



## *Jude The Obscure: A Pessimist Novel And A Tragedy Of Love And Unfulfilled Aims*

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### Abstract:

The article tries to peep in the world of Hardy and dig out the reason behind pessimism and tragedy. The researcher has tried to analyse the pessimism in the story of Jude and Sue as well as, the role played by incident and circumstances in preparing the platform for tragedy. The article also highlights on how virtue is punished, the act of indiscretion, and how fate as usual in Hardy's all novels plays the key role in causing disaster.

*Jude the Obscure* is a tragedy that highlights Victorian society's suppression of the human spirit. Jude Fawley's life serves as a metaphor for both the tragedy of hurried and ill-considered marriages and the social rejection that result from adhering to moral standards that are different from those of the majority of society. Jude eventually entered a state of inertia because of his disillusionment with organised religion (which he considered cruel), his conviction that existing civil laws were irrational, and his belief that natural law, which condemns everyone, regardless of their alleged worth, to suffer and eventually die (inactivity, sluggishness). In fact the other chief character Sue's tragedy is brought about by her own impulses and her tragedy establishes the supremacy of conventions and social codes.

Hardy has represented the basic idea of this novel in transformations and failures: Jude and Sue have been snared in the modern spirit, have battled to break free of the traditional methods, and have suffered and failed. This supports Hardy's assessment of the book as a "tragedy of unfulfilled aims" in the preface to the book.

Key words: tragedy, pessimism, fate, Hardy

### Introduction:

Hardy says, "A plot, or tragedy, should arise from the gradual closing in of a situation that comes of ordinary human passions, prejudices, and ambitions, by reason of the characters taking no trouble to ward off the disastrous events produced by the said passions, prejudices, and ambitions," This statement works well in the context of Hamlet or Agamemnon, but does it work in Tess, The Woodlanders, or Jude the Obscure? In Hardy's tragic works, it is not character that is the controlling factor, but a power beyond man and deliberately opposed to his will—a power that can be called Fate. In another passage, Hardy is more explicit: "Tragedy may be created by an opposing environment, either of things inherent in the universe or of human institutions."

Hardy's tragedy can be said to spring from within the human actor only in the sense that this universal force fastens one of its tentacles within man's very mind. That is, instinct, rather than character, can bring his actors to their knees; however, they have no more control over this instinct than they do over chance, which destroys their happiness.

Hardy has stated unequivocally that Jude's tragedy is not that his love experiences were completely unsuccessful, but that he was unable to fulfil his noble aspirations for an educational and useful life. Sexual instinct from within was as much his enemy in this defeat as the uncompromising traditions of Christminster, the narrowness of convention, and the blighting nature of womanhood—all of which manifestations of Fate he was mercilessly pitted against.

A very vital role is played by incidents and circumstances too. According to Albert Pettigrew Elliott, Hardy's "primary concern with the overpowering importance of external things is one of the key-notes of all his art. It is akin to that aspect of his methods of plot construction noticed by Beach: 'He seems to have read life in terms of action, of objective action; in terms of brute incident, things happening.' When critics point out the importance of accident and coincidence in Hardy's plots, it is important to remember that these are not haphazard construction methods, but purposeful devices born of his way of seeing life. He saw the objective nature of joy and pain, as well as the role that incident played in causing them." (Elliott)

Elliott goes on to say that truth, beauty, and goodness are always worth cherishing because their polar opposites are not. In fact, a man's very goodness may be his undoing. Almost every step that causes Tess pain stems from a noble motive. She goes to market on that fateful day because she wants to help her parents. Jude is fired by his boss for allowing Hungarian crows to pick up the grain. This experience teaches the boy about the "flaw in the terrestrial scheme, whereby what was good for God's birds was bad for God's gardener." Jude's revelation may have been sufficient because it emphasises the idea of conflict between creatures who are all one in the universal Will. If Jude understood this lesson, it would be enough for a full life.

