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#### Recommended Citation

Corning, Victoria T., "'The letter killeth': The obscurity of language and communication in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* 2016" (2016). *Master's Theses*. 9.  
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**‘The letter killeth’**: The Obscurity of Language and Communication  
in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*

by  
Victoria T. Corning

A Thesis  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Master of Arts in English

Department of English, School of Arts and Sciences

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK  
COLLEGE AT SUNY CORTLAND

May 2016

While the epistolary novel is a genre closely associated with 18<sup>th</sup> century England, 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian literature also incorporates letter writing as a significant form of communication. Written messages convey what can often not be said out loud, as it is easier to hide behind a pen and paper, write in solitude, and be absent when the letter is read by the recipient. Impulsive and emotional thoughts and feelings can be written down immediately and then later edited, which makes writing an unstable form of communication. Is the author conveying true feelings or concealing true feelings?

Layering multiple modes of language within a novel, such as letters, notes, and verbal communication creates problematic communication in relationships. A written statement will either contradict or reinforce what is verbally stated, but the validity of the written word is also questionable. This essay will analyze the obscurity<sup>1</sup> of language in Thomas Hardy's novel, *Jude the Obscure*, and the ways in which written communication and intertextuality both define and complicate relationships between characters, as well as a character's relationship to the world through religion, education, and marriage. More specifically, I will examine communications by letter writing for moments of contradiction, degrees of formality, and the ways in which characters such as Jude Fawley, Sue Bridehead, Arabella Donn, and Richard Phillotson use letter writing to convey the truth, tell a lie, or confess what cannot be said out loud. Furthermore, this paper will study the insertions of intertextuality within *Jude* and how such epigraphs function to illuminate the ways in which Jude and Sue are attempting to negotiate their role within Victorian society.

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<sup>1</sup> The term obscure will be used in this text to define what is ambiguous or uncertain, and also the notion of concealment. Obscurity of language in the text functions to mask characters' true feelings if they are not perceived to be socially acceptable.

The first part of this essay will pursue letters and notes as communication devices between characters and the ways in which written communication can obfuscate the meaning of language and the message being conveyed. But first, it is important to discuss one significant epigraph that connects letters to intertextuality and Jude's relationship to the written word: 'the letter killeth' quoted by Jude (Hardy 338). 'The letter killeth' references the letter of Christian law, and more specifically Christian marriage law. However, Hardy uses the idea of the 'letter' to 'kill' in multiple ways throughout the novel.

Mark Rollins examines the epigraph in his essay, "Another Way 'The letter killeth': Classical Study in *Jude the Obscure*," as he states, "Read literally, 'the letter killeth' would make an appropriate epigraph for many of Hardy's novels, for letters often kill in Hardy's fiction. Letters read at the worst possible moment, or sent capriciously, or never received often prove fatal to his character's hopes and plans, and sometimes even contribute indirectly to their deaths" (Rollins 50). Rollins continues his argument in clarifying the origin of the epigraph, as it is from chapter three, verse six, of Paul's second epistle to the Corinthian church, and explains, "[Paul] reminds Christians that theirs should not be a ministry of 'condemnation' grounded upon Mosaic law, but one of 'righteousness' guided by and respectful of the spirit of Christ that resides in each believer: 'for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.' In *Jude the Obscure*, the condemnatory Victorian society compels individuals to obey the letter of civil, church, and social law and punishes those who refuse" (Rollins 52). Therefore, it would seem that 'the letter killeth' because Jude and Sue attempt to live outside of Victorian social

conventions, but are constantly being chastised and pushed back in their “rightful place” within society.

The first note of communication in the narrative is Arabella’s note to Jude stating, “*Have gone to my friends. Shall not return*”<sup>2</sup> (Hardy 71). The two sentences, which are both fragments, are aesthetically casual and blunt, as there is no addressed recipient or author. Her message is vague, as she does not identify who her “friend” is and “shall not” implies a permanent decision. It is designated as “a line” and was written on “the inside of an old envelope,” which indicates that it was likely written quickly and with little effort (Hardy 71). It is permissible to say that this note demonstrates an accurate representation of Arabella’s appreciation for literature and the written word. Early on in the novel, Arabella is told that “[Jude’s] been very stuck up, and always reading. He wants to be a scholar they say” to which she replies, “O, I don’t care what he is, or anything about n,” which implies that Arabella is not after Jude for his knowledge or education, but rather she sees him as useful to her financially (Hardy 42). More so, during the early stages of Jude’s relationship to Arabella, he loses his interests in his books as she does not value them and does not support his spending time to read: “Arabella soon reasserted her sway into his soul. He walked as if he felt himself to be another man from the Jude of yesterday. What were his books to him? . . . It was better to love a woman than to be a graduate” (Hardy 48). Then Arabella abuses Jude’s books at the beginning of chapter six, “throwing them on the floor” after her hands were soiled with “hot grease, and her fingers consequently left very perceptible imprints on the book covers” (Hardy 68). Jude’s reaction to the treatment of his books is fury, as he exclaims “Leave my books

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<sup>2</sup> Any direct italicized quote in the edition of Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* will be represented as italicized in this essay.

Alone! . . . You might have thrown them aside if you had liked, but as to soiling them like that, it is disgusting!” and physically “caught her by the arms to make her leave off” (Hardy 68). The incident is tense and exhibits that Arabella finds education and books worthless because in her view they are not economically useful. In sharp contrast with Jude’s cherished books, Arabella’s hands stain the books because they are “smeared with hot grease” from making lard. The significance of Arabella’s hands represent her lack of affection for animal life because she doesn’t see the pig as a pet, she sees him as financial income. Jude, as an intellectual person, values knowledge and keepsake items, like books. Arabella values items that collect profit; so therefore, according to Arabella, Jude’s knowledge of literature is not sufficient in keeping them financially stable, rendering his books useless.

Essentially, the contrast between Jude and Arabella’s opinion on the importance of knowledge and literature is the wedge that prevents a successful relationship between them. Arabella represents Jude’s social status in society, as she understands that laboring work is all she is capable of and it’s what she believes Jude should settle on doing, which is represented in the pig killing scene. Jude doesn’t want to kill the pig even though it will bring them income, as he states, “I would sooner have gone without the pig than have had to do this,” and Arabella tells him he is a “fool” for being “tender hearted” (Hardy 64). Arabella explains that “pigs must be killed” because Arabella is constructed as practical and detached, as she is focused on an animal’s profit, while Jude is sensitive to the meaning of life, both human and animal, because he is compassionate (Hardy 65).

Later on in the novel, Arabella composes an entirely different letter to Jude than her first note, when she informs him of their son, little Father Time. The letter is much

more formal than her note, as she addresses Jude stating, “Dear Jude (I won’t be so distant as to call you Mr. Fawley)” (Hardy 273). Announcing that she is not going to be “distant” acts as a reminder of their marriage and romantic relationship. Arabella’s letter is significant because it exists in the narrative after she sees Jude face-to-face, yet, because he will not meet with her privately, she chooses to write, implying that it was the easiest way to reveal to Jude the truth about their son, which is supported by her statement “what I write about more particular is that private affair I wanted to speak to you on . . . I couldn’t very well tell it to your lady friend, and should have much liked to let you know it by word of mouth, as I could have explained it better by letter” (Hardy 273). Arabella’s second letter is the longest letter within the novel and at the end of it Arabella affirms, “I was honest to you from the time we were married till I went away, and I remain yours &c.,” and then signed “Arabella Cartlett,” her new married name. Arabella emphasizes that she was “honest” starting with their marriage and past, which makes her appear loyal, yet it undermines the honest persona she attempts to create, as she was clearly not truthful with Jude prior to their marriage, forcing him to marry her on the basis of a false pregnancy.

