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JUDE THE OBSCURE AS AN ANTI-DIDACTIC NOVEL

RENZO D'AGNILLO

In Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* the main protagonist's quest for academic success leads to alienation and with his death the ultimate deletion of all knowledge. But the cause of Jude's failure is not to be attributed to the prohibitive elitism of Christminster[1] so much as his fallacious notion of culture. Moreover, in his determination to make academic studies his raison d'être, Jude ironically forfeits the empirical knowledge drawn from his personal experiences without which, for Hardy, 'no great thoughts are thought, no great deeds done' (*Life and Work*: 151). Whilst the primacy of individual development over academic formation is a principle Hardy shares with Samuel Smiles and Matthew Arnold,[2] his representation of Jude's education is in direct opposition to the pragmatic optimism of these otherwise very different figures. Smiles' maxim that '[F]ailure is the best discipline of the true worker'[3] is certainly not applicable to Jude whose process of self-culture is continually hindered by the distractions and relapses of his existential predicaments. Indeed, although he demonstrates a potential for self-motivation, his lack of self-control and 'energetic individualism' are antithetic to Smiles' extolling of 'patient purpose, resolute working, and steadfast integrity'.[4] Furthermore, Jude's refusal to connect the rational and empirical lessons of both his formal and natural education can be seen as a denial of what Matthew Arnold calls the principle of Hellenism: 'Essential to Hellenism is the impulse to the development of the whole man, to connecting and harmonising all parts of him...'[5] In this respect, Jude's educational dilemmas may be seen in terms of a conflict between the forces of Hellenism and Hebraism which Arnold distinguishes as follows: 'The uppermost idea with Hellenism is to see things as they really are; the uppermost idea with Hebraism is conduct and obedience ... The governing idea of Hellenism is *spontaneity of consciousness*; that of Hebraism, *strictness of conscience.*'[6] In his representation of Jude's educational journey, Hardy not only rejects the possibility of a reconciliation between Hellenism and Hebraism in terms of the common end suggested by Arnold, of man's perfection or salvation, but insists on their irreconcilability by making Jude continually fail *to see things as they really are* and finally abandon

the very *strictness of conscience* with which he sets about attempting to achieve his objectives.

Richard Phillotson's early exit from Marygreen is the catalyst that impels Jude's life-long search for self-fulfilment. The opening of the novel anticipates the failure of Phillotson's own academic venture as well as prefiguring the tragic denouement of Jude's fate:

> The schoolmaster was leaving the village, and everybody seemed sorry. The miller at Cresscombe lent him the small white tilted cart and horse to carry his goods to the city of his destination, about twenty miles off, such a vehicle proving of quite sufficient size for the departing teacher's effects. For the school-house had been partly furnished by the managers, and the only cumbersome article possessed by the master, in addition to the packing-case of books, was a cottage piano that he had bought at an auction during the year in which he thought of learning instrumental music. But the enthusiasm having waned he had never acquired any skill in playing, and the purchased article had been a perpetual trouble to him ever since in moving house. (*JO*: 47)

Phillotson's lowly position as a village schoolmaster hardly qualifies him for a university education in Christminster. It is therefore significant that the narrator's attention focuses on his cottage piano rather than his books. For a young man with next to nothing in the world, the piano seems an unnecessarily superfluous possession and its purchase has certainly been more a question of mild curiosity (he '*thought* of learning instrumental music') and economical risk-taking ('he had bought at an auction') than genuine interest in music. However, Phillotson's ineptitude for playing does not diminish his grasp of its importance as a status symbol. As such, it has become the ironic objective correlative of his snobbish idea of cultural appropriation through social arrivisme,[7] and his facile abandonment of 'learning instrumental music' presages his eventual renunciation of the academic project which he discloses to Jude prior to his departure:

> 'Well, don't speak of this to everyone. You know what a university is, and a university degree? It is the necessary hallmark of a man who wants to do anything in teaching. 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 practicable

> at all, I consider that being on the spot will afford me a better chance of carrying it out than I should have elsewhere.' (*JO*: 48)

