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Abstract

In Thomas Hardy's literary landscape, the female protagonists Bathsheba Everdene and Sue Bridehead emerge as complex figures who challenge and navigate the rigid social norms of Victorian society. Through their journeys in *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *Jude the Obscure*, respectively, Hardy explores the themes of independence, conformity, and the impact of societal pressures on individual agency.

Bathsheba Everdene, in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, initially stands as a symbol of independence, defying the conventional gender roles expected of Victorian women. However, her trajectory reveals the nuanced ways in which societal expectations shape her choices, ultimately leading her to conform to patriarchal demands. Bathsheba's transformation serves as an exploration of the tensions between individual autonomy and societal conformity.

Similarly, Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure* embodies the spirit of the "New Woman," rejecting traditional notions of femininity and marriage. Yet, even Sue finds herself grappling with societal pressures, and in particular in her relationship with Phillotson. Hardy's portrayal of Sue's struggles demonstrates the complex relationship between personal desires and societal expectations in shaping women's lives. These expectations include being a maternal figure, submissive to their husbands, and gender roles.

With these two characters, Hardy critically examines the impact of marriage and property rights on the lives of women in Victorian society. Their narratives shed light on the evolving attitudes towards gender roles and marriage during this period, highlighting the

constraints and complexities faced by independent-minded women seeking to carve out their own paths in a world bound by rigid social norms.

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

Bathsheba and Sue: Hardy's Independent Heroines

by

Alexandra Acosta

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

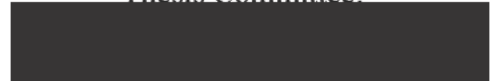
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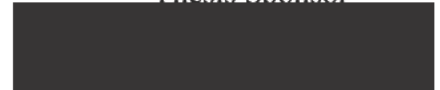
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A THESIS

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Montclair State University

Montclair, NJ

2024

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In Thomas Hardy's novels, female protagonists Sue Bridehead and Bathsheba Everdene share similarities and differences in terms of their triumphs and defeats. Bathsheba and Sue Bridehead both do not want to be married off and live a traditional Victorian life, they both accept that they have to accept these restraints in that society. In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Bathsheba is independent and does not fill the usual mold of women of her time. She is quite unusual because she owns land and is a businesswoman. The manner that Bathsheba perceives her sexuality makes her a New Woman. She takes full control on who she wants to date and not be with is a very forward for the Victorian time. Victorian women were expected to be motherly, dependent on their husbands, and are expected to be married. Neither Bathsheba and Sue are maternal figures overall. Sue does start off the novel being partial maternal then renders her maternal instincts. Over time Bathsheba has to relinquish that status in order to fit the patriarchal society. Sue from *Jude The Obscure* does not present as a typical woman of her time, but ultimately is subjected to marriage due to the unhappy deaths of her children. Sue is more of an intellectual compared to Bathsheba. Women are expected to be motherly, dependent on their husbands, and are expected to be married. Neither one of these women are a maternal figure. Sue from *Jude the Obscure* has characteristics of the New Woman era, but like a lot of these figures in novels of the 1890s, she is ultimately subjected to the track of Old Woman, in her case true due to the unhappy deaths of her children. Both of these women attempt to break away from the mold they are meant to fit, but ultimately succumb to the restraints of society. To elaborate, this thesis will define the terms New Woman and True Woman before expanding upon Sue and Bathsheba's characterizations.

The New Woman movement emerged in the late 19th to early 20th centuries in Britain and America, marking a progressive shift in female identity away from Victorian norms. This movement championed women's rights and autonomy, particularly in education and career

choice, challenging traditional gender roles. They emphasized intellectual pursuits and societal contributions over domestic obligations, sparking both admiration and criticism (Nelson 3). Often illustrated as active and proponents of practical clothing, New Women were hesitant towards marriage but valued equality and shared responsibilities in companionate relationships, emphasizing mutual respect (Nelson 3). The movement also embraced evolving ideas of sexual liberation.

In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Bathsheba has both success and downfalls throughout the novel. She has success with the farm, being independent, and many options to choose bachelors. Bathsheba learns how to manage the farm, her workers, and the livelihood of her estate. She also has the downfall of needing to be married off in order to keep her estate. Bathsheba has the triumph of being financially independent. She owns the farm and produces her own wealth. She proves to be a hard worker and it is reflected throughout the novel. She states to Gabriel Oak that she will “be up before you are awake, I shall be afield before you are up, and I shall have breakfasted before you are afield. In short I shall astonish you all” (*Far from the Madding Crowd* 74). Having acquired the farm, she is determined not to let it be unsuccessful. She will continue to fight for her independence by being awake before everyone else and doing the work that is necessary for the farm. Additionally, she states how she will astonish everyone and prove to be successful against the odds. During the 1870s, there were not a lot of farmers who were women, and Bathsheba was going to prove to be a successful female farmer.

Bathsheba has the difficult task of choosing eligible bachelors in order to receive her estate. Bathsheba is in the predicament of having to choose between eligible bachelors which include Gabriel, Sergeant Troy, and Boldwood. Shazia Ghulam Mohammad and Abdus Salam Khalis highlight how different Bathsheba’s character is compared to the women in her time.

Although Bathsheba is financially independent, she cannot be free to be alone in that society. Hardy comments on this by having these three bachelors approach and try to date her. In the beginning of the novel, with Gabriel, Bathsheba informs Gabriel she would never be submissive and under a man's rule. She says how she would "hate to be thought of men's property in that way" but acknowledges "though possibly...to be had some day" (*Far from the Madding Crowd* 26). Khalis and Mohammad state how "her resistance ... absorbed in the identity of patriarchs testifies to her autonomous and independent way of thinking" (Khalis and Mohammad 1). By having the farm, she continues to resist the standard patriarchal approach to her life. She does not need a man to be part of her life and she knows it. Therefore, she has difficulty with the idea of choosing a suitor throughout the novel. She does not want to succumb to the ideals of needing a man, because she wants to prove to be successful in her management of the land. Bathsheba exclaims her refusal to the patriarchy by being forward to her bachelors. She exclaims to Oak "I'd wanted you I shouldn't have run after you like this; t'would have been the forwardest thing" (*Madding Crowd* 27). She dismisses her suitors because she feels she does not have a need for them. She also discusses the want to not be married off with Oak. It would be the ultimate surrender for her if she does so and the expectations she has for herself. She states in a later passage how "people would talk about me, and think I had won my battle, and I should feel triumphant, and all that. But a husband" (*Madding Crowd* 28). People in her community know what kind of woman she is and how she would not be submissive to having a husband.

