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On Hardy's View on Marriage Through the Marriage of Jude and Arabella

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Abstract

Thomas Hardy is regarded as the last important novelist of the Victorian age and also in many ways the father of modern English literature. As a novelist, he wrote 14 novels and four collections of short stories. The theme of love and marriage dominates *Jude the Obscure*, the last and also the most controversial novel by the renowned British writer Thomas Hardy. In the book, Hardy mainly portrays three relationships: The marriage between Jude and Arabella, Sue's marriage to Phillotson and the union of Jude and Sue. *Jude the Obscure* tells the story of the relationship among three couples of lovers and also emphatically describes Jude and Arabella's marriage besides the description of Jude and Sue's bonds of romance. The thesis will further demonstrate Hardy's deep pessimism and fatalism to the institution of marriage at that time.

Key words: Thomas Hardy; *Jude the Obscure*; Sex-incited marriage pessimism; Fatalism

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INTRODUCTION

In *Jude the Obscure* Sue, a bachelor girl with her strong revulsion against sex and "licensed marriage" is discriminated against and abandoned by the merciless society, which just exhibits the dark side of the contract

marriage opposing human nature. On the contrary, Arabella, who is a typical character of Flesh, can coerce Jude without any shame only because in her mind, she just regards the marriage as a simple and cold contract. This ridiculous phenomenon is a great satire to the hypocritical "decent" "society" of "justice", etc., the full exhibitions of these female roles make us understand Hardy, his view of love and marriage, and his consciousness of tragedy which has been rooted in people's heart. Of the three marriages, the most unworthy is the one between Jude and Arabella, based on flesh rather than true love. Admittedly, their marriage is a big mistake, but it is an error freely entered into by the two persons concerned; it is hard to imagine what could happen if the marriage is prevented against their wishes, and because of Arabella's deceitful and acquisitive nature, and Jude's gullibility and malleability, their combination is a natural thing.

1. MARRIAGE BASED JN FLESH

Instead of a voluntary union for both the man and woman, marriage contract, in a particular historical period, can be regarded as a form of social bondage. During the most time in our history, even now, marriage is sometimes not a relationship based on mutual love, but reduced to an institution devoted to acquiring wealth, power, and vulgar enjoyment—the enjoyment of voice and countenance, the enjoyment of physical contact rather than spiritual resonance.

Arabella views marriage as a way of acquiring the materials with her payment for the marital merchandise—sex. She once spoke to Sue: "Life with a man is more businesslike after that, and money matters work better" (*JO*. p.283). Having found Jude was learned and knowledgeable, she affirmed her idea that he had the power of earning more money for her to squander. So she seduced Jude, under the guise of pregnancy, she coaxed him into marrying her. Only after marrying Jude she found

he had no ability to meet her monetary lust which was the main reason why she married him, without any tent of hesitation, she deserted him and went to Australia with her parents. There she found a new target—an innkeeper and married him without divorcing Jude because this man could give her a more genteel life; once again, the payment for this was her sexual service together with her beauty. Arabella's indignity, ignorance and even shamelessness, to some degree, proves her nature of philistinism.

Arabella's selfishness is such that she does everything only for his or her own good, without any consideration for others. When she sees Jude for the first time, she is attracted by him utterly. Thus, she throws a piece of flesh on Jude's face to draw his attention. In order to marry Jude, she pretends to be pregnant and cheats him into marriage. An unstable love was hastily built up. Hardy describes it as frivolous and dissolute. In their marriage, the soul or spirit, from the beginning, has crawled at the foot of the flesh. Here is a description of Arabella:

She whom he addressed was a fine dark-eyed girl, not exactly handsome, but capable of passing as such at a little distance, despite some coarseness of skin and fiber. She had a round and especially conspicuous bosom, full lips, perfectly beautiful teeth, and the rich complexion of a Cochin hen's egg. She was a complete and substantial female animal—no more, no less. (Ibid., p.265)

In this extract, the author shows the reader a vivid picture and directs them to appreciate it with the stresses of Arabella's characteristics of the sense of flesh. Hardy described Arabella as the daughter of a butcher, the meaning is self-evident: Arabella is a woman with strong desire of flesh and regards making contract with flesh as a matter of course. The author thoroughly describes her sensual action of playing with feeling and enjoying desire with Jude. Arabella is uneducated. All her life is the pursuit and tricks of seducing males. When she meets Jude who passes by her for the first time, she has identified him as her man, and throws the chitterlings aiming at him. The dirty chitterlings in themselves have proved the vulgar desire. Throwing chitterlings at Jude equals seducing him. So Hardy says the chitterlings are "missiles" and to throw them at Jude is a "new tactic".

