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COMMANDING LANGUAGE

Linguistic Authority and Female Autonomy in Thomas Hardy's Fiction

Completed in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the University of Ottawa
Master of Arts Programme

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Abstract

This thesis examines the fluid relationship between linguistic control and female autonomy and power in four novels by Thomas Hardy. Chapter One attends to the way in which the constructive use of dialogue in *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) enables Bathsheba Everdene's integration into generative social, economic, and personal relationships. Chapter Two examines *The Return of the Native* (1878), focusing on gossip's role in Eustacia Vye's destruction, which is the consequence of her defiance of public discourse. Chapter Three explores *A Laodicean* (1881), centering on Hardy's depiction of Paula Power's control of language, which is facilitated by her access to property, wealth, and communication technologies. Chapter Four addresses *Jude the Obscure* (1895), particularly the portrayal of Sue Bridehead, whose demise results from her unorthodox challenge to the way patriarchal texts circumscribe human relationships and identity.

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Chapter One

Untangling the “coarse meshes of language”: *Far From the Madding Crowd*

"They had planted together, and together they had felled; together they had, with the run of the years, mentally collected those remoter signs and symbols which seen in few were of runic obscurity, but all together made an alphabet."

— *The Woodlanders* (249)

At the core of Hardy's depiction of the use and misuse of language in *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) is the heroine's education in the capacity for linguistic negotiation and compromise. The novel's various representations of dialogues -- both generative and destructive -- demonstrate how private relationships, even private discourse, have public consequences, both in terms of identity and economics. Bathsheba Everdene's increasing ability to conduct linguistic relationships fairly and effectively runs parallel to her negotiation of personal and public relationships; the success of both fluctuates throughout the novel. The partnership marriage that emerges at the novel's end exemplifies those principles of reciprocity, both economic and emotional, that mimetically reproduce the terms of generative dialogue: willing exchange based on mutual interest and benefit. "Work," then, as Susan Beegel suggests, "is the language of love in this novel. All other language is unreliable" (126). The relationship that ultimately develops between Bathsheba and Oak demonstrates how the inadequacy of communication between men and women is a gap that can be closed by a willingness to enter into partnership based on labour and manifested in linguistic exchange.

The term "linguistic exchange" has multiple implications. Bathsheba's linguistic education coincides with her inheritance of property and her participation in the money-

market as a farmer, as well as with the economic vagaries of her lovers. Furthermore, Boumelha accurately observes that the “process by which [Bathsheba] is made into a fitting wife for Oak involves not only growth, but loss” (*Thomas Hardy* 33). The novel demonstrates the extent to which Bathsheba is increasingly subject to the confines -- linguistic, social and sexual -- that her society’s dominant constructions of gender necessarily place on women. Many readers therefore struggle with “the critical problem of describing the novel’s ending” (Beegel 108), which, I would submit, finally resists identification as either entirely redemptive or entirely repressive.¹ Arising in the midst of shared labour and, importantly, linguistic reciprocity, it simultaneously elides clear divisions of gender, divisions upon which Bathsheba’s more destructive relationships have depended. Yet it nonetheless stands as the culmination of Bathsheba’s integration into the terms of patriarchal discourse. Any analysis of the process leading to the equanimity that characterizes the union between Bathsheba and Oak must therefore admit that its “equality” is largely enabled by Bathsheba’s ultimate willingness to subsume herself within her community’s social, economic, and linguistic structures.

We do not proceed too far into the novel before encountering the convergence of economic and linguistic imperatives in the context of Bathsheba and Oak’s early contact. As Boumelha points out, “their earliest interactions are . . . disjointed and

¹ The “problem” of the novel’s ending has generated much debate. Mitchell and Shires, for example, occupy opposite ends of the critical spectrum in this regard. Mitchell views *Far From the Madding Crowd* as “a deceptively lighthearted love story, partaking of an underlying sexism that manifests itself in the ‘lesson’ it finally teaches its recalcitrant heroine” (174) whereas Shires warns that such criticism “runs the risk of reverse sexism” (51) and insists that the unstable relationship between power and gender in the novel means that the final marriage “cannot be interpreted merely as a recuperation of Bathsheba into a patriarchal prison-house” (64).

uncommunicative, each observing the other from carefully described vantage points” (*Patriarchy* 139). Oak’s first encounter with Bathsheba while she is “on the summit” (9) of furniture in her wagon illustrates her sensitivity to class and gender boundaries, particularly in her intentional silence. Like Gabriel, we hear Bathsheba’s “soft though decided voice” (9) but briefly, as she directs her waggoner to retrieve their missing tailboard. This concludes our access to Bathsheba’s direct speech for the remainder of the chapter, although her sentiments are hardly muted. Following the widely-discussed mirror scene,² the waggoner returns and conveys his mistress’ sentiments to the tollman, a figure unworthy to receive her direct speech: ““Miss’ess’s niece is upon the top of the things, and she says that’s enough that I’ve offered ye, you gr’t miser, and she won’t pay more.’ These were the waggoner’s words” (9). Gabriel promptly intervenes to provide the necessary twopence, saying, “let the young woman pass” (11). His chivalrous economic intervention should secure Bathsheba’s gratitude, but her refusal to enter into linguistic or emotional exchange with him dashes his heroic hopes: Bathsheba “carelessly glanced over him and told her man to drive on. She might have looked her thanks to Gabriel on a minute scale, but she did not speak them” (11). Her sense of superiority is thus registered both linguistically, by her silence, and also spatially: she is both above Gabriel and, directly, moves beyond him.

This brief exchange serves as a microcosm for those converging issues of power and language that are central to the novel. “Often a raw form to the claim to superior understanding that [can be] called the discourse of mastery” (W. Morgan 182), silence

² See Rosemarie Morgan (pp. 34 - 36) and Garson (pp. 36 - 38) for example.

can be a mark of both power and subordination;³ conversely, the command of language may signal a figure's authority, while excessive use of language for manipulative or indulgent ends can lead to disaster. The difference registered in linguistic terms is also frequently represented spatially, the body itself often the site of discourse⁴ when "the coarse meshes of language" (26) prevent adequate communication.

Furthermore, Bathsheba demonstrates keen perception and unwillingness to be the tollman's financial dupe, characteristics necessary to Weatherbury's operation and that, ironically, will be undermined by her marriage to the "dashing" (173) Sergeant Troy. Indeed, economic and linguistic power are aligned generally, the ultimate union between Oak and Bathsheba representing the generative convergence of both terms. The processes of economic rise and fall in the novel are mimetically reproduced in the various kinds of linguistic jostling that characterize the characters' interaction. What Hardy finally shows is how, like categories of class and gender, the control of language is in constant flux. Depending on who has access to its control, the movement and mutability of language can either disrupt or reinforce the community's power structures.

The extent to which the representation of various forms of dialogue offers Hardy a means for discussing the operation of power in other kinds of exchange relationships -- sexual, economic, and otherwise -- is demonstrated during the dialogue between Bathsheba and Oak that occurs following her fortunate rescue of him from his

³ In "Gender and Silence in Thomas Hardy's Texts" William Morgan discusses "the position of silence" in Hardy's works, suggesting that "whose silence it is, what voicing it enables, and what it requires of a reader -- may be seen as the marker that indicates both the main periods in the history of Hardy's attempts to deal with female otherness and the kinds of strategic solutions he may be seen to propose" (182).

⁴ Poole, for example, examines the "transformation of the body into language" (331) in Hardy's fiction.

smouldering hut. Hardly marked by willing accommodation on Bathsheba's part, the form of their dialogue transforms Oak's physical peril into emotional vulnerability:

"I believe you saved my life, Miss -- I don't know your name. I know your aunt's, but not yours."

"I would just as soon not tell it -- rather not. There is no reason either why I should, as you probably will never have much to do with me."

"Still, I should like to know."

"You can inquire at my aunt's -- she will tell you."

"My name is Gabriel Oak."

"And mine isn't. You seem fond of yours in speaking it so decisively Gabriel Oak." (27)

Linguistically stonewalling Oak at every turn, Bathsheba invokes a stance that will likewise problematize her relationship to her community's patriarchal power structures: resistance to the categorization demanded by normative discourse. Her status as a woman farmer will upset her community's social hierarchies, which she challenges even here in denying Oak's desire for linguistic and, by extension, sexual engagement with her. The very act of giving her name would grant Oak a level of intimacy with Bathsheba, and therefore a measure of power, that she hopes to elude. The relationship between Bathsheba's name and her fluctuating access to authority recurs throughout the novel in the context of possession. Her power is signified, for example, by the branding of her property, her sheep, with her initials, but is subtly undermined by Troy's insistence on calling her "Miss Bathsheba" (185) when he should use the more appropriate "Miss Everdene" and, later, by Boldwood's extreme breach of propriety in purchasing clothing for Bathsheba and having it labeled "Bathsheba Boldwood" (397) far in advance of their marriage, which is, in fact, only a potentiality. The treatment of Bathsheba's name thus illustrates William Morgan's notion of the representation of male linguistic control in Hardy's fiction, precisely in terms of the metaphor Morgan invokes: "the dominant

epistemological position of Hardy's fiction is a patriarchal one that participates in a tradition of male linguistic privilege as old as Adam's right to name the animals in Eden" (171). Patriarchal language will increasingly threaten to circumscribe Bathsheba's identity over the course of the novel. Her silence in her interaction with Oak thus marks her refusal to engage in linguistic exchange predicated on masculine domination.

Yet Bathsheba's simultaneous reliance on the language of command also reveals the extent of her sexual and economic power. Although when Oak offers his hand, Bathsheba initially "hesitated, somewhat disconcerted at Oak's old-fashioned earnest conclusion to a dialogue lightly carried on" (27), she concludes their dialogue by flirtatiously offering her hand not once, but twice. She suggests Oak might kiss her hand, but withdraws it at the last moment, concluding their exchange not by physical submission but with verbal imperative: "Now find out my name" (28). She thus appropriates the terms of Oak's desire to know her name, throwing them back upon him in order to assert her authority. While this convergence of sexual and verbal manipulation is ironically characteristic of the kinds of entrapment that Bathsheba will be subjected to throughout the novel, her recourse to physical and linguistic impulsiveness and dominance often grants her a measure of power.

The imperative language that Bathsheba employs in this scene aptly anticipates the social and economic authority that will accompany her inheritance of Weatherbury, authority that is, in fact, first demonstrated by Oak's arrival. Yet his appearance at the farm initially illustrates the extent to which Oak can give order through language. Oak reorganizes the workers' "remarkable confusion of purpose" (49) in the face of the fire by means of verbal instruction: "Get a tarpaulin -- quick! . . . Stand here with a bucket of

water and keep the cloth wet. . . . A ladder!” (50). Bathsheba’s appearance aptly coincides with Oak’s removal from his literal and figurative “elevated position” (51) atop the rick, reestablishing Oak’s economic and social subordination in relation to her, the inheritor of Weatherbury and the resistant object of his desire. Bathsheba again refuses to speak to him, forcing the now-unemployed Oak to repeat “mechanically . . . in an abashed and sad voice, ‘Do you want a shepherd, ma’am?’” (52). Bathsheba’s insistence that Oak “speak to the bailiff” (51) regarding his employment confirms her superiority and their relationship as one based solely on economics.

When Bathsheba does speak to her employees, her words register her authority but also demonstrate the way in which her gender complicates her access to power, since her sexual attractiveness makes her dominance doubly threatening. Joseph Poorgrass, for example, “hardly had strength enough to look in [his] young mis’ess face,” and “Twere blush, blush, blush with [him] every minute of the time, when she was speaking to [him]” (61). Bathsheba endeavours to undermine any limitations that her gender may be seen to put on her capacities, telling her employees,

“Now mind you have a mistress instead of a master. I don’t yet know my powers or my talents in farming, but I shall do my best, and if you serve me well, so shall I serve you. Don’t any unfair ones among you (if there are any such, but I hope not) suppose that because I’m a woman I don’t understand the difference between bad goings-on and good.”

(All) “No’m.”

(Liddy) “Excellent well said.”

“I shall 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.”

(All) “Yes’m!”

“And so good night.”

(All) “Good night, ma’am.” (86)

Bathsheba may not yet know the power of her farming capacities, but she is well aware of the authority inherent in her speech. Concluding her distribution of the weekly wages, her discourse produces the concord necessary for productive labour. Motivated by their mutual economic interests, both employer and employees engage in a dialogue of good will that is essential to Weatherbury's success and that emphasizes Bathsheba's conscious efforts to elide the way in which her gender threatens to compromise her authority.

The extent to which the connection between linguistic exchange and the possession of authority is complicated by matters of gender and sexuality is reinforced by a scene in the following chapter, in which Fanny Robin speaks to Troy from outside the barracks. Troy's response to Fanny underscores the precariousness of her position, particularly as a woman, and is informed by anything but good will. He does not validate what Fanny says, but entirely negates the direction of her speech:

“I did not expect you to-night. Indeed I did not think you would come at all. . . .”
 “You said I was to come.”
 “Well -- I said that you might.”
 “Yes, I mean that I might. You are glad to see me Frank?”
 “O yes -- of course.”
 “Can you -- come to me?”
 “My dear Fan, no! The bugle has sounded, the barrack gates are closed, and I have no leave.”
 “. . . Frank, when will it be?”
 “What?”
 “That you promised.”
 “I don't quite recollect.”
 “. . . when shall we be married Frank? . . . To-morrow?”
 “Not to-morrow. We'll settle in a few days.”
 “You have the permission of the officers?”
 “No -- not yet.” (91-92)

Unlike Bathsheba's, Fanny's language reveals uncertainty rather than authority, and Troy's responses are marked by evasion rather than enthusiasm. The process of deferral

that is registered in Troy's language -- "No," "not yet" -- characterizes much of the action of the narrative and much of the dialogue between characters, particularly that relating to promises; such language signals a lack of true affection or honest intentions. Furthermore, while Bathsheba's discourse with her workers is aimed at eliding those limits that her gender would typically place on her authority and autonomy, Fanny ironically reaffirms the link between gender and specific occupations, telling Troy that "There are bad women about, and they think me one" (92). The juxtaposition of these two dialogues subtly underscores the extent of Bathsheba's authority, as well as its inherently subversive nature.

Although immediately demonstrating the contrary realms of social and economic authority in which Fanny and Bathsheba function, the proximity of the scenes in the text anticipates the way in which -- through linguistic and sexual exchange -- Troy will bring about the degradation of both women.⁵ Troy's arrival at Weatherbury reconstructs the lines of gender and class that Bathsheba's control of the farm has destabilized, his emphasis on her desirability as a woman necessarily placing her in his power. Through her relationship with him, Bathsheba becomes subject to the humiliation that accompanies his dominance, entrapment, and false promises, all of which he invokes in relation to the helpless Fanny.

Significantly, Bathsheba first encounters Troy while she is doing what a man does, while "watching" (169) her property, alone, at night. While Fanny's independent

⁵ This similarity between Bathsheba and Fanny subtly reflects what Tim Dolin illustrates as contemporary anxieties about "the proximity of the sexualized woman of property and the fallen woman" (87), since women's access to control of property in the nineteenth century as a result of such legal changes as the Married Woman's Property Acts (1870, 1882) rendered traditional power relations between genders increasingly unstable. Dolin offers a useful analysis of this issue in relation to Hardy's fiction generally.

adventures abroad at night to visit Troy make her easily confused with a prostitute, Bathsheba conducts an evening examination of her property's "nooks and corners with the coolness of a metropolitan policeman" (169, italics added). Yet her encounter with Troy immediately reminds the reader just how un-manly she is, his phallic spur pinning down the external sign of her femininity, her dress. Bathsheba's movement from a commanding figure of authority to Troy's muted "prisoner" (172), in this scene and, ultimately, as his wife, is rendered in spatial terms.⁶ Like many of their clandestine meetings that follow, this encounter between Bathsheba and Troy occurs outdoors amidst the enclosure of vegetation, and thereby registers her vulnerability, given that her authority is derived from her position in her house.

The way in which their meeting reestablishes gender norms is further reinforced by the language Troy employs from the moment he and Bathsheba meet and, also, by Bathsheba's response. Troy's first question (one that, notably, Clym poses to Eustacia at their first meeting), "are you a woman?" (170), illustrates the extent to which Bathsheba resists the terms of patriarchal categorization, categorization that Troy reinstates as primary. He confirms her subordinate position in relation to him, a man, by both his words and his looks, questioning why "such a fair and dutiful girl [should] have such an aversion to her father's sex" (172 italics added). He thus relocates a woman's value not with her authority, but with her appearance, which is naturally subject to men's

⁶ See Shires' discussion of the significance of Bathsheba's exile from her home following Troy's abrogation of their marriage. Shires persuasively addresses Bathsheba's escape into the womb-like fernpit, which she views as the mark of her desire to "slip back into a void of pregendered nothingness" (49), in terms that are particularly relevant to my discussion: "she even loses her voice, the most authoritative, acculturated aspect of herself. Losing her power over language, the strong farmer is reduced to a lost infant" (49). This pattern of exile and a desire to return to a presexual state that follows upon sexual degradation, often by one's husband, recurs in much of Hardy's fiction, including *The Return of the Native* and *Jude the Obscure*.

evaluation. In response to such relentless flattery, “Bathsheba looked down again, for his gaze was too strong to be received pointblank with her own” (172). She attempts to dismiss Troy, adopting the terms of command that she typically uses in relation to those over whom she has authority -- “Go on your way, please” (172) -- but the extent of her inability to escape him, both physically and emotionally, ultimately renders her speechless: “She closed her lips in a determined silence. . . . Bathsheba really knew not what to say” (173). Bathsheba’s recourse to silence is thus transformed from a mark of her condescension to a mark of diminished power. Confined to the position of “an object of information” (Foucault 200), Bathsheba has lost all command of language that formerly invested her with authority that defied conventional limits of gender.

Indeed, Bathsheba’s first encounter with Troy is largely characterized by sexual and linguistic entrapment analogous to the Foucauldian understanding of the way the exercise of power depends on both physical and visual fixity. It thus anticipates the form their relationship will take throughout the remainder of the novel. Adrian Poole, like many critics,⁷ identifies how Hardy’s texts demonstrate “the effort of men’s words to circumscribe and describe, confine and define, women’s *bodies*” (329). When next they meet in the fields, Troy’s entrapment of Bathsheba into dialogue reinforces the extent to which language is the originary source of her vulnerability. Her voice registers her increasing agitation in the face of Troy’s linguistic manoeuvring: “there was even a little tremulousness in the usually cool girl’s voice” (184) and she becomes “so distracted” (186) until she is “brimming with agitated bewilderment” and can only speak in “half suspicious accents of feeling” (187). Bathsheba is also implicated in her own

⁷ See also Rosemarie Morgan for the way in which men’s words “fix” Bathsheba.

destruction by “allowing herself to be further lured into a conversation that intention had rigorously forbidden” (180). Troy’s verbal seduction of Bathsheba thus shows how dialogue is a code for the negotiation of sexual relationships. Bathsheba’s vulnerability to both Troy’s desire and her own is thus aptly manifested in her loss of linguistic control.

Her willingness to enter into dialogue with Troy is rightly described as Bathsheba’s “capitulation,” this moment being “the turning point of a career” (180). Insofar as farm labour is a backdrop to this scene, it prefigures the negative impact Troy will have on Weatherbury. Bathsheba discovers Troy in the fields where he is, initially, an unwanted volunteer. Yet unlike Oak, who, even in the face of Troy’s destructive indulgences, “will help, to [his] last effort, the woman [he has] loved so dearly” (254), Troy works for self-interested gain alone. Indeed, the extent to which loyalty and love are manifested in Oak’s perpetual safeguarding of Weatherbury illustrates the superficiality of Troy’s feelings for Bathsheba. His abrupt attempt to purchase her affections with a gold watch only further underscores the extent of Troy’s tendency toward impulsive economic exploitation, which is later exemplified by his drunken, irresponsible behaviour during the storm that threatens the ricks to the order of, in Oak’s calculations, “seven hundred and fifty pounds in the divinest form that money can wear” (254). Troy’s attempt to secure her affections with gifts aptly coincides with his incessant efforts to obtain continued linguistic access to her, both of which are derived from his narcissistic desire to dominate. Although Bathsheba temporarily insists that Troy “will never” (185) speak to her, she submits to him in a state of mind that will ultimately incite her to marry him: “distraction” (263).

