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Marriage, Motherhood, and Self-Blame: Analyzing the Tragic Heroine's Spiritual Suicide in *Jude the Obscure*

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Abstract

The societal phenomenon of self-blame disproportionately impacts women who encounter tragedies as wives and mothers. This is demonstrated in Jude the Obscure (1896) by Thomas Hardy, one of the most controversial pieces in Victorian literature. With the use of textual analysis and the application of feminist theory concentrating on Clarissa Pinkola Estes' idea of the female psychic slumber in her book Women Who Run With the Wolves (1995), this paper inspects Hardy's character of the enigmatic Sue Bridehead, aiming to unearth the underlying causes of her spiritual suicide after the three children's death. Estes' notion of spiritual demise indicates a woman's submission to conventionality after encountering tragedy, especially during marriage and motherhood. As a nonconformist within a traditional societal framework, Sue's transformation from Part III to VI of the book stands out as she shifts from being a free spirit to a conventional wife after encountering tribulations. Her spiritual suicide stems from three interrelated factors: Regret for her children's short life; culpability; and her idea that it is God's way of punishing her for her nonconformist beliefs. This convergence weaves together a memorable picture of a woman's spiritual self-destruction amidst traumatic events and the expectations of a conventional society that women should submit to their husbands and renounce whatever unorthodox beliefs they have.

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Introduction

Women often carry the blame for a tragedy or trauma they encounter in their lives (Brown, 2013). When they target themselves for the traumas they endured, it leads to a web of difficult challenges. The burden of responsibility to take the drastic action of self-blame impacts their mental well-being and the way they make decisions. In Sheikh & McNamara's (2014) study, they explored why individuals tend to blame themselves for various things. Their pivotal discovery within their research unveiled a trend among the respondents: people tend to internalize accountability, attributing failure to

themselves. This tendency amid the spectrum of attributions clarifies an interesting facet of human behavior.

One of the most tragic incidents that could occur in a woman's life is the untimely death of her children. When a mother encounters this event, a psychological paradigm shift usually happens. This is well demonstrated in one of the most critical literary pieces ever written in the Victorian era. Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* was condemned by readers and critics plenty of times during its publication in 1896 because of its underlying attack on a conventional society, its representation of marriage, and its characterization of the elusive Sue Bridehead (Sisson, 1978). She is the concept of a modern woman, the most unpredictable heroine Hardy has ever written, and a most complicated psychological invention (Shukla, 2017).

When Sue's children perish in the last part of the novel, she eventually commits "spiritual suicide" (an act where a person renounces their independent, nonconformist beliefs and puts off the "inner fire" of their individuality to conform to the norms of society). Suicide, in any form, is a devastating idea. Studies have shown that during a serious phase of grief, a parent bereaved by a child's suicide experiences severe emotional and mental distress (Dyregrov & Dyregrov, 2015). According to the Dyregrovs' study, women also encounter more psychosocial distress than men. Sue's situation also echoes the current state of women's psychological health in the Philippines.

According to a population-based study about the mental health of women in the country, married females have more suicidal thoughts and attempts than unmarried females (Antai et al., 2014). Most of the time, it is because of the pressures of society on women when it comes to motherhood and marriage. As a worker and mother, a woman is expected to give her full attention physically, emotionally, and mentally to her job, husband, and children. This can cause women to be hard on themselves, overlook their strengths, and become their worst inner critic (Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014).

There are also many recent relevant suicide cases. On October 24, 2022, a mother in her late 20s jumped from the 38th floor of the Crown Regency Hotel in Cebu City. A pregnant woman also jumped off the Marcelo Fernan Bridge in Mandaue City last October 20, 2021, because she had problems with her rent and wanted to go home to Bohol but couldn't because of financial difficulties. Both women had suicide notes in their pockets when their bodies were found. The character of Sue presents a suicide note differently. She shows it by abandoning her ideal beliefs, forgetting all of her dreams, and submitting herself to a man she does not love (Sivandipour & Talif, 2018).

