

JUDE THE OBSCURE: PORTRAYING THE DISRUPTION OF THE SOCIETY

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Abstract:

Thomas Hardy was born at a time when, in Europe and in rest of the world, political forces were gathering strength to stage revolts and revolutions. He died two years before the onset of the Great Depression. Hardy had the unique opportunity to see the established feudalism reign of leading to the rise of bourgeoisie. Hardy's life spanned two centuries: the second half of the 19th century and the first three crucial decades of the 20th century. All his novels chronicle his life experiences clubbed with the social experiences. Thus his novel remains as a mirror to forecast the 19th century upheaval in the society. While reformation and reconstruction were the ongoing progress in the 19th century, the darker side or the underworld of the same period must not go unrecorded. Thomas Hardy's works balances the brighter and the darker side of his society balancing and justifying the true image of the society. While the majority of his themes are centered on the disturbance of the society; this paper is limited with *Jude the Obscure* attempting to analyze the disruption of the society through the protagonist: Jude Fawley.

Hardy's last and by most accounts gloomy novel, *Jude the Obscure* details the dejected life and dishonorable death of Jude Fawley, a bright and motivated, but ultimately insignificant, man. The central idea of the work is the inability of an individual to overcome the social and psychological forces that determine their lives. In *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy further explores this theme in relation to the constricting forces he observed around him in Victorian society: class, religion, and sexuality. Thus, the novel describes Jude's unrealized dream to enter the university at Christminster and his inability to remain happy with the woman he loved; Sue Bridehead, outside of the socially accepted tradition of marriage.

Keywords:

Hardy – class – religion – Victorian era - Jude the Obscure

Jude The Obscure portrays the failure of a young man; Jude, at thirty years losing his intellectual and emotional hopes: "It was hell—the hell of conscious failure, both in ambition

and in love" (133). Like Tom Carlingford in Benson's *Limitations* obsessed with his passion to master Latin; "he was more than anything else ambitious loafer, who might turnout a loafer without ambition or an ambitious man" (11). Love is the meager exchanger of poor and it is the cheapest commodity that poor's can afford to have. But Jude was an unfortunate failure even in love. As the name Sue suggest—prosecute—she literally prosecutes Jude to lose his aspiring intellectual quest and leads him to the death bed. Ignited by Arabella and fumed by Sue, Jude gets entrapped into the weak economical, social and cultural upheaval of the nineteenth century. The century which proclaims; if you are born poor, there is some external factor which says "you shan't learn!" (349), "you shan't labour!" (349), "you shan't love!" (349).

The importance of literacy in nineteenth century is incited by Thomas Hardy through two of his primary characters; Jude and his night school master Mr. Phillotson at Cresscombe. Both of them are wishing to migrate to Christminster to pursue University degree:

You know what a University is, and a University degree? It is the necessary hallmark of a man who wants to do anything in teaching. (14)

However both of them strive hard, they could not succeed in their ambition. Because pursuing University education; as Jude says: "Such places be not for such as you—only for them with plenty o' money" (121).

Orphaned by the ill luck of fate; Jude who "is crazy for book" (17), was destined to attend the night school at Mr. Phillotson's office. Because during day time, he was observed by Miss.Drusilla Fawley; his great aunt who had provided him shelter after his parents death. But his feeble hope faded as his master Mr. Phillotson migrated to Christminster to peruse his ambition. With the School Master's migration Jude's fate was sealed by the position of scaring birds for Farmer Troutham. But he could not fare well in his job because of his milk of human kind nature. He was a Communist in his approach to spare the 'lion's share' of the Farmer Troutham to the poor birds. Through his act Hardy attacks the superfluous money getting stagnated by only one side; either the imperial men, or the aristocrats, or the rich people. But the poor always remain poor, since the flow of money is circulated only among the economically sound class.