Yet Bathsheba is not the sole victim of Troy's linguistic manoeuvrings. The ease with which he abandons Fanny for Bathsheba similarly marks him as an untrustworthy, evasive "trickster" (238), and his interaction with Boldwood also illustrates the pleasure he derives from verbally manipulating others. Significantly, their first discussion occurs in the context of "a business transaction" (239) in which Fanny and Bathsheba are the chief commodities for exchange. Unaware that Troy and Bathsheba are already married, Boldwood offers to "settle a sum of money upon [Fanny]" (239) should Troy marry her and abandon his pursuit of Bathsheba. Boldwood's efforts to purchase Bathsheba from Troy render him complicit in her degradation, a fact that Troy confirms: "Bad as I am, I am not such a villain as to make the marriage or misery of any woman a matter of huckster and sale. . . . You say you love Bathsheba. Yet on the merest apparent evidence you instantly believe in her dishonour. A fig for such love" (245). Believing that Bathsheba is already carrying on an illicit relationship with Troy, Boldwood quickly offers to settle "the five hundred on Bathsheba instead of Fanny to enable [Troy and Bathsheba] to marry at once" (243-44). Like Bathsheba's, Boldwood's complicity in his entrapment by Troy similarly illustrates how his sexual desire has clouded his judgment, and this ill judgment is registered in his speech: ". . . Boldwood's voice revealed only too clearly a consciousness of the weakness of his position, his aims, and his method" (239). This lack of judgment manifests itself in economic terms that extend outside of this dialogue. Bathsheba's relationship with Troy puts Weatherbury in increasing economic jeopardy, and the emotional torment Boldwood undergoes as a result of Troy and Bathsheba's relationship leads him to ignore the financial imperatives of his farm. Furthermore, Troy's manipulation of Boldwood reveals not only Boldwood's moral

degradation, but anticipates the extent to which Bathsheba can be easily aligned -- in a man's mind -- with a fallen woman such as Fanny Robin.

If a combination of taciturnity and command initially offers Bathsheba a means to power, over the course of the novel Hardy reveals her ever-increasing loss of linguistic -- and therefore moral and economic -- control in the face of men's categorization of her. Entrapment in language has already come to characterize her relationship with Boldwood as well as Troy. Just prior to her midnight flight to seek Troy in Bath, she encounters Boldwood whose accusatory words "came showering about her ears" (214) like a legal interrogation:

"When I had not thought of injuring him why did [Troy] force himself upon your notice? Before he worried you your inclination was to have me; when next I should have come to you your answer would have been Yes. Can you deny it -- I ask, can you deny it?"

She delayed the reply, but was too honest to withhold it. "I cannot," she whispered. (215)

Having merely "returned silent and weak denials" (214) until the point of submission, Bathsheba cannot adequately respond to Boldwood's indictment of her behaviour in words. She instead removes herself physically, fleeing Weatherbury in pursuit of Troy. Yet following Troy's apparent death, Bathsheba's regret about sending the valentine renders her nearly powerless to resist Boldwood's demands. Her guilt is marked by her ongoing use of metaphors of debt and repayment in reference to her relationship with Boldwood, -- "a question," as John Goode suggests, "of 'schooling herself to pay'" (*Thomas Hardy* 23). Such language thus emphasizes how the union would be based on undesirable, artificial terms of exchange -- sexual, economic, and linguistic.

The dialogues between Bathsheba and Boldwood thus become characterized by a

process of advancement and retreat. Yet Bathsheba's ambivalence does not signal authority, but desperate resistance, since her sense that she is "wicked to have made [Boldwood] suffer so" (134) is acute. The result -- linguistic and behavioural paralysis:

"Say then, that you don't absolutely refuse. Do not quite refuse!"
 "I can do nothing. I cannot answer."
 "I may speak to you again on the subject?"
 "Yes."
 "I may think of you?"
 "Yes, I suppose you may think of me."
 "And hope to obtain you?"
 "No -- do not hope! Let us go on."
 "I will call upon you again to-morrow."
 "No -- please not. Give me time."
 "Yes -- I will give you any time," he said earnestly and gratefully.
 "I am happier now."
 "No -- I beg you! Don't be happier if happiness only comes from my agreeing: Be neutral Mr Boldwood! I must think."
 "I will wait," he said.
 And then she turned away. (134)

Driven to secure her hand by any means, Boldwood willingly submits to what seems the hopeless deferral of her promise, both here, at the initial proposal, and later in the novel, when he agrees to wait more than six years. Bathsheba's authority is all but undermined by the time she tells Boldwood, "It is difficult for a woman to define her feelings in language, which is chiefly made by men to express theirs" (364). Unable to engage in the dialogue of empty promises, Bathsheba cannot express herself in terms satisfactory to Boldwood. Her response thus illustrates Wayne Anderson's claim that when "Betrayed or trapped by words, Hardy's characters become isolated in their own subjectivity. They cannot say what they mean, what they feel, lapsing into silences that lead to further alienation and loss" (Anderson 94). When able to assume a role of authority and command the terms of "men's language" in her management of the farm, Bathsheba had

access to a certain amount of power. But her interaction with Boldwood and Troy has depended upon her acknowledgment of the limited power available to women in sexual relationships and, as such, all but silenced her.

Perhaps anticipating the ultimate affinity that Bathsheba and he will share, earlier in the novel Oak says to Bathsheba (in words remarkably similar to her words to Boldwood), “I can’t match you, I know, in mapping out my mind upon my tongue” (27). Yet the depiction of Oak’s reticence demonstrates an aspect of silence that operates outside the dialectic of silence and speech that characterizes Bathsheba’s oscillating access to power. The “silence which says much” (153) in this novel, as the increasing communicative affinity that emerges between them will show, is not solely connected to the operation of power. Oak’s inability to shape his feelings for Bathsheba in the form of “passionate tales, -- ‘Full of sound and fury/signifying nothing’” (29) contrasts with those forms of manipulative rhetoric that characterize Troy’s use of language. Oak cannot subscribe to the romantic narratives that inform both Troy’s and Boldwood’s pursuit of Bathsheba, and that illustrate the extent of their narcissism and reliance on the terms of false promises. Oak realizes that it is often better to “say no word at all” (30) and, in doing so, demonstrates how silence can signal honest intentions that have generative results, both for the individual and the community.

Although his economic and social status as Bathsheba’s employee removes Oak from the realm of command, he nonetheless attempts to encourage Bathsheba to maintain order at Weatherbury, particularly by warning her about her conduct with men. When she asks him to contradict any gossip about a relationship between her and Boldwood, he entirely refuses: “if Mr Boldwood really spoke of marriage I bain’t going to tell a story

and say he didn't to please you. I have already tried to please you too much for my own good" (138-39). Bathsheba's agitation increases at Oak's insistence that she is "greatly to blame for playing pranks upon a man like Mr Boldwood" (141). Here the physical context of this scene is significant, given that over the course of their discussion Oak educates Bathsheba in the art of shear-sharpening by "enclosing her two hands completely in his own (taking each as we sometimes clasp a child's hand in teaching him to write)" (138). While somewhat condescending, the metaphor employed here is entirely appropriate, given that Oak is attempting to improve not only Bathsheba's farming methods, but her methods of communication. He goes on in regard to Boldwood, "And even Miss Everdene if you seriously inclined towards him you might have let him find it out in some way of true loving-kindness, and not by sending him a valentine's letter" (141). Intuitive to their unreliability and detachment from authenticity, Oak is immediately suspicious of such artificial forms of communication.

Yet before examining the function of Bathsheba's more disastrous communicative activities, we might well note that she temporarily engages in the kind of balanced communication that Oak encourages her to employ. Not surprisingly, Bathsheba first erupts with fury in response to criticism of her "private conduct" (141) and expels Oak from the farm. His initial refusal to return to assist her ailing sheep forces her to admit her genuine need for him:

she sat down and hastily scribbled a note between the small convulsive sobs of convalescence which follow a fit of crying as a ground swell follows a storm. The note was not the less polite for being written in a hurry. She held it at a distance, was about to fold it, then added these words at the bottom: '*Do not desert me Gabriel!*' (146)

Bathsheba's use of the imperative here reveals not her power, but her dependency on Oak. Following Gabriel's profitable return, Bathsheba willingly asks him to remain working with her. We cannot but read their words as anticipating Bathsheba's ultimate proposal to Oak at the close of the novel: "'Gabriel, will you stay on with me?' . . . 'I will'" (148). Like their marriage, this willing "good fellowship" (409) emerges out of mutual labour and occurs in the context of face-to-face authentic dialogue.

Yet this sense of resolution is hardly permanent. Like many of the events in the novel -- Troy's promise to marry Fanny, Bathsheba's promise to Boldwood, confirmation of Troy's death -- it operates according to the terms of deferral. Troy's appearance entirely disrupts Oak and Bathsheba's partnership. Significantly, speaking with Troy is precisely what Oak warns Bathsheba against and what she refuses to resist. Oak aptly anticipates the danger inherent in Troy's spurious character:

"When he tries to talk to 'ee again, why not turn away with a short 'Good-day'; and when you see him coming one way, turn the other. When he says anything laughable, fail to see the point and don't smile, and speak of him before those who will report your talk as 'That fantastical man,' or 'That Sergeant What's-his-name' -- 'That man of a family that has come to the dogs.'" (201-02)

Oak is sensitive to the way in which Bathsheba's private conduct, even at the level of speech, informs her public identity. He recognizes that by granting Troy access to her voice, she grants him too much liberty. Again unwilling to heed Oak's advice, Bathsheba responds with vehemence, the breakdown in her language emphasizing precisely Oak's point -- that language is a yardstick for one's interior emotional state, and that hers is in perilous decline:

“I say -- I say again -- that it doesn't become you to talk about him -- why he should be mentioned passes me quite!” she exclaimed desperately. “I know this, th-th-that he is a thoroughly conscientious man -- blunt sometimes even to rudeness, but always speaking his mind about you plain to your face!” (202)

The extent of the irony of Bathsheba's statement is clear. Troy may indeed assault her face with flattery, but his intentions are hardly honest.

Heedless of Oak's bid to dispose of Troy, Bathsheba engages in behaviour that contributes to the breakdown of the border between public and private that she has worked to maintain. Oak himself speculates on Bathsheba's seeming loss of control: “It was not Bathsheba's way to do things furtively. With all her faults she was candour itself” (247). The morally destructive nature of her relationship with Troy is signaled by her night-time journey to Bath, during which she is “dogged like a thief” (225). Oak and Coggan mistake her actions for those of a criminal, since, according to Coggan, “ladies don't drive at these hours . . . as a jeneral rule of society” (222). Bathsheba metaphorically operates as a thief of her own property, since her relationship with Troy will lead to Weatherbury's economic jeopardization. Her night-time pursuit also aligns her once again with the likes of Fanny Robin, whose movement abroad at night in pursuit of the young sergeant rendered her motives largely suspect. Furthermore, Bathsheba's absence from the farm reproduces the patterns of discourse that surrounded Fanny's initial absence from Weatherbury.⁸ In his “great history” (231), Joseph reports having seen Bathsheba with Troy in Bath. As her relationship with Troy proceeds, Bathsheba becomes

⁸ The Oxford edition of *Far From the Madding Crowd* restores several manuscript passages which were deleted at the request of the *Cornhill* editor, Leslie Stephen. It includes a passage from Chapter XXIII that adds to the speculation in the novel about Fanny. Pennyways appears at the sheep-shearing supper and reports having seen Fanny in Melchester, where she appeared “too well-off to be anything but a ruined woman” (160). However, his reliability is made suspect by his characterization as an untrustworthy thief.

increasingly subject to public exposure and speculation that illustrates how a woman's private conduct is never free from public constraint or consequence, how "what is mirth to the neighbours" can be "ruin to the woman" (201).

Many of the events of the novel focus on the disaster often occasioned by the movement of language -- oral or written -- through space. Bathsheba's valentine is the novel's most overt example of the danger inherent in the transmission of the disembodied linguistic artifact. Thus, in this novel, a woman's literal mobility is shown to coincide with the often destructive capacity of linguistic mobility. Subsequent incidents in the novel comment on the nature of the particular connection between women's socio-sexual degradation and the communicative treachery that the valentine embodies. As John Goode points out, the valentine derives its danger from its function as the declarative artifact of Bathsheba's gender and sexuality: "The valentine is the sign that she exists as a woman, but it is a sign that is immediately sent out of the control of what it is intended to signify" (*Thomas Hardy* 22). Significantly, Joseph Poorgrass' admission of illiteracy appears in the chapter directly following Bathsheba's sending of the valentine. Like her missal, Joseph's "inside-out-like" (114) branding signs (which, notably, like Bathsheba's "MARRY ME," are visually reproduced in the text) do not adequately represent what they aim to signify. Their similar difficulty in appropriately using language to convey their meaning suggests that, despite Bathsheba's education, she lacks the temperance and reason that would have prevented her from sending the valentine: "So very idly and unreflectingly was this deed done. Of love as a spectacle Bathsheba had a fair knowledge; but of love subjectively she knew nothing" (101). The class terms are obviously significant here: while Joseph is hindered by his lack of literacy, Bathsheba possesses

limited knowledge of the language of love, as her inability to anticipate accurately the impact her valentine will have on Boldwood and, by extension, the Weatherbury community, shows.

The significance of Bathsheba's valentine as a catalyst for her potential degradation in class terms is reinforced by the appearance of another letter in this chapter: Fanny Robin's. Like Bathsheba's valentine, Fanny's letter to Oak is incommensurate with reality: "[Sergeant Troy] would I know object to my having received anything except as a loan, being a man of great respectability and high honour -- indeed, a nobleman by blood" (115). Representing Troy as a man of honest moral and economic intentions, the letter also illustrates Fanny's limited interpretive ability. Significantly, Boldwood offers the oral account of Troy's history that entirely undermines the veracity of Fanny's letter. Fanny's inability to read Troy is thus analogous to Bathsheba's inability either to anticipate the detrimental results of Boldwood's "equilibrium disturbed" (126) or identify Troy's dubious character. In this sense, Bathsheba's similarity to Fanny is anticipated in their use of language long before Troy makes their similitude absolute by renouncing Bathsheba as his wife and thereby positioning her, not Fanny, "as the soiled and ruined lover" (113) who is "nothing" to him (312).⁹ Finally, while Boldwood stands here as the univocal voice of male authority -- and thus takes on the role of disinterested narrator -- he will ultimately, in his idealization of Bathsheba, succumb to the kind of romantic narratives in which she and Fanny and become embroiled.

⁹ Although Troy verbally inverts Fanny's and Bathsheba's respective positions as his mistress and wife, Fanny's body also possesses the capacity to rewrite history. Bronfen offers a subtle analysis of this scene in her essay "Pay As You Go: On the Exchange of Bodies and Signs." I also address this issue in relation to the eroticization of Eustacia Vye's corpse in my essay, "'The Woman Shall Bear Her Iniquity': Death as Social Discipline in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*."

The connection between Liddy, Bathsheba's employee and companion, and the verbal circulation of romantic narratives also plays a central role in Bathsheba's misconduct, particularly that linked to her misuse of language. Liddy encourages Bathsheba to attempt to discover who she is going to marry by superstitious use "of the Bible and key" (98), and while Bathsheba initially intends to send her valentine to Teddy Coggan, "the irrepressible Liddy" (100) exclaims, "What fun it would be to send it to the stupid old Boldwood, and how he would wonder!" (100). Furthermore, Liddy fills Bathsheba's head with fancies that correlate to the kind of valorization of Troy contained in Fanny's letter:

"What kind of a person is he?" [Bathsheba asks.]

"O miss -- I blush to name it -- a gay man -- a walking ruin to honest girls, so some people say. But I know him to be very quick and trim, who might have made his thousands like a squire. Such a clever young dand as he is! He's a doctor's son by name, which is a great deal; and he's an earl's son by nature!"

"Which is a great deal more. Fancy! Is it true?"

"Yes. And he was brought up so well, and sent to Casterbridge Grammar School for years and years. . . . Ah -- such a blessing it is to be high born: nobility of blood will shine out even in the ranks and files." (174)

Liddy's reports illustrate her bias in favour of the young romantic hero over the stodgy Farmer Boldwood. The extent to which Bathsheba both engages Liddy as a confidante and relies on her judgment, much of which is shown to be derived from the circulation of "reported" (174) gossip, points to the instability of her social position (she has only recently risen from her position as a milkmaid to her role as head of Weatherbury), which depends largely on the proper use and interpretation of language. Liddy undermines Bathsheba's initial negative response to Troy, leaving her unable to "clearly decide whether it was her opinion that he had insulted her or not" (174). Bathsheba's

susceptibility to Liddy's influence illustrates how poor judgment leads to a decline characterized by misconduct that is insensitive to class propriety, propriety which is dependent on the appropriate use of language and the proper choice of partners in linguistic exchange.

Hardy signals Bathsheba's progress toward a relationship based on honest dialogue that operates outside the limited terms of romantic narratives by revealing her increased capacity for interpretation. Her efforts in this direction focus primarily on the revision of her consideration of her relationship with Troy. Following Troy's abrogation of their marriage, Bathsheba secures herself as "a voluntary prisoner in the attic" (329) where she takes up the reading of her uncle's books, as if to reinvest herself with the conventional paternal authority that he represented. She notably rejects Liddy's suggestion that she read "that story of the black man who murdered his wife Desdemona, . . . a nice dismal one that would suit [her] excellent just now" (318), reprimanding Liddy for examining her books without permission and insisting that tragic romantic tales are hardly suitable for her. Her education thus takes the form of a course in realism. Having entirely overthrown her interest in "love as spectacle" that previously informed the conduct of her relationships, Bathsheba begins the process by which she will be "reinterpellated into her culture" (Shires 62).¹⁰

Bathsheba's separation from Troy during his exile from Weatherbury is additionally redemptive for her. Upon Troy's return, the power imbalance that operated

¹⁰ While I hesitate to accept Shires' suggestion that this process of reinterpellation insists that Bathsheba recognize her "femininity and *power*" (Shires 62, italics added), her discussion of how the "crisis of gender" in the text marks Hardy's resistance to "a dialectical theory of power where one sex oppresses the other" (51) is engaging.

in his favour is inverted. Troy's degradation, which is suggested by his connection to the spectacle of the circus and his dependency on the likes of "the knavish bailiff Pennyways" (357), is underscored by his reaction to seeing Bathsheba, "queen of the tournament" (354) on the occasion of his performance at the Weatherbury fair:

He had not expected her to exercise this power over him in the twinkling of an eye. . . . There suddenly arose in him a sense of shame at the possibility that this attractive young wife who already despised him should despise him more by discovering him in so mean a condition after so long a time. He actually blushed at the thought. . . . (355)

Troy's subordination is thus shown in his physical response to Bathsheba, which subverts those gender norms his presence had formerly established: to retain any sense of dignity, he must conceal his identity by keeping silent before Bathsheba, who gazes down on him from the stands. Finally, that Troy's theft of the revelatory note that she receives from Pennyways is interpreted as an attempt "to rob [the] young lady" (361) signals unequivocally the extent of his decline both in class and economic terms. His theft of the words that would expose his identity also reaffirms Troy's position as the novel's locus of linguistic and economic exploitation and reinforces our sense of the way in which experiential contingency is grounded in the transmission of language.

The events surrounding Troy's death are the final manifestation of his powerlessness. Although his final words demonstrate an attempt to command her, Bathsheba's silent resistance illustrates their inefficacy:

Then Troy spoke. "Bathsheba, I come here for you."
 She made no reply.
 "Come home with me: come."
 "Bathsheba moved her feet a little, but did not rise. Troy went across to her.
 "Come madam, do you hear what I say?" he said peremptorily.

A strange voice came from the fireplace -- a voice sounding far off and confined, as if from a dungeon. Hardly a soul in the assembly recognized the thin tones to be those of Boldwood. Sudden despair had transformed him.

“Bathsheba, go with your husband!”

Nevertheless, she did not move. (390)

Boldwood similarly attempts to shape Bathsheba’s behaviour by his commands, but her reaction to Troy -- first, stasis and, finally, a scream of revulsion -- ultimately incites Boldwood to shoot Troy. In overseeing the inscription of Troy’s gravestone and ensuring that he occupies the space next to Fanny in death that he should have had in life -- lying next to her -- Bathsheba concludes her revision of history, effectively writing herself out of her relationship with him. In doing so, she displays her renewed sense of loyalty to the terms of realism, her behaviour responding to Troy’s erection of Fanny’s tombstone, which Bronfen aptly views as serving as yet another “function of [the] romantic display” (73) upon which his character depends.

While Bathsheba’s behaviour seemingly operates as a tribute to Fanny rather than to Troy, it simultaneously subscribes to the notion that sexual conduct and reproduction determine a woman’s status (that Fanny, having had a prior sexual relationship with Troy and having borne his child is therefore his actual “wife”), a notion entirely characteristic of patriarchal discourses on sexuality. Thus, in rewriting Fanny and Troy’s history, Bathsheba simultaneously enacts her own “detextualization” (Bronfen 72). Such is appropriately the case as the novel proceeds toward a realistic ending seemingly contrary to Bathsheba’s former independence. Bathsheba becomes increasingly dependent on men’s advice, telling Oak, with some irony, “When I want a broad-minded opinion for general enlightenment, distinct from special advice, I never go to a man who deals in the

subject professionally. So I like the parson's opinion on law, the lawyer's on doctoring, the doctor's on business, and my business-man's -- that is, yours -- on morals" (369). As the novel proceeds we hear less and less from Liddy; the only woman's opinion Bathsheba relies upon is her own and only for matters of love. Subscribing to the kind of romantic narratives which fascinate Liddy has led her to "some rash acts" that have taught her "that a watched woman must have very much circumspection to retain only a very little credit" (367). To operate as a woman under public scrutiny in a patriarchal world, Bathsheba must select her private relationships with care. Her increased sensitivities therefore encourage Bathsheba to keep her engagement to Oak a secret; she tells Liddy of the imminent event only on the morning of the wedding, in words that they alone can hear -- the reader only receives report of Bathsheba's whisper.

