to the male characters, or in getting past the generalizations used to represent their individual experiences, Bathsheba, Tess, and Sue are important as representative feminine voices actively resisting the appropriation of the patriarchal gaze. By making herself ugly, [Tess] tries to place herself beyond the mastery of the male gaze....[She tries] to efface the erotic pattern that has been traced upon her body by a series of 'interested' viewers, so that she herself no longer serves as a supporting surface for the figuration. (Silverman 25)

Tess recognizes the appropriative power of words, and reacts violently to Alec when he uses them to categorize her carelessly: "How can you dare to use such words!...Did it never strike your mind that what every woman says some women may feel?" (TD 75). She also finds the words of the sign-painter powerfully oppressive, and she struggles to dismiss their "Crushing! Killing!" (78) influence. Even Clare's "fanciful names" distress her, for beyond the fact that she "[does] not understand them," they do not represent who she really is. She resists their containment, demanding of Clare simply, "Call me Tess"
Alec's murder near the conclusion of the novel is Tess's last defiant action, since she takes her fate into her own hands and actively frees herself from her persecutor, as well as forcing a removal of herself from our gaze, not only through the screened nature of her subsequent execution (Freeman 322-3), but through her very death and escape from the confines of the narrative itself. Because Tess's world is not prepared to understand the spirit of Tess's actions and insists on strictly upholding the patriarchal "letter of the law," Tess must find some way to pay for her fall in a society which offers few alternatives for the ruined woman. Through her death she both satisfies the letter's sense of justice and frees herself from our gaze.

Sue, the last of Hardy's great heroines, is the least intruded upon by her narrator: "[s]he simply is, and it is up to the reader to sense the inner truth that creates multiple, lively, totally conflicting impressions" (Heilman 310). As the most articulate of the three heroines we are examining, Sue has the most to say, not only about herself but also about the failings of a society which refuses to recognize the needs of those who do not quite fit into the prescribed moulds: "the social moulds civilization fits us into have no more relation to our actual shapes than the conventional shapes of constellations have to the real star-patterns" (JO 266).

In Jude the Obscure, Sue contests every label applied to her from "a clever girl" (JO 156) to "a product of civilization" (191), saying, "You don't know what's inside me" (192). Sue resists conformity, revelling in doing what has "probably never been done before" (229), but still insisting that she and Jude are not unique, that "more are like us than we think" (354). She makes herself a spokesperson for the many others who must,
like her, feel the need to exist outside of the phallocentric perception of reality. She claims a life other than that allowed by the narrator's and Jude's points of view, and leads us to see that if we are to rely solely on the narrator's presentation of her character, we are getting only part of the true picture of her. Conversely, Langland asserts that the reader cannot completely separate him/herself from the context of narrative technique and point of view. In discussing Sue's character, we must continually account for the novel's point of view which is closely allied with Jude's experience and with a man's perspective on an unconventional woman. (13)

It would, however, be difficult to take "the novel's point of view" seriously when neither Jude nor the narrator can even pretend to understand who Sue really is, since she constantly presents herself in conflicting ways. She refuses to be the sexual object that Arabella is happy to be, but also objects to being considered "sexless" (JO 203); she is humiliated by the marriage ceremony, but goes through with a marriage to a man she doesn't love and whom she finds physically repulsive; she asserts that she "did want and long to ennoble some man to high aims" (207), yet objects to a society that demands the submission of woman to man (276); she claims to be an unconventional "Ishmaelite" (192), but quickly marries Phillotson to escape public censure. Neither Jude nor the narrator even attempts to explain these inconsistencies in terms of Sue's womanhood, or in any terms at all. She is a "conundrum" (189) to them, and she will always be incomprehensible from within the patriarchal context which does not take well to anything
that does not fit into its sense of order. To fit Sue into the expected forms, the narrative itself must finally gain control of her by banishing her to silence.

**Final Silence**

The only possible ending for characters unable to express themselves in the language of the male narrator is silence. Though Hardy's women do not at first succumb to the prevailing consensus which "simply makes invisible any view that seriously challenges it" (Ermarth 9), they are soon left either in situations that make speech difficult or with no words with which to respond to the discourse of the other. Bathsheba, for example, eventually comes to accept the Victorian notion of feminine heroism: "that the only path to moral dignity for women is 'austerity, silence, and endurance'" (Humm 46). After giving up her once "clear voice" (*FFMC* 298) to an undeserving husband, she later literally loses her voice and is finally left with only a smile "(...she never laughed readily now)" (465) to express herself. In death, Tess's silence removes her from the patriarchal framework of the novel, but it also destroys her. And Sue, Hardy's last and most articulate heroine, is left with no words of her own, but can only quote others, and refuses to question or "discuss" (*JO* 438) her own loss of speech.

If the struggle is one of woman to be heard, "a struggle over language and voice" (Goode 122), then woman cannot overcome, for "the feminine...cannot describe itself from outside...except by identifying itself with the masculine. The alternative...is silence: the alternative is to be a muted group" (Spender 183). Though Hardy's heroines are given their own voice, their meanings can never be fully spoken in the words of the other. Bathsheba is left floundering to "direct her will into any definite groove for freeing herself
from this fearfully awkward position" (FFMC 258), and can only return "silent and weak
denials to [Boldwood's] charges" (260); Tess chooses silence as "on the face of it, best for
her adored one's happiness" (TD 189), sacrificing herself for the good of others; and Sue
is left gasping "in a whisper" and finally speaking "no more" (JO 446). Deprived of
voice by the patriarchal structure of language, these women are left with only silence as a
weapon "against men who speak and are not answered" (Childers 322). But silence is
accorded power which is not always reliable, and usually not acknowledged by the
patriarchal community. In Tess's expressive eyes, for example, "are found the words
which she is presumed not to need to speak" (Goode 122), but which do not help her
avoid the wrath of the man she loves, or execution for the murder of her seducer. When
Sue becomes silent, she is not seizing power, but exhibiting her own suppression, for
"[w]hen we no longer hear her voice, it is because Sue is alienated from herself as well as
us" (Jacobus, "Sue the Obscure" 307). Silence, as an absence of speech, is all that is left
to woman in a man's world where woman herself is defined in opposition to man's
manifest presence.

Conclusion

King asserts that Hardy's novels and his women characters speak for those
inarticulate masses who are unable to convey "their own deepest thoughts and feelings"
(54); but what these characters "convey" is their own difficulties in articulating
themselves: "I only meant--I don't know what I meant--except that it was what you don't
understand!" (JO 156). Sue is at a loss for words to express what she feels not only
because she is trying to communicate these thoughts to a man but because there simply
are no words to convey her feelings, foreign as they are to the patriarchal viewpoint. Designed to communicate the viewpoints of men, language fails to account for the emotions and experiences unique to women and thus dismisses these experiences from society’s understanding of the world. As a result, Sue sees herself as a "negation" of a society (JO 201) which does not accommodate her in any way; she is a symbol for her gender and its struggle to communicate in a patriarchal world which allows women no voice and no reality outside of that describable in words.

If we are to accept the feminist notion that the patriarchal world is named from the male point of view, this not only suggests the possibility that the experience of woman is completely overlooked, but also that women themselves are labelled in ways that lead to generalizations inadequate to express the reality of those women who resist classification. Language, as a result, works only to silence women, as it leaves them no place to exist as autonomous, articulate creatures with words to express themselves from the margins from which they must exist. In Hardy’s novels, language and its inadequacies are important issues, and are made into feminist concerns by the many female voices heard denying the authority of the male point of view, and asking the reader to recognize the woman’s right to speak for herself.
Hardy's Women and Sexuality

The Double Standard

Beyond the patriarchal society's influence over language, the law of the father also extends into the world of sexuality, yet another "social sphere of male power" (MacKinnon 618) which Hardy's novels explore. Sex is a source of power over a woman who is required by legal contract in marriage to be "responsive to [her husband] whenever he wishes" (JO 274), and who is held accountable for her own purity outside of wedlock or must look "upon herself as a figure of Guilt" (TD 84). Sexuality is an important issue in the arena of the fallen woman, whose "purity" is measured in terms of her sexual experience or inexperience. A sexual man, no matter how unprincipled, is viewed as attractive by the women around him. Alec's sexuality is dazzling to Tess even though she does not love him (TD 75), and Troy's sexual aggression fills Bathsheba with "agitated bewilderment" (FFMC 231) and desire, yet all three of Hardy's female protagonists are punished for giving in to their own sexuality. Women are not permitted to be aggressively sexual creatures, and those females who flaunt their sexuality or take on a more dominant role in male-female relationships are classed in a derogatory way as unnatural or immoral. Women are denied any role in sexual relationships other than as objects of male desire.