Despite the clear understanding of her assertive nature within her community, the expectation of marriage as a prerequisite for land ownership underscores the existence of a broader societal framework centered around sexual economics. The transaction of having the need to be married off in order to have ownership of the farm implies the society having a sexual economy. A sexual economy takes place where in a society in a heterosexual community, men

often try to exchange resources for sex from women. This can cause societies to view women as the ones who "sell" sex and men as the ones who "buy" it. Female sexuality, like virginity and faithfulness, is usually valued more than male sexuality in these situations. Bathsheba exhibits characteristics of a New Woman for much of the novel, particularly through her ownership of a farm and her management of workers, which highlights her independence and capability. She states to Oak that is "too independent" when conveying the idea of marriage to her (*Madding Crowd* 28). In the beginning of the novel, Oak tries to sway Bathsheba into having a marriage with him. He asks Bathsheba to take Sunday strolls with him and her mind is more on taking care of the farm. She responds with "Don't press me any more – don't. I don't love you – so 'twould be ridiculous" (*Madding Crowd* 34). She is firm on not wanting to have social time with him and states her true feelings about him to her. A True Woman, as depicted in literature and society, often embodies traditional gender roles and societal expectations that prioritize submission, dependency, and limited agency. However, such portrayals fail to capture the full spectrum of womanhood. A True Woman would not look for education or ways to make her own profit. Instead she would depend on who she marries. Marriage would determine her fate. Beyond these narrow confines, women exhibit resilience, strength, and multifaceted identities that defy simplistic categorization. They are architects of their destinies, challenging stereotypes and reshaping narratives to reflect their diverse experiences and aspirations. During this phase, Bathsheba's independence and autonomy are overshadowed by her submissive demeanor towards Troy, particularly in financial matters. Her willingness to relinquish control of her profits and allow Troy to manipulate them for his own gratification reflects a traditional, patriarchal dynamic where women are expected to defer to male authority. This phase in Bathsheba's journey highlights the constraints imposed on women within traditional gender roles, relegating them to positions with diminished agency and influence. Yet, upon severing ties

with Sergeant Troy, she reclaims her agency and once again embodies the spirit of a New Woman.

Mohammad and Khalis highlight how she “humiliates Gabriel Oak by dismissing him from service; she drives Boldwood insane by a childish freak played upon him on the pretext of responding to his devotion” (Mohammad and Khalis 2). She doesn't want to be chased or settled with a man until she is ready. Sergeant Troy would be the best option if he was not in love with Fanny. Sergeant Troy made Bathsheba more comfortable with her sexually, but due to the fact he has his eyes on Fanny, Bathsheba has no option but to stay with Gabriel. After she gets married, she does not talk. Therefore, becoming more of a True Woman although wanting to present as a New Woman. As for the suitor, Boldwood, their marriage did not work out either because Bathsheba does not fill the mold of a standard Victorian woman. Boldwood could not control her because she was not dependent on him. When she chooses to be with someone it is because she wants to be with them, not because she is reliant on them. This leads to one of her defeats. The society that she lives in would not allow for that. This proves to be the case when she eventually marries Gabriel in order to keep the farm. Gabriel was also the better option of all the suitors. He has helped on the farm before and he was there to be there for her rather than the potential of obtaining the farm property rights. Bathsheba does care for Gabriel the most because he has proven how hard of a worker he is, but this does not necessarily mean that if Bathsheba had the option of keeping her property rights without the need for a man, she would have not married him. She can keep her relations with him without the legalities of marriage. When Gabriel was threatening to leave, Gabriel still did not think that Bathsheba was capable of managing her own farm although she proves otherwise. The society in which she lives creates her own defeat. She could not be capable of owning her own because she is a woman. If it did not matter that she was a woman, and had to be married in order to keep her estate, it is her

greatest defeat she is forced to take. If she weren't obligated to marry and oversee her own farm, she could thrive as an independent woman, embodying the ideals of the New Woman rather than merely conforming to its surface. Gabriel believes that she cannot run the farm on her own due to the fact that she is a woman. Gabriel, without a second thought, thinks about how she will continue to care for her farm although it is hers. He states "how would the farm go on with nobody to mind it but a woman", it is deemed in his mind that a woman could not run a farm on her own (*Madding Crowd* 169). Due to the Victorian society that Bathsheba lives in, the idea of a woman running her own land is unheard of. Although Gabriel and the author suitors respect Bathsheba and are aware of her character qualities of her being an independent woman, the thought of her managing the farm on her own is inconceivable. Bathsheba is aware of these thoughts by the people and community around her; she wishes that she was born a different gender. That way, she does not get second guessed at every decision she makes and would not need a man to continue to have her own farm. She could truly be independent and not have to worry about what society needs and expects from her. Bathsheba expresses this in multiple parts of the novel. She states "loving is misery for women always. I shall never forgive God for making me a woman" (*Madding Crowd* 179). She does recognize that being a woman makes her the weaker gender, and the need to be married off and to create a family.

During the Victorian era, the notion that some women might not possess maternal instincts, might reject the institution of marriage, and might resist subjugation to men was not permitted. She does have the independence in financial terms, but has to be married off in order to keep her inheritance and have the rights to her farm. If she did not marry Gabriel, she would lose her estate and her income. She needed to have a husband in order to keep the estate. Her uncle only allowed her to keep the farm if she was married. The idea of being subjected to a man repulses Bathsheba. This leads to the downfall of having to choose a suitor. This also

explains why she acts the way she does with her three gentlemen callers. She entertains herself by dismissing their advances until she has to eventually choose one to keep her estate. Central to her identity is a refusal to be controlled by any man, in any capacity. Her independence is not merely a surface-level trait; it is ingrained in her character through life's lessons and experiences. Bathsheba has navigated challenges, which has taught her the importance of asserting herself and standing firm in her convictions. As a result, she becomes a force to not be reckoned with, resilient in the face of attempts to conquer or rule over her. In the novel, she states to Gabriel Oak she meant “to tell you was only this...that nobody has got me yet as a sweetheart” (*Madding Crowd* 64). She proclaims this message to Gabriel Oak to inform him that she has not been conquered by anyone and is not planning to. She tells him this to inform him that she does not need anyone and goes against the social norm of needing to be with someone. She has made it this far in her life without the need of anyone and refuses to be ruled over.

