

Katarina S. LAZIĆ
University of Kragujevac
Faculty of Philology and Arts
Department of English language and literature

katarina.lazic@filum.kg.ac.rs

STAR-CROSSED LOVERS – THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF LOVE IN THOMAS HARDY’S *JUDE THE OBSCURE*

The paper will primarily explore the topic of impossible love between the main character of Thomas Hardy’s novel *Jude the Obscure*, Jude Fawley, and his cousin Sue Bridehead. Namely, as the term “star-crossed lovers” refers to “lovers whose relationship is doomed to fail (they are frustrated by the stars), because those who believe in astrology claim that the stars control human destiny”,¹ so is with Jude and Sue, starting from his great-aunt’s monition that “the Fawleys are not cut out for marriage”. Though the readers during the course of the novel might have impression that their love will overcome all the obstacles, their liaison (and love) ends in disaster due to external agents. What is more, not only is Jude unfortunate in the matters of love, but he is star-crossed in his desire for education, having his prospects of enrolling at the university and receiving higher education thwarted, being forced to work as a stonemason for his living. The paper will try to reach the conclusion whether the liaison between Jude and Sue ends up disastrously due to its “not meant to be” or it was simply thwarted by social (namely marital) conventions.

Keywords: Hardy, star-crossed lovers, love, fate, marriage, conventions

INTRODUCTION

The very term “star-crossed” implies that the stars “have a say” in human destinies: a certain individual is not favoured by the stars and therefore has to suffer the consequences of his/her ill fate. Considering the aforementioned, one gets the impression that at times human destiny can depend on other, external factors that one cannot control. In this context we can talk about the so-called “astrological determinism²³” which, according Kotyk represents “the idea that events – be they in the life of a nation or an individual – as well as human personalities and health are predetermined to varying extents. Such fate is determined by the influences of planets and other celestial bodies, or otherwise fated developments might be conceived of as ‘signaled’ by such bodies (Kotyk 2018: 145).” What is more, Kotyk goes on to claim that “one could be born under an astrological configuration that causes pain throughout life (Kotyk 2018: 160).” Consequently, humans can have little or no influence on their fate, the fact that lays all the blame on the stars/planets and puts the humans in a passive role. Robert Holcot⁴ according to Cartlidge expresses his dislike of “anything resembling a deterministic view of the universe, according to which the structure of things is so fixed and inevitable as to present people, implicitly, with an excuse for moral passivity (Cartlidge 2020: 287).” Holcot according to Cartlidge states that,

1 <<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/star-crossed-lovers>> accessed: 6th of November 2024.

2 Astrological determinism can be partially equated with the so-called “paranormal determinism” which “refers to the belief that human personality and behaviors are directly determined by the influence of paranormal factors (Dambrun 2004: 627).” According to Dambrun, paranormal determinism can often be the cause of prejudice against the socially disadvantaged groups (see Dambrun 2004: 628).

3 Kotyk (2018) brings the concept of astrological determinism into connection with the “Indian Buddhist experience of astrology” (see Kotyk 2018: 145).

4 (d. 1349) a Scholastic theologian. He entered the Dominican Order and studied and taught at Oxford. <<https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095940855>> accessed: 6th of November 2024.

Many confess their wickedness, but in a way that is contrary to God. For when they are discovered in their sins, they say “It wasn't me who did this”, or else “this isn't a sin”, but rather “God wished it”. Others say, “It was done to me by Fate, it was done to me by the stars”, and thus by a roundabout route they seek to find a way of accusing God – for he created the stars, and set them on their courses; and in this way, by means of the stars, they try to show that it was God who made them sin. But anyone who is truly penitent says, “It was me who sinned: it was not Fate or Fortune or the Devil who drove me to it, but rather I consented to temptation. (Cartlidge 2020: 287–288)

Therefore, humans are put in a position where they can commit any deed and still lay the blame on the “inauspicious stars”⁵, brushing the responsibility off. Shakespeare likewise mocks this propensity of human nature to “lay the blame on the stars” in *King Lear* through the words of Edmund, the bastard son of the Earl of Gloucester:

This is the excellent foppery of the world, that
when we are sick in fortune (often the surfeits of
our own behavior) we make guilty of our disasters
the sun, the moon, and stars, as if we were villains
on necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion; knaves,
thieves, and treachers by spherical predominance;
drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enforced
obedience of planetary influence; and all that we
are evil in, by a divine thrusting on. (Shakespeare: 37)

What both Holcot and Shakespeare cannot stress enough is that human beings ought to take responsibility for their (bad) deeds and not simply blame it on the stars, bad luck or ill fate. Thecla⁶ according to Burns states that “human beings are ‘free of all necessity’ and ‘are not slaves to fate and fortune’”, and that “assigning responsibility for action to fate robs humans of responsibility (Burns 2017: 208, 212).” What is more, not only that our actions are completely independent of any celestial influence, but we can be the masters of our destiny. According to Niermeier-Dohoney, “in these⁷ earliest uses, astrologers asserted the stars neither compelled peoples’ actions nor controlled their destinies, and indeed, for the prudent individual, precisely the opposite held true (Niermeier-Dohoney 2021: 1)”: therefore the coinage “sapiens dominabitur astris”, i. e. “the wise man will be master of the stars” (see Niermeier-Dohoney 2021: 1). Niccolò Machiavelli according to Niermeier-Dohoney states that “any man wise enough to understand both the times and the pattern of events, and to adapt himself to them, would always have good fortune or would always protect himself from bad fortune, and it would become true that the wise man would command the stars and the Fates (Niermeier-Dohoney 2021: 11).” Consequently, human beings are not at all passive or helpless in the face of destiny/fate/stars/ but can be assigned an active role in the course of the events.

JUDE AND SUE – THE STAR-CROSSED LOVERS OR JUST THE VICTIMS OF THE SOCIAL (AND LEGAL) CONVENTIONS?

James Loehlin according to Carolina Conte (2001) defines star-crossed lovers as “teenage-lovers who struggle against ‘the corrupt values of their parents and so fall victim to a violent and uncaring society (Conte 2001: 50).” Jude Fawley and Sue Bridehead, the lovers and cousins of Thomas Hardy's novel *Jude the Obscure*, are not teenagers (as Romeo and Juliet were), yet they do struggle against the corrupt

5 The term “inauspicious stars” can be found in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

6 Saint Thecla was a contemporary of Saint Paul who became an evangelizer after hearing his teachings. <<https://stthecla.com/about-us/saint-thecla/>> accessed: 6th of November 2024.

7 It refers to the interpretation of astrology in the late thirteenth century.

values of the Victorian society and they do fall victims to “a violent and uncaring society”. Consequently, one cannot blame (just) the stars for their ill-fated love. What is more, even Jude’s thwarted academic aspirations are the consequence of a corrupted and flawed society which does not know recognize and appreciate true values. Though from the title of the paper one can draw a conclusion that the stars are “at fault”, the initial hypothesis of our paper will be to ascertain the responsibility of the Victorian society for the frustration of Jude and Sue’s liaison, as well as for Jude’s academic failure.

At the very beginning of the novel Jude (as a child) is described as “the sort of man who was born to ache a good deal before the fall of the curtain upon his necessary life should signify that all was well with him again (Hardy 2002: 11).” What is more, there are further “astrological” references concerning Jude in the novel, such as that “he (Jude) might battle with his *evil* star (Hardy 2002: 68)”, or an epigraph from Swinburne’s⁸ prelude to *Songs Before Sunrise*, “Save his own soul he hath no star (Hardy 2002: 70).” Consequently, one gets the impression of the existence of an “aura of fatality” about Jude, which is additionally supported by his great-aunt Drusilla’s words, warning him of the family history in the marriage matters: “Jude my child, don’t *you* ever marry. ‘Tisn’t for the Fawleys to take that step any more (Hardy 2002: 8).” Yet, during the course of the novel it is not so much that the stars (fate/destiny) influence Jude’s life but the rigid Victorian society which first deprives him of his chance to pursue his academic career (though Jude might be partially responsible for that and in the later course of the paper we will see why) and later (vicariously) destroys his free union with Sue. According to Sasaki Joe, “*Jude the Obscure* shares with *The Return of the Native* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (other Hardy’s novels) the fact that although human will is in actuality the greatest force in the novel, the efforts of the protagonist appear to be defeated by powers outside himself (Sasaki Joe 1968: 77).” Consequently, *Jude the Obscure* becomes a social criticism (see Sasaki Joe 1968: 77). Guerard according to Sasaki Joe states that “in *Jude the Obscure* ‘the original cosmic idea has become a meaningful pervasive judgement on society rather than a meaningless and isolated judgement on the cosmos’ (Sasaki Joe 1968: 77).” Stewart according to Sasaki Joe argues (in agreement with Guerard) that in this particular novel society is placed at the centre of Thomas Hardy’s vision (see Sasaki Joe 1968: 78):

