THE CONSTRUCTED SELF:
A STUDY OF THREE
NINETEENTH-CENTURY NOVELS

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This thesis focuses on three major nineteenth-century European novels which are considered 'realistic', namely Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Theodor Fontane's *Effi Briest* and Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*. Central to the project are notions of 'construction' and 'constructedness'. Through close textual analysis I examine the ways in which the principal characters 'construct' themselves and those around them and how they in turn are constructed both by other characters and by the social norms and conventions of the particular world that they inhabit. I try to demonstrate how each of the novels functions not merely as a simple depiction or reflection of the social world but reflects profoundly upon the ways in which that world functions and is allowed to continue to function and upon the ways in which the society is as much a part of the individual as the individual is a part of society.

I relate the process of the construction of the self to the more theoretic issue of the constructing processes practised by the narrating voice. My argument is that the deceptively 'solid' realistic narrative can actually, in these three instances, be shown to be anything but stable, coherent and rhetorically uncomplicated. Whilst the third person narrative voice in each text may function at one level as the impersonal, authoritative, chronicling presence that we might expect from a novel under the 'realistic' rubric, that voice simultaneously employs techniques at odds with our ideas of such an authority. These techniques contribute to the sense of construction and constructedness already established at the level of story or plot. The narrative mode, then, becomes part of the thematic indeterminacy, with the text itself implicated in the mechanisms of constructedness which are so central to the characters' experience.
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Foreword

This thesis focuses on three of the great canonical works of nineteenth-century European literature, three works which, comfortably or uncomfortably, often bear the label of 'realist novel'. This study makes no claim to offer radical new readings of these works which depart substantially from the almost infinite wealth of secondary literature devoted to them and their authors, nor does it endeavour to approach the texts from the specific agenda of a particular slice of critical theory. At the same time, it is to be hoped that fresh perspectives on hitherto less foregrounded moments in the texts will open up along the way, with close textual analysis playing a crucial role in the proceedings.

Comparative studies looking at Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Fontane's *Effi Briest* frequently, and quite rightly, take the issue of 'the adulterous heroine' as a key starting point. This study, however, brings in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* - a text which, although it outraged the contemporary reading public does not contain a single adulterous moment. It seeks to move beyond this focus on transgression and the female to a wider consideration of individual selfhood as such - and not just that of the eponymous protagonist. The link developed to unite the three texts is the issue of 'construction' or 'constructedness'. Through an exploration of this theme the thesis seeks to combine an analysis of two specific strands. Firstly, there is, for each text, a consideration of character, looking at how the characters in the novels construct themselves and are constructed. The study tries to understand what makes the characters tick and offers an unashamedly traditional examination of characters as people, rather than mere ciphers, lifeless black marks on a white page. Secondly, the study shifts to a more theoretical focus on narrative, on the multitude of techniques that narrative uses to achieve its effects, on the idea of text as text, as carefully constructed artefact. A central contention of the study is that the narrative within each of the three novels conceals an unexpected complexity which is at odds with traditional assumptions of the ways in which the nineteenth-century realist novel 'works'. This complexity exposes a depth of self-reflexivity which shatters our expectations of solid, unambiguous narrative authority and this results in a questioning of the way we, as readers, read, and the way we, as readers, both individually and collectively, construct texts.
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THE CONSTRUCTED SELF: A STUDY OF THREE NINETEENTH-CENTURY NOVELS

INTRODUCTION

'Irony is one of those words, like love, which are best not talked about if they are to retain any force of meaning - other such words are sincerity and authenticity.'^1 Thus writes Lionel Trilling, with obvious ironical intent, approximately half way through a book which grapples with these very notions of sincerity and authenticity and their significance for, and indeed in, literature. Focusing on specific literary texts in a largely chronological approach, Trilling charts the development and intensification of a sense of personal identity and suggests that this development arises almost concurrently with the growth of the notion of something called 'society'. The self comes to understand - or at least to be conscious of - itself as 'individual' and with this new awareness arrives the consciousness of the problematical nature of the individual’s relationship with what Trilling terms ‘the external power of society’.^2 Trilling regards society as something which is both necessary for the individual’s survival and simultaneously, paradoxically, extremely damaging in that it corrupts the very life that it fosters. From this perspective, he goes on to discuss the problems faced by the increasingly urban and increasingly alienated individual, who, he writes, is subject to the constant influence, the literal in-flowing, of the mental processes of others, which, in the degree that they stimulate or enlarge his consciousness, make it less his own. He finds it ever more difficult to know what his own self is and what being true to it consists in.^3

Trilling finds - in accord, as he points out, with Rousseau - that it is society that is ultimately responsible for the individual’s loss of authenticity. He maps the growing doubt expressed within literature as to the feasibility of the positing or survival of the authentic self and registers the deep anxiety which accompanies the awareness of the dehumanising but apparently ineluctable slide into the inauthentic,

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1 Lionel Trilling, Sincerity and Authenticity (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 120.
2 Trilling, Sincerity, p. 36.
3 Trilling, Sincerity, p. 61.
wryly quoting Oscar Wilde's typically cynical epigram: 'The first duty in life is to be as artificial as possible.'

What Trilling effectively does, then, is to suggest the existence of a clear dichotomy. On the one hand we find big, bad (but regrettably wholly indispensable to civilisation) society, with all its corrupting machinations at the ready to destroy the individual’s integrity. On the other hand we find that same blameless individual, forced by circumstances to relinquish its primeval ‘honest soul’ the moment it comes into contact with society. Trilling sets up a very clear idea of self versus society and suggests that the crucial distinction to be made is between authentic (original) self and inauthentic (socialised) self.

On the surface, the three texts analysed in this thesis fit in with this tidy idea of self versus society. On the surface, for instance, Geert von Innstetten in Fontane’s Effi Briest apparently suffers because he is forced to choose between the irreconcilable options of following the dictates of his heart in continuing to love Effi and following the dictates of society in banishing Effi and challenging Crampas to a duel. On the surface, Sue Bridehead and Jude Fawley in Hardy’s Jude the Obscure apparently suffer because society denies them the right to live as they desire to, that is, together but unmarried, demanding instead an overwhelming - but by society’s standards highly ‘moral’ - level of unhappiness with each returning to his or her first partner. On the surface, Emma Bovary in Flaubert’s Madame Bovary is apparently prevented from living out her dreams by the prosaic and stifling small-mindedness of the society of which she is doomed to be a part. But all of these clear distinctions exist only on the surface. If we try to unravel the selfhood of the characters, try to establish where authenticity ends and inauthenticity begins, where self ends and society encroaches, we discover rather that self and society, the authentic and the inauthentic, are inextricably linked, and that the individual’s battle is more often than not with and against himself. The idea of the ‘honest soul’ or the authentic self seems in this light to be little more than an attractive chimera. The self seems to consist instead of layer upon layer of constructed identities. It becomes evident that it is not so much an examination of the opposition between self and society which might be revealing as an examination of their interaction. In the texts, the individual is repeatedly seen

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4 See Trilling, Sincerity, p. 118.
constructing him- or herself and endeavours also to construct others. At the same time, the same self is shown being, in turn, constructed by others, both by individuals and, on a more general scale, by the faceless mass of conventions which is society at large. The processes and motivations behind these attempts at construction are many and varied, and it is through the analysis of these that we might perhaps come to understand the characters and to assess whether any single version of the self might reasonably be deemed to come any closer to authenticity than any other. We might also assess whether even if we can take the self out of society we can ever take society out of the self.

All of the texts discussed come, of course, from the canon of nineteenth-century realist prose fiction. Although such an umbrella term inevitably covers a multitude of texts, the reader nevertheless approaches any narrative within its bounds with certain expectations. One key expectation, as Lilian Furst observes, is that of an emphasis within realism on 'truth-telling'. This is connected to the fact that realism, much like its near relation naturalism, has often been regarded as being based on 'a fundamental belief that art is in essence a mimetic, objective representation of outer reality (in contrast to the imaginative, subjective transfiguration practised by the Romantics)' and as being commonly associated with ideas of stability, in terms both of the assumption of a stable, knowable ‘reality’, to which we all have equal access, and a correspondingly stable system of the representation of this reality within the novel text. We expect of the nineteenth-century novel a world that makes sense, and a narrator who makes yet more sense of that sense and who is there as our dependable (but not obtrusive) guide. Much recent literary criticism has, of course, challenged the naïve assumptions of the nineteenth-century novel as a straightforward and uncomplicated reporting of the ‘truth’ of everyday life. We are forced at the very least to engage with the texts in the light of

- a more differentiated understanding of the writer’s partial relationship to his or her world, to the complexities, constraints and artifices involved in trying to depict it, including the role of literary form in determining a writer’s options, and the dynamics of the readers’ responses to those strategies.

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8 Furst, Realism, pp. 21-22.
More careful scrutiny of the texts leads us to appreciate that they may often be full of unexpected contradictions and subtle gestures which belie their outward face of simplicity. At the same time, we must be wary of a descent into claims of inexhaustible polysemy. William Cain observes how within the deconstructionist arguments, reality itself is just another fiction, just another version of 'text'. An 'actual', physical text, then, cannot possibly refer to anything called 'reality', since such a thing does not, it seems, exist. When we deconstruct a text, so the argument runs, we demonstrate irrefutably that there can be no 'naturally' privileged centre for its meanings and that all can be said to exist only in 'a multiple and interwoven “play” of meanings'.\(^9\) This is all very well, but it does not promise an especially fruitful prospect beyond an infinite series of possibilities. It seems instead that we would do well to follow Furst’s advice when she suggests that in our dealings with the nineteenth-century realist novel we should endeavour to steer between 'the Scylla of the referential fallacy that the realist novel is simply a faithful mirror to everyday life and the Charybdis of the linguistic fallacy that it is simply a web of words'.\(^10\)

This means, in effect, trying to hold on to some of the established ideas about realism and, rather than discarding them all wholesale in a fit of critical pique, attempting to analyse them, as applied to the texts studied, in the light of the claims of critical discourse which confronts such established ideas. Such an approach justifies the rejection of the notion that characters are nothing more than words on a page and that to discuss them ‘as if they were real people’ is nothing short of ‘vain’.\(^11\) It seems at this point fair to concur with Trilling when he argues that in its essence literature is ‘dedicated to the conception of the self’, addressing the intricacies of selfhood and what it means to be, to have, ‘a self’ far more intensely and probingly than general culture can ever hope to do.\(^12\) To capitalise on this focus, it does not seem unreasonable to refuse to dismiss characters as black marks on white paper and instead to engage with them fully in an attempt to understand, on an unabashedly human level, their bafflement and anguish in the face of this thing called life, albeit, in


their case, a fictional one. What is more, if we accept the contract offered to us by the author - and in terms of the nineteenth-century novel this contract is generally one of our accepting, to a certain extent at least, such ideas as were referred to above, ideas, that is, of representations and an outside, accessible reality towards which it gestures - then we surely more often than not discover, with Wayne Booth, that 'we feel a strong concern for the characters as people; we care about their good and bad fortune'.

By examining the way that characters construct and are constructed within the society they inhabit does not, however, limit us simply to that sphere. In addition, by highlighting the theme of construction as it features at the level of story or plot we are able then to assess, in a more theoretic mode, the extent to which the narrative voice plays a part in processes of construction. By examining the narrative technique we reveal how at times the texts fulfil the criteria which the traditional approach to the nineteenth-century novel expects and how at other times they subvert these expectations and reveal a degree of unanticipated self-reflexivity. The narratives demonstrate a degree of slippage, of instability, not to the extent that we can say that the myth of the reliable, third-person narrator is fully exploded and that we do, after all, exist in something of a polysemic morass, but just enough to indicate that the text is, at times, aware of itself as constructed and constructing. Gaps are created which lead us to consider the ways in which the narrating voice can both describe and contribute to notions of construction and constructedness. Within these gaps, we also consider how to 'read' such texts, again both in terms of what we expect and in terms of what literary criticism argues, seeking a balance between familiar categories and the subversion of familiar categories.

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CHAPTER 1: GUSTAVE FLAUBERT'S MADAME BOVARY: CHARACTERS

Emma Bovary is one of the most intriguing and, arguably, annoying heroines of nineteenth century French fiction. She is, without a doubt, one of the most written about. She has variously been described as 'foolish', and 'completely selfish', as 'a frustrated, passionate, pretentious provincial', as a representation of 'the ineluctable cycle of desire and disillusion', and as a heroine for all times in as much as 'nous sommes tous Emma Bovary'. She is all of these things and much more. She is all of these things and none of them consistently. She constructs, deconstructs and reconstructs herself time and again throughout the novel, and is constructed by all the characters, particularly the key male ones, who surround her, and whom she in turn constructs. The multiplicity of role-playing and role assignation is so complex that the reader, the other characters and Emma herself find it difficult, if not impossible, to assert which, if any, is the 'real' Madame Bovary. As Tony Tanner points out, 'the more [Emma] seeks for some alternative name/role in and through which to realise a distinct identity (and thus discover what it really is to be Emma), the more she loses distinction and distinctness'. We might add to this that Emma's problem is also that she is generally unaware that she is even trying to realise 'a distinct identity'.

W. J. Harvey suggests that understanding a fictional world can be valuable for readers in terms of our understanding of the world at large. He suggests that we are close enough to the fictional world to be interested and engaged in fathoming the mechanics of the fictional categories, but distant enough to be able to draw the kinds of rational conclusions which often elude us in our day to day existence. Fiction effectively 'fills in the gaps', in that '[l]ife allows only intrinsic knowledge of the self, contextual knowledge of others; fiction allows both intrinsic and contextual knowledge of others.' Up to a point, this is a valid assertion, but Emma Bovary

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7 W. J. Harvey, Character and the Novel (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965), p. 32. It is important, of course, that understanding and not just reading of fiction is the criterion, for Emma herself is a reader
seems to present a rather special case. It is debatable whether the conflicting knowledge which we gain about her can ever allow us to draw definitive conclusions, or whether we are simply left with a web of unanswered and unanswerable questions. As we shall see, our endeavours to untangle the web may not always be fruitful. Rather than finding that we can fill in the gaps, we discover that more and more gaps are produced as we read and a picture of a ‘complete’ Emma eludes us. The combination of contextual and intrinsic knowledge does not necessarily make for easier interpretation, and Emma, like the novel itself, seems both to ‘resist and invite recuperation’. This should not, however, preclude attempts to understand Emma. As implied above, seeking to understand a literary character consists in far more than subscribing to a ‘fetishization’ of nothing but a ‘myth’. Critics may claim that ‘there are no people in a novel or a play or a poem: there are only words’, but why then is it that we ‘remember’ Emma Bovary or Michael Henchard or Nicholas Nickleby as something more than the sum of the words on the page? Perhaps more convincing is the assertion that, in fact,

[i]n most works of any significance, we are made to admire or detest, to love or hate, or simply to approve or disapprove of at least one central character, and our interest in reading from page to page, like our judgement upon the book after reconsideration, is inseparable from this emotional involvement.

Plays we may well recall as plays, poems as ideas or linguistic experiments; novels, however, ‘by the characters in them’. Emma may not be ‘real’ in the sense that our next-door-neighbour is real, but she is ‘real’ both in the sense that she provides material for us to interpret in terms of psychology, motivation and selfhood, and in the sense that we care what happens to her, frequently oscillating between Booth’s oscillating categories of admiration and scorn, love and hate, approval and disapproval, and wondering ‘who’ Emma is.

One of the roots of the difficulty of interpretation is the fact, alluded to above, that time and again throughout the novel we see Emma throw herself into numerous

who consumes literature without ever really comprehending it, simply assimilating instead those parts of it which appeal to her imagination and romantic sensibilities.

10 Gibbons, p. 9.
11 Booth, pp. 129-30.
different roles. It is a relatively simple matter for the reader to recognise the roles as precisely this, but it is often much more difficult to assess the level of Emma’s self-knowledge. She begins her role-playing at an early age. Whilst she is still at school in the convent her mother dies. Emma, with her fixed ideas of how one should behave in the event of the death of a loved one – ideas derived in part, no doubt, from her illicit reading of romantic novels smuggled into the school by friends or by the old woman who comes once a month to assist with the laundry – reacts in a manner which seems rather extravagant:

Elle se fit faire un tableau funèbre avec les cheveux de la défunte, et, dans une lettre qu’elle envoyait aux Bertaux, toute pleine de réflexions tristes sur la vie, elle demandait qu’on l’ensevelît plus tard dans le même tombeau.\(^\text{13}\)

At first glance, this seems like extreme behaviour, exhibiting a ‘tendency to self-dramatization’.\(^\text{14}\) On reflection, however, we might also regard it simply as something approaching ‘typical teenage behaviour’; Emma might be acknowledged as the forerunner of the melancholy teenager sitting in a darkened bedroom listening to depressing Leonard Cohen albums and feeling as world weary as someone four times their age might. Such a claim to normalcy might moreover be supported by what follows: ‘Emma fut intérieurement satisfaite de se sentir arrivée du premier coup à ce rare idéal des existences pâles, où ne parviennent jamais les cœurs médiocres.’ (53).

Like the melancholy, introverted, bedroom-bound late-twentieth century teenager, Emma has a specific idea of the ‘type’ of person she wants to embody, the kind of character she wants to be seen as, and she has, in addition, a very real impression that she is distinctly superior to the mediocre souls by whom she finds herself surrounded. This felt superiority is, of course, entirely specious, illustrative only of a deeply egotistical immaturity. Furthermore, the stance seems to resonate with inauthenticity in as much as it implies a subordination of any real sense of grief to the sense of how she thinks she wants to be seen and how it is appropriate, according to her, to react in this situation. There are two points to be raised here. Firstly, there is the issue of the ‘right’ way to react. Society tends to regularize and ritualise emotions, and Emma’s behaviour here merely demonstrates a rather clumsy manifestation of the process of

\(^{13}\) Gustave Flaubert, Œuvres complètes, 22 vols (Paris: Conard, 1910-1930), I (1921), p. 53. Subsequent references to this edition and volume are given as page numbers in parentheses after quotations in the main body of the text.

\(^{14}\) Tillet, p. 15.
the as yet immature internalisation of the emotional codes. We will see a similar phenomenon occurring in *Effi Briest*, with Effi wanting to feel the 'right' kind of shame, the 'right' kind of guilt, and with Innstetten yearning to feel the 'right' kind of response to the knowledge of his wife's adulterous affair. In this sense, Emma's reaction is a more self-conscious version of the behaviour to which the average adult subscribes, with his or her 'instinctive' (read: so thoroughly assimilated that it now feels natural) understanding of how one should react in a given situation. Here, that situation is the death of a parent. As Fairlie points out, the dilemma of any civilised society is that 'we approach things through a set of inherited preconceptions',¹⁵ and this holds true even for emotional responses, with the result that reactions to an event such as death are closely regulated matters.

The second point to make is that we should not necessarily find this apparently exaggeratedly self-conscious attitude of 'wanting to look the part' disturbing. It is often very difficult, especially as a child – which is what Emma effectively is at this point – to reconcile the theoretical enormity of death and the strange lack of feeling that typically accompanies the news of death. Emma is, moreover, living away from home, and so does not experience any sharp sense of sudden absence, since the presence of her mother has been defined only through lack. Nor are we given any indication of how close the mother-daughter relationship is. Certainly during the course of the text Emma makes no nostalgic reference to a maternal presence ever having figured strongly in her life. It is her father, after all, who accompanies her when she first leaves home to go to school. Compounding the complexity of the situation is the probable circumstance that Emma will not have her own previously developed set of 'coping with death' experiences to which she can refer, and will thus measure anything that she might actually feel against that about which she has read or that which she has observed, on the surface, in others. If she finds that her own emotions are somehow 'lacking' in terms of intensity, it is small wonder that she should try to shape them to fit the models that she has encountered. Whilst her motivations are indeed on the one hand wholly self-indulgent, they are, on the other hand, paradoxically sincere; Emma genuinely wants to 'be', to encapsulate (the image of) the Grieving Daughter. It is in this sense that we might understand and agree with

¹⁵ Fairlie, p. 38.
Victor Brombert’s assertion that ‘[d]espite [Emma’s] vanity, [...] her emotions have an unquestionable authenticity’.

For all that this first instance of Emma’s self-conscious role-playing might partially be attributed to her youth, these are habits which she will never grow out of. During the course of the text the impression becomes more and more insistent that the acts are founded in an egotistical desire for self-fulfilment, with Brombert’s idea of fundamental authenticity becoming progressively more difficult to substantiate. What is worse, Emma’s constructions of herself continue to find her caught between a precise consciousness of wanting to arrive at the status of fulfilling a certain category and a distinct lack of self-knowledge. Not only is she often unable to identify her role-playing for what it is, the hackneyed forms that her self-expression takes tend to stifle and negate the value of any vestige of sincere feeling which we might tentatively have identified. Having succumbed to Rodolphe, for instance, she gazes at herself in a mirror and rejoices in her new ‘status’ of adulteress, of possessing a lover. The focus is not on the ramifications of what she has done, nor on an interrogation of the future nor even on whether or not the sex was better than with Charles. Quite simply the issue is one of having met the criteria for being able to identify herself as a figure who has ‘un amant’:

Elle se répétait: ‘J’ai un amant! un amant!’ se délectant à cette idée comme à celle d’une autre puberté qui lui serait survenue. Elle allait donc posséder enfin ces joies de l’amour, cette fièvre du bonheur dont elle avait désespéré. (225)

It is interesting to notice, of course, that just as the male characters tend to obliterete Emma’s identity as such, so too does Rodolphe become here simply an anonymous and undefined ‘amant’. He becomes a generic type, a mere cipher. Emma does not love Rodolphe as such, nor will she later love Léon. What she is more in

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17 See especially Tanner on this idea of the relentless erosion of Emma’s individuality and identity by characters, narrator and author. It has, of course, become a critical commonplace to point out that the title of the novel has nothing of Emma in it, using as it does the anonymous title ‘Madame’ and the married name ‘Bovary’, and Emma being, effectively, the third ‘Madame Bovary’ that we meet, after Charles’s mother and his first wife. This contrasts with the title Effi Briest, which insistently avoids the alienating ‘Frau von Innstetten’ tag.
love with is ‘herself loving them’, and even this self is displaced as she watches herself, turns herself into an object for her own contemplation.

The above example is also illustrative of Emma’s complicated relationship with time. She demonstrates a curious inability to locate herself adequately in past, present or future, Anne Green suggesting that for Emma past and future ‘merge and blur’, leaving her no proper sense of either time or history. Our example shows a fleeting consciousness of the present, based on categories derived from past reading, but this is inextricably bound up with an anticipation of future delights, of what the new status will bring, again based on past reading. Put more simply, the dreams of the past are not adequately fulfilled by the present and so a theoretical future with which to combine this present must be posited. Because there is invariably a degree of insufficiency to the present moment, happiness, that notion which was, according to Flaubert, invented by the devil ‘pour fair enrager le genre humain’, is always deferred and Emma remains in a state of dissatisfaction. We will see later how she attempts to combat this by endeavouring to go beyond the merging and blurring of time scales and almost to ‘escape’ time and place entirely.

More puzzling than these occasions when Emma tries to project an image which is gratifying to her own ego and her idea of the self that she would like to be are those times when she seeks to posit a self to which she does not personally aspire. Having realised that Léon is in love with her, Emma suddenly decides to adopt the mask of devoted wife and mother. Much to Léon’s bewilderment, she begins trotting out complacent, aphoristic claims, such as ‘[u]ne bonne mère de famille ne s’inquiète pas de sa toilette’, (147), this latter in frosty response to Léon’s joke about Madame Homais’s ‘tenue fort négligée’, a joke in which Emma has hitherto joined heartily. Everything about Emma, the narrator tells us, changes at this point. She focuses anew on her domestic duties, starts attending church regularly, is stricter than ever before with her servant, has Berthe brought home from the wet-nurse’s, lavishes attention on her husband. Léon is entirely convinced by Emma’s performance: ‘Elle lui parut donc si vertueuse et inaccessible, que toute espérance, même la plus vague, l’abandonna.’

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The other inhabitants of Yonville, too, believe what they see and are enchanted by this walking example of all things virtuous: ‘Les bourgeoises admiraient son économie, les clients sa politesse, les pauvres sa charité.’ (149). In one sense it might be suggested that some kind of deep-rooted bourgeois pusillanimity is the prompt for Emma’s behaviour; she takes refuge behind the image of the Domestic Goddess because she is frightened of her feelings for Léon. Certainly for her the projection has nothing to do with a genuine set of aspirations actually to be a devoted wife and mother. Neither, however, does she acknowledge any sense of either prudery or fear. Rather, once again, the construction is to do with self-perception. Whilst others may perceive the proffered Wife/Mother image, and may be convinced by it, the image that Emma projects to herself is actually that of the long-suffering Martyr. She experiences a sense of joy, a sense of pride, in being able to look into her mirror - again we witness this displacement of self - ‘en prenant des poses résignées’ (150) and to announce to the audience, that is, her reflection, ‘je suis vertueuse’. Only this tableau serves to compensate her a little for the sacrifice that she sincerely believes that she is making. Paradoxically, however, the compensation is, at the same time, the motivation for making the sacrifice. The sacrifice entailed in pretending to be a good wife and mother and cold-shouldering Léon provides a compensatory element ... but it is the promise of this compensatory element (being able to see herself as virtuous martyr) which is the catalyst behind her (as she imagines it to be) self-sacrificing behaviour. This illustrates a circularity to Emma’s role-playing which goes some way towards explaining her frustrating - both to the reader and to herself - immobility.

What Emma herself apparently fails to realise, of course, is that the Martyr-self is no more genuine than the Domestic Goddess-self. There is a suggestion in the text that beneath them all, beneath the calm, complacent exterior, lies yet another self, a self which ‘était pleine de convoitises, de rage, de haine. Cette robe aux plis droits cachait un cœur bouleversé, et ces lèvres si pudiques n’en racontaient pas la tourmente’ (149). So far, so good. What we see hinted at here we probably interpret as, at last, an authentic self (the passionate, angry, upset Emma) fighting to free itself from the inauthentic construction (the calm, devoted Emma, the self which society

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(148)

deems so laudable and which, more insidiously, Emma herself can find so praiseworthy). We see that the invented self offered to the outside world for scrutiny suggests itself as patently the safer option and that the illusion is indeed accepted as reality, is applauded, admired, wondered at. It is important also to note that this projected self demonstrates Emma’s own strong sense of the behaviour that society expects of her. Accepting social codes or not, she is to some extent ‘ventiloquée par les discours sociaux’, for she understands the roles that marriage and motherhood theoretically assign to her and she understands also the social unacceptability of the self which lurks behind her pretended fulfilment of these duties. This is certainly the way in which some critics interpret the text. In a similar vein to Trilling’s distinction of self versus society, Susan Rosowski advocates the idea that Emma’s conflict is an internal one between the inner, imaginative self of private value, and the outer, conventional self of social value. And yet there is a problem with this interpretation of fake, social Emma versus genuine, private Emma, notwithstanding the almost insurmountable problems in practical terms that the supposedly ‘genuine’ self would encounter should it dare to transgress the rules and reveal itself. For whilst we learn that Emma is indeed ‘amoureuse de Léon’ (149) and has even realised that she is, the result is not quite searing passion. The ramifications of this discovery of the state of ‘being in love’ reveal the complexity of emotional response, for Emma recherchait la solitude, afin de pouvoir plus à l’aise se délecter en son image. La vue de sa personne troublait la volupté de cette méditation. Emma palpitait au bruit de ses pas: puis, en sa présence, l’émotion tombait, et il ne lui restait qu’un immense étonnement qui se finissait en tristesse. (149)

Not only does this return us to the issue, raised earlier, of Emma’s desperate and vain attempts to escape space and time, it reveals a disjunction between reality and the way the individual interprets and deals with that reality. What is more, it illustrates how difficult it is to locate an ‘authentic’ self, a ‘real’ self, for more than a fleeting moment. The repressed self that the reader might initially assume to fulfil

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23 Leo Bersani argues that the distinction between an apparent self and a real self is anyway invidious. To a certain extent he is right, in so far as every self projected can be seen to be a self invented. On the other hand, *Madame Bovary* surely shows us differing levels of inauthenticity and constructedness within the sense of selfhood, and thus justifies our speaking of the idea of a ‘real’ self. See Leo
this role is itself a kind of virtual self, equally as incomplete and insubstantial as the
publicly projected outward self. The most satisfying way of living out the passionate
fantasy that Emma finds is not the logical, if metaphorically suicidal, one of yielding
to Léon in a defiant gesture of romantic authenticity, but rather to lock herself away,
alone, and to build the story in her imagination. This retreat from Léon should not,
moreover, be misinterpreted as a sensible and practical measure of self-preservation.
At this point, Emma is in no real emotional danger in Léon’s presence for she can
only preserve the intensity of heightened, impassioned, feeling when he is not there.
This highlights a curiously multi-faceted inauthenticity within Emma’s character.
Again, whilst the self projected to the outside world - the perfect wife and mother - is
clearly fake, so is the self that Emma pretends to herself that she is hiding, - the
passion-filled woman, the martyr beneath the mask of domestic perfection - and which
the narrator duplicitously initially allows the reader to believe that she is hiding.
There is no overwhelming sense of dangerous passion other than that generated in the
realm of the imagination. The imagination takes humdrum reality and tries to
transform it into something more satisfying. The substance of the imagined could,
conceivably, be metamorphosed into actual reality, but this, ironically, would be to
destroy its very charm. William VanderWolk suggests that Emma’s inability to
capture and capitalize on the present moment can be attributed to the fact that ‘it is
fleeting, and does not hold the promise of the future or the security of the past’,
referring again to Emma’s inability to cope with time as such, but as well as these
dimensions of promise and security, there is the strange element by token of which the
imagined is, quite simply, more fulfilling and, paradoxically, more real, than the real.

Throughout the novel, Emma continues to construct wholly imagined
scenarios for herself. She demonstrates a consistent propensity to envisage alternative
- and far ‘better’ – lives that she could have led, living in an ever recurring mode of
‘What if...?’ and ‘If only...’. Following on from the above section, we watch her as
she attributes all of her dissatisfaction, frustration and sense of unfulfilled being to


24 Brombert writes: ‘To the entire generation reared on Romanticism […] adultery, because of its
officially immoral and asocial status, acquired a symbolic value: it was a sign of unconventionality,
rebellion and authenticity’. Brombert, *The Novels of Flaubert*, pp. 82-83; my italics.
none other than poor, hapless Charles, of whom she had such great expectations. Far worse than the actual fact - in Emma’s eyes - that he is to blame for the unbearable mundaneness of her existence is his condition of not realising he is to blame, of failing to appreciate the innumerable sacrifices that she feels she is making for him:

Ce qui l’exaspérait, c’est que Charles n’avait pas l’air de se douter de son supplice. La conviction où il était de la rendre heureuse lui semblait une insulte imbécile, et sa sécurité là-dessus de l’ingratitude. Pour qui donc était-elle sage ? N’était-il pas, lui, l’obstacle à toute félicité, la cause de toute misère, et comme l’ardillon pointu de cette courroie complexe qui la bouclait de tous côtés? (150; my italics)

Emma feels resentment for Charles on two levels. Firstly she blames him for her unhappiness, seeing him as the key stumbling block. Secondly, she resents the fact that he is an unsatisfactory audience for her posturing. Her own admiration is inadequate. To make the ‘sacrifices’ worthwhile, there must be someone other than herself to appreciate them. This is an interesting point, for it demonstrates that despite Emma’s overwhelming narcissism, she still feels a strong need for others’ attention and appreciation in order to validate her existence. Being an object for one’s own contemplation can only provide a limited degree of satisfaction.

As we have already seen, Emma’s state is generally an immobile one and her wishful thinking self-projection merely compounds this. Despite investing a large amount of time in her imaginings, they have, without some radical and apparently uncharacteristic activity, no chance of realisation. Interestingly, some critics claim that Emma dreams not too much but too little; ‘too little not in terms of the practical welfare of a provincial woman but in terms of the possibility of creating fiction, of coming into being as a narrator’. To be sure, we are all guilty of indulging in daydreams and pipe dreams, wondering what we might do in the unlikely event of, say, our winning the lottery, but Emma’s inventions frequently seem to defy all sense of proportion. They encroach to such an extent on her day-to-day existence that the imagined is ‘lived’ far more energetically than the real, yet at the same time, Emma’s manner of dreaming is such that, as Ginsburg suggests, it leads nowhere because it lacks conviction. Ultimately, this leads to the strange situation whereby not only does the imagined superimpose itself upon the real, it wholly supplants it, yet at the same

time offers no possibility of concretisation. Consequently, Emma’s life takes on the curious colour of a mere hypothesis. We witness differing levels of this. Firstly, there is the simple, rueful, ‘What I could have been…’ level:

Elle se demandait s’il n’y aurait pas eu moyen, par d’autres combinaisons du hasard, de rencontrer un autre homme; et elle cherchait à imaginer quels eussent été ces événements non survenus, cette vie différente, ce mari qu’elle ne connaissait pas.
Tous, en effet, ne ressemblaient pas à celui-là. (62)

During the course of the book, we watch such idle musings escalate. Emma’s behaviour after the ball at La Vaubyessard is an important case in point. Critics take different attitudes to the significance of the ball. Tanner, amongst others, suggests that it produces for Emma a hole in existence that was not previously there. Other critics, such as David Roe, on the other hand, maintain that, for Emma, the visit to la Vaubyessard ‘confirms […] the authenticity of the image of reality presented by her reading’. For some, then, the ball creates a hitherto unfelt sense of loss or absence. For others, the ball emphasises and renders more precise the already extant notion of lack. What both approaches seem to have in common is the idea that the ball registers in Emma’s mind not as a one-off event, a singular occurrence requiring planning over several weeks, but as something which is a matter of course for the kinds of people who inhabit her imagination and the kinds of people that she has encountered at La Vaubyessard. For Emma, it is part and parcel of the kind of existence which she invents for herself in her mind after her return to Yonville and the irritatingly prosaic ‘soupe à l’oignon’ (77). She purchases a map of Paris, entertains herself with imaginary shopping trips in the capital, buys fashion magazines and tries to keep up to date with the addresses of all the best (Parisian) dressmakers, knows the dates of the opera performances, invents links between herself, the viscount from the ball and, most absurdly, ‘les personnages inventés’ (81) and dreams of ‘salons lambrissés de miroirs’, of ‘tables ovales couvertes d’un tapis de velours à crépines d’or’ and of duchesses who ‘portaient du point d’Angleterre au bas de leur jupon’ (81). As with her dreams of ‘what could have been’ for her own existence, of course, these are dreams without either plot or issue. What is more, she is unable to sustain her imaginings. Just as she was unable to sustain the memory of her sadness at her

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27 Tanner, p. 263.
29 See Ginsburg, p. 88.
mother's death, so she is unable to hold on to the memories that patchily link together her vaporous dreams.

This inability to sustain the imagined is perhaps best seen with Emma's endeavours to hold on to her memories of Léon after his departure. His image becomes 'le centre de son ennui' and she stokes the memory with every small detail that she is able to recollect; 'elle ramassait tout, prenait tout, et faisait servir tout à réchauffer sa tristesse.' (172-73). We should notice that she is again trying to maintain an emotional state gratifying to her self-image. Ultimately, however, her powers of imagination fail her: 'Cependant les flammes s'apaisèrent, soit que la provision d'elle-même s'épuisât, ou que l'entassement fût trop considérable. L'amour, peu à peu, s'éteignit par l'absence, le regret s'étouffa sous l'habitude.' (173). What we have, then, is a dual problem with Emma's alleged love for Léon. On the one hand, it is, as witnessed earlier, unsustainable in his presence and she finds it easier to create an atmosphere of sensuousness when he is not there and she can just focus her thoughts on her image of him. On the other hand, the actual prolonged absence leads not to a deepening of her love and a refinement of her yearning, but rather to a dwindling both of the feelings and of the memories of the feelings as the sense of regret suffocates through its becoming too familiar. The imagined, more potent on one level than the real, can yet only be sustained for as long as it does not grow boring. In a letter to Ernest Chevalier, Flaubert himself claimed that '[c]’est une belle chose qu’un souvenir, c’est presque un désir, qu’on regrette‘, and this reflects perfectly Emma’s mood immediately subsequent to Léon’s departure. Two years earlier, however, Flaubert, again writing to Chevalier, had drawn attention to the dangers of dwelling on the past, asserting that ‘il ne faut pas regarder le gouffre car il y a au fond un charme inexprimable qui nous attire’.\(^\text{30}\) Emma is initially seduced by the charm, but she stares so long that the attraction of the abyss palls through its sheer familiarity.

It is important always to notice that although Emma is profoundly self-conscious, in that she is keen to create a persona for, if nothing else, personal viewing, she paradoxically lacks any real depth of self-awareness. As Fairlie succinctly puts it, Emma 'shows self-consciousness without self-knowledge'.\(^\text{31}\) At no point does she

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\(^\text{31}\) Fairlie, p. 44.
personally seem to be on a quest to posit a self any more consciously authentic than the last. She seems to lack the ability to make any kind of distinction between the roles that she plays. One is very much, to her mind, as good as another. Not for her any mental wrangling à la Geert von Innstetten over the projection of a self that might finally embody something genuine. Instead, Emma seems able to ‘believe’ in each self without being disturbed by any sense of discontinuity or contradiction. As Bardèche observes, as well as ‘inventing’ two lovers quite removed from the reality with which she is presented, Emma ‘fabrique tout aussi bien une autre ou d’autres Emma Bovary qu’elle prend pour elle-même’.

As we have seen, she is also able to step back and survey the effect as if as a third party, contemplating herself as though she were a disinterested observer. Her failure to notice the contradiction inherent in such behaviour quite clearly implies not only a lack of self-knowledge as Fairlie accurately remarks, but also a lack of desire for self-knowledge. In this, the characters exhibit a numbing uniformity: they do not understand themselves or others and nor do they try very hard to do so. Emma’s interest does not lie in probing hidden depths. We must of course also acknowledge that in this regard she is trapped in something of a vicious circle. She does not seek self-knowledge because she is unaware that she lacks it. She is unaware that she lacks it because it does not cross her mind to seek it. ‘Le bovarysme nous fait croire que nous sommes tels que nous voudrons être.’

As we saw in the example with Emma projecting the image of devoted wife and mother, her construction of herself is not only about an imagined self created for her own private gratification. Rather, every situation seems to demand a new role for the benefit also of the Other. We see this most clearly in her adulterous relationships. As noted above, with the quotation from Brombert, Romantic thought perceived adultery in a defiantly positive light, seeing it as an affirmative, individualistic gesture of authenticity. Emma’s problem is that her foray into these realms is governed by these very interpretations of Romantic thought, so it is not an instinctive force that she

32 Bardèche, pp. 200-01; my italics.
33 For an interesting discussion on the ways in which narrative uncertainty underscores this lack of self-understanding and understanding of others, see Edward J. Gallagher, ‘Narrative Uncertainty in Flaubert’s Madame Bovary’, Orbis Litterarum, 53 (1998), 312-17.
is obeying, but second-hand ideas gleaned from her reading. That is, the notion of authenticity - and it is not even so much authenticity that Emma seeks as 'love' and 'passion' in their literary versions - comes not viscerally from her but is something that she has absorbed mentally, her desire 'is the desire of the other'. Thus it is that her adulterous relationships are embarked upon with a closed mind and Emma is unaware of the borrowed nature of her dreams. She is not by any means attempting to dig deep within herself, to 'find' herself, to posit herself. Rather, her mind is full of a specific image, a category that she seeks to attain. If the experience falls short of the expectations, it is, then, her task to manipulate it to make it more satisfactory, more fitting. She is chasing shadows of dreams, shadows of dreams which have been assimilated by her as words. When Léon and Emma meet in the Croix rouge the day after the opera in Part 3, we have a strong sense that both characters are striving to project selves which both satisfy their own conception of the kind of role they are playing (not that they personally see it as artificial role-playing) and accord with their ideas about what they imagine that the other expects and desires them to be. Emma talks languidly about 'la misère des affections terrestres et l'éternel isolement où le coeur reste enseveli' (321). Léon, of course, responds in kind: 'Pour se faire valoir, ou par une imitation naïve de cette mélancolie qui provoquait la sienne, le jeune homme déclara s'être ennuyé prodigieusement tout le temps de ses études.' (321).

There is a sense, particularly as the narrator leaves the motivation equivocal with his deftly placed 'ou', of Léon feeling a need to satisfy his own and Emma’s perceptions of him. We do not have any information regarding the truth or otherwise of his assertion, but the fact that the chapter opens with a description of Léon’s frequentation of prostitutes and the claim that he was something of a model student in his unimaginative mediocrity seems to suggest that his words are calculated merely to accord with the prevailing atmosphere established by Emma’s own overtures of melancholy.

But this is not just construction of the present moment. It also encroaches upon the past. The pair reconstruct the past to fit the image of it which best corresponds to the way in which, in retrospect, they would prefer it to have been. Accuracy is immaterial providing the emotional fix is right: '[C]ar c’est ainsi qu’ils

35 Ginsburg, p. 84.
auraient voulu avoir été, l'un et l'autre se faisant un idéal sur lequel ils ajustaient à présent leur vie passée.' (324). Fairlie suggests that in this scene '[t]he mere use of words gradually creates belief', 36 and whilst this is true, it is also interesting to note that much of the construction is achieved not through what is said, but through what is omitted. The narrator tells us that '[Emma] ne confessa point sa passion pour un autre; [Léon] ne dit pas qu'il l'avait oubliée' (322). There is a curious sense, supported by the narrator's general assertion that 'la parole est un laminoir qui allonge toujours les sentiments' (324), that language enjoys some kind of veridical status. By uttering something, by putting it into spoken words, a notion or an image acquires greater validity than the reality over which silence is preserved, this silence effectively robbing it of its very existence. This stands strikingly at odds with the other linguistic thesis of the novel, that is, that language instantly robs a moment of its integrity.

Flaubert, of course, was a great believer in the importance of language and the tales of his obsessive searches for the 'mot juste'^ 37 have acquired almost apocryphal status. He claims in one letter that '[i]l n'y a pas de belles pensées sans belles formes, et réciproquement' 38 and in another, some years later, that 'la poésie est une chose aussi précise que la géométrie'. 39 He seems to parody this notion of a deep consciousness of linguistic significance within the text, with his delineation of Léon and Emma's relationship to language. At times, it is as if form totally supersedes content, rather than working in tandem with it. This is true, for instance, of the first conversation that takes place between them when the Bovarys arrive at the Lion d'or in Yonville. Both characters speak in what are, to the reader at least, recognisably clichéd patterns about sunsets, alpine landscapes, Swiss waterfalls, effectively repeating catchwords of what Nathaniel Wing dismisses as 'the already worn language of Romantic love'. 40 Each recognises in the other's words the keynotes of their own speech and thought patterns. This means that the way in which things are said rather than what is said is of prime importance, with the kind of discourse used allowing each to recognise that which they identify as a kindred spirit in the other. Wing goes

36 Fairlie, p. 47.
37 In a letter of 15-16 May 1852 to Louise Colet, for instance, he claims 'je suis souvent plusieurs heures à chercher un mot'. See Flaubert: Correspondance, II, p. 88.
on to suggest that their use of this clichéd language ‘expos[es] as a delusion the desire for a transparent language of fulfilled self-expression. Their exchanges require, yet cannot locate, an “original” language’. This claim, however, appears, in a sense, to miss the point. For Emma and Léon, this is original language, full of sincere self-expression. It is the discourse of Romanticism, Romanticism is what they ‘believe’ in, and thus this discourse is the one appropriate to their needs. It is only the reader, from outside the text, who demands an original language, only the reader, encouraged by the narrator, who identifies the clichéd register of the exchange. The emotions behind the words are no less felt for the reader’s observation of the inadequacy of their expression.

Heath brings a different but related criticism to bear, maintaining that in *Madame Bovary* ‘conversation is an exchange of monologue and everyone is their monologue, the particular frame of language they happen to be in’. This is certainly true of the ‘conversation’ which is simultaneously taking place between Homais, who simply talks at Charles, and Charles, whose ‘monologue’ is one of silence. It is not, however, strictly true of this moment shared between Emma and Léon. Knight recognises the contradictory message present in this passage. She observes that whilst this initial exchange between Emma and Léon is heavily satirized, ‘it is made clear at the same time both that a genuine communication is taking place and that the words used are not significant’. This addresses both the issue raised by Wing, of the unoriginal language, and the issue raised by Heath, of the monologic dimension of conversations. Emma and Léon are working within the same particular frame of discourse rather than two disparate ones, and this means that their exchange transcends the uncommunicative level of two monologues. The fact that they share a common understanding of the Romantic ethos means that they sense that a communication of ideas has taken place, even though the reader might interpret the conversation as banal and sterile.

In her comments, Knight identifies the inherent insignificance of the words themselves. At times, this notion is taken to an almost improbable extreme. The kind

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41 Wing, *Limits of Narrative*, p. 56.
42 Heath, p. 129; original italics.
of discourse used remains important in as much as it represents a notion of common ground, of being on the same wavelength amongst all the other ignorant and prosaic fools – as Léon and Emma tend to see them – of Yonville. At the same time, what matters most may be not what is actually spoken but what remains unsaid. During another meeting between the pair, when Léon accompanies Emma to the wet nurse’s to pay a visit to Berthe, they talk about a troupe of Spanish dancers shortly expected on the Rouen stage. The narrator steps in to make a direct address and to set the record straight:

N’avaient-ils rien autre chose à se dire? Leurs yeux pourtant étaient pleins d’une causerie plus sérieuse; et, tandis qu’ils s’efforçaient à trouver des phrases banales, ils sentaient une même langueur les envahir tous les deux ; c’était comme un murmure de l’âme, profond, continu, qui dominait celui des voix. (131)

Once again, this reflects a double-edged dimension to the constructing energies in operation. Firstly, Léon and Emma are using ‘borrowed’ language anyway. The types of things of which they speak and the way in which they speak of them all contribute to build up a specific desired image. But this densely structured language, a language whose supposed ‘banality’ is perhaps judged by the narrator, perhaps by the characters themselves, functions as a mask to that which they are ‘really’ saying, that deep ‘murmuring of the soul’ of which their eyes are full. What this illustrates is an intense degree of polyphonic – if we can so designate a situation where one of the ‘voices’ is effectively silent – construction, which derives its force from the fact that the protagonists accept and interpret the hackneyed as both original, meaningful and expressive, and as referentially irrelevant. On one level, the conversation is intended sincerely as a meeting of like minds. On a different level, it is the conspicuously duplicitous and insincere mask to the ‘real’, unspoken sincerity which lurks just beneath the surface. The silence can only enjoy such eloquence because Emma and Léon know that they speak the same language(s). Language and silence, then, interact in the construction of personalities and situations, and, crucially, they interact within pre-established boundaries, resulting inevitably in a curious

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Knight, p. 25.

This seems to represent an extra dimension to the role of silence as discussed by Philippe Dufour. Dufour emphasises how ‘Flaubert fait […] du silence une des composantes du dialogue, qui en infléchit la signification, sans que pour autant on puisse mesurer exactement la nature de cette inflexion’. Here we have less a case of actual silence providing an inflection than the unspoken (and thus silent) beneath
tension between the sincere and the insincere, the unique and the conventional, the authentic and the inauthentic.

In view of all the energy that Emma expends upon constructing herself, it seems scarcely credible that she might have reserves to use in the construction of others. But this is as much an important trait of her character as her own role-playing, and it suggests that Emma has a very dramatic – if not melodramatic; one must only think of the moment where she hopes that Rodolphe has pistols with him in order to defend himself against Charles, should the cuckolded husband discover the lovers in a compromising position – sense for the entire picture. It is not, then, adequate for Emma to feel that at least she fits into a particular category. She wants those surrounding her, whose presence is vital to the whole image, to ‘fit’ into a category that corresponds to her own. As Bersani observes, Emma tends to think ‘in tableaux’. Since Emma’s overwhelming obsessions are centred on ideas such as Love, Passion and Desire, all, of course, bearing the metaphorical capital letter, her foci for construction are those with whom she is involved in this capacity. Her apparent indifference to every other character is striking. She takes very little interest in her daughter and certainly does not construct imaginary futures for her in the way that Charles does. Beyond such minor matters as giving her servant orders or quarrelling with her mother-in-law, we do not see any real interaction with other female characters. She has no female confidante and does not appear to have kept in touch with any of her school friends. She pays little attention to Homais and her interest in Bournisien is limited to his peripheral role in her moments of exaggerated religious fervour. Her constructing energies, then, are focused on the three men whom she sees, at different points in time, as offering the potential for becoming the elusive Romantic Lover; Charles, Léon and Rodolphe.

the words. For an extended discussion on the important role of silence in Flaubert’s work, see Philippe Dufour, Flaubert ou la prose du silence (Paris: Nathan, 1997).


46 The claim that indulging her maternal instincts would have been Emma’s route to salvation is a critical opinion which has deservedly languished, on the whole, in the century which bred it. See Emile Faguet, Flaubert (Paris: Hachette, 1899). It is, however, important to bear in mind that at least some of her indifference towards Berthe stems from the fact that she is a girl, rather than the son Emma had hoped for, and through whom she dreamt of vicarious living, much in the manner of Charles’s own mother.
Emma has various ideas as to how the romantic hero, the male lover, should be. Her ideas are at once, paradoxically, risibly precise and frustratingly vague, in that her precision tends to focus on strangely peripheral details:

Que ne pouvait-elle s'accouder sur le balcon des chalets suisses ou enfermer sa tristesse dans un cottage écossais, avec un mari vêtu d'un habit de velours noir à longues basques, et qui porte des bottes molles, un chapeau pointu et des manchettes! (56-57)

Such moments prompt Ginsburg to suggest that Emma resembles a realistic narrator 'for whom the smallest detail of décor is important because it creates the illusion of reality'. This sense of illusion is crucial, for Emma’s models are so rigid that she is unable to make the necessary leap from words to reality, unable to compromise, unable – and, we must surely presume, unwilling – to adapt her own personal situation to the literary clichés that she has imbibed. This means that she has a tendency to start with the end. For instance, in her endeavours to change Charles into an exciting lover, she pictures only what she is trying to make out of him. She fails to think rationally, fails properly to assess the raw material in front of her. Thus it is that her initial effort to discover - or to create - love and passion by making Charles accord with her imagined ideas is a signal failure:

[D]'après les théories qu'elle croyait bonnes, elle voulut se donner de l'amour. Au clair de lune, dans le jardin, elle récitait tout ce qu'elle savait par cœur de rimes passionnées et lui chantait en soupirant des adagios mélancoliques; mais elle se trouvait ensuite aussi calme qu'auparavant, et Charles n'en paraissait ni plus amoureux ni plus remué. (60-61)

So Charles remains unresponsive to having poetry recited to him by the light of the moon in the garden. From what we have hitherto seen of Charles, variously described by less forgiving critics as 'inept and cloddish', 'imbiclic', 'a dolt' who 'respire la médiocrité' yet whose 'simple heart' demands a 'certain tolerance' this comes as no great surprise to the reader. More important, however, is the...

47 Ginsburg, p. 95.
48 Fairlie, p. 11.
striking fact that even for Emma, who fervently believes in the potential effectiveness of her methods, the whole thing is something of a non-event and she fails even to inspire herself. She cannot justifiably blame Charles for his failure to metamorphose into the ardent lover, for her own non-responsiveness reveals a flaw somewhere in her approach and exposes the ‘théories’ as merely that: theory. Yet Emma’s failure to make any kind of significant progress with her husband does nothing to deter her from continuing to believe that it is feasible to convert somebody into someone or something that she would like him to be. We see this with her concerted efforts repeatedly to manipulate and change her lovers’ characters, for she refuses to ‘see’ them as they are; ‘elle ne voit en tout que ce que lui échappe.’

Rodolphe himself is an adept at role-playing. He quickly demonstrates an astute, if cynical, understanding of Emma’s character – ‘Pauvre petite femme! Ça baille après l’amour, comme une carpe après l’eau sur une table de cuisine.’ (181). He also understands both the fact that ‘the way to [Emma’s] heart […] is through language’ and exactly the kind of language that it is necessary to use in order to appeal to her. Yet despite his virtuosic performance he still does not quite correspond to the lover that Emma has created in her imagination. We are told that ‘[e]lle eût désiré le voir plus sérieux, et même plus dramatique à l’occasion’ (235). There is a sense that Emma feels that Rodolphe is not taking the affair quite as seriously as she would wish. Emma herself resents everything that is mundane, ordinary and everyday, so the notions that every moment of her adultery might not be charged with dramatic, electric passion, that the most extravagant things often enough repeated degenerate inevitably into the state of habit, are sheer anathema to her. It is not sufficient that she has a lover; for the entire duration of the relationship, Emma tries to follow the ‘prescribed’ patterns that she believes to be valid. She makes Rodolphe exchange portraits, for instance, makes him give her locks of his hair and presents him with locks of her own, demands that he give her a ring, ‘un veritable anneau de mariage, en signe d’alliance éternelle’ (235). In her eagerness to mould him exactly as she wants him, Emma is blind to the fact that Rodolphe is already cynically exploiting her trust in the validity of the Romantic prescriptions by proffering her a

55 Maraini, p. 55.
version of himself which is wholly manufactured according to his exploitative and manipulative understanding of these prescriptions. Emma’s lack of self-knowledge hampers her ability to analyse and fathom the characters of others: ‘L’illusion sur soi précède et accompagne l’illusion sur autrui et sur le monde.’\textsuperscript{56} Having seduced herself, she assumes the Other must necessarily react in the same way, and this leads her to ‘see’ the Other only as she desires to see him.

But Emma, in effect, is guilty of no more than Rodolphe himself. Rodolphe, who has his own egotistical impression of himself as the dashing seducer never foolish enough to grow incurably attached to any one woman, has chosen to see in Emma the pretty, bored housewife, stuck in a dull marriage and looking for a brief spell of excitement and passion. A version of Emma, that is, that fits in with his own agenda and his own character. So far, so good. Emma is, after all, all of these things. But just as Emma fails to understand anything of Rodolphe beyond that which he has constructed for her and that which she herself has constructed, so too does Rodolphe fail to understand Emma. Even if he accepts that she was always bound to take the liaison far more seriously than him – his initial reservation as to whether or not he should seduce her bears witness to an awareness that she will grow attached to him in a way that will never be reciprocated; ‘Comment s’en débarrasser ensuite?’ (181) – he fails to recognise the sincerity behind the utterances and the poses that he interprets as mere clichés. Since Rodolphe’s Romanticism is only feigned, a convenient means to achieve a precise end, the result is, as Bersani astutely recognises, that he ‘listens to Emma too closely; he condemns her style’.\textsuperscript{57} This differs greatly from the conversations between Emma and Léon which we focused upon earlier. Whereas they use the language of romance with the same degree of ingenuousness and sincerity, for Rodolphe the words \textit{do} matter, because he has heard them ad nauseam: ‘Il s’était tant de fois entendu dire ces choses, qu’elles n’avaient pour lui rien d’original.’ (265). Emma is no different from any other mistress that he has ever had. She speaks the same language and uses the same formulas. Novelty quickly reveals that it is but the superficially deceptive mask of monotony. At the same time, however, although Rodolphe fails to appreciate it, Emma \textit{is} different, and the narrator is keen to

\textsuperscript{56} Dumesnil, p. 402.
\textsuperscript{57} Bersani, \textit{Balzac to Beckett}, p. 170.
emphasise this difference, keen to highlight how language is not as simple as mere words:

[Rodolphe] ne distinguait pas, cet homme si plein de pratique, la dissemblance des sentiments sous la parité des expressions. Parce que des lèvres libertines ou vénales lui avaient murmuré des phrases pareilles, il ne croyait que faiblement à la candeur de celles-là. (265)

Barbara Smalley encapsulates the nature of the double bind in which Rodolphe is, ironically, trapped. She writes:

Rodolphe [...] is a far more cynical manipulator of sentimental language than Homais in that he calculates his stratagems. At the same time – and this is a paradox that Flaubert makes more of than has often been observed – he is in good part the victim of his own pretenses. 58

The narrator goes on to explain the inadequacy of language and the way in which ‘la parole humaine est comme un chaudron fêlé où nous battons des mélodies à faire danser les ours, quand on voudrait attendrir les étoiles’ (265). This has at least a two-fold significance. Firstly, the implication is that, as has already been suggested, for all the fact that Emma’s discourse ostensibly consists of tired, over-used clichés, it does not mean that it is not spoken sincerely. Whereas Rodolphe utilizes the cliché in the full knowledge that that is what it is, Emma uses it because to her, as we saw in her first exchanges with Léon, this is what ‘romantic language’ is. She cannot see the language from the same kind of impersonal distance which Rodolphe and the reader are able to invoke. ‘Typisch ist für die Flaubertsche Erzählweise gerade das Verschwimmen von authentischem Gefühl und klischeehafter Form, in der es sich äußert.’ 59 This ‘Verschwimmen’ is typical also of Emma’s self. The second level of significance is that this moment represents one of the rare occasions where the narrator aligns himself with Emma. Gone is the ironic, mocking, distance which he usually maintains. 60 Instead, we see a dimension of sympathy that is inspired by common ground. The narrator is, with his lament for Emma and the inadequacy of the language to which she has recourse, highlighting his own plight as constructor of the

60 Knight draws attention to the wilful viciousness that the narrator generally exhibits towards Emma. She compares Jane Austen’s narrators and their ‘kindly irony’ to the ‘almost gratuitous cruelty’ utilized by Flaubert. Emma is no more silly than many of Austen’s characters, but she is treated with far less indulgence, far less tolerance, far less sympathy. Knight, p. 78.
text. The problem of the ‘parole fêlée’ extends to the narrative itself. No matter how hard he endeavours to put the words together in original ways, to present something fresh and novel in his tale, he is fettered by the constraints of ‘la parole humaine’ and will invariably fall short of his aims. As Heath argues:

Aiming at the creation of a literary object, the novel as self-contained work, a unity or art through style, Flaubert made a book, a text, that states, articulates, represents the modern problematic of inauthenticity within which writer as well as character are involved, Flaubert and Emma both - how, again, is one to write, and what is one to write, and what credit is to be given to reality, its representation, one’s language?