Bathsheba's reticence is indicative of her increased capacity to employ language prudently to productive ends.¹¹ Oak supplants Liddy as Bathsheba's confidante: Bathsheba willingly enters into "an oddly confidential dialogue with Gabriel about her difficulty" (366) with Boldwood, divulging the details with "reckless frankness" (367). Yet it is their discussion of marriage that conclusively marks their relationship as one dependent on fair linguistic exchange. Significantly, it arises in reference to local gossip, as Bathsheba asks,

"Things said about you and me -- what are they?"

"I cannot tell you."

"It would be wiser if you were to, I think. You have played the part of mentor to me many times, and I don't see why you should fear to do it now."

¹¹ Rosemarie Morgan is among many who identify the "muting or silencing" (51) of the heroine as the mark of the destruction of her spirit. The use of the "language of taming, of conquering and domination" (Mitchell 171) in the novel is not to be dismissed, but Bathsheba's growing ability to use language generatively ultimately produces a sense of equilibrium that complicates the sense of her subordination.

“It is nothing you have done this time. The top and tail o’ t is this -- that I’m sniffing about here, and waiting for poor Boldwood’s farm with a thought of getting you some day.”

“Getting me -- what does that mean?”

“Marrying of ‘ee, in plain British. -- You asked me to tell, so you mustn’t blame me.” (407)

Oak again exhibits his desire to be faithful to the truth of reality as opposed to conjectured fictions. Thus, as their discussion proceeds, it is characterized by careful attention to the most minute subtleties of language:

“Marrying me -- I didn’t know it was that you meant,” she said quietly. “Such a thing as that is too absurd -- to soon -- to think of by far.”

“ . . . It is too absurd, as you say.”

“Too s-s-soon were the words I used.”

“I must beg your pardon for correcting you, but you said too absurd, and so do I.”

“I beg your pardon too!” she returned with tears in her eyes. “Too soon was what I said. But it doesn’t matter a bit -- not at all -- but I only meant too soon. Indeed I didn’t, Mr. Oak, and you must believe me!”

“ . . . If I only knew one thing -- whether you would allow me to love you and win you and marry you after all -- if I only knew that!”

“But you never will know,” she murmured.

“Why?”

“Because you never ask!” (407-408)

Although Bathsheba insists that Oak ask her to marry him, the necessity of his question is eradicated by the desire implicit in Bathsheba’s insistence. Bathsheba’s “proposal” to Oak recalls Fanny’s discussion with Troy regarding their intended marriage, which made her “say what ought to be said first by [him]” (91). It also, to a certain degree, anticipates Thomasin’s plea to Wildeve in *The Return of the Native*: “Here I am, asking you to marry me; when by rights you ought to be on your knees, imploring me, your cruel mistress, not to refuse you, and saying it would break your heart if I did. I used to think it would be pretty and sweet like that; but how different!” (RN 41-42). Yet while the necessity of a woman’s proposal can, as in the cases of Fanny and Thomasin, signal both her shameful

sense of subordination and the imminent peril threatening her reputation as a result of her lover's duplicity, Bathsheba's proposal to Oak signals their equality, her position as suitor serving to counteract the imbalance inherent in Oak's long-suffering stance: "I've danced at your skittish heels, my beautiful Bathsheba, for many a long mile, and many a long day" (409). She both possesses the power to ask him and yet retains the sensitivity to be somewhat shocked by her own forwardness -- "it seems exactly as if I had come courting you -- how dreadful" (409) -- that is in no way the result of a lack of feeling or honest intention on Oak's part. Hardy's careful rendering of this scene shows how Bathsheba and Oak's relationship finally enables the dissolution of those barriers to communication that are reinforced by the strict prescription of linguistic roles according to gender. The terms finally characterizing their marital relationship in fact exemplify Wildeve's comment on Thomasin's idealization of the "cruel mistress" / "imploring" lover model: "real life is never at all like that" (RN 42).

More consistent with the imperatives of "real life," Bathsheba and Oak's joint economic contribution to the partnership (Oak's tenure of Little Weatherbury is forthcoming) renders their marriage generative in a way that sharply contrasts with both Troy's economic exploitation of Bathsheba during their marriage and Bathsheba's response to Boldwood in terms of "the rendering of a debt" (386). Thus, the economic and linguistic balance finally characterizing Bathsheba and Oak's marriage, a "romance" that has emerged "in the interstices of a mass of hard prosaic reality" (409), aptly culminates in the acknowledgement of their mutual labours:

This good fellowship -- *camaraderie*, usually occurring through similarity of pursuits, is unfortunately seldom superadded to love between the sexes,

because men and women associate not in their labours, but in their pleasures merely. (409)

The growth of their relationship has been rendered throughout the text in terms of their work, the chapter aptly entitled “The Two Together” in which Bathsheba and Oak toil together to protect the ricks anticipating the joint supervision of Weatherbury that culminates in this partnership marriage. At the point of their engagement, Oak “accompanied her up the hill, explaining to her the details of his forthcoming tenure of the other farm. They spoke very little of their mutual feelings: pretty phrases and warm expressions being probably unnecessary between such tried friends” (409). The extent of their shared labour grants the pair a level of understanding that operates outside the limited terms of verbal discourse.

Governed by authentic discourse that can overcome the often stifling limitations that dominant constructions of gender have placed on communication between men and women, Oak and Bathsheba’s engagement aptly coincides with the demonstration of how silence has a communicative function in the novel that registers neither dominance nor subordination, but tacit sympathy. In contrast to the kind of destructive discourse in which both Boldwood and Troy, and even Bathsheba herself, engage, participation in authentic dialogue finally grants Bathsheba access to a privately and publicly generative relationship that, even in silence, circumvents “the coarse meshes of language.”

The relationship between Bathsheba and Oak thrives within the conventional relational structures that Hardy will demonstrate to be increasingly constrictive. I turn now to a narrative in which the heroine’s existence – social, economic, and linguistic – operates according to the terms not of integration, but exclusion: *The Return of the Native*.

Chapter Two

Subversively Speaking: *The Return of the Native*

“In God’s mercy don’t talk so, Eustacia.”
– *The Return of the Native* (197).

In turning to *The Return of the Native* (1878) we move from the “Queen of the Corn Market” (*FMC* 180) to the “lonely . . . queen of the solitude” (*RN* 12). While Bathsheba’s supervision of Weatherbury necessitates her operation in the public sphere, Eustacia Vye both eludes and is excluded from interaction with her community. Furthermore, in *The Return of the Native* Hardy produces a heroine who all but eclipses Bathsheba’s claim to independent status. Eustacia exhibits little trace of maiden modesty, and her sense of her own “Mental clearness and power” (91) grants her far more self-assertion, even in the face of confrontation and accusation.

The way in which individuals communicate in *The Return of the Native* is at the root of the novel’s tragedy. Critics frequently point to the extent to which classical drama dictates much of the novel’s narrative structure,¹ but I would add that it also shapes much of the novel’s linguistic structure. As in those classical dramas which the novel invokes -- *King Lear* and *Oedipus Rex* -- saying the right words and accurately interpreting signs become matters of survival; the inability to do so has devastating consequences. The dynastic focus of such tragedies also foregrounds the significance of strategy, alliances, and betrayal, even in the context of personal relationships. The same is true of *The Return*

¹ See Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy*, pp. 49 ff. See also Lothe, pp. 112-129.

of the Native, where both tactical and familial relations are predicated on the use and misuse of language.

In examining the way in which “gossip impels plots” (7), Patricia Meyer Spacks observes the connection between covert communication and destruction: “The idea of talking in secret . . . about someone recalls old conceptions of words as dangerous weapons” (11). Spacks’ view of the combative nature of gossip is extremely applicable to a consideration of the function of language in *The Return of the Native*. Mrs. Yeobright’s ability to indict Eustacia’s behaviour is largely derived from her access to the rumours in circulation about the “young witch-lady” (181), which are generally produced by the speculation of the lower-class heath dwellers. While their conjectures are, for the most part, not intentionally damaging in and of themselves, the destruction resulting from the appropriation of their narratives by such figures as Mrs. Yeobright and, ultimately, Clym, demonstrates how gossip can supply a “powerful weapon” and “can effect incalculable harm, . . . sowing insinuations which generate tragedy” (Spacks 4).

Yet discourse is not the only destructive verbal strategy at work in *The Return of the Native*; silence proves equally as damaging to relationships and identity. Eustacia’s use of both signs and silence rather than verbal communication is, as Jennifer Gribble observes, a manifestation of her “urge for love, sexual need, boredom, [and] frustration” (240). She operates generally in ways that challenge her community’s class and gender hierarchies, moving across the heath at night, mumming, communicating through covert signals and signs, and carrying out clandestine meetings with her lovers. Her unwillingness to interact -- socially, linguistically, and otherwise -- with the Egdon Heath

community (unless for her own benefit) positions Eustacia as a figure of both extreme suspicion and vulnerability.

As other people's words subject Eustacia to a position of increasing confinement, she finds herself in a state of economic, social, and linguistic exclusion over which she has little control. Ultimately exemplifying the way in which the transmission of information serves an exacting regulatory function, the novel culminates in tragedy that is the manifestation of the most destructive form of communicative treachery. Upon her death, Eustacia is definitively transformed from an enigmatic manipulator of language to a legible, public text.

I concluded my discussion of *Far From the Madding Crowd* by demonstrating how the very terms of their marriage proposal can be seen to characterize the development of Bathsheba and Oak's relationship as a whole. The linguistic transaction that characterizes Clym and Eustacia's discussion of marriage in *The Return of the Native* is equally revelatory in regards to character and, likewise, the function of language more generally in the novel. Clym must in fact remind Eustacia of the necessity of seeking her Grandfather's permission to marry. Responding, "I am so accustomed to be my own mistress that it did not occur to me that we should have to ask him" (201), Eustacia demonstrates the extent of her removal from those codes governing public discourse and behaviour. Their marriage itself leads to their social exclusion, an extension of the terms that define Eustacia's existence on the heath.

Eustacia's isolation from her community initially seems to mark her as a figure of disruptive power since it results from her sense of social superiority and positions her as

an object of fascination and desire, a situation that as we shall see, she will use to her advantage. She will not engage with the usual rituals of the community, whether the building of bonfires or attending church, “her instincts toward social non-conformity” leading her to resist involving herself in such activities, “that she might be unoppressed with a sense of doing her duty” (67). Eustacia’s isolation from the heath-dwellers renders her an enigmatic figure and apparently invests her with a kind of mystical power. Yet her self-imposed solitude both incriminates and dehumanizes her, the heath-dwellers’ detection of “something sinister in the mendacious way Eustacia appropriates and distorts nature’s language” (Garson 67) making her additionally threatening. Eustacia’s subversive methods of communication, to which I shall directly return, produce much speculation about “the lonesome dark-eyed creature that some say is a witch” (47).

But I shall first turn to the form and function of the local gossip, since Eustacia in fact co-opts the speculation about her into her communicative strategies. Subject to Egdon’s “surrounding tongues” (385), Eustacia’s public identity effectively rises up from the narrative lore of the heath, which hearkens back to pagan superstition in such activities as its bonfire rituals and, indeed, in the portrayal of Eustacia as a witch.² The heath-dwellers’ talk exemplifies Spacks’ sense of the way gossip can “solidify a group’s sense of itself by heightening consciousness of ‘outside’ (inhabited by those talked about) and ‘inside’ (the temporarily secure territory of the talkers)” (5). Thus, gossip and conjecture about Eustacia serve as primary mechanisms in her marginalization from the Egdon community. Significantly, the circulation of information about Eustacia

² See Firor (pp. 89-91) for a discussion of the origins of the witchcraft motifs found in *The Return of the Native*.

immediately positions her as a threatening competitor in the eyes of the women of Egdon. The sense of Eustacia as a figure of menace is chiefly perpetuated by Susan Nunsuch, who does not “care for her close ways” (20). While women such as Susan see her as menacing and corruptive (an attitude that Mrs. Yeobright will adopt), men, in contrast, are intrigued by her sexual attractiveness. Humphrey, for example, feels that “She’s a well-favoured maid enough, . . . especially when she’s got one of her dandy gowns on.” (27); Timothy doubts that he “ever . . . should call a fine young woman such a name” as witch (48); and Grandfer Cattle would “be very glad to ask her in wedlock, if she’d hae [him], and take the risk of her wild dark eyes ill-wishing [him]” (48). Yet although their perception of Eustacia is divided along gender lines, both men and women resort to stereotypical categorizations of the feminine object -- beauty or demon -- in an attempt to fix, through spoken exchange, her seemingly unstable identity.

However, as I have mentioned, Eustacia also cultivates her image as a woman to be reckoned with by invoking the heath dwellers’ narrative mythology. Her reference to herself, for example, as the “Witch of Endor” (62) illustrates how Eustacia initially “participates enthusiastically in her own encoding” (Garson 70). Comprised of contradictory impulses,³ Eustacia is the embodiment of a syntactic structure, paradox: “In Eustacia’s brain were juxtaposed the strangest assortment of ideas, from old time and from new” (65). Indeed, tension between her resistance to and dependency on the heath is reinforced throughout the text. The heath brushes her hair (63) and Eustacia’s very sigh is part of the “wild rhetoric” (52) of the heath, which Hardy depicts as a speaking vessel:

³ See Boumelha (*Thomas Hardy*, pp. 54-55) on the “critical commonplace” (54) of Eustacia as a divided figure.

“The bluffs had broken silence, the heath-bells had broken silence; at last, so did the woman; and her articulation was but as another phrase of the same discourse as theirs” (52). Although she desires escape from Egdon, which has become a “jail” (180) to her, her form “was so much like an organic part of the entire motionless structure [of the heath] that to see it move would have impressed the mind as a strange phenomenon” (72). This passage registers Eustacia’s connection to the heath, but in terms that make explicit the oppressive stasis to which it confines her.

However, the wildness of the heath itself seems to afford Eustacia the opportunity to exercise her desire, since in speaking the “same discourse” as the heath-bells,

What she entered was a lengthened sighing. . . . There was a spasmodic abandonment about it, as if, in allowing herself to utter the sound, the woman’s brain had authorized what it could not regulate. The point was evident in this: she had been existing in a suppressed state, and not in one of languor or stagnation. (52)

While this passage reinforces Eustacia’s connection to the heath, it also points to the “deregulation” (Giordano 64) of her sexuality that the heath seemingly facilitates. Furthermore, in positioning her very utterance as mark of her unruly desire, Hardy subtly illustrates the subversive nature of Eustacia’s voice. When Wildeve appears in response to her signal flame, for example, she tells him assertively, “I determined you should come; and you have come. I have shown my power” (62).

The authority of Eustacia’s word is central here, since although she initially imports the eccentricities of her publicly-constructed identity into her own discourse, her simultaneous refusal to engage with her community takes the form of the subversion of conventional methods of communication. Eustacia communicates instead in “a manipulative lover’s code” (Garson 67) via the secret signals and signs that the heath

makes available to her: her bonfire, the sound produced by the dropping of a stone in a pool, disguises, “clandestine” (97) window taps, and fluttering moths. Eustacia’s use of signs is connected to her subversive, sexual power; in her fire, or “signal light” (49), what typically symbolizes a generative guiding principle instead facilitates corruption, particularly sexual corruption, encouraging Wildeve to go to Eustacia “in obedience to her call” (61). Indeed, Eustacia’s fire itself is viewed as subversively anti-social, as Timothy Fairway observes: “To have a little fire inside your own bank and ditch, that nobody else may enjoy it or come anigh it!” (27).

Eustacia’s shrewd linguistic strategies are shown to complicate her relationship to gender norms: “She seldom schemed, but when she did scheme, her plans showed rather the comprehensive strategy of a general than the small arts called womanish, though she could utter oracles of Delphian ambiguity when she did not choose to be direct” (68). This potent combination of feminine subtlety and masculine authority emerges particularly in relation to Eustacia’s use of men in her communicative strategies: Johnny, “her little slave” (56) sets her bonfire; Venn delivers her letter of rejection to Wildeve (153); and, sensitive to “the power of this girl’s face and form” (124), Charley facilitates her mumming activities. Eustacia’s behaviour thus inverts typical gender hierarchies as she treats men as purchasable and disposable property in order to facilitate her linguistic manoeuvres.

Her appropriation of authority is literalized when she takes up the implements of masculine power as a mummer and is “Changed in sex, brilliant in colours, and armed from top to toe” (128), having set aside her “woman’s gown” (125) for “sword and staff” (126). Her mumming performance combines those activities that have implications for

the novel as a whole: surveillance, stealth, and silence. Eustacia places herself into a text that affords her the distance necessary to engage in covert observation of the foreign object, Clym.⁴ Their initial encounter is aptly framed in terms of combat, which emphasizes the aggressive, strategic function of Eustacia's role as a mummer, and characterizes her covert activities generally.⁵ Like the sword scene in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, which is also overtly connected to sexual desire, this scene situates the female figure in a combative position, as an enemy on the battle field. Both scenes thus conflate the spectacle of the ritualized mating dance and the threat of violent assault. Yet Bathsheba ultimately serves as the passive object of Troy's sword exercise. In contrast, as the title of the chapter in which Clym and Eustacia first speak -- "The Two Stand Face to Face" (136) -- suggests, Eustacia's mumming performance positions her as a much more equal adversary.

Yet once this encounter takes place, the transgression of social and gender boundaries necessitated by her participation in this "traditional pastime" for which, in fact, she "had the greatest contempt" (122), soon compromises her dignity and sense of agency, particularly since the disguise of her voice it necessitates conceals her feminine desirability. In costume, Eustacia soon found "the power of her face all lost, the charm of her motions all disguised, the fascinations of her coquetry denied existence, nothing but a voice left to her: she had the sense of the doom of Echo" (144). Hardy's analogy depicts

⁴ In discussing the anti-feminist "scopic economy" (161) at work in Hardy's texts, Mitchell suggests that the extent of Eustacia's power as an observer is significantly undermined by the fact that throughout the text "the reader is invited to share the perspective of the unspecified male observer and to 'look at her looking'" (176).

⁵ Rosemarie Morgan observes how the unconventional application of attributes initially equivocates the distribution of power in their relationship, noting that Hardy depicts Eustacia as "physically sturdy, potentially combative: 'her mouth is cut as the point of a sphere.' Clym, in complement, is introspective, passive, soft" (60).

her identity as reduced to a mere disembodied voice and, furthermore, “also evokes her dependence on the utterance of a male other” (Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy* 55). Indeed, the reestablishment of Eustacia’s feminine vulnerability coincides with Clym’s conversation with her. Recalling Troy’s first words to Bathsheba, Clym’s initial question, “are you a woman?” (145) positions him, at this early stage in the text, as a figure concerned with the regulation of normative discursive categories of identity, categories to which he will increasingly confine Eustacia.

Prior to her climactic and ruinous confrontation with Clym, Eustacia is challenged by various other linguistic adversaries in ways that illustrate how suspicious economic dealings have their analogues in destructive verbal exchanges. Economics in fact play a central role in the (mis)communication that ultimately leads to her demise. Her act of giving Johnny a crooked sixpence illustrates the volatile connection in the novel between money, illicit behaviour, and rumour, such that the token’s superstitious value associates Eustacia with witch-like behaviour and thus leads Susan Nunsuch to relentlessly pursue her. Furthermore, the confrontation that results from the misadventure of the guineas that Mrs. Yeobright intended for Clym and Thomasin is in fact the originary point of the irreparable division between Mrs. Yeobright and Eustacia. The misplaced money leads to Mrs. Yeobright’s heightened suspicions about Eustacia, who responds with vehemence to the implication that she is Wildeve’s mistress, revealing her acute sense that “It was a condescension . . . to be Clym’s wife” (245). “Suspected of secretly favouring another man for money” (246), Eustacia is accused of possessing luxuriant desire. Her ceaseless longing for the dazzling offerings of Paris, “the centre and vortex of the fashionable world” (109), is itself a code for her unrestrained sexual desire, the perception of which

encourages speculation about her that will be implicated both in her separation from Clym and her ultimate destruction.

