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The Biblical Parallels of Suffering in Jude the Obscure

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The Biblical Parallels of Suffering

In Jude The Obscure

(TITLE)

BY

Denny Lee Brandon

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THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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PREFACE

Biblical passages quoted in this paper are taken from the Authorized King James Version though other good translations have been recently made available since it was with this translation that Thomas Hardy was familiar and since he preferred it for artistic reasons as explained in Chapter I.

The writer wishes to thank Dr. Francis Palmer for his valuable assistance in the research and writing of this paper and Dr. Charles Switzer and Dr. Robert Wharton for their considerate reading and advice. Finally I wish to thank my family for their patience and understanding these last few months.

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INTRODUCTION

A recent trend in literary criticism is that of analyzing the imagery and parallels of a given work as it relates directly to the author's thematic and artistic intentions; another more established tradition is a study of the extent to which the author was influenced by other works of art. This paper attempts to benefit from both schools of criticism by positing that the already recognized Biblical background of Thomas Hardy afforded profitable images and parallels which he employed in the development of his last novel, Jude the Obscure. The Biblical parallels Hardy uses serve to delineate the suffering and despair of the protagonist and to emphasize the author's thematic concern over the apparent conflict between charity and the laws of man. The Bible presents two figures of suffering in the extreme: Jesus and Job. Repeated references to the despair of Job and the crucifixion of Christ in Jude the Obscure function as concrete parallels to sharpen the character of Jude Fawley and emphasize the theme of the struggle of man's nature with the legalistic demands of society.

CHAPTER I

THE BIBLICAL BACKGROUND OF THOMAS HARDY

Other writers have satisfactorily established that Thomas Hardy was familiar with the Bible and that he enjoyed the literary achievements of the King James Version. David Cecil, for example, notes, "Every Sunday in the grey old churches the community met together, as their ancestors had done for generations, to hear their joys and sorrows voiced and sanctified in the sublime meditations of Prayer-Book and Authorized Version."¹ William R. Rutland adds,

It [the Authorized Version] gripped Hardy with a grip which never relaxed. The fascination, indeed, seems to grow with the years; and long after he had lost all religious faith, he continued to read the Bible as literature. The matchless writings, which had cast the spell of their power and their consummate English upon him as a child, lost nothing of their hold until his dying day. The Wessex novels contain Biblical allusions by the hundred and end upon the whispered quotation of the dying Jude: "Let the day perish wherein I was born."²

¹David Cecil, Hardy The Novelist: An Essay in Criticism (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1943), pp. 21-22.

²William R. Rutland, Thomas Hardy: A Study of His Writings and Their Background (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1962), pp. 1-2.

Certainly the Biblically forceful characters and themes in Thomas Hardy's later novels separate his work from the bulk of an otherwise largely secular Victorian age.

Hardy's knowledge of sacred writing was not limited to the Authorized King James Version. Because of his concern over religious questions and his early ambition toward becoming a clergyman, Thomas Hardy became familiar with the Apocrypha and the New Testament in the original Greek text. "The Greek Testament edited by Griesbach which Hardy acquired in February, 1860, was not bought for caprice, but for the exact discussion of matters like Paedo-baptism."³ Similarly, in Jude the Obscure, young Fawley diligently studies the Greek text before he is forced to choose between Arabella and his ecclesiastical ambitions.⁴

Like Jude, Hardy became something of a sceptic in later years, though critics have probably given this scepticism more attention than it deserves in their analysis of his art. Hardy never lost his love for the literature of the Bible or his respect for the charitable principles of the New Testament. Those books which he especially enjoyed attest to his admiration of strong character

³Edmund Blunden, Thomas Hardy (London: MacMillan & Co., 1942), p. 10.

⁴H. C. Duffin, Thomas Hardy: A Study of the Wessex Novels (Manchester: University Press, 1921), p. 10.

development. Hardy was especially drawn to the narratives of the Old Testament and the Gospels. His favorite single books were Genesis, Job, Psalms, and Ecclesiastes.⁵

It would be wrong to say that Hardy's scepticism included the principles of Christian morality as some early readers have claimed. With other sceptics like Voltaire, Paine, and Clemens, Hardy's philosophy ignored the theological dogmas of the Church as they came in conflict with enlightened empirical conclusions while it accepted the moral values of Christ's teachings and the Pauline letters.