Jude and Sue read the letter together, which subverts the purpose of a private letter because although a letter can be addressed to a person, the writing becomes a permanent fixture, and can be read by anyone who has access to it, making communication via written messages insecure and vulnerable. Mirella Billi analyzes the use of letters in Victorian literature in her essay, “Victorian Letters: Bad, Mad, and Dangerous to Read” stating, “letters, as dangerous, betraying secrets and crimes, ruining reputations, exposing people, are burned, buried, silenced, destroy, and just simply

thrown away and removed or sent to relatives, to be submitted as legal evidence in courts of justice, and result in personal catastrophes and punishments” (Billi 15). While the contents of Arabella’s letter are not legally destroying, she is aware that her reputation within her new marriage could be ruined if her new husband became aware of little Father Time, as he would likely not accept him. As Arabella states, “naturally, Cartlett might think him in the way,” which may refer to physically in the way at the bar, but in a deeper sense, little Father Time would be in the way of Arabella and Cartlett’s new family. Aside from those two correspondences, Arabella does not communicate via letter again within the novel, even when Jude requests that she write to Sue for him when he is on his deathbed.

On the other hand, it is significant that Arabella is the last character to speak in a novel that is essentially Jude’s. Arabella abandons Jude on his deathbed to socialize, even as she repeats, “I must be getting home again” or “I had better get back,” but takes her time in socializing and stopping to organize services at “the last necessary offices for the poorer dead” (Hardy 404-406). She realizes that “If Jude were discovered to have died alone an inquest may be deemed necessary,” which further adds credence to her coldness and detachment from a meaningful relationship to Jude. There is no evidence of sadness and mourning from Arabella, as she describes, “Yes. He’s a ‘andsome corpse” (Hardy 407). Her last line in the novel relates to the unfortunate situation of Sue and Jude’s obscured love, as she states, “She may swear that on her knees to the holy corss upon her necklace till she’s hoarse, but it won’t be true! . . . She’s never found peace since she left his arms, and never will again till she’s as he is now!” (Hardy 408). Arabella is fully aware how much Jude and Sue love each other; yet, she made sure to remarry Jude and



condemned him to die alone. In the article, “In Defense of Arabella: A Note on *Jude the Obscure*,” Fredrick P. W. McDowell argues,

At the end of the novel [Arabella] is again a voice of wisdom. She perceives that Sue’s existence with Phillotson is a sham, she realizes that the lovers are forever tied to one another by the deepest affinities, and she asserts what cannot be denied, that Sue has no peace from the time that she left Jude’s arms and will have no peace until she joins Jude in death. Arabella thus possesses more insight, more of the human attributes, and more praiseworthy qualities that the animal symbolism of the novel would intimate (280).

While Arabella is correct in assessing the true circumstances of Sue’s marriage to Phillotson and the masking of Sue’s undying love for Jude, it appears to be more of a social intellect, rather than wisdom and knowledge. Arabella is clever in manipulation, being able to twist and turn the social system to her benefit. She knows that Jude and Sue love each other, but Arabella is aware of Sue’s guilt in living in the sexual taboo of incest and the loss of her children, opening an opportunity for her to invade their relationship. To have the ability to manipulate situations people is not a “praiseworthy” or “insightful” attribute, but rather a cruel capacity to always keep oneself at the highest priority. Therefore, Arabella’s last words of the novel represent the force of Victorian society and its preventative means of disallowing the lower class to rise up, even in Jude’s most admirable attempts to better himself through reading and education.

Jude's character is embodied as loving language and knowledge, as he is constantly reading books or quoting from scholars; however, through a letter, Jude's dreams of becoming an academic man are diminished because of his social class in Victorian society. In Christminster, Jude receives a letter from the college to which he applied, "Biblioll College," in which T. Tetuphenay writes, "judging from yourself as a working man, I venture to think that you will have a much better chance of success in life by remaining in your own sphere and sticking to your trade than adopting any other course" (Hardy 117). The letter is addressed to "Mr. J. Fawley," but also "Stone-cutter" follows his name, reinforcing him as a laborer, rather than an academic (Hardy 117). As Jude attempts to rise above his working class status, society pushes him back, restraining him in the lower class in order to preserve education for the upper class. Critic Mark Rollins observes the ways in which 'the letter killeth' stating, "The letter that destroys Jude's scholarly ambitions is equally killing . . . [T. Tetuphenay's] tersely worded assertion that working men should know their place and stick to their trade betrays a class prejudice that Hardy's novel condemns as one of the primary obstacles of keeping earnest and eager seekers after knowledge like Jude from pursuing a university education" (Rollins 51). Even as Jude embodies high work ethic and knowledge, he is not permitted to belong to an educated society, which is a criticism upon the University, rather than Jude. Sue recognizes the faulty Victorian system of education as she states,

You are one of the very men Christminster was intended for when the colleges were founded; a man with a passion for learning, but no money, or opportunities, or friends. But you were elbowed off the pavement by the millionaire's sons (Hardy 151).

Moreover Rollins argues, “Hardy’s metaphorical descriptions of the university as an intellectual factory where students perform rote learning with machine-like precision are sustained by his depiction of Jude’s attempt to obtain admission. Jude fails because of his class position . . . because he does not follow the approved methods for learning Greek and Latin (Rollins 59-60). Jude and Sue both learned texts through memorization, yet Jude’s knowledge and abilities are ignored. In the early stages of Jude’s relationship with Arabella, he keeps abandoning his reading of Η ΚΑΙΝΗ ΑΙΑΟΗΚΗ, which is the Greek text of the New Testament. The text is inserted with Greek letters in the novel three times, and the intertextuality alludes to Jude’s devotion to literature and education. While Jude exists in a lower class community, he attempts to push himself into the next social class by educating himself. However, the Greek lettering suggests that as Jude is reading and memorizing such texts, it is unclear if he truly understands the knowledge he is absorbing, or whether it is just enough to memorize and reciprocate. The barrier between reading and actually understanding is what prevents Jude from learning and becoming a scholar because even as society allows Jude access to such important, scholarly works, society is also preventing Jude from fully understanding it by not allowing him in the University. Based on Jude’s failed relationship with Arabella, it seems that Jude doesn’t fit within the lower working class because of his intellectuality, which explains Jude’s infatuation and love for Sue Bridehead, as they are both unable to climb the social ladder despite their self-taught knowledge.

The most extensive correspondence of letters within the novel is between Jude and Sue Bridehead. Jude and Sue are distant cousins, yet the narrator makes it clear that they have similar values in education and literature: “The boy [Jude] is crazy for books,

that he is. It runs in our family. His cousin Sue is just the same” (Hardy 13). The variation in visual representations of letters between Jude and Sue represents the shift in their relationship from friendly to romantic, as they attempt to understand their feelings for each other as well as negotiate their incestuous relationship within Victorian society.

