Chapter 6

Jude the obscure (1895)

Of all the novels of Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* is most noticeably informed by his multiple and contrasting perspectives on the problematic nature of human existence. And consequently, it involves the postmodern debate on the question of finality of meaning and universal truth. More than any of his preceding novels *Jude the Obscure* explores the relationship between man and the universe, man and society, and between man and woman in their conjugal life. Ian Gregor's understanding of the novel is worth our attention:

> It seems, almost ostentatiously, to be "about" so many things – a malevolent universe, an outworn system of education, the rigidity of the marriage laws.....

It is this simultaneous preoccupation with divergent and contrasting issues which undermines any critical attempt to attribute a finality of vision to the novel's central meaning. The conventional ending of the novel is not in harmony with the tone and mood of this superb work. Judging from the structural design of the novel as well as its internal tensions, *Jude the...

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Page references to *Jude the obscure* are to the Penguin edition (1978).
obscure is Hardy’s rejection of any totalizing attitude. It is a plea for cultural as well as ethical pluralism.

Hardy’s ultimate imaginative vision may rightly be compared with that of Dostoevsky:

Dostoevsky inaugurated a new “polyphonic” type of fiction in which a variety of discourses expressing different ideological positions are set in play without being ultimately placed and judged by a totalizing authorial discourse.

However, in spite of the skillfully preserved symmetry of the novel, Jude the Obscure received vitriolic criticism from the reviewers as well as the reading public. Bishop of Wakefield announced in a letter to the papers that ‘he had thrown Hardy’s novel into fire.’ A critic of the New York Word said ‘....when I finished the story I opened the windows and let in the fresh air...’ There has been no dearth of disparaging criticism of this superbly executed novel which was considered by Hardy himself as the most moral of all his works.

The only point in the novel on which I feel sure is that it makes for morality... that the ethical feelings of the novel, even if somewhat crudely put, was as high as that of any of the bishop’s sermon’s...”

Even today there is no critical consensus about the ultimate vision embodied in the novel. The inherent ambivalence of the novel continues to paralyse any attempt to arrive at a closure. Besides, Hardy’s refusal to
accept any totalizing principles as true is suggestive of the postmodern tendencies. Postmodernism condemns 'universalizing meta-narratives ... which ruthlessly expunge particular or local ... in its drive towards universal rationalization.' Jude the Obscure marks an important stage in the development of ethical awareness, and an increasing recognition of the irreducible diversity of voices and interests which are true in their own right and context. Hardy himself acknowledged the contrasting elements in the novel: ‘Of course the book is all contrasts – or was meant to be in its original conception.’ It is through the interplay of opposites that Hardy gives expression to his ‘series of seemings’ or ‘impressions.’ Consequently, the novel displays a sense of the irresolution of issues. What the novel ultimately leaves behind is a ‘dualistic impression.’ This is because ‘we do feel a genuine disparateness of theme, a constant oscillation of interests.’ The characters are seen in ‘constantly shifting emphasis and depth.’ The dialectics in Hardy’s imagination can be best comprehended if we examine the three basic issues in the novel – relationship between man and the universe, man and his society and, the question of marriage laws.
In *Jude the Obscure* Hardy’s long standing love-hate relationship with nature receives a thorough probing. His critical estimate of nature is best expressed by Phillotsn’s remark to Arabella:

Cruelty is the law pervading all nature and society; and we can’t get out of it if we would. (p.389)

Phillotson’s observation is an echo of Sue when she cries out “O why should nature’s law be mutual butchery!” (p.378) Hardy seems to go back on himself by ‘making nature share with society the responsibility of man’s unhappiness.’ Among other things *Jude the obscure* reveals Hardy’s enhanced awareness of the plight of man in his cosmic setting. There is an intensification of his consistent belief that the universe is malign, hostile and always thwarts man’s efforts to achieve success and happiness in life. The novel evokes a sense of ‘cosmic tragedy’, a sustained air of ‘cosmic gloom.’ Like Alexander Pope Hardy complains of a snag in the cosmic structure. The universal order is marked by complexity, contradictions and incompatible elements. There are various episodes in the novel which illustrate that man and animals alike are victims of nature’s cruelty.

Orphaned by the premature death of his parents, Jude feels himself unwanted by everyone, even by his own aunt, Drusilla. The inherent cruelty of nature is discovered by Jude even as a tender boy of eleven years of age. It is first evident when Jude is physically punished by Former
Troutham for letting the rooks eat the farmer’s corns. Young Jude is surprised at the scheme of things:

That mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another sickened his sense of harmony. (p.57)

The same perplexity is encountered later by Phillotson when he lets Sue go free from her marriage contract with him. He is dismissed by the School Management for his liberal attitude towards Sue. And yet he “did not see how an act of natural charity would injure morals.”(p.312)

