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LOVE AND MARRIAGE IN, 'JUDE THE OBSCURE' A LINK OF DIFFERENT MEANING

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ABSTRACT

Thomas Hardy constructs a twisted web involving four characters in six marriages in his last novel *Jude the Obscure*. The controversial actions and philosophies of his female characters in this novel created such an outcry among readers that Hardy gave up novel writing forever. Both Arabella Donn and Sue Bridehead shun traditional views of marriage as a lifelong commitment, but Arabella follows her physical desires and lust for excitement, while Sue is led by her conscience and social pressures.

Arabella is Hardy's stereotypical sexual adventurer, but she crudely masquerades as a woman attempting to appease society's accepted view of women. She is driven by her sexual impulses and, like Eustacia Vye, frequently aligns herself with men for her own enjoyment and fulfillment. From her first introduction onward, she is "a complete and substantial female animal –no more, no less"s. Hardy inundates the meetings between Jude and Arabella with images of physical lust and desire in order to show the reader that their relationship is purely sexual. In fact, Arabella first attracts Jude's attention by hitting him in the head with a pig's penis

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This highly sexualized encounter likewise slaps the reader in the face with the woman's true intentions with Jude. Arabella repeatedly creates dimples in her cheeks and eagerly flirts with Jude as a means of enticing him. Heilmann explains, "The ordinary coquette may tease and chill by plan, invite and hold off deliberately, heighten desire by displaying readiness and simulating retreat . . . This is what Arabella offers with great crudity in the beginning" . Because Jude has been ignorant of women and the world of love, he "is an easy victim" for Arabella's temptations . He blindly falls into her sexual trap believing that she is pure and honorable, but really she is simply out to catch a husband to satisfy her physical lusts. Beach states that "the whole setting of her home, the scene of wooing, is sordid in the extreme, a type of the purely animal love". Arabella's intentions are far from innocent and Jude is soon seduced.

Once the courting begins, Arabella follows the advice of her friends, a clear sign of social pressures, and ensnares Jude in a sexual trap. She then claims that she is pregnant to compel him to marry her. Although Arabella claims she truly thought she was expecting a child, Beach asserts, "She set out deliberately to catch a man by sexual incitements, and to cheat him into marrying her by false representation". Because she knows Jude is "honourable and serious-minded," she feels confident he will adhere to social expectations and marry her. He does follow through with his responsibility and soon realizes that Arabella is shallow and purely sexual, but he attempts to focus on the hope of their union. Hardy tells the reader, "For his own soothing he kept up a factitious belief in her. His idea of her was the thing of most consequence, not Arabella herself, he sometimes said laconically". He seems to be trying to hide the

true state of affairs from himself, as well as from those around him. When Arabella reveals her “mistake” in believing she was pregnant and consequently requiring Jude to marry her, she treats the mishap nonchalantly. Jude, on the other hand, sees the matter as a serious threat to his goals: “Those women friends of yours gave you bad advice. If they hadn’t or you hadn’t taken it, we should at this moment have been free from a bond which, not to mince matters, galls both of us devilishly. It may be very sad, but it is true.” Arabella replies that women have a right to perform in such a way, as long as they realize the risk associated with such an act, meaning social ostracizing and loss of reputation. Jude focuses solely on the “lifelong penalty,” though and can only see his future dashed by the animal-like passions of one dishonest woman.

Hardy continues to play on the sexuality and entrapment of the couple in frequent references to Samson and Delilah. When the two lovers enter an inn on the return from a courtship walk, a picture of the Biblical pair hangs on the wall to foreshadow the couple’s future. After Jude and Arabella quarrel and Jude attempts to commit suicide by jumping on the frozen pond, Jude again stops at the inn and notices the picture. This time the resemblance of the pair to his own marriage strikes him, and he drinks “briskly for an hour or more”. Just as Delilah trapped Samson under false pretenses, so Arabella has ensnared her man, too blinded by infatuation to realize the woman’s selfish motives. Hardy reveals Arabella’s selfish attempts to raise her status through the premature marriage: “she had gained a husband; that was the thing—a husband with a lot of earning power in him for buying her frocks and hats” . The naïve Jude only realizes what he has done and whom he has married after the nuptials are complete. Even after Arabella’s second capture of Jude in Christminster, Hardy plays on the symbolism again and states that Jude was Arabella’s “shorn Samson”, a clear reference to her manipulative and deceptive powers.

Hardy is also quick to demonstrate the lack of emotional intimacy between Jude and Arabella in their marriage, showing that sexual attraction is the primary motive. Jude is shocked when Arabella detaches a hairpiece and then explains that she

bought it during her barmaid days in Aldbrickham, another unknown to the new husband. As Steel explains, “Jude soon discovers Arabella has tricked him by professing false pregnancy, false hair, false dimples, and counterfeit innocence in order to entrap him. The barmaid daughter of a pig farmer is a seasoned survivor, ready to indulge her hearty appetites”. Early in their marriage, Jude is forced to regard his wife “with a feeling of sickness” when thinking of her unknown past:

For all he knew, many unsophisticated girls would and did go to towns and remain there for years without losing their simplicity of life and embellishments. Others, alas, had an instinct towards artificiality in their very blood, and became adepts in counterfeiting at the first glimpse of it. However, perhaps there was no great sin in a woman adding to her hair, and he resolved to think no more of it.

