

“Obscure” Life under the Deviation of Ethical Identity: *Jude the Obscure* in the Perspective of Ethical Literary Criticism

Dong Kai

School of International Studies, Zhejiang University
Yuhangtang Rd. 668, Xihu District, Hangzhou, 310058, China
Email: dongkaiwaiyuan@163.com

Sui Hongsheng

School of Foreign language, Zhejiang University City College
Huzhou Rd. 51, Gongshu District, Hangzhou, 310015, China
Email: suihongsheng 1972@163.com

Abstract As for Thomas Hardy’s *Jude The Obscure*, the cause of Jude’s tragedy has always been a topic of great concern in literary study. The existing researches lay more stress on external factors such as social contradictions and class orders, claiming that the inferior class status and the hidden social injustice are the main causes of Jude’s disaster. However, this paper argues that Jude’s weak ethical consciousness and his deviation of ethical identity play a vital role in his tragedy, which is the deeper root of his obscurity. Due to his excessive emphasis on free will and unconstrained desire while neglecting his responsibilities and obligations assigned to him by his ethical identity, Jude fell into multiple predicaments in marriage, career and interpersonal communication, and finally passed away in an unknown and sorrowful manner. This paper mainly explores how Jude deviates his ethical identity in love relationship, father-son relationship, and teacher-student relationship, as well as the profound influence on his tragic life.¹

Keywords *Jude The Obscure*; literary ethical criticism; ethical identity; ethical responsibility

Author Dong Kai is PhD candidate at School of International Studies, Zhejiang

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University. His main research interests include American literature and Intellectual studies. **Sui Hongsheng** is Professor and PhD supervisor at School of Foreign Language Studies, Zhejiang University City College. His main research interests include British and American literature, Gender Poetics, and Virtue Ethics.

Introduction

In the British history, the Victorian era of the 19th century is a significant transitional period from the past to the future. The development of science and humanity has indicated that “the social structure and the social ethics of the Britain would undergo a profound transformation”(Houghton 1). Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) is one of the most influential English writers of this very era. *Jude the Obscure* (1895, hereinafter referred to as *Jude*) is Hardy’s last full-length novel, which has manifested his deep reflection on many issues concerned with the times and the life in his later years. However, the work caused an unexpected uproar in public sphere after its publication. Many common readers and professional critics have condemned the moral implication and public influence of the novel, stigmatizing it as an “evil work” that corrupts religious ideal and family ethics. For protesting the publication and the circulation of *Jude*, the outraged Bishop Wickfield of England even burned the work in public as for which Hardy poignantly remarked that the bishop was “probably in his despair at not being able to burn me” (*Jude* 40). Having not expected such a barrage of criticism for his literary expression, Hardy directly claimed that he would no longer write novels afterwards.

Although *Jude* has suffered slanderous remarks and strong resistances at the beginning, the artistic attainment and the idealistic value of the work have not been buried, but constantly been discovered and affirmed as the time goes on. Duffin holds that the broad theme and the infinite content of the work have brought readers into an infinite space of pondering (Duffin 188). Gregor points out that the publication of *Jude* embodies that Hardy has been the pioneer of the time in both artistic style and subject matter (Gregor 139). Generally speaking, the academic circle has changed its understanding of *Jude* to a large extent, and has gradually re-examined the work from different levels such as the social system, the ideal culture and the narrative structure after the Second World War. The ideological value and the epochal significance in the work are thus further highlighted.

As for the root cause of Jude Fawley’s tragedy, the previous studies have paid more attention to external factors such as the social contradictions and the class solidification, implying that the life of Jude has been ruined by “the eternity

of social conflicts, the inevitability of tragedy and the futility of human struggle” (Fischler 516). The above-mentioned concept reflects a prevailing view in the academic circle: The writer’s criticism on the society is the transformed sympathy towards the protagonist, and the defects of the social system is the the source of the protagonist’s misfortune. There is no doubting that Hardy has made a sharp criticism on the British society of the Victorian era. Needless to say, the humble class background and the social injustice of the times are important reasons for Jude’s failing to realize his ambition.

