

JUDE THE OBSCURE

Thomas Hardy



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Introduction and Notes by Amy M. King

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Thomas Hardy



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FROM THE PAGES OF JUDE THE OBSCURE

“You know what a university is, and a university degree? It is the necessary hall-mark of a man who wants to do anything in teaching.”

(page 10)

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. 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. (page 31)

Jude Fawley shouldered his tool-basket and resumed his lonely way, filled with an ardour at which he mentally stood at gaze. He had just inhaled a single breath from a new atmosphere, which had evidently been hanging round him everywhere he went, for he knew not how long, but had somehow been divided from his actual breathing as by a sheet of glass. The intentions as to reading, working and learning, which he had so precisely formulated only a few minutes earlier, were suffering a curious collapse into a corner, he knew not how.

(page 42)

Their lives were ruined, he thought; ruined by the fundamental error of their matrimonial union: that of having based a permanent contract on a temporary feeling which had no necessary connection with affinities that alone render a life-long comradeship tolerable.

(page 71)

Weary and mud-bespattered, but quite possessed of his ordinary clearness of brain, he sat down by the well, thinking as he did so what a poor Christ he made. (page 128)

She looked into his eyes with her own tearful ones, and her lips suddenly parted as if she were going to avow something. But she went on; and whatever she had meant to say remained unspoken. (page 180)

He knew he should go to see her again, according to her invitation. Those earnest men he read of, the saints, whom Sue, with gentle irreverence, called his demi-gods, would have shunned such encounters if they doubted their own strength. But he could not. He might fast and pray during the whole interval but the human was more powerful in him than the Divine. (page 213)

“Sometimes a woman’s love of being loved gets the better of her conscience, and though she agonized at the thought of treating a man cruelly, she encourages him to love her while she doesn’t love him at all.” (page 248)

“All laughing comes from misapprehension. Rightly looked at there is no laughable thing under the sun.” (page 282)

His hope that he was recovering proved so far well grounded that in three weeks they had arrived in the city of many memories; were actually treading its pavements, receiving the reflection of the sunshine from its wasting walls. (page 327)

“Do not do an immoral thing for moral reasons!” (page 362)

“The best and greatest among mankind are those who do themselves no worldly good. Even



JUDE THE OBSCURE

Thomas Hardy

With an Introduction and Notes
by Amy M. King

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Consulting Editorial Director



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Introduction, Notes, and For Further Reading

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Note on Thomas Hardy, The World of Thomas Hardy and *Jude the Obscure*, Inspired by *Jude the Obscure*, and Comments & Questions

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THOMAS HARDY

Thomas Hardy was born on June 2, 1840, in the village of Higher Bockhampton, near Dorchester, market town in the county of Dorset. Hardy would spend much of his life in his native region, transforming its rural landscapes into his fictional Wessex. Hardy's mother, Jemima, inspired him with a taste for literature, while his stonemason father, Thomas, shared with him a love of architecture and music (the two played the fiddle in the parish choir and at local dances). As a boy Hardy read widely in the popular fiction of the day including the novels of Scott, Dumas, Dickens, W Harrison Ainsworth, and G. P. R. James, and in the poetry of Scott, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, Keats, and others. Strongly influenced by the Bible and the liturgy of the Anglican Church in his youth, Hardy later contemplated a career in the ministry; but his assimilation of the new theories of Darwinian evolutionism eventually made him an agnostic and a severe critic of the limitations of traditional religion.

Although Hardy was a gifted student at the local schools he attended as a boy for eight years, his lower-class social origins limited his further educational opportunities. At sixteen he was apprenticed to the architect James Hicks in Dorchester and began an architectural career primarily focused on the restoration of churches. In Dorchester Hardy was also befriended by Horace Moule, eight years Hardy's senior, who acted as an intellectual mentor and literary advisor throughout his youth and early adulthood. From 1862 to 1867 Hardy worked in London for the distinguished architect Arthur Blomfield, but he continued to study—literature, art, philosophy, science, history, the classics—and to write, first poetry and then fiction.

By the early 1870s Hardy's first two published novels, *Desperate Remedies* and *Under the Greenwood Tree*, appeared to little acclaim or sales. With his third novel, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, he began the practice of serializing his fiction in magazines prior to book publication, a method that he would utilize throughout his career as a novelist. In 1874, the year of his marriage to Emma Gifford St. Juliot, Cornwall, Hardy enjoyed his first significant commercial and critical success with the book publication of *Far from the Madding Crowd* after its serialization in the *Cornhill Magazine*. Hardy and his wife lived in several locations in London, Dorset, and Somerset before settling in southwest London for three years in 1878. During the late 1870s and early 1880s Hardy published *The Return of the Native*, *The Trumpet-Major*, *A Laodicean*, and *Two on a Tower* while consolidating his place as a leading contemporary English novelist. He would also eventually produce four volumes of short stories: *Wessex Tales*, *A Group of Noble Dames*, *Life's Little Ironies*, and *A Changed Man and Other Tales*.

