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**“The Sleep of the Spinning Top”:
Masculinity, Labor, and Subjectivity in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure***

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Dedication

To M.H., S.Q., and all the angels seen and unseen.

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Abstract

“The Sleep of the Spinning Top”: Masculinity, Labor, and Subjectivity in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*

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This paper explores and interrogates late Victorian anxieties concerning the issues of masculinity and labor, taking Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* as a key text in this discourse. I argue that Hardy, drawing upon his own experiences, offers a meditation on the differing Victorian modes of masculinity outlined and embodied in the thought of John Henry Newman and Thomas Carlyle, and in doing so, constructs a dialectical tension between already outmoded, yet remarkably persistent, answers to the questions and pressures of modernity. Through the use of one of the text’s central images—that of Christminster and its accompanying Gothic architecture—Hardy creates an opposition between an idealized intellectual labor and the earthy reality of manual labor. Both forms—figured in either the heroic and organic terms of Carlyle or the reserved, tradition-bound reaction of Newman—represent the ideal that allows Jude to live, but also the force that leads to his death. Therefore, in the clash between the ideal and real, the dialectic fails to deliver a possible synthesis, and instead spirals restlessly in the

darkened gaps of self-negation. At the same time, because the specter of a crude social and biological Darwinism consciously haunts the edges of the story, the dialectic never stops *demanding* a synthesis if Jude is to discover the grounding for a fully integrated identity or ethics. The central question for Hardy thus becomes one of form: For a modern masculine subjectivity to take hold, external social forms must have a connective vitality with interior dispositions, a proposition that Hardy views as a near impossibility.

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In an 1876 notebook entry, Thomas Hardy copied the following quotation from an article by Theodore Watts: “Science tells us that, in the struggle for life, the surviving organism is not necessarily that which is absolutely the best in an ideal sense, though it must be that which is most in harmony with surrounding conditions” (*Literary Notebooks* 40, emphasis original). Watt’s comment on an aspect of Darwin’s theory of evolution held enormous significance for Hardy, not only for its biological application, but also for how this scientific truth transferred to the social sphere. For Hardy—ever doubtful of evolutionary claims toward “progress” and convinced that nature lacked any intrinsic morality—the implication of this transfer was discomfiting, for it suggested that ethical impulses made an individual unfit for survival in an indifferent and mechanistic world.¹ At the same time, Hardy recognized that ethical ideals were an important foundation for creating both individual and cultural meaning. Attempting to reconcile this split between the ideal and the real seemed to entail two possibilities, both of which were defeated at their inception: either fitting the conditions to the ideal (a virtual impossibility) or fitting the ideal to the conditions (a moral disaster). For late Victorian society, the urgent reconciling question was even more specific: How was a Protestant religious culture, one

¹ In his autobiography, Hardy lamented the “woeful fact—that the human race is too extremely developed for its corporeal conditions, the nerves being evolved to an activity abnormal in such an environment” (*Life and Works* 227). Because of this fact, “emotions have no place in a world of defect, and it is a cruel injustice that they should have developed in it” (*LW* 63). In sum, nature was, as Hardy described it to his friend Frederic Harrison, “*unmoral*” (*Collected Letters III* 231). For the fullest explication of Hardy’s response to evolutionary theory and its implications for his fiction and poetry, see Roger Ebbatson, where Hardy is referred to as “the complete Darwinian” (44).

built upon the foundation of biblical inerrancy, going to construct a new ethical life now that the Bible's truth claims had been eroded by science?²

In *Jude the Obscure* (1895), Hardy attempts to address these issues through the depiction of Jude's thwarted attempts to enter Christminster College and the disastrous consequences of his failed marriages. Supported by prevailing religious assumptions, both of these institutions become the site of Jude's attempt to reconcile the ideal with the actual, thus addressing the difficulty of forging ethical principles in a world inherently hostile to ethics. Moreover, Jude faces an ontological crisis, a fissure in his own neatly stitched ideological construction of a particularly masculine subjectivity.³ In this essay I argue that Hardy, drawing upon his own experiences, uses Christminster and its attendant Gothic architecture to dramatize the near impossibility of Jude's attempt to consciously construct a masculine subjectivity among buildings both real and unreal. Drawing on the differing Victorian modes of masculinity outlined and embodied in the thought of John

² Numerous studies deal with the fascinating subject of Victorian religious doubt. Lance St. John Butler offers a different take on the classic thesis of absolute belief and decline, noting instead that doubt itself came to be seen, especially later in the century, as the corrective grounds for a renewed faith (2). A.N. Wilson also provides a recent and highly readable discussion on the topic, taking his title, *God's Funeral*, from one of Hardy's poems.

³ I use the term "subjectivity" in its widest possible sense, viewing it as not only a construction of self-consciousness, but also as a process formed in opposition to others (other "subjects"), and as a subject itself of institutional and social discourses. As subjectivity relates specifically to gender and class in the nineteenth-century, I take my cue from Reginia Gagnier's notion that the Victorian (or "modern") subject consists of "a mixture of self reflexivity, middle-class familialism and genderization, and liberal autonomy" (31). This last aspect, that of "liberal autonomy" is especially echoed by Ruth Robbins in her discussion of the ways that the discourse of self-development and individualism framed mid-Victorian thinking about the formation of a mature, masculine subjectivity (74).

Henry Newman and Thomas Carlyle, Hardy labors to create a dialectical tension between already outmoded, yet remarkably persistent, answers to the questions and pressures of modernity. For Jude, Christminster and its architecture—figured in either the heroic and organic terms of Carlyle or the reserved, tradition-bound reaction of Newman—represent the ideal that allows him to live, but also the force that leads to his death. Therefore, in the clash between the ideal and real, the dialectic fails to deliver a possible synthesis, and instead spirals restlessly in the darkened gaps of self-negation. At the same time, because the specter of a crude social and biological Darwinism consciously haunts the edges of the story, the dialectic never stops *demanding* a synthesis if Jude is to discover the grounding for a fully integrated identity or ethics.⁴ The central question for Hardy—and it is here that he is at his most Carlylean—thus becomes one of form: For a modern masculine subjectivity to take hold, external social forms must have a connective vitality with interior dispositions, a proposition that Hardy views as a near impossibility.