The first written communication to examine between Jude and Sue is her first letter to him that follows a verbal dialogue in which Sue exclaims, “you mustn’t love me. You are to like me – that’s all!” (Hardy 155). The first part of her letter is not represented in the text, instead it is summarized by the narrator, and then the letter is presented in the novel towards the end as, “What I really want to write about, dear Jude, is something I said to you at parting” and is signed as “Sue” (Hardy 155). Sue connects her written language to her verbal language, as she references to what she “said at parting,” and is now going to attempt to change what has been said by contradicting her statement. Sue seems to recognize her impulsivity, which she attempts to correct through letter writing, as the narrator states, “Sue still seemed sorry for her rashness, and to wish she had not rebelled” (Hardy 155). Her “rash” action of staying with Jude when she should have been at Training School has influenced Jude to admit his love for her, so she refutes his love by impulsively arguing that he “mustn’t love” her (Hardy 155). Then Sue uses the opportunity of the letter to rewrite what she may have truly wanted to say or attempting to ease her guilt of hurting Jude: “*If you ever want to love me, Jude, you may: I don’t mind at all; and I’ll never say again that you mustn’t!*” (Hardy 155). Significantly, Sue contradicts her verbal statements with her written statements, which undermines authenticity of either because it is questionable whether it is easier for her to tell the truth or lie with a written letter. While it may be truthful because she has had time to reflect

upon her initial response and the language implies a romantic feeling between them: “She was nearer to him than any other woman he had ever met, and he could scarcely believe that time, creed, or absence would ever divide him from her” (Hardy 153). On the other hand, the letter may also represent guilt because after verbally telling Jude not to love her, the narrator describes, “Jude’s face became so full of complicated glooms that hers was agitated in sympathy as she bade him adieu” (Hardy 155). Her agitation is explained by “sympathy” rather than mutual feeling, which complicates the relationship. Jude’s emotions for Sue are romantic and sexual, while Sue’s feelings still appear to be focused on plutonic companionship. Sue’s emotions are constructed as obscure by her contradicting language, both verbal and written, as she appears to be masking what she truly feels and is instead bouncing back and forth between submitting to her feelings for Jude and negating them. It is unclear whether Sue romantically loves Jude or is afraid to lose his company if she does not allow him to love her. Furthermore, in arguing that Sue does have romantic feelings for Jude, she appears to be masking, or obscuring, her love for him because of the unconventional and taboo incestuous aspect of their relationship. Sue is constantly vacillating about everything, questioning the thoughts in her mind and the actions she takes. Hardy’s construction of her represents the ways in which he believes the “modern woman” acts, constantly changing in opinion and mood.

Sue continues a similar pattern throughout the narrative in writing letters following a face-to-face interaction between her and Jude, as she uses the letters to contradict her actions or words, as she tries to negotiate her position in Victorian culture and in her own desires of life. Sue hears of a local reaction to her and Jude’s relationship, more specifically the night that Sue spent with Jude, and explains to him that “somebody

has sent [the people at Training School] baseless reports about us, and they say you and I ought to marry as soon as possible, for the sake of my reputation!” (Hardy 157). What seems most important to Sue at this moment is “the sake of [her] reputation,” yet, she argues that the reports are “baseless.” Therefore, it is a failing of Victorian society and modern society that even when accusations exist without proof, people are still to follow the conventions of society to uphold or save one’s reputation. Sue first takes the blame stating, “I began to fancy you did love me a little . . . It is all my fault” (Hardy 157). But then she contradicts her self, exclaiming, “O [Jude,] you have been so unkind to me – you have – to look upon me as a sweetheart without saying a word . . . I’ll never trust you again!” (Hardy 157). Sue accuses Jude of being “unkind” for not outright telling her that he loves her. Yet, Sue seems to be very much aware that Jude has romantic feelings for her, even if she attempts to ignore such a notion or as she states, “I was so blind” (Hardy 157). Sue admits to allowing Jude to love her in her first letter to him and admits to her knowledge of it, so she is not “blind,” but is obfuscating her feelings by blaming Jude for loving her when it is “wrong” in her eyes. Jude admits to masking his love for Sue stating, “Don’t you think I deserve a little consideration for concealing my wrong, very wrong, sentiments, since I couldn’t help having them?” (Hardy 158). *Jude the Obscure* is demonstrating obscurity, as he feels he must mask his true feelings, as they are societally “wrong.” Jude’s sexual arousal towards Sue is surfaced as the narrator describes, “By every law of nature and sex a kiss was the only rejoinder that fitted the mood and the moment . . . it was upon his lips; yet at the hour of this distress he could not disclose it. He preferred to dwell upon the recognized barriers between them” (Hardy 158). The “barriers” of their familial tie as cousins, Jude’s lower/working class status, and Sue’s

relationship with Phillotson interferes with a possible romantic relationship between Sue and Jude.

After the encounter between Sue and Jude over the “baseless” accusations, the narrative describes Jude’s reaction, stating, “When [Jude] awoke he felt rather vexed with [Sue], and decided that she was rather unreasonable, not to say capricious.” Yet, as soon as Jude reads her letter he “forgave her straight away, and asked her to call for him” (Hardy 159). Jude’s immediate forgiveness towards Sue represents how much he truly loves her, as he is willing to constantly overlook the obstructions she places between them and how much she fights her returned love for him. The letter, signed as, “—Your repentant Sue,” begins with “forgive me for my petulance yesterday. I was horrid to you” Sue also begs him to “please still keep me as your friend and associate, with all my faults” (Hardy 158). The letter complicates not only Sue’s language, but it further obscures her feelings towards Jude. Every time she pulls him back in with her written language in letters.

Jude recognizes the change in Sue’s tone between physical interactions and interactions via written letters. As Sue resists talking to Jude as much as possible after his meeting with Phillotson to inform him that nothing sexual happened between Sue and Jude, he states, “It is very odd that . . . that you are never so nice in your real presence as you are in your letters” (Hardy 165). Jude is poking at what Sue attempts to be obscuring, her true feelings for Jude. He is attempting to uncover which part of her is true, her writings or her verbal statements to him face-to-face. Sue finds this statement “strange” and argues, “I feel just the same about you, Jude. When you are gone away I seem such a cold hearted — . . . it was that which made me write and say — I didn’t mind your loving

me, -- if you wanted to” (Hardy 165). The ambiguous language that describes Sue’s feeling is that she feels “the same,” but it is unclear what “same” feeling she has in both writing and speaking to him. Then Sue admits that her shift in writing tone stems from her concept of herself and that when she is alone or without Jude, she seems “cold hearted.” After Jude admits his past relationship with Arabella, Sue adds that to the list of obstacles that keep her and Jude from consummating a romantic relationship: “We should have had to keep apart, you see, even if this had not been in your life” (Hardy 167). While Jude sees his past as the only barrier between them, Sue argues, “You forget that I must have loved you, and wanted to be your wife, even if there had been no obstacle . . . and then we are cousins, and it is bad for cousins to marry. And – I am engaged to somebody else” (Hardy 167). In the moment that Sue admits her love for Jude, she buries it beneath all of the reasons that they can’t be together. The Victorian influence appears to be the most prevalent reason as Sue states, “as to our going on together as we were going, in a sort of friendly way, the people round us would have made it unable to continue. Their views of the relations of a man and woman are limited” (Hardy 167). Sue does not find the relationship between her and Jude to be wrong, but instead finds it to be beyond the “limits” of Victorian perceptions of marriage and romantic relationships. Jude views himself and marriage as an impossible mixture from the advice of his great-aunt, as he states, “It was always impressed upon me that I ought not to marry – that I belonged to an odd and peculiar family – the wrong breed for marriage” to which Sue reacts saying, “That’s strange. My father used to say the same to me!” (Hardy 168). The quote that Jude and Sue both take from their relatives is a form of intertextuality within the novel. They are bringing forth what someone else has said and placing it in their own mouths within