We have already mentioned Flaubert’s consuming obsession with language, but in Madame Bovary the issue is especially crucial. In a letter of 1853 he writes that, ‘bien écrire le médiocre et faire qu’il garde en même temps son aspect, sa coupe, ses mots même, cela est vraiment diabolique.’ Flaubert, Flaubert’s narrator, Flaubert’s characters: all are implicated in this eternal problem of the inadequacy of language, of originality of feeling and thought having to be translated into language ‘that is unoriginal, in that it is communal and based on certain tacitly agreed-on formulas for repetition’. In addition, Flaubert has somehow to express the boring, the dull, the mediocre in an interesting way. He must actively create a gap between language and what he is expressing, for to represent the boring in a boring way is inevitably to alienate the readership. Bersani argues that Flaubert’s work constitutes an ‘anguished condemnation of the idea of correspondence between reality and what the imagination invents’. More than this, however, it illustrates how the author may consciously have to widen the gap between language and what it (supposedly) signifies, whilst nevertheless insisting on the emphatic correspondence between the two sides of the gap.

The adulterous liaison with Léon marks the point at which Emma’s constructing powers are truly put into top gear. More receptive than Charles and - at least initially - more devoted than Rodolphe, Léon is much more promising material for Emma to work with. Malleable though he is, however, Léon too has very precise ideas about who, or what, he desires Emma to be. Just as we saw them busily

61 On this topic, see Adert, p. 49ff.
64 Tanner, p. 266.
constructing precise versions of themselves in the *Croix rouge*, so too do we see
during the course of their affair the way in which they both make of the other that
which they want him or her to be. Again, this is a very egotistical manoeuvre in as
much as each wants the other to fit an idealized pattern that they carry in their mind’s
eye.

As Léon waits in the cathedral for Emma – and only Emma could have
suggested a cathedral for what is, effectively, a lovers’ tryst – he pictures to himself
her arrival:

> Elle allait venir tout à l’heure, charmante, agitée, épiant derrière elle les regards qui la
suivaient, - et avec sa robe à volants, son lorgnon d’or, ses bottines minces, dans toute
sorte d’élégances dont il n’avait pas goûté, et dans l’ineffable séduction de la vertu qui
succombe. (331)

The image is one of the virtuous woman about to transgress. This, of course,
is a deeply gratifying image for Léon in that he considers himself to be the catalyst for,
the cause of, the transgression. He naturally has not the slightest inkling of Emma’s
previous adulterous liaison with Rodolphe.

When Emma does eventually arrive, however, she comes in a far different
guise from that that Léon had expected. She is walking quickly, greets Léon
brusquely, and then, playing a part herself with her supposed determination to present
Léon with her ‘interminable lettre’, written the night before, in which she declares that
any incipient relationship between them must be nipped in the bud, that she is too old,
he too young, she disappears into ‘la chapelle de la Vierge’ where she throws herself
to her knees to pray. Léon is irritated by her behaviour. He interprets it as a ‘fantaisie
bigote’, clashing as it does with his own carefully constructed image. After his initial
annoyance, however, ‘il éprouva […] un certain charme à la voir, au milieu du rendez­
vous, ainsi perdue dans les oraisons *comme une marquise andalouse*’ (332; my
italics). At first glance, it seems as if Léon’s irritation at having his picture spoiled is
soon overcome by the inherent charm that he discovers in the reality. Far from it. All
Léon does is to superimpose another image – that of the Andalusian marquess – onto
the external reality which Emma proffers. The charm that he discovers resides in the
manufactured gloss with which he coats the reality.

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As the affair progresses – the ‘interminable letter’, of course, ends up in shreds thrown from the window of the notorious ‘fiacre’ – Léon’s construction of Emma escalates to attain dizzying proportions. Emma represents for him the fulfilment of multiple categories and roles. She is ‘une femme du monde, et une femme mariée! une vraie maîtresse enfin’ (367; original italics). We learn that:

Par la diversité de son humeur, tour à tour mystique ou joyeuse, babillarde, taciturne, emportée, nonchalante, elle allait rappelant en lui mille désirs, évoquant des instincts ou des réminiscences. Elle était l’amoureuse de tous les romans, l’héroïne de tous les drames, le vague elle de tous les volumes de vers. Il trouvait sur ses épaules la couleur ambrée de l’odalisque au bain; elle avait le corsage long des châtelaines féodales; elle ressemblait aussi à la femme pâle de Barcelone, mais elle était par-dessus tout Ange. (367; original italics)

This represents no less than ten disparate categories into which Léon shoe-horns Emma. On the one hand, of course, it might be claimed that such outwardly incompatible combinations as the images of angel and the odalisque at her bath merely serve to reflect the intense variety of Emma’s ever-changing character. On the other hand, the juxtaposition might be dismissed as preposterous. Wing even suggests that the great variety of figures implies quite the opposite of variety, arguing that “[t]he apparently meaningful diversity of these characterizations paradoxically underscores the radical reduction of the protagonist to a series of equivalent figures.” Whatever our attitude, it seems fair to suggest that all the images serve to create a distance from Emma as individual. By fitting Emma into multiple categories, pigeonholing her under various headings, Léon is playing a very safe game. The notion of the category represents specific limitations and implies the possibility of encapsulating an individual, which itself suggests the possibility of absolute control. The other side of the coin is that the categories effectively constitute a denial of the enigmatic or the unique by asserting, ‘You are just like…’ and fitting the individual into a pre-existing, established pattern, a plagiarized identity. By applying all of these categories to Emma, Léon is at once making himself feel safe by marking out perimeter fences and also indulging his own fantasies, in that the categories are all ones by which he is fascinated. He loves, not Emma, but his idea of Emma: ‘Wenn

66 Wing, Limits of Narrative, p. 70.
67 For an interesting discussion on the idea of Emma being confined or liberated by the men in her life and/or by the text itself, see Sharon Johnson. She argues that the text ‘disrupts a coherent, naturalized coding of women, in particular, in the two most commonly perceived feminine spaces of convent and the home’. Sharon P. Johnson, Boundaries of Acceptability: Flaubert, Maupassant, Cézanne and
Léon [...] die Frau des Arztes zu lieben glaubt, kultiviert er im Grunde lediglich seine idées reçues und preßt Emma in deren Schemata. We might also notice the vagueness of the epithets and the tendency to rely on such imprecise words as 'femme' and 'elle'. Léon does not even pinpoint specific historical figures, does not choose to see Emma in terms of, for instance, 'his' Joan of Arc, or 'his' Mary, Queen of Scots. Instead, he settles for the indistinct, thus further eroding Emma's identity in that it blurs in its subsumption under a 'type'. Wing, in a perhaps strained interpretation, sees a further dimension to the passage in as much as he suggests that the 'vague elle' is a play on words of 'le vague L(éon)', with the emphasis on the desiring male. Whilst this seems, on the one hand, a little contrived, it does fit the general atmosphere of arrogant male egotism.

The issue raised here is whether these many roles attributed by the lover serve to obscure a genuine, real 'Emma as Emma', or whether they highlight rather the notion that every aspect of life, even – or perhaps especially – within the erotic sphere, is unspontaneous and pre-constructed. Supporting this latter notion is the fact that Emma is similarly guilty of trying to mould Léon into a certain form. Her constructing extends even to his wider surroundings, his 'backdrop', and this illustrates again how easily Emma becomes embroiled in the peripheral details and background, how she 'exists in and through objects' and how absurdly important these things are liable to become to her:

Elle voulut qu'il se vêtît tout en noir et se laissât pousser une pointe au menton, pour ressembler aux portraits de Louis XIII. Elle désira connaître son logement, le trouva médiocre; il en rougit, elle n'y prit garde, puis lui conseilla d'acheter des rideaux pareils aux siens. (383)

Like Léon's version of Emma, Emma's version of Léon must fit a prescribed visual image. Both are effectively victims of an illusion. They expect – or want – life to replicate the kind of world that they have discovered in literature. What they fail to acknowledge is that literature does not replicate life in the first place, so they are

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Cassatt (New York: Lang, 2000), p. 114. This may be true in itself, but what the text also does, as we see in this example with Léon, is to insist on a dimension of coding in every other potential sphere, so to escape one set of coding merely implicates the individual in another set.

68 Frank Leinen, *Flaubert und der Gemeinplatz* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1990), pp. 159-60. Leinen, of course, presses Emma into his own 'Schemata' by designating her 'die Frau des Arztes'.

69 Wing, *Limits of Narrative*, p. 71. Wing also argues that this represents the emasculation of Léon: Elle:L:elle.

70 Heath, p. 60.
lacking a genuine common denominator. Gengembre sees this as the characters' fundamental failing, in so far as it means that they always find themselves – or unwittingly place themselves – at one remove from reality:

Les personnages, et Emma au premier chef, sont les prisonniers de leur point de vue et de leur imaginaire, lui-même farci de ce qui n’est pas eux. Il est impossible d’être authentique, car toujours entre soi et le réel s’interposent des images, des mythes, des lectures, des mots.\(^{71}\)

There is a sense, of course, that if these images, myths, books and words contributed to a degree of happiness, even within a frame of inauthenticity and unreality, then that, at least, would compensate in some way for the falsity involved. This is not, however, the case and the relationship degenerates into a battle of wills. Emma becomes quite tyrannical in her construction of Léon and her demand for control over his existence. The narrator informs us that Léon accepts all of Emma’s opinions and tastes, without asserting any of his own, that, in fact, ‘il devenait sa maîtresse plutôt qu’elle n’était la sienne’ (383-84). Leaving aside the tacit implication that it would be more in the ‘natural’ order of things for the man to play the dominant role\(^ {72}\), what we see is a relationship which sets out from false premises and which progresses along lines which will leave both parties frustrated and dissatisfied. Léon initially does nothing to combat Emma’s tyranny, but gradually he grows tired of her domineering. On the other hand, as the novelty begins to fade for Emma too, she feels, once again, a sense of having been short-changed. She holds on to the relationship merely ‘par habitude ou par corruption’, blames Léon, as she has in the past blamed Charles, for her disappointed hopes, goes so far as to accuse him of betrayal, and, in short, ‘souhaitait une catastrophe qui amenât leur séparation, puisqu’elle n’avait pas le courage de s’y décider’ (401). Instead, then, of actively taking a decision and finishing the relationship, Emma resorts on the one hand to cliché once again to try to revive the flagging desire and, on the other, hopes for some sort of divine intervention which will absolve her from the necessity of acting to finish the affair. She promises herself, ‘with an optimism as chronic as it is unfounded’,\(^ {73}\)

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71 Gengembre, p. 43.
72 Which, as Johnson points out, Charles, too, signally fails to do. In a society governed by the bourgeois patriarch he cuts a rather sorry figure and is unable to control any aspect of Emma, be it her spending, her imagination, her body or her heart. Sharon Johnson, p. 95.
new heights of passion and is time and again dismayed as the ecstasy fails to
materialize. She writes letters to Léon – after all, a mistress is ‘supposed’ to send her
lover letters – in which ‘il était question de fleurs, de vers, de la lune et des étoiles,
ressources naïves d’une passion affaiblie’ (390). This is not all, however. Rather
more insidiously, but, in view of what we have seen, not surprisingly, her letters turn
Léon into a somewhat different man from that that he is:

En écrivant, elle percevait un autre homme, un fantôme fait de ses plus ardents
souvenirs, de ses lectures les plus belles, de ses convoitises les plus fortes; et il
devenait à la fin si véritable, et accessible, qu’elle en palpitait émerveillée, sans
pouvoir néanmoins le nettement imaginer, tant il se perdait, comme un dieu, sous
l’abondance de ses attributs. (401-02)

Emma is bored, frustrated and disappointed. Rather than channel her energies
into finishing the relationship or changing the status quo, however, she uses them to
create a different, preferred version of the situation. She does this in spite of the fact
that ‘ces élans d’amour vague la fatiguaient plus que de grandes débauches’ (402).
Her alternative version is based on the deeply seductive received ideas that she
cherishes about what ‘love’, ‘passion’ and ‘desire’ should constitute. The strong
influence of these ideas means that Emma refuses to recognise the degeneration of her
love affairs, believing that there are higher, more satisfying peaks that they have not as
yet attained but which, once reached, will be bliss.

Léon, too, grows bored. This in itself is quite unremarkable. Another change
in Léon, however, which is more noteworthy and perhaps more poignant is the way in
which he succumbs to external pressures and begins to grow concerned with the way
he is perceived by his mother, his employer, and his friends:

Léon enfin avait juré de ne plus revoir Emma; et il se reprochait de n’avoir pas tenu sa
parole, considérant tout ce que cette femme pourrait encore lui attirer d’embarras et de
discours, sans compter les plaisanteries de ses camarades, qui se débitaient le matin,
antour du poêle. D’ailleurs, il allait devenir premier clerc; c’était le moment d’être
sérieux. (400)

Léon displays an acute sensitivity regarding the damaging repercussions that
his relationship with Emma could wreak on his standing in society. On the one hand,
this is a deep disappointment for the reader. It is as if Léon has joined the scrap heap
of would-be poets, sensitive souls and erstwhile dreamers, sacrificing the romantic
cult of the individual who is answerable to no one, in order to embrace sensible,
bourgeois mediocrity, subscribing to herd-mentality and focusing prosaically on his
legal career, putting youthful fancies and follies firmly behind him. Before getting
carried away with the idea that Léon has sold his soul and traded authentic individualism for a place in an inauthentic society, we should consider the evidence and bear in mind Fairlie’s assertion that Léon is, quite simply, from first to last, a typical product of his age and society. She maintains that although he may imagine himself, much as Emma does herself, to be a superior spirit, he has simply been granted access to ‘exactly that degree of timid and moderate experimentation with the arts and passions which conventional society will pride itself on broad-mindedly allowing to a young man before he settles down’.\(^74\) In the worst of all possible interpretations, Léon’s behaviour betrays the recurrent weakness of what some psychologists refer to as ‘other-directedness’,\(^75\) an intense susceptibility to the shifting demands created by others’ expectations, which forges for him a prison whereby his sense of identity is wholly conditioned by his paranoia regarding others’ appraisal of him, first Emma’s and then that of bourgeois society and key representatives of that society such as his mother. We remarked earlier how Emma seems to need an other in order to validate herself, but this tendency manifests itself much more strongly in Léon. Emma needs an audience, but is capable of generating selfhoods without prior reference to this audience. Léon is keen to assess probable reactions before forging a definite selfhood and then act according to how he thinks he ‘should’. On the other hand, of course, what is Léon to do? The relationship with Emma has, in any case, reached a state of stagnation, and it was, as we have seen, based on layer after layer of inauthenticity and cliché. To opt for the bourgeois lifestyle is not to opt for anything more inauthentic. Rather, he simply replaces one pre-established discourse with another. As Dufour points out: ‘L’homme de la constellation Flaubert, lui, ne risque pas de perdre son identité, car il ne l’a jamais trouvée.’\(^76\) Hitherto ‘spoken’ by the clichés of Romantic language, Léon will henceforth be spoken by the language of his chosen career, of civilised society, of the upright pillars of community, a language which speaks, as Rosemary Lloyd points out, with an inexorability as forceful as that formerly enjoyed by the gods of antiquity.\(^77\)

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\(^74\) Fairlie, p. 57.
\(^76\) Dufour, p. 184.
What we see with the characters in *Madame Bovary*, then, is a rather different approach to self and other from that that we witness in either *Effi Briest* or *Jude the Obscure*. Certainly the intensity of construction is evident in a similar way in as much as the self endeavours time and again to project different versions of itself and to create specific versions of the other. The difference lies, perhaps, in the level of self-awareness. Geert von Innstetten especially, for instance, is very conscious, as we shall explore, of a fundamental need to posit a self that he imagines might meet the criteria of what it means, in his own interpretation, to be an authentic individual. His yardsticks for these criteria are, of course, deeply flawed in themselves, but we see several moments where Geert interrogates himself and reaches a level of self-knowledge which will haunt him forever. Similarly, Sue Bridehead's quest for individual selfhood starts out from a strong consciousness of who it is that she wants to be. In stark contrast to this, many critics have highlighted that Emma does not really know what it is that she wants. Marianne Bonwit, for instance, writes that 'Emma ne sait ce qu'elle désire. Elle lutte, mais comme dans l'obscurité.' Sue's tragedy is that she does not have the courage of her convictions and that her fight is too often conducted under a harsh light of judgement by others, not that her original aim is intrinsically flawed or invalid. Emma's 'idéal', it is often argued, is, from the outset, something 'fauz et illusoire'. Sue believes that she 'sees better' at the end of the novel. In fact, she just sees differently. Emma sees neither better nor differently, but dies as blind and as lacking in perspicacity as she has always been, having teetered on the edge of, but then drawn away from, fresh vision.

Neither Léon nor Rodolphe achieve any moment, let alone sustained, of 'seeing better'. Their understanding never progresses beyond the initial step of boredom. They do not question why they are bored, or what causes the breakdown of their relationship with Emma. Whilst Emma, too, fails to interrogate herself, fails to try to analyse who she 'really' is, settling time and again for the insufficient image of what it is she imagines she desires to project, Emma *does* have a moment of epiphany. Regrettably, however, it is a moment as redundant in the long-term as that

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experienced by Effi, for Effi reneges on the insight that she gains, and Emma’s moment of understanding is brief and transitory, leaving no valuable impression. It is nevertheless interesting to see that Emma does have the capacity to understand the falsity of her situation.

The moment comes when Charles and Emma take their trip to Rouen to see the opera Lucia di Lammermoor. Initially, Emma’s response to and involvement in the drama is just what we would expect; ‘Elle se retrouvait dans les lectures de sa jeunesse.’ (309); ‘Elle reconnaissait tous les enivrements et les angoisses dont elle avait manqué mourir.’ (310-11). But suddenly there is a moment of brief, intense insight. Emma experiences a sense of superiority, a sense of world-weary disillusionment, whereby she not only makes the distinction, unusual for her, between art and life, but understands also that art is by no means a mirror of life: ‘[C]e bonheur-là, sans doute, était un mensonge imaginé pour le désespoir de tout désir. Elle connaissait à présent la petitesse des passions que l’art exagérait.’ (312). Yet almost as soon as the epiphany occurs, so does the clarity blur once again. The passage continues: ‘S’efforçant donc d’en détourner sa pensée, Emma voulait ne plus voir dans cette reproduction de ses douleurs qu’une fantaisie plastique bonne à amuser les yeux, et même elle souriait intérieurement d’une pitié dédaigneuse…’ (312; my italics). It is as if the lucidity is only provoked by the recognition that whilst the pain might have matched up, the height of the passion most definitely did not. The final flicker of insight is, of course, extinguished by the appearance ‘au fond du théâtre’ of ‘un homme […] en manteau noir’ (312), namely, Edgar Lagardy. Emma is instantly sucked into the magic of the spectacle once again, and her reaction represents an extreme swing of the pendulum from this moment of clarity. Confusing the man with the character he is portraying, ‘elle tâcha de se figurer sa vie, cette vie retentissante, extraordinaire, splendide, et qu’elle aurait pu mener cependant, si le hasard l’avait voulu’ (313). More than this, she becomes convinced that Lagardy is looking directly at her and

elle eut envie de courir dans ses bras pour se réfugier en sa force, comme dans l’incarnation de l’amour même, et de lui dire, de s’écrier: ‘Enlève-moi, emmène-moi, partons! À toi, à toi toutes mes ardeurs et tous mes rêves!’ (313-14)

For a split second, the reader imagines that Emma might have learned something, might have attained a degree of self-knowledge which has hitherto eluded
her, but this is not the case. The epiphany is wasted, sterile. 'No character in fiction
forgets sooner than Emma, or learns less from more experience.' Yet for some
critics, it is this very lack of self-knowledge which is the means by which Emma
actually preserves her selfhood:

The self can exist as a self only if it remains unaware of the imaginariness of its
existence; the moment it becomes aware of its imaginary existence and sees its own
lack of integrity and originality, it is annihilated as a self. Emma remains a self
because she does not see the otherness in herself.

This seems to be a rather disingenuous argument. Whilst we might agree that
Emma has no consciousness of the fragmentation and lack of integrity which for the
reader characterises her self, nor does she really have any sense of a coherent, stable
selfhood, a self 'as a self'. Rather she exists in a no-man's land of repeatedly trying
to posit a specific image of a self. Ignorance may, in many senses, be bliss, but to
argue that Emma remains a self is to argue against the alternative position that Emma
never actually becomes a self in the first place. Drawing on her experience of
literature and her preconceptions of life she creates a series of constructed
potentialities, none of which she is able to sustain for any prolonged length of time.
Along with this, she is poured into the numerous moulds in which the various male
characters would like to see her and these moulds function anyway as a countervailing
force to any self she endeavours to project. As Claudine Gothot-Mersch insists:
'Lorsque Emma rencontre un homme, le point de vue adopté met l'accent sur le fait
que ce n'est pas elle qui décide et qui agit. Elle ne choisit pas, elle est choisie.' At
the same time as her individuality is denied by others – and these others are both
characters within the text and the narrator figure 'outside' the text – Emma
persistently denies the right of the Other to a degree of otherness. Eric Gans suggests
that the final lesson of Madame Bovary is that 'all human understanding is based on
our acceptance of one another's Otherness,' but this seems only partially accurate.
Hand in hand with it must go an acceptance of and understanding of our own
selfhood. Each character fails to understand either him- or herself, or, indeed, any

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80 Bruce E. Fleming, 'An Essay in Seduction, or The Trouble with Bovary', The French Review, 62
81 Ginsburg, p. 95.
82 Fleming, in fact, sees her as wholly incoherent.
83 Claudine Gothot-Mersch, 'Le Point de vue dans Madame Bovary', Cahiers de l'association
internationale des études françaises 23 (1971), 243-59 (p. 257).
Other, but, what is worse, fails even to try, instead constructing a world and people to inhabit that world from words, clichés, ideas, pictures, memories of things once read, once heard, once dreamed. There is no authenticity, there is only construction, and the multiplicity of constructions which abounds at every level means that not even a single construction ever stands out as more valid than any other.

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CHAPTER 2: GUSTAVE FLAUBERT’S MADAME BOVARY: NARRATIVE

With Flaubert’s almost obsessive attention to language, it is small wonder that the ways in which the narrative of Madame Bovary functions have come under such detailed critical scrutiny. Language, of course, always functions as a special kind of contract, presupposing from the outset that each user will abide by a certain set of rules. Language use in literature has the added dimension of codification regarding our expectations of genre. At the same time, language use entails, of course, much more complex work than a simple exchange and deciphering of standardized codes and on these grounds Madame Bovary is often seen as a text which puts everything—sender, receiver, message—into question.\(^1\) The narrative engages in an almost ludic way with the idea that language and thought are considered to be inseparable, demonstrated at the most fundamental level when an attempt is made to visualize Charles’s school cap, an object impossible to imagine and about which so much has been written. Words always come, of course, pre-loaded with denotations and connotations and are received according to other denotations and connotations which may - or equally well may not - overlap. The ‘original’ thought, then, is altered as soon as it is ‘translated’ into words for communication to a second person and the final version understood by the receiver will never correspond exactly with the original. Furthermore, aside from its communicative aspect, language can also be used, intentionally or otherwise, to prejudice, to mystify and to control.\(^2\) The importance of this dimension in Madame Bovary quickly becomes evident when we examine directly how language is used in the text, how the text is narrated. Let us look in the first instance at a description of Emma which appears early on in the novel, as she and Charles sit eating breakfast after Charles has attended to Rouault’s broken leg:

Son ecu sortait d’un col blanc, rabattu. Ses cheveux, dont les deux bandeaux noirs semblaient chacun d’un seul morceau, tant ils étaient lisses, étaient séparés sur le milieu de la tête par une raie fine, qui s’enfonçait légèrement selon la courbe du crâne; et, laissant voir à peine le bout de l’oreille, ils allaient se confondre par derrière en un

\(^1\) On this point, see, for instance, Laurence R. Schehr, Flaubert and Sons: Readings of Flaubert, Zola and Proust (New York: Lang, 1986).

\(^2\) For a more extended discussion on language, thought, and the theories of Sapir and Whorf in relation to Flaubert’s text, see Anna V. Lambros, Culture and the Literary Text: The Case of Flaubert’s Madame Bovary (New York: Lang, 1996).
chignon abondant, avec un mouvement ondé vers les tempes, que le médecin de
campagne remarqua là pour la première fois de sa vie. (20)

There are two points to be made here. Firstly, it is made clear that the
perspective offered is Charles’s. He is ‘noticing’ Emma, registering for the first time
in his life the sensuous curve of a woman’s thick chignon. Secondly, however, it is
important to remember that we have seen in the early pages of the book how prosaic
and inarticulate Charles generally tends to be. This is not a condition that improves
throughout the text; we might think, for instance, of his stammered attempt to ask
Rouault for Emma’s hand: the old man ends up providing the words. Similarly, after
Emma’s death, it is Homais who provides the text for the inscription on her
tombstone. The fact that it is a highly inappropriate one merely emphasises further
Charles’s inadequacy on the plane of language. These, then, are not Charles’s words
as such. He may be doing the noticing, but this noticing is articulated by the narrator.
Furthermore, the actual words used are somewhat double-edged. On the one hand we
might naively interpret them as a straightforward description of the physical. On the
other hand, however, it is important to notice that the focus is on minute details such
as the tips of Emma’s ears or the curve of the shape of her head, rather than a total
sketch. This evokes a strong impression of the sensuous and titillating. This
description marks, in fact, the beginning of a series of descriptions of Emma which
will be highly charged in terms of eroticism and will always focus on tips, edges and
details with a fanatical and almost fetishistic accuracy. We see, for instance, the
moment when Emma shares a drink with Charles. Having poured a full glass for him
but only a drop for herself, she must tip the glass right up to drink. She smiles, ‘tandis
que le bout de sa langue, passant entre ses dents fines, léchait à petits coups le fond du
verre’ (30). Again, the perspective offered is Charles’s, but the way in which the
image is presented to the reader imbues it with a degree of linguistic eroticism which
Charles himself would have been at a loss to create. Later, arriving for the first time
in Yonville, Emma enters the Lion d’or and approaches the fireplace in order to warm
herself. We find her described thus:

Du bout de ses deux doigts elle prit sa robe à la hauteur du genou, et, l’ayant ainsi
remontée jusqu’aux chevilles, elle tendit à la flamme, par-dessus le gigot qui tournait,
son pied chaussé d’une bottine noire. Le feu l’éclairait en entier, pénétrant d’une
lumière crue la trame de sa robe, les pores égaux de sa peau blanche et même les
paupières de ses yeux qu’elle clignait de temps à autre. Une grande couleur rouge
passait sur elle selon le souffle du vent qui venait par la porte entrouverte. (109)
Fingers, ankles, a dainty boot, eyelashes, the pores of a pale skin. It is not until after the description that the reader becomes aware of the presence of a perceiving character. It is, of course, Léon: ‘De l’autre côté de la cheminée, un jeune homme à chevelure blonde la regardait silencieusement.’ (110). We could go on to give example after example of this kind of passage; Rodolphe watching the sensuous bend of the back of Emma’s dress, for instance, or Justin lovingly cleaning her boots or questioning Félicité about the various items of lingerie that he sees hanging out to dry. What the passages have in common is that they indicate a kind of complicity between certain characters and the narrator. The ways in which Emma is perceived by the individual characters are given voice, articulated, by the narrator. On the one hand, of course, we cannot attack the narrator for this; he is simply illustrating - narrating - how Emma is often viewed as an object, a series of seemingly unconnected pieces, ‘morselized’, ‘fragmented’, by the men surrounding her. On the other hand, it can also be argued that the narrator is guilty of colluding with the male characters. By translating their brief perceptions and instinctive thoughts into strongly eroticised language he is assisting in the process of the depersonalisation of Emma. Tanner’s focus is particularly on how Charles’s eye breaks Emma down into ‘bits’, and how this corresponds to the text itself. He claims that both husband and text ‘register the parts with careful and minute attention, but precisely in so doing they miss the whole, which is not to be found in the sum of the separate items’. Whilst Charles may be unaware of what he is doing, Flaubert, and, by extension, his narrator, quite clearly is not. As we see, Tanner’s point can be widened to encompass every male eye that alights on Emma with sexual interest. The element of narrative collusion means that the combination of the actual physical focus and the language used to verbalize this focus provides for the reader a biased, male perspective rather than anything approaching the kind of neutral perspective which might be gained by a disinterested observer. This, of course, highlights the importance of the language exchange between narrator and reader and our assumptions regarding the kind of text that we are reading.

3 And we cannot fail to notice the irony of the fact that the would-be lover (Justin) removes the mud (and thus the evidence) gathered in the trips across country to surprise the actual lover (Rodolphe).
4 Tanner, p. 351.
5 Bersani, Astyanax, p. 91.
Before we go any further, then, it seems important to establish the type of narrator that we are dealing with in *Madame Bovary*. The text has long been acknowledged as one which is breathtakingly avant-garde (for its time) in its approach to narrative. Initially the novel seems to fit in with ‘normal’ narrative strategy. It commences with an emphatic ‘nous’ – ‘Nous étions à l’étude quand le Proviseur entra…’ (1) – which means that the reader instantly assumes that the narrative is one in the first person, that she is to be led through the tale by a character who is also a participant in the action or who, at the very least, has some connection with and knowledge of the characters of whom he is going to tell. This assumption is disappointed on two counts. Firstly, no identifiable ‘je’ emerges from behind the collective ‘nous’ of these opening pages. The expected first-person narrator does not adopt the form which we anticipate. In actual fact - and this is the second, related point - the ‘nous’ itself vanishes in the middle of the first chapter. It does not return and the narrative which ensues is solidly - but not uncomplicatedly - in the third-person.

Critical reaction to the ‘nous’ has varied dramatically. Some critics choose to identify a voice behind it as an actual member of the school class, a real witness. They sometimes choose simply to ignore the problematic implications of his disappearance, of his lack of positive identification, of his sometimes knowing so much and then claiming to know nothing.\(^7\) Alternatively, they may assert that the witness theory remains valid for the entire text, with Flaubert trying to create a point of view which invokes the idea of a witness who, whilst not directly involved in the main action, ‘more or less represent[s] the social group within which the action takes place’,\(^8\) and thus, presumably, also emphasising Charles’s exclusion from that group. Other critics acknowledge and justify the disappearance of the ‘nous’ by arguing along the lines that Flaubert begins with the personal narrator in order to ‘legitimize his narrative presence by asserting his authority as eyewitness’ but then gradually subsides to the more impersonal and traditional voice of the historian.\(^9\)

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\(^6\) Bersani, *Astyanax*, p. 91.
\(^7\) See for instance Uwe Dethloff, *Das Romanwerk Gustave Flauberts* (Munich: Fink, 1976), p. 121.
Some critics admit that they find the device 'perplexing'\textsuperscript{10} or 'puzzling'.\textsuperscript{11} Attempts to explain it, however, are not necessarily convincing. Furst argues that the approach might help to forge a 'contract of sorts' between reader and narrator, the anonymity of the vague 'nous' encouraging identification but at the same time restricting it to a contract which is 'mooted rather than posited' and which allows at times for 'delicate manipulation of the reader's apprehension and response' but which is simultaneously 'sufficiently tenuous to become a source of doubt'.\textsuperscript{12} There is, however, no stronger a case for a curious unidentified first person than for a third person narrative here, particularly as a contract can hardly be sustained with an entity that disappears after the first few pages. What is more, we have already hinted at how manipulative and yet how much a 'source of doubt' the impersonal narrative voice can be. Brombert's argument is that the 'nous' represents 'part of those subtle modulations whereby Flaubert guides our vision to the very center of tragedy, while exploiting all the possibilities of an ironic distance', in as much as the 'nous' allows us to focus initially on Charles and then effect the transition from a wider viewpoint to the unique and essentially narrow perspective of Emma.\textsuperscript{13} Again, it is not made clear why this should not be possible anyway with a third person narrative running all the way through and modulating to Emma's point of view, utilizing the technique of free indirect speech. Again, we could argue from the converse position that the modulation would, in fact, be more effective if it started from an omniscient, impersonal narrator narrowing to a less stable, more subjective figure whose perspective is seen to correspond ominously with that of Emma, in as much as we would thereby see emphasised that any reality is inescapably a personal reality, and therefore – even from a supposedly omniscient and neutral narrator – a subjective perspective.

Enid Starkie rather peremptorily dismisses the 'nous' as 'clumsy', an 'error in technique' and argues that whilst such an accusation directed at so meticulous an author borders on the presumptuous, it is 'difficult to discover what has been gained

\textsuperscript{10} Furst, \textit{Fictions}, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{11} Brombert, \textit{The Novels of Flaubert}, p. 41.
\textsuperscript{12} Furst, \textit{Fictions}, p. 71.
\textsuperscript{13} Brombert, \textit{The Novels of Flaubert}, p. 41.
from this method'. Culler, however, argues that Flaubert gains – or at least achieves – a great deal... namely an impression of 'parody and obfuscation' and the demoralisation of the hapless reader:

Having allowed us to enter his novel in the traditional way and to set about identifying the narrator who speaks, the text stops us short by telling us that the narrator we have identified knows nothing about the events in question, can remember nothing about the character whose history we have taken him to be recounting. There may be a suggestion that most novels are unrealistic in the amount of detail the narrators are supposed to recall, but that is very much incidental to the main point: that the text is not narrated by anyone and that the attempt to read it as if it were can lead only to confusion.¹³

We might argue here that Culler goes both too far and not far enough. Certainly the text questions our assumptions of narrative. On the other hand, it is difficult to understand what he means when he says that 'the text is not narrated by anyone'. If he means 'anyone' in the sense of an identifiable character, then, yes, he is quite right, but this would be no different from many texts which take an anonymous, faceless third person as their narrator. It is often the case that we cannot identify any specific 'person', 'character', 'body', 'self' behind the voice. If on the other hand he means 'anyone' in the sense of an actual narrator, then this cannot be accurate. Throughout the text, despite extensive use of 'style indirect libre', despite the use of dialogue in which the narrator does not intervene, despite the uncertainty and ambivalence, the combination of apparent omniscience with an attitude of knowing nothing, we can still always 'hear' a narrating voice. The voice certainly shifts; sometimes it is a distinct, over-arching meta-voice which 'knows better' than the characters, and sometimes it seems to sit in direct alignment with those same characters, but it is always there. It is not so much that no one is narrating the text, but rather that the someone is not some one. As we saw with the way in which Charles’s perceptions of Emma are given voice, there is a distinct narrative presence that organises the events, thoughts, words and perspectives which go to make up the text into a more structured whole than could probably exist without that presence.

Kathleen Tillotson suggests that the ‘narrator’ should be seen as a method rather than

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¹³ Culler, Uses of Uncertainty, p. 112.
a person, and this is certainly helpful in so far as we can, if need be, reduce the idea of 'narrator' to that of 'organising process'.

Whatever the intended purpose of the 'nous', then, and about this we can do little more than speculate wildly, one practical effect of its sudden disappearance is to alert the reader from the word go to the necessity of paying careful attention to narrative claims. Much modern literature takes up an overtly belligerent position in its narrative style; in texts such as John Fowles' The French Lieutenant's Woman, for example, a text which employs many of the conventions of nineteenth-century realist literature, the narrator is constantly reminding the reader of his status as narrator, of the text's status as text (and thus invented, contingent, malleable at the author's whim). This effectively means that such texts work with the reader in as much as the reader is given explicit reminders that she should remain on her guard. The actual nineteenth-century realist novel, of course, tends to offer a much more seductive reading experience, often providing what seems to be a stable, third person narrator in whom we naively invest our trust. Flaubert introduces notions of instability, varied perspective and incoherence from the very beginning and, much like the modern text, warns us against being seduced by language. Interestingly, David Lodge argues that 'an unreliable "omniscient" narrator is almost a contradiction in terms, and could only occur in a very deviant, experimental text'. If we take the implied meaning of 'omniscient' to the very letter, then he is of course right, but we might also argue that Flaubert uses the convention of the omniscient narrator and then subverts it, although not in any overtly 'deviant' or conspicuously 'experimental' way. The narrative voice is indeed the organising, articulate voice, but this should not distract us from the fact that it is still a voice amongst other voices.

It is important that we do become aware so early on, for if we analyse the ways in which the narrative functions, it becomes clear that it is constructed in such a way as to reflect and echo the fragmentation, the lack of coherence, the multifarious contradictions and ambiguities, that we have identified in the characters. In the

18 Smalley points out that seen from another century, Flaubert's method for dealing with the interior life of his heroine does not appear so boldly experimental as it did to his contemporaries. This issue of experimentalism might be argued to extend to the entire text; used to the radical approaches of the
analysis of the characters it became clear that it is generally impossible to distinguish the authentic from the constructed and that, ultimately, there might only be construction. Similarly, with the narrative we find ourselves focusing on how we might identify what is offered as truth, as significant, as, indeed, authentic. Again, we find that the issue is far from simple. We have already examined a moment at which the narrator appears to sympathize with Emma, recognising her own difficulties with language, 'la parole humaine', and its unoriginality as his own. Other aspects of the construction of the narrative reveal similarly interesting moments of overlap.

Even once we are beyond the strange oscillation between first- and third-person narrators of the initial chapter and the third person mode holds sway for the rest of the text, this does not automatically provide any sense of a more stable authority. Rather, the narrator shifts between moments of the perfect pattern of all-seeing, all-knowing presence with 'access all areas' that we expect from the realist novel, and moments during which he seems to be at the same level of ignorance as the characters and the reader.

A key pointer is the narrator's apparently fluctuating knowledge of background history. On the one hand, he is able to tell us in detail about Homais's less than model past. He tells us that the pharmacist 'avait enfreint la loi du 19 ventôse an XI, article 1ère', and that he was summoned to Rouen to appear before 'M. le procureur du roi, en son cabinet particulier' (120). The narrator provides us with this information in order to explain Homais's almost servile attentions to Charles and Emma. The initial assertion - 'L’apothicaire se montra le meilleur des voisins' is thus revealed as inadequate. Homais has ulterior motives - 'en s’attachant M. Bovary par des politesses, c’était gagner sa gratitude et empêcher qu’il ne parlât plus tard, s’il s’apercevait de quelque chose' (121). Although the ‘se montra’ is admittedly rather ambiguous - the narrator does not go so far as to mislead the reader by stating that Homais ‘fut’ the best of neighbours - we nevertheless see that the narrator has very definite control over how much information is imparted, providing further details at a later point which may contribute to the correction of a skewed or equivocal picture. In addition we see that the narrator has access, at least here, to both factual knowledge

writers of the nouveau roman, it is easy to fail to appreciate Flaubert's avant-gardism. See Smalley, p. 51.
(Homais’s infringement of the law) and mental, personal knowledge (Homais’s secret motivation behind the ostensibly straightforward neighbourliness) which another character would not necessarily be in possession of.

On the other hand, however, there are similar moments at which the narrator seems to enjoy none of this knowledge. An obvious example to correspond with the above is the mystery surrounding Lheureux’s background. Whilst the narrator tells us that Lheureux was ‘[n]é Gascon, mais devenu Normand’ and whilst he treats us to a vivid description of his none too appealing physical attributes, such as his skin which ‘semblait teinte par une décoction de réglisse claire’ (143), he does not shed any light on his background:

On ignorait ce qu’il avait été jadis: porteballe disaient les uns, banquier à Routot, selon les autres. Ce qu’il y a de sûr, c’est qu’il faisait, de tête, des calculs compliqués à effrayer Binet lui-même. (168)

He does not substantiate either of the general rumours which circulate about Lheureux’s past, but simply proffers them as equally possible alternatives. The superior vantage point manifested with regard to Homais’s history vanishes here, although the reader is unsure whether the narrator does not know, or chooses not to tell us.

What both of these examples have in common is that they are clear-cut in the level of information being given. The reader understands where the limits of the narrator’s knowledge – or his desire to share that knowledge – are set. Such clarity, however, is not always the case, as becomes evident by analysing a relatively long passage that occurs in Part One of the text. It takes place at a point in the novel before Charles has married Emma – a point, in fact, when his first wife is still living and he is paying regular visits to Les Bertaux in his capacity as doctor, to check on the progress of the mending of Rouault’s leg. It addresses the issue of why it is that Les Bertaux is visited so assiduously by Charles.

Quant à Charles, il ne chercha point à se demander pourquoi il venait aux Bertaux avec plaisir. Y eût-il songé, qu’il aurait sans doute attribué son zèle à la gravité du cas, ou peut-être au profit qu’il en espérait. Était-ce pour cela, cependant, que ses visites à la ferme faisaient, parmi les pauvres occupations de sa vie, une exception charmante? Ces

19 This striking physical description of Lheureux is particularly interesting in view of Pape’s observation that on the whole there is an astonishing lack of physical description given for the male characters: ‘Charles, Léon, Rodolphe und Homais sind im Prinzip gesichtslos’. Klaus Pape, *Sprachkunst und Kunstsprache bei Flaubert und Kafka* (St. Ingbert: Röhrig Universitätsverlag, 1996), p. 233.
jours-là il se levait de bonne heure, partait au galop, poussait sa bête, puis il descendait pour s'essuyer les pieds sur l'herbe et passait ses gants noirs avant d'entrer. Il aimait à se voir arriver dans la cour, à sentir contre son épaule la barrière qui tournait, et le coq qui chantait sur le mur, les garçons qui venaient à sa rencontre. Il aimait la grange et les écuries; il aimait le père Rouault, qui lui tapait dans la main en l'appelant son sauveur; il aimait les petits sabots de mademoiselle Emma sur les dalles lavées de la cuisine; ses talons hauts la grandissaient un peu, et quand elle marchait devant lui, les semelles de bois, se relevant vite, claquaient avec un bruit sec contre le cuir de la bottine. (22)

The first sentence indicates that the narrator has access to Charles's thoughts — or, in this case, lack of thoughts; omniscience, then, but in a curiously obverse sense. This impression then fades, however, with the assertion that if Charles had thought about why his visits to Les Bertaux cause him such pleasure then he would ‘sans doute’ have attributed it to his professional zeal, or ‘peut-être’ to the envisaged financial profit to be made. Is the fact that the narrator is not certain that Charles would have done this evidence of a lack of narrative omniscience? Or can we not really expect a narrator to have insight into something that does not anyway exist? Why should we expect him to know what Charles would have thought?

The situation becomes more complicated still with the narrative question of ‘Était-ce pour cela, cependant, que ses visites à la ferme faisaient, parmi les pauvres occupations de sa vie, une exception charmante?’ On the one hand we might insist that this is a simple, innocent question, no more, no less. On the other hand, the very fact that the question has been posed at all seems quite clearly to imply that the narrator regards the two proffered hypothetical explanations of Charles’s enthusiasm as wholly unfeasible. But, of course, the explanations are not offered by Charles himself. They are suggested by the narrator as the kinds of reasons that he supposes Charles might – ‘peut-être’ – have given if challenged, which brings us full circle. What we see, then, is that the narrator is creating for the reader a Charles that does not necessarily exist by asserting, albeit rather vaguely, the pattern which his thoughts might have followed had he actually engaged in any. The assertion is no more reliable than reasoned speculation. The fact that the doubt is formulated as a direct question suggests a direct address to an assumed reader, and thus a situation is constructed in which the reader is not only invited but effectively obliged to move and invent within the space, the gap, left open for conjecture, thus avoiding what some critics have identified as the nuisance dimension created by the use of an omniscient narrator,
since the all-seeing viewpoint can tend to ‘deny [the reader] the right to formulate his own impressions’. Working with the narrative hints, the reader invokes her sense of human psychology to focus the signs and to evaluate probabilities. She is simultaneously drawn into a complicitous relationship with the narrator; reader and narrator ‘know better’ and know more than Charles himself, who, unlike the external observers, does not analyse his own behaviour. This complicity is heightened by the use of the words ‘pauvres occupations’ and ‘exception charmante’, (my italics), for it seems unlikely that Charles, if he does not think about his happiness, will categorise the activities of his life so judgementally.

The second section of the passage is interesting on two counts. Firstly, we see that Charles does have a certain level of self-awareness; ‘[i]l aimait à se voir arriver dans la cour…’. This moment functions almost as a scaled-down forerunner of the extravagant tableaux in which Emma will later see herself and demonstrates how even the apparently least self-analytical and most prosaic of characters nonetheless has a tendency to look at the effect the self makes as if as a third party.

The further interesting point of this second section is the way that it constitutes a catalogue of what Charles ‘likes’ about his visits to the farm, listed according to the manner in which he himself might have articulated them. Again, whilst the narrator and the reader ‘know’ that Emma is the key element which draws Charles so enthusiastically to Les Bertaux, the narrator appears almost to be duplicitously subscribing to and presenting Charles’s view of himself by relating how whilst he claims to like Rouault for himself, what he likes about Emma is… her clogs. This focus on detailed edges of Emma reiterates the observation made earlier about the way that the male figures tend to break Emma down into parts, failing to see the whole. At the same time, of course, the narrator and the reader once again ‘know better’ than Charles; his fascination with the ‘sabots’ stems from an unavowed fascination with their wearer.

The combination of narrative omniscience and non-omniscience, then, has a particular effect. It means that the narrator creates a gap for speculation which the reader must engage with, but because of the ironic distance maintained from Charles’s

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innocence the narrator communicates from within the ostensible ambiguity a sense of how things are supposed to be interpreted. To a certain extent, the passage functions as a joke at Charles’s expense. Alignment between reader and narrator is created, and the character is firmly excluded, just as he was excluded from being part of the ‘nous’ in the opening pages. The impression is one of shared meta-knowledge and the tone one of gentle raillery regarding Charles’s passivity, his unassertiveness, his lack of both self-consciousness and self-knowledge. At the same time, it is as if the narrative structure operates as a kind of mocking mirror to Charles. The narrator knows and yet ostensibly does not know. Charles also knows (that he enjoys visiting Les Bertaux) but does not know (why). The narrative echoes this, but on a far more self-conscious, self-aware and, by token of this, ironic level. Again, attention is drawn to the issues of perspective and subjectivity. The narrative implies that the same thing may be viewed in different ways according to different pre-existing criteria. In this sense the narrative is very liberating for the reader, constructing the text as it goes but acknowledging that things might well be different and thus permitting space to accommodate the reader’s difference. In this way, narrator and reader work in tandem to produce an ‘enlarged perspective’ on both the text and the world, a perspective which refuses to subscribe to simple notions of ‘truth’ and ‘reality’.

Whilst the above was a passage that aligns reader and narrator at a level of superior insight, there are other times at which this alignment does not occur. The reader may feel as though she has been left stranded, with neither anchor nor landmark by which to orientate herself. This occurs, for instance, at the moment when Léon visits Emma in the hotel room after Charles has left her in Rouen so that she might see the Lagardy opera through to the end. Léon has just declared his love for Emma and Emma is protesting against the avowal:

Elle lui représenta les impossibilités de leur amour, et qu’ils devaient se tenir, comme autrefois, dans les simples termes d’une amitié fraternelle.
Était-ce sérieusement qu’elle parlait ainsi? Sans doute qu’Emma n’en savait rien elle-même, tout occupée par le charme de la séduction et la nécessité de s’en défendre; et contemplant le jeune homme d’un regard attendri, elle repoussait doucement les timides caresses que ses mains frémissantes essayaient.
‘Ah! pardon,’ dit-il en se reculant.

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Et Emma fut prise d'un vague effroi, devant cette timidité, plus dangereuse pour elle que la hardiesse de Rodolphe quand il s'avançait les bras ouverts. Jamais aucun homme ne lui avait paru si beau. Une exquise candeur s'échappait de son maintien. Il baissait ses longs cils fins qui se recourbaient. Sa joue à l'épiderme suave rougissait – pensait-elle – du désir de sa personne, et Emma sentait une invincible envie d'y porter ses lèvres. (327)

We begin with a straightforward snippet of reported speech. Then, as in the example with Charles given above, the narrator makes use of the interrogative and questions the sincerity of Emma’s words. Whereas in the example involving Charles, however, the answer to the question was instantly clear, residing, in fact, within the question, the matter is not so obvious in this case. The narrator refuses to answer his own question. Instead, he suggests that Emma probably – the beautifully ambiguous ‘sans doute’ with its paradoxical tones of absolute certainty and wavering possibility – was not sure herself, and then goes on to confide that she is preoccupied by the charm of the seduction scene and the necessity of defending herself against that charm. This narrative sentence, then, consists half of a denial of adequate access to Emma’s inner self – the narrator refuses even to state whether or not Emma herself is unsure of her own sincerity, thus creating a double layer of uncertainty – and half of a close assessment of that very self in the subsequent analysis of the emotions and state of mind in which Emma is absorbed.

In addition, again just as in the previous example, we cannot be certain about the provenance of certain words. Is it the narrator who identifies the ‘charme’ of the atmosphere of seduction and the ‘nécessité’ of defending oneself, or is this simply another clichéd pose adopted by Emma? The reader is given no clues. Similarly, the reader is told that Léon’s timidity is more dangerous for Emma than Rodolphe’s ‘hardiesse’. But according to whom? And for what reason? In what sense? More dangerous because infinitely more seductive? More dangerous because it means that Emma must play more of an active, dominant role and thus accept more of the responsibility for the inevitable course of events? More dangerous because it represents a novel – and thus not yet tainted by the grime of the familiar – factor? Information is given and information is withheld. The gaps for speculation are much greater in this passage than in the previous one. Answers are not forthcoming and the narrator does not state the case: ‘Stattdessen suggeriert er Details oder Einzelheiten,
die als möglich oder wahrscheinlich in Erwägung gezogen werden können. At one level, this is - ironically in view of Swinden’s claim that we cited earlier about the reader’s ‘right’ to formulate his own impressions as an integral part of the reading experience – decidedly frustrating, particularly as the reader is unsure whether the narrator doesn’t know or simply ‘isn’t telling’. The uncertainty and sense of frustration increase with the sentence, ‘Sa joue à l’épiderme suave rougissait – pensait-elle – du désir de sa personne, et Emma sentait une invincible envie d’y porter ses lèvres’. Multiple questions are raised. Is Léon’s blush real? Or does Emma imagine it? Does the ‘pensait-elle’ refer to both parts of the sentence or only to one? The idea of the unreliable, subjective perspective is highlighted by the visual isolating of the ‘pensait-elle’ within dashes, but this highlighting also serves to emphasise the ambiguity of the language construction used, in that we are unsure what it qualifies.

On one level, then, this is deeply frustrating. At the same time, however, we might suggest that the development of this combination of apparent omniscience with equal amounts of non-omniscience, and the greater degree of ambiguity created within the combination points to the greater degree of complexity evident within the moment. Charles is a much less complicated, much less contradictory, character than Emma. The differences between the narrative approaches perhaps serve to highlight these different levels of complexity. The gaps for speculative inventiveness are perhaps wider because although the level of self-knowledge of the characters is astonishingly similar (in its very lack), it is consistently easier for the reader to apply everyday categories of psychological interpretation to ‘explain’ Charles than to ‘explain’ Emma. The degree of narrative complexity and ambiguity, then, works in tandem with the degree of complexity and ambiguity typically exhibited by the character. The wider the ‘gaps’ that the narrator leaves for the reader, the harder her task. What is more, the difficulty of filling the gap highlights our tendency to want to ‘pin down’ characters in literature in a way that we would not expect to be able to do in real life.

Baruch Hochman argues that

Literature [...] has the capacity to charge relatively limited quantities of information with a sense of significance and to consolidate them into patterns of meaning. In the realm of character, this capacity leads to the heightening of something we know only too well from life – namely, the impulse to make constructs on the basis of limited

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22 Pape, p. 228.
information; to infer wholes from parts; and to generalize from those parts to the
nature of the whole that they represent. In art as in life, glimpses of behaviour – brief
vignettes – are taken to be touchstones of larger being.\(^{23}\)

For Hochman, then, literature and life are similar in that we desire to interpret and see
parts as wholes. Michael Bell, on the other hand, maintains that high on Flaubert’s
agenda is an eagerness to emphasise the sheer lack of mutuality between life as we
know it and the fictional world, claiming that ‘[t]here is no bridge, or continuity,
between our world and the fiction. The one is simply encapsulated, as an ironic
simulacrum, within the other’.\(^{24}\) By refusing to close the gaps and leaving Emma’s
character as eminently unconsolidated, it seems rather that Flaubert does on the one
hand emphasise the idea of a certain reciprocity between fictional literary characters
and people we encounter on a day to day basis (in as much as we cannot just reduce
Emma to a metaphor, as signifying some point or other, as representing an idea, an
argument, a type). On the other hand the suggestion seems to be that our attitudes as
observers are wrong in both art and life; interpreting any individual synecdochically is
doomed to failure as we draw inaccurate conclusions.

Just as reader and narrator must interact on the level of what is known, what is
surmised and what is conjectured, so too does interaction feature on the level of
judgement. Flaubert was very conscious of the implications of people judging one
another. In a letter to his close friend Louis Bouilhet (to whom Madame Bovary was,
of course, dedicated), he writes:

\[
\text{Que je sois pendu si je porte jamais un jugement sur qui que ce soit! La bêtise n'est}
\text{pas d'un côte, et l'Esprit de l'autre. C'est comme le Vice et la Vertu; Malin qui les}
\text{distingue.}\]

In spite of this caution, and the tandem idea that the novelist ‘\text{n'a pas le droit de dire}
son avis sur les choses de ce monde’ and that he should simply ‘faire et se taire’,\(^{26}\) it is
impossible for any narrator – and we will see this also in Effi Briest and in Jude the
Obscure – simply to present a wholly neutral set of images, not least because, as we

\(^{24}\) Michael Bell, \textit{The Sentiment of Reality: Truth of Feeling in the European Novel} (London: George
\(^{25}\) Letter of 1 August 1855. \textit{Flaubert: Correspondance}, II (1951), p. 98. See also a letter of 15 March 1842
to Ernest Chevalier, in which Flaubert writes: ‘La justice humaine est d’ailleurs pour moi ce qu’il y a de
plus bouffon au monde; un homme en jugeant un autre est un spectacle qui me ferait crever de rire, s’il
ne me faisait pité, et si je n’étais forcé maintenant d’étudier la série d’absurdités en vertu de quoi il le
have consistently witnessed, language effectively comes 'pre-loaded' and we find ourselves forced to use it with pre-established connotations, the speaker becoming, as Michel Foucault suggests, 'part of a system of discursive practice' rather than enjoying authority over discourse as a means of pure self-expression. As with the tension between omniscience and non-omniscience, so too, then, we see a tug of war between narrative judgement and narrative non-judgement in the text.

The first thing to notice is that there are many moments which the reader can interpret only as pure, unequivocal, narrative judgement. These moments include such instances as the observation that Lheureux is 'poli jusqu'à l'obséquiosité' (143), or, regarding Emma's written correspondence with Léon once the passion of the affair begins to wane, the assertion that 'dans les lettres qu'Emma lui envoyait, il était question de fleurs, de vers, de la lune et des étoiles, ressources naïves d'une passion affaiblie' (355; my italics). Such instances leave the reader in no real doubt as to the narrator's attitude. Judgements like these create a distance between characters and narrator by means of which the narrator implies that he knows more and sees more than the character, that he 'sees things as they really are' whilst the characters are too close to attain such objectivity. Often, as in the first example, the reader has little choice but to align herself with the narrator and thus be complicit in the stance of superiority. Examples such as the second leave more room for manoeuvre, but to reject the judgement entails also rejecting a sense of superior insight.

Conversely, there are moments where the narrator quite clearly opts to maintain an impassive stance of neutrality and refuses to make any sort of judgement. We have already seen how valuable the use of such evasive and ambiguous devices as 'peut-être' and 'sans doute' can be, and the narrator uses a similar trick to swing the focus to a particular perspective. To do this, he employs such tags as 'elle croyait' or 'il lui semblait'. These tags serve, again, to distance the narrator from his narrative, placing the onus for the words squarely on the shoulders of the character, and giving the narrator more the status simply of a reporter of events and also thereby enhancing the illusion of 'character as an entity independent of the mind that created it'.

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instance, it is said of Emma: ‘Il lui semblait que certains lieux sur la terre devaient produire du bonheur, comme une plante particulière au sol et qui pousse mal tout autre part.’ (56). It is up to the reader to decide whether she herself will accept the possible validity of such a notion or simply reject it out of hand. This single sentence is all the more interesting in view of what precedes and what follows it, for it is surrounded by typical Emma hyperbole, with a jumble of disparate images of goats on a mountain side, the smell of lemon trees, romantic Swiss chalets and so on and so forth. For all that the specific images are - to a modern reader at the very least - exaggeratedly ridiculous, the analogy with the plant should perhaps prevent us from dismissing it all as just more evidence of Emma’s silliness. In some ways, Emma may have a valid point; after all, some people detest living in the country, some cannot bear cities, some grow depressed if they live in a cold climate... At moments like these, the reader finds herself on her own, with the narrator providing no guidance, and it is at moments like these when Flaubert’s assertion regarding what he effectively sees as the arrogance of judgement comes back to haunt us; things are not just black and white. Life is full of buts. Emma is indeed silly, but.²⁹

There are other points in the text at which, paradoxically, narrative judgement seems to overlap with narrative non-judgement. Such moments plunge us into a degree of ambiguity from which it is difficult to extricate ourselves with any vestige of cognitive certainty. Let us look, for instance, at a passage which occurs after Emma’s funeral:

Rodolphe, qui, pour se distraire, avait battu le bois toute la journée, dormait tranquillement dans son château; et Léon, là-bas, dormait aussi. Il y en avait un autre qui, à cette heure-là, ne dormait pas. Sur la fosse, entre les sapins, un enfant pleurait agenouillé, et sa poitrine, brisée par les sanglots, haletait dans l’ombre, sous la pression d’un regret immense, plus doux que la lune et plus insondable que la nuit. La grille tout à coup craqua. C’était Lestiboudois; il venait chercher sa bêche qu’il avait oubliée tantôt. Il reconnut Justin escaladant le mur, et sut alors à quoi s’en tenir sur le malfaiteur qui lui dérobait ses pommes de terre. (469)

At first glance, we might claim that the presentation of both Rodolphe and Léon is wholly neutral and non-judgemental. Perhaps we might even see a smattering of indulgence for Rodolphe in that he has at least spent the day apparently aimlessly indulgent...