In 1883 Hardy and his wife moved back to Dorchester where Hardy wrote *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, set in a fictionalized version of Dorchester, and went on to design and construct a permanent home for himself, named Max Gate, completed in 1885. In the later 1880s and early 1890s Hardy wrote three of his greatest novels, *The Woodlanders*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, and *Jude the Obscure*, all of them notable for their remarkable tragic power. The latter two novels were both initially published as magazine serials in which potentially objectionable moral and religious content was removed by the author, only to be restored in book publication; both novels nevertheless aroused public controversy for their criticisms of Victorian sexual and religious mores. The appearance of *Jude the Obscure* in 1895 in particular precipitated harsh attacks on Hardy's alleged pessimism and

immorality, contributing to his decision to abandon the writing of fiction after the appearance of his last-published novel, *The Well-Beloved*.

In the later 1890s Hardy returned to the writing of poetry that he had abandoned for fiction thirty years earlier. *Wessex Poems* appeared in 1898, followed by several volumes of poetry at regular intervals over the next three decades. Between 1904 and 1908 Hardy published a three-part epic verse drama, *The Dynasts*, based on the Napoleonic Wars of the early nineteenth century. Following the death of his first wife in 1912 Hardy married his literary secretary Florence Dugdale in 1913. Receiving a variety of public honors in the last two decades of his life, Hardy continued to publish poems until his death at Max Gate on January 11, 1928. His ashes were interred in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey in London and his heart in Stinsford outside Dorchester. Regarded as one of England's greatest authors in both fiction and poetry, Hardy has inspired such notable twentieth-century writers as Marcel Proust, John Cowper Powys, D. H. Lawrence, Theodore Dreiser, and John Fowles.

THE WORLD OF THOMAS HARDY AND JUDE THE OBSCURE

- 1840** The eldest of four children, Thomas Hardy is born on June 2 in Higher Brockhampton, near Dorchester in the county of Dorset. His father, Thomas, is a master stonemason, and his mother, Jemima, teaches her son to read at an early age. Hardy's frail health prevents him from entering the village school until age eight.
- 1848** Hardy enters the village school, where he soon surpasses the other students. He reads Samuel Johnson, John Dryden, and William Shakespeare, among others, and develops a love of education that will persist throughout his lifetime. He cultivates his love of music, playing the fiddle with his father in the parish choir.
- 1850** Jemima enrolls her son in a school in Dorchester, where he studies for the next six years.
- 1856** After helping his father design renovations for a country church, Hardy is awarded an apprenticeship to the Dorchester architect John Hicks. Disappointed at not having the means to attend Oxford or Cambridge, he studies Greek and other subjects in his free time and develops a close friendship with Horace Moule, a vicar's son who becomes his mentor.
- 1862** Hardy leaves Dorset to work for a prominent architect, Arthur Blomfield, in London. He finds time to nurture his creative writing but fails in attempts to publish his poetry. He visits museums and plays, takes French lessons, and attends a reading by Charles Dickens.
- 1863** Hardy becomes engaged to Eliza Nicholls. He is awarded an essay prize by the Royal Institute of Architects.
- 1865** Hardy's first published essay, "How I Built Myself a House," appears in the Dorchester paper Chambers's Journal.
- 1866** The engagement to Eliza Nicholls is broken off.
- 1867** Failing health necessitates a return to Dorchester, where Hardy again works for John Hicks. He writes his first novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady* (authored by "the Poor Man").
- 1869** *The Poor Man and the Lady* is rejected for publication. Hardy takes a position in Weymouth as an architect specializing in church restoration.
- 1870** Hardy meets his future wife, Emma Lavinia Gifford, while on a trip to Cornwall.
- 1871** Tinsley Brothers publishes the novel *Desperate Remedies* at Hardy's expense.
- 1872** Hardy moves back to London, where he creates architectural plans for schools. Emma's father refuses to allow Hardy to marry her. Hardy publishes *Under the Greenwood Tree* with Tinsley; another novel, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, is serialized in Tinsley's Magazine and the New