Yet in spite of their passive role in sexual matters, women are still made to feel responsible for any and all sexual indiscretions. No matter what the circumstances, it is the female "who is...held to be culpable or the more culpable party in nearly any sexual liaison" (Millett 54), for it is the female who is expected to resist the wickedness that in
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the male is "only the natural man's desire to possess the woman" (JO 428). No matter the level of Tess's "unavoidable dependence", she will always "loath and hate [her]self for [her] weakness" (TD 75). The fact that Tess is not the first to be "a favourite of d'Urberville's" (62) is not an issue; Alec's sexuality is never condemned by Tess, the narrator, or even by Alec himself except for his light-handed labelling of himself as "a damn bad fellow" (75). Hardy's novels challenge this ironic double standard by portraying woman as less the instigator of sexual "indiscretions" and more the victim of an "accepted social law" (TD 84) which is foreign to nature, and which makes even Hardy's toughest heroines subject to the cruel whims of masculine power. Troy, for example, is a representative of the patriarchal law which sees woman as merely an object whose greatest attribute would be to "have pluck enough to let [him] do what [he] wish[es]" (FFMC 239). When he performs the sword exercises, he is playing with his role of dominant male, and Bathsheba's role of submissive, inactive female. Her subsequent "powerless[ness] to withstand or deny him" (241) reflects her acceptance of her role as victim and Troy's lesson of feminine heroism: "don't...flinch. Stand your ground, and be cut to pieces" (FFMC 366). Tess learns the same lesson from her persecutor, and becomes the passive, heroic victim of Alec's abuse: "Whip me, crush me; you need not mind those people under the rick! I shall not cry out. Once victim, always victim--that's the law!" (TD 326). It is the law of society that condemns both Bathsheba and Tess to this passive role: a role that causes Bathsheba to deny her own natural strength, and forces Tess to accept punishment for a sin which would not be one under natural laws.
Tess’s narrator, however, refuses to accept the patriarchal authority which condemns this "daughter of nature," and instead encourages a respect for "the natural side of her which knew no social law" (90). Tess is always going to come out the loser, living as she does within a double standard of morality that views her as essentially asexual while at the same time responsible for the sexual violations visited on her even when the "sin was not of [her] own seeking" (78). But though Tess may appear to be more innocent than the "dark" and "careless" Car Darch (62-63) as a result of her dependence on Alec and her ignorance of the "danger in men-folk" (80), her "crime" is the greater one since her fall is greater. Never one to involve herself with the low indulgences of her fellow peasant-folk, Tess abhors the drinking and carousing of her parents, refuses to join in with the drunken dancing of her fellows (60), and "majestically" refuses to fight (64) even in the face of "a torrent of vituperation" (64). Yet in spite of Tess’s apparent purity, Car Darch responds to the "richer note" (64) of her laughter with outrage: "How darest th’ laugh at me, hussy!"(64). Besides the fact that this Queen of Spades has herself been Alec’s mistress, her ready shucking of her bodice and desire to fight would alone make her more of a hussy than Tess. Yet even Car recognizes that Tess is not as easy with her virtue as she and her sister are with theirs, and from Tess’s higher moral state she has farther to fall when she does succumb to Alec’s advances. In addition, Tess is more painfully aware of her own wrongdoing than Alec’s previous favourites are of theirs, and therefore feels more guilty and more deserving of punishment. Tess allows herself to become a victim because she accepts this role herself; she refuses to accept that her "crime" is as easily overlooked as her mother may imply, and suffers the consequences of
doing so. Trapped between the knowledge of her Sixth Standard Training and her connection to the natural world, Tess is as much a victim of nature’s inability to protect her from society’s "sticks and stones" (85) as are the animals of the field.

**Pressure to Conform**

Hardy’s heroines, as products of their culture, are subject to the "social and sexual expectations of Hardy’s men" (Humm 44), but these expectations need not be voiced, for each woman is socialized to listen for judgements resounding within her own head. Tess, for example, makes herself miserable with guilt on her return from the d’Urbervilles when she creates a characterization of herself "based on shreds of convention, peopled by phantoms and voices antipathetic to her...a cloud of moral hobgoblins by which she was terrified without reason" (*TD* 84); Bathsheba "feel[s] that Gabriel’s espial [of her on horseback] had made her an indecorous woman without her own connivance" (*FFMC* 69), even though she has heard no word of censure from Oak himself; and Sue, after spending her life fighting against regard for social opinion, finally accepts her tragedy as a punishment from God, and sees herself as "a vile creature--too worthless to mix with ordinary human beings!" (*JO* 425). Each of these women, no matter how strong her individuality appears to be, cannot avoid subjection to the repressing influence of her society which denies women self-expression in any but very narrowly defined ways:

> [h]ow could she be otherwise, even in those perversities which she stoops to in order to 'please' and to live up to the 'femininity' expected of her....when her sexual instincts have been castrated, her sexual feelings, representatives, and representations forbidden? (Irigaray 59-60)
Hardy's women illustrate this need to please, to live up to the expectations of society, in spite of the personal cost; they "are incapable of realizing whether some idea...in fact corresponds to themselves, or whether it is only a more or less passable imitation of men's ideas" (Irigaray 342).

Why do women not only allow themselves to be seen in this way, but also actively attempt to conform to these models of behaviour? According to Kate Millett, "[i]n the matter of conformity patriarchy is a governing ideology without peer; it is probable that no other system has ever exercised such a complete control over its subjects" (32-33). Bathsheba, first seen as an adolescent girl, typifies this need to conform even as she rebels, and this contradiction is illustrated by her first appearance "on the apex" of the wagon, seemingly in charge of the vehicle and all its contents, "together with a caged canary" (*FFMC* 53). Her authority is an illusion; though she may think she has the freedom to move as she pleases, she, like the canary, is limited to "the perches of [her] prison" (54). It is Gabriel Oak who first introduces Bathsheba to knowledge of guilt and fear, since "his compulsion to straighten her to conformity, to render her [a] 'thoughtful ...meek, and comely woman'" (Morgan 47) makes him the instrument of socialization that works with circumstances to subdue, suppress, and sublimate "her exuberant and passionate nature" (Doheny 21). Though Bathsheba attributes her conquered state to Troy, it is really Gabriel's "opinion of [her] conduct" (*FFMC* 185) that demands she give up her "wildness" and become a quiet, thoughtful model of Victorian womanhood; it is Gabriel who makes her conscious of an audience "stronger than herself" (354), increasing her awareness of the importance of society's judgement. In the face of this audience
Bathsheba is left to recognize the bars of her own canary cage that first imprison her in the role of Troy’s victim, forcing her to "[s]tand [her] ground, and be cut to pieces" (366). Unable to escape her cage even after Troy’s supposed death, she must assume responsibility for Boldwood’s sanity, play the role of loyal widow when Troy is shot to death, and finally cease to sing altogether in becoming the silent, submissive wife of Gabriel Oak.

Her will is finally suppressed and, in the process, she loses her authority and becomes a secondary figure to one who is her social inferior, her employee. Bathsheba’s conformity to patriarchal demands is unavoidable, however, in a society which trains women "to be artificial...and as long as they are so trained there will never be equality" (Calder 21-22). By succumbing to this call for artificiality, Bathsheba denies her right to self-determination and makes herself into something she is not, for as Sue asserts, "the social moulds civilization fits us into have no more relation to our actual shapes than the conventional shapes of the constellations have to the real star-patterns.” (JO 266)

By suppressing natural instincts in this way, society’s demands become destructive (King 23), leaving the character either dead or broken in spirit; Hardy’s novels confront and condemn this artificial view of female sexuality:
Is it...that women are to blame; or is it the artificial system of things, under which the normal sex-impulses are turned into devilish domestic gins and springes to noose and hold back those who want to progress? (JO 279)

Through an examination of Tess's unconscious sensual nature, Bathsheba's unconventionally aggressive nature and ultimate denial of her sexuality, and Sue's rejection of traditional male/female relationships and "the necessity of being responsive" (JO 274) to men's sexual demands, the reader is asked to reexamine these accepted notions of women's sexuality and sexual identity, and to recognize the artificiality of the patriarchal order of things.

The Attraction of Female Sexuality

Questioning the social order which causes women to repress natural urges and makes "[p]retence, seeming, [and] outward show...the standards by which a woman's character [is] measured" (Fawcett 9), Hardy's novels bring attention to the unnatural restraints women must endure to live in a world that will not accept them as individual, active beings--a world that will place a Tess, "who knew herself to be more impassioned in nature, cleverer, more beautiful" (TD 145) than the other dairymaids, into the category of unacceptable, of "Magdalen" (128) or whore. To be otherwise, she must relinquish her sensuality, thereby denying not only an essential part of her nature but a part that Angel loves:
How very lovable her face was to him. Yet there was nothing ethereal about it; all was real vitality, real warmth, real incarnation. And it was in her mouth that this culminated....To a young man with the least fire in him that little upward lift in the middle of her red top lip was distracting, infatuating, maddening. (147-148)

To repress this side of herself would deny Tess her powerful charm, would render her artificially ordinary, an unexceptional dairymaid with no particular attraction for Clare, the narrator, or even the reader.

Angel’s attraction to Tess is undoubtedly a physical one. Though he may try to rationalize his desire for her as a need for a good farmer’s wife (160), he is more attracted to Tess’s sensual lips than to her skill as a milkmaid; her sexuality has more allure than does the chaste spirituality of Mercy Chant, who perfectly fits the Victorian ideal of womanhood, glorying in her Protestantism with her arms full of Bibles (261-2). Tess, a far more vital, almost pantheistic being, is in complete opposition to this ideal of female, Christian purity, yet she is not characterized as Mercy’s opposite, as whore, but from within Hardy’s

less-than-typical Victorian view of female sexuality...[a] complete faith in the healthy, life-giving force of free, unrepressed sexual activity, [a] complete commitment to active, assertive, self-determined women.

