

**The Mind-Body Warfare in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895)**

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**Abstract:** Through a psycho-sociological approach, this paper explores the mind-body warfare in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895). It shows how an ambitious country boy's long-standing dreams of self-achievement and academic life in the city are later thwarted by his unexpected encounter with a charming girl from his own village. His impulses, affections and vices take precedence over his scholarly yearnings and make him an easy prey of flesh. Responding to the call of the body, he forgets about his ambition and marries that village girl, but only to repent later. The second chance he is given to fulfill his dream of a successful academic life in the city after the failure of his marriage does not turn out well either. His encounter with an unknown cousin of his in the city drifts him away from his ambition too. Hardy's hero proves to be a victim of fate triggered by his own action, personality and social determinism.

**Key words:** ambition – body – character – conflict – determinism – fate – flesh – mind – passion – tragedy.

**Introduction**

The mind-body relationships have always been an old concern in man's history. As Adler early pointed it out, men have always debated on whether the mind governs the body or the body governs the mind. Philosophers have joined in the controversy and taken the one side or the other; whether they have called themselves idealists or materialists, they have raised thousands of arguments; and the question still seems as vexed and unsettled as ever (Adler 1931: 1). Some Ancient Greek philosophers much expounded on the question. For instance, Democritus and other Atomists tried to reduce mental processes to the operations of material stuff, which strictly follow physical laws (Stumpf and Fieser 2003: 476). In his dualism theory, the 17<sup>th</sup>-century French philosopher Descartes denies any interaction whatsoever between mind and body. Commonly known as the "mind-body problem", this issue, which is "*one of the oldest and most explored areas of philosophy*" (Stumpf and Fieser 2003: 476), is also a transversal one in the debate within Humanities, as shown by the great interest psychology, medicine and other sciences take in it<sup>1</sup>.

William Boyd's postmodern short story entitled "The Mind/Body Problem", published in his collection *Fascination* (2005), shows that literature too is concerned with the issue<sup>2</sup>. But two centuries earlier, Victorian literature, following up the intellectual tradition of the

Enlightenment, had already shown interest in the warfare between mind and body, notably with the English writer Thomas Hardy who had fictionalized it in his novel *Jude the Obscure*<sup>3</sup>, wherein it particularly turns into a deadly warfare between flesh and spirit. As a matter of fact, Hardy presents Flesh as a subversive force and puts Spirit on shaky grounds. As Hardy himself specifies it, the theme of *Jude the Obscure* is: “[...] *the fret and fever, derision and disaster, that may press in the wake of the strongest passion known to humanity, ... a deadly war waged between flesh and spirit; ... the tragedy of unfulfilled aims...*”<sup>4</sup>. Besides, *Jude the Obscure* is also a novel about the academic frustrations of a young countryman who yearns to fulfill his dream of scholarly life and self-achievement in the city, but who is ultimately caught up into the shackles of the reality of life and the trap of fate.

The plot of *Jude the Obscure* is built around *three* major characters whose personalities are quite different: Jude Fawley, Arabella Donn and Sue Bridehead, who is considered as “*perhaps the most remarkable feminine portrait in the English novel.*” (Southerington 1971: 145). Arabella and Sue are two quite antagonistic women: they live in two different worlds; and they have nothing in common physically, intellectually and spiritually. Jude is the bridge that links these two worlds. Hardy wittily merges the representation of the mind-body relationships with the dualism of nature and culture, the opposition between “ruralness” and urbanization, and the conflict between vice and virtue, raising on the occasion moral issues in a late Victorian conservative society.

Hardy’s novel was published in the Victorian era, a period marked by a specific social and axiological context of conformity, decorum, attachment to conventions and values, but also by various forms of cant (social, political and religious). In the same way as Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891) caused a scandal, his novel *Jude the Obscure* likewise did. Victorian England was not at all ready to welcome the stories of a writer who let « *les raisons du corps* » express themselves and who suggested the possibility to let oneself be guided by them. (Barrot and Rapp 2003: 114). It is even on record that the second Mrs. Hardy, Florence Emily Dugdale, who did not appreciate her husband’s scandalous novel, had turned the title *Jude the Obscure* into “Jude the Obscene” (Barrot and Rapp 2003: 116).

Furthermore, in a society which had since long been undergoing some very deep changes, a generation of people from the working class were trapped between respect for conservative values and aspiration to a progressive life of changes; between deep-rootedness into custom and openness to education; between class attachment and class transcendence. The late Victorian society was indeed going through crucial mutations due to technology exemplified by the 1851 Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace. The introduction of the train and railways brought about a lot of upheavals and movements uprooting traditional rural ethos and ways of life. People from ordinary walks of life had started attending universities. *Jude the Obscure* clearly fictionalizes the individual’s aspiration to self-achievement through education in a pretty conventional society where conventional behaviour was among the main standards.

Based on a psycho-sociological approach, this paper seeks to analyze the mind-body dialectic in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*. It intends to show how Hardy particularly turns this issue into a tragic warfare between flesh and spirit, and closely relates it to the dualism between nature and culture.

The first part of the article studies the mind-body relationships through the dialectic of nature and culture, whereas the second part spells out how interest in flesh can thwart or

incurve the course of intellectual pursuits. The third part analyzes the aching aspiration to intellectual life. The fourth and last part discusses “*Hardy’s vision of man*” (Southerington 1971) in the novel.

## I – The Nature-Culture Dialectics: a Metonymy of the Mind-Body Dualism

Through the hero of *Jude the Obscure*, Thomas Hardy comes up with an epitome of the self-educated proletarian transposed into a rural context. Jude is indeed a “rural” type of the self-educated worker who was a common figure in 19<sup>th</sup>-century English history, and who endeavoured to study so as to say his word about political matters and to wittily defend his interest through unions. In choosing as a hero a young countryman whose burning ambition is the pursuit of knowledge in a reputed university, Hardy goes beyond the simple portrayal of the deprivation of a young countryman, to represent the condition of a whole social class (Page 1978: 398-399). Later in the narrative, Jude hints at this social context: “*I was, perhaps after all, a paltry victim to the spirit of mental and social restlessness, that makes so many unhappy in these days*” (Jude 391).

