
Sexual Orientation in 'Jude the Obscure and Sons and Lovers

In her book *Towards a Recognition of Androgyny*, Carolyn Heilbrum defines androgyny as "a condition under which the characteristics of the sexes, and the human impulses expressed by men and women, are not rigidly assigned (Heilbrum 10). In Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, Sue is depicted in a comparable gender-neutral way. In the novel's introduction, Dennis Taylor describes Sue as being "distractible and unfocused in her sexuality" (Taylor xxvi). She seems to view men as comrades, or one of her own, rather than objects of sexual desire. Through descriptions, Sue is sometimes described in a manner that does not place emphasis on masculine or feminine qualities. In addition, Sue despises the restraints placed upon females during her era. Just as Sue struggles with her femininity and overcoming her gender's norms, Paul Morel in D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* faces a similar battle in maintaining his masculinity. Mary Burgan writes that Paul Morel is one of the most "powerful twentieth century advocates of sexual liberation," yet he is defenseless against a "woman's power" as "mother of the artist" (Burgan 178). Paul Morel and Sue Bridehead's lack of appropriate gender behaviors and characteristics results in their inability to have fulfilling and intimate relationships with members of the opposite sex.

When Jude Fawley sees Sue Bridehead for the first time, he only remembers vague physical descriptions of her appearance. Instead of recounting her outstanding female qualities, Jude says that "she was not a large figure...That was about all he had seen. There was nothing statuesque in her" (Hardy 90). Without previous knowledge that this character is a female named Sue, this initial portrayal of her could be one for either a male or a female gender. In his book *Hardy and the Erotic*, T.R. Wright writes that Sue has a "curious unconsciousness of gender" and often combines with males "almost as one of their own sex" (Wright 120). After all, Sue could "do things that only boys do, as a rule I've seen her hit in and steer down the long slide on yonder pond, with her little curls blowing...All boys except herself" (Hardy 112). Sue is considered a tomboy because of her mannerisms. Even at twelve years old, she refuses to submit to female gender norms when her aunt sees her "walking into the pond with her shoes and stockings off, and her petticoats pulled above her knees, afore I could cry out for shame, she said: 'Move on, aunty! This is no sight for modest eyes!'" (Hardy 110-111).

The attempt to feminize and control Sue occurs shortly after she meets Jude's friend (and her future husband), Richard Phillotson. Phillotson encourages Sue to enroll in the teachers' Training College at Melchester. They make plans to marry in two years when she has completed her schooling, and then teach together at a large coed school in town. Sue becomes

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incredibly unhappy and lonely at Melchester. When Jude goes to visit her, he instantly notices that "all her bounding manner was gone; her curves of motion had become subdued lines...She had altogether the air of a woman clipped and pruned by severe discipline" (Hardy 132). Sue tells Jude about the difficulty of living "with all the bitterness of a young person to whom restraint was new" (Hardy 133). Even the clothing enforced at the school was "a nunlike simplicity of costume that was rather enforced than desired" (Hardy 136). Unaccustomed to the restraints of being a female, Sue runs away from the Melchester Training College to Jude's house. She immediately changes out of her wet clothing, which she describes as "sexless cloth and linen," into Jude's suit (Hardy 145).

During a conversation later that night, Sue tells Jude that she has "no fear of men" and that she has "mixed with them almost as one of their own sex" (Hardy 147). Though it is not clearly stated, she could be referring to the Oxford undergraduate whom she "used to go about together like two men almost" (Hardy 148). Sue's "curiosity to hunt up a new sensation" guides her to experiments, such as unorthodox living arrangements with the undergraduate (Hardy 173). With "her strange ways and curious unconsciousness of gender," Sue lives with him for fifteen months before she realizes that her comradeship was not what he was looking for (Hardy 149). The undergraduate wanted to be Sue's lover, but she would have nothing of it. Sue assures Jude of her virginity by claiming that "I have remained as I began" (Hardy 149).