Although Phillotson's discourse exerts a powerful effect on his hypersensitive pupil, in reality it quivers with trepidation. He begins by posing a rhetorical question in the affirmative form, as though the answer were self-evident, only to proceed with a definition his little pupil could not possibly understand.[8] He then makes telling self-corrections which detract from his initial decisiveness, notably in the replacement of conscious method with fanciful longing in '[M]y scheme, or dream'[9] and the shift from proximity to distance in 'at Christminster, or near it'. Phillotson's anxiety is also evident in his parenthetic phrase 'so to speak' and a distinct lack of self-confidence underlies his conjectural supposition 'if my scheme is practicable at all'. Finally, his supplication to Jude not to speak of his plan to everyone suggests he is revealing a secret, whereas his intentions are common knowledge.[10] Whether or not Phillotson's reticence is a confirmation of his negative presentiment, his underlying insecurities are revealing. At a time when education and religion were regarded as not simply 'inseparable, but synonymous',[11] the schoolmaster creates a confusion over the purpose of studying for a degree ('a man who wants to do anything in teaching') and its end ('and then to be ordained'). The Hebraic insistence on obedience and action which is the driving force behind this essentially fallacious view of culture is unquestioningly accepted by Jude,[12] who proceeds to construct a mental figuration of Christminster based on the elusive references in Phillotson's discourse. Phillotson's farewell words of advice reiterate the Hebraic principles that become permanently imprinted in Jude's mind: 'Be a good boy, remember; and be kind to animals and birds, and read all you can.'[13] It is a cruel irony that every time Jude applies these precepts it is to his disadvantage. His short-lived employment in Farmer Troutham's field where he receives a humiliating reprimand for feeding the crows he has been employed to scare away constitutes a first bitter lesson. The episode also foreshadows the conflict between altruism ('what was good for the birds') and self-centredness (the fact that 'he had wholly disgraced himself') that characterises the existential vicissitudes of the novel, as well as signalling the point at which Jude unconsciously renounces the possibility of an ideal Hellenism in his acknowledgment of universal disharmony:

> He pulled his straw hat over his face, and peered through the interstices of the plaiting at the white brightness, vaguely

> reflecting. Growing up brought responsibilities, he found. Events did not rhyme quite as he had thought. Nature's logic was too horrid for him to care for. That mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another sickened his sense of harmony. As you got older, and felt yourself to be at the centre of your time, and not at a point in its circumference, as you had felt when you were little, you were seized with a sort of shuddering, he perceived. All around you there seemed to be something glaring, garish, rattling, and the noises and glares hit upon the little cell called your life, and shook it, and warped it. (*JO*: 57)

Jude's self-concealment ('He pulled a straw hat over his face') and the criss-crossing interstices inscribed upon the bright sky (like undecipherable signs on the page of a book), figuratively pre-announce his full immersion into the Hebraism of his private study. At the same time, his propensity to evade whatever ruins his sense of harmony is a denial of 'the intelligible law of things'.[14]

Jude's fallacious notion of education is underpinned by the narrator's calculatedly ambivalent representation of his reading activity.[15] It is conspicuous, for example, that before he conceives the idea of studying at Christminster the only two instances in which books are mentioned evidence Jude's clumsiness with them: 'The boy *awkwardly* opened the book he held in his hand, which Phillotson had bestowed on him as a parting gift' (*JO*: 48); 'Here a little book of tales which Jude had tucked up under his arm ... *slipped and fell* into the road.' (*JO*: 64; my italics) Later, when he receives the two volumes of Greek and Latin grammars, his disconsolation at the immense task ahead confirms his underlying uncertainty with books: 'What brains they must have at Christminster and the great schools, he presently thought, to learn words one by one, up to tens of thousands!' (*JO*: 72) In spite of his naive notion of the translation process as 'a pushing to the extremity of mathematical precision what is everywhere known as Grimm's Law' (*JO*: 71), the narrator applauds Jude's intuition: 'Somebody might have come along that way who would have asked him his trouble, and might have cheered him by saying that his notions were further advanced than those of his grammarian. But nobody did come, because nobody does.' (*JO*: 72) In spite of the fact that such a providential appearance would violate the destructive pattern of Hardy's coincidences, the sympathetic narrative intervention is an attempt to redress the fundamental ignorance of Jude's 'gigantic error' (*JO*: 72).

Once again, however, he reacts by retreating into self-isolation: 'As he had often done before, he pulled his hat over his face and watched the sun peering insidiously at him through the interstices of the straw.' (*JO*: 72) This reversal of Jude's position from object to subject of perception (previously he 'peered through the interstices of the plaiting at the white brightness', now he finds 'the sun peering insidiously at him') dramatises his cruel epistemological awakening as the sunlight of the real world blots out the (textual) signs represented by the interstices of his straw hat. Despite his bitter realisation that it would have been better for him if 'he had never seen a book' (*JO*: 72), the warning signs of this early shock are put aside.