Trying to remain hopeful, Jude realizes that Arabella has paraded herself as the epitome of the pure housewife but is only a sexual temptress in disguise. The couple’s opposing personalities again become evident in the pig-killing scene when Jude chooses to kill the pig quickly and mercifully, but Arabella is concerned only with profit and making her blackpot from the pig’s slow-draining blood. When Jude exclaims, “It is a hateful business!” at the bleeding of the pig, Arabella simply states, “Pigs must be killed.” Jude focuses on the animal’s pain, while Arabella sees only profit. At the end of the pig’s struggling and Jude’s merciful attempt to slaughter it, the relieved husband states, “Thank God! . . . He’s dead.” To which Arabella disdainfully replies, “What’s God got to do with such a messy job as a pig-killing, I should like to know! . . . Poor folks must live” (Hardy, Jude 69). Clearly, Jude and Arabella have different views on the value and purpose of life, and their marriage suffers the consequences.

Hardy also displays the inevitable disappointment of their marriage when Jude realizes that his dreams of higher learning must be delayed by their marriage. Norman Page believes Arabella “has drawn Jude [in] and caused him to abandon the straight line he was pursuing”. Jude tells her that their marriage “is a complete smashing up of my

plans—I mean my plans before I knew you, my dear”. The situation Jude is unknowingly forced into will “effectually silence his aspirations for a while”. This initial acknowledgement will breed contempt between the couple until Arabella disdainfully throws Jude’s books to the floor after smearing the covers with her pig-greased hands. At this point Jude accepts the true state of their matrimony: “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 lifelong comradeship tolerable” . Jude is relieved of his daily struggles with Arabella when she decides to go with her parents to Australia. Her parting letter to him states, “That she had gone tired of him . . . He was such a slow old coach, and she did not care for the sort of life he led. There was no prospect of his ever bettering himself or her” . As Jelke points out, Arabella “consistently chooses the option that will give her ‘a better life’—more security, material riches, or status” . Arabella’s final jab during this first marriage comes with Jude’s discovery of his photo among the items her family has sold before their departure. Hardy relays Jude’s sense of closure:

The utter death of every tender sentiment in his wife, as brought home to him by this mute and undersigned evidence of her sale of his portrait and gift, was the conclusive little stroke required to demolish all sentiment in him. He paid the shilling, took the photograph away with him, and burnt it, frame and all, when he reached his lodging.

This unemotional parting destroys all remaining sympathy for Arabella and consequently turns the reader against her. Later in the novel when Jude’s aunt is dying, Arabella volunteers to return with Jude to see her. Hardy tells us that Jude realized “There was something particularly uncongenial in the idea of Arabella, who had no more sympathy than a tigress with his relations or him, coming to the bedside of his dying aunt, and meeting Sue”. Even after their separation and Arabella’s sham marriage to Cartlett, she has little respect for dignity or honesty. Although her drives and desires are

similar to Eustacia’s, Arabella’s crude nature and apparent lack of tact repulse the reader.

Arabella also shows a lack of sensitivity in her treatment of her son. She reveals Jude’s paternity via letter and announces that he must take their son because her parents no longer want him; leaving Jude little choice in the matter, the boy arrives the very next day. Her selfish motives are clear in her letter: “I would have him with me here in a moment, but he is not old enough to be of any use in the bar, nor will be for years and years and naturally Cartlett might think him in the way.” As Sue pitifully sympathizes, “The poor child seems to be wanted by nobody!”. The lack of love manifests itself in the personality of the child: he is quiet, melancholy, and unaffectionate. When the boy later kills the couple’s children and then commits suicide, Arabella shows no remorse or guilt for her son’s death. As Dutta explains, “It is no wonder that this intensely lonely, unloved, and unwanted child commits suicide, and yet his death seems to leave Arabella with no perceptible signs of guilt or remorse”. She is truly a selfish woman and cares little for the suffering or well-being of others.

When Arabella and Jude remarry, the same purpose and emotionless interactions exist. Arabella is lonely after the death of her second husband and is still physically attracted to Jude. She begins to play with Jude’s emotions in relation to Sue’s recent departure and remarriage and tells him, “[Sue] felt [Phyllotson] was her only husband, and that she belonged to nobody else in the sight of God Almighty while he lived. Perhaps another woman feels the same about herself, too! . . . I feel exactly the same as she!”. When Arabella gets Jude drunk and preys on his emotional vulnerability, he falls for the same trap he had previously and returns to his first wife. Arabella has conjured a similar plan to profit from Jude’s honor, and he feels obligated to marry the woman he has lived with for the past four days, even though he was drunk or unconscious for most of the time. As Arthur Mizener explains, “Jude, partly because of a kind of stunned indifference (he takes to drink), and partly because of Arabella’s predatory sexuality, returns to his first wife”. To illustrate the lack of change from their previous marriage, Hardy describes the landlord’s impression

of the couple when he overhears Arabella "one night haranguing Jude in rattling terms, and ultimately flinging a shoe at his head, he recognized the note of genuine wedlock". Undoubtedly, the second marriage differs little from the first.

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