Bathsheba's independence and strength make her a difficult woman to conquer. Although Troy could be seen as the best bachelor for her to marry due to the fact he opened her up sexually, ultimately he is not the best choice in terms of finances. Her choice to wed Troy ultimately undermines both her financial stability and the well-being of her farm. Troy's irresponsible conduct and indifference towards Bathsheba's financial security contrasts the current societal norms, which typically dictate that marriage should safeguard her estate. Bound by tradition, she enters into matrimony. Yet rather than bolstering the farm's prosperity, Troy's actions precipitate its economic downturn. Her strong will and determination render her resistant to manipulation. Even if someone were to succeed in conquering her, she would never fully submit or relinquish control unless circumstances forced her hand. In the beginning of the novel, her resilience and unwillingness to be part of marriage make her a compelling character. She is challenging societal norms and expectations at every turn. Towards the end of the novel

her character changes from being independent to silenced. Roxanne Jurta describes Hardy's novels and how they have commonalities. She states how "all marriages in Hardy's work end the same way – in utter tragedy" (15). Bathsheba's character ends in tragedy when her decision to marry occurs. She lost herself and does not speak towards the end of the novel. Sue does not marry her husband out of love but out of guilt. Almost all the marriages in Hardy's works end in tragedy. For instance, Bathsheba's marriage ends tragically as she loses her sense of self and voice. Similarly, Sue ultimately marries not out of love, but rather out of a sense of guilt, highlighting the complex and often unhappy outcomes associated with marriage in Hardy's literary universe. Both of these characters are desperate to marry at the end of the novel. Through these depictions, Hardy offers a critical examination of societal expectations and the consequences of conforming to traditional norms for women.

Thomas Hardy has received multiple criticisms of how he portrays his female characters in his novels. Bathsheba's journey throughout the novel portrays her limitations although she is considered to be not a typical Victorian woman. She is still limited in terms of not being able to manage her own farm, but having the societal expectation and law expectation to marry a man in order to keep her property. Hardy's exploration of gender dynamics and the complexities are reflected through Bathsheba to reflect women's experiences in the Victorian era. Bathsheba's reluctance to conform to traditional societal expectations regarding marriage highlights her desire for independence and autonomy. She is forced to have a traditional marriage. Instead of contributing to the prosperity of the farm, Troy's actions lead to its economic decline. The actions that Troy takes towards Bathsheba's money, as evidenced by his statement "I have (no money) but what my wife gives me" clearly highlights the kind of person he is (*Madding Crowd* 300). He does not care to spend her earnings while he makes no attempt to earn his own. Bathsheba's sense of powerlessness in preventing Troy from squandering her wealth reflects the

broader societal reality faced by women in patriarchal societies. Despite her status as a landowner, Bathsheba's agency is undermined by the legal and social structures that prioritize male authority and control.

In the novel, while Gabriel Oak was being supervised by Bathsheba, he did not view her as his boss. Although Gabriel did manage parts of the farm, it is ultimately Bathsheba's property, and he just saw her as a woman who is pretty rather than his employer. Wittenberg writes how "Oak himself seems to become aware of the violating penetration of his gaze, guiltily withdrawing his eyes from Bathsheba 'as suddenly as if he had been caught in a theft' (*Madding Crowd* 21, Wittenberg 28). Gabriel Oak's reaction to Bathsheba's beauty suggests that he does not primarily see her as his boss, but someone to gaze at and admire. Gabriel feels a sense of guilt for staring at Bathsheba. His sudden withdrawal of his eyes implies that he recognizes his error, for he corrects himself. This reaction reflects how although Bathsheba is his employer, women would be seen as a woman first, and as a boss second. Bathsheba's introduction and admiration are controlled by the male perspective overall. She battles with the different male gazes she encounters and these challenges reflect the patriarchal norms in the society. Wittenberg mentions that her story "depicts both the possibilities...limitations imposed upon a spirited woman who tries to affirm her individuality in a society unready to accept unconventional behavior" (31). This encapsulates the nature of Bathsheba's narrative; her story unfolds as a vivid illustration of the potential for individuality and self-expression. As a spirited woman determined to assert her independence and carve out her own path, Bathsheba grapples with the inherent limitations imposed by societal norms that are resistant to unconventional behavior. Bathsheba wishes to live by her own rules and not to be dictated by someone else. She is radical in the sense that she does not want to be a mother, does not want to have children, and instead wishes for her own way of life. In the novel, she states she would "hate to be thought of

men's property in that way" and that she would be only interested in "being a bride at a wedding (only) if I could be one without having a husband" (Hardy 32,33). Bathsheba's declarations in the novel serve as reflections of her character, revealing her strong-willed nature and her resistance to being confined by traditional gender roles. *New Woman* is about the liberation of being thought of men's property. Bathsheba's character represents someone who is trying to escape the restricted around her. One of the few ways that women could escape True women is to become self reliant and have their own source of income. Women were limited. The need for education was questionable. Why need education when you would have a husband to support you? The idea of being attached to your husband and being forced to have full dependence on him did not resonate with Bathsheba. Hardy wrote this novel to illustrate when there is an attempt to become a *New Woman*. In the novel, Fanny represents a *True Woman*. She would follow the traditional maternal role and not grow as a character from there. Her personality is motherly, submissive, reliant on her partner. She would do anything for her partner and would have successfully been married off if she did not show up to the wrong church. When Bathsheba expresses her hatred to being considered men's property, she asserts her desire for autonomy and independence. Bathsheba asserts her right to exist as her own individual, with her own agency and identity. Furthermore, Bathsheba's statement about wanting to be a bride without necessarily having a husband illustrates her unconventional thinking and her desire to challenge societal norms. By expressing this desire, she disrupts the conventional notion of marriage as a means of ownership or possession by a husband. Instead, she imagines a scenario where she can partake in the celebration of a wedding without being bound by the traditional roles and expectations associated with marriage. This reveals Bathsheba's inclination towards independence as wants to continue to question and defy societal conventions.

