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University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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HARDY, DARWIN, AND THE ART OF MORAL HUSBANDRY

by

Owen D. Roberts-Day

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HARDY, DARWIN, AND THE ART OF MORAL HUSBANDRY

Owen Roberts-Day, M.A.

University of Nebraska, 2013

Advisor: Linda Ray Pratt

This study of the influence of Charles Darwin on Thomas Hardy's tragic novels centers on two key concepts in the work of Darwin. The first is Darwin's narrative of the evolution of morality, which describes moral decisions as a struggle for survival between various instincts, habits, and customs, both within the individual and within society as a whole. Of particular importance is the role of reason and sympathy in overcoming base and selfish instincts. The second is the idea, introduced in *Origin*, that the work of scientific breeders represents an act of Conscious Selection, a separate form of evolution in which human ingenuity deliberately changes the course of Natural Selection to create new varieties and species.

Applying these ideas to *Return of the Native*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, and *Jude the Obscure*, I argue that all three novels essentially follow the same Darwinian arc: an individual who demonstrates the next stage in intellectual and emotional development required for the advancement of morality is introduced into an unsympathetic society. The conflict of the novels proceeds from the struggles, both within the individual and between the individual and the larger society, for the survival of those traits. The tragic outcomes of the novels are rooted in the fact that Hardy places those new traits in opposition to more traditional instincts and customs, driving them to extinction either through the death of the protagonist or through an atavistic return to more traditional values on the part of the protagonist. These tragic endings are meant to engage the sympathies of the reader while also appealing to their reason through the dissection of those internal and external forces that overcome the protagonists' new views. In this way,

Hardy applies the principles outlined in *Origin and Descent* to a project of moral husbandry first suggested by Darwin.

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Chapter One

Eminent Breeder of the Immanent

*In days when men found joy in war,
 A God of Battles sped each mortal jar;
 The peoples pledged him heart and hand,
 From Israel's land to isles afar.
 ...
 That modern meditation broke
 His spell, that penman's pleadings dealt a stroke,
 Say some; and some that crimes too dire
 Did much to mire his crimson cloak.*

-Thomas Hardy, "The Sick Battle-God"¹

Thomas Hardy's poem "Drinking Song," published in his final collection of poetry, begins with a description of Thales' assumption that, as Hardy puts it, "everything was made for man" (Poems, 905). From that point, Hardy proceeds with a catalog of the scientific developments that have unsettled all of Thales' assumptions, moving from Copernicus to Hume, Darwin, and Cheyne, finally arriving at the work of Einstein:

And now comes Einstein with a notion—
 Not yet quite clear
 To many here—
 That's there's no time, no space, no motion,

Nor rathe nor late,

Nor square nor straight,

But just a sort of bending ocean (*Poems*, 907).

The poem's subject should come as no surprise to any reader of Hardy; the role of scientific theories in Hardy's writing has long been a subject of critical discussion. But there is a crucial idea embedded in these lines. Hardy's description of the "bending ocean" posited by Einstein, written in the 1920's, reminds us that Hardy was an avid, engaged reader of scientific literature, interested in exploring the specific ideas of thinkers like Einstein and teasing out their implications for society.

This is especially important for critics attempting to approach the influence of Darwin on Hardy, a subject that has been treated in a variety of ways. Overlooked in these treatments, however, is a Darwinian narrative which frames Hardy's fictional world, in which tragedy exists but is not informed by pessimism or despair. Closer scrutiny reveals a scientifically-informed hope that the fate of society could be deliberately changed for the better. Darwin's ideas provided Hardy with a framework for understanding human morality, how it developed by natural selection, and how it could be influenced by carefully crafted fiction.

Pessimism and Darwinism are two concepts that any critic approaching Hardy's philosophical thought must understand. The two are so inextricably linked in many readings of Hardy that any mention of one concept seems to necessitate a mention of the other. The easiest way of linking the two is to argue that a young Hardy, after reading the work of Charles Darwin, despaired at the idea of a universe run not by a benevolent

creator but by a series of brutal, unguided physical processes. Crushed by the absence of God, the argument continues, Hardy put his characters at the mercy of an unfeeling Nature whose only logic was survival of the fittest. In this reading, Hardy's novels are reduced to an expression of his disillusionment at the discovery that life is, at best, a pitiful, meaningless struggle to find some temporary happiness in the face of a growing certainty that there would be no life to come, no reward for suffering.

This deterministic reading gains some traction when measured by the plots of Hardy's later novels. Beginning especially with *The Return of the Native*, Hardy's novels became increasingly dark; from the drowning of Eustacia Vye to the terrible murder-suicide of Jude Fawley's children, Hardy's work was increasingly filled with unrequited love, unhappy marriages, death, murder, and even suicide. And there can be no doubt that circumstance often appears at first glance to play a large part in the development of these tragedies; it is the accidental slumber of Tess Durbeyfield, for instance, that seems to bring about the death of her family's horse and the inevitable downward spiral of her own life that results.

This reading depends on an understanding of Darwinian ideas as fundamentally pessimistic, an understanding that confuses the cultural response to Darwin with the substance of his ideas. It further relies on the assumption that Hardy's fatalism is absolute, that his pessimism is never compromised. Hardy, however, consistently asserted that both claims were false. Seizing on this, a number of critics have written on the elements of Hardy's fiction that support his resistance to the label "pessimist." Yet, as Roy Morrell asserts in his treatment of *The Dynasts*, "It may be that when we *recall*

Hardy's novels, a deterministic interpretation can be made to seem plausible; but it is very different when we read or reread them"(24).

An alternative to the idea of Hardy as a Darwinian pessimist is revealed if, like Hardy, we carefully examine the details of Darwin's writing. The strictly pessimistic reading makes of evolution a bogeyman for theology, as opposed to what Hardy saw it to be: a scientific theory that not only explained the origin and nature of human consciousness and morality but also described the way in which humanity could perfect its moral system and extend the benefits of that system to all living creatures. This potential power of sympathy in Darwin's work is the basis of Hardy's hope for the possibility of a more perfect concept of justice and equality in the world.

More recently, critics have offered a number of readings of Hardy's work that engage more directly with the substance of Darwin's ideas. One school of Darwinian reading is exemplified by Peter Morton's "*Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, a Neo-Darwinian Reading." Morton seizes on the idea of hereditary transmission in Darwin, arguing that Hardy's tragedy is motivated by hereditary determinism. Another line of argument has been extended by Roger Robinson, who, working from passages in Hardy's personal writing, focuses on his claim that emotions and morality are an evolutionary blunder, a sensitivity that can only leave mankind pained and unhappy. Both authors suggest a profoundly pessimistic reading of both Hardy and Darwin.²

In outlining Hardy's response to the works of Darwin, Robinson declares that Hardy "eschewed, contemptuously ...the palliative 'contortions' and compromises with conventional Victorian religion or conventional Victorian progressivism," never losing

sight of “his deep initial belief in the absolute truthfulness and fundamental hopelessness of Darwin’s ideas” (128). Robinson sums up his idea of the “fundamental hopelessness” inspired by evolutionary theory in his reading of the famous final lines of *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*. Responding to Hardy’s Aeschylean allusions and the idea that Tess had been toyed with by some unseen “President of the Immortals” (422), Robinson remarks that

It is pointless to object that the novel’s view has not been Aeschylean. Of course it hasn’t. But the novelist’s recourse to such an explanation, illogically and inconsistently, at the moment of deepest grief and pity, adds a further level of response to his work. We are as moved by Hardy’s pity, by his need to invent a malicious God, as by Tess’s plight (148).

The problem with this reading of *Tess* is that it ignores the irony with which Hardy’s narrator views Tess’ fate. This reading limits the function of the narrator to one who relates the unfolding of events, without a deeper understanding or critical vision.

Robinson supports this idea with his reading of the poem “Hap,” originally written in 1866 and collected in the 1898 volume *Wessex Poems and Other Verses*. The poem is an inevitable fixture in any pessimistic reading of Hardy’s work. In the poem, the speaker laments the lack of a “vengeful god” who could identify himself as the source of the speaker’s suffering (*Poems*, 9). Much to the narrator’s dismay, however, there is no such vengeful deity. Instead, he explains

Crass casualty obstructs the sun and rain,
And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan....

These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown

Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain” (9).

Robinson is not alone in linking the desperation of “Hap” to the tragic mood of the novels. Rather, he is simply reiterating the commonplace view that the themes of Hardy’s work follow from the views of the narrator of “Hap” and that passages such as the final lines of *Tess* suggest nothing more than a despondency at an unjust world operated by chance alone, a despondency accompanied by a desperate wish for a scapegoat deity. But while such a view is well-supported by “Hap,” the idea becomes harder to support when applied to the rest of Hardy’s work, both in verse and prose. This difficulty suggests one possible logical error informing any purely pessimistic reading of Hardy: the assumption that “Hap,” a short early poem, best exemplifies the whole of Hardy’s worldview, despite the disparity between the ideas expressed in “Hap” and Hardy’s more methodical attempts to describe his worldview in both public and private writing.

In his personal writings and correspondence, for example, Hardy repeatedly dismissed the search for a personal deity as outdated and unnecessary. In a letter first printed in Florence Hardy’s biographical work, *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy*, he responds to a similar criticism of the passage in *Tess*, saying that

[u]nder this species of criticism if an author were to say ‘Aeolus maliciously tugged at her garments, and tore her hair in his wrath’, the sapient critic would no doubt announce that author’s evil creed to be that the wind is ‘a powerful being endowed with the baser human passions’,

etc.,etc (4-5).

Hardy's frustration with this line of argument extended beyond the basic claim that he was simply employing figurative language. In another letter printed in the same volume, he expresses his feelings about the effort to label him an atheist:

Much confusion has arisen and much nonsense has been talked latterly in connection with the word "atheist". I have never understood how anybody can be one except in the sense of disbelieving in a tribal god, man-shaped, fiery-faced and tyrannous, who flies into a rage on the slightest provocation ... Fifty meanings attach to the word "God" nowadays, the only reasonable meaning being *The Cause of Things*, whatever that cause may be. Thus no modern thinker can be an atheist in the modern sense, while all modern thinkers are atheists in the ancient and exploded sense (176).

Hardy's contention that all modern thinkers must have moved on from this "ancient and exploded" theology highlights the development of his philosophy since "Hap." The speaker in the poem expresses his frustration at having no scapegoat deity on whom he could blame his troubles, no "vengeful God" to say "Thy love's loss is my hate's profiting" (*Poems*, 9). By the time Hardy gets around to the above definition of "atheist," the "vengeful God" of "Hap," who would certainly fit Hardy's description of a "tribal" and "fiery-faced" god, has been rendered ridiculous. Indeed, the very search for an identifiable deity now seems absurd to Hardy. In another journal entry, Hardy asserts that some questions "are made unimportant by their very magnitude," among them such

questions as “whether we are moving in Space this way or that,” and “the existence of a God” (*Later Years*, 54).

These notes definitely pose a challenge to the idea of Hardy’s career as an exercise in bleak pessimism. Furthermore, they suggest that the desolate frustration of the speaker in “Hap” is not the central feature of Hardy’s ideology so much as its starting point. In the poem, Hardy records the feelings of someone who has accepted an atheistic or agnostic position and is now struggling with the implications of that acceptance. It seems believable that Hardy, writing the poem in 1866 at the age of twenty-six, was wrestling with the same angst as the poem’s speaker. Judging by Hardy’s later work, it seems less believable that he never progressed beyond that initial period of frustration and confusion.