Hardy’s novel clearly reflects the Manichaeic nature of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century England social-class system. The representation of the mind-body warfare forks in that of the dualism between the worker and the intellectual, the countryside and the city, and consequently between nature and culture, all interconnecting and forming an interrelated network of signs and meaning. It appears through the story a marked spirit of place and class reflecting these binary oppositions. The countryside is associated with physical activities and nature, whereas the city is depicted as the place of knowledge and mental activities. It is associated with Mind.

Replacing the setting of the novel in its geographical background, El Faïd highlights the way Hardy *does not* resort to Wessex with its natural landscape. *Jude the Obscure* is set in North Wessex (Berkshire) and just across the frontier, at Christminster (Oxford), which is not in Wessex at all. As she specifies, Berkshire is an unpoetic and unglamorous county characterized by loamy cornfields and dreary hedgeless highways (El Faïd 2002: 80). Butler accounts for the necessity to get out of Wessex by the very nature of the issues Hardy wants to broach in the novel. The plot is basically structured around social and moral issues (Butler 1978: 122).

From childhood to early maturity, the life of Hardy’s hero, Jude Fawley, is basically centred on “ruralness”. At the dreary village of Marygreen where the story starts, the focus is mainly on rustic activities. Jude Fawley is a little fatherless and motherless orphan who lives after the death of his parents with an old aunt of his, Miss Drusilla Fawley, who has received him in her green-thatched cottage at Marygreen where she lives alone. His childhood is spent on labour. And the chores he does are physical and typically rural. Though a little boy, he works like a damned person, fetching water without rest, helping his aunt in her bakery. He even works in his free time for Farmer Troutham “*as a-scaring of birds*” (Jude 25) in repayment for sixpence a day.

Education only comes after the daily chores. Physical work is more valued than mental work in the village; the body is more solicited than the mind. Unlike the other children of the village, little Jude is not enrolled at the local primary school. Though he longs for learning, his aunt does not yet send him to school. Busy working all day long, his only opportunity to

learn is “*to attend the night school*” (Jude 25). He gets closer to nature than to culture, sharing with the rooks he is supposed to frighten away the same lack of care, and finding in them “*the only friends he could claim as being in the least degree interested in him*” (Jude 34). His aunt even overtly expresses her wish to get rid of him. The village is a place of frustration, dereliction, despondency and solitariness. Because adulthood is an age of responsibilities, he does not yet want to become a man.

The help of the local school master Mr. Phillotson participates, in some way, in the fulfillment of the little boy’s dreams. Jude’s attachment to the local school master is somehow “*transference*”, in the psychoanalytic sense of the term, of his love for knowledge onto the educational institution embodied by the man; it is *identification* with and even *incorporation* (Torok 1975) into the latter as well. All that he lacks in terms of schooling and education, he seems to seek in the company of the school teacher whom he is very close to. The little boy’s psychological transference is all the more explicit as he wishes to follow Mr. Phillotson when he leaves the village of Marygreen to pursue his studies in the city of Christminster. The very day Mr. Phillotson leaves the village for the city is almost the end of the world for him. Much saddened by the news, he is of all the school children and the villagers the only person to shed tears. The village of Marygreen is not a place where the dream to become a university graduate and then to be ordained can come true.

Intellectual and spiritual life is rather associated with the city. University education, which is “*the necessary hallmark of a man who wants to do anything in teaching*”, takes place in Christminster city (Jude 29). The city offers many more opportunities, and living there or nearby will afford “*a better chance of carrying it out*” (Jude 29) than living anywhere else. For the dwellers of Marygreen village, Christminster city is almost a myth. Though located in England, Christminster appears, in the rural imagination, as a foreign country with a foreign language.

By means of hyperboles, Christminster city is highly idealized. A street is considered as unique in the world: “*There’s a street in the place that ha’n’t another like it in the world*” (Jude 44). Another hyperbole further emphasizes the idealistic vision of the city, where Greek and Latin are the languages of education. Exposed to Christminster’s linguistic and academic environment, even “*the very sons of the old women who do the washing of the college can talk in Latin*” (47). In the rural imagination, Christminster stands for the “*city of light and lore*” (54), “*a stronghold of learning*” (57). The narrative is replete with words and phrases forming a network of images which highlight the marked difference between the city and the countryside. The prestige attached to Christminster appears, for instance, through the concern of the city dwellers. People from Christminster never look at anything that folks such as those from Marygreen can understand. The phrase “*a serious-minded place*” used to qualify Christminster reveals how much the city is valued in people’s mind. Furthermore, it is widely believed that it only takes five years to turn an idle “*hobbledehoy chap into a solemn preaching man with no corrupt passion*” (44). Apart from education and religion, music takes centre stage in the city: “*There is beautiful music everywhere in Christminster*” (44).

Every day the appeal of the city resounds more and more within little Jude’s mind. His solitariness and his love for books and knowledge further prick his dream. Consequently, he embarks upon a long quest for information about Christminster, that far-off city he looks upon as “*the new Jerusalem*” (41). The pieces of information he has gleaned over years about it

undeniably prove the mythical stature of the city in the eyes of the folks from Marygreen for whom intellectual and spiritual life is perceived as symbol of spiritual elevation, a form of lofty social prestige.

The amount of information Jude has collected is all the more paradoxical as it is elicited from “*well informed*” people who have never set foot in Christminster city and who only know all from hearsay. The channel whereby the bulk of information is collected clearly shows the impact of the city on the collective unconscious. Utterly conquered, little Jude speaks out his determination to move to Christminster sometime in the forthcoming years: “*Christminster shall be my Alma Mater, I shall be his son*” (Jude 58). The Biblical allusions in Jude’s own opinion of Christminster further participate in setting spiritual imagery in the text: Christminster stands for a “*city of light, where the trees of knowledge grow and a place that teachers of men spring from and go to*”, it is a castle manned by scholarship and religion (45).

