

The Doomed Union

Thomas Hardy's Pessimism Toward Marriage, Anglicanism, and Society

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate Thomas Hardy's pessimism by examining his life and to display how three of his novels, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, and *Jude the Obscure* reflect actual events, relationships, and social issues in Hardy's life. Hardy's fatalism began to manifest itself in his early childhood, as he was the result of an unplanned pregnancy, and then later in his youth, when his family could not afford to fund a full education. As he grew into adulthood, Hardy began to feel acutely the line drawn between him and those of a higher class. His despairing relationships with two women, his cousin Tryphena Sparks and his first wife Emma Lavinia Gifford, were the inspiration for the futile plotlines of these three novels. Because of the harsh society in which he lived, his lack of money, two unhappy relationships, and the failure of his last two novels to be accepted by his readers, Thomas Hardy emerged as a pessimistic novelist and poet of the nineteenth century.

### **The Doomed Union**

Thomas Hardy's Pessimism Toward Society, the Church, and Marriage

### **Introduction**

Thomas Hardy, who lived and wrote in rural Dorchester, England, is widely recognized as a major contributor to the English novel. He produced many successful novels between the 1860s and 1890s, but his most famous were his last and also his most controversial. Hardy captured the heartbeat of the rural English people against the looming backdrop of encroaching industrialism. His novels have a genuine, almost autobiographical feel because he used many personal experiences, acquaintances, settings,

and opinions in his fiction. An early novel, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, (1874) and his two last novels, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, (1891) and *Jude the Obscure*, (1895) reflect considerable portions of his life experiences. Some of Hardy's heroes and even heroines adopt his personal qualities and go through some of the same life situations that he did. Additionally, many of Hardy's female characters are extremely similar to lovers and friends he had throughout his life. Hardy personally felt the crushing pressure of Victorian society, namely its rules and regulations concerning love and marriage. Hardy, and therefore, his characters often rebel against this society, making decisions that contradict the expectation of their society.

Many times, Hardy felt that he was an outcast in his society, partly because his religious beliefs did not match up with the Church's, but also because his social thoughts and actions were more progressive than his counterparts'. After experiencing years of disagreement with the England of the 1800s and having a marked desire for progression, Hardy became understandably morose. His novels became increasingly dismal and pessimistic and it is for this fatalistic tone that he is greatly remembered. Because of his difficult childhood, and his advanced ideas in adulthood in conjunction with his lack of money, Hardy emerged as one of the most poignant, yet pessimistic novelists of the nineteenth century.

### **Early Childhood**

*Jude the Obscure* and *Far from the Madding Crowd* indicate the way Thomas Hardy's early childhood contributed to his dismal attitude toward human existence and marriage.

Thomas Hardy did not have the hopeful, joyous start that many firstborns bring to their expectant parents. He was conceived out of wedlock; his parents Thomas Hardy II and Jemima Hand, were forced to marry six months before his birth. The stress of societal expectations took its toll on Hardy's parents and was exacerbated when, upon delivery, the infant Hardy was pronounced dead. According to Gibson, Hardy's newborn body was laid to the side to be disposed of while the nurses tended to his mother; it was not until his faint cries were heard that anyone realized he was alive at all (1). Hardy's near-death experience in the first minutes of his life and the possible recounting of this story by his mother set the stage for a life of developing fascination with doom, fate, and pessimism.

A strong theme of childhood death which evinces this experience can be found in Hardy's final novel, *Jude the Obscure*. His character, Little Father Time can serve as a physical manifestation of the young Hardy himself and is used as an instrument to play out the subject of childhood death and suicide. Little Father Time is like Hardy because he is the only child in the novel who is born within the legitimacy of marriage. He is the son of Jude, the novel's title character, and his first young wife, Arabella. Arabella tricks Jude into marrying her initially by telling him that she is pregnant. He immediately concedes to this marriage because in the late nineteenth century, other options simply did not exist, just as they did not exist for Hardy's parents. Seven years later, Jude and Arabella meet up again and she reveals to her still-legal husband that she gave birth to his son in Australia and that she wants him to take custody of the young boy. According to Palmer, though societal laws were rigid at this time, the child would have been considered completely legitimate and Jude would have been admonished to raise him

under the influence of the church (88). Jude, once again, because of the compulsion of society, agrees to do so. He is introduced to Little Father Time, a morose and pensive little boy, who, Elliot says is much like Hardy himself at his age (15.) In his book, *Fatalism in the Works of Thomas Hardy*, Elliot writes about Hardy as a boy: "Meditating on what he had seen and done in the world up to that time, he concluded that he preferred not to grow up" (14). The young Thomas Hardy was himself a sad and pessimistic little boy who did not see the reason in living, and Little Father Time fleshes out this attitude.