Either way, the events are upsetting and they present the long-term issue of mental health and the failure of society to provide the proper and much-needed assistance to individuals who are dealing with mental health problems. When provided with proper help like clinical interventions, empowerment programs, and story circles, women can increase self-efficiency (East & Roll, 2015). Although these forms of assistance were rare during the Victorian era, our capability as a modern society can certainly address these issues, especially when it comes to mothers. Written 100 years ago, Hardy's Jude the Obscure remains a cry for help from unheard repressed women and depressed mothers until now. Even though Sue's condition is recognized as a symbolic death, it does not stray far from the notion of suicide in mothers and married women as seen in the events of today. Charlwood (2019) discussed in their journal article that Hardy might have written literary pieces that highlight death (metaphorical or physical) to help the future generation realize it.

Sue distinctly represents the persona of a nonconformist and elusive woman in a conventional society in the 19th century. Her choices differ from the words that she says throughout the beginning of the novel. She executes a complex female personality and makes conventional choices as a mother and wife after the death of the three children.

Shukla (2017), in their study, implies that the character of Sue Bridehead is often compared by researchers to a chameleon, which means she changes her personality from

time to time in the book, confusing everyone around her. They state that Sue's character tries the hardest to live in the present among all of Hardy's heroines. In the paper, Sue is also regarded as Hardy's most powerful feminist character who does not tolerate the traditional way of life and wishes to break free from the sociocultural norms of the 19th century where women were expected to focus on home and family instead of having high ambitions for themselves.

According to Sivandipour & Talif (2018), Sue's life and individuality are still affected both directly and indirectly by a male-controlled and conventional culture. She wishes to live a life she likes, but reality restricts her from this vision. The pressure to conform to societal expectations leads Sue into a life of inner conflict and complexity, as she wrestles with her desires and the roles imposed on her. Such a dichotomy between individual yearning and societal demand encapsulates the plight of many women of the time, who are compelled to navigate the rigid standards of a male-dominated culture. Despite the progressive mindset that she embodies, the reality that Sue confronts illustrates the deep-seated resistance to change within the culture and the formidable obstacles that women must overcome to realize genuine independence.

Based on the study by Fang & Jiang (2015), religion also plays a significant role in Sue's character in the novel. As a modern-minded woman in the religious Victorian era, Sue feels inferior and trapped. From the beginning, there is clear evidence of her anti-Christian and self-contradicting attitude. She misses church services and questions religion but also works as an engraver and artist-designer of religious items. She excitedly purchases naked Roman statues that mirror Catholic saints but also presents her guilt and embarrassment of them by covering their exteriors with papers and hiding them inside a chest in her room. According to the researchers, this duality of Sue's personality makes her prone to self-degradation.

From a psychological standpoint, a paper by Ren & Zhao (2013) also demonstrates the narcissistic psyche of Sue. For Hardy, Sue's inner world is interesting yet puzzling and complex. She tells Jude she does not love him but marries a man she does not like to hurt him once she learns of his previous marriage. Then, she leaves her husband to be with Jude and punishes herself later on by living as a conformist individual because of her children's deaths. The cause of Sue's narcissistic personality and negative perspective about relationships and marriages stems from her unhappy childhood and her parent's divorce.

Bhatt (2018) also has a paper on Sue's perspectives on romantic connections. She views the idea of matrimony as a destructive one or a self-sabotaging contract. To her, marriage forces women to respond, act, and think in a recommended manner. According to Bhatt, Sue feels anxious about her identity as a liberated thinker when she becomes the lawfully wedded wife of a conformist and uninteresting man. As a whole, recent researchers have found that religion and the standards of a patriarchal society influenced Sue's id, ego, and superego remarkably.

Chowdhury (2018) even says that Sue Bridehead's character embodies the connection between self-education and the psychological impact it had according to societal views at the time. Sue's intelligence and self-taught education, which she furthers through her association with a student in London and winning a scholarship, stand in contrast to Jude's unsuccessful educational endeavors. The novel explores the consequences of intellectual pursuit on women during the era, suggesting the belief that excessive mental exertion led to a heightening of the senses and could potentially result in an 'aberrant psychology' or 'perverseness.' This reflects the then-contemporary fears that intellectual ambitions, particularly for women, could be both a mark of exceptionality and a source of psychological strain.