Sue enjoys the company of men, but does not seem to be sexually involved or interested in any of them. This contradicts the characteristics and human impulses typically assigned to females. Even after she is married to Phillotson, Sue tells Jude that "though I like Mr. Phillotson as a friend, I don't like him-it is a torture to me to-live with him as a husband!" (Hardy 212). Phillotson notices Sue's "unconquerable aversion to myself as a husband, even though she may like me as a friend, 'tis too much to bear longer...They [Jude and Sue] seem to be one person split in two!" (Hardy 229). Later, Sue's obvious disgust of her sexual relationship with her husband is seen when Phillotson is talking with his friend, Mr. Gillingham. He tells Gillingham that "owing to my entering of her room by accident, she [Sue] jumped out of the window-so strong was her dread of me!" (Hardy 230). On a separate occasion, Sue even attempts to sleep in a closet.

Just as Sue was "something of a riddle" to Jude, Phillotson finds her to be "puzzling and unpredictable" (Hardy 134 and 224). Phillotson cleverly remarks that "her [Sue] exact feeling for him [Jude] is a riddle to me-and to him too, I think-possibly to herself" (Hardy 229). All of Sue's relationships with men turn out to be unfulfilling. She cannot really make a decision whether to refuse or admit men in her life. This is seen in her self-description as a "cold-natured, sexless creature" for living with Jude, yet not wanting to marry him (Hardy 267). When Sue takes on the name Mrs. Fawley, she possesses a "dull, cowed, and listless manner," which contributes to the notion of Sue's aversion to her marriage (Hardy 298). Both as cousins and as two people that share many similarities, Jude and Sue complete each other. However, Sue continues to express

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her distaste for marriage when she tells Jude that "we ought to have lived in mental communion, and no more" (Hardy 352).

Thomas Hardy frequently uses the term "sexless" to describe Sue. This is interesting because although Sue lives with men, and even has children with Jude, Hardy does not give the reader any reason to believe that Sue wanted or enjoyed sex. Conveniently, there is no mention in the text of the conception or birth of her and Jude's three children. In Part Five, Sue tells Jude "I know that women are taught by other women that they must never admit the full truth to a man. But the highest form of affection is based on full sincerity on both sides" (Hardy 260). Thus, if women are not telling the full truth to men, yet highest affection can only exist with this truth intact, then these women must be achieving the highest form of affection with other women. Sue's desire for friendship and comradeship with men is continuous throughout the novel; however, she is unable to attain a successful sexual relationship with any of them. This is a continuation of the fact that Sue does not seem to desire sex. Because of this contradiction with traditional female desires and impulses, it leaves the reader questioning Sue's sexual identity. Through Thomas Hardy's frequent comparisons of Sue with Voltaire, he creates a nonconforming woman whose sexuality and gender is unclear.

In D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, Gertrude Morel latches all of her dreams and aspirations onto her sensitive and artistic son, Paul. His mother's effect on him, combined with Paul's hatred of his father, is so powerful that it could be classified as an Oedipal Complex. Even after his mother's death, Paul remains unable to love anyone else. Gertrude Morel has the ability to denigrate Paul's masculinity, which results in his inability to have fulfilling and intimate relationships with any of the other women he becomes involved with.

When Paul is born, Mrs. Morel first feels guilty because he was an unwanted baby. However, her emotions soon change. As Lawrence writes, "She had dreaded this baby like a catastrophe, because of her feeling for her husband. And now she felt strangely towards the infant" (Lawrence 34). In an attempt to make up for her initial feelings, she exclaims that "she would love it all the more now it was here; carry it in her love" (Lawrence 35). However, the bond between Paul and his father was nowhere near as strong. "No one spoke to him [Walter Morel]. The family life withdrew, shrank away. But he cared no longer about his alienation" (Lawrence 39). The hypersensitive Paul "hated his father," and often prayed for him [his father] to die (Lawrence 58). According to Graeme Russell's report on the role of fathers and its relation to masculinity, paternal nurturing and the extent to which fathers participate in child rearing have been found to be associated with "the development of masculinity in sons" (Russell 1174). In reference to *Sons and Lovers*, Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson claims that Paul embraces his "feminine traits" and rejects patriarchal values (Lewiecki-Wilson 143).