- 1873** Hardy is devastated by the suicide of his close friend Horace Moule.
- 1874** Far from the Madding Crowd, Hardy's first commercially successful novel, appears. Hardy and Emma marry. Over the next several years the two move many times between London and Dorset, and travel abroad.
- 1878** Return of the Native, another novel, appears.
- 1880** The Trumpet Major, a novel, is published. Hardy suffers from internal hemorrhaging and is confined to bed for many months. During this time, he dictates a novel, A Laodicean, to his wife.
- 1885** Hardy moves into Max Gate, the home he and Emma have designed and built near the city of Dorchester. He will write some of his greatest novels here.
- 1886** Another novel, The Mayor of Casterbridge, is published (Casterbridge is Hardy's name for Dorchester).
- 1888** Wessex Tales, Hardy's first collection of short stories, is published.
- 1891** Tess of the d'Urbervilles appears after being severely edited by the publisher. The novel raises a storm of controversy for its treatment of marriage and religion. Many praise Hardy as England's greatest novelist.
- 1892** Hardy's father dies.
- 1893** On a trip to Dublin, Hardy meets Florence Henniker, with whom he has a relationship. Marital troubles between Hardy and Emma are ongoing.
- 1895** Jude the Obscure appears after it is serialized in Harper's New Monthly Magazine as The Simpletons and Enduring Hearts. Like Tess, Jude is highly controversial. It is Hardy's last novel, and he turns to poetry.
- 1904** Hardy's mother dies.
- 1912** Emma Hardy dies, inspiring the highly personal "Poems of 1912-13."
- 1914** Hardy marries his longtime secretary, Florence Dugdale. The onset of World War I causes Hardy intense sadness and disillusionment.
- 1919** Collected Poems is published.
- 1920** Hardy is celebrated in England and abroad on his eightieth birthday.
- 1928** Hardy dies of a heart attack on January 11 at Max Gate. His ashes are placed in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey in London; his heart is buried next to the remains of his first

wife, Emma, in Stinsford.

INTRODUCTION

For a novel addressed by a man to men and women of full age; which attempts to deal unaffectedly with the fret and fever, derision and disaster, that may press in the wake of the strongest passion known to humanity; to tell, without a mincing of words, of a deadly war waged between flesh and spirit; and to point the tragedy of unfulfilled aims, I am not aware that there is anything in the handling to which exception can be taken.

—Thomas Hardy, *Preface to the first edition of Jude the Obscure* (1895)

Thomas Hardy perhaps already sensed that there were elements in the first edition of *Jude the Obscure*—but not in the “abridged and modified” version of the novel serialized in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*—that would prompt what he calls “exception.” And indeed readers did take exception—exception, in particular, to what had been excised from the heavily bowdlerized serial version of the novel. The serial version omits the sexual component of the relationship between Jude Fawley and Sue Bridehead; it casts them instead simply as friends and cousins, their children adopted rather than the product of an illegitimate union. The editor at *Harper’s* kept Hardy to his contract despite Hardy’s attempt to extricate himself from it when the writing blossomed into something that would not suit the readership of the magazine. Instead, as Robert Purdy shows in *Thomas Hardy: Bibliographical Study*, in response to the editor’s (apologetic) protest about the content, Hardy consented to revise and bowdlerize the story. For the first edition of the narrative in volume form, Hardy returned to the narrative what we might call his original intentions—those elements he had taken out, as he pens in the margins of his manuscript copy, “for serial publication only.” The resulting fiction is one that indeed captures both the “deadly war waged between flesh and spirit” and the tragedy of a person whose goals and aims result in failure: the tragedy, indeed, of the obscure.

The negative response to the appearance of *Jude the Obscure* on the literary scene of 1895 was strong but not unanimous. The Bishop of Wakefield famously reported that his disgust at the moral tenor of the book had prompted him to throw it in the fire—an act that Hardy refers to in his postscript (written in 1912) as a substitution practiced “in his despair at not being able to burn me” (p. 4). Moral outrage at the novel was promulgated by newspaper reviews in America and England alike, though the literary luminaries of the day issued more sober appraisals, acknowledging both the difficulty of the subject and yet, in some cases, continuing the castigation. Mrs. Margaret Oliphant, a prolific and popular novelist and reviewer of the day, writing in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* in January 1896, declared that the novel was a “nauseous tragedy” and “an assault on the stronghold of marriage.” At stake in the novel, according to Oliphant, was the institution of marriage, for she read Hardy’s plot line social prescriptions that veered from the shocking to the grotesque. In referring to the violence suffered by Jude’s children, she bitingly asks: “Mr. Hardy knows, no doubt as everybody does, that the children are a most serious part of the question of the abolition of marriage. Is this the way in which he considers it would be resolved best?”