the text. The statement displaces Sue and Jude from “normal” Victorian society people, as they are deemed “odd,” “peculiar,” and the “wrong breed” which foreshadows that even as they try to conform to their place in society, they will never fit quite rightly in it. Sue attempts to brush it off and blame it on being “unlucky,” but the fact that both are under this scrutiny of strangeness predicts the failing of their marriage.

Sue’s next letter highly contrasts her first two letters from the formality of the letter to the coldness of her language, and it parallels the well-known epigraph within the novel, ‘the Letter Killeth,’ as it causes emotional damage to Jude.

My Dear Jude, – I have something to tell you which perhaps you will not be surprised to hear, though certainly it may strike you as being accelerated (as the railway companies say of their trains). Mr. Philloston and I are to be married quite soon – in three or four weeks. We had intended, as you know, to wait until I had gone through my course of training and obtained my certificate, so as to assist him, if necessary, in the teaching. But he generously says he does not see any object in waiting, now I am not at the Training School. It is so good of him, because the awkwardness of my situation has really come about my fault in getting expelled. Wish me joy. Remember I say you are to, and you mustn’t refuse! – Your affectionate cousin, Susanna Florence Mary Bridehead (Hardy 169).

Firstly, the letter is structured extremely formal in comparison to her previous letters beginning with “My Dear Jude” and ending with “Your affectionate cousin,” stressing the fact that they are purely family members, not romantic lovers. Then she uses

her full name rather than just Sue. Furthermore, Sue begins by walking around the subject, rather than flat out stating the purpose of her letter. She says, “I have something to tell you” instead of just saying what it is she needs to tell. Then she uses the metaphor of a railway company train for her “accelerated” marriage to Phillotson to distract from the main point of the letter. Sue is aware that it will “strike” Jude, and it seems that she is delaying explaining her marriage even as she says that it will not surprise Jude because she knows well that it will upset him. Her tone is very cold and distant, as she constantly uses “we” to represent her and Phillotson, while Jude knows that Sue doesn’t really love Phillotson or want to marry him, as he states in reaction to the letter, “O Susanna Florence Mary . . . you don’t know what marriage means!” (Hardy 169). Moreover, Sue declares that it is “so good” of Phillotson to marry her so soon in order to save her reputation because of the “awkwardness of [her] situation,” referring to her being expelled for spending the night with Jude. Therefore, Sue’s obscure language in explaining the reasoning behind her and Phillotson’s hurried marriage is truly masking society’s pressure on Sue to marry and protect her social status. She cannot marry Jude because that would tarnish her reputation, as it is beyond the limitations of Victorian ideals of marriage. At the end of the letter, Sue asks to Jude, “Wish me joy” punctuated by a period, which contradicts the excitement and happiness that the word “joy” evokes. Instead, she seems to need Jude’s support in order to go on with the decision she has made and force herself to feel “joy.” Mark Rollins investigates the use of the letter within *Jude* and explains:

Letters kill in *Jude the Obscure* as well. Indeed, in selecting the novel’s epigraph Hardy may parody himself by playfully acknowledging his

melodramatic use of letters to inflict harm in previous novels. They are used to similar effect on Jude Fawley. Sue Bridehead's letter announcing her impending marriage to Richard Phillotson, followed soon after by her note requesting that Jude give her away, shatters Jude's romantic hopes for his cousin's affection (Rollins 50-51).

The letter mentioned in Rollin's article that Sue requests Jude give her away, demonstrates the same formal style depicted in the first letter, yet she indirectly confesses her unhappiness with her marriage to Phillotson, as she states about marriage, "Somebody *gives* me to him, like a she-ass or she-goat, or any other domestic animal" (Hardy 170). Sue views marriage as an ownership of one person over another, more specifically, a man owning a woman. The term "domestic" implies obedience and trained behavior, which Sue despises based on her use of sarcasm, which she reinforces in her next line, "Bless your exalted views of woman, O Churchman!" (Hardy 170). Sue's understanding of marriage is that it is constructed by the church's law and from her point of view, the church views women as an object to be owned, passed off from one person to another. Sue states that she finds it "very humiliating that a giver-away should be required at all" because she doesn't view herself as an object to be given away and cannot agree with the notion that she cannot give herself away (Hardy 170). Furthermore, she recognizes her flirtatious behavior with Jude and states, "But I forget: I am no longer privileged to tease you. – Ever" (Hardy 170). She has not "forgotten" that she is not allowed to "tease" Jude, but rather she is emphasizing her desire to have a playful relationship with Jude, but the church's law and societal law that intervenes on a possible romantic relationship between them.

Sue has not only used letters to contradict her verbal language, but contradicts her written language as well, as she attempts to portray herself as happy with her decision to marry Phillotson, yet, uses language in communication with Jude that expresses the opposite. In turn, it is difficult for Jude to know what Sue most desires, and because of his romantic interest in her, her words are constantly either lifting him up or dragging him down. When Jude replies to her letter, he signs his more casually as merely “Jude” and brings up the unnecessary formality of her letter: “I don’t see why you sign your letter in such a new and terribly formal way? Surely you care about me still!” (Hardy 170). Jude agrees to give Sue away at her wedding and emphasizes that he wishes her “joy” by using an exclamation point. But the narrator makes a point to reveal “what had jarred on [Jude] even more than [Sue’s] signature was a little sting he had been silent on – the phrase ‘married relation’ – What an idiot it made him seem as her lover!” (Hardy 171). The laws of both church and society are attempting to push out Jude’s romantic feelings for Sue, deeming them as wrong because they are of familial “relation.” Sue and Jude both seem to be using letter writing as a way to reveal truths about their love for one another, and simultaneously as a way to obscure such feelings by using sarcasm or forced language of happiness for one another.

There is one point within the novel in which Jude receives a letter from Sue too late, and the letter is not presented in the way that Hardy has previously inserted letters in *Jude*, such as, addressed, word for word, and signed within the text. Instead, Jude summarizes the letter:

It was a contrite little note from Sue, in which she said, with sweet humility, that she felt she had been horrid in telling him he was not to

come to see her; that she despised herself for having been so conventional; and that he was to be sure to come by the eleven-forty-five-train that very Sunday, and have dinner with them half-past one (Hardy 196).