Bathsheba's character evolves from being driven by emotions to gaining economic autonomy when her uncle bequeaths his farm to her. She does this progression with multiple actions, she is seen giving orders to her male employees and when she announces she will be her own bailiff. Bathsheba states how she will do her best and astonish them. During this time, there was not a family of women farmers, and it was quite uncommon, Hardy writes how the male figures would have reacted both in novel and if it did ever occur in reality. The first to criticize Bathsheba's position in power would be denizens of the malthouse and then Oak attempts to defend her but then he blames her as well. Wittenberg writes how he "irrationally blames Bathsheba for the threat posed to the year's crops by the harvest supper debacle attributing to the 'instability of a woman' (Hardy 279, Wittenberg 33). The role of Bathsheba's ascendancy to a position of power as a landowner challenges the traditional patriarchal order of society, leading to resentment and skepticism from those who are accustomed to the patriarchal hierarchy. The workers in the malthouse, representing the society with their traditional values, are quick to question Bathsheba's authority and competence. Their criticism stems from a combination of misogyny, jealousy, and perhaps fear of change. Bathsheba's gender amplifies their disapproval, as they struggle to accept a woman in a position of power traditionally held by men. Gabriel Oak attempts to defend her against the denizens' criticism, though he too succumbs to the societal rules of the time. His irrational blame to Bathsheba for the threat posed to the year's crops reflects deeply ingrained gender biases and stereotypes because he believes just because she is a woman in charge, that is why the crops failed. By blaming Bathsheba for the instability caused by the harvest supper debacle, Oak reveals his own internalized sexism and his tendency to view women as inherently less capable or reliable in positions of authority. Gabriel questions Bathsheba's competence to run the estate solely because she is a woman. If she were a man, he would not have a reason to question her.

Bathsheba ultimately has to be married to keep her estate. Gabriel Oak is the best option out of the different suitors that Bathsheba is presented with. Jill Rappoport discusses property management and property problems in the novel, noting that Bathsheba's economic choices are limited. Although she does own her farm, it is not permanently hers until she marries Gabriel. Rappoport discusses "property problems of four unmarried female characters whose economic choices" are limited to "relations" (637). It is not permanent due to the fact she could lose it if she does not marry Gabriel. It is not officially hers until her marriage begins with him. Hardy uses this in his novel and it is a common theme in similar time period books such *The Type-Writer Girl* by Grant Allen, *Villette* by Charlotte Bronte, and *Middlemarch* by George Elliot. This essay exemplifies four unmarried female characters that are in similar situations to Bathsheba and brought insights behind the legality of ownership.

Rappoport also provides timelines for the ownership of property for women receiving the rights to property ownership. She states that "in the decades between the 1856 petition for married women's property rights and the 1870 and 1882 Acts that granted them, advocates fought to secure ...economic rights" (644). Women during the mid-19th century advocated for legal reforms granting them greater rights and in particular in regards to property ownership and inheritance. The Women's Property Acts of 1870 in England were crucial legislative milestones in this regard. Before these acts were passed, married women in England had limited rights to own property in their own name. Upon marriage, a woman's property would often become her husband's and she would have little control over it. However, the Married Women's Property Act of 1870 started to change this by granting married women some rights over their own property. In the context of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, these legal reforms would have been part of the backdrop against which the characters operated. The novel explores themes of independence, social conventions, gender roles, and the changing legal landscape regarding women's property

rights that would have influenced the societal dynamics depicted in the story. It is interesting that if Hardy did allow Bathsheba to have ownership of the farm without the need of a husband, how would that have altered the marriage to Gabriel Oak? Due to the society that they live in, it was essential for women to have husbands and could not want to be independent if they wanted to be. Bathsheba is not your standard Victorian woman and is quite independent. Bathsheba wants to stay independent, does not mean she is a “frigid” woman.

In the novel, Bathsheba is part of a sexual economy. In the context described, Bathsheba's sexuality can indeed be related to her land ownership through the lens of the sexual economy of marriage. Viewing Bathsheba solely as a potential bride can overshadow her financial decisions and legal transactions regarding her land. If Bathsheba has been married before, her marital status and past relationships could influence others' perceptions of her land ownership. For instance, a male suitor might seek to take advantage of her land by either coercing her into selling or transferring ownership, or by using marriage as a means to gain control over her assets. Thus, her sexuality becomes intertwined with her land ownership, as it affects the power dynamics and potential exploitation in her financial and legal affairs.

Jill Rappoport also goes on to say how sexual economies that exist within this society are tied to marriage legalities and ownership. The article mentions an interesting point of how “attending to the fem sole in her single state instead of always seeing her as potential bride means considering financial decisions” (Rappoport 645). This could also be considering whether or not seeing someone as a potential influences considerations as potential legal transactions being made. For example, if Bathsheba has been married before and had been divorced or widowed, then there is a possibility of someone wanting to take advantage of the potential of being to have the land if they are a male and either forcing Bathsheba to be removed if bought out/ownership change or having the sexual economy opportunity to impose her to be with the

suitor. In the historical context, especially during periods where land ownership was crucial and often dictated power dynamics, Bathsheba's status as a previously married woman could indeed make her vulnerable to exploitation. Bathsheba's ownership of land could be a significant asset, particularly if she inherited it from her previous husband or family. In patriarchal societies where land was primarily passed down through male lineage, her ownership might already be a point of contention or interest. In a society where women's rights and autonomy were limited, a male suitor could see Bathsheba's land as an opportunity to increase his own wealth and influence. This suitor might use various tactics to gain control of the land, including coercion or manipulation.