The narrative summary which introduces the subsequent stage of Jude's progress, however, is conspicuously vague regarding his self-selected programme of studies. What is emphasised is his Hebraic 'strictness of conscience' manifested in his faithful memorising of classical texts, word by word and sentence by sentence. Furthermore, the severe application and perseverance with which Jude follows this mnemonic method of study begs the question of his enthusiasm for reading, which is carried out in the manner of a labourer conducting his manual work. It is no accident that Jude initially succeeds in incorporating his readings in his daily occupation delivering loaves for his aunt Drusilla's bakery:

> As soon as the horse had learnt the road and the houses at which he was to pause awhile, the boy, seated in front, would slip the reins over his arm, ingeniously fix open, by means of a strap attached to the tilt, the volume he was reading, spread the dictionary on his knees, and plunge into the simpler passages from Caesar, Virgil or Horace, as the case might be, in his purblind, stumbling way, and with an expenditure of labour that would have made a tender-hearted pedagogue shed tears; yet somehow getting at the meaning of what he read, and divining, rather than beholding, the spirit of the original, which often to his mind was different than that which he was taught to look out for. (*JO*: 74).

The ingenious strategy Jude designs in order to continue his studies remedies his earlier clumsiness with books. But the energy with which he 'plunges' into translating 'the simpler passages' from his random selection of classical authors is disproportionate to the task involved. Moreover, in light of the misunderstanding that belies his approach to

the academic world, he soon senses a problem with the content of the works in question:

> The more he thought of it the more convinced he was of his inconsistency. He began to wonder whether he could be reading quite the right books for his object in life. Certainly there seemed little harmony between this pagan literature and the medieval colleges at Christminster, that ecclesiastical romance in stone. (*JO*: 76)

While there may be unintentional humour in Jude's perplexed questioning over the appropriateness of his reading matter, his suspicion of an incongruity between pagan literature and ecclesiastical institution contains an underhand irony. What is more, the phrase 'that ecclesiastical romance in stone' conflates Jude's point of view (as part of a free indirect discourse) with the narrator's ironic observation of his idealistic connection between education and religion. After all, Jude has swallowed whole his schoolmaster's assertion that a university education leads to a career in the church:

> '... I must concentrate all my energies on settling in Christminster. Once there I shall so advance, with the assistance I shall there get, that my present knowledge will appear to me but as childish ignorance. I must save money, and I will; and one of those colleges shall open its doors to me – shall welcome whom now it would spurn, if I wait twenty years for the welcome.
>
> 'I'll be D.D. before I have done!'
>
> And then he continued to dream, and thought that he might become even a bishop by leading a pure, wise, Christian life. (*JO*: 79)

The arrogance of Jude's self-confident soliloquy contrasts glaringly with Phillotson's veiled uncertainty (and is, of course, ironic in view of what will happen to him there). The implicit suggestion is that his religious aspirations are, in reality, a necessary textual appendage to his academic ambitions rather than a question of faith.[16] In addition, the self-congratulatory tone of his quantitative assessment of his studies is symptomatic of his anxious arrivisme:

> 'I have read two books of the Iliad, besides being pretty familiar with passages such as the speech of Phoenix in the ninth book, the fight of Hector and Ajax in the fourteenth, the appearance of Achilles unarmed and his heavenly armour in the eighteenth

> and the funeral games in the twenty-third. I have also done some Hesiod, a little scrap of Thucydides, and a lot of the Greek Testament...' (*JO*: 78–9)

Jude's readings are haphazard and fragmented. They are not dictated by an objectively coordinated programme but based on his own intuitive assumptions. Moreover, far from exercising his faculties, he withdraws into a state of romantic reverie: 'he was now standing quite still, looking at the ground as though the future were thrown thereon by a magic lantern' (*JO*: 80). The image undermines the hard fact that what Jude has achieved has been the result, not of 'magic', but tremendous self-sacrifice. More importantly, his mechanical rote learning is synonymous with his Hebraic notion that knowledge is attainable since it derives from God. He himself is a passive vessel into which knowledge is poured rather than an individual involved in a process of understanding. Jude's self-study does not strengthen his rationality or emotional intelligence in a way that may help him face the dilemmas of his personal experiences however true his initial intuitions may be. In this instance, his correct suspicion of Arabella as the girl to whom 'was attributable the enterprise from attracting his attention from dreams of the humaner letters' (*JO*: 81), is followed by his submission to her 'magical' female charms:

> He gazed from her eyes to her mouth, thence to her bosom, and to her full round naked arms, wet, mottled with the chill of water, and firm as marble.
>
> 'What a nice looking girl you are!' he murmured, though the words had not been necessary to express his sense of her magnetism. (*JO*: 83)

Jude may immediately perceive Arabella as a presence 'quite antipathetic to that side of him which had been occupied with literary study and the magnificent Christminster dream' (*JO*: 84), and he may be fully aware that she is guilty of throwing the piece of pig-flesh at him to attract his attention, but these realisations are short-lived: 'It had been no vestal who chose that missile for opening her attack on him. He saw this with his intellectual eye, just for a short fleeting while ...And then this passing discriminative power was withdrawn...' (*JO*: 84). As occurs time and again in the novel, Jude is allowed a momentary foresight which becomes lost within the distracting influence of his passions. Thus, his walk with Arabella to the Brown House ('the spot of his former fervid desires to behold Christminster': *JO*: 88) becomes a moment of ironic reflection

for the narrative voice which anticipates her deleterious effect on his intellect:

> He talked the commonest local twaddle to Arabella with greater zest than he would have felt in discussing all the philosophies with all the dons in the recently adored University ... An indescribable lightness of heel served to lift him along; and Jude, the incipient scholar, prospective D.D., Professor, Bishop, or what not, felt himself honoured and glorified by the condescension of this handsome country wench in agreeing to take a walk with him in her Sunday frock and ribbons. (*JO*: 88)

As Jude walks along the same path the following day, he notes that their footprints are still visible. As Janet H. Freeman has rightly pointed out, on seeing these imprints Jude 'reads his own history written on the ground, the history of his coming down to earth'.[17] This is bitterly confirmed by Arabella's obliviousness, in turn, of walking along the same path with her friends. Jude's chivalrous decision to marry her out of moral responsibility is assumed with the same simplicity with which he fed the crows in Troutham's field. But his kindness is once again punished when he discovers she has lied about her pregnancy. Even the narrator does not spare him from ridicule: 'All his reading had only come to this, that he would have to sell his books to buy saucepans.' (*JO*: 102) The irony is compounded by the astonishing ease with which he decides to renounce his studies: 'But what are they, after all! Dreams about books, and degrees, and impossible fellowships, and all that!' (*JO*: 101) However, although Jude's married life with Arabella represents an 'end' to his studies, his books significantly reappear in the climactic moment of their conflict:

> 'I won't have them books here in the way!|' she cried petulantly: and seizing them one by one she began throwing them on the floor.
>
> 'Leave my books alone!' he said. 'You might have thrown them aside if you had liked, but as to spoiling them like that, it is disgusting!' In the operation of making lard Arabella's hands had become smeared with the hot grease, and her fingers consequently left very perceptible imprints on the book covers. She continued deliberately to toss the books severally upon the floor ... (*JO*: 114)

The grease marks left by Arabella are emblematic of the couple's absolute incompatibility (and an ironic contrast to the imprints of their

footsteps on their first romantic walk together). Jude's attempt to reason with her only increases her contempt until the ensuing squabble incites his most aggressive action in the whole novel: 'Jude was exasperated, and went out to drag her in by main force.' (*JO*: 115) His subsequent reflection over the fundamental error of their matrimonial union is an disillusioned response to his earlier soliloquy over his readings before his encounter with Arabella: 'I am a man …I have a wife. More, I have arrived at the still riper stage of having disagreed with her, disliked her, had a scuffle with her, and parted with her.' (*JO*: 119) Jude establishes an ironic distance between sufferer and observer so that he not only denies his role as a husband ('I am a man') but also revives his plan to go to Christminster as if nothing has occurred. The fact that the inscription he carved at the back of a milestone indicating the direction to Christminster has remained unspoiled justifies his intention to make a tabula rasa of his situation. But its arrow also suggests Jude's sense of linearity and progression which is continually frustrated by the sense of inescapability rendered by the circular structure of the novel (in this case realised by Arabella's ominous return and re-marriage with Jude).