Sue, once again, demonstrates her pattern of using letters to reflect upon her own guilt for her behavior, as the note is described as “contrite,” indicating Sue’s feelings of remorse for her behavior towards Jude. After such encounters, Sue uses letters and notes at an attempt to restore her relationship with Jude when she believes to have ruined it or lost him. Jude’s reaction to the letter is depicted as, “[he] almost tore his hair at having missed this letter till it was too late to act upon its contents . . . he longed to see her; he was angry at having missed her: and he wrote instantly,” which demonstrates the grasp that Sue has over Jude with her physical presence and with her letters (Hardy 196).

Written communication seems to become a substitute for one’s presence, as Jude’s emotions and behaviors are triggered from what Sue writes to him just as much as when in her presence. When Sue requests that Jude come see her, he “got leave from the Cathedral works at the trifling expense of a stoppage of pay, and went,” which demonstrates that Jude would stop and give up anything if Sue asked him to (Hardy 196).

The last bit of written communication between Sue and Jude are short notes, not addressed, only signed, with exception to Jude’s last note to Sue. Sue asks Jude not to come visit her because “we were too free, under the influence of that morbid hymn and the twilight,” the term free implying that Sue allowed herself to act like an unmarried woman (Hardy 207). Sue is referring to the previous night in which she discussed her true feelings to Jude face-to-face. She explains, “I can’t tell you the truth – I should shock you by letting you know how I give way to my impulses,” which suggests that her “impulses”

are to keep in communication with Jude to maintain their close relationship. While Sue states that she doesn't want to tell Jude the "truth," she admits, "I am called Mrs. Richard Phillotson, living a calm wedded life with my counterpart of that name. But I am not really Mrs. Richard Phillotson, but a woman tossed about, all alone, with aberrant passions, and unaccountable antipathies" (Hardy 205). Sue Bridehead is attempting to understand her feelings as she resists her marriage to Phillotson, as well as attempts to resist her feelings for Jude. She seems to want Jude to know that she is unhappy, yet her note to him conveys the guilt that she feels in admitting her true feelings. Through letter writing, Sue is demonstrating her pattern of acting, reacting, and then utilizing letter writing as a way to alter what had happened by stating that it was wrong or cannot happen again. Even as Jude agrees, the narrator foreshadows an event that will bring them back together: "But other forces and laws than theirs were in operation" and Jude's last letter to Sue invites her to their Aunt's funeral (Hardy 207-208).

Sue and Jude's relationship via written letters appears to be their way to negotiate their unconventional romantic feelings for each other. Sue seems to be fighting her feelings for Jude in her written communications with him, while Jude seems to be dragged in all different directions according to Sue's mood because of his devotion to her. As soon as Jude's Aunt Drusilla dies, the narrator states, "It was absolutely necessary to communicate with Sue, though two or three days earlier they had agreed to mutual severance" (Hardy 208). At this moment, Jude recognizes his need for communication with Sue, as written communication can function as a substitution for one's presence to comfort and support. After Sue and Jude's last written correspondence, Sue verbally confesses to Jude, "Is it wrong . . . for a husband or wife to tell a third person they are

unhappy in their marriage?” and furthermore, she goes on to differentiate marriage as a “religious thing” or a “sordid contract” (Hardy 209). Sue attempts to negotiate what marriage means, as she rationalizes that if marriage is a religious connection and that if one says they are unhappy in that relationship, then it’s wrong. But if Sue defines marriage as a contract for “marital convenience in householding, rating, and taxing, [etc.]” then being unhappy is socially acceptable (Hardy 209). Sue finally declares what has been apparent in her letter writing to Jude, stating “I don’t like [Phillotson] . . . There now I have let it out – I couldn’t help it, although I have been – pretending I am happy” (Hardy 212). Sue and Jude no longer have written communications after she is able to express her unhappiness with Phillotson and her passionate feelings for Jude, which shifts the plot of the novel.

Another correspondence of written language in the novel occurs between Sue and Richard Phillotson. They use informal notes as tools of communication while in the same space, but separate rooms. Their communication is brief, yet is presented as awkward and filled with obscurity. Sue verbally tells Phillotson that she wants “to free each other” and “cancel” the “contract” between them (Hardy 223). She admits that she would like to move out of the house to live with Jude. Sue calls her relationship with Phillotson a “constraint” and argues to him that “for a man and a woman to live on intimate terms when one feels as I do is adultery, in any circumstances, however legal” which illuminates that Sue loves someone else and feels that being intimate with Phillotson is deceitful to Jude (Hardy 223). Phillotson seems to be in disbelief that Sue is serious about her request: “She was beginning to be so puzzling and unpredictable that he was ready to throw in with her other little peculiarities the extremist request which a wife could make”

(Hardy 224). While he is aware that Sue is in love with Jude, he cannot decide if Sue is completely serious and that her words carry any weight. Their conversation is interrupted by “the ringing of the school bell,” which separates them across the hall from each other, which leads into their written correspondence and ultimately becomes one of the turning points in the novel (Hardy 223).

The scene is constructed in a way that Phillotson is described as being able to view Sue, but the narrator does not mention that Sue can observe Phillotson, therefore, only one person is participating in watching the receiver’s reaction. The notes are not addressed or signed, as they are acting as a very casual form of communication and are initiated by Phillotson because he could not escape from “concentrated agitation of thought” (Hardy 224). He takes out his frustration on the paper as the narrator describes, “he tore a scrap from a sheet of scribbling paper and wrote” (Hardy 224). Phillotson begins the communication, addressing Sue first, asking if her request was “seriously made,” to which she responds, “I am sincerely sorry to say that it was seriously made” (Hardy 224). As she reads his note, “he could not see her hands, but she changed her position,” which emphasizes his analysis of her reaction (Hardy 224). In a desperate response, Phillotson brings up Sue’s reputation and the damage that it would endure in leaving him for Jude “I cannot agree to such a preposterous notion as going to live with your lover. You would lose everybody’s respect and regard; and so should I” (Hardy 224). Phillotson’s character becomes embodied as a part of the societal force that prevents Jude and Sue from having an accepted relationship, as Phillotson brings to the surface the issues of appearance and reputation within Victorian society. He asserts himself as the proper suitor for Sue, the ethically moral partner. Furthermore, he



mentions that her leaving him would also damage his reputation, asserting that his concern is more for people losing respect for him, than of her happiness.

Another pattern of Sue's which will be examined later in this essay, is her choice to integrate supplementary quotes when she is unsure what to say, which she does in her response to Phillotson, stating, "To produce 'Human development in its richest diversity' (to quote Humboldt) is to my mind far above respectability" (Hardy 225). Sue uses the quote to emphasize that being with Jude would make her truly happy and that Sue has no interest in being "respectable" (Hardy 225). At this point in the novel, Sue is convincing both Phillotson and herself that society's view of her is unimportant, as she admits, "[her] tastes are low – in [Phillotson's] view – hopelessly low," taste being both of someone in a lower socio-economic class and blood related (Hardy 225). The correspondence between Phillotson and Sue is represented as choppy, rather than back-and-forth dialogue, as the notes are short interrupted by pauses from the narrator. The interjections in-between notes with lines such as, "To this he returned no answer. She wrote again" create disconnect between one note and the other accentuating the time between sending and receiving written notes (Hardy 225). When Sue receives no response from Richard, she writes to him again, which demonstrates the anxiousness that written communication can inspire. Without the immediate reaction of face-to-face speaking, one is left pondering to a point of almost panic, which leads to more almost obsessive communication for the means of a response. Sue uses religious connotations in her note, pleading to Phillotson to "have pity" and "be merciful," making him out to have Godlike power of her. She blames Eve for her perceived failures as a woman, stating, "No poor woman has ever wished more than I that Eve had not fallen, so that (as the primitive Christians believed) some

harmless mode of vegetation might have peopled Paradise” (Hardy 225). Sue’s literal begging to Phillotson places the power of the situation onto him as she states, “I beg you to . . . be kind to me – even though I have not been kind to you!” (Hardy).