Xiang Xu also criticizes the development of Hardy's views on love and marriage. Xu mentions how Hardy uses Bathsheba to showcase that even if a strong independent woman were fully independent in this society it would be impossible to navigate through society. Xu mentions how "Bathsheba is a beautiful, zealous, and ambitious girl who longs for and goes after freedom ...leads to a tragedy" (92). No matter how much Bathsheba longs for this freedom from the patriarchy, it simply does not happen. She is stuck with a man that she did not want to marry and live a life she did not want to have. She did not want to be married, and have the farm on her own so that she can manage herself without the need for men. Xu adds that "although Bathsheba often seems self- confident and decisive and daring...she still has to do everything according to the rules she herself, others, and the society have set consciously or unconsciously" (Xu 92). Xu comments that no matter how Bathsheba has tried to be a New Woman, she will always be set down by the rules bestowed upon her. She is not independent enough to ever be a New Woman due to the rules imposed upon and her assets. Hardy writes this novel to give a sense of reality of the patriarchal society that is present.

Hardy also depicts Sue Bridehead as a woman who attempts to escape as a True Woman

and become part of New Woman movement. In *Jude the Obscure*, Sue Bridehead has had both triumphs and defeats similarly to Bathsheba. Sue Bridehead is much more intellectual compared to Bathsheba. Like Bathsheba, she was also not a typical Victorian woman of her time. She goes to school, she constantly bends the rules in her university, and she is only married to keep her job. Sue comments in the novel on her ideas of marriage. She states “ I have been thinking . . . that the social molds 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” (Hardy 246). She is describing the problems that arise with marriage. She feels that marriage is done for the want of the society rather than the needs of the individual. People get married based on the society, not because they have an emotional attachment to the person. With every marriage, there is a transactional purpose of whether the person would be able to support them in financial means rather than in an emotional connection. Sue also feels that marriage plunges herself as an individual. Instead of being Sue Bridehead, she is known as someone’s wife. As if being someone’s wife is more important than the person you were beforehand.

Sue’s character is viewed in many different views and her feminist view of life. Sue is described as a bachelor because she is quite free in her relationships. Critic Cedric Watts notes that when the novel was released in Germany, Sue was received as “the heroine, it was the first delineation in fiction of the woman who was coming into notice in her thousands every year - the woman of the feminist movement - the slight, pale 'bachelor' girl” (Watts 1). Sue was one of the first female characters written by Hardy as a bachelor girl who had power and multiple options in men. But she was not interested in marrying any of them until society had crept into her about marriage. Sue was a character created by Hardy, who was one of the first women in his stories to be independent and have many choices when it came to men. Even though she had options, she didn't feel the need to marry any of them until society started pressuring her about it. She was

educated, smart, and didn't believe that getting married and having children was the only goal for women. Instead, she believed in being free and making her own choices in life.

In the Victorian Era that Sue lives in, being married is a goal for women to have. Since Sue was not the type of woman to be wanting to be married and constricted, she felt as soon she got married her voice as Sue the individual, and not the wife was taken away. Sue comments on this by stating that "I am called Mrs. Richard Phillotson, living a calm wedded life with my counterpart of that name. But I am not really Mrs. Richard Phillotson, but a woman tossed about, all alone, with aberrant passions, and unaccountable antipathies" (*Jude* 246-247). She feels like she is not an individual but rather attached to her husband. She is not her own person. She feels like she is tossed around because she is a woman, but no longer with passions because she is married. What does she need to have passions for if she is married? She critiques the society that is around her and having to be married in order to fit societal needs.

Shazia Mohammad and Abdus Khalis discuss Sue's character and how she is one of the most challenging characters in the novel due to her Victorian views of life. The article mentions how "Hardy portrays a modern woman torn by the split between opposing forces" (Mohammad and Khalis 74). Sue begins as a modern woman who makes her own decisions and makes no apologies for what decision she decides to make about her life. She does not choose to be a heavy, devoted, religious woman. She did not want to be married off because the society around her wanted her to be married. She is an outspoken female character during a time where it was unimaginable and unthinkable to be. Sue is quite a complex character because she does change from being an independent woman, to her biggest downfall and tragedy of the loss of her children. Once her children passed, she let go of the modernist female and fully let herself be submissive to Phillotson. The death of her children is a crucial moment for Sue and leads to her self-destructiveness of everything she believes in. Mohammad and

Khalis mention how she “brings destruction upon herself and all those around her including her children by being indifferent to their existence” (Mohammad and Khalis 78). She goes against everything she believes in a self-destructive manner. By giving up on what she believes in, which is a modern, independent, free-spirited character to what is expected of her during this time buries her character. She no longer has independence and loses her feminist characteristics of a modern woman and reverts to a True Woman.

For the majority of the novel, prior to losing her children, Sue has resistance. She has resisted conforming the gender roles by wanting to be free from marriage, she has children out of wedlock, and kept her head held high after judgment. Resistance to “surrender to the male authority which society approves in the guise of husband” (Mohammad and Khalis 74). Although she does enjoy the company of Jude, she would have not married him. She does not want to be tied down and do what society wants her to do. It was not anything personal to Jude, it is not that she did not love him, but anything that resembles societal expectations is intolerable for her. The article also mentions the interesting point of Jude’s perspective of Sue. “[In] Jude’s opinion, she marries Phillotson when she does not understand what marriage is” (Mohammad and Khalis 74). In the letter that Sue writes to Jude to ask him to give her way; she does this in a mocking tone rather than a serious tone. She mocks the idea of marriage in this letter and asks him in a tone where it is just a simple favor. Her attitude towards marriage makes her seem indifferent towards marriage. At first she was opposed to the idea of marriage because it was just expected from her, not that she was afraid or did not want commitment. She does not understand fully what a marriage consists of and the amount of work that came with it. The article states how “the idea of loving someone forever with social sanction does not make sense to Sue” (Mohammad and Khalis 75). Sue is a modern, independent woman. The concept of having the need to be with someone forever does not seem appealing to her. The

idea of marrying someone because it is expected in society is intolerable for Sue and goes against what she believes in. She marries Phillotson because it was what he wanted for her and it was not socially acceptable to be with Jude. Mohammad and Khalis highlights how “the sense of servitude or bondage is intolerable for Sue be it to social demands, institutions, religion or men” (Mohammad and Khalis 75). For her to be marrying Phillotson is against everything she believes in and that is why Jude thinks she does not understand what she was getting herself into by asking him to give her away in a marriage.