William Dean Howells, the American novelist and editor, defended Hardy’s novel in the December 7, 1895, issue of *Harper’s Weekly* magazine by pointing out that the genre was tragedy: “It has not only the solemn and lofty effect of a great tragedy ... but it has unity very uncommon in the novel, and especially the English novel.” If there are displeasing elements of the book—and Howells states as much, and warns us that the novel “is not for all readers”—they are elements that Howells suggests

“are deeply founded in the condition, if not the nature of humanity.” Edmund Gosse, an influential reviewer and novelist, would go further in the January 1896 issue of the journal *Cosmopolis* and write that “censure is the duty of the moralist and not the critic.” Yet despite his admiration for the novel even Gosse acknowledges that he felt disgust at certain of its elements. In defense of the novel he pleads for Hardy’s stature as reason to grant him leeway about his themes. At best, Gosse suggests, we should acknowledge the power, even if negative, of Hardy’s art: “We may dislike her, we may hold her intrusion into our consciousness a disagreeable one, but of her reality there can be no question. Arabella lives.” If Arabella lives on in the consciousness of innumerable readers of *Jude the Obscure* it is an impression that has a history beginning with the novel’s first issue.

Hardy’s stature as a novelist when *Jude the Obscure* was published guaranteed him a certain degree of critical attention, but the attention he was to receive was so negative as to alter the course of his career. *Jude the Obscure* was Hardy’s final novel. In one of the strangest turns in literary history Hardy at the age of fifty-five turned to poetry, which he continued to write until his death in 1928 at the age of eighty-eight. In letters to close friends he pretends a somewhat jaunty indifference to the negative response to *Jude*, but in an essay entitled “The Profitable Reading of Fiction,” which appeared in the journal *Forum* in 1888, Hardy’s defensiveness about readers suggests the effect the reception of his novel would have upon him:

A novel which does moral injury to a dozen imbeciles, and has bracing results upon a thousand intellects of normal vigor, can justify its existence.... It is unfortunately quite possible to read the most elevating works of imagination in our own or any language, and, by fixing the regard on the wrong sides of the subject, to gather not a grain of wisdom from them, nay, sometimes positive harm. What author has not had his experience of such readers?—the mentally and morally warped ones of both sexes, who will, where practicable, so twist plain and obvious meanings as to see in an honest picture of human nature an attack on religion, morals, or institutions.

If Hardy had become wary of a certain kind of reader, his bitterness toward what he calls “the mentally and morally warped ones” did not prevent him from continuing to believe that such “imbeciles” numbered in the dozens, not the thousands. He continued to tinker with the novel in subsequent editions. In the 1903 edition he tempered the scene in which Arabella throws the pair’s genitals at Jude, while in the 1912 edition he introduces some two hundred small but nevertheless effectively important changes. These changes, which the edition you read here reflects, are generally considered to have been softening gestures to the depiction of Sue. For instance, as the bibliographic critic Robert Slack has shown, in the 1903 edition Jude threatens to return to Arabella unless Sue consents to live with him (and, it is inferred, become his sexual partner), and Sue agrees to it because he has “conquered” her; in the 1912 edition, Sue’s acquiescence is the result of love. The key words “do love you” are included seventeen years after the first publication of the novel. The revisions that Hardy makes go beyond an author’s usual attention to errors in early editions. *Jude* clearly stayed with Hardy in the years following his switch to poetry, though whether we should understand that switch in light of a renunciation inspired by the extremity of the negative reaction to *Jude* or as an excuse for returning to the genre (poetry) with which he began his writing career is less certain; it was, if nothing else, a decisive one.



So why was *Jude the Obscure* so upsetting to many of those who read it when first published? The

representation of the marriage between Jude Fawley and his wife, Arabella, conformed neither to traditional representations of courtship in the English novel, nor to contemporary standards of morality. It was accused of being indecent and permeated with coarse sexuality; even by the end of Hardy's life, when the novel had received its due recognition and had been translated into numerous languages, Jude was remembered with admiration in Hardy's obituary as a great novel of human sexuality. If it is difficult to understand the level of anxiety Hardy's critique of marriage engendered, it is perhaps indicative of how far removed we are from the social context of the time, especially from the issue of marriage and divorce, which was very much in the forefront of the public consciousness in 1890. What became known as the "Parnell case" inspired a public controversy around the subject of divorce as well as becoming the cause celebre of the day. The case began with a Captain William O'Shea, who filed for divorce from his wife on the grounds of her having committed adultery with Charles Parnell, the premier Irish politician and agitator of his day. Although the divorce was granted, the English Liberal Party urged Parnell's resignation on the grounds that his leadership was no longer tolerable. The cause of Irish Home Rule suffered an almost fatal blow from what was widely considered Parnell's moral turpitude. Parnell died in 1891, ruined in reputation and in health, but the discussion and polemics about the question of the sacredness of marriage did not die with him.