The notion that Hardy viewed Carlyle and Newman as a pair of authors addressing similar questions seems to be confirmed by his own notes. While busy ushering the book edition of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) into print and simultaneously outlining the writing of *Jude*, Hardy penned the following entry into his literary notebook: “Newman, & Carlyle. The former’s was a feminine nature, which first decides, & then finds reasons for having decided. He was an enthusiast with the absurd reputation of a logician and reasoned. Carlyle was a poet with the reputation of a

⁴ For a discussion of “the disruptive elements of the Darwinian vision” (239) among the late Victorians, see George Levine’s *Darwin and the Novelists*.

philosopher. Neither was truly a *thinker*” (LW 244, emphasis original). Clearly, Hardy renders both writers in gendered terms. The ascetic and celibate Newman, figurehead of the Anglo-Catholic Oxford Movement, receives an explicitly “feminine” designation, while Carlyle, famous for his “Gospel of Labour,” and seemingly the more vigorously masculine of the two, has his thought aestheticized to the point where his own masculinity becomes suspect or lacking. As a long-time attendee and member of Walter Besant’s “Rabelais Club,” a society devoted to the “declaration for virility in literature,” the diminutive Hardy was no stranger to the anxiety-ridden relationship between masculinity and forms of labor, be it intellectual or manual (Hardy, LW 136). Hardy, designated by the Rabelais association as “the most virile writer of works of the imagination” (LW 136), follows the traditional script of relating a fully realized masculinity with rationality, figuring the intellectual productions of Carlyle and Newman as diminished modes or styles of male subjectivity. Hardy’s comment also registers his discomfort with a perceived incongruence between outward forms and inward realities; in both cases Hardy tries to distinguish between the ways Newman and Carlyle were perceived by the general public against what he discerned as their true natures. So while Hardy questions the intellectual substance of both writers’ claims, he also exalts them as exemplars of a superior aesthetic. Over the course of his career, Hardy routinely declared that certain passages of Carlyle—one of the most quoted writers in his *Literary Notebooks*⁵—had “never been surpassed by anything I have read,” and that they

⁵ Hardy was a life-long reader of Carlyle. He owned the complete 37 volume “People’s

constituted the highest “specimens of contemplative prose” (*LN* 255). Likewise, Hardy—always the devoted admirer of High Church liturgy—claimed Newman’s “Lead, Kindly Light” as one of his favorite hymns (*LN* 242).⁶

Despite his aesthetic appreciation, Hardy’s ambivalence towards the content of Newman’s and Carlyle’s philosophical thought seems consistent with the idea that both writers, in their respective attempts to conceive a new basis for subjectivity against the crumbling edifice of religious authority, made appeals based not on rational argument but by assertions of individual charisma. According to James Eli Adams, Carlyle and Newman, in their respective roles as self-styled sages or prophets, recast “moral and social authority...as an ineffable personal influence, which would disrupt, and ultimately reconfigure, existing economies of power and gender” (33). For Carlyle, labor served as the primary vehicle for this reconfiguration of masculine identity. From Teufelsdröckh’s ecstatic exhortations in *Sartor Resartus* (1833) to “Produce! Produce! Were it but the pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a Product, produce it in God’s name!” to Carlyle’s solemn declaration in *Past and Present* (1843) that “there is a perennial nobleness, and even sacredness, in work” (195), a morally earnest and spiritualized form of labor

Edition” of Carlyle’s works and his literary notebooks contain quotations and references ranging from essays like “Characteristics” (1831) to later works such as “Reminiscences” (1881). It is surprising how little work has been done on Carlyle’s influence, especially considering that Carlyle is the second most quoted author in Hardy’s literary notebooks. With nearly 100 citations, Carlyle clocks in just ahead of Matthew Arnold and just behind Thomas Babington Macaulay.

⁶ Though Hardy was antagonistic toward church doctrine, he was a lifetime devotee of Anglican liturgy and music. See Jan Jedrzejewski for an updated overview of Hardy’s curious and sometimes contradictory attitudes to the church.

becomes the essential and guiding task of both men and gods. Elaborating further, Carlyle affirms the notion that “all work, even cotton-spinning, is noble; work alone is noble; be that there said and asserted once more. And in like manner too all dignity is painful; a life of ease is not for any man, nor for any god” (155). As a buffer against uncertainty or doubt, this expansive form of idealized labor, be it physical or intellectual, constitutes the groundwork of male subjectivity. Under stress from the threat of increasing industrialization, Carlyle embarks on a project to endow work with a heroic, near transcendent function, the only intervention against social instability and a descent into meaninglessness (Ulrich 84). For Carlyle, it is essential that “eternal” inner facts and historically based social forms should exist organically. Society becomes corrupt and demands revolution and transformation when the outer forms no longer adequately match inner desires. Therefore, as Herbert Sussman argues, Carlyle wishes “to metamorphose the traditional gentry warrior model of manliness to the service of industrial capitalism, to turn male energy from warfare to material production” (33). Essentially, work is noble because it is productive and vital, demands hierarchy and discipline, and serves as a unifying force for social stability.

