

On Hardy's View on Marriage Through the Marriage of Sue and Phillotson*

GUO Yu-hua

Binzhou University, Binzhou, China

In novels *Jude the Obscure* (*JO.*), Hardy attaches much weight to the theme of love and marriage which runs through his writing career. For him, love has the position that is as important as life, or even higher than life. Love's dignified power is almost like religion that cannot be invaded. For Hardy, who is sensitive and full of tragic consciousness, the life realization is not only about the sorrow for the illness, pain, age, and death in this world, the more is about the joys and sorrows, partings and reunions of love and about misery of distorted and intolerable love.

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Introduction

In the book, Hardy mainly portrays three relationships: the marriage between Jude and Arabella, Sue's marriage to Phillotson, and the union of Jude and Sue. All these relationships end in failure or tragedy. This paper emphatically analyzed the marriage between Sue and Phillotson. Although their combination is not based on flesh, they just treat each other as friends instead of a lover with mutual interest. Such marriage can only bring misery to both parties. As a young woman, Sue agrees to accept Phillotson's proposal out of ignorance and gratitude and then marries him succumbing to secular pressure. She respects Phillotson, but without love between them, she is physically repulsive to Phillotson. Consequently, what they await is no more than separation. Through Sue and Phillotson, Hardy attempts to inform people that the marriage with neither love nor sex is bound to be unfortunate.

Unnatural Combination

Hardy strongly criticized the then marriage system and expressed his desire for love and freedom through the character Sue. There was no love but compulsion in Sue's marriage. After leaving Phillotson, neither did she easily yield to Jude as he had expected before, nor did she agree to marry him. Actually, she has been clearly aware of the essence of marriage.

Marriage was just a union of material for her. She regarded marriage as a "sordid contract" on the basis of "material convenience in house-holding, rating and taxing, and the inheritance of land and money by children making it necessary that the male parent should be known" (*JO.*, p. 220).

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GUO Yu-hua, lecturer, M.A., Foreign Language Department, Binzhou University, Binzhou, China.

Sue looks down on this kind of marriage which is material union by nature. Though she falls into love with Jude, she does not have the courage to marry to him and she is afraid that their true love based on the marriage contract will be ruined. Living on the spiritual communication between them is just her wish. All these show Sue, as the embodiment of soul as well as an embodiment of angel, considers spirit more important than eroticism. Considering her sober attitude to human desire, Hardy stresses that Sue persists in the pursuit of spirit and he even describes her as a rational woman with modern self-consciousness. She protests the traditional obey of instinct, objects to the bargain marriage contract without true love, and looks forward to the perfect harmony of spirit. To defend her faith, she jumps out of the window for suicide to threaten her husband to leave her bedroom. She even escapes from the church when she is getting married to Jude, as she changes her idea for one moment. Her passion is one kind of rational cognition, not the desire but almost the spirit.

Phillotson admitted later that he “took advantage of her inexperience [...] and got her to agree to a long engagement before she well knew her own mind” (*JO.*, p. 240). But Sue fell in love with Jude and regretted for her previous engagement to Phillotson. However, as a result of a supposed affair in the Training School (She stayed the whole night with Jude and was easily suspected of a possible sexual relationship between them and she therefore was punished by the school authority) and her discourage on Jude's having been married to Arabella—Otherwise she should marry Jude as is required to maintain her reputation, finally she helplessly and unwillingly accepted Phillotson and “blindly fulfilled her engagement”.

Phillotson becoming her husband she “chose freely” (*JO.*, p. 221), in fact, she was forced to it by oppression from traditional values. What is more, the church marriage showed that she had no other choices at all but only obedience. She wrote to Jude: “According to the ceremony as there printed, my bridegroom chooses me of his own will and pleasure; she-goat, but I don't choose him. Somebody gives me to him, like a she-ass or any other domestic animal” (*JO.*, p. 177).

After marriage, Sue recognized that the “give” was neither a word nor a form but a real responsibility that a woman should shoulder for a man. Both her name and her body were obliged to him.

Sexual and Emotional Incompatibility

Apparently, Sue holds totally different philosophy from Arabella on marriage. On the one hand, although Sue has been married to Mr. Phillotson, she hates to have sexual intercourse with him, because she thinks sex without love is doomed to be a tragedy. These are the words that she directly says to him:

I do like you! But I didn't reflect it would be—that it would be so much more than that. For a man and woman to live on intimate terms when one feels as I do is adultery, in any circumstances however legal. (*JO.*, p. 155)

In Sue's definition, marriage should not be “only a sordid contract, based on material convenience in house holding, rating and taxing, and the inheritance of land and money by children making it necessary that the male parent should be known” (*JO.*, p. 220), but a “free union” based on temperaments. In a “free union” marriage, husband and wife are two equal independent individuals who have their own personality. There is no dreadful contract confining their relationship and they can undo it if it is difficult to continue. In her opinion, the sexual relationship was a “risk” which means submission and compulsion. Sue got the opinion from her unhappy marriage with Phillotson. She hoped to emancipate herself from men's control of her body. She did not submit to Phillotson nor would she submit to Jude. She hoped to be herself, an independent individual.