Furthermore, Sue feels as though if she were to wed Jude, that the passion she holds for him would dissipate. Arabella views marriage as a form of confinement but also as a means of securing financial stability. She employs any tactics at her disposal to achieve her goals. Arabella begins in the novel as independent early on with her farming abilities. Arabella stands out as the simplest among the main characters, lacking in ambition but fiercely determined in pursuing her desires. Her primary goal is to find a man who can provide her with comfort and some luxuries in life. While attractive in a flamboyant manner, she possesses a practical nature and lacks formal education. Despite this, she exhibits sharp wit, cunning, and persistence. Arabella's preferences and interests are quite ordinary. Her ability to survive challenges sets her apart from the other characters, showcasing her resilience in navigating life's complexities. When Jude proves unable to meet her expectations, Arabella ventures to Australia and remarries. She stands in stark contrast to the virtuous and cerebral Sue, embodying associations with alcohol and carnal gratification. In her pursuit of Jude's return, Arabella resorts to manipulation, intoxicating him and coercing him into marriage. Following Jude's demise, or even before it, she promptly begins the search for a new husband. Sue is described by Mohammad and Khalis as someone who “does not want Jude’s passion to subside by marital relationship and keeps the thrill of having illicit relationship alive by bearing children as well” (Mohammad and Khalis 77). Having

the obligation to Jude is something that is intolerable for her because she does not want to be restricted. This led to her ultimately being with Phillotson, and what led to the death of her children. Many other critics observe this want for independence from Sue such as Xiang Xu.

Xiang Xu critiques Hardy's use of female figures and the complicated relationships they have within their society. Hardy uses the character, Sue, to show how much she is aware of her opposition to society and is obligated to be married regardless of her wants. The article states how Sue is "naive...falls in love with Jude...is obliged to marry Phillotson due to the oppression of the society... she and Phillotson are seemingly in harmony but actually at variance...she is unable to get... unsullied love she has been longing for at all" (Xu 94). The True person that she is in love with and truly would want to be with, she cannot be with because of the oppression of society. She does not have a healthy relationship with Phillotson. Even together, they are in opposition. Phillotson has a traditional view of marriage and Sue does not. They have different beliefs and expectations of each other. Phillotson believes women should follow the traditional True Woman path and Sue attempts to flee from. Hardy uses Sue to show the difficult choices females had to make due to society. Sue believes "the love between her and Jude is True love with the communication of heart and soul" (Xu 94). The marriage that Sue goes after is the one that gets her heart flowing and fills her with warm feelings. She believes that marriage should be between the person who you share heart and soul with, share your intellect, not a contract or opinion made by society. This proves to be a defeat with the marriage with Phillotson. Although she does leave him for Jude, she had to return due to society oppression to be with Phillotson.

In *Jude the Obscure*, Sue Bridehead does show triumphs. She is not your typical Victorian woman. She does have the triumph of being a more modern woman. Xu highlights how Sue's "thought(s) and action(s) represent the tendency of many women's aspiration for liberation and freedom" (94). Many women at this time aspire to have this liberation and

freedom. She chose to go to college, she chose to not fit the social norms of believing everything the Bible says. When Phillotson sees Sue critique Judaism, he mentions the comment of how clever she is. He states when in conversation with Jude, “your cousin is so terribly clever that she critiques it unmercifully... she is quite skeptical as to its correctness” (*Jude* 90). The fact of being so open to critiquing the model and to the school children. No woman of her time would have been able to do that as she pleases because it is quite outside of the social norm. Hardy uses her character to comment on the dependence and limitation women had to spread their opinions.

Hardy uses Sue to show a more modern woman that many would aspire to be. She did not want to be married, even though she still had the independent thought of telling her husband that she is leaving him to be with her cousin and had the audacity to come back. Men of that time would have not simply allowed their wives to leave and come back as pleased. Phillotson knew that Sue was different from the women of their time. He knew what kind of woman he was going to marry; although she did leave him, she did come due to societal oppression of being married. Arabella comments at the end of the novel how Sue would never find peace again. Jude has passed and Arabella believes that she will find the peace she had been searching for until she joins Jude in the afterlife. Arabella states “ she may swear that on her knees to the holy cross upon her necklace till she’s hoarse... she’s never found peace since she left his arms, and never will again till she’s he is now” (*Jude* 332). Sue is being punished for being a New Woman. One of Sue’s biggest defeats would be losing Jude and marrying Phillotson, and by approximation converting to more religious beliefs because of her guilt. To circle back to Jurta, she also mentions how Sue never had a true chance of becoming a New Woman. She states “Hardy, though, does not even give Sue a chance to become a New Woman; instead, he dooms her early in the novel, and the rest of the narrative is not a portrayal of a New Woman struggling

to succeed, but a chronicle of her anticipated downfall” (Jurta 18). Jurta also mentions how Sue is a broken woman through this novel. Jurta depicted Sue in the end of the novel as someone who “mortifies herself by returning to and re-marrying Phillotson...Sue is no longer the same as in her independent days, when her intellect sparkled like diamonds. Rather, like a child, she regresses to total dependence upon Phillotson” (Jurta 19). Sue's transformation into a subdued and dependent figure, contrasting sharply with her previous independence and intellectual vibrancy. Sue willingly subjects herself to a state of self-mortification by returning to and remarrying Phillotson. This act symbolizes Sue's regression to a childlike state of total dependence on Phillotson, a stark departure from her former autonomy and intellectual brilliance.

Saleh Salman and Abassi discuss various points of how Hardy criticizes the concept of marriage through the use of his characters in his novels. The article emphasizes the fact how from a Victorian perspective, women's lives were based on their marital status. This proves to be true in the novel *Jude the Obscure*. The article highlights how “Hardy's attempt in creating non-conformist characters approved the efficacy of social norms and prejudices on how the non-conformist characters, doomed in the course of life” (Abassi and Salam 49). Hardy uses the character, Sue, for example, to show how she goes against the social norm of Victorian women, she was doomed. The article makes commentary that Hardy feels that the social influence of religion and restrictions of the need for marriage ultimately dooms the lives of people; this is prominent in his novels.