Hardy does nothing to disguise the fact that Christminster is Oxford. If anything, the fictional name exposes Jude's indefatigable worship of the venerable city and typical sense of denial: 'When he passed objects out of harmony with its general expression he allowed his eyes to slip over them as if he did not see them.' (*JO*: 125) Significantly, Hardy does not attempt to dramatise the contrast between university life and the daily life of the rest of the city. Moreover, the colleges are never represented in terms of their academic function but as distant, impenetrable places populated by shadowy, remote figures and haunted by the ghostly reminders of the city's cultural past. The description of the lamps which Jude had observed in anticipation for so many years also differentiates his perception from that of the narrator: 'They winked their yellow eyes at him dubiously, and as if, though they had been awaiting him all these years in disappointment at his tarrying, they did not much want him now.' (*JO*: 124) The implication that Jude has arrived in Christminster too late is also dramatically foreshadowed in his literal counting of the bell strokes in Tom Tower: 'he listened till a hundred and one strokes had sounded. He must have made a mistake, he thought: it was meant for a hundred.' (*JO*: 125) Jude not only errs from a numerical point of view, but his ignorance of the significance of the extra stroke is already a reflection of his subconscious incredulity at representing a possible extra

addition to the academic life of Christminster. His arrival at the very moment in which the gates of Christchurch college are shut, leads him to explore its darkest recesses: 'Down obscure alleys, apparently never trodden now by the foot of man, and whose very existence seemed to be forgotten ... It seemed impossible that modern thought could house itself in such decrepit and superseded chambers.' (*JO*: 125) The obscurity of such forlorn corners reflects not only his own obscurity as he wonders over 'the isolation of his own personality, as with a self-spectre' (*JO*: 126), but a cultural obsoleteness that he has prided himself in pursuing.

His readings, in the meantime, have expanded to incorporate 'all that could be read and learnt by one in his position, of the worthies who had spent their youth within these reverend walls, and whose souls had haunted them in their mature age' (*JO*: 126). Hardy's ghostly evocation of these great voices of its past haunting Jude's dreams is an extraordinary moment. But if the intention is to convey the fragments of a cultural wasteland, it is only in terms of the impressionistic representation of passages and speeches memorised by Jude. When he wakes up, it is to a very different sense of what Christminster is:

> he found that the colleges had treacherously changed their sympathetic countenances: some were pompous; some had put on the look of family vault above ground; something barbaric loomed in the masonries of all. The spirits of the great men had disappeared. (*JO*: 130).

Jude's artisan eye clinically reads the decaying 'historical documents' of 'the numberless architectural pages around him', rather than interpreting them as the signs of cultural decadence (*JO*: 130). But his decision to find work as a stonemason (as opposed to learning dead subjects) brings him into direct contact with the real life of the city:

> For a moment there fell on Jude a true illumination; that here, in the stone yard was a centre of effort as worthy as that dignified by the name of scholarly study within the noblest of the colleges, but he lost it under the stress of his old idea. (*JO*: 131)

Once again, Jude is afforded an insight into his own fallacious situation only for it to be immediately withdrawn.[18] Whilst he is continually represented as occupying the periphery, here he feels himself for once placed within 'a *centre* of effort'. What is more, this is also 'a little centre of regeneration' (*JO*: 131) equal in importance to the university colleges. But the two worlds remain dichotomies. Tinker Taylor's words

eloquently articulate the contrary attitude to learning of the villagers and the labouring classes throughout the novel: 'Now with me 'twas different. I always saw there was more to be learnt outside a book than in; and I took my steps accordingly, or I shouldn't have been the man I am.' (*JO*: 171) Jude ignores the lessons to be learnt outside books precisely because he persists so obstinately with his plan. The kind of man he is ultimately belongs neither within or outside books. Smiles' encouraging comment that 'labour is by no means incompatible with the highest intellectual culture'[19] is besides the point. For Jude, labour is not a luxury but a necessity: 'He was young and strong, or he never could have executed with such zest the undertakings to which he now applied himself, since they involved reading most of the night after working all day.' (*JO*: 133) Gradually, his imagination is saturated with the 'Christminster "sentiment" … till he probably knew more about those buildings materially, artistically, and historically, than any one of their inmates' (*JO*: 132). It is telling that Jude is never made to exhibit this superior knowledge, which is nothing more than an accumulation of memorised facts about the city.

Yet, ironically, his academic studies become a matter of apprehension and uncertainty: 'He had lately felt that he could not quite satisfy himself with his Greek – in the Greek of the dramatists particularly. So fatigued was he sometimes after his day's work that he could not maintain the critical attention necessary for thorough application.' (*JO*: 163) His difficulty with the Greek dramatists foreshadows his tormented relationship with the Hellenist Sue. But it also triggers his belated realisation that he has been squandering his time 'in a vague labour called "private study" without giving an outlook on practicalities' (*JO*: 163). Jude's 'practicalities' take the form of five letters of application sent to academic figures according to their physiognomies (this improvised attempt contrasts with Phillotson's simultaneous practical decision to move to a larger school for a larger income). The letter of rejection Jude receives does not, in reality, carry the full weight of a final sentence both because he has no expectation of success, and because he realises the foolishness and futility of the course he has adopted. However, his furious lapse into colloquial English is a significant vindication of his roots:[20] 'I don't care a damn …for any Provost, Warden, Principle, Fellow, or cursed Master of Arts in the University! What I know is that I'd lick 'em on their own ground if they'd give me a chance, and show 'em a few things they are not up to yet!' (*JO*: 171) His drunken recital of the creed in Latin in an obscure tavern is an ironic follow-up to