However, through a closer reading, it could be found that Jude’s tragedy has internal causes behind the external elements. This essay aims to point out that the lack of ethical consciousness and the deviation of ethical identity play an essential role in Jude’s tragedy, which is the deeper cause for Jude’s “obscurity.” According to the theory of literary ethical criticism, “the ethical identity of the human being is a mark for his (her) existence in society, and he (she) needs to assume the related responsibilities and obligations entrusted by his (her) identity” (Nie 263). It is of great importance to realize that if an individual wants to be accepted and recognized by the society, and to achieve success in marriage career and interpersonal communication, it is necessary to build up the sound ethical identity in different ethical relationships and assume the related responsibilities and obligations intrinsic in ethical identity. In *Jude*, because of the lack of the consciousness of ethical identity, Jude has thought highly of the release of free will and the indulgence of the desire, but regarded little of his ethical responsibilities and obligations as the lover, the husband and the father. He thus passed away in an obscure manner after his marriage, career and interpersonal contact were all in dilemma. This paper focuses on the disastrous impact of Jude’s ethical identity deviation in three ethical perspectives, including love relationship, father-son relationship, and teacher-student relationship.

The Deviation of Ethical Identity in Love Relationship

Among all kinds of ethical relationships, the love relationship between men and women can be said to be the most typical and complex ethical relationship. The ancient Greek philosopher Plato regards love as a religion, as well as “a miraculous fusion of the souls with an eternal wisdom far beyond body lust” (Plato 251). Love is not only concerned with sensual pleasure and physical satisfaction, but has an internal depth of spirit and soul. In this regard, the perfect combination of the soul and the body is the symbol of the ideal love relationship, which is the highest state of love. According to Marx, love is the “ethical entity” of a society, which

“internalizes moral obligations into the social life and is therefore the noblest moral emotion” (Marx 183). Marx affirms the value of love, but does not ignore the ethical responsibility in love relationship. In contemporary society, Sternberg points out in his “ternary theory of love” that love essentially includes intimacy, passion and responsibility (Sternberg 120), which explicitly claims that the responsibility of the acting subject is indispensable in love ethics, reflecting the importance of ethical responsibility of both parties in love relationship.

Indeed, love is related to the ethical selection and identity construction of both sides of the courtship behavior, it thus has considerable moral and ethical attributes. On the one hand, the moral cultivation and the personal character of the acting subject are the basic conditions for maintaining love and marriage. Marriage without the foundation of love is unstable, just as Han once said: “Husband and wife does not have the natural association of flesh and blood. They are intimate when they are in love, they are aloof from each other when they are out of love” (Han 73). However, love without moral connotation is equally difficult to sustain. Since many acting subjects falling love with each other pays inadequate attention in moral connotation and ethical consciousness, they end up their relationship with the disillusionment of love and the dissolution of marriage. On the other hand, the love relationship with spiritual and moral connotations can encourage and promote each other, based on which a sound moral personality and a clear life planning can be built up, so that the value of the individual and the overall can be better realized. Unfortunately, when it comes to the ethical selection of love, Jude pays more attention to the satisfaction of lust, but lacks the necessary ethical identity consciousness. He exposed serious flaws in both the selection of the mate and the operation of marriage, which could be regarded as the first reason of his obscurity.

In terms of the selection of the mate, Jude only focused on the the physical appearance and the sexual attraction in the beginning, but ignored the importance of the the moral cultivation and the personal character of the object, which is the deep reason for his failed marriage. In fact, when Jude first met Arabella, it is her young body and physical beauty rather than her cultivation and character, that have attracted him a lot. For Jude, “She had a round and prominent bosom, full lips, perfect teeth, and the rich complexion of a Cochin hen’s egg”(Jude 81). Although Arabella appeared rustic in manner and labor, Jude was then attracted by her charming and desperately wanted to live with her. During the intimate period, “the passing discriminative power was withdrawn, and Jude was lost to all conditions of things in the advent of a fresh and wild pleasure” (Jude 84). Since he had put too much emphasis on physical gratification, soon he learned the bitter

fruit of impulsiveness. After marriage, Jude came to have a deeper insight and get tired of his wife. He perceived not only her makeup and wig, but also her vulgarity and utilitarianism. At this time he realized that he had fallen into the trap of love and become a victim of hasty marriage. Jude unilaterally regarded himself as a victim of a failed marriage, but did not realize that the root cause of his adversity is the lack of spiritual connotation and moral consciousness in his love selection.

