

Thomas hardy's jude the obscure

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



The novel *Jude the Obscure*, by Thomas Hardy, was first published unabridged in 1896. It narrates the doomed existence of the protagonist, Jude, from the moment he is still a boy at Marygreen and is inspired by a rural schoolmaster to think of a university education, to the moment in which he dies, alone and unattended. It tells the story of a man whose dreams and ambitions are gradually destroyed, and end up being shattered. Jude lives an eternal cyclical movement, in which he never gets any closer to whatever he is looking for, due to forces which seem to be operating against him all the time. In this essay, I will conduct an analysis of these social forces, in order to show that Hardy did create a realistic depiction of nineteenth century British society. According to Brooks [1], a realistic depiction is similar to the vision we have if go up a high tower and remove the housetops of the houses, to show what is really happening in the rooms exposed.

It is a duty of the realistic writer, to dismantle appearances and not to reproduce the facade, and “ to give us not only the world viewed, as well as the world comprehended . Hardy shows us that Jude is making choices at a certain level, referring to his personal life, but there are social and economic forces which operate on him so he does not take decisions, once these circumstances limit his choices. Early on in the novel, we see Jude struggling against the circumstances. The village of Marygreen is set in opposition to the university town of Christminster. The young Jude sees Christminster as an enlightened place of learning, relating it to his dreams of higher education and his vague notions of academic success. Yet while Jude lives quite close to Christminster and knows a man who is going to live there, the city is always

only a distant vision in his mind. It is nearly within his reach but at the same time unattainable.

This physical distance is a metaphor for the abstract distance between the impoverished Jude and the privileged Christminster students. For the first time in the novel we see Jude heading towards a destination, and being unable to reach it. At the start of the novel, Jude is portrayed as a determined and innocent young man who aspires to things greater than his background allows. He resists succumbing to the discouragement of those around him and does not fear the gap he is creating between himself and the other people of his village. He is seen as eccentric and perhaps impertinent, and his aspirations are dismissed as unrealistic. These circumstances might have led him to marry Arabella. All through his young adult life, he avoids going to Christminster.

He appears to be afraid of the failure he might encounter there. In Arabella, he sees something attainable and instantly gratifying, as opposed to the university life, of which he fears he may never become a part. In this way Jude tries to avoid disappointment, but finds that he cannot live within the confines of an unhappy marriage. The freedom he receives after Arabella leaves is only partially liberating: It lets him be independent in a physical sense, but because he is still married, it forbids him to achieve legitimate romantic happiness with someone else. Jude is attracted to Christminster because of Sue, who he seeks with a strange devotion, despite his aunt's warning that he should stay away from her. Taken together with her warning that marriages in their family never end well and with the fact that they are

cousins, Jude's haste to find and fall in love with Sue creates a sense of foreboding about his fate. He finds that the Christminster colleges are not welcoming toward self-educated men, and when he accepts that he may not be able to study at the university after all, he starts drinking.

“ He began to see that the town life was a book of humanity infinitely more palpitating, varied, and compendious than the gown life. These struggling men and women before him were the reality of Christminster, though they knew little of Christ or Minster. That was one of the humours of things. The floating population of students and teachers, who did know both in a way, were not Christminster in a local sense at all. ” The narrator tells us how big the distance between his aspirations and his reality is, since Jude works so hard that he can no longer dedicate himself to his studies at night: “ So fatigued was he sometimes after his day's work that he could not attain the critical attention necessary for thorough application. He felt that he wanted a coach - a friend at his elbow to tell him in a moment what sometimes would occupy him a weary month in extracting from unanticipative, clumsy books. ” The episode in the pub, in which he recites Latin to a group of workmen and undergraduates, shows the contrast between Jude's intellect and his appearance.

Christminster will not accept him because he belongs to the working class, yet he is intelligent and well-read through independent study, he is advised to remain in his own sphere. The realization that his learning will help him only to perform in pubs sits heavily with Jude, as we can tell from his reaction at the pub: “ ‘You pack of fools! ’ he cried. ‘Which one of you knows

whether I have said it or no? It might have been the Ratcatcher's Daughter in double Dutch for all that your besotted heads can tell! See what I have brought myself to - the crew I have come among! "' He looks for consolation with Sue and shows her what he considers to be his worst side": "... `I am so wicked, Sue - my heart is nearly broken, and I could not bear my life as it was! So I have been drinking, and blaspheming, or next door to it, and saying holy things in disreputable quarters - repeating in idle bravado words which ought never to be uttered but reverently! Oh, do anything with me, Sue - kill me - I don't care! Only don't hate me and despise me like all the rest of the world! "' Jude is comforted only by the idea of becoming a clergyman. Once again, he does have the ability to make a decision, but he only chooses to become a clergyman because his choices were limited by the conventions and prejudices of society.

The moral implications of the friendship and romance between Jude and Sue emerge as an important issue. Jude's doomed existence is also shaped by other people's indecision. Sue shows herself to be both radical in her intellectual views and conservative in her social practices. She leaves the Training College because she discovers that its rules are intolerably strict, and she cannot conform to the rules of her establishment in Melchester either. She comes to see Jude as a protector, and reveals to be quite an impulsive character, and not to care much about Jude's intense feelings for her and the implications of her actions: Suddenly, however, quite a passionate letter arrived from Sue. She was quite lonely and miserable, she told him. She hated the place she was in; it was worse than the ecclesiastical designer's; worse than anywhere.