Jude and his current lover Sue Bridehead agree to raise Little Father Time who feels the disapproving eyes of society upon him. Though he is a mere child, he has intuition and sees that his culture does not approve of his father and Sue's relationship because they are not married. Jude and Sue have two other children together, which they raise alongside Little Father Time. In a climactic point in the novel, Sue and the three children are staying in a boarding house when Sue reveals to a nine-year-old Little Father Time that she is once again pregnant. He reacts with immediate horror and blames her for allowing herself to be in that state. He feels acutely the burden that he and his half-siblings are upon their parents and takes responsibility upon himself to solve his parents' financial struggles. Shuttleworth points out that because of the burden that he adopts, Little Father Time is robbed of his juvenility (138). The child is unable to live out a normal youthful life because of the oppression he feels from society. Unable to take the pressure and in a scene of sweeping horror, Little Father Time hangs his two younger siblings and himself.

Though Little Father Time is fictionalized, he does have traces of the young Thomas Hardy in his character. Little Father Time is a child who grows up seeing

religious convention being broken or shirked by parents who choose to bring children into the world regardless of their marital status. Hardy's understanding of his own illegitimacy seems to have negatively affected his outlook on procreation and on conforming to society's expected behavior. Hardy was never despondent enough to commit suicide, but, based upon a letter that he wrote to H. Rider Haggard in May of 1891, his outlook on children's lives was extremely grim. Haggard and his wife had recently lost a child, and Hardy's consolation was this: "Please give my kind regards to Mrs. Haggard, and tell her how deeply our sympathy was with you both in your bereavement. Though, to be candid, I think the death of a child is never really to be regretted, when one reflects on what he has escaped" (*Letters* 235). Hardy seems to be offering genuine sympathy and consolation, but through his words, it is evident that his view on the sanctity of human life and even the value of the human existence was very skewed.

A second way that Hardy's childhood demonstrates his pessimism stems from the brass telescope his father owned when Hardy was a child. The Hardys lived in Little Bockhampton, England, in a house that was close to the town square but not close enough to see it well with the naked eye. He was fond of the large brass telescope, a family heirloom, which he used not only to look at the stars but for a far more morbid curiosity. According to Gibson, as a little boy, Hardy turned this object not to the heavens but to the gaol in the town square, a place where criminals were executed. His fascination with these gruesome executions may have translated into the scene in *Far from the Madding Crowd* when Boldwood shoots Sergeant Troy and is as a result chased down by the town officials for execution (12). Hardy's choice to watch numerous executions may

have simply been boyhood curiosity, but whether this was just the wide-eyed disbelief of a child or a deeper character flaw, the theme of death can be seen in all of his novels.

### **Young Adulthood**

As a young adult, Hardy was exposed to ideas that made him skeptical about religious practices of the church, most pointedly, infant baptism. He also met Tryphena Sparks, his cousin, who quickly became his lover. Tryphena served as an inspiration for some of Hardy's plots and female characters.

In his early manhood, as observed by Gibson, Hardy met regularly with the man to whom he was apprenticed, architect John Hicks. Because of his family's financial situation, Hardy was unable to attend college; grade school was as far as he progressed, making an apprenticeship necessary for him to learn a trade and make his own living. John Hicks was extremely influential in Hardy's life. Though he was an architect, he was well read in both the Scriptures of the Church and also the Classics, both Greek and otherwise (14). It is with Hicks that Hardy first began to discuss and question the regulations and ceremonies of the church. Hicks may have never known that the conversations that he just intended to broaden the mind of his pupil were to have an incredible effect upon the subjects of novels. According to Creighton, infant baptism was a particular practice that Hardy not only questioned, but also for which he simply could not find an answer (65). Eventually, Hardy would include the theme of infant baptism in one of his novels, *Tess of the d'Urvilles*. In this book, his heroine, Tess, gives birth to a baby out of wedlock and wants to have him baptized and blessed by the Church. When the rector refuses to do so, Tess attempts to baptize the child herself. Hardy's intellectual conversations with Hicks pertaining to infant baptism likely are displayed in his depiction

of poor Tess and her desire to have her bastard child baptized and christened. Hardy may have wished to convey the pitiful religious efforts of an uneducated young mother when he portrayed Tess baptizing her infant.