One of Hardy’s most systematic attempts to outline his worldview was the “Apology” that served as preface to the 1922 verse collection, *Late Lyrics and Earlier*. In it he expresses a particular frustration with the use of the word “pessimism” as a descriptor for his work. He argues that the “disallowance of ‘obstinate questionings’ and ‘blank misgivings’ tends to a paralysed[sic] intellectual stalemate,” and that what his detractors called pessimism was “only such ‘questionings in the explorations of reality,’ questionings that were “the first step toward the soul’s betterment, and the body’s also”(*Poems*, 557).³ Hardy goes on to quote the line from his poem “In Tenebris”: “If a way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst,” glossing the line by explaining that such an examination requires “the exploration of reality, and its frank recognition stage by stage along the survey, with an eye to the best consummation

possible: briefly, evolutionary meliorism” (557).

The concept of evolutionary meliorism is crucial to understanding Hardy's worldview. Robinson, for his part, lists “evolutionary meliorism” as one of a progression of worldviews which Hardy eventually “eschews contemptuously” while focusing on the “hopelessness” of Darwin’s ideas (128). Robinson’s implication that Hardy defied the optimism of evolutionary meliorism is particularly troublesome because the idea of evolutionary meliorism and the “full look at the Worst” are, by Hardy’s own estimation, central to his work. How, then, should these ideas be approached by critics? The best way to do so seems to be obliquely, through an exploration of another central concept in Hardy’s work: the Immanent Will.

The Immanent Will appears in Hardy’s epic verse treatment of the Napoleonic Wars, *The Dynasts*, and it is the crystallization of the ideas that Hardy had been developing throughout his career. The Will is an unconscious, all-moving force, made up of the sum of the natural mechanisms that rule and constitute the universe and everything in it. This definition of “Will” differs in a fundamental way from familiar definitions used in philosophy. In *The Dynasts*, the Immanent Will does not represent the will of the individual, or even the collective will of society, although both forces do make up part of the total Will. Because it represents the effects of natural laws and processes as opposed to the efforts of an intelligent deity, spirit, or social collective, Hardy presents the Will as both unconscious and sexless. But it is important to note that the nature of the Immanent Will is not fixed. If it were, then *The Dynasts* would certainly support the pessimistic readings offered by many critics. A closer examination of the play, however, suggests a

philosophy much more complex than the determinist narrative attributes to Hardy.

The Dynasts has two levels of narrative: the human narrative surrounding the political and military struggles of Europe and the philosophical narrative featuring the various spirits who observe and comment on those struggles. The central feature of the philosophical narrative is the debate between the venerable Spirit of the Years and the youthful Spirit of the Pities about the fate of humanity, a debate that is introduced in the “Fore Scene.” At the beginning of that scene, the Spirit of the Years provides a description of the Immanent Will, saying that

*It works unconsciously, as heretofore,
Eternal artistries in Circumstance,
Whose patterns, wrought by rapt aesthetic rote,
Seem in themselves Its single listless aim,
And not their consequence (Dynasts, 1).*

The Spirit of the Years’ observation is met with despair by the Spirit of the Pities:

*Still thus? Still thus?
Ever unconscious?
An automatic sense
Unweeting why or whence?
Be, then, the inevitable as of old,
Although that So it be we dare not hold! (1).*

This response echoes the feelings of the speaker in “Hap.” The Pities struggle to accept the idea of a universe governed by an “automatic sense” as opposed to a benevolent (or

even malevolent) deity, refusing to accept the fatalistic implications of such a revelation. Ultimately refusing to accept the arguments made by the Spirit of the Years, the Spirit of the Pities argues in favor of a more just world shaped by the ennobling effects of sympathy. The final lines of the play, sung by the entire chorus of the Spirits, suggest the goal of the Spirit of the Pities:

That the rages

Of the ages

Shall be cancelled, and deliverance offered from the darts that were

Consciousness the Will informing, till It fashion all things fair! (525)

There are elements of the play that definitely suggest that in struggling to “fashion all things fair,” the Spirit of the Pities labors in vain for a naïve cause. If that were true, then it would be hard to disavow a pessimistic reading of *The Dynasts*, and of Hardy’s work in general. A closer examination of his personal writings suggests, however, that Hardy put a great deal of stock in the philosophy presented by the Spirit of the Pities, a philosophy that he himself had been developing throughout his career. As he explained to Howard Wright in a letter written just after the publication of *The Dynasts*:

In a dramatic epic—which I may perhaps assume *The Dynasts* to be—some philosophy of life was necessary, and I went on using that which I had denoted in my previous volumes of verse (and to some extent prose) as being a generalized form of what the thinking world had gradually come to adopt. That the Unconscious Will is growing aware of itself I believe I may claim as my own idea solely—at which I arrived by

reflecting that what has taken place in a fraction of the whole (*i.e.* so much of the world as has become conscious) is likely to take place in the mass; and there being no Will outside the mass—that is, the Universe—the whole Will becomes conscious thereby: and ultimately, it is to be hoped, sympathetic (*Early Life*, 124).

This letter is crucial to any understanding of Hardy's worldview. In it, he explicitly states that the growing consciousness of the Will isn't merely possible, it is happening. He further claims that his view squares, at least to some extent, with the ideas presented in his earlier prose and poetry. It is also worth noting that, as with his "modern" definition of atheism, Hardy saw his view of the developing consciousness of the Will to be an unavoidable conclusion that was being embraced by the "thinking world."

The fact that the Spirit of the Pities, the main proponent of sympathy and understanding, is the character who extends Hardy's argument within *The Dynasts* is also significant. Hardy's early notes on *The Dynasts* suggest that he had always been particularly taken with the idea of humanity as an organism and that he was particularly interested in the biological development of human sympathy and morality. In an 1875 note proposing a "Great Modern Drama," Hardy writes of a desire to "[d]iscover for how many years, and on how many occasions, the organism, Society, has been standing, lying, etc., in varied positions, as if it were a tree or a man hit by vicissitudes" (*Early Life*, 188). In another note he proposes "a history of human automatism, or impulsion—viz., an account of human action in spite of human knowledge, showing how very far conduct lags behind the knowledge that should really guide it," (*Early Life*, 197-98). Perhaps most

telling is a note written in his journal in 1881 after “infinite trying to reconcile a scientific view of life with the emotional and spiritual” (*Early Life*, 192):

General Principles. Law has produced in man a child who cannot but constantly reproach its parent for doing much and yet not all, and constantly say to such parent that it would have been better never to have begun doing than to have *overdone* so indecisively; that is, than to have created so far beyond all apparent first intention (on the emotional side), without mending matters by a second intent and execution, to eliminate the evils of the blunder of overdoing. The emotions have no place in a world of defect, and it is a cruel injustice that they should have developed in it.

If Law itself had consciousness, how the aspect of its creatures would terrify it, fill it with remorse! (*Early Life*, 192)

This passage, written at the beginning of Hardy’s career as a tragic novelist, contains all of the philosophical underpinnings of *The Dynasts*: the conception of humanity as organism, the unconscious natural laws, the difficulties of emotionally sensitive creatures in an indifferent world, and the disconnection between human sympathy and human behavior. At the same time, the note contains the same emphasis on the role of sympathy. In another journal entry, written in 1890 (a year before the publication of *Tess*), Hardy sums up his ideas by observing that

Altruism, or The Golden Rule, or whatever ‘Love your Neighbor as Yourself’ may be called, will ultimately be brought about I think by the

pain we see in others reacting on ourselves, as if we and they were part of one body. Mankind, in fact, may be and possibly will be viewed as members of one corporeal frame (*Early Life*, 294).

These notes further reinforce the continuity of thought between the tragic novels and *The Dynasts*. They suggest that Hardy was developing the ideas expressed in *The Dynasts* for some time before he actually wrote his verse drama. They further suggest that the notion of the “full look at the Worst” of the “Apology” and “In Tenebris” is fundamentally similar to Hardy’s idea of the development of sympathy and the evolution of the Immanent Will. The evolving consciousness of the Immanent Will in *The Dynasts* and the process of “evolutionary meliorism” in the “Apology” are inextricably linked by their emphasis on the role of sympathy and reflection in the development of a more just society. This focus on the potential power of reflection on tragic events is central to any understanding of the optimistic Darwinian narratives that inform Hardy’s tragedy.

With these things in mind, it is possible to return to *The Dynasts* and find passages which explicitly connect the ideas of evolutionary meliorism and its “full look at the Worst” with the evolving consciousness of the Immanent Will. In the Fore Scene, for example, the other spirits reproach the Chorus of the Pities for lamenting the plight of mankind. When the Shade of the Earth asks about suitable replacements for the leaders of the various nations, the Chorus replies:

We would establish those of kindlier build,

In fair Compassion skilled,

Men of deep art in life-development;

*Watchers and warders of thy varied lands,
 Men surfeited of laying heavy hands
 Upon the innocent,
 The mild, the fragile, the obscure content
 Among the myriads of thy family.
 Those, too, who love the true, the excellent,
 And make their daily moves a melody (3).*

In these lines, Hardy describes his model for the ideal human being: he or she must be compassionate, caring for his or her fellow humans as well as the Earth and its creatures, and must have a love for truth, justice, and art. The evolution of such a race of man is the primary goal of Hardy's idea of evolutionary meliorism, and it is important to look at the way that the various spirits discuss the Chorus' proposal. The Shade of the Earth, for example, assigns responsibility for such developments to humankind itself:

*They may come, will they. I am not averse.
 Yet know I am but the ineffectual Shade
 Of her the Travailler, herself a thrall
 To It; in all her labourings curbed and kinged (3).*

The Spirit of the Years, however, expresses its doubts about the possibility of such developments:

*Shall such be mooted now? Already change
 Hath played strange pranks since first I brooded here.
 But old Laws operate yet; and phase and phase*

Of men's dynastic and imperial moils

Shape on accustomed lines (3).

In both responses, the emphasis is on the role of humanity's newly developed consciousness and their sense of semi-independent will. The development of individual consciousness is the foremost of the "strange pranks" played by change that the Spirit of the Years mentions. And the Shade of the Earth, operating as spokesperson for the Earth itself, claims that it would not oppose the development of such a race of men, a claim that implies that such a development could logically follow the evolutionary developments that have already occurred, if mankind wills it to be so.

The mechanism for such a change is mentioned explicitly by the Spirit of the Pities a few lines later and it is acknowledged by the Spirit Sinister in an aside. Asked why it wastes its compassion on humans, the Spirit of the Pities replies that "*They [humans] are shapes that bleed, mere manikins or no,/ And each has parcel in the total Will*" (4). The Spirit Sinister, in response, says, "*Limbs of Itself:/Each one a jot of It[The Immanent Will] in quaint disguise? I'll fear all men henceforward!*" (4). The implicit suggestion is that human will, informed as it is by consciousness, can contribute to the development of the Pities' ideal race of humans.

Despite the power that Hardy ascribes to human will as a result of that consciousness, he does not suggest that humankind is therefore free from from the influence of heredity or instinct. In the letter to Howard Wright mentioned above, he explains the implications of his ideas on the debate over free will:

This theory [of the Immanent Will], too, seems to me to settle the question

of Free-will v. Necessity. The will of man is, according to it, neither wholly free nor wholly unfree. When swayed by the Universal Will (which he mostly must be as a subservient part of it) he is not individually free; but whenever it happens that all the rest of the Great Will is in equilibrium the minute portion called one person's will is free, just as a performer's fingers are free to go on playing the pianoforte of themselves when he talks or thinks of something else and the head does not rule them (*Later Years*, 124-5).

