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Programme:	Oxbridge Academy Scholars Programme
Course Title:	The Crown and Crisis
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Essay Number and Title: <i>(taken from Course Materials)</i>	Essay #2; 'Teach me how to die' (Jude, Part 2, Ch. 1). What lessons does Jude the Obscure seek to teach its reader?
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'Teach me how to die' (Jude, Part 2, Ch. 1). What lessons does *Jude the Obscure* seek to teach its reader?

William Dean Howells describes Thomas Hardy's final novel, *Jude the Obscure*, as a "tragedy of fate" in Victorian literature. The preface to the first edition of *Jude the Obscure* alerts the reader of a foreshadowed "deadly war waged between flesh and spirit" as well as "the tragedy of unfulfilled aims" (5). For the duration of this misfortune, an internal debate flourishes within Jude Fawley, whom the novel is based on, that involves his continuous struggle of either listening to his impulses or God. Even though he begins the novel as a young boy with aspirations for a religious future, Jude finishes the novel with an unfortunate fate after all of his mistakes committed with his cousin Sue Bridehead. Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* teaches readers not only to consider the consequences of choosing flesh over spirit, but also to learn from Jude's mistakes and not fall into a life of failure. Ultimately succumbing to his flesh, Jude Fawley gives in to his unceasing passion for Sue Bridehead and evolves into a character whose previously strong faith fades away after a series of unfortunate events.

When examining a moment of sleep deprivation early in the novel, the reader can see that Jude is incapable of reaching peace with himself in his internal war of flesh versus spirit. After his first day at Christminster, Jude roams the empty streets, views sculptures of famous gentlemen, and imagines several of these gentlemen speaking to him by quoting excerpts from their literary works. One hallucination in particular that stands out in Jude's subconscious is Bishop Ken, and Jude claims that his voice has "endeared to him from earliest childhood" (70). Bishop Ken singing his most famous hymn, "An Evening Hymn," is the final illusion that Jude receives before he falls asleep, showing that Jude is comfortable with and genuinely values this figure. Jude hears the following verses from Bishop Ken before he falls asleep: "Teach me to live, that I may dread / The grave as little as my bed. / Teach me to die..." (70). These lines are explaining to whoever is listening – in this case, Jude – that one should enjoy life while they still have it so death will not be as unbearable as it may seem in the abstract. If one fears death as little as sleeping, the concept of dying will not be intimidating. In these few lines, the reader can see that Jude's mind is

eased through a hymn that focuses on learning how to live so that he will not fear his inevitable death. However, the lines that Jude recites in his mind exclude a very significant line that completes the stanza: “Teach me to die that so I may / Rise glorious at the judgement day” (Bishop Ken). Jude falls asleep knowing that this is the verse that follows his last conscious thought, proving that he believes that he needs to learn how to die so he can go to Heaven despite all of his sins. Since Hardy intentionally leaves out the rest of the hymn, the reader is left to consider many explanations as to why this decision was made; this includes the possibility that the hymn foreshadows Jude being unable to recover from his future sins and that he will accept dying from them. In essence, Hardy attempts at teaching the reader that learning how to live is through being able to cope with the mental concept of death. In an alternate scene, Hardy briefly mentions “An Evening Hymn” when the girls attending Christminster sing it immediately before they realize that Sue Bridehead is nowhere to be found (116). Sue’s disappearance from such a religious center can be compared to Jude’s hope slowly becoming absent as more scandals are created between the two – an outcome of them both following desire rather than God’s plan.

The reader is presented with examples of Sue and Jude’s outlooks on religion through small moments in dialogue. When discussing the ways they each solve their problems, Jude says to Sue, “Life isn’t long enough to work out everything in Euclid problems before you believe it. I take Christianity,” to which Sue responds with, “Well, perhaps you might take something worse” (127). At this point in the novel, Jude has a religious preference in making his decisions while Sue prefers to take a more historical and textual approach. Sue makes her opinion quite clear about Christianity, saying that Jude could believe in something worse, yet she still alludes to her belief that Christianity is not a stable route that Jude should take to structure his decisions. It is through Sue’s reluctance to believe in God that Hardy imposes his own beliefs upon this character, mostly due to how emotional the changes in faith and lifestyle impact Sue. Her lack of faith has such a lasting impression on Jude to a point where she changes Jude’s own beliefs. This is

most evident when Jude concludes that “the utmost he could hope for was that in a life of constant internal warfare between flesh and spirit the former might not always be victorious” (159-160). It is at this point in the novel when Jude openly admits to the reader that he is desperately fighting to win in a battle between following his sexual desires and complying to God’s wishes; however Jude also confesses that the most he could hope for is that his spirit will grow stronger than his sinful longings. Jude accepts that there will be times where his faith will not be strong enough to subdue his flesh’s desires, however he recognizes that the most he could do is hope that he can overcome what is considered corrupt and, in turn, follow God. Hardy creates this moment with the belief that it is Jude’s best interest to follow his spiritual mindset rather than what he physically wants, showing how indecisive Hardy himself could be about his own religious values. The narrator also states, “[Jude’s] passion for Sue troubled his soul... [Jude] was a man of too many passions to make a good clergyman,” showing the intensity of Sue’s effect on Jude’s religious attitude (159). As Jude’s passion continues to escalate for Sue, the narrator provides a suggestive notion that Jude will remain too infatuated with Sue to ultimately become a member of the Church as he once aspired to be. Sue’s influence on Jude’s religious mindset proves that Jude would not be suited for the life of a religious man; therefore Jude essentially allows his flesh to defeat his spirit.

