



THOMAS HARDY'S JUDE THE OBSCURE: THE PUZZLING PARADOX

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ABSTRACT

Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* is a fine study of man-woman relationship. The novel yields various interpretations. As a traditional story teller, Hardy regarded life as a psychological fact and the novel is mostly concerned with the relation of the sexes. The novel gives the sense of tragic despair. Despite their deep attachment and love, Sue and Jude's love story ends tragically. Arabella in the novel is the only character who knows to find her way and finally survives. Sue's character is complex one that becomes the cause of rift and eventual doom of Jude who since his very birth to death remains and dies in obscurity. Hardy greatly succeeded in portraying the characters in the novel and the secret of his success lies in his understanding and sensing every pulse of man-woman relationship. The present paper attempts to study the characters, their psychology, and their responsibility in bringing about disruption and eventual tragedy.

Key words: love, paradox, character, psychology, disruption etc.

Introduction

Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* was much appreciated and criticised too. Most of the criticism was based on moral ground rather on aesthetic one. Hardy's art here marks its zenith by his subtle psychological understanding of characters. There is philosophical truth and germs of practical wisdom which are true and valuable forever. The characters in the novel are well-adjusted to their environment and to each other. He has portrayed all shades, degrees and varieties of passions; still there is perfect correspondence between individual and his passions. Sue's role in the novel is profound. It is through her character that Hardy presents the puzzling paradox of love, sex and character. Jude Fawley, after whom the novel is entitled, perishes because of certain flaws in his character, his romantic nature and failure in understanding the female characters in his life. Arabella

Donn is the least complicated character who knows what she wants and goes about getting it.

Arabella Donn

Arabella is practical in having no romantic notions about life. She has neither an idealism of any kind nor intellectual craving. She is Machiavellian in sense that she is guided by her own will having no conscience. She would not allow to be hampered by any kind of consideration in pursuit of her worldly ends. She is "fine dark eye girl, not exactly handsome" but her physique "had round prominent bosom full lips" and she could produce artificial dimple adroitly (46). By her coquettish means she entraps Jude. She tantalizes him and by giving him what the youth like him wants, entraps him. She uses her trump card of fake pregnancy and thereby dupes him into marriage. No sooner she marries Jude, she realises her folly in marrying 'a

tender hearted fool'. Since she finds no prospect of betterment in life with Jude she prepares to leave him unscrupulously. Being practical, she knows "money matters work better" and marries Cartlett .

She is perfect in judging the character and guessing the situation. She shrewdly perceives that Jude and Sue were not married when she happens to encounter the couple. When she is left alone after the death of Cartlett she turns her attention to Jude again. She perfectly knows that the girl like Sue "slim fidgety little thing" cannot satisfy Jude. She is shrewd in the art of persuasion too. She enkindles the desire in Phillotson to get back Sue. She cares but very little about scruples and has no sense of guilt. She believes that "feelings are feelings! I won't be creeping hypocrite any longer"(388). Somehow she manages to 'catch' Jude once again and again repents having married him. For, this time Jude is so deplorable to her because of his illness. She realises that he will not be able to come out of his 'rivalry' for Sue. She senses the approaching death of Jude and began to find her way with Vilbert. "Well, weak women must provide for a rainy day. And if my poor fellow upstairs do go off- as I suppose he will soon- it's well to keep chances open"(33).

Her ruthlessness reaches its climax when Jude is breathing his last she releases herself in the arm of Vilbert. Her unscrupulous and mercilessness is further seen when Jude dies and she goes to witness 'boat bumping'. It is only after the race is over she goes about in mechanical manner for the arrangement of Jude's funeral.

Jude Fawley

Jude as a boy had great love for learning and Christminster for him was the "city of light". How would not let slip the chance of reading even when he is on the horseback. As Polonius in Hamlet states 'youth is rebel' that is why when he becomes young man he thinks "it is better to love a woman than be a graduate, a parson or a pope"(58). Arabella like a tempest enters in his life and carries away with her all his ambitions. No matter who initiates whom if it contains the full sincerity on both sides. But in the relation between Arabella and Jude the same thing is lacking which Jude is unable perceive. Once she coaxes him a bit he becomes

little lamb tagging behind her. He is unable to understand the plot of her intentions and "rushed at her feet"(68). As a creature of flesh and blood he surrenders the 'weakness of moment' and gets attached to 'lifelong penalty'.