The issue of the rise of the self-educated worker transposed into a rural context is clearly fictionalized as Jude actively and patiently prepares for his moving to Christminster. Over years he has managed, all by himself, to learn Latin and Greek from the two grammar books the former school teacher, Mr. Phillotson, sent him on his request. By 16, he is a learned boy. He also prepares his future settlement in the city by learning the rudiments of freestone-working. He acquires some practical professional experience by working as the apprentice of a stone-mason at Alfredston where, later on, he also works for a church-builder, under the direction of whom he becomes handy at church restoration, only returning to Marygreen on weekends.

## II – From *Eros* to *Bathos*: the Reasons of Body

“Men succumbing to the temptation of flesh” is a classical *topos* in literature from early Renaissance to the Victorian and Edwardian Ages (Felperin 1990). A diachronic study of stories about men yielding to the temptation of flesh in narrative texts will show how recurrent the issue really is. James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) is, among many other typical examples, a reference work in which flesh is the main cause of the deviant behaviour of the formerly devoted and faithful hero Stephen Dedalus, a student in the Jesuit boarding school Belvedere College. Due to his assiduity to brothels, “*devotion had gone by the board*” (Joyce 1972: 103). His receptivity to flesh, life and nature absolutely legitimates his future rejection of religious calling, his shift from one calling to another.

Jude’s long-standing quest for self-fulfillment through intellectual and scholarly pursuits is undermined by the ear he has lent to basic instincts. At the peak of his intellectual yearning, he comes across Arabella, a sensual country girl whose advances definitely drift him away from his ambition. She is from Marygreen village, and she absolutely embodies flesh, body, nature.

The description of Arabella is centred on her anatomy, with her fleshy body, and her dimples, all symbols of charm. She is reduced to “animality” as: “*She was a complete and substantial female animal no more no less*” (42). The scene in which she cleans some pig flesh down the stream, contributes to the parallel with the pig Hardy makes: Arabella is like a pig, a “human pig”, in terms of both plumpness and instinctive behaviour.



Any analysis of the topos of amorous encounter in English literature cannot but take into consideration Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*. Set in the countryside, the amorous encounter abides by the context of "ruralness" and rusticity. The symbolism attached to the circumstances in which Arabella encounters Jude is quite telling. They first meet on a Saturday afternoon, as Jude is on his homeward way to Marygreen from Alfredston, and Arabella busy washing the innards of a killed pig in the stream, with the help of two friends of hers. It is a piece of pig flesh that she hurls at Jude to draw his attention. The young man is struck both literally and figuratively. They appoint the following day to meet again, and from then their relationship turns essentially carnal.

The narrative does not focus on any witty attribute regarding Arabella, and yet she is a pretty clever girl judging from the trap she lays for Jude to fall into it. She sketches out a Machiavellian plan to "have" Jude. She lures him into her bed and shams pregnancy later, driving the young man to marry her to make up for his mistake in conformity with the decorum "of the rural districts among honourable men who had drifted so far into intimacy" (*Jude* 58).

The turn their love affair takes undeniably proves the supremacy of flesh over spirit in so far as it utterly drifts Jude away from his one childhood dream: to read the New Testament in Greek, to study, to work and later on to settle in Christminster. Hardy's hero has sacrificed his supreme ambition on the altar of flesh. Sexual enjoyment, carnal pleasure, has taken the place of spiritual sustenance at Marygreen. In yielding to the power of flesh, Jude's project is ruined. His encounter with Arabella has ended up with the betrayal of the ideal that would give sense to his life (Millgate 1971: 329).

Having tirelessly prepared his future settlement in Christminster city, Jude has accumulated by the age of 16 much knowledge about Latin and Greek. But teenage is also the period of sexual awakening. His quest occurs at a pretty crucial moment in life, corresponding to the conflicting impulses between two antagonistic forces, bodily and spiritual forces; in other words the hoarsely down-to-earth call of sexual drives and the soul's elevated need for spiritual sustenance. As a result, it is at the acme of Jude's quest for the ideal, his yearning for the mental, that he absolutely experiences what could metaphorically be considered to be an "Adamic fall", the cause of which is nothing else but so non-ideal and non-mental a thing as flesh. D.H. Lawrence expounds that along with blood: "*Sex is our deepest form of consciousness. It is utterly non-ideal, non-mental. It is pure blood-consciousness. It is the basic consciousness of the blood, the nearest thing in us to pure material consciousness.*" (Lawrence 1977: 173)

The relationship between Jude and Arabella is not based on reason, but instead on desire, instinct, flesh. It is also based on the challenge Arabella takes up on her friends' advice: "*Nothing venture, nothing have*" (*Jude* 70) Jude has not taken enough time to better know her partner before engaging into marriage. Consequently, soon after the wedding, the couple is torn by violence, and ultimately divorces.

The outcome of the prompt marriage following their encounter legitimates the moral lesson Jude draws from his marital experience: "[...] *marry in haste and repent at leisure*" (*Jude* 306). Soon after their marriage, a de-escalation of their mutual attraction takes place, their feeling falls off. Arabella goes to Australia with her parents, leaving alone Jude, who sinks into drunkenness to drown his sorrows. Temporary passion is at the core of Jude's fall

from his ideal: *“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”* (*Jude* 81). The marriage was based on lies and constraints. Furthermore, although they both live in Marygreen, Jude and Arabella do not belong to the same world. Arabella exclusively embodies flesh whereas Jude is a man of both flesh and spirit.

