

The Ideological Questions of Marriage in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*

Saleh, N.S.¹, Abbasi, P.²

^{1,2}English Literature, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, IRAN

e-mails: nafisehsalmansaleh@gmail.com; pyeaam77@yahoo.co.uk

ABSTRACT

As one of the prominent ideologies of the nineteenth-century— in a complex interrelation with other contemporary ideological discourses particularly femininity and marriage—religion adopts a critical stance in Hardy's presentation of characters. Breaching the religio-conventional image of femininity as "Angel in the House" and "Cow Woman," Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895) is indeed deemed to be his milestone in presenting his anti-Christian attitudes towards the contemporary religion. This study aims to present Hardy's outright hostility towards the nineteenth-century Christianity through his creation of non-conformist characters, necessitating a parallel study with other contemporary discourses regarding marriage and femininity, and conflict with the religion of the time. Hardy's magnum opus, the work on which he was to stake his final reputation as a novelist, was clearly *Jude the Obscure* which as a noticeable socio-religious experimentation of the late nineteenth-century, reveals Hardy's perception of new ideas about femininity and marriage by presenting the hot contemporary issues of "New Woman" and "Free Union" through the development and presentation of Sue Bridehead and her free union with Jude, respectively. Hardy's presentation of Sue Bridehead as a "New Woman," and employing the "Free Union" in marked contrast with the nineteenth-century convention of marriage as a "Bonded Pair" is Hardy's closing upshot of his final novelistic attempt. The non-conformist Jude and Sue are presented as figures touching the Victorian Christian standards of morality, while, the final tragic destiny of Jude and Sue's helplessness attest to the writer's substantial contribution as a Victorian male novelist to the ideologies circulating at the time.

Keywords: Thomas Hardy; *Jude the Obscure*; Religion; "New Woman;" Free Union.

INTRODUCTION

Hardy was successful enough in giving his message despite having to swim against the current [the Victorian conventions], Thomas Hardy was not drowned; his message survived [...] he said it by means of art [his novels and poetry] (Chakraborti, 1997, p. 5).

From a Victorian perspective, a woman's duties and responsibilities were defined within the domestic hearth as a committed angel whose purity supplies the family's morality. Being socially guilty of corrupting the Christian morals, Hardy's fictional characters are observed outside the parameters of Victorian decorum of a chaste virgin who are, rather, vociferously condemned for their socio-religious non-conformity. Hardy's attempt in creating non-conformist characters approved the efficacy of social norms and prejudices on how the non-conformist characters, doomed in the course of life, are portrayed in Victorian Christianity. In a sense, Hardy is eulogized as a prominent Victorian literary figure whose fictional characters,

epitomizing his personal thoughts and impressions, representing his hostility towards the Victorian Christian standards of morality and purity.

Throughout Hardy's fiction, particularly *Jude the Obscure* in this study, femininity and marriage are used as the main vehicles through which Hardy's religious cynicism is carried. To be more precise, *Jude the Obscure* is an accumulation of issues related to marriage and the position of women in the sole purpose of indicting the institution of marriage. In a sense, in what seems to be an attempt for a fuller understanding of Hardy's ideologies about femininity and marriage, an in-depth analysis is offered to discuss Hardy's notion of femininity and marriage exhaustively through his selected novel, *Jude the Obscure*, in the ensuing pages.

Jude the Obscure, further, clarifies Hardy's aggressive attitudes towards the contemporary religion through two separate but related investigations. The first part of the paper tightly focuses on Hardy's astute picture of femininity in contrast with the nineteenth-

century ideal perception of femininity which seems to be an endeavor worthy of his effort to show the inefficacy of the nineteenth-century socio-religious ideologies on femininity, and as the second part of the paper sheds light on Hardy's objection towards the Victorian marital slave-master relationship that is manifested through his presentation of "Free Union" between Sue and Jude in primacy to the legal contract between Sue and Phillotson.