Experience are the real eye openers, they supplants imbecility of a character. The readers get relieved when he is free from Arabella "now he might battle his evil star, and follow out his original intentions"(91). At the same time "he does not want to be cured"(120). His very dream to enter the 'city of light' gets inextricably mingled with his desire to meet Sue, an inimical branch of his family. Again we see him in bashfulness of a lover in that he began to weave curious and fantastic dreams about her. Whenever he is reminded by his conscience that he is married and disruption of coarse conjugal married life with Arabella, he excuses that Sue will be his " a kind star, an elevating power, a companion in Anglican worship, a tender friend "(111).

His nature is so fluctuating that he wants Sue to be his friend and at the same time he "wanted something to love"(120). He began to consider his association with her as something spiritual one and his past affection for Arabella was mere 'erotelepsy'. In the process when his love passes through the stages of friendship, predilection and love is very curious matter. The irony of situation is that whatever the imaginary castles he builds around till now, Sue is far from aware. Of course the greater irony is still ahead.

While Jude is wishing Sue as intellectual companion in Anglican worship, Sue cares for pagan gods. The city of light i.e. Christminster is ruling passion for him because in the history of the city the eminent figures like Newman, Psuey, Ward and Keble looms so large. But Sue cherishes Mill's doctrine, respects Gibbon and Shelley. She has no respect, nor any favourable feelings for Christminster. For her even the importance of Jerusalem is played out. But love is, as a rule, blind.

Jude becomes blind to great differences that are the part of their psychological makeup but draws out similarities according to his own convenience. Moreover he should have kept his ear attentive when Sue reveals the episode of her

intimacy with a university student. She confess that "people say I must be cold hearted sexless on account of it"(185). It is this curious 'unconsciousness of gender' that destroys her scholar friend. No doubt it destroys 'gross' Jude too. Nevertheless, Jude romanticises that though they debate much on the hypothetical subjects, she can be better comrade in the world than any other woman, if only "he could get over the sense of her sex"(190).

Furthermore, he would reproach her for not so often nice in her presence than she is in her letters. The conversation among them when he plays on a piano throws on fundamental similarity and difference:

Not so easily moved?

'I didn't quite mean that'

O, but you are one of that sort, for you are just like me at heart!

But not at head. (204)

Here lies the crux which binds them together and also separates them permanently. In his intense frustration he would call her a flirt and yet become reckless finding her unhappy with Phillotson. Their relation remains pathetic throughout.

Jude marriage with Arabella for second time when Sue again joins Phillotson, is probably his most hopeless enterprise. To a certain extent his estrangement with Sue is desirable, but it is surely a folly of marrying the woman 'not kindred of his soul'. It is merely out of break up with Sue or probably he again seeks the embrace of 'fleshy-low passion woman'(251) because he too is a creature of animal desire. What Sue lacks Arabella has it and has it in sufficient measure. But to forget his "sadly sweet" Sue becomes impossible Arabella could have cured him but "he does not want to be cured' (444). In the worst condition of illness he visits Sue and returns with dejection for life.

No doubt Jude is romantic since his childhood but at the same time he is tender, sympathetic and affectionate. Even if romantically enters into a relation with Arabella, he could not forget his dream for the 'city of light'. To regard him

mere 'passion's slave' altogether will be unjustified. He is conscious about the worth of Arabella "he knew well, too well, in the secret centre of his brain that Arabella was not a worth a great deal as a specimen of womankind" (70). It is Arabella who traps Jude. As a sincere and honest one, Jude marries her out of sense of reparation of a mistake. He is completely unaware of her crafty designs. Once he enters into a marriage he tries his best to save it and puts his likes and dislikes asides. When her fake pregnancy, the very reason which forces him into marriage, comes under light Jude shows remarkable restraint. He does not blame her but says that "those woman friends of yours gave you bad advice" (82). His efforts to keep pace with Arabella cut no ice and it is Arabella who breaks off the relation not Jude. As for affection for Sue he has natural affinity, every reason to feel that she is his counterpart. In his pursuit for intellectual life he sees companionship in her. He seeks conscientious avoidance of Sue initially. His conscience keeps him reminding of his being married. We have deep penetration in his heart when he goes to meet her by the time when Sue develops a relationship with Phillotson. In his drunken state he goes to her to relieve his mind but sleeps there on chair and returns without seeing her in the morning out of sense of guilt.

He shows remarkable restraint while living together with her. His desire is to be always with her. He never asks her for physical relation even when they live together for a year. Nor he does ask her to get married. It is only after when Arabella appears he rebukes Sue for being 'too cold'. But he wants Sue anyhow with him and at the same time he is aware of futility of his efforts and her elusiveness. No doubt he falls prey to Arabella again but this time too Arabella traps him through the cycle of her friends, bar and Vilbert. Moreover, this time he is more shattered and frustrated. In short, when the wheel comes round its full circle, Arabella captures him. This does not meant that he forgets Sue. His love for her is so pathetic and intense that he would call Arabella by the name of Sue goes to meet her and knowing that it will be more disastrous to plead her returns disappointedly.