In his own way, Newman, too, asserted a similar heroic function, though his appeals to reserve and tradition differ from Carlyle’s vigorous command to labor. With his influence likened to that of an “irresistible force of a magic spell, which exhilarates through an apparent suspension or evasion of rational agency,” Newman’s notion of masculine labor was almost exclusively intellectual, and his fellow Tractarians offered a

model of masculinity based on mystique and a sense of belonging to a select fraternity of equally intellectually committed males (Adams 97). By declaring in the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864) that “Rationalism is the great evil of the day,” Newman rendered null and void any faith not based on the mysteries of revelation (112).⁷ As a consequence, he argued for the return to Anglican practice of a wide array of neglected theological doctrines such as auricular confession, apostolic succession, and the veneration of saints. Symbols such as candles and crucifixes were once again important sacramentals. As Andrew Radford remarks, “Explicitly Catholic styles of church architecture and liturgy were perceived as important links...with a pre-Reformation church” (191). Religious doubt was not sublimated through manual labor, but erased by historiography, and a re-envisioning and bolstering of the role of patriarchal dogma. “The Tractarians, and especially Newman,” notes David Delaura, “were important agents in putting an end to ‘Protestant’ England” (xiv). This tradition-bound answer to fissures in Protestant ideology had the effect of both re-Catholicizing the Anglican Church and influencing the mainstream of intellectual and cultural life in England. But while the re-Catholicizing of the Anglican Church excited many, it also brought upon Newman charges that he and his fellow Tractarians were engaged in a sort of continental conspiracy against notions of English masculinity. This is to say that, as echoed in Hardy’s own comment, Newman

⁷ In 1865, Hardy studied Newman’s *Apologia* closely. He describes “a great desire to be convinced by [Newman]” and praises him for his charming style. However, he continues “there is no first link in his excellent chain of reasoning, and down you come headlong” (LW 48).

and his fellow Tractarians were often viewed as lacking in vigor, the whole “Oxford Movement” thought of as an un-English effeminizing of the culture.⁸

Turning to *Jude the Obscure*, we can see Hardy positioning the lingering thought of Carlyle and Newman against the backdrop of a Darwinian universe. Orphaned and living with his Aunt in a rural village, the young Jude is a stranger in his own home and homeland. Alienated by local life and customs, he wishes for something to “anchor on, to cling to,” a place where “without fear of farmers, or hindrance, or ridicule, he could watch and wait, and set himself to some mighty undertaking like the men of old of whom he had heard” (62). Jude’s earliest aspirations are thus figured around the intersection of labor, class, and shame—his identity hinging on the discovery of a productive labor, one disassociated from the poor farmers of Marygreen. While Jude longs to discover noble work, he has a distaste for the degradations of manual labor, instead associating “real” labor with the intellectual undertakings of the local village schoolmaster, Phillotson, an inclination that exposes Jude to ridicule in a rural community slow to recognize, or perhaps blind to, the value of intellectual work. After all, Phillotson himself is already leaving the community in the novel’s opening scenes, bound for the university town of Christminster, where, as he explains, any man must go if he “wants to do anything in

⁸ Attacks by Charles Kingsley on Newman hover around suspicions that there is something effeminate and perhaps homoerotic embedded in the discipline of priestly celibacy. John Tosh also points out that the revival of confession warranted hostility among evangelicals because it undermined the husband’s position as spiritual authority of the household (37). Thus the Anglo-Catholic revival not only threatened supposedly normative male modes of sexuality, but also encroached on the ordering of the domestic sphere.

teaching” (46). With his fearless mobility and educational schemes, Phillotson provides for Jude not only an alternative view of labor, but also a model of middle-class masculinity. Jude for once recognizes that there is a life beyond the bounded fields of Marygreen, and that his own effort and discipline can lead him to that life.

At the same time, Hardy makes clear that Jude’s predilection for books and learning is hereditary and, considering his environment, potentially problematic. His aunt remarks, “The boy is crazy for books, that he is. It runs in our family rather. His cousin Sue is just the same” (50). Positive as that quality may be, Hardy also reveals that suicide and a tendency to ruinous marriages are also part of the genetic blueprint in the Fawley family (50), suggesting that natural predispositions can lead to personal disappointment or extinction if they are not adaptable to their environment. Extended beyond the Fawleys, Hardy develops the overarching theme that the possession of finer ethical sensibilities exposes the possessor to injurious or even fatal consequences if those same sensibilities run counter to entrenched social institutions or attitudes. Because of this, Jude’s recognition of his own sensitivities and uniqueness becomes a curse, creating a cycle in which the more his own ethics run afoul of Marygreen’s social practices, the more he feels those ethical imperatives grow, and, consequently, the greater his isolation grows in equal measure.

This connection between ethics and isolation is especially evident in Jude’s growing class consciousness and its association with labor. The whipping Jude receives from the farmer Troutham for allowing birds to feed in his fields not only solidifies

Jude's alienation from Marygreen, but also causes him to associate essential qualities of masculinity and manhood with its labor practices. As Jude is beaten with his own clacker—an instrument of manual labor now inextricably paired with trauma—Troutham ridicules him for “idling at the schoolmaster's too instead of coming here” (52). The accusation of “idleness”—a dreaded word in Carlyle's gospel of labor (Kaplan 152)—and its pairing with Phillotson extends Troutham's physical attack to an ideological assault on Jude's notions of labor and class, injuring not only his body but also his developing sense of identity. But while this assault reasserts an animalistic hierarchy of raw physicality over the intellect, it also punches open a hole in Jude's previously cohesive ethical thought. In a moment of heightened perception, Jude recognizes that there is a “flaw in the terrestrial scheme, by which what was good for God's birds was bad for God's gardener” (52). Allowing the birds to feed in the field—an act he associated with benevolence and solidarity with all creation—transforms into an act of selfishness, one in which he has robbed Troutham of the cash revenue from his saleable commodity, while simultaneously wasting food destined for the table of Marygreen's hungry peasants. The entanglement of his ethical act with other competing claims wounds Jude's sense of justice. In fact, faced with such dizzying complexity, justice seems impossible. His complaint is cosmic, and filled with the stirrings of religious doubt: “Growing up brought responsibilities, he found. Events did not rhyme quite as he had thought. That mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another sickened his sense of harmony” (54). Nonetheless, Jude still retains the determination to

view himself as an ethical actor, aligning himself with the concept of mercy, rejecting the Trouthams of the world who protect only their own interest. Coming upon “scores of coupled earthworms” writhing on the ground, and faced with the recognition that “it was impossible to advance in regular steps without crushing some,” Jude still does his best to “pick his way on tiptoe...without killing a single one” (53). Grounded in his own isolation, Jude feels “a magic-thread of fellow-feeling” uniting him with the “puny and sorry” lives too fragile for an uncaring world (51). For the narrator, Jude’s identification with the weak becomes a symptom of his own character: “This weakness of character, as it may be called, suggested that [Jude] was the sort of man who was born to ache a good deal” (53). Of course, at this moment Jude is not a man, but still a child. Hardy cynically implies that this laudable desire for an integrated and cohesive subjectivity is the desire of a child’s consciousness, one inconsistent with the unmoral nature of the Darwinian world. Therefore, retaining a sense of subjective wholeness in a world naturally fragmented requires the maintenance of a child-like series of idealizations. Thus Jude’s ultimate response to the complexities of the adult world is the wish to remain perpetually a child: “If he could only prevent himself from growing up! He did not want to be a man” (55). Specifically, he does not want to be a man if a proper masculine subjectivity defines itself by the labor or ethics of Marygreen.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that at this moment Jude clearly apprehends his situation or that Hardy merely delivers a straightforward lament about the crudeness of Marygreen’s peasants or the general unfairness of the world. Undoubtedly,