On the other hand, without the least affection for Phillotson, Sue is disgusting to her role as his sexual

partner. "It is a torture to me to live with him as a husband!" (*JO.*, p. 223), cries Sue. While most of the time he devotes himself in his own activities ignoring his young wife, Phillotson is irritated by Sue's response. He supposes his intimacy with Sue to be an addition of his day-to-day functions and Sue's conformity to him to be a moral duty. Sue's refusing to sex makes her insensitive, cold-hearted, selfish, or unsympathetic in his eyes, morally at fault. "You vowed to love me", he accuses her, "you are committing a sin in liking me" (*JO.*, p. 324). Sue finds his accusation rather ridiculous. She questions fiercely whether a "legal obligation... is destructive to a passion whose essence is gratuitousness" (*JO.*, p. 286). Sue's resistance to sex is the result of the education she receives from society. As a girl, Sue maintains no prudery and enjoys scandalizing Aunt Drusilla by baring her legs and then scoffing the shocked older woman. What little Sue gets for her behavior is a beat. Therefore, Sue is brought to combined bodies and any pleasure obtained from them shapely. Likewise, while at the teacher's training college, Sue is compelled to tower a nun-like simplicity of costume intending to conceal sexual beauty. Again, society strengthens the concept of sexuality as unhealthy and vicious. Sue has never regarded sexuality notable and affirmed. Sue's crooked sexuality also results from Jude, the only man she respects in the novel, who thinks her as a good angel rather than a normal woman.

Thirdly, for Phillotson, his loyalty to Christianity makes it impossible for him to fully release himself and then fully enjoy the happiness that marriage should have brought to him. Actually, in some sense, Phillotson is an eminently respectable man. Though he fails to achieve the same goals that Jude pursues, he is like Jude in many ways: good-hearted and honorable, allowing instinct to overrule reason; too accommodating for his own good. However, unlike Jude he is no longer dazzled by ideals, perhaps because he is older. Maybe too late he learns to act on the basis of calculation, estimating that Sue's return to him will be worth the benefits it may bring. His feeling for Sue contains more concern than love which indicates that their marriage conceals too many risks.

So from the above, it can be seen that Sue's opposition to traditional marriage and her advocacy of free union are adverse to Victorian values and run counter to Phillotson's view on marriage. They are incompatible, both sexually and emotionally. In Sue's eyes, in a society that does not respect the individuality of its members, her endeavor is condemned to end up in failure. As an extremely free-spirited woman, instead of waiting for six or seven years to be accustomed to sex with him, she resolutely escapes from Phillotson. Instead, she would rather choose to risk her life by jumping from the window than stay at bed as a tolerant wife. It is easily "read" in her approval to be Phillotson's wife:

I have promised—that I will marry him when I come out of the Training-School two years hence, and have got my Certificate; his plan being that we shall then take a large double school in a great town—he "the boys" and I "the girls"—as married school-teachers often do, and make a good income between us. (*JO.*, p. 138)

Apparently, Sue's primary determination for her engagement encompasses more of employment and money than love or physical attraction. Sue was depressed in her marriage. Although she attempted to deny it out of pride or conceit, she could not help crying on hearing Aunt Drusilla's remark that there were "certain men here and there that no woman of any niceness can stomach" (*JO.*, p. 198); and she thought Phillotson was just like these men. Sue acknowledged that what her aunt said was right that she could not tolerate Phillotson as a husband. For there are differences between them in age and intellect—Phillotson was 18 years older than Sue, but Sue had read 10 times as much as Phillotson and the most unbearable thing for Sue was Phillotson's compulsory demand for having sex with her. Maybe as a friend or a teacher, Phillotson is wonderful because of

his carefulness and kindness but as a husband he is not perfect for Sue. Once Sue voiced her anguish:

What tortures me so much is the necessity of being responsive to man whenever he wishes, good as he is morally! —the dreadful contract to feel in a particular way in a matter whose essence is its voluntariness! (*JO.*, p. 223)

Through her marriage, Sue recognized that one of the bad respects of marriage is oppressing woman especially in offering sex to their husband. The compulsion of marriage is not in line with Sue's persuasion of freedom. She had read a lot and had been enlightened by J. S. Mill's thought about freedom that everybody has the full right of having freedom in speech and action as long as they do not hurt others. She freed herself depending on this. Sue thought it was the artificial restriction rather than the unhappy marriage itself that brought a tragedy. She argued:

It is none of the natural tragedies of love that's love's usual tragedy in civilized life, but a tragedy artificially manufactured for people who in a natural state would find relief in parting! (*JO.*, p. 226)

And she was sure that "when people of later age look back upon the barbarous customs and superstitions of the times that we have the unhappiness to live in, what they will say!" (*JO.*, p. 226). Sue's courage to make herself free from her husband mainly came from the arguments in *On Liberty* by J. S. Mill. She argued that they should abide by J. S. Mill's words and Phillotson should "chooses his plan of life for him, has no need of any faulty than the ape-like one of imitation" (*JO.*, p. 234).