According to Bjork, it was at this time that Hardy began to read Greek authors such as Aeschylus and Sophocles, weighing and measuring their teachings against what he saw of life and society. He was also an avid reader of critical periodicals of the day, namely *The Saturday Review*. His reading of this periodical in particular was perhaps unhealthy, for its hyper-critical stance contributed to his extreme self-condemnation. Bjork writes, "... the 'corrective skepticism' that we find in Hardy's early novels is attributable to his almost weekly confrontation over many years with the criticism in *The Saturday Review* of Victorian social evils, hypocrisy and sentimentality" (104). Even in his early manhood (during the 1860s) Hardy was developing the increasingly pessimistic and gloomy attitude, which was to color his later novels.

Also during his young adulthood, he met Tryphena Sparks who was an influence for his female characters like Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure*. Hawkins suspects that Hardy based his character, Sue on his cousin, Tryphena Sparks, with whom he fell in love in his youth (32.) The brief but sweet nature of Jude and Sue's relationship may very well be a reflection of Hardy's relationship with Tryphena which was also short-lived. Because there is little to no documentation of their relationship, the very nature of their commitment remains unknown. Hardy kept journals in which he mentions her, but other than that, no conclusive evidence exists on whether or not they were engaged. Hawkins speculates that the ring Hardy gave Tryphena was given second-hand to his first wife, Emma, after his relationship with Tryphena had ended. Tryphena may also have given

birth to Hardy's child out of wedlock, just as Sue gave birth to Jude's children (31). Regardless of the truth of these unconfirmed rumors, it is certain that Hardy based at least pieces of his character, Sue, upon his dear cousin, with whom he had brief companionship. According to Miller, Hardy's relationship with Tryphena ended sadly and his first marriage also dwindled to estrangement because of irreconcilable differences (193). Tryphena served as an unrealistic, Romantic lover and his first wife, Emma Lavinia Gifford, eventually served as a representation of the unforgiving reality of nineteenth century marriage.

### **Early Married Life**

When Thomas Hardy met his first wife, Emma Lavinia Gifford, he was utterly enchanted but the enchantment quickly faded; such seeds of disenchantment can be seen in *Far from the Madding Crowd* and absolute disgust toward marriage is evident in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*.

According to Gibson, the day that he met his first wife, Emma Lavinia Gifford, Hardy was doing restorative work on a church at which her brother-in-law was the parson. They happened upon each other and he immediately thought her attractive, though her first impression of him was that he was older than he appeared. Interestingly, she also remembered the small detail that there was a blue piece of paper sticking out of his pocket. It contained the beginnings of a poem he was writing. Gibson notes that Hardy described his future wife's hair in a journal he kept as being "corn colored" (49). He was later to use blonde hair as a symbol of beauty in his female characters. For example, Sergeant Troy, in *Far from the Madding Crowd* praises the color of Fanny's hair and says that her light-colored hair is superior to Bathsheba's dark tresses (Hardy

262). Interestingly enough, though, Fanny was not Troy's wife, but his lover and the mother of his illegitimate child. Perhaps Hardy was discontent with his marriage partner even at the time he wrote *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Furthermore, Gibson points out that by the time that Hardy and Emma were married, *Far from the Madding Crowd* was being published serially. Ironically enough, the part of the book in which Sergeant Troy claims that "all romances end in marriage" was published at the very time that Hardy and his new wife were on their honeymoon (51). Even though Hardy did write many affectionate letters to his wife, letters that still survive today, it appears that he may have regretted entering a marriage union if his novels reveal his true beliefs and opinions.

### **Adulthood**

Based on the seeds of discontentment that were planted in his early childhood, Hardy struggled with the concepts of an "Imminent Will" that governed Nature and "purity" as defined by the Church of England. He included both of these themes in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, where his pessimism really began to be evident.

Hardy's belief in an "Imminent Will" takes form in many of his novels. According to Bates, he adopted the viewpoint that there was an outside Force that governed the lives of humans, but that that Force was arbitrary and uncaring in nature (472). Additionally, Bates points out that Hardy came to believe that Nature was a driving force actuated by an indifferent God and that the sufferings of mankind came to be because of an inevitable lack of justice and hostile environment (473). His writings reflect this belief; but more importantly, they took shape because of great suffering he experienced. Also, Hardy's use of despondency in his writings is not limited to a self-destructive and morbid hopelessness. He also intended for his pessimism to be a search

for answers and a journey to further understand reality. According to Brown, though he did believe that the Universe was a hostile place, Hardy also wanted to discover why this was and just how the natural world was set up (85). His fascination with nature versus transcendence viewed in a pessimistic light is remarkable.