The imperatives of economics and class are equally significant for the more prosperous fate of another of the novel's chief linguistic manipulators: Diggory Venn. Venn's shrewd retrieval of the guineas from Wildeve is apt behaviour for this disguised representative of middle class normative values. The novel's moral watchdog, this "officious intruder, troublemaker, and . . . demoraliser" (R. Morgan 67) regulates others' behaviour primarily through the control of language and information.⁶ For example, when he accompanies Thomasin home in his van, he will not let her be looked at, nor will he give her name to the curious Captain Vye, and yet it is Diggory who first arrives with "something bad to tell" (35) Mrs. Yeobright about her niece. His "disconcerting lift of the curtain" (88) when first confronting Eustacia in regards to her association with Wildeve equally demonstrates his ability to withhold information and reveal it at the crucial moment. Venn acts time and again as go-between and facilitator of communicative exchange, saying to Eustacia, "If you choose to send 'em by me, miss, and a note to tell [Wildeve] that you wish to say no more to him I'll take it for you quite privately. That would be the most straightforward way of letting him know your mind" (152). Yet the amount of covert surveillance in which the reddleman engages makes him notably similar to Eustacia, particularly in his alienated, enigmatic condition: "His occupation tended to isolate him, and isolated he was mostly seen to be" (74-75). But while Eustacia rebels against the restrictive demands of status quo normalcy, Venn polices them. The extent to

⁶ Rosemarie Morgan's analysis of Venn is consistent with that of Garson, who suggests that "the actual results of Venn's meddling . . . are so negative as to invite the no doubt perverse conclusion that he is the real villain of the story" (58).

which Venn serves as the guardian and purveyor of information positions him as one of the text's chief administrators of modern social discipline.⁷

The reddleman is particularly instrumental in Mrs. Yeobright's communicative plotting. She is shown to have "thanked God for the weapon which the reddleman had put into her hands" (95). The weapon in this case, and many others, is crucial information: she will use her knowledge of Venn's desire for Thomasin to incite Wildeve to marry her niece. Like Venn, Mrs. Yeobright's efforts to regulate others' behaviour through language render her a figure of destructive intervention. Possessed of the power of oral discourse, she "forbad the banns" (18) between Thomasin and Wildeve, as she similarly protests against Clym and Eustacia's relationship. Her relationship with Clym depends on linguistic manipulation; she both conceals information, such as that about Thomasin's initial botched marriage attempt, and, as we shall see, is equally able to enact the timely revelation of information to serve her interests.

Yet before turning to the way in which Mrs. Yeobright employs the language of public opinion as a chief weapon in her verbal assault on Eustacia's character, we should note the similarity between the two women,⁸ which serves to blind each to the other as they become locked in competition, to the point of death, and beyond. Both Mrs. Yeobright and Eustacia are similarly subject to public talk, exile, and death. While,

⁷ My reading of the novel is largely Foucauldian in this regard. Despite Venn's depiction as "one of a class rapidly becoming extinct in Wessex" (7), he is particularly implicated in carrying out the kind of surveillance that is necessary for the cultivation of modern discipline -- self-regulation -- as outlined in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (pp. 195-293).

⁸ See Garson (pp. 75-77) for an astute reading of the "the demonic power of Clym's mother" (77) and the various doublings that occur in the novel. McKee has observed how the frequent doubling of female characters in nineteenth-century narratives is an index to the way in which "women's knowledge, particularly self-knowledge, tends toward confusion rather than distinction" (17).

like Venn, Mrs. Yeobright adheres to the judgment and language of orthodox dictates that indict enigmatic women such as Eustacia as evil, both she and Eustacia suffer at the hands of Clym's neglect and misapprehension and are, in the forms of their deaths, effectively killed by the heath itself. Like Eustacia, she is also subject to the public scrutiny that accompanies a woman's speaking out: "I felt it so strongly that I did what I would never have believed myself capable of doing -- stood up in the church, and made myself the public talk for weeks" (38). The novel ultimately illustrates that outspoken women must be expunged from a society that valorizes the submissive silence exemplified by women such as Thomasin.

The likeness of the two women also points to Eustacia's "psychological fragmentation" (McKee 14); ironically her lack of stable identity makes her particularly vulnerable to the damaging public conjecture and judgment perpetuated by her mother-in-law. Perceiving Eustacia as a threat to Clym's livelihood, Mrs. Yeobright invokes the speculative language and superstitions of the lower class, co-opting into her discourse the rumours circulating about Eustacia:

"Who's Miss Vye?" said Clym.
 "Captain Drew's grand-daughter, of Mistover Knap" [said Venn].
 "A proud girl from Budmouth," said Mrs. Yeobright. "One
 not much to my liking. People say she's a witch, but of course that's absurd." (164)

Mrs. Yeobright may initially reject the rumours about Eustacia as absurd, but she ultimately subscribes to them in her attempts to keep Clym and Eustacia apart. As Clym's interest in Eustacia grows, Mrs. Yeobright becomes increasingly compelled to rely on local gossip:

Observing that Clym appeared singularly interested Mrs Yeobright said rather uneasily to Sam, "You see more in her than most of us do. Miss Vye is to my mind too idle to be charming. I have never heard that she is of any use to herself or to other people. Good girls don't get treated as witches even on Egdon." (180)

Like Susan Nunsuch, who also fears for her son's subjection to Eustacia's power, Mrs. Yeobright publicly articulates a view of Eustacia that ultimately proves much more damaging than the report of her attractiveness circulated by men such as Sam. Thus, the competitive model that develops between women in this novel is shown to have its primary basis in the manipulation of language, particularly oral communication. Recalling how Liddy's gossip about Boldwood and Troy incites Bathsheba to perilously frivolous behaviour in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Mrs. Yeobright's use of the witch-narrative points to the way in which middle-class appropriation of lower-class gossip, conjecture, and superstition, invests such discourse with a dangerous amount of authority. Showing how "people utterly lacking in public power may affect the views of figures who make things happen in the public sphere" (Spacks 7), such linguistic appropriation may also subtly mark the ruinous acquisitive tendencies of the middle class, who put lower-class gossip to much more manipulative and, ultimately, destructive ends.

Significantly, the increasing circulation of the witch narrative, brought to the fore by Susan Nunsuch's stabbing of Eustacia in church, coincides with the occasion of Clym's interest in Eustacia. Their relationship will be largely implicated in her growing sense of the degree to which her power is limited by the community's view of her, a view to which Clym will ultimately subscribe. When Eustacia loses control of her narrative -- when it becomes public property and subject to public scrutiny (scrutiny which is chiefly enacted by her own husband) and, finally, to public reformation -- she begins to realize

the hand that gossip and public opinion have in her fate. Increasingly bereft of any sense of agency, she becomes “obliged to act by stealth not because [she has] done ill, but because others are pleased to say so” (286).

What others are pleased to say is, then, centrally implicated in Eustacia’s demise. Hardy thus demonstrates the extent to which spoken words shape conduct, the characters seemingly commanding the direction of the narrative by their very words. Eustacia’s destruction is prophesied by her own claim about the heath: “Tis my cross, my misery, and will be my death” (82). Her own words, and the form of her death, in fact echo Mrs. Yeobright’s warning that she is “on the edge of a precipice” (247). But, the effect of Clym’s premonitory curse, “may all murderesses get the torment they deserve!” (327), most explicitly illustrates the extent to which, in this novel, “words may kill souls” (Spacks 30). Thus, Eustacia’s plot is determined largely not only by her self-destructive tendencies, but by external judgment, speculation, and speech. For example, Eustacia’s overhearing that, according to her neighbours, she and Clym “would make a very pretty pigeon pair” (107) shapes the direction of her desire, writing a script for her that was formerly blank: “the heathmen had instinctively coupled her and this man together in their minds, as a pair born for each other. That five minutes of overhearing furnished Eustacia with visions enough to fill the whole blank afternoon” (108). The repetition of oral exchange ultimately transforms conjecture into truth, providing Eustacia with the role of tragic lover which she has longed to perform. The spoken word transforms, produces, and is reality.

Ironically, other people’s words will ultimately lead to Eustacia’s exile and suffering rather than fulfillment, particularly because of her persistent defiance of public

opinion. While her increasing subjection to such surveillance and conjecture will ultimately drive her to death, she is not initially threatened by it:

The reddleman's hint that rumour might show her to disadvantage had no permanent terror for Eustacia. She was as unconcerned at that contingency as a goddess at a lack of linen. This did not originate in inherent shamelessness, but in her living too far from the world to feel the impact of public opinion. Zenobia in the desert could hardly have cared what was said about her at Rome. (92)

Eustacia's marginalized position thus ultimately wreaks havoc upon her, since it not only affords her the opportunity to indulge herself within the "secret recesses of sensuousness" (92), but also initially renders her largely ignorant of the severe public consequences that accompany a woman's perceived misconduct.

Thomasin's contrasting ability to perform the role of "exemplary, dutiful, submissive, forbearing wife" (R. Morgan 59), which is derived from her acute awareness of the public observation and judgment women face, emphasizes Eustacia's insensitivity and alludes to the sense of public scorn that she will ultimately experience. The action of Thomasin's body -- her flight from Southerton⁹ and subsequent confinement in her home -- tells the tale of her humiliation. Both her visibility and invisibility are a "warning to others" (111), the symbol of the circumstances that befall a shamed woman.

Indeed, a woman's articulation is often most influential when her body serves as the speaking artifact. Venn's delivery of Eustacia's letter to Wildeve offers an explicit illustration of the analogous relationship between language and the body in Hardy's texts:

"The meeting is always at eight o'clock, at this place," said Venn.
 "And here we are -- we three."
 "We three?" said Wildeve looking quickly round. "Yes; you and I and she. This is she." He held up the letter and parcel. (153)

⁹ Anglebury in the Wessex edition.

Wildeve's response to the rejection contained in the letter further emphasizes the connection in the text between the female body, language, and destruction:

“. . . Humbled like this,” he said to himself. “She has played that trick once too often. Between the two I am coming to the ground, am I? But we'll see. Little does she think that I mean to take her at her word!” He tore into fifty pieces the letter that he carried in his hand. (154-55)

Wildeve strongly objects to a woman's attempt to control events through language.¹⁰

Furthermore, his action reinforces the acute relationship in the novel between the body and the text, particularly since it anticipates the destruction of Eustacia's body that will occur at the novel's end, which has its basis in the punitive application of language and which will enact permanent silence.

In its explicit association of violence and the female voice, the image on the Quiet Woman inn sign (39) of a woman carrying her head under her arm most forcefully articulates the novel's central concern with the varying fates of speaking and silent women.¹¹ It also suggests that signs often prove more readable than direct communication, and that the body itself is an effectual speaking vessel. Pervaded by an absence of generative communication, the novel largely concerns the interpretation of signs, literal and figurative, and the disaster inherent in their misinterpretation.

Guilty herself of adhering to faulty readings, Eustacia is shown, as we have seen,

¹⁰ J. Hillis Miller's essay, "Hardy, Derrida, and the 'Dislocation of Souls,'" offers a provocative reading of Hardy's poem, "The Torn Letter," in which the speaker's behaviour closely resembles Wildeve's response to and treatment of Eustacia's letter in this scene: "[he] has such a violent resistance to receiving the letter, responding to it, becoming subject to its performative power, turning into the person it would by perlocution make him be, that he tries to destroy the letter in all its latent power. He wants to turn it back into senseless matter" (137), to silence the woman as Wildeve does here. Also referring, for example, to the way in which Bathsheba's valentine works to construct Boldwood as a "bold lover" (137), this essay makes a suggestive argument about the function of the letter in Hardy's texts generally.

¹¹ Gribble examines this particular issue at length in her article, "The Quiet Women of Egdon Heath."

to underestimate the power of her community's scrutiny and judgment of her behaviour. Eustacia's resistance to her surroundings renders her generally incapable of understanding the heath, which "has a language of its own which requires learning for full comprehension" (Gatrell 44). Her willingness to trivialize and divest traditional rituals of their "communal significance" (Garson 68) serves as a primary mark of her inability to read the language of the heath, as does the form of her relationship with Clym, who shares a deep affinity with the Egdon landscape. Indeed, his occupation as a furze-cutter manifests physically his emotional connection to the heath, and Garson accurately detects an "implied analogy between the heath's 'lonely face' . . . and Clym's own thought-marked visage" (66). The palimpsest-like nature of Clym's face further links him to the heath, which is itself characterized as a teller of tales (*RN* 3).¹² Notably, in positioning her death "off-stage" as a private exchange between Eustacia and the heath, Hardy demonstrates the ultimate consequences of Eustacia's lack of interpretive skills, which has necessarily distorted, by extension, her readings of Clym, "the man from Paris" (253).

Her relationship with Clym thus operates largely according to the terms that govern Bathsheba's relationship with Troy: it is a fictional romance. Initially, independent isolation enables her to exert a certain amount of control over communication, but once in Edenic "solitude" (241) with Clym (and thus in a state of bliss that is destined to fall), Eustacia discovers her dreams of Parisian escape dashed and, with the event of Mrs. Yeobright's death, soon finds herself living directly under the scrutiny of the public body. While, as we shall see, Clym devotes himself to what develops as a criminal investigation of Eustacia's behaviour, he is shown far in advance of their relationship to be unable to

¹² See also Wike, who suggests that "The world as text in Hardy is mainly a matter of legible faces" (455).

discern accurately truth from fiction. In his initial misreading of the circumstances surrounding Thomasin's "scandal" he asks,

How could such a gross falsehood have arisen? It is said that one should go abroad to hear news of home, and I appear to have done it. Of course I contradict the tale everywhere; but it is very vexing, and I wonder how it could have originated. It is too ridiculous that such a girl as Thomasin could so mortify us as to get jilted on the wedding-day. What has she done? (158)

Although Clym's lack of knowledge is largely due to Mrs. Yeobright's withholding of information from him (neither she nor Thomasin have informed him of the truth of the scandal), Clym's biased expectations also suggest that, despite his Parisian education, he is not sufficiently able to allow for a range of possible interpretations of experience. Rather, as his premature conclusions about Eustacia's involvement in his mother's death will make explicit, he relies on narrow, unequivocal, and destructive explanations.

The heath-dwellers' view of language illuminates the unreliability of such exclusive readings, and subtly points to the danger inherent in them. Christian's explanation of his age, for example, calls into question the reliability of language: "That's my age by baptism, because that's put down in the great book of the judgment-day that they keep down in the church-vestry; but my mother told me I was born some time afore I was christened" (23-24). Its tenuous relationship to truth makes language susceptible to manipulation. This tension between oral and written language also illustrates the supremacy of oral transmission of history and narrative in this community. This is illustrated by the heath-dwellers' response to the social change that has emerged in the form of more widespread literacy. According to Olly the besom-maker, "The class of folk that couldn't use to make a round O to save their souls from the pit of salvation, can

write their names now without a sputter of a pen, oftentimes without a single blot: what do I say -- why, almost without a desk to lean their stomachs and elbows upon" (21).

Despite Clym's place of admiration in the community, such scepticism raises questions about the practicality of his education scheme, suggesting that his idealism may serve no great constructive purpose on Egdon Heath.

Indeed, his use of language shows precisely that. Clym's return to Egdon effectively imports modern applications of language onto the heath, particularly those which function in service of social discipline that sustains hierarchical categories. With the death of the mother who sought to dominate him, Clym can assume the position as Eustacia's primary regulator. As such, his chief objective is to construct a linear, coherent narrative through the piecing together of evidence, both oral and written. He conducts interviews and cross-examinations "as a means of gleaning new particulars" (324) and surveys evidence, such as Eustacia's letters, that are related to his investigation. Eustacia's behaviour has constantly circumvented the direction of Clym's plot, the shape of his vocation, his personal relationships, and, now, his understanding of history, particularly the circumstances surrounding his mother's death. As a result, when Clym believes himself to have pieced the narrative together, Eustacia faces severe accusation, judgment, and punishment: "You shut the door -- you looked out of the window upon her -- you had a man in the house with you -- you sent her away to die. The inhumanity -- the treachery -- I will not touch you -- stand away from me -- and confess every word!" (331). The disjointed nature of Clym's diction reveals the intensity of his anger and also illustrates the cumulative process of his piece-meal narrative construction. This process ultimately leads him to nullify his marriage to Eustacia who, accused of being "a well-

finished and full-blown adept in a certain trade” (332), is exiled from their home bearing the name of murderess and prostitute.

The stereotypical categorizations to which Clym resorts illustrate how Eustacia thus “can be seen as a victim not only of her husband’s misreading, but of all male readings of woman as Other” (Garson 71). In demanding Eustacia’s confession -- both regarding her relationship with Wildeve and her intentional persecution of his mother -- Clym attempts to invest the spoken word with absolute authority. However, the fallaciousness of his efforts rests with the fact that his indictment of Eustacia conforms with the gossip that has cultivated her public identity as a seductive witch: “How bewitched I was! How could there be any good in a woman everybody spoke ill of?” (333). The spoken word, regardless of its veracity, is finally the ultimate measure of truth.

Unlike *Far From the Madding Crowd*, a novel in which generative discourse is the key to the novel’s apparent comedic ending, in *The Return of the Native* a lack of authentic dialogue is largely implicated in its tragedy. Eustacia’s silence in regards to the circumstances of Mrs. Yeobright’s death largely facilitates her incrimination, even though the confession Clym seeks is not commensurate with the truth at all; Eustacia had remained “technically faithful” (Woodcock 29) to Clym and had not intentionally caused his mother’s death. Her initial unwillingness to contradict Clym’s accusations opens a gap in which he can insert his own narrative history, and it is her silence that, in large part, confirms her guilt. Yet her silence ultimately functions as a form of rebellion. In the climactic scene that we have just examined, what Clym desires most from Eustacia is her confession, which will validate his assumptions. But in the face of Clym’s accusations, she asserts, “I’ll hold my tongue like the very death that I don’t mind meeting, even

though I can clear myself of half you believe by speaking. Yes I will. Who of any dignity would take the trouble to clear cobwebs from a wild man's mind after such language as this?" (331).

Eustacia's juxtaposition of the terms of silence and death is significant here; they anticipate the end that will befall her, which will at once produce her permanent silence and speak the truth of her innocence.¹³ Indeed, the woman's dead body is, as we have seen in the case of Fanny Robin, often the most influentially declarative object of all. Mrs. Yeobright, for example, can still threaten to stand between Thomasin and Venn and punish Eustacia even in death, her dying words to Johnny enabling her to implicate her daughter-in-law. Yet it nonetheless takes her dead body to bring about the breach between Clym and Eustacia that she desired in life. Her death itself reinforces our sense of the oedipal nature of her relationship with Clym since, as Boumelha observes, "Dead, she can play Jocasta without danger" (*Thomas Hardy* 59). The sign of the corpse thus possesses more agency than a speaking woman.

Mrs. Yeobright is most similar to Eustacia in this regard, since the death of both women converts their bodies into textual, documentary evidence. Eustacia's body is the location of the inscription of the narrative that has been generated about her through public speculation, gossip, and judgment. To a large extent, it also serves as the culmination of her efforts to escape the ceaseless surveillance that makes Egdon a prison for her. Yet it simultaneously marks her submission to the publicly-constructed narrative of her identity. Foucault's discussion of the traditional spectacle of punishment emphasizes the textual nature of the criminal's body: "The body, several times tortured,

¹³ On the simultaneously punitive and redemptive function of Eustacia's drowning, see Larson, pp. 55-63.

provides the synthesis of the reality of the deeds and the truth of the investigation, of the documents of the case and the statements of the criminal, of the crime and the punishment” (47). While Susan Nunsunch’s initial stabbing of Eustacia points to the penetrability of Eustacia’s body and effectively inscribes her with the witch narrative, her death makes the effect of this destructive narrative explicit, given that the form of her death -- drowning -- in fact replicates the kinds of “old tests or trials -- ordeals, judicial duels, judgments of God” (Foucault 40) that characterized the traditional, confession-seeking forms of discipline and punishment to which alleged witches were subject. Yet the spectacle of Eustacia’s body simultaneously restores her to innocence, finally rewriting the text of her publicly-constructed identity. Only upon the occasion of her death does Clym’s admission of guilt register -- albeit too late -- the misapplication of justice that her death signifies: “She is the second woman I have killed this year. I was a great cause of my mother’s death; and I am the chief cause of hers” (381).

The Return of the Native ultimately demonstrates how women who speak out are the chief objects of the punishment that, in this society, takes the form of “terminal silencing” (Gribble 234). The destructive nature of Mrs. Yeobright’s invocation of local gossip is registered by the form of her death -- a snake bite -- which contains overt symbolic connections to temptation and the potential for ruin inherent in the malicious use and misinterpretation of language, particularly that enacted by women. It thus recalls the “Christian denunciation [which] implicitly assumes that Eve, a woman, brought sin into the world by unwise speaking and unwise listening” (Spacks 41). Eustacia’s ongoing willingness to rail against the unjust judgment to which she is subject -- even through silence -- is her primary crime as a woman.

