

Irony in jude the obscure



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In his work, *Jude the Obscure*, Thomas Hardy tells the tale of two people hopelessly in love, fighting against both internal and external conflicts to pursue that love and have some semblance of a normal life together. Set in England in the late 19th century, this story is about Jude and Sue's struggle to overcome the harsh pressures of society's strict class structure in order to live their lives together. From the day they meet, Jude and Sue experience countless setbacks that prevent them from attaining happiness. Though their bond is very strong and it appears that they are meant for each other, the pair is unable to remain together. Interestingly enough, many of the disasters that befall this ill-fated couple and the predicaments with which they are forced to deal are ironic. Hardy strategically uses irony in a subtle way throughout *Jude the Obscure* to develop the book's overall marriage theme. The first way in which Hardy uses irony in correlation with the marriage theme is through the two main characters' own personal experiences with marriage. Jude Fawley was slyly tricked into marrying Arabella at a very young age after she told him that she was pregnant with his child and had nowhere else to turn. This relationship quickly fell apart after Jude discovered that there was no child on the way and he realized that a life with Arabella would be an unhappy, confined existence in which he wanted no part. In a similar situation, Sue Bridehead was wed to Jude's childhood schoolmaster, Richard Phillotson, also at a young age. This marriage was based more on convenience for Sue than it was on love, for Phillotson promised a sound financial future for his new wife. Sue entered into this union because she saw no other sensible candidate for marriage. Eventually, the commitments that Jude and Sue made to Arabella and Phillotson served as enormous barriers standing in the way of their lives

together, causing both emotional heart ache and social alienation. The irony in this situation is quite profound. Neither Jude nor Sue truly wanted to be married to their mates, but rather wanted to follow their hearts and marry each other. They both married out of necessity and, ironically, it was these very marriages that kept them from starting a real family together. Hardy, by using this clever device, hints to his audience about implications of marriage and the effect it has on peoples' lives. In an effort to further develop the marriage theme throughout the book, Hardy uses irony again regarding the children of Jude and Sue. The first child that comes into their lives is Little Jude, also known as " Little Father Time" or just " Time". This child, ironically, is not even Sue's. He is the byproduct of Jude's dysfunctional marriage to Arabella, his very existence unbeknownst to Jude until the days immediately prior to his arrival. Little Jude, therefore, stands as a constant reminder to Sue of the illegitimate nature of her relationship with Jude, as if she did not have enough reasons to doubt that relationship beforehand. The child situation is further complicated after the birth of two more children, both mothered by Sue this time. This does not appear to be a problem until Little Jude, acting in what he believes to be a noble manner, kills his two siblings and himself in an effort to solve the problems facing Jude and Sue. Through the horror of this catastrophe, the irony of the situation is still clear. The child of Jude's first marriage is responsible for the death of Sue's only children. Not only did Little Jude's actions take the lives of Jude's two children, but they also caused the downfall of his quasi-marriage to Sue. These events, like a message from the heavens, serve as constant reminders to both Jude and Sue that they cannot be married to two people, stressing the marriage theme even more. Finally, to help develop his overall theme, Hardy uses

irony in the very nature of Jude's relationship with Sue. After a long, arduous relationship that eventually fails, Jude finds the one person with whom he wants to spend the rest of his life. Sue feels the same way about Jude. But after they both find their soul-mates, by some ironic twist of fate, they turn out to be completely wrong for each other; doomed from the start. Their first problem is the very nature of their connection: they are first cousins. Even the idea of having anything more than a platonic relationship with a cousin was seriously frowned upon by the strict, almost prude Victorian society of the time. Sue admits, " It depends on the sort of love; and yours-ours-is wrong" (Hardy, 345). This resulted in both Jude and Sue being practically shunned by society, which made finding work and lodgings quite difficult. To add to the irony of the situation, Jude and Sue are also from a family that is said to be cursed when it comes to marriage. So, doomed by both fate and society, the two lovers are not able to stay together, but forced to live out the rest of their miserable lives with people they do not love. In *Jude the Obscure*, there is one constant theme that rises above all the rest in significance. That theme is marriage. Throughout this novel, marriage is an issue that receives constant attention, playing a huge role in each of the main characters' lives. Hardy, in an attempt to develop this overall theme throughout, uses irony in several key situations the characters face. By using irony subtly in these situations, Hardy is able to not only develop his theme, but he is also able to make a point about life in general. The truth is that life is not always fair. As the reader sees time and time again with Jude and Sue, things do not always end happily. Some things are not meant to be, like Jude and Sue. Regardless of their efforts, the two are unable to make their

relationship work. As Sue puts it, “ All the ancient wrath of the Power has been vented upon us... and we must submit” (Hardy, 342).