Jude was short of long-term planning in his love issues, he thought little about how to create favorable conditions for a happy and lasting marriage. After getting married as the husband of Arabella, Jude had forgotten his dream, ignoring his plans to study and work and becoming affectionate and short-sighted. While Arabella had kept some expectations in check in her domestic life, she once thought that Jude is “a husband with a lot of earning power in him for buying her frocks and hats when he should begin to get frightened a bit, and stick to his trade, and throw aside those stupid books for practical undertakings” (*Jude* 103). Obviously, Arabella took it for granted that Jude, as her husband, had the ethical identity as a breadwinner of the family, she thought he would take the role and the responsibility as the protector and the provider, which is the self-evident recognition of the husband’s ethical identity in the Victorian era. However, Jude did not treat love as the impetus for a good family, nor did he provide a solid material foundation for a perfect marriage. Instead, he attributed his mediocrity to misfortune. He felt underappreciated for a long time, mistakenly regarding marriage as a shackle to his personal value: “There seemed to him, vaguely and dimly, something wrong in a social ritual which made necessary a canceling of well-formed schemes involving years of thought and labor, of foregoing a man’s one opportunity of showing himself superior to the lower animals, and of contributing his units of works to the general progress of his generation” (*Jude* 107).

Jude’s narrow-minded understanding doubtlessly led to a sharp conflict with Arabella’s secular expectation on an “ideal husband.” Arabella was gradually dissatisfied with Jude’s behavior, accusing him of being stale and unable to handle family responsibilities. Faced with his wife’s criticism, Jude shirked his ethical responsibility in love relationship on the grounds that there was “no emotional basis” existing between each other. However, when he found his spiritual partner Suzanne and got married with her as a nominal couple, Jude still lacked a conscious understanding of his ethical identity in the love relationship. The wishful union of the soul and the body that he had yearned for remained an ethereal illusion, which was never practically established and maintained in a responsible manner. Due to the neglect of the ethical identity and the responsibility consciousness, Jude always

lacks realistic basis and moral connotation in his ethical selections concerning love relationship. It is clearly proved afterwards by the subsequent breakdown of Jude's relationship with Arabella and Suzanne in succession.

In examining the relationship between love and marriage in the Victorian era, Hardy found the defects of the era by virtue of literary reflection. As a forward-thinking writer, Hardy once mentioned, "Marriage should not be a shackle to human beings. If a true marriage cannot be achieved, then the so-called legal contract should be annulled"(Hardy, *Selected Letters* 246). Although Hardy affirmed the significance of human nature in his mediation, it did not mean that he ignored the ethical responsibilities in love relationship. In the *Jude*, the protagonist with a free will was eager to transcend the shackles of the secular system and pursue an ideal life. However, he ignored his ethical identity and evaded his ethical responsibility again and again in love relationship. As a result, he became a deemed loser impossible to build up a sound relationship with his wife in his two marriages. It can thus be seen that Hardy attached great importance to the ethical identity of the individuals in which the ethical responsibility is indispensable.

As a basic way of life and the mechanism of human reproduction, marriage is bound to be restricted by the social context and the realistic situation. Taking into account the needs of family members and maintain the operation of family life, is always the implied ethical responsibility in husband-wife relationship. "Even in modern society, the unconditional pursuit of love as the only value orientation of marriage is neither realistic nor possible" (Zhu 21). Jude obstinately created binary opposition between love and marriage, between desire and responsibility, mistakenly pursuing his value standard of "love supermacism." Since he had treated the ethical responsibility as a terrible bond, his life was tortured by the unbearable lightness because of which he could neither establish a happy family nor pursue a meaningful life. The consequence is that his life is destined to be branded with the mark of obscurity.

The Deviation of Ethical Identity in Father-Son Relationship

The father-son relationship is a key ethical relationship in family life, which is the main axis of constructing harmonious family and realizing inter-generational inheritance. In a wholesome father-son relationship, fatherhood implies not only authority and dominance, but also responsibility and obligation. The existence of fatherhood enables children to grow up under a proper guidance and care, while the absence of fatherhood probably makes children trapped into crisis and anxiety. In a family life, paternal responsibility is directly reflected in the breeding and education

for children. It is the most effective way for fathers to build up their authority and legitimacy by creating a good living environment and providing correct educational guidance for the children. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to clarify the responsibilities and obligations of his ethical identity as a father.