Although the new scientific thought led to his uncompromising dissent from the theology of the Church, he held fast to Christian values, and looked forward . . . to a new religious outlook combining "scientific knowledge" with "loving kindness" to all. Hardy found the highest human virtues expressed in the New Testament; they are summed up in Paul's conception of "charity." No other book, not even the works of Shakespeare, informed the thought and character of Hardy as much as the Bible; and no other work was so continually in his mind.⁶

Jude the Obscure decidedly stresses Hardy's concern with charity and the pharisaism of the Victorian church. The unwillingness of his age's hypocrites to heed his message caused Hardy to write "In Tenebris" shortly after Jude

⁵Rutland, p. 4.

⁶F. B. Pinion, A Hardy Companion (New York: MacMillan & Co., 1968), p. 218.

the Obscure's unfavorable public reception.⁷ Among its lines, these express the author's bitterness at the intransigence of modern English society.

Let him in whose ears the low voiced Best
is killed by the clash of the First,
Who holds that if way to the Better there be,
it exacts a full look at the worst,
Who feels that delight is a delicate growth
cramped by crookedness, custom, and fear,
Set him up and be gone as one shaped awry;
he disturbs the order here.⁸

Regardless of Hardy's early detractors his moral premises are neither agnostic nor antinomian; rather he seems genuinely disturbed by hypocritically legalistic approaches nominal Christians make toward their moral judgments in enforcing the letter of the law without the spirit. The motto on the title page, "The letter killeth," seems to be Hardy's endorsement to this understanding of his purpose.

⁷Ibid., p. 11.

⁸Gerald De Witt Sanders and John Herbert Nelson, Chief Modern Poets of England and America (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1943), p. 17.

CHAPTER II

PARALLELS BETWEEN JUDE FAWLEY AND JOB

Thomas Hardy makes us aware that certain parallels exist between the experiences of Job and Jude Fawley even though their resultant understanding of the nature of suffering differs. Although the physical and emotional trials of both Job and Jude and their subsequent search for justification of their experiences are similar, Job is able to attain a level of awareness concerning the meaning of suffering which Jude is never able to grasp. It is central to the purpose of this paper to point out that the traditionalists who attempt to explain the meaning of suffering worsen the torment of both Job and Jude.

Hardy first calls our attention to Jude as reminiscent of Job by quoting the book of Job four times. It is Aunt Drusilla Fawley who first recites from this frequently despairing Biblical book after young Fawley has lost his job scaring the rooks from Farmer Troutham's fields. She quotes Job 30:1: "Now they that are younger than I have me in derision, whose fathers I would have disdained to set with the dogs of my flock."⁹ Jude, having been advised to give up his scholarly plans by a letter from the head of one of the colleges at Christminster, writes

⁹Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure (New York: The Modern Library, 1967), p. 12.

Job 12:3 on the gate of the offending college: "I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you: yea, who knoweth not such things as these?"¹⁰ The third chapter of Job is quoted twice by Jude, the first time on hearing of the existence of a son by Arabella.

"Just think of his life in a Lambeth-pothouse, and all its evil influences, with a parent who doesn't want him, and a stepfather who doesn't know him. 'Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived!' That is what the boy--my boy, perhaps, will find himself saying before long!"¹¹

Jude's observation proves prophetic, for his son, aptly named Little Father Time, does despair of the day of his birth and commits suicide. Jude, at his own death, is to repeat these words from Job.

Of greater significance than the quotations in establishing the parallel between Job and Jude Fawley are the similarities in their experiences. The suffering of both Job and Jude involves the loss of family and material possessions. Because of Jude's union with Sue out of wedlock he is forced to sell all of his household effects and work as an itinerant stonemason for two and a half years.¹²

¹⁰Ibid., p. 123.

¹¹Ibid., p. 291.

¹²Ibid., p. 329.

Like Job, Jude loses his health, and both Sue and Young Jude feel compelled to assist Jude by selling gingerbread at the Kennetbridge trade fair. The parallel with Job is brought home most forcefully when Jude's three young children die. Thus the nature of Jude's suffering is remarkably similar to that of Job.

Another parallel between Job and Jude Fawley is that both feign great patience with those who try to comfort them though the extent of this patience could be subject to question. Job asks his commiserative guests, "'How long will ye vex my soul and break me in pieces with words? These ten times ye are not ashamed that ye make yourselves strange to me.'" ¹³ In case the reader has missed Job as a parallel character to Jude, Hardy remedies this oversight by having Jude tell Sue, "'I've waited with the patience of Job.'" ¹⁴

The parallelism between the character of Job and Jude is supported by the worthless explanations concerning the reasons for their suffering that Job and Jude receive from their comforters. Job's wife tells him that he should curse God and die. Aunt Drusilla's advice to Jude is equally useless. "'It would ha' been a blessing if Goddy-

¹³Job 19:2-3.