In Hardy's novels, tragedy also arises from the sabotaging of future opportunities for happiness through some act of indiscretion in childhood or a compromising decision made in haste or before maturity. Henchard has about an hour to wreck his life at Weydon Priors furmity stand. Tess's fate is sealed by her brief encounter with Alec on The Chase. Jude's hasty marriage to Arabella precludes him from requesting Sue's hand at a time when she might have accepted him. In Jude's case, it's doubtful that happiness existed in that way, but his entire life of misery began the moment Arabella drew his attention with the pig's pizzle.

Fate is working hard against Jude, because the Fawley family has never been happy in marriage. Heredity, coincidence, woman, convention, and every other tool at Fate's disposal are used to play havoc on his pitiful soul. Jude has a sensitive personality, which leads to his defeats at the hands of Fate. His nature predisposes him to a life of sorrow.

Albert Elliott makes a convincing case for Jude the Obscure's tragedy. His remarks merit our attention. Because we are aware that Jude had nothing to do with the disaster, he continues, "We feel the agony of this tragedy all the more. Tess committed a sin, albeit an innocent one, but it was still sin. To all living things, he was compassionate and gentle. Because he was too friendly to several crows and wanted them to have food, he was fired from his first job. He is shocked by the outcome, saying that "Nature's reasoning was too dreadful for him to care for." The disgusting pig-killing incident is more noteworthy. "The white snow, stained with the blood of his fellow mortal, wore an illogical look to Jude as a lover of Justice, not to say a Christian."

Additionally, he was in excruciating pain after seeing a rabbit caught in a trap. Little less appealing than his pity is Jude's loyalty. He will never forget his former teacher. Phillotson, whom he longs to see again, as soon as he does see him. He's been utterly forgotten by Phillotson. Later, Phillotson is supposed to rob Jude of Sue as payment for his loyalty. Jude's feeling of obligation is very developed. He agreed to marry Arabella because she asked him to because he believed it was his responsibility to do so, only to discover afterwards that he had been cruelly duped. His love for Sue Bridehead may have been enough to ease most of his sufferings, but Hardy has tarnished that love with so much despicable behaviour that it no longer seems to be enough. The caprice with which Sue returns it and the terrible anticlimax of his second marriage to Arabella undermines its partial idealist. Jude's refusal to enrol at the University of Christminster, however, is undoubtedly the story's greatest tragedy. We were aware of his aptitude for learning and readiness to make great sacrifices in order to obtain an education, making this dissatisfaction all the more painful. One of the most heartbreaking things is to see these hopes dashed. Hardy treats Jude in a callous manner. He doesn't only decline to honour nature's nobility; he also declines to allow it to be its own reward. Jude's beliefs are continually challenged, and in the final scene, he expresses his disdain by wishing he had never been born. He sometimes seems to have a lot of Job in him. Yes, he was, indeed a "predestinate Jude". Even if he may fight beside his bad stars, he must eventually give in to life's ironies.

There are many references to fate in Jude. Sue Bridehead seems most conscious of a malignant fate. Phillotson asks her, "Who is (to blame) then? Am I?" she answers: "No-I don't know! The Universe, I suppose things in general, because they are so horrid and cruel!" (Hardy) Jude also believes in fate. He thinks, in the earlier part of the novel, that the Power above is interested in his welfare. "He took it as a good omen that numerous blocks of stone were lying about, which signified that the Cathedral was undergoing restoration or repairs 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 practiced while waiting for a call to higher labours." (Hardy) Jude finds that he missed the chance to see Sue when he visits a hymn writer with whom he is unhappy. But, "at least his chimerical expedition to Kennet Bridge really did seem to have been another intervention of Providence to keep him away from temptation. But 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' errand." (Hardy) What more complete disillusion could be cited than that final dying scene, as he, suffering the agony of thirst, utters with consummate contempt the lament of Job for his birth. "The President of the Immortals has ended his sport with Jude." Thus Jude appears to be the victim of a predetermined situation as a result. His character has no bearing on his fate; hence his will is not free. He was powerless to change the situation.