_in Jude the Obscure_, the term ‘nature’ is taken both as an impersonal, external force and as the ‘inner voice’ of the individual. Since as an external force nature remains callous and indifferent to man’s aspirations, it is the inner voice, the dictates of the inner self that Hardy seems to rely upon as the true basis of actions. At the same time Hardy seems to suggest that ‘the personal fate of the individual is largely at the mercy of impersonal forces over which he has little control.’ 14 Then the question that the novel raises is the extent to which man’s inner voice is free from the influence of nature as an external force. According to Peter J. Casagrande, ‘Hardy believed that human life is unavoidably out of harmony with the orders that encompass its movements.’ 15 Within such
cosmic design man is doomed to failure, no matter how authentic and resourceful he is. Jude’s life is a robust statement of the impossibility of achieving centrality in the mysterious cosmic scheme. Nor is there any comfort producing meaning of life. Aunt Drusilla’s belief that there is a natural curse on Jude’s family further demonstrates the cruelty of nature as Hardy saw it. Little Father Time’s murderous act is a response to his reflections on the law of nature after his conversation with Sue. Soon after this tragedy we find Jude trying to console Sue by saying “It was in his nature to do it.” (p. 410) It is this deep sense of determinism which informs Jude the Obscure and excludes even the possibility of living according to one’s inner voice, for the supposed source of the inner voice itself is antagonistic to man. In the face of such cosmic hostility, Hardy raises doubt about the propriety of leading what is called ‘natural’ life, and the novel testifies to this dilemma in Hardy.

Apart from nature, society is also partly responsible for the existential plight of man. Claiming itself as an enunciator of natural laws, society creates its own structure which further aggravates the existential traumas of man. Jude’s fate proves how difficult it is for man to fight against circumstances and surroundings. Circumstances, bad chances, poverty, society and his own natural inclinations combine to make his life a battle ground. In Jude the Obscure Hardy shows how both nature and
society contrive to frustrate the genuine aspirations of man. In a letter addressed to one of his friends Hardy wrote:

The "grimy" features of the story go to show the contrast between the ideal life a man wished to lead, and the squalid real life he was fated to lead.... It is in fact, to be discovered in everybody's life though it lies less on the surface perhaps than it does in my poor puppet's.....

Hardy seems to re-examine seriously his earlier belief that social conventions are the concrete articulation of natural laws. Both the laws are intransigently inimical to man. In this connection, William R. Goetz's observation is worth quoting:

In Jude the Obscure the natural law initially seems to be prior to the social law, which must be interpreted either as an "enunciation" or a deformation of it. By the end of the novel, these two laws are threatening to collapse into one; or rather they become two versions of a system of determinism that governs human fate.

Both nature and society are seen as partners in wreaking havoc on the human individual. Man is ultimately ravaged by these two inescapable external forces. First Jude is trapped by his own natural sexual instincts towards Arabella, thereby shattering his academic hopes through a duped marriage. Then his renewed hopes are further defeated by his magnetic, natural affinity he feels for Sue. In spite of the individual differences of their unique personalities, they would have remained happy had it not been
for the unyielding attitude of their society. What seems to be emphasized by Hardy is that

the cruelty resulting from the laws of nature resembles the cruelty brought about by laws of man: both kinds of laws have a relentless universality, an indifference to the fate of the individual. In their monolithic universal quality, the laws of nature become arbitrary, cruel and machinelike.

Hardy’s tragic hero and heroine are caught between these two forces.

The question that naturally arises is that in such uncertain cosmic structure what kind of morality should one adhere to? — Individual or social? *Jude the Obscure* can be studied as a critique of both types of morality, their virtues as well as drawbacks. This is why the novel defies any critical attempt to elicit a singularity of vision. The reverse movements of the chief protagonists — Jude and Sue — are balanced in such a way as to make any finality of vision impossible. Jude proceeds from a state of conventionality to that of unconventionality whereas Sue moves from blatant unconventionality to perverse conventionality. When Jude gradually severs himself from the oppressive creeds and dogmas of society and creates a new self for him, he remains committed to it. It is a commitment born of conviction. It can’t be affected by even the most grotesque of adversities. Before his acquaintance with Sue, Jude was more or less a
conformist. If he accepted a situation, he had done it with utmost truthfulness to his own self at a given moment of time. What distinguishes Jude from Sue is the authenticity of his personality. For instance, when Arabella feigns pregnancy in order to drag Jude into an early marriage with her, he makes no effort to eschew responsibility. His own instinctive sense of morality is best expressed when he tells Arabella:

I have next to no wages as yet, you know; or perhaps I should have thought of this before...... But, of course, if that's the case, we must marry! what other thing do you think I could dream of doing. (p. 101)

These are the morally assuring words of a man who owns up to the responsibility of his carnal desires. Even though a marriage at this juncture would smash all his hopes, he is ready to forfcit them in order to remain true to the morality of his inner self. In spite of his conviction that Arabella is not an epitome of real woman hood, he accepts the consequences of his action.

Yet, such being the custom of the rural districts among honourable young men who had drifted so far into intimacy with a woman as he unfortunately had done, he was ready to abide by what he had said, and take the consequences. (p.102)
Jude remains loyal to his own natural sense of right and wrong. Simplicity is the distinctive trait of Jude’s personality. Ann, a friend of Arabella speaks of Jude as “simple as a child.” (p.85)

In contrast, Arabella is inauthentic, insincere and cunning. Her words are lies, her hair is false and her motive of marrying Jude is not informed by any sincere love for him. She is an embodiment of carnal physical desires and despicable practicality. She is a symbol of the hypocrisies and selfish interests of the emerging utilitarian society. Hers is not a ‘spontaneous animality’, but ‘calculated coquetry.’ 19 Nothing more vividly illustrates her practicality of life than the scene where she tries to seduce Vilbert while Jude is lying in his death bed. ‘The Pig symbolism used for Arabella successfully brings out her essential sickness.’ 20 She is an antithesis to Jude’s intrinsic sense of morality and altruism. In a way she reveals the hypocrisy of the emerging modern milieu.

