

From the classroom: Digital traces of itinerancy in *Jude the Obscure* by Thomas Hardy

The landscape and geography of Thomas Hardy's Wessex have received much critical attention throughout the years. Studies range from exploring the biographical elements involved in Hardy's conception of Wessex to mapping and retracing the literary geographies of Hardy's novels on the maps of Dorset. In particular, Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*¹ consists of six main sections which are named after locations in Wessex. Such an arrangement in the form of the novel seems to indicate the interconnectedness of space, time, and bodies within the text. The main objective of this pedagogical task² was to enable the students to reimagine this six-part arrangement of the novel on a digitally reconstructed version of Wessex³ in relation to the movement of Jude, Sue, and Phillotson across Wessex.

In preparation to this lab session, the students were asked to note down each character's itinerant concerns across all six sections of the novel. A fraction of the map of Wessex involving the major locations of *Jude the Obscure* was prepared prior to the session using the tools available on [Inkarnate](#), which is an online platform used for creating fantasy maps. During the lab session, the students were divided into three groups (each group was assigned one of the three characters to focus on), and they were introduced to tools and functions available on Inkarnate. Accordingly, the three groups experimented on basic functions such as creating a new map, zooming in and out of the maps as well as undoing and saving changes. Moreover, using the tools such as the art catalogue, path tool etc., the students produced three trial maps to familiarise themselves with the interface of Inkarnate.

After creating trial versions of the maps, each group was given a copy of the fraction of the map of Wessex which had been prepared prior to the session using inkarnate to start locating and labelling the crucial locations referred to in *Jude the Obscure*. Then, the students proceeded to use the path tool available on Inkarnate to trace the movements of Jude, Sue, and Phillotson across Wessex. Each group focused on one of the three characters and made decisions on how to represent and differentiate the 'paths' of the given character across all six sections of the novel. Accordingly, the groups opted to use colours, numbers etc. to differentiate the 'paths' of Jude, Sue, and Phillotson. Despite the technical difficulties that the students had to undergo during the lab session, they successfully produce three maps with the traces of Jude, Sue, and Phillotson across Hardy's Wessex.

While finalising the maps, the students expressed how this task allowed them to reflect on the relationship between distance, which had not been noticeable while reading the text. They also noted that, apart from the three characters in focus, Vibert the itinerant quake-doctor, seems to be another character in the novel who constantly journeyed across Wessex due to the demands of his profession and identity. Moreover, they highlighted how technology and modes

¹ Hardy, Thomas. *Jude the Obscure*. Penguin Classics, 1998.

² This lab session was organised to supplement ENG 2119/ ENG 2223: The Novel in the 18th and 19th Centuries which was taught by Pawan Wijesinghe and Sachini Seneviratne during the academic year 2020/21.

³ Only the portion of Hardy's Wessex that was relevant for *Jude the Obscure* was digitally reconstructed using Inkarnate.

of transportation, particularly the trains, seem to blur the distance between the locations in *Jude the Obscure*.

Find below the maps produced by the students within the three hours of the lab session:

Group 01 – Jude



Student Contributors: Sithmi Edirisinghe, Hiruni Herath, Leesha Rathnayake, Muminah Hakeem

Group 02 – Sue



Student Contributors: Ama Dewanmini, Senadie de Alwis, Nirmali Amarasekara

Group 03 – Phillotson



Student Contributors: Thanuri Charithma, Piyumini Buddhika, Nisali de Silva

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