Hardy's celebration of Jude and Sue's free union instead of the conventional concept of marriage as a licensed consent between two couples, disregarding their mutual affection, is manifested to be at odds with the sacred Victorian Christian union of two souls. In effect, Hardy's anti-Christian endeavor in a network of restlessly stratifying ideologies is well manifested throughout his uncompromising attitudes towards the contemporary concept of marriage and his characterization. In a sense, this study has been carried out to reveal Hardy's unrelenting struggle with the Victorian religious view of femininity in stark contrast with the Victorian ideal conception of femininity, while, concurrently, an attempt has been made to shed light on the Victorian's conception of marriage in contrast with Hardy's free union. However, the final tragic fates of Hardy's new hero and heroine, in the selected novel, attest to Hardy's contribution to the prevailing ideologies of the time as a typical Victorian male novelist. In reality, Hardy's non-conformist characters' lives are designated to abject misery and finally death at the end of the novel. Hence, the final resignation of Jude and Sue, their social ostracism, and, eventually, Jude's final tragic death and Sue's burden of guilt, haunting her for the rest of life, attest Hardy's duties and responsibilities as a Victorian male novelist.

DISCUSSION

The Victorian ideal of femininity was highly indebted to the Christian view of femininity, and women were defined within the Victorian common saying as "the compass of morality and stability that would guide their husband home to the private sphere of hearth and family" (Acton, 1857, p. 11). They were highly expected to preserve the nucleus of society in general and the family in particular against the mundane world. The current issues of the time, later, take the stereotypical notion of Victorian conception of femininity as "Angel in the House" and "Cow Woman" so as to protect the Christian ideals of the family as well as to render support, comfort, and morality to the sacramental family unit representative of the most significant form of Victorian social order. In the Victorian Christian view of femininity, a

woman was honored as a domestic angel to consolidate the union of society in general and the nucleus of family in particular so as to fulfill her biological destiny; to color her social roles as a faithful wife and devoted mother to exemplify "femininity, morality, and maternal longing" (Acton, 1857, p. 11) and improve the moral fabric of the society. Besides, emphasizing on women's domestic essence, William Acton believed that "love of home, children, and domestic duties" were women's only concern and passion.

Furthermore and interestingly, the faithful wives and devoted mothers were cherished as "cow women" to "keep the family true, redefined, affectionate, [and] faithful," (Harrison, 1891, p. 452) by pursuing the chauvinistic family codes. Men's authority over women was, also, commonly accepted where men had the most impregnable position in the family, and the whole familial affair was mapped out to satisfy their taste. Women were, then, conventionally introduced as the last thing civilized and educated by men—fortifying men's authority on women as well.

Women's lives at the end of the nineteenth-century were changing dramatically and drastically on various aspects, and Hardy was one of the promethean figures whose fiction was the product of his promethean spirit in both art and literature. Hardy's life was designed to offer a portrait of a prolific writer at the prime of his fame who was compelled to give up writing fiction due to the critics' mounting exasperation with his taboo-breaking works—most notably his last two novels *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895)—which cost at the price of threatening the Victorian sensibilities. As a moral iconoclast and social critic of the Victorians, Hardy rejected the Christian celebration of femininity and marriage through shattering the contemporary sexual taboos, escaping the oversimplified images of femininity, and developing the concept of free union between couples in priority to the nineteenth-century license of marriage.

Thomas Hardy changed the established nineteenth-century perception of femininity and marriage. The Victorian image of femininity had no longer the slightest shade of meaning to Hardy; as a result, the Richardsonian image of "Angel in the House" – the prisoner of feeling and private life—lost its meaning and faded away. Hardy's heroines arise to express the individuality suppressed for years. He challenges the Victorian moral values by vociferously challenging the ethics so as to heighten the awareness of the Victorian injustice and inequalities on femininity. During the spectrum of 1871-1895 Hardy's fourteen

novels all dealt with the issues of femininity, love, sex, and marriage performed by characters who were socially and sexually deviated. In effect, Hardy did not idealize his characters; and created them without trying to save them, and by challenging social conventions regarding sexual instinct, sexual morality, marriage, and divorce—especially by releasing his last two novels—he came under society's trenchant criticism. In *The Trumpet-Major* (1880) Anne Garland choice's of marriage is argued endlessly and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), *Jude the Obscure* (1895), *Desperate Remedies* (1871), and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) are exclusively concerned with femininity and the relevant issues particularly the concept of fall and marriage. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge* the concept of family is criticized by an awfully drunken husband and the writer's aims and objectives were to show the deficiencies of the Victorian society. Besides, most Hardy's fictional heroines experience painful marital life like Tess in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Bathsheba in *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874), and Thomasin Yeobright, the unconventional Eustacia Vye, and Clym Yeobright in *The Return of the Native* (1878). In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Bathsheba Everdene is presented as Hardy's first non-conformist heroine who strives for fostering her sexual independency as well as her individuality.