(Morgan x)

Instead, Hardy’s novels look forward to the
Feminist thinkers in the eighties and nineties [who appear] to be redirecting their energies from specific political and legal questions towards the formulation of a new morality, a new code of behaviour and sexual ethics. (Cunningham 3)

They present images of women who do not fit neatly into one of the two patriarchal categories of the traditional female, who demand an examination of the code of ethics in order to be understood. In this way, Tess plays the part of the New Woman, "a highly sexual being, all the more dangerous since she cannot be dismissed as a prostitute or a fallen woman" (Cunningham 14), who demands a reevaluation of woman’s sexual nature.

Sexuality and the Fallen Woman

In addition to displaying the sensuality of his women, Hardy fully supports his heroines’ rights to be sexual beings. Though Tess and Sue are by definition "fallen" women, they are no less attractive to their narrators or even their readers because of their sexuality. Tess is one of the most passionate of all Hardy’s heroines, yet is viewed as lovable not only by the narrator and the male characters, but even by the women in the novel:

she could not be--no women with a heart bigger than a hazel-nut could be--antagonistic to Tess in her presence, the influence which she exercised over those of her own sex being of a warmth and strength quite unusual, curiously overpowering the less worthy feminine feelings of spite and rivalry. (TD 291)
It seems impossible not to love Tess, and even Clare, who insists in his fantasies that his lover is but a pure and simple daughter of the soil, is overcome "by [a] waxing fervour of passion for the soft and silent Tess" (146). He does not even question the spontaneous passion she shows him, never mind condemn her for it:

Having seen that it was really her lover who had advanced, and no one else, her lips parted, and she sank upon him in her momentary joy, with something very like an ecstatic cry. (148)

Tess knows no social mores that could repress her natural response to her lover, and this is a part of her appeal.

As a woman, "part and parcel of outdoor nature" (86), Tess does not exist by the law of the father which demands she show restraint, insisting that she stay her "impassioned woman’s kisses...upon the lips of [the] one whom she loved with all her heart and soul" (187). Neither Clare nor the narrator condemns Tess’s abandonment of propriety, but, noting that her ardour is for "her lover...and no one else" (148), they take it as a sign of her passionate devotion, not as an indication of her immorality.

In other words, though Tess may offend "the taboos and rules which seek to regulate women’s bodies and their movements" (Poole 338) and give free reign to her natural sexuality, the narrator refuses to see her as fallen. As the subtitle of the novel asserts, Tess is a "pure woman" in the eyes of nature which knows no "social law" (84). Tess is more a daughter of nature than of society, at home in uncultivated grasses, "gathering cuckoo-spittle on her skirts, cracking snails that were underfoot, [and] staining her hands with thistle-milk and slug-slime" (121). Tess suffers more from indoor than
outdoor fears (122) and with good reason, for as a woman easily assimilated into her
natural surroundings (86), she is as easily destroyed by "indoor" society as the "[r]abbits,
hares, snakes, rats, mice [are] every one put to death by the sticks and stones of the
harvesters" (85). However, this devastation of the natural world is not permanent, and
neither is Tess's ruin, for she will always spring back due to the "recuperative power
which pervade[s] organic nature" (98). The "blighted" (26) social world she faces can
never completely overcome a child of nature who is not subject to the laws of the
patriarchal, indoor world. She cannot easily be destroyed, but when she is finally gone,
one who "has all the best of [her]" (386) will rise to take her place.

Within the patriarchal framework of society, a woman's fall is seen as a loss of
innocence, a breaking of the social law demanding chastity. But is Tess, whose fall is
"owing to her unavoidable dependence" on Alec (57), her gratefulness for his aid to her
family, and her ignorance of "the danger in men-folk" (80), truly dragged down to the
level of "whorage" (64) Car Darch represents with her bare shoulders and closed fists?
Is Tess any less innocent than the "good and simple and pure" (386) 'Liza-Lu who has
simply not had the opportunity to be spoiled? Can she be any more guilty in her wish to
marry Clare in spite of her past than Izz Huet who agrees to accompany Clare to Brazil
despite the "wrong-doing [this would be] in the eyes of civilization" (265)? There are too
many extenuating circumstances which require the law to look beyond black and white
judgements and consider individual incident, before passing judgement according to
objective codes of ethics. Tess may be very attractive to the men around her, but she is
herself too much "an old maid" (44) to assert her womanhood consciously to her own
advantage, is too much the innocent to play seductress, and is "quite clearly the victim of men's cruelty" (Cunningham 97) and desire. Though Tess has lost her innocence according to society's standards, does this truly make her less worthy of happiness than the other milkmaids in spite of her being superior in beauty and in nature (145)?

But even if we can excuse Tess's literal "fall" as the work of forces outside of her and beyond her control, the passionate images used to characterize her still make her suspect in the eyes of patriarchal society. Focusing on her "infatuating, maddening" mouth (148), and constantly surrounding her with images of unrestrained fertility does not help to convince the Victorian reader of her purity. "Amid the oozing fatness and warm ferments of the Var Vale, at a season when the rush of juices could almost be heard below the hiss of fertilization" (146), Tess can almost be seen as one of "the ready bosoms existing there...impregnated by their surroundings" (146). Yet the narrator continues to stress Tess's connection to this natural, sensual world in the face of conventions which require a much less sexual view of a character who is not to be labelled impure or guilty of any culturally contrived sin. But Tess is no more comfortable in the "[d]arkness and silence" of the Chase, surrounded by "hopping rabbits and hares" (71) before her fall than after. She has always been connected to the unconscious sensuality of nature, and has always had an erotic element which is innocently ingenuous, denying sinfulness by virtue of its spontaneity. This sexuality is a part of Tess's character even before her literal loss of innocence when she allows Alec to feed her strawberries and gather blossoms "to put in her bosom" (36). Though an "immeasurable social chasm was to divide our heroine's personality thereafter from that previous self of hers who
stepped from her mother’s door to try her fortune at Trantridge poultry-farm” (72), Tess herself has not been changed by her experience. She has not become any more of the “hussy” (64) Car Darch labels her, or any less the "fresh and virginal daughter of Nature" (119) Clare takes her for. Though she may not approach the immaculate purity of Mercy Chant, who would doubtless refrain from planting "impassioned woman’s kisses...upon the lips of one whom she loved with all her heart and soul" (187), Tess’s ardour for the man she loves is all the more admirable to her narrator and readers because of its unaffected impulsiveness. Her childishly innocent "'appetite for joy’ which pervades all creation...was not to be controlled by vague lucubrations over the social rubric" (187-188). Though Tess may be "Maiden No More," she is still the "child" (188) Clare takes her to be. In spite of the lesson Alec has forced upon her, she retains her innocence. It is not her experiences with Alec that push her from paradise, but Clare’s rejection of her, driving her from the Eden-like Blackmoor Vale to the barrenness of Flintcomb-Ash where she is "without defence" against her old tempter and the harshness of the post-lapsarian world. Even after she again succumbs to Alec’s "cruel persuasion" and "touche[s his] heart" (375) with the knife that finally makes him her "victim" (375), Tess is still the child she was, hoping only for the freedom to be happy with the man she loves:

  I could not bear the loss of you any longer--you don’t know how entirely I was unable to bear your not loving me! Say you do now, dear, dear husband; say you do, now I have killed him! (377)

It is impossible for the reader to accept Tess as a criminal for her retaliation against a man who has forced her to betray herself, manipulating her through lies and the needs of
her "little sisters and brothers" (373); Tess herself, however, acknowledges her guilt in the face of society's demands that standards of purity be maintained. Her crimes of passion are unpardonable by these standards, and she is ready to suffer her punishment.

**Crime and Punishment**

It is Tess herself who insists on her ruined state, and accepts the judgement of a society which demands "that a woman's fall ends in death" (Auerbach, "The Rise of the Fallen Woman" 30). Taught to adhere to the law of the father which demands her purity, Tess struggles against her sensual nature, and it is this clash between her natural instincts and the expectations of society that will finally destroy her. Having "eaten of the tree of knowledge" (102) Tess cannot avoid her fate, for in Victorian society passionate women are destined to be

  profoundly discontented. They cannot win happiness; the comfort of hearth and home with which the good women are rewarded...cannot be theirs.

  They destroy themselves...as if their passionate natures exiled them from a normal life. (Calder 111)

Certainly Tess could not live silently with the guilt she is made to feel for an action that is forbidden by a law beyond her control. Though Mrs. Durbeyfield assures her daughter that "[m]any a woman--some of the Highest in the Land--have had a Trouble in their time; and why should you Trumpet yours when others don't Trumpet theirs" (188), Tess must follow her "Childish Nature...[and] tell all that's in [her] heart" (188). She could never be happy as Angel's wife without his acceptance of her past, and she would never
be content as the grateful consort of a man she despises and fears. Her death illustrates more than the narrator’s final resignation to convention (Fernando 140), for in Hardy, the survival of the fittest is rarely the survival of the best. It is a commonplace of tragedy that the innocent are least likely to be able to accommodate themselves to a world of evil.... (King 34)

Tess’s death is not meant to satisfy the reader’s sense of justice. As the men close in on Tess and her "Stone of Sacrifice" (387), we are again reminded of the helpless retreat of the field animals into an "ephemeral...refuge...shrinking to a more and more horrible narrowness" (85). There is no sense or purpose to their deaths, just as Tess’s execution does little to convince the reader of the legitimacy of the law which condemns her.