The regardlessness of the universe towards that which has tragically come to consciousness within it is now seen as miniature in the regardlessness of society towards the individual. Men collectively and for their material ease have decreed ordinances against which they see with complacency individuals break themselves and bleed: and to these ordinances they have baselessly ascribed supernatural wisdom. (Sasaki Joe 1968: 78)

Therefore, there are no (evil) stars (at least in this Hardy’s novel) responsible for one’s frustrated desires or professional aspirations, but a rigid (and hypocritical) society that constrains the individuals.

Concerning Jude’s thwarted academic ambition, Sasaki Joe states that “despite Jude’s ambitions toward obtaining a college education exhibited by his studies in Greek and Latin, the system of higher education is such that merit is unrecognized unless it is accompanied by wealth (Sasaki Joe 1968: 80).” This is supported by Sue Bridehead in her words to Jude: “You are one of the very men Christminster 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 (Hardy 2002: 144).” Long, on the other hand, Jude’s academic failure attributes to “his own inability to be cold-blooded and selfish (Long 1984: 8)”: “in his society, one must be concerned with one’s own interests at the expense of others. Refusing to act in that manner, Jude is doomed to worldly failure (Long 1984: 8).” In the novel this is supported by Sue’s words to Jude: “Your worldly failure, if you have failed, is to your credit rather than to your blame. Remember that the best and greatest among mankind are those who

8 Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909) was an English poet and critic, outstanding for prosodic innovations and noteworthy as the symbol of mid-Victorian poetic revolt. <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Algernon-Charles-Swinburne>> accessed: 6th of November 2024.

do themselves no worldly good. Every successful man is more or less a selfish man. The devoted fail. 'Charity seeketh not her own (Hardy 2002: 350).' However, besides the "flaws in the terrestrial scheme"⁹ (Long, 1984), Jude's failure to pursue first the academic career and, then, the ecclesiastical one, may be attributed to Jude's attraction to women, his physical attraction to his first wife Arabella, and his spiritual, intellectual attraction to Sue. According to Long, "his weakness toward women especially contributes to Jude's failure to accomplish his original ideals. (...) Jude clearly allows women to influence him (Long 1984: 6)." The academic career was given up by Jude on meeting Arabella, the fact clearly visible in the novel:

Arabella soon reasserted her sway in his soul. [...] What were his books to him; what were his intentions, hitherto adhered to so strictly, as to not wasting a single minute of time day by day? 'Wasting,' it depended on your point of view to define that: he was just living for the first time: not wasting life. It was better to love a woman than to be graduate, or a parson; ay, or a pope (Hardy 2002: 43).

Due to his newly acquired manhood, Jude gives up his academic ambition and soon marries to Arabella (owing to her alleged pregnancy). According to Long, "the fact that he (Jude) must choose between Arabella and his intellectual goals indicates a flaw in the world. (...) His brief marriage with Arabella brings into question the logic of social and natural law which show indifference to his finer aspirations (Long 1984: 7)." Likewise, Jude gives up his ecclesiastical career, this time for Sue:

It had been his standing desire to become a prophet, however humble, to his struggling fellow-creatures, without any thought of personal gain. Yet with a wife living away from him with another husband, and himself in love erratically, the loved one's revolt against her state being possibly on his account, he had sunk to be barely respectable according to regulation views. It was not for him to consider further: he had only to confront the obvious, which was that he had made himself quite an impostor as a law-abiding religious teacher. (Hardy 2002: 209)

Long states that "when Jude finally admits the nature of his feelings for Sue, he believes that he is hypocritical to maintain his religious study (Long 1984: 7)": therefore, he decides to return to his career of a simple stone mason. Jude's (academic and ecclesiastical) failure is explained in the following manner: "because Jude keeps lowering his goals, yet never satisfactorily filling even the lowered versions, he is continually frustrated. Jude is torn between his ideals and goals on the one hand, and his human nature and desire to accommodate others, on the other (Long 1984: 7)." Therefore, Jude's failure concerning academic and ecclesiastical achievement(s) cannot be attributed to the stars/fate, nor just to the society, but to Jude himself, his "apathy", "his failure to use the opportunities that are his to control the course of his own life (Sasaki Joe 1968: 111)", or his human weaknesses, or as Long argues, "his tendency to forget those things about which he deeply and sincerely cares in order to satisfy a temporary desire (Long 1984: 48)."

Concerning the (im)possibility of love between Jude and Sue, which will be the crux of our paper, the main problem arises due to their unwillingness¹⁰ to legalize their marriage, their insistence on the so-called "free union". The said unwillingness (at least partially) arises from the strange superstition concerning their family and the matters of marriage, which is discernable in Sue's words to Jude:

Jude, do you think that when you *must* have me with you by law, we shall be so happy as we are now? The men and women of our family are very generous when everything depends upon their goodwill, but they always kick against compulsion. Don't you dread the attitude that insensibly arises out of legal obligation? Don't you think it is destructive to a passion whose essence is its gratuitousness? (Hardy 2002: 262)

9 The title of Long's thesis.

10 The said unwillingness is, however, more attributable to Sue than Jude.

According to Ganjoo, “what gives legal stamp to man-woman relationship is of course marriage (Ganjoo 2014: 30). Yet, due to their family history and the failure of their previous marriages (see Ganjoo 2014: 33), the institution of marriage is exactly what Sue dreads, the marital trivialization of love. However, Tyagi according to Ganjo states that this cannot be considered as “justification” (see Ganjo 2014: 33):

It does not mean that people in love will stop loving each other, only because they have obtained social and legal right to love. Truth and honesty are great virtues in themselves. If there is law against theft and deceit it does not detract from the merit of a person who is honest and truthful. The law against theft and deceit is oppressive only to thieves and liars but never to honest and truthful men. Hence a general observation cannot be formed merely on the basis of the opinions of thieves and liars. Similarly the law governing marriage is not oppressive to everyone. It is oppressive only to those who thoughtlessly enter either into false or impossible marriages. (Ganjoo 2014: 33)

Consequently, since Sue and Jude’s love is neither a thoughtless liaison nor is false or impossible (the fact that they are cousins is not an impediment), there are no obstacles to their marriage, save their irrational fear that marriage will extinguish their love and the fact that, according to Ganjo, they “either fail to act in time or miss the chance (Ganjoo 2014: 33), which gradually leads to the tragic development¹¹ of their lives and the cessation of their liaison. However, the stars are not the ones to be blamed for that.

The fact that Jude and Sue cannot maintain their “free union” but have to legalize their liaison is an indication of the society being in control of an individual. Kar according to Ganjo, states that “individual as such remains controlled by society because in a society individual cannot behave just in the manner he wishes because he has to bear in mind the consequences of his action upon other people. In order to bring individual to the right path the society has to exercise certain restrictions. The control of human behaviour is exercised through traditions, mores, folkways, taboos, laws and norms (Ganjoo 2014: 33).” The denial of other people to provide Jude and Sue’s family (their three children with Sue’s being pregnant again) with lodging and job is just their protest against Jude and Sue’s violation of social conventions. Therefore, the pressure of the society eventually leads to the tragic development of the events, the dissolution of Jude and Sue’s union, and Sue’s frantic return to religion and (social) conventions. Yet, the stars are not the ones to blame again.