As stated by Bjork, one source of Hardy's fascination was author Auguste Comte, a nineteenth century French philosopher and psychologist who focused his studies in the area of biology (108). Bjork writes, "The essence of Comte's analysis here of modern thought is recognizable also in most of Hardy's criticism of contemporary ideas: that is, much of the suffering of his characters is due to the fact that traditional moral concepts and religious ideas have not kept pace with the general progress of human thought, or with each other" (110). Angel Clare, one of Tess's lovers is a characterization of Comte's theories. He marries Tess, but upon discovering that she has lost her virginity, refuses to consummate their marriage and leaves her. Hardy suggests through a pitiable portrayal of Tess that if only Clare had understood that virginity and purity do not necessarily go hand in hand, a legitimate companionship could have flourished.

Hardy does make it clear, however that Tess is no brazen woman; she is pure and untarnished, as demonstrated by the novel's blatant, but sometimes misunderstood theme: the definition of purity. In a letter to Roden Noel, dated May 17, 1892, Hardy wrote,

As if it mattered a straw whether I have, or have not, put too liberal a construction on the word "pure." Reading over the story after it was finished, the conviction was thrust upon me, without any straining or wish for it on my own part – rather, indeed, with some surprise – that the

heroine was essentially pure – purer than many a so-called unsullied virgin: therefore I called her so (*Letters* 267).

Hardy, in writing this novel, wished to do away with the traditional view of society that assumed that virginity and purity were synonymous with absolutely no exceptions. According to Gibson, his promotion of this new idea of purity is furthermore displayed in the subtitle of the novel that he added right before its publication: *A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented by Thomas Hardy* (116). As stated by Tomalin, Hardy wanted *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* to “demolish the doll of English fiction” (228). In order to do this, Hardy attempted to present Tess’s character in a pitiable light, showing that she was a woman who was broken by society’s perception of her rather than by her actions and circumstances. The scene where Tess is raped is far from graphic, but is also impossible to misunderstand as an act of her own sexual volition. Hardy argues that just because Tess loses her virginity, she does not immediately become impure. He suggests that purity is something that extends beyond physical boundaries but instead it is a result of the human will, which can remain untarnished.

Hardy’s pessimism is well displayed in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and is even used as a form of foreshadowing. Early in the novel, Tess and her younger brother Abraham are traveling to the market in the wee hours of the morning in their drunk father’s stead. It is dark outside and the vast expanse of space is visible overhead. Abraham begins an inquiry about the stars, asking Tess if the stars are other worlds, and whether those worlds are good ones or blighted ones. She quickly responds by telling him that their world is a blighted one and that if it were a good one that “father wouldn’t have coughed and creped about as he does, and wouldn’t have got too tipsy to go on this journey, and

mother wouldn't have been always washing, and never getting finished" (Hardy 26). Already here Hardy is embedding his pessimism towards marriage by showing Tess's perception of her parent's marriage in a dismal light. As a young teenager, Tess is far from idealistic and though she has not yet been touched by extreme tragedy, her outlook on life is far from positive.

Tess's outlook on life (an expression of Hardy's outlook), takes a plummet from vaguely pessimistic to outrightly dismal only paragraphs after her conversation with her younger brother. Because the sun has not yet risen, their visibility is limited and their horse, Prince, is impaled upon another cart that was coming from the opposite direction. Tess, being at the reins, takes full blame for this and takes the burden of her family's finances heavily upon herself. Her brother's reaction is similarly pessimistic: "When Abraham realized all, the furrows of fifty years were extemporized on his young face. 'Why, I danced and laughed only yesterday!' she went on to herself. 'To think that I was such a fool.' 'Tis because we be on a blighted star, and not a sound one, isn't it, Tess?' murmured Abraham through his tears" (Hardy 28). The realization of the fallen world by a young boy such as Abraham suggests that Hardy may not have view the world positively. Pessimism can take root in youth, just as it did for Abraham and Tess, becoming a sudden and heavy burden.