Tess’s death is not the punishment deserved by a criminal, "but the final stage in a long, generalized suffocation" (Ermarth 2) of our heroine. Tess refuses to be contained by the patriarchal view of women as asexual beings, just as she rejects Alec’s attempts to master her from the first:

He was inexorable, and she sat still, and d’Urberville gave her the kiss of mastery. No sooner had he done so than she flushed with shame, took out her handkerchief, and wiped the spot on her cheek that had been touched by his lips. (50)

She refuses to become Alec’s property, refuses to consider a "convulsive snatching at social salvation" (80) in order to restore her respectability; her punishment "is not for breaking a moral code but for attempting to live by a personal code of integrity and dignity after her 'fall' has disqualified her for a life on these terms" (Sankey 95). She
finally does break free of the artificial labels of society, just as "she breaks free of the man who mastered her body, and faces the harsh reality she brings upon herself with [a] dignity and courage" (King 114) not associated with the "fallen woman":

'I think you are lying on an altar.'

'I like very much to be here,' she murmured. (386)

Tess's punishment is unavoidable, even though "[n]ever in her life--she could swear it from the bottom of her soul--had she ever intended to do wrong" (350). By ending his novel in the conventional way and punishing Tess for her passionate nature and for refusing to suppress the natural, feminine instincts she possesses, Hardy is condemning society's blindness to realities outside of the "law" which often contradict the neat categories of right and wrong which society has created.

The Aggressive Female

Unlike Tess, who does not actively take control over her own fate until the end of the novel, Bathsheba is a much more assertive heroine who begins by demanding that she retain control of herself and her own life, and is not grateful for the aid of any man who "in gaining her a passage...had lost her point" (FFMC 56). She is often the aggressor in relationships with men both equal to her and below her on the social scale. Bathsheba does not really fit into Irigaray's category of woman as one who "does not so much choose an object of desire for herself as she lets herself be chosen as an 'object'" (104). She exudes self-confidence, and
a bright air and manner...which...seemed to imply that the desirability of her existence could not be questioned; and this rather saucy assumption failed in being offensive because a beholder felt it to be, upon the whole, true.

(FFMC 66)

As a result of her self-confidence and proud womanhood, Bathsheba presents a puzzle to the men around her by taking on the supervision of her own business affairs as well as "the conventionally masculine role of aggressor" (Casagrande 62) in her dealings with men.

Young Bathsheba revels in her own existence, embraces actions "hardly expected of a woman" (66), and denies the necessity of marriage as anything other than a "battle" to be won (79); relishing her strength and independence, she nourishes "a secret contempt for girls who [are] slaves of the first good-looking fellow who should choose to salute them" (333). In contrast to Tess, whose sensual nature continually creates an internal struggle, Bathsheba is an instinctive disciple of Diana (334): "proud of her position as a woman...[whose] lips had been touched by no man’s on earth--that her waist had never been encircled by a lover’s arm" (333). Bathsheba denies the Victorian image of woman in a different way from Tess who lacks access to Bathsheba’s economic advantages, a strength which would have shielded her from the temptations of a man like Alec whose attentions she is not in a position to prevent.

**Bathsheba’s Sensuality**

But if Bathsheba has advantages with which to shield herself from the kind of men Tess is prey to, why then does she fall so easily to the suspect charms of Sergeant Troy?
Bathsheba too co-exists closely with the natural world and is not immune to the influences and desires which Tess has to confront. The fertile vegetation on Bathsheba’s farm is ripe with the same sensual imagery found in Tess despite the fences which give it the appearance of being more contained:

The vegetable world begins to move and swell and the saps to rise, till in the completest silence of lone gardens and trackless plantations, where everything seems helpless and still after the bond and slavery of frost, there are bustlings, strainings, united thrusts, and pulls-all-together.... (172)

The swelling of springtime in Bathsheba’s meadow is but the foreshadowing of her own rising saps, which will also seem helpless during an emotional frost, but will not be stilled forever. At the sheep shearing, she is further connected with the sensual imagery associated with "lopp[ing] off the tresses" (197) of the blushing ewes, and the blood-drawing snip in the groin which foreshadow both Troy’s capture of Bathsheba’s own lock of hair, and his sexual penetration of her. Bathsheba is no less a daughter of nature than Tess, and is just as subject to her emotions as Hardy’s later heroine, though hers have the appearance of being under control, just as the fences of a meadow appear to domesticate the swelling meadow of Bathsheba’s farm.

It is in her ignorance of this side of herself that Bathsheba has a problem. Overestimating her own strengths, she is at a loss to maintain her self-control in the face of Sergeant Troy’s "overpowering" advances. With all her education and economic independence, Bathsheba is no different from those women she has held in contempt for becoming "the slave of the first good-looking young fellow who should choose to salute
them" (333). She is no different from poor Fanny Robin who also loses a lock of hair, her heart, and her self-respect to Troy, a man who has less compassion and respect for his own victim than a homeless dog does for this same suffering woman (326). For having the "pluck" (239) to allow Troy to proceed with his selfish games, Bathsheba has become "Esther to...[Fanny’s] poor Vashti" (354) but at what price? Fanny loses her life and her child, and Bathsheba must live on with the knowledge of her own hypocrisy and weakness in allowing herself to become the property of a man with "no conscience at all" (246).

Overwhelmed by her desire for Troy, Bathsheba chooses to suppress the part of herself that Liddy claims "would be a match for any man" (FFMC 255), and feels "powerless to withstand or deny" (241) Troy. She is determined to participate "in the adventure which is so forcefully sexual and clearly against propriety and controlled behaviour" (Doheny 13). Attracted to Troy as one wilder and more aggressive than she, to one she sees as able to "tame" (80) her, Bathsheba gives herself up to his control, leaving herself open to the criticism of those who think her stronger than that:

What a fool she must have been ever to have had anything to do with the man! She is so self-willed and independent too, that one is more minded to say it serves her right than pity her. (429)

In denying her own power, Bathsheba becomes the weak woman Fanny Robin represents, and finally gives in to the feminine emotionality she has no more strength to fight against.

Finally broken, Bathsheba responds by abandoning her prized self-control and takes on the role of emotionally weak woman, "brimming with agitated bewilderment" (231). Blaming her gender for her error, she still retains her individual dignity by making
her weakness a feminine one, not a personal one: "I shall never forgive God for making me a woman, and dearly am I beginning to pay for the honour of owning a pretty face" (254). The narrator is not so easy on her, stating that "[w]hen a strong woman recklessly throws away her strength she is worse than a weak woman who has never had any strength to throw away" (243). Unlike Fanny, Bathsheba has once had the strength to defy Troy’s "cajoleries that she knows to be false" (243). Whereas Fanny, "so much like a mere shade upon the earth" (136), is never any match for Troy’s methods of "dealing with womankind" (221), Bathsheba could once have stood up against his cruelty if she had only made an "attempt to control feeling by subtle and careful inquiry into consequences" (244).

Bathsheba does not question Troy’s influence, since to do so would require her to acknowledge a part of herself that she is not prepared to accept: a feminine sexuality which the attentions of Gabriel and Boldwood could never stir. She strives "miserably against this femininity which would insist upon supplying unbidden emotions in stronger and stronger current" (260), struggling to maintain her self-image as an asexual woman, whose strength admits no need for the support of a man. The desire she has for Troy shows that woman does indeed have sexual desires, and that a healthy woman, no matter her abilities and apparent independence, is as subject to carnal needs as a man. It is, however, a man’s world, and as a woman, Bathsheba cannot give in to her desires and still retain her freedom. She must allow herself to be tamed, or she must give up the object of her passion. Though no man would be asked to make this choice, Bathsheba must, even though this means denying her own strength and leaving herself powerless to
"fight her own battles" (201). Left in this state, she must now "court" the attentions of one who was once not "good enough" (126), asking him to join her in a relationship of "good fellowship...occurring through similarity of pursuits" (458).

**The Asexual Woman**

It is in Sue Bridehead that "[t]he struggle of the Victorian heroine in late nineteenth-century fiction for liberation from her traditional role and personality comes to a climax" (Fernando 142). More self-aware than Tess, and more socially conscious than Bathsheba, Sue understands the law of the father and revels in denying it. She questions laws which "make you miserable when you know you are committing no sin" (JO 285), denounces those who let "the world...choose [their] plan of life for [them as having] no need of any other faculty [than] the ape-like one of imitation" (286), and demands a way of life in which she can live side by side with a man, "unconscious of gender" (203).