Since any discussion of Hardy's fiction must at some point touch on his handling of marriage (Stubbs, 1979), Hardy's redefined image of female characters is observed in close relation with the concept of marriage. As a social meliorist, Hardy put a great deal of effort in revising the Victorian expectations about femininity and marriage by re-inventing his female fictional characters. Hardy's all-out effort to present a new aspect of femininity—particularly excluding them from the entrapped gender assumptions—and his underlying themes like the emergence of the "New Woman," a sense of female empowerment, and "Free Union" in priority to "Bonded Pair" present him as a universally acknowledged novelist standing up for women's down-trodden rights both inside and outside the seemingly safe domestic haven.

Hardy witnessed how women were treated as well as the dreadful conditions in which they lived. Well aware of the nineteenth-century limitations on women, Hardy stood for women's down-trodden rights that were devastated for centuries. The life long effort of Hardy's predecessors on alleviating the "working class condition, agricultural condition, and the marriage law" (Barnard, 1984, p. 133) finally bear fruits in Hardy's significant contribution to the "New Woman" and the "Marriage Question." Hardy stood

against the Victorian Christianity through his fictional heroines whereby his frank treatment of the social taboos of the time made grounds for his reputation as a Victorian dissident.

Hardy's deep misery of the social injustice and inequalities paved the ground for his religious pessimism. As a Victorian novelist, Hardy was no longer counted as a religious devotee and to him, the Christian religion and the grace of God did not have the slightest shade of meaning even to the extent that he demonstrated an act of bravery through the creation and development of his characters. Hardy's characters, especially his heroines, are considerably deviated from the Victorian ideal perception of femininity through their anti-conventional attitudes towards "Angel in the House" and the sacramental institution of marriage. In effect, Hardy was bold enough to express his personal thoughts about the Victorian conception of femininity and marriage whereof his characters were markedly different from his time as well as his contemporaries.

Hardy adheres to support his fictional heroines who prefer "Free Union," which is going to be dealt with in the ensuing pages, instead of the Victorian conventional tie of marriage. In the same vein, Rosemarie Morgan in her detailed study of Thomas Hardy's heroines pointed to the conclusion that all of Hardy's female characters are in stiff opposition to the notion that marriage should be the expressed aim of their sexuality. In *Jude the Obscure*, for instance, Hardy's heterodox stance is well-perceived where he stands openly and defiantly behind his heroine –Sue Bridehead— who shows her stiff resistance to the notion that marriage should be the expressed goal of her sexuality.

In a word, Hardy's determined opposition to the contemporary religion is presented through his creation and development of his non-conformist heroines who do not show any conformity to the Victorian "angel in the house" notion and prefer the union of free love instead of a licensed marriage which lays the groundwork for Hardy's religious cynicism towards the contemporary religion

In a letter to Mrs. Henniker on 3 October, 1911, Hardy explicitly expressed his views on marriage: "[Y]ou know what I have thought for many years: that marriage should not thwart nature, and that when it does thwart nature it is no real marriage, and the legal contract should therefore be as speedily cancelled as possible. Half the misery of human life would I think disappear if this were made easy."

Late in the nineteenth-century, the “Marriage Question” took up a considerable portion in creating opportunities for women to delineate both their roles and position in marriage. Hardy, whose strained marriage and painful marital experiences with Emma Lavinia Gifford had already hurt him emotionally, was resolute enough to oppose the Victorian deep-seated belief about marriage. As one of the promethean writers of the popular stream against the Victorian conventionality of marriage, Hardy had enough temerity to voice his outright hostility towards the contemporary marriage custom. In effect, Hardy’s literary canon mirrored his serious objection to the reliability of marriage, as a licensed agreement between two lifetime partners committed to each other and, at times, without any truly mutual affection. Hence forth, the authors call for Hardy’s endeavor to voice his free expression of mind about marriage through the creation and development of his characters as well as developing the concept of “Free Love” and “Free Union” instead of the Victorian concept of licensed marriage. In *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy personally develops his anti-Victorian notion of marriage and the subsequent development of the ideal picture of woman hood.