Jude's magnanimity towards the birds resulted to lose his job at the farm and was allowed to earn six pence a day for keeping the rocks off the farmer's corn. Jude's aunt reduced him to a state of nothingness when she heard that he had been turned away from his job. Jude could not understand that "mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another" (23). As his aunt let him down he decided to go to his School Master at Christminster. But he did not know the ways and means to reach the place. Opportunity seekers cannot restrain themselves in the limitations of available possibilities. The world is far and wide to quench the thirst of ambition. As Tom in *Limitation* said; "It's the duty of every man to knock about a bit, and learn that the outer darkness does not begin at Cambridge Station. There is a place called London, and there are other places called Europe, Asia, Africa, and America" (4). Here Jude reconciles with Tom to relinquish his ambitions across the world.

The unknown city Christminster increased Jude's curiosity. He took great pains to reach this destination, because, the man for whose knowledge and purposes he had so much reverence

was actually living in Christminster. Jude thought “it is a city of light” (30). He considered “the tree of knowledge grows there” (30). “It is a place that teachers of men spring from and go to” (31). “It is what you may call a castle, manned by scholarship and religion” (31). But unfortunately Jude could not reach the place but manages to continue his private study through the two thin books he received from Mr. Phillotson on Jude’s request through a letter.

Ever since Jude visualized Christminster he curiously thought that an acquisition of language is easy. With this pretext he aims to master Greek and Latin. But only after opening the book that he received, he understood every word in both Latin and Greek was to individually committed to memory at the cost of years of plodding. He now understood, “that was Latin and Greek” (36). His attempt of private study was disturbed by the co-travelers. Therefore he had to quit his private study and join his uncle at least to have a financial ground. In order to join his uncle’s trade he substituted his work of distributing bread loaves and found a humble stone-mason in Alfredston to learn about the rudiments of free-stone working for a trifling wage. He found his lodging during the week in the little town and returned to Marygreen village on every Saturday morning.

Jude had passed his nineteenth year without quenching the thirst of knowledge. Yet he was confident to visit Christminster in other one or two years. Amidst his persuasion to become a scholar, he comes across Arabella Donn—a pig-breeder’s daughter. “She was a complete and substantial female animal” (44). Thomas Hardy might sound harsh to criticize a woman through a strong and wild comparison to animal. But she fits into the comparison through her flirting nature. She is the one who sells her charm to win a comfortable position in the society. She spins to become Mrs. Fawcely which would give her a position in the society. But later when she realizes the chicken-heart of Jude sympathizing to kill even a Pig, she understands his materialistic worthlessness and comes out of the spin. She tries her copious in marrying the Manager of the bar in which she worked as a barmaid. She settles for a short while in Australia with her new partner but returns to London on her personal grounds. Later she insists a divorce from Jude to marry her new partner legally. All was well until the new partner dies. After that she tries her trap to get Jude entrap again. She wins him back on his separation from Sue. But she laments for having made a wrong decision as Jude proved again worthless owing to his illness.

Thomas Hardy indiscriminately described Tess; but her attitude suits his criticism. With the sense of her magnetism, she invents dimples on her cheeks; though she was not born with natural dimples. Through her good looks, she first attracted Jude towards her. In their journey of courtship Jude started to realize that “Arabella was not worth a great deal as a specimen of womankind” (63). But still he abided to marry her considering the intimacy he had developed with her. All his reading had only come to this state of idiocy to marry her. “He would have to sell his books to saucepans” (64).

After their wedding they settled in a lonely roadside cottage between the Brownhouse and Marygreen. Life with a stone-mason’s apprentices for half wages did not provide a good prospectus married life. The profits of the vegetable garden besides his cottage and utilize his wife’s past experience in breeding a pig managed to meet their ends. But Arabella was married in different thoughts. According to her she had gained a husband. She thought her husband would possess a lot of earning power in him to buy her frocks and hats.

Disappointment hit a strong blow to each of them unsatisfied within each other after marriage. Jude was disappointed with Arabella's false hair and artificial dimple. He thought; "women fancy wrong things sometimes (68). Thomas Hardy attacks the shallow state of matrimonial. After marriage, Jude realizes that he had least known about Arabella. He could not deduce that Arabella shall have Public-house experience before marriage. When he married her he thought she had always lived only in her father's house. But now he is surprised to learn that she had stayed away for three months. On the other hand Arabella considered Jude "a tender-hearted fool!" (70), not having the heart to kill the pig which he had fed with his own hands.