¹⁴Hardy, p. 280.

mighty had took thee too, wi' thy mother and father,
 poor useless boy!" and later, "'Jude, my child, don't
you ever marry.'"¹⁵ Job is urged by Bildad, Eliphaz, and
 Zophar to repent when actually he has nothing for which
 to repent. Jude is advised to give up his ambition of a
 college education by one of the college officials:

"Biblioll College.

"Sir,--I have read your letter with in-
 terest; and, judging from your description
 of 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 by adopting any other course. That,
 therefore, is what I advise you to do.
 Yours faithfully,

"T. Tetuphenay.

"To Mr. J. Fawley, Stone-mason."¹⁶

Years later Sue reminds Jude that they must not reach for
 the unattainable; they must not break the lock-step order
 of creation.

"We must conform! . . . All the ancient
 wrath of the Power above us has been
 vented upon us, His poor creatures, and
 we must submit. There is no choice. We
 must. It is no use fighting against God!"¹⁷

The advice of the orthodox pessimists who discourage
 Job's questioning of God's ways in the lives of men is
 paralleled by the observation of one of the villagers
 when Jude returns to Marygreen after failing to gain entrance

¹⁵Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 121.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 365.

into any of the colleges of Christminster. "'Just what we thought! Such places be not for such as you--only for them with plenty o' money.'"¹⁸ Thus both Job's comforters and Jude's advisors discourage attempts to presume that one man may question the wisdom of higher powers, whether of God or society.

Though the nature of Jude's suffering is similar to Job's the source of their suffering is different. The devils who tempt Jude are the two women in his life, Arabella Donn and Susanna Bridehead, who represent the value system of nineteenth-century English society. Hardy so wishes us to recognize their satanic nature that he interjects the following observation:

Strange that his [Jude's] first aspiration--toward academical proficiency--had been checked by a woman, and that his second aspiration--toward 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 springes to noose and hold back those who want to progress?"¹⁹

Though Thomas Hardy makes the reader aware of the identity of Jude's devils, Jude recognizes them too late to avoid being ensnared.

The first appearance of Arabella Donn gives us an early hint that she is capable of bringing Jude down;

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 116-117.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 299.

in reference to Arabella's house Jude says, "'I must have known it if I had often come this way. But I mostly go straight along the high-road.'" Arabella answers, "'My father is a pig-breeder.'"²⁰ Like Job, Jude usually proceeds "straight along the high-road." But on this day he is detained by Arabella. On their first planned meeting Arabella and Jude see a fire in the distance and she leads him to the destroyed house just as she is to lead him to his own destruction later. Arabella deceives Jude, tricks him into marrying her, and ends his hope for the goal at the end of his "high-road." When the marriage fails, Jude eventually lives with Sue Bridehead, but that union also seems doomed to failure. Finally Jude remarries Arabella, likening her to the Whore of Babylon.²¹

The nature of Jude's torment by Sue is different from the tempting of Job by Satan. Sue tortures Jude continually over his concepts of marriage and religion where Job's tormentor plagues him with boils and loss of family and possessions. Satan intervenes directly in Job's suffering by depriving him of his health, family, and possessions; Sue's vehicle of torture is the letters she writes to Jude which raise his hopes only to be dashed in the next missive he receives from her. Another time she gloats,

²⁰Ibid., p. 38.

²¹Ibid., p. 408.

"And I won't write him any more. . . And I hope it will hurt him very much--expecting a letter to-morrow morning, and the next, and the next, and no letter coming. He'll suffer then with suspense--won't he, that's all!--and I am very glad of it!"²²

Jude's fall from his apostolic goals is in contrast to the faithfulness of Job. Job is advised by his wife to curse God and die, but he refuses; Jude does become blasphemous when he drunkenly recites the Nicene Creed in Latin in a public house.²³

Job's refusal to follow the advice of his wife is rewarded by Jehovah, who comes to Job from out of a whirlwind to explain that suffering is a part of the human existence that has a divine purpose which transcends mortal understanding; Jude, on the other hand, receives no divine visitor. Job is lifted from his despair and cursing the day of his birth, but Jude dies with the mistaken idea that his death is meaningless. Hardy shows that Jude's poverty of understanding is absolute when in his death Jude uses the words of Job to convey his surrender to the despair Job was to overcome. H. C. Duffin, recognizing Jude's surrender, says,

Once again, listen to the immortal despairing words of Job, whispered forth from the dying lips of Jude the Obscure, the abandoned. What fresh-formed words of lamentation could have had the effect of the syllables of that ancient sorrow?²⁴

²²Ibid., p. 231.