Jude the Obscure succinctly summarizes Hardy’s ideas about marriage. In *Jude the Obscure* Hardy relates the life of couples who are bound to a licensed nuptial life and the subsequent pain they are doomed to burden. He prefers to foster free love and free union between lovers instead, henceforth; “Free Union” was a suggestive term by Hardy as an alternative to the conventional marriage. In *Jude the Obscure*, free from social conventions, Jude and Sue start leading a life of love without the intrusion of social conventions whereupon Weber believes that “the love of Jude and Sue, with all its errors and its agony, most nearly approaches the ideal love” (qtd. in Hardy, 2000, p. 150). As the Victorian expectations require, Sue, who has experienced “Free Love” with Jude before, undergoes such crippling repression, subjection, and degradation. Sue herself is even aware of her being entrapped into marriage, as she is forced to revert to her loveless life with Phillotson. Although Jude and Sue lead a short-lived life of love beyond the Victorian bondage of marriage, the unexpected suicide of Little Father Time and his half siblings ruin Jude and Sue’s true happiness attesting the reliability of Victorian ideologies and the contribution of a Victorian novelist to the circulating ideologies of the time.

The early Victorian novels distinguished themselves from the later ones in the century through their new

perspectives on marriage. Early in the nineteenth-century, marriage was a means of resolving all women’s hardship where Charlotte Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Elizabeth Gaskell’s novels were invaluable in this regard. On the contrary, the novels of the second half of the nineteenth-century England, specially the novels of the 1880s and 1890s, highly focused on the question of marriage so as to seek opportunities for women to express their aspirations and individualization both inside and outside the domestic haven. The novels of the late nineteenth-century, also, put an end to the common happy ending—“They lived ever after happily”—of the earlier novels in the century.

The Victorian society laid the groundwork for marriage on gender prejudices and inequalities whereupon women’s aspirations and individualization had been undermined as a result. The Victorians were prone to show complete conformity to the socially bound institution of marriage. From a Victorian perspective, there seems to be an intricate link between one’s social identity and marital status. In the nineteenth-century, women’s rights were also strictly limited to domesticity. Even after marriage, women did not have any free expression of the mind and were subordinated to the male’s authority, and were deemed to be a part of their husband’s property. To yield to a man, however, threatened women’s loss of identity as well as individuality. A married woman was compelled to give up her own familial name to adopt her husband’s surname. The very adaptation of her husband’s name was considered as a symbolic token of turning herself into her husband’s property.

Hardy’s vision on marital institution was not as positive as the Victorians’; as a matter of fact, Hardy’s vision on marriage even became bitter by his own increasingly unhappy marriage resulting in his doubled-bitterness within his fictional theme than the one he really intended to. Accordingly, throughout Hardy’s fiction, marriage is used as the main vehicle through which his religious cynicism is carried. For instance, in *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy vociferously condemns the institution of marriage through Jude’s illicit relation with Sue who strenuously objects to the marriage tie with Jude and believes that it is a free relation, and “not marriage,” that would bring happiness to them. Hardy took the lack of a proper sexual education, affection, gender prejudices, sexual incompatibilities, as well as sexual inequalities as grounds for the failure of conventional marriage. Hardy postulated that marriage itself could not guarantee its partners’ happiness unless they were sexually compatible. Namely in *Jude the Obscure*, Sue’s repulsion from leading a sexual life with

Phyllotson, who is thirteen years her senior, proves to show a direct association with the problems of sexual incompatibility. In the scene where she imprisons herself, Hardy substantiated Sue's previous statement about leading a despising nuptial life with Phyllotson: "it is a torture to me to live with him as a husband!" (JO, 2000, p. 249) he believed that sexual compatibility was a pivotal part of marriage and no woman should go against her sexual nature. In fact, what *Jude the Obscure* and *The Woodlander* (1887) have in common is the marital unhappiness and sexual incompatibility which law and social custom refus to confirm. Hence, in Hardy's perspective, a break-down marriage is grounds for the couple's sexual incompatibility.

Hardy also believed that "a marriage should be dissolvable as soon as it becomes a cruelty to either of the parties—being then essentially and morally no marriage" (2000, p. 25). In *Jude the Obscure* hence, Hardy was bold enough to present a kind of human relationship between a man and a woman on grounds of mutual affection which does not have any thing in common with the institutionalized concept of marriage, though. In a way the relationship between Sue and Jude was popularly known as "companionate marriage" in the Victorian England. The mutual love between Jude and Sue sparks their interest to lead a nuptial life without fettering themselves to the traditional bondage. The conservative society not only does not confirm their free union but also utterly abhors their illegitimate relationship.