While there has been plenty of exploration of the disposition of Sue in the conventional norms of the late 19th century, researchers overlooked the impact of motherhood and marriage on her tragic character transformation in the novel. Thus, the primary objective of this paper is to

observe the way Sue's psyche changes throughout the novel and unveil the reason through this observation why she opted for spiritual self-destruction after the premature demise of the three children. This will help us address the research gap and understand how nonconformist females, mothers, and married women act and make choices in a conventional and religious society.

Methodology

This paper uses Qualitative with textual analysis as a research method, and the Penguin Classics 1985 reprinted edition of *Jude the Obscure* by Thomas Hardy with an introduction and notes by C.H. Sisson is utilized as a research instrument. A qualitative method with textual analysis involves examining written texts in a thorough way to understand the themes, messages, and underlying meanings they hold between the lines (Kuckartz, 2019). The text is read and analyzed in a detailed way using the feminist theory of literature, specifically Clarissa Pinkola Estes' concept of the female psychic slumber in her book *Women Who Run With the Wolves (1995).*

In the state of a woman putting out her "inner fire", she walks, talks, eats, works, loves, and sleeps normally – but her dreams, thoughts, and choices imply the truth of her condition. She becomes a subconsciously caged bird when faced with the intricate challenges of life that often lead to emotional wounds. Women can continue to submit to the norms and live a predictable life but the truth is, they are asleep throughout (Estes, 1995). This study focuses on Part III-VI of *Jude the Obscure* where Sue's personality shift is evident. Using Estes' concept of the female psyche, this paper scrutinizes the intricacies of character metamorphosis observed in Sue Bridehead, thereby accomplishing the research objective.

Results and Discussion

Estes (1995) discussed in *Women Who Run With the Wolves* that women are "wildish" in nature. However, "wild" here is not utilized in the modern "pejorative" sense - but in its "original" sense, which implies that this "wild" aspect is an integral part of women's psyche and is essential for their psychological and spiritual well-being. In this context, "wild" refers to a woman's innate connection with her deep, instinctive nature that is often marginalized or repressed in patriarchal societies. Women's empowerment through this is not just by tangible, objective shifts in society, but more subjective. The theory of 'belief-mediated social change' suggests that women will be empowered by new opportunities, such as those offered by knowledge societies - only if they cultivate a belief in their own empowerment and similar emancipative values (Alexander & Welzel, 2011). These propose that acknowledging and embracing this free-spirited nature can lead to a fuller, more authentic life.

The Free Spirit

Starting on page 182, Sue becomes engaged and married to Richard Phillotson, the schoolmaster from Melchester, who taught Jude (Sue's cousin and lover) when he was a young boy in Marygreen. Sue's rebellious and fickle nature as an engaged and married woman is vividly demonstrated in the chapters of Part III-V. The data is separated into two subcategories, The Fickle and Ardent Young Woman and The Skeptic Christian.

The Fickle and Ardent Young Woman

Through a letter, Sue told Jude that she felt unhappy and alone at the Training School that Phillotson wanted her to go to for her teaching certificate. She was averse to Phillotson's idea and wished she never listened to him (Hardy). When Jude opens a conversation about her relationship with the schoolmaster, she puts an implication of not have anything to do with him beyond professional work because he is too old for her. Eventually, she reveals her engagement with Phillotson to Jude and justifies her decision:

> *I have promised – I will marry him when I come out of the Training-School two years hence and have got my Certificate; he plans that we shall then take a large double school in a great town – he the boys' and I the girls' – as married school-teachers often*

do, and make a good income between us. (Hardy, 1895, p. 186).