Tess feels the burden of pessimism and knows that she must work to benefit her family's financial lot in life. She becomes employed by a Mrs. D'Urberville who is a distant relative. It is as a result of this connection that Tess meets Alec d'Urberville, Mrs. D'Urberville's son and Tess's long-lost cousin. Alec is portrayed as being forward and unctuous from the first time that Tess meets him; his general demeanor serves as yet

another instance of Hardy's unmistakable foreshadowing. Alec shows immediate interest in Tess because of her youthful beauty and pursues her without any sense of decorum or propriety. He takes her into a strawberry patch, picks one of the blood-red fruits and offers to feed it to her. She tries to take it in her own hand and eat it herself, but he insists upon putting the fruit into her mouth himself and, because he is the stronger of the two, eventually wins out. The strawberry that Alec feeds Tess almost by force is a horrible picture of his sexual intention with her. With this scene, Hardy displays a foreshadowing of the violation that is to come.

Fate is also an enormous underlying theme in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and is allied with Hardy's pessimism. Hardy's story unfolds almost as though it could have happened no other way. Try as Tess might, Hardy portrays her life as governed by a force much stronger and higher than she: a force that is cold and indifferent to either her joy or her suffering. Hardy writes: "Thus the thing began. Had she perceived this meeting's import she might have asked why she was doomed to be seen and coveted that day by the wrong man and not by some other man, the right and desired one in all respects..." (Hardy 37). According to Elliot, in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, all of the odds are collected not for, but against virtue (37). Try as Tess might, she is on an unfortunate but inevitable path toward the desecration of her virginity. Hardy even uses Tess's name as a representation of her lifelong struggle with Fate. According to Tomalin, he originally wanted to title his novel, *Too Late, Beloved*, and have the main character named, "Sue Troublefield" (227). His original title of the novel and name for his heroine are blatantly pessimistic and fatalistic.

Elliot states that Tess's dire situation is not helped by her mother, who is prone to just accepting circumstances as fate, without even questioning or fighting against them (47). In fact, the society in which Tess's character lives observes life in a very similar way as Tess's mother. Multiple characters remark on harsh situations with a dismissive attitude. Marian, one of Tess's fellow milkmaids, explains Tess's heartbreaking abandonment by Angel Clare as being caused by "something outside ye both," instead of by any fault belonging to either of them (Hardy 323). Even Hardy's minor characters, like Marian the milkmaid and her other companions, echo his major theme of fatalism.

Hardy's fatalism in his novels was very likely a result of the period in which he lived. Elliot writes: "In literature, this recoil took the form of a renewed and defiant, though somewhat anemic, outburst of the Romantic spirit (22). Hardy must have felt suffocated by the culture that surrounded him and also by his experiences in life. His theme of inevitable fate may have been influenced by his initial lack of success in publishing his novels and his unhappy marriage to Emma Lavinia Gifford.

Yet, even nature, independent from society, is an instrument of fate in Hardy's novels. Elliot writes that in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, nature is more often brooding and dark than lighthearted and cheerful (82). Nature seems to be working against Tess and Abraham as they travel to the market in the first section of the book. Had they not been travelling in the dark, they most likely would not have been involved in the accident, which killed their horse, Prince. Additionally, nature is a destructive and dismal force in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* during the moments before the rape scene. Tess reluctantly agrees to allow Alec to drive her home in his horse-drawn cart, despite the fact that she has ridden in it before with him when he drove far too recklessly and tried to kiss her

against her will. Regardless of these past negative experiences in the cart, Tess agrees again to allow Alec to drive her. Just like the time when she and Abraham were riding to the market, it is dark outside. Alec and Tess become lost in a heavy fog (yet another gloomy dismal way nature manifests itself) and Alec suggests that Tess take his coat and sit in the woods while he goes on to look for a familiar landmark. Poor Tess is overcome by fatigue and falls asleep. When Alec returns, he witnesses this fair maiden in her most vulnerable state and succumbs to his lustful desires by taking advantage of her. The combination of night, fog, and natural tiredness can be attributed to Tess's unfortunate and horrifying rape.