By patriarchal standards, Sue is sexless, but she denies being "cold-natured," and declares that she is "self-contained" (203), personifying "the extreme refinement of sexual sensibility, the extreme moral fastidiousness, toward which idealizing young feminists unwittingly tended" (Fernando 143). But in her unconventionality, Sue is no happier than Tess and Bathsheba are in theirs, for to her, communion of the mind is all and body does not exist (Lawrence 76), leaving her aware of only half of herself, and keeping her subject to the patriarchal notion of woman as asexual creature.

But Sue does not see her sexual self-restraint as an attempt to fit the patriarchal model of chaste Victorian woman. For her, to consummate a relationship with a man is to lose her power in the association. Not until Sue's standing relationship with Jude is
threatened by the appearance of Arabella does Sue feel threatened enough to find that offering herself sexually provides a more powerful tool than to further withhold her sexual favours from her cousin. Until this episode, Sue has denied that her liking for Jude is a sexual one, insisting instead that it is "a delight in being with [him], of a supremely delicate kind" (JO 304). Although she denies any need for a sexual consummation of their "friendly intimacy" (202), she does recognize the power she wields in withholding her sexual favours, and has never shrunk from using Jude's desire for her as a form of power over him:

'but you do like me very much, Sue? say you do! Say that you do a quarter, a tenth, as much as I do you; and I'll be content!'

'I've let you kiss me, and that tells enough.' (304)

There is more power in carefully doling out kisses than in simply giving away embraces as Tess does with Clare. It is not until Arabella returns and asserts her spousal rights to Jude's attentions that Sue feels threatened enough to allow her cousin to "kiss her freely, and [return] his kisses in a way she had never done before" (333). But though Sue now chooses to use her sexuality to secure her tie with Jude, she is repulsed by the business-like attitude towards sex and marriage whereby Arabella uses her sexuality to get what she wants from Jude, from her second husband, and finally from Vilbert. She continues to reject the convention of marriage and will not play the games at which Arabella is so skilled. When Sue consummates her relationship with Jude and allows herself to be falsely taken for his wife, she gives up the only power she understands. Existing as a "negation" (201) of society, "[o]utside all laws except gravitation and germination" (191),
Sue can only masquerade as the "product of civilization" (191) that Arabella truly is. She is not comfortable with the role of wife/mistress, and cannot reconcile this with her resolve to mix with men "almost as one of their own sex" (202); in becoming Jude's mistress, Sue is no longer the comrade she wished to be, and instead takes on the passive, "feminine" role of the conquered woman:

'I ought to have known that you would conquer in the long run, living like this!'

She ran across and flung her arms round his neck. 'I am not a cold-natured, sexless creature, am I, for keeping you at such a distance? I am sure you don't think so! Wait and see! I do belong to you, don't I? I give in!' (332)

Sue's ideal companionship between equals is no longer possible once she agrees to become Jude's mistress. Once she surrenders her "self-containment" (203), Sue has lost her power in the relationship, and accepts her role as Jude's possession. Having no understanding of how to face her passionate nature and still retain her power, she is defeated, for she can never be truly free until she can assert her sexuality alongside her intellectual independence.

**Conclusion**

Hardy's novels explore human sexuality from within a Victorian framework which denies women any right to assert their sexual energies as equals with men. Surrounded by sensual images, Tess unconsciously displays a passionate nature which makes her a target for a man like Alec who corrupts her innocence in the eyes of society, and leaves her with
only a legacy of guilt. Bathsheba, once possessed of a strength that made her "a match for any man" (*FFMC* 255), must relinquish her powerful independence in order first to satisfy her desire for one "with a less pure nature than her own" (333), and finally to join Oak "arm-in-arm" (463) and become a farmer's wife instead of a farmer. For Sue, sex implies a loss of power in her relationships with men; in assenting to sexual relationships with Jude and Phillotson, she loses a larger and larger measure of the independent spirit that she so prized, until we finally discover that "Sue ha[s] disappeared" (479) altogether into her role of "contrite woman" (477) and become a mere shadow of the woman she was before. None of these heroines, atypical as they are of the model Victorian woman, could normally expect to arouse the reader's sympathies, yet Hardy's women are capable of doing just that. Shown to be irregular only within a subjective description of normality, Tess, Bathsheba, and Sue stand as models for future feminist writers who will also challenge the patriarchal constraints on women's sexuality and the relationships between man and woman.
The Marriage Question

Perfect Woman, Perfect Wife

Within a patriarchal community which allows few women the freedom to work or to possess their own money, women are left with only one possible ambition: "[t]he one aim and object of woman was to get married; an unmarried woman was a social failure" (Fawcett 5). To many Victorian women, the matters of love or compatibility were not in question in their rush to the altar, since the main object was merely to catch a husband before time absconded with their main asset in the husband hunt: a pretty face (TD 47). Of course being "a woman with money" (FFMC 81) was also a definite advantage in the race to avoid being labelled "old maid." For those poor individuals who were either too poor, too plain, or too old, the meagre choices they might have available were still preferable to no husband at all:

'Do anybody know of a crooked man, or a lame, or any second-hand fellow at all that would do for poor me?' said Maryann. 'A perfect one I don't expect to get at my time of life.' (FFMC 203)

Women were socialized to believe that becoming a wife was the most noble occupation for a woman, and as there were few alternative options, marriage stood as the common goal for womankind at large.

What kind of wife a woman should be was also an issue of interest to society. The perfect model of Victorian womanhood was created and sustained around the image of
a monument of selflessness, with no existence beyond the loving influence
she exuded as daughter, wife and mother. (Auerbach, Woman and the
Demon 185)

To fit this model, a woman’s life should rightly centre on her family. She is given no
opportunity to live her life for herself, or to challenge the "[p]ower [being] exerted
directly or indirectly in civil and domestic life, to constrain women" (Selden 137), who
were not expected to participate in the world outside the confines of hearth and home.

Marriage as Patriarchal Necessity

From the patriarchal point of view, the restraining elements of marriage were not
controversial, for married life was seen as a means to deliver women from an existence
which was clearly unsatisfactory, an existence which lacked the financial security and
domestic bliss of a house, a husband and children for which to care (Calder 15). True
feminine happiness was generally thought to be attainable through a trip to the altar, and
to end up alone was the result of punishment for some error (Miles 149). In order to
socialize women to the belief that marriage is the proper course for the female life, the
patriarchal culture made "an attempt to beautify the traditional confinement of women at
any cost" (Millet 79): "And at home by the fire, whenever you look up, there I shall be--
and whenever I look up, there will be you" (FFMC 79). For the most part, however,
matrimony did not provide the happiness and fulfilment which it promised the young
bride and groom. The harsh reality of life at close quarters with someone who could well
have been a near stranger before the wedding was not always so easy to transform into
the blissful image Oak envisions. The groom may yet discover that his bride’s "long tail
of hair" can be "unfastened" (JO 103) or that her dimples "were far oftener absent from her face during his intercourse with her nowadays than they had been in the earlier weeks of their acquaintance" (105); the bride may soon discover just "what marriage means" (225) and that "what a woman shrinks from--in the early days of her marriage--she [cannot shake] down to with comfortable indifference in half-a-dozen years" (273).

The reality of marriage appears to be articulated most fully in *Jude the Obscure*, where married couples do not necessarily provide the loving support expected by Gabriel Oak, but are recognized by the degree of malice they show each other: "overhearing [Arabella] one night haranguing Jude in rattling terms, and ultimately flinging a shoe at his head, [the landlord] recognized the note of genuine wedlock" (JO 464). Instead of Oak's romantic view of two people "at home by the fire" looking up to each other in harmonious, eternal partnership (FFMC 79), one is more likely to find an authoritarian husband who demands mastery over his dependent wife as Alec attempts to do with Tess: "Remember, my lady, I was your master once! I will be your master again. If you are any man's wife you are mine!" (TD 326). Arabella also recognizes whose side the law is on, and that men have the right, and perhaps the responsibility, to use the power wedlock gives them to subdue their women: "There's nothing like bondage and a stone-deaf taskmaster for taming us women" (JO 389). Certainly, if one's married life was completely unbearable, a woman could find refuge in divorce, and was eventually even allowed custody of her children and her own assets, but this woman was sure to face enormous hostility from society (Williams 49).
In a world so long the domain of male power, improving legal status alone could not immediately erase the traditional views of women. Generations of socialization could not be wiped out so easily, and

[as long as [women] could be persuaded to believe that marriage was their major occupation in life, and as long as there were men who could afford to buy wives...it would be possible for men....to consider their destined brides as precious items of furniture, tributes to their own good taste.

(Calder 181)

This is not to say that the improving legal status of women went completely unnoticed, for it did provide a threat to male authority. Allowing women the chance to work for their own living, to possess their own property, and to make their own sexual choices could not help but imperil the patriarchal view of woman as object. Hardy's novels further promote this change in perception by illustrating the results of a bad marriage, and questioning the necessity of matrimony all together.