Though Jude began his career as a conformist, yet his total personality was always in disharmony with the natural and social world around him. His was a life surrounded by the inauthenticity of society and people. From the very outset of the novel, Jude is confronted with a world
that is out of tune with his authentic temperament and attitude. The remaining tale of Jude is a painful self discovery that his sense of natural harmony and sincerity of intention will always be a rarity in the world. As a young boy he is deceived by Physician Vilbert who promises to give him Greek and Latin grammars. Then his dream of entering Christminster, the centre of learning is obstructed by the deceitful Arabella. And the final blow comes in the guise of Sue who deserts him after converting him to her own radical beliefs and ideologies. Sue’s final desertion of Jude points to two things – first, the doubtful integrity of her former conviction, secondly, the implacable influence of society on the individual. Jude has always been a victim of social conventions. Apart from his early marriage with Arabella the stratified Victorian society has been responsible for Jude’s failure to get admitted into the university. Hardy himself declared that the novel is a pathetic tale of a socially and economically disadvantaged youth’s frustrated attempts to receive university education. Hardy is highly critical of the discriminative attitude of the Victorian society in particular and every other similar society in general. In Jude theObscure Hardy has more or less truthfully followed the general tendencies of narrative literature which shows ‘the fortunes of characters as they define themselves and are defined by various combinations of their past, the choices they make and the social forces that act upon them.’

21 The much awaited letter from a
Master in one of the colleges clearly states the conservative attitude of the society of Hardy’s time. It was a society that catered to the affluent, the influential and socially privileged classes. *Jude* has affinity with *The Poor Man and the Lady* in its stringent and direct attack on class prejudice and the economic squashing of aspirants of humble station. Jude’s intellectual abilities and brilliance can’t find fertile soil for fulfilment in such a snobbish social world. And Hardy is vocal in his resentment of the social apartheid practised by the so called enlightened, intellectual community of his time. What Jude embodies in his thoughts and feelings is:

> the deepest aspirations of his class, and generation – for education, for an enlarged professional skill, for a more scientific philosophy, and above all for personal and sexual relationship based on a new level of candour and equality.  

But Jude’s hope of rising above his cramped social condition is frustrated by the rigidities of society. The frustrated Jude then reconciles himself to his inescapable fate and retorts:

> And I don’t regret the collapse of my university hopes one jot. I wouldn’t begin again if I were sure to succeed. I don’t care for social success any more at all. (p. 177)

He is disappointed with society, with its fixed laws and notions, bias and social exclusion of the poor. The observation of Sue about Christminster is, to a great extent, Hardy’s own views:
It is an ignorant place, except as to the towns people, artisans drunkards, and paupers.... They see life as it is, of course; but few of the people in the colleges do. You prove it in your own person. You are one of the very men Chrisminster was intended for when the colleges were founded; a man with a passion for learning, but no money, or opportunities, or friends. But you were elbowed off the pavement by the millionaires' sons (p.205)

Any social arrangement based on economic or class divisions is unethical, for it excludes the marginalised ‘other.’ An individual’s potential for growth can be throttled by such socio-economic structures. Hence, it is immoral. Society’s egoistic arrangements are perceived by Hardy as an attempt of the affluent to retain social, economic and political power centres. These are historical and opportunistic cultural constructs. They are not, by their very nature, informed by any natural truth.

Social conventions and ethical principles receive rigorous critical scrutiny in *Jude the Obscure* when Hardy dwells upon the question of marriage laws. Though he declared that the central concern in the novel is not with marriage laws yet this issue seems to occupy a major portion of the narrative. The technique employed in the narrative is to place genuine and authentic individuals like Jude and Sue in dialectical opposition to society’s established moral paradigms. In the process of exploring the
unsettled debate about the validity of individual and social morality, Hardy provides a critique of both without betraying any authorial predilection. Yet the novel clearly illustrates one thing that Hardy’s ethical impulses have not conformed themselves intellectually to social morality although emotionally he remains a conventionalist. This division in Hardy can be felt throughout the novel. By portraying the tumultuous lives of Jude and Sue with their unconventional ideas and attitudes, Hardy takes the narrative to the subtle question of marriage laws. Jude may be said to represent all that is natural which comes into conflict with the artificial, whereas early Sue embodies the intellectual rebellion against all that is irrational in society. Together they form a revolutionary voice against society’s stubborn resistance to comprehend the very basis and meaning of marriage. Jude’s is a very natural, instinctive kind of personality. It was his impulsive nature which drew him to Arabella once, and it is the same force which later draws him to Sue. Jude’s life and character vividly express Hardy’s deep insight into human nature:

He knew there was an element in human nature, not subject to mathematical or the water—tight theories of dogma, and this intransigent, measureless force, divided against itself, is in conflict alike with its own system of laws and the unknown laws of the universe, was the real theme of Hardy’s novels. 23
Jude the Obscure questions by implication the primacy of thought over feeling, reason over instinct. The novel demonstrates the predicament and tragic consequence of the individual’s craving for natural existence in a society constructed by the rational consciousness of man. Though crushed by both nature and society, Jude does not flee from his half-natural, half-created self unlike Sue. What gives an irresistible morality to Jude’s personality is his tenacious truthfulness to his natural self. There is neither pretension nor hypocrisy in his dealing with both women who enter his life. Both are treated with equal magnanimity and with an inexorable commitment to his sense of right and wrong. Jude does not desert either Arabella or Sue, but he is deserted by both. In his relationship with both the women Jude displays an incontestable sense of moral integrity. His unimpeachable sense of right and wrong is best expressed when he struggles to resist his natural impulses towards Sue, his own cousin. It is an incontrovertible evidence of Jude’s primary urge to honour the ‘letter’ of his marriage with Arabella.

