

*Jude Fawley and Sue Bridehead:
Illusions about a Life Outside the Societal Framework*

Summary

Jude and Sue, Hardy's tragic lovers, each have dreams untypical of the society of their time. As a couple, they move outside the prescribed framework of their respective social positions, setting in motion the mechanism of events that will result in great sacrifice with the ultimate goal of restoring the social balance of gender and class categories. This paper has shown that an individual is too weak to fight the conventions of society. Both Jude and Sue aspire beyond their predestined roles and categories but are ill-equipped to endure the blows of life outside the societal framework: Jude is torn between the traditional male role and his vision of himself as a learned man, whereas Sue both intuitively and consciously crosses the gender border, dreaming of becoming "a comrade" to her emotional partner and suppressing the physical part of her character. Thus, they blur the borders which society has raised in order to keep its members within the proper limits. Once disturbed, the balance needs to be restored, so Jude and Sue become the victims of the mechanism of mimetic desire and sacrificial crisis. This paper has shown that in *Jude the Obscure* the conventions of society are far too strong for any individual to remain intact outside them. The sacrificial crisis which ends the agony of Jude and Sue's battle against the conventions and apparently restores the traditional balance is nothing but another illusion: Jude's physical death seems tragic, but it ends sufferings and removes the threat to the society, whereas the death of Sue's soul is utterly tragic because it represents the token of the ultimate victory of the society over an individual.

Keywords: *Jude the Obscure*, class, gender, illusion, self-deception, mimetic desire, sacrificial crisis