²³Ibid., pp. 125-126.

²⁴Duffin, p. 84.

Jude, dying untended by Arabella, hears the sounds of merrymaking outside his room.

"Ah--yes! The Remembrance games," he murmured. "And I here. And Sue defiled!"

The hurrahs were repeated, drowning the faint organ notes. Jude's face changed more: he whispered slowly, his parched lips scarcely moving;

"Let the day perish wherein I was born and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived."

("Hurrah!")

"Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it. Lo, let that night be solitary, let no voice come therein."

("Hurrah!")

"Why died I not from the womb? Why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly? . . . For now should I have lain still and been quiet. I should have slept: then had I been at rest!"

("Hurrah!")

"There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor . . . the small and great are there; and the servant is free from his master. Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul?"²⁵

God has come down again as he did to Job, but this time it was to smite Jude. The effect of this quotation is to establish beyond question that Hardy's intended link between Jude Fawley and Job is not absolute, for although their suffering is similar, Job's response was a perseverance that was rewarded while Jude Fawley dies in his despair at

²⁵Hardy, p. 432.

his inability to escape the pessimism of his society. Thus Jude is not a nineteenth-century Job, for though he suffers, he is unable to rise from the wallow of his despair as Job did.

Because society was unable to accept the union of Jude and Sue, Jude is forced into itinerant work which eventually breaks his health and kills him. Sue is disgraced and forced to leave school, also at the hands of an unremitting society. Phillotson loses his position because he refused to demand that Sue remain with him. Jude sees the pressures of social convention as similar to the divine temptation suffered by Job. Jude is unable to conquer nineteenth-century English society as Job is able to conquer the trials of Satan and the cold orthodoxy of his comforters.

CHAPTER III

PARALLLS BETWEEN JUDE FAWLEY AND CHRIST

Thomas Hardy makes Jude Fawley a close parallel to Christ. The strength of the comparison between Christ and Jude is so great that Jude as a Christ figure is Hardy's most successful use of a Biblical parallel in Jude the Obscure. Jude Fawley's mistreatment at the hands of a society of traditional values is similar to Christ's treatment by the pharisees; indeed it is Jude's struggle with legalism that is one of the themes of this book.

Both Jude and Christ were laborers, Jesus as a carpenter and Jude as a stonemason. Jude, in his attempt to forget Sue Bridehead, begins to study for the ministry, thinking in passing that "he might mark out his coming years as to begin his ministry at the age of thirty--an age which much attracted him as being that of his exemplar when He first began to teach in Galilee."²⁶ Jude, like Jesus, augmented his study with fasting in an attempt to overcome temptation.

More important than these rather superficial similarities, Sue provides insight into Hardy's view of Jude as a Christ figure. Hardy tells us that one of Sue's

²⁶Ibid., p. 135.

favorite poems was Swinburne's "Hymn to Proserpine" in which is found

"Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean;
The world has grown grey from thy breath!"²⁷

Later in a moment of passion she tells Jude, "'I ought to have known that you would conquer in the long run!'"²⁸ Thus for Sue, Jude seems like Christ in his ability to conquer even though, in Jude's opinion, he has conquered nothing.

Hardy identifies Jude as a parallel with Christ in that both loved their "holy city." It did not seem to matter to them that Jerusalem had rejected Jesus and that Christminster had spurned the ambitious Jude. Sue, like others in the book, is unable to understand Jude's tenacious love for the city of his dreams.

"Why should you care so much for Christminster?" she asked pensively. "Christminster cares nothing for you, poor dear!"
"Well I do, I can't help it. I love the place--although I know how it hates all men like me."²⁹

Similarly Christ apostrophized,

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathers her chickens under her wing, and ye would not!"³⁰

²⁷Ibid., p. 98.

²⁸Ibid., p. 282.

²⁹Ibid., p. 341.

³⁰Matt. 23:37.