this colloquial tirade and an apt parody of his academic dreams.[21] Indeed, the swiftness of Jude's shifts of mood and linguistic register are constant reminders of his tenuous hold on his cultural and religious aspirations.

Jude's decision to abandon his pursuit of an intellectual career and enter the church is a tardy recognition of the discrete foundations of education and religion: 'It was a new idea – the ecclesiastical and altruistic life as distinct from the intellectual and emulative life. A man could preach and do good to his fellow-creatures without taking double-firsts in the schools of Christminster.' (*JO*: 181) Behind this reassessment is a reaffirmation of the Christian values evoked by Phillotson. For even in his deepest suffering Jude always remembers to 'be a good boy'. Nevertheless, his second new start in life is accompanied by another distraction which the narrator ironically defines as 'an ethical contradictoriness' of a human interest 'to which he was not blind' (*JO*: 182). The circuitous phrase mimics Jude's insincere attempt to rationalise his attraction for his cousin Sue as a sort of intellectual problem. His unwillingness to recognise that his feelings stem 'as distinctly from Cyprus as from Galilee' (*JO*: 139) is an ironic foreshadowing of Sue's Hellenism which constitutes an element of disturbance to his religious vocation. As with Arabella, the narrator disseminates numerous signs that point against their union, from Aunt Drusilla's warning that the Fawleys were not made for marriage to Sue's capriciousness and flippancy. Indeed, Sue embodies a radical liberalism that conflicts with Jude's orthodoxy. Her attitude to books is a case in point. The fact that Sue sees authorship as a male prerogative (all the authors she cites are male) reflects ironically on Jude given the broader and more specific nature of her own readings:

> 'I have had advantages. I don't know Latin and Greek, though I know the grammars of those tongues. But I know most of the Greek and Latin classics through translations, and other books too. I read Lemprière, Catullus, Martial, Juvenal, Lucian, Beaumont and Fletcher, Boccaccio, Scarron, De Brantome, Stern, De Foe, Smollet, Fielding, Shakespeare, the Bible and other such ...' (*JO*: 201)

Sue's knowledge of books is the means through which she can impress, manipulate or polemicise with her male companions, as in her quotations of Browning and Swinburne to Jude, and of J. S. Mill's *On Liberty* to an exasperated Phillotson. The indiscriminate nature of her readings reflects the lively curiosity and open-mindedness of an un-Arnoldian

Hellenistic approach, in contrast with Jude's Hebraic faith in the finality of knowledge, in which she impudently engages in reconstructions of meanings, as in her chronological re-arrangement of the New Testament, or questioning of social convention. Also, as a woman, her understanding of the academic reality of Christminster[22] exposes Jude's reverential attitude to ridicule: 'At present intellect in Christminster is pushing one way, and religion the other; and so they stand stock still like two rams butting each other.' (*JO*: 205)

Unlike Tess, Sue never speaks in dialect and is at ease with her knowledge in a way Jude never really is. However, Hardy clearly intends her enigmatic nature and nervous disposition to be the symptoms of a psychological disorientation that has been inflicted by education, against which she strives in her restless search for truth. For unlike Jude, Sue does not take knowledge for granted. Her rage at people's attempts to falsify the Bible, for example, says more about her religiousness than any of Jude's pious statements of intent reveal about his. It is therefore telling that when Jude speaks the language of the intellect, it is to Sue's consternation and, one might add, the reader's: 'A Nemesis attends the woman who plays the game of elusiveness too often, in the utter contempt for her that, sooner or later, her old admirers feel; under which they allow her to go unlamented to the grave.' (*JO*: 325) Jude's stilted language betrays an artificiality that belies his infuriation with Sue's non-commitment. Yet the destructive effect of his persistence with her on his religious studies is not lost on him:

> Strange that his first aspiration – towards academical proficiency – had been checked by a woman, and that his second aspiration – towards apostleship – had also been checked by a woman. 'Is it,' he said, 'that the women are to blame; or is it the artificial system of things, under which the normal sex impulses are turned into devilish domestic gins and springs to noose and hold back those who want to progress?' (*JO*: 279)