Other instances where Jude is seen to be hopeless in following his spiritual path as he had intended at the start of the novel include moments where the dialogues are surrounded by Biblical references. After watching Sue from afar for quite some time, Jude comes to the realization that desiring a relationship with Sue, a married woman, would be a sin. He claims that it would not matter how often he prays or fasts to attempt at repenting, “but the human [is] more powerful in him than the Divine” (170). Once again, Jude is consciously aware that his thoughts are wrong in the eyes of God, and he sadly accepts that his spirit is becoming subservient to his body. Hardy mentioning the word ‘human’ proves that Jude’s war is further than just his ‘body’ or ‘flesh;’ Hardy insinuates that Jude as a mortal being is growing stronger than the

power of God within him. Ignoring the evident signs that he is going against what he knows is morally right, Jude shows the reader how important it is to follow a first instinct. Shortly after this realization, Jude comes to the conclusion that he cannot possibly be a “law-abiding religious teacher” after all of his sins, so he decides to burn all of his theological and ethical books (178). “No longer a hypocrite to himself afforded his mind a relief which gave him calm,” meaning that Jude finally reaches a state of tranquility by setting the holy books aflame so he would not be left to read about how he should be living his life (178). This is the complete antithesis of who Jude Fawley begins the novel as; this is a Jude Fawley who admits that he now stands as “an ordinary sinner, and not as a whited sepulchre” founded by “his passion for Sue” (178). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term ‘whited sepulchre’ refers to “a hypocrite, or one whose fair outward semblance conceals inward corruption.” Incorporating this meaning of the phrase, Hardy makes it clear when he describes Jude as not being a ‘whited sepulchre’ that he is insinuating that Jude has become immoral within while outwardly hiding who he has become. Biblically, there is evidence that directly supports this statement: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness” (*New King James Version*, Matthew 23:27). When Hardy states that Jude is only a typical sinner and is not as clean as a ‘sepulchre,’ Hardy also incorporates the Word of God to prove his point even further that Jude is not as pure of a man as his appearance makes him out to be.

Soon after the murders of the children and suicide of Little Father Time – a series of events which critic Edmund Gosse calls “a fit of infantile mania” – “Sue and [Jude] had mentally travelled in opposite directions” (279). Sue becomes more focused on religion, and Jude ultimately loses his battle of flesh and spirit by falling to his spiritual death after the physical death of his children. The two of them notice this significant change in behavior, and Sue proceeds to eliminate the unavoidable situation by speaking about

the matter aloud. “Our life has been a vain attempt at self-delight. But self-abnegation is the higher road. We should mortify the flesh – the terrible flesh – the curse of Adam,” Sue says in pure disgust of the sins that both she and Jude had committed (279). Claiming that they have lived only to please themselves, Sue seeks to teach Jude that ‘self-abnegation’ – the act of not allowing their interests to come before others – is the appropriate approach to living the rest of their lives. In an attempt to help Jude view the matter from her perspective, Sue mentions that following along with the desires of flesh is caused by the curse of Adam when he disobeyed God. In a way, Sue is comparing herself and Jude to Adam and Eve, in which both couples know what God expects of them yet society views their actions as taking alternate routes to sin. Sue allows herself to fall to societal standards and expectations by openly repenting for her sins, however Hardy attempts to show the reader a world where religious values greatly impact the social constructs even in times of grief and shock.

It is clear by the end of the novel that Jude’s war with himself comes to a full circle, since Jude is seen roaming the streets of Christminster once again. This time, however, Jude seems to be taking a walk of shame past the sculptures of geniuses. He mentions how he “hear[s] them rustling” and that he doesn’t “revere all of them as [he] did” on his first walk (319). This moment, in particular, is a turning point in the novel, where Jude realizes that all of his aspirations he had begun his life with have failed. Jude’s method of coping with his failure seems to include losing faith in his beliefs that have let him down instead of learning how to succeed. Jude admits defeat and seeks to “put an end to a feverish life which ought never to have been begun,” which explains why this walk past the sculptures is his final walk before his death (318). As Jude walks past all of the sculptures, he claims that they seem to be “laughing” at him, as if they are mocking how much he has failed at accomplishing his dreams of becoming a Church minister (319). A key difference between his final walk and his first walk is that this time Jude is walking with Arabella, the woman who crushed his dreams and entrapped him in his many sins. In fact, Arabella makes it known to

Jude that she does not care about the famous gentlemen because they are dead. This is not surprising because Arabella's insensitivity to Jude's dreams is a persistent theme that carries itself throughout the entirety of the novel. In response, Jude says, "When I am dead, you'll see my spirit flitting up and down among these" (320). This is one of the few signs that Jude provides, especially by the end of his life, that he still believes he has a spirit. Despite this, there is still a substantial lack of evidence to support any claim that Jude chooses the Word of God over his own desires.

Nevertheless, the lessons learned by *Jude the Obscure* go beyond following one's instinct or God; watching Jude make countless mistakes to go against what he morally believes in is enough to learn how to live a proper life with a minimized amount of failure. Hardy creates a hindrance on Jude following his faith by maximizing Jude's craving for Sue, even when both characters know that their relationship is corrupt. Lastly, after the tragic loss of all their children, Sue and Jude seem to trade souls – the non-religious one suddenly having faith, and the one full of soul losing every ounce of desire to live. This sudden change of character is included to show how important it is to maintain an unfaltering heart despite the worst of times. To lose or gain a completely different persona after a crisis is bound to end in failure, as Hardy seeks to teach the reader through Jude's sudden lost interest in living. If the reader does not take any lessons out of *Jude the Obscure*, they most likely will find comfort in Jude's unpredictable mindset and will, in turn, create an unpredictable fate for themselves.

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