Even the events of the last days of Christ in Jerusalem have their parallels in Jude's return to Christminster; Christ, for example, enters Jerusalem on the Passover while Jude enters his Jerusalem on Remembrance Day, the canonical name for Passover.³¹ The parallel with Christ's entry is underscored when Jude says of Phillotson, whom Sue has seen in the crowd, "He is evidently come up to Jerusalem to see the festival like the rest of us."³² Sue later adds that their leaving Kennetbridge for Christminster is like Jesus' trek "from Caiaphas to Pilate."³³

The crucifixion imagery is perhaps the strongest of all figures in Jude the Obscure. Both Jude and Jesus were prepared to die. Christ knew He was to be crucified and Jude willingly risked his life to see Sue for the last time. He had earlier told her, "'Crucify me, if you will! You know you are all the world to me whatever you do!'"³⁴ Like Christ on the cross, Jude in his dying asks for water and receives none.³⁵ At Christ's death the temple veil was torn from top to bottom. Jude's use of this image suggests the crucifixion figure when he tells the departing Sue,

³¹Pinion, pp. 54-55.

³²Hardy, p. 350.

³³Ibid., p. 351.

³⁴Ibid., p. 256.

³⁵Ibid., p. 432.

"Then let the veil of our temple be rent in two from this hour!"³⁶ The scene at Calvary is hinted at even before Jude's dying; a picture of the crucifixion hangs ominously in Sue's room in Christminster. It is equally portentous that Jude is moved by an Easter hymn entitled "The Foot of the Cross."³⁷

The purpose of this parallelism is to establish the extent and cause of Jude's suffering as similar to that of Christ. Both Jude and Jesus suffered at the hands of the pharisees of their day; neither was able to break the bonds of legalism. Christ's claim to divinity was a direct challenge to the pharisees, who used his working of miracles on the Sabbath as an excuse to destroy him. Thomas Hardy does not wait for the book to begin to announce this theme; in the authorized second edition the title page bears the motto "The letter killeth."³⁸ The tyranny of the Victorian mind of the English Church made an ecclesiastical career unacceptable to Jude because his love for Sue, which seemed morally right, had been declared legally wrong by the Christian society.

. . . he saw one thing: that though his kiss of that aerial being had seemed the purest moment

³⁶Ibid., p. 378.

³⁷Ibid., Pp. 204-206.

³⁸II Cor. 3:6. "Who also hath made us ministers of the new testament: not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."

of his faultful life, as long as he nourished this unlicensed tenderness it was glaringly inconsistent for him to pursue the idea of becoming the soldier and servant of a religion in which sexual love was regarded as at its best a frailty, and at its worst damnation.³⁹

This decision to leave the church was based on his deep antipathy for hypocrisy. "In his passion for Sue he could now stand as an ordinary sinner, and not as a whited sepulcher."⁴⁰ Much of the rottenness of pharisaism that made it objectionable to Christ and Jude is that even the strictest legalists are unable to keep the laws by which they judge others; Phillotson, for example, obtains his divorce by reason of Sue's alleged adultery, a sin of which she was innocent. Sue becomes persuaded of the questionable legality of the separation, leaves Jude by whom she has had two children, and returns to Phillotson, her husband whom she never loved.

It must be mentioned that there are significant differences between the last days of Christ and Jude's return to Jerusalem. For one thing, Jude's misery lasts longer than Christ's; Jude dies a year after he comes back to Christminster. Christ's return is greeted by people lining the street to lay palm branches in his path. Jude is not the center of attention on his return; rather he

³⁹Hardy, pp. 228-229.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 235.

stands on the sidelines as straw is laid under the wheels of the parade of colleges.⁴¹ Christ's death is to be the salvation of mankind for eternity; Jude realizes his death will accomplish little more than ending his suffering. Thus he notes, "'I may do some good before I am dead--be a sort of success as a frightful example of what not to do; and so illustrate a moral story.'"⁴²

The parallel between Christ and Jude Fawley is the most successful in the entire book, for it establishes the source of Jude's suffering as comparable with that of the Son of Man. At the same time the nature of Jude's death was more unbearable for him because he knew his death would go unnoticed. Hardy's sympathy for Christ and Jude is largely due to their undeserved abuse at the hands of the keepers of tradition.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 349.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 347-348.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY

The Biblical allusions and parallels in Jude the Obscure serve to emphasize the suffering of Jude by comparing his agony with that of Job and Jesus. Thomas Hardy sees Christ's suffering as directly attributable to the legalism of the pharisees; He is proclaimed the Son of God and He teaches a doctrine of love that directly challenges the strict orthodoxy of the religious lawyers. Jude's desire to excel academically and escape his social position makes him a threat to the established order; Jude's threatening rise must be stopped before he supplants those who have enviable positions by accidents of birth. Thus the source of Jude's suffering, like Christ's, is his attempt to break the lock step of an unresponsive society.