Facing many falsehoods in their married life, Jude thought that "there was perhaps something fortunate in the fact that the immediate reason of his marriage had proved to be non-existent. But the marriage remained" (69). When Arabella felt that Jude could not earn more, she ruined his life by forsaking him to join her friends; Anny and Sarah. She did not respect his moral conduct or his intellectual aspiration to pursue degree. Like Mrs. Joan Durberville in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* Arabella matched marriage through monetary benefits, Arabella's marriage concept was only a concert in money.

After the broken marriage, Jude had reset his phase on intellectual track, but he was again distracted by another girl; his cousin Mary Susanna Bridehead. The fact that he was already married and marriage to his family usually meant a tragic sadness, he subsided his zeal towards her. However, he thought to consider Sue as his intimate friend at least. He thought that a man could not live by work alone; he wanted something to love. He knew what he was doing was erratic, informal and unexpected. He knew he was becoming immoral by deviating his country's law—to love Arabella and none other into his life's end. But still he was totally bounded by Sue. With promising luck; time enhanced their friendship to get developed. In the quest to develop an intimacy with Sue and stop her going out of the town, because of the enmity with her boss, Jude persuades her to grab the opportunity of being the assistant teacher to Mr. Phillston about whom he had come to know through Sue. Unfortunately he himself had set the ball of courtship rolling between Sue and Mr. Phillotson. But there is no justification for his burdened heart. "Was he not Arabella's? (117). But Jude could not digest their growing relationship. He had lost his love for the second time. Owing to his drunkenness he had also lost his job.

Loveless and jobless Jude came to his great aunt's cottage and excused his arrival there was for want of rest. He was totally disappointed at his life. He had realized that:

Now I know I have been a fool, and that folly is with me...And 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. But I do feel I should like to do some good thing; and I bitterly regret the church, and the loss of my chance of being her ordained minister. (134)

Thus Hardy brings through Jude, a complete failure of an ordinary man to acquire knowledge or family in the highly disrupted and morally corrupted society. Arabella and Sue are morally corrupted to settle in the marriage of convenience and comfortable, whereas the Christminster University is looking only for the sophisticated students to garland in its premises.

After the continuous failure Jude was managed to enter the Church as a licentiate. Jude found the ecclesiastical and altruistic life as distinct from the intellectual and emulative life. He was worried that he had entered the church in an unscholarly way and had to remain not raising to a higher grade through his entire career. He had to live as a humble Curate wearing his life out in an obscure village or city slum. But still he was a waver at the thought of Sue. He resigns his job and settles near her and positions him as her caretaker and a lively person to keep her company alive. But Sue is a perfect opportunity seeker, for whom, "Intellect at Christminster is a new wine in old bottles" (157). But for poor Jude "Christminster has much that is glorious; though I was resentful because I couldn't get there" (157). Whereas Sue mocked at him saying:

You are one of the very men Christminster was intended for when the colleges were founded; a man with a passion for learning, but no money, or opportunities, or friends. But you were elbowed off the pavement by the millionaires' sons'. (158)

Though Sue sounded harsh; in fact she was mirroring the then socio-economic condition of the nineteenth century England; when passion alone could not win over ambitions but the ultimate Alma matter is money; for without money Jude failed both in his academic as well as in domestic life. Jude contradicts Sue's mockery through his higher hopes. But Sue persisted; "at present intellect in Christminster is pushing one way, and religion the other; and so they stand sock-still, like two rams butting each other" (158).

Sue had rightly understood the society in which she was living and thus was calculative and choosy in her matrimony. Thus she had promised to marry the school teacher in order that it might chance her to become a school teacher in future. But though she likes Jude what could be the monetary benefit in marrying him. Therefore she suppresses her love for Jude and organized her mind to marry the school teacher. But her married life proved unsuccessful. She sought an opportunity to get rid off Mr. Philloston to join with Jude. Time takes its reverse order in the most crucial situation which fated Jude to meet Arabella. As he anticipated Sue's arrival and waited to receive her, unluckily he happened to meet Arabella who was busily attending her customers in the bar.