Jude's aversion to ethical and social complexities and his petulant refusal to grow up speaks to his own limitations. Jude's tendency to idealization makes him blind to some of the concrete realities of his surroundings. Due to the early influence of Phillotson, Jude's "natural" interest in learning takes on an entirely institutional cast, and with his eyes and imagination projected upon Christminster's abstracted ideal, the local knowledges of Marygreen's folkways and customs do not seem worth learning at all. Before even coming to maturity, Jude's idealism estranges him from the earthy realities of his surroundings. While Marygreen is a "small sleepy place" for the clever to escape, Christminster is the "new Jerusalem," a site of salvation (56). But in fact, Marygreen is not sleepy at all, but a place alive to its own history: in "every clod and stone there really attached associations enough and to spare—echoes of songs from ancient harvest-days, of spoken words, and of sturdy deeds. Every inch of ground had been the site, first or last, of energy, gaiety, horseplay, bickerings, weariness" (50). Seeing in Marygreen's fully articulated networks of life nothing but a forbidding and alienating work-ground, Jude essentially makes the error of mistaking form for substance, an error that will be repeated many times throughout the text. Blind to particulars, Jude contents himself with a retreat into self-sustaining ideals.

The pull of the ideal and its particular hold over Jude becomes explicit in his first glimpse of Christminster. Revealing itself after the "thinning mist dissolved altogether from the eastern horizon," the formerly shrouded city glows with increased transparency, where its "topaz points showed themselves to be the vanes, windows, wet roof slates, and

other shining spots upon the spires, domes, freestone-work, and varied outlines that were faintly revealed” (57). In this description, Hardy pairs Christminster’s exotic location on the “eastern horizon” with its Gothic architecture, veiling it in both mist and mystery to depict a city wholly mythologized. Hardy here recalls Tennyson’s *Gareth and Lynette* (1872) from *Idylls of the King*, and his version of Camelot, where “At times the summit of the high city flash’d;/ At times the spires and turrets half-way down/Prick’d thro’ the mist” (189-91). Like the stronghold of Arthur’s realm, Christminster is, for Jude, “what you may call a castle, manned by scholarship and religion” (*Jude* 62). But if Hardy links Christminster with the idealized form of Camelot and its exclusive fraternity of men, he also emphasizes its status as an inevitable site of Jude’s disillusionment, for in Tennyson’s ideal city, all is “enchanted” and “there is nothing in it as it seems” (259-60). That this disillusionment also relates to a romanticized view of labor seems clear in the fact that when Jude hears the Christminster bells “faint and musical” (*Jude* 59) he fantasizes a space of erased labor, a place where all its inhabitants proclaim “we are happy here” (59) because, like Camelot, the city is built “[t]o music, therefore never built at all, And therefore built for ever” (273-74).

Thus Jude’s initial attraction to Christminster revolves not only around the idealized city but also about idealized visions of intellectual work. When he quizzes the laborers in Marygreen about life in Christminster, they necessarily speak the language of sheer utility, one tinged with a dose of hardheaded realism. They recognize that the intellectual work at Christminster takes place fully enmeshed in the capitalist economy. It

is not a site of intellectual and spiritual altruism, but a “business, like anybody else’s,” where “they raise pa’sons there like radishes in a bed,” and scholars that are “able to make hundreds by thinking out loud” (61). If Jude recognizes only the potential of being a scholar and the benefits that come along with achieving the position, he does so ironically by internalizing the fantasy that intellectual labor is not really labor at all. In a sense, Jude’s early ideas of manhood have the simple cast of Newman and the Tractarians. Dreaming of assimilating himself into a secret fraternity of insiders at once plays on Jude’s desire to construct a subjectivity out of ready-made tradition and a culture of his choosing, while at the same time veering dangerously close to a form of self-conscious narcissism. Figuring Christminster as the Other, Jude meditates not on the difficulties of the mental and class barriers that separate him from his dream, but on the rewards, the possibility of being “among the more thoughtful and mentally shining ones” (58). Instead of a self-forgetful plunge into a Carlylean Heroic labor, Jude is intensely self-conscious, beset by grand visions of the example he might one day set as a bishop.

It does not take long for Jude to readjust his attitude towards labor, though. In his preparation for an eventual entrance into Christminster, Jude attempts to learn Latin and Greek. Once he procures a series of textbooks, he comes to the humbling and dispiriting realization that the ancient languages cannot be decoded with a simple key and that “the charm he had supposed in store for him was really a labour like that of Israel in Egypt” (67). Since the disillusioned young Jude does not wish to work, he reverts back to the desire for ontological dissolution, the negation and end of being. Once again, he wishes

“he had never been born,” relating any masculine existence bound by the norms of Marygreen to one of devitalized and infinite servitude. But here Hardy also presents the moment of abjection as an equal opportunity for enlightenment. By recalling the biblical story of the Israelites’ escape from Egypt, Jude recognizes a mode in which a new subjectivity can find formation, not as a slave but as one couched in the language of freedom. While Jude still wants to envelop himself in the ready-made tradition of Newman and Christminster, he also sees that undertaking intellectual labor can be represented in the terms of heroism. More pointedly, as figured in the implicit example of Moses, triumph comes by either following or becoming a prophetic voice, and here Hardy puts the feminized intellectual labor of Newman into a grinding dialectic with the masculinized version of Carlyle. Jude now begins to subordinate the chaotic nature of intellectual labor to the power of his will. As Martin Danahay remarks, “The conventional view of a Victorian male as a powerful, active subject depended upon the rejection of self doubt” (27). So Jude casts off doubt and figures his work in heroic terms: acquiring the ancient languages now becomes a “herculean performance,” where, like a manual laborer, “the mountain-weight of material under which the ideas lay in those dusty volumes” must be moved “piecemeal” (68). He is not only the heroic Carlylean man, but also a seer or prophet, one who goes deeper to uncover the true and eternal essences locked in outmoded and transient forms. “With an expenditure of labour that would have made a tender-hearted pedagogue shed tears,” Jude can get at “the meaning of what he read...divining rather than beholding the spirit of the original” (68).