It is important that this assessment, too, be read in the light of Hardy's idea of evolutionary meliorism and the development of society as an organism. While it may seem to ascribe to individuals very little control over their destiny, it is based on the recognition that humanity has already won a great coup by achieving consciousness and that it is within the realm of possibility that that revolution could spread to all of existence. In that sense, humanity has gained much, and it has the potential to employ what it already has in order to gain still more.

Hardy's views on the potential of human will suggest a narrative that is fundamentally different from the pessimistic response to Darwin described by Robinson, Morton, and other proponents of the determinist narrative in Hardy's work. In place of their understanding of Hardy, we are confronted with an idea of Hardy as a pragmatist, exploiting his understanding of humanity's free will to serve a philosophical view bent on the improvement of the individual and of society as an interconnected whole. In the place of a desolate longing for God, we are presented with a cautious hope that the simple,

“man-faced” idea of God could be replaced by a belief in the attainability of a fundamental unity of all creation through sympathy and compassion. What Hardy viewed as an outmoded understanding of religion was to be slowly replaced with the understanding of religion “in its modern sense entirely, as being expressive of nobler feelings towards humanity and emotional goodness and greatness” (*Later Years*, 121).

In exploring Hardy’s doctrine of evolutionary meliorism and the developing consciousness of the Immanent Will, it is certainly fair to say that Darwin’s theories played a central role in the development of those ideas. That is not to say that Hardy, as Robinson suggests, responded to Darwin with despair and gave up on the future of humanity. Instead, there is every suggestion that he embraced Darwin, using his work as a central source in the development of his doctrine of evolutionary meliorism.

In the “Apology,” Hardy spends a good deal of time talking about the role that religion and literature both have to play in the betterment of society:

In any event, poetry, pure literature in general, religion—I include religion, in its essential and undogmatic sense, because poetry and religion touch each other, or rather modulate into each other; are, indeed, often but different names for the same thing—these, I say, the visible signs of mental and emotional life, must like all other things keep moving, becoming; even though at present, when belief in witches of Endor is displacing the Darwinian theory and “the truth that shall make you free,” men’s mind’s appear, as above noted, to be moving backwards rather than on (561).

Hardy's remarks suggest every element of the doctrine of evolutionary meliorism: he asserts the power of "the visible signs of mental and emotional life" to change the nature of society for the better, he grounds that power in the continual evolution of mental and emotional capacities, and he makes that evolution contingent on the sober acceptance of certain rational observations, chief among them the ideas of Darwin. To be sure, Hardy makes it clear that progress is not the rule. In lamenting the "backwards" motion of men's minds, Hardy emphasizes the fact that progress can be as easily undone by the influence of superstition and ignorance.

This shouldn't come as a surprise to most readers of Hardy. As a young man, Hardy was "among the earliest acclaimers of *The Origin of Species*" (*Early Life*, 198), and he continued to follow Darwin's work throughout his life. His personal writings make it clear that he was particularly attentive to Darwin's own ideas about the implications of evolution for theology. In one letter Hardy suggests that a Rev. Dr. A. B. Grosart, who had written asking how to "reconcile [Darwinian ideas] with the absolute goodness and non-limitation of God" could "be helped to a provisional view of the universe by the recently published life of Darwin" (*Early Life*, 269). Hardy even attended Darwin's funeral at Westminster in 1883 (*Early Life*, 198).

Hardy's extensive engagement with Darwin's ideas suggests a feature of the doctrine of evolutionary meliorism that is often overlooked by critics: Hardy doesn't use the term "evolutionary" to simply connote a gradual change. Rather, the term connotes the specific processes of evolutionary change posited by Darwin. Accepting this understanding of evolutionary meliorism and the Immanent Will means turning aside

from Robinson's idea that Hardy did not respond to Darwin's theory by "attempting any ... schematized philosophy"(129), adopting instead the understanding that Hardy saw in Darwin the means for a systematic approach to the betterment of mankind.

Hardy's idea of the evolution of society as an organism isn't an entirely original one. Darwin treats the subject extensively in *The Descent of Man*. For Darwin, the starting point in the evolution of morality is the combination of a social instinct with a reasoning mind:

Any animal whatever, endowed with well-marked social instincts, the parental and filial affections being here included, would inevitably acquire a moral sense or conscience, as soon as its intellectual powers had become as well, or nearly as well, developed as in man (*Descent* 81).

This would occur, he explains, because social instincts "lead an animal to take pleasure in the society of its fellows, to feel a certain amount of sympathy for them, and to perform various services for them" (81). The next step in the process is particularly important:

As soon as the mental faculties had become highly developed, images of all past actions and motives would be incessantly passing through the brain of each individual; and that feeling of dissatisfaction, or even misery, which invariably results, as we shall hereafter see, from any unsatisfied instinct, would arise (*Descent* 81).

In this way, Hardy's idea that altruism would be brought about by "the pain we see in others reacting on ourselves" accords perfectly with Darwin's understanding of the way that social instincts could develop into a moral sense. Darwin goes on to suggest that

“[t]he mere sight of suffering, independently of love, would suffice to call up in us vivid recollections and associations,” ultimately concluding that “to do unto others as ye would they should do unto you [...] is the foundation stone of morality” (*Descent*, 105). Furthermore, Darwin’s ideas provide a scientific justification for Hardy’s argument that a conscious Will was to be achieved through a “full look at the Worst,” a method that, according to Darwin’s theories, amounts to a voluntary engagement in the fundamental process of moral evolution.

Upon further examination of Darwin’s description of the process of moral evolution, the influence on Hardy becomes clearer. Writing about the tension between mankind’s base instincts and its newly developed moral sentiments, Darwin argues that any human, presented with the choice between acting on social instincts and acting on more selfish instincts “will no doubt be apt to follow the stronger impulse” (94). In the early days of morality, he suggests, the stronger impulse would likely be the base instinct. Afterwards, when given time to ruminate on the judgment of society, the person in question will feel remorse, ultimately resolving “more or less firmly to act differently for the future; and this is conscience; for conscience looks backward, and serves as a guide for the future”(94).

Darwin’s explanation of the tension between the base instincts and the more refined social instincts lines up with Hardy’s idea of the limited free will of mankind: while all humans are, as a result of their powers of reflection, free to feel remorse and to vow to take a different course of action in the future, they are still animals and therefore constrained by the powerful influence of older, more primal instincts. A blurring of the

lines between primal and social instincts further complicates the tension between the two forces. As Darwin explains, “although in civilized countries a good yet timid man may be far more useful to the community than the brave one, we cannot help instinctively honoring the latter above a coward, however benevolent” (*Descent* 98).

As civilization expands, Darwin explains, the progress of moral development is impeded yet again, this time by the clash of different cultures:

As man advances in civilization, and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all the members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him. This point being once reached, there is only an artificial barrier to prevent his sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races. If, indeed, such men are separated from him by great differences in appearance or habits, experience unfortunately shows how long it is before we look at them as our fellow-creatures (*Descent* 102).

These “artificial barriers” represent significant impediments to human progress, but, like the earlier impediments, they are not insurmountable. Looking to the future, Darwin charts the potential development of human morality:

as man gradually advanced in intellectual power, and was enabled to trace the more remote consequences of his actions; as he acquired sufficient knowledge to reject baneful customs and superstitions; as he regarded more and more not only the welfare, but the happiness of his fellow-men;

as from habit, following on beneficial experience, instruction, and example, his sympathies became more tender and widely diffused, extending to men of all races, to the imbecile, maimed, and other useless members of society, and finally to the lower animals—so would the standard of his morality rise higher and higher (*Descent* 103-4).

The influence of this idea on Hardy is hard to overstate. Darwin describes a process that is fundamentally the same as Hardy's process of evolutionary meliorism: the evolution of society as a whole through the act of reflection, resulting in the extension of sympathy to all creation. Darwin also expresses the hope, shared by Hardy, that this evolution could be the logical extension of developments that had occurred thus far.

Hardy's engagement with Darwin's ideas about the evolution of morality have been treated only sparsely, most recently by Caroline Sumpter in her article "On Suffering and Sympathy: *Jude the Obscure*, Evolution, and Ethics." Sumpter traces the connection between Hardy's and Darwin's ideas on the subject, ultimately observing that both Jude and Sue are "clearly among [Darwin's] 'few men' (and women) whose sympathies already extend to both humans and animals," Sumpter goes on to argue, however, that "these highly sympathetic individuals are crushed by public opinion rather than able to reform it through 'instruction and example,'" (672). Furthermore, Sue and Jude's inability to reform society is paired with a failure on the part of society, as "custom and public opinion fail to offer that ethically regulating role that Darwin optimistically granted them; the few sympathetic individuals are left to rely on their rudely acquired "social instincts" (679). Ultimately, Sumpter concludes that Hardy's views on morality

were more centered on the role of “biological determinism” and that he was “much less convinced than Darwin about the positive role of reason and habit in moral development” (672).⁴

This reasoning depends on two arguments. The first is that “hereditary factors, not training and habit, lead to Sue and Jude’s social restlessness and excess of sympathy”(678). Sumpter focuses especially on Jude’s sympathy for animals as a trait that he displays from his earliest days. It is worth noting, however, that the very first scene of the book depicts Jude's beloved teacher Richard Phillotson as he leaves for Christminster, instructing Jude to “Be a good boy ... and be kind to animals and birds, and read all you can” (34). Given that Jude is defined throughout the novel by his strong sense of sympathy, for humans and animals alike, as well as his incessant pursuit of academics, it is hard to overstate the impact of Phillotson’s statement. This accords with Darwin’s description of the blurred line between nature and nurture: “ it is worthy of remark that a belief constantly inculcated during the early years of life, while the brain is impressible, appears to acquire almost the nature of an instinct; and the very essence of an instinct is that it is followed independently of reason” (*Descent*, 101).

The tension between instinct, beliefs acquired at an early age, and reason helps to highlight another fundamental assumption in Sumpter’s argument. Sumpter suggests that the failure of Jude and Sue's contemporaries to sympathize with the unfortunate couple suggests that Hardy has eschewed the role of reason in the development of morality, an argument not borne out by the rest of Hardy's work. The depiction of the clash between Jude and Sue’s ideas and those of more conventional members of society fits in perfectly

with Darwin's description of the barriers which must be overcome for morality to advance.

In *Descent*, Darwin tackles the issue of why "savage" cultures have a lower morality than more developed ones:

The chief causes of the low morality of savages, as judged by our standard are, first, the confinement of sympathy to the same tribe. Secondly, powers of reasoning insufficient to recognize the bearing of many virtues, especially the self-regarding virtues, on the general welfare of the tribe. Savages, for instance, fail to trace the multiplied evils consequent on a want of temperance, chastity, etc. And thirdly, weak power of self-command; for this power has not been strengthened through long-continued, perhaps inherited, habit, instructions, and religions (99).

Furthermore, as Sumpter herself acknowledges, Darwin is explicit about the fact that the judgment of society "will not rarely err from ignorance and weak powers of reasoning," giving rise to "the strangest customs and superstitions, in complete opposition to the true welfare and happiness of mankind" (*Descent*, 101). In other words, society's failure to accommodate Jude and Sue's unconventional relationship is a powerfully effective demonstration of the barriers to progress identified by Darwin.