Sue Bridehead

Sue Bridehead stands poles apart from the rest of Hardy's heroines. She is not romantic like Eustacia Vye in *The Return of the Native*, nor she is like Tess or fleshy like Arabella Donn. Jude the Obscure is Hardy's last masterpiece and Sue is his last best creation. Sue appears in the novel after all the characters are introduced. Before her actual entry in the scene she has just passing reference. But once she appears she carries the novel away from its central character. Her character and relationship with two men Jude and Phillotson is a fine psychological study. It is through her character that Hardy probes deeper into puzzling paradox of love, sex and character. Her hypersensitivity, inconsistency, sexual ambiguity and paradoxical psycho-dynamics that causes the final collapse—both in relation with Jude and in her personality too. The men in her life become mere puppets responding to her whims and yet conscious of her elusiveness. Phillotson, a mature one survives because of his steadfastness but equally hypersensitive and creature of flesh and blood, Jude gets destroyed.

Sue is consistently inconsistent though she is not a coquette. Sue would ask Jude not to love her and then writes back that he may "just out of charity". She would ask him to meet and would cancel the meeting. She is well aware that it is Jude who could provide outlet to her sensitive mind. The manner she runs away from Phillotson is rather eccentric. She jumps out of the window least caring that her adventure might have proved a fatal one. Then she in her peculiar way convinces him to release her from the bond of marriage and when she gets free from the man she does not love, she began to "respect him more than ever"(294).

Her sexual inhibition is a matter of great puzzle. In spite of living together Jude and Sue live separately for one year or so. When we see Jude intensely desires to kiss her she would let him have it but 'incorporeally'. That is why he is so confused that he feels her having "hardly flesh at all; so when I put my arms around you I expect them as through you as through air" (302). It is out of jealousy and fear of Arabella that she surrenders physically and

when she is assured, she asks him to "set your wishes above your gratification"(297).

Her indifference particularly in sexual matters puzzles the readers as it puzzles Jude too. Her opinions about relation are justified sometimes as she tells about her marital relation with Phillotson that:

What tortures me so much is the necessity of being responsive to the man whenever he wishes--- the dreadful contract to feel a particular way in the matter whose essence is its voluntariness! (263)

But she treats alike Jude too, even though she loves him and since he allows every freedom to her. At Register's office when Sue observes the bride and groom she says that the flowers in bride's hand are like garlands which decked the heifers of sacrifice. But Jude's gentle rebuke is reflective and sums up the essence of relation:

Still, Sue, it is no worse for woman than man. That's what some women fail to see, and instead of protesting against the condition they protest against the man, the other victim; just as a woman in a crowd will abuse the man who crushes against her, when he is only the helpless transmitter of the pressure put against him.(352)

Her children are never named "as if they were not embodiment of passion and love. Her masochistic sensitivity to her own privileged suffering exceed any concern of hers for the sufferings of Jude and children"(Kiberd 97).

After the catastrophe of 'hanging', sudden collapse is seen in her personality. it is the same Sue who transforms Jude from believer to radical, who prefers railway station to cathedral and whose "intellect scintillated like star"(421) began to think of penance, self -abnegation etc,. Since beginning she opposes the marriage institution as it is "the climax of love"(349). In short, she is the product of theatrical modernity so shatter by practical experience and again joins Phillotson as reparation of the 'sin'. Yet cannot forget Jude but the sense of 'duty' overcomes. One needs not to wonder

whether she will regain her mental peace after the death of Jude. Arabella provides an epilogue "She's never found peace since she left his arms, and never will again till she's as he is now"(503).

Sue's psychology is really a matter of puzzle. She too is probably aware of her "colossal inconsistency"(217). The more we probe in her character her elusiveness looms yet large. When Phillotson calls her 'clever' girl she sensitively resists and says that "I hate to be what is called a clever girl- I only meant-I don't know what I meant- except that it was what you don't understand" (132). She is in constant dilemma about her own doings. She cares for pagan statues and yet afraid of a landlady. She neither is not exactly a coquette nor is she La Belle Dame Sans Merci. On the other hand she is equally sensitive as Jude. But she could hardly perceive the complications in both the men in her life. "She had least conception how the heart of twain went out to her at this momentary revelation of feeling, and what complication she was building up thereby in the future of both"(132).

