

***Jude the Obscure*, the Deprived and Exploited Protagonist in Thomas Hardy's Novel**

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Abstract

Jude the Obscure, the tragic hero of Thomas Hardy's novel, is shown as being exploited and deprived. In *Jude the Obscure* (1895) Jude Fawley and Sue Bridehead are socially hated for their unconventional relationship. The rigid societal and religious norms exploit their desire for personal freedom. Jude's dream of attending Christminster (a fictional representation of Oxford) is crushed by class prejudice. Despite his intellectual aspirations, he remains a stonemason, symbolizing the class barriers that crushed his ambition.

Keywords: Deprived, Exploited, Victorian Society, Academic Ambition

Introduction

Thomas Hardy is one of the greatest novelists of the late Victorian and early Modern period known for his tragic characters. Hardy places the scene of his stories in the English countryside, in a region to which he gave the name of Wessex. The characters in his novels are always natives of the countryside. *Jude the Obscure* is no exception in this context, even though the action of this novel takes place largely in towns, and especially in the city of Christminster. It is true that Sue has mostly lived in a town and that she is therefore, referred to as a "townish girl". But she, like Jude, hails from a family that lived in the countryside. Jude spends the early years of his life in Marygreen, and is essentially a product of the countryside; and the same is the case with Arabella. Thomas Hardy exposes the harsh realities of Victorian society. His works remain timeless in their empathy for the marginalized and their critique of oppressive social structures. Thomas Hardy's novels often depict the lives of the deprived and exploited, offering a powerful critique of the rigid social

structures and injustices of Victorian society. Hardy's portrayal of rural England is filled with vivid characters who suffer due to class constraints, gender norms, and the cruelty of fate.

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In this research paper, the researcher has examined the characters of Jude Fawley. Jude is the characteristic Hardian hero, hypersensitive, high-principled, essentially soft-minded actual in a Victorian working man. We know him in much more detail than we know Clym Yeobright and Angel Clare in *The Return of the Native* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* respectively.

We first meet Jude Fawley when he is a boy of eleven, living with his great-aunt in the village of Marygreen. Jude has lost both his parents and is brought by his none-too-sympathetic great-aunt who treats him as a liability forced upon her by circumstances. Jude strikes us at this time as a sensitive and sentimental lad who feels overcome by a feeling of distress at the departure of the schoolmaster,

Phillotson, to whom the boy was greatly attached. Indeed, we are told that “tears rose into the boy’s eyes”, when the schoolmaster was leaving.

Jude is a dreamy and reflective type of boy, who has a feeling that he is not wanted in this world. In fact, he discovers this resemblance between himself and birds, namely that neither he nor the birds are wanted in this world.

Early in life, Jude shows an innate love of knowledge and a natural inclination to study. The growing boy becomes more and more interested in Christminster, the city of learning which he regards as “the heavenly Jerusalem”, and which he conceives of as “the city of light” and “the tree of knowledge.” Often, Jude strains his eyes just to catch a glimpse of the city of Christminster on the distant horizon.

In the pursuit of knowledge, Jude strikes a bargain with the quack-doctor, Vilbert, who promises to lend him books of Latin and Greek grammar, but who badly lets him down, finding, that no intellectual light can be obtained from this source. He then manages to obtain a couple of grammar books by post from his old teacher, Phillotson, and begins to grapple with them with all his mental resources. However, he feels miserable on finding that he cannot make any headway with these grammar books without guidance. It is at this stage that Hardy 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 the Obscure,
p.36)

This may be regarded as the first stage in the history of Jude’s intellectual tragedy.

During the next three or four years Jude continues his private efforts at acquiring an acquaintance with classical authors and then with Christian theological books. His intellectual ambitions continue to develop and he wishes, next to being a scholar, to be a Christian divine. Christminster, the city of light and lore, gets an even deeper hold on his mind. Considering that Jude has to depend on self-effort only, his intellectual progress is commendable. He has read two books of the *Iliad*, done some mathematics, acquainted himself with the Fathers and with Roman and English history. He has begun also to harbour thoughts of becoming a Doctor of Divinity and eventually a Bishop. He says to himself;

“I must save money, and I will: and one of those colleges shall open its doors to me---shall welcome whom now it would spurn, if I wait twenty years for the welcome. I’ll be D.D. before I have done!” (Jude the Obscure, p .44)