Perhaps more interesting, however, is the way Hardy crafts his narrative to work on the reader in service of that progress. More than any of Hardy's other tragedies, the outcome of *Jude* constitutes the sort of "full look at the Worst" called for in the "Apology." And while the characters around Jude and Sue are unpersuaded by either

reason or sympathy for the ill-fated couple, the reader is. As Sumpter observes, “Hardy’s achievement may be to make us feel the loss of altruists in individual terms” (676). This sympathy for Jude and Sue is, according to Darwin, crucial to the advancement of morality. By encouraging the reader to reflect on Jude and Sue’s fate, Hardy encourages the Darwinian moment of reflection that pits superstition, habit, and selfish instinct against reason and sympathy. In this way, Hardy’s work reveals another fascinating debt to the ideas of Darwin.

In *Origin*, Darwin begins his explanation of the mutability of species not with examples from the wild, but with examples of domesticated species. Tracing the development of certain domestic breeds, Darwin describes their adaptation “not indeed to the animal’s or plant’s own good, but to man’s use or fancy” (*Origin*, 34). Citing the example of certain breeders of pigeons in England and abroad, Darwin argues that “[t]he key is man’s power of accumulative selection: nature gives successive variations; man adds them up in certain directions useful to him. In this sense he may be said to make for himself useful breeds” (35).⁵

As Darwin explains, the effects of humankind’s efforts on the evolution of various species have been visible for thousands of years, even if the scientific practice of plant and animal husbandry had been developed only recently. The change brought about by the development of scientific breeding, he writes, is the change away from purely natural selection:

For our purpose, a kind of Selection, which may be called Unconscious, and which results from every one trying to possess and breed from the

best individual animals, is more important. Thus, a man who intends keeping pointers naturally tries to get as good dogs as he can, and afterwards breeds from his own best dogs, but he has no wish or expectation of permanently altering the breed. Nevertheless, I cannot doubt that this process, continued during centuries, would improve and modify any breed (*Origin* 38).

The difference between Conscious and Unconscious Selection in Darwin's theories is crucial to an understanding of his influence on Hardy. It is the change to Conscious Selection that helps to free up the fingers of Hardy's piano player, allowing humankind to take a hand in its own evolutionary development. This suggests a radical resolution to the conflict between fate and free will in Hardy's tragedy. Darwin's idea of Conscious Selection represents the ultimate act of human agency: the use of human ingenuity to fundamentally alter the effects of the Immanent Will. This opens up the possibility that Hardy could have found in Darwin cause for optimism. The opportunity to consciously steer the course of evolution transforms Hardy's "full look at the Worst" from gloomy pessimism to the methodical examinations of a careful breeder of morality.

Following this reading of Darwin's influence on Hardy, the project of moral husbandry becomes the central purpose of Hardy's tragic work. Hardy's attempt to focus on the complexities of moral structures in nineteenth-century society represents an attempt at the conscious selection of moral values that is grounded specifically in Darwin's explanation of the way that morality had developed and could continue to develop, overcoming the "artificial barriers" that prevented its progress.

This view of Hardy's work allows for a new understanding of the narrative structures that he employed. Given Hardy's emphasis on the role of "the pain we see in others reacting on ourselves," his use of tragedy can be understood in an entirely new way. Consider, for instance the way that he wrote about the genre: in an 1885 journal entry he argues that a tragedy "exhibits a state of things in the life of an individual which unavoidably causes some natural aim or desire of his to end in a catastrophe when carried out" (*Early Life*, 230). It is significant that in Hardy's conception of tragedy, culpability is shifted from an individual with a tragic flaw to the "state of things in the life" of the individual. This leaves the protagonists room to be characters with whom readers could identify or sympathize. Tess Durbeyfield, for example, is explicitly described as "A Pure Woman," despite the approbation of her contemporaries.

Hardy manipulated this identification between reader and character very carefully. In an 1892 journal entry, he argues that "The best tragedies...are those of the WORTHY encompassed by the INEVITABLE. The tragedies of immoral and worthless people are not of the best" (*Later Years*, 19). In an earlier entry, he argues that

[a] Plot, or Tragedy, should arise from the gradual closing in of a situation that comes of ordinary human passions, prejudices, and ambitions, by reason of the characters taking no trouble to ward off the disastrous events produced by the said passions, prejudices, and ambitions (*Early Life*, 157).

This note was written in 1878, the year that *The Return of the Native* was published, inaugurating Hardy's career as tragedian. Like his description of the "best tragedies," it focuses not on the culpability of the individual in bringing about the tragic end of a story,

but on the role of society as a whole. It is not the protagonist, but all of the characters who “tak[e] no trouble to ward off the disastrous events” of the plot. Hardy’s description of the source of those “disastrous events” is especially important. The “passions, prejudices, and ambitions” are clearly analogous to the forces at the heart of the Darwinian conflict over morality: instinct, sympathy, reason, and habit.

These subtle variations on the more traditional idea of tragedy are the practical results of Hardy’s understanding of Darwin. In the Darwinian narrative of the evolution of morality, moral decisions are depicted as the products of a struggle between instinct, sympathy, reason and habit, all of which vie for control of the individual. Conscience is the force that leads the individual to look back over his or her choices and decide whether those choices were morally correct. In Hardy’s tragedies, the reader is invited into carefully crafted moments of crisis, shown the outcome produced by the status quo, and invited to reflect on what might have been different. And while it is true that Hardy’s characters are fated to meet tragic ends, the author encourages his readers to think about the ways in which their own disasters and the disasters of others could be avoided if society as a whole took the trouble to approach each other with a more highly evolved sense of sympathy.

Earlier critical work has, of course, focused on the incongruity between contemporary social conventions and Hardy’s treatment of his tragic characters and what its purpose could be. One work, in particular, Virginia R. Hyman’s *Ethical Perspective in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* deals extensively with the notion of the pain of the central characters and its effect on the ethical sensibilities of the reader. Hyman, however, views

Hardy's writing in terms of his engagement with Comte, Stephen, Huxley and Mill, mentioning Darwin's name only in passing and doing little to engage with his actual scientific ideas. As a result, she approaches the notion of a society that is evolving in the abstract sense but not in the concrete, Darwinian sense.⁶ Indeed, by overlooking Darwin's description of the forces at play in the creation of conscience, Hyman minimizes the role of the reader's reason in Hardy's work, a role that is essential to Hardy's project of evolutionary meliorism. Hyman argues that for Hardy "to make his readers aware that he was intentionally arousing their social sympathies would negate the emotional affect of the work itself" (25). Following a Darwinian reading, reader awareness is essential because it lies at the heart of the moment of reflection that produces a more evolved conscience. A sympathetic response opens the door to a conflict between the reader's reason and his or her socialized habits and more base instincts. Hardy attempts to fix the outcome of this conflict by supplying the reader with a Darwinian genealogy of the biological and social forces undergirding the conflict of his fiction.

This, then, is the essence of Hardy's work in the genre of tragedy. Beginning especially with *The Return of the Native* and proceeding until the disastrous reception of *Jude the Obscure* and his decision to renounce fiction, Hardy embarked on a career of careful scientific examination and demonstration. Each novel represents a sort of dissection of the "organism" that is society, an attempt to show the reader the various biological and social forces at play within it. The action of each tragic novel hinges on a carefully crafted representation of the forces of instinct, emotion, habit and reason at the heart of major social issues of the time.

Perhaps more important, however, is the way that Hardy controls that representation, deliberately honing it to act on the sympathies and reason of the reader. This is especially clear in three of the major tragic novels, *The Return of the Native*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, and *Jude the Obscure*. A Darwinian reading shows Hardy working throughout his career in tragedy to perfect a number of narrative structures that form the foundation of his attempt at educating and improving society. These commonalities include the conflict between a character who is presented as explicitly representative of humanity's future and those who represent the status quo, the dissection of the evolutionary and social forces behind a major social convention, and a climax that is driven by the conflict between instincts, habit, reason, and superstition. Collectively, these narrative choices represent a conscious and methodical attempt by Hardy to deliberately sway the attitudes of the reader, to bend the unconscious Immanent Will toward consciousness by exploiting the Darwinian process as Hardy understood it.

Such a project was, to say the least, ambitious. Darwin observed, in his discussion of methodical breeding in *The Origin of Species*, that

[n]ot one man in a thousand has accuracy of eye and judgment sufficient to become an eminent breeder. If gifted with these qualities, and he studies his subject for years, and devotes his lifetime to it with indomitable perseverance, he will succeed, and may make great improvements; if he wants any of these qualities he will assuredly fail (36).

In a sense, this highlights the ultimate optimism of Hardy's project. As Darwin suggests, the work of husbandry demands a continuous, meticulous attention to detail and a

perseverance that is rare indeed. Hardy's writing, both personal and private, suggests a belief that not only could the same sort of work be done to improve society, but that a writer could, through well-crafted fiction, train their readers to do the work as well.

Chapter Two

The Future of Morality and the “Sense of Sex”

*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.

“In Tenebris II”⁷

*What I insist on is, that to explain such verses as this: “Whither is thy
beloved gone, O thou fairest among women?” by the note: “The Church
professeth her faith” is supremely ridiculous!”*

*-Sue Bridehead, *Jude the Obscure*⁸*

One of the most striking elements of *The Descent of Man* is the way that Darwin expands the process of natural selection beyond the development of living things, bringing everything from language to fashion to morality under its umbrella. He is careful to ground these ideas in a conversation that had begun to take place among scholars in a variety of fields at the time. In the years since the publication of *Origin*, Darwin observes, philologists such as Max Müller had depicted the development of language as a struggle for life among various words and linguistic constructions. Darwin puts an explicit label on this struggle, arguing that “the survival or preservation of certain favored words in the struggle for language is Natural selection” (74). For Darwin, this observation opens a floodgate of ideas about the development of the customs and habits of a given culture:

According to a large and increasing school of philologists every language bears the marks of its slow and gradual evolution. So it is that the art of

writing, or letters are rudiments of pictorial representations. It is hardly possible to read Mr. [John] M'Lennan's work and not admit that almost all civilized nations still retain traces of such rude habits as the forcible capture of wives. What ancient nation, as the same author asks, can be named that was originally monogamous? The primitive idea of justice, as shown by the law of battle and other customs of which vestiges still remain, was likewise most rude. Many existing superstitions are remnants of former false religious beliefs. The highest form of religion - the grand idea of God hating sin and loving righteousness - was unknown during primeval times (*Descent*, 122-3).

Darwin's insight, then, is to expand upon the notions of his contemporaries about the evolutionary nature of the customs, habits, and social structures of a given culture, creating a framework for understanding cultures as organisms that have evolved according to the same process as individual species. At the heart of this evolution is the sort of internal struggle for survival that Darwin describes in his arguments about the evolution of morality, a struggle in which new ideas take the place of the biological mutations that drive the development of species. In this way, all new cultural products must survive three great struggles: the struggle for expression that is constantly taking place within the individual, the struggle for survival of the individual within the broader culture, and the struggle for the survival of that culture in the global population.