Probably no other writer would have portrayed her character more faithfully and realistically than Hardy. Hardy has embodied the subtle shades and nuances of a psychology of modern woman through the character of Sue. She is womanly woman at times as when Arabella threatens her and when Jude asks her why she got married since she does not love Phillotson. Her reply is peculiar at once womanly and reveals the complexity of modern woman. She says that "some women's love of being loved is insatiable and so often is their love of loving" (253). When her curiosity to hunt up a new sensation ceases she realise her folly and joins Jude. She loves Jude on his equal scale but could not respond the time and situation, could not reconcile her views and relationship. Eventually, the dilemma of her character makes her typical Victorian. No doubt the portrayal of Sue is a major achievement of the novel. Heilman regards that:

It is an imaginative feat, devoid of analytical props, for all the descriptive words he uses, Hardy never explains her or places her, as he is likely to do with lesser characters. Sue

simply is, and it is up to the reader to sense the inner truth that creates multiple lively, totally, conflicting impressions. (212)

Reciprocity of love

Despite her intellectuality, Sue finds only Jude the only person as her comrade to relieve her mind. "When they talked on an indifferent subjects there was ever a second silent conversation passing between their emotions, so perfect was reciprocity between them"(252). Their love is reciprocal and so also their loving quarrels. Jude's love for her is intense and pathetic and Sue's love for him is unexplainable. They have differences of opinions, they quarrel upon hypothetical subjects, share same views on subjects like marriage and sex- relations. Just as Jude becomes restless when she marries Phillotson, so is she when he prepares to visit Arabella. After death of their aunt Sue admits that she is not happy with Phillotson, Jude becomes more restless. But he is helpless and at this juncture both are aware of their love for each other. Sue is about to leave:

And they had turned from each other in estrangement, and gone their several ways, till at a distance of twenty and thirty yards both had looked round simultaneously. That look, behind was fatal to the reserve hitherto more or less maintained. They had quickly run back and met, and embracing most unpremeditatedly, kissed close and long.(268)

The scene is at once visualised and handled by Hardy with superb skill and mastery. Thereafter Sue seeks' honourable way to break off with Phillotson. There are yet more instances of unique affinity between them. For instance, Arabella taunts their attachment as "like two children" (262). It is Phillotson who probably grasps the exactitude of the attachment between Sue and Jude. He tells his friend Gillington that:

I found from their manner that extraordinary affinity, or sympathy, entered into their attachment, which somehow took away all flavour of grossness. Their supreme desire is to be together to share

each other's emotions and fancies, and dreams—

Platonic!

Well! no Shelleyan would be nearer to it.(286)

So in spite of this they get separated. To say it grim relish or what not on Hardy's part "It is none of the tragedies of love, that's love's usual tragedy in civilised life, but a tragedy artificially manufactured for people who in a natural state would find relief in parting"(266). The question does not arise whether Sue would ever find relief or will be able to forget Jude. To the epigraph Hardy added line from Robert Browning:

There are two who decline, a woman and I

And enjoy our death in the darkness here"(01).

The death of Jude obviously indicates the virtual death of Sue too.

Feminist Reading

Sue is free from, and rebellious against the concept of gender. She is seen working as paid employee in an ecclesiastical warehouse to the conventionally genteel jobs of a teacher or governess. It is on Jude's insistence she joins Phillotson as an assistant teacher. But the job does not suit her. So when the school inspector pays visit to the school she gets horrified and falls down. This indicates her unsuitability and aversion for the job which imposes anything but feminine on her being. Besides, she is frank and unabashed while talking on sexual matters. She tells Jude that she has no fear of men and in mixing with them. She answers his unasked question that "I have never yielded myself to any lover, if that is what you mean! I have remained as I began"(185).

Her rebellious spirit does not allow her remain there where is the disregard of her dignity. When the school authority expels her she feels that she is now free from the institution where there is distinction between genders, as she says:

Their views of the relation of man and woman are limited, as is proved by their

expelling me from the school. Their philosophy only recognises relations based on animal desire.(208)

At every step she is conscious that she would not, on any account, enact the role of a member of 'oppressed' sex. In the same way when she runs across the river in an escape from the school Jude leaves her for changing her clothes as she is shivering and when she returns " he saw a slim and fragile being masquerading as himself"(179). It is but a bankrupt notion on the part of Jude to think her of as "masquerading as himself" because when she notices Jude watching on her dying clothes, she removes his romantic notion "I suppose, Jude, it is odd that you should see me like this and all things hanging there? Yet what nonsense! They are only a woman's clothes – sexless-cloth and linen"(179). That is why Hardy attires Sue in Jude's suit because; he is anxious to define the precise quality of her femininity, its charm along with its charming precariousness, but also because of her clothing represents of the clichés of sexual stereotyping". (Kiberd 90).