²⁹ Countless critics have grappled with this contradiction. Tillet, for instance, condemns Emma as second-rate, but nonetheless allows that there is a certain something about the poignancy with which her
wandering ‘pour se distraire’ – was he, then, upset? Reflecting on his relationship with Emma and the element of blame which he might incur in the eyes of the gods for her downfall? Or is there a touch of sarcasm intended with the image, with Rodolphe at one level fulfilling the clichéd idea of the tortured Romantic Hero in this impression of the lonely soul roaming through nature, lost in every sense, but at the same time managing, like Léon, to sleep peacefully once night falls? And what of the juxtaposition of the curt description of the two former beaux sleeping peacefully, with the image of the distraught, weeping Justin, kneeling by Emma’s grave? Does the reader judge the older men harshly? The narrator makes no explicit accusation and does not ask us to judge Rodolphe and Léon. He does, however, seem to manipulate our emotions by emphasising Justin’s youth, calling him ‘un enfant’ and charging his language with such poetry – the sense of grief, the regret, which is gentler than the moon and more unfathomable than the night. So clear is the contrast between the idea of the lost soul and the blissfully peaceful sleep of the just that the reader is drawn into and becomes complicit in the oblique attack which masquerades beneath the seemingly innocent words. This illustrates again how closely the narrator and the reader often work together. Even more ambivalence and complexity arise with the arrival of Lestiboudois in search of his forgotten spade. The sexton’s entry onto the scene introduces a strong note of bathos into proceedings, and this bathos nosedives yet further into the sublimely ridiculous as Lestiboudois prosaically reflects, recognising Justin as the latter scales the wall, that at last he has identified the troublesome potato rustler. What the hapless reader faces is the question of whether this sudden and, let us admit it, unexpected, bathos simply illustrates how ‘life goes on’, the lyrical inevitably rubbing shoulders with the dreadfully mundane, or whether the narrator is, in fact, poking fun at his own romantic description of the weeping Justin: as Tanner astutely points out, Justin’s love for Emma, whilst being on the one hand ‘a mute and pathetic reproach to every other kind of love expressed and enacted and permitted in the society around him’ is at the same time ‘not an alternative. It could hardly satisfy Emma in all her inarticulate longings’.

The reader cannot be

suffering is conveyed that renders her tragic. See Tillet, especially pp. 16-27.

30 Tanner, p. 279. Julian Barnes discusses the significance of Justin’s character in a short article in which he writes that Justin is ‘an echo’ of Emma, with his erotic tragedy going as unnoticed in Yonville as Emma’s in the wider world. He is, according to Barnes, ‘that perfectly placed bit of kindling which
sure who, or what, is being laughed at, or who, or what, is being criticised. By not judging, the narrator does not align himself with any character in particular, and, by combining so many different tones (of his own) he manages to distance himself from each in turn. With judgement thus avoided, there is a sense also of discouragement from identifying with one or other character. The wide gap left for speculation prompts recognition of various potentialities of allegiances. Because, for instance, we are drawn into a sense of sympathy for Justin and his unrequited love and then watch as this sympathy is (possibly) derided, the reader comes to realise that Culler may well have a point when he suggests that Flaubert makes fools of his readers when they attempt to interpret. The paradox is, of course, that surely to refuse to attempt to interpret would also render the reader somewhat foolish.

This example ties in with the narrative technique of presenting a multiplicity of perspectives on a single scene. The narrator may choose to show us the views of two characters juxtaposed, or he may place ‘his’ narrative perspective alongside the perspective of a character, or, as above, he may simply show that any scene can be seen from a variety of angles. Each time, what is highlighted is the importance of the subjectivity of any view and the fact that point of view can be characterized only by its ‘instability and indeterminacy’. An interesting passage which demonstrates in tandem the issues of perspective and judgement occurs at the time of the ball at La Vaubyssard:

Au haut bout de la table, seul parmi toutes ces femmes, courbé sur son assiette remplie, et la serviette nouée dans le dos comme un enfant, un vieillard mangeait, laissant tomber de sa bouche des gouttes de sauce. Il avait les yeux éraillés et portait une petite queue enroulée d’un ruban noir. C'était le beau-père du marquis, le vieux duc de Laverdière, l’ancien favori du comte d’Artois, dans le temps des parties de chasse au Vaudreuil, chez le marquis de Conflans, et qui avait été, disait-on, l’amant de la reine Marie-Antoinette entre MM. de Coigny et de Lauzun. Il avait mené une vie bruyante de débauches, pleine de duels, de paris, de femmes enlevées, avait dévoré sa fortune et effrayé toute sa famille. Un domestique, derrière sa chaise, lui nommait tout haut, dans l’oreille, les plats qu’il désignait du doigt en bégayant; et sans cesse les yeux d’Emma revenaient d’eux-mêmes sur ce vieil homme à lèvres pendantes, comme sur quelque chose d’extraordinaire et d’auguste. Il avait vécu à la Cour et couché dans le lit des reines! (68)


Culler, Uses of Uncertainty, pp. 108-09.

Wing, Limits of Narrative, p. 42.
Initially, then, we have a sober, far from indulgent description of the doddery old duke, dribbling his food and stammering his requests. The narrator almost cruelly emphasises the old man’s emasculation; he is sitting alone amongst the women, he wears his serviette knotted around his neck like a child’s bib, he has a long-suffering servant who tends to his needs almost like a nursemaid. The physical image offered of this old man ‘à lèvres pendantes’ dribbling gravy is, for the reader, quite repulsive. Yet Emma is able to look upon the duke as something – or, rather, someone, although the narrator does indeed use the French ‘quelque chose’ which is, in itself, quite telling when we remember Emma’s mania for, and tendency to define herself through, objects – extraordinary and august. The fact that the narrator has already described the duke so dispassionately coupled with the simple ‘comme’ implies that the narrator disagrees with Emma’s assessment. What Emma ‘sees’ represents a taking to extremes of Ginsburg’s claim that ‘what one “sees” is always to some extent shaped by language, by what one (or someone) says’. What Emma ‘sees’ is not at all what the narrator ‘sees’ and what he causes the reader to see. But Emma’s interest does not lie with what is there to be seen now. She is fascinated instead by what the duke once was, with rumours, stories (words, language, things said) about him having been Marie-Antoinette’s lover, albeit ‘entre’ two other beaux. It is the language about the romantic, poetic past which shapes what she sees in the rather more prosaic present, and we see Emma’s perspective, coloured by this, alongside the narrator’s perspective, which focuses insistently only on the ‘now’. In some ways, of course, Emma’s perception might be dismissed as arrant nonsense. In other ways, the suggestion is also that the unprepossessing exterior may hide something rather unexpected.

Certainly Emma’s focus – the duke’s sexual exploits – is banal, some might even say typically so, and the duke is the kind of character who might happily feature on the pages of today’s glossily vacuous celebrity gossip magazines. Yet if we set aside the intrinsic triviality of the nature of the history, we are perhaps surprised to discover the ambiguity of the moment, in as much as what we see is Emma refusing to be seduced by mere visible external details and able instead to use her imagination to see beyond appearances. In some ways there is a sense of table-turning on the narrator and the

33 Ginsburg, p. 102.
reader; there is the hint of an idea that Emma is able, at this point, to ‘see better’ than either of them. Yet the sheer frivolity of the focus simultaneously detracts from this notion and the ultimate implication is the relentless reiteration of this idea of perspective as inherently skewed, whether it be from a dispassionate and supposedly ‘objective’ angle (the narrator’s) or from a rose-tinted and awe-struck one (Emma’s). Different criteria govern each perspective on a scene and, as Bakhtin argued, a single point of view can never be complete in itself, being rather one perception of an event, seen from a certain place, locatable only as opposed to an almost limitless number of other places (or perspectives) from which the same event might also be viewed.^^

The exclamation mark at the end of the final sentence of this passage seems to imply that far from being a sober narrative observation it is a moment of the much discussed Flaubertian ‘style indirect libre’, or free indirect speech, this example coming from an overwhelmed Emma. Free indirect speech is a frustratingly ambiguous narrative technique, and much ink has been spilled just discussing what exactly qualifies for the title. It is generally accepted that it is characterised by a blurring between the voices of the narrator and one or more characters, but it seems important explicitly to add, as Albert Thibaudet does, an additional rider:

Tandis que le style direct est celui où parle le personnage et le style indirect libre celui où parle l’auteur, le style indirect libre, allant chercher plus loin le principe de sympathie nécessaire à l’art, confond dans un même mouvement le personnage, l’auteur et le lecteur.^^

Quite often it works, just as in the above example, in such a way as actually to leave the reader in little doubt as to whose voice is effectively ‘behind’ the words. Although there is no reassuring ‘Emma said’, or ‘Rodolphe thought’ tag, the reader can be quite confident in her interpretations in as much as the moment will tie in with what she already knows of a character, with the tone and manner of thinking or speaking that she has come to expect of him or her. At other times, however, the distinction is much less clear-cut, and it is on these occasions that free indirect speech

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36 For extended discussions on the functions and effect of this technique in Flaubert’s work see, for example, Marguerite Lips, Le Style indirect libre (Paris: Payot, 1926); Vahed K. Ramazani, The Free Indirect Mode: Flaubert and the Poetics of Irony (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1988); Roy Pascal, The Dual Voice: Free Indirect Speech and its Functioning in the Nineteenth Century European Novel (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977).
reveals its full potential for introducing a disturbing degree of confusion and ambiguity.

Let us look, for instance, at the moment when Emma, in her mounting desperation, decides to appeal to Rodolphe in the hope that he will lend her enough money to save her from instant and complete ruin. He refuses, claiming that he doesn’t have at his disposal the 3,000 francs that she demands:

Il ne mentait point. Il les eût eus qu’il les aurait donnés, sans doute, bien qu’il soit généralement désagréable de faire de si belles actions: une demande pécuniaire, de toutes les bourrasques qui tombent sur l’amour, étant la plus froide et la plus déracinante. (429-30)

The opening sentence appears to function as a straightforward narrative sentence, making a simple statement. The implied omniscience of this opening sentence is, however, immediately undermined by the subsequent use, once again, of the insidious little ‘sans doute’ in the next sentence. The narrator is not, apparently, entirely sure what Rodolphe would have done had he been in a position to help Emma. Such narrative uncertainty should not, by now, surprise us. The key focus here, however, is on the claim that fine gestures such as lending money are, on the whole, disagreeable, and qualify in fact as the worst kind of ‘bourrasque’ – literally, ‘whirlwind’, ‘hurricane’ – that can befall a love affair. As a generalisation this is, in any case, quite ambiguous in meaning. Are we to understand that money and love make poor bedfellows, with questions of finance tending to sully the purity of emotion? Or are we to interpret the claim more cynically, as seeming to suggest that generous actions are per se a tiresome inconvenience when all one wants is the egotistical gratification of being loved, or, perhaps worse, the physical gratification of regular sex? The second key issue is whether the words ‘belong’ to the narrator or to Rodolphe. On the one hand, they might indeed be seen as a general rule of thumb which the narrator would have us apply to any love affair. On the other hand, the words might belong to Rodolphe, and thus be a manifestation of the intense cynicism of his character, already shown at other points in the text, and his sceptical views on love and economics. The cynicism is disturbing on either level, and by leaving us

38 R. J. Sherrington argues that once we have accepted that Flaubert’s narrator is not the omniscient figure that we instinctively supposed we would find, then statements of the ‘sans doute’ type ‘emphasize, rather than contradict, the normal technique’ and come to be entirely expected. R. J. Sherrington, *Three Novels by Flaubert: A Study of Techniques* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 88.
unsure as to the actual provenance of the words, what we effectively get is a conflation of narrative and character voices, of narrative and character cynicism. The consequence of this is that whilst at times the narrator may not want to align himself with any particular character, there are equally moments, as here, where he takes no especial steps to distance himself. Thoughts, perspectives and opinions blur.

Sometimes, this blurring may, paradoxically, deepen the reader’s insight and understanding, causing her to see accustomed things in an entirely new light. This is the case with the passage which occurs towards the end of the text, in which the priest, Bournisien, comes to say the last rites over Emma’s racked body:

Ensuite il récita le *Miseratum* et l’*Indulgentiam*, trempa son pouce droit dans l’huile et commença les onctions: d’abord sur les yeux, qui avaient tant convoité toutes les somptuosités terrestres; puis sur les narines, friandes de brises tièdes et de senteurs amoureuses; puis sur la bouche, qui s’était ouverte pour le mensonge, qui avait gémi d’orgueil et crié dans la luxure; puis sur les mains, qui se délectaient dans contacts suaves, et enfin sur la plante des pieds, si rapides autrefois quand elle courait à l’assouvisance de ses désirs, et qui maintenant ne marcheraient plus. (446-47; original italics)

The image we tend to have of the ceremony of the last rites is probably a very solemn, formal one. The image created here seems to emphasise not the solemnity nor even the absolution accorded to the sinner in the moments prior to death, but rather the startlingly sensuous element implicit in the ritual and ceremony with the idea of the oil on the body. This is particularly so as the body we have here is that of an attractive young woman rather than, say, a decrepit old man. The passage seems to capitalize on this latent sensuousness to offer both a highly stylised condemnation of Emma’s desperate sexual overheatedness and also a strange kind of poetic acknowledgement of the wonderful splendour of that body and its self-destructive appetites. Curiously, the sense of a celebration of the sensual and of the passionate, does not result in a travesty of the seriousness of the ritual and the implied sensual element to the ritual itself does not necessarily cheapen it. Fairlie captures the delicate equipoise of the passage:

The richly balanced sentences evoke at the same time the life of an individual and the dignity of an age-long ritual; the last phrases rise to echo in sound and rhythm the urgency and intensity of her life, then fall into nothingness [...]. The whole movement

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suggests not only the pathos but the strange majesty in frail and fallible human existence as it struggles, enjoys, sins, suffers and disappears.40

The priest’s voice and the narrator’s voice combine to at once expose Emma as a miserable and commonplace sinner, but also to elevate her above this status. We might go so far as to agree with Brombert, who claims that in spite of the fact that we recognise how distorted Emma’s values are, in spite of her selfishness and her irresponsibility, in spite of her silliness and the exasperation which she often causes us to feel, her rebellion is not entirely devoid, in the final analysis, of ‘a measure of […] dignity’.41 At the same time, however, this passage, because it is presented in stylised religious language, emphasises the construction at work behind even sensuousness and desirability, the categorising of the uncategorisable. The unexpectedly erotic dimension to the Catholic ritual highlights the inescapability of Emma’s position of female, desired object, and shows how even the most theoretically pure language can promote this.42 Fairlie writes of the passage within the scheme of some kind of dignified tragic tradition, but what she ignores is the unpalatable fact that Flaubert effectively makes voyeurs of us all.

Earlier we saw the way in which the narrator has a tendency to lend his own articulacy to the characters and how this can have a profound effect on the reader’s perspective, particularly of Emma. Sometimes, however, it is Emma herself who becomes the beneficiary of this externally imposed articulacy, and the narrator extends the boundaries of the notion of free indirect speech by developing what are fairly basic thoughts into reasoned arguments, almost, indeed, hijacking the initial premise in order to transcribe the vagueness and woeful lack of eloquence into his own superior level of linguistic coherence. This lending of coherence to thought goes a step further than lending it to vision, and has more profound ramifications. The earlier example did not essentially change what Charles saw, but shaped it in a specific tone, a specific register, for the reader to consume. Here, the interference is greater and entails a

40 Fairlie, p. 70.
41 Brombert, The Novels of Flaubert, p. 87.
42 Gallagher also makes an interesting observation regarding the rather blunt statement that ‘Elle n’existait plus’. He writes: ‘If not for those present at her death, then certainly for Flaubert’s readers, the chapter’s last words mark an absolute and highly un-Catholic finality and are hardly consonant with the consoling aim of the sacrament of Extreme Unction’. See Gallagher, ‘Last (W)Rites’, p. 10. Not only, then, are the words strongly eroticised, their comforting value is debunked and exposed as specious.
degree of elaboration, of change, of extension. On the one hand, of course, it might be argued that the narrator is simply offering himself as mediator between character and reader, enhancing expression on one side and comprehension on the other. On the other hand, this might be considered to be a deeply disingenuous technique, as we shall see by looking at the following passage, the focus of which is Emma’s wish that her child might be a boy:

Elle souhaitait un fils; il serait fort et brun, elle l’appellerait Georges; et cette idée d’avoir pour enfant un mâle était comme la revanche en espoir de toutes ses impuissances passées. Un homme, au moins, est libre; il peut parcourir les passions et les pays, traverser les obstacles, mordre aux bonheurs les plus lointains. Mais une femme est empêchée continuellement. Inerte et flexible à la fois, elle a contre elle les mollesses de la chair avec les dépendances de la loi. Sa volonté, comme le voile de son chapeau retenu par un cordon, palpite à tous les vents; il y a toujours quelque désir qui entraîne, quelque convenance qui retient. (123)

It seems highly unlikely that the Emma that we know could formulate the confused, basic and not very remarkable reflection that ‘It would be nicer to have a boy’ into language which is at once so belligerently feminist and so insistently visual in its dextrous use of simile. It seems rather that Emma’s psychological condition serves simply as the starting point and that the narrator gives spoken shape to, and, what is more insidious, expands the hopes and dissatisfactions which go to make up, this condition. Emma’s unremarkable perception is given an articulacy by the narrative voice which lends it an almost aphoristic or, absurdly, philosophical, authority, particularly in view of the general terms such as ‘un homme’ or ‘une femme’ which are used. The disingenuousness of this technique resides in the fact that Emma is no suffragette, no prototype revolutionary feminist. Her belief is not especially that women per se have a bad time of it, but purely that she personally has had an unfair share of bad fortune. Not only does she believe that heroines in books lead the perfect existence, she believes too that all of her old convent friends must be much happier than she finds herself, having married men far more admirable than Charles:

À la ville, avec le bruit des rues, le bourdonnement des théâtres et les clartés du bal, elles avaient des existences où le cœur se dilate, où les sens s’épanouissent. Mais elle, sa vie était froide comme un grenier dont la lucarne est au nord. (62)

By conflating the voices, then, by lending his own articulacy to Emma, the narrator is disingenuously creating an Emma who seems to have far more serious, far more pertinent, far more searching thoughts than she in fact does. The point made
about the fettered state of women is one with which the reader is more than prepared to sympathize, but the way in which it is made seems to suggest that Emma clearly recognises that her disadvantaged position within the patriarchal system is the root of her problem. This is patently not so.\(^\text{43}\)

Such lending of articulacy to characters may mean that we are quicker to accept a certain perspective – perhaps unfairly. The following passage illustrates this:

La conversation de Charles était plate comme un trottoir de rue, et les idées de tout le monde y défilaient, dans leur costume ordinaire, sans exciter d’émotion, de rire ou de rêverie. Il n’avait jamais été curieux, disait-il, pendant qu’il habitait Rouen, d’aller voir au théâtre les acteurs de Paris. Il ne savait ni nager, ni faire des armes, ni tirer le pistolet, et il ne put, un jour, lui expliquer un terme d’équitation qu’elle avait rencontré dans un roman. (57)

As with the previous example, there is a sense of articulacy, particularly to the opening sentence with its vivid simile, which is not typical of Emma. This leads us to imagine that the comment about Charles is made by the narrator. But as the passage progresses it seems to degenerate into petulant whining and it becomes evident that the perspective is Emma’s. Charles is, after all, a provincial doctor. There is no reason why he should be comfortable with weapons or knowledgeable about the precise terms of horsemanship. What seems like a moment of narrative judgement, then, is actually more probably a moan of Emma’s. Charles’s conversation is no more ‘ordinary’ than her own, but its ordinarily is of a different kind. As Thibaudet points out, ‘Emma, qui ne pense que par idées reçues, a l’idée reçue de l’idée reçue, et c’est pourquoi elle a horreur de celles que Charles étale avec simplicité’.\(^\text{44}\) The strange result, then, is a kind of sanitized, poeticised, free indirect speech, which renders the reader’s task even harder. Free indirect speech alone can cause problems of identification in as much as it functions ‘grâce à l’effacement du je et assure une difficulté d’identification des voix narratives’.\(^\text{45}\) With this added dimension, the reader faces potential confusion on two levels. Firstly, there is the issue of actually

\(^{43}\) Some critics argue that the reason behind such moments as this was Flaubert’s sense of offended aestheticism. Roe, for instance, claims that ‘Flaubert’s pioneering realism is […] inhibited by his own double passion for clarity and beauty. The same inhibition, of course, affects his use of direct speech. When it is allowed to flow, it rings true in a way not found in the hyper-literary dialogues of his earlier fiction; a spin-off, no doubt, from his projected dictionary of clichés. But with the striking exception of Homais – who talks like a book anyway, albeit an encyclopaedia – direct speech is limited, partly to control the unavoidable vulgarity imposed by the choice of character, theme and milieu on a writer of great aesthetic sensibility’. Roe, pp. 46-47.

\(^{44}\) Thibaudet, pp. 116-17.

\(^{45}\) Gengembre, p. 74.
identifying the voice; it may be easy to overlook instances of free indirect speech, and this can create problems of interpretation. Secondly, there is, here, this extra layer of inauthenticity, in that the narrator may substitute his own superior discourse for Emma’s rather mediocre standard of articulacy, but that the fundamental thoughts and expression nevertheless ‘belong’ to Emma. In this way, then, the narrative compounds the complexity of the character. That which is already unstable and fluid is further destabilized. The self as it narrates itself (that is, for instance, Emma and the way that she constructs and projects different versions of herself), already a myriad of possibilities and alternative constructions, comes into competition with the externally narrated selves (that is, for instance, Emma as we see her narrated by the narrator proper), again a shifting series of alternatives.

In many ways, this depiction of an infinitely exploded selfhood might seem to suggest a narrative focus on the personal, the individual and who the individual is, but as we observed in the passage dealing with Emma’s desire for a son, general, universal terms may also be used, terms which render the moment, justifiably or not, relevant to a wider condition than that of the individual situation. In fact, the narrator makes regular use of generalisations. Sometimes this may be with an underlying judgement, as, for instance, when he tells us that Léon, about to bite the proverbial bullet and tell Emma that he is in love with her, is motivated by ‘cette résolution des poltrons que rien n’arrête’ (320). Léon is thus categorised as a coward, and cowards are indicated as possessing a particular kind of resolution, quite peculiar to them.

Alternatively, the generalisation may seek to suggest a certain attitude to the reader and to implicate her within the mood of the text: ‘Il y a toujours après la mort de quelqu’un comme une stupéfaction qui se dégage, tant il est difficile de comprendre cette survenue du néant et de se résigner à y croire.’ (450). Or, ‘un infini de passions peut tenir dans une minute, comme une foule dans un petit espace.’ (393).

Sometimes the narrator takes this idea of implication a step further still, seeking actively to include the reader by employing a strategically placed ‘nous’:

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46 It is also useful to relate this statement back to Emma’s reaction to the news of her mother’s death. The idea of ‘stupéfaction’ reiterates the notion of the individual’s difficulty, if unpractised in the established art, of knowing how to react.
In some ways, these generalisations seem to work in opposition to the question of the identity, if there is one, of the individual. They echo such moments as Léon’s categorising Emma into possible types and seem to function in conjunction with the characters’ own tendencies to work within the parameters of stereotypes rather than the unique. At the same time, such moments of generalisation are telling in terms of the narrative attitude to the construction of the tale, for what they do is to create an inexorable framework of normalcy around it. No matter how bizarre, exceptional or unique a character might seem to the reader, the implication of wider ramifications which might potentially be universalised serves as a counterbalance to the ironic distance which the narrator often maintains. As none of us is exempt from the typical, all of us are implicated. If we take this to its logical conclusion, we are forced to admit, as Lloyd does, that if we read Madame Bovary, we probably do so either through escapist longings, as Emma reads her novels, or because we believe that literature has something to reveal to us, also as Emma does. We may convince ourselves that our reading is more complex and subtle than hers, but that is in itself a commonplace of Romanticism.\(^{48}\)

The generalisations, then, help to show us that no matter how much distance we try to maintain, we are all, to some extent, Emma Bovary.

Whilst the generalisations may, then, bring us closer to the text, the narrator at other times insistently creates distance. He may achieve this by leaving what seems to us to be the ‘main’ story to indulge in lengthy digressions. One example is the seemingly interminable description of the wedding festivities. An entire chapter is devoted to the recounting of the wedding celebrations, but the description seems rather out of kilter with our expectations. The most obvious peculiarity is the fact that we see very little of Charles and Emma, the key couple. Instead we have paraded before our eyes the countless ‘conviés’ along with their various modes of transport and their motley sartorial choices. In a wider sense, with reference to the rest of the

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\(^{47}\) I do not find convincing the argument that such moments mark a return to the ‘nous’ of the opening chapter. This ‘nous’ includes the reader, much as a general, but less personal, ‘on’, whereas the ‘nous’ of the opening chapter refers emphatically to a class of schoolboys from which not only Charles, but also the reader, is excluded, in as much as neither understands the rituals of membership, such as the throwing of the caps upon entering the classroom.

\(^{48}\) Lloyd, p. 176.
text, none of the characters are of the least importance; all appear from nowhere and
disappear whence they came and the detail in which they are described can surely only
be explained as the creation of the Barthesian ‘effet de réel’, detail for detail’s sake, to
create not a sense of the intrinsic significance of these details but to give an
impression of the insistent thereness of reality. We have described to us, for instance,
the picture of ‘vestes de gros drap, qui accompagnaient ordinairement quelque
casquette cerclée de cuivre à sa visière’ and ‘habits-vestes très courts, ayant dans le
dos deux boutons rapprochés comme une paire d’yeux, et dont les pans semblaient
avoir été coupés à même un seul bloc, par la hache du charpentier’ (36). Yet all we
learn about Emma’s wedding dress is the rather indifferent detail that it was ‘trop
longue’ (37). We do not witness the ceremony, but only walk across the fields with
the fiddler. We have no access to what any of the key protagonists is thinking. We
are kept firmly at arm’s length and are shown everything from the outside. What is
more, it is such a detailed outside that the chapter becomes frustrating; the detail leads
only to dead ends (a disgruntled ‘mareyeur’ who feels he received too many bad cuts
of meat for it not to have been on purpose; Charles’s father flirting outrageously with
an unidentified ‘jeune paysanne blonde’) and all we learn about the newly-weds is that
the next morning it is Charles ‘que l’on eût pris pour la vierge de la veille, tandis que
la mariée ne laissait rien découvrir où l’on pût deviner quelque chose’ (41).

Perhaps, however, the frustration, the sense of ‘going nowhere’, is the very
point? The chapter, in its slow, meandering pace and its pedantry, reflects a mind-set
where the standard manner of celebrating a wedding is for everyone to don their smart
clothes, in which they are at best ill at ease and at worst visibly uncomfortable, to tell
bawdy jokes and play tricks on the newly-weds, to gorge themselves senseless on the
food and drink provided and still have the bad grace to feel hard done by. The
relentless detail and the highlighting of the bizarreness of the whole event causes the
reader to perceive that Emma’s expressed desire to be married ‘à minuit, aux
flambeaux’ (34), a notion met with blank incomprehension by her father, is no more
ridiculous or absurd than the palaver to which she is subjected and which somehow
qualifies as ‘normal’. Moreover, by making Charles and Emma so conspicuously
absent from ‘their’ day, the reader gets a strong impression of enforced passivity, of a
lack of say in proceedings, of things being done the way they have always been done
because they have always been done in this way. The pedantic, detailed narrative construction simply reflects the pedantic, detailed construction of the society that is taken for granted as ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ by those who constitute and perpetuate it. The irrelevance and tangentiality reflect the irrelevance and tangentiality of convention to anything other than itself. In addition, the clever narrative construction demonstrates the way that an event has no ‘centre’: it can be narrated with an infinity of different centres, each rendering the story from a new angle, giving emphasis to a different element and to different individuals.

What we see in Madame Bovary, then, is varying levels of construction and varying degrees of self-awareness within these different levels. At the most fundamental level, the text shows us a picture of characters caught in a web of received ideas, of dreams, desires and established values and shows us how they construct themselves and those around them, more often than not in accordance with the dictates – consciously acknowledged or not – of this web. This may often be in pursuit of something that the characters themselves – especially Emma and the early versions of Léon – might vaguely term authentic, but the reader has a clear sense that any ideas of authenticity are merely borrowed ones, taken from literature and hazy impressions of other levels of society gained, for instance, at the ball at La Vaubyessard. The text shows us also how the characters are in turn constructed by others and prevailing ideas. Although it is perhaps less urgent in its depiction of society and the underlying faults of society and its rigid conventions than both Effi Briest and Jude the Obscure, the idea of collective values is nonetheless evident; Léon’s construction of Emma, for example, according to literary categories such as ‘le vague elle’ points to the strong influence exerted by ideas belonging to the public domain and consciousness.

The theme of construction, then, is one that helps to drive the plot and whilst Richard Cross argues that ‘one of the great services Flaubert performed for fiction was to liberate it from what E. M. Forster has characterized as “tyranny by the plot”’, he freely admits that the novel is far from plotless. It maintains a distinct narrative line, and part of the dynamic of this line is the construction of self and other which is in

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evidence and which often determines, partly if not wholly, the course which events subsequently take. Alongside this depiction of the processes of construction at the levels of characterization and plot there is also the issue of the constructing role played by the narrator. Every tale needs a teller, and, as observed earlier, the teller within the nineteenth-century novel is generally assumed to enjoy a high degree of authority and trustworthiness. The *nouveau roman* challenged established ideas of narrative, seeking to draw the reader’s attention to the processes of narrating and reading as such, this generally being achieved by the presence of a narrator who is either explicitly unreliable, or reflects insistently and overtly on his status as narrator. *Madame Bovary* is by no means a *nouveau roman*, but nor does it offer the reader total stability and authority in terms of the narrating voice. What we find instead is a degree of shifting and slippage within the narrative; the narrator shifts between knowing and not-knowing, judging and not-judging, certainty and uncertainty, first person and third person mode. He thereby, albeit in a less insistently flagged way than in the *nouveau roman*, implicates himself as part of that debate of construction and draws the reader’s attention to the inherent issue of narration. This in turn highlights the difficulties involved in the idea of the narrator and/or the reader ever genuinely seeing and knowing ‘better’ than the characters and in deciding whether there can ever be a level of authenticity which either precedes or transcends construction. The narrative itself seems to suggest instead that there is no privileged moment. Each moment is a variation on a theme. In our endeavours to unscramble this, it is inevitable that we should turn to the questions of generic and stylistic purpose. The novel works, as we have seen, within many of the traditions of the nineteenth-century realist novel, but also questions and subverts some of them. Perhaps if we can examine beyond this and see what ‘kind’ of text we have within this skewed frame of the realist novel then we can make more sense of the constructions and assess them from ‘outside’. If, for instance, we could see the text as a philosophical novel or a Bildungsroman, then we could analyse the constructions within the text from our understanding of the category.\(^{50}\) The ‘kind’ of text that we might identify *Madame

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\(^{50}\) The value of this becomes clear if one thinks of texts whose sense change drastically according to how one ‘reads’ them. How different, for instance, is *Gulliver’s Travels* if we do not read it as a satire on contemporary England. How altered are our perceptions on *Northanger Abbey* if we do not view it as Austen’s mocking of the Gothic novel.
*Bovary* as is particularly interesting in as much as it is, in some ways, a novel about reading. We have witnessed how Emma derives many of her ideas from her reading of novels and her rather idiosyncratic appropriation of the things she finds in the books. She indulges in what John Williams calls a ‘flawed reading process’, whereby she is incapable of distancing herself from the subject matter and reading dispassionately. Not only this, she reads in an idiosyncratically selective way, discarding all that can have no relevance to herself and appropriating every moment which she can apply (or would like to have applied) to her own existence and self. It is, on the other hand, a mistake to see the flaw of Emma’s reading primarily in the kind of literature that she consumes. Her reading is by no means restricted to trashy pot-boilers. To be sure, in the convent she reads highly sentimental keepsake romances, and she has a phase during which she devotes herself to the ghoulish thrills of Gothic novels, but other novelists that are mentioned include the far more respectable figures of Walter Scott, Eugène Sue and George Sand. Whilst Charles’s mother condemns Emma’s reading per se, the narrator seems to be more at pains to express that it is the way in which Emma reads that is at fault. Thus, reading and the way in which we read is thematized as a central point, leaving us no choice but to interrogate not only the way we as readers read, but also the way in which we read another reader reading. In this sense, the novel seems almost to operate on the level of a roman à thèse. It could be taken to illustrate the trouble which can befall a young woman if she immerses herself too much in literature without knowing how to ‘prendre conscience, lucidement, sans illusions, de la réalité profonde de la vie’.

Yet it immediately becomes clear that such a theme cannot work successfully for a roman à thèse, unless it be on a highly ironic level, for the novel would otherwise thereby be in danger - in the spirit of the paradox of the Cretan liar - of inculpating and condemning itself and would have to admit that it belongs to the enterprise of insidious constructing which it depicts and should be reduced to ashes forthwith. In addition, it would need to offer an attractive alternative, and Emma’s surroundings are

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52 Douchin, p. 59.
so far from that that it is small effort for the reader to sympathize with her
dissatisfaction.53

As suggested above, Madame Bovary is a text which engages with society and
its conventions in ways that distinguish it from Jude the Obscure and Effi Briest. In
these two texts there are characters who consciously interrogate the status quo and
wonder if there might not be another way. Neither Emma nor any other character
does this in Flaubert’s text, and criticism tends to come more subtly from the narrator,
for instance in his ironic handling of the character of Homais, the quasi-scientist, the
bourgeois who is on the rise and who achieves, at the end of the novel, his goal of
being presented with the prestigious Croix d’honneur. Specific social dictates and
conventions are not as overtly challenged by the characters in Madame Bovary as they
are in the other two texts and there is not quite the strong subtextual assertion that the
mechanisms of society are at fault that we find in Fontane’s and Hardy’s texts. One
set of mechanisms that the text does fully engage with, however, are those of fate, and
as we shall see, this aspect has echoes in both Jude and Effi. Emma repeatedly blames
fate for her situation, continually lamenting variations on the theme of, ‘Oh! Si le ciel
l’avait voulu!’ The fact that it is Emma giving voice to such laments would, of
course, initially cause us to dismiss them, but the situation is ultimately much more
complex. Towards the end of the novel, Charles goes to the market at Argueil to sell
his horse in order to raise much needed funds. Whilst he is there, he encounters
Rodolphe, and this meeting is, of course, after he has discovered the truth about
Emma’s adultery. They both turn pale on meeting, but Rodolphe has the presence of
mind – or sheer audacity – to offer Charles a drink. Charles, studying Rodolphe, feels
he has something of Emma before him and ‘aurait voulu être cet homme’ (480).

Eventually, Charles speaks:

‘Je ne vous en veux pas,’ dit-il.
Rodolphe était resté muet. Et Charles, la tête dans ses deux mains, reprit d’une voix
étincelante et avec l’accent resserré des douleurs infinies:
‘Non, je ne vous en veux plus!’
Il ajouta même un grand mot, le seul qu’il ait jamais dit:
‘C’est la faute de la fatalité!’

53 Interestingly, LaCapra suggests that in the hands of the defence at the trial of Madame Bovary, the
text is forced to become ‘a provincial Bildungsroman or a roman à thèse leading on all levels to a
resounding reaffirmation of existing morality and society’. Dominick LaCapra, Madame Bovary on
Rodolphe, qui avait conduit cette fatalité, le trouva bien débonnaire pour un homme dans sa situation, comique même, et un peu vil. (480)

How are we to interpret this statement about fate? On the most obvious level, it might be suggested that the moment is a deflation of the idea of fate; Charles pronounces something which we might, with the narrator's connivance, be tempted to interpret as a 'grand mot' and then this is instantly debunked by the assertion that Rodolphe was responsible for guiding fate, that it thus does not exist at all. But this seems a rather crude mechanism. It requires us to take at face value this moment of Flaubert's narrator making a categorical statement (about the 'grand mot') only then instantly to contradict it, in stating that Rodolphe was acting as 'Fate's' puppeteer. Perhaps instead, we should acknowledge the possible ambiguity of the narrative moment and the ambiguity that this in turn accords the notion of fate. For we can put the case just as convincingly for Rodolphe not having guided fate as for him indeed having had a hand in it. His servant wishing to be bled, Emma's reading, Charles encouraging Emma to go riding with Rodolphe, the catastrophic operation on Hippolyte's foot; none of these things depend at all on Rodolphe. This assertion, then, 'Rodolphe, qui avait conduit cette fatalité', may be nothing else than an arrogant assessment of the situation from Rodolphe's own viewpoint, and this would fit in with what we have learned about his character over the course of the text. With this interpretation, then, we must take on board the implication that we are then required to take more seriously the claim of Charles's 'grand mot', for despite the change that comes over him in the last few pages of the text he does not gain especially in self-awareness and it would be stretching a point to suggest that this is his evaluation of his words, sitting in counterpoint to Rodolphe's refutation of the claims of fate. The narrator, then, seems to be asserting the existence of something that we might call Fate, is siding with Emma and refusing to lay the blame explicitly at the door of any human agent. Taking the fate tragedy line, we might argue that there is an inexorable force to the way in which Emma's tale develops and reiterate Gothot-Mersch's point, quoted earlier; Emma does not actively choose but finds herself chosen. Does Fate engineer the conspiracy of circumstances which lead to Rodolphe and Emma meeting? Does Fate lead Léon to attend the opera in Rouen on the same night as Emma and Charles, despite the fact that he has already seen a performance? Yet at the same time, everything is eminently explicable on a very prosaic level and a chain
of human causality - combined with the degree of coincidence permitted by nothing more mysterious than the laws of probability - is easy to trace. There is a clear indication that ‘Fate’ often receives more than a helping hand from unexpected but wholly earthly quarters; we should not forget that it is Charles who encourages Emma to go riding with Rodolphe nor that it is Charles who decides that Emma should stay behind in Rouen to attend the opera again, accompanied by Léon. If anyone could be said to have ‘conduit cette fatalité’, it is none other than the wronged husband, unknowingly complicit in his own cuckolding.

What gradually becomes clear, then, is that the narrative includes or makes allusions to various generic styles, but refuses to remain anchored within a single one, choosing instead to select and use certain elements and reject and subvert certain other elements, just as it does regarding our expectations of the nineteenth-century realist novel as such. Just as the characters within the story itself do, the narrative seems to construct itself according to a combination of established criteria and socio-psychological whim and, like the characters, permits us to identify the constructing and constructedness at work but prevents us from pinpointing some kind of unambiguous meta-awareness, an Archimedean point which transcends the idea of construction.
CHAPTER 3: THEODOR FONTANE’S EFFI BRIEST: CHARACTERS

German nineteenth-century Realism is generally considered to be the poor relation to that of France or England. Furst and Skrine, for instance, write that ‘[N]ineteenth-century German Realism [...] was a milk-and-water concoction compared to the more potent brews in France and England’. Whilst German prose literature may lack the insistent ‘thusness’ of, say, a Balzac or a Dickens, there are nonetheless rich pickings to be had in terms of characters, their psychology and how they function, and Fontane is one author who is (albeit often grudgingly) recognised to be worthy of comparison with his Gallic or British counterparts. In Fontane’s Effi Briest, just as in Madame Bovary and Jude the Obscure, we frequently see evidence of characters constructing themselves, of them constructing others, of society, convention, tradition and language all playing crucial roles in character formation, be it with or without the individual’s consent or even knowledge. The motivations behind the construction of the self and the construction of the other are many and varied, and we see both similarities with and differences from the characters presented in our other two texts. Sometimes there may be a link with a sense of guilt or a feeling of personal inadequacy. At other times there may be a sense of duty either to others or to pre-established external standards and ideals. There may also be a need to create an Other which corresponds to the impression – be this erroneous or accurate – which the individual has of the self. Effi Briest highlights the complexity of the almost organic process of construction and, like Madame Bovary, throws open the question of authenticity and quite what it constitutes, and where (if anywhere) it may reside.

When we speak of the authenticity of a thing, - of a painting, for example, - it is a relatively easy matter to explain what we mean. Is that thing exactly what it is

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1 Furst and Skrine, Naturalism, p. 39. For an in-depth interrogation of the notion of the ‘deutsche Sonderwege’ see Martin Swales, Epochenbuch Realismus: Romane und Erzählungen (Berlin: Schmidt, 1997).

purporting to be, or is it something masquerading as that which it is not? The authenticity of a person, however, is an altogether more complicated matter. We witness in Madame Bovary how difficult it is to assess whether a ‘genuine’, ‘authentic’ self is ever identifiable, or whether the notion is simply a reflex of wishful thinking on the part of the reader. As readers we are often eager to make clear distinctions and to interpret characters as comprehensible, whole entities. When we read Effi Briest, this may translate into a desire to see Innstetten’s quandary regarding the duel as that of a man caught between what he wants to do (private, authentic self) and what he feels society is demanding of him (public, inauthentic mask to the self). As suggested earlier, however, it quickly becomes apparent, after analysing the schemes of construction, that our characters are, once again, much less easy to deconstruct and pigeonhole than we would like to imagine. They do not exist on a simple level of opposition, of private- versus public self, of the authentic versus the inauthentic, but present instead a multiple layering of constructed selves.

In order to try to understand the complexity of the characters, the focus here will be directed at the two key protagonists, Effi and Innstetten, in a bid to discover whether or not we are able to pinpoint an authentic self, a kind of primordial being which transcends – or could transcend, were it permitted – the constraints of construction by the self and by the other. Effi is often regarded by critics as an inherently passive character. Stern, for instance, describes her as ‘merely a victim’, an example of that ‘morality of inertia’ which consists in ‘not making moral decisions’. To a certain extent, the notions of passivity and inertia are true; the decisions regarding her marriage are taken by her parents and Effi is consulted in only the most desultory and token manner. Once she is married, all of the decisions are taken by her husband. Effi – as would, of course, have been typical of this patriarchal era – has no say over where and how she will live. Even with the adulterous liaison we get the

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3 J. P. Stern, Re-Interpretations: Seven Studies in Nineteenth-Century German Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), pp. 133-34. A salient exception to this general acceptance of passivity, however, is Stanley Radcliffe. He argues that critics have generally ‘understressed the element of social ambition’ evident in Effi’s character. Whilst this only identifies positive activity on a specific, limited level, it nonetheless cautions us against indulgently regarding Effi as wholly passive ‘by nature’. See Stanley Radcliffe, Fontane: Effi Briest (London: Grant & Cutler, 1986), p. 18.

4 This is, of course, quite typical of the period. As Antje Harnisch so brusquely points out, daughters were little more than ‘Objekte auf dem Frauenmarkt’, traded between father and husband. Antje Harnisch, Keller, Raabe, Fontane: Geschlecht, Sexualität und Familie im bürgerlichen Realismus (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1994), p. 20.
impression that this is something that Effi ‘let happen’. She does not actively seek an
entanglement with Crampas, but nor does she actively seek to avoid it. The narrator
himself implies that the sequence of events concerning Crampas can, to a great extent,
be attributed to Effi’s inertia. He tells us that, quite simply, ‘...die Kugel war im
Rollen, und was an einem Tage geschah, machte das Tun des andern zur
Notwendigkeit.’⁵ A. R. Robinson points out that despite being aware of the danger
surrounding her, despite theoretically having the potential to influence the course of
events, Effi ‘lacks the strength of will necessary to free herself. So she drifts on
towards catastrophe’.⁶ Whilst accepting that passivity is one of Effi’s traits, this
should not blind us to the fact that Effi is capable of moulding her self to fit a variety
of different roles. We should not overestimate her naivety, or try to exaggerate her
child-like qualities. Alan Bance observes that Effi is the kind of girlish character who
simply likes to be liked. He suggests that Effi is implicated in the norms and values
upheld by society only in as much as that society around her nourishes her, arguing
that her conformism ‘does not follow upon a discriminatory choice of codes of
behaviour, but is a naïve inclination towards the source of affection and approval’.⁷
Similarly, Richard Brinkmann sees Effi as a ‘bezaubernde und im Grunde der Seele
unschuldige junge Frau’.⁸ Susan Wansink goes a step further, characterising Effi as
‘natural and unconventional’.⁹ Bance implies, then, that Effi conforms only out of a
childlike and forgivable desire to be loved, without ever knowing that she is
‘conforming’; for Brinkmann she is beyond culpability; for Wansink Effi is, anyway,
somehow ‘beyond society’, a perfectly natural, instinctive figure, presumably in stark
contrast to the deeply socialised, rigidly formal ‘Prinzipienreiter’, Geert von
Innstetten, a man who behaves according to the dictates of convention rather than
those of emotion. The mere fact of Effi’s youth does indeed seem to encourage us to

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⁵ Theodor Fontane, Werke, Schriften und Briefe, ed. by Walter Keitel and Helmuth Nürnberger, 4 parts,
and volume are given as page numbers in parentheses after quotations in the main body of the text.
⁶ A. R. Robinson, Theodor Fontane: An Introduction to the Man and his Work (Cardiff: University of
71.
12-13.
⁹ Susan Wansink, Female Victims and Oppressors in Novels by Theodor Fontane and François
give her the benefit of the doubt, but it seems important also to resist the seductive quality of those descriptions which portray Effi as a ‘Naturkind’ and a ‘Tochter der Luft’. Both because of and in spite of her youth Effi is, in fact, as deeply socialized as any other character. She is ‘natural’ only in so far as her society wishes to see her so. She is by no means unconventional and she never oversteps the unspoken limits which she knows, be it consciously or unconsciously, are prescribed. In view of this, it seems we must reject claims that Effi personifies ‘nature at its best’. Even her gymnastic exercises follow a strict pattern, a prescribed ‘Kursus’ (8), albeit they are performed with one eye on comic exaggeration. Furthermore, Effi’s self-constructing impulses are just as highly developed as Innstetten’s, although they may function in different ways. It is interesting to note that Effi’s powers of construction are sometimes invoked, quite paradoxically, in order to maintain her ostensibly static state of passivity. At other times, of course, she finds herself painted into a corner where self-construction becomes necessary for survival. Ironically, such a position as this may be prompted as a result of the consequences to which the initial passivity - the attitude to Crampas’s advances is the obvious example – has contributed. There are few, if any, points, however, at which Effi seems totally unconscious of what she is doing.

Effi has an unmistakable penchant for fairytales, myths, and legends, and there is a recurring, if understated, fairytale motif running through the text: when Innstetten arrives early for that pivotal visit to Hohen-Cremmen, Effi, called in from the garden where she has been playing with her friends, declares to her mother, ‘du weißt, ich kann auch rasch sein, und in fünf Minuten ist Aschenputtel in eine Prinzessin verwandelt’ (17); Briest describes the Berlin trip prior to the wedding as a journey undertaken ‘um […] den ‘Trousseau’ für Prinzessin Effi zusammenzukaufen’ (22; my italics); Effi is captivated by the performance of ‘Aschenbrödel’ at the theatre in Berlin, in which she ‘hätte […] wirklich selber mitspielen mögen’ (27); the Kessin house causes Effi to remember a picture book that she once owned, containing illustrations of an Indian or a Persian prince surrounded by all kinds of strange and exotic objects. Were Innstetten to cross his legs, she claims, he, with all the curios

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with which his own house is stuffed, would be just like the prince (56); when asking Annie about school and her favourite subjects, Effi says of herself, ‘Mythologie war immer mein bestes.’ (273). Radcliffe emphasises the significance of this fairytale motif, suggesting that Effi ‘longs for her own future to correspond to the Märchen tradition’.\(^{11}\) Certainly Effi, like Emma Bovary, has a great capacity for imagining scenarios and then stepping outside of the frame in order to observe the effect of the carefully fabricated picture of which she imagines herself to be the radiant centre.\(^{12}\) When, for instance, Luise reacts unenthusiastically to Effi’s request for a Japanese bedspread featuring golden birds on a black background and for ‘eine Ampel für unser Schlafzimmer, mit rotem Schein’ (30), she is disappointed, sighing that ‘ich hatte es mir so schön und poetisch gedacht, alles in einem roten Schimmer zu sehen’ (30).

There is clearly slightly more to this, however, than simply the fairytale princess idea. It also seems to suggest an element of fascination with erotic fantasy in Effi – the focus for the required accoutrements is, after all, the bedroom, the soft red light a key feature – and the precision of the items specified, echoing Emma Bovary’s exactness, implies a demanding nature, someone who has a clear idea of what she wants rather than someone with vague, unattainable, fairytale-like, romantic dreams. To be sure, she does not argue with her mother’s rejection of her request, does not take issue with – or even react to – Luise’s almost brutal insinuation that the reality of sex in married life is something which, all things considered, is probably much better with the lights off: ‘Du bist ein Kind. Schön und poetisch. Das sind so Vorstellungen. Die Wirklichkeit ist anders, und oft ist es gut, daß es statt Licht und Schimmer ein Dunkel gibt.’ (30-31). Yet the mere fact that Effi has expressed herself thus suggests to us the idea of a character influenced by pictures she has seen, by books she has read, and one with an understandable interest in the taboo area of conjugal relations. A character, in

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\(^{11}\) Radcliffe, *Effi Briest*, p. 16. Jhy-Wey Shieh explores the fairytale theme in depth and observes that Effi can be seen as a Cinderella in reverse; where Cinderella has to overcome countless obstacles and hardships and finally marries the prince, Effi makes a socially advantageous marriage and then the problems begin. Jhy-Wey Shieh, *Liebe, Ehe, Hausstand: Die sprachliche und bildliche Darstellung des ‘Frauenzimmers im Herrenhaus’ in Fontanes Gesellschaftsroman *Effi Briest*” (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1987), p. 46.

\(^{12}\) Such an ability assumes a bitter irony if we accept Pascal’s claim that *Effi Briest* can be viewed as a ‘picture of good, harmless people who fall into misfortune without understanding why, precisely because they cannot view their situation from outside’, because they cannot see that what is at issue is not the failings of individuals, but the failings of a class living by obsolete standards, withered, in which
short, very far from the happy, childlike, innocent figure railroaded prematurely into an unsuitable marriage with which so many critics would like to present us.

For all the precision of Effi’s imagined self-projection, however, much like Emma Bovary she lacks the drive and the courage required to attempt to realise the fantasies. Moreover, her acceptance too of her mother’s opinion as final is characteristic, for she often tries to adopt and project the kind of self that she feels is expected by others, adapting herself, as she does here, to the preferred response when she meets with resistance. She is not deterred if the self that it is necessary to project does not correspond with how she feels. Sometimes, this may simply be a matter of not making waves, as, for instance, on the occasion on which Geert makes his enthusiastic suggestion of passing the long winter nights by ‘reliving’ the honeymoon journey through Italy. Effi, for whom a ‘ganz gewöhnlicher Plauderabend’ without the particular emphasis on the ‘Italian boot’ would be much more welcome, responds ‘mit einer gewissen Gezwungenheit’ (143). Geert does not notice her forced tone and fails to realise that his enthusiasm is not wholeheartedly shared. The implication is that Effi sees her preference as inferior, less valid, presumably at least in part because it does not involve the level of high culture which Geert envisages. She thus suppresses her preference in order to fall in with Innstetten’s vision. This demonstrates an instance of Effi yielding to an individual that she regards as superior to herself. She actively moulds the self in order to remain in a passively accepting mode. She does not want to assert the self that she identifies here. The question raised, then, is whether Effi is here denying her ‘true’, ‘real’, ‘authentic’ self. On one level, yes of course she is. On another level, it is tempting to dismiss this in as much as the reader can perhaps easily sympathise with Effi’s wariness with regard to admitting to a preference to gossip over intellectually engaged discussion. This prompts the consideration of the underlying motivation for Effi’s behaviour. Perhaps there is a desire, however heavy-hearted, to ‘improve’ herself, to learn more? Should this be the case then we cannot invoke the idea of the suppression of the authentic self. There is nothing wrong with wanting to learn, nor is there anything inherently wrong in wanting to adapt elements of the self the better to accord with a loved one.

This, surely, is just compromise, a key element of harmonious existence, and one that Fontane himself recognised as essential, once writing to his daughter that he was not an advocate of rigidly fixed principles, but that ‘ich bin nun mal für Frieden und Compromisse’. Yet there is also a sense of the fear of inadequacy, a sense that Effi does not want to ‘show herself up’. This impression grows stronger at other points in the text, highlighting that the practice of any kind of self-suppression may be much more insidious than is suggested by the gloss of harmlessness that we are able to invoke here. It then becomes manifest that it is impossible to locate a magic dividing line.

An obvious example is the first evening that Effi has to spend without Innstetten in the Kessin house. The amount of time that Effi has to fill before retiring to bed hangs heavily on her hands and she finds it difficult to keep herself fruitfully occupied. One of the key reasons for her restlessness is the exaggerated fear of the ghostly Chinaman that she has built up in her mind. She voices some of her anxieties to Johanna. In response, Johanna suggests that perhaps she could pass the night in her mistress’s room, sleeping on a corner of the sofa. Effi’s reaction shows evidence of deep emotional distress and illustrates the extent to which she is battling to control and to conceal her feelings:

‘Ja, das ginge vielleicht. Aber nein, es geht auch nicht. Der Herr darf nicht wissen, daß ich mich ängstige, das liebt er nicht. Er will immer, daß ich tapfer und entschlossen bin, so wie er. Und das kann ich nicht; ich war immer etwas anfällig... Aber freilich, ich sehe wohl ein, ich muß mich bezwingen und ihm in solchen Stücke und überhaupt zu Willen sein.’ (74)

This is not a case of wanting to improve the self culturally or intellectually. This is shame and a sense of inadequacy within a wholly different realm. Nancy Kaiser writes that *Effi Briest* exposes ‘the disjunction of individual and social role, the incomplete integration of character and encompassing society’, which in turn ‘exposes the constructed and constructing nature of social reality’. This example takes this disjunction a step further in as much as the role of wife, even within the intimate, domestic sphere, on a one-to-one basis with the partner, is revealed to be as heavily structured and coded as any other social role. Effi is desperate to be the kind of

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person, on an emotional, feeling, level, that she believes Innstetten would expect of a
wife, and this, for her, implies being similar to him, being 'tapfer und entschlossen'.
She is profoundly conscious that she cannot actually be these things, but she nonetheless desires to appear as though she genuinely were them. She has to pretend
that her fears and anxieties simply do not exist. Ingrid Mittenzwei is right when she
observes that 'Effi zeigt von Anfang an, daß sie sich auskennt in dem, was “man”
sagt', but we might also add to this that Effi also demonstrates from the very
beginning that she understands 'wie “man” handelt', even if it is in stark opposition to
how one feels. We can concede, of course, that bravery and decisiveness might be
advocated as two very positive virtues, both worth aspiring to. At this level is could
be argued that Effi’s attempt to present a self that she fundamentally is not is no worse
than the previous example. But the point must also be made that the result of Effi’s
adamance is that she denies her own rather more faint-hearted instincts without
coming anywhere near achieving the envisaged ideal. Most disturbing is the
indication that she sees nothing wrong or unjust in the notion that she must repress her
self as she senses it to be and as she freely admits it to Johanna to be. Believing that
she owes Innstetten obedience on every level, she is prepared to superimpose the ideal
self onto the real self, and hope that her husband does not notice the deception. This
dimension of the denial of the self is much more problematic than the previous
element because here we are dealing with fears and anxieties, emotional responses
and intuitive reactions. No matter how hard Effi tries to adopt a brave face, her fear
will not simply disappear, for she is unable to rationalise its underlying cause. In
addition, since she does not find herself in a position to discuss the fear properly (and
thus see it in a tempered light) with Innstetten, it is likely to escalate. Even after the
unsettling experience that Effi explains to herself in her excitement as a manifestation
of the Chinaman, but which remains tantalizingly unexplained to the reader, she will

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15 Ingrid Mittenzwei, Die Sprache als Thema: Untersuchungen zu Fontanes Gesellschaftsromanen
16 Critics have responded in varied ways to the matter of the ‘Spuk’. In a now much-quoted dismissal,
Stern refers to it as ‘a piece of bric-à-brac left over by poetic realism’. See Stern, Re-Interpretations, p.
319. Helen Chambers, however, is altogether more enthusiastic. She writes: ‘In Effi Briest the
supernatural motif of the Chinaman is so fully integrated into the work as to form an element which
serves to illuminate and develop the central themes of the work’. She makes a persuasive case to
explain what the Spukgeschichte symbolises and how it fits into – and, indeed, functions as an
indispensable element of – the novelistic framework. See Helen Elizabeth Chambers, Supernatural and
not hear of the idea of Geert seeing how agitated she is. She rejects out of hand Johanna’s suggestion that Innstetten be sent for: ‘Er würde mich vielleicht auslachen, und das könnt ich ihm nie verzeihen.’ (76). The shaky foundations of the relationship are distressingly apparent, for this statement exhibits a mistrust of Geert, an uncertainty as to how he would react, and a preference for not revealing herself for fear of what might happen. Wansink suggests that ‘Effi is distanced from herself, in the sense that she lacks self-definition. A person who knows him/herself does not depend upon others for self-worth’.\(^{17}\) It seems, rather, at least from the evidence in this example, that it is not so much self-knowledge that Effi lacks, but self-worth perse. She is very aware of herself,\(^{18}\) very conscious of how she would react should Geert laugh at her. The ‘nie’ may of course have only rhetorical force, but the point still holds that the distance to which Wansink refers might be more accurately attributed to the gap between that which Effi senses herself to be and that which she would like herself to be.

The implication of this entire episode is that whilst Effi is prepared to reveal the depths of her fears to Johanna, a servant who, by the natural order of things, is likely to feel more loyalty towards the original master than towards a newly settled mistress, and whom some critics claim is even more the inhuman Prussian\(^ {19}\) than Innstetten himself, she hides herself from Geert. She goes so far as to communicate to Johanna how intimidated she feels by her husband, and she disguises her fears from the person who should surely be her most intimate and trusted confidant. The melancholic aspect of this situation is further heightened by the fact that she even enlists the servant’s help in her deception, effectively asking her to keep her behaviour a secret from

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\(^{17}\) Wansink, p. 37


Geert. As already suggested, the scene implies that Effi feels her instinctive reactions to be somehow inappropriate or inadequate. But this in itself is only half the story. Effi’s openness with Johanna is telling. It indicates that she feels no inherent sense of shame regarding her anxieties. Her fear is not even a general one of Innstetten knowing that she is frightened by the house and its Spukgeschichte. Her fear is, rather, a specific one of ridicule at Geert’s hands. Her readiness to share her anxiety with Johanna illustrates that on one level she herself views her reactions as justifiable and comprehensible. This suggests that if we choose to see the anxious, nervous, fearful self here as Effi’s ‘real’ self, more real, at least, than any other projected self at this moment, then the individual erects a hierarchy of others to whom she can partially or wholly reveal herself. That is, there are gradations according to which each Other may be granted more or less access to the self. Some critics have interpreted behaviour such as this as a fear of authenticity. Claudia Liebrand, for instance, writes that ‘unter dem Deckmantel kritischer Autoreferenz, hinter der Bereitschaft zu Selbstironie und Selbstpersiflage kann sich die Furcht vor selbstbestimmten Handeln, vor aktiver Realitätsgestaltung verbergen’. There is, in Effi’s behaviour, a distinct element of self-irony in as much as some element within her recognises her fears as risible from a male (and, more specifically, Geert’s) perspective. At the same time, she refuses to take this self-ironizing stance fully on board and to assess its ramifications, and it is this refusal, coupled with the fear of looking ridiculous in front of Innstetten, that means that Effi limits herself to a sphere of pretence and inaction.