Darwin's focus on the "traces of...rude habits" suggests that much of contemporary culture had evolved according to natural or unconscious selection and had yet to make the leap to the sort of methodical selection that eminent breeders had made in the development of various species of plants and livestock. Thus, while Victorian matrimony was no longer a matter of the "forcible capture" of wives, he suggests that contemporary society had yet to root out some lingering aspects of its original nature. Darwin also examines such practices as slavery and "primogeniture with entailed estates"

(115), noting that slavery “is a great crime; yet it was not so regarded until quite recently, even by the most civilized nations” (97), and that while primogeniture constitutes a “direct evil” for society, “it may formerly have been a great advantage by the creation of a dominant class, and any government is better than none” (115).

Darwin’s ultimate conclusion regarding this process is that the time of the eminent breeder of morals has arrived. Near the end of the passage on morality, he issues what is essentially a challenge, couched explicitly in the terminology of animal husbandry:

In the breeding of domestic animals, the elimination of those individuals, though few in number, which are in any marked manner inferior, is by no means an unimportant element toward success. This especially holds good with injurious characters which tend to reappear through reversion, such as blackness in sheep; and with mankind some of the worst dispositions, which occasionally without any assignable cause make their appearance in families, may perhaps be reversions to a savage state, from which we are not removed by very many generations. This view seems indeed recognized in the common expression that such men are the black sheep of the family (116-7).

He goes on to outline the stakes of such a challenge, arguing that “[i]f the various checks...do not prevent the reckless, the vicious, and otherwise inferior members of society from increasing at a quicker rate...the nation will retrograde” (119).

The checks that Darwin suggests can prevent this moral regression are precisely those traits that lead to the development of a more refined morality:

as man gradually advanced in intellectual power, and was enabled to trace the more remote consequences of his actions; as he regarded more and more not only the welfare, but the happiness of his fellow-men; as from habit, following on beneficial experience, instruction, and example, his sympathies became more tender and widely diffused, extending to men of

all races, to the imbecile, maimed, and other useless members of society,
and finally to the lower animals (103-4)

This highly developed intellect and sense of sympathy work in concert, in Darwin's view, to support the final trait that he suggests is crucial to the development of higher morality: self control. Discussing the "low morality of savages," Darwin suggests that among primitive peoples, "this power has not been strengthened through long-continued, perhaps inherited, habit, instructions, and religion" (99). In this way, self-control can be seen as the process of higher moral impulses or instincts winning out in the struggle with more primal urges, as when the urge to procreate is made subservient to the more recently evolved notion of chastity.

Hardy's fiction can be seen simultaneously as a response to Darwin's challenge and an attempt to extend that challenge to a broader audience. The plots of Hardy's tragedies essentially follow the same Darwinian arc: an individual who demonstrates the next stage in intellectual and emotional development required for the advancement of morality is introduced into an unsympathetic society. The conflict of the novels proceeds from the struggles, both within the individual and between the individual and the larger society, for the survival of those traits. The tragic outcomes of the novels are rooted in the fact that Hardy places those new traits in opposition to more primal instincts, particularly sexual desire, and the customs surrounding them, driving the new traits to extinction either through the death of the protagonist or through an atavistic return to more traditional values on the part of the protagonist. These tragic endings are meant to engage the sympathies of the reader while also appealing to their reason through the dissection of those internal and external forces that overcome the protagonists' new views. In this way, Hardy applies the principles outlined in *Descent* toward the project of moral husbandry first suggested by Darwin.

In Hardy, as in Darwin, the advanced notions of the protagonists have their roots in the development of intellect, in particular the pursuit of unconventional studies or

interests. From the beginning, each of Hardy's forward-thinking protagonists is intimately associated with education and its effects. When Angel Clare, the defiant agnostic of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, first appears at a club-walking and dance at the beginning of the novel, Hardy's depiction of the young man suggests an appearance that defies traditional description, ultimately defining him by his broad intellectual interests:

there was an uncribbed, uncabined aspect in his eyes and attire, implying that he had hardly as yet found the entrance to his professional groove.

That he was a desultory student of something and everything might only have been predicted of him (41).

The object of his attention at the dance, the young Tess Durbeyfield, is likewise described in terms of her intellectual advancement in relation to her impoverished rural background and the backwardness of her parents. In his first description of Tess, Hardy observes that “[t]he dialect was on her tongue to some extent, despite the village school,” (40), creating a sense of the tension between the culture of traditional rural England and the modern era. This conflict is clearest in the comparisons of Tess and her mother. Joan Durbeyfield speaks in dialect, but Tess, “who had passed the Sixth Standard in the National School under a London-trained mistress, spoke two languages; the dialect at home, more or less; ordinary English abroad and to persons of quality” (46). As a result of her education, Tess is portrayed as so far in advance of her mother that “there was a gap of two hundred years as ordinarily understood [between them]. When they were together the Jacobean and the Victorian ages were juxtaposed” (48).⁹

Likewise, both Jude and Sue, the protagonists of *Jude the Obscure*, are introduced as characters fixated on and defined by academic achievement from the outset. Like Tess and Angel, they come together at different stages in their development, with Sue playing the intellectual mentor to Jude in much the same way that Angel does to Tess. Jude's education begins with the lessons of his childhood hero, the schoolteacher Phillotson, and the aunt who serves as his guardian. Phillotson, as he leaves the village to pursue the life

of an academic, urges Jude to “read all [he] can” (34), while his aunt bemoans the fact that he didn’t join Phillotson in Christminster: “Why didn’t ye get the schoolmaster to take ‘ee to Christminster wi’un, and make a scholar of ‘ee?” (38). From that point on, much of young Jude’s character is defined by his voracious reading and desperate but clumsy attempts to ready himself for a career in academics.

His cousin Sue, likewise, is presented as an insatiable student. By Sue’s own reckoning, her life prior to her introduction in the novel has been “entirely shaped by what people call a peculiarity,” namely that she has “no fear of men, as such, nor of their books” (167). This has led her to close personal and intellectual relationships with a number of men, particularly a young undergraduate with whom she used to go on “walking tours, reading tours, and things of that sort” (168). Unlike Jude, whose obsession with Christminster is equally academic and spiritual, Sue is interested only in secular education. In recounting her experiences with the young undergraduate with whom she previously lived, she explains that she has “no respect for Christminster whatever, except, in a qualified degree, on its intellectual side” (170).

Perhaps the most striking example of the way that Hardy grounds his protagonists in their intellectual aspirations and achievements is Clym Yeobright, the eponymous hero of *The Return of the Native*. Like Angel, Clym has had the advantage of elevated social standing, wealth, and the educational access that comes with them. When Yeobright finally appears nearly a third of the way through the novel, Hardy’s description of him suggests a character so thoroughly defined by his intellectual pursuits that it has physically altered his appearance:

His countenance was overlaid with legible meanings. Without being thought-worn he yet had certain marks derived from a perception of his surroundings, such as are not unfrequently found on men at the end of four or five years of endeavour at which follow the close of placid pupilage. He already showed that thought is a disease of the flesh, and indirectly bore

evidence that ideal physical beauty is incompatible with emotional development and a full recognition of the coil of things. Mental luminousness must be fed with the oil of life, even though there is already a physical need for it; and the pitiful sight of two demands on one supply was just showing itself here” (156).

In this way, Clym has something in common with the scarlet-stained reddleman, Diggory Venn, who “had relinquished his proper station in life for lack of interest in it” (101), choosing instead to pursue a career that literally marks him as separate from society and staining his skin with a dye that reduces him to “a sublimation of all the horrid dreams which had afflicted the juvenile spirit since imagination began” (100). Like Clym, Diggory is physically defined by both his emotional and intellectual development: “after looking at him one would have hazarded the guess that good-nature, and an acuteness as extreme as it could be without verging on craft, formed the framework of his character” (101). At the same time, Diggory's traditional physical beauty is noticeably altered by his choice of career, just as Clym's appearance is altered by his habit of reflection. Thus, Hardy remarks, Venn's appearance “was an instance of the pleasing being wasted to form the groundwork of the singular” (101). The appearance of both men is a reminder to the reader that their ideas place them squarely at the crossroads between old and new systems of philosophy.¹⁰

Hardy's development of his intellectually advanced protagonists plays out in a way that reinforces Darwin's argument that such advancement would allow a person to “trace the more remote consequences of his actions” and to “reject baneful customs and superstitions” (*Descent*, 103). In particular, Hardy's characters often struggle with their understandings of theology and its relationship to primitive superstitions. They are then left to wrestle with the moral implications of questioning or even abandoning that theology. As Hardy progressed in his career, this element of his work put him increasingly at odds with many of his contemporaries.

Although Clym Yeobright, one of Hardy's earliest tragic protagonists, is presented as less aggressive in his exploration of theology, he is still actively focused on a campaign to root out superstition and ignorance in his neighbors. Yeobright returns to his home on Egdon Heath ready to “clean out the cobwebs” of ignorance that he sees as plaguing his fellow heath-dwellers through a project of “high-class teaching” (203). This project is a response to his experience in the world of the Parisian diamond trade and his rejection of material ambition. More than that, though, Hardy’s descriptions of Clym suggest something deeper behind the young man's attempts to overthrow old systems of superstition. The description of Clym’s physical beauty as “incompatible with ... a full recognition of the coil of things” is further developed in a later passage which suggests that Clym’s unique appearance is the result of his engagement with contemporary scientific developments, an engagement that will soon be so popular that it will bring about a shift in aesthetic ideals. “Should there be a classic period to art hereafter,” Hardy argues, “its Pheidias may produce such faces” (185). Hardy continues:

The truth seems to be that a long line of disillusioning centuries has permanently displaced the Hellenic idea of life, or whatever it may be called. What the Greeks only suspected we know well; what their Aeschylus imagined our nursery children feel. That old-fashioned reveling in the general situation grows less and less possible as we uncover the defects of natural laws, and see the quandary that man is in by their operation. (185)

Of all Hardy’s tragic protagonists, Clym’s belief system is perhaps the most ambiguous. His ideas lack the full-throated denunciations of doctrine and dogma of Hardy’s later characters, focusing more on the petty superstitions of backwards Egdonites such as Christian Cantle and Susan Nunsuch. Still, the discussion of the “defects of natural laws” and “the quandary that man is in by their operation” suggests that the “typical countenance of the future” (185) that Clym’s face foreshadows will be sculpted

by a more profound change in our understanding of the world.¹¹ Indeed, Clym's failure to fully reach that understanding is central to the tragic outcome of the novel.

Another possible reason for Hardy's comparatively timid approach to theology with Clym's character is his decision to avoid placing Yeobright not at the forefront of social advancement, describing him instead as something of a "modern type" (185). Indeed, Yeobright's notions are only advanced in comparison to those of the people whose company he has chosen to keep: "Mentally he was in a provincial future, that is, he was in many points abreast with the central town thinkers of his date" (190). According to Hardy's introduction, the action of the novel takes place "between 1840 and 1850" (29), so it seems fair to argue that Hardy operated on the assumption that Yeobright's ideas would be very familiar to the novel-reading public by the time of *Return's* publication.

Whatever the reasons for Hardy's choices regarding Clym, by the writing of his later novels, he had clearly resolved to further pursue the Darwinian notion of intellect as enemy of superstition, deliberately courting controversy as he did so. Abandoning the vague allusions employed in his depiction of Yeobright, Hardy is much more explicit about the conclusions to which experience and education lead his later protagonists. Even before her fateful encounter with Alec d'Urberville, young Tess Durbeyfield shows no signs of the "old-fashioned reveling in the general situation" mentioned in *Return*. Applying a bit of her scientific education, Tess explains to her brother Abraham in an early scene that all of the stars are worlds, though some, like their own, are "blighted" (56). Asked what it would be like to be on one of the "splendid and sound" worlds, Tess explains that "father wouldn't have coughed and creped about as he does, and wouldn't have got too tipsy to go this journey; and mother wouldn't have been always washing, and never getting finished" (56).