In this part, Sue perceives her engagement and marriage to Phillotson as a necessary business agreement between two people or an understanding to help them both economically and financially. This is not, however, an underlying definition of matrimony. Simone de Beauvoir stated in her book, *The Second Sex*, that love is not the central foundation of marriage (Beauvoir, 2011). Beauvoir (2011) also included Honore de Balzac's words in her book that "marriage is considered politically, morally, or civilly as an institution, a law, and a contract." Even though Sue is engaged to Phillotson, she spends a huge amount of time with Jude. In traditional societies, it was deemed improper for a woman to devote a lot of time to an unmarried man while being engaged to another. She eventually gets in trouble for it at the training school, becomes distressed, escapes through a small window of the room she was confined in, crosses a cold stream to run away from the grounds of the school, and visits Jude without any second thoughts:

> *They locked me up for being out with you, and it seemed so unjust that I couldn't bear it, so I got out of the window and escaped across the stream!' She had begun the explanation in her usual slightly independent tones, but before she had finished the thin pink lips trembled, and she could hardly refrain from crying* (p. 197).

In chapter five of Part III, she regrets her actions the next morning and expresses fear of Phillotson to Jude:

> *I fear I ought not to have run away from that school! Things seem so different in the cold light of morning, don't they? What Mr. Phillotson will say I don't know! It was quite by his wish that I went there. He is the only man in the world for whom I have any respect or fear. I hope he'll forgive me; but he'll scold me dreadfully, I expect!* (p. 209).

This makes Sue a very complicated creature, which makes readers see her as predictable and unpredictable at the same time. The uncertainty of her personality is demonstrated here strongly (Ren & Zhao, 2013). As a matter of fact, Alhaj's paper stated that Sue pushed herself into a state of neurosis as a liberated individual, a "coquette" who sexually torments her man (Alhaj, 2019). In chapter nine, Jude tells Sue that she ought to be a content and joyful wife and she tells him that she is without a doubt. After Aunt Drusilla asks her why she married Phillotson, she tells Jude that she does not mind the frankness of the old woman, but concludes the conversation by saying "I ought – perhaps not to have married!". Her regret represents her ignorance of what marriage means.

Research on Victorian marriage unhappiness often suggests that women had limited options, either to submit or navigate within accepted social conventions. These examinations have tracked a rise in the emphasis on male dominance and a legislative shift focusing on female empowerment, particularly as feminism emerged and authors started voicing discontent over the insufficient legal rights for women (Tromp, 2013). In chapter ten, Sue gives Jude a note implying that she despises herself because of her actions:

> *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* (p. 254).

In the fourth part of the book, Sue does not see herself intimately connected to Phillotson and asks him if she could live away from him. She also implies that her identity does not depend on the fact that she is married to the schoolmaster. "Forced" marriages, in the case of Sue, are often subjected to pressure from society. The idea that women should marry well while they are young is a great example of imposing patriarchal authority (Grillo, 2011). But Sue strips her individuality away from the conventionality of marriage and says that she is a woman of strong passions and oppositions:

> *I have been thinking', she continued, still in the tone of one brimful of feeling, 'that the social moulds civilization fits us into have no more relation to our actual shapes than the conventional shapes of the*

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> *constellations have to the real star-patterns. I am called Mrs. Richard Phillotson, living a calm wedded life with my counterpart of that name. But I am not Mrs. Richard Phillotson, but a woman tossed about, all alone, with aberrant passions, and unaccountable antipathies…* (p.266).

Conformist societies, like Sue's environment in the book, expect women to maintain the façade of a conventional, religious, and submissive wife (Bhaumik, 2015). In a traditional culture, they must secure a good marriage, learn to run a household properly, bear offspring, raise children, and give up high ambitions. To be seen and to live as a traditional woman frightens her. She wishes to have a free life away from her husband and disregards the possible consequence of her separation from him and her elopement with her cousin completely. Phillotson tells her that she will lose all respectability and reputation if she goes over with her decision, but she tells him immediately that "she does not want to be respectable." In the fifth chapter of Part IV, Phillotson agrees to their separation eventually and Sue starts to live with Jude. She sees Phillotson's generosity to her as gentleman-like, but the act does not make her wish to return to him or feel for him emotionally:

> *According to the rule of women's whims I suppose I ought to suddenly love him because he has let me go so generously and unexpectedly,' she answered smiling. 'But I am so cold, or devoid of gratitude, or so something, that even this generosity hasn't made me love him, or repent, or want to stay with him as his wife* (p. 301-302).