Clym's final position atop the heath appropriately represents the displacement of Eustacia for which he has been largely responsible. Yet it also positions him as a textual spectacle of sorts, one that Garson suggests renders him as a "cadaverous figure" (75). Ironically, in his role as itinerant preacher, Clym continues to use the oral transmission of language and narrative as a means of persuasion. Although he thus draws the heath dwellers together through language, his exclusion from interaction with the community seems absolute. Nonetheless, the sense of injustice remains and echoes in Clym's words in absolute terms: "for what I have done no man can punish me!" (382). Indeed, for although Clym faces a certain amount of social exclusion, the power of his voice persists.¹⁴

The neutral position -- "sometimes secular, and sometimes religious, but never dogmatic" (412) -- that Clym occupies in his final vocation seems to speak to his increased knowledge of the damaging consequences that can result from rigorous adherence to a preconceived notion of a single truth. The issue of neutrality leads us to a consideration of *A Laodicean*, a novel equally concerned with female identity and agency and with the control and construction of truth.

¹⁴ Critics often point to the way in which Clym gives his mother the "last word" in the novel. Yet Garson (p. 79) and Nancy Warner Barrineau, in her "Explanatory Notes" to the Oxford edition (p. 442), note the irony of Clym's final Biblical quotation (1 Kings 2: 19-20) which is, in fact, connected to Solomon's failure to keep his promise to his mother, Bathsheba. The irony inherent in Clym's use of this passage may perhaps suggest that his capacity for the misreading and manipulation of language persists; yet if Clym is conscious of the discrepancy, it may aptly emphasize his desire to rewrite the past text of betrayal.

Chapter Three

Transient Words and Graven Images: *A Laodicean*

"I am merest mimicker and counterfeit! --
Though thinking, *I am I,*
And what I do I do myself alone."
-- Thomas Hardy, "The Pedigree"¹

In a scene that exemplifies the text's preoccupation with the issue of indecision, *A Laodicean* (1881)² immediately presents us with the words of a minister who rails against the kind of moderateness Clym exhibits at the end of *The Return of the Native*. Yet subtitled *A Story of Today*, *A Laodicean* superficially appears to share little with the wild, rural scene of Egdon Heath. Despite the medieval nostalgia that permeates the novel, it situates us firmly in the modern world, where telegraph lines proceed from a castle that can be accessed by "numerous convenient trains from all parts of the county" (223) and where characters traverse with ease a Europe littered with omnibuses, casinos, and luxury hotels. The "circumstance of being a woman" (404) is also shown to have undergone significant alterations; enigma comes to characterize a particular kind of woman, the New Woman. One of many *fin-de-siècle* "cultural novelties" (Ledger 1), this

¹ *Moments of Vision and Miscellaneous Verses* (1917), *The Complete Poems*, pp. 460-461.

² Like most critics who discuss this novel, Peter Widdowson notes that "together with the *Hand of Ethelberta*, *A Laodicean* is probably the most execrated and disregarded of all Hardy's novels" (91). Critics have typically taken issue with the protracted European travelogue and with the seemingly pointless insertion of such characters as Abner Power. The varied and incongruous modes of the text -- "realism, social comedy, romance, sensation, melodrama" (Widdowson 105) -- have also provoked criticism. Yet in a convincing argument, Widdowson suggests that the text exhibits a conscious self-reflexivity that sets out, through various forms of generic parody, to interrogate realism as a form, and that often goes undetected. In his full-length study in 1982, Richard Taylor has also made efforts to revise the status of Hardy's "lesser novels," including *A Laodicean*. Jane Thomas has more recently addressed Hardy's "minor" fictional works in her book, *Thomas Hardy, Femininity, and Dissent: Reassessing the Minor Novels* (1999).

figure, who Paula Power anticipates, and who Hardy will more fully explore in the character of Sue Bridehead, is by definition one who defies conventional categories of female identity. Paula's efforts to exert control over the construction of her identity by the exercise of linguistic "power" thus serve as an apt manifestation of both the resonances of her name and her modernism.

Paula's unconventional authority is also registered in her connection to such realities of the modern world as the railway and the telegraph and becomes virtually inscribed on the landscape. Yet as such technologies literally enable language to move rapidly through public space, the boundary between the oral and the written word collapses, and language becomes extremely vulnerable to manipulation. The ongoing subversion in this novel of the authority of language and visual images illustrates the way in which formerly unequivocal hierarchies have become increasingly subject to destabilization. Paula's connection to the alterations -- both social and technological -- of the modern world sharply problematizes her relationship to the past and makes her equally susceptible to the deceptive powers of imitation in ways that forcefully challenge her claim to a legitimate identity.

Questions of imitation and reproduction -- both genealogical and technological -- permeate *A Laodicean*, the most pertinent one being that which Somerset asks, and which the text finally eludes: "*Who is Paula?*" (33). Indeed, the question of Paula's identity is the same as Eustacia's: who shall she imitate?³ Like that of many of Hardy's heroines, Paula's unconventionality leads her to struggle with the prescriptive roles

³ Jane Thomas' discussion of *A Laodicean* (pp. 96-112) offers a sustained investigation of the subject of role playing in the novel.

available to women. Her inscrutability and indecisiveness ultimately register, however subtly, her awareness of the limited options for articulating her subjectivity. Therefore suspicious of the reliability of verbal exchange, Paula most frequently adopts the role of text. Aptly so, since, as a seemingly stable communicative artifact, a text tacitly demands interpretation, but, like Paula herself, simultaneously eludes finite definition. Unlike Eustacia, for whom the fixing of her body as a textual object resulted from the interpretation and manipulation of her identity by “surrounding tongues” (RN 385), Paula intentionally positions herself as a text. Her cryptic identity grants her control by distancing her from her various readers. Paula’s “scheme of reserve” (264) thus serves as a mark of her unconventional access to ownership -- of herself, her property, and others. Yet, as in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, the central challenge posed in the text, both by *and* to the authoritative heroine, is an interpretive one. The ongoing corruption of textual evidence and visual images in the novel produces the misreadings that pervade it, misreadings that Paula can only ultimately correct not through further codifying herself, but through candid discourse.

Paula’s interaction with such technologies as railways, telegraphs, newspapers, and photographs illustrates the extent of her connection to a rapidly changing society, but her unconventionality works to exclude her from her immediate community, though much less fatally so than for Eustacia or Sue. Paula’s defiance of patriarchal demands for behaviour similarly proves the source of much of her isolation. The scene in the novel in which, as “She stood upon the brink of the pool” (16), Paula is first charged with Laodicean lukewarmness for refusing to submit to the rite of baptism obliquely recalls the

spectacle of Eustacia's drowning, and thus comments on the implications of its punitive and purifying function: "it seemed like reviving the ancient cruelties of the ducking-stool to try to force a girl into that dark water if she had not a mind for it" (18). The terms of patriarchal authority make Paula's immersion in the water imperative, the act which, as in *The Return of the Native*, emblemizes the repression of unruly female autonomy. Paula is encouraged to "descend" (16) by Reverend Woodwell, an obvious representative of the authoritative paternal "Word" (17), but in refusing to be baptized, she tacitly rejects the imperatives of male discourse, both the biblical Word and her father's, since his "dying wish [was] that she should make public profession of her . . . denomination" (34). Although Woodwell reminds Paula that she stands "in the eyes of the whole church as an exemplar of [her] faith" (17), she ultimately refuses to allow her body to serve as such a spectacle of endorsement. This scene anticipates the tacit defiance of patriarchal discourse that Paula will attempt to sustain over the course of the novel, and also points to the command over her body that she will insist upon.

The baptism scene is one among many visual displays of Paula's unconventionality that Somerset witnesses. Notably, our attention, and Somerset's, is first drawn to the "friendly wire" (21) that is linked to Paula's telegraph machine at Stancy Castle directly following her refusal to be baptized. Hardy thus at once underscores the extent to which the control of language grants Paula a sense of self-command and introduces that object which is instrumental in Paula's exercise of authority, her house. Paula's economic status plays no little part in her assertiveness since, as Somerset observes, she possesses the economic means to sustain her defiance of orthodox expectations:

Looking on as a stranger it seemed to [Somerset] more than probable that this young woman's power of persistence in her unexpected repugnance to the rite was strengthened by wealth and position of some sort, and was not the unassisted gift of nature. The manner of her arrival, and her dignified bearing before the assembly, strengthened the belief. A woman who did not feel something extraneous to her mental self to fall back upon would be so far overawed by the people and the crisis as not to retain sufficient resolution for a change of mind. (19-20)

Paula's verbal resistance to authority is largely enabled by her economic independence.

Havill's contrasting economic decline seemingly reflects, for example, the challenge the female property owner poses to convention. She does not attend to the imperatives of tradition which would ensure that Havill assume the position of her architect since he was her father's. Her economic status thus provides her with a will to choose that disturbs conventional relationships and overturns conventional authority.

Paula's connection to social and technological alterations renders her autonomy extremely suspect, particularly given the way in which it identifies her capacity to manipulate time and space. Her efforts to do so prove far more advanced than Eustacia's exploits with her telescope and hourglass, and they operate on a much larger scale. Somerset's initial tour of the castle with Charlotte in Paula's absence offers him a survey of her various powers. Unlike the clock that Charlotte's "very great grandfather erected in the eighteenth century," Paula's newly-erected clock, for example, "tells the seconds" since, according to Paula, "time, being so much more valuable now, must of course be cut up into smaller pieces" (36). Paula's capacity to determine the shape of the future, indeed, to dissect and reorganize the landscape, is exemplified not only by her connection to the railway lines that have put an end to the rural "sanctuary of remoteness" (Kern 213), but also by her possession of a large map outlining her design for a new town to be built near

the railway station. This visual representation of her power suggests that such control threatens to extend far beyond the walls of Stancy Castle. The sense of this threat is reinforced by those inscriptions that likewise assert Paula's authority. Walking around the castle, Somerset views a man "pulling down a rotten gate that bore on its battered lock the initials 'W. De S.'" and erecting a new one whose ironmongery exhibited the letters "P.P."; and "After a walk of three-quarters of an hour he came to another gate, where the letters 'P.P.' again supplanted the historical 'W. De S.'" (43). Like the "oblong white stone let into the wall just above the plinth, on which was inscribed in block letter: ERECTED 187—, at the sole expense of JOHN / POWER, ESQ., M.P." (13) that graces the "recently-erected chapel of red brick" (13) and the "new and shining" clock that bears "the name of a recent maker" (25), Paula's inscriptions signify the power of her possession, inscribing the landscape with her absolute authority. In doing so, they also erase the terms of patriarchal ownership that formerly dominated it.

Similarly emphasizing the relationship between authority and the textual artifact, what Paula reads is also indicative of her modern unconventionality:

On the tables of [her] sitting room were most of the popular papers and periodicals that he knew, not only English, but from Paris, Italy, and America. Satirical prints, though they did not unduly preponderate, were not wanting. Besides these there were books from a London circulating library, paper-covered light literature in French and choice Italian, and the latest monthly reviews; while between the two windows stood the telegraph apparatus whose wire had been the means of bringing [Somerset] hither. (37-38)

In addition to illustrating the extent of Paula's association with the contemporary world of mass media,⁴ this scene subtly invokes the conventional assumption of the potential for

⁴ Ledger's chapter on "The New Woman, modernism and mass culture," pp. 177-198 is of interest here.

corruption reading holds for the heroine, particularly since it contains both voyeurism and subtle implications of sexual violation. Just prior to noticing the literature, Somerset “cast his eyes round the room, and blushed a little. Without knowing it he had intruded into the absent Miss Paula’s own particular set of chambers, including a boudoir and a sleeping apartment” (37). Here, the text assumes the place of the woman, the literature serving as the object of Somerset’s voyeurism, which is sexually charged to the extent that it makes him blush. Although her possession of literature may serve as a subtle sign of Paula’s sexual openness, her “light literature” is notably supplemented by cosmopolitan periodicals from around the globe and “photographic portraits of the artistic, scientific, and literary celebrities of the day” (38), which connect this heroine to a public world much outside the eroticized domestic sitting room. Yet the quantity and variety of literature she possesses registers a far-reaching acquisitive power and points to Paula’s valorization of and interest in textual and visual documents.

Likewise, while the telegraph wire similarly serves to connect Paula to the outside world, it also effectively lures Somerset to her. The telegraph is shown to disturb many of the divisions between public and private space.⁵ It also becomes dangerously open to corruption and exploitation, the likes of which William Dare will take pains to enact. Somerset’s initial response to Paula’s telegraph machine points to the telegraph’s capacity to expose private discourse: “Somerset fancied himself like a person overlooking another’s letter, and moved aside” from the “machine [that] went on with its story . . . in language unintelligible to him” (42). His association of Paula’s telegraph machine and “language unintelligible” is critical, given the extensive interpretive

⁵ See Kern (pp. 197-191) on the invasion of the private sphere by *fin-de-siècle* technology.

difficulties he will have in relation to Paula herself. The technology that Paula possesses at once increases her inscrutability and also marks the extent of her access to the public world, access that, with its connotations of sexual vulnerability, is, likewise, a somewhat disturbing aspect of modernity. The depiction of Paula's connection to technological and social change thus complicates the portrayal of her identity. Although her "laodiceanism" is signified by the apparent "clash between ancient and modern" (34) in her constitution, her "ambiguous manner" (93) speaks to the way in which such an independent woman is, like the telegraph itself, yet another "inscrutable" (96), mobile aspect of the changing modern landscape.

In no scene in *A Laodicean* is the movement of the female body under greater scrutiny than during that "notorious" (Ball 35) episode in which we view Paula in her gymnasium. Most importantly, this scene illustrates how the movement of the female body through space is definitively linked to the use of language. As she does her gymnastic exercises, Paula is described as "A sort of optical poem" (172), which succinctly links her movements to the elusiveness of her identity. Paula's exertions recall Bathsheba's various manoeuvres on horseback, which were similarly executed while under the watchful eye of a concealed male observer. Likewise, Paula's "pretty boy's costume," which makes her appear "a lovely youth and not a girl at all" (169), resembles Eustacia's mumming costume. In foregrounding their capacities for transgressing gender boundaries, such scenes serve as an index to the general challenge to categories of female identity that these women pose. As an indication of her "advanced views on social and other matters" (170),⁶ this scene also illustrates Paula's capacity for rigid self-control,

⁶ Jane Thomas outlines the growing emphasis on women's physical education in the period (pp. 105-106).

control which will continue to be undermined by the men who scrutinize her, and, in doing so, eroticize her behaviour. The voyeurism -- on the part of De Stancy, Dare, narrator, and reader -- is overt in this scene to a parodic extent, transforming Paula into a text that serves a visually erotic function. The observation of her signifies a threat to Paula's efforts to retain control of her body and identity in both literal and figurative terms, since Captain De Stancy's sight of her first incites him to win Paula as his wife.

As when she remained "rigid as a stone" (16) in the face of Reverend Woodwell's insistence that she be baptized, Paula's desire for absolute control of her body is reflected in her use of language; her "natural silentness" (114) is not merely an index to her lack of feeling or her capriciousness, but is often a mark of conscious repression. Paula's exertion of strict control over language, especially her unwillingness to articulate sexual preference, grants her a degree of power that renders her extremely anomalous to her male interlocutors.

Somerset, as we have seen, is immediately placed in the position of reader; Paula serves as the textual object. As an observer of an enigmatic object, he becomes not only a creator of architecture, but of narrative. Upon seeing Paula entering the church prior to her baptism, "His imagination, stimulated by this beginning, set about filling in the meagre outline with most attractive details" (16). Yet his imaginative capacity is somewhat limited. His conclusions about Paula's behaviour, particularly her reticence on emotional issues, go only in either of two directions: she is frigid or a caprice, and thus "unable to escape definition other than through her sexuality" (J. Thomas 106). His conclusions are merely derived from conventional definitions of female behaviour that do not adequately accord with "a modern type of maidenhood" (17). He can thus only

interpret Paula in contrary terms, such as a “modern flower in a medieval flower-pot” (39), that cancel each other out, leaving her as a void, a vacant space. Like Eustacia, whose profile appeared “as though side shadows from the features of Marie Antoinette and Mrs Siddons had converged upwards from the tomb to form an image like neither but suggesting both” (*RN* 52), Paula emerges as an inscrutable third term “which [Somerset] could not unriddle” (93). A linguistic anomaly, Paula cannot be accurately described in the terms available to the men who observe her, the narrator himself conceding that “It would be impossible to describe her as she . . . appeared” (59).

Although readers often rightly draw attention to Paula’s apparent lack of subjectivity and suggest that she exists largely as a construct of her male observers,⁷ certain subtleties in the text point to Paula’s consciousness of her enigmatic status, which complicates our understanding of her identity. In a letter to Somerset, for example, she rather sarcastically admits “that a woman who is *only* a compound of evasions, disguises, and caprices, is very disagreeable” (266). She insists on another occasion, “I simply echo your words” (254) while reprimanding Somerset for his “expostulations” (254) and later asserts, “it is better that you should guess at what I feel than that you should distinctly know it” (265). Such comments point to Paula’s conscious resistance to her society’s hierarchical categorizations and manifest her scepticism about the adequacy of oral exchange and her preference for communication through visual signs. She puts little faith in the exchange of words, challenging Somerset’s insistence that she make a “formal confession” (270) of her feelings and demanding, “Why should the verbal *I love you* be

⁷ Gatewood, for example, argues against the notion that Paula possesses any coherent subjectivity at all: “there is no analysis of her motives and no revelation of her inner life” (xiv).

such a precious phrase?" (270).⁸ In this exchange, Paula most anticipates Sue Bridehead's efforts to resist male control through the only method available to her, evasion: "a declaration of love is always a mortifying circumstance to us [women], and it is a natural instinct to retain the power of obliging a man to hope, fear, pray, and beseech as long as we think fit, before we confess to a reciprocal affection" (270). Rather than indulging her passions through subversive methods of communication, as Eustacia does, Paula restricts them until that time she finds it absolutely necessary to "attach herself to a socially sanctioned mode of femininity and to confess its truth" (J. Thomas 96). By doing so, she converts herself into a textual artifact, a sign that necessarily demands interpretation. But, as a fixed artifact, a text cannot literally speak to its reader; Paula's seemingly "natural silentness" is thus an entirely appropriate manifestation of her presentation of herself as a text, an object that at once perpetually eludes definition, but remains a fixed object of interpretation. As both of these things, Paula is necessarily an object of fascination.

This act of self-translation that registers Paula's attempts to extend her authority, over both her own desire, and that of Somerset, is shown most overtly during the series of telegraphic and epistolary exchanges that the two carry out while Paula is abroad. In thus speaking "from her new habitation nine hundred miles away" (263), Paula not only exercises strict control over her own discourse, but also commands Somerset's use of language, telling him what he should write, with what means, and insisting that one of her servants educate him in the use of the telegraph. Her control of his linguistic access to her

⁸ An alteration in the 1882 edition renders this phrase a more direct challenge to Somerset's interpretive capacities: "Why should *I love you* be ever uttered between two beings of the opposite sex who have eyes to see signs?"

regulates the extent of his emotional access to her, the conduct of their relationship across vast distances marking the extent of her desire for emotional distance. The form of their exchange exemplifies the sense of “simultaneity made possible by the telegraph” (Kern 68) in the period, and thus complicates the balance of power in their relationship, since it is a simultaneity that Paula can terminate at any time. It also offers Somerset an interpretative challenge, placing him in a position where he literally can only read her (often coded) messages, which he frequently “wished . . . would be more explicit” (266). This does not initially serve to encourage his understanding, but, as “her silence gave him dread” (273), places Somerset in the role of prostrate and emasculated wooer. He writes, “I would rather have sharp words from your pen than none. . . . The consequences of a love which, at the beginning was so pleasant and blissful, are now a ruinous disgust with everything I used to take an interest in, and I cannot say where it will end” (274). The extent of Paula’s dominance is clear, the penetrative symbolism of her pen representative of the amount of power that such strict control of language can grant her.

While her instruction of the “obtuse and literal” (255) Somerset on matters of interpretation inverts, in terms of gender, the process of linguistic education that took place in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Paula, as we shall see, certainly makes interpretive mistakes of her own. Yet her difficulties in this regard hardly make viable Richard Taylor’s claim that “Somerset is intellectually dominant throughout” (117) the novel. Even when Somerset displays what could perhaps be seen as “dominance” in his “intellectual tournament with the eager old man” (58), Reverend Woodwell, the confrontation reveals his narcissistic shortsightedness. His seemingly cruel indulgence leaves Woodwell “grievously wounded” (63), his book carelessly tossed upon the grass.

In addition to its obvious comment on the rejection of antiquated religious beliefs, this action shows Somerset's disregard for the authentic use of language. Despite his agile manipulation of biblical text, Somerset's conduct points to his capacity for misinterpretation and his willingness to engage in performance for mere sport. His admission to Paula, "I am no scholar, and no theologian" (61), positions him instead as a mere "receptacle of cultural information" (Austin 215). Revealing his capacity for imitation, this scene also renders him analogous to Captain De Stancy, who possesses a proclivity for spectacle that has its basis in manipulation and fraud.