Because of Sue’s relentless begging, Phillotson gives into her last written plead, as he coldly states, “I am disposed to agree to your last request,” that she will “go away, go abroad, anywhere, and never trouble [him]” (Hardy 225). Phillotson is able to reread her notes, giving her written words more weight than her verbal statements, because they can repeatedly be seen by his eyes and pondered in his mind, as the narrator states, “nearly an hour passed” before he returned an answer (Hardy 225). Putting the power in Phillotson’s hands seems to be what triggers his compliance. Therefore, Sue uses specific wording in her notes in order to persuade him. When quoting literature didn’t work, Sue utilized religious terminology, which succeeded. The written communication between Phillotson and Sue demonstrates a mix of direct and indirect language. Sue’s messages are more obscure than Phillotson’s, as she tries to walk around what she wants to say by quoting the philosopher, Wilhelm Humboldt, using religious anecdotes; meanwhile, Phillotson uses direct and precise language. Sue is attempting to be honest with Phillotson about her feelings, which is a shift from her letters to Jude in which she is either lying or conveying the truth through sarcasm or a joke, both masking her true thoughts.

The final written message between characters that this essay will examine is the epic and tragic moment of the novel in which little Father Time hangs himself and his two siblings, leaving the note, “*done because we are too menny*” (Hardy 336). Father Time’s death is foreshadowed in the narrative, as his character appears to be very aware

of death and he mentions death and dying throughout the novel. When Jude and Sue ask Father Time about being Christened, he replies, "I never was [Christened] . . . because if I died in damnation, 'twould save the expense of a Christian funeral" (Hardy 280). Father Time's outlook on death is abnormally practical for a child, as he is more concerned about the cost of the funeral than any fear of dying. He demonstrates a fixation with death, as he finds it to be the only solution of easing pain and sorrow, and also an inevitable fate for all. Even when Jude, Sue, and Father Time admire flowers, he states, "I should like the flowers very very much, if I didn't keep on thinking they'd be all withered in a few days!" (Hardy 297). Furthermore, Father Time is not represented as the focus of Sue and Jude's attention. When Arabella sees Sue, Jude, and Father Time at the Agricultural Exhibition, the narrator explains the scene as, "not regardful of themselves alone, they had taken care to bring Father Time, to try every means of making him kindle and laugh like other boys, though he was to some extent a hindrance to the delightfully unreserved intercourse in their pilgrimages which they so much enjoyed" (Hardy 291). Father Time is tagging along with Jude and Sue throughout the exhibit, but it appears that Sue and Jude are more involved with each other than the child.

Little Father Time's role reveals the financial difficulties for large lower class families in the Victorian. When he first arrived, he demonstrated his knowledge of the expense of large families, discussing the Christian burial. Then, when he asks Sue, "I ought not to be born, ought I?" he perceives that he and his siblings are a burden on Sue and Jude, as they struggle to find lodging that will accommodate all of them in Christminster (Hardy 332). There is no evidence that Father Time received a response for the question, and it may seem a hypothetical inquiry; however, it develops a pattern of

non-reciprocated statements by little Father Time. Significantly, little Father Time's question seem to be his way of negotiating his thoughts as he learns about the world and a cry for attention, yet they go unreturned, making him feel unloved.

The Fawleys experience a despairing and miserable situation in Christminster, as the family is forced to new lodging day after day, and they currently must live separate from Jude. Father Time is described to have acquired a form of anxiety from the unstable lifestyle, as the narrator describes, "the failure to find another lodging, and the lack of room in this house for his father, had made a deep impression on the boy; – a brooding undemonstrative horror seemed to have seized him" (Hardy 332-333). His anxiety is placed onto Sue, as Father Time shouts to her, "Mother, *what* shall we do tomorrow!" which likely adds more stress onto Sue than she is already experiencing (Hardy 333). In conversation with Sue, Father Time asks, "It would be better to be o' the world than in it, wouldn't it?" and in a state of exhaustion and desperation Sue makes the mistake of talking to Father Time as an adult, rather than a child, saying, "It would almost, dear" (Hardy 333). Moreover, Father Time blames children for the difficulties in Sue and Jude's world, stating, "Tis because of the children, too, isn't it, that you can't get a good lodging?" and Sue reveals that some lodgers do not allow children, which substantiates Father Time's belief that their situation is the children's fault (Hardy 333). Father Time keeps prying on the situation of children and asks, "Then if children make so much trouble, why do people have 'em? . . . we don't ask to be born" (Hardy 333). Sue seems to brush off his inquiries of reproduction and answers that "it is the law of nature" (Hardy 333). It appears that Sue's exhaustion and own depressing outlook on their situation distracts her from seeing Father Time's psychological struggle with the value of life. He

sees himself as “trouble,” as he explains, “I oughtn’t to have come to ‘ee – that’s the real truth! I troubled ‘em in Australia and I trouble folk here. I wish I hadn’t been born!”

(Hardy 333). Father Time at this point is fixated on himself as a problem in the world, as he has been abandoned as a child, barely knows his real mother, Arabella, and now lives in an unstable lifestyle with no solution in sight.

Father Time’s obsession with death is exceedingly exhibited in his statement, “I think that whenever children be born that are not wanted they should be killed directly, before their souls come to ‘em and not allowed to grow big and walk about!” (Hardy 333). His morbid belief that children should be “killed directly” if they’re not wanted exhibits that he believes he should be killed because in his perception, he is not wanted. Once again, Father Time’s statement goes without response.

The turning point in the novel and trigger for Father Time’s actions is when Sue decides that she will be truthful with him.

Sue did not reply. She was doubtfully pondering how to treat this too reflective child. She at last concluded that, so far as circumstances permitted, she would be honest and candid with one who entered in to her difficulties like an aged friend. ‘There is going to be another in our family soon . . . There is going to be another baby’ (Hardy 333-334).

Sue’s initial mistake is treating Father Time as if he were “an aged friend.” Although Father Time’s intellectual thoughts are mature for his age, his state of mind is far too fragile to endure more bad news that will bring further hardship. Learning of another child on the way sends Father Time into a frenzy, which ultimately influences his suicide and the murder of his siblings. He argues to Sue, “How ever could you, mother, be so

wicked and cruel as this, when you needn't have done it till we was better off, and father well! – To bring us into more trouble!” (Hardy 334). In Father Time’s view, children equal trouble, hardships, and problems. From Father Time’s point of view, children are the “fault” of the mother, and he doesn’t understand Jude’s involvement in reproduction. Sue neglects to mention Jude Fawley’s role in reproducing another baby, as she only tells Father Time that she can’t “explain” and “will when you are older,” which influences him to blame only Sue (Hardy 334). Hardy constructs Father Time’s character to not value life for the sake of purely living, but to only live without “troubles,” or only live if one is financially stable enough to do so. Even as Sue attempts to help Father Time understand that her pregnancy was unintended, he argues, “Yes it is – it must be! For nobody would interfere with us, like that, unless you agreed! I never believe you care for me, or father, or any of us anymore!” (Hardy 334). His age and immaturity surfaces, as Sue realizes that she cannot make Father Time understand the “law of nature” quite yet. The last that Sue hears from Father Time is “If we children was gone there’d be no trouble at all!” (Hardy 334). Sue instructs Father Time to “sleep” and not to “think that,” but it foretells his decision to hang himself and his siblings (Hardy 334). Many critics have analyzed Father Time’s murder-suicide within the novel and have developed theories both about the note itself and about little Father Time.