In attributing his failures to external causes beyond his control, Jude's deductions follow the same self-delusional pattern as his previous assessments. But the hypocritical situation of his passion for Sue leads to his drastic decision to destroy his books once and for all: 'It was nearly one o'clock in the morning before the leaves, covers, and binding of Jeremy Taylor, Butler, Doddridge, Paley, Pusey, Newman and the rest had gone to ashes...' (*JO*: 280) In view of Bishop Walsham How's burning

of Hardy's novel, this scene has a poignant irony. Jude's burning of his books appears as a gratuitous act of self-punishment and anticipates his final abandonment to illness and death.

It is an ultimate irony that by the end of the novel the man responsible for initially inspiring Jude to set out on his disastrous academic itinerary assumes the function of a real teacher. However, the antagonistic circumstances of their personal lives blind Jude to the lesson he can learn from his old master. Indeed, Jude and Phillotson diverge completely from the parallel courses they initially undertake. Whilst Jude insists with his academic ambitions to the point of self-humiliation, Phillotson accepts his failure with stoic dignity and seeks to work within the terms of his limitations. When Jude and Sue seek him out at Christminster, Jude is dismayed to learn 'he couldn't do it!' (*JO*:149), and depressed that his old schoolmaster has no recollection of him. But even the lesson of Phillotson's failure serves as no warning to Jude. However, although Phillotson tends to be regarded with general antipathy by readers, this is, in reality, the result of a reflex effect of Sue's final humiliating self-submission. In spite of the fact that Phillotson's ostracism at the end of the novel, marked by his 'return to zero with all its humiliations' (*JO*: 388), is the consequence of his inadvertently anti-conventional behaviour, and that his position is 'a weakened repetition of his starting point',[23] he emerges as the ironic moral victor of the novel. Whilst Jude's relations with Arabella and Sue confirm his lack of emotional intelligence, Phillotson gains in maturity precisely during the trials and tribulations of his separation from Sue. His totally selfless attitude during the crisis of his marriage contrasts with Jude's selfish despair during his own crisis with Sue. Also, whereas Sue reverts into a state of inert Hebraism, Phillotson breaks away from the narrowly conceived confines of his own Hebraic tendencies towards an essentially Hellenistic acceptance of life. His concession in allowing Sue to live with Jude leads to a broader understanding of life: 'The more I reflect, the more entirely I am on *their* side!' (*JO*: 295) His quiet restraint when Sue abandons him makes his suppressed emotional reaction all the more moving: 'She is gone – just gone. That's her tea-cup, that she drank out of only an hour ago. And that's the plate she' – Phillotson's throat got choked up, and he could not go on. He turned and pushed the tea things aside.' (*JO*: 298)[24] The measured tone in which he expresses the range of his emotions and intentions is the mark of an altruistic spirit that suffers in dignity and appreciates the needs of others: 'I would have died for her; but I wouldn't be cruel to her in the name of the law. She is, I understand,

gone to join her lover. What they are going to do I cannot say. Whatever it may be she has my full consent to.' (*JO*: 299) In an ironic turn of events, Phillotson's personal and moral enlightenment at the end of the novel is placed in diametrical opposition to Jude's ontological annihilation, in which his inflexible Hebraism is replaced by an instinctual exploration that is the very opposite of Arnold's Hellenistic sweetness and light: 'I am a chaos of principles – groping in the dark – acting by instinct and not after example. Eight or nine years ago when I came here first, I had a neat stock of fixed opinions, but they dropped away one by one; and the further I get the less sure I am.' (*JO*: 399) In his realisation of the fallacy of the educational quest that has always eluded him, Jude finally finds himself face to face with the awful knowledge of his tragic fate.

NOTES

[1] Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* (Harmonsdworth: Penguin, 1978), p. 42: henceforth cited in the text as *JO* followed by page numbers. Hardy's own explanation of Jude's dilemma in terms of the 'difficulties down to twenty or thirty years back of acquiring knowledge in letters without pecuniary means', forestalls any suspicions of his novel being used as a platform to attack the injustices of an élite educational institution. Jude is also depicted as a sadly belated witness of the increasingly viable opportunities in education for the poor: 'I hear that there is going to be a better chance for such helpless students as I was … And it is too late, too late for me!' (*JO*: 280). Later he also remarks: 'They are making it easier for poor students now, you know' (*JO*: 345). Hardy himself wryly notes in his Postscript that some of his readers believed that Ruskin College 'should have been called the College of Jude the Obscure' (*JO*: 42).