Many people consider *Jude the Obscure* to be, among other things, part of that larger discussion of love and its relation to marriage and divorce that was so active in those years. It should be noted that Hardy specifically denied that Jude was a manifesto on what people at that time called "the marriage question." Even so, his own description in the original preface to the novel in 1895 suggests that even if Hardy did not explicitly frame his novel around the sociological issues of the day, he nevertheless was quite aware that the novel spoke to the sometimes vexed relation between "flesh" and "spirit." In describing his intention in writing Jude, Hardy wrote in the preface to the first edition: "To tell, without a mincing of words, of a deadly war waged between flesh and spirit; and to point the tragedy of unfulfilled aims, I am not aware that there is anything in the handling to which exception can be taken" (p. 3).

Jude's "unfulfilled aims" were indeed on display in the novel's representation of how he and Arabella came to be married; two months into a relationship that had clearly turned sexual, Jude proposes going away by himself, as he wishes "some things had never begun!" (p. 58). Arabella's insinuation, later proved false, that she is pregnant prompts Jude to marry her, even though as he acknowledges to her that he had "never dreamt six months ago, or even three, of marrying. It is a complete smashing up of my plans" (p. 58). Hardy denied that any exception could be taken to the "handling"—what we might understand as the representational choices he made—of the tragic event. But the narrative voice describing the scene of marriage can hardly be said to be supportive of the marriage vows: "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" (p. 59).

The critique of marriage here is based on the problem Hardy sees with extending the momentary impulse of sexual feeling into an infinite futurity; in the 1912 edition he underscored his critique by adding language ("at every other time of their lives *till death took them*") that echoed the marriage vow. Here, the marriage vow is represented as a tool of exaggeration, one that extends and codifies a fleeting emotion. The critique of the permanency of marriage continues when Arabella reveals that she had been mistaken in thinking herself pregnant. Jude, already disgusted by the evidence of a false

hairpiece and feigned dimples, is not only stunned by the revelation but cognizant that the “transitory instinct,” or sexual desire, has passed—and yet, as the narrative points out, “But the marriage remained” (p. 63). Here, the persistence of marriage as an outward form is meant to echo the persistence of objects with which the novel opens:

The schoolmaster was leaving the village, and everybody seemed sorry. The miller at Cresscombe lent him the small white tilted cart and horse to carry his goods to the city of his destination, about twenty miles off, such a vehicle proving of quite sufficient size for the departing teacher’s effects. For the schoolhouse had been partly furnished by the managers, and the only cumbersome article possessed by the master, in addition to the packing-case of books, was a cottage piano that he had bought at an auction during the year in which he thought of learning instrumental music. But the enthusiasm having waned he had never acquired any skill in playing, and the purchased article had been a perpetual trouble to him ever since in moving house (p. 9).

The piano is the result of a momentary impulse; bought at auction, it fed an enthusiasm that the schoolmaster used to feel for learning music that was never fulfilled. If the impulse to purchase and play the piano was brief, its persistence as a fact of the schoolmaster’s life beyond its usefulness is evident here at the description of moving day—much like the marriage that remained for Jude long after the impulse that fed that enthusiasm had waned. That Hardy opens his novel with the problem of the piano seems somewhat random unless one understands it in light of the critique of marriage that is to come. The opening passage’s fixation on the persistence of the piano is what we might call a first-level analysis of impulse—a critique here of a piano that is meant to shed light on or foreshadow the more complicated analysis of the persistence of marriage, beyond the life span of the impulse that inspired it, to come. Like the piano for Phillotson, the marriage that “remained” for Jude would become as the piano had for the schoolmaster: “a perpetual trouble to him ever since.”

That Hardy locates the origin of the novel’s tragedy at least in part in the persistence of the social form of marriage beyond its usefulness is evident in his postscript to the novel of 1912. That his intention was to write a tragedy is evident from his reference to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, as well as his realization that the potential conflict between emotions and the social contract of marriage could produce a universal tragedy: “A marriage should be dissolvable as soon as it becomes a cruelty to either of the parties—being then essentially and morally no marriage—and it seemed a good foundation for the fable of a tragedy, told for its own sake as a presentation of particulars containing a good deal that was universal, and not without a hope that certain cathartic, Aristotelian qualities might be found therein” (p. 5). The catharsis that Hardy envisions from the tragedy is evident in the postscript, but it is signaled even earlier, in the title of the novel, *Jude the Obscure*. The way in which Hardy fashions his title alludes quite obviously (and with the heavy irony that is Hardy’s trademark) to tragedy, particularly Greek tragedy: *Jude the Obscure* echoes *Oedipus the King*. Of course the question that immediately ensues is whether an obscure person can have a tragedy—Jude is no king, nor even a prince, as was Hamlet. Hardy signals here that he is attempting to write the tragedy of the contemporary, everyday man.