Hardy opposed the idealization of marriage favoured by the patriarchal culture; "[t]ending, instead, towards socialistic views and the abolition of marriage...he was more readily drawn to the radical feminist fringe" (Morgan xv), as his last novel, Jude the Obscure, so prominently demonstrates. In Jude, few characters lack the occasion to question the convention of marriage. Phillotson, who initially takes Sue's vow to love him very seriously (JO 285), comes to wonder "why the woman and the children should not be the unit without the man" (295); Jude perceives that "there is something wrong somewhere in our social formulas" (399); and Sue holds the emphatic opinion that,
in a proper state of society, the father of a woman's child will be as much a private matter of hers as the cut of her under-linen, on whom nobody will have any right to question her. (303)

Sue questions the attention paid to the paternity of a woman's child, showing a deep distrust of society's role in this convention and a recognition of artificial constructs masquerading as natural states of affairs. This questioning of the artificiality of the marriage contract is found in *Tess* and *Far From the Madding Crowd* as well.

The confusion caused by social norms passing for natural laws is illustrated throughout the three novels by continual disagreement about who is rightfully the spouse of whom. Tess believes the man she loves and married is her true husband (*TD* 310), while Alec insists that only he, her seducer and the father of her child, can be her true master (326). Bathsheba and Troy disagree on the same issue, with Troy asserting that Fanny, as his first love and the mother of his child, is his "very, very wife" (*FFMC* 361), while Bathsheba acknowledges her wifely subjection to Troy as a contract she must fulfil even after he abandons her for the memory of another woman. Sue, though at first claiming Jude, the father of her children, as husband, later turns from "Nature's own marriage" (*JO* 426), determined that her first union, "ratified eternally in the church at Melchester" (426), is the true one in Heaven. Is the "fallen" woman the true wife of her seducer or of the man she loves and legally marries? Is the true husband the man who merely deflowers the woman, or the man who fathers her children? Is marriage determined by action or by word? The novels do not offer any answers to these questions, only using them as evidence of the various ways the law can be understood by
each character. And as each heroine reads the law to her own disadvantage, its cruel ambiguity is all that is made clear. What the novels do uncover is the artificiality of these constructs created by patriarchal language and morals, and "the ultimately false options between marriage, adultery, and divorce...between a life in society and a life in nature" (Goetz 213). Our three heroines all touch on this issue of questioning the validity and authenticity of marriage, with Bathsheba objecting to the necessity of marriage, Tess denying her right to marry, and Sue desiring an independence not allowed her as a married woman.

**Inevitability of Marriage**

In Hardy’s novels, "[t]he power of a husband over his wife, supported as it was by public opinion, religion and the law, seem[s]...the cruellest case of man’s inhumanity to woman" (Williams 58). The necessity for such a system to exist at all is questioned, and in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Bathsheba herself begins by wishing she could be a bride "without having a husband" (80). Though she wants the attention and acceptance a wedding would bring to her, she wants these on her own terms and not through a man’s involvement. But Bathsheba does realize that she will eventually have to choose this path to social acceptance even though she "[won’t] marry...yet" (80), since what she calls her wildness has need of "somebody to tame" it (80). "I am too independent" (80), she acknowledges, and independence does not sit well on a woman in a patriarchal culture. Even though the odd male voice may rise in challenge to this presumption--as does Henery Fray’s--"I don’t see why a maid should take a husband when she’s bold enough to fight her own battles, and don’t want a home" (201)--there are few voiced challenges to
society's standards beyond Bathsheba's own: "I hate to be thought men's property in that way" (78). It is this ownership of her that so many men in the novel desire, and that causes Bathsheba to retreat "not only from the man but from the marriage bid itself, which forebodes total possession of her person" (Morgan 42).

Oak is the first to approach her in this way, threatening her self-identity and privacy with his shadowy spying and silent recriminations that make her feel like "an indecorous woman" (69). When he finally does approach her with his bid to make her his wife, he has no words to express his feelings to a woman who is indifferent to his love and to all he can think of to offer. Boldwood’s approach is not far different from Oak’s in that he too tries to tempt Bathsheba into wifehood with promises he believes will appeal to the feminine heart:

I will protect and cherish you with all my strength --I will indeed! You shall have no cares--be worried by no household affairs, and live quite at ease, Miss Everdene. (179)

To both these men, Bathsheba is a beautiful possession which they desire to make happy in their own patriarchal way: Gabriel surrounding her with flowers, pianos, and little useful birds (79), and Boldwood promising her protective care and restful ease. Neither man, overwhelmed as he is by his own emotions, cares to establish whether or not Bathsheba returns his love, believing she should be content in being loved: "But I love you--and, as for myself, I am content to be liked" (80).

Only Troy, more experienced in the ways of women, and virtually free of judgement-shrouding passions, knows the trick of making a woman fall in love with him.
Bathsheba, who "had never taken kindly to the idea of marriage in the abstract as did the majority of women she saw about her" (333-334), is no less immune to Troy's wooing than was Fanny Robin, and "[i]n the turmoil of her anxiety for her lover she...agree[s] to marry him" (333-334). No longer the rebellious adolescent who feels no need for public approval, Bathsheba must marry Troy in order to maintain her respectability after succumbing to Troy's verbal and physical "techniques of seduction" (Garson 28). For all her "saucy assumption[s]" (66) about her own superiority, Bathsheba is no stronger in the face of Troy's tricks than the "slight and fragile" (101) Fanny Robin. As quick to abandon herself to Troy's ownership as Troy is to deny Fanny his name, Bathsheba must now accept that "[s]he belong[s] to [Troy]" (385), one whose "course [is] down'ard" (246). Marriage is not the love-story she had imagined it to be, for "[all] romances end at marriage" (330). Her battle is not one that the woman can win after all, and in reconsidering her initial ideas of marriage, she feels quite differently about her second trip to the altar: "Bathsheba has a great wish that all the parish shall not be in church, looking at her--she's shy-like and nervous about it" (461). The romantic image Bathsheba has so cherished, yet still instinctively rejected, has been destroyed, and replaced by the practical view of marriage as a business contract between two landowners. Though young women may be led to believe in the wonderful adventure marriage provides, Bathsheba now sees the reality of a situation, the bottom line of which is that she loses her independence and trades an attentive lover for a master, or an admirer for a business partner.
Marriage and the Impure Woman

Tess is another Hardy heroine who rejects marriage, but in her case this is not a renunciation of patriarchal ownership, but a denial of her own right to married bliss. Unlike Bathsheba, Tess is in love, deeply in love, and would like nothing more than to be carried off as Angel's "property" (*TD* 199), even if he carries her to where "the river [is] deep and wide enough....[to] drown her" (244), or to the cold, hard bed of an "empty stone coffin" (245). Tess has no objections to marriage, no problem with giving up her very life to the power of the man she loves; it is her own right to marry that she is made to question by "something outside" of herself (278), something artificially created by patriarchal law. Because of the unworthiness from which she believes she suffers, she asks "only...to love" Clare (168), but society dictates that to do so she must marry him, "make herself his...call him her lord, her own" (208). Tess, so simple in nature, "deliver[s] her whole being up to [Angel]" (244), happy in the thought that "he was regarding her as his absolute possession, to dispose of as he should choose" (244). But Tess is no happier than Bathsheba in her marriage, "oppressed" (210) as she is by thoughts of her own unsuitability, thoughts articulated later on by Alec who berates her for her actions: "But has not a sense of what is morally right and proper any weight with you?" (310). The irony of this phrase, coming as it does from Alec’s mouth, adds to the sense of the artificiality of this moral propriety. Tess understands her social sins better than Alec does, but chooses to bear her guilt alone rather than marry the man who has wronged her, as "[a]ny woman would have done...but [her]" (79). Though her resulting "impurity" has left her unworthy--at least in her own mind--of becoming Angel’s wife,
Tess wants only to love. Her final solution is to offer him her sister as a "simple and pure" (386) version of herself, more acceptable to the law of the father.

By the end of the novel, however, Angel has accepted Tess as worthy to be his wife, has decided to judge "Tess constructively rather than biographically, by the will rather than by the deed" (363). He has come to see her innate purity, has learned to "see [her] as she [is]" (371). Though society will still punish Tess for her sins, in Clare "[t]enderness was absolutely dominant...at last" (378). He has come to appreciate Tess for the "passionately-fond woman" (378) she is, and finally recognizes himself as Tess’s true husband and protector "whatever [she] may have done or not have done" (378).

**Contractual Love**

Tess’s great capacity for selfless love withstands the tests of time and the legalities of a marriage contract. Unlike Sue, who shies away from the business aspects of marriage, Tess embraces them as the means to her total union with the man she loves. Marriage without love, however, is as distasteful to Tess as it is to both Bathsheba and Sue. Despite the respectability she loses by not getting "Alec d’Urberville in the mind to marry her" (TD 80), Tess cannot imagine a marriage to...a man "[s]he had never wholly cared for" (80). Bathsheba’s resistance to both Boldwood’s and Oak’s early advances is also in large part because "love is wanting" (FFMC 416). Sue is the only one who agrees to marry for the practical purpose of taking on "a large double school in a great town...and mak[ing] a good income between" (JO 186) herself and Phillotson. But though Sue does later escape this situation, flying instead to Jude’s arms, she returns to her loveless marriage just as Tess returns to Alec and Bathsheba finally marries Gabriel. All
three women must relinquish their hopes for married bliss with a man they love, and settle instead for a man who loves them and a contract.