After her experiences with Alec, her resulting pregnancy, the social stigma that comes with it, and the eventual death of her child, Tess undergoes a sort of physical

transformation very much akin to that of Yeobright:

Almost at a leap Tess thus changed from simple girl to complex woman. Symbols of reflectiveness passed into her face, and a note of tragedy at times into her voice (127).

The nature of her experiences is such that by the time Tess encounters Angel Clare, she is depicted as “expressing in her own native phrases - assisted a little by her Sixth Standard training - feelings which might almost have been called those of the age - the ache of modernism” (152). And it is through Angel and his ideas that Tess begins to develop a system of beliefs that follows the Darwinian narrative of advanced moral development.

Angel, like Clym, is described as having been universally recognized as a young man of promise: “as a lad people had said of him that he was one who might do anything if he tried” (142). Like Clym, his education and experience lead him to react against what he identifies as the pernicious influence of superstition on society. Unlike Clym, however, this brings him into direct conflict with Christianity and his upbringing as the child of a clergyman. Citing the church’s “untenable redemptive theolatriy” (143), Clare refuses the opportunity of a university education and a life in the clergy, arguing that what the Church requires is a reasoned rejection of irrational and superstitious doctrine:

I cannot underwrite Article Four (leave alone the rest), taking it ‘in the literal and grammatical sense’ as required by the Declaration; and therefore I can’t be a parson in the present state of affairs...My whole instinct in matters of religion is towards reconstruction; to quote your favorite Epistle to the Hebrews, ‘*the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain*’ (144).

In laying out the philosophy of Angel Clare, Hardy was certainly taking a bold step beyond what he had dared with Clym in *Return*. With its discussion of “the defects of natural laws” and “a full recognition of the coil of things,” *Return* simply leaves the door

open to a scientific critique of dogmatic Christianity. In *Tess*, Hardy is much more explicit. In some ways, Angel's (and later, Tess's) ideal of religion without dogma or superstition is a vastly more irreligious reading of Darwin's ideas than Darwin himself was willing to publish in his lifetime.

The example of the central couple in *Jude* is even more striking. In *Jude*, Sue takes the place of Angel as master, while Jude takes Tess's place as pupil. Trained by her experience with her undergraduate friend, whom she describes as "the most irreligious man I ever knew; and the most moral" (170), Sue is seen early on railing against the "medievalism" of Christminster, calling it "a place full of fetichists[sic] and ghost-seers" and insisting that "intellect in Christminster is pushing one way, and religion the other; and so they stand stockstill, like two rams butting each other" (170). Like Angel, Sue is devoted to the attempt to shift the balance of that struggle in favor of intellect, taking the project so far that she literally re-creates her Bible:

I altered my old [New Testament] by cutting up all the Epistles and Gospels into separate *brochures*, and re-arranging them in chronological order as written, beginning the book with Thessalonians, following on with the Epistles, and putting the Gospels much further on. Then I had the volume rebound. . . . I know that reading it afterwards made it twice as interesting as before, and twice as understandable (171).¹²

As with Angel and Tess, the influence of Sue's ideas on Jude (helped more than a little by his romantic attachment to her) leads him through a dramatic series of philosophical changes. Having started his studies with dreams of reaching the highest clerical offices, Jude abandons those notions in his pursuit of Sue, choosing to "go on believing as before" but "to [profess] nothing and no longer [own] and [exhibit] engines of faith" (235). By the time of Sue's return to Phillotson, he has largely foregone attending church services at all.

Although the degree to which the various protagonists' education leads them to

such a direct engagement with or assault on dogma and doctrine varies, one thing is true of all five characters: they do not respond to the loss of old beliefs or superstitions with despair. Rather, they all share a sense of the crucial importance of the search for a moral system that is more altruistic and egalitarian. Central to this search is an emphasis on The Golden Rule, which Darwin himself referred to as “the foundation-stone of morality” (*Descent, III*). Thus Clym Yeobright, shaken to his core by the tragic deaths of his mother and wife, finds himself clinging to the value that most informed his entire project of education, vowing to become “an itinerant preacher of the Eleventh Commandment” (393). Likewise, Tess’s explanation of the ideology that she has absorbed from Angel in her time with him is that she has religion without a belief in anything supernatural, focusing instead on “the *spirit* of the Sermon on the Mount” (344). Without dogma, she explains to the incredulous Alec d’Urberville, one can still have “the religion of loving-kindness and purity at least” (353), a proposition that Hardy defends by noting a fundamental difference between “theology and morals, which in the primitive days of mankind had been quite distinct” (353).

Of all Hardy’s protagonists, Jude Fawley is most well-suited to adopt this philosophy of an altruistic and rational religion without dogma. Jude, like Darwin’s hypothetical man of highest moral values, is animated by a sympathy so strong that it extends to all animals, perhaps stemming from Phillotson’s early admonition not only to read, but to “[b]e a good boy....and be kind to animals and birds” (34). Jude certainly does as Phillotson wishes, displaying the sort of sympathy to lower animals described by Darwin, which Hardy describes as “a magic thread of fellow-feeling” that binds his life to those of animals and even plants. Hardy sums up Jude’s pronounced sense of sympathy in an early passage:

He was a boy who could not himself bear to hurt anything. He had never brought home a nest of birds without lying awake in misery half the night after, and often reinstating them in their original place the next morning.

He could scarcely bear to see trees cut down or lopped, form a fancy that it hurt them; and late pruning, when the sap was up, and the tree bled profusely, had been a positive grief to him in his infancy. (41)

This heightened sense of sympathy is a trait shared by all of Hardy's protagonists. Clym Yeobright, for example, arrives in Egdon as “a John the Baptist who took ennoblement rather than repentance for his text” (190). Yeobright has undertaken this project specifically as the result of his love for his fellow man:

Yeobright loved his kind. He had a conviction that the want of most men was knowledge of a sort which brings wisdom rather than affluence. He wished to raise the class at the expense of individuals rather than individuals at the expense of the class. What was more, he was ready at once to be the first unit sacrificed. (190)

This impulse toward self-sacrifice is confirmed when, after nearly blinding himself in the pursuit of his studies, Clym responds with “[a] quiet firmness, and even cheerfulness,” (260). As Hardy explains, “Yeobright was an absolute stoic in the face of mishaps which only affected his social standing, and...the humblest walk would satisfy him if it could be made to work in some form of his culture scheme” (260).

Angel Clare displays a similar disdain for class distinctions, one which proceeds from his irreligious views and his focus on the altruistic elements of Christianity. Thus, after discussing Clare’s issues with literal theology and his “instinct...towards reconstruction,” Hardy explains that

[t]he effects of this decisive debate were not long in showing themselves. He spent years and years in desultory studies, undertakings, and meditations; he began to evince considerable indifference to social forms and observances. The material distinctions of rank and wealth he increasingly despised. Even the ‘good old family’ ... had no aroma for him unless there were good new resolutions in its representatives. (144)

Hardy portrays Angel as an academic who moves from theoretical egalitarianism to a practical experience that confirms his suspicions about existing class distinctions, if only after overcoming some initial awkwardness:

Much to his surprise he took, indeed, a real delight in their companionship. The conventional farm-folk of his imagination - personified in the newspaper-press by the pitiable dummy known as Hodge - were obliterated after a few days' residence. ... At first, it is true, when Clare's intelligence was fresh from a contrasting society, these friends with whom he now hobnobbed seemed a little strange. Sitting down as a level member of the dairyman's household seemed at the outset an undignified proceeding. The ideas, the modes, the surroundings, appeared retrogressive and unmeaning. But living on there, day after day, the acute sojourner became conscious of a new aspect in the spectacle.

(145-6)

In *Jude*, Hardy presents Sue and Jude as being of two very different minds on this issue. For Jude, the revelation that Angel experiences at Dairyman Crick's farm about the nature of class distinction and the value of physical work comes only fleetingly, always at odds with his idealized vision of the immeasurable worthiness of Christminster's academic institutions. Whenever the notion occurs to Jude, however, Hardy leaves no doubt as to its truth. The first such revelation comes when Jude first sets foot in the stoneyards of Christminster:

For a moment there fell on Jude a true illumination; that here in the stoneyard was a centre of effort as worthy as that dignified by the name of scholarly study within the noblest of the colleges. But he lost it under stress of his old idea. (108)

The tension between Jude's ideals and his experience is further heightened after he receives a brutally dismissive letter from a Christminster professor suggesting he would

“have much better chance of success in life by remaining in [his] own sphere and sticking to [his] trade” (138). Reflecting on his experiences, Jude comes closer to abandoning his ideals, noting that

town life was a book of humanity infinitely more palpitating, varied, and compendious, than the gown life. These struggling men and women before him were the reality of Christminster, though they knew little of Christ or Minster. That was one of the humours of things. The floating population of students and teachers, who did know both in a way, were not Christminster in a local sense at all. (139)

Jude’s association with Sue and her much more radical ideology helps to cement this change of perspective. Sue’s notion of the injustice of class differences comes up most clearly in her discussion of the “medievalism” of Christminster, a city which she deplors as “an ignorant place, except as to the townspeople, artizans, drunkards and paupers” (170). In praising Jude, Sue goes on to express the same sense of injustice that continually intrudes upon Jude’s fantasies of Christminster academic life:

[The lower classes] see life as it is, of course; but few of the people in the colleges do. You prove it in your own person. 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. (170)

At this stage in the evolution of his thinking, the message is still somewhat lost on Jude, but as he moves closer and closer to Sue’s positions on matters of religion and metaphysics, he finds himself abandoning his idealistic view of Christminster elitism in favor of a more egalitarian view. Thus, by the time of little Father Time’s arrival, Jude finds himself arguing that “excessive regard of parents for their own children, and their dislike of other people’s is, like class-feeling, patriotism, save-your-own-soul-ism and other virtues, a mean exclusiveness at bottom” (288). When Jude and Sue arrive in

Christminster for the last time near the end of the novel, he has come even farther in the direction of Sue's thinking (and, by extension, in the direction of Darwin's moral ideal) declaring himself to be

in a chaos of principles - groping in the dark - acting by instinct and not after example. Eight or nine years ago when I came here first, I had a neat stock of fixed opinions, but they dropped away one by one; and the further I get the less sure I am. I doubt if I have anything more for my present rule of life than following inclinations which do me and nobody else any harm, and actually give pleasure to those I love best. (336-7)

In this way, the evolution of Jude's ideas and morality most closely parallels the Darwinian narrative of the evolution of higher morality, beginning at its roots in instinctive urges guided by superstition and the judgment of society and ultimately arriving at a morality grounded in altruism, guided by reason and experience.

An examination of *Return*, *Tess*, and *Jude* reveals the way that Hardy, building on the ideas that had captivated him since "Hap," carefully honed his representation of the development and struggle for survival of that moral sense within the individual and the broader society. As Hardy himself suggests in the three novels, many of the specific ideas that inform this moral sense were hardly new, from the focus on altruism to the importance of reason to the subversion of existing religious beliefs and class structures. Yet the moral systems promoted by Hardy's protagonists were far from dominant in contemporary culture, for reasons that Darwin himself explored in his work. This underscores the particular value of applying Darwin's ideas to an attempt at moral improvement through fiction, particularly through tragedy: if, as Darwin argues, low or faulty moral systems were to be improved by the application of sympathy and reason, then the pathos of his characters' tragic ends, combined with an intellectual examination of the forces that bring those ends, would serve as an effective method of bringing about change. In this way, Hardy's tragic protagonists serve as martyrs for the cause of moral

improvement.