[2] Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help* (Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 21: 'it is life rather than literature, action rather than study, character, rather than biography which tend perpetually to renovate mankind.' See also Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 21. Arnold similarly warns that culture without character is only 'something frivolous, vain and weak'

[3] Smiles, *Self-Help*, p. 4.

[4] Smiles, *Self-Help* p. 21

[5] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, p. 145; Smiles, *Self-Help*, p. 271, puts it succinctly: 'the experience gathered from books, though often valuable, is but of the nature of *learning*; whereas the experience gained from actual life is of the nature of *wisdom*' (Smiles' italics).

[6] *Culture and Anarchy*, p. 128: Arnold's italics.

[7] Peter Widdowson, *Hardy in History: A Study in Literary Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 132, in discussing education as a form of upward social mobility rightly points out that 'Hardy's fiction continually introduces [education] as a motif, although never as unproblematically beneficial; more often it is the cause of disruption, alienation, non-communication, frustration and so on.'

[8] Phillotson's separate emphasis on the nouns *university* and *university degree* also stresses the arduous nature of his academic venture.

[9] The irony of this cognitive contrast is also phonically underlined by their being rhyme-words.

[10] In the following chapter, Jude's aunt Drusilla comments openly: 'Why didn't ye get the schoolmaster to take 'ee to Christminster wi' un, and make a scholar of 'ee' (*JO*: 52).

[11] James Kay Shuttleworth, *Public Education as Affected By the Minutes of the Committee of the Privy Council* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1853), p. 26.

[12] It may be noted here that *Jude* is also the German for *Jew*.

[13] In their straightforward simplicity Phillotson's words paraphrase Thomas Arnold's guiding rules as headmaster of Rugby school: religious and moral principles, gentlemanly conduct and intellectual activity.

[14] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, p. 149.

[15] There are only two references to this at the beginning of the novel. First, in his aunt Drusilla's comment: 'The boy is crazy for books' (*JO*: 52) and later in the narrator's referring to 'his sheer love of reading' (*JO*: 76). However, it is not explicitly stated whether Jude's passion for learning is innate or due to the influence of his schoolmaster. C. S. Sisson takes for granted the fact that 'Jude first conceived a passion for learning as a result of his encounter with his schoolmaster Phillotson' (*JO*: 19, 'Introduction'). However, there is no textual evidence to support this view.

[16] This is later confirmed after his intention of leading the altruistic life of a humble curate at Marygreen (in a re-visitation of the return of the native motif that recalls Clym Yeobright's final conversion) is soon completely discarded for his pursuit of Sue Bridehead.

[17] Janet H. Freeman, 'Highways and Cornfields: Space and Time in the Narration of *Jude the Obscure*', *Colby Quarterly*, Vol. 27, no. 3 (1991), p. 163.

[18] Martin Malone, '"Lost Under the Stress of an Old Idea": Pre-Modern Epiphanies in Hardy's Short Stories', *The Thomas Hardy Journal*, Vol. XXIII (Autumn 2007), p. 40. Malone makes the interesting observation that Hardy balances the sense of solidity in the phrase 'centre of effort' against 'what he sees as the basis of Jude's unrest: aroused consciousness as represented by the vicariously 'worthy' efforts of the Christminster colleges and scholars'.

[19] Smiles, *Self-Help*, p. 262.

[20] Raymond Chapman, *The Language of Thomas Hardy* (London: Macmillan, 1990), for a detailed linguistic consideration of Hardy's use of dialect, in particular pp. 112–118.

[21] Timothy Hands, *Thomas Hardy: Distracted Preacher?* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 94: 'Hardy's settings draw attention to [the] conflict between drink and religion. Inns and churches frequently have their functions inverted so that hostelries become centres of quasi-religious activity, whilst churches are corrupted by alcoholic abuse.'

[22] Phillip Mallett, '*Jude the Obscure*: A Farewell to Wessex', *The Thomas Hardy Journal*, Vol. XI, no. 3, (1995), p. 56, who rightly notes that 'It is Sue, despite or perhaps because of her suspicions about Christminster values who is most sharply exposed to the pressures carried within its language.'

[23] Norman D. Prentis, 'The Tortured Form of *Jude the Obscure*', *Colby Quarterly*, Vol. 31, no. 3 (1995), p. 179.

[24] It may be noted that Phillotson's observations reflect a Hardyan sensitivity to the powerfully transformative effect of ordinary objects.