After separated from Jude, Arabella had migrated to Sydney; where she had remarried Cartlet, the manager of the bar in which she worked as a bar-maid. Jude was taken aback by her new married news. "I have nothing at all to say about the—crime—you've confessed to!" (194). Here Hardy drives in the disorder of the social values between men and women. When Jude considers Arabella's second marriage as a crime, perhaps what was he deciding to do about with Sue? Wasn't that a crime too? Are the laws of marital sacrament different for men and women? When Jude understands that Sue was unhappy with Mr. Philloston, Jude tried to help her out of the way: "I will never care about my doctrines or my religion any more! Let them go! Let me help you, even if I do love you and even if you...." (224). Was Jude really bound to his moral to criticize Arabella?

Sue joined Jude to settle in Albrickham, a bigger town of sixty thousand or seventy thousand inhabitants and nobody knew anything about the new couple. Jude had quit his cathedral work. He had already ruined his intellectual expedition; now he had ruined his prospects of the Church; progress of his trade; and every thing.

Jude sought self-employment in lettering headstones which he kept in a little yard at the back of his little house. Sue assisted his work but was not prepared to marry him yet. Though they live together she had not agreed to marry him and postpones it through lame excuses. "Love has its own dark mortality when rivalry enters in" (276). When Sue found the interruption of Arabella she urges to marry Jude immediately. Arabella interrupted Jude, to solve the mystery that she had left unsaid on her first meeting after their separation: the marriage of her to Jude had given her a boy baby who was growing up with her parents at Antipode. Now that she is going to well settle with her Sydney husband, her parents had objected to take care of her son. Nor Arabella could retain her son with him, because her new husband might not react positively for the intake of her son. She also regards of son's return based on his worth. Of his age, the son might be worthless to take in to assist the bar also. Arabella was selfish to regard her son too on the basis of return benefit.

Jude was happy to know that he had a son through his previous marriage and instructed Arabella to direct his son to live with him. Sue was also kind enough to be a step mother to Jude's son. She decided to marry Jude before the boy comes from Arabella's parents, as she is prepared to adopt the boy. The child managed to reach Arabella through the family in whose charge he had come. Unlike the normal mothers, Arabella, immediately dispatched her son to her former husband thinking that her present husband must not see her son. After a great deal the boy reached his father's house, who welcomed him with great love. Jude envisioned educating and training his son with the view for University. A boy of no name; who was only called by his nick name "Little Father Time", as he looked so aged, was not christened also. "Because if I died in damnation, 'twould save the expense of a Christian funeral" (289). Economically, darkened life, darkens not only the Christianization of the little boy, but also formed the strong basis for the death of other three children also.

Not worried about the sorry state of her son, being without a name to own, not worried about the death of her husband, Cartlett, Arabella lately started to plan to win back Jude. She developed a hankering interest in her first husband. When she first met Jude and Sue in the Great Wessex Agricultural show, she could not control her envious feeling to see her former husband with another girl. In the Spring Fair at Kennetbridge, Arabella met Sue and Arabella's son selling their 'Christminster cakes'. Having lost her husband six week awhile, Arabella felt; "I wish I had Jude back again" (326). She paid deaf ears to her friend, Anny's advise on morals. "He is more mine than hers...'what right has she to him, I should like to know! I'd take him from her if I could!" (326). She met Mr. Philloston and persuaded him to take back his wife, Sue.

Lost in all their ambitions, Jude and Sue came back to Christminster as "a fool that fellow was in following a freak of his fancy" (337). Jude had become the poor victim to the spirit of mental and social restlessness that made him completely unhappy. Nine years ago, when Jude had arrived Christminster he had come with fixed opinions, but now they had dropped one by one. But at least this time he thought he should provide the best education to his son. They struggled to get lodging and finally allowed to stay in a house excluding Jude, for Jude was not permitted by the land lady. Therefore Sue and her three children stayed in the house and Jude sheltered in a public house.