Distinguished as one of the early dissidents of the nineteenth-century bonded pair, Hardy personally felt that the unrelenting pressure of the Victorian society, most pointedly, the stringent rules and statutory regulations regarding love and marriage restrains women's freedom. In effect, his fictional characters often lead rebels against the Victorian society by making decisions that flatly contradict the expectations of the society. Hardy's heavy criticism was singled out for the Victorian society where the excessive attention to nuptial conventions acts as an obstacle to a couple under the duress of losing each other through the matrimonial bounds, and marriage contract. Hardy's marital unhappiness and sexual incompatibility were clearly portrayed in *Jude the Obscure* where the central and marginal figures undergo that lachrymose experience of failure in marriage. Encapsulating his bitter cynicism to the very institution of marriage and family, Hardy's novels are all the best embodiment of his related ideas. His novel approach to marriage severely undermined the Victorian widely-held conventions of marriage. In effect, Hardy lodged strenuous objection

against the institution of marriage presented through two separate but related moulds. Hardy, initially, expresses his hostility towards objectifying women in marriage through the slave-master relationship. Secondly, he opposes the constitution of marriage as a "sordid contract" which, more or less, causes agony and pain to both partners. Hardy opposes the reliability of the marriage as an eternal commitment between two couples whereupon they are compelled to lead a lifetime life, at times, without mutual affection. Hardy's objection towards the nineteenth-century idea of marriage is lodged against the irrevocability of the marriage contract, not its monogamy. Although Jude's marriage to Arabella – Jude's legal wife— has a temporary basis in mutual desire, it leads to their final separation.

Hardy, initially, expresses his hostility towards objectifying and possessing women through the slave-master relationship. In reality, Hardy's perception of marriage seemed to dictate John Stuart Mill's ideas on individual liberty. Supportably, John Stuart Mill, a British philosopher, political economist, also opposed the Victorian ideal of womanhood by drawing an affinity between women's status in marriage and slavery. He wrote:

The wife is the actual boxed servant of her husband: no less so, as far as legal obligation goes, than slaves commonly so called. A female slave has (in Christian countries) an admitted right, and is considered under a moral obligation, to refuse to her master the last familiarity. Not so the wife: how ever brutal a tyrant she may unfortunately be married to— though she may know that he hates her, though it may be his daily pleasure to torture her, and though she may feel it impossible not to loathe him- he can claim from her and enforce the lowest degradation of a human being, that of being made the instrument of an animal function contrary to her inclinations. (1929, p. 85)

As a devoted practitioner of John Stuart Mill, Hardy drew close parallels between Victorian marriage and slave code practices. Namely, in *Jude the Obscure*, Sue perceives the marriage as a matter of "property transaction" (Jacobus, 1997, p. 202) through which she was reluctant to give up her individuality. Similarly, D. H. Lawrence, one of the devoted practitioners of Hardy's decorum, argued that Sue considers marriage as "a submission, a service [and] slavery" (qtd. in Guerard, 1986, p. 71).

Both marriage and slavery required the bonded party to carry master's name. In effect, Sue was successful

enough to express her deep-seated resentment towards the Victorian nuptial contract by naming it as a “sordid business”: “It spoils the sentiment, does not it! She said on their way home, it seems making a more sordid business of it even than signing the contract in the vestry” (*JO*, 2000, p. 328). Sue’s evident reluctance with legitimizing the “sordid business” comes from the slave-master relationship where the marital contract bears fruits in giving one individual judicial authority and absolute power over another. Henceforth, Sue’s idea on the marriage contract is remarkable in this regard, where she asks Jude to accompany her: “According to the ceremony as there printed, my bridegroom chooses me of his own will and pleasure; but I don’t choose him, somebody gives me to him, like a she-ass or she-goat, or any other domestic animal” (*JO*, 2000, pp. 198-199). Besides, earlier in the novel Sue’s depersonalization reaches its peak by going under “the name of Mrs. Fawley,” that sense of depersonalization embraces her so tightly that makes her “dull, cowed, and listless” for days (*JO*, 2000, p. 349). In *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, Rosemarie Morgan also confidently states that unlike Bathsheba’s—Hardy’s heroine in *Far from the Madding Crowd*—muted voice as Mrs. Gabriel Oak, Sue’s ignominious defeat “as the unhappy Mrs. Phillotson does not eclipse her rebellious voice” (2006, p. 79) is evident.