The particulars of Jude Fawley’s tragedy are the lifeblood of the novel’s plot, though the potential universal aspects of what an obscure person’s tragedy might look like are worth exploring. We might understand the tragedy of the obscure man through three categories: the tragedy of consciousness, the tragedy of restlessness, and the tragedy of instinct. The tragedy of consciousness is particular to the person caught in obscure circumstances—the tragedy that Hardy claims ensues when one has too rich a consciousness for one’s surroundings, when one is more conscious, more aware, of what

happening to one than is necessary. Jude's fine, even rich, sensibility creates the problems that lead to his difficult life. For instance, his finely wrought sympathy—for the birds he is hired as a child to keep away from the farmer's corn, or the pig he cannot kill in such a way as to fetch the highest market price because that would cause the animal additional pain—is the product of a rich consciousness and sensibility that make it difficult to thrive in the social environment into which he was born. In Jude's world we learn that coarser natures, such as Arabella's, triumph over fine ones and that to be one who notices everything may be counterproductive to survival. Jude's decision to kill the pig swiftly, rather than let it bleed slowly to death to ensure a higher-quality meat, puts him at odds with Arabella, who unsentimentally declares, "Pigs must be killed" and later, "Poor folks must live" (pp. 66, 67). The tragedy of consciousness that plagues Jude is behind most of his failures, from his difficulty in walking so as not to kill earthworms to his inability as a working-class man to become a scholar at Christminster.

The tragedy of the contemporary everyday man, the novel seems to suggest, would also partake of the *tragedy of restlessness*. If one turns to the novel's table of contents, one might notice that it is structured in an intriguing way, in six parts, each of which is named after a place ("At Marygreen," "At Christminster," "At Melchester," "At Shaston," "At Albrickham and Elsewhere," "At Christminster Again"). The novel is, quite obviously, about mobility. However, the kind of mobility that Jude experiences is not the kind of heroic upward mobility one sees, for instance, in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, where the main character, Fanny Price, achieves a higher social class by virtue of her exceptional virtue, and where her ascension is signaled by a geographic transplantation, from the socially murky world of Portsmouth to the rural gentility of Mansfield. Jude the Obscure depicts instead a restless, modern mobility, a mobility where one moves back and forth to no apparent purpose. Notice as you read *Jude the Obscure* the amount of moving around that occurs, and the novel's interest in forms of transportation (walking, carts, coaches, and especially trains) and what is possible psychologically and socially as a result of each of these forms of transportation. Jude's lack of grounding in a specific place—the fact not only of his restlessness in relation to the situation in which he was born but also the ensuing psychic homelessness that he experiences—is a kind of dilemma particular to the new subject of Hardy's modern tragedy.

Perhaps the deepest tragedy of all for Hardy is what we might call the *tragedy of instinct*. The tragedy of instinct is a way of describing all those events arising out of human forces that one cannot effectively control through consciousness. That is, those things that occur despite our intentions and move us to act even when we despise ourselves for acting: what Hardy, following the new modern consciousness about the ways of the natural world, actually calls "instinct" in the novel. Hardy brings to prominence this new understanding of instinct, coming from Charles Darwin, through his novel; the novel not only alludes to but can be said to give a full sketch of instinct and unconscious motives, including the instinct for sex and self-preservation. For Jude, determined to educate himself and enter the university despite having been born into the working class, the sexual instinct that takes over when he encounters Arabella is the origin of his particular tragedy. The novel takes pains to show how Jude's intention at every step is to resist this attraction. On several occasions he intends not to meet her, and on the night when they become lovers he intends to leave but is caught up in a playful game in which a chicken egg she has put down her bosom to warm it for hatching becomes seductive. Jude asks:

"Why do you do such a strange thing?"

"It's an old custom. I suppose it is natural for a woman to want to bring live things into the world

...

Then there was a little struggle, Jude making a plunge for it and capturing it triumphantly. Her face flushed; and becoming suddenly conscious he flushed also.

They looked at each other, panting; till he rose and said: "One kiss, now I can do it without damage to property; and I'll go!" (p. 56).

That Arabella strategically hides in an upstairs bedroom for him to find her and claim his parting kiss is meant to be understood as a trap in much the same way that her miming of maternal affection for the egg is indicative, at least symbolically, of the trap being laid for Jude by nature. And yet it would be a mistake to understand Jude's tragedy purely in the light of another person's falseness. A force far greater than Arabella's agency is at work here. The engine that draws Jude, seemingly willingly and yet somehow unwilling, from the darkened, empty parlor to the bed upstairs is sexual instinct. The tragedy of instinct, though here worked out through Jude, is certainly one of the elements of the narrative that Hardy perceived as having universal force.

