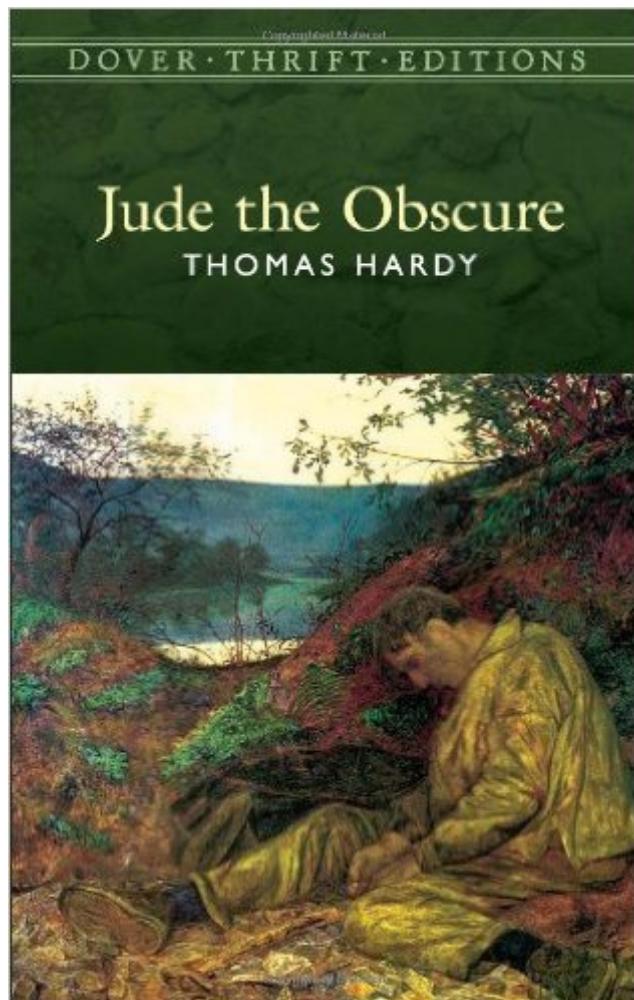


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Jude The Obscure (Dover Thrift Editions)



Synopsis

Powerful and controversial from its 1895 publication to the present, *Jude the Obscure* scandalized Victorian critics, who condemned it as decadent, indecent, and degenerate. Between its frank portrayals of sexuality and its indictments of marriage, religion, and England's class system, the novel offended a broad swath of readers. Its heated reception led the embittered author to renounce fiction, turning his considerable talents ever afterward to writing poetry. Hardy's last novel depicts a changing world, where a poor stonemason can aspire to a university education and a higher place in society — but where in reality such dreams remain unattainable. Thwarted at every turn, Jude Hawley abandons his hopes, is trapped into an unwise marriage, and pursues a doomed relationship with his free-spirited cousin, Sue Bridehead. The lovers find themselves equally incapable of living within the conventions of their era and of transcending its legal and moral strictures. Hailed by modern critics as a pioneering work of feminism and socialist thought, Hardy's tragic parable continues to resonate with readers.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Ready for four hundred pages of sparkle and sunshine? "Jude the Obscure" is about a group of people whose every hope and dream is gradually crushed to a fine powder and blown away by the winds of despair. Hardy is his usual unforgiving self in this grim, discomfiting tale of educational goals thwarted, marital bliss destroyed, childhood innocence corrupted, and spiritual redemption viciously mocked. Those who might suspect that this is a recent example of the current cultural debasement of family values would be amazed to know that this novel was written not in 1995 but in

1895. Upon its publication, Hardy was criticized for his pessimism when all he was did was herald the arrival of the pessimistic twentieth century. "Jude the Obscure" is not an indictment of education, marriage, family, or religion, but rather Hardy's bitter commentary on how society misuses these institutions to defend its shaky beliefs and practices. Jude Fawley, the title character and society's puppet, is a young man trying in vain to transcend his environment. A stonemason by trade, he dauntlessly studies Latin and Greek with the rigorous mind of a classical scholar in preparation for entering the ivy-covered Gothic halls of Christminster, a college town supposed to evoke Oxford. Two things stand in his way: He is too poor to afford the tuition, and he marries an ignorant farm girl named Arabella who discourages his academic aspirations. Separated from Arabella but still legally married, Jude begins a relationship with his pretty cousin, Sue Bridehead, after he moves to Christminster to be nearer his goal, supporting himself with various stonemasonry jobs. Sue marries Jude's former teacher, Richard Phillotson, many years her senior, also rejected by Christminster and now a local schoolmaster.

Jude wants to get ahead in the world. Starting at a young age he studies the Classics; learns Latin and Greek, and opens his mind wide to knowledge in general. He is preparing himself for Oxford, but Oxford won't have him, nor undoubtedly will any other university. You see he is poor, and poor people aren't admitted to college in Victorian times. After exiting a short-lived dismal marriage Jude then meets and falls in love with his cousin who ultimately leaves her husband and moves in with him. There is no "happily ever after" in this novel. Sue, his lover, has sexual problems that need the ministrations of Dr. Ruth, who unfortunately was not available at the time. Sex is repellent to her, and so she and Jude live fairly platonic lives; lives that are not made easier by society's negative reaction to their living in "sin". Jude and Sue are nice, if not psychologically whole, individuals. You wish them well, but Thomas Hardy has decided to sacrifice them to his philosophical views. He burdens the poor couple with society's repressive attitudes toward women, the lower classes, and marital nonconformity. A novel that begins with the hope of springtime, ends in a winter of despair. It is a pessimistic, depressing story that examines Victorian sexual and societal mores, and for this it was condemned by many critics. Hardy was so affected by this criticism that he never wrote another novel. Instead he successfully turned to poetry, although his pessimism was again apparent in some of his verses (Read for instance his elegant poem "God's Funeral"). Some of the novel is a bit melodramatic, but that is a common trait of many works of the period. My credulity is strained somewhat by the basically non-sexual relationship of Jude and Sue.

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