This moment with Johanna is by no means the only time that we see Effi in non-dissembling mode. An apt parallel is the conversation with Maria Trippelli in which Effi wonderingly admires that which she interprets as the singer’s bravery at singing the frightening songs:

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20 Which, of course, Johanna does not do. She reports the events of the previous evening back to Innstetten, referring to the Chinaman as ‘der von oben’ (233).

21 Claudia Liebrand, Das Ich und die Andern: Fontanes Figuren und ihre Selbstbilder (Freiburg: Rombach, 1990), p. 311.

22 It is interesting to note that some critics see Maria Trippelli as a positive, emancipated role model, living proof to Effi that there is ‘another way’. Hanni Mittelmann, for instance, calls her ‘die Verkörperung von Emanzipationsmöglichkeiten für die Frau’. Hanni Mittelmann, Die Utopie des weiblichen Glücks in den Romanen Theodor Fontanes (Bern: Lang, 1980), p. 52. Innstetten himself, of course, simply finds Maria slightly ridiculous.
‘Aber eines, wenn Sie mir verzeihen, bewundere ich fast noch mehr, das ist die Ruhe, womit Sie diese Sachen vorzutragen wissen. Ich bin so leicht Eindrücken hingegeben, und wenn ich die kleinste Gespenstergeschichte höre, so zittere ich und kann mich kaum wieder zurechtfinden. Und Sie tragen das so mächtig und erschütternd vor und sind selbst ganz heiter und guter Dinge.’ (93)

She makes no attempt to put on a brave face and conceal her susceptibility to ideas of the supernatural. Instead, she freely and honestly admits her fearfulness and credulity. The pattern emerging seems to be that Effi is prepared to be more honest with those she sees either as her inferiors or her equals than with those to whom she herself feels inferior. This illustrates an important degree of falsity, in that she constructs herself according to her audience, and a degree of insecurity, in that she finds such pretence necessary. It also, however, reveals Effi to be deeply human; it is often much easier to confide problems, fears or troubles to someone whom we do not know well or to someone whose feelings towards and opinion of us are a matter of relative indifference, than to a close friend or family member whose esteem we value and whose approval we feel we need.

What we see at this stage, then, is an already complicated layering of selfhood. There does at this point seem still to be a residual innocence to the self-construction in as much as Effi’s agenda appears to be one motivated by concerns of wanting to be ‘worthy’ of Geert, of wanting to gain and keep his love and respect and dreading to attract his disapprobation or, more mortifying still, his ridicule. As the novel progresses, however, the motivations shift radically and the ways in which the self is constructed also undergo a significant change. We move into the far less palatable and justifiable realms of guilt and bad conscience. As she becomes embroiled in the unhappy affair with Crampas, projecting a self far removed from the reality becomes for Effi a matter of absolute necessity in terms of – social – survival. As the narrator so succinctly puts it: ‘So kam es, daß sie sich, von Natur frei und offen, in ein verstecktes Komödienstück mehr und mehr hineinlebte.’ (169; my italics). We have seen how problematic it is to try to get to the root of someone’s ‘nature’ in a world so governed, constrained and manipulated by social expectations, taboos and unwritten

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23 Henry Garland, amongst others, argues that a key element of Effi’s character is, in fact, the ‘rechte Liebe’ which Innstetten himself, it is maintained, lacks. The issue of love, of who loves how, is a moot point in the text. H. C. Sasse for instance, argues quite the opposite to Garland, maintaining that Effi is incapable of complete, self-abandoning love. This, perhaps, is one element of her tragedy. See Henry
codes, even in the ‘private’ sphere, but this narratorial assertion seems to point less to an unsubstantiated idea of Effi as unconventional or non-conformist, and more to the idea that it does not come easily to her to have secrets, to lie or to deceive. This is perhaps better illustrated if we compare the contrasting figure of Crampas; clearly, the major, far from having learned his lesson from the earlier duel which has left him a constant reminder of his misdemeanour, revels in the challenge of flouting convention under a specious mask of perfect candour and propriety. He conducts the relationship with Effi as a ‘gesellschaftliches Spiel’ and his playfully equivocal comments reveal a character who is emotionally disengaged from his actions, viewing them more as an exercise in audacity. When, for instance, on the way back from Ring’s house the sleighs encounter the mysterious ‘Schloon’, and Sidonie smugly retakes her seat in her father’s coach, Crampas, having assisted Sidonie, returns to Effi’s side, murmuring, ‘Ich kann Sie nicht allein lassen, gnäd’ge Frau.’ (161). The ambiguity of the statement shows Crampas’s dangerously playful attitude, and emphasises how different his attitude is from Effi’s. At the same time, of course, Crampas always takes care not to overstep the limits, as is shown in his letters to Effi, which reveal a character as conventionally coded and as conscious of his ‘duties’ to society as any other.

During her liaison with Crampas, Effi exists in a closed, guarded, double world, with secrets from everyone. The cover for the couple’s meetings is provided by the long walks prescribed to Effi by her doctor. It is important to notice the emphasis that Effi lays on the notion of her simply ‘following the doctor’s orders’. There is a particularly interesting moment where she discusses with Roswitha whether or not she should take her customary walk on that particular day:

‘Ob ich heute wohl noch gehe? Doktor Hannemann besteht darauf und meint in einem fort, ich nähme es nicht ernst genug, sonst müßte ich besser aussehen; ich habe aber keine rechte Lust heut, es nieselt und der Himmel ist so grau.’

‘Ich werde der gnäd’gen Frau den Regenmantel bringen.’


25 In this light, perhaps Sabine Hotho-Jackson has a valid point with her startling claim that Crampas is no more and no less than Innstetten’s alter-ego. See Sabine Hotho-Jackson, “Dazu muß man selber intakt sein”: Innstetten and the Portrayal of a Male Mind in Fontane’s Effi Briest’, Forum For Modern Language Studies, 32 (1996), 264-76.
‘Das tu! Aber komme heute nicht nach, wir treffen uns ja doch nicht’, und sie lachte.
‘Wirklich, du bist gar nicht findig, Roswitha. Und ich mag nicht, daß du dich erkaltest
und alles um nichts.’ (174)

It is impossible conclusively to decide whether her insistence on the ‘fact’ that
the exercise is taken on the doctor’s orders is more for Roswitha’s benefit or for her
own. The reader has a strong sense that she is so unhappy with the role into which she
has tumbled\(^{26}\) that she is trying to ease her conscience with an attempt at a piece of
doublethink, endeavouring to convince herself of the innocence and medicinal
benefits of the walks. This is further emphasised by her reproach to Roswitha that the
latter is ‘gar nicht findig’, invariably failing to be in the right place at the right time
that they might meet and walk home together. She is, of course, perfectly well aware
that the blame for their never crossing one another’s path lies squarely on her own
shoulders. The creation of this seductive idea that she is assiduously following the
doctor’s orders and then finding her patience tried by Roswitha’s incompetence,
however, provides a calming image on which to focus. This image distracts her, if
only momentarily, from the sorry reality. The sorriness of this reality is underlined by
the ambiguous sounding ‘und alles um nichts’, with its subtextual implication,
particularly when viewed in conjunction with Effi’s later claim that Crampas was a
man ‘den ich nicht einmal liebte und den ich vergessen hatte, weil ich ihn nicht liebte’
(275), that the affair is empty, meaningless, ‘nichts’. This passage is typical of the
way in which Fontane uses the spoken word, for we can detect a hint of dual meaning
running through its entirety, highlighting the way in which dialogue can function both
as ‘the sovereign instrument of self-disclosure’ and ‘the best defence against it’.\(^{27}\)

The denial of the unpalatable self reaches what might be seen as its peak in the
conversation that Effi conducts with Roswitha upon returning from her walk. She

\(^{26}\) Claims such as Sara Shostak’s that ‘Effi’s affair with Crampas is a defiant rebellion against the rules,
morals, roles, and constraints of society, and thus, against Imnsetten’ ring somewhat hollow. Attempts
to recuperate Effi as a feisty, feminist heroine, whilst attractive, seem to ignore the textual evidence to
the contrary. See Sara Shostak, ‘The Trauma of Separation: Public and Private Realms in Effi Briest’,
in New Approaches to Theodor Fontane: Cultural Codes in Flux, ed. by Marion Doebeling (Columbia:
Camden House, 2000), pp. 51-67 (p. 61). Similarly, Richard Koc claims that Effi’s adulterous liaison
is prompted partly ‘out of protest’ at Imnsetten’s treatment and that she is ‘thereby secretly getting back
at her husband’. Again, the argument is not wholly convincing. Richard A. Koc, The German
Gesellschaftsroman at the Turn of the Century: A Comparison of the Works of Theodor Fontane and
Eduard von Keyserling (Bern: Lang, 1982), p. 29.

\(^{27}\) Gordon A. Craig, Theodor Fontane: Literature and History in the Bismarck Reich (New York:
reproaches the servant for a moment of flirtation with Kruse, reprimanding her with the claim that ‘[m]it einem Ehemanne...das tut nie gut’ (178). For Roswitha, the reprimand is straightforward enough and conceals no subtext. For the reader, however, the warning contains far more complexity. At the most fundamental level, Effi’s hypocrisy is risible. But it also reveals a great deal about her character. In response to Roswitha’s petition that the Virgin Mary protect Effi from ever having to undergo the misery and trauma of separation from her child, Effi stares at her servant ‘mehr erschrocken als empört’ and exclaims, ‘Was du nur sprichst! Ich bin ja doch eine verheiratete Frau. So was darfst du nicht sagen, das ist ungehörig, das paßt sich nicht.’ (177-78). Both this and the previous reprimand give the impression of being reflex responses, illustrating how deeply socialised an individual Effi is. She responds to the notion of transgression as society would expect her to - and would itself - respond. This implies a level of non-reflection on Effi’s part, but there is the added, possible dimension here that whilst on the one hand the responses are instinctive, on the other hand they provide a life-raft for Effi. There is a sense that she is clinging to a conveniently simplistic sense of certain established categories - here the Married Woman - and that these categories, because of their accepted currency in society, necessarily embrace certain immutable characteristics, virtues and criteria, which, like a magic cloak, automatically protect the bearer of the category label - that is, herself - by their necessary exclusion of certain other, less attractive, possibilities. Her words reveal that for all her discomfort at the deception, for all her consciousness of her status as an adulteress, she is still refusing properly to admit or even to consider the full gravity of the potential consequences of her actions. She is leading a dangerous dual existence whereby she is oddly convinced that the two strands will never actually meet, simply running forever in parallel. Effi is aware of how unacceptable her concealed self is – or would be – to ‘respectable’ society, but it is also so deeply unacceptable to herself that she tries to separate herself off from it. This is, of course, a fool’s errand; one cannot separate the self from the self. She peddles clichés both as a reflex response and in a bid to calm herself and to convince herself that as Baronin Innstetten, respected wife and mother, she is safe. What we have, then, is the projection of a self to serve as a mask which can be presented to the wider world and which also serves as an insulating layer of defence, giving Effi a specious sense of
distance from herself. The effort involved in this distancing is summed up in her final thought to herself having asked Roswitha to bring the fashion journals: ‘Womit man sich nicht alles hilft? Eine hübsche Dame mit einem Muff und eine mit einem Halbschleier; Modepuppen. Aber es ist das beste, mich auf andre Gedanken zu bringen.’ (179). Effi oscillates between rueful self-recrimination and desperate, wilful self-deception, leading a life which grows ever more ‘disembodied’,28 with the frantic construction of the self becoming an exercise in damage-limitation, both in terms of her social status and in terms of her own emotional and mental stability.

This aspect of self-construction takes us, of course, into a wholly new realm regarding the question of the authenticity of the self. The issue here is less one of the honesty of the self towards the outer world – to reveal the truth and confess the facts would obviously be tantamount to social suicide – but one of truth to the self. As we saw above, the narrator makes it clear that Effi’s enforced behaviour – the secrecy, the deception – does not come naturally, and Hermann Boeschenstein is right to claim that the key to Effi’s suffering is not her knowledge of herself as adulteress, but the fact that she ‘feels contaminated by a lie’.29 It is also important to realise that, once again, we do not have a simple distinction between outward, public face of innocence and inward, private truth of dissembling adulteress. The construction for the outside world is obvious and provisional, meeting immediate needs. It is the construction for the self that is interesting, for Effi cannot even be true to her self. She denies her self not only in her words, but also in her thoughts. Her inability to deal honestly with the reality even on the most private, personal level is symptomatic of the fact that the reality, that is, her status as guilty party, clashes with the standards and norms that she knows exist in her society. Not only do these standards and norms exist, Effi has, as suggested above, always accepted them as unquestionably valid. Her transgression of these norms is categorically not a defiant act of interrogating their validity. Instead she is stuck in a metaphorical quagmire whereby her beliefs and upbringing are irreconcilable with her actions. Her lies to the outer world are a means of self-preservation. Her lies to herself are evidence both of an inability to accept what she

has done and a tenacious belief in the norms and conventions of her society. She fails, as Kaiser points out, to identify the contingency of these norms and conventions.\(^3^0\) All apprehension of the creaking mechanism is left squarely to the reader.

Within the Crampas liaison, Effi ends up feeling like a ‘Gefangene’, although once again she appears to do nothing to actually try to change the status quo, seeming rather to be a passively willing victim, drawn along by *ennui*, nonchalance, thoughtlessness, almost frivolity,\(^3^1\) existing in the tension between helpless entrapment and the fascination of entrapment. As the time for departure to Berlin draws closer, however, she identifies a definitive means of escape. Her role-playing now begins to follow a very specific agenda, with an actual aim in view rather than an ongoing project of enforced self-defence. The aim of the temporary but necessary and intense pretence is, of course, to leave Kessin forever and as quickly as possible.

When Effi receives the letter from her mother telling her that Luise is, as she writes, in Berlin ‘in Kur’ (185), and that Effi should visit at once if she thinks that her mother might be of assistance in the search for a suitable house, she is clear in her mind as to how she must handle the situation:

Effi legte den Brief aus der Hand und sagte nichts. Was sie zu tun habe, das stand bei ihr fest; aber sie wollte es nicht selber aussprechen, Innstetten sollte damit kommen, und dann wollte sie zügernd ja sagen. (186)

This moment highlights the important – and complex – relationship between ‘Denken und Handeln’.\(^3^2\) What Effi does here is to create two roles, one for herself to play, and one which she hopes Innstetten will adopt. Fortunately for her, he swallows the bait. Interestingly, both characters astutely identify the potential manipulativeness of the other’s words; when Effi says that she does not want to be apart from Geert again so soon after being reunited, he calls her a ‘Schelm’ (186), laughingly accusing her of saying such a thing only ‘weil du meine Schwäche kennst’ (186) and going on to tell her, ‘Reise, sobald du’s für nötig hältst und vor deinem Herzen verantworten kannst’ (186). Far from blind to the surely only half-playful implication, Effi replies,
'So darfst du nicht sprechen, Geert. Was heißt das "vor meinem Herzen verantworten"? Damit schiebst du mir, halb gewaltsam, eine Zärtlichkeitsrolle zu, und ich muß dir dann aus reiner Koketterie sagen: "Ach, Geert, dann reise ich nie." Oder doch so etwas Ähnliches.' (186)

Another level of construction is revealed here. Effi, already consciously playing a role with a specific end in mind, reproaches Innstetten for trying to foist a different role upon her. The implication of the reproach is that he is being unfair, trying to force her to be something that she is not. There are two ironic facets to the reproach, both lost, of course, on Innstetten. Firstly, Effi is already being disingenuous, is already playing a role and presenting a ‘fake’ self. Secondly, Effi has triumphed where her husband has failed. She has induced Innstetten, without his knowing that he is being manipulated, to play along in the role she requires of him. To be sure, Innstetten’s attempt was rather less serious than Effi’s, so the outcome is unsurprising. This does not, however, alter the fact that this scene shows, in a particularly transparent manner, typical processes of construction and attempted construction, both of self and of other, and the ways in which these interact. It is important also to notice the way in which the implicit category of authenticity is invoked dishonestly.

This pretence in Kessin is bound up with the subsequent pretence in Berlin of being ill, a pretence which Rummschüttel, perhaps in his capacity as a doctor, perhaps in his capacity as complete outsider and disinterested observer, immediately penetrates. From start to finish, the single goal in Effi’s mind is to escape the situation with Crampas, putting as much geographical distance between herself and him as she can. But there are other reasons for not wanting to prolong her stay in Kessin. She has never liked or grown used to Geert’s house and has always felt uncomfortable with its associated ‘Spukgeschichte’; she has forged no real friendships and has found the people she has encountered – with notable exceptions such as the kindly Gieshübler – to be hostile towards her; she feels isolated from her family, particularly as the house offers no real accommodation for guests, meaning that her parents have never been to stay. Rather than frankly admitting these to Geert as reasons for her alacrity to leave, and concealing only the key grounds, she chooses instead to play out an elaborate charade of lies and pretence. A straightforward explanation is that in her desperation Effi fails to think through her situation rationally and is thus not in a position to recognise any justifiable reason for wanting to leave
beyond the salient one of the Crampas situation. Alternatively, however, it might be suggested that Effi’s behaviour indicates to us once again her deep-seated fear of appearing ridiculous before Innstetten. She has attempted in the past to make Innstetten agree to move house on the grounds that she is frightened of her current quarters, only to be met with a point-blank refusal and a demand that she see how foolish he would look to outside eyes. She has met with a similar unresponsiveness when requesting that at least they might decorate and alter the upstairs portion of the house. Small wonder, then, that she is loath to broach the subject again, under whatever circumstances.

Ultimately, of course, she achieves her ends and she escapes Kessin, never to return. But the escape is at a price. The deception in which she engages represents another factor to add to her already bad conscience. This is painfully demonstrated in a short exchange between Effi and Geert when the latter meets his wife from the train in Berlin after she has been visiting Hohen-Cremmen:

‘Ich dachte schon, du würdest nicht Wort halten.’
‘Aber Geert, ich werde doch Wort halten, das ist doch das erste.’
‘Ja, das war anderes.’
Sie mochte nicht sagen “ich war krank”, und Innstetten hörte darüber hin. (220)

It is a relatively insignificant moment, and certainly it makes no impression on Innstetten. It does, however, reveal to the reader Effi’s discomfort with her lies. Her reticence to reiterate and reinforce the lie about being ill by repeating it shows, perhaps, a superstitious dread that to do so might be to tempt fate, to encourage the revelation of all that has been so carefully concealed. This superstitious relationship to words is especially interesting when considered alongside the reflex assertion that ‘ich werde doch Wort halten, das ist doch das erste’, for this shows again that the self is not just a binary opposition of private versus public self. Once again, Effi seems to say these words unthinkingly, that is, without considering in any depth how well – or how badly – they correspond to her actual practice. This does not mean, however, that if challenged she would deny the essential validity of the words. If challenged, indeed, it is likely that she would assert this as one of the values that, to her, carry immutable authority. This mixture of conscious reflection and unconscious reflex in Effi’s self once again illustrates the difficulty of identifying the authentic self since the
two elements are theoretically irreconcilable. Which is the ‘real’ Effi here? On the one hand we have the automatic response which, far from representing a primordial, genuine self, is nothing but a conditioned, socialised response, reflecting the all-pervasive ‘Despotie’\textsuperscript{33} of social modes of thought and the ramifications of which Effi has not even considered until Innstetten brings her attention to them. On the other hand, we have a reflecting self actively building barriers between past and present, actively trying to deny, or even, perhaps, to eradicate, a less attractive part of the self. This suggests a kind of abdication from responsibility, a declaration that ‘That wasn’t really “me”’.

The previous quotation usefully highlights how important dialogue can be as a vehicle for revealing dimensions of character to the reader. Fontane is, of course, justly renowned as an author who often uses conversation as a means of providing direct access to his characters, letting them speak rather than narrating their story for them, with Martin Swales describing Fontane’s narrative mode as a masterful example of ‘sustained eavesdropping’.\textsuperscript{34} It is only on rare occasions, however, that the characters are given the scope to give vent to their feelings in interior monologue. Horst Glaser maintains in fact that the depiction of the ‘Innenwelt’ \textit{never} occurs in Fontane’s work. He writes:

\begin{quote}
Was Gesten und Handlungen der Personen nicht sichtbar machen, kann allenfalls in den Unterhaltungen zur Sprache kommen. Das bedeutet aber, daß Empfindungen und Wünsche sich stets des Vokabulars der gesellschaftlichen Konversation bedienen müssen, um sich auszudrücken zu können.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

Glaser is, in my opinion, only half right. \textit{We do} get moments of access to some kind of inner being, and when such moments occur, the reader tends perhaps to assume that she is being granted an exceptional, privileged, direct glimpse into the workings of a character’s mind, without mediation via another character or even via the narrator. We should still be wary, however, of hailing this as an infallible moment of access to an authentic self, for even private thoughts are governed by public categories, and the private realm, even in its apparently most intimate moments, ‘is directed toward a

\textsuperscript{33} Brinkmann, \textit{Verbindlichkeit}, p. 86.
public agenda and a public audience', with the result that the vocabularies of private and public realms are identical.

One occasion of interior monologue for Effi occurs at the end of her holiday in Rügen with Innstetten. Before returning to Berlin, the couple visit Effi’s parents in Hohen-Cremmen. Innstetten stays only for a few days, Effi a week longer, aiming to return to Berlin in time for her wedding anniversary. During her time at the parental home she experiences a momentary sense of flashback, with all the events of the past months and especially the very moment which she identifies as the point at which her gradual slide into adultery began, being relived in her mind’s eye as she watches her sleeping daughter. This triggers a series of reflections on her guilt, and we are permitted a glimpse into Effi’s feelings towards and evaluation of past events. She realises that it is not so much a sense of guilt that weighs her down as the fear that all will one day be brought to light and her misdeeds uncovered to general scrutiny. She feels a sense of shame, but this is not so much at the adulterous liaison itself as at having found herself in a position in which she has had no alternative but to tell lies. Her insight into these feelings results in disorienting confusion. She is not distressed by the feelings themselves, but by the relentless question, which she is unable to answer, as to whether her feelings are abnormal. On the one hand, this is a moment of painful honesty. Effi faces up to the fact that she does not feel the guilt that she considers it would be natural to feel, and she analyses quite precisely what it is that she feels instead. We witness a close addressing and assessing of her emotions. On the other hand, however, we cannot ignore the impression that Effi can never quite dig deeply enough into her own self so that that self fills the entire picture. The other – be it in the form of the individual other or of society – always encroaches onto the edges:

Ja, Angst quält mich und dazu Scham über mein Lügenspiel. Aber Scham über meine Schuld, die hab ich nicht oder doch nicht so recht oder doch nicht genug, und das bringt mich um, daß ich sie nicht habe. Wenn alle Weiber so sind, dann ist es schrecklich, und wenn sie nicht so sind, wie ich hoffe, dann steht es schlecht um mich, dann ist etwas nicht in Ordnung in meiner Seele, dann fehlt mir das richtige Gefühl. (219; original italics)

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36 Shostak (Doebeling), p. 53.
What Effi is doing is assessing her feelings with one eye on how she feels she ought to feel, on how she imagines that others would feel in her position. She cannot escape the reflex of comparison, cannot escape, once again, the notion that there are certain norms and standards, even – or perhaps especially, plagued by the memory of Niemeyer’s enigmatic assertion that everything depends upon having ‘das richtige Gefühl’ – in the realm of supposedly private and personal feelings and emotions, and that to fail to meet these standards is to fail in a much wider sense. Effi fervently believes that there is such a thing as a ‘rechte Reue’, a ‘rechte Scham’ (219). She does feel remorse, she does feel shame, but it is neither this remorse nor this shame that is destroying her. Rather it is the exaggerated and inescapable conviction that it is not the right kind of remorse, not the right kind of shame. The irony behind all of this is the unconsciously expressed implication that if she could only experience these things as she feels they ought to be experienced, feel this traditional, standard, ‘normal’ guilt and shame, then she would, she thinks, feel substantially less oppressed. As Thomas Degering writes:

Genauso, wie Innstetten alles als ‘Krimskrams’ bezeichnet, bleibt Effi das nötige Schuldgefühl fremd: sie kann keinen positiven Grund für ihre Schuld finden. Ihr Leid schreibt sich lediglich her aus dem als Fehler empfundenen Mangel an volliger Internalisierung der geltenden Gesetze. Ihr Problem besteht in der von ihr nur unvollständig geleisteten Inkarnation von Normen, deren Sinn nicht gewußt wird.37

This marks a moment of semi-epiphany which never quite reaches fruition and is important to bear in mind later, when we also see Innstetten interrogating and feeling dissatisfied with his emotions. The reader senses here that by wanting to feel only the ‘right’ emotions, authenticity is somehow beyond Effi’s grasp. She sees but does not see. She comprehends how she feels, but cannot comprehend this in any context beyond the unsatisfactory one of it being not how she ‘should’ feel. The self is denied and rejected for fear of its being tainted with the ‘abnormal’. Any attempt to analyse the self is skewed in advance by reference to assimilated categories belonging to society’s conventional discourse:

Wenn die Person bei Fontane nach sich selber fragt, dann findet sie nicht nur ihr individuelles Sein, sondern überall sitzt, wie Swinegel im Wettlauf mit dem Hasen, auch das, was Innstetten das ‘Ganze’ nennt, und ruft: ich bin schon da.\(^{38}\)

The second key moment of access to Effi’s inner thoughts comes after the pitifully ill-starred visit from Annie. Effi, appalled by what has become of her relationship with her daughter, by the uncrossable divide that has opened up between them, becomes hysterical once Annie has left. Her emotional outburst ostensibly takes the form of a prayer, since she kneels before a hastily grabbed Bible and hymn book, and it is important to understand the significance of this action; even when overwhelmed by sadness and by emotion, the vestiges of convention and the need to adhere to some kind of established ‘standard’ – here, prayer – prevail. Nominally addressing God, then, Effi breaks down and rants, giving vent to all her bottled-up frustration, anger and hurt. This is, without doubt, the closest that we ever come to seeing Effi with all her socialised defences down.\(^{39}\) In a confused outpouring combining self-accusation and accusation of Innstetten, Effi gives voice to her derision for the emptiness of the speciously noble-sounding notions of ‘Ehre’ and ‘Tugend’ that have contributed to her fall from (social) grace. Her blunt adamance that she is to blame – ‘Und ich schuld’ - can do nothing to mask the accusation implicit in her words: ‘Mich ekelt, was ich getan; aber was mich noch mehr ekelt, das ist eure Tugend. Weg mit euch.’ (275). Unless we take this ‘euch’ to refer solely to Geert and Annie, which seems unlikely, given that Effi blames Geert for Annie’s alienated and stilted behaviour rather than Annie herself, we must read this as an accusation both of Geert and of the wider society. This is the notionally pivotal moment at which Effi seems to recognise a cliché for a cliché, gives vent to her disgust for what she seems to identify as outworn convention and wanton cruelty masquerading under a cloak of virtue. The reader has a sense that perhaps the

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\(^{39}\) Brinkmann seems to be of a similar opinion. He suggests that we can propose many interpretations of Effi’s outburst, but that, in the end, it is beyond interpretation: ‘Auf den Inhalt ihres Ausbruchs kommt es nicht so sehr an, wohl aber auf dieses ganz unreflektierte, spontane Vergegenständlichen ihres – ja wessen, von was? Ihres religiösen Raptus, ihrer Not, ihrer Gefühle, des Gegenübers eines göttlichen Du, das sie in verschütteten Regionen ihres Herzens kennt, das gleichwohl verborgen und nur mit der Vermittlung eines Zeichens zu vergegenwärtigen und aussprechbar ist, das einen elementaren Gestus des ganzen Menschen erlaubt? – Es ist schwer auszumachen’. Brinkmann, *Verbindlichkeit*, p. 167.
pressure of intense hurt has exploded many of the protective elements of social
construction surrounding Effi, leaving a raw, exposed, genuinely angry Effi, open to
eenlightenment and open to a level of feeling which she has hitherto refused to
entertain. Yet in terms of insight, this moment proves to be intrinsically worthless,
leading precisely nowhere. Not only does Effi fail to turn her insight to her advantage
and use it as a fresh source of strength in her life, she actually renounces the
knowledge, letting it fade along with the sense of hurt and injustice. Having failed to
hold on to it, she sinks into a death-wish mentality: ‘Ich muß leben, aber ewig wird es
ja wohl nicht dauern.’ (275). She is unable to retain any element of her new
comprehension of herself as victim of an unnecessarily vengeful society, of Innstetten
as acting according to social rather than humane dictates. Instead, she herself
ultimately succumbs once again to the improbable charms of these insidious social
ddictates. Shortly before her death, she calmly tells her mother how important it is to
her that Innstetten should be made aware, ‘wie mir hier klar geworden, daß er in allem
recht gehandelt’ (294). By this point, Effi seems to have irrevocably constructed in
her mind an image of herself that concurs with that which she imagines others to have
of her. She has branded herself Adulteress, Bad Wife, Bad Mother, Bad Daughter.
By constructing this image and perceiving herself in the light in which she believes
others perceive her, she is able to exculpate Innstetten and anyone else who might
have featured within that censorious ‘Ihr/euch’ category. She is wholly unable to
formulate an independent set of categories that might help her to cope with the
situation and has recourse to nothing but tired, clichéd patterns. She ‘reproduziert ein
holzschnittartiges Gesellschaftsurteil über Ehebrecherinnen und eignet es sich an’, 40
condemning herself as more sinning than sinned against, scarcely conscious of herself
as victim of society, as Karl Richter accurately observes. 41 This final capitulation is a
saddening spectacle, but it comes as no real surprise. It is difficult to see on what
Shostak’s claim is based when she writes that

Effi, still even at the end of the novel, represents a wild unsocialized spirit seeking
freedom from the narrow and restrictive definitions of the female gender and from the
private realm in which women of aristocratic families were isolated. 42

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40 Liebrand, p. 12.
41 Karl Richter, Resignation: Eine Studie zum Werk Theodor Fontanes (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1966),
p. 65.
42 Shostak (Doebling), p. 62.
Looking at the evidence, this hardly seems to be the case. For Effi to have come up trumps as a social revolutionary would have demanded a complete volte-face in every aspect of her thoughts and beliefs. Her capitulation is, if not inevitable, at least eminently predictable, far more so than, for instance, Sue Bridehead’s in *Jude*. It accords with that self that we have so often seen in action, the self who accepts the conventions and norms of the day not as conventions and norms but as almost sacrosanct truths, generally failing to appreciate their status as made rather than given. This is why, attractive though it might seem as a tidy option, we cannot categorically declare that Effi’s outburst after her daughter’s visit provides a glimpse of a ‘real’ authentic self. Certainly we as readers identify and sympathize with the truth of her angry words, but our agreement does not automatically render this Effi any more quintessentially genuine than the Effi who parrots platitudes and truisms. If the self that has reneged upon the insight were conscious of its renunciation, then we might have a case, but the self that reneges effectively does so in good faith. Effi means what she says, her final pronouncement ‘accepts the superiority of society’s norms’ and accepts them sincerely, not with any secret agendas. By the time of her death, she is not suffering from the kind of existential schism in the self as we will witness in Geert. The claim that ‘[Effis] Einsichten lassen die Innstetten weit zurück’ is curious at the very least, for Effi ultimately learns and gains nothing from her insights, whereas Innstetten is never able to rid himself of what he has confronted and acknowledged. There is no sense of the interred, private, wounded self versus the self that outwardly accepts the unfair burden of guilt accorded her by society’s values. There is no basis for arguing that her claim of being reconciled to everything and everybody is anything but the truth. Attempts by some critics to salvage an aura of heroism from this ending are not always convincing. Bance maintains that Effi dies ‘with dignity, resignation, even heroism’, and whilst we recognise her quiet dignity and resignation, we wonder whether heroism perhaps demands a greater degree of self-awareness. A second critic goes much further, asserting that Effi ‘maintains the consistency of her spirited character to the end: resisting rather than, as is commonly supposed, submitting – resisting instead of becoming a transfigured, saintly, martyr

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44 Richter, p. 83.
version of her once rebellious self.\textsuperscript{46} Besides the contentious issue that Effi can ever be described as ‘rebellious’, it is hard to see that Effi resists anything at the end; she accepts the judgement of society over her, she accepts that Innstetten was ‘right’, she even accepts, rather than resists, death.

To conclude on Effi’s self is problematic. We have seen the lengths to which she goes to construct herself and we have seen how society has constructed her, especially in terms of the kind of language she instinctively uses. We have also seen how she consciously lets herself be constructed according to what she believes the other wants. Ultimately, though, the key thing that we have seen is how authenticity eludes Effi. Even at those important moments where we might be seduced into believing that here, at last, we have access to the spontaneous, feeling, emotional, unconstructed self, the whole is contextualised by a socialized mind-set, the question ever present as to what the other, what society, would think, want, feel. Effi never gets away from the omnipresence of the ‘Ihr/euch’.

Innstetten presents a similar set of problems. Like Effi, he constructs himself time and again throughout the text. Like Effi, he exhibits strong traits of being a product of his society. Like Effi, he is faced with moments of painful soul-searching as it becomes apparent to him that his thoughts and his actions do not fit adequately together. At the same time, however, there are salient differences between Innstetten and Effi. The issues of socialized self, of self-denial, of self-betrayal, of the construction of the self and of the other are the same, but the processes of the development and the resolution of these issues quite different.

Throughout the course of the novel, the reader is repeatedly made aware of the high regard in which Innstetten is generally held, of how exemplary a citizen he is. Luise describes him as ‘ein Mann von Charakter, von Stellung und guten Sitten’ (18); Niemeyer’s opinion is that he is ‘ein Mann von Charakter, ein Mann von Prinzipien’ and ‘auch ein Mann von Grundsätzen’ (35); the Ministerin who arranges the meeting between Effi and Annie after the former’s fall from grace warns that he is ‘ein Mann, der nicht nach Stimmungen und Laune, sondern nach Grundsätzen handelt’ (271). Innstetten, then, by the other characters’ assessment, is a fine, upstanding, admirable

\textsuperscript{46} Bance, p. 40.
and admired man. It is important, of course, to recognise the emphasis of principles over feelings in these assessments, and to be aware that these opinions of Innstetten are all given by characters, rather than the narrator. It is important as well, however, to note Fontane’s own dismay at the fact that many contemporary readers disliked Innstetten. In a letter to a female friend who had dismissed Innstetten in unmitigated disgust as ‘ein Ekel’, Fontane protests that Innstetten is ‘doch in jedem Anbetracht ein ganz ausgezeichnetes Menschenexemplar, dem es an dem, was man lieben muß, durchaus nicht fehlt’. But surely alarm bells are already ringing in the reader’s mind. So Innstetten is a man of character – an enigmatic phrase in itself – he is principled, he is conscientious, he does not act impulsively, is not ruled by his emotions, does not let his heart rule his head… There is already a clear impression of extreme rigidity, of a self carefully schooled to fit a mould from which it never deviates and which accords with the general consensus of what the good, upstanding citizen should be. Many critics have been quite hostile towards Innstetten. Elsbeth Hamann writes that ‘[d]er Leser kann wenig Mitleid für einen Götzendienst leistenden Gesellschaftsklaven empfinden’, while Pascal dismisses him as ‘a conformist through and through’. Sasse suggests that Innstetten embodies ‘a specific environmentally conditioned form of inhumanity besides which an individual longing for warmth and affection is irretrievably destined to suffer’ and Wolfgang Paulsen that he is quite simply ‘die Verkörperung eines auf seine Prinzipien festgelegten höheren Beamten’. Certainly all of these assessments are valid if we accept the surface Geert. The question for the reader, however, is the extent to which we can identify a more volatile, more impulsive Innstetten beneath this impassive, conformist exterior, and, if such a self is found to exist, whether it is a more genuine self than this rather stilted surface.

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50 Sasse, p. 132.
Despite brave assertions by early critics that Geert is 'on the whole a straightforward character', it seems fair to suggest that Geert is actually the most frustratingly complex and impenetrable character in the novel. Later critical discourse has acknowledged this. Hotho-Jackson, for instance, sees him as 'a man characterized by a deep-seated ambivalence which alienates him from both his public and his private self', whilst Brian Holbeche describes him as 'an insecure and troubled personality', suggesting that his behaviour when he decides to fight the duel is not that of an unfeeling instrument of barbaric social conventions, as he is so often said to be, but of a distraught man desperately trying to decide how to behave in an emotional crisis that is all the more devastating for him because it has already happened, albeit in a different form, once before, and involves the daughter of the first woman that he lost.

Although we do not see Innstetten role-playing in the transparent ways in which Effi does, this should not lead us to think that he is any the less self-constructing than her. The Geert we tend to see is a Geert who has assimilated so many of society's conventions, who is so profoundly permeated by a consciousness of norms, standards, the done and the not done, that it is difficult, both for the reader and for Innstetten himself, to see beyond that. As Martin Swales succinctly puts it, Innstetten has 'so internalised the norms of his society that he can never begin to see, feel and think – and judge – independent of these norms'. This is no simple case of the external, public face suppressing the gentler, more emotional private self. To a great extent, of course, this is very much like Effi, but the glimpses into Innstetten's mind which the narrator affords us indicate how much less transitory Innstetten's consciousness of multiple contradictions within the self is, and perhaps, how much more intense his personal tragedy.

The first of these crucial moments really only qualifies as a 'half' moment, given that it does not find Innstetten alone. It is, of course, the justly renowned conversation with Wüllersdorf, a moment described by Conrad Wandrey as 'die

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53 Hotho-Jackson, p. 264.
54 Brian Holbeche, 'Innstetten's 'Geschichte mit Entsagung' and Its Significance in Fontane's *Effi Briest*', *German Life and Letters*, 41 (1987-88), 21-32 (p. 21 and p. 27).
This is a passage which has come under the critical microscope innumerable times, but which justifies yet another analysis by virtue of the fact that Innstetten’s self is so frustratingly elusive. Innstetten has just discovered the evidence of his wife’s adultery and has requested Wüllersdorf to visit him. The exchange begins with Innstetten obeying his reflexes to play the hospitable host towards his guest, excusing his intrusion on Wüllersdorf’s time, telling his friend to make himself comfortable, to help himself to a cigar. There are at least two ways in which we can interpret this opening. On the one hand we can condemn Innstetten, finding his obedience to the robotic urges and reflexes of good social breeding almost risible in view of the circumstances – how, we ask, can he think of offering Wüllersdorf a cigar, plunged as he is into this crisis? The image according to this interpretation is one of an unfeeling automaton, strangely inured to the pain and naked emotional response that we might expect in such a situation.

Bance, for instance, remarks on the register of the language of the conversation, which he describes as being ‘extraordinarily cool’. There is an alternative to this somewhat negative interpretation, however. We might instead see in Innstetten’s words a desperate bid to hold on to some vestige of normality, of things as he knows them in their old, tried and tested - indeed, conventional - routine, at a time when the rest of his world has just come crashing about his ears. The entire catalogue of Innstetten’s behaviour at this point could perhaps be seen as evidence of an immeasurably troubled self; he is, for instance, pacing distractedly up and down, and the constant motion provides a degree of relief such that he ‘wäre bei der ihn verzehrenden Unruhe gern in Bewegung geblieben, sah aber, daß das nicht gehe’ (233). Again, this seems to imply a tension between instinct and a need to hold on to established parameters of ‘normal’ behaviour. The peremptory manner in which Innstetten states his request to Wüllersdorf also appears to show evidence of a man in great distress. Loquacity and eloquence at such a moment would surely have jarred and seemed deeply suspicious to the reader, but the bluntness, the few words, hint at a great deal of bottled-up emotion which Innstetten is endeavouring to keep that way. It is worth bearing in mind, then, as we progress, that our intuition at this point suggests that Innstetten’s

56 Conrad Wandrey, Theodor Fontane (Munich: Beck, 1919), p. 285. This quotation has become almost as renowned as the Wüllersdorf-Innstetten conversation itself.
rigidity and formality are functioning overtime as dams to his emotion. As Robinson observes, Innstetten’s emotional capacity is ‘clearly larger than appears on the surface, and the reader comes to understand that he has suppressed a good deal of his feeling’.\(^{58}\) It is important once again to stress, however, that what we are seeing is not a simple dialectic of private, emotional self versus public – even with an audience of one – persona.

In the conversation it is actually Wüllersdorf who initially does most of the talking, questioning the necessity of the duel and summarizing the reasons against fighting it. Only when he forces Innstetten to address his feelings does Geert begin to offer more than just responses to his friend’s words. His first admission is to state quite openly that he does not know whether he feels ‘so verletzt, beleidigt, empört, daß einer weg muß’ (234), and he stands for a moment by the window, distractedly drumming his fingertips against the pane. Not only, then, is Geert impenetrable to others, he is impenetrable even to himself. He does not know what his feelings amount to. What follows is a strange kind of outpouring in which Innstetten tries to analyse his feelings and tries to explain why ‘es muß sein’ (235) and why it is that he has ‘keine Wahl’ (236). The reader’s task is to break down Innstetten’s claims in order to establish whether or not they make sense or are just so much hot air. By dismantling Innstetten’s argument, the reader discovers a great deal about Innstetten the constructed and constructing individual, some of it somewhat surprising.

The analysis that Innstetten ultimately gives is to say that whilst he feels unhappy, deceived and offended, he is without any feelings of hatred or of desire for revenge. Interestingly, just as Effi assessed her feelings of shame and remorse with one eye on other people and on the way in which she would have expected others in her situation to react, so too does Innstetten examine his feelings with an encircling ‘should’. The very fact that he mentions hatred and revenge, those absent impulses, quite clearly implies that he believes that this is what he ought to be feeling. He explains their absence by the effect of time, and the reader is in no position to judge how different things might have been had the discovery of the affair been made sooner. The notion of harbouring a precise sense of the proper emotions and reactions

\(^{57}\) Bance, p. 52.
is further emphasized by elements such as ‘ich liebe meine Frau, ja, *seltsam zu sagen*, ich liebe sie noch’, ‘ich bin so sehr *im Bann* ihrer Liebenswürdigkeit’, ‘…daß ich mich, *mir selbst zum Trotz* […] zum Verzeihen geneigt fühle’ (all 235; all my italics). Innstetten, then, admits how he feels, but, like Effi, sees his feelings as being out of kilter with how he feels he should feel. Cord Beintmann writes:

> Der grundlegende Konflikt stellt sich dabei so dar: das Individuum soll sich sozialen Normen und Zwängen unterwerfen, ist selbst ein Produkt des gesellschaftlichen So-Seins, zugleich aber empfindet es ‘natürliche’ Wünsche und Bedürfnisse, die jene Normen massiv in Frage stellen.59

Even emotions have become part of social norms and forces and Geert’s sense of this, his sense of needing to feel as he ‘should’, seems to be, although he does not state as much, a key factor in his decision to fight the duel.

Wüllersdorf accepts all that Innstetten says, going so far as to suggest that he would probably feel exactly the same. But, he says, if such is the case, then why the need for the duel? It is at this juncture that the reader might be forgiven for losing the thread. Innstetten, for all that we have seen of him as an intelligent, articulate, logical, fair-minded man, does not state his case in simple terms. By the end of the speech, despite some critical claims that assert that the dialogue is ‘eminently logical’, the whole seems to be nothing but a triumph of sophistry. Certainly the ‘[w]eil es trotzdem sein muß’ (235) claim, taken in isolation, is illogical. But let us examine in detail the arguments that Innstetten advances. His case is split into three sections, the first two punctuated by Wüllersdorf’s vacillating, ‘Ich weiß doch nicht…’. In the first section, Innstetten explains how, having considered the matter every which way, he has come inexorably to the conclusion: ‘[m]an ist nicht bloß ein einzelner Mensch, man gehört einem Ganzen an, und auf das Ganze haben wir beständig Rücksicht zu nehmen, wir sind durchaus abhängig von ihm’ (235). In other words, one is unable to act solely according to one’s own, personal parameters, but must take notice of and fulfil one’s duty – of whatever that might be judged to consist – to the whole that is society. In general, abstract theory, this makes, of course, perfect sense. Communities and civilisations cannot hope to exist peacefully unless each member of that community or of that civilisation feels and respects certain obligations towards

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the other members, both as individuals and as a whole. But what if those obligations are unreasonable? Or illogical? Or unfair? What if fulfilling those obligations will actually result in more harm than good? The paradox of the society represented here is that each individual is a part that goes to make up that whole, yet the whole, made up of the parts, apparently reflects nothing of the individual. Innstetten helps to perpetuate the arcane tyranny of 'das Ganze' in that he daily adheres to and thus, tacitly at the very least, daily sustains and promotes its unwritten codes and rules. At the same time, he himself is a victim of its patently unreasonable demands. Many critics indeed see this tension as the key problem addressed by Fontane in the text, suggesting that 'es ist Fontanes Grundproblem, eine existierende Gesellschaft in ihrer Ordnung als notwendig anerkennen zu müssen und dennoch ihre Unmenschlichkeit – ohne Aussicht auf eine wirkliche Alternative – deutlich zu empfinden'. Innstetten claims that if he were able to exist 'in Einsamkeit' then he could do that which his inclinations and instincts urge him to do. That is, he would just let things go on with the same external appearance as before, bearing his burden and simply existing without happiness, something which is, after all, not uncommon, since 'es müsse so viele leben ohne dies "rechte Glück"' (235). But this attitude, he maintains, is not feasible within the prevailing status quo:

‘[I]m Zusammenleben mit den Menschen hat sich ein Etwas ausgebildet, das nun mal da ist und nach dessen Paragraphen wir uns gewöhnt haben, alles zu beurteilen, die andern und uns selbst. Und dagegen zu verstoßen, geht nicht; die Gesellschaft verachtet uns, und zuletzt tun wir es selbst und können es nicht aushalten und jagen uns die Kugel durch den Kopf.’ (236)

All that this effectively amounts to is that Innstetten accepts that not only is he affected by social opinion but also that the effect of society’s derision would be liable to be so great upon him that he would ultimately reject himself in a similar way and would be able to see no alternative but suicide.

Yet in itself, the argument is dishonest. The option of Innstetten not fighting the duel, not fulfilling the obligations he claims he feels would have no repercussions for society. In the most theoretical, abstract sense, he does have the choice of

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62 It is worth noting, of course, that the idea of 'right' happiness here joins the notions of ‘right’ shame, ‘right’ regret, ‘right’ love. Every emotional category seems to have its preordained pattern in the
behaving as an individual in as much as no one need ever know anything. The existence of the letters and of the affair need not be publicised. Innstetten need never suffer society’s scorn for society need never be any the wiser. The argument that Innstetten advances, then, is deeply flawed. The conclusion that we necessarily draw is that this is not a case of Innstetten the private individual versus the tyrannical ‘Gesellschaft’ at all. The arguments regarding society are something of a red herring. Rather, it is a matter of Innstetten versus Innstetten, of Innstetten the individual with instincts which tell him that he still loves Effi enough to forgive her, versus Innstetten the embodiment of a society which declares that his individual feelings are somehow ‘wrong’ and unviable, falling short of the strict criteria expected. Innstetten is claiming to be up against societal expectations; in fact, he is fighting nobody but himself.

This exposure of the first part of the argument as unsound renders the second part of his argument all the more disingenuous. Innstetten now goes on to maintain that prior to sharing his story with Wüllersdorf, ‘hätt ich das Spiel noch in der Hand’ (236). As soon as he had ceased to be the only one to know, as soon as the ‘Fleck’ upon his honour had a ‘halben Mitwisser’, then the decision was effectively made for him. Many critics accept this reasoning as it stands. Garland, for one, maintains that

\[\text{[t]he vital thing for Innstetten is to seem immaculate; the secret blemish would not matter if it were truly secret; but the slightest chink destroys all, and he must establish his impeccability by the violent process licensed by Society.}\]

Craig also seems to be seduced by Innstetten’s claim, asserting that

As an intelligent man, [Innstetten] is well aware that his conduct is not rational, but in order to render his doubts ineffectual he tells a close friend, Baron von Wüllersdorf, of the affair, thus making it, as he sees it, impossible for him not to go forward with his drastic course of action.

This approach seems to disregard the fact that Innstetten has just been at pains to emphasize that that choice never really existed in the first place. So where, suddenly, has the notion of control come from? In point of fact, the notion of simply quietly and sadly shouldering the burden of knowledge and doing nothing more is an impossible, chimerical idea. The motivating forces are the demands of society as

characters’ consciousnesses. The notions of individual versions of feelings are never entertained as feasible.

\[\text{Garland, p. 191.}\]

\[\text{Craig, p. 187.}\]
articulated and as imposed by the individual upon the individual, not whether or not another individual or indeed the whole society knows the shameful details:

Was Innstetten fürchtet, ist das Bild, das andere sich von ihm machen (könnten) oder: er will, nachdem er die Kontrolle über seine 'Nerven' verloren hat, Kontrolle über die Information, die sein öffentliches Bild alteriert. Er kann diese Kontrolle aber nur behalten, wenn er sich bild- und normkonform, also erwartungsgemäß verhält; bevor andere ihn sanktionieren, sanktioniert er sich selbst.65

It is the final point of Helmstetter’s claim that is crucial. What matters is Geert’s perceptions of others’ perceptions, not their perceptions per se.

Still, Innstetten pursues the claim. He states that Wüllersdorf’s assertions that he, the ‘halben Mitwisser’, would be as silent as the grave are irrelevant. For Wüllersdorf, by the mere fact of his knowing, involuntarily assumes the role of a kind of bad conscience; Innstetten would always be conscious that Wüllersdorf ‘knows’. He would feel, rightly or not, that he was mocking him, or, at the very least, shaking his head in pity at him. He would always feel, in essence, that Wüllersdorf represents in recognisable form that big, bad, nasty, faceless society by which he claims to feel so tyrannized. He asserts that Wüllersdorf would always be thinking that Innstetten ‘ist noch nie an einer Sache erstickt’. This simply brings us full circle to that original notion of not feeling that which one imagines one ought to feel. It does not matter in the least whether or not Wüllersdorf would always be thinking this. In actual fact, the hypothetical situation that Innstetten constructs is so unlikely ever to be realised as to be almost risible. But the probability or otherwise of the situation occurring is irrelevant. What matters is Innstetten’s conviction, for it seems to reveal a fear within himself, a fear that has nothing to do with Wüllersdorf, that ‘er doch nie an einer Sache erstickt ist’. This is a crucially revelatory moment for the reader. Innstetten, whether he likes it or not, whether, indeed, he knows it or not, has become obsessed, on one level, with emotion. More than this, he has become obsessed with an elusive idea of authentic emotion. He senses within himself a lack of what he considers to be the appropriate feelings. His belaboured focus on how he imagines Wüllersdorf would always judge him in the future were he now not to issue the challenge seems to indicate that the decision to fight contains at least an element of wanting to convince himself, Wüllersdorf and the world at large that he has, finally, ‘erstickt’ on something. As Erika Swales puts it: ‘By fighting the duel and facing the
consequences he hopes to wrest some kind of experiential authenticity from his confusion and uncertainty.\textsuperscript{66}

The fact of Wüllersdorf knowing, then, is no more the real reason for the duel than the issue of the individual's obligations to 'society'. Once again, Innstetten's battle is seen to be with himself. Wüllersdorf, however, refuses to recognise this. Instead, he sums up the essence of what he believes – or perhaps would like to believe – his friend has just articulated:

'Ich finde es furchtbar, daß Sie recht haben, aber Sie haben recht. Ich quäle Sie nicht länger mit meinem "Muß es sein". Die Welt ist einmal, wie sie ist, und die Dinge verlaufen nicht, wie wir wollen, sondern wie die andern wollen. Das mit dem "Gottesgericht", wie manche hochtrabend versichern, ist freilich ein Unsinn, nichts davon, umgekehrt, unser Ehrenkultus ist ein Götzendienst, aber wir müssen uns ihm unterwerfen, solange der Götzte gilt.' (237; all original italics)

Wüllersdorf sets up here the seductive notion of the opposition of the individual – the 'ich' implicit within the 'wir' – versus society – 'die andern'. He fails to admit, however, that each 'ich' is, for every other 'ich', part of 'die andern', thus part of the enemy, with the obvious link, then, that each 'ich' is 'die andern', that there is no distinction. The only opposition as such is that the individual is at war with himself, which, as we have pointed out above, very much sums up Innstetten's own case. Innstetten, however, nods silently in agreement with Wüllersdorf's summary. We do not have to look far to understand why these two intelligent men should be content with this apparently defective reasoning. As Martin Swales observes, regarding this concluding speech of Wüllersdorf's: 'Seine Worte sind traurig – aber für ihn doch beruhigend; es sind 'die andern', die für das 'Gesellschafts-Etwas' verantwortlich sind.'\textsuperscript{67} By promoting the idea that if they had more influence, if they weren't just two individuals within the constrictive society, then things would follow a wholly different, much more liberal pattern, they are setting themselves apart from 'the others', distinguishing themselves as decent, but put-upon, as astute enough to recognise the innumerable flaws in the system, but as powerless to change it.

On the whole, critics who have discussed this scene have tended to show little indulgence towards Innstetten. The attitude taken is that the episode reveals to us

\textsuperscript{66} Helmutte, p. 190 (my italics).

Innstetten the moral coward, hiding behind social convention and failing to posit himself as a decisively acting individual, failing, in essence, to take any real responsibility for his actions. Sasse regards his conservatism as nothing but 'a mask hiding his irresoluteness'. Sasse also accepts the idea that the issue of the duel is representative of the opposition between self and society: 'Here the irresolvable conflict between an antiquated, outworn conventionality, the status-quo, and the anti-conventional demands and aspirations of the individual amid the contingencies of life is expressed in all its paradoxical polarity'. Similarly, Garland regards Innstetten's arguments for fighting the duel as 'the sanctification of custom and habit and the fear of ostracism'. He then goes on to maintain that 'Innstetten’s training, temperament and ambition all impel him to override personal and emotional factors; fear of “what the neighbours will say” makes sure that he does'. Bance believes that Innstetten, 'through his decision to make public the news of his wife’s long-past adultery, displaces his own indecision by electing for the pseudo-decisiveness of a duel, and enters upon a fatal charade', turning what should have been a private, deeply personal decision into nothing but 'an external, bureaucratic affair, to be settled according to regulations governing conduct'. Müller-Seidel swings the focus round to society itself, but the implications remain similar:

[D]ie Gesellschaft als Orientierungspunkt allen Denkens behält das letzte Wort [...]. Daß im Raum dieses Romans das Private – alles Private – von Gesellschaftlichen verdrängt wird, macht die Sache so schlimm, die Sache der Menschlichkeit, wenn man das so sagen darf.

All of these arguments seem to accept the validity of Wüllersdorf’s conclusion and take it as their starting point. Innstetten is castigated for acting inauthentically, for failing to act, as they see it, in accordance with how he - apparently - really feels. This takes us back to the opening idea of Trilling’s that the self, intrinsically authentic, is rendered inauthentic by his or her contact with society. Perhaps, however, the emphasis on the society versus individual, the external public image versus the private

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68 Sasse, p. 144.
69 Sasse, p. 143.
70 Garland pp. 190-91.
71 Bance, p. 26 and p. 52.
inner self dichotomies results in unfairness to Innstetten. We have already suggested that the division of self is not a simple black and white affair. The public persona is entangled with, not distinct from, the private self. This is why it is so hard to establish of what the quintessence of Geert’s self consists. As Christine Renz insists:

Das freie Subjekt erweist sich als ein immer schon gesellschaftlich determiniertes. Das Gegenüber von menschlichem Recht und objektiver Rechtsnorm – von Ich und Gesellschaft – wird zu einem unaufloslichen Ineinander: das einzelne Subjekt ist in dem, was es als Recht empfindet, immer schon von der Rechtsnorm geprägt.\(^\text{73}\)

Innstetten does not simply take his discovery in his bureaucratic stride. The actual incoherence of his ostensibly articulate reasoning bears witness to his emotional upset. Both he and Wüllersdorf make the spurious ‘self versus society’ distinction, but this distinction serves only to obscure the more fundamental issues at stake. Innstetten is accustomed to living according to society’s rigid dictates. What is more, he is accustomed to having to smother his feelings and press on regardless. His youthful love for Luise is marginalized in the text as a whole, and both trivialized and depersonalised by Effi’s insensitive rendering of it as ‘eine Liebesgeschichte mit Held und Heldin, und zuletzt mit Entschagung’ (10), a ‘melting down’ of the painful history ‘zu einer interessanten Geschichte’ which thereby loses ‘seinen Ernst und seine Schwere’.\(^\text{74}\) The reader nevertheless gains a sense that perhaps the young Luise really was the love of Geert’s life. Relinquishing her seems to have cost him a great deal. Admittedly we cannot support this claim with the evidence of any great suicide bid or of any grand, solipsistic and all-engulfing despair à la Werther, but Fontane’s is not a world of hyperbole and majestic gestures. On the one hand the modern reader smiles at Effi’s claim, ‘Nein, das Leben hat er sich nicht genommen. \textit{Aber ein bisschen war es doch so was}.’ (13; my italics). One cannot, surely, commit ‘ein bisschen’ suicide.