When the land lady said she could not permit Sue and the children to stay more than a week because her husband does not allow her to take in the family with children, as children

might cause so much of nuisance, Sue was worried to think about another shelter. Meanwhile, the little Jude's curiosity to learn about the problems that children might cause to the economically weaker sections, started quivering Sue with many questions. One leading to another Sue acted considering the little Jude as her matured companion and told about the family is going to get another new baby. Already perplexed about the disturbance caused by the children, the little child could not imagine the multiplied problem that could accompany the arrival of the new baby. Little Jude, further said; 'I think that whenever children be born that are not wanted they should be killed directly, before their souls come to 'em, and not allowed to grow big and walk about!' (344). The fact of another baby coming into their family disturbed him very much. He had come to the conclusion: "If we children were gone there'd be no trouble at all" (345). On a piece of paper the boy wrote; "done because we are too menny!" (347) and hung along with his siblings.

Horried at their children's death Jude and sue became totally loss. The ensuing economic crisis made Sue to pacify her children's death; "better that they should be plucked fresh than stay to wither away miserably!" (350). If you are born poor, there is some external factor which says, 'you shan't learn! You shan't labor! You shan't love!' (349), their union had resulted in nothing but the loss of their children. "Yes O my comrade, our perfect union—our two in oneness—is now stained with blood! (349). Sue's heart was filled with guilt that she had shared things to the little boy which one could share only to the people of matured age. "I said the world was against us, that it was better to be out of life than in it at this price; and he took literally. And I told him I was going to have another child. It upset him. O how bitterly he upbraided me! (350).

Sue viewed wedding as 'business contract' while married Mr. Philloston. Therefore she did not mind marrying him even she was eighteen years younger to him. That resulted in the unhappy ending. Now that she had joined Sue, she is again unhappy at the loss of her own children. She was kind enough to become a step mother to the little Jude; but what had he given in turn was to take away the lives of her own children along with him. She shattered it as the penance for the sin she had done to Mr. Philloston. Moreover she was guilty-struck that she was the driving force behind all Jude's miseries.

Added to Jude and Sue's despair; "a child had been prematurely born, and that it, like the others, was a corpse" (353). Their marriage had resulted like two bitter dishes on the same plate. Jude shifted the ill-omen lodging and moved to other lodging and obtained work at his old trade. But to sustain his work he had to get his marriage formalized, or else he would again be turned out from the job as it happened at Aldbrickham. But Sue thought: "I have had dreadful fears, a dreadful sense of my own induce of action; I have thought—I am still his wife!" (355). Therefore she was not prepared for the formalized marriage to Jude.

Jude and Sue started to travel in the opposite direction mentally. The strength of their unity started to fall slowly after the death of their children. Since the tragedy Sue's mind reflected: "I have thought that we have been selfish, careless, even impious, in our courses, you and I. our life has been a vain attempt as self-delight. But self-abnegation in the higher road. We should mortify the flesh—the terrible flesh—the curse of Adam! (356). She further said that their marriage would never be signed in vestry. "I don't think I ought to be your wife—or as your wife

any longer” (358). “Because I am Richard’s” (358). Sue was this type of dawdle attitude which made Thomas Hardy to describe about the curious trick in Sue’s nature as; “cruelly sweet” (180).

Arabella planned to turn the situation to work for her side. She came to meet Jude and saddened with grief on her son’s death. Though in his life time she had shown no care at all, she started now to exhibit a ceremonial mournfulness that was apparently sustaining to the conscience. When Arabella left, Sue said; “she seems to be your wife still and Richard to be my husband!” (362). She wanted to go back to Mr.Philloston, because she thought; ‘Arabella’s child killing mine was a judgment—the right slaying the wrong” (362). She had made her mind that she was no more Jude’s wife as she belonged to Richard sacramental. Jude could not take her decision, because she was his social salvation; his guardian angel. But she was determined to leave him.