Jude has a double-faceted personality, and this much recalls Hardy’s own personality in some way. As a matter of fact, young Thomas Hardy was a quiet man who was working towards becoming the talented figurehead of the rural world, his native Dorsetshire. But he was also a “scandalous” man. And these two facets of his personality could not coexist harmoniously in the Victorian era (Barrot and Rapp 2003: 110). Just as many other 19<sup>th</sup> century writers, Hardy were haunted by bodily instincts, sexuality, desire, and all things which, in Victorian England, were not allowed and were even repressed. People could talk about them but not write about them (Barrot and Rapp 2003: 110). But he did in *Jude the Obscure*, which *“shocked the more genteel critics, while from the clergy it produced a predictable conditioned reflex”* (Pearsall 1993: 93)

Flesh is the major hindrance to Jude’s dreams of scholarly life. His encounter with Arabella has unexpectedly thwarted his intellectual yearnings. The young woman’s seduction power and sex appeal have instantaneously worked on him. Much sensitive to Arabella’s physical charms, he has carnally succumbed, showing thus the instinctual power of flesh over him. Explaining the nature of the relationships between Jude and Arabella, Hardy makes it clear that:

[...] there was a momentary flash of intelligence, a dumb announcement of affinity *in posse*, between herself and him, which, so far as Jude Fawley was concerned, had no sort of premeditation in it. She saw that he had singled her out from the three... for no reasoned purpose of further acquaintance, but 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.<sup>5</sup>

Jude’s engagement with another woman, his cousin Sue, undermines his academic and spiritual ambitions a second time, thus further proving his “carnal” weakness. Once again, his quest is threatened by so earthly a concern as flesh. His love for Sue hampers his project: *“With Sue as companion he could have renounced his ambitions with a smile. But without Sue it was inevitable that the reaction from the strain to which he had subjected himself should affect him disastrously”* (*Jude* 136). Southerington alleviates the impact of sexuality on Jude’s life and relativizes it:

Jude’s first marriage, it is true, lends colour to the belief that he is over-sexed, a victim to his own sexual passions – until one recalls that it is not until he is nineteen that he even looks at a woman as an object of sexual desire; and Hardy’s text makes it clear that his passions are perfectly normal. His life with Sue before she eventually yields to him is more remarkable, and shows that he has firm control over himself... (Southerington 1971: 141)

Up to the end of the novel Arabella symbolizes flesh, as she is at the root of the sexual satisfaction later experienced by the unmarried couple Jude and Sue. Indeed, following her

return from Australia, Arabella pushes Sue to show Jude some semblance of love, which she takes literally, to the latter's great satisfaction.

Jude's deviation from his ideal due to Arabella, then due to Sue, denotes weakness. Kant has expounded a close relationship between morality and character. Morality is all about character. If you want to have a good character, you have to turn your back on passions. The human being must not let his penchants degenerate into passions; he must learn to do without that which he or she is denied. Together with culture and the acquisition of prudence and sociability, the German philosopher and pedagogue Kant assigns to education the following objectives: to discipline man, to seek to prevent his bestial dimension from nipping in the bud his moral one, to raise moral standards in man<sup>6</sup>. Ironically, it is at the moment when Jude most yearns for education that he falls into the trap of that which education seeks to prevent. Arabella's behaviour perfectly well illustrates lack of education too.

After Arabella has thwarted his ambitions, it does not take Jude long to resolve to follow out his first intention: to go to Christminster. In his dream of scholastic achievement Christminster city emerges again, but this time he dreams of becoming a clergyman. His eagerness to meet Sue Bridehead, his cousin who lives in Christminster, definitely seals his decision to settle in that city. Jude's walk to Christminster, "his promised land", and his dream of leading a life of clergyman there, install in the narrative a set of spiritual imageries. Jude is symbolically a pilgrim who walks to Jerusalem.

### III – The *Pathos* of the Pursuit of Knowledge

In walking to Christminster to fulfill his dream of spiritual and scholarly life, Jude appears as a pilgrim of the "intellect". Christminster is Oxford fictionalized. There is a strong feeling of alienation in *Jude the Obscure*, especially when Hardy's hero goes to Christminster. As Wheeler puts it, in the novel "*the alienation of the protagonist is further intensified [...] Jude is both protagonist and outsider, a would-be intruder into the closed world of Christminster who lives and dies in the obscurity of the intellectual artisan*" (Wheeler 1985: 191).

As he takes a walk in Christminster streets, he gets the impression that the phantoms of all the learned scholars who have lived in the city are talking to him. Despite his appalling living conditions, he spends his stonemason wage on books. The symbolism is quite striking at this point of the narrative: Jude puts his body at the service of his mind. He uses his strength to earn his living and buy spiritual nourishment. His purpose is "*to get ready by accumulating money and knowledge and await whatever chances were afforded to such an one of becoming a son of the University*" (Jude 104). Jude grants much more importance to immaterial than to material life. Although both knowledge and money guarantee invulnerability, the pursuit of knowledge takes precedence over that of money: "*Wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence; but the excellency of knowledge is that it giveth life to them that have it*" (Jude 104).

The long-standing valuable image of the city strongly built in the imagination of the country folk appears to be mere illusion, as evidenced by "*the reality of Christminster with its struggling men and women*" (Jude 136). Jude realizes that all that he thought about Christminster when he was in Marygreen village is nothing but delusion. He fails in his



dreams of scholastic fulfillment in the city, turning into neither scholar nor clergyman. This failure is foreshadowed by the strong sense of alienation associated with his arrival at Christminster, as the oniric vision he has on his very first night in that very place shows a city inhabited by people and by ghosts. He later discovers that the people foreseen in his sleep are no one else but the true dwellers of the city, those hard-working men and women who embody the everyday reality of Christminster and who, seemingly, know little of “Christ” or “Minster” (Draper 1991: 233). As for the ghosts in the dream, they appear to Jude as the literary figures whose writings have long built the image of the city. Symbolically, Jude is no stranger in Christminster in so far as the hard job of stonemasonry he does to earn his living definitely legitimates any identification with the hard-working city-dwellers. The idealized perception of Christminster contrasts with the disillusionment and frustration he experiences in the city. The life Christminster seemed to promise at the beginning collapses in his contact with the hard realities of that city.

In Christminster Jude meets Sue Bridehead, an unknown cousin of his who partly weighed on his decision to settle in the city. Sue is a woman of “spirit”, a free-thinking woman. Both Sue and Christminster city fail to fulfill the great satisfaction Jude expected from them, giving him “*hard times*”, to borrow the title of Dickens’s novel (1854).