On the other hand, by this particular society’s standards and parameters, ‘ein bisschen war es \textit{doch so was}’, and as readers we must be receptive to the societal interpretation and valuation of these earlier actions. Holbeche, who, as we have already seen, is


\(^\text{74}\) Richter, p. 67.
sympathetic towards Innstetten, is keen to use his past as part justification for the emotional distance he keeps between himself and Effi: 'Innstetten’s inhibited behaviour towards Effi reflects [...] the fear of emotional involvement of someone who has had his fingers badly burnt in the past.' The enforced renunciation of Luise represents a first major formative lesson in the influence of society’s unwritten codes not just in the public domain but also in the private sphere. It represents a question mark over naïve notions of love, romance and spontaneity, and a key step towards the acceptance and assimilation of the codes.

The issue of the duel, then, is not an issue of private self versus social dictates because the decision, whilst indeed being about following society’s unwritten rules, functions on a level of how those unwritten rules have been etched indelibly into Innstetten’s character, not on a level of how those rules clash with the ‘true’ suppressed, repressed, self. The rules have become incorporated into the self to such an extent that they have become an organic part of it. Rainer Kolk makes a valuable observation which might apply to any of the characters in Effi Briest, but which has especial resonance when applied to Innstetten: ‘Die ‘Natur’ eines Individuums ist niemals als solche, sondern nur als durch Sozialisation immer schon veränderte zu sehen.’ Liebrand agrees, and suggests that it is typical of Fontane’s works that this issue is highlighted: ‘Im Fontaneschen Œuvre wird kein monadisches Subjekt einer zum Gegenüber hypostasierten ‘Gesellschaft’ konfrontiert, sondern Gestalten, deren Ich sich nicht als ‘authentisches’, sondern bereits als Resultat sozialer Prozesse präsentiert, suchen nach Wegen der Selbstkonstitution.’ Both Kolk and Liebrand imply that to search for an authentic self within the characters is a fool’s errand. There is no primordial self, the subject having no special part of his self that is reserved from society’s influence. Again, however, this is not quite accurate. Innstetten does feel something approaching anti-conventional, non-socialized, urges; he would like to forgive Effi. The society that prevents forgiveness does so in the form of a human, individual agent. That agent is, of course, none other than Innstetten himself. It is the intertwining of social impulses and urges in contradiction with the

75 Holbeche, pp. 21-23.
77 Liebrand, p. 12.
social dictates, themselves censored by the self which is keyed in to the social mentality, which makes it impossible for either Innstetten or the reader to work out exactly who he is or what he feels. Paradoxically, Innstetten wants to try to posit an authentic self, based on what he believes the authentic self ought to be, rather than anything that he actually feels.

The next time that we gain access to Innstetten’s thoughts is when he is on his way back to Berlin after fighting the duel. During the journey, he thinks about everything that has happened. His train of thought begins with an affirmation of the validity of what he has just done, declaring to himself: ‘Schuld verlangt Sühne; das hat einen Sinn.’ It is not long, however, before the doubts start to creep in. He initially dismisses the notion of ‘Verjährung’ as ‘etwas Halbes, etwas Schwächliches, zum mindesten was Prosaisches’ (243). He then finds himself admitting that, all things considered, it is also ‘das einzig Vernünftige’ and that ‘das Vernünftige ist meist prosaisch’ (243). In many ways, this brings us back full circle to the issue of emotions, for it might be maintained that feelings of being hurt and insulted, of having been deceived and made a fool of, are far more prosaic and distinctly less glamorous than their stormier and more proactive brothers, hatred and desire for revenge. This parallel reinforces the theory that in fighting the duel Innstetten is not only succumbing to the internalised pressures of social convention, but is also attempting to dig down within himself in a quest to discover his own reserves of those elusive emotions which he considers to be the ‘real’, ‘authentic’ ones in these circumstances.

The bid to uncover these emotions, to actually feel them, has, however, failed. He has behaved simply as a ‘Schauspieler’, following the dictates of a ‘gewählte Rolle’. ‘Er erkennt zu spät, daß er die falsche Rolle gewählt hat.’ Innstetten is forced to admit that the whole event has been little more than a farce:

‘Ja, wenn ich voll tödlichem Haß gewesen wäre, wenn mir hier ein tiefes Rachegefühl gesessen hätte... Rache ist nichts Schönes, aber was Menschliches und hat ein natürlich menschliches Recht. So aber war alles einer Vorstellung, einem Begriff zuliebe, war eine gemachte Geschichte, halbe Komödie.’ (243)

We can interpret these words about the ‘Begriff’ and the ‘Vorstellung’ on two levels. Firstly, there is the societal dimension. The ritual of the duel has been performed because of the notion, the idea, of ‘honour’ upheld and propounded by

78 Lehrer, p. 116.
society. Secondly, there is the level of Innstetten’s own complicated emotional expectations. His concepts of ‘Haß’ and ‘Rache’ correspond more to an academic ‘Begriff’ or a ‘Vorstellung’ than to any concrete, felt reality and Helmstetter is quick to point out the vicious circle of ‘Vorstellungen’ at work in society, observing that ‘es sind die Vorstellungen der in der gesellschaftlichen Realität handelnden Subjekte, die die Vorstellungen hervorbringen, nach deren Maß sie handeln’. Fighting the duel has not enabled Geert to resolve anything. Considering his own reactions inadequate and unfitting, he has found himself incapable, at least on this occasion, of grasping and realising that which he imagines to constitute the adequate, the appropriate and, perforce, - by his reckoning - the authentic. By consciously, actively, trying to act authentically, he has simply been driven back further into the realms of inauthenticity.

Almost against his will, then, Innstetten finds himself admitting the emptiness of the course he has just taken. In some ways, this is an epiphany just like Effi’s, for Geert, just as Effi did, recognises here the bankruptcy of such impressive sounding principles as ‘honour’ and ‘virtue’. Effi’s insight, however, as we have seen, is transitory and quickly forgotten, whereas Geert will never cease to feel haunted by what he understands at this moment. This is highlighted at the point at which we see him receive two very different letters. The first is a formal note, officially informing him of and congratulating him on his promotion. The second is a personal letter from Roswitha, in which she makes the request that Rollo might be sent to Hohen-Cremmen to keep Effi company on her solitary walks. Although Innstetten is pleased by the promotion, it is made quite clear that he has daily reappraised his values since fighting the duel. He now uses quite different yardsticks:

Denn was das Höherhinaufklimmen auf der Leiter anging, so war er seit dem Morgen in Kessin, wo Crampas mit einem Blick, den er immer vor Augen hatte, Abschied von ihm genommen, etwas kritisch gegen derlei Dinge geworden [i.e., things such as his promotion]. Er maß seitdem mit anderem Maße, sah alles anders an. Auszeichnung, war was es am Ende? (285)

To assume, however, that Geert’s insight into the factitiousness of society’s categories has effected within him a total revolution in terms of his outlook and behaviour is to underestimate the tenacity of his conditioning and the way in which

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79 Garland makes the important observation regarding the duel ethos that ‘anyone who possessed the privilege and yet declined to conform to the duel mystique laid himself open to aspersions of cowardice. This is the background to Innstetten’s problem’. Garland, p. 187.
80 Helmstetter, pp. 186-87.
those categories and conventions become so inextricably a part of the self. Rather, he has come to believe that happiness 'liegt in zweierlei'. Namely, 'darin, daß man ganz da steht, wo man hingehört [...] und zum zweiten und besten in einem behaglichen Abwickeln des ganz Alltäglichen' (285). That is to say, that whilst Innstetten has recognised the value of the smaller, incidental things in life, he nonetheless persists in an idealised notion of meritocracy and the importance of being on the 'correct' rung of the social ladder. He does add to the notion of standing in the appropriate position the important rider, 'aber welcher Beamte kann das von sich sagen', but the implication prevails nevertheless that happiness and the career ladder, happiness and social position are, for Innstetten, still inextricably linked. The brave words dismissing 'Auszeichnung' have a hollow ring after all. Innstetten is unable to throw off the elements of his character which require others’ respect and admiration for self-validation, yet he knows that the things for which that respect and admiration are accorded are fundamentally worthless. Innstetten is reduced by social forces to a condition of 'Halbheit' where no single element has total validity for him, none of the parts can make up a whole, and he is stuck in a limbo of negation. Furthermore, the definition of what constitutes 'Glück' remains starkly theoretical, for upon reading Roswitha's letter, Innstetten passes a hand wearily across his forehead 'und empfand schmerzlich, daß es ein Glück gebe, daß er es gehabt, aber daß er es nicht mehr habe und nicht mehr haben könne' (285; original italics).

Innstetten's position, then, is excruciating. He has identified the grim worthlessness of ambition, but cannot fully cut himself free from it; he has recognised what happiness is, has acknowledged that he was once in possession of happiness... and is certain that he will never be genuinely happy again. He does not, however, have a viable alternative in which to seek refuge. Vague ideas such as abandoning his career and his comfortable life to move to Africa are analogous to Effi's yearning, in her social ostracism, to be able to help poor children. Both represent improbable images of the self, conjured up in a desire to escape the misery of current existence. Like Effi, Innstetten laments, '[m]ir ist eben alles verschlossen' (287), but the exclusion is of a different order. Effi is actively ostracized by society and even by her parents as members of that society. Innstetten can, in theory, get on with his life and

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81 Radcliffe, Effi Briest, p. 77.
continue to climb the career ladder, with society accepting him henceforth as hitherto, respecting him for having ‘done his duty’ and ‘defended his honour’. No such rehabilitation is available to Effi. Innstetten’s sense of exclusion, however, results in his inability ever again to believe in the values of the society to which his self nonetheless inexorably binds him. On one level, Effi’s position is the more painful because she is explicitly rejected and openly despised by the people whom she had formerly considered to be her friends, allies and equals. From a different perspective, it might be suggested that Geert’s condition is the more tragic and carries with it the graver ramifications. Unlike Effi, he is unable to reconcile himself either to society or to himself. He finds himself in a limbo of alienation from both. Holbeche perhaps exaggerates a little when he claims that the Innstetten that Fontane leaves us with is ‘a broken and desperate character’, for Innstetten is far too outwardly dignified for such a description, but he makes the important observation that ‘despite his acceptance of guilt, [he] is denied the traditional resolutions of tragedy and the sentimental “Verklärung” which is accorded to Effi’.  

It is also interesting to note that when Geert talks of Africa, the issue of authentic emotion arises again. He claims that he would like to be amongst people,

die von Kultur und Ehre nichts wissen. Diese Glücklichen. Denn gerade das, dieser ganze Krimskrams ist doch an allem schuld. Aus Passion, was am Ende gehen möchte, tut man dergleichen nicht. Also bloßen Vorstellungen zuliebe... Vorstellungen! (288; original italics)

There is still that nagging sense that genuine emotion, authentic passion, have eluded him. There is still that sense of frustration that he cannot justify his actions since they were not governed by spontaneous emotional response but only by the mechanics of how he felt that that response ought to feel. What he overlooks in blaming his society’s notions of culture and honour is that the tribal communities which he seems to envy and which he envisages as leading such an uncomplicated and honest existence have their own sets of different, but nonetheless rigid and binding, conventions, taboos, traditions, customs. He fails to recognise the striking kinship between his Western ‘civilisation’ and the ‘uncultured’ tribalism of which he is so short-sightedly jealous. Robinson makes the point explicitly, the other way around, arguing that ‘[i]n their conformity with the ethos of their caste [the characters] suggest

82 Holbeche, p. 29.
analogies with primitive tribal society and its multiplicity of taboos as well as its dire retribution for all those who flout them'. The apparent opposite alternatives are nothing but mirrors to one another in different dress.

Wüllersdorf’s ‘answer’ to Innstetten’s outpouring is to claim that ultimately one must ‘[e]infach hier bleiben und Resignation üben’ (288). This is a terribly unheroic response and seems charged with a sense of world-weariness and apparent defeatism. Much has been written on the theme of ‘resignation’ in Fontane’s work.

Richter warns us against reading too much negativity into the resigned attitude:

Wir gewahren die eigentümliche Ambivalenz der Resignation. Sie ist Ergebung in das Unabänderliche, Unterwerfung; aber als solche hat sie Züge der Bewußtheit und Einsicht zur Voraussetzung, die über jegliches nur Fatalistische und Passive hinausweisen. Sie ist Verzicht auf eine wirkliche Auslösung ausgeworfener Widersprüche; doch ging dem eine Erkenntnis der Unlösbarkeit voraus. Sie ist Eingeständnis des Schwächeren; aber paradoxerweise verbirgt sich gerade in der Bewußtheit der Unterwerfung ein Maß an menschlicher Kraft, das den scheinbar Überlegenen [...] am wenigsten eigen ist.

Put much more succinctly – and much less kindly; resignation is a deeply human response. Just as Effi’s capitulation is as believable as it is depressing, so is the notion of Geert resigning himself to marking time, to maintaining his stiff upper lip and wading through the endless days. He chooses the ‘Überlebensstrategie’. His failure, if it is that, to reject the inadequate status quo in society is a result of the fact that he has nothing with which to replace it and this sense of helplessness reflects Fontane’s own attitude. His ‘Gesellschaftskritik erfolgt nicht von einem Standort aus, der das Bild einer neuen, einer künftigen und besseren Gesellschaftsordnung impliziert. Dieser Dichter blickt über die Illusionen jeder Utopie hinaus’. Fontane recognises the necessity for some kind of social structure and simultaneously acknowledges the destructive elements within the structure in place. So much of Innstetten’s self is so inextricably caught up with the elements that he at least mentally rejects as worthless that he is trapped in a double bind. He recognises his own – and

83 A. R. Robinson, p. 175.
85 Liebrand, p. 310.
society’s – inauthenticity, but his desperate bid to posit a self which he imagines might qualify as authentic founders on the awkwardly contrived and societally coloured criteria which he tries to use. Not only does this leave him in a similar position to the one in which he began, he now has the burden of insight with which to contend, the insight that his bid for authenticity resulted only in the construction of a self as hollow as the one who had ‘nie an einer Sache erstickt’. As John Stuart Mill argues, social tyranny can be

more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself.  

Fontane denies both himself and his characters ‘die zwar wünschenswerte, aber nicht realistische Flucht in den Urwald’ and offers no answers either to himself, or to his characters, or even, most crucially, to his readers, leaving instead a series of alternative and equally ambivalent constructions.

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88 Degering, p. 72.
CHAPTER 4: THEODOR FONTANE'S EFFI BRIEST: NARRATIVE

What we have seen so far, by examining the characters of Effi and Innstetten, are the ways in which the characters construct themselves and each other and the important role played by society and its norms and conventions in the formation of the self. We have also seen how difficult it is, both for the characters and for the reader, to establish any stable, convincing sense of a 'real', 'authentic' self. Again the notion of authenticity is reduced to the status of an illusion. At the same time, of course, any work of fiction is itself merely a construction. The maker of this construction is, in the broadest sense, the author. He is the creator of the novelistic universe, the architect of the novel’s structure. It is he who has ultimate jurisdiction over everything, he who chooses what goes in and what stays out. As the articulator of structure, the author is the one who makes the decisions concerning the Barthesian 'effet de réel', the sense that the novelistic universe employs a plethora of 'things' whose only function is to create an atmosphere of 'the real'.^ 1 At the other end of the spectrum to this is the issue of relevance. How much digressive, discursive information, how many tangential additions should the author permit himself? The issue is fraught with potential problems, as Booth points out: 'If the reader fails to catch the full significance of each loaded fact, he is of course seriously misreading. But, on the other hand, if he assumes that his author is choosing details consciously and packing them with significance, he may find himself overinterpreting.'^ 2 How, that is, is the reader to know precisely what to do with the construction with which she is presented, how is she to read it?

Effi Briest is a text which might be accused of inviting both over- and under-interpretation. On the morning after Effi and Geert’s return from their honeymoon, we are provided with a long and detailed description of the Kessin house and garden. The reader is given such an overwhelming amount of information that she stops in her tracks to wonder why. Certainly it is perfectly natural for someone to desire a tour of

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1 One of the examples that Barthes uses is that of a barometer in Flaubert’s tale, ‘Un cœur simple’. The barometer seems to be of no intrinsic significance. Rather, argues Barthes, it, and other, similar objects, 'ne disent finalement rien d'autre que ceci: nous sommes le réel; c'est la catégorie du 'réel' [...] qui est alors signifiée.' See Roland Barthes, 'L'Effet de réel' in Le Bruissement de la langue (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1984), pp. 167-74 (p. 174).

2 Booth, p. 114.
the house that will henceforth be called 'home', but the minute details give a sense of
information overload and are, anyway, untypical of the Fontane narrative. The
'Musterung' begins with the kitchen, 'deren Herd eine moderne Konstruktion aufwies,
während an der Decke hin, und zwar bis in die Mädchenstube hinein, ein elektrischer
Draht lief, – beides vor kurzem erst hergerichtet' (60). The interpreting mind goes
into overdrive. Maybe the message is that Innstetten is a modern soul at heart, what
with all the new-fangled kitchen equipment and the latest electric technology. Maybe
the starting of the tour in the kitchen is significant, indicating the domestic sphere to
which Effi is now confined (as opposed to playing in the garden, swinging on the
swing, boating on the lake in Hohen-Cremmen). Then again, maybe the prosaic
description of the commonplace, the ordinary, is meant to heighten the uncanny
impression created by the subsequent description of the disused upstairs room with its
strange noises and its brightly coloured cut-out picture of a Chinaman stuck to the
back of a broken chair. Then again, maybe... But surely this is Booth’s point. The
reader, in her anxiety not to miss the full significance of the author’s message, must at
the same time take care not to distort the message in the opposite direction. The point
of all this is, once again, structure. By including such elements, the author is at once
acknowledging the redundantly teeming materiality of the world at large and the fact
that within his construction understandable limits must be observed; it is impossible
to chronicle everything. In this way, structure itself, the processes of selection and of
limitation, become thematized. The significance of this is that the construction of the
novelistic universe bears close resemblance to the construction – and constructedness
– of the social world depicted within that novelistic universe. The potentially,
apparently meaningful may, on closer inspection, be wholly redundant or arbitrary. In
this way, layers of construction, internal and external, textual and societal, of self, of
other, by self, by other, by author, by reader, are seen to reflect, to refract and to
interact with one another.

Whilst we have acknowledged that the author is the figure with overall control
over every aspect of the text, we should not underestimate the importance of the
narrator. In many ways, the narrator might be seen as functioning at a kind of halfway
stage between author and characters. He has, of course, no more genuine autonomy
than the characters in as much as he, too, is a product of the author’s imagination:
'Narrators, too, are personae created by the text.'\(^3\) As in *Jude the Obscure* and for the most part in *Madame Bovary* we have in *Effi Briest* a third person narrator, an unidentifiable figure hovering somewhere without the story’s margins, effectively set apart from the characters rather than one of them. For this reason, we tend to accept, perhaps naively, perhaps erroneously, that his voice holds more authority than those of the characters. What is more, we consider that that authority has been invested in him by the author himself. It is the narrator’s voice that we hear throughout the text, commenting, reflecting, judging - or not - especially in respect of the characters and the motivations for their actions - or inaction. Any narrator is an inherently curious entity. Although, as mentioned earlier, much recent literary theory has taken serious measures to try to dispel the myths and challenge the assumptions, we still have a tendency to want to be guided by the narrator, to want to hear that impersonal voice as a stable, authoritative, reliable presence who will leave behind him the crucial Ariadne’s thread for us to cling on to and follow. The narrator in *Effi Briest*, however, far from being the solidly omniscient figure that some critics seem to categorise him as,\(^4\) presents a complex mixture of stability and instability, of authority and non-authority, of reliability and unreliability, subverting such traditional-based claims as the idea that 'the point of the realist narrative is [...] to demonstrate successful readings of the world; therefore figurative constructs that resist hermeneutic penetration because of an absolute opacity would undermine the project'.\(^5\) Fontane’s narrator, like the narrator of *Madame Bovary*, challenges such a transparent agenda. He is sometimes assertively present, sometimes seemingly invisible, sometimes apparently clear in his message, sometimes frustratingly ambiguous or non-committal. By means of the varying modes in which he functions, the reader is alerted not only to the fact of and the importance of the constructedness of both text and character,\(^6\) but

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\(^4\) See, for instance, Gertrude Michielsen, who almost peremptorily asserts that 'Fontane’s narrators, without exception, write in the third-person form and are omniscient'. Gertrude Michielsen, *The Preparation of the Future: Techniques of Anticipation in the Novels of Theodor Fontane and Thomas Mann* (Bern: Lang, 1978), p. 11.


\(^6\) Greenberg goes so far as to assert that *Effi Briest* is fundamentally 'a text about narrative', but this seems to emphasize the dimension of the narrative as self-conscious narrative at the expense of the novel’s status as story, which seems equally – if not, indeed, more – important. Greenberg, p. 771.
also to how awareness of processes of construction can affect processes and decisions of judgement.

The opening chapter of Effi Briest is initially rather misleading in suggesting what we might expect of the narrator during the course of the novel. The detailed description of the Hohen-Cremmen house and garden comes across with an almost photographic precision. The attention paid to background minutiae such as ‘der Hohen-Cremmener Schindelturm mit seinem blitzenden, weil neuerdings erst wieder vergoldeten Wetterhahn’ (7) seems to suggest a narrator à la Balzac, fulfilling that idea that ‘the realism of the nineteenth-century novel is fuelled by a fascination with the sheer thusness of life’7 and, again, is an almost open invitation to over-interpretation. Hamann suggests that the opening is rather disconcerting for the reader: ‘Die Fülle der Details mag verwirren, weil noch keinerlei Beziehung zu irgendeiner Handlung oder zu Figuren hergestellt werden kann.’8 Heinz Ohff is rather more blunt in his assessment: ‘Die ersten drei Sätze des Romans […] könnten jeden Leser dazu veranlassen, die Lektüre sofort wieder einzustellen. Bandwurmlang, wie ziemlich fade Regieanweisungen für ein Bühnenbild liest sich die langatmige Beschreibung des Landsitzes Hohen-Cremmen.’9 Confusing? Dull? Simply a case in point of Roland Barthes’s ‘effet de réel’? However we categorise it, it is quite uncharacteristic of the way in which our narrator will continue. After this first descriptive moment, we quickly gain an impression of a narrator with a predilection for self-effacement. We have a sense of a narrating figure who prefers to allow the characters to tell their own tale in, as it were, their own words, with direct speech and dialogue taking precedence over third-person narrative and narrative interpretation.

We have already seen in the conversations between Wüllersdorf and Innstetten the effect to which the dialogic mode can be put. Critics frequently focus on the extensive use of speech in Fontane’s novels, varying in how they interpret the aims and effects of the technique, but united in their agreement of its success in terms of power and immediacy. Both Radcliffe and Sasse, for instance, regard conversation as

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7 Richard Harland, Literary Theory from Plato to Barthes: An Introductory History (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p. 81; original italics.
8 Hamann, EB aus erzähltheoretischer Sicht, p. 114.
a key means of characterisation, of information-giving and of social commentary.\textsuperscript{10} That is, the characters, the world that they inhabit, and the commentary upon this world may often be created and delivered less by means of descriptive, impersonal narrative than by the words spoken directly by the characters to one another. Brinkmann sees speech as an effective, efficient way of presenting a variety of perspectives at the same time, without having to lend narrative authority to any particular one, emphasising rather each one’s inherent relativity and subjectivity in that it is proffered as a speaking character’s viewpoint rather than that of an all-knowing narrator figure. He observes that the narrator often maintains complete silence regarding these viewpoints and that he carefully ‘läßt keine Meinung triumphieren’,\textsuperscript{11} refusing to interfere with the picture as it is created by the characters. Paul Böckmann focuses on the importance of speech in terms of how it permits the characters access, albeit on a temporary and unstable basis, to some level of truth and reality. Conversation in \textit{Effi Briest}, he claims,

\begin{quote}
zeugt davon, wie dem Menschen sich die Wahrheit eröffnet; wie er sie neimals endgültig besitzen und festhalten kann, sondern nur im Augenblick des Sprechens ergreift und dann wieder losläßt, um sie in die Antwort des Gesprächspartners eingehen zu lassen. Das Gespräch wird zur entscheidenden Darstellungsform Fontanes, nicht nur als technisches Mittel, um die Figuren zu charakterisieren, sondern als die bestimmende Lebensform des Menschen, der nur im Antwortgeben sich seiner selbst vergewisser und zugleich in der Flüchütigkeit des Gesprächs dem Wandel der Zeit am unmittelbarsten begegnet.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

Conversation is, indeed, a characteristic device of Fontane’s and we glean much insight into the characters portrayed through what they say and to whom they say it. \textit{Effi}’s frequent and unconscious recourse to cliché, for instance, emphasises how language may often be used unthinkingly, effectively constructing us in a certain mould without our knowledge. This stands in direct opposition to Böckmann’s claim, in as much as speech may often obscure truth and reality, either intentionally, or, more insidiously, if it is used as a reflex, as a pre-packaged mechanism.\textsuperscript{13} As we saw earlier, \textit{Effi} has a tendency to make sweeping generalisations, and whilst she may

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[10]{Radcliffe, \textit{Effi Briest}, p. 54; Sasse, p. 141.}
\footnotetext[11]{Brinkmann, \textit{Verbindlichkeit} p. 184.}
\footnotetext[12]{Paul Böckmann, ‘\textit{Der Zeitroman Fontanes}’ in Theodor Fontane, ed. by Wolfgang Preisendanz (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973), 80-110 (p. 101).}
\end{footnotes}
wholeheartedly believe in them, she does not necessarily always follow them to the letter herself. What we say does not invariably correspond with what we do, so we must be wary of drawing conclusions about a character without comparing words and actions. That which is not said may also be important. Briest frequently avoids discussion by dismissing a topic or a raised question with his ‘Es ist ein weites Feld’ catch-all catchphrase. This shows, perhaps, an unwillingness openly to challenge and to enter into debate with the status quo. Here again, though, the words used do not necessarily provide a transparent window onto the character. This is illustrated by the different attitudes taken to Briest’s concluding ‘Es ist ein zu weites Feld’ (296) at the end of the novel. Garland, for instance, views Briest positively. He suggests that his catchphrase is ‘a simple tactical device which enables him to evade his wife’s dogmatic simplifications’ and that in the catchphrase we ‘sense Briest’s own conviction, his consciousness of the futility of speculation, and his wish to spare and protect his wife. The trivial phrase thus acquires a new poignancy and provides a perfect, quiet but thoughtprovoking ending’. Hayens agrees, suggesting that Briest’s stance is the ‘wise’ one and Kurt Schober maintains that the catchphrase ‘zeigt [Briest] als einen liebenswürdigen Agnostiker. Seine heitere Skepsis macht ihn zu einer der anziehendsten Gestalten des Romans’. Richter regards the phrase with ambivalence: ‘Ohnmacht vor dem Unabänderlichen, aber auch das skeptische Abstehen von jedem gewaltsamen Zugriff und jeder bohrenden Forderung, Kompromißbereitschaft und Nachsicht: all das nehmen die wenigen Worten auf.’ Stefan Neuhaus, however, is altogether less indulgent, insisting that ‘[d]er Spruch hat eine Placebo-Funktion, weil er vom Problem ablenkt und dem Redner [...] das Gefühl gibt, daß weitere Erörterungen nichts nützen’. Stefan Greif agrees; he sees in Briest’s words the attitude, like that held by Roswitha, that the blame must be sought elsewhere, ‘bei den “anderen”’, and this represents a hiding to nothing in as much as it equates to a metaphorical shrugging of the shoulders. Whilst speech is important,
then, and the narrator often seems to vanish behind the directly uttered word, his importance as mediator between text and reader should not be underestimated.

Many major eighteenth and nineteenth century novelists such as Dickens and George Eliot often made very direct authorial intrusions in their work. In line with many late-nineteenth and twentieth century novelists who rejected their predecessors' intrusive ways of writing,\(^{20}\) Fontane was, in theory at least, deeply suspicious of the notion of authorial intervention in the text. He writes in a letter to Friedrich Spielhagen: ‘Das Hineinreden des Schriftstellers ist fast immer vom Uebel, mindestens überflüssig. Und was überflüssig ist, ist falsch.’\(^{21}\) In some ways, this is, of itself, a specious claim; as remarked above, the author is always the overarching architect of the text. That which is written is written by his hand, that which is said is said by him. Fontane goes on in the letter to say:

Allerdings wird es mitunter schwer festzustellen sein, wo das Hineinreden beginnt; der Schriftsteller muß doch auch, als er, eine Menge thun und sagen, sonst geht es eben nicht, oder wird Künstlei. Nur des Urtheilens, des Predigens, des klug- und weiseins muß er sich enthalten.\(^{22}\)

Metaphorically, then, it is the author who does all the talking. Literally, however, and especially with a third-person narrator, the author can only ‘hineinreden’ through the narrator, since whilst the author is, indeed, the omnipresent creator of the entire narrative universe, the narrator’s is the voice which the reader ‘hears’ telling the tale. Certainly we should be wary of failing to discriminate between ‘Schriftsteller’ and ‘Erzähler’, yet at the same time, it seems impossible to deny the link between them in a text of this kind.\(^{23}\) Intervention, then, whilst eminently undesirable, is inevitable. The author has to say and do a great deal in order for the whole enterprise

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\(^{20}\) Lodge explains: ‘Around the turn of the century [...]the intrusive authorial voice fell into disfavour, partly because it detracts from the realistic illusion and reduces the emotional intensity of the experience being represented, by calling attention to the act of narrating. It also claims a kind of authority, a God-like omniscience, which our sceptical and relativistic age is reluctant to grant to anyone. Modern fiction has tended to suppress or eliminate the authorial voice, by presenting the action through the consciousness of the characters, or by handing over to them the narrative task itself.’ Lodge, *Art of Fiction*, p. 10. What makes *Effi Briest, Madame Bovary* and *Jude the Obscure* so exciting is the fact that they all seem to reside on the border of the two schools of thinking.


\(^{23}\) As opposed to, for example, a text with a first person narrator who clearly functions as a character within his own story. Although we should avoid such statements as, ‘The author is claiming / suggesting / implying...’, when basing our claims on narrative statements within the text, it seems unnecessarily obtuse to deny that there is any degree of conflation.
to function. The key location for this is within the narrating voice. The unforgivable error, however, is to adopt the tone of judge, preacher, superior sage.

In practice, what we see in *Effi Briest* is a narrator who passes through various levels of non-judgement and non-preaching. At the farthest extreme is a narrator who not only does not judge, he does not even seem to pass comment. An example which illustrates this is Briest's report of the sacking of Inspektor Pink, the grounds of the sacking being what we can only assume is an adulterous relationship with the gardener's wife:

‘Natürlich habe ich Pink entlassen müssen, übrigens ungern. Es ist sehr fatal, daß solche Geschichten fast immer in die Erntezeit fallen. Und Pink war sonst ein ungewöhnlich tüchtiger Mann, hier leider am unrechten Fleck. Aber lassen wir das; Wilke wird schon unruhig.’ (25)

Of and in itself, this is a trivial moment; thematically speaking, however, it is of obvious significance. There is ample scope for narrative comment and analysis, but the reader is left to find her own way and make her own assumptions. She must, for instance, pick up on the tacit implications of the casual sounding ‘natürlich’, with its indication of automatic adherence to certain social standards and attitudes, but must also recognise the evidence of external social pressure in that it finds itself juxtaposed with ‘ungern’. She must identify the humour - whether intended by Briest or not - in the comic notion of such events always being inconveniently timed, as if their occurrence at harvest time somehow rendered the perpetrators more morally culpable and irresponsible. The narrator provides no assistance. He maintains a low profile and does not pass comment on the deservedness or otherwise of the sacking. Once again, direct speech carries the day. Yet is the narrator wholly absent? In actual fact, our narrator has constructed an important framework for us, and, as with a painting, the frame becomes almost invisible to us as Briest’s words take centre-stage, functioning as the focus, the actual ‘picture’ to which we are paying attention. If we step back, however, to examine the frame, what we see is the narrator telling us that Briest is pleased to see his wife and daughter again after their trip to Berlin, that he asks innumerable questions, but that he generally fails to pay any real attention to the answers. ‘Statt dessen erging er sich in Mitteilung dessen, was er inzwischen erlebt.’ (25). That is, the Inspektor Pink tale. Then, as the family sits down to dinner, Briest, having told his story, ‘hörte [...] besser zu’ (25). On the one hand it can be argued that the narrator functions here simply as a neutral presence, filling in minor details and
setting the scene for the reader before handing over, as it were, to the characters, allowing direct speech free rein. On the other hand, however, it might also be suggested that those ostensibly minor details carry wider ramifications. The narrator constructs for the reader the image of a Briest who is so impatient to 'spill the beans' about Pink that he is unable to listen to anything else until he has shared his story. Why is Briest so eager? From what we see of him throughout the course of the novel, he is no whispering scandal-monger à la Sophie Zwicker. His introduction to the Pink story is as follows: 'Ihr habt mir vorhin von der Nationalgalerie gesprochen und von der 'Insel der Seligen' - nun, wir haben hier, während ihr fort wart, auch so was gehabt.' (25). The link, then, is with the Böcklin painting that Dagobert has insisted on Effi seeing during her stay in Berlin. The painting, actually entitled 'Gefilde der Seligen', was painted in 1878 for Berlin's National Gallery. Despite being a replacement for an earlier painting which had met with much shocked disapproval, 'Gefilde der Seligen' also provoked a storm of public outrage because of its depiction of naked nymphs. The link, then, summed up in Briest's euphemistic 'so was', is the realm of the sexual, the taboo, the scandalous. It is the realm of all those things about which it is most impolitic to talk in polite society.

What are we to do with this? By presenting to us the cognitive, judgemental leap from the supposedly scandalous painting to the scandal of adultery, with Briest lumping everything under the vague umbrella term of the 'so was', the narrator is presenting a somewhat negative picture of a rather unenlightened Briest. At the same time, however, Briest's acceptance of the definitions of the scandalous is passive and his indistinct inking that perhaps all is not right with them is expressed in the 'ungern'. There is a sense that Briest understands that to sack Pink defies good sense and that to let him keep his job would entail no negative repercussions as far as his professional capabilities are concerned. That is, he understands, but either he is not prepared to act upon what he understands, or, paradoxically, he does not realise what it is that he understands. Either way, the combination of narrative pointers and what Briest actually says permits the reader to identify Briest's position as an inauthentic one, be it consciously or unconsciously so. The root of the problem is an issue tackled at length by Mill. He emphasises the danger of holding a passive belief in something, in as much as the creed or belief, by remaining effectively outside the mind, petrifies
the mind against other influences, ‘doing nothing for the mind or heart except standing sentinel over them to keep them vacant’.\textsuperscript{24} Importantly, the narrator does not judge Briest: ‘Allumfassendes Prinzip bleibt die Diskretion in der Darstellung, die gepaart ist mit einer Furcht vor verbindlichen Urteilen und dem Verzicht des Erzählers, sich in lehrhafter Manier an den Leser zu wenden.’\textsuperscript{25} This non-judgement causes the reader to focus on the processes of Briest’s construction, showing us how his attitudes to those things personally relevant to him are in direct accord with the general attitudes by which he is surrounded. The narrator, through his own careful processes of construction, implicitly urges us to understand these processes of Briest’s construction rather than simply to condemn him either for cowardice (in not acting on his understanding) or blindness (in not comprehending, or seeking to comprehend, what it is that he understands).

This approach of non-judgement is a central facet of the narrator’s general behaviour. Corresponding with the assertions made by Fontane in the letter cited above, he (the narrator) tends to speak and act without either preaching or judging. Judgement per se implies a declaration - implicit or explicit - of superiority, and also a certain concretisation of opinion, a definite avowal that there is black and white, right and wrong. Fontane was wary of such stark distinctions, not only in literature but in everyday life, claiming that, ‘Personen, denen irgend etwas absolut feststeht, sind keine Genossen für mich, nichts steht fest, auch nicht einmal in Moral- und Gesinnungsfragen.’\textsuperscript{26} The ramifications of this attitude are neatly summed up by Pascal. He remarks that Fontane’s novels constitute

expositions of moral dilemmas. They are not moral tracts, for although they contain much practical wisdom they leave us in some sense indetermined, aware of the complexity of the issues rather than persuaded of right and wrong.\textsuperscript{27}

The lack of narrative intervention, then, is not a message to the reader that the narrator is investing absolute faith in her to share the load of the interpretive task and to draw all the ‘right’ conclusions and make all the ‘right’ judgements. Rather, it is a tacit warning that conclusions, fixed opinions and judgements are dangerous concepts. The reader is advised that her role is to understand, rather than to judge. Fontane

\textsuperscript{24} Mill, pp. 102-03.
\textsuperscript{25} Hamann, \textit{EB aus erzähtheoretischer Sicht}, p. 447.
\textsuperscript{26} Cited in Böckmann (Preisendanz), pp. 96-97.
\textsuperscript{27} Pascal, \textit{German Novel}, p. 212.
‘malt nicht schwarz-weiß, schafft nicht Engel und Teufel, berauscht sich nicht an
pikanten Abenteuern, setzt sittliche Maßstäbe, aber moralisiert nicht, urteilt aber
verurteilt nicht’. The reader’s task is to accept the ambiguity... and then to wonder
what to do with it.

The above example concerning Briest is one of relatively covert narrative
presence. It requires the reader to make certain connections on her own initiative.
There are other moments where the narrative intervention is presented in a far more
direct manner, with this sometimes even approximating - despite what we have just
maintained regarding the narrative approach - a kind of judgement. This may take the
form of the subtle use of a single word. One particular description of Effi, for
instance, states that ‘der armen jungen Frau schlug das Herz’ (62; my italics).
Another instance sees Niemeyer being categorised as a ‘schwacher Vater’ (217; my
italics). In both cases a minor, but definite, judgement is passed. In both cases the
judgement is so well integrated that it is barely perceptible, the single word swept
along in the flow of the otherwise neutral narrative rather than standing out, jarring, as
an interpolated comment. The narrator quietly enlists the reader’s assent and support,
offering her his constructions of the characters and their situations. At the same time,
the subtle use of the single word acknowledges the power of language and the way
much of it arrives in our consciousness preloaded with distinct connotations and value
judgements. By acknowledging this in such an understated manner, the narrator alerts
us - if we take the time to notice! - to the innate power of language as such.

The direct manner may, at other times, be less subtle, clearly inviting
identification as narrative intervention. A case in point occurs in a passage relating to
Luise and Effi’s expedition to Berlin to make purchases for the wedding and
honeymoon. Effi seems to display a marked lack of interest in the shopping. Luise
explains to herself this apparent indifference by terming Effi ‘anspruchslos’ and by
reflecting, fairly complacently, that her daughter ‘lebt in ihren Vorstellungen und
Träumen’ (23). This time, the narrator does not leave us to identify for ourselves the
possibility of maternal blindness, or to recognise that parents often seem to possess an
inbuilt tendency to put a positive, indulgent gloss upon even the worst of their
offspring’s foibles. Instead, he steps quite decisively forward to provide qualifications

28 Brinkmann, Verbindlichkeit, p. 72.
for Luise’s assertions. Whilst it is not in the same league as a ‘Dear reader...’ kind of buttonholing, the reader senses nevertheless that the words can be for her benefit only:

Das alles war auch richtig, aber doch nur halb. An dem Besitze mehr oder weniger alltäglicher Dinge lag Effi nicht viel, aber wenn sie mit der Mama die Linden hinauf- und hinunterging und nach Musterung der schönsten Schaufenster in den Demutschen Laden eintrat, um für die gleich nach der Hochzeit geplante italienische Reise allerlei Einkäufe zu machen, so zeigte sich ihr wahrer Charakter. Nur das Eleganteste gefiel ihr, und wenn sie das Beste nicht haben konnte, so verzichtete sie auf das Zweitbeste, weil ihr dies Zweite nun nichts mehr bedeutete. Ja, sie konnte verzichten, darin hatte die Mama recht, und in diesem Verzichtenkönnten lag etwas von Anspruchslosigkeit; wenn es aber ausnahmsweise mal wirklich etwas zu besitzen galt, so mußte dies immer was ganz Apartes sein. Und darin war sie anspruchsvoll. (23-24; original italics)

The sense here is quite patently of a superior vantage point, and this perhaps strikes us as rather unusual. Why is the narrator at such pains to establish his version of Effi’s ‘wahrer Charakter’ when at other times he seems quite content to maintain his deceptively impervious silence or to drop hints, as in the case with Briest? The narrator actively dismantles the image of Effi that the reader has just gleaned from Luise’s private musings. He replaces it with what we can only suppose is a more authoritative one. Instinctively we feel inclined to accord a deeper degree of trust to the narrative voice, for all its inconstant volume, than to the voice of an individual character with its inevitably limited perspectives and personal biases. At the same time, we cannot help but be reassured of the narrator’s intrinsic fairness in as much as amidst the assertions regarding Effi’s character, no moral judgement is passed. He does not try to imply that such and such an aspect of her character is good and/or positive or bad and/or negative. It is important to register, of course, that the narrator uses the word ‘wahr’. This implies a belief in a primordial character, a self that is the ‘real’ self. As we have already seen, however, trying to pin down a character’s ‘real’ self is a far from straightforward project.

What this scene should not do is to persuade us that our narrator, with his apparently superior vantage point and privileged degree of insight, fulfils the role of ‘omniscient third person narrator’. It should not lead us to believe that he has access to each character’s ‘real’ self, that he holds the key to each enigma. Certainly there are moments at which the narrator is careful to point out to the reader details that cannot be known to the characters involved. When Annie finally visits Effi in her ‘exile’, for instance, we are told that ‘Annie blieb an der nur angelehnten Tür stehen, halb verlegen, aber halb auch mit Vorbedacht’ (272; my italics). Effi might, even in
all her confusion and excitement, correctly identify her daughter’s embarrassment, but there is no way that she could be certain of the intention behind the reluctance to advance further into the room. At such points as these, narrator and reader are aligned in their enjoyment of a superior perspective, both knowing and understanding more than the characters themselves. Again, however, by according us this superior knowledge, it seems that the narrator is inviting us to understand, rather than to judge. He shows us the impossibility of the individual ever fully knowing or understanding the Other and thus demonstrates to us how the judgements we make are never based on all the information potentially available. He also demonstrates to us once again the processes of construction always at work around the individual. Annie’s ‘intentional’ holding back is not, of course, an intention of hers specifically. It has been ‘implanted’ in her by Geert and Johanna’s teaching. Annie, of course, is unaware that the self she is presenting to Effi is the self that she has been ‘trained’ to present to her mother. By showing us the efficacy of the change in Annie’s attitudes, the narrator questions, again, where we might locate the ‘real’ self. We would like, as readers, to imagine that if we scratched the surface we would uncover the ‘real’ Annie who still loved and missed her mother. In reality, of course, Annie has been used as an innocent pawn in a situation for which she bears no responsibility. There is no more genuine self beneath the constructed individual with which we are confronted, Annie not being of an age to be fully aware that there are at least two sides to every story. By alerting us to the complexity of the processes and motivations of construction, the narrator at the same time points once again to the impossibility of making clear distinctions between natural and constructed, innate and socialised.

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29 It is important to remember the role that Johanna plays in Annie’s formative years. Before the discovery of the adulterous relationship, the differing influences of Roswitha and Johanna effectively balance one another out. After the discovery, however, Innstetten metaphorically hands Johanna a licence to alienate Annie from her mother: ‘Und dann, Johanna, noch eins: die Frau kommt nicht wieder. Sie werden von anderen erfahren, warum nicht. Annie darf nichts wissen, wenigstens jetzt nicht. Das arme Kind. Sie müssen es ihr allmählich beibringen, daß sie keine Mutter mehr hat. Ich kann es nicht. Aber machen Sie's gescheit.’ (p. 245; my italics). I think Settler goes too far when he suggests that a key subtext in Effi Briest is that of Johanna being Innstetten’s mistress. Certainly she would very much like to be, but none of Settler’s claims for the existence of such a relationship are convincing. See Humbert Settler, Effi Briest: Fontanes Versteckspiel mittels Sprachgestaltung und Mätressenspuk (Flensburg: Baltica, 1999).
authentic and inauthentic; the individual components are reduced ‘zu einem unauflöslichen Ineinander’\(^{30}\) and the opposing parts are no longer separable.

In this example, the narrator has enabled the reader to know and understand more than the characters. This is not, however, a consistent trend in the narrator’s way of storytelling. Instead, throughout the text we are repeatedly made aware that not only is the narrator not an omniscient figure, he is not even pretending to be. The text is liberally sprinkled with such words as ‘vielleicht’, ‘wahrscheinlich’ and ‘entweder...oder’, words which, in their very essence, create a degree of instability and ‘verhindern eine endgültige Bestimmung des Gesagten’.\(^{31}\) Some instances of their usage seem to be relatively straightforward, reminders that the narrator is not offering his word as gospel. For instance, there is the moment at which a conversation between Golchowski and Innstetten is interrupted by the imminent passing of a train: ‘Wahrscheinlich, daß sich dies Gespräch über den Fürsten noch fortgesetzt hätte, wenn nicht in ebendiesem Augenblicke die von der Bahn her herübertönnende Signalglocke einen bald eintreffenden Zug angemeldet hätte.’ (88; my italics). Here the narrator is, understandably, refusing to assert what hypothetically would have happened if something else hadn’t happened instead. Other examples, however, exhibit less transparency. There is, for instance, the time of Innstetten’s arrival in Kessin for the duel: he ‘begrüßte den Kapitän, der etwas verlegen war, also im Laufe des gestrigen Tages von der ganzen Sache schon gehört haben mußte’ (238; my italics). Here, perhaps, an alarm bell sounds in the reader’s mind. Is this a simple plea of understandable limits? That is, the narrator is unable to register every event everywhere? Or should we be asking how the narrator can enjoy a superior vantage point one moment, allowing him access even to private thoughts and motivations, and then be reduced to the level of ignorance which is the hallmark of the hapless reader? At other moments still, there is a distinct aura of dishonesty surrounding this technique of introducing the clear admission of uncertainty.

One such example is the occasion of the final horse ride of the season. Innstetten has been unexpectedly called away to Morgenitz, and is therefore unable to accompany Effi and Crampas on the ride. They decide to go nonetheless. The

\(^{30}\) Renz, p. 29.

narrator informs us that Crampas ‘sprach sein Bedauern aus, vielleicht nur, um was zu sagen, vielleicht aber auch aufrichtig’ (135). Already, the narrator is denying that he has any insight into Crampas’s motivations. Maybe he was just paying lip-service to regret. Maybe he genuinely meant it. The narrator, it seems, has no privileged insight. If we accept this claim, what follows is quite remarkable. For the narrator goes on to give us a detailed analysis of Crampas’s character, qualifying the initial comment with the information that ‘so rücksichtslos er im Punkte chevaleresker Liebesabenteuer war, so sehr war er auch wieder guter Kamerad. Natürlich, alles ganz oberflächlich’ (135). We see here the curious tension between knowledge and denial thereof. On the one hand the narrator seems to be intimately acquainted with the subtler workings of Crampas’s character; on the other hand, he refuses to ascribe a definite motivation to the words of regret which he utters. It is important to understand the significance of the ‘natürlich alles ganz oberflächlich’. The reference to superficiality is a reference to calculated role-playing, and whilst the narrator highlights the role-playing, he does not show us anything deeper, any more genuine self, than that. The ‘natürlich’, however, perhaps hints, in an inverse way, at Crampas’s character. Namely, that such calculated role-playing is precisely what we might expect from him. The paradoxical implication, of course, is that the quintessence of Crampas’s character is to consciously act out different roles, none more genuine than another, and so the narrator raises the issue of selfhood, of how we can judge who the self is, of what the self consists.

It might be argued that what the narrator is doing in each of these cases is to put himself on a level equivalent to the characters, thus illustrating to the reader how characters might judge and surmise. In the example of Innstetten with the captain, the words equate to what Geert himself must have supposed from the captain’s embarrassment. Or in the Crampas example, the information provided about Crampas’s character, the way he is ‘rücksichtslos’ in terms of his amorous exploits and yet a good friend nonetheless, is behaviour which could be observed by any interested third party. The judgement on his superficiality would simply be the logical conclusion drawn as to how Crampas manages to reconcile these two ‘qualities’. The narrator suggests ways that processes of deduction and supposition work, but by using himself as the vehicle does not colour the issue by attributing the conclusions drawn
to a specific character. Once again, it is the processes of structuring which are our focus, both in terms of the structuring by the individual and the structuring of the individual according to the other’s (partial) observations.

In the same way, the narrator does not maintain a constant, superior narrative perspective in terms of the things to which he is actually party. Shifting of narrative alignment results in some interesting and revealing shifting of perspectives for the reader, emphasising 'the contingency and variability of established meanings and reductive readings' and the fact that no single perspective can ever be adequate. A germane example of this occurs at the time of Innstetten’s discovery of Crampas’s letters. As he gathers the haphazardly strewn contents of Effi’s workbox and restores them to their original positions, he asks Johanna now and then where a specific object belongs. As the questions and answers pass steadily back and forth, he looks a little more closely at ‘das kleine, mit einem roten Faden zusammengebundene Paket, das mehr aus einer Anzahl zusammengelegter Zettel, als aus Briefen zu bestehen schien’ (231; my italics). At this point, the impression is of the description of the bundle coming from Innstetten. The narrator merely relates the impression. He does not offer superior knowledge, does not state either that the bundle is made up of ‘Zettel’ or that it is made up of ‘Briefe’. There is, once again, an underlying hint of non-omniscience to the narrator’s words. It is as if he knows no more than Innstetten, as if he, too, is encountering the bundles here for the first time. The passage continues still from Innstetten’s perspective:

Er fuhr, als wäre es ein Spiel Karten, mit dem Daumen und Zeigefinger an der Seite des Päckchens hin und einige Zeilen, eigentlich nur vereinzelte Worte, flogen dabei an seinem Auge vorüber. Von deutlichem Erkennen konnte keine Rede sein, aber es kam ihm doch so vor, als habe er die Schriftzüge schon irgendwo gesehen. Ob er nachsehen solle? (231)

We are given Innstetten’s view of the bundle, Innstetten’s reported thoughts - he thinks that he recognises the handwriting but is unable quite to place it, he ponders whether or not he should examine the contents of the packet further. The narrator maintains a half-way stance: he refuses to draw the reader with him into a superior position, but he also refuses quite to let go of narrative control and permit the moment to become one of pure interior monologue where we might have access to Geert’s thoughts as they occur. He maintains this control by almost poeticising the little
bundle, turning it into ‘ein Spiel Karten’, by being precise about the ‘Daumen und Zeigefinger’ in a way which means that we have banality juxtaposed with the potential enormity of the moment. As Renz observes, playing on the card-game imagery, ‘nie läßt der Erzähler sein Spiel völlig aus der Hand’. The reader has a very clear sense that the narrator knows a lot more than he is sharing, but that he is purposely aligning the reader with Innstetten, keeping his information to himself and thus heightening the tension and suspense, forcing the reader to put herself in Geert’s shoes. This is why what follows comes as something of a surprise. When Innstetten retreats into his room with the ‘Päckchen’, he does not shut the door on just Johanna and Annie. He also shuts it on the reader. Stranger still, he also seems to shut it on the narrator:


Alignment shifts, with the result that, curiously enough, Innstetten is the one with the superior knowledge, whilst the narrator, the reader, and Johanna are located together in their exclusion on the other side of the door. At first, this seems to make little sense. But perhaps what the narrator is doing is purposely switching and reswitching the reader’s viewpoint. Now she is Innstetten, now Johanna, now Annie. By refusing to reveal all in one fell pre-emptive swoop, by refusing the reader a stable position from which to survey matters, the narrator emphasises the partiality of individual perspective. With Geert our mind races into overdrive at the discovery of the letters, with Johanna we wonder at Geert’s behaviour, alone we wonder, frustrated, what Innstetten has found in his reading of the correspondence. ‘Für Fontane speziell gibt es gar keine absolute Objektivität, sondern nur verschiedene Sichtweisen eines Ereignisses, die erst zusammen die Realität bilden; der Leser soll sich selbst ein Urteil bilden (können)’. What makes Fontane’s method so particularly effective is the speed of the changes. The multiple changes within a single scene both disorient the reader and prevent her from lazily viewing events from only one angle.

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32 Kaiser, p. 32.
33 Renz, p. 32.
34 Geist, p. 20.
Such scenes are, once again, clearly about processes of judgement and how we can only ever know ‘bits’ of a story. At the same time, and connected with this, they are about the importance of silence. The narrator preserves a silence over certain factors, Innstetten retreats in silence, not explaining to Annie or Johanna what is wrong, all that the reader ‘hears’ from Innstetten’s room, aside from the pacing up and down, is silence. Unlike Briest’s evasive silence, his refusal to discuss matters and his tendency to lump things together in the ‘weites Feld’, this is the silence of the pregnant moment. The words which break the silence - asking for the lamp, checking on how Annie feels after her fall - are mere meaningless diversions. It is what is not uttered which is important here. The reader is aware of this, but Annie and Johanna are not. We see the same scene, but we understand its significance much better, or, at the very least, more comprehensively. We understand it better because the narrator has shown it to us from a number of different angles. We do not understand it wholly, because we have not been granted access to every angle.

We see, then, how, despite the overwhelming preponderance of direct speech, the ‘not said’ can be important in Fontane’s work. At the same time, ‘erlebte Rede’ also features as a key narrative technique and, again, can be insightful for the reader. Just as we saw with the ‘vielleicht’ device, there are various levels of complexity to the ‘erlebte Rede’ technique. Sometimes, it works quite straightforwardly:

Es war schon heller Tag, als Effi am andern Morgen erwachte. Sie hatte Mühe, sich zurechtzufinden. Wo war sie? Richtig, in Kessin, im Hause des Landrats von Innstetten, und sie war seine Frau, Baronin Innstetten. Und sich aufrichtend, sah sie sich neugierig um. (52)

The words are clearly Effi’s, addressed to herself as she wakes up for the first time in the Kessin house. Neuse explains the moment by asserting that its effect is to emphasise ‘die innere Unruhe und Unsicherheit der jungen Frau in ihrer neuen

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35 For interesting critical comments on the importance and significance of silence in Fontane’s work, see also Mittenzwei, and Elsbeth Hamann, Theodor Fontane: Effi Briest (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1981), pp. 88-89.
36 Just to highlight the complexity of the ‘erlebte Rede’ issue, it is worth mentioning the different critical appraisals made of the use of the technique in Fontane’s work. Sasse, for instance, claims that Fontane shows a marked ‘reluctance’ to use reported or indirect speech ‘unless absolutely essential’, whilst Liebrand maintains that Fontane employs ‘erlebte Rede’ ‘häufig und virtuos’. Sasse, pp. 141-42 and Liebrand, p. 250.
Umgebung\textsuperscript{37} but this does not adequately explain why the answer Effi supplies to her question is so strikingly stilted and formal. Perhaps we might explain it by highlighting the similarity of this moment with the moment, examined earlier, of Innstetten offering a cigar to Wüllersdorf at a time of emotional crisis. There, we argued that Innstetten, far from being cold, distant and inappropriately formal, was actually trying to keep a hold on some sort of sense of normality. Perhaps we have an analogous situation here, with Effi also trying to maintain a certain perspective. It is likely that the honeymoon will not have seemed like married life as such - always on the move, staying in hotels, visiting different places, eating out in restaurants. The beginning of life in Kessin, however, marks the beginning of a whole new existence, of life in the adult world as a Landrat's wife. It is probable that Effi is anxious about her new status and how she will cope in her new role. By thinking of herself and Innstetten in the terms she uses, there is a sense of her perhaps endeavouring to normalise and domesticate the strangeness of her surroundings, invoking the causal explanations in as much as it is her husband's administrative rank which brings with it the Kessin house. By using reported speech - or, rather, thought, in this case - the narrator accords himself enough distance to seem absent (and therefore neither judging nor even interrupting with such fillers as 'sie sagte') whilst maintaining the flow of narrative to make the switch from simple narration to 'erlebte Rede' and back imperceptible.

The reason for mentioning this imperceptibility is that whilst the above example is simple in terms of intuiting to whom the words belong, other instances are far less limpid. The result is a degree of ambiguity as to viewpoint, sometimes leaving the reader confused regarding the spirit in which she is intended to interpret the views expressed. Such ambiguity arises in a passage describing Effi's thoughts shortly after the New Year's celebrations. In her letters, Effi's mother has been teasing her over what she light-heartedly terms her daughter's 'Liebe zum Alchimisten' (102), that is, Gieshübler. For all the playful intentions, however, Effi finds the teasing rather painful,

The first thing to notice is that Effi herself has identified what she believes is lacking in her marriage, although her consciousness of the lack is admittedly still somewhat ‘unklar’. We are not, then, being provided here with an element of superior narrative knowledge, a reasoned and coherent articulation of a confused and nebulous dissatisfaction, the root of which Effi is unable to explain to herself. She has pinpointed a cause of her unhappiness and it is Gieshübler’s much appreciated attentions, such as his providing hothouse camellias for Effi to wear to the New Year’s ball, which have, at least in part, functioned as a catalyst for allowing her to understand what it is that she feels Innstetten is failing to deliver. The identification of the lack, then, can clearly be attributed to Effi. The remarks regarding Innstetten, himself, however, are less clear-cut. The claim that ‘ein Liebhaber war er nicht’ sounds distinctly like narrative comment on two counts. Firstly, we might approach the assertion on the arguable level of character analysis. If these are considered to be Effi’s words, we must ask what her yardstick could be. For all her tendency to project her future in her imagination as taking on the glittering splendour of a wonderful fairytale, Effi is no Emma Bovary. She does not nurture an improbable and inflexible notion of the characteristics of the perfect ‘Liebhaber’. Whilst she asks her mother for fantastic items for her trousseau, she actually harbours few girlish illusions regarding the institution of marriage itself. Her apparently prosaic, unromantic attitudes allow her quite flippantly to assure her friends, when they ask her at the time of her engagement if Innstetten genuinely qualifies as ‘der Richtige’, that ‘[g]ewiß ist er der Richtige. Das verstehst du nicht, Hertha. Jeder ist der Richtige. Natürlich muß er von Adel sein und eine Stellung haben und gut aussehen’ (20). By her own admission, Effi is more socially ambitious than she is romantic. She does not expect the passion, the freedom, the ecstasy, which Emma anticipates. The second reason for considering the claims about Innstetten to come directly from the narrator is a grammatical one. Had the narrator’s intention been to imply that this is only Effi’s biased opinion, surely each ‘war’ would more appropriately be a ‘sei’. At the very least, the narrator is endorsing Effi’s views. This argument gains strength after comparison with the next sentence - which does contain a ‘sei’. In this following...
sentence, the perspective has switched again, moving over to Innstetten’s viewpoint. What is more, here the reader has the distinct impression that the narrator is refusing to vouch for the validity or otherwise of Innstetten’s interpretation of his feeling that he genuinely loves Effi. By introducing this element of doubt, the narrator highlights the problematics of emotions and feelings, their intense subjectivity and how what one individual believes he feels may be interpreted in a different way by a second individual. The focus on just what constitutes love evokes the motif of ‘die rechte Liebe’ that runs through the text. Very early on, Luise says to Briest of Effi: ‘[S]ie gehört nicht zu denen, die so recht eigentlich auf Liebe gestellt sind, wenigstens nicht auf das, was den Namen ehrlich verdient.’ (39). This constitutes a very clear judgement on her daughter and also implies a claim of personal superiority, as if she, Luise, does know what real love is. From what we see of the Briests’ relationship throughout the course of the novel, it is clear that theirs is not a marriage based on ‘rechte Liebe’. Perhaps we might then tentatively suggest that it was real love, an emotion that genuinely deserved the name of love, that she felt all those years ago for Innstetten and that she was forced to renounce. Later on, of course, Effi will claim that Innstetten himself is a man incapable of ‘rechte Liebe’. She will claim that she feels reconciled in herself both with Geert and with the way he reacted: ‘Denn er hatte viel Gutes in seiner Natur und war so edel, wie jemand sein kann, der ohne rechte Liebe ist.’ (294). The issue circles again around the question of authentic emotion. Each individual claims to be able to identify the inauthenticity of some other individual’s emotions. By illustrating this to us by means of the recurring theme, the narrator highlights once again for us the difficulty of establishing adequate benchmarks for notions of authenticity within the fluid realm of feeling. By showing the judgements of character upon character he causes us to step back from judgement, for we can identify the fallibility of these judgements.