The title *Jude the Obscure* cuts to the heart of Aristotelian notions of tragedy, for Hardy—perhaps for the first time in the history of the novel, although he is picking up on a question the poet William Wordsworth implies in his poem "Michael" (1800)—asks whether ordinary people, under conditions of suffering, can have the nobility of tragedy. If we have explored in part what the tragedy of the obscure man would be about, we have not yet considered the operating problems for tragedy in Hardy's time. First, it was in this time period that the plays of Henrik Ibsen first appeared on the English stage, and Hardy was among the first members of an association formed to sponsor the production of Ibsen's plays. It is known that while Hardy was writing *Jude the Obscure* in 1893, he attended several performances of Ibsen's plays, including *Hedda Gabler*, a play that established and continues, for many people, to personify social tragedy. Hardy can be said to follow in the aftermath of social tragedy, a genre in which society and an individual come together to create a tragic "problem." The tragedy that ensues, we are meant to understand, is the result of the misalignment of society's processes and the needs of the individual.

Second, Hardy might be said to have coped with the modern twin of the tragic: the "pathetic," a journalistic form of tragedy in which startling events (kidnappings, plane crashes, motiveless murders) bubble up without much background information, and are immediately allegorized by the culture in large ways as "tragic." The eruption of these horrifying events are enigmatic insofar as the real story is not known, and the result is that we invent a background of meaning for these events by giving them the generic stature of tragedy. In essence, the desire to call a horrifying event a tragedy is the desire to confer upon it the dignity of meaning, for "tragedy" is classically about meaningful suffering of a large enough magnitude to attain universal relevance. One can see how Hardy, a novelist who aspired to quotidian realism, might have an odd relation to the events of tragedy, which in general are too far outside the everyday to be the subject for a democratic practitioner of realism. For Hardy the laws of nature replace the role of the gods in traditional tragedy.

The background of these contemporary approaches to tragedy—the Ibsenite tragedy, the journalistic tragedy—created for Hardy a set of questions for his own tragic plot. Since classical tragedy represents suffering that leads to a higher consciousness, meaningful suffering is an expectation that the reader of *Jude* brings to the novel only to have that expectation feel at times frustrated by the banality with which horrible events are rendered almost commonplace. This leads to a major question about the novel: Is the tragedy of *Jude the Obscure* one of social misalignment—the fault of society as Ibsen's social tragedies are—or is it a tragedy of nature? In the former, Jude's tragedy might be

understood as the tragedy of the “laws of nation”: those precedents or customs, enforced by society that Ibsen, for instance, identifies as problems for the happiness of individuals. In this reading of Jude’s tragedy, marriage law and the class bias of Christminster in denying him admission are social problems that provide the engine for the ensuing tragedy. The novel also seems to propose, however, that Jude’s tragedy should be understood as the tragedy of the “laws of nature”: those natural factors such as reproduction, the sex drive, and the Darwinian description of the struggle for scarce resources. In this reading of Jude’s tragedy, the instinct that propelled him to become Arabella’s lover and the nature that made it impossible for him to be cruel made him “unfit” for survival, and prompted the ensuing tragic dénouement. We might understand *Jude the Obscure* as an experiment in deducing which of the two laws, that of society or that of nature, stands behind contemporary tragedies.

Certainly the novel considers both possibilities. Sue Bridehead, for instance, is frequently the voice of criticism about how society and individual happiness are often fatally misaligned: “I have been thinking ... that the social moulds civilization fits us into have no more relation to our actual shape than the conventional shapes of the constellations have to the real star-patterns. I am called Mrs. Richard Phillotson, living a calm wedded life with my counterpart of that name. But I am not really Mrs. Richard Phillotson, but a woman tossed about, all alone, with aberrant passions, and unaccountable antipathies” (p. 211). Jude, who at first attempts to conform to society’s rules, becomes passionate in his rejection of both religion and social law: “It is none of the natural tragedies of love that’s love’s usual tragedy in civilized life, but a tragedy artificially manufactured for people who in their natural state would find relief in parting!” (p. 222).