Sue is the intellectual incarnation of the French saying “*Qui s’y frotte s’y pique*”. Due to her, Hardy’s novel can be defined as “*a work whose heroine destroys two men – Jude himself and the unnamed leader-writer – with perhaps a third potential victim (Phillotson) barely escaping, and only by becoming a destructive force himself*” (Southerington 1971: 55). Just as Jude has, Phillotson has experienced the emancipation of the young lady. Sue’s freethinking has successively enlightened and blinded the two of them. It has caused not only great concerns to Phillotson, but also the breaking of their first marriage. Sue tends to mentally impose herself on men who share her life, almost dictating her rules. When married, she deliberately objects to fulfilling her conjugal duties, preserving her body, to the detriment of her husband Phillotson.

In Jude’s eyes, Sue is not only “*as innocent as unconventional*” but also enigmatic and anti-conformist. In describing a late close friend of hers who was an undergraduate at Christminster University as the most irreligious and the most moral man ever, Sue implicitly reveals her nature. “*Birds of a feather flock together*”, as the saying goes. Sue stands for the modern girl. She is an iconoclast and a free spirit in a conventional society where people abide by the norms. She is free and emancipated in such a conservative society as the Victorian one, where women are expected to abide by such social norms as virtue, decorum, submissiveness to the patriarchal dictates and so on.<sup>7</sup>

Sue is associated with Christminster city, and consequently to culture, knowledge, and to “spirituality”, at least professionally speaking. She is a woman of a complex psychological nature. The reader fully perceives the problematic layout of her psychology and personality, which seems to be the product of her past. It is likely that she has had an unconventional upbringing and education, due to an absence of secure family circle and a lack of formal education. She lives in Christminster and works in a church shop. Her occupation consists in “*designing or illuminating in characters of church text on a piece of zinc or some other metal intended to be fixed up in some chancel to assist devotion*” (Jude 108). Later on, she switches

to teaching, further illustrating her freedom. She abandons her first occupation and becomes a schoolmistress in a school run by Mr. Phillotson in Christminster.

Jude's life in Christminster does not turn out well. But he is not the only person whose pursuit of knowledge meets with failure. His former school master, Mr. Phillotson, who left the village of Marygreen for an academic career in Christminster does not succeed in his quest either. Indeed, he is no more than a mere school master, but in another village. With the free indirect speech device, the narrator reports Jude's doubt when he finds out about Mr. Phillotson's failure: "*how could he succeed in Christminster in an enterprise wherein Mr. Phillotson had failed?*" (Jude 124).

His dream of scholastic and spiritual life does not come true. His passion for knowledge is rather transferred onto his cousin Sue Bridehead whom he is so much in love with. Here, the plot revolves around Jude, Sue and Phillotson, with relationships based on a triangular love pattern, which had no doubt been borrowed from the folk tradition (Firor 1966). Jude loves Sue who is rather attracted by Phillotson who, in turn, sees in Sue qualities that would make her a good teaching assistant in his school. Sue's interest in Phillotson is not based on any sexual fantasy, nor on any bodily attraction, otherwise she would marry the young Jude whom she loves and not Phillotson who is a middle-aged man. It is rather based on the latter's position of teacher; it is therefore motivated by the prospect of an intellectual occupation.

The physical contact between Mr. Phillotson and Sue – he places his hand around her waist – causes jealousy and embitterment in Jude. Quest for knowledge then becomes a way of quickening the course of life. The chance to date Sue relies on knowledge acquisition, which appears to be a means of defence, a shield. Jude writes to the five most distinguished provosts and wardens to sensitize them about his poor living conditions and his quest for knowledge. The flat denial he meets with casts him into an unspeakable disappointment, which he tries to drown in alcohol. Coming from Biblioll College, a second flat denial tells him that he will have "*a much better chance of success in life by remaining in his own sphere and sticking to his job than by adopting any other course*" (Jude 136). Jude cannot face the lack of prospect in higher education and turns much more desperate and depressive.

The letter of dismissal awaiting him at home adds to the series of failure at Christminster. Hardy uses circularity symbolism to represent the failure of his hero in his ambitions. After packing his luggage, Jude walks from Christminster to Marygreen where all started, and where he is overwhelmed by the "*hell of conscious failure – both in ambition and love*" (Jude 148).

Jude's passion and desire for Sue is fuelled by the latter's frame of mind, her intellectual, psychological and enigmatic dispositions. Obsessed by Sue, he does not hesitate to join her in Melchester city where she attends a teacher training college, and where he still nourishes the hope to get theological instruction and to lead an "*ecclesiastical and altruistic life*" distinct from the "*intellectual and emulative life*" (Jude 148). With a Theological College, Melchester is a quite soothing and almost ecclesiastical city. Jude's dream is to engage in ministry by the age of thirty. To prepare his future reconversion, his young age enables him to take classes and to earn and save money "*by his trade to help his aftercourse of keeping the necessary terms at a theological College*" (Jude 149).

It is for intellectual reasons that Sue leaves Christminster city for Melchester city, where she is supposed to spend two years at Melchester Normal School, a teacher training school. Schooling is at the core of Sue's wedding project with Mr. Phillotson. Following the urban tradition, they contemplate taking a large double school in a large city after Sue's training, "*he the boy's and she the girl's – as married school teachers often do*" (Jude 153). Sue's decision to marry with Phillotson constitutes a new severe blow. His dream of theological instruction too turns into failure. The job of cathedral masonry he takes ironically makes him a "theological mason" instead of a theologian.

In Shaston city where she later lives with her husband Phillotson, freethinking Sue questions the institution of marriage which she merely sees as a secular one. Because she cannot stand Phillotson any longer, she eventually joins Jude, with the agreement of her husband. The two of them, having experienced both marriage and divorce, perceive this timeless institution as horrible. As a result, they live together unmarried, even making children. Motherhood experience dives Sue into a new phase of life. But the contact she has with her children is mainly reduced to feeding them, to fulfilling their "bodily" needs. As a woman of "spirit" she seems to find it difficult to cope with female duties such as taking care of children. The sexual and intellectual contentment Jude temporarily experiences with his partner Sue in Aldbrickham city is soon taken over by problems. The neighbours' condemnation of the couple's immorality is part of the reasons why the couple definitely leaves Aldbrickham city for Christminster city again, where they settle with their children.