What we have tried to illustrate, then, is how the novel works as a construction reflecting and reflecting on the construction and constructedness of the world that it seeks to depict. We have tried to analyse the processes of construction and the complexity of these processes. By highlighting this complexity it has again been demonstrated how difficult it is to establish clear-cut categories with such attractive headings as ‘private’, ‘public’, ‘authentic’, ‘inauthentic’. What we initially approach
as straightforward quickly reveals hidden dimensions. Fontane's narrative method reflects this in that his narrating figure is a far more complex entity than we might at first suppose. As we attempt to deconstruct the construction we are forced to concede that whilst we ultimately believe that we see and know and understand more and better than the characters and the society concerned, we are unable to stand in superior judgement due to the precariousness of this insight. We are, instead, much like the narrator, caught in a web of ambivalence and ambiguity.

One way of attempting to stabilise the significance and weight of our partial insight is, as attempted previously with *Madame Bovary*, to try to focus on the way in which we might categorise the text. As suggested earlier, generic categorising may assist the reader not only to understand the parameters within which she is reading, in terms of established expectations, but also to identify the available yardsticks for comparison, thus achieving a degree of stability whereby the text is recognised as belonging to an - at least partly - explicable generic whole.

Fontane is often accused by critics of 'Halbheit'. Müller-Seidel, for instance, contends that Fontane’s heroes tend to be ‘halbe Helden im leidenschaftslosen Eheroman der bloßen Liebelei’ and Fontane, it is argued, never really offers solutions to the problems that he highlights and the questions that he poses. In some ways, this idea of ‘Halbheit’ might be argued to re-emerge when we attempt to define the text’s generic home. As with *Madame Bovary*, it seems to be part of many things, but wholly none of them.

Other critics might question this chariness to place the text in a category. Barbara Hardy, for instance, contends that ‘if *Effi Briest* is not a Bildungsroman, no novel is’. This is a bold statement to make and is not the central thrust of her essay, being rather made in parentheses with, regrettably, no explicit gloss. It is worth, then, exploring the claim further. Certainly the text has an eponymous heroine, one of the traditional characteristics of the Bildungsroman. But what of Effi’s status as the subject of the Bildungsroman? Certainly Effi is no Jane Eyre, trying to make her way in the big, wide world and growing in wisdom with each new experience. Instead,

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38 Müller-Seidel, p. 372.
Effi, from a relatively privileged background, simply follows the pattern typically available to a girl of her age and class. She personally does nothing to initiate events as everything is managed by her parents and the man who will be her husband. If we take Hardy’s position to mean that Effi has a short, intense Bildung in the way that she discovers the (unpalatable) truth about society through her brief sexual transgression and its wide-reaching ramifications, then this would be, on the one hand, quite true, but might also be argued to be pushing a point: the learning that Effi finds forced upon her actually does little to disturb those well-anchored opinions and values to which she subscribes as a result of her upbringing. She ‘learns’ no more than she already knew. Her consciousness of adultery and the punishments that accompany it is established early on with the ritual of the sinking of the gooseberry pips and Effi’s recollections of the similar fate met by adulterous women in Constantinople. Her naive assertion that ‘so was’ could not occur in her own time and society since it is more civilised merely lends a degree of irony to her acceptance of the duel as the standard and proper response to the fact of adultery. She has, as we have seen, her moment of insight during which she recognises the shallowness of the socially conditioned responses, but this is not an insight which brings with it any lasting enlightenment, Effi ultimately conceding, with regards to Innstetten, ‘daß er in allem recht gehandelt’ (294). Her awareness clouds over again and the only reconciliation with life as she recognises it is through resignation and, ultimately, death. This sits in stark opposition to the classic Bildungsroman ideal of learning to know the self and understanding how that self and the wider world can acceptably co-exist. Effi dies a sadder, but not by any means wiser, version of the self that we first encounter.

Perhaps, of course, we might shift the emphasis from Effi and examine how the text functions as a Bildungsroman with Innstetten as its central figure. To be sure, Geert is rather old to be suitable material as the subject of a Bildungsroman; his formative years are long gone and he has experienced in the past a substantial and painful degree of Bildung at society’s unforgiving hands having found himself forced, as a much younger man, to give up his love, Luise von Belling. It is not, however, only Innstetten’s age which renders him an unsuitable subject for the Bildungsroman. Of much greater significance is his inflexible character. He is an old dog who seems wholly incapable of learning new tricks, even though part of him might well like to.
His mind, his habits, his outlook, are too far petrified for them to be moulded into fresh – or even slightly altered – shapes. On this level, Geert is resistant not only to Bildung as such, but even to any kind of Umbildung of his priorities and values. Despite his willingness to admit a theoretical re-evaluation, he is incapable of applying his hard-won insight practically, meaning that it is ultimately as sterile and worthless as Effi’s. Like Effi, we leave Innstetten a sadder figure. Unlike Effi, he is also a wiser one, but this wisdom does not function in the Bildungsroman scheme of synthesising self and world to a positive alloy, for Innstetten has never felt so alienated from his society as he does by the end of the novel. In terms, then, of the text as Bildungsroman, it is about education which leads nowhere, learning which changes nothing.

A logical source of enlightenment regarding the novel’s generic positioning might be, of course, the author himself. Earlier, the differing critical opinions regarding the theme of the ‘Spuk’ were touched upon, but we did not at that point examine Fontane’s own pronouncements on the issue. In actual fact, he is quite categorical. In a letter addressed to Joseph Widmann, Fontane is grateful for what he considers to be Widmann’s perspicacity in his reading of Effi Briest. He writes:

Sie sind der erste, der auf das Spukhaus und den Chinesen hinweist; ich begreife nicht, wie man daran vorbeisehen kann, denn erstlich ist dieser Spuk, so bilde ich mir wenigstens ein, an und für sich interessant, und zweitens, wie Sie hervorgehoben haben, steht die Sache nicht zum Spaß da, sondern ist ein Drehpunkt für die ganze Geschichte.40

‘Ein Drehpunkt für die ganze Geschichte.’ How are we to interpret this? Is the implication that we should see Effi Briest, at least in part, as a ghost story? It is important to bear in mind that the ghost of the Chinaman is not the only uncanny element in the tale. There is also the curious ‘Schloon’, along with the unexplained sounds that Effi – but not Sidonie, who is with her at the time – hears on the sleigh-ride just prior to the encounter with this ‘Schloon’. There is the mysterious Frau Kruse with her totemic familiar, the black hen. There is all the exotic clutter in the house in Kessin, such as the shark and the crocodile suspended from the ceiling in the entrance hall. And there is the all-pervasive sense of uncertainty as to the status of all these elements. As already touched upon, whilst we might dismiss Effi’s susceptibility to belief in the paranormal as girlish impressionability, it is more
difficult to be quite so flippant with Innstetten’s equivocal stance. When Johanna
reports back to her master on Effi’s fears of ‘der von oben’ (77) he calls it ‘das alberne
Zeug’ (77) and says that he does not wish to hear another word about such nonsense.
When, however, he discusses the matter with Effi and she seeks reassurance, he
signal fails to offer it:

‘Ja, Geert, bist du denn so sicher, daß es so was nicht gibt?’
‘Will ich nicht behaupten. Es ist eine Sache, die man glauben und noch besser nicht
glauben kann. Aber angenommen, es gäbe dergleichen, was schadet es?’ (80)

Certainly, we might follow Crampas’s lead and suggest that this is evidence of
Innstetten’s unpleasant ‘Angstapparat aus Kalkül’ (134), but the words are not
couched in language calculated to frighten. Instead, they seem to indicate an
unwillingness to deny the possibility of the supernatural, an echoing of the Hamletian
musing that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in either his,
Innstetten’s, or her, Effi’s, philosophy. But the ghost story offers only fleeting
interest as a story in its own right. No new information comes to light regarding the
enigmatic fate of the captain’s niece, and the ghost of the Chinaman may or equally
well may not exist. Instead, the supernatural elements seem to function as a vehicle
for revealing the characters’ thoughts and selves. The Chinaman’s ghost has solid
origins in events which occurred within living memory and it is the nature of the event
itself which is important. Firstly, there is a hint of illicit love with the disappearance
of the captain’s niece and the death of the Chinaman. This introduces the theme of
the forbidden liaison and prefigures the similarly shady and unsatisfactory relationship
between Crampas and Effi. Secondly, the event is important for what it reveals
regarding attitudes to convention. Gieshübler, for instance, along with Maria
Trippel’s father, would have been happy to have seen the Chinaman buried in
consecrated ground, but the mere suggestion shocks Effi’s sensibilities, illustrating an
open-mindedness in Gieshübler which Effi cannot begin to understand. From this
perspective, then, the story is significant not especially in terms of a ghost story in its
own right, but rather in terms of what it reveals about attitudes to transgression and
social codes and the way in which it prefigures the story proper.

Having said this, however, the ‘story proper’ is far from being a novel about transgression, a novel of adultery. It is a novel of adultery only in so far as we eventually learn that an adulterous liaison has taken place between Effi and Crampas. We see hints of the burgeoning relationship, such as Crampas kissing Effi’s hands in the sleigh, or Effi inexplicably never meeting Roswitha when she has arranged to, but the focus is certainly not on their meetings or the development of the feelings involved in the chain of events. Whereas with Emma Bovary we can minutely trace the start, the development, and the breakdown of her relations with Rodolphe and Léon, we get only the merest hints with Effi, and a cursory reading of the text could cause us to miss the fact of the adultery altogether until we discover it with Geert when he unravels the pile of letters.

The actual acts of transgression, then, remain firmly in the background, and it is this backgrounding which leads us perhaps to wonder if Effi Briest does not function as a fate tragedy. This would be to suggest that it is irrelevant that Effi is at such pains in the careful playing of her hand to escape Kessin and Crampas; the truth is inexorable, and it will emerge because it is fated to emerge. This would be to cast Fontane in the role of the Greek tragedian, to argue that his perspective on events is governed by a Sophoclean sense of sheer inevitability. Certainly Helena Ragg-Kirkby argues for such an interpretation. She contends that

the most powerful subtexts in Fontane envisage a timeless process that is anthropological rather than specific to any particular society, a process that is part Sophoclean-Euripidean, part reminiscent of Lord of the Flies. The ‘realistic’ details and characters in his fiction become on this level emblematic; the novels come to depict ancient and inexorable social mechanisms that ritually crush any individual who steps out of line.\(^\text{41}\)

This is all very well, but what this does is to elevate the constructedness of the social rituals and values into something given, static and rooted in antiquity, thus lending it greater legitimacy by suggesting that things are as they are simply because they are, not because they are made that way and might be changed. There is certainly a degree of fatalism to the story, but fate has the interesting dimension of apparently having coincidence as a twin sister. This means that whilst Ragg-Kirkby might be right when she states that Fontane’s fiction has at its core ‘preoccupations strongly reminiscent of

\(^{41}\) Helena Ragg-Kirkby, "'Alles ist wie Opferstätte': Society and Sacrifice in the Works of Theodor Fontane", *Oxford German Studies* 29 (2000), 95-130 (pp. 119-20).
Attic tragedy’, we might argue that what Fontane’s fiction does is to draw attention to the way that social processes are so formidable that they succeed in governing existence in such a way that their dictates appear to be part of some higher dictates of destiny. Effi’s tragedy need in no sense be seen as being directed by fate. The chain of events which leads to the discovery of the letters – the race between Annie and Roswitha, Annie tripping and injuring herself, the frantic hunt for the bandages, the breaking open of the sewing box, the fact that it is Innstetten, never usually seen in such a domestic role as tidying-up, who gathers the contents of the box together again and thus discovers the foolishly preserved correspondence – might be seen as a chain of tragic inevitability, or of almost crass coincidence, or of a tacit comment on novelistic convention per se: the letters are found because without the letters being found we do not have much of a story. Citing Ragg-Kirkby again, she maintains that Fontane is not simply writing about a particular society that happens to have conjured up a particularly repressive set of rules that individuals flout at their peril: his characters are gobbled up by ancient and inexorable social mechanisms that have been operating since the beginning of time.

Certainly we can see the arguments for seeing the text as a fate-tragedy, but there seem equally strong reasons not to do so. By accepting the fate idea, we move away from the idea of the narrator as a constructing voice. The narrator of a fate tragedy can only narrate what is fated to happen. Our narrator seems to have much more autonomy than such status would imply. As we have seen, he plays a crucial role in the way in which the text is constructed and the way in which the reader apprehends the constructedness of the characters. This makes the narrator complicit in the processes of construction at work at the level of plot, but, also as we have seen, the construction at this level of plot is anchored in a very precise social world. To suggest that this social world is nothing more than a version of the society encountered in the classic Greek dramas is, firstly, to exonerate society of blame for Effi’s tragedy and, secondly, to accord a greater naivety to the narrating voice than it actually seems to embody.

Once again, then, what we encounter is a text which, although it engages with a variety of generic styles, nonetheless refuses to be anchored within one specific category. Again, this highlights a consciousness on the narrator’s part of the

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42 Ragg-Kirkby, p. 128.
possibilities available to him in terms of the way he constructs his text. The fact that we recognise certain generic styles, however, also shows how it is not a narrative free-for-all; certain conventions shine through clearly. This technique reflects the characters’ situation in as much as they construct themselves and are constructed according to a variety of dictates, and within these dictates we see moments and gestures of resistance and subversion which, although clearly there, do not destroy the original structure. The combination and interaction of the conventional and the resisting means, in addition, that no one version transcends the other as ‘more’ valid.

43 Ragg-Kirkby, p. 126.
CHAPTER 5: THOMAS HARDY'S *JUDE THE OBSCURE*: CHARACTERS

In the same way as our two other texts, *Madame Bovary* and *Effi Briest*, *Jude the Obscure* might, at first glance, be considered to be relatively straightforward both in terms of characterisation and in terms of narrative mode. The skeleton of the novel seems to amount to a man and a woman who are, apparently, fundamentally 'right' for one another, two halves of the Platonic whole, the heroine fulfilling the Shelleyan ideal of the hero's epipsyche,\(^1\) prevented from living 'happily ever after' by ill-timed events and, equally importantly, by the stifling atmosphere of social convention which surrounds them. We seem to have before us two naïve but sincere selves pitted against an uncomprehending and inflexible society, which forces them gradually to a point at which they destroy both themselves and each other. Or, as one critic succinctly puts it: 'Jude is the tragedy of two simpletons who think they can defy society by their refusal to conform.'\(^2\) Our initial reading will probably find us rooting for Jude and Sue, the underdogs, willing them to ignore the mutterings and incomprehension by which their lives are beset and to assert themselves as the anti-conventional beings that we imagine them to be, finding the strength that they need both in one another and for one another. But this, of course, is Hardy, and the happy ending is not one of his specialities.\(^3\) Society prevails, crushing the lifeblood of authentic selfhood beneath its unforgiving heel and the reader is left contemplating the

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1 Carlos Baker writes: 'The Shelleyan hero is very often somehow dependent on the Shelleyan heroine. His spirit is often 'girt round with weakness'; he is unable to cope with his environment effectively unless he is able to establish a connection with some epipsychological counterpart, through whom he is completed and strengthened, wakened to energy, shielded from impurity, disciplined, and directed. The pattern can be discerned in the Laon-Cynthia relationship of *The Revolt of Islam*. [...] The separation of epipsyche from psyche produces death, whether actual or symbolic. The lamp is shattered, or at any rate is incapable of giving light because the energizing power is not there.' Carlos Baker, 'The Necessity of Love: Alastor and the Epipsyche', in *Shelley: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by George M. Ridenour (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1965), pp. 51-68 (p. 63). Sue, of course, requests Jude to recite some of the lines from Shelley's poem *Epipsychidion* to her and then, Jude not knowing the poem to which she refers, recites them herself. Some critics see Shelley's *The Revolt of Islam* as the most important text for *Jude* after the Book of Job. See, for instance, John Goode, *Thomas Hardy: The Offensive Truth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p. 162.


3 J. Hillis Miller goes so far as to claim that the reader can generally hear in the voice of any Hardy narrator a grim satisfaction 'that things have, as was foreseen, come out for the worst in the worst of all possible worlds'. See J. Hillis Miller, *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 7. In a similar vein, J. I. M. Stewart alleges that Hardy 'is determined, beyond everything else, that his vision shall grate on us. He exploits whatever will grate'. J. I. M. Stewart, *Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography* (London: Longman, 1971), p. 191.
tableau of two farcical remarriages, Jude’s virtual suicide and, apparently, satisfaction in the wider society that things have turned out for the best after all.\(^4\)

Again, however, just as in the two other texts, the issues are not quite so clear-cut as we might initially, with that first reading, like to imagine. John Sutherland, amongst others, warns strongly against taking Jude too much at face value. He suggests, for instance, that what might seem ostensibly to be simple and straightforward narrative organisation actually conceals significant moments of teasing and obliqueness which serve to make the novel a far more complex and challenging read than it might at first appear.\(^5\) It quickly becomes evident that this claim for complexity is true on levels other than the narrative one. The more closely we examine Jude’s self or Sue’s self, for instance, the more apparent it becomes that we cannot simply hold them up as shining examples of two deeply authentic but brutally thwarted and vulnerably naïve beings. Once again we witness how the simplification of a situation to the notion of self versus society is flawed and inadequate. Throughout the text we are given an insight into the problems involved when elements of character are influenced, or even determined and defined, by the personal assimilation of social and cultural values which critical thought might justifiably call into question. We gain, once more, an impression of a bitter battle waged by the self against none other than the self. A diary entry of Hardy’s from 1890 illustrates how conscious he himself was of the infinite complexity of selfhood: ‘I am more than ever convinced that persons are successively various persons, according as each special strand in their characters is brought uppermost by circumstances.’\(^6\) Hardy explores and illustrates this belief to the full in Jude. The conclusions that he draws are often far from comforting.

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\(^4\) Although there is, of course, that unlikely moment of acute insight accorded to Arabella at the end of the novel when she disagrees with Mrs Edlin’s claim that Sue appears to have found some kind of peace in her remarriage to Phillotson: “She may swear that on her knees to the holy cross upon her necklace till she’s hoarse, but it won’t be true!” said Arabella. “She’s never found peace since she left [Jude’s] arms, and never will again till she’s as he is now!”’ Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure, The New Wessex Edition with introduction by Terry Eagleton and notes by P. N. Furbank (London: Macmillan, 1975) p. 413. Subsequent references to this edition are given as page numbers in parentheses after quotations in the main body of the text.


\(^6\) Florence Emily Hardy, The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928 (London: Macmillan, 1965), p. 230 (December 4 1890). The actual author of this volume is, of course, generally accepted to be Thomas Hardy himself. Peter Widdowson terms the book ‘a striking fantasy of the socially and sexually
As the novel opens, Jude’s position is not an enviable one. He is effectively without any kind of genuine anchor in his life; an orphan, he has been sent to live with his great aunt Drusilla, a formidable woman who suggests to Jude, ‘the poor, useless boy’ (37), - and the suggestion is practical rather than wilfully cruel – that it would have been just as well for him and for everyone else concerned if he had died along with his parents. The only human being to have cast a kindly glance in Jude’s direction is Richard Phillotson, the schoolteacher, who, with fire and ambition in his belly, is on the point of leaving the village in order to pursue his dreams of a university education in Christminster. The sole bright point in Jude’s life, then, is about to be extinguished. Jude has been described as ‘Hardy’s ultimate exemplar of modern, lost, alienated man’, and whilst this is certainly true, it is important to register the fact that Jude does not, over the course of the novel, undergo a process of disillusionment and alienation whereby he starts from a privileged position of a strong sense of self and then spirals into a vortex of disintegration. Rather, from his earliest years he is stranded in a hostile environment, lacking any real sense either of identity or of self-worth and ‘much in need of a mentor’. Perhaps even worse, he possesses the fatal quality of imagination. Rather than accepting his lot, meagre as it is, and settling down into an anonymous existence as Drusilla’s great-nephew, fetching and carrying and ultimately learning a trade to see him through his uneventful rural life, he builds castles in the air, dreaming of an existence far away from the drudgery, cruelty and indifference by which he finds himself surrounded in Marygreen. He projects a future for himself which would see him following in (what he imagines to be) the schoolmaster’s footsteps, gaining a university education and discovering his real self within the walls of the Christminster colleges. His training in stonemasonry is always seen by Jude as ‘a provisional thing only’ (108), something to see him through the insecure lower-class meritocrat’. Peter Widdowson, *Thomas Hardy* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1996), p. 9.

Many critics deem it essential to stress this issue of isolation, suggesting that in *Jude* Hardy tries to emphasize the painful problems thrown up by the disappearance in the changing times of a sense of community. See for instance Simon Gatrell, *Thomas Hardy and the Proper Study of Mankind* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), p. 158. I am not convinced that Hardy is quite as nostalgic as some would like to imagine.

dark days before entry into the glittering world of academic life. Jude posits a sense of selfhood, then, in a world of which he knows nothing. Taking the distant reality of Christminster, he 'translates it into a child's imaginings of fabled promise, constructing a place for himself there'. In addition to his ability to dream and to imagine wonderful alternatives to his miserable existence, Jude is a profoundly sensitive boy. We see this, for instance, in his careful, if futile, endeavours not to crush any earthworms as he walks along and also in his encouragement to the birds, which 'seemed, like himself, to be living in a world which did not want them' (39), to partake of Farmer Troutham's seeds when he should be scaring these very birds away. Small wonder, then, that this imaginative, sensitive, lonely boy should focus upon the departing schoolmaster as upon a positive point of brightness in an otherwise dark world. Having enquired of two elderly carters what they know of the distant, magical city of Christminster, we learn of Jude that:

It had been the yearning of his heart to find something to anchor on, to cling to – for some place which he could call admirable. Should he find that place in this city if he could get there? Would it be a spot in which, without fear of farmers, or hindrance, or ridicule, he could watch and wait, and set himself to some mighty undertaking like the men of old of whom he had heard? (49)

The drive to be a scholar, then, is by no means based solely on a clear-sighted decision to further himself by capitalising upon the natural aptitude and enthusiasm for learning which Jude has so amply demonstrated at the night school. In many ways we might equate Jude's naïve coupling of geography and happiness with Emma Bovary's tendency to see contentment as residing inevitably in the elsewhere, but it is important not to judge Jude too harshly. He is young, uninformed, intemperate and the idea of happiness entailing a longing for admittance to a Christminster college is one freshly put into his mind by Phillotson, the closest Jude has to a hero. We do not see Phillotson's dream at this point as risible or unrealistic or impossible to attain, and so we must also acknowledge that Jude's naïve construct might easily be the childish beginnings which provide the impetus for a mature and realisable project. At the same time, however, we cannot ignore the incipient tragedy; Jude is effectively

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10 See also p. 59, which describes Jude's attitude just after taking up stonemasonry: 'Not forgetting that he was only following up this handicraft as a prop to lean on while he prepared those greater engines which he flattered himself would be better fitted for him, he yet was interested in his pursuit on its own account.' It might be argued that there is more than a hint of autobiography here. Hardy the architect was always convinced that Hardy the poet was the more valuable and 'fitting' self.
dreaming the dream of another dreamer (Richard), a dream which, as Jude appropriates it, is as yet unfulfilled and which will, disappointingly and more crucially in terms of the trajectory of Jude's own dream, remain thus. It is also imperative not to underestimate the importance of the desires for stability, security and coherence which inform Jude's impressions of Christminster. When he focuses on what Christminster 'is', we find:

'It is a city of light,' he said to himself.
'The tree of knowledge grows there,' he added a few steps further on.
'It is a place that teachers of men spring from and go to.'
'It is what you may call a castle, manned by scholarship and religion.'
After this figure he was silent a long while, till he added:
'It would just suit me.' (49-50)

It is obvious how very different the place he envisages is from the Marygreen he perceives, a place swathed in mist, 'bleak', 'lonely', 'vast', 'meanly utilitarian' (38-39) where the reader sees Jude standing on 'the brown surface of the field' which goes 'right up towards the sky all round' (38). The vision of Christminster, on the other hand, suggests both light (and, by extension, enlightenment; no aggressive farmers there!) and enclosure; the idea of the 'castle' suggests protection and security and the notions of scholarship and religion suggest, at this point at least, worthy and reliable anchors. Jude, then, constructs an image of a safe haven for himself, peopled by men such as he aspires to be, a place from which ignorance and impiety are banished. The tacit implication is the construction of the self within this image as someone whole and valuable, as a 'teacher of men'. Marjorie Garson interprets Jude's desire for Christminster as

a desire for a transfigured state of being. Outside the walls of Christminster, experience is fragmented, he is alienated from his fellow man, and the world is brown, grey, dark, and gloomy [...]. He wants transfiguration, he wants to be swept out of this fallen world, translated, illuminated, penetrated, 'imbued with the genius loci'. The transformation involves being contained within the walls of the mystical city.

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13 Enstice points out that Jude will subsequently choose to ignore the darkness that he encounters in Christminster: 'Darkness and shadow, neglect and desertion, crumbling stonework and outmoded design - Christminster seems to reek of decay in mind and body. Yet Jude continues to regard the city in an inspirational light.' Enstice, p. 160.
Ramon Saldivar makes a similar point: 'For his own sporadically controlled, partially understood world, [Jude] substitutes the image of a unified, stable and understandable one.' The grave problem is, of course, that this entire construction of Christminster and self in Christminster are nothing more than images and imaginings. In view of Jude’s circumstances and upbringing it clearly could not be anything else, but the innocent naivety of the images makes the reader ache. Jude fails to take into account any of the negative elements which might be part and parcel of Christminster life – intellectual jealousy, say, or petty competitiveness – and so the degree of inevitable future disillusionment being set up is immense. Jude’s vision is one of hermetically sealed perfection, and nothing is permitted to disturb this notion of perfection, not even when Christminster – or the authorities that constitute the Christminster of which Jude seeks to be a part – has unequivocally rejected him. Such is the strength of his vision that even incidents only slightly connected with the city take on a significance beyond their due. The reader witnesses this when Jude does finally make the move to go to live in the city of his dreams:

He had that afternoon driven in a cart from Alfredston to the village nearest the city in this direction, and was now walking the remaining four miles rather from choice than from necessity, having always fancied himself arriving thus. (101; my italics)

It is as if the image on the way to realising the dream is equally important as its ultimate fulfilment. Jude’s consciousness of the image he is projecting, either to himself or to others, robs the moment both of its poetic poignancy simply in terms of the reading experience, and also of any element of personal authenticity in that it is so premeditated and over-rehearsed.

On the one hand, then, we have an impression of Jude’s desire being rooted in an already complicated combination of needs for security and stability and a romantically tinged fascination with books and learning. At the same time, however, his dreams are complexly bound up with an element of social ambition. Just prior to the pivotal first meeting with Arabella, Jude is walking along, making a ‘mental estimate of his progress thus far’ (60), and reflecting on his future:

‘I’ll be D.D. before I have done!’
And then he continued to dream, and thought he might become even a bishop by leading a pure, energetic, wise, Christian life. And what an example he would set! If

his income were £5000 a year, he would give away £4500 in one form and another, and
live sumptuously (for him) on the remainder. Well, on second thoughts, a bishop was
absurd. He would draw the line at an archdeacon. Perhaps a man could be as good
and as learned and as useful in the capacity of archdeacon as in that of bishop. Yet he
thought of the bishop again. (61)

Whilst it is clear that Jude’s is not a social ambition concerned with material
gains, we nonetheless see that bound up with his desire to do good to others is a desire
to excel personally in a highly socially visible manner. Subconsciously at least, Jude
covets a recognisable title. What is more, there is a sense that he wants to
distinguish himself from the ‘run of the mill’ autodidact. He wants to represent
something unique and to feel that he has raised himself above the common ambition.
This becomes glaringly apparent after his marriage to Arabella. Despite having to
work long hours to support himself and his wife, Jude continues to read as much as he
can, going so far as to attempt to study his books en route to and from Alfredston, his
place of work. For all his continued endeavours, however, ‘he sometimes felt that by
caring for books he was not escaping commonplace nor gaining rare ideas, every
working-man being of that taste now’ (89; my italics). Learning of and in itself is
curiously inadequate in Jude’s eyes and the notion that he is just one more amongst
many is complete anathema to him. Jude sets himself up not only in competition with
these other like-minded men, but, effectively, in opposition to them. Far from
revelling in the idea of a common bond, he feels disturbed that his project is not a
special one. Far from being a happy pioneer, glad to welcome and encourage others
with ideas similar to his own, glad at the notion that educational avenues and
opportunities are being opened up and made more accessible to the working man, he
seems to desire to maintain the status quo, to retain the idea of the intellectual elite,
with the slight modification that he should be a (central) part of it. In Jude’s words we
see, perhaps, a sense of frustration that no matter how hard he toils he begins to sense
that his status will shift merely from Everyman in the artisanal world to Everyman in
the intellectual world.

Jude’s projections for himself, then, are bound up mercilessly with social
ambition and reveal a constant need to compare himself with others. There is a sense

16 Goode warns us, however, against being too judgemental of Jude. He sees Jude’s social ambition as
being bound up with a desire for a more comfortable life-style, for escape from the proletarianism of
Marygreen, and warns us that ‘to regard [Jude] as hypocritical because he fancies having money is a
middle-class judgement’. Goode, p. 143.
of a need to validate the self through the medium of others’ admiration, recognition and esteem. This goes some way to illustrating the confusion within Jude. He sees himself as ‘incipient scholar, prospective D.D., Professor, Bishop, or what not’ (69) and does not accept quiet and disinterested learning as a valuable end in itself. This implies a fascination with the social mechanisms in place for ‘measuring’ intelligence, as though such a thing were possible. Saldivar’s general comment on the behaviour of characters in Jude may be applied quite precisely in this instance. He suggests that characters such as Jude and Sue are poised between their desire for natural freedom and a need for a stabilising social order. This is reflected in Jude’s attitude to scholarship: he gains much from his own unorthodox methods of personal study on a private intellectual level, but he grows concerned that in reading ‘heathen works exclusively’ he has ‘taken up a wrong emotion for a Christian young man’ (58). Jude feels a need for yardsticks, for reading lists, for recognised courses, teaching, examinations, grades. He feels, in short, a need to conform to the established pattern of ‘scholar’. There is nothing in itself heinous in this – it is, after all, in this way that schools, colleges, universities function. The reader, however, feels resistant towards the attitude, remembering the gently mocking words of the carter when he says that in Christminster they raise pa’sons [...] like radishes in a bed and that they ‘turn un out wi’ a long face, and long black coat and waist-coat, and a religious collar and hat, same as they used to wear in the Scriptures, so that his own mother wouldn’t know un sometimes...’ (48)

Whilst on one level we fully accept that Jude must ‘play by the rules’ in order to make his mark and establish himself in the manner of which he dreams, we nonetheless fear that by doing so he may unwittingly sell his soul and be transformed into one of these identical ‘pa’sons’.

After the cruel rebuff of Tetuphenay’s letter, however, Jude reassesses his dreams and options, and takes a hard look at the direction that his life is taking. Seeking out an ‘obscure spot’ (144) in which to hide, he returns to Marygreen. Whilst there, he takes the opportunity to speak to Mr Highridge, the local curate. Jude is censorious of himself after this meeting. He considers himself to have been ‘a fool’

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17 It is interesting to compare Phillotson’s research into ‘Roman-Britannic antiquities’ here, ‘an unremunerative labour for a National schoolmaster but a subject, that, after his abandonment of the University scheme, had interested him as being a comparatively unworked mine’ (179). Phillotson pursues the research simply because no one else has.
(145) and regrets having concentrated on the 'intellectual and ambitious side' (145) of his dream at the expense of the theological. He goes so far as to assert that 'I don't regret the collapse of my University hopes one jot. I wouldn't begin again if I were sure to succeed. I don't care for social success any more at all' (146). Just because Jude recognises and ostensibly turns away from the highly stylised image of socially successful scholar that he has built up in his mind does not mean, however, that any subsequent sense of self that he nurtures is any the less stylised. Having decided that a man can 'preach and do good to his fellow-creatures without taking double-firsts in the schools of Christminster' (149) he envisages instead a poor, humble, godly self:

But to enter the Church in such an unscholarly way that he could not in any probability rise to a higher grade through all his career than that of the humble curate wearing his life out in an obscure village or city slum – that might have a touch of goodness and greatness in it; that might be true religion, and a purgatorial course worthy of being followed by a remorseful man. (149)

What Jude claims to have identified is the 'mundane ambition' lurking beneath the supposedly high-flown ethical or theological enthusiasm. He seems to feel chastened that he could so easily have succumbed to society's notions of the categories of success. This moment of recognition reflects Hardy's own profound awareness of the problematical representation of convention in literature. A diary entry of 1888 reads: 'The literary productions of men of rigidly good family and rigidly correct education, mostly treat social conventions and contrivances – the artificial forms of living – as if they were cardinal facts of life'. By showing Jude, a character neither of 'rigidly good family' nor of 'rigidly correct education', in a state of having been seduced by the charms of convention, Hardy emphasises how deep-rooted he considers the dangerous reflex to be. Despite Jude's fresh insight into the arbitrariness of society's yardsticks, however, a key element of the revised vision remains a deep-rooted desire to distinguish the self from the herd. Besides the issue of ambition, Jude also actively recognises that by pursuing the course that he has hitherto followed he was at risk of failing to elevate himself above the status of a non-entity:

He feared that his whole scheme had degenerated to, even though it might not have originated in, a social unrest which had no foundation in the nobler instincts; which was purely an artificial product of civilization. There were thousands of young men on

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18 Saldívar, p. 159.
19 Diary entry of August 21 1888, F. E. Hardy, p. 213.
the same self-seeking track at the present moment. The sensual hind who ate, drank, and lived carelessly with his wife through the days of his vanity was a more likable being than he. (149)

On the one hand, Jude is shaken to discover that what he imagined was an individual quest for selfhood, uninfluenced by external pressures, can be interpreted as the kind of scheme generated by the governing social moment. On the other hand, he is perturbed that his project is simply one amongst many. Ian Gregor views this almost obsessive individualism as a concern which emerges only in Hardy's later fiction, claiming that '[w]here the earlier novels had continually stressed the community of being, Jude stresses a wounding isolation, an exacerbated consciousness of self'.

There is a sense, even in Jude's idea of the curate of the slums, of a noble isolation from and self-sacrifice for a community to which one can never belong; that is, an almost active search for isolation. Whilst Jude is by no means as image conscious as Emma Bovary he nonetheless shares with her and, as we have seen, with other characters at certain moments, this propensity to view the self, as it were, from 'outside', to see the effect that the whole picture makes. Just as disinterested study was apparently insufficient and had to be coupled with the concrete, visual image of 'scholar', so too the altruistic good work is insufficient and has to be coupled with a specific figure in the imagination. In many ways, there is a tinny, Hollywood ring to the whole thing; the poor man succeeding against the odds and selflessly helping his fellow creatures... At the same time, of course, there is a very clear sense that Jude intends his heroism sincerely rather than as a grandiose gesture of self-gratification. It is not, after all, an image whose realisation could feasibly be attained without genuine effort and sacrifice. We must surely agree with Carl Weber when he states that Hardy creates in Jude a character of genuine worth, 'a man who was obscure and weak, it is true, but a man of high ideals, true humility, steadfast courage, and affectionate loyalty'. How, then, are we to reconcile these ideas of highly stylised self-image and genuine, urgent sincerity? An answer to this

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problem is perhaps suggested in George Wotton’s idea that the crux of Jude’s quest is ‘the search for harmonious conjunction of being and consciousness’.22 Even if we reject Wotton’s highly politicised arguments concerning individual and societal ideologies, we can nonetheless make use of the basic proposition. Jude’s perplexity of self derives at least in part from the tensions involved in developing self-awareness. At times he seems naïve and immature, but this can, on the whole, be attributed to his youth and his background. Beyond this, he is a character of real imaginative, spiritual and emotional intensity, and he is uncertain how to deal with that intensity, particularly since, if he looks outside himself for help and guidance, society seems to lack answers and offers no aid. As the text progresses, Jude becomes more conscious of socially generated categories and conventions as such and has to learn how to deal with these on his own and on his own terms. In many ways, it is Sue who eventually awakens him to the notion of the ‘made’ as against the ‘given’.

Such tensions are perhaps even easier to understand if we take into account the (often apparently wholly involuntary) inconsistency of Jude’s character. The inconsistencies of Sue’s character are frequently remarked upon, and it is perhaps her highly visible extremes of fickleness and changeability which serve to mask instances of the same in Jude.23 Often, however, his carefully constructed selves – selves to which he aspires with a rare passion – stand in stark and manifestly irreconcilable contrast to the urges or primitive desires by which he so frequently feels himself gripped. The decision to adopt this image of the humble, pious curate, for instance, follows hot on the heels of a bout of angry drunkenness during which, ‘with the self-conceit, effrontery, and aplomb of a strong-brained fellow in liquor’ (141), he has regaled his fellow drinkers with a recital of the Nicene Creed in Latin, a performance which ultimately disgusts him with both himself and his auditors, whom he summarily dismisses as a ‘pack of fools’ (143). Much of Jude’s fight is within himself, with himself and the pain that this fight engenders cannot be overemphasised.

This sense of the battle of impulsive, instinctual self versus idealised, envisaged self is one which permeates the entire novel. One of the best early

examples that we come across is in Jude’s relationship with Arabella. Until his
encounter with Arabella, it is as if the female sex, in terms of potential partners, quite
simply does not exist in Jude’s world, such beings inhabiting the shadowy realm
which lies ‘outside his life and purposes’ (64). Arabella, however, is quickly able to
exercise a powerful magnetism over Jude. Her personality, even at this first meeting,
‘held Jude to the spot against his intention – almost against his will’ (64). And thus
the trouble commences. It is by no means a simple battle. Jude is not a ‘typical’
student, bored with his dry studies and constantly seeking adventure and any available
pretext for procrastination. A girlfriend – never mind a wife! – is quite simply not on
the agenda. His reading is far from a chore for him; the perusal of his new copy of the
New Testament, for instance, is something to which he has eagerly looked forward
and from which he has anticipated deriving ‘much pleasure’ (67). Yet this day set
aside for reading is also the day on which he has arranged to meet Arabella for a
second time. Which will triumph? Woman or text? For many men, of course, there
would have been no question and the scripture would have been set lightly aside for
another day. For Jude, however, the matter is more complex. He appears to have
decided against visiting Arabella. He sits down and tries to concentrate on the text in
front of him. But his mind wanders and he can think of nothing but his promise to
Arabella.\(^2\) Finally, the Greek is abandoned, ‘and the predestinate Jude sprang up and
across the room’ (68), spontaneously throwing, so we perhaps imagine, caution to the
wind. (The ‘predestinate’ causes problems of interpretation here. Hardy does not
elaborate as to whether Jude is ‘predestined’ by external forces or by the simple fact
of his character being such as it is to act as he does. This is typical of the ambivalence
which surrounds the themes of fate, destiny and determinism throughout the text.
Widdowson believes that the only determinism at work in Hardy’s characters is
invariably social and ideological and that this is why they never seem to control their

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\(^2\) Some critics have, however, acknowledged the fact that Jude is in many ways equally as fickle and
inconsistent as Sue. See, for instance, George Levine, ‘The Cartesian Hardy: I Think Therefore I’m

\(^2\) Jude’s reasoning, given in the form of ‘reported thought’ by the narrator, is, in itself, interesting: ‘Had
he promised to call for her? Surely he had! She would wait indoors, poor girl, and waste all her
afternoon on account of him. There was something in her, too, which was very winning, apart from
promises. He ought not to break faith with her.’ (67). Before admitting to himself that there is
something ‘winning’ about Arabella, he ‘sets up’ the idea that keeping his promise would merely be as a
kindness to her, rather than an act of self-indulgence. There is a clear denial of responsibility in this.
We are instantly disabused of any notions of Jude's romantic spontaneity, however, with the information that, '...foreseeing such an event he had already arrayed himself in his best clothes.' (68). Two distinct desires are in conflict within Jude, then; his desire to progress with his studies (which he enjoys) and his desire to spend an afternoon with a pretty girl (by whom he is captivated, despite the assertion that she is 'a woman for whom he had no respect, and whose life had nothing in common with his own except locality') (68). This behaviour shows us that Jude seems to be attempting to deny part of himself whilst simultaneously being fully aware that this is the very part which will ineluctably triumph. There is an obvious element of self-deception involved, but the issue is further complicated by the equal element of self-knowledge. The self, deceiving the self, is fully conscious of the deception and is, moreover, aware that the deception is ultimately futile.

Goode rather enigmatically states that 'Jude is not one of the many (typical) - he is one of us'. This seems to propose that 'we', the readers, are not 'typical', but perhaps an equally accurate proposition would be that Jude is one of the many (typical) - he is one of us. He has a sense of the self that he would like to be, but other urges, desires and demands get in the way. One of the things that makes Jude such a deeply sympathetic figure is the fact that he is not moulded in the traditional tragic hero manner with his single, impressive fatal flaw. Jude is not Macbeth or King Lear, nor even a second mayor of Casterbridge. His fallibility is much more mundane, grounded in prosaically conventional social and sexual stereotypes of a kind familiar to the average reader.

Whilst Jude is conscious, then, of the route that he will be impelled to take, he wants at the same time to be permitted to play his role on his own terms. He certainly does not wish to fit into the category that Arabella's family and friends instantly attribute to him. He winces at being referred to as Arabella's 'young man' (68) who has 'come coorting' (68) and attempts to rationalise the situation linguistically in his mind, so as to sanitise it and to elevate it above the crude commonplaceness of every

27 Goode, p. 139.
young buck's Sunday afternoon: ‘He was going to walk with her, perhaps kiss her; but 'courting' was too coolly purposeful to be anything but repugnant to his ideas.’ (68). The implied subtext, of course, in addition to the recurring notion of 'being different', is that Jude does not want to recognise any long-term purpose in or consequences to his actions. He does not want to see them or think that they might be seen as motivated by notions of matrimony and chooses instead to register them only as isolated incidents. The reader, aware that Jude is wholly incapable of being cold and calculating enough to don the mask of the cad and bounder, pities his innocent naivety in that he seems to imagine that provided this is the image that he has of the relationship, it will not be misinterpreted by anyone else. Ultimately, of course, Jude finds himself painted into an uncomfortable comer. He finds that he must – or, at least, his sense of honour dictates that he must - marry Arabella, love her or no, intended or no. It is a rude awakening, and one which brings home to him the impossibility now of fulfilling his dreams. This moment might even be seen to represent the first of those moments in the text which make up Hardy's bigger picture of 'the pain of the impossibility of fulfilled desire, fulfilled ideal'. Jude seeks to remain sanguine, however:

That night he went out alone, and walked in the dark, self-communing. He knew well, too well, in the secret centre of his brain, that Arabella was not worth a great deal as a specimen of womankind. Yet, such being the custom of the rural districts among honourable young men who had drifted so far into intimacy with a woman as he unfortunately had done, he was ready to abide by what he had said, and take the consequences. For his own soothing he kept up a factitious belief in her. His idea of her was the thing of most consequence, not Arabella herself, he sometimes said laconically. (80-81)

The first thing to notice is Jude's sharp awareness that his marriage to Arabella will be a gesture made to satisfy convention, or 'the custom of the rural districts'. The second thing to notice is that it does not cross his mind to challenge such convention or custom. Arabella is (supposedly) pregnant, thus there can be only one possible resolution. He is bound by a notion of 'honour' which has much more to do with concern for appearances than for the happiness of either party. In order to mitigate the

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28 This is ironic, since one of Jude's Justifications for permitting him to keep his promise involves him filling himself in to the pattern of the 'usual' and 'normal': 'Even though he had only Sundays and week-day evenings for reading he could afford one afternoon, seeing that other young men afforded so many.' (p. 67; my italics).
29 Levine, p.126.
unpalatable aspect of the enforced union, Jude clings to an idealised version of
Arabella, a version that does not accord at all accurately with the reality. The
astonishing thing is, however, that this is not simply a case of the narrator explaining
to the reader that Jude was blind to the reality and nurtured instead a false image
unconsciously generated in order to soften the blow dealt to his plans. Rather, it is,
once again, a case of Jude knowingly, consciously, deluding himself. Once again, the
self deceives the self, paradoxically knowing full well that it is being deceived. The
narrator speaks of the ‘secret centre’ of Jude’s brain, but does not explain from whom
it is secret. Certainly not from Jude himself. This is not a thought process taking
place in any vague, pre-Freudian subconscious, but constitutes an active choice on
Jude’s part. Jude seeks the security of a situation with which he would be satisfied
and superimposes this ideal onto the status quo. He constructs a vision a million
miles from the reality and despite his awareness of the construction nourishes it,
pretending to himself that it, the constructed vision, has more value, matters more,
than the actual facts which are doing their best to stare him in the face. It is as though
he imagines that everything will be less painful if he simply inhabits his own world of
make-believe. What is difficult for the reader to grasp is Jude’s awareness of the
make-believe quality of the make-believe world. He seems unable to deal sensibly
with the tension between the ideal and the real; there is a sense that in understanding
the criticism levelled at the real by the ideal he also comprehends the tragic
unattainability of the ideal, but rather than admit to this he chooses to pretend that the
real and the ideal do, in fact, coincide. By playing such intricate games of
doublethink with himself Jude projects to the reader a deeply inauthentic self, tackling
the implications of convention with little more than mental casuistry.

In this situation with Arabella we witness the mechanics of a central facet of
Jude’s character, namely his overwhelming tendency to mould, in his mind, others’
characters in order to fit either that which he imagines them to be or that which he
would rather they were. Whilst on the one hand this obviously predestines Jude for a
great deal of disappointment, on the other hand it reveals a store of positive energy by
means of which Jude is always able to look on the plus side and tirelessly to commit

30 Eagleton makes a similar point about the dialectical interplay between the ideal and the actual. See
to a naive, almost childlike faith in mankind’s potential for good. An obvious case in point is Jude’s behaviour regarding the composer of the new hymn, ‘The Foot of the Cross’. Jude is deeply moved by the hymn, finding it ‘a strangely emotional composition’ (211) and the more he thinks about the hymn and the man who wrote it, the more convinced he grows that he must speak to him:

‘He of all men would understand my difficulties,’ said the impulsive Jude. If there were any person in the world to choose as a confidant, this composer would be the one, for he must have suffered, and throbbed, and yearned. (211)

The second sentence is given as direct narrative, but it clearly continues Jude’s own musing. He imagines not only that the composer must have felt as moved writing the hymn as he feels hearing and singing it, but also that in order to have written it he must have experienced extremes of suffering. Jude squanders a day to visit the man and consequently suffers a dual disappointment. Firstly, the man he finds is a materialistic cynic, interested only in financial gain and seeking to abandon composing for the wine trade, which he views as a more lucrative business. In addition, by visiting the man, Jude misses an impromptu invitation from Sue. This moment illustrates two things. Primarily, it shows that Jude is capable of constructing an other even when that other means little or nothing to him in the general scheme of human acquaintance and relationships. Secondly, it demonstrates that his tendency to construct others according to the best of all possible models may have far wider ramifications than could ever be anticipated. Jude persistently imposes a stereotyping ideal onto his impressions of life and people and this inevitably results in the infliction of an excessive degree of pain upon himself.

If Jude, then, is capable of constructing a Phillotson, an Arabella, a Vilbert, even a writer of hymns to suit his vision, it is small wonder that he builds a Sue to accord with his desires and small wonder that he has a fixed idea of her and her personality long before the two actually meet. Many critics go so far as to maintain that the reader’s knowledge of Sue is limited entirely to whatever is filtered through

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31 This is quite extraordinary when we recall that first glimpse that we have of Jude as a child. He seems to have insight beyond his years into the unpleasantness of the world: ‘Growing up brought responsibilities, he found. Events did not rhyme quite as he had thought. [...] As you got older, and felt yourself to be at the centre of your time, and not at a point in its circumference, as you had felt when you were little, you were seized with a sort of shuddering, he perceived. All around you there seemed to be something glaring, garish, rattling, and the noises and glares hit upon the little cell called your life, and shook it, and warped it.’ (p. 42). Jude’s negative childhood experiences do nothing towards instilling any kind of sense of pessimism in him.
Jude’s perceptions and that we only ever see her through this male gaze. When Jude first sees Sue in the flesh she is sitting in a shop window, illuminating the word ‘Alleluya’ on a piece of zinc: ‘A sweet, saintly, Christian business, hers!’ (111). The subtext of the words is that Sue herself, rather than just the task in hand, is sweet, saintly and Christian. A short while later, again before the two have actually spoken to one another, Jude sees her in church and speculates on the probability that she is a frequenter of that place, and reflects on how, by ‘occupation and habit’ she must be ‘steeped body and soul in church sentiment’ (115). Little does he imagine that Sue likes to regard herself as quite the antithesis of all these categories that he is imposing on her.

To begin with, out of a combination of a consciousness of feeling rough beside what he sees as Sue’s daintiness, a desire not to defy his aunt’s wishes quite so openly and a sense of unease at how Sue might react to ‘that unpleasant part of his history which had resulted in his becoming enchained to one of her own sex whom she could certainly not admire’ (112), Jude avoids making contact with his cousin and instead allows Sue to grow to represent a multitude of roles in his imagination. She remains ‘more or less an ideal character, about whose form he began to weave curious and fantastic daydreams’ (112), and who he imagines might be for him ‘a kindly star, an elevating power, a companion in Anglican worship, a tender friend’ (113). Most disturbing, of course, is the impression that he has effectively fallen in love with the

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33 When Jude writes to Drusilla to ask that she send him the small picture that she has of Sue, she complies with his request, but counters it with a request of her own, ‘that he was not to bring disturbance into the family by going to see the girl or her relations’ (108). It is important to remember the role of catalyst that the portrait has already played. He has already asked his great aunt for the picture once, but she refused and the image haunted him until it ‘ultimately formed a quickening
ephemera of his imagination, this 'half-visionary form' (113). Certainly he
determines that he must endeavour to regard her only in terms of a relation, but the
energy expended in explaining to himself why this should be so illustrates clearly how
infatuated he has already allowed himself to become.\(^{34}\)

On one level, this betrays nothing unusual in Jude. Which of us has not at
some time constructed a self, an existence, for another person whom we have seen
only fleetingly, to whom we have never yet spoken a word? The difference is,
however, that Jude's relationship with Sue throughout the novel, even when they have
become intimate, remains, to a large extent, based on his imaginings of who and what
she is. As we have seen above, before meeting her, Jude constructs Sue as a being
who is far superior to him and who is effectively out of his reach. As his love
increases and they grow closer, their emotions more complex, the increased
knowledge by no means breaks down these constructing tendencies and Jude
continues to see in Sue 'types' of entity which render her, as before, out of reach,
untouchable, beyond the prosaic level of the earthly and the human.\(^{35}\) Examples that
illustrate this phenomenon help to demonstrate the implications that it has. On one
occasion, Jude goes to visit Sue at the teacher training school. On his way,

\[\text{On one occasion, Jude goes to visit Sue at the teacher training school. On his way, a wave of warmth came over him as he thought how near he stood to the bright-eyed vivacious girl with the broad forehead and the pile of dark hair above it; the girl with the kindling glance, daringly soft at times - something like that of the girls he had seen in engravings from paintings of the Spanish school. (151)}\]

Jude pictures Sue to himself as if he were observing a painting. This
effectively removes Sue from the realm of 'the normal', and she is elevated in the
same way that Léon elevates Emma Bovary in Flaubert's text. Her designation as 'the
girl', moreover, has a depersonalising effect which serves to lend Sue a somewhat

\(^{34}\) 'He affected to think of her quite in a family way, since there were crushing reasons why he should
not and could not think of her in any other.
The first reason was that he was married, and it would be wrong. The second was that they were
cousins. It was not well for cousins to fall in love, even when circumstances seemed to favour the
passion. The third: even were he free, in a family like his own where marriage usually meant a tragic
sadness, marriage with a blood-relation would duplicate the adverse conditions, and a tragic sadness
might be intensified to a tragic horror.' (113).

\(^{35}\) Some critics have actually accorded the characters a kind of elemental status. John LeVay, for
instance, sees Arabella as earth and of the body, Phillotson as water and of the soul, Sue as air and of the
mind, and Jude as fire and of the spirit. See John LeVay, 'Hardy's Jude the Obscure', The
mysterious, unknown aura. This element of mystery is deeply symptomatic of the relationship which develops between Jude and Sue. Jude acknowledges that Sue’s is a character of inconsistencies, but he chooses to see these inconsistencies as ‘one lovely conundrum’ (156), seeking to preserve, rather than to explain, them. This ‘conundrum’ is permitted to persist partly because of Sue’s extreme sensitivity, in that she grows quickly upset when she feels that she is being asked to justify or explain herself. There is a sense also that Jude actually enjoys the inexplicability of his cousin, in as much as it raises her above the prosaic transparency of such characters as Arabella, and is thus happy to preserve it. The inexplicability combined with the constructed vision inevitably makes for an addictive recipe. After all, ‘reality always proves inferior to the vision.’

When Sue runs away from the training school it is to Jude that she instinctively turns. Having swum across the river, she arrives, sopping wet, at Jude’s lodgings. He approaches her, seizes her hand ‘and found she was clammy as a marine deity, and that her clothes clung to her like the robes upon the figures in the Parthenon frieze’ (163). Jude accords almost mythical stature to Sue and her actions and he translates her every state into something elevated high above the prosaic and the normal. There are two implications to this. One dimension reveals the romantically inclined Jude. The stark reality that Sue is cold and wet and that her clothes, after

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36 John Lucas makes an interesting point when he writes that ‘[n]ames suggest identity, so that to know the name is in some measure to know the person’. John Lucas, The Literature of Change: Studies in the Nineteenth-Century Provincial Novel (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1980), p. 138. It is as if this moment works in the exact reverse manner. To remove the name, to deny the name, to obscure the name, is to return to an engineered paradisaical state of non-knowledge, of mystery.

37 Sue repeatedly plays the ‘victim’ card. When she and Richard take the schoolchildren to Christminster to see a model of Jerusalem, for instance, Sue is quick to criticise the model but then grows equally quickly upset when Richard tells Jude of her criticisms, even though it is only ‘with good-humoured satire’ that he does so (129). Sue herself feels more than conscious that her upset is ‘absurdly uncalled for by sarcasm so gentle’ (129), yet this is typical that she should allow herself to feel as though she were being ‘ganged-up’ on. When she and Jude are discussing the Bible after he has said his prayers, Sue tells her cousin of the ‘new New Testament’ (171) which she constructed for herself by cutting up all the Epistles and Gospels and arranging them into chronological order. Jude’s only response is an equivocal ‘H’m!’ and then, to her spirited attack on the stilted inadequacy of the synopses of the chapters of Solomon’s Song, he ventures to suggest that his cousin is ‘quite Voltairean’ (171). Jude’s words, then, hardly constitute an attack, but Sue interprets them – or exaggerates them – as such, exclaiming, ‘I wish I had a friend here to support me; but nobody is ever on my side’ (172; original italics). Her overreaction clearly suggests that she is not confident in her assertions and reveals a state of emotional instability which she unsuccessfully attempts to conceal with her outspokenness.

their impromptu dip and then their half-dry as she runs through the streets, are stiff and damp, is inadequate for Jude. Sue could not, for him, ever be cold and wet in a ‘normal’ way. At another level, there seems to be an unspoken subtext that Jude is sublimating the sexual charge of Sue’s wet, clinging clothing into a culturally iconic (and therefore acceptable) image. The presence of this subtext is emphasized when Jude returns to the room after allowing Sue time to remove her own clothing and put on some of his, and it is emphasized by Sue herself. She says, ‘I suppose, Jude, it is odd that you should see me like this and all my things hanging there? Yet what nonsense! They are only a woman’s clothes – sexless cloth and linen…’ (164). For all her protestations, it is Sue that blushes, not Jude. Her attempt to demystify the clothing achieves the opposite end, drawing attention instead both to its potential erotic quality and to the fact that Sue is sitting in borrowed clothes, divested of her own, has been naked in Jude’s room and is warm and sensual flesh beneath the leant male trappings. Later still, Jude looks quietly on the sleeping Sue, still wrapped in his great-coat and ‘looking warm as a new bun and boyish as Ganymedes’ (173). The reference to Sue’s boyishness evokes that epicene quality which is so urgent in the text, but the allusion is also strangely suggestive of a slightly homoerotic tone, Ganymedes having been abducted either by Zeus or on his orders, Zeus considering the boy to be the most beautiful of all mortals. Again, the classical reference has a dual function. Superficially, the allusion elevates Sue, rendering her, as previously, ‘almost a divinity’ (165). At the same time, the reference clearly indicates Jude’s desire, and his inability to know quite what to do with it. The reader is well aware that Sue is as humanly flawed as the best of us, but Jude seems to feel a need to keep Sue on that pedestal on which he placed her before meeting her, both as a tribute to the Sue he conceives and as a means of distancing himself from his own desire for her. The refusal to accept Sue as ordinary and fallible is troubling and potentially destructive. The decision to build up a vibrant image of her exceptionality results in an image which will suffer all the more when Jude is, finally, forced to admit that Sue has feet of clay. One critic asserts that the problematical concepts of ‘history’, ‘truth’

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and ‘fiction’ are the key to Hardy’s work, in that ‘much of the wonder of Hardy’s enduring fictions depends on the way in which they extend, complicate, and wrestle with the meaning of these concepts’. In many ways, this also encapsulates the problematics of Jude’s relationship with Sue: there is the issue of their common (and unhappy) family history, their personal histories (such as Jude’s marriage to and separation from Arabella), the fiction of the selves projected and constructed, and the truth, ever elusive, ever changing, ever subject to personal interpretation and deformation.