In the novel's fifth part, Sue demonstrates her willingness to live a nontraditional life without the social, economic, and financial advantages of marriage:

> *I am not so exceptional a woman as you think. Fewer women like marriage than you suppose, only they enter into it for the dignity it is assumed to confer, and the social advantages it gains them sometimes – a dignity and an advantage that I am quite willing to do without* (p. 324).

It is now clear that Sue despises the entirety of matrimony. After leaving Phillotson, eloping with Jude, and living with him, they plan to marry but the action is always postponed. Sue explains that a relationship knotted by law does not have anything to do with one's happiness:

> *Jude, do you think that when you must have me with you by law, we shall be as happy as we are now? She continues: Don't you dread the attitude that insensibly arises out of legal obligation? Don't you think it is destructive to a passion whose essence is its gratuitousness?* (p. 338).

Sue is suddenly informed that Jude has a child with Arabella in the third chapter. Even though the child is not hers, she tells Jude that she wishes to show gentle affection to the child and treat it as her own. When the child cries because he was not wanted where he came from, Sue feels deeply for him:

> *Sue thereupon could not refrain from instantly doing likewise, being a harp which the least wind of emotion from another's heaty could make to vibrate as readily as a radical stir in her own* (p. 345).

It is not until chapter six that Sue's psyche begins to shift and show signs of frustration and sadness in their condition. She becomes greatly affected by her new exterior: the pitiful woman. Sue bears two children with Jude and is upset by how people see their situation:

> *I can't bear that they, and everybody, should think people wicked because they may have chosen to live their way! It is these opinions that make the best-intentioned people reckless, and become immoral* (p. 372).

By chapters seven to eight, Sue tells Arabella Donn (Jude's first wife) that she and Jude have given up all ambitions and are happy as they are with their triumphant cake-selling business but keeps to herself her true feelings:

> *Sue, though remarkably successful in her cake-selling experiment at Kennetbridge fair, had lost the temporary brightness which had begun to stir upon her sadness on account of that success* (p. 390).

Sue stops her academic pursuits and focuses on her family's survival. Estes (1995) mentioned that there is a theft of women's fiery spirit and that it often happens in women's lives whenever hardship occurs. In Sue's case, family life and society steal her from her brightness as a passionate woman with nontraditional ambitions. According to Estes, this certain spirit can also disappear because of a deep or 'forbidden love'. When a woman stops depositing energy and gaining more ideas, knowledge, and excitement, her passions dry up and she psychically dies. However, Sue's state does not stop her from continuing to live the life she chose.

The Skeptic Christian

Since the part where Sue is principally introduced by Hardy, her disbelief about what religion or the church implies about women and marriage is obvious. When Jude asks to meet her at the cathedral, she tells him that the cathedral is no longer the epicenter of town life and she would rather go to the railway station (Hardy). Also, in the sixth chapter of Part III, she says: "I at least don't regard marriage as a Sacrament". Beauvoir (2011) mentioned that society conventionally offers matrimony to women as their destiny. Sue does not take the notion of marriage seriously, sees it as a way for material expediency, and takes it away from the list of a Christian's duties. However, she first asks Jude a rhetorical question before explaining her point through another form of unanswerable query:

> *Is it wrong, Jude?' She said with a tentative tremor, 'for a husband or wife to tell a third person that they are unhappy in their marriage? If a marriage ceremony is a religious thing, it is possibly wrong; but if it is only a sordid contract based on material convenience in householding, rating, and taxing, and the inheritance of land and money by children, making it necessary that the male parent should be known – which it seems to be – why surely a person may say, even proclaim upon the housetops, that it hurts and grieves him or her*? (p. 270).

In the fourth chapter of Part V where Sue and Jude attempt to get married, she observes the contracts provided for them carefully. Sue also does not find them pleasing and believes they are despicable:

> *It spoils the sentiment, doesn't it! She said on their way home. It seems making a more sordid business of it even than signing the contract in a vestry. There is a little poetry in a church* (p. 348).