Concerning Jude and Sue’s unwillingness to enter into matrimony, it is important to note that the hesitance is stronger on the side of Sue than of Jude. Throughout the novel one is aware of Sue’s “squeamishness” of sex: Sue first denies sexual access to “an undergraduate” she briefly associated with in her early youth, then to Richard Phillotson (her husband), and ultimately to Jude. Elvy according to Sivandipour and Talif states that “for Sue, marriage is a horrible and sordid undertaking - and it seems the most irritating issue about marriage for her is that marriage legitimizes the man’s desire for sex and the wife must always be available to him (Sivandipour and Talif 2018: 55).” Yu-hua agrees with Sivandipour and Talif, claiming that “Sue does not want marriage because she thinks that marriage contract would provide Jude with the more pressure of selfish claim on her body (Yu-hua 2016: 654).” Hardy himself according to Yu-hua further supports this claim in a letter: “One of her (Sue’s) reasons for fearing the marriage ceremony is that she fears it would be breaking faith with Jude to withhold herself at pleasure, or altogether, after it; though while subcontracted she feels at liberty to held herself as seldom as she chooses (Yu-hua 2016: 654).” This is further supported by D. H. Lawrence who, according to Reuter, states that “with respect to Sue, although Jude has a mental communion with her, she is ‘physically impotent’ (Reuter 1978: 30).” The only reason why Sue consents to sexual relations with Jude is her jealousy over Arabella, her fear that Jude might eventually return to her (Arabella) (see also

¹¹ It refers to the death of Sue and Jude’s two children at the hands of Jude’s son from the marriage with Arabella, little Jude, and little Jude’s suicide.

Reuter 1978: 30): “Very well then – if I must I must. Since you will have it so, I agree! I will be. Only I didn’t mean to! And I didn’t want to marry again, either!... But, yes – I agree, I agree! I do love you. I ought to have known that you would conquer in the long run, living like this!” (Hardy 2002: 256).” Just as Arabella is Jude’s mismatch intellectually, so is Sue sexually. Needless to say, the stars are not to be blamed for that: their incompatibility certainly is.

When it comes to the said Jude and Sue’s incompatibility, Yu-hua states that “even though Jude and Sue enjoy spiritual mercy to each other, they cannot truly understand each other either (Yu-hua 2016: 651).” According to Reuter, “Sue is too narcissistic and emotionally unstable to have close and lasting relationship with anyone (Reuter 1978: 31).” This is also supported by Sivandipour and Talif’s statement that “Hardy portrays her character as an unsure, unstable and changing woman. Sue does not know what is right and what is wrong (Sivandipour and Talif 2018: 50)”, and Katherine Rogers who, according to Reuter, argues that “‘Sue can think abstractly, but she lacks the ability to control her emotional impulses, to behave consistently and responsibly,’ and ‘to respect the rights and feelings of others’ (Reuter 1978: 27).” In the novel, Sue is inconsistent and even cruel towards Jude: yet, he often brushes this fact off. According to Reuter, “Jude blinds himself to Sue’s true nature so that he can preserve his image of her as ‘an object of ideal yearning’ (Reuter 1978: 34).” D. H. Lawrence according to Reuter argues that “it appears that Jude first falls in love with the idea which he has of Sue, and then concludes that, because he loves this idea, he wants Sue, the woman who spawned its birth in his mind, to be his mate (Reuter 1978: 33).” Sue is often described in the novel as “phantasmal, bodiless creature” (Hardy 2002: 250) with “so little animal passion in her” (Hardy 2002: 250), almost an abstraction, and that is how it will remain till the end of the novel: though they are often represented as “one soul in two bodies”, Jude (and we as the readers) does not get any valid insight into her character: there is only an idealization of Sue. What is more, according to Reuter, it is exactly this adoration of Sue’s idealized image that spawns his physical attraction towards her: “Jude is never spontaneously entranced by Sue’s physique in the way he is by Arabella’s. (...) Jude’s attraction to Sue is due more to the reverence which he has for his conception of her than it is to the physical effect which she has on him (Reuter 1978: 34).” However, the stars likewise cannot be responsible for that.