Having taken on the heroic mantle, Jude must then determine what exactly constitutes “productive” labor. Obstructed by social institutions and class division, he must find a way to combine mental and physical labor if he is to progress. Physical labor then becomes a viable option for Jude only when conceived of as a service to intellectual labor. With this allowance, Jude readily plunges himself into manual labor while still mentally aligning himself with the middle class, exemplifying what Sussman calls the “class bound muscle envy” that caused writers like Carlyle to glorify the seemingly untroubled masculinity of the working classes (41). Because they “built in a city,” Jude “would learn to build,” apprenticing himself as a stonemason, specializing in restoring decrepit gothic stone (71).⁹ This synthesis is doomed to failure, however, as are all other “organic” configurations in the text. As Norma Clarke notes, “In the popular perspective, intellectual life equaled ‘unprofitable utilized leisure,’ the amateurish pursuit of knowledge for its own sake instead of economically profitable appropriation of knowledge” (39). Jude’s steady pose as the working-class intellectual comes undone under the pressures of his marriages or in the resistance he receives from the social restrictions he encounters in trying to enter the academy. As a stonemason and self-identified “working man,” he’s not taken seriously as an intellectual. At the same time,

⁹ Four generations of Hardy’s forefathers were stonemasons, and Hardy was apprenticed as well. In fact, Hardy undertook restoration work on the parish church of West Knighton in 1893-94 during the writing of *Jude*. For an interesting discussion of his ambivalence towards the value of church restoration, see Harold Orel, 24-27. Interestingly, Carlyle’s father James, who he writes about movingly in *Reminiscences*, was also a stonemason.

though he fully engages his work as a mason, he cannot cease looking at it as a lower form of labor.

The guiding motif to Jude's engagement with either form of labor is that of romance, and a particular form of romance guided by his aping of middle-class assumptions. The dangers of adherence to romantic idealizations become readily apparent when Jude capitulates in chivalrous fashion to marriage with Arabella. Described as "a complete and substantial female human," Arabella represents animality, common-sense, and adaptability—in other words, a perfect type fitted to survive in her environment.¹⁰ Arabella is not conflicted about either the material ends of labor or her desires; she wants "a husband with a lot of earning power in him for buying her frocks and hats" (95). Her sexual aggressiveness exploits two important aspects of Jude's constructed masculinity: on one hand a healthy male sexual appetite should respond to Arabella's "complete and substantial" physicality, while on the other, through her feigned pregnancy, an immediate marriage is guaranteed because the rhetoric of idealized chivalry demands it. Despite his misgivings, Jude consents to the marriage because that is the "custom...among honourable young men" (93). And though the marriage quickly turns sour, Jude feels the necessity to "abide by what he said," claiming that "his idea of her was the thing of most consequence" (94). It is more apt to say that it is the idea of *himself* that is most at stake, and to that end Elizabeth Langland rightfully asserts, "Jude's

¹⁰ As if to drive this point home, Hardy, in a 1903 revision of the text, rephrases this line to read "a complete and substantial female animal." Also, see Ross Shideler for a convincing discussion of Arabella's "basically Darwinian" world (155).

construction of manliness betrays him because he applies a middle-class ethic to Arabella's classic peasant ruse" (36). If Arabella is in some sense reduced by the notion that she is merely a mirror for Jude to view his own masculinity, she reasserts her agency by successfully contorting his image and pretensions for her own gain.

As Jude attempts to reconceive his masculinity in terms of being a husband and potential father, he moves further and further away from his intellectual ambitions in an attempt to support the decaying form of his married life. As mentioned earlier, there is always a sense in *Jude* that individuals are necessarily marked with certain characteristics—as a Fawley, there is no hope for Jude to have a successful marriage. Woefully adapted to his environment, Jude is a man cast in a wrong form: the intellectual in the role of the manual laborer; the feminine in the role of the masculine; and the idealist jammed into a realist world. But Hardy also undercuts the notion that any of the characters in *Jude* can with any clarity define their “natural” position (such a position, may, in fact, be an impossibility). Thus the absurdity of attempting to find unity between form and reality, or the absurdity of formulating a sense of self by being “self-forgetting,” becomes the ground on which Jude must stand. The essential Carlylean insight of fitting new forms to new ideas remains paramount to the functioning of the self, even if the idea runs parallel in the background as a willful fictionality.

Nowhere is the organic desire to link form and content as evident as in the Gothic architecture of Christminster. Harkening back to the city's exotic texture, Hardy seems to suggest that the menace of Jude's “new Jerusalem” comes from its foreignness. Prior

to the description of Christminster, an un-English Gothic presence has already intruded on Marygreen in the form of the new church. In comparing Marygreen's old church with the new, Hardy writes:

Above all, the original church, hump-backed, wood-turreted, and quaintly hipped, had been taken down, and either cracked up into heaps of road-metal in the lane, or utilized as pig-sty walls, garden seats, guard-stones to fences, and rockeries in the flower-beds of the neighbourhood. In place of it a tall new building of German-Gothic design, unfamiliar to English eyes, had been erected on a new piece of ground by a certain obliterator of historic records who had run down from London and back in a day. (48)

The new Gothic church, imposed upon Marygreen from the outside, represents an intrusion not only of foreign custom, but a custom modeled on the foreign past. The old church does not exactly disappear, as much as it becomes incorporated unconsciously into the structures of the town. Thus the old modest religion, the one once most suitable to its environment, rests dormant under the grand shadow and spectacle of its modern counterpart. But Hardy's criticism suggests that this change is not organic, and that the new church fails as a natural replacement for the modern environment. In a place where "in every clod and stone there really lingered associations," even the village of Marygreen, figured as "ugly" by Jude, has within itself the imprint of historic grandeur if its essence can be discovered under the misshapen new forms (50). If the Gothic church structure can be taken as an external symbol of its intrinsic religious creed—and by

extension, the ability of that creed to form ethical principles in a modern scientific world—then its insufficiency extends beyond idealization. Idealizations, as I have argued, are in some sense necessary, but an idealization that confronts its modern predicament by retreating into a new version of the medieval past can only lead to a stunted social order.