In *Jude the Obscure*, Sue objects strenuously to the patriarchal laws which place women in the position where they cannot choose their own mode of life without the approval of a binding contract. She becomes a fallen woman by defying the "laws and ordinances...[which] make you miserable when you know you are committing no sin" (285). Unlike Tess, who falls as the result of ignorance, Sue becomes Jude's mistress as a matter of choice. She consciously denies being subject to the "legal obligation....[she believes is so] destructive to a passion whose essence is its gratuitousness" (338), and introduces the anti-marriage theme in a much more prominent way than does Tess or Bathsheba. The awareness Sue brings from her first failed marriage allows her to wage her attack on matrimony with a "particular savagery...bind[ing] together the frustrations of class, the tyranny of institutions, and established Christianity into a devastating vicious circle" (Calder 195). At the centre of the drama of *Jude*, "Sue is the always simmering revolt of the modes of life which she rejects, the devious self-assertion of rejected values" (Heilman 320), and the main values she rejects are that of marriage being the purpose and goal of a woman's life, and the necessity of a man and woman legitimizing their love through the "sordid business of...signing [a] contract" (348). Just as the issues of patriarchal language and social mores raise feminist issues in Hardy's novels, so too Sue's anti-marriage crusade argues in favour of a feminism well "ahead of its time as far as the feminist movement of the early 1890s goes, and more in line with twentieth century suffragetism" (Morgan 111). Here too we find an enlightened response to the marriage
debates raging in Victorian society, and a recognition of women's rights to exist as more than the objects of men's desires: as independent human beings who should not be called upon to present an artificial set of values and beliefs as their own.

A major part of this artificiality is the notion that a legal contract can bind two people emotionally for life.

This is the issue with which Sue is most concerned: that love is "supposed to be made permanent" by a license (348). Fearing to place her natural emotions into the hands of a social contract, Sue tries to avoid marrying Jude thinking that a contract that demands feelings would eventually kill these feelings (Humm 45): "it is foreign to a man's nature to go on loving a person when he is told that he must and shall be that person's lover" (323). The letter of the law is again recognized as destructive in its attempt to create a situation with words which runs contrary to the natural impulses of those under its authority. Is it not human nature to rebel against the demands of authority? It is certainly Sue's nature to do so, and she realizes this as she also realizes that she is not as "unlike other people" (354) as may be thought. The institutionalization of a relationship cannot give love eternal life as long as human beings, like Sue and Jude, will "always kick against compulsion" (338). Marriage is, after all,

       only a sordid contract based on material convenience in householding,
       rating, and taxing, and the inheritance of land and money by children,
       making it necessary that the male parent should be known-- (270)

Marriage is not construed by Sue as a religious ceremony that binds two people together forever in love, but as a base contract, engineered to make the laws of inheritance easier
Marriage Question 70

to deal with, and to keep women in a subordinate position economically. As a business contract, marriage has already failed Sue once, and she does not trust it to ensure Jude's eternal love "when he is told that he must and shall be [her] lover" (*JO* 323).

Sue further rejects the belief that men and women cannot live together in a state of pure companionship. In a society that does not view women as in any way equal to men, the idea that a woman and man could live only as comrades, "like two men almost" (202), and that any woman could hold "out against [a man]...long at...close quarters" (202), is impossible to comprehend. Women are not given credit for having anything to contribute to a male-female relationship beyond the obvious sexual endowments and, in their feminine weaknesses, are assumed not to be capable of holding out against the overpowering desires of their male comrades. As a result, social law condemns male-female relationships outside of marriage as sin, and Sue finds this hard to live with: "it is very hard that I mustn't have my own way in deciding how I'll live with you, and whether I'll be married or no!" (325). Both "Jude and Sue...through most of the novel, continue to harbour hope for a way of life that lies outside of, and prior to, the 'letter' of the social law that is persecuting them" (Goetz 207-8):

I can't bear that they, and everybody, should think people wicked because they may have chosen to live their own way! It is really these opinions that make the best intentioned people reckless, and actually become immoral! (372)

Unlike Tess, Sue does not accept that it is she who is wrong, but blames the social system for what are perceived to be her crimes. Resisting the pressure to conform, refusing to let
"the world, or [her] own portion of it, choose [her] plan of life for [her]" (286), Sue continues "struggling against the current" (346), and lives with Jude "in her own sense of...[being] a married woman" (403), even though the rest of society will not accept "such a woman" (404).

**Marriage vs Independence**

But Sue’s real objection to marriage is to the loss of personal freedom this institution has imposed upon her, a loss which is directly connected to the physical consummation of such a relationship. With the Christminster graduate, Sue found the kind of comradeship she wants to have with a man: a relationship in which sex is not a requirement of staying together. In marriage, Sue finds she loses the option of a platonic relationship and, from the first days of her marriage to Phillotson, she is completely repelled by the physical act of marriage and "the necessity of being responsive to this man whenever he wishes" (274). She would have been "happy to go to Phillotson 'as a friend'; it is as a husband, with right over her body, that she rejects him" (Jacobus, "Sue the Obscure" 312). Sue does not adhere to the philosophy that "only recognizes relations based on animal desire" (223), and she requires a new kind of male-female relationship which will allow her to retain her individual freedom, "[c]onsequently, through all her adult relationships she yearns for an equal friendship with a man with whom she can be herself" (Jekel 192). She recognizes the present state of affairs, in which women are not allowed an active role in their own fates, as a primitive one, and sees a time "[w]hen people of a later age [will] look back upon the barbarous customs and superstitions of the
times that we have the unhappiness to live in [and wonder]" (276). Sue's objections to
sexual relations are not
a result of frigidity but of her strongly independent spirit which balks at being made
subject to the whim of a husband:

With Sue...the marriage was no marriage, but a submission, a service, a
slavery....Her spirit submitted to the male spirit, owned the priority of the
male spirit, wished to become the male spirit. (Lawrence 71)

Marriage, like language, is created by man-centred society to establish a state of
affairs that will maintain the dependent status of women within society. Though initially
Sue "does not realize what marriage means" (228), she does recognize the humiliation of
being given away:

According to the ceremony...my bridegroom chooses me of his own will
and pleasure; but I don't choose him. Somebody gives me to him, like a
she-ass or she-goat, or any other domestic animal. (226)

In marriage, a woman is no less a sacrifice to the desires of a man than the "heifers of
sacrifice in old times" (355); this is completely unsatisfactory to Sue, who "is fearful of
submerging her identity in that of another or worse, of becoming a kind of chattel"
(Langland 22). But what other option is there for a woman in a man's world? Just as
Bathsheba must eventually accept that she will not be treated as a competent woman
farmer without the backing of a man, so too must Sue realize that her dreams of chaste
comradeship are impossible to realize in a world which demands that a woman give up
her identity to show her love.
Ironically, it is when Sue finally persuades Jude to share her point of view that she falls apart and begins to accept the law she has been struggling against for so long. Though she does not love Phillotson, she goes back to him as her first and only true husband, selling herself into what Jude calls, "fanatic prostitution" (437). Her own happiness is no longer the issue it has been; love is no longer a reason to stay with Jude:

But you are my wife....I loved you, and you loved me; and we closed with each other; and that made the marriage. We still love....Therefore our marriage is not cancelled. (436)

Even Mrs. Edlin is prepared to ignore social law, knowing how cruel it can be: "You be t'other man's ....After all, it concerned nobody but your own two selves" (442). For Sue, devastated as she is by the loss of her children and, in her grief, seeing their deaths as the punishment of some angry god, marriage is no longer perceivable as a joining of souls but as the contract she has so long despised, a contract completed by the sexual act that has so repelled her, and this "is the letter that almost 'killeth' Sue" (Goetz 197).

**Conclusion**

In all three of these novels, marriage raises different considerations. For Tess, marriage to Angel would not mean a surrendering of herself, but a joining with a will stronger than her own, an escape from the cruelty of a man like Alec into the gentle, loving protection of the man she loves. Instead of a struggle against matrimony, Tess’s struggle is against her own feelings of unworthiness for a comfortable married life, feelings created by the same society which demands she marry in order to regain her respectability, while denying her the right to marry any but the man she despises for
ruining her. The two weddings in *Far From the Madding Crowd* both serve to suppress the voice of the heroine, "rob[bing] her of control of her estates, nullif[ying] her legal existence, and render[ing] her man's property in the bargain" (Morgan 43). Bathsheba loses her early self-confidence through marriage to a man with "no conscience at all" (*FFMC* 246), and is left a mere shell of a strong woman. Adamantly opposed to marriage, Sue "[t]hrough all the sensitiveness, fragility, and caprice...appears [to have] an impulse for power, for retaining control of a situation...in one's own terms" (Heilman 311). Though "labelled 'Phillotson'" (*FFMC* 246), Sue remains "unaltered" (246), and leaves her husband before "[w]ifedom has...squashed up and digested [her] in its vast maw as an atom which has no further individuality" (247). It is only in her return to Phillotson, and her "almost maniacal enactment of the letter of the law that she had previously flouted" (Goetz 211), that she too loses her voice and herself. In none of these cases does a woman find a happiness greater than in her independent single life, despite the patriarchal assertion that woman's greatest hope is to be married and under the protection of a husband. Though the heroines' objections to the options society presents as appropriate are ultimately ignored, their destruction cannot go unnoticed, and stands as evidence that their instincts for free choice do not fit into the patriarchal ordering of women's lives where choice is but an illusion.
Conclusion

Throughout these three novels, Hardy’s characters present the reader with ways in which language, sexuality, and marriage all reflect the disadvantages of women in patriarchal society. From one novel to the next, these ideas are approached from different, and progressively bleak directions. As we move from Bathsheba, to Tess, to Sue, we see different sides of the same issues and are struck by the darkening of Hardy’s vision.