In addition to the way in which Jude constructs a phantom Sue in the guise of a goddess, we cannot fail to notice as well his retrospective projections, which work along similar lines to Emma Bovary’s ‘What if...’ laments. For instance, at a particular trough in Jude’s life, just prior to receiving the further blow of Tetuphenay’s summary rejection, Jude has a moment of insight, during which he realises – or, perhaps, admits to himself – that far from ever being able to enter the ranks of students and teachers, ‘his destiny lay [...] among the manual toilers in the shabby purlieu which he himself occupied, unrecognised as part of the city at all by its visitors and panegyrists’ (137). As he surveys the town, he feels strongly the pain of what he interprets as his failure, but feels also that he could have borne it, if only he had Sue by his side:

With Sue as companion he could have renounced his ambitions with a smile. Without her it was inevitable that the reaction from the long strain to which he had subjected himself should affect him disastrously. (137-38)

Certainly it is by no means as extreme as Emma’s ‘What if...’ and ‘If only...’ moments, in as much as Sue does exist and in as much as it is, of course, often easier to bear disappointment with someone with whom one can discuss things. At the same time, it illustrates again in Jude a tendency to idealise Sue’s character and to attribute greater strengths to it than it perhaps in reality possesses. Interestingly, Bayley claims that in Jude we see how the pain inflicted by society is actually nothing in comparison to that inflicted on each other by one another. As outsiders, we see perfectly the hurt that Jude and Sue cause to one another, but their own passionate natures prevent them

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40 As Garson points out, Sue meets a similar fate to Christminster at Jude’s hands. Both, for him, are ‘bodiless, visionary presences, existing in their ‘luminous purity’ only in Jude’s imagination’. Garson, p. 153.
41 Hasan, p. 1.
from analysing this damage rationally. This dependency of Jude’s upon a character that he himself has created shows that the pain is by no means inevitable. Jude’s persistent failure to see anything beyond that which he desires to see is one of his great tragedies.\(^{43}\)

A similar moment occurs later, again when Jude is in something of a trough. Having unexpectedly encountered Arabella in Christminster, thinking her to be far away in Australia, Jude ends up spending the night with her. He consequently fails to meet Sue as had been arranged; the two were supposed to be travelling back to Marygreen together to see the ailing Drusilla. To Jude’s great surprise, Sue, having gone to Marygreen alone, returns to Christminster to seek him out. Her explanation is that she feared that he might perhaps have tried to drown his gloom in alcohol as had once happened before. Jude is elated: ‘And you came to hunt me up, and deliver me, like a good angel!’ (204). In his mind, he enters into a series of rapturous words of praise and wonder at Sue:

Looking at his loved one as she appeared to him now, in his tender thought the sweetest and most disinterested comrade that he had ever had, living largely in vivid imaginings, so ethereal a creature that her spirit could be seen trembling through her limbs, he felt heartily ashamed of his earthliness in spending the hours he had spent in Arabella’s company. (204)

That ‘living in vivid imaginings’ is rather enigmatic. Is the implication that Sue (as Jude sees her) lives less in the real world than in the world of her mind, or might we also interpret it as a nod from the narrator that Sue’s character is built from the vivid imaginings of Jude’s mind? In whichever way we interpret this moment, the result of Jude’s tendency to mythologise Sue in this manner is that he always heaps the blame for things that go awry entirely upon himself. This is as extreme a form of construction as the opposite, overly indulgent and (wilfully) blind form of his constructing Sue so as to render her purer than pure, immune from censure. Time and time again he castigates himself, declares himself unworthy of his cousin, praises her as the ‘innocent’,\(^{44}\) accuses himself of being, effectively, the villain.

\(^{42}\) Bayley, pp. 208-09.

\(^{44}\) For instance, after Sue has told Jude about her prior relationship with the undergraduate, Jude refuses to think any kind of ill about her: ‘His voice trembled as he said: “However you have lived, Sue, I believe you are as innocent as you are unconventional.”’ (168).
Once Sue has left Phillotson and joined Jude, Jude intends that their first night together be spent at a Temperance hotel in Aldbrickham. What follows is a remarkable scene in which multiple images and self-images constantly interact. Firstly, Sue objects to the idea of a shared room – the message is, that she has not come to Jude as his lover, for sex: ‘I didn’t mean that!’ (254). Jude is discomfited and does not understand, but nonetheless generously accepts both her refusal to share a room and her vexing evasiveness on the topic. Secondly, Sue is insensitive enough to talk affectionately of Phillotson, of how kind he was and how he was calmly resigned to letting her go, speaking of the ‘thoughtful arrangements’ that he took care to make for her journey. It does not seem to occur to her that the subject of Phillotson might, per se, be a painful one for Jude, nor does she seem to imagine that her emphasis on Richard’s thoughtfulness regarding arrangements might be construed as a comparison, an attack on Jude’s lack of thoughtfulness (as Jude might believe that Sue sees it) in booking only the one room. Thirdly, after the departure from this first, rejected hotel, the pair ultimately take rooms at the very inn in which Jude has so recently spent a night with Arabella. Learning of this circumstance from one of the servants at the second inn, Sue is upset and miserable and she accuses Jude of being false to her. When Jude ventures to suggest that she is being ‘unreasonable’ – the subtext to Sue’s distress is that although she herself does not ‘want’ Jude, she does not want anyone else to have him either – Sue hides behind language and calls Jude ‘gross’. She claims in addition that but for this new knowledge regarding the renewed relations with Arabella, ‘perhaps I would have gone on to the Temperance Hotel, after all, as you proposed; for I was beginning to think I did belong to you!’ (259). To the reader’s ears, if not to Jude’s, this sounds like little more than cruel, tantalising teasing and a sanctimonious appropriation of the high moral ground rather than a genuine admission. Yet at the end of this virtuosic demonstration of sulkiness, inconsistency, jealousy, insensitivity and anger, Jude maintains his position of Sue-good, Jude-bad, asserting that just to be near to Sue renders him ‘comparatively happy’ (259):

‘It is more than this earthly wretch called Me deserves – you spirit, you disembodied creature, you dear, sweet, tantalizing phantom – hardly flesh at all; so that when I put my arms round you I almost expect them to pass through you as through air! Forgive me for being gross, as you call it!’ (259)

To the bitter end, Jude blames himself. He accuses himself of seducing Sue:

‘You were a distinct type – a refined creature, intended by Nature to be left intact. But
I couldn’t leave you alone!’ (352). Even when Sue tries to bear some of the burden of responsibility herself, Jude will hear none of it, telling her, ‘You have been fearless, both as a thinker and a feeler, and you deserved more admiration than I gave. I was too full of narrow dogmas at that time to see it.’ (353-54). There are two points to notice here. The first is that the construction of the other leads to a parallel constructing of the self in order to maintain some kind of equilibrium, however contrived. The second is that Jude’s constructions of Sue drive her into categories which it is impossible for her to live up to. Blinded by his love for her, Jude straitjackets his cousin in his version of her, desiring her to be the purer-than-pure angel that she is not. This selfishness is, paradoxically, unwitting and a result of the best intentions, and it gives rise to a dishonesty and inauthenticity of the self along with a similar fate foisted upon the other.

We have seen, then, that Jude creates a highly idealised version of Sue. It might be considered helpful at this point to examine the version of Sue to which she herself subscribes. As countless critics have found, however, this is much more easily said than done, since the unpredictable ways in which her character works continually ‘deflect attempted comprehensive analysis’. This has led to interpretations of Sue spanning all kinds of attitudes. Stewart, for instance, praises Sue as ‘the last and greatest of Hardy’s gifts to fiction. Wherever she comes from, her reality is as unchallengeable as Emma Bovary’s or Anna Karenina’s’. Geoffrey Thurley, however, is somewhat less grateful to Hardy, expostulating that ‘[f]ew characters in fiction irritate the reader more than Sue Bridehead’, while George Wing finds her frigid and prone to ‘neurotically unexpected’ behaviour and Kate Millett almost admits defeat, claiming that Sue is ‘by turns an enigma, a pathetic creature, a nut, and an iceberg’. The very fact that Sue has managed to excite such varied critical interpretations illustrates already what a complex and enigmatic character she is. The first extended sighting that the reader gains of Sue is one to which Jude is himself not

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45 Kramer (Kramer) p.173.
46 Stewart, p. 203.
48 George Wing, Hardy (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1963), p. 76.
We are accorded a glimpse of her on an afternoon’s holiday, when she takes ‘a walk into the country with a book in her hand’ (115-16). Whilst out on her walk she comes across a man selling images, and she purchases two statuettes, one representing Apollo and one representing Venus. As Sue lives and works in what is described to the reader as an ‘ecclesiastical establishment’ it is obvious that the purchase of these particular icons is at once far from apt and also a conscious and wilful gesture of rebellion against the Christian doctrine by which she is surrounded and stifled. Yet Sue is unable to sustain the confidence of the rebellious moment and quickly grows flustered:

When [the statuettes] were paid for, and the man had gone, she began to be concerned as to what she should do with them. They seemed so large now that they were in her possession, and so very naked. Being of a nervous temperament she trembled at her enterprise. (116)

She ends up wrapping the images in large dock leaves. She continues to voice her defiance to herself, ‘Well, anything is better than those everlasting church fal-lals!’ (117) but the very fact that she senses a need to reiterate to herself the validity of her action merely adds weight to the comment that follows: ‘But she was still in a trembling state, and seemed almost to wish she had not bought the figures’ (117). This illustrates the deep schism within Sue’s self, a schism which will contribute markedly to her destruction. She nurtures an idealised sense of her self as defiant, unconventional and highly secularised. This is the self which she strives at every moment to posit. She cannot, however, ever escape from the guilt of the feeling which inexorably presents itself to her that she is somehow doing, or thinking, something ‘wrong’. Eagleton encapsulates this schism in his idea that Sue fits into two distinct - and theoretically mutually exclusive - categories. She is at once ‘a chronically timid prisoner of convention’ and ‘an impetuous rebel’. This moment is indicative of a theme, relating specifically to Sue, which runs through much of the text. The reader – and Jude – find it hard to explain and understand Sue for the very simple and obvious reason that she is not entirely sure herself who it is that she is. In spite of all her efforts to posit a very particular

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50 This, of course, scuppers all those critical claims that we only ever see Sue as she is perceived by Jude.

individuality, the gaps, the fissures, are always in evidence. By analysing particular examples in the text it becomes clear how the pattern of self versus self repeats itself time and again and indicates the turmoil in which Sue exists on a day-to-day basis. It is also important to notice that it takes very little for an Other – be it Jude, Phillotson, or anyone else – unintentionally to undermine her carefully engineered constructions of herself, showing on what insecure foundations they actually rest.

When Sue and Jude go out on a day trip and find themselves having to stay overnight with a shepherd and his mother, Sue makes a great show of enthusing about the simplicity of the place. She claims to revel in the notion of being ‘[o]utside all laws except gravitation and germination’ (158). The formulation is somewhat strained and contrived, and Jude laughs at her claim, asserting that she is, in fact, ‘quite a product of civilization’. Her quick rejoinder is that she craves nothing so much as to get back to the life of her infancy and its freedom. This strikes both Jude and the reader as curious, for if Drusilla’s reports are even half accurate then the ill-fated pairing of Sue’s parents cannot have made for an especially carefree childhood. There is a sense instead that Sue has an ideal version of ‘infancy’ in her head and that, just as she nurtures an ideal (but unfulfilled and inconsistent) version of herself in the present, so too does she cherish a skewed version of an ideal, perfect past. Once again, we see this complex interplay between history, truth and fiction, and this is a moment which illustrates an observation made by Vigar: ‘All through the novel Hardy’s method is to point the difference between objective and subjective truth, the real and the imagined ideal.’

Sue’s approach to life involves, in its own way, constructions similar to Jude’s. At the same time, there is a sense, especially in the earlier scenes involving Sue, that she is aware that to live life authentically she must strive to posit this self which rejects the mechanisms and responses of her society. Her failure wholly to embrace this self points to the impossibility of ever ridding the self of assimilated socio-cultural values. Her ‘right-minded openness and hostility to convention are undercut by what might be thought of as a visceral incapacity to live out her ideas’. The question must be asked, of course, as to how far we can see as

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52 Vigar, p. 194.
53 Levine, p. 115.
'visceral' an incapacity which is clearly inculcated by exposure to and consciousness of society's norms.

Sue is punished by the authorities of her teacher-training school for having stayed out overnight with Jude. Her story that he is her cousin is treated with derision, the head girl remarking knowingly: 'That excuse has been made a little too often in this school to be effectual in saving our souls.' (160). Exasperated and angry at what she perceives as the sheer injustice of the punishment, Sue runs away from the college, managing to escape by crossing 'the largest river in the county' (164). She heads, as we have seen, straight for Jude's lodgings. Again, we witness in the ensuing scene the bitter struggle between alternate selves within Sue. She begins the explanation to her cousin 'in her usual slightly independent tones' (164) but ends it close to tears. Once her initial anger and frustration have subsided and she starts to consider the possible ramifications of her actions, she is unable to maintain the defiant, anti-conventional, devil-may-care stance and falls immediately to worrying about what 'they' (166) – meant, of course, is, those in the training school who will decide her fate, but implied by extension is also Society as a whole – will think of her behaviour. Ultimately her disquiet becomes focused on how Phillotson will judge the escapade. Here, once again, we see two opposing forces battling for domination. On the one hand she declares, 'He is the only man in the world for whom I have any respect or fear. I hope he'll forgive me.' (174). Immediately thereafter, however, she crossly exclaims, 'I don't care for him! He may think what he likes – I shall do just as I choose!' (174). Jude begins to draw her attention to this blatant contradiction but she cuts him short. Her refusal to address the issue betrays a deep-seated dissatisfaction with herself and suggests, moreover, a hint of fear that the matter is unresolvable. This moment starkly illustrates how Sue's search for selfhood is intrinsically more painful and complicated than Jude's in as much as she has the added disadvantage of her sex to cope with. It would be stretching a point to lay any claim for Sue as a proto-feminist, and it is even more difficult to establish whether or not she identifies with any sense of womanhood or chooses instead to privilege the individual side of her struggle.54 Certainly the latter seems more likely; like Jude, Sue

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54 Certain critics see something distinctly non-feminist in Sue in that they argue that she wants not freedom for women as such but seeks to posit the masculine side of herself, to adopt the paternalistic,
is often concerned that the manner of her existence should be unique, individual, peculiar to her. On one occasion when Phillotson refers to her as ‘terribly clever’, Sue is vexed, retorting, ‘I am not – altogether! I hate to be what is called a clever girl – there are too many of that sort now!’ (129; my italics). Having said this, Sue is very conscious of the stranglehold exerted by the paternalistic, patriarchal elements of the society in which she exists, as shown, for instance, by her repugnance at the sexist wording of the marriage vows, which serve to lend the woman the status of a transferable object. Her inconsistency at this point might be seen as an expression of her irritation at having, as it were, caught herself out. Elizabeth Hardwick maintains that

\[\text{[the personal, the analytical, the passion for self-knowledge that raise authenticity above everything and certainly above duty and submission, come so naturally to Sue that she is almost childlike. Hypocrisy, especially in matters of feeling, is to her a sacrilege.]} \]

What Hardwick seems to overlook is the issue of Sue sometimes finding herself entrapped in a web of hypocrisy quite in spite of herself.

As the novel progresses, it seems that Sue grows more and more conscious of her inconsistencies and their implications. On more than one occasion she frankly admits that her theory and her practice often find themselves failing to correspond. Trying to explain herself to Richard, for instance, she confesses that she knew that she did not love him before she even married him but that, for the sake of convention and for fear of damage to her reputation she let the engagement stand:

‘Of course I, of all people, ought not to have cared what was said, for it was just what I fancied I never did care for. But I was a coward – as so many women are – and my theoretic unconventionality broke down.’ (238)

Similarly, a little later, when she has left Richard and is about to spend her first night with Jude, she bridles, as we have seen, at the notion of their being ‘lovers’. She is unable to be quite candid ‘as to the state of that mystery, her heart’ and simply offers Jude the rather lame excuse: ‘Assume that I haven’t the courage of my opinions.’ (255). The admission that she hasn’t the courage of her convictions is an

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patriarchal system in an active, perpetuating way, rather than enduring it as a passive victim. See, for instance, Margaret Elvy, Sexing Hardy: Thomas Hardy and Feminism (Kidderminster: Crescent Moon, 1998) and Anne Z. Mickelson, Thomas Hardy’s Women and Men: The Defeat of Nature (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, 1976).

important one. It illustrates that Sue does not remain in a static condition of irreconcilable self versus self, but passes through a depressing stage of not only recognising but also confessing her weakness. Once she has passed this point, the only way is down, and the unconventional self will ultimately become the loser, Sue suppressing it and endeavouring to become instead that which she imagines social consciousness would like her to be. What happens in effect is that whereas at the start of the novel there is a sense of the conventional glimmering behind the unconventional, at the end of the novel the two have changed places.\(^{56}\) The conventional is the side which Sue tries to stoke, but the unconventional refuses totally to die. The problem for the reader is to establish where, if anywhere, the ‘real’ Sue lies. Michael Hassett claims that Sue destroys her ‘essential self’ in her disturbing volte-face after the tragic deaths of her children.\(^{57}\) but it might also be claimed that part of Sue’s tragedy is that she never really succeeds in locating an essential self. Societal pressures prevent her from ever being able fully to establish the self that she would like to posit. She is unable to give wholesale commitment to her unconventionality and when things go wrong she casts around for an alternative, ultimately finding recourse only to society’s rigid categories and conventional thinking. The categories are never so wholly internalised in the manner of Innitelten in Effi Briest, but, as in his case, Sue is unable to construct a viable and sustainable alternative to these categories. Gregor, like Hassett, maintains that ‘the ultimate tragedy for [Sue] […] is that she has forsaken herself in a way that Jude never does’.\(^{58}\) This may be seen as partly true, but it is also surely true that Jude’s strength and, indeed, Jude’s unconventionality, is something derived from his faith in, admiration for and love of Sue. Jude adopts the qualities that he believes he recognises in Sue, but, in truth, they are but tentative flickers in her character and it is Jude’s devotion which renders them, in his eyes, solid and certain. The reader should not be seduced by Jude’s vision into believing that Sue’s was ever a stable self which she could betray.

\(^{56}\) Hasan claims that ‘[Sue’s] career in the novel might well be described as the triumph of the traditional imagination. It illustrates the inescapability of community and culture’. Hasan, p. 172.


On the whole, Sue, perhaps not surprisingly in view of its flattering nature, delights in Jude’s construction of her as an airy, ethereal, incorporeal spirit. She too tries to foster this image, and whilst it may be endearing and even seductive to Jude, the reader may often find herself regarding it as bordering on, or even becoming, arrogance. The perfect example of this arises, once again, at the point at which Sue baulks at the idea of there being only one room booked at the Temperance Hotel. Having thwarted all of Jude’s plans, she allows him to blame himself for being what he, echoing her, terms ‘gross’ (259), allows him to condemn himself as ‘earthly wretch’ and laud her as a ‘dear, sweet, tantalizing phantom’ (259) and then responds by entreating him to ‘[s]ay those pretty lines, then, from Shelley’s ‘Epipsychidion’ as if they meant me!’ (259). Jude confesses ruefully that he knows hardly any poetry and this is invitation enough for her to recite the lines herself:

'There was a Being whom my spirit oft
Met on its visioned wanderings far aloft.
*   *   *   *   *
A seraph of Heaven, too gentle to be human,
Veiling beneath that radiant form of woman...
O it is too flattering, so I won’t go on! But say it’s me! – say it’s me!’ (260)

C. H. Sisson, for one, in his editorial notes in the Penguin edition of Jude, judges Sue harshly in respect of this. He suggests that it is ‘an appropriate point of reference for Sue, as she imagines herself to be, and the quotation is an occasion for an exhibition of Sue’s vanity’. This is quite true, and the unalloyed egotism of the moment causes the reader to blush on Sue’s behalf. Yet it is essential not to overlook the subtext of the lines. The emphasis (and this can only be an emphasis deliberately chosen by Sue) is on her not being a woman as such. Implicit within this is Sue’s unwillingness to enter into a sexual relationship. Many critics have judged Sue harshly on this matter, but there is a sense that only as the ephemeral self can she

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60 Langbaum, for instance, advocates the idea that Sue is frightened of sex. Robert Langbaum, Thomas Hardy in Our Time (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), p. 17. D’Exideuil sees her as ‘almost lacking in sex’. Pierre d’Exideuil, The Human Pair in the Work of Thomas Hardy, trans. by Felix W. Crosse (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1970), p. 107. Wilson is much harder. He claims that ‘[i]n many ways Sue seems modelled on the Cybele of antiquity, who required of her devotees their vitality if not their manhood as a sacrifice necessary in sustaining the realm of birth and decay over which she ruled; in one common version of the legend, Cybele castrates her lover Attis to prevent his marriage to another. Sue’s mates – the undergraduate at Cambridge, Phillotson, Jude – likewise must become
maintain any power over anything. If she once admits herself to be earthly, bodily, human, then she risks losing her hard won autonomy. This notion of bodilessness is especially important within the parameters of the relationship with Jude. Just before one of their abortive attempts to marry, Sue says to Jude: ‘Jude, I want you to kiss me, as a lover, incorporeally.’ (295). This is puzzling: what does Sue mean by ‘incorporeally’ in this context? Sue is in a tragic mood, saying, ‘It won’t ever be like this any more,’ so what she seems to be asking for from this kiss is a definitive, final statement ending a specific way of (unmarried and, therefore, untrammelled) existence. But how can a kiss be incorporeal? Obviously it cannot. What the request indicates, however, is that Sue has the misfortune to have more than one schism within herself. We have already seen how she has the conventional and the anti-conventional constantly doing battle for the upper hand. There is also a sense that within Sue there is a battle between physicality and non-physicality. To dismiss her as sexless as some critics do is too simplistic. She loves and desires Jude just as he loves and desires her. After his final visit to her, she tells Mrs Edlin, ‘Jude has been here this afternoon, and I find I still love him – O, grossly! I cannot tell you more.’ (399). That ‘O, grossly!’ is a cry from the heart, for it is Sue’s euphemistic term for sexual desire. Sue’s problem with the sexual act is that it is bound up with so many implications. Firstly, there is the issue of sex as procreation. In some ways, this might be seen by Sue as a loss of control over the body, as it has to support and nourish another entity. The individual woman becomes submerged beneath those other titles of ‘wife’ and ‘mother’, defined only through the individual’s relationship to an Other. Secondly, there is the matter of submission. Sue uses the sexual act as celibate to please her’. Overlooking the three times that Sue gives birth, Wilson charges Sue with repressing her femininity, which results in ‘sterility and consequent self-destruction’. James D. Wilson, The Romantic Heroic Ideal (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), pp. 112-13.

61 Perhaps not surprisingly, it is generally female critics who tend to be more understanding of and sympathetic towards Sue. See especially Boumelha, Hardy and Women, and Morgan.

62 Sengupta, for instance, asserts that the ‘truth’ about Sue is that ‘she is not a passionate woman’ but is a ‘cold, sexless creature’. C. Sengupta, Thomas Hardy: The Novelist of Tragic Vision (Gibindpuri: Bahri, 1994), p. 160. If this were the case, how much easier an existence Sue would surely have.

63 D. H. Lawrence, for one, supports this idea. He observes that Sue wants ‘no experience in the senses’ desiring only ‘to know’. ‘Sue needed all the life that belonged to her, for her mind. It was her form. To disturb that arrangement was to make her into somebody else, not herself. Therefore, when she became a physical wife and mother, she forsaw her own being. She abjured her own mind, she denied it, took her faith, her belief, her very living away from it.’ D. H. Lawrence, Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays, ed. by Bruce Steele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 119-20.
a final gesture to symbolise absolute submission towards Phillotson in her farcical remarriage. The mere fact that Sue equates the sexual act here with the disagreeable realm of complete surrender illustrates how difficult it is for her to establish a self which can comfortably reconcile desire and independence.

How, then, are we finally to evaluate Sue’s character? We have already seen how many critics judge her volte-face as a definitive abdication from what they regard as her essential self. We have also seen, however, that it is a matter of debate as to whether Sue is ever in possession of an essential self. More light is shed on this issue by analysing the motivations and justifications surrounding her turn-around. It occurs, of course, after the death of her children. She suddenly becomes convinced that everything must happen according to the dictates of some great Power. She now talks of ‘the ancient wrath of the Power above us’ and claims that it is ‘no use fighting against God’ (351). This adoption of God as ultimate causal element might initially be cynically regarded as, indeed, a means of abdicating from personal responsibility, as a way out of the fight. However, the problem might equally be seen to lie in the fact that Sue actually tries to make too much sense of things and tries to take on, personally, too much responsibility.

She sees in the events which have befallen her a connected set of clearly interlinked and intermotivated moments and in her endeavours to contextualise everything and to give it the same background she loses all sense of the idea of universal arbitrariness. She can no longer believe, as Jude so fervently does, that they are fighting against ‘man and senseless circumstance’ (351) because the scale of the tragedy is too great for her to comprehend without seeking explicable Causes. The only cause that she can engineer is herself, so if her behaviour thus far has been at fault she must revise her position, change her attitudes, become a different entity. This means that she must reject all of the beliefs that she has hitherto held and must adopt instead all of those which she has ridiculed, belittled, raged against, striven to escape. She claims that ‘self-abnegation is the higher road. We should mortify the flesh’ (353) and that ‘[s]elf-renunciation – that’s everything!’ (354). She claims that ‘Arabella’s child killing mine was a judgment – the right

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64 Millett goes so far as to suggest that in presenting herself at Richard’s door, Sue is demonstrating ‘the full hideous iniquity of conventional marriage which is Hardy’s target in the novel’. Millett, p. 133.
slaying the wrong!’ (358), that she ‘belongs’ to Richard, if to any man, her marriage to him being ratified eternally in the Church and in Heaven, and that, similarly, Jude can rightfully belong only to Arabella. Things go so far as for her to claim that allowing Richard his conjugal rights is something which, no matter her aversion, no matter her distaste, is a ‘duty’ (400). What Sue tries to do, then, is to construct what she imagines is the epitome of the truly penitent, pious, self-castigating self. It becomes abundantly clear, however, that she has not been able to convince even herself of its sincerity in as much as she still loves Jude and can do nothing to stop herself loving Jude. Sue acts as the catalyst for a chain of events which takes social conventions and prescribed norms to their ultimate, logical and quite hideous extremity. By focusing on Sue as the key vehicle, in her unhinged, hysterical state, the text presents the chain of events almost as a grotesque parody of ‘normal’ social conditions. The absurdity of their absolutism highlights the dangers of ever making stark moral distinctions between ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. The vicar’s congratulations to Phillotson and Sue on ‘having performed a noble, and righteous, and mutually forgiving act’ (376) are monstrous; they condemn the vicar and any other member of society who could possibly regard such proceedings with self-righteous equanimity. More than this, however, these words also exonerate Sue. The state to which Sue’s self has been reduced by the end of the novel signifies a damning indictment of a society in which ‘desire for authentic existence is defeated by forces of established law, and stoic acceptance passes for virtue’ 66. At no point, then, does Sue achieve a sense of selfhood with which she is content. She lurches from one construction of herself to another, between extremes, and each time must fight out a battle, sometimes trying to fend off society and its conventions, sometimes trying to fend off the anti-conventionality which she had once tried so hard to embrace. Critics are often dissatisfied with Sue as a character, but this seems to be part of Hardy’s greater purpose: she is, after all, never satisfied with herself.

Richard Phillotson is equally as complex a character as both Jude and Sue. He is a perplexing combination of the old-fashioned and the avant-garde, the arch-
conservative and the liberal, and his central role in the text as catalyst should not be
under-estimated. There are three key points at which the narrative focuses exclusively
on Phillotson. At each of these points the reader is granted a degree of insight into his
private thoughts and emotions. The first of these occurs when Sue first broaches the
issue of her proposal to leave her husband in order to go and live with Jude. The
majority of the words in the exchange are Sue’s, suggesting that she realises that her
proposition demands a great deal of explanation. She speaks at length about her
motives for wanting to leave and about her justifications for her suggestion. She
seeks to lend authority to her argument by citing Mill, displaying ghastly insensitivity
(such premeditated argument is bound to be hurtful to Richard) but also a distinct
consciousness of the irregularity of the request, along with an indication of her
insecurity regarding her estimation of her capabilities of adequately arguing her case
with only her own voice. Phillotson’s responses are short yet speak volumes: ‘It is
irregular’; ‘But we are married - ’; ‘But you are committing a sin in not liking me’;
‘You distress me, Susanna, by such importunity’; ‘But it does – it hurts me! And you
vowed to love me’ (All 239). Even during the exchange of hand-written notes from
classroom to classroom, the tone does not change:

> God knows I don’t want to thwart you in any reasonable way. My whole thought is to
> make you comfortable and happy. But I cannot agree to such a preposterous notion as
> your going to live with your lover. You would lose everybody’s respect and regard;
> and so should I! (240)

All the responses conform to the kind of attitude we might probably expect
from what Phillotson, in abstract terms, effectively ‘is’; a prematurely aged rural
schoolmaster. The focus is on the irregularity of the request, on ‘what people would
say’, and on what looms large to Richard as the key reason against such a move; the
fact of their being married. Yet it does not take long for Phillotson to undergo a
change of heart. We learn the reasons behind this change of heart from a conversation
that he has with his friend, George Gillingham. Richard has already decided on his
course of action before actually speaking to Gillingham, just as, in Effi Briest,
Innstetten’s mind is made up regarding what he must do long before consulting
Wüllersdorf. Upon arrival Richard states explicitly, ‘I’ve come, George, to explain to

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67 Chapman remarks that this is a frequent technique in Hardy’s novels: the reader effectively plays the
part of eavesdropper and simply ‘listens in’ on a conversation. See Raymond Chapman, The Language
you my reasons for taking a step that I am about to take.' (244). Phillotson is well aware that people will question his decision and behaviour and that his actions will be met with uncomprehending censure, but this knowledge does nothing to dissuade him from his course. He endeavours to explain to Gillingham the reasoning behind his decision. The first key point is to notice that Phillotson, like both Jude and Sue, is not slow to accept responsibility and shoulder blame and, like them, he probably chooses to shoulder more than his fair share. He claims to believe that he 'took advantage of [Sue's] inexperience' and that he had her agree to an engagement 'before she well knew her own mind' (245). In some ways, of course, this is true, but only in so far as Sue is notoriously bad at knowing her own mind. In other ways, it is an exaggeration of the situation, particularly as the idea of Phillotson as some cunning, exploitative manipulator is quite ludicrous. The second key point is that Phillotson is capable of standing back from the painful situation in order to remove himself from the equation. He tells Gillingham, regarding Sue and her cousin, how struck he has been by 'the extraordinary sympathy, or similarity, between the pair' (245) and how in many ways they seem to him to be 'one person split in two'. As we know, Phillotson is neither cold nor indifferent towards his wife and he does sense genuine physical desire for her, so for him to be able to assess this matter with such calm, measured disinterest speaks volumes for the degree of iron willpower which he is able to exercise. What is more, it shows a dimension of generosity in his character. A further aspect of Phillotson's generosity is revealed in his willingness to recognise Sue's intellect as superior to his own. Sue is both much younger and a woman, so this demonstrates how far Phillotson is from subscribing to the hierarchical, patriarchal ideals of his day. He states quite bluntly to Gillingham, 'I can't answer her arguments – she has read ten times as much as I!' (245). This shows that Phillotson is able to separate the intellectual from the emotional. Certainly he does not like Sue's arguments, but he acknowledges his inability to counter them with similarly cogent reasoning. He acknowledges that he is responding not to inarticulate female hysteria, but to logical argument which finds support in the writings of contemporary thinkers such as Mill.68

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We have already observed that there are similarities between this scene and the central conversation between Wüllersdorf and Innstetten in *Effi Briest*. A key difference, however, is to be seen in the reactions of the men to the situation that they are attempting to deal with. If Phillotson were a dyed-in-the-wool Innstetten, he would presumably refuse his wife’s request on the grounds that it is wholly contrary to ‘the done thing’ and that no matter how absurd the done thing could be proved to be, it must continue to be done, simply because it holds that canonical status. Phillotson, however, chooses to fly in the face of accepted convention and to listen to the promptings of his heart, to what his instinct tells him to do. His conclusion is simple and stark: ‘It is wrong to so torture a fellow-creature any longer; and I won’t be the inhuman wretch to do it, cost what it may!’ (245). He admits that he cannot defend his stance either ‘logically, or religiously’ (246), and also that he cannot harmonise it with the ‘doctrines’ (246) he was brought up in. These factors, however, change nothing: ‘Only I know one thing: something within me tells me I am doing wrong in refusing her.’ (246). This is perhaps one of the most startling declarations in the entire novel. What it amounts to is the rebellion of Phillotson’s whole rational being against that which he has decided to do. It is impossible to reconcile the thoughts, ideas, conventions and opinions which constitute his character with that which he feels to be, deep in his heart, ‘right’. He senses viscerally, rather than rationally, that there is no other choice. He goes on to say:

‘I, like other men, profess to hold that if a husband gets such a so-called preposterous request from his wife, the only course that can possibly be regarded as right and proper and honourable in him is to refuse it, and put her virtuously under lock and key, and murder her lover perhaps. But is that essentially right, and proper, and honourable, or is it contemptibly mean and selfish? I don’t profess to decide. I simply am going to act by instinct, and let principles take care of themselves. If a person who has blindly walked into a quagmire cries for help, I am inclined to give it, if possible.’ (246)

This is a profoundly complex speech. First of all, it shows Phillotson invoking a notion of collective male thinking. Under theoretical circumstances he would subscribe to this collective manner of thinking. Then there is the problem of that ‘so-called preposterous request’. Again, under theoretical circumstances, a request such as Sue’s would indeed seem quite ‘preposterous’. But the ‘so-called’ surely casts doubt on the infallibility of the established categories. Further, the word ‘regarded’ is crucial to the sense of the passage. Phillotson is subtly pointing up an important distinction between that which *seems* and that which *is*, between justice being done
and justice being seen to be done. He is drawing Gillingham's – and the reader's – attention to the fact that we are often blinded to the underlying implications of an action by our acceptance of conventional, conditioned responses. He is able to see that the kindest, most generous reaction to Sue is to grant her request. The fact that this will not be seen as 'right' or as 'proper' or as 'honourable' by the society of which he is a part does not mean that it is not any of these things. Phillotson himself, having posed the question of what qualifies as 'right' and what as 'contemptibly mean and selfish' categorically refuses to answer it. He says simply that he doesn't 'profess to decide'. That is, he indicates that there might be a discrepancy, but declines to come out fully on the side of the social revolutionary. Again, this is very similar to the scene between Wüllersdorf and Innstetten in as much as they too question the validity of the status quo and suggest, between themselves, that things are not quite as they should be. They, however, opt to support the status quo and to uphold the established conventions, because they have nothing which they consider viable with which to replace them. Phillotson, on the other hand, opts to reject the status quo **even though** he has nothing to put in its place; we should not for one moment be seduced into entertaining the idea that Phillotson is advocating his own position and decision as recommended standard behaviour.\(^{69}\)

Gillingham, throughout the whole exchange, represents the voice of society; 'But – you see, there's the question of neighbours and society – what will happen if everybody - ' (246). He says he is 'amazed' that 'such a sedate, plodding fellow as you should have entertained such a craze for a moment' (246). Despite all that Phillotson has said, Gillingham is unable to regard the issue outside the conventionally conceived parameters and simply sees his friend as wrongheaded. The more he puts the case for society, however, the more doggedly does Phillotson defend his corner, going so far as to say, after comparing Jude and Sue to Shelley's Laon and Cythna\(^{70}\) and to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*, that '[t]he more I reflect, \(^{69}\) Wotton suggests that what defeats Hardy's characters time and again is 'their inability to find a suitable ideological structure to replace that from which they have become detached'. This is especially true in this case, for Phillotson tries to survive without any kind of replacement structure and he finds that this is simply not feasible. He has no recourse to any of Fontane's 'Hilfskonstruktionen'. Wotton, p. 102.

\(^{70}\) Bayley is impatient with what he calls Phillotson's 'delusion' on this matter. Bayley, p. 207. Elvy, too, questions the idea of Jude and Sue's 'togetherness', claiming that their union is decidedly shaky at
the more entirely I am on their side’ (247; original italics). Phillotson, then, spares himself nothing. He builds Sue’s case against himself and bends over backwards to explain and justify not what he himself is doing but why Sue should have made the request. His interest lies not so much in seeing himself emerge with his dignity intact but in avoiding having Sue’s name dragged through the mire.

Gillingham despairs. He raises the issue of the family as the accepted and normal family unit, expresses horror at the idea of matriarchy, exclaims how Phillotson’s behaviour will ‘upset all received opinion hereabout’ and wonders what the inhabitants of Shaston will say (247). He offers Phillotson no positive words and no indication of support, even privately, as Wüllersdorf does to Innstetten, yet Phillotson sticks - albeit rather sadly - to his guns. ‘I don’t know - I don’t know!... As I say, I am only a feeler, not a reasoner.’ (247). This is an interesting claim. In many ways, Phillotson has reasoned his situation out. His decision does make profound logical sense...or would, that is, to anyone unencumbered by preconceptions engendered by prevalent social attitudes. By attributing his decision to instinctive feeling it is as if Phillotson can avoid the perhaps unpalatable idea that his is a reasoned, calm, philosophical decision. By attributing his decision to feeling, he can avoid a greater sense of responsibility. This is by no means to disparage Phillotson, for his decision is a generous and courageous one, which is bound - and which he is well aware is bound - to incur problems and grief for him. There is, however, a sense that he is slightly anxious of the reality which he is facing. He is prepared to make the decision and to regard the decision as right according to his heart’s dictates, but there is a sense also that he is not prepared to take the decision on board as universally applicable: ‘Yes - I am all abroad, I suppose!’ (247). Richard eschews the part of social revolutionary.

It is important to appreciate that Phillotson is not the cold fish that his behaviour might theoretically mark him down as. Once Sue has departed, he walks in the direction taken by the omnibus in which she is travelling ‘for nearly a mile’ (250). We have no access to what he is thinking or feeling, learning simply that, ‘[s]uddenly turning around he came home’ (250). Upon arriving home, he finds - much to his

the best of times, that they ‘fuse then fragment, like particles in some subatomic experiment’. Elvy, p. 42. The issue can certainly be argued from both angles.
relief - Gillingham waiting for him. The sight of the tea things, so recently used by Sue, proves to be too much for Phillotson's stoicism and his calm words are belied by his inability to complete them: "And that's the plate she-". Phillotson's throat got choked up, and he could not go on' (250). The friends do not launch into another lengthy discussion on the rights and wrongs of Phillotson's behaviour, but Richard offers two additional decisive comments. Firstly, he says, 'I would have died for her; but I wouldn't be cruel to her in the name of the law.' (250). This illustrates how much he loves Sue and demonstrates the level of his generosity and self-sacrifice. Secondly, when Gillingham ventures to suggest that he might feasibly have stopped at an agreement to separate rather than, as he sees it, condoning Sue's moving in with her lover, Phillotson holds firm:

'I've gone into all that, and don't wish to argue it. I was, and am, the most old-fashioned man in the world on the question of marriage - in fact I had never thought critically about its ethics at all. But certain facts stared me in the face, and I couldn't go against them.' (250-51)

This effectively summarises all the arguments and reasons already rehearsed to Gillingham and shows that Phillotson's beliefs are unchanged, even after the event.

Phillotson's behaviour is difficult to categorise. Whilst in the reader's terms there seems to be a clear dimension of laudable authenticity to it, in as much as Phillotson rejects the artificial demands of the conventions which surround him, it is rendered problematic in that it is conspicuously not part of a wider quest for authentic selfhood. Phillotson acts as if dazed, disbelieving of himself, and in this sense is the most lacking in self-awareness of all the characters in the novel. This is not an initial gesture that heralds Phillotson's quest for more truthful self-understanding. It is a construction of a self which accords with none of his rational being and which he does not wish to affirm as universally valid. Phillotson's behaviour, with the irreconcilable tensions of heart and head at its root, seems to represent a moment of authenticity achieved almost in spite of himself, by means of a suppression of the self that he considers himself to be.

Such a notion acquires more than a hint of unhappy irony when we remember that Phillotson suffers greatly at the unforgiving hands of society for his generosity of spirit. The School Committee demands his resignation on account of what they term his 'scandalous conduct' in what they regard as his 'condoning [Sue's] adultery' (262). They certainly do not accept Phillotson's version that he simply chose to give
his ‘tortured wife’ her ‘liberty’ (262). Phillotson, however, refuses to resign, despite
gillingham’s entreaties that he should comply with the request. His refusal is based
on very noble, selfless foundations:

‘[B]y resigning I acknowledge I have acted wrongly by her; when I am more and more
convinced every day that in the sight of Heaven and by all natural, straightforward
humanity, I have acted rightly.’ (262)

He refuses, then, either to renege on his assertion that he acted for the best, or to paint
Sue as the villain of the piece. He wants to accept responsibility for his action and not
to deny its validity. As a result of this stance, he loses his job, for the committee
members regard his behaviour as evidence of ‘private eccentricities’ which might
injure the morals of those whom he teaches. Again, Phillotson’s gesture is not
evidence of a commitment to the positing of an authentic self in the face of received
opinion, but is concerned with protecting Sue’s reputation and absolving her from
blame.

We do not see much of Phillotson’s life alone - this is not, after all, primarily
Richard’s story - but we can safely assume that it is neither the most cheerful nor the
most materially successful of existences. Towards the end of the novel the narrator
informs us quite categorically that:

No man had ever suffered more inconvenience from his own charity, Christian or
heathen, than Phillotson had done in letting Sue go. He had been knocked about from
pillar to post at the hands of the virtuous almost beyond endurance; he had been nearly
starved, and was now dependent entirely upon the very small stipend from the school
of this village (where the parson had got ill-spoken of for befriending him). (365)

This moment of involuntary authenticity, then, is achieved at great personal cost, and
when we come to assess Phillotson’s subsequent actions, those sufferings should
always be borne in mind, if not as mitigating circumstances, then at least as
explanations. Michael Millgate is unforgiving of Phillotson. He says that he ‘betrays
by his final surrender to selfishness and repressiveness the altruism and open-
mindedness he had originally shown in letting Sue go’. 71 In many ways, this
judgement has a certain force, but it is important also to analyse the role played by
external pressures in order to evaluate whether or not it is also fair to Phillotson.

328.
The first thing to notice is that, privately, Phillotson does not renege on the validity of his decision. He sticks firmly to the belief that he acted rightly in letting Sue go. The narrator states:

Such was his obstinate and illogical disregard of opinion, and of the principles in which he had been trained, that his convictions on the rightness of his course with his wife had not been disturbed. (365)

Nevertheless, he has, as we have seen, learnt a hard lesson, and he is deeply conscious of this and its implications:

To indulge one's instinctive and uncontrolled sense of justice and right, was not, he had found, permitted with impunity in an old civilization like ours. It was necessary to act under an acquired and cultivated sense of the same, if you wished to enjoy an average share of comfort and honour; and to let crude loving-kindness take care of itself. (366)

There are at least three points of interest here. Firstly, the final sentence seems to be an almost conscious echo of Phillotson's earlier claim that he intended simply to act by instinct 'and let principles take care of themselves' (246; my italics). Such an echo speaks volumes about the distance that Phillotson has travelled in terms of emotion and self-awareness. Secondly, the passage constitutes a vociferous attack on social convention, with its suggestion that the notions of 'justice' and 'right' have been subverted, depending as they do not on generous instinct but on artificially acquired and cultivated standards. Thirdly, the passage demonstrates Phillotson's recognition that it is necessary to bow to these standards and to dissemble if one is to make one's life and general day-to-day existence bearable. In many ways, of course, Phillotson knew all of this — in abstract terms at least — before, but he could not have anticipated the level of condemnation and ostracism that he has encountered. It is this unpleasant altercation with society's crueler side which causes Phillotson to reflect more carefully before declaring his motives and intentions so candidly this time around. His decision to 'take Sue back' is based, just as previously his decision to let her go, on little more than instinct. Previously it was an instinct alloyed with selflessness, this time it is a combination of instinct and selfishness:

Principles which could be subverted by feeling in one direction were liable to the same catastrophe in another. The instincts which had allowed him to give Sue her liberty now enabled him to regard her as none the worse for her life with Jude. He wished for her still, in his curious way, if he did not love her, and, apart from policy, soon felt that he would be gratified to have her again as his, always provided that she came willingly. (365)
It is difficult to establish from this exactly what it is that Phillotson is feeling, but what is more than amply evident is the fact that there is no agenda of remorse or desire for reparation of past errors involved. There is, perhaps, a sense of physical fascination, even desire, and a sense that life with Sue cannot be worse than life has been without her, and that she would even be a welcome addition to his dreary existence. Phillotson, however, is not about to admit such woolly-minded reasoning to the wider world, or even to George Gillingham, whom, consistently enough, he both consults and ignores. Rather, he is profoundly aware of the need for duplicity as a means of self-protection and, to this end, constructs a self which he knows will be acceptable to Gillingham and to the society of which Gillingham is the representative. This is made evident at several points. The spurious ‘reason’ which Phillotson establishes for accepting Sue back is her innocence (recently revealed to him by none other than Arabella) when she left him: ‘I have good reason for supposing that she was innocent when I divorced her – that I was all wrong. Yes indeed! Awkward isn’t it?’ (363; my italics). In actual fact, of course, it is not awkward in the least. If we refer back to Phillotson’s earlier declaration and the conversation with Gillingham, we find: “What, you’ll let her go? And with her lover?” “Whom with is her matter. I shall let her go; with him, certainly if she wishes.” (245-46). The focus was clearly on according Sue her liberty, not on whether or not she had slept with Jude (or, indeed, with anyone else) or on whether or not she intended to live with someone else. But Phillotson has since discovered that ‘artifice was necessary […] for stemming the cold and inhumane blast of the world’s contempt’ (365). So he must play a part, pretend, dissemble. He is evasive towards Gillingham, for

[h]e did not care to admit clearly that his taking Sue to him again had at bottom nothing to do with repentance of letting her go, but was primarily, a human instinct flying in the face of custom and profession. (373)

Furthermore, as he speaks to his friend he feels ‘more and more every minute the necessity of acting up to his position’ (373). Similarly, to Sue he says, ‘It is for our good socially to do this, and that’s its justification, if it was not my reason.’ (376; my italics). Sue does not ask for reasons.

All of this shows a ‘new’ Phillotson, a Phillotson who is far more self-aware than hitherto and far more conscious of the necessity of constructing a self with a face acceptable to society. We cannot blame him for his battle-scarred cynicism, but we
are, perhaps, disappointed that he has been so utterly destroyed and cowed by society's pointing finger. What is more, he doggedly pursues this 'instinct' of wanting Sue back by ignoring the promptings of the nobler, earlier instincts which are, in fact, still active in his mind. Quite without Widow Edlin's attempted intervention in affairs it is obvious to Richard that Sue is forcing herself to do something which does not accord with her will, but Phillotson stubbornly chooses to take her at her (almost hysterical) word. To be sure, he gives her chance after chance to back out, but his consistent non-coercion is as effective as his forcing her hand would have been. His response to Mrs Edlin's plea is terse and betrays a nagging bad conscience; "It's her wish, and I am willing," said Phillotson with grave reserve, opposition making him illogically tenacious now. "A great piece of laxity will be rectified" (374).

The picture of Phillotson's self at this point, then, is a depressing one, but it is also a representative one. It illustrates that in a society which is itself constructed according to strict, unthinking principles, the only means of survival is, at the very least, a cynical manipulation of the self to fit these principles. Phillotson has a much clearer vision than either Jude or Sue regarding how self and society interact, although, ironically, a much more blurred sense of self-knowledge. With Phillotson, just as with the two main protagonists, it is impossible to separate private from public, authentic from inauthentic. Phillotson seems to achieve a moment of authenticity almost in spite of himself, flying against what he claims he believes, and this demonstrates how complex issues of emotion, instinct, conditioning and reason are, and how inseparably they work together.
CHAPTER 6: THOMAS HARDY'S *JUDE THE OBSCURE*: NARRATIVE

Of our three texts, it is, perhaps, the narrator of *Jude the Obscure* who might be judged to best fit the bill of omniscient third person narrator. With neither the constantly shifting obliquity of Flaubert's narrator nor the studied self-effacement of Fontane's narrator, Hardy's narrative voice seems initially to be a solid, stable, authoritative presence, a voice with full knowledge of the tale he is telling and with explanations and interpretations ready at his fingertips. Some earlier critics subscribe almost fully to this idea. Arthur McDowall, for instance, regards Hardy's method as being

> in the main, *the old method of the omniscient author*. It is anything but indefinite, but it shifts from one character to another in a way that may remind us of the *detached but imperious creator*.¹

Even were we to accept the claim of detachment, however, we have clearly seen the complexity of the individual characters portrayed in *Jude*, so a wholly self-assured, imperious narrator would sit in uncomfortable juxtaposition with these uncertainties. Thus it is that later critics have recognised that behind the stable façade we can in fact identify multiple instabilities. These instabilities are akin to those that we have analysed in the other two texts. H. M. Daleski, for example, discerns a distinct tension in the Hardyean narrative. He suggests that on the one hand Hardy fully accepts the constraints dictated by the prevailing realistic ethic of the Victorian novel as such, recognising the demand for a straightforward method of narration and thus 'regularly and unadventurously employing an omniscient narrator who copiously avails himself of the opportunity for commentary that the omniscient stance naturally affords'.² On the other hand, however, he points out that Hardy also makes use of some strikingly modernist narrative techniques, tending, for instance, towards an impressionistic rather than a didactic method. This is not to make of him a Robbe-Grillet or a Faulkner, but rather situates him on the border between Victorian and modernist literature, and means that *Jude* might be regarded as a novel 'that threatens to crack open the powerful ideology of realism as a literary mode, and throws into

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question the whole enterprise of narrative'. The fact that it does this beneath the appearance of uncomplicated narrative renders it doubly striking.

The narrator often presents the tale in what seems to be a very expansive manner, filling in historical, geographical, and local anecdotal detail. Such breadth increases the impression of omniscience for it contextualises and historicises the story proper, making it appear as simply one particular event, or series of events, amongst many others, equally worthy of telling, set against a background which is at once changing and static. The reader is, for instance, granted access to the details of a history of Marygreen - a very human history, moreover - of which Jude appears to be wholly ignorant. Jude's own focus is on the here and now of his own moment and he remarks only on the physical ugliness of the place:

The fresh harrow-lines seemed to stretch like the channellings in a piece of new corduroy, lending a meanly utilitarian air to the expanse, taking away its gradations, and depriving it of all history beyond that of the few recent months, (though to every clod and stone there really attached associations enough and to spare). (38; my italics)

The narrator goes on to detail the human history of the site, to 'make the past eloquent' for the reader, mentioning groups of gleaners, girls and their lovers, bygone harvest days. 'But this neither Jude nor the rooks around him considered' (39). This indicates clearly an idea of a narrator who is in a position to present his story in a wider human and historical context and suggests one who is able to explore and to share with us the characters' thought processes and emotions. We have an impression of a narrator with a secure, superior vantage point, capable of leading us through his tale, warning us of minefields en route and elaborating and interpreting where necessary. A narrator, indeed, who seems detached, imperious, omniscient.

At times, this seems precisely to be the case. One example is the moment at which Jude first encounters Arabella. Leaving aside for the time being the significance of the language which the narrator often uses to describe Arabella, we see at once how the narrator and the reader are able to survey the scene from a privileged position. Both are initiated, for instance, into Arabella's method for producing

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3 Boumelha, *Hardy and Women*, p. 156.
4 Janet Burstein, 'The Journey beyond Myth in *Jude the Obscure*', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 15:3 (1973), 499-515 (p. 503). The narrator also provides a long historical background of Shaston at the beginning of Part Four and a description of Stoke Barehills in Chapter 5 of Part Five, in which he discusses the bifurcation of a road, about which few people in Jude's time would, he claims, have had the least idea.
dimples in her cheeks, but she performs this operation deftly, 'without Jude perceiving it' (63). They also have access both to Jude's nebulous thoughts about what he perceives as Arabella's intrinsic unworthiness as a partner for him and to the banter between Arabella and her friends once the hapless Jude has departed, when Anny asks if Arabella has 'caught un' (65). Similarly, on the first date between Jude and Arabella, reader and narrator have access to both perspectives - Arabella's thought, when Jude ventures to suggest that she take his arm, is that his behaviour is '[r]ather mild' (70), whereas this very same action causes Jude to reflect somewhat differently: 'How fast I have become!' (71). In addition to this, there is an 'outside' perspective offered, in as much as the reader 'overhears' the maid-servant in the inn whispering her surprise to her mistress at seeing such an unlikely combination as Jude, the student who 'kept hiself up so particular' and Arabella (70). Such an approach seems to indicate an alignment between reader and narrator, a 'looking down' on events from a higher, bird's-eye view. What is more, the narrator sometimes seems to want to protect the reader against the potential seduction of the moment. After Sue makes her escape from the training school, Jude accompanies her to the station on the following morning. Just before the train pulls away, she tells him that he is on no account to love her, but only to like her. On the very next day, Jude receives one of Sue's many missives and we see him rejoicing in what he - understandably enough - regards as a kind of admission of love from Sue: 'If you want to love me, Jude, you may: I don't mind at all; and I'll never say again that you mustn't!' (175; original italics). Arriving so closely on the heels of her instruction that he should not love her, the letter seems to indicate a mind in turmoil, typical, of course, of a mind in love. The narrator, however, will not allow the reader to be drawn into hope and speculation in the same way that Jude is drawn, and quickly offers the sobering, yet still frustratingly enigmatic, clarification: 'Yet Jude was in danger of attaching more meaning to Sue's impulsive note than it really was intended to bear.' (175).^ The narrator compels the reader to retreat by initiating her into a greater degree of knowledge than that enjoyed by the character and he thus detaches her from too close an involvement. The

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^ For further discussion on the implications of the written correspondence in Jude, see Saldivar, especially pp. 166-68. Saldivar suggests that '[a] letter is a medium that effectively separates the writer from the effects of the message, while the message received is often one created by the reader himself'. This notion of failed or skewed communication is a central theme in Jude.
narrator's technique is not consistently thus, however, and as the reader becomes aware of the tensions between knowing and not knowing, seeing and not seeing, telling and not telling, Levine's words seem to ring true:

The curious instability and inconsistency of Hardy's narratives are not merely philosophical commentaries on a difficult world but reflections of Hardy's awareness that language and art do not correspond to reality. [...] Hardy's narrative, as it challenges the ideal rejection of the material, also challenges the ideal of objective knowledge, for narrative fundamentally implicates its characters, their selves, and their desires, in the act of knowing.6

By examining and analysing the varied techniques that the narrator uses, how the expected and the unexpected interlock, we are able to see that, once again, the narrative constructions in Jude reflect and reflect upon the constructions and the constructedness of the characters and the society that it seeks to represent, just as we have seen is the case in Madame Bovary and Effi Briest.

At times, the narrator does not elevate the reader to a position of privileged perspective, but instead leaves her aligned with a particular character. One such example occurs when Jude watches Sue through a window of her house. She opens a work-box, from which she takes a photograph.7 'Having contemplated it a little while she pressed it against her bosom, and put it again in its right place.' (223). Jude is unable to see of whom the photograph is, but does see, as Sue approaches the window in order to close the curtains, that 'there was an unmistakable tearfulness about the dark, long-lashed eyes' (223). He ponders the matter on his solitary journey home.

"'Whose photograph was she looking at?" he said. He had once given her his; but she had others, he knew. Yet it was his, surely?' (224). It is only the first question which is given as being explicitly Jude's, yet it seems evident that the rest of the passage is intended to be interpreted as reported thought: Jude, not the narrator, is doing the wondering. The narrator maintains an impenetrable silence on two counts. Firstly, the reader is given no clue as to whose photograph Sue is looking at. She, the reader, is imprisoned within Jude's visual scope. Secondly, the narrator offers no indication of Sue's thoughts or the significance of her tearfulness. The reader is left at the same level of ignorance as the poor, tortured Jude. An image is constructed and both character (Jude) and reader are left to draw their own conclusions and make their own

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6 Levine, p.120.
7 See Vigar for a discussion on the significance of the photograph per se in Hardy's work.
(possibly wildly erroneous) speculations. A hint as to the identity of the subject of the photograph might go some way to revealing Sue’s state of mind: if, for instance, the picture is one of Jude, as he believes, or at least fervently hopes, she is clearly brooding and melancholy and her tearfulness would seem to betray feelings of love for her cousin. If, however, it is a picture of, say, Phillotson, or of the thwarted undergraduate, or even of her father (unlikely, but not impossible), then the gesture of pressing the image to her breast implies perhaps a gesture of trying to steel herself against her softer emotions for Jude, and, in the case of it being her father, of reminding herself perhaps of her family’s inauspicious history in the realm of marriage. There are, with regard to the narrator’s role here, at least two possible explanations of this moment. Perhaps the narrator exercises complete control, enjoys his knowledge in this instance in isolation, and chooses simply not to inform the reader. Or perhaps, as Sheila Berger alleges, there are moments in the text where the narrator, like the characters, like the reader, is able to see only surfaces, able to see only from a specific perspective. The subject of the photograph is not revealed in a later episode and the moment remains one in which Sue is privileged – and isolated – in her position. By creating moments such as these the narrator highlights the partiality of perspective and indicates that the ‘final’ picture which the individual has of something may be one patched together with elements of both fact and fiction. He draws attention also to the impossible nature of the storyteller’s task: only in fiction do we encounter figures who present themselves as all-knowing, so to render fiction more ‘real’, the narrator must effectively undermine the very authority that he purports to wield in those moments of apparent omniscience.