These data both contain the word "sordid." Sue uses this word to define the process of marriage. Here, it is understood that even if Sue is strong willed and opinionated, she is emotional and prefers everything to be akin to poetry. Her sentimentality causes her to withdraw herself from the idea of traditional matrimony secured by the church and to adhere to a nonconventional way of living. It does not matter to her whether she and Jude marry or not, as long as they are content and happy. Therefore, church contracts and other people's opinions on their situation do not affect or alter her decision to leave Phillotson, live with Jude, and despise conformity.

The Conventional Wife

Yu (2019) explored the idea of cosmopolitanism in Victorian literature. He says that cosmopolitanism focuses on the ideas surrounding multiple affiliations and the disruption of strict geographical boundaries, highlighting the complexities of transnational and dual identities. It emphasizes the importance of understanding identity as something that can encompass many different types of attachments and associations across different places and cultures. As Victorian women engaged in actions and movements that had a global influence, the traditional 'woman's place' ideology became a subject of negotiation through a cosmopolitan perspective. The cosmopolitan approach to identity emphasizes a principle of embracing divergent attributes, both within ourselves and when engaging with others. It advocates for the recognition and integration of the

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uniqueness of "the other" into one's own sense of self. This means understanding and valuing differences as an essential part of our own identities without erasing or dominating them. In Sue's case, there is a tug of war between her two identitites. From the free spirit to the conventional wife, her struggle in this part of the novel is evident.

The Troubled Mother

Two years after living with Jude, Sue bears two children and becomes pregnant once more. At the beginning of Part VI, her frustrations as a mother are presented distinctly while attending to Jude and Arabella's boy, her two children with Jude, and her condition. This is also the part where the death of the three children occurs. Sue and Jude decide to go back to Christminster to show the people there that they are not ashamed of their state, not minding the fact that they both caused a scandal and Phillotson also resides in the city.

Unfortunately, Sue is challenged by the difficulty of finding lodgings and jobs. The people of Christminster know about the humiliation that had happened years ago and most of the landlords do not accept lodgers with too many children, particularly youngsters and infants. As a socio-religious experimental novel, Hardy presents the couple, Jude and Sue, as characters reflecting the Victorian Christian morality at that time. Their helplessness attests to the hypocrisy of the era (Saleh & Abbasi, 2016) When they both find a room run by an aged landlady and her husband, she begins to feel safe and tells the landlady about their true condition. After admitting a couple of facts, the old woman asks her if she is truly married. Sue tells her the truth:

> *Sue hesitated; and then impulsively told the woman that her husband and herself had each been unhappy in their first marriages, after which, terrified at the thought of a second irrevocable union, and lest the conditions of the contract should kill their love, yet wishing to be together, they had not found the courage to repeat it, though they had attempted it two or three times. Therefore, though in her sense of the words she was a married woman, in the landlady's sense she was not* (p. 403).

The landlady and her husband fail to sympathize with them and decide that Sue and Jude should go at first light. Sue, not wishing for any trouble with them both, acquiesces. In particular, being a mother is highly respected by society if the woman is legally married to a man, but an unwed mother stays an object of degradation and scandal (Beauvoir, 2011). This also does not affect Sue gravely. In the novel's movie adaptation called Jude, directed by Michael Winterbottom and released in 1996, Jude tells her that she should have lied to the landlady, to which she replies loudly: "It's nothing to be ashamed of. I won't hide it from anyone".

In chapter two, Sue converses with Jude and Arabella's boy about their circumstance. The boy talks about their problem with finding lodgings and asks her if he can do anything to help ease their situation. Sue, frustrated as she was, instantly tells him that there is nothing he can do and that "all is trouble, adversity, and suffering" (Hardy). She does not console the boy but instead tells him the harsh truth of their state. When the boy asks her if it is better to be out of the world, she replies that it would be. She loves the child as if it were her own, but her exasperation causes her to respond thoughtlessly without evaluating her emotions. Nolen-Hoeksema found out in her study about emotions and the role of gender that more ruminations in women account for greater anxiety and depression compared to men (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2011). This reveal of her tactless side may also have a strong connection to her unhappy childhood where her parents squabbled often and she was taught to despise her mother by her father (Ren & Zhao, 2013).