Hardy has received various labels, including fatalist, determinist, pessimist, meliorist, etc. He focuses more on the negative aspects of human life than the positive and upbeat ones, hence it is clear that he is pessimistic. However, there isn't a singular formula that will apply to all of his novels when it comes to the root of human misery. Character, society, nature, and fate—mainly in the form of chance and coincidence, but also to some extent in the form of heredity—are all accountable for human tragedy, but the level of each responsibility changes from novel to novel. For instance, character plays a dominant role in bringing about tragedy in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Whereas in *The Return of the Native*, character, nature, chance and coincidence combine together to bring about the tragedy. In *Tess* the character of the heroine is not as much responsible for the tragedy as other causes. In *Jude the Obscure* the tragedy is brought about by (i) the characters of Jude and Sue; (ii) the tyranny of social conventions and social institutions, such as marriage; (iii) social conditions, such as the poverty of Jude; and (iv) heredity.

Jude's tragedy is a love story with unmet expectations. The preface to the novel states that Hardy's subject matter is "the fret and fever, scorn and tragedy that may press in the trail of the strongest passion known to humanity." Hardy further says that the novel depicts "a deadly war waged between flesh and spirit," and it points to "the tragedy of unfulfilled aims "The conflict that takes place in Jude and Sue's minds between

the demands of the body and those of the soul is referred to as the deadly war between flesh and spirit. Jude's intellectual aspirations were frustrated, which is a tragedy of unmet goals.

Jude's tragedy is first hinted to in the first pages of the novel when he feels unwelcome in the world and when his great-aunt wishes that God the Almighty should have removed Jude when He removed his parents. There is never a good time to share sorrow with others, thus it must always be a lonely experience. In addition, it is not worthwhile; they never understand; and only Thomas Hardy would comprehend Jude. Jude's sincerity can be extremely unnerving at times. He does not want to grow up for a number of very compelling reasons. Jude develops an obsession with the city of Christminster, a city of light and learning, as a result of his hunger for knowledge. He must read Latin and Greek grammar novels in order to be admitted to the University of Christminster as a scholar, but he feels hindered in his attempts to acquire these languages. He believes that he needs someone's help and direction in order to learn these languages. Hardy here makes one of the pessimistic observations when he says: "Somebody might have come along that way that would have asked him his trouble, and might have cheered him by saying that his notions were further advanced than those of his grammarian. But nobody did come, because nobody does; and under the crushing recognition of his gigantic error Jude continued to wish himself out of the world."

Jude's encounter with Arabella causes his academic and religious aspirations to be derailed, which causes him to experience negative outcomes. He later develops a romantic attraction in his cousin Sue after meeting her. Once more, he is divided between his enthusiasm for studying and his love for Sue, two emotions that are both equally strong. After his encounter with Sur, a battle between the flesh and the spirit starts. He reconsiders continuing his studies when Sue marries Phillotson and writes letters to five Christminster academicians asking for advice and support. But the reply which he gets from one of them puts an end to all his academic hopes; the reply seemed a hard slap after ten years of labour. The result of this failure is frustration and he goes to bar and gets drunk. He finds himself in hell-"the hell of conscious failure in ambition and in love." (Hardy) This is the second stage of the tragedy of Jude.

Jude's heart starts to burn with love once more when Sue returns to him after leaving her husband. He destroys his theological and ethical works and gives up on becoming a licentiate altogether. On this occasion he meditates: "Strange that his aspiration-towards apostleship-had also been checked by a woman." (Hardy) So his academic and religious goals suffer yet another setback as a result of his weakness for women. In the end, Sue gives in to him sexually and gives birth to two kids. Jude is left abandoned and lonesome when she decides to return to Phillotson after the family tragedy has claimed the children. His health completely fails, and he passes away painfully. It should be mentioned that the tyranny of social norms and institutions is what led to Sue abandoning Jude.