Just as in Madame Bovary and Effi Briest, then, so here the narrator does not attempt to lay claim to total knowledge. This mode of partial ignorance is frequently in evidence, as in the above example with Sue, when it comes to explaining what
characters are feeling and thinking. The atmosphere of non-omniscience is, again, frequently achieved, or at least contributed to, by the use of such qualifying words as ‘probably’, ‘possibly’ or ‘perhaps’. The moment at which Sue announces to her cousin her intention to marry Phillotson is one imbued, not surprisingly, with tension and bitterness. Sue knows that her news is likely to upset Jude, and avoids telling him at first. When pressed, however, she puts her case, taking good care to qualify the announcement by couching it in the prosaic terms of its sound professional and economic sense. Jude looks at her with reproach, draws his hand away from hers, and turns away to the window. ‘Sue regarded him passively without moving.’ (154). When she speaks, it is ‘with an air of no emotion whatever’ (154), from which information the reader can deduce little, if anything at all. She says that she knew that Jude would be angry with her, and then: ‘I ought not to have let you come to see me! We had better not meet again; and we’ll only correspond at long intervals, on purely business matters!’ (154). The narrator instantly picks up on her words in order to assess them: ‘This was just the one thing he would not be able to bear, as she probably knew, and it brought him round at once.’ (154; my italics). Because of this strategically placed ‘probably’ the reader is unable to judge Sue. Does she make the comment knowing that she will hurt Jude even more? Is she aware that the brutality of the threat will ‘bring him round’? Is it simply an uncalculated outburst in a moment of personal upset? Another, similar moment occurs when Sue visits Phillotson as he lies ill in bed, after their separation. Sue is keen to avoid all reference to past events and does nothing to correct Phillotson’s erroneous belief that she and Jude now live together ‘in effect’ (266) as husband and wife:

The dread of a reactionary change in the schoolmaster’s sentiments coupled, perhaps, with a faint shamefacedness at letting even him know what a slipshod lack of thoroughness, from a man’s point of view, characterized her transferred allegiance, prevented her telling him of her, thus far, incomplete relations with Jude. (266; my italics)

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10 Cecil goes so far as to assert that Hardy ‘exhibits his characters first by their actions, second by their words. Their inner life is left to our imagination, so that if their speech does not reveal their individuality, we never get to know it’. David Cecil, Hardy the Novelist: An Essay in Criticism (London: Constable, 1943), p. 86. Millgate makes a similar point when he writes that for no character in Jude does Hardy offer anything approaching an extended psychological analysis, characters being made to reveal themselves in action and dialogue instead. Millgate, p. 331. The justice of such remarks should not, however, blind us to the fact that we do, on occasion, have access to a character’s inner life: Phillotson’s, for instance, when he decides to take Sue back, but keeps his reasoning known only to himself.
Gregor claims that

Hardy’s kind of fiction dramatizes a third-person consciousness, in which experience, and reflection upon experience, become an integral part of his imaginative act. The novel as an unfolding process [...] can in this way be seen to extend into its metaphysical structuring, so that the implied author exists neither as a mediator between the characters and the reader, nor as a dramatised consciousness taking a place with the other characters, undergoing the same experiences as they undergo, reflecting upon them as they do. ¹¹

The above moment in the text, relatively insignificant in terms of the story as a whole, nevertheless goes some way towards illustrating and confirming Gregor’s point. The narrative relates the characters’ experiences, and reflects upon those experiences, but at no point is the narrator ‘just another character’. In this example, the ‘perhaps’ is at once Sue’s and the narrator’s. Neither is able quite to determine the motives for Sue’s silence, so possibility is permitted to hover over the text. The narrator hereby draws attention to his own inadequacy as infallible ‘sense-maker’, as, indeed, reliable mediator between characters and reader, and, at the same time, highlights the typical contrivance involved in the narrative task per se, particularly if the narrator in question is able to tie up all loose ends and answer all unanswerable questions. Narrative traditions are challenged by the implicit suggestion that the supposed inexplicability and impenetrability of Sue’s character would be rendered risible if the narrating voice could simply deconstruct and interpret it. Far from this being a disingenuous narrative technique, it serves, rather, to highlight the impossibility of any individual ever being able adequately to explain an ‘other’ and to draw attention to the challenge that the individual faces even in trying to understand and explain the self.

Often, it seems as if the narrator is at pains to demonstrate the fact that he is acquainted with the whole story, that as he begins his tale he already knows what Jude’s fate is. It is essential, however, to differentiate between this notion of knowing an entire story in terms of its external progression and structure, and omniscience regarding the finer details of that story and the psychological and emotional states of those involved. The narrator may well be relating a tale whose end is already known, but this does not mean that there will not be multiple blanks and gaps along the way, spaces open to speculation and conjecture. The narrator still, however, has a great

advantage over the reader, and his manner of presenting the idea that ‘he knows the story’ may often be quite tantalising. He makes much, for instance, of the very first written note which Jude receives from Sue, a note whose contents are only reported to us, but which is, we are informed, ‘of the most artless and natural kind’ (122). The narrator tells us:

[W]hen [Jude] reached his lodging he found a note from her - a first note - one of those documents which, simple and commonplace in themselves, are seen retrospectively to have been pregnant with impassioned consequences. The very unconsciousness of a looming drama which is shown in such innocent first epistles from women to men, or *vice versa*, makes them, when such a drama follows, and they are read over, by the purple or lurid light of it, all the more impressive, solemn, and in cases, terrible. (122; original italics)

This illustrates quite clearly how we are dealing with a narrator who has mastery of the entire story, but at the same time it represents only one level of the story’s construction. Philip Weinstein’s comment on Jude and Sue’s prolific written correspondence is interesting in the light of this narrative technique. He writes:

Jude and Sue tirelessly write each other letters, seeking to express their deep selves and to make contact with each other. The letters are more eloquent than speech. By ignoring the disconcerting presence of an interlocutor, they succeed, if not in telling the truth, *at least in making a narrative of their lives.*

There is a sense, then, of a dual level of narrative; Jude and Sue’s own structuring and ordering of their lives, along with the way this becomes converted into the written, rather than the spoken, word, and then the second layer of written structuring which sees the narrator ordering those lives into a coherent whole, this being superimposed upon the isolated, heterogeneous events. This is, of course, nothing but a literary conceit of the author’s, but the reader has no choice but to accept the conceit. Dual narrative creates dual construction, and to this must be added the interpretations and speculations contributed by the reading mind. Any notions, then, of narrative omniscience or authority are negated by this multiplicity of structuring elements, and, as Adelman suggests, when reading *Jude* ‘[w]e see, we feel, we know everything, and yet nothing’. It becomes a matter of comparative irrelevance whether the narrator ‘knows’ or ‘does not know’. The reader is confronted instead

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13 Adelman, p. 111.
with possibility - a far more promising, if potentially frustrating, reading experience than simply accepting the authority of an all-knowing, all-analysing, god-like narrator.

In a similar way to that in which narrative omniscience and narrative non-omniscience function, the narrator will sometimes comment on events, sometimes adopting a recognisable attitude towards them, at other times will present the case ambiguously, and at other times still will seem simply to let things pass with no discernible comment whatsoever. He may use irony in order to imply something without having to resort to an overt statement. We are told, for instance, how Jude’s innocently truthful explanation as to why he was encouraging the birds to eat Troutham’s seeds ‘seemed to exasperate the farmer even more’ (40), and how the clacks from the bird-scaring instrument, which Troutham uses to beat Jude, echoed ‘from the brand-new church tower just behind the mist, towards the building of which structure the farmer had largely subscribed to testify his love for God and man’ (40). Nothing is stated explicitly, but the way in which the reader’s attention is drawn to this circumstance serves to suggest that there is a level of inconsistency, if not (unconscious) hypocrisy, to Troutham’s behaviour. It is yet more important, however, to identify Troutham as representative of the wider community. He personally sees no contradiction between his professed Christian faith and beating the living daylights out of a small boy. It is unlikely that, being told the story, any of the Marygreen inhabitants would challenge Troutham. For Troutham is not interested in Jude’s motives and reasons for inviting the rooks to eat the seeds. The demonstration of Jude’s inherent kindness and generosity, his belief that ‘[t]here is enough for us all’ (39), is not an issue for him. What matters to Troutham is that Jude has failed in his appointed task, has even, apparently, been naughty and disobedient in wilfully flouting his instructions. It is this failure and naughtiness and disobedience that Troutham is punishing. The punishment would not have been one degree harsher if Jude had simply been lazy or had encouraged the birds to eat up the seeds in order to spite his employer. This is one of the hard lessons that Jude must learn over the course of the novel: the situation as it appears will invariably speak louder than less visible good intentions or inherent goodness of heart. Society’s judgements are passed on the basis of that which can be seen and not necessarily that which is. Mrs Edlin’s later claim to Sue that her and Jude’s domestic arrangements ‘concerned
nobody but your own two selves’ (372) may be true in principle, but does not function in practice. At the same time, however, Troutham is in some ways justified - if excessive - in his reaction. The seeds constitute a portion of his livelihood. For the reader to side wholly with Jude would be too naive. In this one, small moment, then, we see how narrative ambiguity may, paradoxically, be crucial to the narrator’s integrity. To pretend that a simple either/or exists and that the narrative voice is equipped to transform that either/or into a simplistic world of good/bad and right/wrong would be to lend an otherwise absent order to the ambiguous world that the narrator is endeavouring to represent.

Crucially, however, there are moments at which the narrator’s stance appears to be unequivocal, especially on one of the prevailing issues of the text, that of marriage. When Jude and Arabella marry for the first time, the narrator’s description of the event is couched in blackly humorous terms, coupling a parodistic approach with a sense of the stark bleakness that is the reality:

And so, standing before the aforesaid officiator, the two swore that at every other time of their lives till death took them, they would assuredly believe, feel, and desire precisely as they had believed, felt, and desired during the few preceding weeks. What was as remarkable as the undertaking itself was the fact that nobody seemed at all surprised at what they swore. (81)

By juxtaposing the notions of ‘the preceding few weeks’ and ‘till death took them’, the narrator draws attention to the intrinsically flawed nature of the marriage contract if viewed in a rationally theoretical light, taking into account man and woman’s inherent changeability. He also highlights the way in which custom can dull the senses, allowing the observer to accept without reflecting. No one notices the absurdity of the words of the marriage contract because their meaning has become deadened in their ritualistic context. They have acquired a symbolic significance which has somehow managed to obscure their actual sense. With regard to moments such as this, it is interesting to notice as well that the narrator in Jude sometimes employs a method similar to one used in Madame Bovary. In the latter text, we observed how the narrative voice would sometimes seem to hijack a vague and incoherent idea or emotion originating in Emma’s perceptions, and elevate it to a level of cogent articulacy unattainable for the heroine herself. Jude, we can safely assume, is a far more intellectually capable figure than we can ever interpret Emma as, and thus is fundamentally more able to formulate his thoughts into articulate arguments.
At the same time, however, we have already seen how Jude is trying to convince himself of one set of ideas, whilst actually being aware of another set, with regard to Arabella and her fitness to be a suitable partner for him. In addition, emotional involvement often functions as a severe hindrance to rational reflection and reason. Once Jude discovers that Arabella had 'made a mistake' (84) and is not pregnant after all, he finds himself in the lamentable position of having married unnecessarily.¹⁴ Through his marriage he has effectively put the kiss of death upon his youthful dreams, for he must devote his energies to supporting himself and his young wife in their new home. The narrator's words suggest that Jude is in a state such as prevents him from ordering his thoughts and feelings into any kind of cogent argument:

> There seemed to him, vaguely and dimly, something wrong in a social ritual which made necessary a cancelling of well-formed schemes involving years of thought and labour, of foregoing a man's one opportunity of showing himself superior to the lower animals, and of contributing his units of work to the general progress of his generation, because of a momentary surprise by a new and transitory instinct which had nothing in it of the nature of vice, and could be only at the most called weakness. He was inclined to inquire what he had done, or she lost, for that matter, that he deserved to be caught in a gin which would cripple him, if not her also, for the rest of a lifetime? (85)

The passage is a long one and the argument presented fluently and persuasively. It is certainly not argued 'vaguely and dimly' as it apparently occurs to Jude's thoughts. It might be suggested, of course, that the narrator is simply ordering Jude's thoughts and pitching them at a level to be comprehensible to the half-intellectual reader. Yet the coherence and persuasiveness that the words thereby achieve seem to lend them the stamp of the narrator's authority and support. Had the narrator not wanted to step forward in support of such notions, he had only to refrain from the intervention, leaving Jude's thoughts as vague and dim - and thus, probably, badly argued, imperfectly conceived.

This issue of 'voice', of who - character or narrator - is speaking, is central to the text. The narrative involves much slippage between voices and this provides an interpretative challenge for the reader. Often, Hardy, like Fontane, allows direct

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¹⁴ The issue of Arabella's pregnancy is a convoluted one. She claims to have 'made a mistake', and her friends believe that she tricked Jude on purpose. Another possible explanation is that she procured some of Vilbert's 'female pills' (52) and thus aborted the child. An unexplained passage in Part One, Chapter 9 reads: 'One day [Arabella] met the itinerant Vilbert. She, like all the cottagers thereabout, knew the quack well, and she began telling him of her experiences. Arabella had been gloomy, but before he left her she had grown brighter.' (80). That same evening, Jude announces his intention to leave Marygreen (and Arabella) and Arabella drops her bombshell.
speech to predominate. His characters reveal themselves through conversation with little narrative input beyond a cursory ‘he said’ or ‘she declared’. The reader thus effectively becomes an eavesdropper, listening in on private exchanges. Whilst she may have the difficulty of individual psychology, of trying to second-guess how much the character is, for instance, trying to hide from his or her interlocutor, the issue of ‘who the words belong to’ is straightforward and unambiguous.

But matters are not, of course, always so clear-cut. We have already touched on the issue of free indirect speech with the incident where Jude watches Sue looking at the photograph of the unidentified subject, and this is by no means an isolated instance in terms of the narrative technique employed. In the example with the photograph, it seemed clear that the thoughts on the page were Jude’s, even though this was not specifically indicated. At other times, however, the ambiguity is deeper, and we find that the narrative may modulate between the consciousness of a character and that of the narrator, leading to confusion for the reader regarding the authority or bias of perspective of the proffered moment.

Sometimes the question may be one of viewpoint; who is doing the seeing? Two particular examples serve to illustrate the complexity of this. The first is taken from the point at which Jude is heading towards Christminster for the first time. We see the view that Jude has as he nears the place and as he draws closer he confronts the lamps of the city, ‘those lamps which had sent into the sky the gleam and glory that caught his strained gaze in his days of dreaming, so many years ago’ (102). The lamps, then, have a special significance, both in terms of Jude’s perceptions of the city, and in terms of narrative symbolism, in that the narrator has conveyed to the reader an impression of the lights combining to form a great ‘halo’ arching over the city, marking it off from the ‘black heavens behind it’ (47). But as Jude nears the city, these lamps ‘winked their yellow eyes at him dubiously, and as if, though they had been awaiting him all these years in disappointment at his tarrying, they did not much want him now’ (102). The second example is taken from the final section of the novel and this time occurs within the actual precincts of Christminster. Jude, Sue and the children have arrived in the city on Remembrance Day, and Jude wants to try to get near to one of the colleges in the nostalgic hope of hearing some of the Latin of the
speeches. Sue implores him to leave; they have not yet secured lodgings, and she is heavily pregnant. Jude, however, is intractable, so there they stand, upon the straw that was laid to drown the discordant noise of wheels, where the quaint and frost-eaten stone busts encircling the building looked with pallid grimness on the proceedings, and in particular at the bedraggled Jude, Sue, and their children, as at ludicrous persons who had no business there. (338)

On the most prosaic level, of course, neither lamps nor stone busts, as inanimate objects, can do any kind of looking, judging, commenting. This, however, is not the point. Both images are presented as straightforward narrative, yet neither 'sounds' like the voice of the narrator. In the case of the lights, there seems to be no reason for the narrator to need to create such an obvious suggestion of impending doom; the reader is well aware that Jude's background and upbringing already mean that the cards are stacked against him in terms of likely success in entering a Christminster college. In addition, the narrator often seems keen to debunk notions of signs and omens, such as the point at which he emphasizes that the psalm that seems so appropriate and significant to Jude in his then state of mind was merely the usual psalm for that particular Sunday. If, however, we try to suggest that this piece of narrative is, then, a moment presented in free indirect speech and represents Jude's own thoughts as he approaches the city, we encounter a different problem. For Jude's mood as he walks along is sanguine. There is the incentive of meeting his cousin, and the incentive of fulfilling, at last, his dreams of entering a Christminster college. He is not yet aware of Phillotson's failure in a similar project and has not been disillusioned as regards the feasibility of his dreams, nor has he been dealt the sobering blow of Tetuphenay's 'terribly sensible' (138) advice. His outlook is positive and confident; he regards himself as 'a species of Dick Whittington whose spirit was touched to finer issues than a mere material gain' (102) and when he sallies forth to explore Christminster, having secured lodgings for himself, he disingenuously allows his eyes to 'slip over' any objects which seem 'out of harmony' with what he perceives as the 'general expression' of the 'venerable city' (103). Jude, then, is not seeking negative elements or discouragement at this point (indeed, he never is!) and it seems strange that the lights, which have hitherto been so welcoming, so protective, so representative of things enlightened and things enlightening, should suddenly appear to be so hostile. The upshot of this difficulty of satisfactorily attributing the words is that we are left with an ambiguous narrative moment. It could be an advance warning
to the reader, it could be intended to reflect Jude’s self-doubt, it could be meant to
highlight the fatuousness of attributing any kind of ‘intentions’ to inanimate objects.

The second example functions in much the same way. It is, again, presented
as straightforward narrative, yet seems, again, strange if we attribute it to the narrator.
There is no reason why Jude, Sue and their children should appear any more ludicrous
than Phillotson (whom Sue has spotted in the crowd) or any of the other bystanders.
The suggestion may be that the busts represent the heads of the college and the
petrified attitudes which haunt the university and which effectively bar Jude from
becoming a student, and in this case, then, it might well be argued that Jude does
stand out from the crowd as ludicrous in as much as he once exhibited the temerity to
request admission to a college. At the same time, the reflection could belong to one of
the characters; perhaps Sue feels that her presence there is ludicrous, or perhaps Jude
feels this. Yet this explanation too has its flaws. Jude seems too caught up in the
passion and defiance of the moment either to notice the busts or to reflect upon how
his presence might appear to an outsider or, even more improbably, a stone statue.
Similarly, Sue seems to be preoccupied solely with entreating Jude to leave the spot
and to focus his energies instead on the pressing question of lodgings for the night.
Ultimately, then, in instances like these, the reader must recognise the ambiguity of
the perspective offered. The slippage between voices emphasizes the instability of the
narrative structure and points to the importance of the interpretative gaps left for the
reader.

At other points in the narrative, we are confronted with the kind of ambiguity
which we instinctively leapfrog, interpreting it intuitively as a case of free indirect
speech. We have already touched on the example with the photograph. An earlier
instance occurs when Jude leaves Arabella’s house after their first arranged ‘date’.
Initially he feels a ‘sense of relief’.

But that sense was only temporary: Arabella soon reasserted her sway in his soul. He
walked as if he felt himself to be another man from the Jude of yesterday. What were
his books to him? what were his intentions, hitherto adhered to so strictly, as to not
wasting a single minute of time day by day? ‘Wasting!’ It depended on your point of
view to define that: he was just living for the first time: not wasting life. It was better
to love a woman than to be a graduate, or a parson; ay, or a pope! (72)

In some ways, of course, this passage might be read as straightforward
narrative. The general emphasis on ‘woman’ (rather than specifically on Arabella)
would tend to support this idea, and the passage could be seen as a narrative paean to love. The reason that we reject this interpretation is that Arabella and Jude are so obviously unsuited. Arabella is not worth the sacrifice of Jude's plans. This is not, it must be stressed, to disparage Arabella as such, but merely to underline the idea that she is not an appropriate soul mate for Jude. At this early stage of the relationship, lust blinds good sense; this is Jude's first real 'encounter' with womankind. He is naive, virginal and misinterprets the desire he feels for love. These moments of free indirect speech, then, require the reader to be alert. By presenting them in this way it is as if the narrator is asking the reader to 'spot the absurdity'. By avoiding the overuse of 'he thought', 'he reflected' and so on, the narrator acknowledges (what he hopes is) the reader's capacity to make the necessary distinctions.

In the above example, these distinctions seemed conveniently salient, but there are other moments where the narrator seems to take on board the possibility of unresolved complexities. We have already seen, in the examples of the winking lights and the scornful stone busts, that problems arise when the words do not seem logically to belong to anyone. An inversion of this kind of ambiguity is that which arises when we find a blurring between the consciousness of the narrator and that of the character, where the words or sentiments could feasibly belong to either, or, indeed, to both. One instance of this occurs when Jude is in a mental and emotional trough in Christminster. He suddenly recognises 'what a curious and cunning glamour the neighbourhood of the place had exercised over him' (136). There then follows the claim:

It would have been far better for him in every way if he had never come within sight and sound of the delusive precincts, had gone to some busy commercial town with the sole object of making money by his wits, and thence surveyed his plan in true perspective. (137)

In some ways we can hear the depressed Jude in this passage. He is feeling without hope and we can picture him wishing he had never embarked on the scheme and had chosen rather money over mind. At the same time, however, we cannot be certain that the narrator's voice is not present. It is, on the whole, difficult adequately to assess the narrator's attitude to Jude and his dreams. Certainly as far as the marriage question goes, we are in no real doubt that the narrator is keen to draw attention to the out-datedness of the conventions surrounding marital and sexual
partnerships. But the university scheme is another matter. Who is it, for instance, who calls the contents of Tetuphenay’s letter, that is, the injunction to Jude that he should remain in his ‘own sphere’, ‘terribly sensible advice’? (138). Is it Jude’s own opinion or the narrator’s? Or both? Or is it intended ironically? What is the significance of Jude’s short-lived epiphany during which he realises that in the stoneyard is a ‘centre of effort as worthy as that dignified by the name of scholarly study within the noblest of the colleges’ (108) and that the subsequent (and almost immediate) loss of this so-called ‘true illumination’ is termed Jude’s ‘form of the modern vice of unrest’? (108). The fact that Jude has lost the illumination implies that it is the narrator – and the narrator only – who dubs it that. But is the implication that scholarship and stonemasonry are equally noble and therefore Jude should stick to the trade he knows, or that scholarship and stonemasonry are equally noble but that an individual may find himself unsuited to one and thus justified in trying to change (noble) course? Is wanting to leave the sphere into which one was arbitrarily born categorised as ‘unrest’ and thus a vice? But why should it be a vice to want to follow one’s dreams? We see, then, that the quoted passage could easily be attributed to either Jude or the narrator, or to both. An interesting question is thrown up by the idea of ‘true perspective’, for a perspective, is, of course, by its very nature, simply a point of view, a particular take on events. Perspectives surely must be just that, perspectives, and thus neither true nor false. The idea of Jude imagining that he could see things from their ‘true perspective’ from a busy commercial town is risible. Surely the further he moved away from his dreams, the more alluring and urgent they would have seemed. Similarly, the idea of the narrator naively suggesting the possibility of finding a true perspective on the situation is absurd. He has been keen from first to last to emphasise how romantic and utopian Jude’s perspective on Christminster and dreams of erudition are. How could soulless money-making in a busy town possibly improve the situation?

In terms of the perspective taken on something and also in terms of this complex blurring of consciousnesses, we might also mention a moment which occurs towards the end of the novel and which focuses on the dead Little Father Time:

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15 It should, however, be emphasised, that the narrator has no simple alternatives to offer.
The boy's face expressed the whole tale of their situation. On that little shape had converged all the inauspiciousness and shadow which had darkened the first union of Jude, and all the accidents, mistakes, fears, errors of the last. He was their nodal point, their focus, their expression in a single term. For the rashness of those parents he had groaned, for their ill-assortment he had quaked, and for the misfortune of these he had died. (346)

Little Father Time's position in the novel is a troubled one at best. Garson sees him as 'less a character than an awkward plot device', whilst Stewart maintains that Hardy effectively murders the child himself – with 'deadly prose'. The general consensus is that he is a strange, metaphysical, allegorical figure, a character 'so broadly symbolic that he is rather hard to take and hard to pin down'. Even if we accept this and overlook the way in which the moment of the dual murder and suicide might be argued to verge dangerously close to the edge of inappropriate melodrama, it is difficult to be sure whose words these are, describing the boy's face. In many ways, it seems logical that they should be Jude and Sue's. Both are in a maudlin state of mind after the tragedy, receptive to ideas of symbolism and notions of some kind of visible exteriorisation of the pain and turmoil experienced internally by themselves. But it seems improbable that in their state of grief they could articulate this vision, either verbally or mentally. As narrative, however, it is somewhat heavy-handed. If we hear the narrator's voice at this point, then it really does push the scene into melodrama and accords young Jude far too onerous and weightily symbolic a role for his brief appearance. It is, moreover, important to recognise how the passage resonates with a central motif of the text: fate. We have seen already how the narrator seems keen to debunk notions of fate; insisting, for instance, on the ordinariness of the psalm which Jude finds so significant and apt. At other times, however, the narrator's attitude towards the idea of fate is altogether more ambiguous. Right at the beginning of the novel, when Jude is dismayed to discover the monumental amount of time and effort that must be invested in order to learn Greek and Latin, it is reflected that 'somebody might have come along that way who would have asked him his trouble, and might have cheered him by saying that his notions were further advanced than those of his grammarian' (55). But, crucially, 'nobody did come because nobody

16 Garson, p. 176.
17 Stewart, p. 189.
does.’ (55; my italics). At one level, this suggests a fatalistic, deterministic outlook, an idea that Jude is effectively destined to suffer, destined not to receive help. At another level, however, we might see this as an almost self-reflexive gesture of the narrator’s, an admission that literature depends on such conventions as ‘nobody coming’ for its driving force. Anybody who had come would, like as not, have been a Marygreen inhabitant who would have had little trouble in convincing the already downcast Jude that the grammar of the classical languages was not a realm for him and that would have been the end of that. Anybody who had come in the form of a fairy godmother or –father would have been pushing the boundaries of ‘coincidence’ even for Hardy.

This slightly ambivalent attitude to fate within the narrative closely resembles the tensions which operate within the characters themselves. Jude, in his ‘pious youth’ stage, initially appears to believe in the existence of some kind of divine Providence, which guides events beneficently. At Melchester, for example, he passes the cathedral and he took it as a good omen that numerous blocks of stone were lying about, which signified that the cathedral was undergoing restoration or repair to a considerable extent. It seemed to him, full of the superstitions of his beliefs, that this was an exercise of forethought on the part of a ruling Power, that he might find plenty to do in the art he practised while waiting for a call to higher labours. (151)

As the novel progresses, however, Jude gradually shakes off his beliefs and ultimately rejects the idea of an omnipotent hand. When, for instance, he pays the visit to the writer of the beautiful hymn and returns home to find that he has missed an unexpected invitation to visit Sue, he initially proposes that the fruitless expedition to Kennetbridge had been ‘another special intervention of Providence to keep him away from temptation’ (213). Yet he is unable to maintain such a belief, for ‘a growing impatience of faith, which he had noticed in himself more than once of late, made him pass over in ridicule the idea that God sent people on fools’ errands’ (213). To imagine, however, that Jude simply undergoes a straightforward enlightenment (or disillusionment) would be erroneous. After the tragic deaths of the children, for example, the line he finds himself reflecting on and quoting to Sue is a fate-ridden extract from Aeschylus’s Agamemnon: ‘Things are as they are, and will be brought to their destined issue.’ (348). For all this display of apparently helpless determinism,
however, Jude then rejects Sue’s claims of the existence of some kind of transcendent power. Towards the end of the novel, Sue invokes the idea of a profoundly unforgiving world order, with God featuring as an entity full of ‘ancient wrath’ (351) and herself standing subdued; wrong, evil, culpable. Jude, as we have seen, tries to argue against her, insisting that they are fighting only against ‘man and senseless circumstance’ (351) but Sue perseveres in her belief that Arabella’s child killing hers was ‘a judgment – the right slaying the wrong’ (358). Sue does not, of course, take the argument to its logical conclusion; how does she then justify ‘the right’ slaying the right, that is, himself? She is, of course, unable to – has probably not even considered the matter in these terms. The fact that Sue’s invocation of fate, providence, a divine power or whatever we wish to term it is so muddled serves to emphasise what the narrative itself has already hinted at in its dealings with the same themes; fate would seem to be a man- (or woman-) made entity which serves the individual’s own purposes, interpretations, needs. It is a comfort, a causal recourse, an explanation to cling to in a moment of desperation. It is inadequate, unfounded, a mere convention. The narrator is keen to establish this idea from an early point in the text. Part One ends with the suggestion that ‘[Jude] might battle with his evil star, and follow out his original intention’ (97), thus suggesting fatalistic powers and external domination. Part Two, however, is prefaced by a quotation taken from a poem by Swinburne; ‘Save his own soul, he hath no star’. From ‘Prelude’, the poem continues, ‘And sinks, except his own soul guide’ (99). The half-quotation, then, is teasing, but if, as seems likely, the narrator assumes his reader to share his store of literary and cultural references, then the implication is nonetheless a veiled questioning of the idea of ‘stars’ per se, be they evil or benign, and seems to suggest that man must make his own good fortune, construct his own fate, and that factors external to us may influence but cannot dictate.

This is a moment of narrative where the narrator’s voice is muted and states nothing explicitly. In contrast to this, there are moments in the text where that voice grows much more strident and seems to speak out, offering individual opinion. One such moment occurs towards the end of the novel, and refers to Sue’s carrying out of her decision to remarry Phillotson. Mrs Edlin has already voiced her strong

19 Stewart, p. 192.
disapproval of the event, but both Gillingham and Phillotson, for their different reasons, regard it as the most satisfactory conclusion to an unfortunate series of episodes. The narrator is quite frank in his estimation of the situation:

The next morning came, and the self-sacrifice of the woman on the altar of what she was pleased to call her principles was acquiesced in by these two friends, each from his own point of view. (375)

The intrusiveness of such moments should not, however, lead us to imagine that the narrator has a specific agenda and is trying, for instance, to present a manifesto against marriage. The issue of marriage is just as complex and ambiguous as any other in the novel and this ambiguity is addressed in detail by critics such as William Goetz and Virginia Hyman. Goetz affirms, for instance, that the marriage laws effectively function as Hardy's 'tragic machinery' for demonstrating that 'even an escape back to a putative state of nature would only reveal that nature too already articulates itself in terms of "laws", laws that offer only a false alternative to those of society'.

Both critics imply, then, that no real, viable alternative to society's established laws of marriage are on offer. The narrator does not offer a utopian vision of how things easily could be. It is interesting to note that during one of the long conversations between Jude and Sue, in which they discuss marriage and the marriage contract, the narrator does not intervene to pass comment or otherwise preach or moralise. The arguments are put by the couple, Sue maintaining that matrimony involves the 'sordid conditions of a business contract' (298) whilst Jude more circumspectly argues that 'the intention of the contract is good, and right for many' (299) but that it doesn't seem quite appropriate to them. The narrator supports neither angle, neither character functions as his mouthpiece, and nor does he repudiate either view. This alternation on the narrator's part between outspokenness and silence both highlights the idea that the narrator, for all his traditional third-person position, has no metatextual wisdom to offer the reader, and also disrupts the easy flow of the reading process. Anticipating

explanation, the reader is challenged to make sense for herself and to understand that sense-making may be too trite. Expecting, on the other hand, ambiguity, the reader finds herself confronted with incontrovertible narrative authority. Berger suggests that Hardy, whilst permitting the seemingly omniscient voice to exist, 'disrupts its final authority by breaking through its frames of omniscience and abstractions with a multiplicity of voices'.\(^{22}\) We might add to this recognition of multivocality the importance, as we have seen, of silence(s) and gaps. These tensions between speaking and not speaking, judging and not-judging, then, challenge the comfortable notions of the reliable third-person narrator whilst at the same time, as it were, apparently 'playing by the rules' and ostensibly subscribing to all the usual conventions, in a way that, for instance, the overtly self-reflexive *nouveau roman* never pretends to do. This framework reflects the tensions in the characters' behaviour between the instinct or urge of following established conventions, recognising the flaws in these conventions, seeking viable alternatives, and having the courage to try to pursue and implement these alternatives. Hardy’s narrator is not, it must be stressed, a revolutionary figure in terms of literary form, but the text nonetheless includes incipient modernist techniques of drawing attention to the text as constructed object, just as the prevailing socio-cultural norms are highlighted as being made rather than immutably given.

Clearly, any novel is constructed from language, and the narrative per se depends upon the narrator’s ‘use of language’. Certain features, however, repay a closer focus. We have examined with reference to *Madame Bovary* and *Effi Briest* the ways in which language may come pre-loaded with quite specific connotations and implications, and the ways in which language, powerful as it is, may function as a double-edged sword. As St. John Butler accurately observes, language has a force whose consequences may be as easily negative as positive:

> [P]ower is always already present in language; as soon as we recognise a sign, and repeat it or see it repeated, we are caught up in the noisy throng of its legions of meanings, and with it comes the cliché that we may or may not want, the stereotype of meaning with which power has invested this sign.\(^{23}\)

\(^{22}\) Berger, p.108. For other interesting comments on multivocality and Bakhtinian polyphony in Hardy, see also Lance St. John Butler, *Registering the Difference: Reading Literature Through Register* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

In *Jude*, the characters frequently find that language may serve as anything but a simple, effective, useful medium of communication. It may hinder understanding and be used for evasive purposes (it is especially Sue who manipulates it to this end); its meaning may be impenetrable because of the use of official jargon (on the divorce papers for instance); it may attain an unwarranted aura of sacrosanctity in its old-fashioned, ritualistic stasis (for example in the archaic wording of the marriage contract, which, with its insistence upon a 'giver-away' of the bride, so distresses Sue). The ways in which language is used by the narrator are just as revelatory as the ways in which it is used - or not used - by the characters and their society. At times, the narrator may apparently intentionally exploit the 'pre-loaded' quality of language, seemingly in a bid to influence the reader's disposition towards a character or situation. A salient example in *Jude* is the narrator's attitude towards Arabella.

Initially Jude is, for some reason known not even to himself, captivated by Arabella. He feels that before meeting her he has not lived, and that, as cited once already, '[i]t was better to love a woman than to be a graduate, or a parson; ay, or a pope!' (72). The narrator refuses to let her exercise a similar degree of magnetism over the reader, however. At the first encounter with Arabella, the description is quite precise:

> She whom [Jude] addressed was a fine dark-eyed girl, not exactly handsome, but capable of passing as such at a little distance, despite some coarseness of skin and fibre. She had a round and prominent bosom, full lips, perfect teeth, and the rich complexion of a Cochin hen's egg. She was a complete and substantial female animal - no more, no less. (62)

By no means is this a negative description if the elements are taken individually. Taken together, however, they have the ring of the professional and disinterested appraisal of an animal at market or a show, and this is, indeed, how Arabella is seen, as 'a complete and substantial female animal'. This impression is heightened throughout the novel since we often see Arabella in conjunction with pigs; washing the chitterlings, chasing the escaped pigs, helping Jude to slaughter the pig, making black pudding and so on. The clear message seems to be that whilst in many

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24 Sumner also observes how the register of language is important, particularly where Sue is concerned. In arguments, for instance, Sue switches from a level of rational discussion to highly emotionally charged language when she feels under threat and imagines that her interlocutor is criticising her. Sumner, p. 178.

25 For a more extended discussion on the ways in which the characters use language, see Burstein, pp. 499-515. Burstein suggests, for instance, that 'Jude and Sue are continually frustrated by the failure of
ways we might dismiss Arabella as ‘nothing special’, at the same time she is, in the text, the physically ungainsayable embodiment of primeval female sexuality. In a sense, this renders her presence purely functional in as much as she operates on one level simply as a figure diametrically opposed to Sue, epitomising everything that Sue is not. Arabella’s emphatic ‘thereness’ is often stressed; when, for example, Sue takes pity on Arabella, having begged Jude not to go and speak to her, and decides to visit her in the inn in Aldbrickham, she finds her rival still in bed. Galvanised into action, Arabella leaps out of bed ‘so suddenly that the soft parts of her person shook’ and Sue jumps aside ‘in trepidation’ as though Arabella were a ‘six-foot sojer’ (283) rather than a woman like herself. Arabella the buxom, earthy, practical, prosaic, is juxtaposed with Sue the slim, ethereal, intellectual, poetic.

The narrator builds up what seems to be a clear picture of the Arabella that he wants the reader to envisage; as she and Jude stand on the bridge together, she looks ‘slyly’ away from him in another direction (63); she brightens with a ‘little glow of triumph’ when Jude proposes that he call for her the following day (64); in the inn, she laughs ‘the low and triumphant laugh of a careless woman who sees she is winning her game’ (70; my italics); she smears pig fat all over Jude’s precious books (92) and sells the photo-frame containing Jude’s picture that was his wedding gift to her (96). She is prosaic and unsentimental about the pig-killing. She takes little interest in Little Father Time until after his death when she visits Jude and Sue and, ‘seeming utterly unable to reach the ideal of a catastrophic manner, fumbled with iterations’ (356). Such images are a million miles from the super-sensitive Sue, kept awake by the thought of a rabbit trapped in a snare, finding pleasure in smelling a bunch of beautiful flowers at the Agricultural Show, beside herself with grief for the dead children to the extent that she entreats the gravedigger to exhume them so that she might see them once more.

Yet in spite of the narrator’s apparently clear endeavours to load the dice against Arabella, critics’ reactions to her character have been extremely varied. Herbert Grimsditch stands at one end of the scale, dismissing her as ‘thoroughly
coarse and brutish" along with Sengupta, who calls her 'the villain of the piece' and 'the very apotheosis of cruelty'. Marlene Springer is less damning, claiming that her character constitutes a complex mixture of traits, and that she is in turn conniving, crude, selfish, honest, straightforward, insightful and practical. Adelman concords with this mixed review, asserting that Arabella is 'vulgar, conniving, selfish, yet she also has earthy, humorous common sense. She is resilient, a survivor'. Further into the pro-Arabella camp we find Eagleton, who regards her as possessing a 'crude but candid authenticity', whilst Lawrence, unforgettably, refers to her as nothing less than an 'aristocrat'. Whether we are supporters or detractors, we cannot fail to admit that if Sue is disadvantaged by the fact that we rarely have access to her thoughts, then Arabella is even more so: Jude sees and interprets her, Sue sees and interprets her, the narrator sees and interprets her, but never does she have a moment in which to interpret herself, beyond the blunt statement of her intentions. It is this apparently simple juxtaposition of and contrast between Sue and Arabella, however, which puts us on our guard. Certainly the narrative voice seems to have stacked the cards against Arabella, but as the differing critical responses show, the matter is not without ambiguity. Rabbetts sees great ambivalence in the narrative and authorial attitudes towards the two female protagonists, claiming that the reader is afforded 'a balanced perception of the reasonableness of Arabella's opportunism, and the wilful selfishness of Sue's idealism'. The point seems to be in fact that the narrative voice capitalises on the kinds of preconceptions typical of the average reader, exploits them and exposes them. Dickens tends to present very clear categories within his casts of characters. The reader is rarely in any doubt as to the identity of the heroes and the identity of the villains. There is a sense that the narrator in Jude capitalises on such ideas and draws back before the moment of commitment, offering suggestions but

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27 Sengupta, p. 15 and p. 171.
29 Adelman, p. 39.
31 Lawrence, p. 102.
32 Rabbetts, p. 92.
ultimately exploding the myth that we can pit good against bad and right against wrong in quite such a fairy-tale manner.

This becomes still clearer when we examine the narrator’s approach to Phillotson. Again, critically speaking, Phillotson has had a mixed press. LeVay writes him off rather harshly as ‘wishy-washy’ and ‘dull-as-ditchwater’ and Thurley finds something ‘unclean and clammy’ about him, ‘something redolent of close, stuffy rooms, laboured but unintellectual study, a negation of the life of the body’. Once again, Springer can be relied upon to provide the balanced perspective, identifying a combination of positive and negative elements in Phillotson’s character, seeing him as sensitive and compassionate, but also as eccentric, ineffectual and irresolute.

Midway through the novel, the narrator provides a description of ‘the schoolmaster’ (as he is so frequently alluded to):

The schoolmaster’s was an unhealthy-looking, old-fashioned face, rendered more old-fashioned by his style of shaving. A certain gentlemanliness had been imparted to it by nature, suggesting an inherent wish to do rightly by all. His speech was a little slow, but his tones were sincere enough to make his hesitation no defect. His greying hair was curly, and radiated from a point in the middle of his crown. There were four lines across his forehead, and he only wore spectacles when reading at night. (181)

Just as in the passage referring to Arabella, here, the narrator makes careful choice of words in order to create a specific impression. Analysed carefully and dispassionately, the picture is actually a surprisingly balanced one, tending neither for or against Phillotson, but the salient words that the reader may end up focusing on are those such as ‘old-fashioned’, which is, moreover, used twice, as if to emphasise the point, ‘unhealthy’, ‘greying’, ‘lines across his forehead’, ‘slow’. The reader wonders whether it is Drusilla who puts into words what she herself has subconsciously been thinking, or whether the old woman is the catalyst which serves to generate the thought when she asks Sue what on earth could have made her agree to marriage with Phillotson:

‘I can mind the man very well. A very civil, honourable liver; but Lord! - I don’t want to wound your feelings, but - there be certain men here and there that no woman of any niceness can stomach. I should have said he was one.’ (208)

What is more, the earlier description of Jude (that is, what Sue has forsaken in order to marry Phillotson) seems to stand in stark, almost mocking opposition:

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33 LeVay, p. 220.
34 Thurley, p. 195.
Jude would now have been described as a young man with a forcible, meditative, and earnest rather than handsome cast of countenance. He was of dark complexion, with dark harmonizing eyes, and he wore a closely trimmed black beard of more advanced growth than usual at his age; this, with his great mass of black curly hair, was some trouble to him in combing and washing out the stone-dust that settled in the pursuit of his trade. (101)

There is nothing intrinsically unjust in the narrator's construction of Phillotson, but, as with Arabella, the linguistic dice seem to be loaded against him. He suffers in the reader's mind both from what is said and from what is only implied (that is, the comparison with the younger, stronger, more interesting Jude). Again, however, as in the case of Arabella versus Sue, there is ambiguity at work. On the whole, we have seen that Phillotson is a relatively good, well-intentioned, kind and generous man. He suffers many defeats and setbacks, but never attempts to blame external circumstances. He shows kindness to Jude in Marygreen, and if he has forgotten him when Jude visits him in Lumsdon, can we really blame him?\(^{35}\) Certainly we may feel a degree of sorrow at the way he takes Sue back, remarries her, and goes so far as to accept the sacrifice of her penitent body, but he has suffered much for her sake and at no stage does he actively try to force her to anything. It is Sue who demands the remarriage, and Sue who insists on the renewal of sexual relations.

The point of all this is to show how it is the observer who demonises or exonerates. The narrator reveals to the reader her preconceptions and expectations in that through emotive language he is able to construct an image which we tend to take as the whole picture. When we add the rest of the facts we are shamed into admitting that we are actively seeking a land of heroes and villains. This too reflects the manner in which Jude and Sue's society demonises them as a result of its (society's) rigid mind-set of word- and idea-associations.

In his constructions of characters and the novelistic world, then, the narrator employs techniques which, when analysed, serve to highlight both the constructedness of narrative as such and the complexities of the socio-cultural constructions extant within the world represented in that narrative. He also exposes the constructions at

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\(^{35}\) Springer, pp. 154-55.

\(^{36}\) When Phillotson leaves Marygreen, he says to Jude, 'I shan't forget you' (34). At this point, Jude is all of about eleven years old. When Jude visits Richard in Lumsdon, telling him that 'he had come to see him as an old friend who had been kind to him in youthful days', Phillotson thoughtfully replies, 'I don't remember you in the least' (124). Small wonder: the event takes place more than ten years later and Jude has grown a beard. It would be unreasonable to hold such a broken 'promise' against Richard.
work beyond the novelistic universe, in terms of the invisible scaffolding which quietly influences the expectations and accepted parameters brought to bear in the typical reading experience.

This invokes the novel itself as party to the entire nexus of stereotypification and 'constructedness' at work and this prompts the question of how we are to 'read' Jude. As already suggested, as seasoned readers we are practised at placing novels into our mental filing cabinet with its folders of different 'types' of writing. Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg write: 'All readers of literature carry around with them notions about character and incident in the form of unconsciously consulted touchstones which shape their evaluations of literary works'. As observed with the analyses of Madame Bovary and Effi Briest, this is also true of generic styles. Mentioned above was the way that fate is often invoked in Jude and the story functions both in some ways as a fate tragedy and in some ways as an explosion of this style of text. Similarly, by examining the text according to other generic yardsticks it becomes clear that it may be seen to incorporate many styles but fit in with none of them entirely.

In many ways, the novel carries all the hallmarks of a Bildungsroman. It has an eponymous hero whom we encounter as a young boy, and we see some twenty years of his life pass by. We see Jude learning much along his way; he encounters the disappointments and frustrations of love, of thwarted ambition, and of unfulfilled dreams. Yet at the same time, there is a nagging sense of the novel not quite fitting the pattern. We do not see much of his youth in detail; instead we leap great stretches of time. Furthermore, he is by no means our sole focus, as is, for instance, Dickens's Pip in Great Expectations. Instead, he shares the stage with Sue, and Jude is as much her story as it is Jude's own. One other possible key to the problem is suggested by Franco Moretti, when he claims that Jude is effectively presented in Hardy's text as 'a youth without the right to dream'. He suggests that the idea of a working class hero in a Bildungsroman raises problems in as much as a character such as Jude does

not have the leisure to undergo an education at the hands of the world in the way of,
for instance, a young Rastignac or Wilhelm Meister. He writes:

    In a sense, Hardy's cruel sentence says it best: Goethe's 'aspirations', Stendhal's
    'ambition', Balzac's 'illusions', Dickens's 'expectations', Eliot's 'yearnings' – all
    these emotions are here rewritten as the stark double negative of the 'modern vice of
    unrest'.

Jude's 'Bildung' is one over which a great question mark rests, in as much as,
as we have seen, the suggestion sometimes appears to be the bitter one that perhaps he
would have been better off sticking to 'his own sphere'. In addition, the
Bildungsroman typically moves towards some kind of synthesis or balancing of the
needs and desires of self and society, or, at least, an understanding of how the
relationship between self and society functions. This is illustrated in, for instance,
Balzac's Le Père Goriot: Rastignac does not wholly reconcile himself to the ocean of
filthy mud which he has discovered Paris to be, but he determines nonetheless to stay
the course, to bite the bullet, to make his mark. His defiant challenge to the city at the
end of the book marks the end of the crucial transition from innocence to worldly
cynicism and serves to illustrate the extent of the 'Bildung' which Rastignac has
undergone. Jude, of course, offers no such challenge at the end of his tale, but dies,
cursing the day that he was born. There is a sense that there has been no real
'education' in that Jude never attains a point of maturity from which he can look upon
his situation philosophically (as seems to be the case for Richard Phillotson when he
surveys his life and his failure to enter a university) or defiantly (à la Rastignac).
Frank Giordano identifies this as Hardy presenting a 'fierce anti-Bildungsroman'
which 'exposed Victorian society's demoralizing, dehumanising, and destructive
social codes and institutions; because existence in such a society may be unendurably
painful for a decent man, Jude chose to repudiate it by ending his life'. At the same
time, however, we have the sense of a man and his Einbildung. Jude, the hero without
the right, the luxury or the time to dream, is, ironically, trapped in the net of his own
imaginings, fantasies and dreams. Jude effectively refuses the Bildung offered him by
society, because he does not like what it suggests. Just like Emma Bovary and Effi
Briest he refuses to face the truth.

39 Moretti, p. x.
40 Frank R. Giordano Jr., "I'd Have My Life Unbe"; Thomas Hardy's Self-destructive Characters
In other ways, we might choose to see the novel in terms of a nineteenth century social novel. The Victorian social problem novel as such was a phenomenon of the mid-nineteenth century, and was the preserve of such authors as Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, Disraeli and Charles Kingsley. Often sidelined today, the texts tended to address the underlying social causes of specific problems (for instance, alcoholism might be addressed as a social issue to do with poverty, overwork and lack of education rather than a sign of individual moral depravation). Their revolutionary element was to subvert the standard novelistic pattern of examining how the individual must change or adapt himself to fit in with his society and to suggest that it was not necessarily the rebellious, non-conforming individual that should be regarded as the problem. Certainly *Jude* is too late a work to be considered as a mainstream social novel as such, but Hardy, along with George Gissing, is widely acknowledged as one of the most vociferous social critics of the late nineteenth century, and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure* as two of his most outspoken texts. *Jude* depicts a specific socio-historical moment and in some ways appears to indict the society that it describes for its relentless victimisation of Jude and Sue. It addresses issues such as marriage, parenthood, education, suicide, alcoholism and adultery and tries to probe the underlying social mechanisms which cause or might cause problems. On the other hand, however, *Jude* is not a simple manifesto. Whilst the reader undoubtedly feels sympathy with Jude and Sue she also recognises that they are not being offered by the narrator or the author as paradigmatic alternatives. Certainly society is at fault, but the characters are no mere helpless victims. At times it is they themselves who are their own worst enemies. Hardy does not blindly champion the individual and does not attempt to resolve thorny issues by offering us neatly packaged (and utopian) alternatives regarding the ways in which society might change to accommodate diversity and to render itself more open and tolerant. Sue's deep dislike of the marriage vows, for instance, goes far beyond the predictable issues of not wanting to be objectified, not wanting to be seen as any man's 'property', not wanting a government stamp to legitimate her love. Rather, her disquiet is bound up with a personal deep-seated disquiet of the body, with a profoundly complicated and profoundly individual attitude to relationships, both platonic and sexual, between men

and women. Furthermore, the social problem novel often tends to set up an opposition between self and society, and whilst this opposition is clearly present within Jude, we have also seen how there are equally important oppositions at stake, such as self versus self, and it is on levels such as these that the text does not fit inside the parameters of the social novel.

Akin to the idea of the social novel, that is, the novel-with-a-purpose, we might also choose to read Jude as a philosophical novel. The philosophical novel typically presents a specific philosophical viewpoint, be it metaphysical, ethical, or aesthetic. There is often a strong sense of the allegorical in philosophical novels as the philosophical theme outweighs, for instance, characterisation or plot. The philosophical dimension to Jude might be interpreted as the pervasive motif of matter versus spirit, with spirit being further split into the poles of Christian versus pagan. Already we have examined the way in which Arabella is generally characterised as being very 'earthy' and solid, with Sue as her airy, ethereal counterpart; there is the life of the mind versus the life of the hands; intellectual endeavour versus stonemasonry, books versus pig fat, reading versus delivering bread. But what can we conclude from any of this? Jude does not, unlike an earlier novel such as Fielding's Tom Jones, conclusively embody a particular, identifiable, moral philosophy. In the case of Christianity versus paganism, for instance, we see Christianity severally embraced by Jude, Arabella (briefly), and finally, in the depths of her despair, Sue. Similarly, Jude has a period of devotion to 'pagan' literature, Arabella uses her parents' absence from home (they are in church...) to seduce Jude, Sue buys the statuettes of the pagan deities and then is nervous about what to do with them. The nexus of references is intricately woven and it is impossible to derive a stable philosophical statement or agenda from them. Faith is not necessarily the road to salvation and pagan worship the route to damnation or vice versa. Answers lie precisely nowhere and claims such as Jeremy Robinson's that '[i]t is ultimately Christianity that ruins Jude and Sue's ethereal romance'⁴² address the matter too simplistically.

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Another category which initially seems quite appropriate to Jude is that of the psychological novel. In terms of action in Jude, it might be argued that not a great deal actually happens. Certainly people move from place to place, get married, change jobs, but there is nevertheless a sense in which, as in the archetypal psychological novel, the thoughts, feelings and motivations of the characters are of equal or greater interest and importance than is the actual external action. In itself, Jude and Arabella's courtship and subsequent (ill-fated) marriage is not of great interest, nor does it follow anything other than an eminently predictable pattern. What renders it interesting to the reader is the exploration of the protagonists' wildly differing attitudes and agendas. Having said this, however, we have already seen how we are frequently excluded from the characters' thoughts and frustratingly have no access to their inner being. Indeed, the novel addresses the very problem of locating and identifying that inner self, asking if the inner life is not rather something quite depressingly similar to the outer life.

As with our other two texts, then, we find a text which can be read in many ways, under the rubric of many genres, which seems to draw on several novelistic traditions and conventions, but which ultimately refuses to fit comfortably into any of them. Jude, like Madame Bovary, like Effi Briest, reveals itself as a hybrid which it is impossible absolutely to pin down. The crucial theme in Jude, as in Madame Bovary, as in Effi Briest, the theme which unites the various elements of the text, is that of construction.
CONCLUSION

The observation that the nineteenth-century realist novel is not always as straightforward and rhetorically naïve as is often claimed is by no means a revolutionary one. As remarked at the very beginning of this study, much recent literary criticism has overtly challenged established ideas of the nineteenth-century novel as the unmediated reporting of something called ‘the truth’, as a transparent window on, or mirror held up to, the ‘real’ world. What often seems to be lacking, however, are the detailed textual analyses that are necessary to validate these critical claims. This study attempts to redress this balance by examining how we might read the nineteenth-century novel both in the light of fresh critical ideas that insist on the textuality of the narrative act, while retaining some kind of allegiance to traditional notions in respect of substantial social experience. It is only through detailed textual study that we can hope to see how the narratives function, both within and in opposition to what we might regard as traditional, established categories.

I venture to suggest that what emerges from my detailed textual readings is an intimation of just how complex the third-person narrative can be. Work on the narrative perspective of the novel has been central to literary scholarship over the past half century or so, with particular attention being paid to the overtly ‘subjectifying’ forms, such as the stream of consciousness, interior monologue and free indirect speech. Yet up to a point the (as it seems) four-square, reassuring, reliable third-person narrative can prove even more upsetting than its more obviously subversive counterparts, precisely because it holds out these promises of security and consistency. This has been my contention in respect of Madame Bovary, Effi Briest and Jude the Obscure. Time and again there are gaps, discontinuities, moments of unclarity in the narrative performance. What they achieve is a slight moment of uncertainty and self-reflexivity in our reading process; we find ourselves parties to the process of constructing novelistic meanings, of shoring up the gaps with the cement of our good intentions. And therefore we partake precisely in that process of ordering and structuration that is at the heart of the novels’ thematic statement.

The starting point of this study was the question of authenticity, more specifically the authenticity of the self, and of whether any one version of an
individual’s self can ever be deemed to be more ‘true’, more ‘real’, more akin to Trilling’s idea of the ‘honest soul’ than any other. All three of the texts focused on here depict characters whose selfhood is, or can be, called into question, be it by the characters themselves, by other individuals in the text, by the society of which they are a part, by the narrative voice, or by the reader. By attempting to examine how these selfhoods are constructed, by whom and by what they are created, influenced, manipulated, denied, it becomes clear that each self is a layer of different versions, that there is no simple dichotomy between the authentic and the inauthentic, the true and the false, the natural and the socialised, the private and the public, but that these categories are inextricably interlinked. By breaking down the constructions, by assessing the motivations behind and ramifications of the constructing processes, the reader becomes aware that, in these cases, the battle joined is not between the individual on the one hand and social generality on the other, but is, rather, a ceaseless, complex contest involving a large number of different, competing versions of the self, none of them more ‘valid’ than another. The study of the interaction between self and others, self and society and self with self reveals how every level of existence, every aspect of life, is subject to the pressures of a multiplicity of constructing influences.

With this constructedness of selfhood in mind, the next step is to look at the way the story is told. Our expectations of the nineteenth-century realist novel include the presence of a stable narrative voice on which we can depend for information and elaboration; the narrators of Trollope, for instance, work in this way. The narrators of the three texts discussed here, however, reveal themselves as part of the nexus of construction which is so important at the fictional level. The narrative voice both reflects and reflects on the constructing processes which are at work within the novelistic world. It reflects them in as much as just as we can ultimately discern no single, authoritative version of the individual selfhood of the characters, so are we unable consistently to hear a single, authoritative version of the narrative. The narrators, subtly yet explicitly, refuse to subscribe to that tidy idea of stable third-person presence so commonly associated with texts of this kind. They reveal themselves instead to be a combination of things, to exist within the tensions of authority and non-authority, certainty and uncertainty, stability and instability,
knowing and not-knowing. The narrative voice reflects on the constructing processes in as much as it is, paradoxically, the voice which provides the help to the reader to understand and to dismantle the constructions which it presents as integral to the society and characters depicted.

At the same time, however, that we recognise shifting boundaries, slippage, and flexibility, we must also observe that the traditions and the established categories nonetheless hold true to a certain extent. Just as the characters present to the readers selfhoods which are grounded in, but which simultaneously confront and resist, sometimes knowingly, sometimes unknowingly, established conventions, so too do the narratives exhibit a degree of fidelity to specific, recognisable generic patterns, yardsticks which enable the reader to orient herself and which, of course, are the means by which the reader identifies those moments where the unexpected subversion or rejection of these patterns arises. Both characters and narrative exist not in a state of eternal play, where everything is just ‘text’ and where we cannot say much at all about anything, but in a state characterised by a complex state of flux: a carefully constructed one that obliges us to acknowledge both the ‘textedness’ and the substantiality of the experiences put before us.
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