Sue, who at one point calls legal marriage “vulgar,” is a figure in the novel like Jude, who wants to “progress” beyond the normal social moulds but who is unable to find the courage either to remarry or to live happily unmarried. Ultimately, as the result of the particular horror she experiences, Sue retreats to a conventional morality as a way of doing penance. Jude understands this as the fatal misalignment of social law and their individual happiness: “As for Sue and me when we were at our own best, long ago—when our minds were clear, and our love of truth fearless—the time was not ripe for us! Our ideas were fifty years too soon to be any good to us. And so the resistance they met with brought a reaction in her, and recklessness and ruin on me!” (pp. 409—410). In this formulation of the tragedy, the “laws of nations” are given the blame. And yet the novel nevertheless traffics deeply in the possibility that there was nothing that Jude could have done, and nothing that society could have done to have prevented the tragedy that was his life. The laws of nature, after all, propelled him into a mistaken and even unwanted sexual liaison and marriage with Arabella. The child who results from that union testifies to Jude’s continuing sexual instinct long after his love for Arabella has died, and it is this child—Little Father Time—whose actions initiate and propel those aspects of Jude’s tragedy that most readers find hardest to stomach.

In the wake of those horrific events, Sue’s anguished cry is in many ways the classic question implied and answered by social tragedy: “I am driven out of my mind by things! What ought to be done?” (p. 348). Jude’s response captures the pessimism of tragedy based on natural law: “Nothing can be done.... Things are as they are, and will be brought to their destined issue” (p. 348). Here Jude is quoting from the chorus of the ancient Greek tragedy *Agamemnon*, by Aeschylus, borrowing directly from a Hellenic pessimism that is one of the novel’s most prevalent resources. The educated fatalism of the sentence stems as well from Jude’s realization that his grief is the progeny of the sexual instinct that led him to Arabella. In this light, Sue’s anguished hope that society could reform itself so nothing like this could happen again falls on deaf ears, and Jude’s response (“nothing can be done”) is a

argument that their tragedy was the result of the “law of nature.”



Hardy’s exploration of his characters’ difficulty in understanding what forces are at work in their lives would seem to put him in a long tradition of the English novel, one that had charted the moral growth of its characters and that had employed a rational, analytical, and intellectual vocabulary for the process. Jane Austen, for instance, belongs to this tradition, for her novels suggest that she wants us to understand her characters and perhaps even model our own moral growth upon them. Austen seeks to make us aware of the consequences of acts in the lives of others, and sees her role as that of one who captures a kind of moral and intellectual analysis of character and actions. This approach points to the fact that Austen, as well as many other nineteenth-century novelists, wrote strongly out of a religious tradition of conscience, self-examination, and the weighing of good and evil within actions. To that extent, this kind of novel is a heritage of the English Puritan conscience; it is not coincidental that the early English novel is to a significant extent born out of spiritual autobiography, such as John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. In Austen’s world, motives are knowable and rational, for she believes that people are responsible for themselves and for their lives. This tradition of the novel has been understood as optimistic—Austen’s novels suggest that human beings, once educated by experience, are not driven by irrational or monstrous motives.

To understand Hardy is to make this perhaps somewhat shocking claim: Hardy believes none of this. To describe the persons in his world, Hardy often has them act in ways that they themselves cannot explain. This impacts what we call the “procedure” of the novelist as well, for Hardy in general does not step in to explain for his inarticulate characters the reason behind their actions. Unlike in Austen, where pages upon pages are devoted to rational analysis, in *Jude the Obscure* the characters often seem lost and inarticulate, powerless to understand or explain the events that are occurring. Hardy replaces rational analysis with a different kind of novelistic procedure, which I will discuss momentarily. The important thing to understand is that in Hardy’s novels the conscious thoughts and spoken words of a character are often less important than the unconscious or unknowable drives and wishes that lead someone to act in a particular way.

Hardy’s narrative procedure is distinctive in its use of juxtaposition: the arbitrary act of putting two unrelated facts in collision with one another, in order to make a critique that would otherwise have to be stated analytically. Hardy owes something to the nineteenth-century French novelist Gustave Flaubert for this technique, as does James Joyce, who will later employ it in *Ulysses* when he has a horse defecate at the same moment drunken pub-goers yell anti-Semitic slurs. Jude’s recitation of the Creed in Latin, while drunk in a pub, as well as his admission to Sue about his marriage to Arabel while surrounded by market refuse, are examples of juxtaposition: “It was told while they walked up and down over a floor littered with rotten cabbage-leaves, and amid all the usual squalors of decayed vegetable matter and unsaleable refuse. He began and finished his brief narrative” (p. 171). Here, the intervention of an analytical critique of Jude’s unhappy position is not necessary because the juxtaposition of his story and the rotten refuse produce an obvious, if implied, critique.

Another way in which Hardy’s novelistic procedure is distinctive is the way he employs objects in his narrative. Objects in the novel project a certain reality about the characters with which they are associated; more than symbols, these objects tell a story about the person they are associated with that the inarticulate character cannot say, and which the narrator refuses to spell out for us. A

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