The epigraph of the whole novel chosen by Hardy is “The Letter Killeth” Here “letter” stands for the laws, conventions and customs of society which remain insensible to the quintessence of a unique individual. The epigraph is taken from St. Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians,
(Chapter 3:6). Interestingly, the second half of this quotation, “the spirit (that) giveth life” is omitted by Hardy. This apparently deliberate omission adds to the subtlety of meaning and puzzles the critics in their attempt to arrive at a consensus about the finality of Hardy’s moral vision. The “letter” of the law becomes the emblem of what is wrong with the institutionalized society.’ 24 If Hardy had taken the whole quotation of St. Paul then it would mean the “spirit” is more redemptive than the “letter” But the dramatic ending of the novel holds back the readers from dashing into such easy conclusion, and this is what Hardy wanted to accomplish in his last novel. Hardy refuses to take sides, and presents issues before the readers for their own personal judgement. Judging Hardy as a conventionalist from the formal ending of the novel is a critical error. The epigraph is too obvious to prove otherwise. As it is, the epigraph reveals the opposition between ‘the state of civil society and the state of nature’ 25 The “letter” kills something or somebody. What or who does it kill? From the narrative structure of the novel we can easily answer these questions: the “letter” kills otherness, difference and authenticity. And yet, Hardy seems to ask himself whether these are worth defending. The answer is, they are. The tragedy is that they can’t find a place in a social structure that is too intolerant to accommodate differences. By quoting only the first part of St. Paul’s letter, Hardy attempts to show the pernicious tendency of man
made laws which thwart all that is elemental in man. And by avoiding the second part of the quotation he refuses to be labelled as a moral preacher, for his works are only a ‘series of seemings or impressions.’ It is after a long struggle between the claims of the “letter “and of the “spirit” that Jude denounces the former for the latter. But the “spirit” does not give him life, rather takes away his life literally and Sue’s psychologically.

Jude’s initial respect for established social conventions can’t hold on for long against his natural impulses in his relationship with Sue. The natural ultimately triumphs over the unnatural. In his struggle “the human was more powerful in him than the Divine.” (p.267) It is, however, after long meditation and inner struggle that Jude surrenders to his instinctive self:

Some men would have rushed incontinently to her, snatched the pleasure of easy friendship which she could hardly refuse, and have left the rest to chance. Not so Jude – at first. (p. 146)

But once he recognizes the intensity of his affinity with Sue and his love for her, he remains true and loyal to the end. Never does he disown the consequences of his action. Jude’s attraction for Sue has a qualitative difference from his earlier attraction for Arabella. The latter was of a
physical and carnal nature. But the Jude – Sue relationship is characterized by its spiritual, ethereal quality. The ineffable, mysterious affinity that exists between Jude and Sue is acknowledged by even the aggrieved Phillotson. A reflection attributed to him confirms that fact: “They seem to be one person split in two.” (p. 293) From the orthodox point of view Jude’s fascination for Sue may be regarded as immoral, for he “was licensed by the laws of his country to love Arabella and no other unto his life’s end…” (P. 146) But here Hardy is engaged into a critical scrutiny of the very basis of a durable, meaningful marriage. After Jude’s matrimonial debacle with Arabella, he realizes the inherent error of their union:

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 which had no necessary connection with affinities that alone render a life-long comradeship tolerable. (p. 115)

Viewed from outside the purview of conventional ethical standards, their marriage lacks the support of any natural ties that alone are capable of sustaining a life-long relationship. Though in his heart Jude is convinced of its invalidity, especially after the discovery of Arabella’s feigned pregnancy, yet he remains committed to the social norms:

There was perhaps something fortunate in the fact that the immediate reason of his marriage had proved to be non-existent. But the marriage remained. (p. 107)
It reveals Jude’s conscious attempt to conform. Nothing is more moving than his sincere efforts to pray against his new weakness for Sue. But ultimately the natural in him proves too forceful for the life denying social morality. It is too tangibly evident when he tells Sue:

I’ll never care about my doctrines or my religion any more! Let them go! Let me help you, even if I do love you and even if you.... (p. 276)

According to William R. Goetz, Jude the Obscure ‘seeks to call into question the institution of marriage on the grounds of natural morality.’

What compels Phillotson to allow Sue to go to Jude is his intuitive sense of the immorality of holding her back forcibly. He makes no secret of it when he discusses the issue with his friend, Gillingham:

I know I may be wrong – I know I can’t logically or religiously, defend my concession to such a wish of hers; or harmonize it with the doctrines I was brought up in. Only I know one thing: something within me tells me I am doing wrong in refusing her (p. 293)

What prompts Phillotson to make such concession is his awareness of a natural morality as opposed to the social.