Jude's suffering, like Job's, is aggravated by the orthodox interpretations of the source of his misery. Job's comforters have told him that he suffered because he had sinned against God. The fallacious nature of this logic is easily perceived when its premises and conclusion are reduced to a syllogism:

Suffering is God's punishment for sin.
 Job suffers.
 Therefore, Job must have sinned.

The fallacy in this argument results from a major premise

that is untrue; God appears to Job to explain that his suffering is not necessarily the result of sin, but that suffering is a part of the human condition. Jude is beset by advisors, who tell him essentially the same thing--that he suffers because he has violated the laws of God by living in adultery, and this is the source of his suffering. God does not come down to Jude to explain the nature and meaning of suffering as He did to Job.

Neither Job, Jude, nor Christ is able to surmount orthodoxy alone. Job's visitors are not quieted until God answers Job's plea for an explanation by condemning the foolishness of Bildad, Eliphaz, and Zophar.

And it was so, that after the Lord had spoken these words unto Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right as my servant Job hath. Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering: and my servant Job shall pray for you; for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job."⁴³

One tends to believe that, similarly, it is not Jude, but the legalists of the novel who need prayers in their behalf. Jesus conquered the pharisees by dying at their hands, thus replacing the legal traditions of the Jewish

⁴³Job 42:7-8.

law with His doctrine of love and mercy. When Jude dies, however, it is the pharisees who have conquered.

Jude Fawley hears no voice from the whirlwind to vindicate him as Job does. Jude continues to suffer until he dies, but unlike Christ, Jude's death breaks down no traditional barriers; instead his death stands as testimony that misery and death is legalism's unchanging response to the charitable.

Jude the Obscure is Hardy's indictment against traditionalism in society and the church as the motto appearing on the title page that "The letter killeth" indicates. Orthodoxy's application of the letter of the law crushes the rebellious thinking of Jude and Sue. Sue was to become the strictest legalist in the book. She quotes from the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians that "Charity seeketh not her own." Jude answers, "In that chapter we are at one. . . and on it we'll part friends." Sue, unable to think long on the conflict between her actions and Christian love, can only reply, "Well--don't discuss it."⁴⁴ Mrs. Edlin, the widow who befriends Jude and Sue throughout the book, is horrified at the strictness of Sue's legalism; she advises Sue, "Lord, you be too strict! . . . Upon my life I don't call that religion!"⁴⁵

⁴⁴Hardy, p. 387.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 390.

Sue is an important figure in the book because she represents the futility of opposition to legalism as clearly as Jude. Her last name, Bridehead, could well indicate her role as symbolic of the spirit of the Church, which, like Hosea's wife, Gomer, has lapsed into harlotry.⁴⁶ Indeed, Jude labels Sue's strict interpretation of marriage, which causes her to return to Phillotson, as "fanatic prostitution."⁴⁷ Sue's return to legalism after the liberty of love is symbolic of the apostasy of the church which Paul calls spiritual adultery in II Corinthians 11:1-3.⁴⁸

Other characters reflect Hardy's concern for this apostatic legalism, but it is Jude who must pay the penalty. Phillotson, for example, is professionally ruined by the sanctimonious Shaston. Hardy notes, "No man had ever suffered more inconvenience from his own charity, Christian or heathen, than Phillotson had done in letting Sue go."⁴⁹ Jude, however, suffers most from

⁴⁶Hosea 1-3.

⁴⁷Hardy, p. 385.

⁴⁸II Cor. 11:1-3: Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me. For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

⁴⁹Hardy, p. 382.

legalism, for he must die for his sin of desiring more than nineteenth-century English society is willing to grant him. After a lifetime of failure Jude, himself, is convinced on his return to Christminster on Remembrance Day. "A lesson on presumption is awaiting me to-day!-- Humiliation Day for me."⁵⁰

The true cause of Jude's failure, however, is the inability of the legalistic age in which he lived to apply the principles of charity or accept them in others. Again the lines of Hardy's "In Tenebris" bitterly convey Hardy's attitude toward pharisaism:

Let him in whose ears the low voiced Best
is killed by the clash of the First,
Who holds that if way to the Better there
be, it exacts a full look at the worst,
Who feels that delight is a delicate growth
cramped by crookedness, custom, and fear,
Get him up and be gone as one shaped awry;
he disturbs the order here.⁵¹

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 344.

⁵¹Sanders, p. 17.

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