Through the address identified by Arabella, Mr.Philloston wrote a letter to Sue, expressing his deep condolence and his regret for the sorry state of Sue’s life. He had liberated her to be free and happy with the man whom she loved dearly. But when that was not happening he meant that there is no more meaning to be united with the man. He wrote that he was ready to forgive her, even though she had forsaken him and would accept her to be his wife if she was willing.

Sue yielded to the letter and approved her decision of separation from Jude. But Jude could not get separated from Sue; because she was his everything. “Even now he could not let her down. However, Jude pleaded, Sue turned her deaf ears and went to Mr. Philloston.

Arabella, the opportunity seeker, found the absence of Sue in Jude’s lodging was her best chance to grab Jude to her side. Arabella, planned to drive away his thought on Sue slowly. She succeed in every move of her planning to win Jude back and gets him to her father’s house and plays a trap in which Jude gets caught again and therefore forced to remarry her. Jude agrees to marry her, as by his nature he would not dishonor any woman. A marriage party was arranged, where the Clergy Man spoke: “The Church dont’ recognoise divorce in her dogma...What God hath joined together let no man put asunder” (397).

Thomas Hardy attacks the prevailing hypocrisy of the religion. If the church does not recognize divorce in her dogma, can it recognize remarrying? Was the marriage of Jude and Arabella or Sue and Mr. Philloston, affiliated to the true sacrament of religious wedding? If so can they be morally corrupted to fancy their whims? If it was for want of true love that they did not find in their first marriage and therefore sought after their second marriage; why must they hang around to rejoin with their first partners? After rejoining their former partners why Sue’s heart oscillates about Jude’s illness and Arabella running behind yet another bright chance through the quack doctor?

After remarriage, Jude and Arabella shifted from her father’s house and moved to lodging nearer to the center of the city. Jude’s health had become precarious and Arabella was exhausted attending his illness. Jude felt that his physical weakness had taken away all his dignity. He longed to meet Sue for the last time when already one of his feet was in grave. He had requested Arabella to write for Sue. She agreed on a condition that she must be in the room when Sue comes to meet him. Jude resisted the offer. But neither Sue came or she replied for his letter.

This raised a suspicion on Arabella, whether she would have posted the letter or cheated Jude through her false promise. So, Jude, though physically unable, enforced to meet Sue by himself. He had only two wishes left in the world, one; to see Sue and the other; is to die after seeing her. As he quenched the first desire he was prepared to die. On his return from Marygreen he stopped at the Christminster College. On his last walk, he fancied his first walk. "The theologians...the high-handed statesman, and others, no longer interests me. All that has been spoiled for me before the grind of stern reality" (416).

To be surprised, Jude was recovered slowly from his illness and worked at his work for several weeks, but not likely to do much work for a long while. His physical discomfort disappointed Arabella. She turned her attention on the quack, Villert by adding the love-philter, in a wine, that she brought from him in the past Agricultural show to use it to win back Jude. She said:

And if my poor fellow upstairs do go off—as I suppose he will soon—it's well to keep chances open. And I can't pick and choose now as I could when I was younger. And one must take the old if one can't get the young. (416).

The cruelty of Arabella was clearly brought out, when she was not shaken at the death news of Jude. She light-heartedly commented; "he's a 'handsome corpse'" (422). Jude did not have a peaceful death; because Sue did not come to meet him at least once, when he was alive nor that she came after his death, because of the promise she had made to Philliston. When she could break the promise of her marriage to him could not she break the promise this time to bid final farewell to Jude. She was exactly as described by Thomas Hardy; "cruelly sweet" (180).

Thus Thomas Hardy's *Jude The Obscure* shows in a crystal clear way the downfall of individuals in the domestic life accustomed by the upheaval of the society; through its staunch influence on the social, economical and religious background. Thus Jude and Sue have had become the poor victim of the social surroundings. However personally they might have flawed the grossed prejudices; still they are lamentable on account of the disruption of the society.

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