For both Hardy and Darwin, one of the most important factors in that improvement was religion. In *Descent*, Darwin provides a concise narrative of his ideas about the likely evolutionary history of spirituality and organized religion, drawing on the work of then-contemporary anthropologists. He argues that while “the ennobling belief in the existence of an Omnipotent God” is not an innate human trait, studies of various civilizations around the world suggest that there is a universal tendency to invent spiritual or supernatural forces as a way of understanding the world:

If, however, we include under the term ‘religion’ the belief in unseen or spiritual agencies, the case is wholly different: for this seems to be universal with the less civilized races. Nor is it difficult to comprehend how it arose. As soon as the important faculties of the imagination, wonder, and curiosity, together with some power of reasoning, had become partially developed, man would naturally crave to understand what was passing around him, and would have vaguely speculated on his own existence. As Mr. M’Lennan[sic] has remarked, ‘Some explanation of the phenomena of life, a man must feign for himself; and to judge from the universality of it, the simplest hypothesis, and the first to occur to men, seems to have been that natural phenomena are ascribable to the presence in animals, plants, and things, and in the forces of nature, of such spirits prompting to action as men are conscious they themselves possess,’(77-8)

Darwin goes on to observe that this tendency to assign “animating spirits” to plants, animals, and even natural forces, “would easily pass into the belief in the existence of one or more gods. For savages would naturally attribute to spirits the same passions, the same love of vengeance or simplest form of justice, and the same affections which they themselves feel” (78). From there, he lays out a narrative of the rise of modern religion:

The same high mental faculties which first led man to believe in unseen

spiritual agencies, then in fetichism [sic], polytheism, and ultimately in monotheism, would infallibly lead him, as long as his reasoning powers remain poorly developed, to various strange superstitions and customs. Many of these are terrible to think of - such as the sacrifice of human beings to a blood-loving god; the trial of innocent persons by the ordeal of poison or fire; witchcraft, etc. Yet it is well occasionally to reflect on these superstitions, for they show us what an infinite debt of gratitude we owe to the improvement of our reason, to science, and to our accumulated knowledge. (79)

It is hard to overstate the importance of this narrative in terms of its influence on Hardy's fiction. The legacy of man's initial attempts to understand the natural world and his own mind loom large throughout the tragic novels, casting a shadow down through the ages to darken the lives of all of Hardy's protagonists.

It is not surprising that Hardy settled on exploring the issue so carefully, given the role that Darwin gives it in the internal moral struggle. At one point in *Descent*, Darwin once again refers to the importance of sympathy and reason in determining an individual's actions, adding this qualifying statement: "Another element is most important, although not necessary - the reverence or fear of Gods or Spirits believed in by each man; and this applies especially in cases of remorse"(94). The influence of religion on morals, which Darwin suggested could simultaneously have positive effects while "infallibly" leading to such abominations as the torture and murder of innocents, became a fixation of Hardy's. In his project of moral husbandry, the use of reason to root out superstition and its opposition to a higher moral order is a central goal, one which depends on carefully constructed representations of Darwin's narrative of the origins of those superstitions and their role in contemporary theology.

Hardy's Wessex is depicted as a place where this lineage surrounds the characters, sometimes quite dramatically.¹³ Thus the reader's first view of Egdon Heath in *Return*

comes on Bonfire Night, when the figure of Eustacia Vye atop Rainbarrow could be mistaken for “the person of one of the Celts who built the barrow, so far had all of modern date withdrawn from the scene” (41).¹⁴ Eustacia, like the Celts before her, is succeeded by a more modern group, the motley crew of Egdonites who have come to celebrate Bonfire Night. But Hardy is careful to highlight the connection between modern and ancient practices, tracing both to something even more elemental and noting that

[t]he ashes of the original British pyre which blazed from that summit lay fresh and undisturbed in the barrow beneath their tread. The flames from funeral piles long ago kindled there had gone down upon the lowlands as these were shining now. Festival fires to Thor and Woden had followed on the same ground and duly had their day. Indeed, it is pretty well known that such blazes as the heathmen were now enjoying are rather the lineal descendants from jumbled Druidical rites and Saxon ceremony than the invention of popular feeling about the Gunpowder Plot.

Moreover, to light a fire is the instinctive and resistant act of man when, at the winter ingress, the curfew is sounded throughout Nature. (44-5)

Similarly, Hardy traces the history of May-Day reveling, suggesting at the end of the novel that “the impulses of all such outlandish hamlets are pagan still” and concluding that “in these spots homage to nature, self-adoration, frantic gaities, fragments of Teutonic rites to divinities whose names are forgotten, seem in some way or other to have survived mediaeval doctrine” (385). Likewise at the beginning of *Tess* he observes that while the primeval forests of Blackmore Vale were no longer visible, “some old customs of their shades remain...only in a metamorphosed or disguised form,” such as the transformation of the Pagan May-Day revel into the modern club-walking (38). The young Jude Fawley, like all the residents of Marygreen, draws his water from a well which has been in use throughout the long history of the village, which Hardy traces to its

location alongside an ancient Roman road.

In this way, Hardy's settings provide an excellent backdrop for his examination of the origins and implications of modern religious beliefs. The notion, continually expressed in Hardy's Wessex novels, that the primitive origins of modern culture are on display at all times in rural England prepares the reader for a more focused examination of the evolutionary origins of the elements of that culture which Hardy critiques, particularly religion.

The origins of the earliest phase of belief described by Darwin, that phase in which "savages imagine that natural objects and agencies are animated by spiritual or living essences" (*Descent*, 78) survives in the myriad superstitions of Hardy's protagonists and the company they keep. Perhaps the best example is Christian Cantle of *Return*, who spends much of the novel scared of spirits and devils that he believes populate Egdon Heath. Cantle, portrayed as comically credulous and dim, serves as a convenient stand-in for a member of Darwin's "less civilized races," arriving at "strange superstitions and customs" precisely because of his poor reasoning skills. After a chance victory in a dice game, Christian gains his first moment of true confidence, but only through his belief that the dice used in the game are possessed of an animating spirit that can change his destiny: "What curious creatures these dice be - powerful rulers of us all, and yet at my command! I am sure I never need be afeared of anything after this" (235-6).

Given the way that his name serves to attach his superstition to the broader Christian community, it is unsurprising that Cantle's bizarre notions are hardly out of the ordinary on Egdon Heath. The Egdonites on Bonfire Night are seen discussing the correspondence between the fullness of the moon at a boy's birth and his manliness as an adult (53) and having a matter-of-fact discussion of the peculiar appearance of a ghost that has been seen wandering the Heath of late (later revealed to be the reddleman Diggory Venn). The Egdonites remark that the spirit looks "as if it had been dipped in blood," even though it is common knowledge that "most ghosts be white" (53). Likewise,

Tess's companions at Talbothays engage in a lengthy discussion of how a woman in love can prevent a batch of butter from hardening and how the only solution is to hire the services of a "conjurer" (160). In the same way that the Bonfire Night celebrations reflect a survival of an older worldview, these superstitions maintain their hold in Hardy's Wessex, as yet untouched by a rational view that would render them ridiculous.

Early in *Return*, Hardy offers a glimpse of how ancient man might have progressed beyond simple, fetishistic views of the universe in his description of the "untameable, Ishmaelitish" (35) Egdon Heath. On Bonfire Night, after the revelers have gone and Eustacia has returned to the peak of Rainbarrow, Hardy describes the sound of the wind traveling through the plants of the heath and the impression that it leaves upon the listener:

'The spirit moved them.' A meaning of the phrase forced itself upon the attention; and an emotional listener's fetishistic mood might have ended in one of more advanced quality. It was not, after all, that the left-hand expanse of the old blooms spoke, or the right-hand, or those of the slope in front; but it was the single person of something else speaking through each at once. (78)

This notion of identifying a single animating spirit that controls the entire Heath suggests the transition to a more modern monotheistic religion, or at least a system in which spiritual forces are united in a more orderly fashion toward a given purpose.

Hardy grounds the theology of many of his characters in a logical process very much the same as that which causes Christian Cantle to view his dice and the random results they produce as products of a powerful spiritual agency. Young Jude's notion of Christianity and the power of prayer, for instance, is not unlike Cantle's view that he can use his dice to bring about any good fortune he desires:

People said that if you prayed things sometimes came to you, even though they sometimes did not. He had read in a tract that a man who had begun

to build a church, and had no money to finish it, knelt down and prayed, and the money came in by the next post. Another man tried the same experiment, and the money did not come; but he found afterwards that the breeches he knelt in were made by a wicked Jew. (45)

Jude's story of the "wicked Jew" suggests another way that early polytheistic or fetishistic beliefs are adapted in contemporary religions: a whole pantheon of evil and vindictive spirits are simply lumped together into the form of the Devil and his minions. Thus moments of good fortune are ascribed to the action of heavenly powers, while tragic circumstances are blamed on the influence of diabolical agents.

Hardy's depiction of his characters' religious beliefs is couched in terms that are meant to leave no doubt as to how they should actually be viewed. Consider Clym's reaction to his own guilt at not initiating a reconciliation with his mother before she died:

He continually bewailed his tardy journey to his mother's house, because it was an error which could never be rectified, and insisted that he must have been horribly perverted by some fiend not to have thought before that it was his duty to go see her, since she did not come to him. (314)

In his insistence on the influence of "some fiend," Yeobright avoids a confrontation of the harsh reality that both he and his mother were to blame for their split, just as they both had the opportunity to resolve it but failed to do so. Likewise, when Jude arrives at the Cathedral of Cardinal College, riddled with guilt over a recent bout of drinking and his conflicted feelings about a budding interest in Sue, he sees a special significance in the day's reading from the 119th Psalm:

It was the very question that was engaging Jude's attention at this moment. What a wicked worthless fellow he had been to give vent as he had done to an animal passion for a woman and allow it to lead to such disastrous consequences; then to think of putting an end to himself; then to go recklessly and get drunk. The great waves of pedal music tumbled round

the choir, and nursed on the super-natural as he had been, it is not wonderful that he could hardly believe that the psalm was not specially set by some regardful Providence for this moment of his first entry into the solemn building. And yet it was the ordinary psalm for the twenty-fourth evening of the month. (114-5)

Both young men are caught in the grip of a powerful natural force and they ascribe it to the influence of the supernatural. In both Clym and Jude's cases, however, that force is the power of their own conscience and the overwhelming feelings of remorse they experience as a result of their decisions.

This is another point at which Hardy engages with the then-contemporary discussion about the origins of religion. Darwin asserts that early man "would naturally attribute to spirits the same passions, the same love of vengeance or simplest form of justice, and the same affections which they themselves feel" (*Descent*, 78). Hardy takes this a step further, suggesting that it is mankind's tendency to attribute those values to deities because the deities spring out of humanity's attempt to explain the powerful urgings of their own conscience, just as early man might create spirits out of natural forces such as fire, wind, or rain.¹⁵

This idea is most clearly expressed in a passage in *Tess*, shortly after the heroine's return from The Chase, as she wrestles with the response of her fellow villagers to her pregnancy:

At times her whimsical fancy would intensify natural processes around her till they seemed a part of her own story. Rather they became a part of it; for the world is only a psychological phenomenon, and what they seemed they were. The midnight airs and gusts, moaning amongst the tightly wrapped buds and bark of the winter twigs, were formulæ of bitter reproach. A wet day was the expression of irremediable grief at her weakness in the mind of some vague ethical being whom she could not

class definitely as the God of her childhood, and could not comprehend as any other.