Hardy had it "almost by heart", particularly the third chapter *On Individuality*. He quoted from this chapter and put it into *Jude the Obscure*, when Sue was trying to persuade her husband so as to win his permission to let her leave him and argued that he should "choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of institution" (*JO.*, p. 236). Eventually, Sue's strong willingness of pursuing freedom defeated Phillotson. He realized that the best thing he could do for Sue was to give up their marriage. There was a dreadful incompatibility between him and Sue in both intellectual and sexual aspects. He said: "She has read ten times as much as I. Her intellect sparkles like diamonds, while mine smolders like brown paper... she is too many for me!" (*JO.*, p. 241).

Even if he knew that society would support him to force her to stay with him, he felt conscientiously to force her to go. He found it wrong to "torture a fellow-creature any longer" and he tried not to be a wretch without humanity. "I know I can't logically, or religiously, defend my confession to such a wish to hers; only I know one thing: something within me tells me I am doing wrong in refusing her" (*JO.*, p. 242). In pursuing her freedom to dissolve her unhappy marriage, Sue would inevitably encounter pressure from the social convention in marriage. When Hardy began to write this novel, divorce had been already permitted by the law. However, the religious ideas were still controlling people's mind. Christianity believed that marriage was a holy event protected by God. Once being married, a couple was not supposed to separate. Phillotson reproached Sue that she was "committing a sin in not liking him" since she had "vowed" to love him (*JO.*, p. 234). Even Sue herself believed that she had made a sin in destroying this "holy event". Besides, though Sue did not hurt other people physically, her leaving her lawful husband was considered as a threat to the stability of family and patriarchy. Phillotson's friend Mr. Gillingham said: "there'd be a general domestic disintegration" and "it will upset all received opinion hereabout" (*JO.*, p. 243).

However, Hardy also experienced an unhappy marriage, so he tried his best to express himself through

Sue's actions and thoughts. He thought that human's happiness was more important than rules as same as Mill's and Milton's. Though the topic is still a controvertional problem, it is a fact that Hardy's idea supporting humanity, human nature, and equality between sexes in marriage is progressive.

The Bitter Fruit

Despite of the fact that the combination of Sue and Phillotson was legitimate, in their era, they were doomed to be condemned by the traditional morality. Unaware of her own true inner-thoughts, she got engaged with Phillotson and later was forced to marry him for the pressure of rumors pouring to her. On the other hand, Phillotson married Sue out of the consideration of expanding his school. Sue respected Phillotson by taking him as an experienced and wise teacher and scholar, at the same time, Phillotson, like a humane father and friend, also treated Sue kindly. However, in her deep heart, Sue did not love him at all and her ignorance to themarital affairs and the pressure she suffered strongly and continuously afflicted her. The attitude for Sue towards Phillotson turned from indifference without any tent of enthusiasm to abomination. Hopelessly living with Phillotson in this emotional state, Sue was tantamount to carrying the cross of adultery and when she finally made up her mind to leave Phillotson and lived with her true beloved—Jude.

Sue's resistance to the notion that marriage should be the expressed goal of her sexuality is of central importance in one's life. If marriage is only a sordid contract without love, based on material convenience in house-keeping, rating and taxing, and the inheritance of land and money by children, making it necessary that the male parent should be known—which it seems to be why surly a person may say, even proclaim upon the housetops, that it hurts and grieves him or her (Hardy, 2000, p. 170)? Sue's strike against the institution of marriage is rigorous, radical, and militant, ideologically ahead of the times as far as the feminist movement of the early 1890s went, and more in line with 20th century suffragettes. Sue, however, encountered the opposition from the whole society.

Phillotson allowed Sue to live together with Jude out of the religious sympathy, but his move was ridiculed by the public and he himself was also expelled from school. When Sue canceled her marriage to Phillotson, she was deprived of all that belonged to her step by step by the harsh secular forces: the care from her own parents and friends; the lost of her job, home, and her own child. The only thing for Sue to do was to choose to yield: yield to the persecution of her social environment.

Eventually, Sue melancholy went back to Phillotson, living the bleak life like a zombie. Forced by the social pressure, Sue's return to Phillotson just meant a marriage in name only, which has been completely distorted by the society, ethics, and religion. Their marriage did not belong to themselves and was doomed to be a tragedy from the beginning.

Conclusion

Hardy had witnessed the unethical and hypocritical Victorian evils and boldly revealed his total aversion to them in his depiction of the main characters in *Jude the Obscure*. Many of the most cherished Victorian beliefs—in Providence, for example—were just what Hardy found he could not accept. Greatly influenced by Darwinism, Hardy's insight into love and marriages in Victorian era, in a great sense, is laced with pessimism. Meanwhile, his ambivalent emotions and feelings on Christianity justify Hardy's fatalism. He is an agnostic or skeptical Christian. Through the portrayal of the marriages, we can see Hardy exposes the harm and torture inflicted on people by the marriage system in the Victorian patriarchal society and the hypocritical morality.

The novel also shows Hardy's view of marriage as tinged with dark clouds of pessimism and fatalism.

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