Paivo & Pascual-Leone mentioned in their book *Emotion-Focused Therapy for Complex Trauma: An Integrative Approach (2023)* that experiences like neglect and the loss of loved ones during childhood can have a deleterious effect on a person's decision-making skills (Paivo & Pascual-Leone, 2023). Because both Sue's parents abandoned her psychologically and physically when she was a child, she subconsciously becomes insensitive to others.

A woman who is an 'unmothered mother', according to Estes (1995), tends to suffer from the absence of seasoning, naïve presentiments, and the skill to logically picture out the events that will occur a day, a week, a month, or a year after any decision she makes. Fortunately, she and Jude found a new job as religious relics artists to help them survive but her newfound happiness is instantly destroyed by what Jude and Arabella's boy did. Upon returning from the workplace to tell her children the wonderful news, she and Jude found the boy hanging from the ceiling with the other two children on the bed, both lifeless and "with box cords round each of their necks" (p. 409). The words, "Done because we are too menny", were scribbled on a piece of paper and were found on the floor:

> *At the sight of this Sue's nerves utterly gave way, an awful conviction that her discourse with the boy had been the main cause of the tragedy, throwing her into a convulsive agony which knew no abatement* (p. 410).

This is only one of the scenes that mirrors the consensus views that Hardy's novel is not a tragedy in the classic sense but rather a lament, interpreting the novel as an expression of grief or sorrow. This sadness is perceived not so much as a denouncement of God but as a portrayal of existence in a world seemingly devoid of a divine presence - an existential despair over a life without the comfort or design of a higher power (Holman, 2017). This event and agony lead Sue to rethink all of her choices. In Jen Baker's paper, she implied that Jude and Sue were not provided the experience of the beautiful death of a child (as what other authors present in their work). Instead, they are shown with something disturbing, perverse, and grotesque (Baker, 2017). Sue breaks down and tells Jude that her children did no harm and it should have been her who was taken away. The death of the children strikes her unexpectedly at first, but she realizes she had led the boy to do this and says:

> *I talked to the child as one should only talk to people of mature age. I said the world was against us, that it was better to be out of life than in it at this price; and he took it literally* (p. 412).

She then explains to Jude that she should have been wiser like other women and should have lied to the boy and told him "pleasant untruths". It is in this part that she succumbs to self-degradation, calling herself "a pitiable creature who is not good for heaven nor hell". The child in her womb also died after being born prematurely after the incident. She tells Jude that their children were sin-begotten and it was right that they were taken away from her. According to Kumar (2022),, uncontrolled pregnancy usually leads to trouble among women in the Victorian era. In the case of Sue and Jude, trouble would have been avoided if they had complete control over sexuality, proper means to avoid pregnancy, and medical help if it was prevalent at that time. Sue concludes that the tragedy was meant to happen to her:

> *They were sacrificed to teach me how to live! – their death was the first stage of my purification. That's why they have not died in vain!* (p. 440).

The tragedy impacts Sue's psyche tremendously. Song et al said that violent demises of children (i.e., suicide, accident, homicide) have a more damaging effect on parents than on children who die at birth or of sickness (Song et al., 2010). This can be originated from the fact that parents did not have the opportunity to say goodbye. According to Song et al, parents who have the chance to do so have a better chance to adapt to life after grief. In Sue's case, she blames herself for the entire misfortune and refuses to listen to Jude's consolation. In the movie, she can be seen attending church services regularly and can be heard saying "It is right that I suffer" after Jude asks her to come home. She uses the word "purification", which implies the cleansing of her being. Sue perceives her free-spirited, nonconventional self as something unclean that needs to be purified right away by conformity and religion. To her, the death of the children is a punishment from God. She uses this as a reason to go back to Phillotson.