First of all, the father is a breadwinner of a family, he needs to rely on labor to obtain the income for the living, maintain the operation of the family and bring up the children. Secondly, the father is a protector who relies on nurturing and caring to foster security and confidence for his children. Thirdly, the father is also the spiritual teacher of his children, he should cultivate their virtue and personality for their mental growth. In the family life, the fulfillment of paternal responsibilities is an important basis for the sound development of children. On the contrary, giving birth only but ignoring the role of raising and caring as a father, will bring serious disaster to the children. In *Jude*, Little Time (the son of Jude and Arabella) was not tenderly cared and nurtured by his parents because of which he ended his life in extreme form. The experience of Little Time reflects Jude’s failure in fulfilling his paternal responsibilities, which is considered as the second reason of Jude’s obscurity.

In other’s eyes, Little Time is a “spirit of tragedy” full of melancholy. It seems that “a ground swell from ancient years of night seemed now and then to lift the child in his morning life, when his face took a back view over some great Atlantic of time, and appeared not to care about what it saw”(Jude 288). The development of Little Time’s personality is directly related to his growth experience. Since his mother Arabella hid his birth in the beginning, he never saw his father in England, but was raised by his grandfather in Australia. It was only years later, after Jude and Arabella had separate families, Little Time was shipped like a cargo to England by his grandfather. Little Time did not receive adequate care from his parents like other children in a regular family. As a child with pale face and frightened eyes, he lacked the sense of security and belonging that his parents should have given him since his birth. After he was back in England, Arabella didn’t want him to interfere with her second marriage, and she thus selfishly pushed him off to his father. Unfortunately, Jude had not yet handled sensibly his responsibilities as a father as well. If failing to bring up had been one of Jude’s mistakes to his son, then raising without a sensible guidance was another mistake Jude had made afterwards.

Jude’s failure in fulfilling paternal responsibilities is mainly reflected in two aspects. First of all, because Jude violated the incest taboo of the secular society, he plunged himself into the dual pressure of spiritual and material crisis. Bierquier points out that “the incest taboo is the first law made by the human society” (Bierquier 39). It limits human’s biological impulse and forms an ethical

consciousness. With the growth of Christianity and capitalism, incest became a marriage taboo and began to be punished by the secular law (Goody 41). In the Victorian age which emphasizes “rationality” and “restraint”, incest has become a degenerate behavior representing barbarism and debauchery in the public’s consciousness. After violating the incest taboo, Jude faced both moral pressure and financial punishment. Since his profession is mainly to carve tombstones and inscriptions related with religion, Jude’s transgression in love issues had to some degree amounted to sacrilege as for the secular public. he was thus laid off by his employer and deprived of a steady source of income. Secondly, although Jude and Suzanne broke through the shackles of tradition, they did not have the courage to embrace the eccentric life directly. Faced with the condemnation of the society, they chose to live a vagrant life, which not only left the family members adrift all the time, but also made Little Time suffer from the discrimination of neighbors and companions. In the absence of paternal responsibility, little Time lost the sense of belonging and confidence needed for a child to grow up, he began to doubt the rationality of his own existence. Little Time once said to Suzanne: “I oughtn’t to have come to’ee - that’s the real truth! I troubled’ em in Australia, and I troubled folk here. I wish i hadn’t been born” (*Jude* 323). Having realized little Time’s pessimism, Suzanne even didn’t know how to eliminate the pent-up sorrow existing in the child’s mind.

Little Time is essentially a kind-hearted child, who not only loved his ailing father Jude but also cared his laborious mother Suzanne. He blamed his own existence for the misery of his parents’ life. Failing to realize the joy he brought to the family, he felt he was dragging down his parents who had been struggling. From his perspective, instead of being a protector, his father had become an object of being pitied. The disaster brought to the family by the lack of paternal responsibility was mistakenly transformed into a kind of guilt borne by little Time due to his cognitive deviation. When he saw that his father was sick in bed and that Suzanne was about to give birth to another child, Little Jude said sadly: “How ever could you, mother, be so wicked and cruel as this, when you needn’t have done it till we was better off, and father well” (*Jude* 328). Out of both the hatred for his existence and the fear for his parents’ life, Little Time deals with the family’s problem in an extreme way: he killed his brother and sister and took suicide afterwards as a way to help his parents. Little Time was not vicious by nature, he treated self-destruction as the only way to relieve his parents’ pressure. He wrote his last words in a letter: “done because we are too menny ” (*Jude* 410).