At this stage fate intervenes in the shape of Arabella Donn whose personality distinctly utters the unvoiced call of woman to man, which is promptly answered by Jude who has a sensual streak in his nature. This is the second stage in the account of the tragedy of Jude’s intellectual aims. Joseph Beach says, “Jude is weak and without knowledge of life: and he falls victim to the wiles of a

vulgar woman, whom he marries under the persuasion that he must save her from disgrace. This is the particular ruin of his hopes.”³

The disappointment of Jude’s academic ambition is not wholly due to the want of money and the want of encouragement. There is in Jude a strong streak of sensuality which asserts itself at various times in the course of his brief life. The first such occasion is his encounter with Arabella whose physical charms and voluptuous body he cannot resist. Having an extremely simple nature, he is unable to perceive the cunning devices that Arabella employs to entrap him as her husband. He is lured into marrying her, his sense of honour as a man compels him to adopt the only course open to him if Arabella has become pregnant by him as she claims to be.

The marriage proves, as was only to be expected, a complete failure. Jude has sensitive, refined nature, while Arabella is coarse and over – worldly. The disparity of temperaments between the two leads to a separation, but during all this time of two, or three years, Jude’s studies were forgotten. In other words, his weakness for a woman proves a hindrance in the way of his academic progress.

Another obstacle which hinders the academic progress that Jude might have made is his getting entangled with his cousin Sue Bridehead. Sue becomes an even greater obsession with him than his academic ambition was earlier. But the fact is that he cannot resist the physical charms of Sue, especially when with her physical attraction she combines an exceptional intelligence which makes its own appeal to Jude. He is fully aware of the reasons which should prevent him

altogether from getting emotionally involved with Sue. In the first place, he is already a married man. Secondly, she is so closely related to him that any matrimonial alliance with her, even after divorcing Arabella, might be looked upon with disapproval from the religious point of view. Thirdly, marriages in the family from which Jude and Sue are descended have generally not been successful. In spite of these reasons, Jude simply cannot subdue the flame of passion that Sue kindles in his breast.

Jude suffers, and suffers deeply throughout his life, and dies under tragic circumstances. True, he has had a certain amount of ecstatic joy in the company of Sue, especially during the period when she surrenders herself to him in a physical sense, but that happiness is short-lived as compared to the total duration of his misery and the intensity of that misery.

At no stage in the novel is there any reason for us to doubt Jude’s integrity. There is no cunning in his nature; he never resorts to any unfair or crooked means to attain his ends; he is always honest and truthful.

Jude, we are to understand, is a sensualist and a man who, at crucial times in his life, seeks consolation, in liquor. But as we see him under these aspects in the novel, he is certainly not more sensual or more of a drinker than the average men. Neither Jude’s sexual nor does his drinking exploit him. But they are anything out of the ordinary, and if these could have produced little effect on the course of his life other circumstances had not intervened. What bring about Jude’s tragedy are the intellectual ambitions which are beyond the reach of a man of his humble social position to attain. The common-sense

advice to a man of his social position and with his intellectual ambitions is given by the distinguished academician who writes to him;

“That you will have a much better chance of success in life by remaining in your own sphere and sticking to your trade than by adopting other course” (Jude the Obscure, p.144)

Jude’s tragedy is due to the following causes: first, his humble birth and poverty which make his entry into the temples of learning in Christminster impossible; second, his weakness for womankind or the sensual element in his nature, which interrupts his studies when he was still at Marygreen; third, his passion for Sue who, despite her affinity with him, is differently constituted and whose behaviour proves to be most capricious and erratic; fourth, the tyranny of social customs and institutions like marriage which do not allow the necessary freedom to the individual to live his or her own life and an infringement of which leads to disastrous consequences

and fifth, his impulse to strong liquor which is responsible for his remarriage to Arabella who proves his undoing once again.

Conclusion

Like rest of Hardy’s novels, in *Jude the Obscure* his tragic hero is from the working-class. He is intelligent, honest, and simple-minded. Hardy has taken here his theme and hero from a strictly contemporary world, and Jude is a man who is defeated by the contemporary world. Jude leaves his class, and hopes to rise in the world. This is not just ambition, although that has something to do with it; it is much more, the yearning for a life which is intellectually and morally better than one he is expected to lead. Like all true heroes of Hardy’s novels, Jude aspires for something greater. He overreaches the severe constraints his humble background, his utopian ambition to study at Christminster and his utter lack of financial means, which hampered his progress.

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