One critic, Andrew Enstice, points out that nature is only a contributor to what Hardy termed "Natural Justice," a strong theme in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (16). Natural Justice can be coupled with fate because it is a result of the forces of nature, destiny, or providence that are entirely outside the control of the characters. Enstice, in his article, "The Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge," suggests that Hardy drew from his studies of the scriptures, namely the books of Genesis and Job to flesh out this theory (16). Tess is just an unlucky woman who has been dealt a bad hand in life and who has experienced deep forms of what Hardy called "Natural Justice." According to Enstice, she understands suffering not because of books she has read or contemplative thought but because she herself has suffered deeply, even as a young teenager (17). Her sufferings are not by any fault of her own; they are because she lives in a world that is fallen and corrupt and she is a victim of post-Edenic suffering. Enstice writes, "For the truth, as the Book of Job declares, is that man cannot understand the vastness of the universe, or put reason to his own existence. 'God', or whatever one chooses to call the concept of power behind all

things, cannot be justified to man. We are too brief a span to comprehend even so small a thing as our own lives" (18). This thought is very indicative of what Hardy believed and helps to disclose his overall stance on God.

The concluding scene of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is a thinly veiled biblical representation of Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve are driven out of the Garden of Eden with the full knowledge of sin. Angel Clare and 'Liza-Lu, Tess's former lover and her younger sister walk away from Wessex as changed people after having seen Tess's death. Perhaps, as Enstice suggests, with this vivid picture Hardy is suggesting that Clare and 'Liza-Lu can now live lives of fuller understanding because they have the knowledge of good and evil, but any echo of hope at the ending of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is weak and frail (18). Clare and 'Liza-Lu, however, are unmistakably representative of Adam and Eve, full of knowledge and sorrow as a result of knowing.

Though Nature is presented as a contributing force to the doomed fate of Tess, society can also be blamed for her demise. Thomas Hardy was quite familiar with the society of his time, especially with the strict standards pertaining to purity and marriage. If a woman lost her virginity, under any circumstance, she was considered to be impure at best. After Tess' rape, she lived with Alec for a time, not because she had any affection for him, but because she felt she had no choice because of the suffocating society that surrounded them. Her best hope at that point, was that Alec would take her as his wife and somehow rectify the premarital sex. Also, according to Holmes, divorce laws during the nineteenth century were extremely stringent, making divorce nearly impossible to achieve. A double standard existed within the courts at that time, where a man could much more easily get a divorce from an unfaithful woman than a woman from an

unfaithful man (601). Tess' society, nearly identical to Hardy's, would have pushed her into a hasty marriage, but then prevented a divorce.

### Old Age

Hardy's pessimism was made concrete in his older years when he divorced his wife and when his last two novels, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, were received poorly by the public because of their prominent anti-religious and anti-marriage themes.

According to Gibson, by the time that *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* was being published, distributed, and was gaining popularity, Hardy's marriage with Emma was declining and turning sour. Gibson explains that the once-beautiful Emma became increasingly unattractive as she aged, and was said to have been ugly by the time she reached her forties. Additionally, the couple had failed to have children. Whether this was because of infertility on either of their parts or because one or the other had willfully withheld sex is not known, but after many years of marriage with no offspring, it was obvious that the Hardys would not be having children (119). Additionally, Emma became increasingly religious with age, perhaps as a coping mechanism, while Hardy became increasingly agnostic. Gibson says that this clash of beliefs was a recipe for marital disharmony (119). Emma was apt to complain publically about her husband, but Hardy was faithful to his wife in speech: he never spoke ill of her out loud; instead, he characterized her in his novels or sought for love elsewhere.

According to Gibson, Hardy met and began a correspondence with a Mrs. Arthur Henniker at the time he was writing *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. She was very attractive and seemed even more so when compared to his aging, obese wife. Her beauty was

compounded when Hardy discovered that she was a fellow writer. Naturally, a correspondence via letter began and for six months they exchanged tips on writing both novels and poetry. A strong bond was created and after the half-year's duration, Hardy arranged a time to sit with her in person. He went to the meeting with all the hopes and expectations of a man who wishes to be a romantic, but, as all things happened in Hardy's life, he was crushed by her stoic rejection of him as a lover. She only viewed their relationship as platonic and had never desired for any seeds of romance to be planted (129). Hardy was brokenhearted (despite the fact that they both were married to other people) but to his credit, he used this emotion for the deepening of his novels. Gibson observes that Sue Bridehead is significantly based upon Mrs. Florence Henniker. She is indeed a combination of traits from Florence, Tryphena Sparks, and even Hardy's sister who was a schoolteacher for sometime (130). Based upon his own personal failures in relationships, Hardy constructs a representation of the brevity and ultimate impossibility of a true companionate union.