There is no doubt that little Time’s tragedy is directly related to Jude’s failure

to fulfill his ethical responsibility. Weber once put forward the famous “ethics of conviction” and “ethics of responsibility” in his sociological research. The former refers to that the behavior subjects take actions solely based on his specific values, while the latter refers to that the behavior subjects consider consequences and responsibilities in their actions (Weber 38). Weber emphasizes that “ethics of responsibility” should be given priority in daily practice because it can make the behavior subjects have a clear sense of responsibility and restrain the behavior reasonably. In fact, the emphasis on “ethics of responsibility” is equally important when it comes to family issues. As the head of the household, Jude mainly relied on kindness and sensibility to cope with the everyday issues, which were inadequate to properly maintain a family and fulfill its responsibilities. As a father, Jude should have a clear understanding of his paternal responsibility when raising his children. It is necessary for him to provide them with material security and spiritual comfort before their personality and character are formed. However, his failure to fulfill his paternal duty caused his son to lose confidence in life and tragically took his own life. Little Time’s life is highly symbolic. as a fleeting visitor in his parents’ life, His final parting is Hardy’s veiled criticism of Jude’s lack of ethical responsibility.

Little Time died of a tragic death. His departure not only stigmatized Jude and Suzanne, but also completely shattered their spiritual will as mates. Looking objectively at the disintegration of Jude’s relationship with Suzanne, Hardy neither treated the incest taboo as the main cause of their downfall, nor regarded their cynicism as a sin. As a forward-looking writer, Hardy was eager to affirm the free will of individuals. He even took Jude’s subversive behavior as the adventure of the modern men into a new world. However, in the process of displaying Jude’s ethical selections, Hardy showed the consequences of Jude’s neglect of paternal responsibility in a rational and restrained way. As the father of the family, Jude caused the death of his son because he violated his ethical identity as a father consciously or unconsciously. The actuality of his middle-aged childless tinted his life with a tragic hue of obscurity.

The Deviation of Ethical Identity in Teacher-student Relationship

Different from the relationship of the husband-wife and the father-son, the teacher-student relationship is not based on legal or blood connection, but based on social interaction. The ethics of teacher- student in the traditional western society neither emphasizes the principle of “treating the teacher as a father,” nor recognizes the principle of “obeying the teacher like a fool.” In the development of humanism and democracy, the ethics of teacher-student in modern western society emphasizes

mutual equality and respect. As an embodiment of social relations, the teacher-student relationship sometimes has interest relation or interest conflict. In this context, both sides must respect each other's personality and take into account each other's interests when they make ethical selections, which is not only the principle of maintaining emotional connection between teachers and students, but also the basis of realizing proper interpersonal communication. In the selection of love mate, Jude pursued another man's legal wife in the name of love. He thought little about the dilemma he had offered to others when he was indulgent of his desire. Furthermore, in the frenzy of love, Jude had completely forgotten the social identity of his lover. Suzanne was not only his cousin, but also the wife of his teacher. His action not only destroys the moral foundation of the teacher-student ethics, but also damages the realized interests and denigrates the public image of his teacher. Jude's unrighteous act is the third reason for his obscurity.

Phillotson had an important influence on Jude's growth, to some degree he was the only guide for Jude's education career. When Jude was young, Phillotson was a man full of ideals. As the headmaster of a village primary school, he felt the changes in British higher education and hoped to change his fate through college education. It is true that the education policies in the Victorian era had broken the monopoly of Oxford and Cambridge on college education, and the emerging of some universities made higher education no longer the privilege of the aristocracy (Christ 288). In this period, the educator John Newman defined the function of university as "spreading knowledge to the society" rather than "just promoting the progress of knowledge itself" (Newman 37), which laid a foundation for the popularization of higher education and the social mobility of the obscure talents. Phillotson's determination to pursue his dream in the city was a great encouragement to Jude who had grown up in the country, he had confessed his dream to Jude: "My scheme, or dream, is to be a university graduate, and then to be ordained, by going to live at Christminster, or near it, I shall be at headquarters, so to speak, and if my scheme is practical at all (*Jude* 48). Before he left the country, Phillotson once told Jude: "be a good boy, remember, and be kind to animals and birds, and read all you can. And if ever you come to Christminster remember you hunt me out for old acquaintance's sake" (*Jude* 49). As Jude's first teacher, Phillotson not only instilled the idea that education could change a man's destiny, but also inspired Jude to get rid of ignorance and pursue the progress on a bigger stage. Inspired by Phillotson's example, Jude was able to overcome the difficulties, and learn Latin and other subjects with a hard-bitten attitude in the midst of his daily grind.