Hardy, however, did his very best to meliorate public thoughts about the role of marriage in defining one’s social identity. He vehemently rejected the commonly-held idea that men were allowed to usurp their authority over their wives to curtail their freedom of speech, individualities, and their rights. In *Jude the Obscure*, for instance, Sue’s repulsion to become male property is also manifested throughout the novel. Her flat refusal to adopt her legitimate husband’s surname is remarkable in this regard: “But I am not really Mrs. Richard Phillotson, but a woman tossed about, all alone” (*JO*, 2000, p. 240). Or in her relationship with Phillotson, Jude is exclusively concerned with physically possessing Sue: “well my dearest,” he says at the first opportunity, “the result of all this is that we can marry after a decent interval” (*JO*, 2000, p. 303) while Sue is double-minded about such a result.

Hence, marriage was counted as one of the serious problems for femininity on the way towards expressing female voice. Women’s aspirations and individualizations were, also, suppressed within the “Bonded Pair,” or at least, a woman was “incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection and cover,

she performs everything” (qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, p. 155). Hardy’s aims and objectives were at the service of dissolving marriage as a licensed agreement since it failed to bring happiness and satisfaction to both parties. On his way to create equal opportunities between couples, Hardy suggests “Free Union” between lovers whereupon they are not required to burden the pains of licensed marriages.

Hardy adhered to this well-grounded belief that through their nuptial life women must enjoy the same privileges as well as men. In reality, Hardy’s proposition of “Free Union” between lovers stemmed from the Victorian hardship in leading a long life based on a conventional marriage where the couples did not have any common ground. Since marriage was a long-term commitment between couples, they were licensed to lead a life even in spite of their desires, and women’s position in this regard was much worse. They were required to show conformity to their husbands’ needs and desires; namely, in *Jude the Obscure* Hardy’s pent-up rage at the bondage of marriage is manifested through Sue’s voice: “What tortures me so much is the necessity of being responsive to this man whenever he wishes” (*JO*, 2000, p. 249). In effect, Sue’s separation from Phillotson is not in the purpose of re-marrying but to have a separate non-restricting life or leading a simple life without any sexuality. Sue escapes from Phillotson for not being treated as an object of desire; and ironically, she is welcomed by the sensual Jude.

Secondly, Hardy regarded the institution of marriage “as a snare and a tyranny as the fell destroyer of love and its delights” (qtd. in Hardy, 2000, p. 125). To Hardy, marriage is a kind of contract that binds two souls, at times without genuine love and mutual affection that might be found in an illegal relationship between the lovers. Hardy’s aims and objectives were at the service of dissolving marriage as a licensed agreement where Hardy’s barrage of sharp criticism is leveled. To put it differently, Hardy is singled out for his fierce criticism against the Victorian institution of marriage since it failed to bring happiness and satisfaction to both parties. To Hardy, marriage could be seen “a tragic farce, spattered with pig’s blood, squalors and the destruction of Jude’s youthful ideals” (Miller, 1970, p. 97). Conversely, in a poem like “The Maiden’s Pledge,” the woman refuses to get engaged with the man she loves knowing that “after marriage, her lover will no more care about her as she used to do when they are lovers” (Fariza, 2012, p. 93). Thus, in his large bulk of literary canon, particularly his poetry, Hardy shows marriage as a relation that leads sometimes to the intense suffering and exquisite agony of one of the partners or sometimes, simul-

taneously, both. *Jude the Obscure* registers Hardy's invaluable contribution to the marriage question which has been time and again at the target of critics' scathing criticism for not only attacking the Victorian conventional society but also questioning the whole institution of marriage. Highly focused on human concerns in a realist traditional mode, *Jude the Obscure* mirrors his skepticism towards the prominent contemporary ideologies, chiefly religion. Keenly aware of the nineteenth-century double standards, social inequalities, conventional religion, and the institution of marriage, Hardy had enough temerity to step away from the restricting conventions through the creation of *Jude the Obscure* as a celebration of his frank treatment of sexuality to indict the institution of marriage, education, and religion of the Victorian England. The journal of the *RW Society* (1999) commented on *Jude the Obscure* as the criticism of double standards, social inequalities, conventional religion, and the institution of marriage. Conversely, in a letter to his friend, Edmund Gosse, Hardy denied that the novel was "a manifesto on the marriage question, although, of course, it involves it" (qtd. in Howe, 1965, p. 394).