Due to those chitterlings, Jude inevitably falls into the trap that Arabella well designed. The only method that Arabella uses to attract and bond Jude to her is the repeated practice of forcing him to sign the marriage contract with her. However, she does not love Jude at all and her seduction is only for the carnal desire. After getting married and the consecutive break-up of her "rich-dream", she deserts her husband to look for a richer male partner. When single again, she entangles Jude once more and obliges him to remarry her. What is more tragic and abhorrent, when Jude is dying, she still keeps on seducing another male rather than staying to look after her ailing

husband. Her body has been controlled by the impulse and the passion of the flesh throughout.

As a matter of fact, Arabella encompasses the archetype of the Mother Earth who lives on her fertility and sexuality. Arabella is just that, a sexual creature that understands the cycle of life and death, and what must be done in order to accomplish that cycle. She does everything in her power to survive as a Victorian woman while also fulfilling the duties of the Mother Earth, which turned her into a vile, selfish, and promiscuous person. Hardy describes Arabella's natural instincts as animalistic, "a complete and substantial female animal—no more, no less." the marriage of Jude and Arabella is purely built on lust of flesh without any tent of love.

The highest form of marriage is definitely not just the sex-based but is a complex matter containing a number of factors which not only arise from the couple but also from the society. However, for a happy marriage, an indispensable factor is the true love from both the man and woman who are always in the pursuit of mutual and deeper understanding of each other. From this sense, for Jude and Arabella, whose marriage is based on the flesh, it is impossible to for them to construct a solid marriage and a happy family through their efforts. The combination of Jude and Arabella, at the same time, decides the failure of their marriage and the pain of their lives.

2. CONFLICT BETWEEN SOUL AND FLESH

Jude meets Arabella in such a condition that his self-education is just beginning to take into shape. Hardy describes Jude's state when his lower passions are roused: Jude has selected Arabella "in commonplace obedience to conjunctive orders from headquarters, unconsciously received by unfortunate men when the last intention of their lives is to be occupied with the feminine" (Ibid., p.39). The bureaucratic language expresses the position of authority of sexuality, of which Christianity is in animosity; suddenly eight years' dedicated study is of no insignificance at all. Jude stops to make Arabella's acquaintance, although his intellectual eye sees for a fleeting moment something in her quite antipathetic. So we venture to say that Arabella is just the incardination of sexuality. Inevitably it's Arabella rather than Christianity that takes possession of Jude, Arabella makes a trap to coax him to sleep with her. "With a jealous, tilefish in drawing of breath" She lures him to her bed, and at this time, Jude is short of dignity which once owned as an ambitious young man. Anyone could observe Hardy's abhorrence of flesh if paying a little attention to the description. Arabella adopted the means of pregnancy to trap Jude into a false marriage. From the moment he lost in this net, he begins to be steeped in a world of sexuality and lies step by step.

Arabella and Jude have so many differences in almost every personal characteristic that, spiritually and emotionally, there exists an impassable gulf between them. Jude has a particular preference for knowledge, philosophy and religion and craves for being admitted into Christminster one day. But Arabella was born as a pig-breeder's daughter who spends much time helping her father wash innards. Her series of experiences and behaviors just like making false hair, telling lies and her sucking operation in her face all make Jude not only surprised but sick. After his first date with Arabella, he returns to Arabella's home where her parents and some neighbors took him for granted as Arabella's intended partner without any doubt, Jude once has the feeling that this place doesn't belong to him so he felt embarrassed. He is aware that they do not take much position of place in his set or circle, so his first thought is to flee from this place as soon as possible. When killing the pig that they have kept for a long time, Arabella insists that it should die slowly to get a good price, but Jude takes a great pity the animal and lets it die in a second. Arabella nearly throws Jude's beloved books away in a quarrel; because she cannot understand her husband's thought of becoming a college student. As Hardy describes:

Arabella, however, felt that all these makeshifts were temporary; she had gained a husband; that was the thing—a husband with a lot of earning power in him for buying her frocks and hats when he should begin to get frightened a bit, and stick to his trade, and throw aside those stupid books for practical undertakings. (Ibid., p.67)

Arabella can't understand why her husband is so obsessed in reading those books, funny and unpractical. In her eyes, a husband's responsibility is to earn as much money as possible for her to buy clothes, cosmetics and other things which she is crazy about. Gradually Jude finds Arabella's vulgar and shallowness, moreover, what's for him to unbearable is that she is "boneless, her disheveled hair blowing in the wind, her bodice apart, her sleeves rolled above her elbows for her work, and her hands reeking with melted fat". (Ibid., p.81)

Jude feels miserable and suffering in his relationship with Arabella. However, in the marriage with Arabella, Jude still sticks to something which he thinks he can't lose under any condition: neither his initial innocence nor belief or hope. Arabella satisfies his curiosity and desire, but for Jude, he has indeed gained his manhood and experience of marriage life during the progress although a progress which brings him too much pain.

In brief, Jude found his marriage with Arabella completely contrary to his real intention and he wished that all this had not happened. At this time, the contradiction between flesh and soul was fully revealed in his heart. As the symbol of flesh, Arabella had a few girlfriends who helped her and gave her advice. So Arabella walked back and forth pretending to be pregnant to coax Jude into falling to her prey and the innocent Jude simply took it for granted. For fame and given particularly

the harsh religious laws in Victorian Age, Jude had to give up his perfect plan made after years of thinking and endeavor. As a man with both flesh and soul, he had to return to the condition equal to animals' instinctive needs, and took this chance to seek his only common ground with Arabella. Here, readers can imagine the intensity of Jude's inner conflict, as if hearing him screaming in agony. After all, Jude is a mentally and physically healthy person; although Jude's dual character is in such conflict with the fleshy and sensual Arabella as to make their marriage inharmonious and to cast a tragic shade upon their love. Unfortunately, Jude, for his instinctive desire, frequently succumbs to Arabella until death.

3. TRAGIC END

In spite of the fact that Jude loses neither his innocence nor belief or hope in his marriage with Arabella, their marriage is doomed to be a tragedy with a deplorable ending for they almost have nothing in common, or even in absolute conflict with each other. In their deep heart, they are two mutually exclusive individuals. In the scene to be discussed is the pig-sticking, their differences in characteristics are thoroughly contradicted. Arabella orders Jude to do the pig-sticking himself, and adds that if he can't make it, she will do it herself. Hardy vividly describes the pig's eyes that glaze themselves on Arabella with their keen reproach of a creature that at last the sees through the treachery of those who had once seemed his only friends is accordant to the theory of "social Darwinism." Darwin's the survival of the fittest theory greatly influences people's attitudes that mercilessly butchering animals are nothing serious but should be taken for granted. Thomas Hardy once wrote to Frederic Harrison,

The question, indeed, of the treatment of animals is a tremendous one. As long as Christian & other theologies were really credited, & the non-human animal was regarded as a creature distinct from man, there was a consistency in treating "brutes" brutally. "Arise Peter, kill & eat," was a natural command to a man with a soul concerning animals without one". (Kramer, 2000, p.42)

Thus, the author is bold enough to say that this brute live scene damages the original ideal enthusiasm, of weak but kind Jude, toward Christianity.

CONCLUSION

Hence, Jude falls into a marital trap woven craftily by Arabella and married her in accordance with Victorian conventions and morality. However, lacking in common ideals, interests and feelings, no fun exists in their married life. The sensual and material Arabella and the scholarly and innocent Jude had little in common with each other. Jude was, impulsively seduced into an unwise marriage with Arabella. This matrimonial union that

based a permanent contract on a temporary feeling, or rather, sensual pleasures, had no necessary connection with affinities that alone render a lifelong comradeship tolerable. There being no love between them, their marriage, therefore, from the beginning was destined to be a tragedy. Hardy exposes the harm and torture inflicted on people by the institution of marriage in the Victorian patriarchal society and the hypocritical morality through portraying the marriages. The novel also shows Hardy's view on marriage with pessimism and fatalism. The gloom and pessimism implied in Hardy's novels, particularly in *Jude the Obscure*, came from his bitterly deterministic and fatalistic view that individuals are ideologically and socially determined or destined and "circumstanced" by the positions they occupy.

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