At this time, Hardy's novels began to really demonstrate his pessimism toward the union of marriage. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, his two final novels, have blatant themes against traditional marriage, and as a result, they were not appreciated or embraced by the general public. According to Tomalin, in his book, *Thomas Hardy*, editors wanted Hardy to change around the more offensive scenes in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, including Tess's rape (228). Additionally, other prominent writers were recorded to "hate" *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and the novel was said to have "divided families and broken up friendships (231). The negative reception of his passionately written novels must have added even more fuel to the fire of Hardy's pessimism.

In his final novel, *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy presents marriage in a very dismal light from several different angles. Davis writes: "The dulling of passion is a major consequence of the intrusion of the marriage laws and other legal considerations..." (60). Any passion that Jude and Arabella had is quickly quelled by marriage. According to Giordano, Jude and Arabella have nothing close to a happy relationship because they married quickly and under the influence of passion, infatuation, and guilt (120). Elliot says, in his book, *Fatalism in the Works of Thomas Hardy*, "Hardy's objection to marriage of the usual kind was based on the fact that a temporary infatuation for the moment, accompanied by no affinities or compatibilities of any kind, was all that was necessary to constitute a marriage contract" (100). Jude was nineteen when he married Arabella and though she served as his first infatuation and the satiation of his initial curiosity, the union that made the act of sex socially permissible was not a good enough reason for their marriage.

Hardy additionally shows how marriage for the sake of sanctioned sex is foolish by Jude's many-year affair with his cousin, Sue Bridehead. Jude, though estranged from his legal wife, Arabella, becomes besotted with Sue. She eventually marries Phillotson, a schoolteacher nearly twice her age for whom she has little affection. According to Davis, while both Jude and Sue are married to other people, they begin an illicit affair that is in violation of the church and society's expectations (153). Thus, Hardy presents his idea of the progressive Romantic who disavows societal rules.

Jude and Sue both are Romantics who have an idealistic view of the world. They staunchly refuse to conform to their culture and decide that the confines of marriage breed discontent. Their lifestyles contradict the church's idea that marriage protects a

couple and helps to prevent fornication; they doubly disobey its rules by both being married and committing the sin of adultery. Sue especially justifies their transgression by saying that her love is purer and more legitimate because it is not commanded or limited by the government. Hardy writes, in *Jude the Obscure*, "I think I should begin to be afraid of you, Jude, the moment you had contracted to cherish me under a Government stamp, and I was licensed to be loved on the premises by you – Ugh, how horrible and sordid!" (272.) Sue even goes so far as to call their relationship a "natural marriage" (283), meaning that their commitment to each other in their hearts is just as legitimate as a legal contract. This idea of a "marriage in heart" is not unfamiliar in literature. Hester Prynne, in Nathaniel Hawthorne's classic novel, *The Scarlet Letter* says, to her clergyman-lover, and father of her illegitimate daughter, "What we did had a consecration of its own!" (161). Sue Bridehead holds to the same system of beliefs: that if a man and woman love each other and decide to live as though they are married, that their relationship is just as, or even more authentic than those who live as one under the compulsory legalization that is the institution of marriage.

Though Jude and Sue are living as though they are married, and though they even have children, their relationship is not a happy or healthy one sexually. According to Miller, Sue is the axis of the relationship and governs the sexual nature of their union (133). Miller suggests that she tantalizes Jude in a "dance of desire" by allowing him to be in close proximity with her but infrequently permitting sex (144). Jude and Sue do not play the traditional roles expected of man and wife in their relationship. Mickelson suggests that Jude takes on the role of Victorian wife, always letting Sue be the one to dictate their sexual relationship, and Sue takes on the role of Victorian man (5). So,

according to Giordano, though Jude and Sue are defying society and living the way they want, neither of them achieves lasting happiness in their affair (125). Though the institution of marriage was encouraged by the church to prevent fornication, Jude and Sue defy this union live together outside of marriage anyway. Their relationship, however, is unfulfilling.

McGrath suggests that another way that Hardy condemns the legal union of marriage is by showing how companionship (which was another reason for matrimony introduced by the church) in marriage is nearly impossible to achieve (474). There are two marriages in *Jude the Obscure* that prove his pessimistic point. The first is Jude and Arabella's hasty marriage, which is based on nothing but guilt and desire. Arabella is crafty and conniving and has no desire to marry for companionship. Instead, according to Elliot, she chooses to be wed for security, making marriage a game. Arabella calls upon her charms to seduce Jude and possess him (93). She and Jude have little to no compatibility because she is the unrefined daughter of a pig farmer and he is a scholarly and inquisitive man who aspires to gain access to the world of academia. Their lack of companionship is seen most strongly in a scene where Arabella, with pig grease on her hands, comes into the house and throws Jude's precious books onto the floor. With their interests in blatant conflict, Arabella proves that she never intended to be Jude's companion and that companionship as a reason for marriage is simply foolish.