Both Jude and Phillotson have an intuitive awareness of what is right and what is wrong. They respect the ‘otherness’ of the other, something unthinkable in the pre-modern world, but celebrated in the
postmodern world. Social and moral laws in any society are formulated on the basis of a belief in the ‘metaphysics of presence’ – a notion that there is a transcendental signified, a God-Word that underlies all philosophical talk and guarantees its meaning. Hardy never believed in the transcendental presence of a purposeful, conscious being from whom emanates everything in the phenomenal world, or who attributes meaning to life. He never believed in the possibility of an ultimate Truth or Being. In this Hardy seems to have anticipated the postmodernist skepticism on the possibility of truth. Jim Powell’s view of Derrida is worth quoting because Hardy seems to share the spirit of Derrida:

According to Derrida, all Western thought is based on the idea of a centre – an Origin, a Truth, an Ideal Form, a Fixed Point, an Immovable Mover, an Essence, a God, a Presence, which is usually capitalised, and guarantees all meaning. The problem with centres, for Derrida, is that they attempt to exclude. In doing so they ignore, repress or marginalize others (which become the other).

The logical outcome of such structures of thought is a tendency towards fixity, institutionalization and totalitarianism. Within such social atmosphere, the unique and the authentic will be oppressed by the social machinery. It is society’s refusal to accept plurality of thinking which causes the tragedy of Jude and Sue. According to William K. Frankena ‘Morality must .... recognize various sorts of excuses and extenuating
circumstances.\textsuperscript{129} This is exactly what is not happening in \textit{Tess of the d'Urvervilles} and \textit{Jude the Obscure}. Hardy regrets the societal attempt to freeze the free play of differences in the individual. It is a blatant refusal to recognize the pluralistic nature of man. The issues raised in Hardy's last two novels transcend the barriers of conventionality, pointing to a world of multiplicities.

Jude Fawley's transition from a state of conventionality to that of unconventionality unveils his increasing awareness of the absurdity of universalism. His is a gradual evolution from an uncritical acceptance of conventions through doubt and questioning, to an intellectual comprehension of the invalidity of man made laws. The tenacity of his conviction, earned through experience and meditation, is too powerful to sever him from their influence even in the midst of intolerable adversities. Whereas Sue makes a backward journey intellectually with the change of her circumstances, Jude remains intransigent. His 'identity is based on personal qualities that are revealed during the tribulations of life.'\textsuperscript{30} In his stoicism Jude has an affinity with Crabriel Oak of \textit{Far From the Madding Crowd}. The essential self of Jude comes into being in his encounters with the world. Essentially Jude has been authentic and Sue inauthentic. Her
inauthenticity is exhibited through trying circumstances. In this connection the observation of Jonathan Culler is worth our attention:

Western novels reinforce the notion of an essential self by suggesting that the self which emerges from trying encounters with the world was in some sense there all along, as the basis for actions which, from the perspective of readers, bring this self into being. The fundamental identity of characters emerges as the result of actions, of struggles with the world, but then this identity is posited as the basis, even the cause of those actions.  

There is an indisputable harmony between Jude’s natural self and his actions. During his initial inclinations towards Sue, Jude engages into an inner battle against the temptations as a married man. It is not Arabella’s personality or his love for her which inspires him to be moral, but his spontaneous respect for a religious marriage contract. Falsity is alien to Jude’s natural make up. For instance, when Phillotson comes to seek a clarification about the scandalous relationship between Sue and Jude, he would have easily sent him off in agony and defeat. But Jude is a genuine, authentic person, and “his action did not respond for a moment to his animal instinct.” (p. 219) The most redeeming trait of Jude’s personality is his acutely felt concern for others. At his surprise encounter with Arabella in a bar at Christminster after so many years of absence, Jude “pitied while he condemned her.” (p. 244) While feeling a keen sense of revulsion for her decline into despicable dissoluteness, as a legal husband he felt pity for
her. "She seems much the same as ever— an erring, careless, unreflecting fellow-creature." (p.331) When Arabella comes to the lodging of Jude and Sue, pleading for help, his natural sympathy is aroused. To Sue’s argument that Arabella is no longer his wife, he retorts: “What those legal fellows have been playing at in London makes no difference in my relation to her.” (p.331) What is striking about Jude’s personality is that in him is combined the spirituality of Sue and the animality of Arabella.

The only occasion when Jude seems to lapse into inauthenticity is when he diverts his attention from his frustrated intellectual ambition to altruistic ecclesiastical adventures. It is not the consequence of any ethical enthusiasm although it was there in him before he met Sue. This voluntary transition of Jude from authenticity to inauthenticity is short-lived. However, it reveals how social circumstances can lead people into a life of inauthentic existence:

He feared that his whole scheme had degenerated to, even though it might not have originated in, a social unrest which had no foundation in the nobler instincts; which was purely an artificial product of civilization. There were thousands of young men on the same self-seeking tract at the present moment. (p.181)

It is an anticipatory echo of what he will discover painfully later about the Wessex music composer. Finer instincts in a man are strangulated by the
rapidly changing social world which is more materialistic and artificial than spiritual and natural.