Misreading is in fact the source of Somerset's initial confusion in regards to the castle's ownership, since Miss Charlotte De Stancy bears no relation to Paula, who is in fact the owner. In this context, lineage is definitively linked to the appropriation of authority. Paula's relationship with Charlotte, an issue to which I shall return, emphasizes the extent to which the rights of lineage have been subverted. In this sense, the novel obviously anticipates *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, which likewise interrogates the increasingly unstable ideal of family heritage, particularly that embodied in a name. Mr. Simon Stoke's facile appropriation of the surname "d'Urberville" from a British Museum catalogue of extinct family names (42) points to the increasing ease with which, as in *A Laodicean*, heritage and history can be appropriated and manipulated. Despite her fascination with a medieval and a Hellenic past, even Paula's heritage is associated with progress. As the heir to a moneyed railway engineer, Paula's ancestry is necessarily predicated on an absence of history.⁹ Nonetheless, Paula's wealth buys her greater access

⁹ Bullen notes, for example, that railway engineering "was explicitly modern, it had no precedent, and unlike traditional building, it was free of the trammels of historicism" (133).

to status than Charlotte's name can possibly secure, and Paula explicitly refers to herself as a "recusant usurper" (428). Widdowson thus rightly observes that "Her entire relationship with the de Stancys is based on an inversion of the established class hierarchies" (102). Charlotte's status as a paid companion overtly connects Paula to such inversion, a principle equally operative in her relationship with another of her employees, Somerset. A sign "representative of the new aristocracy of internationality" (*AL* 428), purchasing "Power" has indeed come to stand as preeminent, and it enables Paula to rewrite the terms of conventional hierarchical relationships, both of lineage and gender. Yet Paula's notion that the visual signifier, a name, alone possesses the capacity to determine identity is promptly shown to be a fallacious one, as text is soon revealed to be hardly a fixed marker of authority.

Tim Dolin's observation that "Hardy's women exploit their propertied wealth, . . . using it to resist marriage as an eventuality" (87)¹⁰ certainly applies to Paula and points to the way in which women's lack of access to property largely limits their capacity for self-determination. Yet, as Dare and Captain De Stancy's exploits show, Paula's wealth also extends her vulnerability. Havill's violent reaction to Paula's relationship with Somerset illustrates how Paula's autonomy disrupts traditional economic and sexual relationships: "Good God! a girl worth fifty thousand and more a year to throw herself away upon a fellow like that -- she ought to be whipped" (131). The "power that wealth gives her to pick and choose almost where she will" (273) may indeed grant her autonomy, but, given Havill's response, it also positions her as an unruly object requiring strict regulation.

¹⁰ Dolin's thorough discussion of the perceived sexual openness of the propertied woman in "Hardy's Uncovered Women" (pp. 85-87) is extremely applicable to this novel, as it is to *Far From the Madding Crowd*. See Chapter One, Note 5 of this thesis.

The defiance of convention that is inherent in Paula's claims to ownership -- of others, property, and even of herself -- makes her the object of all kinds of schemes of forgery, both of image and language, that represent attempts to debilitate her power. The effects of Havill's "anonymous" letter to the newspaper, for example, shows how the public circulation of information can, as in the case of Eustacia, severely circumscribe female behaviour. His intense criticism of her desire to construct a Greek court in the castle incites her to abandon her plans, fearing her reputation as "an iconoclast by blood" (109) will otherwise grow. Havill's forgery of Somerset's design for the castle renovations illustrates more overtly how the control of Paula's property corresponds to efforts to control Paula's "non-conformity" (99). Havill's guilty conscience later encourages him to admit that "To appropriate another man's design was no more nor less than to embezzle his money or steal his goods" (203). The appropriated money or property in question also includes Paula herself, since the theft of Somerset's design restricts Somerset's exclusive access to her in his architectural capacity. Even Captain De Stancy is a figurative forgery, slotting himself into the role of romantic hero of an idealized past in order to capture Paula's affections. All of the corrupt acts of imitation in the novel work to undermine Paula's claim to independence, challenging in particular the way in which her femininity and "newness of blood" (99) render her power a force of inversion.

Paula in fact exhibits an ironic similarity on this account to her chief adversary, the androgynous cosmopolite William Dare, who claims to "labour under the misfortune of having an illegitimate father to provide for" (367). Dare, of course, is centrally connected to the various acts of forgery that pervade the novel. His attempt to inscribe

himself, by means of a tattoo, with the De Stancy identity, one to which he has no legitimate claim, demonstrates the capacity of such inscriptions to alter the terms of ownership and heritage. An alienated bastard, malicious con man, and “skilled strategist” (178), Dare’s connection to debased heritage and exploitation is absolute.

Having inverted the typical parent-child relationship in dealing with his emasculated father, Dare’s behaviour illuminates a circumstance that exists in all of the novels to which I am attending here: ineffectual authority of the paternal word. Sir William De Stancy, the head of the De Stancy line, perpetually invokes maxims of frugality to which he does not actually attend, having gambled away his rights to Stancy Castle, and, despite his lineage, he lives in a house described as a “mushroom of modernism” (44). The novel is indeed “at pains to present [Paula] as stronger than both her suitors” (Widdowson 103): Captain De Stancy is finally powerless to circumvent the narrative that consigns him to a dying history, and Somerset is at Paula’s emotional and linguistic mercy. Dare’s doctrine of “chances and recurrences” (286) offers a definitively modern replacement for Woodwell’s time-worn dogma. Finally, while Paula’s uncle, Abner Power, appears an entirely anomalous addition to the novel, even “less acceptable than Dare, since he has no organic relationship to the story” (Taylor 116), his presence further exemplifies the limited capacity of the voice of paternal authority in this text. Although he possesses the knowledge to expose Dare’s evil doings, Abner’s own crimes ultimately thwart his ability to renounce Dare publicly. As we shall see, it will be the feminine voice which finally possesses the strength both to indict the criminal and demand his punishment.

Dare's illegitimacy thus renders him an apt producer of counterfeits, a circulator of false information and images intended to incriminate those who pose a challenge to his personal gratification, economic or otherwise. He thus consciously operates according to the terms of the tragic revenge villain, who seeks above all to orchestrate, noting himself when his "play is played out" (323). Dare's connection to visual spectacle obviously points to photography's significance in the novel. It is one worth exploring, since it exposes the tension in the text between originality and reproduction -- of both image and identity -- that surrounds not only Dare, but also Paula herself.

In terms that apply to Hardy's presentation of this technology in *A Laodicean*, Carol Christ and John Jordan discuss how the emergence of photography in the nineteenth century vastly altered the relationship between images and authority: "Because the photograph seemed to offer a transparent record of the truth, it assumed a representational authority that rivaled that of text and of graphic art. Its transparency, however, was often illusory" (xxv). In *Dare*, Hardy shows how such technologies, which produced imitations by their very nature,¹¹ claimed a dangerous "documentary power" (Christ xxvi). Dare's distortion of Somerset's photograph into a picture of horror, "a grotesque perversion of modern technical advance" (Taylor 112), illustrates the corruptible nature of images. It exemplifies Ronald Thomas' claim that "a photograph can completely redefine the identity of its subject, depending on how it is composed and viewed" (136).¹² Given photography's increasing claim to have "superseded language in

¹¹ See Welsh (pp. 30-45) on the connection between the copy and authority in the nineteenth-century industrial economy.

¹² Ronald Thomas' article, "Making Darkness Visible," offers an engaging discussion of the significance of photography and "photographic visual powers" (134) in nineteenth-century fiction, particularly that of Conan Doyle and Dickens, which is equally applicable to the function of photography in *A Laodicean*.

approximating reality itself' (R. Thomas 136), Dare's manipulative use of photography is an apt strategy in his efforts to rival Paula's power, since she, as we have seen, both produces texts and relies on their authority. His various interceptions and manipulations of both her letters and telegrams reinforce the way Dare's schemes depend on the subversion of textual authority. Both his mysterious omniscience (his knowledge of Abner Power's terrorist connections, for example, seems inexplicable) and his constant voyeurism lend him a great degree of regulatory power, not unlike the "sweeping ubiquity of the camera eye" (Kern 314) in the period, which became "not only a tool of social knowledge, but a weapon enabling social control" (Christ xxvi). Like Diggory Venn, Dare is marked by an anomalous status and engages in covert activities, but his behaviour is more definitively characterized by an extremely invasive form of manipulation bent on control -- particularly of Paula -- through the exploitation of information and images.

Dare's use of the De Stancy portraits for mere kindling thus signals the transition to a modernity in which images can be easily rendered bereft of their authenticity. Dare's infernal destruction of Stancy Castle realizes Sir William De Stancy's claim about his family's portraits: "Their originals are but clay now -- mere forgotten dust, not worthy a moment's inquiry or reflection at this distance of time. Nothing can retain the spirit, and why should we preserve the shadow of the form?" (47).¹³ The fates of the numerous portraits in the novel thus serve to emphasize the corruptible gap between reality and image, or between reality and text, and also position the De Stancy heritage as obsolete, that of "a worn-out old party" (423). Indeed, in juxtaposing the first image in the novel -- the setting sun -- with Somerset "at his occupation of measuring and copying the

¹³ Walter Benjamin's discussion of the "aura" of the original is of obvious application here.

chevroned doorway . . . which formed the tower entrance to an English village church” (7), Hardy immediately introduces in this “picture within a picture” (Bullen 123) the central problem of the novel: the attempt to manufacture nature. Charlotte is herself a mere “defective reprint” (29) of the De Stancy face and Captain De Stancy’s emblematic connection to feigned authenticity is made explicit in the scene in which he dons the armour of a knight, the relic of the castle that belongs to an idealized, if not entirely fictional, past. Furthermore, his desire to possess Paula’s portrait (195) not only connects him to the impulses of desperate acquisition that are operative in Dare, but also suggests that her marriage to him would unequivocally render her a static aesthetic object that corresponds to Somerset’s initial impression of her: “There was something in her look, and in the style of her corsage, which reminded him of several of the bygone beauties in the gallery. The thought for a moment crossed his mind that she might have been imitating one of them, but it was scarcely likely” (69). This connection between Paula’s identity and the constructed visual object positions her as the embodiment of the conflict in the text between the self and the act of self-fashioning. Faced with an increasing sense of the unreliability of the textual and aesthetic image, however, Paula will soon be forced to forgo her idealization of them.

The issues of identity, imitation, and linguistic manipulation converge in the performance of *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, a play which aptly concerns mistaken identity, role reversals, and the use of performance to win elusive female affection. Hardy’s insertion of this dramatic spectacle within his text draws attention to the unreliability of textual authority, particularly insofar as it sharply contrasts the authentic oral exchange that will ultimately characterize Paula’s relationship with Somerset. De Stancy’s appropriation of

the lines from *Romeo and Juliet* during his performance as King of Navarre -- yet another strategic manipulation of narrative in the novel -- produces an eclectic text of sorts that adds to the *Love's Labour's Lost* plot issues of alliance, genealogy, and onomastics, given the family feuding that serves as the backdrop to the love plot in *Romeo and Juliet*. The "kiss, real or counterfeit" (236), that De Stancy swindles from Paula is described in terms that point to the danger of his exploitation of language: "It was a profanation without parallel" (234). This notion of "profanation" also positions Paula as the exploited text, signaling De Stancy's willing manipulation of her in an effort to claim sole authorship of the course of their romance plot.

Like Eustacia's, Paula's literal participation in the dramatic form overtly connects her to imitation and elusive role playing. Furthermore, the very act of displaying her body on stage raises questions about her sexuality and recalls Clym's query as to the appropriateness of "a cultivated woman playing such a role" (RN 146). Paula's difficulty -- and the text's -- in resolving the tension between her medieval romanticism and her connection to "modernism, eclecticism, new aristocracies" (104) is indeed chiefly one of imitation. This dilemma clearly corresponds to her indecisiveness in love relationships, literally, her dilemma as to what name she shall adopt. Paula sees in marriage to De Stancy the potential to rewrite what she views as the inauthenticity of her past; yet in doing so, she would necessarily obscure the truth of her own identity within his paternal authority, the potential power of which is made explicit during their final confrontation. Paula's response to De Stancy's insistence that she not contact the authorities to report Dare's crimes illustrates her acute sense of the shift in power relations that their marriage would occasion, one that would be primarily located in language: "It wants two hours to

the time when you might have a right to express such a command as that” (389). Such statements register Paula’s consciousness of how her relationship with De Stancy would stifle her autonomy, transferring to him the sole power of command. The conventions of the past embodied by De Stancy hardly accord with Paula’s emerging feminism.

Her relationship with Charlotte, however, is an apt manifestation of Paula’s feminism.¹⁴ Paula and Charlotte share a supportive companionship similar to that of Bathsheba and Liddy in *Far From the Madding Crowd* (one that Eustacia notably lacked in *The Return of the Native*). Like Liddy’s, Charlotte’s position as confidante is marginalized as Paula moves closer to marriage. The reason for the increasing lack of communication between them seems twofold. Although Charlotte’s own feelings for Somerset are emphasized throughout the text, her relationship with Paula is equally, if not further eroticized. Charlotte’s face exhibits “a tender affectionateness which might almost be called yearning” (29), and in first speaking to Somerset of Paula’s finer qualities, “a blush slowly rose to her cheek, as if the person spoken of had been a lover rather than a friend” (35). The landlord of the inn in fact remarks that “they are more like lovers than girl and girl” (50). Thus, with Paula’s marriage necessarily comes the destruction of all subversive bonds that would pose any challenge to her reintegration into conventional social relationships. The problem of female sexuality thus subtly alluded to in this text will form the chief area of inquiry in *Jude the Obscure*, where a woman’s wish to elude sexual relationships with men altogether renders her extremely anomalous and entirely disruptive to normative social categories. This problem is resolved in this text by the

¹⁴ See Showalter’s *Sexual Anarchy* (pp. 22-23) on celibacy and communities of female friendship as *fin-de-siècle* feminist strategies. See also Ledger, pp. 122-149.

confinement of Paula within the marital bond and Charlotte's silencing behind the convent walls, news of which she delivers to Paula not by means of direct discourse but in a letter. Silenced as a Protestant nun, Charlotte returns to a sterile, walled-in existence that recalls the Stancy castle of old. Her religious seclusion points to the absolute fixing of the De Stancy heritage within the past, and may also suggest that the "modern" world cannot yet tolerate the subversive form of female alliance that she represents.

Yet before completely suppressing this subversive force, Hardy gives to Charlotte an extremely consequential role in the plot. She is in fact responsible for Dare's incrimination, carrying out her own investigation of his malicious practices by means of a visit to a local photography shop. Her loyalty to Paula enables her to thwart Dare's schemes, regardless of her feelings for Somerset, in a way that anticipates the candor that will facilitate Paula and Somerset's union. Her crucial revelation of Dare's misdeeds occurs among the circle of the three women -- Paula, her aunt, and Charlotte -- in the most straightforward of terms:

"I have been feeling that I ought to tell you clearly, dear Paula," declared her friend. "It is absolutely false about [Somerset's] telegraphing to you for money -- it is absolutely false that his character is such as that dreadful picture represented it. There -- that's the substance of it, and I can tell you particulars at any time." (387)

Thus, with Charlotte's revelation and subsequent seclusion coincides Paula's emergence from her infatuation with the fraudulent De Stancy heritage, which threatened to permanently possess her, into a realm of authentic discourse.

While critics such as Jane Thomas have suggested that Paula's marriage to Somerset marks her capitulation to the conventional "wifely role" (111), the text, not surprisingly, seems finally lukewarm on this issue. That the final section is notably

entitled not “Paula and Somerset” but “Paula” perhaps suggests that she has finally achieved a level of autonomy that her relationship with De Stancy so threatened. It follows directly upon her discovery of Dare’s fraudulent activities and her subsequent confrontation with De Stancy. This scene in fact offers us the greatest sense of Paula’s willfulness and self-command, undoubtedly because it grants us greatest access to her voice. Although she is minutes from the altar, she does not recoil at the news of betrayal, but immediately invokes the principles of law and order, demanding the justice that her uncle could not: “Justice before generosity, even on one’s wedding-day. Before I become any man’s wife this morning I’ll see that wretch in jail!” (387). She goes on to demand of De Stancy,

“A man has to be given in charge, or a boy, or a demon. . . . You must send instantly for Mr. Cunningham Haze!”

“My dearest Paula,” repeated De Stancy faintly, his complexion changing to that of a man who had died.

“Please send for Mr. Haze at once,” returned Paula, with graceful firmness. “I said I would be just to a wronged man before I was generous to you -- and I will. That lad Dare -- to take a practical view of it -- has attempted to defraud me of one hundred pounds sterling, and he shall suffer. I won’t tell you what he has done besides, for though it is worse, it is less tangible. When he is handcuffed and sent off to jail I’ll proceed with my dressing. Will you ring the bell?” (388)

Paula thus emerges as a rational heroine, particularly in her use of language. While she is undoubtedly motivated by her feelings for Somerset, her desire incites her to decisive action and vocal reaffirmation of her authority that reiterates the connection between her economic and linguistic power. To De Stancy’s interventions she responds, “Why must I not issue orders in my own house. Who is this young criminal, that you value his interests higher than my honour?” (389). Her interrogation thus leads to the revelation of Dare and

De Stancy's relationship that renders a decisive breach between Paula and the debased De Stancy line.

Even in Paula's subsequent search for Somerset across Europe "with a modern disregard for convention" (Taylor 118), her very use of language illustrates the relocation of her affections, particularly in her relinquishing of her position as tacit text. Initially, she reverts to her former elusive position, insisting that she will not tell Somerset "point-blank that [she is] in love with him," but will rather "Act in such a manner that he may tell [her] he is in love with [her]" (398). However, her search for Somerset soon demands close reading on Paula's part, since she must follow him to various locations, picking up clues on her way, such as "a spoilt leaf of Somerset's sketch book" (400). The process is thus shown to invert her subordination of Somerset; as Paula admits, "It isn't every man who gets a woman of my position to run after him on foot, and alone" (401).

The culmination of this shift in power relations occurs not only geographically but also linguistically. Their increasing equality is demonstrated when, in the process of seeking him out, Paula goes so far as to employ Somerset's language, indeed, his very words. Hearing that Somerset "said he was sick and tired of holy places, and would go to some wicked spot or other, to get that consolation which holiness could not give," Paula immediately declares to her aunt that she too is "sick and tired of holy places, and [wants] to go to some wicked spot or other to find that consolation which holiness cannot give" (406). The duplication of these words coincides with her decision to translate the closed text of herself into oral declaration: "I have made up my mind to let him know from my own lips how the misunderstanding arose" (406). The culmination of Paula's transition from her position as silent text occurs when, "throwing all reserve on one side for the first

time in their intercourse” (416), she expresses to Somerset her desire in the most explicit terms: “that there may be *no mistake as to my meaning*, and misery entailed on us for *want of a word*, I’ll add this; that if you want to marry me as you once did, you must *say so*; for I am here to be *asked*” (417, italics added). Her words manifest Paula’s realization of how “in giving too ready credence to appearances [she] had been narrow and inhuman, and had caused [Somerset] much misery” (409). Paula aptly repairs her mistakes by finally submitting to unabashed verbal exchange with Somerset in terms that collapse the linguistic difficulties that formerly stood between them -- misreading and silence -- and offer the definitive remedy for such obstacles -- say, ask.

Paula’s surrender of her linguistic strategy may register that the capitulation of a woman’s authority and autonomy is still an essential component in the formation of that conventional relationship, marriage. Yet their desire to “build a new house from the ground, eclectic in style” (431) suggests the possibility of a generative future, insofar as it recalls Bathsheba and Oak’s marital partnership, one that is likewise finally realized by the heroine’s proposal to her most valued friend and employee, and is chiefly enabled by mutual labour. As in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, interpreting the ending as containing unambiguously positive implications for female identity poses somewhat of a critical challenge. Paula’s final articulated wish that she could retain hold of the medieval past that entranced her (“I wish my castle wasn’t burnt; and I wish you were a De Stancy!” [431]) is the manifestation of a seemingly unresolvable tension between an idealized past and a progressive future, a tension derived from the unstable, pivotal nature of the period. The novel thus finally exhibits Taylor’s claim that “the price of progress is uncertainty” (118). Given Hardy’s sensitivity to the way in which female identity is

extremely subject to change in this period, neither Paula's identity nor our sense of the future of this "modern spirit" (431) can finally be fixed.

This sense of instability is conveyed more fully in Hardy's last novel, *Jude the Obscure*, a text that portrays how "a nemesis attends the woman" (273) who more forcefully attempts to follow through with Paula's unrealized aspirations for an independent selfhood. My final chapter examines how this issue coincides with not only the control but also the deconstruction of language.

Chapter Four

“Her own sense of the words”¹: Verbal Iconoclasm in *Jude the Obscure*

“He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the apelike one of imitation.”