Lastly, the world as it is is not “fertile ground” for Jude and Sue’s love to thrive. Elvy according to Sivandipour and Talif states that “the tragedy of Sue and Jude is that there is no social or cultural space in which their special, two-in-one spiritual love can exist, let alone flourish (Sivandipour and Talif 2018: 54).” Unlike Arabella who is born to thrive in this cruel, materialistic world and “sees nothing wrong with the order of things in the world whereby one species profits at the expense of another (Long 1984: 5)”, Jude and Sue are the people of more refined ideals, and these ideals inexorably come into conflict with crude and trivial reality. Sue as “an example of the modern woman, educated and well-read” (Long 1984: 12) and Jude as someone “whose dreams were as gigantic as his surroundings were small” (Hardy 2002: 16) certainly are not the people who could fit into a materialistic world, the world “which no longer offers any stable and humane values (Ganjo 2014: 34-35).” According to Long, “Jude’s inability to survive in the world is matched by Sue’s: ‘Jude and Sue are both frankly represented as humanly weak, as more than ordinarily sensitive to pain, and ill adapted to an order that calls for a certain callousness as a condition of survival’ (Long 1984: 9).” Therefore they, rejecting to “play according to the world’s rules” lose this battle against the world in advance. Yet again, the stars could hardly be blamed for this: the order of the world is responsible for it and it is in the humans’ power to change it.

CONCLUSION

The paper has primarily explored the (im)possibility of love between Jude Fawley and Sue Bridehead, two cousins and the protagonists of Thomas Hardy’s novel *Jude the Obscure*. The initial hypothesis of the paper has been that, though from the outset there is an aura of fatality about their relationship,

the tragic outcome of their liaison is more the consequence of social conventions (or their own faults and decisions) than to some “fault in their stars”. The same is likewise applicable to Jude’s failure in his academic and ecclesiastical career.

Though the paper has born the title “the star-crossed lovers” the failure in Jude and Sue’s liaison has hardly anything to do with the stars. The reason for this failure may be attributed to the social conventions (the world order in general), the incompatibility, their natures and dispositions, their apathy and failure to use the opportunities, etc. Yet the fate/stars/celestial bodies are not the ones to be blamed for their misfortunes, but their own choices or the social constraints. Some of the future researches might possibly deal with the examples of the existence of a “free union” of lovers (as it has been the case with Jude and Sue) in the Victorian literature, since the topic is yet an unexplored one.

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NESUDJENI LJUBAVNICI – NEMOGUĆNOST LJUBAVI U ROMANU NEZNANI DŽUD TOMASA HARDIJA

Rezime

Rad se prevashodno bavio nemogućnošću ljubavi između junaka Hardijeveg romana *Neznani Džud*, Džuda Faulija, i njegove rodjake Sju Brajdhed. Naime, kako se termin „nesudjeni ljubavnici“ odnosi na ljubavnike čija veza je osudjena na propast (zvezde su im se isprečile na putu), budući da oni koji veruju u astrologiju tvrde da zvezde imaju uticaj na ljudsku

sudbinu, to se isti može primeniti na Džuda i Sju, počevši od upozorenja njegove rodjake da „Faulijevi nisu stvoreni za brak“. Uprkos tome da čitaoci tokom čitanja romana mogu steći utisak da će njihova ljubav prevazići sve prepreke, njihova veza (i ljubav) završava se katastrofalno zahvaljujući spoljnim faktorima na koje ne mogu da utiču. Štaviše, ne samo da Džud nema sreće u ljubavi, već je istovremeno osujećen u svojoj želji za obrazovanjem, budući da mu pristup univerzitetu nije omogućen, te on biva osuđen da radi kao kamenoklesar kako bi se izdržavao. U radu se došlo do zaključka da je veza između Džuda i Sju okončana prevashodno pod pritiskom društvenih (bračnih) stega, a ne činjenicom da „nije bila zapisana u zvezdama“.

Ključne reči: Hardi, nesudjeni ljubavnici, ljubav, sudbina, brak, konvencije

Катярина С. Лазич