Living with his father and Sue, Little Father Time, the mentally precocious son Jude has had with Arabella, is convinced that the trouble faced by the parents is due to the children, himself included. Sue the freethinker sees divine wrath in the tragedy and resolutely turns to God who, in her eyes, has punished her for her dissolute life and her unfaithfulness: "*My children... were sin-begotten. They were sacrificed to teach me how to live! Their death was the first stage of my purification*" (Jude 435). As a result, Sue rejects Jude and remarries with her former husband Phillotson. Unlike Sue, Jude sees in the deadly ordeal the proof of the inexistence of a transcendental Creator.

In burning his religious books, Jude, who is still head over heels in love with Sue, makes a symbolic and irrevocable decision regarding his old yearning for theological instruction and for being a clergyman. His rejections by Christminster colleges and by Sue Bridehead plunge him into drunkenness again. Having lost his job, he goes back to Marygreen, the place where all started. Having lost her second husband in the meantime, Arabella manages to take advantage from Jude's drunkenness and overall poor mental weakness, and gets him to marry her again. Their second marriage does not look like the first one in terms of carnal satisfaction. It rather turns out ephemeral because Jude passes away. Being sick, Jude tries, in bad weather conditions, to walk to Marygreen to see Sue who lives there with her husband Phillotson, again the school master of the village. As though she knew that this would be their last meeting, she displays an unprecedented passionate nature. Back to Christminster, Jude finally dies in miserable conditions, like an outcast. Apart from the title of "Tutor of St. Slums", Jude's intellectual pursuits result in no higher position.

#### IV – *Jude the Obscure*, a Tragic Novel

What really gave sense to Jude's life was his quest for knowledge, his craving for culture and learning, his pursuit of scholarly, then ecclesiastical fulfillment, his aspiration to modern life and his dream of self-achievement. Only spiritual sustenance could give vigour to the sap of his existence and make him a renewed creature. Unfortunately, he unexpectedly meets with disappointment and disillusionment, and ultimately sinks into great suffering. Hardy fictionalizes the way fate can undermine all that which constitutes the sense of existence in a young person: ambition, passion, dream and interest.

Jude Fawley is also a victim of determinism at a double level. His family background is described as being much affected by weakness, intermarriage and degradation. For Southerington (1971: 144) the failure of Jude's marriage and his life with Sue "*are so clearly, even if incompletely, paralleled with the turbulent lives of their common ancestors that they cannot be seen as purely local and temporary features: there is something fundamental here, a force possessed by the blood alone.*". But Jude's condition also derives from his immediate environment, characterized by weariness and powerlessness, due to a process of decay in which the whole society is engaged. In this context of spiritual and intellectual barrenness, Jude stands out with his strong yearning for scholarly pursuits. Norman Page rightly wonders about the origin of Jude's overall failure: "*it is not quite evident whether the claim on Jude's passions, or the inherent weakness of his inherited character, is the source of his failure. Perhaps both*" (Page 1978: 338).

It goes without saying that Hardy's hero is not strong enough to face the trials and tribulations of life. The weakness Page alludes to in the passage above undoubtedly appears through the way Jude always takes refuge in drunkenness to cope with existential ordeals. In addition, there is some naivety in his apprehension of the world. As a young countryman he has always dreamt of education, knowledge, and a position among scholars in Christminster city without having the slightest idea about the difficulties and realities of what his aspiration requires. On top of that, Christminster does not, in reality, correspond to what Jude thought. The reality is not as academic as it seems. The university is just the society in miniature. The scholars are like common people, they have flaws and weaknesses. As Millgate pertinently puts it: "[...] *it becomes increasingly clear not merely that Christminster is impregnable to such as Jude, but that the values the college walls protect are themselves hypocritical and debased*" (Millgate 1971:329). In his attempt to account for Jude's failure, Southerington, in turn, thinks that:

Jude's aims are scholastic, and though his marriage to Arabella is a practical hindrance and his parentage of bastard a social one, neither plays any part in his failure to achieve an academic career. For such as Jude, as the title implies and the book shows, an academic career was a practical impossibility. (Southerington 1971: 141).

Jude is aware of the conflict of his ambitions with his situation (Hornback 1971: 127). Indeed, as Hardy's hero himself acknowledges it, the reason for his failure lies more in his poverty than in his will. However, it would be unfair to account for Jude's failure exclusively by social factors. Jude's own responsibility is engaged in the sense that he did not, for instance, "*make practical inquiries about methods of admission to a college*", and he failed to see "*the blemishes of Christminster at first sight*" (Southerington 1971: 142).

Jude is successively caught into the “fleshy” trap of Arabella and the “intellectual” net of Sue. Arabella’s world is not his, but he also fails to find his place in Sue’s world. Hornback points out that: “*Jude’s self includes, necessarily and essentially, an element which Sue denies: sexuality*” (1971: 129). Frustration is his lot. His marriage with Sue fails just as his marriage with Arabella did, though for different reasons. Flesh is basically the cause of Jude’s failure in his early ambition of scholastic fulfillment. He has easily succumbed to Arabella’s appeal and charms. After he gets over the shock of his disillusionment with marriage, he pursues his quest for self-achievement but through ecclesiastic life. And for the second time, his ambition is again undermined by the encounter with another girl, his cousin Sue Bridehead. Sue’s effect on Jude is physical, of course; but it is mostly intellectual. Jude experiences with his cousin Sue physical and intellectual satisfaction until their love affair is tragically ended by the murder of the children they have out of wedlock. Sue then gets away from Jude physically and intellectually. Jude and Sue’s objection to the conventional marriage institution has precipitated them into tragedy. Such a bathos was characteristic of the Greek tragic writers which Hardy knew. Southerington underscores two factors that make difficult the love between Jude and Sue, but do not constitute a fundamental cause of their fate; these factors are “*the epicene quality of Sue; and the ancestral curse which hangs over their family*” (1971: 140). For Hornback Jude and Sue “*are like the lovers in a tragic version of the scene on Keats’s famous urn, in which even the immediate moment of bliss is frustrated and finally denied*” (Hornback 1971: 135).

