



Thomas Hardy on Metaphysics: An Essay

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Hardy tried to pre-empt criticism of “Jude the Obscure” (1895) by claiming that, like his previous novels, it was about the deadly war between flesh and spirit and the tragedy of unfulfilled aims. His attempt at pre-empting criticism did not work, however, and he was so traumatized by the novel’s reception that he stopped writing novels altogether. Why was “Jude the Obscure” singled out for such strong censure? In this essay, Michael Giffin argues that Hardy’s main problem was his metaphysical confusion. While he claimed to be a humanist, his novel was fatalistic. He never understood that humanism and fatalism are antithetical concepts. It never occurred to him that a fatalistic novel cannot claim to be humanistic novel (6,800 words).

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