In *Jude*, the term “medieval” serves as a short-hand for this predicament of the old intruding on the new. Walter Houghton has pointed out that the psychic discontinuity between past and present was consciously perceived by the Victorians as a break from medieval tradition (2), and Raymond Chapman suggests that “the medieval dream” of many Victorians (Carlyle and Newman included) finds its origins in a romantic sensibility that longed for a return to the stabilities of a mythical, feudal past (61). Hardy takes on this medieval dream, but refigures and reverses the relationship between form and content. If Marygreen represents the horror of new forms brusquely constructed over old thought, then Christminster once again looms as Marygreen’s equally unacceptable opposite, a site where old forms constrain attempts at new thought. Up close, the moldy, decaying buildings of Christminster are “an ancient mediaeval pile” (113); “it seemed impossible that modern thought could house itself in such decrepit and superseded chambers” (114). The narrator informs us that the youthful Jude failed to “see that mediavelism was as dead as a fern-leaf in a lump of coal; that other developments were shaping in the world around him, in which Gothic architecture and its associations had no place” (120). Jude, of course, believes otherwise. Even as he is denied entrance to the

college, he devotes his stone-mason work toward the preservation of Gothic buildings, at times an expression of his continued idealism and at others a depressing capitulation to a tradition he no longer believes in. As Patrick O' Malley notes, "Medievalism no longer has its romantic valence; it has become a symbol of the attempt to introduce stifling forms of religious and social control into modern English lives" (657). Thus while Jude's initial belief in Christminster's medieval dream transported him away from the raw animality he encountered at Marygreen and led him to believe that he was becoming a truly modern subject, he refuses to see that the dead medieval forms of Christminster inform the rigid attitudes that keep him barred from the school. Instead of recognizing Christminster's own values as the source of his disillusion, Jude continues to believe that it was his marriage to Arabella that stifled his goal of becoming a scholar, and still speaks of a Christminster education as "a man's one opportunity of showing himself superior to the lower animals, and of contributing his units of work to the general progress of his generation" (98). He fails to understand that his marriage to Arabella, complete with its attendant suffering, was only possible because of his own internal adoption and slavish adherence to the outmoded and class-based romantic and chivalric codes propagated at Christminster.

While Gothic architecture serves as an external symbol of the failure to adequately address modernity, the guiding religious principles of Christminster—those of ritual and tradition—provide the intrinsic failure. As Merryn Williams observes, "The ritualistic element is especially important, for this is Oxford after the Tractarian

movement, and the Anglo-Catholic sensibility is a crucial factor in determining the codes of morals presented in the book” (184). And indeed, the poor orphan Jude finds a ready-made tradition at Christminster, seeing in the ghosts of Newman, Keble, and Pusey “the echoes of...teachings [that] had influenced him even in his obscure home” (115). Those ghosts are also intricately bound up in his appreciation of the architecture. As Jude enters the city he encounters the disembodied essence of

[t]he worthies who had spent their youth within these reverend walls, and whose souls had haunted them in their maturer age. Some of them, by the accidents of his reading, loomed out in his fancy disproportionately large by comparison with the rest. The brushings of the wind against the angles, buttresses and door-jambs were as the passing of these only other inhabitants, the tappings of each ivy leaf on its neighbor were as the muttering of their mournful souls. (98)

As if to accentuate the fact that Jude’s reverence for the ghosts clouds his vision further, he becomes spatially enveloped in an architecture of darkness:

Down obscure alleys, apparently never trodden now by the foot of man, and whose very existence seemed to be forgotten, there would jut into the path porticoes, oriels, doorways of enriched and florid middle-age design, their extinct air being accentuated by the rottenness of the stones. (125)

Hardy’s criticism of medievalism seems to turn on the fears that the neo-Gothic shell of the Anglican Church houses the ghost of a revived continental Catholicism. Carlyle voiced a similar complaint, claiming in the *Latter Day Pamphlets* that A.W. N. Pugin’s

newly built Gothic houses of parliament were “a visual embodiment of the modern Catholic spirit” run amuck (Morrow 149). In fact, in Sue’s shop it becomes almost impossible to differentiate Anglicanism from Catholicism as the ostensibly Anglican paraphernalia consists of “little plaster angels on brackets, Gothic-framed pictures of saints, ebony crosses that were almost crucifixes, prayer-books that were almost missals” (*Jude* 124). Furthermore, the shop is staffed “entirely by women,” figuring the old patriarchal institution as emasculated and feminine. For Hardy, an old church masquerading as new represents a retreat into old dogmas and traditions that are insufficient for moral health in the modern world. Moreover, the medievalized church represents a first form of failed evolutionary synthesis, as it attempts to mold reality to the prefabricated notion of the ideal. The split nature of Christminster itself—divided as it is between the privileged life of the dons and the squalor of the working classes—shows that the ideal fails even at the site of its most prominent promotion.