– J.S. Mill, *On Liberty* (1859)

While pointedly adding “*She*, or he” (*JO* 234, italics added) to its beginning, Sue Bridehead cites the above statement by Mill in defense of her desire to leave her husband, Phillotson. For Sue, resistance to social demands for imitation is the only way to self-making. The form of Sue’s resistance marks her difference from the female figures we have examined thus far, since it involves more than unorthodox methods of communication or active self-translation in order to resist compliance with conventional definitions of behaviour. Rather, Sue sets out to undermine the very texts that are responsible for implementing those social norms that would oppressively dictate the form of her identity and relationships.

Her relationship with Jude Fawley is thus thwarted from its very beginning, since the texts Sue directly challenges are those to which Jude has faithfully devoted himself. Jude is, in fact, much like Somerset, who fashions his interpretations in accordance with his preconceptions. Jude likewise suffers for his misreadings, but to a much more tragic, indeed fatal, extent. Jude’s relationship with Sue exposes his propensity for misreading and the danger inherent in his valorization of textual authority.

Yet Sue’s is not the only female voice who threatens Jude’s textual authorities. Much attention has been given to the obvious dichotomy Hardy sets up in his portrayal of

¹ Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* (1895), p. 349

Arabella and Sue: Arabella's voluptuousness contrasts Sue's slight form; Arabella's sexual knowledge is at odds with Sue's purity.² Yet the similarities between the two women are more pertinent to this inquiry, since, in *Arabella and Sue*, Hardy offers two versions of women who defy male control through their use of language -- Arabella through deliberate manipulation and Sue through evasion and defiance of language that respond to -- and simultaneously produce -- men's inability to interpret her.

Both Sue's and Jude's use of texts -- whether reading, appropriating, resisting, or subverting -- speaks to their desire to alter class and gender relationships, a desire which the status quo will not tolerate. Both of their unorthodox aspirations, Jude for education and acceptance, Sue for independence, are therefore stifled. Sue ultimately finds herself unable to succeed with her process of textual subversion. Her tragedy thus aptly takes the form of her submission to the terms of those texts she formerly challenged. Sue's final physical submission to Phillotson exemplifies how the inescapable "inculcation of guilt" (R. Morgan 157) can compel the most willful individual to render her own punishment, punishment which has as its result an eradication of identity and a silencing of voice. Serving as the site of her self-enacted punishment and the text of her "Self-renunciation" (364), Sue's body alone speaks to the extent of her capitulation to that "common enemy, coercion" (301).

² Such is the conventional analysis, which Boumelha terms the "critical reflex to refer to Sue Bridehead as sexless or frigid" (*Thomas Hardy* 142). Boumelha argues convincingly against this critical tendency, suggesting that what is often perceived as frigidity or even flirtation is more accurately viewed "as her response to the complexities and difficulties of her sexuality" (143). See also Rosemarie Morgan (pp. 143 ff.) who sees Arabella as "a voluptuous, sexually active woman" (145) whose sexuality lends her perceptive acumen. Widdowson offers a useful catalogue of recent criticism of Arabella, pp. 179-181.

As *A Laodicean* implies, and as *Jude the Obscure* makes explicit, all aspects of modern life had become increasingly subject to the destabilizing effects brought about by such intense rate of industrial change and “the great modern fluctuations of classes and creeds” (*L* 39) that accompanied it. The accelerated pace responsible for the “mental fever and fret” (*L* 23) that Hardy saw as pervading society has particular implications for the overly-cerebral modern woman, or “clever girl” (*JO* 109), who is often identified, like Sue, by her “nervous motion” (*JO* 90).³ The “modern vice of unrest” (*JO* 85) has infiltrated all aspects of society, but those women who move more freely in the public sphere are particularly susceptible to its infection. Sue’s association with constant movement, both physical and mental, links her explicitly to the state of fracture that is modern life, fracture to which even language itself is susceptible. The fact that an “exciting thought would make her walk ahead so fast that [Jude] could hardly keep up with her” (104) illustrates how ideas themselves have become subject to perpetual volatility. Sue’s use of texts shows how she exploits this epistemological instability to her own ends and is the manifestation of her resistance to their strict confinement of body and spirit.

Arabella’s facile movements across England and between continents, not to mention her chain of marriages, signify how she all but ignores the terms of such constraints. Before examining the form Sue’s subversion takes, it is useful to consider the role of Arabella, given that her relationship not only to “the modern vice of unrest” but

³ For connections between the New Woman and nervous disorder, see Showalter’s *Sexual Anarchy*, pp. 39-58 and *The Female Malady*, pp. 121-64. It is worth noting that the New Woman was by no means “new” by the time *Jude the Obscure* was published. Cunningham asserts that “Sue was closer to being the last than the first delineation of this type” (105). See also Goode, “Sue Bridehead,” pp. 108-113.

also to language parallels, in many ways, that of Sue. In each of the novels I have examined thus far, a minor female character -- Liddy, Susan Nunsuch, Charlotte -- is shown to possess a subtle yet significant amount of linguistic power. In *Arabella*, Hardy more fully works out this notion of the subversive power of the seemingly marginalized female voice, sustaining it consistently over the course of the text.

Arabella, says the narrator, is like those women who “had an instinct towards artificiality in their blood, and became adepts in counterfeiting at the first glimpse of it” (58). Jude’s seemingly naïve efforts to transcend the social constraints that would dictate his employment, as well as his personal relationships, also position him as a counterfeit (his stone cutting will associate him with the work of mere “copying, patching, and imitating” [85]), but his relationship with *Arabella* consistently illustrates how he is in no way an adept one. He is equally inept at detecting artificiality as he is at producing it. Following a Sunday tryst with *Arabella*,

He looked closely, and could just discern in the damp dust the imprints of their feet as they had stood locked in each other’s arms. She was not there now, and ‘the embroidery of imagination upon the stuff of nature’ so depicted her past presence that a void was in his heart which nothing could fill. . . . An hour and a half later *Arabella* came along the same way. . . . She passed unheeding the scene of the kiss. (46)

While Jude insists on seeking stable meaning in signs, *Arabella* has no regard whatsoever for their significance. She is, for example, willing to sell Jude’s portrait in an auction without fear of what such an action publicly pronounces. Her behaviour also speaks to the superficial nature of their relationship; she is done with the image of Jude that initially attracted her to him. Jude’s relationship with *Arabella* illustrates the subjective nature of his interpretations and his inability adequately to scrutinize or perceive the motivation of

another. Such will be the source of his difficulty with Sue and the futility of his Christminster dream.

Arabella's use of language is shown to perpetually intervene in Jude's plot, not only in her overt manipulation of him that initially leads to their marriage, but through to the very end of the novel. Her first meeting with Jude illustrates the disruptive function of her language that will continually thwart him. As Jude engages in a mental catalogue of his knowledge, the taunting words of Arabella and her friends interrupt him:

“Meanwhile I will read, as soon as I am settled in Christminster the books I have not been able to get hold of here: Livy: Tacitus: Herodotus: Aeschylus: Sophocles: Aristophanes --”

“Ha, ha, ha! Hoity - hoity!” The sounds were expressed in light voices on the other side of the hedge, but he did not notice them. His thoughts went on:

“-- Euripides: Plato: Aristotle: Lucretius: Epictetus: Seneca: Antoninus. Then I must master other things: the Fathers thoroughly; Bede and ecclesiastical history generally; a smattering of Hebrew -- I only know the letters as yet -- ”

“Hoity-toity!” (33)

Since Arabella's words do not draw sufficient interest from Jude, she intervenes by throwing not only words at him but also “the characteristic part of a barrow-pig” (35).

Yet her linguistic intervention should not go unnoticed. Her use of slang sharply contradicts the learned content of Jude's catalogue, tacitly dissecting his words in a way that corresponds to her ongoing derision of his aspirations, which is later literalized in her degrading treatment of his books:⁴ “her fingers . . . left very perceptible imprints on the

⁴ Garson suggests that, as “embodied male voices,” books in *Jude the Obscure* become “male bodies . . . which . . . are polluted and assaulted by the female touch” (160). Her discussion of *Jude the Obscure* offers a convincing argument in regards to the “sinister power” (163) of the female voice in the novel, which “mocks, undercuts, and dismembers” (165) Jude's relationship to patriarchal authority. Her argument thus somewhat anticipates my discussion of the various forms of textual violence that Sue and Arabella carry out.

bookcovers” as she “continued deliberately to toss the books severally upon the floor” (68). Her speech during their first meeting, which Widdowson aptly refers to as “a kind of Bakhtinian ‘carnival’” (179), thus anticipates the way in which her use of language will continue to degrade Jude and connect him almost inextricably to his past. As she says, “Married is married” (58).

Yet this phrase is one of many to whose truths Arabella herself will hardly adhere. Legal and moral law holds no authority over her. Her subversiveness is exemplified by her marriage to another man in Australia while still legally married to Jude, as well as her willing sexual encounter with Jude once back in England. Her disregard for the sacredness of language leads her to relate to her friends “almost word for word some of [Jude’s] tenderest speeches.” In fact, “very few of his sayings and doings . . . were private” (46). In discussing conventional conceptions of gossip, Spacks observes that “in [gossip’s] perversion of the uniquely human capacity of speech, that gift which links man by analogy to the Articulator of the original creative Word, it symbolizes man’s tragically fallen nature” (28). Arabella’s connection to gossip thus marks her early on as one whose speech perverts and subverts male language and the trajectories of men’s plots.

Her manipulation of gossip also reveals the power of circulating oral narratives generally, as does the speculation and rumour that relentlessly stalk Sue and Jude, transforming their private history into a public document that Arabella can “read all about . . . in the papers” (366). Public report in fact compels Jude to go to Christminster, and also drives him and Sue into a perpetually “nomadic life” (325). The narratives of their parents’ bad marriages contribute to their sense that they are plagued by an inherited tendency toward self-destruction. Sue’s increasing sense of “tragic doom” (297)

illustrates her increasing submission to a text -- that attached to her family heritage -- that has the power to shape her behaviour and her relationships. That “baseless reports” (163) regarding Sue’s conduct are largely responsible for inciting her to marry Phillotson also points to the destructive influence of rumour.

The final words that encourage Jude to go to Christminster come in fact from “a hunchbacked old woman of great intelligence, who read everything she could lay her hands on, and she told him more yet of the romantic charms of the city of light and lore. Thither he resolved as firmly as ever to go” (31). The use of “Thither” in relation to the motivating voice of the intelligent, well-read woman (who, apart from her age, bears an obvious resemblance to Sue) ironically points to the effect women’s use of language will have on Jude’s ambitions, given that Jude etches this very word onto the milestone that points him toward Christminster. His devotion to his inscription shows how the images of things motivate him, as does his attitude toward Sue’s photograph, which “haunted him; and ultimately formed a quickening ingredient in his latent intent of following his friend the schoolmaster thither [to Christminster]” (78). Her visual image alone encourages Jude to love her. Furthermore, the distortion of Jude’s intentions is emphasized by Hardy’s importing of “thither” into this description of Sue’s photograph. It clearly raises questions about his desire to attain academic success in Christminster.

As readers persistently note, the similarity between Jude’s idealization of Christminster and Sue is established early on in the text.⁵ They both serve as the chief

⁵ Garson (pp. 152-53), for example, suggests this illustrates how Jude “insists upon a transcendent reality behind words and signs” (153) and that his preconceptions are derived from his inculcation of literary images. Langland demonstrates how Jude’s absorption of the conventional “rhetoric of manliness” (36) -- is essential to the construction of his masculinity, leading him to finally deprive “Sue of any meaningful textual role outside parallel gender stereotypes” (45).

objects of Jude's desire, objects that he is therefore prone to misinterpret. Just as with Sue's photograph, in seeing Christminster, Jude places his own translation upon it: "He was getting so romantically attached to Christminster that, like a young lover alluding to his mistress, he felt bashful at mentioning its name" (19). His romantic expectations of Christminster entirely cloud his vision, even when reality blatantly fails to correspond to his ideal: "When he passed objects out of harmony with its general expression he allowed his eyes to slip over them as if he did not see them" (79). Jude adheres too closely to the terms of those narratives he constructs for himself. For example, when he hears the chanting in the Cardinal College Cathedral-church -- "*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?*" (92) -- he takes it to have direct meaning for his own situation: "he could hardly believe that the psalm was not specially set by some regardful Providence for this moment of his first entry into the solemn building. And yet it was the ordinary psalm for the twenty-fourth evening of the month" (93). The difficulties that Jude and Sue face are derived from their proclivity for attributing individual human experience to a larger narrative. They trade places in this sense, Sue ultimately submitting to the view that there is a providential plan in place, and conforming to the terms of the biblical texts that she formerly rejected as she does so. Yet Jude's death-bed evocation of Job shows that although he ultimately rejects the convictions of a universal authoritative moral text, he continues to rely on biblical texts as he had always done, "expressing his personal experience through scriptural language" (Nemesvari 57).

The problematic nature of blind adherence to universal narratives is reflected in the treatment of reading and writing in the novel. In particular, Jude's relationship to textual authority comments on his consideration and construction of Sue. After

passionately kissing Sue at the Marygreen train station (227), Jude makes a sacrifice of his books and thereby “disclaims all masculine ambition” (Ingham, *Language* 172). Sue meanwhile promises herself that she “won’t write to him any more, or at least for a for a long time” (229). The relationship drawn here between texts and repression is critical to the function of language in the novel. Jude’s burning of his books speaks to his acknowledgment of his desire and his giving over of his repression, whereas Sue sees her verbal communication with Jude as the source of her corruption, which must therefore cease. This process in fact reflects the larger structure of the novel: as Jude and his doctrines “begin to part company” (225), he abandons his strict adherence to texts. Sue, however, moves in the opposite direction, away from rebellion toward absolute repression.⁶ Her ultimate self-sacrifice marks her capitulation to the doctrines Jude claims to have abandoned.

Jude’s attitude toward language itself is analogous to his treatment of Sue, which converts her into a textual object. Jude’s limited linguistic capacity is revealed early on in his assumptions about the process involved in learning Latin and Greek:

Jude 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. He concluded that a grammar of the required tongue would contain, primarily, a rule, prescription, or clue of the nature of a secret cipher, which, once known, would enable him by merely applying it to change at will all words of his own speech into those of the foreign one. . . . Thus he assumed that the words of the required language were always to be found somewhere latent in the words of the given language by those who had the art to uncover them; such art being furnished by the books aforesaid. (26)

Jude mistakenly construes Sue as a similar puzzle to be solved, an anagram to be reordered into conventional definitions of womanhood. His attempts to classify her in his

⁶ See also McNees on how the “crisis of belief is never satisfactorily resolved” (36).

own terms position her as foreign, the “other” or secondary text, which only exists and which can only be understood in relation to the primary, dominant text.⁷ Thus, Sue possesses little possibility of succeeding with her efforts to construct her own narrative that can be read on its own terms, in its own language, since Jude can only view her through a lens informed by the texts he has idealized. This is the point at which Sue and Jude most sharply diverge. Jude does not possess the capacity of creation that is inherent in Sue, whose very being eludes unequivocal definition. Sue is, as Garson suggests, presented as a “mere replicator and exploiter of discourse”(163), but she appropriates conventional discourse as part of her strategy of textual subversion. Jude instead -- as even his early admiration for Phillotson shows -- merely seeks to internalize and reproduce a prior text in order to align himself with a particular narrative and seek out its fulfillment.⁸

Sue’s disruptive use of language, however, somewhat serves to disabuse Jude of his “grand delusion” (26). Like Paula, Sue often negates men’s efforts to classify her in ways that emphasize their limited capacities for interpretation. Referring to D.H. Lawrence, John Goode observes how “he recognizes that Sue is destructive because she utters herself -- whereas in the ideology of sexism, the woman is an image to be uttered” (“Sue Bridehead” 101). Sue’s response to Jude’s following assumption is just one illustration of her verbal resistance to his desire to utter her, to articulate her identity in definitive terms:

“You seem to me to have nothing unconventional at all about you.”
 “O, haven’t I! You don’t know what’s inside me!”

⁷ See Gregor’s discussion (pp. 210-215) of the limitations of Jude’s notion that there exists a “law of transmutation” (*JO* 26).

⁸ Butler is among many who observe the linguistic links in the text between Jude and Christ (206).

“What?”
 “The Ishmaelite.”
 “An urban miss is what you are.”
 She looked in severe disagreement and turned away. (143-44)

Identifying herself as a “negation” (152), Sue employs all sorts of evasive tactics, on occasion using the arrival of the train, for example, in order to control the direction of dialogue.⁹ Another instance of such recurrent evasion occurs again when they meet at the Shaston school and Sue finds herself touched by a particular piece of music:

“It is odd,” she said, in a voice quite changed, “that I should care about that air; because --”
 “Because what?”
 “I am not that sort -- quite”
 “Not easily moved?”
 “I didn’t quite mean that.”
 “O, but you *are* one of that sort, for you are just like me at heart!”
 “But not at head.” (212)

Both here, and throughout the text, Sue possesses a relentless will to resist definitions that would be thrust upon her, all of which she finds inadequate to articulate her sense of self and of the world. Jude is bewildered by Sue’s perpetual employment of this and various other strategies of evasion, such as talking “vaguely and indiscriminately to prevent [others’] talking pertinently” (236), what Garson sees as “irresponsible babble [that] dismantles the text and undoes Jude” (164). Jude’s chief difficulty with Sue arises from his resulting inability to categorize her within a single definition of womanhood.

The same is true of Phillotson, whose behaviour also positions Sue as text. In her absence, he regards her “historic notes, *written* in a bold womanly hand at his *dictation* some months before, and it was a clerical *rendering of word after word* that absorbed

⁹ My essay, “‘The Modern Vice of Unrest,’” explores the role of transience and the railway in cultivating the sense of human disconnection in the novel, even at the level of dialogue.

him” (167, italics added). Besides its obvious erotic overtones, the terms of this passage anticipate Sue’s submission to the authoritative Word that her relationship with Phillotson will ultimately occasion. In returning to him, she will effectively rehearse and carry out the words of patriarchal dictates. A description of his fascination with her letters follows, and he goes on to view Sue’s photographs, one of her as a child, and another as a young woman, making his paternal relationship to her clear. Kissing “the dead pasteboard with all the passionateness, and more than all the devotion, of a young man of eighteen” (168), Phillotson exhibits behaviour that closely resembles Boldwood’s fixation on Bathsheba’s valentine, which likewise enables him to displace his erotic desire onto the textual artifact that comes to signify the body of the elusive, “tantalizing” (265) woman.

The notion that Sue is here merely “dead pasteboard” emphatically points to the way in which Phillotson’s treatment of Sue’s letters and photographs will threaten to stifle the power that she attempts to obtain -- through distance -- in her use of language. Yet writing appears to serve as Sue’s chief tool for obtaining such control. The argument that she sets forth in a series of notes she exchanges with Phillotson, for example, finally incites him at least to permit her to live in the house “in a separate way” (236) prior to granting her permission to leave him. Her control of text makes her similar to Paula, her various letters depicting her “curious double nature” (219) and her unlocatable desire. One “lovely conundrum” (141) to Jude, she on one occasion insists that they “only correspond at long intervals on purely business matters” (138), only later to reveal to him in an epistle news of her imminent marriage. Yet the distance she seeks in insisting on an epistolary correspondence does not altogether protect her from intimate conversation or misinterpretation. For example, upon receiving her letter stating, “*If you want to love me,*

Jude, you may,” Jude found himself “in danger of attaching more meaning to Sue’s impulsive note than it was really intended to bear” (161). Epistolary communication creates a space in which Jude can exercise an imaginative interpretation of Sue’s feelings and intentions, transforming her according to his desire. While Jude is soon disabused of his fantasies, discovering that she is “often not so nice in [her] real presence as . . . in [her] letters” (171), his willing misinterpretation of her meaning points to the way Sue will become increasingly trapped by her own efforts to manipulate language.