In the last two parts of the novel Hardy's chief focus is on the question of marriage laws. Marriage as a legal institution is placed under scathing critical scrutiny, especially through the radical views of Sue. She is apprehensive about the capacity of a marriage contract to sustain permanent love between the partners. She tells Jude:

I have just the same dread last an iron contract should extinguish your tenderness for me, and mine for you, as it did between our unfortunate parents. (p. 323)

Marriage as a misguided convention receives a penetrating treatment in the novel. Sue finds a relationship without any legal backing likely to be more enduring and passionate than the one brought about by legal contract. Hardy is exploring the viability of a union based on mutual understanding and natural affinities, rather than one created through a legal contract which undermines the real meaning of marriage. According to William R. Goetz, *Jude the Obscure* 'would demonstrate the perversion of a marriage that strays from the laws of nature into cruelty and yet cannot be corrected through divorce.' 33 A legal contract, argues Sue, is potentially destined to
drain away all the natural passion for each other. People generally react against external compulsions. A permanent contract must be based on good will, not on any binding law. Sue is aggressively outspoken about her hatred of marriage institution:

What Arabella has been saying to me has made me feel more than ever how hopelessly vulgar an institution legal marriage is — a sort of trap to catch a man — I can’t bear to think of it. (p. 337)

Sue sees a conventional marriage contract irrevocably binding. If the initial passions of a union dither away and living together becomes intolerable, there is no scope for separation in the conventional scheme of marriage contract.

What Sue resents most is the ‘spiritual bankruptcy and cruelty’ of a civil contract. Throughout the novel Sue and Jude live in a constant state of tension between civil laws and the laws of nature. A legal marriage contract is fundamentally based on the utterance of a pledge. In other wards, it is the “letter” and not the “spirit” which determines the union. In this connection Goetz observes:

In so far as marriage furnishes the “machinery” for Jude the Obscure, the novel becomes an exploration of the marriage contract considered both as “letter” and speech act.35
If we deny the ‘metaphysics of presence’, then a marriage contract which is fundamentally based as mere utterance of a pledge cannot claim to have any sanctioning authority. It is particularly this absurdity of the contract which constitutes the basis for Hardy’s critique of marriage as an institution. In conventional contract, marriage is simply a speech act, an oath. And the convention of the marriage oath is intrinsically incongruous because of the nature of promises and the nature of human diversity. A momentary feeling, an oath, binds one for life as it happens between Jude and Arabella. Most legal marriage contracts are based on physical attraction, not on spiritual affinity. Besides, the conventional, legal contracts do not attempt to find out whether such contracts are based on mere sexual attraction or spiritual affinity. According to Sue, legal marriage is not only a verbal convention, but also an occasion for the sexual act.\textsuperscript{36} She contends that ‘if the “spirit” of marriage seems to be contained in its verbal contract, its “letter” is found in the sexual act.’ \textsuperscript{37} And it is the letter that almost “killeth” Sue. She sees legal marriage as a licensed occasion for sexual acts. However, what Sue fails to recognize is the truth that sex is a natural, procreative act. Yet, her natural repulsion towards sex is only a minor snag in an otherwise natural response to the question of marriage.
The fundamental objections raised by Sue to a legal marriage contract call for a critical evaluation of this natural phenomenon. Even Mr. Phillotson’s approach to Sue’s request for a mutual separation is informed by his deep insight into the problematic issue of marriage contract. His eventual decision to grant Sue freedom reveals his acute awareness of natural morality as against the superficial, oppressive morality of society or the Church. When caught between the opinions of society and his own personal convictions about the serious nature of his relation with Sue, Mr. Phillotson listens only to his conscience. He places the individual above the social laws and religious conservatism, and let Sue go her own way. In the eyes of society his position may be indefensible, but not in the eyes of natural law. Their marriage has not been one of mutual love and understanding. And she has no hesitation in undoing such a loveless union which would be only a misery to both:

I am certain one ought to be allowed to undo what one has done so ignorantly! I dare say it happens to lots of women; only they submit, and I kick... when people of a later age look back upon the barbarous customs and superstitions of the times we have the unhappiness to live in, what will they say! (p. 276)

Sue’s radical views about the conventional rules of marriage may be provocative to the moral sensibility of a traditional society. But Hardy’s
purpose is to turn the attention of the readers to the rigidity of moral laws that are callous to unique cases. Not only Sue, but even Phillotson feels the same with regard to their separation:

... I am more and more convinced everyday that in the sight of Heaven and by all Natural, straight forward humanity, I have acted rightly (p. 312)

The rightness of his decision lies in his conviction that a marriage without love is dead and dry. It is as good as no marriage at all. It mocks the very meaning of marriage. Seeing through the eyes of nature, the marriage of Phillotson and Sue is adulterous. This is what Sue feels about it:

For a man and woman to live on intimate terms when one feels as I do is adultery, in any circumstances, however legal. (p. 285)

Sue’s calling her own marriage adulterous amounts to a radical attack on the institution of marriage. It implies that adultery can happen not just outside of marriage but inside as well. Sue’s essential argument is that the ‘marriage law necessarily generalizes something that is in essence particular, and makes contractual a feeling that should be voluntary.’

Jude is not as radical as Sue although he advocates the need for toleration and circumstantial judgement of a particular case:
Well, I don’t know. The intention of the contract is good, and right for many, no doubt; but in our case it may defeat its own ends because we are the queer sort of people we are — folk in whom domestic ties of a forced kind snuff out cordiality and spontaneousness. (p. 354)

Hardy does not reject the institution of marriage altogether. What he suggests is the need for flexibility in applying general rules to different individuals, for men are pluralistic in nature. He pleads for the dissolution of the universal perspective. Hardy seems to have anticipated the postmodern thought that the pattern or the centre is only a wishful thinking, an imposition. When social laws tend to be rigid, Hardy parts company with conventions. That is why T.S. Eliot speaks of Hardy as ‘a powerful personality uncurbed by any institutional attachment or by submission to any objective beliefs.’