Oliphant, a prolific novelist and reviewer, was in line with the trenchant critics who panned Hardy's last exhaustively-discussed novel. In an article releasing in *Blackwood's Magazine* (1896), she initially introduced the novel as a full-scale assault on the stronghold of marriage where marriage was no longer considered sacrosanct and even divorce was no longer unthinkable and introduced Hardy as an advocate of "Free Love" and "Free Union." Oliphant, also, counted Jude and Sue's children as an insuperable obstacle in abolishing the contract of marriage as well as denouncing the heroine, Sue Bridehead, as a temptress who victimized men around her (qtd. in Hardy, 2000). Then, it is no surprise observing Oliphant standing against the motto in the novel—"the letter killeth" (*JO*, 2000, p. 457)—where Hardy affirms the fact that marriage should be abolished in order to seek personal emancipation. Besides, in Hardy's standpoint, children were recognized as a serious part of the question of the abolition of marriage which was later questioned by Oliphant through her thorough examination of Little Father Time's suicide and his half-sibling homicide throughout the novel.

It is important to bear in mind that Hardy was a Victorian male novelist who was the product of the Victorian reigning patriarchal society and fettered by the available forms of the time and with a vision exclusively conditioned by social ideologies of the time. Hence, as a representative male author of his

time, Hardy had the Victorian sexist view of femininity and masculinity in common. He managed the characters into the Victorian social morality, expectation, and decorum so as to meet society's demands and expectations. Despite his heartfelt sympathy towards nineteenth-century femininity, Hardy led the final plot of his novel in commune with the society's expectations of femininity. Hence, it is no surprise for the reader to see Hardy's non-conformist fictional characters, particularly in this study Jude and Sue, who are doomed to ignominious failure in the course of their life.

As a Victorian male novelist, Hardy was inevitably compelled to make a compromise with society when he chides Sue responsible for the premature death of her children which results in her separation from Jude. In reality, the tragic death of Jude's and Sue's illegitimate children smack Sue hard into reality where Sue is riddled with superstitions to think of the accident as a punishment of her "sin" for being an unwed mother.

The premature death of her children is confronted with a kind of intense agony which eventually led her to revert to her legitimate husband. She, at first, tries to rationalize the event of the death of her children but finally fails to control herself and an intense agony overtakes her. As it is observed in the novel, every attempt of her to lead a life with Jude—who is legally committed to Arabella Donn by the conceptualized Victorian law—is just a failure. The suicide of Little Father Time – Jude and Arabella's legitimate son—slaps Sue to come to the reality of the state where she legally belongs to Phillotson; Sue: "I don't think I ought to be your wife—or as your wife—any longer. Jude: What? ... But you *are!*" In fact, what drives her to Phillotson is merely her duty: "I am still his wife! Whose? Richard's. Good God, dearest!—why? Oh I can't explain! Only the thought comes to me" (*JO*, 2000, pp. 402-403). So as to seek repentance, Sue forces herself to return into her loveless legitimized marital life. In effect, she returns to carry out her duties as a Victorian dutiful wife that she once deliberately disregards. Consequently, as a devoted Christian, Sue physically submits herself to Phillotson: "placing the candlestick on the chest of drawers he led her through the doorway, and lifting her bodily, kissed her, a quick look of aversion passed over her face, but clenching her teeth she uttered no cry" (*JO*, 2000, p. 468).

The novel develops through a major ironic pattern i. e., the way Jude and Sue mutually exchange roles. In the opening pages of the novel Jude is introduced as being conservative and religious, while Sue is