Sue's drastic change in behavior, from her free-spirited nature to her adoption of conventionality, implies that the trauma of seeing her children dead influenced her

emotional responses and general worldview. A descriptive study by Greene et.al. gathered responses from women saying they have at least one experience of trauma in their lifetime. These participants also reported higher levels of emotional sensitivity that impact the way they analyze situations and make decisions after traumatic encounters (Greene et.al., 2023). Their indication that distressing events increases women's emotional sensitivity aligns with Sue's reaction after the children's death and her altered spiritual state.

The Prodigal Spouse

Sue's psyche turns completely upside down in the last pages of the novel. Chowdhury's study implicates the concept of "New Woman" to the psychological demise of Hardy's bachelor girl, Sue. According to Chowdhury, this notion of women was often presented as mentally precarious, which means "new women" were prone to mental breakdowns, depression, and even untimely death (Chowdhury, 2018). In chapter three, Sue tells Jude to go back to Arabella and that they need to conform because God has vented out his power upon them for their choices. From anti-marriage to the prodigal spouse, Sue becomes entirely unrecognizable:

> *I see marriage differently now. My babies have been taken from me to show me this! Arabella's child killing mine was a judgment – the right slaying the wrong. What, what shall I do? I am such a vile creature – too worthless to mix with ordinary human beings!* (p. 425).

By the fourth chapter, Phillotson agrees to marry her again in a church and she finally decides to go back to him, even though she does not love him and says "I will learn to love him by obeying him". She also attempts to do housewife duties and chores timidly but find them tedious to the point she becomes "impatient of domestic affairs". Sue sacrifices her happiness, preferences, and comfort to be a dutiful wife to her 'church-wedded husband'. In chapter nine, she visits Phillotson in his chambers at night and asks him to let her in because it is her duty and she must honor him as she said in her wedding vows. Sue does not find this pleasant, but she endures for her sins:

> *Placing the candlestick on the chest of drawers he led her through the doorway, and lifting her bodily, kissed her. A quick look of aversion passed over her face, but clenching her teeth she uttered no cry* (p. 479).

She submits to her husband regardless of what she feels. Sue believes that by doing this, God will forgive her. Through self-sacrifice, she will be able to suffer for her children's death and pay for her wrongdoings.

Based on the findings of the research, the reason for Sue Bridehead's spiritual suicide in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1896) is deeply complex and incorporates psychological, emotional, and societal factors. After the traumatic death of her children, which she believes are due to her past actions and beliefs, Sue undergoes a dramatic transformation. She becomes convinced that the tragedy is a punishment from divine power and a consequence of living a life contrary to social and religious conventions. This imposes an intense feeling of guilt and self-reproach upon her. Sue's spiritual suicide after the death of the children is caused by guilt, her deep remorse for their short lives, and her conviction that their untimely demise is God's way of punishing her for overlooking her marriage with Phillotson at the church and her rebellious, free-thinking self.

Conclusion

Sue's journey from an independent and spirited woman to one who succumbs to the oppressive societal expectations of Hardy's time after her children's death mirrors Estes' concept of a woman who, though outwardly functional, is internally dormant; her true self "asleep" due to societal pressures and emotional wounds. Hardy not only condemns a society that limits women's freedom but also punishes those who attempt to defy its restrictive moralities. Sue's final resignation to traditional marriage with Phillotson and renunciation of her previous life with Jude, despite her lack of love or desire, is the culmination of her spiritual suicide - a

surrender to the external pressures and pains that have borne down on her throughout the narrative. Her acceptance of suffering and self-blame as part of her "purification" marks her complete departure from her earlier free-spirited self. Just as Estes (1995) articulates a psychic slumber as a defense against patriarchal demands, Hardy's portrayal of Sue represents this psychological retreat, embodying a poignant example of a woman's struggle between authenticity and social conformity in Victorian society. In the end, Sue "repents" her nonconformist ways without considering her previous beliefs and Jude's feelings. In an attempt to let her boat go against the flow of male-dominated ocean waves, parts of her identity are being thrown into the deep waters. Giving up one's independent principles is worse than a physical death. When this happens, a woman with the same disposition as Sue will believe she has no other choice but to let the ship sink.

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