The article continues to state how marriage is used in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* as a main vehicle for religion. Marriage goes hand in hand with religion and this is shown in the novel. This article also illustrates how in order to keep up with what is expected of her, Sue had to be married off. Although she does not need anyone, due to societal standards, she had a duty

to be. The article mentions how it was almost to “fulfill her biological destiny; to color her social roles as a faithful wife and devoted mother” (Abassi and Salman 50). Although Sue did leave Phillotson; she ultimately returns due to guilt. Her children died and felt that it would be improper of her to continue to be with Jude, consumed with guilt, she regressed back to Phillotson. Sue states “I am still his wife” (*Jude* 402). Due to her guilt of her children’s death, she feels it is her duty to return to Phillotson although she does not want to be with him.

Sue completely devotes herself to being Phillotson due to religion. The early death of her children caused guilt to unfold in her agony. Jon Roberts discusses the theme of religion in Hardy’s works of art. Roberts mentions an interesting point of God and how Hardy and uses the theme of suffering in his novels for his characters. Roberts writes “its extinction merely waits upon the emergence of some new form... everyday experiences in ways that compensate ordinary human beings for their suffering” (Roberts 64). What Sue has suffered with the loss of her children and made her turn a new leaf to religion was an interesting character development made by Hardy. He uses the influence of religion and how there is suffering in some aspects in his works of art. This was shown in Sue’s character. Not only does she lose her children, but Jude also passes away. Loss of maternity sends her backwards to the traditional role of women, as a True Woman. She feels she is being punished from breaking away from a traditional Victorian Woman. Although she did let him go as a lover, the pain of losing him is still there. She does care for him and when he dies, that pain is present in her heart.

Although Sue does lose her children, the way that she handles the pain is changing her character. Sue chose to deal with her pain by changing what she believes in and how she acts around the daily people in herself. For example, Sue submits herself to Phillotson not only figuratively, but also physically. Although she does not care for Phillotson and does not love him, she returns to him on the premise that she had children with him and they passed away. The

novel states how she submits herself by “placing the candlestick on the chest of drawers he led through the doorway, and lifting her bodily, kissed her, a quick look of aversion passed over face...clenching her teeth” (*Jude* 468). Sue did not want to be touched and kissed by Phillotson. Against her own will, she has relations with him and submits to him. She does this for the sake of her children and the loss of them. Due to the fact that Phillotson is her legal husband, she would not want to continue her infidelity with Jude and allow her husband to take over her like she is property of him. The article “The Ideological Questions of Marriage in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*” by Salman Saleh and Abassi mentions the interesting irony of how Jude and Sue’s characters flip roles. Jude initially was the person to be studying religion and being conservative in his actions. As the novel progresses and his relationship with Sue, the more his belief and devotion to religion minimizes. He has sexual relations with Sue, develops an illegitimate relationship with her, and his dedication to religion diminishes. When Sue leaves Jude and returns to Phillotson, Jude gives up his beliefs in his religion. Jude loses his hope with religion and is influenced by Sue. He could not obtain the love of his life and there was no hope for him to be with her.

On the contrary, when it comes to Sue she initially does not have a strong allegiance to religion in the beginning of the novel. It was when her children passed away that Sue decided to end her relationship with Jude. She mentions to Jude “well I want to tell you something else...I have thought of it a good deal since my babies died. I don’t think I ought to be your wife...any longer” (*Jude* 406). It took Sue having the loss of her children and having a complete change in character from a sense of guilt and it influenced her decisions when it comes to her marriage. Sue has a loss of her independent thinking and converts to the societal expectations of being a devoted religious woman.

Thomas Hardy uses Sue Bridehead to depict her to be part of New Woman to

demonstrate the changing of traditional to more a modernized woman. Although ultimately she does repent back to a more traditional woman, Sue 's actions throughout the novel describe her as a modern woman. She is described by Maria Struzzio *as* "intellectually independent and well-read" (Struzzio 465). Women during the Victorian age typically received the similar standard education as a male but were pushed more to be a housewife/mother role. Sue wanted to become more than that role, to have the option to go beyond. Sue is described as a "New Woman, Sue also holds unconventional views about marriage" (Struzzio 470). Struzzio comments on Sueos downfall as an attempt to break away from New Woman but downfalls into True Woman. This includes why Sue wanted to have the option to *who* she wanted to marry and settle down with, not what society expects her to do. Although she had children with Jude, she felt that the moment she were to get married, that her power of free will would disappear. Jude did not mind this relationship they had together. Jude and Sue were truly in love with another. He accepted her desire to be independent and keep her happy by having the option of doing what she wanted instead of what society expects her to do. Jude speaks to Sue and states "the time was not ripe for us! Our ideas were fifty years too soon to be any good to us!" (*Jude* 422-423). Jude describes that their time was too soon, that the world around them could not keep what they wanted to do with their lives and could not be accepted for the time they are in. Struzzio also writes how "she unconsciously rejects the cliches of gender stereotyping and affirms her need for independence. She fears that being possessed sexually also entails being denied an autonomous identity" (Struzzio 470). Sue would have never put herself in a position before the death of her children where she affirms to the gender expectations in this society. She ultimately succumbs to the gender expectations around her due to the fact she felt that God was punishing her for being independent and killed her off her children. Due to the death of her children, Sue grieves in a way to blame her actions of independence on the death of her children, instead the

actual blame of Father Time. It is a lot easier for her to accept something irrational as what had happened to her children on religion, then to put it on someone. The guilt of trying to be someone different, someone not accommodating religious practices makes her believe that is the sole reason for her children's death instead of the murderer. Due to the death of her children, Sue returns to Phillotson and absorbs into the life of a traditional Victorian woman. Struzzio mentions how "gender is at the heart of the novel and Hardy explores the social mechanisms and forces by which gendered identities are constructed but always threatened by shifting power relations" (Struzzio 467). This novel revolves around gender at its core and Hardy uses it to speak on gender roles throughout history and this novel. Gendered identities are displayed through the main characters. We see this in Sue; she identifies most of the novel as an independent woman, in no need of male power, until son Father Time influences her position. She returns to Phillotson, thus shifting power relations back to her male counterparts. Hardy uses this novel to express that although as much as a woman may have wanted to become independent, the power of relations of a male in this society will surpass any desire to overcome this independence.