Paul's lack of masculinity is present in some of his sexually inappropriate conversations with his

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mother. Combined with the hatred of his father, it clearly demonstrates an Oedipal Complex. When Paul and his mother are getting ready to go visit Mrs. Leivers, Paul says that Mrs. Morel's new blouse makes her look like a "bobby-dazzler" (Lawrence 117). He continues to make remarks about his mother's appearance, claiming that she is a "fine little woman to go jaunting out with!" (Lawrence 117). When Paul and his mother are on their way to Paul's interview with Mr. Jordan, the pair feels "the excitement of lovers having an adventure together" (Lawrence 89). The young man's comments on his mother's appearance betrays clear sexual and feminine overtones.

Part Two of the novel focuses on Paul's attempt to break free from his mother's grasp. However, it ends up being a contest between Mrs. Morel and Miriam Leivers as to who can possess Paul's soul. When Paul is talking with his "womenfolk," Mrs. Morel and Miriam "almost contested who should listen best and win his favour" (Lawrence 167). In many ways, Miriam is very similar to Mrs. Morel. She is pure and possessive. Yet, Paul "hated her [Miriam] because, somehow, she spoilt his ease and naturalness. And he writhed himself with a feeling of humiliation" (Lawrence 171).

Mrs. Morel is resentful of the intimacy between Paul and Miriam, so she treats Miriam with contempt. She continues to tell her son that she disapproves of Miriam when she says "it is disgusting-bits of lads and girls courting" (Lawrence 154). The relationship between Paul and Miriam cannot work because Mrs. Morel stifles Paul's manhood and ability to form a relationship with another woman. During an argument with Paul about Miriam, Paul begins to cry as he exclaims "No, mother-I really don't love her. I talk to her, but I want to come home to you" (Lawrence 203). Following this remark, there is an intensely sexual scene between the continuously sensitive Paul and his mother.

And I've never-you know, Paul-I've never had a husband-not really---- He stroked his mother's hair, and his mouth was on her throat. "Well, I don't love her, mother." He murmured, bowing his head and hiding his eyes on her shoulder in misery. His mother kissed him a long, fervent kiss. "My boy!" she said, in a voice trembling with passionate love (Lawrence 203).

Mrs. Morel controls Paul's soul, and will not allow him to make room for anybody else in his life.

When Paul meets Clara Dawes, he is attracted to the "sense of mystery about her" (Lawrence 252). They begin a love affair which fulfills a physical need that Miriam could not give him. However, Clara realizes that "she felt a certain surety about him [her husband, Baxter Dawes] that she never felt with Paul Morel (Lawrence 343). When Baxter and Paul encounter each other, Baxter wants to fight Paul. "But," he [Paul] said, "I don't know how to fight" (Lawrence 347). The narrator reiterates this only a few lines later saying "he could not fight, so he would use his wits...He was all bewildered" (Lawrence 347 and 348). In his inability to fight Baxter

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Dawes, Paul's lack of traditional masculinity is apparent. Shortly after, "Clara realized that Morel was withdrawing from the circle, leaving her the option to stay with her husband" (Lawrence 387). By relinquishing Clara to Baxter, Paul is giving her to a more masculine and "crude" male.

The death of Mrs. Morel gives Paul the opportunity for self-liberation. However, even at the very end of the novel, Paul "wanted her to touch him, have him alongside with her. She was the only thing that held him up" (Lawrence 400). Even though Paul does not give in to his suicidal thoughts, he is still under his mother's possession. D.H. Lawrence leaves the reader wondering whether Paul will be able to overcome Mrs. Morel's posthumous control, and therefore regain a sense of masculinity.

Both Thomas Hardy and D.H. Lawrence are both considered pioneers in creating novels that went against conventional views of sexuality. Society now finds many of the notions that were considered radical during Hardy and Lawrence's era to be more acceptable. However, readers of their novels are able to appreciate the "extreme" characteristics of their characters. The controversial sexuality of Sue Bridehead and the phallic desires of Paul Morel prohibit them from having any kind of a fulfilling relationship with a member of the opposite sex. Thus, readers of *Jude the Obscure* and *Sons and Lovers* are entertained by the flawlessly complex descriptions and detailing of the characters' gender struggles.

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