The various signatures she employs -- sometimes “Sue B.” (167), or, simply, “Sue” (161), or “S.” (248), or even “Susanna Florence Mary Bridehead” (176) -- show how her letters, and her very name, also contribute to the complication of her identity and her fluctuating access to power. She attaches the latter of these names to a letter that informs Jude of her fast-approaching marriage to Phillotson, as if the words themselves register the physical and emotional distance between them that her marriage will occasion. Phillotson’s odd way of saying Sue’s name, “Soo,” (231) and his alternative use of “Susanna” (388)¹⁰ also emphasizes how their marriage brings about a change in

¹⁰ In “Appropriating the Word: *Jude the Obscure* as Subversive Apocrypha” Richard Nemesvari brings to light how Hardy’s appropriation and re-writing of apocryphal texts sustains “an ongoing dialogue with textual authority” (63). He shows how Hardy’s history of Jude and Sue relies on narratives in the apocryphal books, “The Epistle of St. Jude” and “Susanna.” In light of this argument, Phillotson’s use of “Susanna,” rather than Sue, draws our attention to the intertextuality at work in the novel and forcefully positions Sue’s voice as a marginalized, subversive text and repressive orthodoxy, which Phillotson comes to represent, as instrumental in her marginalization. The question of textual authority thus emerges as central to the entire thrust of the novel’s charges against religious and moral orthodoxy. It is also worth noting that, as Nemesvari points out, the Book of Susanna centres on the attempted rape of Susanna by two elders, who threaten to publicly charge Susanna with fornication if she does not submit to them. In either case she would face death. She will not submit, but is ultimately freed by the intervention of Daniel, who provides the necessary evidence. Nemesvari points to the obvious connection between Phillotson and the old men, and between Jude and Daniel, and also emphasizes Hardy’s persistent use of apocryphal, as well as canonical, allusions throughout the novel. I would, for example, point to the epigraph to “Part Sixth – At Christminster Again” which comes from the book of Esther: “. . . *And she humbled her body greatly, and all the places of her joy she filled with her torn hair*” (Esther 14:2). Hardy’s foregrounding of apocryphal texts reflects on the marginalization of suspect, derided voices (Nemesvari sketches a useful outline of the

her identity that, though primarily textual, and thus seemingly superficial, is entirely effectual. This anticipates the way in which labels, particularly legal labels, will also work against Sue's pursuit of her own identity: "That Sue was not as she had been, but was labelled 'Phillotson,' paralyzed Jude whenever he wanted to commune with her as an individual" (196).¹¹ Furthermore, at the beginning of Part VI we are told that "Jude Fawley and Sue walked no more in the town of Aldbrickham" (325). Sue's lack of a patronymic speaks to her defiance of patrilineal ownership, which was signified by her abandonment of Phillotson, and thus marks her as absolutely excluded from society and moving into increasing obscurity. Like Paula, Sue herself observes the way externally-enforced naming obscures her own identity: "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" (215-16). Even when she is later shown to have "openly adopted the name of Mrs. Fawley" (313), her fraudulent use of the name is itself yet another subversion of the conventions attached to onomastics. This appropriation occurs when Jude receives a contract from a church to restore its visual representation of the most morally authoritative of all texts, the Ten Commandments. This juxtaposition points to Sue's defiance of religious, legal, and moral authority, which is primarily bound up in language.

ambiguous status of the apocryphal texts over the past century, pp. 50-51), particularly those who, like Sue herself, threaten textual authority by exposing its instability. Hardy notably frames the last section of the novel with the voices of two women, Esther and Arabella, which may serve as a counteractive response to Sue's ultimate silence.

McNees also discusses how "Hardy invariably attenuates and distorts biblical allusions to show both the similarity and discrepancy between Jude and his biblical types" (40).

¹¹ Rosemarie Morgan notes the similarity between marriage and slavery in this regard: "Both institutions required the bonded party to take the master's name upon bondage" (120). Morgan pursues this argument by citing Mill, as well as Sue's aversion to being "licensed to be loved on the premises" (*JO* 271).

The linguistic convergence of these forces of authority obviously occurs in the rite of marriage. Sue's aversion to the marriage ceremony illustrates her fear of the transformative power of text. Her efforts to exercise control over discourse thus points to a corresponding will solely to control her body and not submit it to a man as property. However, after many failed attempts, she and Jude at last intend to wed. At the Superintendent Registrar's office,

Jude Fawley signed the form of notice, Sue looking over his shoulder and watching his hand as he traced the words. As she read the four-square undertaking, never before seen by her, into which her own and Jude's names were inserted, and by which that very volatile essence, their love for each other, was supposed to be made permanent, her face seemed to grow painfully apprehensive. "Names and Surnames of the Parties" (they were to be parties now, not lovers, she thought). "Condition" – (a horrid idea). . . (295)

Sue's revulsion at the sight of this document prevents their marriage. The transformation of "lovers" into "parties" necessitated by the "sordid conditions of a business contract" (300) indicates to her the capacity of the letter of the law to translate people, and their emotions, into texts. As such it threatens to exert absolute control over human impulses that cannot, in Sue's view, naturally be constrained.

Jude and Sue's relationship is doomed as a result of their antithetical attitude toward texts -- he has made the text his sacred idol, and the authority of the text is precisely what Sue deplors. Sue, like Jude, is a maker of images,¹² but she operates consciously in her hypocrisy, knowing what she creates has no significance for her. Sue is intensely sceptical of the visual image or text, particularly those which claim absolute authority. She is also a consumer of texts, and, at least initially, her voracious reading

¹² Garson (pp. 162-63) contrasts the decorative form of Sue's "Alleluia" with Jude's unadorned "Thither" in order to emphasize Sue's position as a mocker of patriarchal texts.

habits largely serve her subversive strategies. Her position as the locus of social change in the novel is emblemized by her relationship to texts, indeed by the very kind of reading she undertakes. Jude, for example, asks her to recommend to him a “good readable edition of the uncanonical books of the New Testament” (213), one that, she admits, could not be read in the school where she teaches since it would “alarm the neighbourhood” (213). The marginalized status of such texts being analogous to the position of women’s voices illustrates how Sue’s disruption of textual authority corresponds to her resistance of patriarchal dominance. Yet she is shown not only to defy conventional interpretations, but dismantle them, both in literal and figurative terms.

In doing so she enacts a program of iconoclasm that severely questions Jude’s reliance on orthodox authority. Her purchase of the statues of Venus and Adonis directly follows, for example, Jude’s meditation on Providence that I earlier referred to, and on Sue’s power to grant him spiritual nourishment, an “anchorage for his thoughts” (93). Hardly an anchor for Jude’s faith, Sue’s destabilizing scepticism forcefully emerges during her visit with Phillotson and their pupils to the model of Jerusalem. She pointedly asks if “this model, elaborate as it is, is a very imaginary production. How does anybody know that Jerusalem was like this in the time of Christ? I am sure this man doesn’t” (108). Although she temporarily proceeds with her blasphemy, she is “easily repressed” (109) as a result of her inability to make herself adequately understood. While her later recreation of the model on the blackboard indeed signifies Sue’s propensity for “echoing and playing with signs and concepts” (Garson 163), it serves as a kind of repentance on her part that will reemerge in the pattern of rebellion and submission to textual authority that constitutes her process in the novel.

Sue's dissection and reordering of the Bible into chronological order exemplifies both her view that such authoritative texts are no longer fixed terms and her ability to exploit this instability to her advantage. This "sacrilege" (157), to use Jude's term, stands as the emblematic effort on her part not merely to defy patriarchal authority, but to subvert it altogether, since the dictates it perpetuates are no longer relevant. Sue challenges patriarchal oppression not merely by means of a strategic use of its discourse, but through its deconstruction. She grounds her insistence on leaving Phillotson, for example, on what Nemesvari aptly terms a "radical redefinition of adultery" (62), insisting that since she does not love Phillotson, it is adulterous for her to remain with him. Her words and actions respond to the kind of textual oppression she feels subject to, such as that enacted by the words of the marriage service, which she observes in *The Book of Common Prayer*:

". . . it seems to me very humiliating that a giver-away should be required at all. According to the ceremony as there printed, 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 a she-goat, or any other domestic animal. Bless your exalted views of woman, O Churchman!" (177)

Sue's insistence that Jude give her away in marriage seems not merely an exploit of "an epicure in emotions" (180), but a punitive response to his adherence to such texts that openly proclaim women's subordinated status.

Sensitive to language's "coercive power, she too will use it as a weapon, and does" (R. Morgan 122). Sue's vehemence in fact aligns her with Arabella, whose capacity for violence -- as her dissection and decapitation of pigs demonstrates -- is a more raw version of the assault Sue enacts on language and, by extension, on Jude; both react against the treatment of women like "domestic animals." Arabella's behaviour is linked

to her emasculation and control of Jude, and Sue's desire to degrade patriarchal texts, to restrain them and break them down by "cutting" them up and "re-arranging them" (157), registers her response in kind to the degradation to which such language has generally subjected women, particularly through the control of their bodies.

Arabella's use of conventional texts contributes to their degradation as she sets out to "prick [their] absurd pomposity and pernicious assumptions" (Widdowson 182). She rather disingenuously insists that she is "not the woman to find fault with what the Lord has ordained" (329) and it is she who quotes Moses' haunting proclamation: "'Then shall the man be guiltless; but the woman shall bear her iniquity,'" which she goes on to scoff mildly at: "Damn rough on us women; but we must grin and put up wi' it!" (335). Sue likewise defies male power through her subversion and appropriation of text, but ultimately fails in her efforts because, unlike Arabella, she does not manipulate language in order to thrive within patriarchal categories. Rather, she does so in order to remove herself from their constraints entirely, including those that demand her emotional and sexual dependence on one man, her husband. Yet Arabella's behaviour necessarily reveals her submission to conventional narratives that pronounce women's dependency on men, as she flirts with Vilbert, knowing all the while that Jude is dead, since the necessity of procuring a husband is a perpetual one.

Not possessed of Arabella's "art of prevarication" (349) Sue must bear her iniquity, iniquity that the texts she so defied will themselves enact. Because, like Eustacia, her rebellious spirit will not be controlled, her body becomes the site of her punishment. Her aunt frequently "smacked her for her impertinence" (113) when she was a child, and Gillingham similarly suggests that she be "smacked, and brought to her

senses” (244) for her wayward desire to leave Phillotson. Sue’s marriage to Phillotson exemplifies Mona Caird’s claim that “if for men the world was a delusion, for women it was a torture chamber” (93).¹³ Although her first marriage is not consummated, Jude observes its connection to the destruction of her body, and therefore her autonomy. To say she will become accustomed to sex is, according to Jude, “like saying that the amputation of a limb is no affliction” (223). Sue’s bind primarily derives from linguistic limitations. Women, such as they are conventionally defined, have no vocabulary with which to discuss their sexual desire or lack thereof. Sue has no access to a means of describing the emotional and physical torture that the sexual act presents to her. She therefore seeks even physical torment since it would at least provide her with a means for self-articulation: “I wish he would beat me, or be faithless to me, or so some open thing that I could talk about as a justification for feeling as I do!” (223). But since sex is considered an act of duty rather than desire for women (Phillotson warns Sue, “you are committing a sin in not liking me” [234]), they can express neither desire nor repugnance. The nature of Sue’s difficulty effectively silences her, and she demonstrates her need for expression of her grief; she “*must* tell somebody” (226) and make her “distressful confession” (227). Unable adequately to do so, she articulates her repugnance and fear in physical terms, by jumping out a window. Sue literally and figuratively “collapses into crushing conformity” (Cunningham 106), finding submission to conventional demands

¹³ Mona Caird’s New Woman novel, *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894), depicts a woman’s protest against the oppression of women that is sustained and perpetuated by conventional tropes of femaleness that naturalize marriage and motherhood. Cunningham notes how *Jude the Obscure* and *The Daughters of Danaus* reproduce a pattern common to narratives about New Women, wherein the heroine’s defiance is followed by a bad marriage, “some period of nervous prostration” (106), and her ultimate submission to the norms she so defied. In *The Language of Gender and Class*, Ingham also observes how New Women novels frequently “compromise their own radicalism” (175).

for female behaviour the only way for articulating her identity. Although Phillotson initially claims that “she’s another man’s except in name and law” (265), Sue soon finds that, rather than her own voice, the power of such disciplinary structures to dictate the ownership of her body is absolute.

Confession is in fact Sue’s chief difficulty, since it depends on the articulation of and commitment to an single, authoritative truth. Such is what Sue cannot give. She reproaches Jude, “you are always trying to make me confess to all sorts of absurdities” (311). The marriage ceremony itself exemplifies the oral expression of an absolute truth that she most fears, since it registers the binding submission of her body to another, a “dreadful contract to feel in a particular way in a matter [sex] whose essence is its voluntariness!” (223). Marriage to Phillotson in fact translates Sue into a conventional text: “There was something in her face which belied her late assuring words, so strictly proper and so lifelessly spoken that they might have been taken from a list of model speeches in ‘The Wife’s Guide to Conduct’” (197). Although Sue initially defies such dictates, her second marriage to Phillotson rewrites, or rather, erases her process of textual defiance. That in seeking to punish herself she desires to eradicate her body seems a kind of vengeance that responds in kind to the destructive textual violence she carried out. She tells Jude, “I should like to prick myself all over with pins and bleed out the badness that’s in me” (364). Increasingly shown to be “as enslaved to the social code as any woman” (253), Sue becomes a consumer of conventional textual authority, her physical subjection serving as the outward sign of her adherence to those texts that control women’s bodies.

As this process unfolds, Hardy illustrates how the written text is extremely efficacious in its capacity for regulation. Jude, for example, is initially held back from expressing his feelings for Sue by “the pair of autographs [his and Arabella’s] in the vestry church” (164). Later, when he was “nearly starving himself in attempts to extinguish by fasting his passionate tendency to love [Sue]” (199), he read “sermons on discipline and hunted up passages in Church history that treated of the Ascetics of the second century” (199) to inspire him in his process of severe physical self-discipline. Finally, Jude’s rejection from Christminster reaches him by way of an epistle, serving the “death blow to Jude’s hopes” (McNeese 42) that exemplifies the destructive, divisive power of the letter.

The letter indeed proves more effective than force in determining that Sue render her own punishment, physical and emotional, her thorough knowledge of patriarchal texts ultimately betraying her. Sue’s guilt and subsequent efforts at repentance derive from the ultimately inescapable belief that there is some larger narrative at work, that the death of her children is indeed a sign of the vengeance of God, the omniscient, omnipotent author. She in fact suffers from an accurate, yet “awful conviction that her discourse with the boy had been the main cause of the tragedy” (355), tragedy which erased the signs -- her children -- of her physical relationship with Jude. Since Father Time “was their nodal point, their focus, their expression in a single term” (356), his death thus marks the obliteration of Sue and Jude’s relationship. As a result of this seeming providential response to Sue’s former derision of God’s Word, she finally determines to return to Phillotson and consummate their marriage, despite her aversion. She thus attempts to redeem her children, relocating her body as the object of providential wrath and the sign

of providential authority.¹⁴ A “spectacle unto the world” (356), Sue, like Eustacia, faces punishment that responds to her desire to operate outside the bounds of acceptable conduct, transforming the horror of her private history into public text.

Her acute sense of being subject to providential control makes her feel helpless to resist her fate and leads her to sacrifice herself “on the altar of duty” (363) in fulfillment of a process of “religious self-abasement” (Butler 204). Sue’s capitulation to Phillotson, first in marriage and then in the submission of her body to his sexual desire, coincides with the demonstration of textual authority in such a way that makes its supremacy explicit. Her eye having “caught a document” (384), their marriage license, Sue’s “look was that of a condemned criminal who catches sight of his coffin” (384). The legal letter of their union thus effectively sentences Sue to “spiritual, moral, and sexual death” (Ledger 187), which will be made absolute by the subjection of her body. In an action that subverts her former scepticism about “the use of thinking of laws and ordinances” (233), Sue submits to Phillotson’s insistence that she seal her pledge not to see Jude again by swearing on the New Testament, not one of her own of course, but the original form of the text. Following this quasi-legal procedure, Sue then insists upon admission to Phillotson’s bed, repeating the terms of their marriage vows as she does so: “Now I supplicate you, Richard, to whom I belong, and whom I wish to honour and obey, as I vowed, to let me in” (419). Sue enters Phillotson’s room as he lifts her into his arms, her body the sign that she intends to practice, as well as preach, the terms of the conventional

¹⁴ Brady argues that Sue’s “loss of reproductive and nurturing activity destroys her intellect, causing a hysterical reversal that exceeds all her earlier inconsistencies. The idea that motherhood is necessary for female mental stability is thus reinforced by [Sue’s] pathetic decline” (99). Brady points to the depiction of this decline as evidence of how Hardy’s novels themselves “participate in . . . hysterical discourse about the female body” (89).

marriage contract. Silencing herself by clenching her teeth all the while, her physical submission thus conforms to the conventional legal and moral marital text.

Paradoxically, Sue's efforts to control texts make her an object of extreme textual control. Her fate thus emerges as fulfillment of a kind of textual revenge tragedy as she becomes complicit in her victimization by the terms of the very narratives she sought to fracture. The perpetual suggestions in the text that Sue and Jude are before their time speak to the inadequacy of the limited categories for human relationships that dominated them. What Sue seems to lack is a comprehending audience for the voice of her own narrative point of view. After the death of her male college companion, Sue may have simply wanted, like Hardy's Mrs. Marchmill in "An Imaginative Woman," a "fuller appreciator, perhaps, rather than another lover" (32). Yet this need suggests that Sue lacked the absolute sense of self necessary to sustain her process of linguistic subversion of authority. She thus fails to fulfill even those texts upon which she would rely, for according to Mill, the avoidance of "ape-like imitation" requires "firmness and self-control to hold to [the] deliberate decision" (Mill 104). The severity of control exercised by the letter of the law and of orthodox codes of morality seems to make sustained resistance impossible. That *Jude the Obscure* is Hardy's last novel ironically underscores this sense of futility, leaving his narrative of a thoroughly unconstrained, self-reliant woman finally unwritten.

Conclusion

Jude the Obscure most forcefully emphasizes Hardy's view of the proscriptive limitations of conventional discourses on human relationships and identity. What I have set out to show is how his novels register the way in which the power of these limitations is embedded in language itself. Those female figures in these novels who thrive ultimately do so by making their use of language conform to established paradigms that accord with existing boundaries of class and gender relationships, but not before exhibiting an unconventional amount of autonomy that challenges the social structures that ultimately govern them. Their conformity thus serves to counteract their already destabilizing access to autonomy that the control of property grants them. More radical efforts to rewrite categories of female identity to include self-articulation and acknowledged sexuality are portrayed as so disturbing to conventional social, economic, and sexual relationships that their success is increasingly doubtful. Indeed, the transition from the relative optimism of *Far From the Madding Crowd* to the tragedy of female silence in *The Return of the Native* marks a profound shift. And, while *A Laodicean* complicates issues of silence and strategy in the context of destabilizing "new aristocracies" that threaten patrilineal authority with obsolescence, *Jude the Obscure* powerfully expands on these issues only to all but obliterate the possibility of women's increased access to autonomy through the interrogation of the oppressive function of language. Patriarchal discourses on gender and sexuality are shown by Hardy to be finally resistant to deconstruction, even, I would finally submit, that which he himself attempts to enact.

Hardy's sense of modernity perhaps most emphatically emerges in his depiction of the inadequacy of verbal expression. Indeed, the most positive form of human connection in his novels seems embodied not in discourse, but in "a second silent conversation" whose "perfect . . . reciprocity" (*JO* 212) supersedes our limited interpretive and expressive capacities. This sense of the problems inherent in language itself is hardly unique to the novels I have addressed in detail here. Indeed, this thesis could have been, and could yet be, pursued in a variety of directions -- to include other of Hardy's fiction, both minor and major, as well as his poetry.

A Pair of Blue Eyes (1873), for example, addresses many of the subjects at issue here, including the function of gossip, the circumscription of behaviour by patriarchal categories, and the problem of female self-expression and articulation of desire. Like Hardy's short story, "An Imaginative Woman" (1894), it also complicates these issues by introducing into the text the figure of the female writer. *The Woodlanders* (1887) depicts the complexities of the female property owner alongside questions of female education, misrepresentation, gossip, and technology. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) Hardy draws together these issues in the most forceful of ways, interrogating the destructive nature of patriarchal discourses on female sexuality, but not without including the more subtle, but equally recurrent, linguistic objects and issues that I have attended to here: figurative and literal signs, the unreliability of epistolary communication, language and female communities, and the authority inherent in onomastics.

I have in passing referred to several of Hardy's poems, including "The Pedigree," which, like *Tess* and *A Laodicean*, foregrounds the tension between a determinant past

and an emerging selfhood. One of Hardy's best-known poems, "The Voice"¹ illustrates the power of the disembodied voice in ways that I have shown to be significant for *Far From the Madding Crowd* and, particularly, *The Return of the Native*. The way the textual artifact -- particularly that which signifies the female body -- becomes the locus of often destructive contests of authority emerges overtly in the "The Torn Letter,"² "The Place on the Map,"³ and in the disturbing spectacle of a woman's burning portrait in "The Photograph."⁴ These few references point to the wealth of material in Hardy's poetry that further illuminates his sustained preoccupation with the complex relationship between textual control, desire, and female agency.

It must be acknowledged that despite Hardy's sustained attention to the way in which language itself severely circumscribes female identity, the consistent depiction of women as enigmatic textual artifacts in his work illustrates the limits of his own discourse and the extent of his own entrapment within Victorian presuppositions about gender that consistently position woman as the untranslatable "other." Yet the very limitations of Hardy's own writing further strengthen his indictment of women's circumscription -- within and by language -- that has its culmination in *Jude the Obscure*. As his heroines' own sensitivity to the restrictive power of language suggests, the utter transformation of the form and function of language itself alone contains the possibility for women to control and construct their own narratives, in their own words.

¹ *Satires of Circumstance* (1914), *The Complete Poems*, p. 346.

² *Ibid.*, p. 313.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

⁴ *Moments of Vision and Miscellaneous Verses* (1917), *The Complete Poems*, p. 468.

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