She felt utterly friendless; could he come immediately? - though when he did come she would only be able to see him at limited times, the rules of the establishment she found herself in being strict to a degree. It was Mr. Phillotson who had advised her to come there, and she wished she had never listened to him. " ... Phillotson's suit was not exactly prospering, evidently; and Jude felt unreasonably glad. He packed up his things and went to Melchester with a lighter heart than he had known for months. " When they meet, the narrator describes her as unhappy and changed, but not anxious and desperate as she was when she wrote the letter, since Jude is the only one overcome by emotion: " Though she had been here such a short while, she was not as he had seen her last. All her bounding manner was gone; her curves of motion had become subdued lines.

The screens and subtleties of convention had likewise disappeared. Yet neither was she quite the woman who had written the letter that summoned him. That had plainly been dashed off in an impulse which second thoughts had somewhat regretted; thoughts that were possibly of his recent self-disgrace. Jude was quite overcome with emotion. " "...

she had altogether the air of a woman clipped and pruned by severe discipline, an under-brightness shining through from the depths which that discipline had not yet been able to reach. " Sue makes it clear that she doesn't see Jude as a lover, and is annoyed by the fact that he is in love with her. She goes back and forth in her protests, sometimes wanting to enter into a romantic relationship with Jude and sometimes believing it to be misguided. When he confesses that he is married, she accuses him of

dishonesty, but there is a hint of disappointment in her tone because his marriage only adds a further obstruction to their possible romance. She marries Phillotson in this state of anger and frustration, and Jude feels that he cannot and should not dissuade her. By doing so, Sue hopes to protect her reputation and achieve the traditional lifestyle of a married woman. After Jude spends the night with Arabella, Sue tries to push him away again, then invites him to her home soon after.

Sue does not know what she wants, but is slowly realizing that she finds Phillotson repulsive. She does not admit to loving Jude, but still turns to him to be her protector. She recognizes her own intellect and her potential for a satisfying career in teaching, and marries Phillotson partly out of a desire for a pleasant work environment. She resists a romantic relationship with Jude, but falls in love with him despite her misgivings. However, when it comes time to marry, she does not wish to enter into a legal contract in which she would again be confined and their financial difficulties push them into a wandering life. The uncertainty surrounding their status foreshadows difficulties to come, as there is a sense of illegitimacy lingering in their relationship. Society disapproves of it, and the children and Sue's pregnancy only add to that.

The tragic conclusion of the novel arises as the inevitable result of the difficulties faced by the two cousins. When Father Time kills himself and the other children, Sue is the one who cannot handle it and starts regarding their relationship as sinful and the death of the children as punishment. She thinks the child of a legitimate union had punished the ones of an illegitimate one,

as the result of her transgressions against the institution of marriage. She marries Philoston again in an act of hopelessness, almost masochistic behaviour, once she feels repulse for him and knows she will never love him. This action may be seen as an attempt to conform, but it is also a selfish act. Sue could have left Jude and lived on her own, kept struggling against conventions as a divorced woman. She finds a solution which is, at the same time emotionally torturing and financially comfortable for her, while Jude remains lonely and poor, having had both his academic and his romantic aspirations destroyed.

Jude then enters a state of self mutilation and acceptance of the suffering. He goes back to Arabella, who once again represents the last and worse of his options, and an act of desistance. After Jude gets sick she immediately starts looking for another possible husband, and slowly reveals, throughout the novel, to be quite an animalistic character. She personifies the danger of a bad marriage, and is heartless to the point of being unable to sacrifice a boat race to be with him while he is dying or even to take care of his body after he dies. The Jude we see in the last chapter is a handicapped version of the young, ambitious one from the beginning of the novel. He is depicted as a man who is exhausted after having spent his life fighting against a strong opponent, represented by nineteenth century British society. It ended up mutilating him and left him with nothing, longing for his death.

The lack of conflicts' resolution and the sense of vagueness in Arabella's suggestion about Sue's miserable future reveal the modernity of the novel. According to Schweik, Hardy successfully images life as first impulsive

passion and confidence leading to disappointments, collapse of hopes, and death. [2] With its open ending, *Jude the Obscure* turns out to be a novel in which the relationship between form and content becomes the form itself.

Bibliography: Brooks, Peter. *Realist Vision*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2005. Hardy, Thomas.

Jude The Obscure. Penguin Popular Classics, England, 1994. Schweik, Robert C. "The Modernity of Hardy in *Jude the Obscure*". In: *A Spacious Vision: Essays on Hardy*. Newmill, The Patten Press, 1994, p. 49-64.

Stern, J. P. "On Realism". In: *Concepts of Literature*. Routledge ; Kegan Paul, 1973. Watt, Ian. "Realism and the Novel".

In: *Essays in Criticism II*, p. 376-396, 1952. ----- [1] Brooks, Peter. *Realist Vision*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2005. [2] Schweik, Robert C. "The Modernity of Hardy in *Jude the Obscure*".

In: *A Spacious Vision: Essays on Hardy*. Newmill, The Patten Press, 1994, p. 49-64.