Phillotson was grateful to Jude, but the latter had obviously failed to repay his

teacher’s kindness. When Jude saw his teacher again nearly a decade later, the once dreamer had become a middle-aged man who was down and out. Phillotson did not realize the dream of being a college graduate, he taught alone at an elementary school. Though he had lost his passion of being a college graduate, Phillotson was still honest with Jude. He accepted Jude’s entreaty to help Suzanne find a post for living, and maintained the dignity as a teacher as ever. But when Jude learned that Suzanne was married to Phillotson for the sake of practical consideration, he became hostile to his teacher. “There had grown up in the younger man’s mind a curious dislike to think of the older, to meet him, to communicate in any way with him” (*Jude* 218). For a moment he even “felt an unprincipled and fiendish wish to annihilate his rival at all cost” (*Jude* 219). In order to satisfy his desire, Jude persuaded Suzanne to run away with him after she married Phillotson regardless of his teacher’s reputation.

When Phillotson learned that Suzanne’s decision had been made, He managed to accept her offer and wrote to Jude: “I make only one condition, that you are tender and kind to her. I know you love her. But even love may be cruel at times. You are made for each other: it is obvious, palpable, to any unbiased older person” (*Jude* 304). As Jude’s teacher, Phillotson did not simply regard Jude as the destroyer of his marriage, but calmly examined the hidden problem between himself and Suzanne. Finally, he affirmed Suzanne’s right to pursue a free love despite that her choice would ruin his reputation and bring him condemnation. Just as the narrator has mentioned: “No man had ever suffered more inconvenience from his own charity, christian or heathen, than Phillotson had done in letting Sue go. He had been knocked about from pillar to post at the hands of the virtuous almost beyond endurance” (*Jude* 433). Phillotson’s indulgence to his wife had degenerated his public image as both a teacher and a husband, which afterwards led him into serious financial and emotional crisis. Even so, Phillotson silently took all the blame and gave Jude and Suzanne the freedom to choose.

Phillotson generosity contrasted sharply with Jude’s selfishness. The difference in behavior reflects Jude’s lack of ethical identity consciousness in the ethical relationship between teacher and student. He did not realize the responsibility that he, as a student, owed to the teacher who had always cared, encouraged and helped him. Besides, Even if there wasn’t a teacher-student relationship between Jude and Phillotson, what Jude had done to Phillotson was still regarded as immoral. It is true that the teacher-student relationship has no direct blood or legal connections, while they embody the communication ethics of a public society. Habermas points out that the core of communication ethics is “mutual understanding” whose foundation is

“equality and respect.” It refers not only that both sides could understand the same expression in a common way, but also that both sides could realize the coordination in a normative context of mutual recognition (Habermas 3). In order to realize the equal communication, it is necessary to build up a “moral emotion” reflecting the overall relationship and rational spirit on the premise of respecting others’ identities and acknowledging other’s interests (Kant 81). However, facing the existing reality of the marriage between Phillotson and Suzanne, Jude selfishly urged Suzanne to get rid of the bondage of marriage and elope with him, which not only hurt the teacher who had been kind to him, but also made him lose a vital guide in his life for the disruption of the teacher-student relationship. Ironically, the kind and tolerant teacher finally got out of the dilemma with a calm mind, while the blind and impulsive student died in his bed with an endless sorrow. The final contrast of fate between the teacher and the student clearly revealed the importance of abiding by the ethical identity in social life.

Conclusion

At the end of his life, Jude realized the confusion of his ethical identity, thus he said in his final farewell to Suzanne: I am neither a dweller among men nor ghosts (433). Jude perceived his ethical identity of “neither man nor ghost” in a way of epiphany, while everything was irreparable since the mistakes had been made. Due to the lack of clear ethical consciousness and the sense of responsibility, Jude could not be accepted and recognized by the society. Therefore, he has to take a life of being ignored and alienated unwillingly. What Jude failed to realize is that no matter how the times develops and how the social value changes, the existing individuals need to assume the ethical responsibilities entrusted to them by abiding by their ethical identities. There are indeed some successful rebels against the traditional ethics during the times of radical change, while most of them has been able to assume the responsibility and obligation of a changed ethics, and become a man with virtue, ability and achievements during the reconstruction of a new ethical identity. Unfortunately, Jude is not such a progressive frontier. Although he expressed dissatisfaction with his class background, his living environment and his marriage status, he has rarely reflected on his own defects in many ethical issues. Such a figure is bound to become one of a mediocre and neglected “majority” in human history, which is the deep meaning for Hardy’s diction of “obscure.”

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