The second marriage that displays the fatuousness of marriage for companionship is that of Sue Bridehead and Richard Phillotson. Initially, Phillotson, who is a schoolteacher, takes an interest in Sue because she is his student and works alongside him in the school. He thinks, foolishly, that because they both have the appearance of

academic interests that they would be sufficient companions. However, she is flighty and only chooses to marry him out of spite when she discovers that Jude is also married. She is sexually averse to Phillotson and is little more than a housemate for him because in reality, she has no love or respect for the schoolteacher. According to Doheny, Sue is a narcissist whose chronic need for a man she can control ruins any chance of an intimate companionship (118). Phillotson's dreams of a companionate marriage are shattered when Sue asks to leave him, disgusted with the confines of matrimony. According to Elliot, Sue's interpretation of marriage, which inevitably cannot include companionship, is summed up in Hardy's poem, titled, "The Christening. "...But chained and doomed for life / To slovening / As vulgar man and wife, / He says, is another thing / Yea: sweet Love's sepulchering" (qtd. in Elliot 102).

Even though Hardy condemns the two legal marriages because of their lack of companionship, he hardly presents Sue and Jude's affair, which is started for the purpose of companionship, in a pleasant light. Initially, they exist as one entity, basking in the light of contentment and friendship. Hardy writes: "They had become such companions that they could hardly do anything of importance except in each other's company" (294.)

But Hardy still uses their relationship to condemn the institution of marriage; he creates two characters with Romantic ideals that struggle against the Church's and society's expectations, only to have them fail utterly in the end. Hardy's deep pessimism is best displayed here because Jude and Sue have the potential to be the Romantic heroes of the story, but instead, he shows the ultimate futility of their beliefs. According to Elliot, Sue and Jude each have a defiant Romantic attitude in their personal lives and also in their non-traditional relationship with each other (22). They refuse to conform to

society and hold fast to their Romantic ideals. Though Jude and Sue put up a very good fight against the culture, Hardy's ultimate plot shows that the idealistic views of marriage as displayed in Romanticism are simply too weak to prevail over the imposing and choking strength of the church at that time.

Thomas Hardy was pessimistic about marriage, whether that marriage was the kind dictated by the church, or the kind that embraced the Romantic ideal of an unfettered union. He uses his final novel, *Jude the Obscure* to flesh out his extreme dislike for the church's strict governance of matrimony and additionally to show how nineteenth century society stifled any fleeting happiness that could be found in marriage. Jude, Arabella, Sue, and Phillotson are the four characters whose relationships give credence to Hardy's dark outlook on relationships. Whether a couple adhered to the societal expectations and ordinances for marriage, or rebelled against them in order to have a Romantic version of marriage, Hardy, in his novel, expresses the view that no lasting matrimonial bliss can ever be achieved.

### **Conclusion**

Thomas Hardy's life experiences are what crafted him as an author. In his early life and childhood he witnessed his parents' unhappy marriage, which was the result of his conception, and became averse to the union of marriage as a result. His inability to attend the University because of lack of funding forced him to become apprenticed to an architect. Hardy's apprenticeship fostered much intellectual discussion about religion, the modern Church, and Darwin; seeds of doubt in God and frustration with organized religion were sown at this point in his life. Hardy's negative experiences with women helped to finalize his distaste for the Church, and most pointedly, the union of marriage.

Because of unhappy and unsuccessful relationships with his cousin, Tryphena Sparks, Mrs. Arthur Henniker, and his first wife, Emma Lavinia Gifford, Thomas Hardy had an increasing dislike for marriage that developed into complete aversion. Hardy channeled his frustration with and pessimism toward life through his writing. His first successful novel, *Far from the Madding Crowd* is the most optimistic of the three examined, but still contains hints of his doubts about marriage. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, his last two novels, show a marked shift between the slightly hopeful tone that Hardy had in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Instead, these novels employ a bleak and entirely pessimistic outlook toward the Church and the union of marriage that undoubtedly reflect the trouble and pain that Hardy endured throughout his life. Hardy did not gain the title of pessimist without great suffering. His writing style and even the subjects he chose to write about allude to his everyday life, which was full of deep sorrow and hardship.

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