Like Jude’s, Phillotson’s early dream of scholarly life at Christminster has not come true. Arabella is a character whose life is based on immorality. Furthermore she has displayed no dream or ambition. As a result, she does not undergo fate the way the other characters do. Analysing the place of Arabella in the novel and discussing her relationships with Sue, Southerington finds that: “*Arabella is more harshly treated by her creator than any other of Hardy’s characters – or is she? Critics have seen in her the most odious of Hardy’s women, and there are some indications that he agreed with them. Yet he makes Sue, for whom his sympathies are strong, feel an instinctive liking for her*” (Southerington 1971: 39).

It is commonly present in Hardy’s work the idea that, no matter how cruel it is, punishment has in some way been deserved. In his plots, there is a poetic justice which heavily weighs upon us, and which is not the justice of people. It is the manifestation of destiny and fate (Barrot and Rapp 2003: 111). Hardy’s works are almost unanimously known to be tragedies of fate rather than tragedies of character (Southerington 1971: 33). But Hornback holds Jude’s character accountable for his fate: “*Jude’s character, like every hero’s, has been his fate, and has been the making of his destiny*” (1971: 138). Character is at the core of Hardy’s novel. Indeed, as Hornback clarifies it:

The argument of the novel is not really about marriage and divorce as institutions, conventions, conveniences, or inconveniences; the focus is on character, as it usually is in Hardy’s work. *Jude the Obscure* is the intense and penetrating representation of the complex and significant character of Jude himself, and everything in the novel contributes to this. (1971: 127)

Predestination is at the core of the lives of characters. The way nature successfully contrives to prevent man’s enjoyment of things can neatly be perceived throughout the novel. Each character is ignorant of the fact that he or she is inexorably directed to his or her fate. As



a result, they are not to be blamed. Despite her dissolute life, Arabella, for instance, should just be taken as a character that plays the conventional role of villain. As Southerington (1971: 141) notes it: “*Arabella’s contribution to the plot is partly artistic – she contributes vitally to the cyclical movement of the narrative – and partly as a contrast to Sue*”. For all these reasons, Page considers: “*Only the universe can be blamed legitimately, and to do that is futile*” (Page 1978: 427).

Butler draws attention on the way Hardy’s characters evolve between two worlds; and are trapped between the physical and the intellectual, the conventional and the unconventional, the old and the new, each trap expressing sorrows and pains, and asking for mercy and safety. Ironic fate operates by placing the characters in a situation where their last condition is their first. Hardy puts into fiction the old cosmic issue of free will and determinism. The novel raises the Promethean question of man’s relation to fate. It asks whether man really masters his fate and his spiritual side, or whether he is just a powerless creature who is at the mercy of fate. *Jude the Obscure* also unravels Hardy’s pessimistic vision of destiny’s *modus operandi*, how it curbs the achievement of happiness and how social causes play a role in man’s failure to lead a satisfactory life (Butler 1978: 126-128). Analyzing the impact of fate on the “*artistic validity*” of Hardy’s works, Smart deplors the following fact:

[Hardy] insists upon the external causes of disaster, the strange perversities of Nature, Fate, and Chance. His characters are brought to ruin by events over which they have no control, suffer for the sins of others, become the playthings of a blind, irresponsible power... The mystery of the world may not be solved by a belief in a divine guidance which visibly brings out all things for good. But neither is it solved by postulating an all-powerful being endowed with the baser human passions, who turns everything to evil, and rejoiced in the mischief he has wrought.<sup>8</sup>

Circularity is the best image to represent the failure of Hardy’s heroes in their quest, dream, aspiration or existential conception. At the end of the novel, Jude’s life turns out to be an absolute failure. His last wife, Arabella, is his first wife. Neither of his dreams of intellectual and ecclesiastic life ever comes true. He is childless, just as he was at the very beginning of the life. Not to mention that he dies in alienation and solitariness in the city of his early dreams. Ultimately, he ends where he started. Sue, in turn, has come back to the starting point. Her last husband, Phillotson, is her first; she is childless; and she is again engaged in religion just as she was when Jude first met her in Christminster. Phillotson is again married to his first wife Sue. And he is again at the point where he started: a schoolmaster at the village of Marygreen. The situations of the characters are the same as they were at the beginning of the novel, as if the story were reenacted. Only the physical places are interchanged, which Hornback accounts for as being “*indicative of the perversity of fate*” or “*an added ironic measure of the futility of dreams*” (Hornback 1971: 137). All in all, it clearly appears at the end of the novel that Christminster was not the right place to go, but Jude and Phillotson did and they underwent the consequences.

Jude’s suicide at the end of the novel is his way of escaping or defeating destruction. In other words, “*Jude’s death is an act of choice, accomplished through the exercise of his consciousness and will*” (Hornback 1971: 136). *Jude the Obscure* reflects the influence of Hardy’s favourite dramatists Aeschylus and Sophocles in the sense that the hero is a victim of

a fateful event he has triggered, a choice or mistake he has made, despite the many unsuccessful attempts he makes to prevent the advent of fate (Hornback 1971: 127). Jude is for instance a victim of his choice to marry with Arabella who “*represents as well as meets and takes advantage of Jude’s animal instincts; she is the weakness which humiliates and destroys him*” (Hornback 1971: 130)

Jude’s story is built upon the dialectic of gender, class, custom and education and it truly reflects the historical mutations underwent by the English society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with notably educational aspirations from the working class. As clarified by Hewitt:

Earlier generations would not have conceived of wanting to go to Oxford; later generations as intelligent and industrious as Jude will succeed. Hardy’s despairing hero is at that point at which desire has been aroused but fulfilment is denied (Hewitt 1987: 14).