However, amidst this backlash several enduringly popular works of the Anglo-Catholic Tractarians remained influential even late into the nineteenth-century. Though Newman’s defection in 1845 to the Catholic Church is generally considered the ending date of the Oxford Movement, the poetry of several original members continued to be reissued well past the 1870’s, and its influence over late nineteenth-century poets like Gerard Manley Hopkins and Christina Rossetti was immense. Two of the most popular of these works were John Keble’s *The Christian Year*, which first appeared in 1827 and

Isaac Williams' *Cathedral*, initially published in 1838.¹¹ While obviously religious in nature, the aim of the Tractarians has been described by the critic G.B. Tennyson as "Devotional," meaning that the poems did not only express religious sentiment, but also "exhibit an orientation toward worship and a linkage with High-Church Anglican or Roman Catholic religious practices" (6). The poetry is thus intimately bound with the act of religious worship, and a form of total cultural immersion in the many facets of tradition. *The Christian Year*, for example, presented a poem for every day of the year, serving as a real-world devotional aid; eventually, several of its poems worked their way into hymnal books, becoming a permanent part of the Anglican liturgy.

While the poems of Keble (mentioned specifically by Jude) and Williams abound with conventional images of the celestial city and Christ's divine light, the real impact of their influence on Hardy may reside in the unique and very original emphasis the Tractarians placed on the devotional possibilities of the physical cathedral. In the section "Trinity Sunday," Keble celebrates the church as the seat of community: "Yet all are One—together all.../Within these walls each fluttering guest/Is gently lured to one safe nest"(31-34). He then grows more explicit, positing the Church structure as a sacramental revelation of Grace:

Along the Church's central space

The sacred weeks with unfelt pace

Have borne us on from grace to grace...

¹¹ Hardy was also an avid reader of *The Christian Year*, and it was a staple in his religious library (Millgate 72).

From each carved nook and fretted band

Cornice and gallery seem to send

Tones that with seraph hymns might blend. (10-12, 25-27)

Isaac Williams developed Keble's idea even further, publishing not only *The Cathedral*, but accompanying volumes *The Baptistry* (1842) and *The Altar* (1847). A huge proponent of the mid-century Victorian mania for Gothic architecture, Williams produced poems that elucidated the principles that made those intricate structures so compelling. His goal was to write poems that described every aspect of a massive Gothic cathedral, with the idea that focusing on any one feature could spin off an innumerable series of coded religious teachings (G.B. Tennyson 155). For Williams, the Cathedral was the blood, bones, and spirit of a community, the site where God and man joined, and where forms and matter united as a heaven and earth. Despite his open hostility to church doctrine, Hardy also displayed an emotional attachment to the idea embodied in church cathedrals. In an 1885 letter to John Morley, he writes:

If the doctrines of the supernatural were quietly abandoned tomorrow by the Church, and 'reverence and love for an ethical ideal' alone retained, not one in ten thousand would object to the readjustment, while the enormous bulk of thinkers excluded by the old teaching would be brought into the fold, and our venerable old churches and cathedrals would become the centres of emotional life that they once were. (CL I: 136-7)

Jude's devotion to the form of the Cathedral seems to capture Hardy's own ambivalence about the necessity of maintaining the illusion of the ideal. Although Sue castigates Christminster as "full of fetichists and ghost-seers" (of which Jude is one), and claims that the Gothic is "barbaric art," she recognizes that Christminster is "a sort of fixed vision" with Jude, and the only thing that sustains him, even once he has passed his "tractarian stage" (185). Nostalgia for church form resides in the fact that it was inside Christminster Cathedral that Jude first became enamored with the flesh and blood Sue. As a result, in Jude's mind, Sue is always related to those ideal forms of Christminster. Channeling Newman's hymn, she would "be to him, a kindly star, an elevating power, a companion in Anglican worship, a tender friend" (126). Like Christminster, Sue would always be "more or less an ideal character, about whose form he began to weave curious and fantastic day dreams" (125).

Of course, Jude is once again guilty of misjudgment through idealization. When he meets Sue, she is the furthest thing from "a companion in Anglican worship," instead espousing an eccentric form of Neo-Paganism. But it is also clear that, although they differ on externals, both Sue and Jude represent completions of each other, the missing fragment in an elusive wholeness. As expected, Jude sees Sue as "just like me at heart" (234), but even Phillotson remarks that there is an "extraordinary sympathy, or similarity, between the pair... They seem to be one person split in two" (262). The irony of Jude and Sue's "split" is that despite their attraction and the children they have together, they never quite come together. At the beginning of the text, when Jude is enamored by the spell of

Newman, Christminster, and the pull of tradition, Sue pushes back violently, carving out her own autonomous and original line of thought. But by the end, when Jude has effectively cast off the vestige of all his religious thought, Sue has returned to the authority of the Church. They are ultimately alike in only one way: by the end of the text, both are broken. Despite working through his various modes of masculinity, Jude remains slavishly chained to that original idea of class striving. In returning to Arabella, he remains ever-chivalrous, declaring, “If I am bound in honour to marry her...marry her I will” (410). For her part, Sue submits to the patriarchal authority of both the church and Phillotson, a man she bodily detests. Her penance then is the desertion of intellect in the name of blind obedience and the sacrifice of her own body to Phillotson’s sexual desires. Sue’s earlier quoting of Swinburne, proffered in the spirit of freedom and subversion at the beginning of the text, comes back as an oppressive truth in the end: “Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from thy breath” (131). Jude stumbles across Sue, who, in the final sign of her submission, lies on the floor of a Cathedral, prostrate under a “solidly constructed Latin cross-as large, probably, as the original it was designed to commemorate” (378).

The battered Gothic stonework houses both the hope and defeat of Jude’s educational dream and his relationship with Sue. The forms that provide for a continuous and sustained subjectivity are also the forms that make his success a psychic impossibility. As Ebbatson has observed, “both Sue and Jude possess potential for human transformation to a new ‘type,’ but the actualization breaks them” (17). Thus Jude

continues to see “in the old walls...the broken lines of the original idea” (120), recalling a Carlylean heroism that prides itself on a rough exterior concealing eternal truth.¹² As a sustaining ideal, Jude recognizes in the stones a “centre of effort” (120) that links him to the tradesmen of the past, clearly a different tradition than that of the scholars of Christminster, but one with which he can claim a more rightful place. This recognition captures a nourishing idea that sustains Jude, however pitifully, in times of total darkness. Into his old age, Jude continues to work at the restoration of the bricks, clinging to an ideal that clearly ends with him propping up the edifice of his own exclusion.