Far From the Madding Crowd is the novel that tackles the issue of patriarchal language with the most vigour. Directly challenging the adequacy of the language with her clear voice, Bathsheba demands that her own point of view be heard over the generalizations of the narrator. She opens the reader’s eyes to the concept that language is just a patriarchal construct and as such is not an absolute method of communication, especially for those groups excluded from its creation. She cries out against having to express her feelings with words designed "by men to express theirs" (FFMC 412), and asks the reader to listen not just to the words themselves but to the manner in which the words are spoken (FFMC 260). Acknowledging the emotional nature of the female, Bathsheba makes it clear that for women the words themselves contain only part of the meaning; the tone of the speaker can add insult to already injurious words: "I can endure being told I am in the wrong, if you will only tell it me gently!" (260).

But if Bathsheba’s own voice challenges language’s inability to account for female experience, Tess’s lacks the ability to make herself understood by oral means. In Tess, actions must speak for a heroine whose words go unheeded. Less articulate a woman than
Bathsheba or Sue, Tess lacks the verbal ability to contradict the unqualified generalizations applied to her by her male counterparts, and denies the stereotypes more through her actions. Though she may cry out against Alec's advances, only her actions are heard:

'You don't give me your mouth and kiss me back. you never willingly do that--you'll never love me, I fear.'

'I have said so, often. It is true. I have never really and truly loved you, and I think I never can.' (TD 76)

Though she may deny him her love with words, Tess's voice is not heard until her actions confirm her phrases. Angel does not even take her written words seriously until he sees for himself that she has had to "try to forget [him]" (350). Tess, on the other hand, has faith in Alec's words when he tells her that Angel will "never come any more" (371). Lacking Bathsheba's clear voice, Tess is even less able to control her own fate, and is left at the mercy of patriarchal justice "without defence" (318) and with no alternative but eternal silence.

By the time we get to Sue, we find a character who is more than capable of speaking for herself, one who masters the language with which Bathsheba and Sue have so much trouble. Sue has managed to live in a man's world "almost as one of their own sex" (JO 202). No one speaks for Sue but herself, and not even Jude pretends to "quite know her mind" (JO 224). She is not afraid to speak out against the "laws and ordinances" (285) which she feels to be unfairly binding; no one attempts to silence her by putting "her virtuously under lock and key" (293). Instead, people come to endorse
her point of view (295). But even Sue, whose "intellect sparkles like diamonds" (293), is eventually silenced by the forces of the patriarchal law, and in her fall from such great eloquence to self-imposed suppression, Sue's fate is the darkest of the three heroines' we have been examining. Sue, who makes herself heard so clearly where Bathsheba and Tess only struggle to have their voices acknowledged, ends in a state much worse than Bathsheba's marriage to Oak or Tess's final escape from the troubles of life. Sue disappears into her wedding/funeral "clenching her teeth [and]...utter[ing] no cry" (479). Having the most to lose, Sue has the farthest to fall, leaving the reader with the darkest descent into silence of the three women.

Any member of a society who is silent is in a position to be treated as an object by the dominant members of that culture. In the patriarchal society which Hardy's novels depict, women are put in this silent, objectified position, and as a result are seen as mere objects of desire by the men around them. As a Victorian woman, Bathsheba may be courted by those men who find her sexually attractive, but she is not to be the aggressor in relationships with men. Considered more or less asexual, women are not expected to be subject to the same desires as men, and Bathsheba has some trouble with this as well. Though she starts out very much in control of her physical desires, Bathsheba is made to face her own sexuality just as the reader is made to see that she is not as restrained as she may like to believe. Though she may be able to remain undisturbed by the courtship of both Oak and Boldwood, Bathsheba's more sensual nature is aroused by the powerful sexuality of Sergeant Troy, whose presence introduces Bathsheba to a side of herself more connected to the "swell and the [rising] saps" (FFMC 172) of the natural world than to
the artificially contained sterility of society. But it is this newly discovered sexuality that is Bathsheba's undoing when she gives up her independence as a result of her passion for Troy.

Tess, an even more obviously sensual creature than Bathsheba, also challenges sexual stereotypes only to be destroyed; unlike her predecessor, she is more a victim of men's appetites. Whereas Bathsheba finally rejects her own sexual nature and chooses instead to conform to the patriarchal model of woman, Tess continues to be her natural self, even after Alec's abuses. Tess's sexuality stands as an unchangeable element of her nature and adds to her appeal. Instead of condemning Tess for her impurity, her sympathetic narrator insists that her social indiscretion breaks "no law known to the environment" (*TD* 84). Tess's death, a result of her unrestrained passion, is somehow less terrible than Bathsheba's final submission to the societal restraints that have denied her a sexual identity. Though Tess must be banished from the society where she is such an anomaly, she never rejects her true nature in favour of societal acceptance.

With Sue, Hardy returns to the more repressed type of woman. Though Sue uses her "self-contain[ment]" (*JO* 203) as a source of power, she cannot deny the sexual side of her nature for ever; giving up her dreams of comradeship with Jude, she chooses instead to become his mistress in order to keep him. A city girl, Sue is far removed from the sensual world of nature which Bathsheba and Tess call home, but once she abandons her sexual restraint, her own thriving fertility connects her to nature in an even more direct way. It is when Sue loses this connection because of the death of her children that she turns away from this side of herself and turns back to the artificial lifestyle she once
despised. Her return to Phillotson's bed to subject herself to an act required of her by law, but repulsive to her nature, leaves the reader in agreement with Mrs. Edlin's thought that "[w]eddings be funerals...nowadays" (*JO* 479).

Nowhere in these three novels are weddings a time of rejoicing. In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Bathsheba begins by rejecting the notion of marriage, and when she does fall into matrimony for what she believes is love, she lives to regret the loss of power that love and marriage bring to a woman. When she settles later for a relationship based on "*camaraderie*" (*FFMC* 458) and for a contract to join her holdings to Oak's, the novel ends leaving the reader ambivalent about the happiness of one who is in yet another situation that "there's no getting out of...now" (463).

Tess too starts out wanting to marry only for love, though she feels unworthy to be Angel's bride because of her "ruined" state. But though she does marry for love, neither she nor either of her lovers acknowledges that love takes precedence over sexual experience; she is "damaged goods" rather than a deeply feeling person who deserves the happiness for which she longs. Cast off by her husband and left to fend not only for herself but for her entire family, Tess is left with little choice but to return to Alec, denying not only her love for Angel but her own right for happiness.

With Sue we find a character who sees clearly the sacrificial role a woman must take in marriage. She objects to the nature of the ceremony itself, in which the bride is treated like "a she-ass or she-goat, or any other domestic animal" (*JO* 226), and later to the responsibility of responding to the physical desires of her husband. Though at first Sue succeeds in escaping the patriarchal trap she has fallen into, her return to her role as
wife to a man she continues to "shrink from" (478) seems more terrible than Bathsheba's marriage based on friendship or Tess's death after a few stolen moments of passion in Angel's arms. It is Sue who pays the highest price for denying her true self and succumbing to the precepts of society.

Each novel moves from one form of despair to an even darker form of resignation. Though Bathsheba must ultimately give up her authority to a man, at least she escapes the clutches of an unworthy man to put herself in the hands of a responsible friend. Tess, though she dies for her rebellious act, does obtain revenge on her persecutor and a moment of happiness before escaping into oblivion. Sue, the last of the three heroines, must bear the darkest ending of all. Her intellect is completely quashed as she is compelled by guilt to act the role of wife to a man who lacks Oak's promise of friendship and prosperity or even Alec's seductive nature. To Phillotson's wife demands that Sue overcome her "unconquerable aversion to [him]" (293) and repress her longings for another man and another way of life.

None of the three novels we have been looking at presents the reader with a happy ending for its unconventional heroines, or its feminist readers, and as Hardy examines the same three themes throughout the novels, his vision of a woman in a patriarchal world becomes darker and more pessimistic. Though Bathsheba and Tess both discover the difficulties a woman must face in dealing with patriarchal language, sexual stereotypes, and notions of marriage, it is Sue in the end who suffers the most from the repression that stifles her voice and forces her into conforming to a role that goes against her nature. Because of his sympathetic female characters who do not observe the patriarchal norms
and who suffer unjustly for failing to do so, we may call Hardy a feminist writer; his exploration of equality between the sexes becomes part of the movement that allows the Bathshebas, Tessas, and Sues of our world to avoid the "barbarous customs and superstitions of the times that [his heroines] have the unhappiness to live in" (JO 276).
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