## Conclusion

The novel *Jude the Obscure* proves, if need still be, that Hardy was an unconventional writer in a conventional society. It tells a story about aspiration to new and modern life in a conservative society. Hardy loved the changing world; he appreciated modernity (Barrot and Rapp 2003: 112). Through their *avant-garde* attitudes, the characters Jude and Sue are prime examples of those people who attempted to transcend the barriers of class, for the former, and gender, for the latter, in a conventional society subjected to profound changes. They represent all those who aspired to new thought, new social standards.

With passion and adultery for background, the novel is also about the life of a man who sways between emotional satisfaction and intellectual fulfillment. Hardy’s hero, Jude, is a victim of his impulses, affections and vices. His sensual self plays an important role in his downfall (Hornback 1971: 127). Hardy remains axiologically true to himself in *Jude the Obscure* in the sense that, as Barrot and Rapp recalls it, his novels are about love affairs, cohabiting unions, living bodies, infanticides and so on, which was scandalous and unacceptable in his time (2003: 114). But on the other hand, “*it is difficult not to believe that Hardy was consciously recalling some aspects of his earlier career. With Jude the Obscure the suspicion that he did so becomes a certainty*” (Southerington 1971: 135). *Jude the Obscure* is, to a large extent, an autobiographical novel:

[...] the most influential period of Hardy’s career was marked by a love-affair with a girl ostensibly his cousin, the birth of a child, the death of Horace Moule, and by a steadily-growing obsession with hereditary influence, based in part on his observations of his own family.” (Southerington 1971: 139)

Character is at the centre of Hardy’s novel. In Arabella, Sue and Phillotson one can find certain aspects of Jude’s character. The three of them “*have an almost Lawrentian coexistence through and in Jude. Of the four characters, one is Jude, and the other three are to a significant degree aspects of Jude*” (Hornback 1971: 127). Sue is Jude’s intellectual and mental alter-ego, Arabella is Jude’s carnal alter-ego, and “*Phillotson is Jude in his impotence, in his intellectual dream and its failures*” (Hornback 1971: 127).

*Jude the Obscure* asks whether man holds a leading role in his life, or whether he is just a powerless creature. Hardy's characters are often in conflict with society through their avant-gardism. They appear to be the immediate authors of their own tragedies, but they are in reality in the grip of the powerful forces of the universe. Fatalism is at the core of Hardy's vision of man. His characters are caught in a world wherein circumstances beyond their control determine their destiny. The contrivance of transcendental forces keeps on entangling them in successive predicaments.

Hardy transmits to his readers his conviction that man is powerless and helpless in the face of destiny. There is no morale in Hardy's conception of man. For him, human beings are damned in a definitive way, and whatever their actions may be on earth, tragedy is within them. Consequently, he incites them to a kind of revolt (Barrot and Rapp 2003: 115). For Butler, only people who can display true sympathy can fully appreciate Hardy's novel (Butler 1978: 128). Despite their tragic fate, Jude and Sue are far from embodying a dying race of people in 19<sup>th</sup>-century England; they rather stand for a race of people yet to be born in a new world.

The novel *Jude the Obscure* confirms Hardy's posture of ethnographer (Kandji 2014), notably through his portrayal of Victorian England, the activities, the frames of mind, the habits, customs, the morals, the lifestyles and so on. All these reasons make Hardy a "historian of sensibilities".

As a Victorian novel *Jude the Obscure* perfectly well shows that existential uncertainty, which is now much represented in English postmodern fiction, is a long-standing theme in English literature.

## Notes

1 – Adler points out the importance of the interactions between mind and body in psychology:

[...] in Individual Psychology we are really confronted with the living interactions of mind and body. Someone's mind and body is here to be treated; and if our treatment is wrongly based we shall fail to help him. Our theory must definitely grow from experience; it must definitely stand the test of application. We are living amongst these interactions, and we have the strongest challenge to find the right point of view (Adler 1931: 1).

In the field of medicine, specialists expound the somatization of some psychic disorders, such as anxiety, stress, depression, trauma and so on. For instance, some sexual dysfunctions are caused by anxiety, stress, depression etc.

2 – William Boyd's short story "The Mind/Body Problem" is about bodybuilding. It addresses the issue of the excessive use of steroids, and the possible side effects. But the story is punctuated by philosophical reflections made by one of the characters who is working on an essay on the mind/body problem. The following passage is an example:

Opponents of Dualism never succeeded in giving a satisfactory account of the feeling we all have of personal identity. They could not account for the special relationship that exists between the elements that make up a person's mind and that particular physical object which is that person's body (Boyd 2005: 194)

3 – Any further reference to this work will appear in the body of the text as *Jude*, followed by page number.

4 – Thomas Hardy is quoted by Southerington. 1971. *Hardy's Vision of Man*. London: Chatto & Windus, p.140.

5 – Thomas Hardy as quoted by Southerington (1971: 39).

6 – Read the article of El Hadji Ibrahima Diop. 2002. « Essence philosophique de la pédagogie de Kant » *Éthiopiennes*, revue négro-africaine de littérature et philosophie, n°68. Dakar: Fondation Léopold Sédar Senghor (ed.). p.137.

7 – Sue's hectic life much recalls George Eliot's.

8 – J. S. Smart is quoted by Southerington (1971: 33).

E.M. Foster, in turn, points at the way the importance Hardy gives to causality is detrimental to his characterization:

Hardy arranges his events with emphasis on causality, the ground plan is a plot, and the characters are altered to acquiesce in its requirements... They are finally bound hand and foot, there is ceaseless emphasis on fate, and yet, for all the sacrifices made to it, we never see the action as a living thing... The characters have been required to contribute too much to the plot; except in their rustic humours, their vitality has been impoverished, they have gone dry and thin. This, so far as I can make out, is the flaw running through Hardy's novels: he has emphasised causality more strongly than his medium permits. [E.M. Foster is quoted by Southerington (1971: 34).]

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