That Jude and Sue are destroyed in alternating turns by social custom and their own psychological concessions to medievalized thought seems clear. If there are any survivors in the novel, they are Arabella and Phillotson, who, in their final commitment to forego ethical thought, find themselves perfectly fitted to their environment. Arabella’s subversion of middle-class ethics and her ability to twist marriage for her own material gains have already been covered. Phillotson provides perhaps a more interesting example of fitting oneself to their environment in that he mediates the same modes of masculinity as Jude, yet comes out intact by rejecting any idealistic aims or ethical imperatives.

¹²Hardy’s drawings in his *Architectural Notebook* demonstrate a lifelong interest in mastering Gothic forms. Many of Hardy’s ideas about the Gothic were, according to C.J. P. Beatty, influenced by John Ruskin (15). Especially relevant to the idea in *Jude* that there is a moral force behind Gothic form, see David Sorenson for a discussion of how Carlyle’s theory of heroism provided the vocabulary for Ruskin’s formulation of the nature of Gothic.

John Tosh has noted the incredible stigma in Victorian society for men who appeared to have surrendered sexual control of their wives. “The man who was not master in his own house courted the scorn of his male associates,” he writes, “as well as economic ruin and uncertain paternity” (3). Phillotson faces just such a situation when Sue leaves him for Jude. In his discussion with Gillingham, Phillotson defends his decision to let Sue out of their marriage and run off with Jude by appealing to the dictates of “manliness and chivalry” (263). Gillingham in turn registers Phillotson’s reasoning as an affront to “neighbours and society” (263), and reminds him that “all received opinion hereabout” (265) will be offended. And of course, Gillingham’s warnings prove prophetic. Phillotson is personally, professionally, and financially disgraced by his own decision. But, in a curious irony, at the same time that Phillotson appeals to the paternalistic code of chivalry—the code that leads to his personal ruin—he also relinquishes it. “Is [his decision] essentially right, and proper, and honourable, or is it contemptibly mean and selfish?” he asks, only to answer: “I don’t profess to decide. I simply am going to act by instinct, and let principles take care of themselves...I am not going to be a philosopher any longer...I only see what’s under my eyes” (263). Phillotson rejects all the strictures of culture to become the natural man. Principles and philosophy are trumped by raw instinct. It is worth noting, then, that Phillotson eventually gets back what he has lost. Sue returns to him as an obedient, faithful, and sexually compliant supplicant. His strategy to win her back consists in manipulating her extreme psychological stress. Knowing that Sue has been “affected by Christminster

sentiment and teaching” and that he does not share the extreme nature of her views, he still vows to “make use of them to further mine” (434). Principles are now malleable for Phillotson, simply means to achieve an end. Unlike Jude, who clings to the ideals written deeply in the stones, Phillotson recognizes that “artifice [is] necessary,” and that surfaces will suffice to “stem...the cold and inhumane blast of the world’s contempt” (386).

Surviving is not thriving, though, and Hardy seems to suggest that the desire to thrive, the desire to reach after the ideal, is—at least for the ethically sensitive—as innate as the desire for material necessity. But until the ideal expresses itself through more vital systems of ethical thought, squarely facing the challenges of modernity, we are left with the grim forecasts of “advanced” men like the doctor prophesying the “universal wish not to live” (365). Like Father Time and the medieval church, these men are further representations of the “new” thought that is already born old and, as a consequence, can only look forward to extinction. The specter of failure and futility haunt Jude, but he nonetheless holds onto his organic ideal until death. If Sue’s espousal of “half realities” instead of “pleasant truths” triggers the death of her children (367), then like Jude, she too realizes the necessity of constructing a fictional whole as the ground for her own subjectivity.

Marjorie Garson has commented that “a fantasy of wholeness” underlies all of *Jude the Obscure* (154). The notion of a whole being, one consisting of a fully integrated, ethical, and modern subjectivity, remains a fantasy for Hardy because he believes that a fragmented society, riddled with unbelief, fails to deliver modern forms to

fit a modern temperament. The heroic solutions of a Newman or Carlyle, the aesthete or the poet, will not suffice in a coldly Darwinian world. Because of this reality, even those people who ache to produce a progressive ethics find themselves reduced to the status of “Simpletons,” as a Jude who Sue chides for taking “so much tradition on trust” (187) resembles Hardy’s version of Newman, a man whose “gentle childish faith in revelation and tradition must have made him a very charming character” (LN 14).¹³ Likewise, when Jude borrows a simile from Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* and describes the seeming lack of laborious activity in Christminster’s streets as “the stillness of infinite motion—the sleep of the spinning-top” (*Jude* 148), he reproduces the Carlylean proposition of the heroic seer who penetrates through the surface of things. Jude’s defeated dream is to salvage a vision of wholeness from the reality of obscured truths, or, as Carlyle writes in “The Hero as Poet”—a passage Hardy suggestively copied into his literary notebook—to “penetrate through *obscurity* & confusion to seize the characteristic features of an object” (LN 179, emphasis mine). Hardy’s pessimism about the future snuffs out this sort of possibility for Jude. In fact, if Hardy were to quote a line further beyond *Sartor*’s “the spinning top,” then we could hear Carlyle describe Jude’s greatest ambition, that of being a seer, a Man speaking to men, capable of clearing away all obscurity and darkness to constitute a coherent and masculine “I”: “The secrets of man’s Life were laid open to thee; thou

¹³ When initially published as a serial in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* in 1894, the first installment of *Jude* was titled “The Simpletons.” As a comment on Jude and Sue’s nature, this title seems more appropriate than “Hearts Insurgent,” the melodramatic moniker it bore for the remainder of the serial. The title “Jude the Obscure” did not appear until the text was published in book form.

sawest into the mystery of the Universe, farther than another” (*Sartor* 13). However, this statement becomes an ironic epitaph for Jude, as the cosmic complaint of *Jude the Obscure* and the source of Hardy’s pessimism reside in the sobering reality that idealizations are a necessity to become a “whole” person, but are ultimately unsustainable when positioned against the reality of a mechanistic Universe void of all mystery.

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