Walter K. Gordon’s essay, “Father Time’s Suicide Note in *Jude the Obscure*” focuses deeply on the six words within the note and the multiple meanings that can be interpreted: “Father Time’s words . . . deserve careful examination because they invite multiple interpretations which, through Hardy’s use of semantic ambiguity and Biblical parallel, show the note to be a microcosmic expression of the tone of despair and futility

of the novel as a whole” (Gordon 298). Gordon argues that the most important word, “menny” is more than just a representation of Father Time’s childlike knowledge, as he states:

On the simplest level this is certainly a misspelling of *many*, attributable to either Father Time’s lack of formal education or his taste of acute melancholia at the time of composition of the note . . . He is gloom personified – an odd combination of child and man, of youth and old age – a boy who seems obsessed too early with decay, death, and human misery . . . the word *Menny* is surely a macabre pun, meaning ‘like men,’ and the entire note suggests one of Hardy’s firm convictions – that tragedy and grief are the lot of both children and adults because of their participation in a common humanity and that even the innocence of children is no protection against the inexorable forces responsible for unmerited misery in the human condition (Gordon 298-299).

Gordon is not the first critic to find the term “*menny*” to be related to “like men,” but what is fascinating about his argument is his connection between Father Time and Thomas Hardy and their fixation with human suffering in an attempt to ameliorate the human circumstance in the Victorian. Father Time’s naïve interpretation of fixing the world is to eliminate himself and his siblings because he believes they are what cause his parents’ financial struggle and unstable lifestyle. Gordon also contends that “[Father Time] seems somehow to be detached from this world, to be more an observer and commentator on the unfolding panorama of life than an active participant in it” (Gordon 299). Yet, I disagree with his statement because Father Time’s character puts certain plot

points into motion. He is a significant, “active participant” in the novel because he not only takes his own life, but the lives of his two younger siblings, which is an extreme action in the novel, influencing the separation between Jude and Sue.

Critic Anna Kornbluh investigates a theme of geometry in *Jude the Obscure* in her article, “Obscure Forms: The Letter, the Law, and the Line in Hardy’s Social Geometry.” Kornbluh argues, “[Sue’s statement about life to little Father Time] yokes the tragic mass infanticide to the letter, a reading prescribed by the novel’s sole italicization<sup>3</sup>, its freneticizing of the literal letter left as explanation for the murders: ‘*Done because we are too menny.*’ The misspelling sadly underscores Father Time’s youth and punningly indicts “men” for their excessive sexual drive to be *in life*” (Kornbluh 11-12). While Kornbluh’s argument of Father Time’s misspelling and pun indicting men is convincing, she is incorrect in stating that Father Time’s note is the only italicized language in the novel, the italics still give it emphasis. Furthermore, Kornbluh argues that it is unlikely that Father Time would know the difference between “to” and “too” and not be able to spell “many,” making the word more meaningful and open to analysis. The present tense of the letter does increase the dark morbidity of the scene, as Kornbluh explains, “The eerie present tense of the dead murderer’s voice . . . conjures an uncanny vitality of the letter that graphically inscribes itself in the doubling of the double letter . . . disclosing the duality of letter written and against itself and further alluding to the ambiguity internal to the letter” (Kornbluh 12). While Father Time’s note is short and appears to be straightforward, his language is obscure and ambiguous, which constructs his death and the murder of his siblings to be that more disturbing. Furthermore, Richard Nemessvari

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<sup>3</sup> The Penguin Classics edition of Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* contains more italics than just Little Father Time’s note, demonstrated in this essay.



explains in his essay, “Hardy and Victorian Popular Culture,” that “the doctor who examines the children’s bodies tells Jude that his son is one of a group of boys ‘springing up amongst us – boys of a sort unknown in the last generation – the outcome of new views of life. They seem to see all its terrors before they are old enough to have staying power to resist them” (Nemesvari 85). In this scene, Hardy is exhibiting his amelioration, as he is attempting to make people aware of the “group of boys” that are growing up in the Victorian that will suffer financially and see the dark aspects of life before they are old enough to understand them. Sue and Jude do not have the luxury to hide their hardships from their children because of their poverty and social otherness. Hardy’s use of little Father Time in the novel embodies the need for improvement in social conditions. His role in the novel as an ameliorator makes transparent societal failures such as lack of birth control, limited career and education opportunities for the low socio-economic class, and social condemnation for “unchristian-like behavior,” such as illegitimate children or marriage between distant cousins.

Aside from letters as communication devices, Hardy integrates epigraphs at the beginning of each part of the novel, outside of the narrative, which seem to foreshadow events within the chapter, as well as expose social issues within the novel. The quotes also serve to correlate with Jude’s academic knowledge, as literature is so highly valued by his character. While the first part of this essay focused on letters, the next part will emphasize “the letter,” or the written word, and intertextuality inserts from supplementary texts interweaved within *Jude*. Thomas Hardy utilizes epigraphs at the beginning of each Part of the novel with a quote or multiple quotes that essentially foreshadow events within that Part. For example, before Part First begins, Hardy places

the quote, “*Yea, many there be that have run out of their wits for women, and become servants for their sakes. Many also have perished, have erred, and sinned, for women . . . O ye men, how can it be but women should be strong, seeing they do thus? – Esdras*” (Hardy 8). In summary, the quote argues that men become “servants” for women and stop thinking for women, and it is the woman who is smart for manipulating a man to do so. In Part First, Arabella finds a way to control Jude with sex and the lie of a pregnancy in order to force him into marriage. Jude abandons his studies for Arabella’s presence. Then again, at the start of Part Third, outside of the narrative, Hardy constructs the quote, “*For there was no other girl, O bridegroom, like her!*’ – Sappho (H. T. Wharton),” which is explained in the end notes of the novel as a quote translated by H. T. Wharton originally written by Sappho, who the narrator describes as “a seventeenth century B.C. Greek poetess” (Hardy 434). The intertextuality appears to be suggesting Sue Bridehead, the “*bridegroom*” in Jude’s eyes, both the bride and the groom, female and male. Little is known about the poetess, Sappho, but it was said that she lived in the years between 615-550 B.C. on the Greek island of Lesbos, which is the origin for the term lesbian, and writers have “parodied” Sappho as “overly promiscuous and lesbian” (Poets 1). Connecting Sue to Sappho, there is no textual evidence to support that Sue is a lesbian, but Sue’s behavior embodies her as independent from men, able to be both masculine and feminine when necessary.