What makes life hard for Jude and Sue is not any intrinsic flaw in their unconventional union, but the intransigent attitude of society. When the neighbours in Spring Street, where Jude and Sue stay with Little Father Time, begin to suspect the basis of their intimate relationship, they begin to ostracize them. The spiritual affinities that constitute their relationship are of no significance to the rabble. They want conformity to laws and rules. Society refuses to understand and recognize the nature of their spiritual
union that any marriage should ideally represent. Sue's bitter reaction to social attitude is worth recalling:

I can't bear that they, and everybody, should think people wicked because they may have chosen to live their own way! It is really these opinions that make the best intentioned people reckless and actually become immoral (p.372)

What Hardy is protesting against is the utter lack of 'sensitivity to differences' and the inability 'to tolerate the incommensurable'—something that the postmodern world has begun to understand and tolerate. Any unorthodox leaps out of existing paradigms or governing structures of thought were morally as well as socially offensive in Hardy's time. If Hardy had been writing today his ideas would have found many takers in the postmodern society, for it 'yields the vision of cultural 'heterotopia'' (pluralism) which has neither edges, hierarchies or center.' And Hardy himself knew that his ideas were a little too in advance of his time. Contemplating over the failure of their unique union Jude tells Sue that their ideas were fifty years in advance of their time to be of any use or success. Though true to themselves, they can't escape the conventional judgement of society. They are out of tune with the times.
Hardy himself declared that '... A marriage should be dissolvable as soon it becomes a cruelty to either of the parties.' In *Jude the Obscure* the divorcés do not, however, bring a lasting solution to the problems of the protagonists. Rather, both the protagonists are ultimately united with their first partners. In Jude's case his remarriage with Arabella is a callous, meaningless exercise from his point of view. But Sue's reunion with Phillotson is a voluntary, conscious act. Many critics like to cite this dramatic ending of the novel as a reaffirmation of Hardy's inalienable belief in social conventions. On the other hand, many are disappointed with Hardy for leaving the problem where he found it. He pointed to a way without showing the possibility of success. This is, in fact, a conscious, deliberate structural design of the novel which is meant to be of 'turbulent contradictory views', without providing any kind of finality of vision. The novel is full of contrasting views and opinions expressed by different characters. They are suggestive of Hardy's own internal conflict. Dale Kramer makes a pertinent observation about the final impression of the novel:

> The relative validity of the several viewpoints of the characters and the narrator is supported by the lack of absolutes in the story.

In Hardy's conscious refusal to endorse any particular viewpoint as universally true, he shares the postmodern skepticism about truth. In *Jude*
the Obscure singularity of perception is replaced by multiple perspectives; universalism is replaced by particularity. The emphasis on the ‘intensity and sanctity of individual perception in Tess and Jude makes them among the most intimate and compelling narratives of the last century.’ And it is this quality of these novels which makes them appealing and relevant to contemporary readers.

In part VI – the final section of the novel – Hardy’s technique is to draw Jude and Sue apart from each other in totally opposite directions. It is part of his artistic design to maintain equilibrium of his moral vision. Sue’s self torturing journey back to Phillotson’s arms, to the lap of conventions, vividly illustrates the horrendous hold of conventions on the individual. After the tragic death of Little Father Time and her own children, Sue is no longer the old, intellectually emancipated, unorthodox woman. She is shattered by the tragic events. Here Hardy is not supporting conventions; rather he seems to suggest that

.... to do and live according to one’s personal ideals in defiance of earth’s opposition and the thunders of Heaven.... is only for vast Promethean natures; perhaps, only for male natures; certainly not for fine and fragile natures as Sue’s.
After the terrible death of her children, Sue leaves an impression of mental derangement. Her self-sacrificing surrender to all that she once despised evokes in the readers both sympathy and a sense of her perversion. She turns superstitious to the extent of becoming a worshiper of her own nemesis:

We must conform. All the ancient wrath of power above us has been vented upon us, His poor creatures, and we must submit. There is no choice. We must. It is no use fighting against God! (p. 417)

While Jude gradually frees himself from the shackles of dogmas partly under Sue's influence, and partly through his own reflections, she succumbs to conventions which she once loathed. While analyzing Sue's character Ian Gregor observes:

With her we find displayed the consciousness of self, the innate uncertainties, the psychic disturbances with which the fiction of our day is to make us so familiar. 47

Sue is inextricably imprisoned within her own extremities. She has never known the moderate path. In her immoderation, Sue shares an affinity with farmer Boldwood. Sue's tragedy springs basically from two factors - her inauthenticity and the inability to maintain equilibrium. But then, throughout the novel Sue is portrayed as a highly particularized individual. She is mysterious, enigmatic and distinguished by the peculiarity of her
nature. Her whole life bears witness to “her colossal inconsistency.” (p.231) She is of “double nature” (P.269) and there is “no order or regularity” in her life (p.283) The impression Sue leaves on the readers is that “things which were right in theory were wrong in practice.” (p. 280) What she ultimately suggests is the inherent disharmony in her personality between what she claims to believe and what she actually practises. Jude seems to have perceived this discrepancy in her character when he tells her:

I have sometimes thought, since your marrying Phillotson because of a stupid scandal, that under the affectation of independent views you are enslaved to the social code as any woman I know. (p. 305)

This is an evidence of Sue’s inauthentic nature. Sue’s love for Jude was initially brought about by feminine capriciousness and jealousy. She herself acknowledges it later:

At first I did not love you, Jude; that I own. When I first knew you I merely wanted you to love me. I did not exactly flirt with you; but that inborn craving which undermines some women’s moral almost more than unbridled passion – the craving to attract and captivate, regardless of the injury it may do the man – was in me; and when I found I had caught you, I was frightened. And then – I don’t know how it was – I couldn’t bear to let you go – possibly to Arabella again – and so I got to love you, Jude. But you see, however fondly it ended, it began in the selfish and cruel wish to make your heart ache for me without letting mine ache for you. (p.429)

What is undoubtedly clear is that Sue’s love for Jude, and her final surrender to his physical desires were partly stimulated by her jealously of
Arabella – "Mine was not the reciprocal wish till envy stimulated me to oust Arabella." (p.428)

The dramatic change in Sue’s intellectual opinions about convention and marriage laws is linked to her inherent “colossal inconsistency.” Her abrupt reversal perplexes Jude:

Sue and himself had mentally travelled in opposite direction since the tragedy: event which had enlarged his own views of life, laws, customs and dogma, had not operated in the same manner on Sue’s. She was no longer the same as in the independent days, when her intellect played like lambent lightning over conventions and formalities which he at that time respected though he did not now. (p.419)

Sue’s eventual return to Phillotson may appear to be a compelling evidence of Hardy’s conventionality. But this is not what the spirit and mood of the novel indicates. Though Hardy believed in the saner, humanly ennobling aspects of social conventions, in Jude man is shown as defeated and ruined by ‘the obduracy of the world about him...’ 48 The individual will and social forces are in constant interplay in the novel. The final vision that emerges from the dynamics of this interplay is the need ‘to reject the necessity of a conflict...’ 49 and the cultivation of a symmetrical attitude towards life. Both Jude and Sue have adopted extreme courses alternately, and suffered accordingly. If Sue had abandoned her eccentric attitude
towards legal marriage and opted for a legal contract with Jude after getting their respective former marriages dissolved, they should have found at least a modicum of happiness. But her extremity of views denies even that last possibility. What she does not realize is that it is not a contract that determines the course of love; rather it is love that leads to a contract and preserves it. Marriage with Phillotson was not the result of love, but a social compulsion following her relationship with Jude. And her final reunion with Phillotson is a repetition of the first blunder she committed. When she enters Phillotson’s bed “clenching her teeth” she betrays herself as well as Phillotson. (p. 479) Her eventual sexual submission to Phillotson is evocative of Tess’s surrender to Alec to save her destitute family. In both the cases the spirit remains severed from the body. This forced union of Sue with Phillotson may be seen as Hardy’s ironic mockery of a conventional, loveless marriage. Yet he was compelled by his age and his own sense of the form of the novel to wrench a formal conclusion from a work that does not offer one. As Ian Gregor has rightly perceived in Jude Hardy tried to venture into new territories which his imagination had no access to. With regard to the conventional ending Ian Gregor’s observation is worth quoting:
In *Jude* Hardy was still committed to a fiction which pressed for a conclusion even though it was to be a conclusion shaken to the core by the pressure of contraries. Looking back, it is difficult to see how that last hard-won ending could have been anything other than the ending to his whole fictional journey.\(^{31}\)

Hardy seems to have realized in course of the evolution of his story what Jude was slow to realize:

> Perhaps the world is not illuminated enough for such experiments as ours! Who were we, to think we could act as pioneers! (p. 428)

Though Jude and Sue could not become successful pioneers, yet they and their creator have shown a way for later day pioneers. John Bayley makes a very pertinent observation about Hardy's works:

> The most Victorian thing about his (Hardy's) novels is their plot: the least, their sense of time, place and event.\(^ {52}\)

With the conventional ending of the novel, Hardy has not achieved any moral resolution to the problems raised in the novel. The reunion of Sue with Phillotson, and Jude with Arabella is not a moral resolution at all. It may be 'a formal resolution, but a moral dissolution.'\(^ {53}\) Society, Phillotson and undiscerning critics may be comforted by this illogical resolution but not Jude and Sue. Jude dies with a curse on his lips. His is the tragic end of an honest, authentic individual. And Sue is left behind to continue her inauthentic existence with Phillotson. Sue's wretched state is vividly
captured by Arabella. To Widow Edlin's opinion that Sue has found forgiveness and peace in her return to Phillotson, Arabella replies:

She may swear that on her knees to the holy cross upon her necklace till she's hoarse, but it won't be true!.... She's never found peace since she left his arms, and never will again till she's as he is now. (p. 491)

Society may triumph, but the individual is crushed. Ultimately Jude and Sue are victims of nature, society and their own authentic selves. In *Jude* Hardy has fictionalized a world where authentic existence will be possible only at the cost of one's own happiness and even life itself. The best summing up of this brief discussion is that of John Rabbets:

*Jude* takes its bitter flavour and its shape from this merciless quality of separation – separation of man from his accustomed environment, of talent from opportunity, of compassion from convention, of love from marriage. 54
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