Gender is not only presented throughout the novel, but through the clothing that is worn and the meaning behind it. Kate Oestreich highlights "Sue, like most Victorian woman, was encouraged to communicate her repressed sexuality through plain clothing...she is required to wear a 'murrey-coloured gown'"(Oestreich 132). The clothing required of Sue for the time period she is represents what expectations were bestowed upon her as a woman. She is supposed to be wearing more flattering colors of garnets to represent what most women during this time would want to be, married off. Oestreich highlights how "the dark and 'plain' uniform by contrast, is meant to secure Sue's chastity by essentially closing her off from the marriage market" (132). Sue continues to close herself off from being marriage material and defies what

society expects of her to do. She does not signal to others that she is looking for marriage, but closing herself off to the world and choosing her own gentleman caller. Oestreich also points out how “the nunlike clothing blocked communication of her sexuality to the public, Sue ...recognized her own desires for Jude” (133). Sue continues to lead her own path of desires, and ironically it is the day she had feelings for Jude. She ‘blocks’ off her desires from others to be perceived as available and acknowledges her feelings for Jude. Ultimately by putting on this type of gown, this reinforces how Sue was more “New Woman” than a traditional Victorian woman. Watts also mentions how “the fictional New Woman is portrayed as intelligent, lively, articulately forthright, capable of pursuing her own career, sexually daring (whether in seductive action or defiant abstinence), and resistant to the conventional claims of marriage” (Watts 4-5). Interestingly, Sue feels the most confident when she has the opposite gender clothing on. In the novel, Sue had a mishap happen with her clothing on the way to her Jude’s home. Jude first offers his landlady’s clothing, which Sue declines but then agrees to wear his suit. While wearing his suit, Sue has a remarkable change.

Although her everyday self is outspoken, she felt more free to speak on other topics while wearing Jude’s suit. Oestreich describes “while dressed in Jude’s clothes, Sue feels free to discuss biblical sexual ecstasy” (Oestreich 134). What makes this scene particularly interesting is how Sue feels even that much more confident wearing the opposite gender’s clothing. Wearing the clothes brings her “male power” and sense of “male privilege” of that topic that it is otherwise perceived as forbidden/ looked down upon for a woman to be discussing during this time and especially discussing this topic with a man. Sue describes women’s clothing as “sexless cloth and linen” (Watts 115-116), but having the ability to discuss about erotic topics with Jude in his clothing serves as an interesting juxtaposition that Hardy creates. What does women's clothing and men's clothing mean? How does having one on compared to the other makes the

person and the power behind who wears it? Hardy displays this scene with a great skill to demonstrate this interesting relationship of the empowerment that clothing serves. Oestreich comments on the ending of Sue's era of radical identity and clothing. She states how "Sue's sorrow over her children's murders causes her to erase her radical identity by abandoning her reform clothing and re-dressing herself according to conservative Victorian ideology" (Oestreich 142). Sue ends her clothing and independence because the clothing she felt connected to and free no longer warrants her needs since her transition to traditional. Sue returned to her "colored clothing" for the mourning of her children and the thought of ever returning to her suits, independence dissipated (*Jude* 267). The real tragedy behind this is that convinced herself she needs to leave this independent life and that she is being punished for her controversial views. Oestreich goes on to say how Sue realizes how unhappy she is in her marriage and both her and Jude are "victims of antiquated martial ideology" (Oestreich 136). If society had allowed it, they would have been together instead of her in an unhappy marriage and Jude dying. Jude was the perfect mold to Sue. He allowed her to be independent by not being married, but knowing that she cares for him and has had three of his children. Sue brought the 'masculine' like personality to Jude who does not resist and is more submissive and allows her to have the power she desires. Phillotson had a traditional view of marriage where he believed by "merely taking a woman to church and putting a ring upon her finger...tragedy (strikes) as that now shared by her and me!" (*Jude* 183). Phillotson had hoped that by simply putting a ring on a woman, that it would lead to a happy marriage. That the woman should just be grateful for having the ring and be considered his. He did not think that marriage would have its ups and downs, or that women would like to be cared for, not just be present in the home. The view of Phillotson speaks to how he thought of women and what society thought of women should be.

Hardy wrote *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *Jude the Obscure* to tell the story of two

women attempting to be part of the New Woman movement. He writes about Bathsheba who had ownership on the farm, and if she did need to marry off to keep the estate, she would have been part of New Woman. She would not have married Gabriel or anyone for that matter. Sue Bridehead presents more as a New Woman throughout the novel and until her children had become deceased, she would not have reverted to True Woman. She attempted to be the New Woman identity by having children out of wedlock, being free on who she wants to be with. Both of these women were desperately trying to be part of the New Woman identity. Hardy wrote these novels to showcase the limitations both Bathsheba and Sue were dealing with. Both of these novels show the struggle with the attempt of the constraints of the patriarchal society they are in.

Hardy uses his characters Sue Bridehead from *Jude the Obscure* and Bathsheba from *Far From the Madding Crowd*, to show how different these women are from the typical Victorian women of their time. Yet although they may be relatively independent, both of these characters do suffer defeats in similar ways. Bathsheba had to be married off to Gabriel not because she was adamant about it, but because she wanted to keep her estate. She was quite depressed at the end of the novel for having to be married off to keep her estate. She did not want to be married off to Gabriel Oak and the passion she had for others is not present in Gabriel. Sue Bridehead ultimately stayed with Phillotson due to societal oppression and by consequence reverted to religion due to her guilty conscience. Ultimately these two women attempted to break away from the restraints of society and failed. They have both defeats and triumphs in the novel to escape True Woman status, but are finally unable to truly escape the reigns of Victorian society.

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