In Part Third, Jude falls deeply in love with Sue and vice versa, and so, the epigraphs reinforce Jude and Sue’s love and appreciation for literature in a world that attempts to barricade them from achieving knowledge and education, as well as indicate events in the Part. It seems that Hardy utilizes biblical quotes as well as ancient Greek

quotes in order to restore a dead language, paralleling Jude's aspiration to restore history. In the article, "Gossip and the Letter: Ideologies of 'Restoration' in *Jude the Obscure*" Jan B. Gordon argues, "Jude attempts to master the dead languages of antiquity by a rote memorization which reproduces but does not restore a lost learning" (Gordon 47). The epigraphs speak in a way that Jude and Sue would understand, as they use quotations from literature to communicate when they cannot find the words themselves. The language demonstrates the connection that Jude and Sue have for their appreciation and love of literature and the dead language of Latin because of its scholarly reputation.

Jude spends his adolescence memorizing Latin, a dead language, in order to be able to read Latin texts because he believes it will permit him to be a scholar at Christminster. When Jude first arrives at Christminster, he begins quoting from literary masters, but Jude's knowledge seems to be surface memorization, rather than understanding the words he is saying: "Why should we faint, and fear to live alone, / Since all alone, so Heaven was will'd we die?," along with other quotes and appears to be Jude's way of reassuring himself that he belongs in the scholarly world (Hardy 82). Furthermore, Jude proves that he can recite in Latin when a man at the bar in Christminster sarcastically asks Jude to recite the "Creed in Latin" if he is such a scholar, to which, "Jude, who having drunk the contents, stood up and began rhetorically, without hesitation: 'Credo in unum Deum, Patrem omnipotentem . . . etc.'" proving his abilities (Hardy 120-122). However, while the people in the bar are impressed, they are not the audience that would appreciate Jude's knowledge, which further supports Jude is inevitably neither the upper educated class or the lower working class. Jude uses the language he has memorized as a way to prove that he is able and worthy of an education.

However, this becomes more of a criticism against the Victorian university, rather than Jude. Mark Rollins explains in his article:

Jude misreads the value of modern restoration methods, but his error conveys a dramatic irony that helps illuminate Hardy's criticism of Christminster's system of tuition . . . Hardy suggests that a Christminster education, or what gets dignified by that name, involves as much copying, patching, and imitating as the restoration of its walls (Rollins 58-59).

For a moment in the novel, Jude feels that his work as a stone mason is as dignified as receiving an education, but he seems to forgo that idea because of his passion for education and books: "For a moment there fell on Jude a true illumination; that here in the stone yard was a center of effort as worthy as that dignified by the name of scholarly study within the noblest of colleges . . . moreover he perceived that at best only copying, patching, and imitating went on here" (Hardy 84-85). Therefore, this unachievable life that Jude is rejected from is constructed as less prestigious and authentic as it appears to be because while Jude sees stone masonry as 'copying,' the education at the university appears to consider education as memorization and replication of great works.

On the other hand, Jude's connection to Sue seems to stem from their fascination with text, as they often quote literature as a way of communicating with each other, as well as integrate the written letter within their daily lives. As part of the working class, Jude and Sue use their labor to make the letter permanent, as Jude is a "Monumental Mason" lettering headstones (Hardy 261). When Jude first sees Sue she is "designing or illuminating, in characters of Church text, the single word, 'ALLELUIA,'" and he is

immediately intrigued and made nervous by her presence (Hardy 88). Later in the novel, they literally restore history, as Jude is hired as contractor to restore lettering on a church. Jan B. Gordon supports the theory of restoration, as she states, “Both [Jude and Sue] devote their energies to the ‘restoration’ of Gothic architecture, the attempt to revive a defunct style. In one important sense both Jude and Sue are archeologists, pioneers of the ‘traces’ made by history” (Gordon 47). At one point in the novel, Sue tells Jude that she has rearranged the bible in chronological order by “cutting up all the Epistles and Gospels into separate *brochures*, and re-arranging them . . . as written” (Hardy 152). Sue argues that “people have no right to falsify the Bible! I *hate* such humbug as could attempt to plaster over with ecclesiastical abstractions such as ecstatic, natural, human love as lies in that great and passionate song” and furthermore states, “What I insist on is, that to explain such verses as this: ‘Wither is thy love beloved gone, O thou fairest among women?’<sup>4</sup> by the note: ‘*The Church Professeth her faith*’ is supremely ridiculous!” (Hardy 152). Sue detests the moments in which the bible romanticizes life and male and female relationships, as she seems to believe that it takes away from the original message of the bible. They both appear to have a passion for the written word as their way to negotiate their understanding of the world, the Victorian Era, and of the human condition.

Thierry Goater views Jude and Sue’s obsession with the written word as a fetish, in the article, “‘The Letter Killeth’: The Text as Fetish in *Jude the Obscure*.” He explains, Goater explains, “Jude idealizes Sue in a fetishistic way. The two beings attract each other through their fascination for culture and texts. Jude sees in Sue a woman of culture fascinated by texts, by signs” (Goater 132). Furthermore, Goater states, “Sue and Jude’s

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<sup>4</sup> Excerpt from Song of Solomon 6:1

thoughts and words are constantly interspersed with quotations” (Goater 132). Jude and Sue use quotations from literature as a way to communicate what they cannot say and it is that connection that makes their relationship strong, as neither of them have access to another person who values language to such an extent. As they are both well read, they understand each other when one quotes a piece of literature. In example, after Sue reveals the boy she used to know who died, she quotes Robert Browning to rebuke Jude’s statement that she is “as innocent as [she is] unconventional” (Hardy 149): “twitched the robe / From that blank lay-figure your fancy draped” from the poem, “Too Late” (Hardy 149). In another moment, Sue murmurs T. Campbell’s “Freedom and Love,” and the incomplete line, “No! Nor fetter’d love . . .” finishes as, “from dying,” which is constructed to foreshadow the end of Jude’s and Sue’s relationship, even as Sue recites with “her face brightened” (Hardy 272). While Jude’s connection with Sue is unbreakable, it does not keep them together, as after Father Time commits suicide and murders his siblings, Sue views his actions as punishment upon them for being together against the law of the church and the law of society.

At their last interaction, Jude exclaims, “Sue, Sue! We were acting by the letter; and ‘the letter killeth!’ to which we return at the closing of this essay, the ways in which the letter functions within *Jude* (Hardy 388). The letter creates distance between the sender and receiver, making it easier to convey the truth, construct a lie, or confess that which causes guilt or cannot be said aloud. Despite their attempt to live unconventionally and negotiate their place within Victorian society, Sue believes that because they have deceived the natural laws of society, and losing their children is a form of punishment. Letters that are initially a secretive and exciting form of communication between Sue and

Jude, drastically shift into an eerie and troubling object, when left with Little Father Time's note of confession. The novel ends tragically, as Jude dies alone, married to Arabella. Sue lives in mourning of her children and Jude, and in misery with Phillotson, but in compliance with Victorian society. The 'letter,' not only as law, but operating physically throughout the novel, obscures language and communication between characters. The letter holds power, as pen and ink are permanent, authoritative, and final. Words on paper linger, as they can be read over and over again, allowing the reader to re-experience the emotions that the letter offers, whether it is ecstasy or tragedy.

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