In addition to being the tragedy of Jude, Jude the Obscure is also the tragedy of Sue. She is an impulsive being. She has developed several views that are in opposition to conventional ways of thinking and living. She hastily and impulsively marries Phillotson, which leads to her rapid descent into misery. She ultimately decides to move in with Jude and leave Phillotson. She married Phillotson, which has ruined her life. She subsequently begins to coexist with Jude without engaging in sexual activity, but eventually succumbs to his demands as a result of her jealousy of Arabella. She and Jude enjoy a few years of happiness together before the family is suddenly struck by tragedy. When Father Time hangs her two children before killing himself and leaving her third kid to be stillborn, she experiences a tragedy. This occurrence almost makes her angry. She starts to believe that she had been leading an immoral life with Jude and that she had betrayed the sanctity of her marriage to Phillotson, which she had been punished for. She tells Sue: "I have had dreadful fears, a dreadful sense of my own insolence of action. I have thought that I am still his (Phillotson's) wife!" (Hardy) She further says: "Arabella's child killing mine was a judgement-the right slaying the wrong. What, what shall I do! I am such a vile creature-too worthless to mix with ordinary human beings." (Hardy) She then decides to remarry Phillotson and lead a life of self-abnegation. She mortifies her flesh. She is miserable enough after this remarriage, but her misery further increases when she

physically surrenders herself to Phillotson in order to make amends for her lapse of allowing Jude to kiss her. This surrender of her body to Phillotson is a kind of self-immolation. Towards the end of the novel, Mrs. Edlin describes her condition: "Tired and miserable, poor heart. Years and years older than when you saw her last. Quite a staid, worn woman now, 'Tis the man (Phillotson); she cannot stomach him even now." (Hardy) And Arabella rightly declares that she will never find peace. Sue's tragedy is complete.

There are various causes of for the tragedy of Sue. Sue's irrational behaviour led to her tragic situation. She makes a mistake by marrying Phillotson in the first place. Second, she exhibits excessive Puritanism when she refuses to have a sexual connection with Jude when they first move in together. Third, she suffers the consequences of social mores and institutions, particularly the institution of marriage. Fourthly, the tyranny of social customs directly contributed to the deaths of her children; if the landlords and landladies had provided Jude and Sue housing, Father Time would not have made the unfortunate decision to kill himself and hang the other two kids. The tragedy of Sue finally comes to a head when she returns to Phillotson and gives herself over to him. Her tragedy establishes the supremacy of conventions and social codes.

Jude the Obscure is primarily a novel about the tragedy of Jude and Sue, but it also seems to be about Phillotson. Phillotson is a decent man, and we respect and feel sorry for him. Like Jude, he has cerebral aspirations that are quickly dashed. After marrying Sue, he must subsequently give her permission to move in with her lover. He not only loses his wife as a result of this action, but also his job. His condition is described thus: "No man had suffered more inconvenience from his own charity, Christian or heathen, than Phillotson had done in letting Sue go." (Hardy) Ultimately Sue comes to him again, and even surrenders herself physically, but this is no comfort to him.

In great part, Phillotson caused his own misfortune. He marries a girl who is much younger than he is, even though he is of sufficient age to be her father. After marrying her, he permits her to leave for her lover. This is a noble deed on his part, but society views it negatively and punishes him for it. He almost becomes an outcast in society. He is now forced to live in extreme poverty, on the verge of hunger. Like Jude and Sue, Phillotson is a victim of the normative attitude of society.

## Conclusion

The novel is deeply pessimistic and a tragedy of love and unfulfilled aims. But it also causes the catharsis of pity and anxiety. The main emotion evoked by this novel's depictions of Jude and Sue's mental agony and suffering is without a doubt pity. Another important theme in the novel is fear. The terrible act that Father Time commits brings the terror to a head. As Jude lies dying in his bed and Arabella leaves heartlessly, the feeling of anxiety reaches a new peak. Without a question, the most harrowing and heartbreaking scene is when Jude dies. Of course, the novel also evokes other feelings like love, respect, adoration, a sense of the universe's mystery, and awe for the unknowable Power that controls the universe's affairs, and so on. Hardy examines the worst possible outcomes for humans in the novel. This is the pessimism of Hardy. Hardy's novel *Jude the Obscure* is his darkest or bleakest novel of his all novels.

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