Female Domination

In his essay Lionel Johnson stresses upon the characteristics of Hardy's art. According to him the novels such as Tess of the D'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure "present, either the resolution of discord into a harmony or breaking of harmony by a discord: always the contrast, according to the worth of the performers with that strange organ, the human mind"(02). Jude tries to grasp Sue's mind and tend to respond her 'ethereal love' and Sue the 'refined creature' attempts to stoop to this level; the result is the tragic discord. The conflict lies in the mind and in the psychological makeup Jude and Sue are apart. Jude's pining for the 'city of light' and its description is almost rare in entire range of English fiction. Arabella in the novel is constantly associated with pig and wine. These symbols are bold and apt to suggest her vulgarity. The simile of killing a pig remains with Jude as he too like a pig is exploited and indirectly killed by Arabella in the end. We have the pictures of Samson and Delilah hanged on the wall of the bar in the novel. The picture is obvious emblem that impulsive love is folly that leads to

blindness. Sue name, as Hardy reminds us connotes 'lily' and her surname Bridehead symbolises the conflict between marriage and maidenhood. "Her noble rejection of the sexist role – stereotyping becomes in the end a rejection of the sex itself"(Kiberd 97) .

Hardy's understanding of human psychology is amazing. The soul of universal man is laid bare in his novels. In this novel particularly the conflict of man woman relationship is soon internalised, and we get into the trouble tossed soul of the hero and heroine of the novel. Hardy's novels are fine psychological studies and enlarge our knowledge and understanding of sex-relations not in fragments but in its entirety. After reading we feel that under the given circumstances a man must act, and he will act exactly as Hardy's characters act. For instance, the man like Jude must act or he will act in given circumstances. Inexperienced as he is, falls in the trap of scheming Arabella and began to romanticise and idealise the fickle woman. He is seen to be representative of a romantic youth for whom even the very sun was anything but the useful lamp for illuminating the face of his beloved. There are many a Arabellas in the world, intervening and obstructing the path of men who struggle hard to make their way into the world.

We may recall the face of Helen of Troy as described by Christopher Marlowe as the face that launched thousands of ships and burnt the topless towers of Ilium. In fact we need not to go citing examples; the very epigraph added by Hardy to the first section of the novel touches the universal. The epigraph runs thus:

Yea, many there be that have run out of their wit for women, and become the servant for their sakes. Many also have perished, have erred, and sinned, for women. O ye me, how it can be but the women should be strong, seeing they do thus?(01)

The human conflict under Hardy's hand becomes symbolic of universal conflict. Sue is a product of and bundle of nerves that modern conditions produced. She is "consistently one thing and then another: reckless, then diffident, independent, then

needing support, severe, then kindly, inviting and then offish" (Heilman 212). Her ambiguity is very likely the ambiguity of modern man who is caught between 'two worlds'. She never finds her authentic self as there is nothing in this world is in uniformity. Hardy has faithfully rendered everyman in Sue as when she read out the huge booklist of her private reading to Jude. It is rather not boast on her part but a confession of self defeat, a search for self-therapy. Jude is life-like in the sense that whereas he craves for the intellectual life he could not forget the demands of his feelings. He is both romantic and realistic at the same time. For he realises the absurdity of life that reality is unbearable unless removed by the dreams. Sue may consider herself superior to him neither as when Jude says to her they are similar and she retorts that "nor in our thoughts! Perhaps a little in our feelings" but Jude's reply is thought provoking as he says, "And they (feelings) rule thoughts..."(251). That is why the rationalism of Sue meets a sea change when reality rambles on it. Since in the world we learn from books rather than by actual experience of life, the collapses in personalities as in Sue are inevitable.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it may safely be considered as the disruption in the relation of characters in the novel is the outcome of their own incompatibility to cope with the other character. As for Jude's marriage with Arabella is concerned no prophet probably is needed to predict the future of this marriage. He fails to perceive that except locality he has nothing common with her. Besides, at this time he cherishes his aspirations and too young to realise the practical undertakings of married life. Undoubtedly, marrying her for second time is his worst folly. He has some fine qualities of head and heart and the readers feel sympathy for him. Arabella is attributed with some signs of fallen woman who does not have any scruple but yet she too could not achieve what she needs and has to remain fluctuating among people and the situation. Sue is without doubt a remarkable creation of Hardy who like her creator is a woman much ahead of her times. It is the glory of literature and literary appreciation that there are no absolute rights and

wrongs and the relations in *Jude the Obscure* bears the stamp yet glaringly.

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