regarded radical and agnostic. Since Sue adopts Christianity, she is compelled to put an end to her free illegitimate relationship with Jude. In the Christian view of the sexes, any sexual intercourse out of wedlock is abhorred and chastised; hence, Sue's newly adopted religion compels her to cease her past illegitimate affair with Jude. In reality, the powerful impetus to observe the Victorian conventionality is her conversion to Christianity. Thus, the unexpected suicide of Little Father Time and his half siblings ultimately puts a compulsory end to Jude and Sue's relationship. In reality, Little Father Time's suicide pops the thought in Sue's mind that children's suicide is God's chastisement: "Well—I want to tell you something else, Jude. You won't be angry, will you? I have thought of it a good deal since my babies died. I don't think I ought to be your wife—or as your wife—any longer" (*JO*, 2000, p. 406). Hence, Sue finally accepts the tragic events as her pre-supposed destiny which compels her into the custody of marriage. She, finally, returns to resume her broken legitimate relationship with Phillotson where the tragic premature death of her children withers her dreams and forces her to lead a loveless life with Phillotson based on the marital "sordid contract." In Miller's perspective (1970), Sue yields to society and crushes the remnants of her instinctual self in an attempt to convince herself that redemption lies in duties and responsibilities as well as sacrifice.

Conversely, Sue's conversion to Christianity has an adverse on Jude's religion. Jude starts despising Christianity whereby he accuses Sue to erode his religious beliefs: "You make me hate Christianity, or mysticism, or Sacerdotalism, or whatever it may be called, if it's that which has caused this deterioration in you" (*JO*, 2000, p. 410). Jude, virtually, gives up his religious faith and his associated ambitions. That is the reason why Doheny (2002) adds that to appease Sue, Jude slaves his own consciousness. Jude's determination to abjure his previous cult is vividly portrayed when he is resolute to burn his theological and ethical works, as a token of his rage to his previous cult, despite the high risk of being punished or rejected by the authorities or others. Indeed he starts to relinquish his previous dogmatic thought in favor of showing reverence towards himself and his new perceptions as well as indicating his new perception of the relation between the individual and society. Jude is determined not to follow blindly the unconsidered dogmas any more, and demonstrates an outstanding ability to bear full responsibility for his own deeds.

All in all, encapsulating new notions of femininity and marriage, Hardy's selected novel not only highly

focused on the question of marriage but it also put an end to the Victorian common happy endings by creating opportunities for women to register their emancipation from the patriarchal chains of the contemporary society. *Jude the Obscure* has been, time and again, the target of critics' scathing criticism for not only attacking the Victorian conventional society but also questioning the whole institution of marriage. As one of the active forerunners of the movement, Thomas Hardy was bold enough to protest against the ideologically constructed notion of marriage. Hardy, whose strained marriage and his painful marital experiences with Emma Lavinia Gifford had already imprinted him emotionally was resolute enough to express his bitter hostility towards the constitutional perception of marriage. In reality, Hardy lodged strenuous objection to the nineteenth-century institution of marriage into two separate but related moulds.

Hardy, first, expresses his hostility towards objectifying and possessing women in marriage through the slave-master relationship—dictating John Stuart Mill's ideas. He, also, opposed the reliability of marriage as a licensed agreement between two couples who are lifetime committed to each other and at times without any common mutual affection. In *Jude the Obscure* Hardy shows temerity to present a kind of human relationship between a man and a woman on grounds of mutual affection which does not show any thing in common with the institutional codes of the nineteenth-century marriage. In effect, the mutual love between Jude and Sue triggers their interest to lead a nuptial life without fettering themselves to the nineteenth-century tradition of "Bonded Pair."

As a typical Victorian male novelist, Hardy was, more or less, under the influence of the patriarchal society of the time. The premature tragic death of Jude's and Sue's illegitimate children smacks Sue hard into reality where Sue is riddled with superstitions to think of the accident as a punishment of her "sin" for being an unwed mother. So as to seek repentance, Sue forces herself to return into her loveless legitimized marital life carrying out her duties as a Victorian dutious wife that she once deliberately ignored.

CONCLUSION

Dominant reading of Hardy reveals the writer's markedly different perspective on femininity and marriage; confirmation of the ideology of separate sphere of gender roles at the close of the novel, depiction of Jude and Sue as rebels against the biased

Victorian expectation of licensed marriage, as well as verifying Jude's resignation and Sue's helplessness in facing the imposing limitations of the society. However, the purpose of this study was an objective reading of *Jude the Obscure* so as to substantiate Hardy's novel as a product of the strict feminist ideology of his time to a typical male novelist. In effect, *Jude the Obscure* is a sociological conflict between novelist's personal thoughts and impressions and society's expectations. Despite his critique to the contemporary perception on femininity and marriage, Hardy led the final plot of his novel in commune with the society's mores, vindicating his chauvinistic attempt as a Victorian male novelist

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