But this encompassment of her own characterization, based on shreds of convention, people by phantoms and voices antipathetic to her, was a sorry and mistaken creation of Tess's fancy - a cloud of moral hobgoblins by which she was terrified without reason. It was they who were out of harmony with the natural world, not she. ... she looked upon herself as a figure of Guilt intruding into the haunts of Innocence. But all the while she was making a distinction where there was no difference. Feeling herself in antagonism she was quite in accord. She had been made to break an accepted social law, but no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly (114).

Tess's confusion and sense of being judged sum up one of the primary issues that Hardy tackles throughout his tragedies: the problems created by theological systems whose moral prescriptions are invented in response to the misinterpretation of natural urges.

As Darwin suggests, "[e]ven when an action is opposed to no special instinct, merely to know that our friends and equals despise us for it is enough to cause great misery. ... The breach of a rule held sacred by the tribe will thus, as it seems, give rise to the deepest feelings" (*Descent*, 95). Tess anthropomorphizes this misery, transforming everything around her into the tools of a judgmental deity, when both the deity and his agents are merely the products of her attempt to understand the natural world and the overwhelming power of a social instinct which causes her to shrink from the judgment of her peers. In Hardy's tragic novels, contemporary moral systems serve as the chief obstacles to the propagation of his protagonists' new ideas. Hardy's project of moral husbandry centers on a careful, reasoned examination of these moral systems and their origins, with a mind toward their modification or elimination. Perhaps because it is rooted in a biological urge that is so fundamental to our nature and so heavily regulated

by religion and culture, Hardy's work is particularly concerned with the role of sexuality in these moral and religious systems.

In Hardy's novels, sexuality is treated as a powerful force of nature, open to the same spiritual interpretation that renders lightning into malevolent spirits and the pangs of conscience into the judgment of an omniscient deity. This power is grounded in the Darwinian notion that basic instincts, like the urge toward procreation, can easily overcome more highly evolved moral sentiments or reason. The tragic outcome of *Return of the Native*, for instance, has its origins in the struggle between Clym's high moral pursuits, his filial instincts, and his desire for Eustacia, which threatens to overcome both:

Thus as his sight grew accustomed to the first blinding halo kindled about him by love and beauty, Yeobright began to perceive what a strait he was in. Sometimes he wished that he had never known Eustacia, immediately to retract the wish as brutal. Three antagonistic growths had to be kept alive: his mother's trust in him, his plan for becoming a teacher, and Eustacia's happiness. His fervid nature could not afford to relinquish one of these, though two of the tree were as many as he could hope to preserve. (216)

In his descriptions of Eustacia Vye and her interaction with the various men and boys of Egdon Heath, Hardy outlines the process by which the imagination transforms sexual urges into a sort of malevolent force. In one of the earliest scenes of the novel, Eustacia is depicted as a mesmerizing presence, drawing men and boys alike to her bonfire. Indeed, the bonfire itself is the product of her overpowering influence, stoked by Johnny Nunsuch, a neighboring boy who is transformed into "a mere automaton, galvanized into moving and speaking by the wayward Eustacia's will" (83). Eustacia's influence on Nunsuch is so profound that Hardy likens him to "the brass statue which Albertus Magnus is said to have animated just so far as to make it chatter, and move, and be his servant" (83).

Moments later Damon Wildeve appears, fresh from a meeting with his jilted fiancée and her guardian, an encounter in which he has asserted that the marriage must happen in order to maintain his own respectability. As such, it is a testament to Eustacia's power that he arrives so promptly, bending to her will just as she predicted he would:

I merely lit the fire because I was dull, and thought I would get a little excitement by calling you up and triumphing over you as the Witch of Endor called up Samuel. I determined you should come; and you have come! I have shown my power. A mile and a half hither, and a mile and a half back to your home - three miles in the dark for me. Have I not shown my power? (87)

Eustacia's comparison of herself to the Witch of Endor underscores Hardy's argument about the nature of sexuality and its influence.¹⁶ Wildeve has every rational reason to avoid Eustacia, and yet he is drawn to her, precisely because she knowingly wields her sexuality so effectively.¹⁷

Eustacia is not the only person to suggest that her power over men is a kind of witchcraft. Susan Nunsuch, Johnny's mother, is certain that Eustacia is a witch who has her son under an evil spell. As such, despite her Christian beliefs, she is willing to stab Eustacia with a hatpin in church, drawing blood in an attempt to counteract the malign "spell" Eustacia has placed on Johnny. Near the end of the novel Susan Nunsuch is seen crafting a sort of voodoo doll using Eustacia's hair, a "ghastly invention of superstition, calculated to bring powerlessness, atrophy, and annihilation on any human being against whom it was directed," (358). As she attacks the doll, the mother recites the Lord's Prayer backwards in an attempt to defend her son by obtaining "unhallowed assistance against an enemy" (359).

In the conflict between Eustacia's unfettered sexuality and Susan Nunsuch's bizarre act of superstition, Hardy suggests something about the roots of contemporary Christian morality. Nunsuch's attempt to enlist the help of powerful spirits to ward off

Eustacia's bewitchment represents a primitive version of the attempt to control the irrational urges of sexuality with religion. This is a theme that runs throughout Hardy's novels, although *Return* is perhaps most explicit in its discussion of the origins of the conflict and its modern legacy.

Hardy extends this idea of sexuality as a supernatural force beyond the confines of Egdon Heath in a long description of Eustacia immediately after her Bonfire Night meeting with Wildeve. He casts her as "the raw material of a divinity" and suggests that if she were transported to Mt. Olympus, "she would have done well with a little preparation" because she "had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman" (89). Chief among those passions is "her great desire," simply put, "[t]o be loved to madness," adding that "she seemed to long for the abstraction called passionate love more than for any particular lover" (92). Hardy's invocation of the Olympians places the attempt to understand and control sexuality at the foundations of human civilization. Furthermore, he goes on to suggest that while humanity has moved on from worshipping the members of the Greek Pantheon, the godlike power that Eustacia yields is still very much a force in the world:

Had it been possible for the earth and mankind to be entirely in [Eustacia's] grasp for a while, had she handled the distaff, the spindle, and the shears at her own free will, few in the world would have noticed the change of government. There would have been the same inequality of lot, the same heaping up of favors here, of contumely there, the same generosity before justice, the same perpetual dilemmas, the same captious alteration of caresses and blows that we endure now. (89)

This is a crucial notion in *Return*. Hardy suggests that Eustacia's motivations, her vanity, her worldly ambition and desperation for the the cultured promenades of Paris (or even their dim shadow, the seaside resort of Budmouth), and her willingness to exploit sexuality in pursuit of those goals, though they appear to stick out in the context of Egdon

Heath, are actually typical of the motivations and conflicts that undergird modern society. In this way, Hardy gives the struggle to understand, control, or exploit sexuality a central role in the development of morality.

The unjust results of this struggle between female sexuality and the attempt to control it are most on display in the story of Clym's cousin, Thomasin, and her erstwhile suitor Damon Wildeve. Wildeve's professional history sets him up as a sort of foil to Clym, who was a great success in the diamond trade. In contrast, Wildeve's attempt at being an engineer is memorialized only in a plaque on the door of his inn:

Upon the door was a neglected brass plate, bearing the unexpected inscription, "Mr Wildeve, Engineer" - useless yet cherished relic from the time when he had been started in that profession in an office at Budmouth by those who had hoped much from him, and had been disappointed. (67)

Still, despite his failures in the professional world, Wildeve lives a fairly comfortable and respectable life on Egdon, although Hardy makes it clear that much of Wildeve's material comfort is owing entirely to the work of those who came before him, particularly in the first description of the inn's location, "Wildeve's Patch":

a plot of land redeemed from the heath, and after long and laborious years brought into cultivation. The man who had discovered that it could be tilled died of the labour: the man who succeeded him in possession ruined himself in fertilizing it. Wildeve came like Amerigo Vespucci, and received the honours due to those who had gone before. (62)

Wildeve serves as a foil to Clym in his social interactions and successes as well as in his commercial efforts. His movements are described as "the pantomimic expression of a lady-killing career" (68), and he is ultimately summed up as "one in whom no man would have seen anything to admire, and in whom no woman would have seen anything to dislike" (68). In other words, Wildeve is a man who can exert the same sort of sexual influence on women that Eustacia can on men. Unlike Eustacia, however, all the shame

and ignominy that results from his behavior attaches to Thomasin rather than to Wildeve himself. Thus, after it appears that she has been jilted on her wedding day, it is Thomasin that suffers most from her neighbors' opinions.

When Thomasin's aunt suggests that such experiences should be openly discussed by others, in order to "thoroughly fill the air with the past misfortune, so that other girls may take warning and keep clear of it," (132), she seems to neatly sum up the Darwinian process by which basic instincts are regulated by the affects of social approbation. Crucial to Hardy's effort, though, is the way that this underscores the injustice of that process when it is unguided by reason. Thomasin's response alludes to this injustice:

"I am a warning to others, just as thieves and drunkards and gamblers are," she said in a low voice. "What a class I belong to! Do I really belong to them? 'Tis absurd! Yet why, aunt, does everybody keep on making me think that I do, by the way they behave towards me? Why don't people judge me by my acts? Now, look at me as I kneel here, picking up these apples - do I look like a lost woman? ... I wish all good women were as good as I!" she added vehemently. (132)

The imagery of the apples, combined with Thomasin's assault on the notion of what makes a "fallen woman" serves to return attention to the primal conflict exemplified by the struggle between Susan Nunsuch and Eustacia Vye and the legacy of that conflict in contemporary Christianity. The simple Nunsuch, confronted by the apparently overwhelming power of Eustacia's sexual appeal, can only conclude that there must be some magical force that requires an equally powerful magical force to counteract it. This primal failure of reason, Hardy suggests, has grown into a religious understanding of marriage as an institution designed to keep that "power" of women in check, at the behest of a judgmental God. Thomasin's sin, like Eustacia's is a perceived refusal to curb that power according to the dictates of convention. This accords with Darwin's idea that the development of religion "would infallibly lead...to various strange superstitions and

customs” (*Descent*, 79) and reinforces the notion of Hardy’s work as an attempt to root out such superstitions and customs through the use of the suffering of his protagonists.

Hardy further develops this idea of the evolutionary legacy of early religion in *Tess*, a novel which hinges on the issue that dogs Thomasin in the first half of *Return*: the notion of purity and acceptable expressions of female sexuality. But unlike Thomasin, whose primary difficulty is the loss of respectability, the question of whether Tess is, as Hardy asserts in the subtitle, “A Pure Woman,” will eventually decide her ability to find work, food, and shelter for herself, as well as for her family. By raising the stakes, Hardy makes more deliberate use of the process Darwin suggested was central to the evolution of morality, pairing his appeals to reason with a more concerted appeal to the sympathies of the reader.

The centerpiece of Hardy’s argument in *Tess* is the disparity between what is preached and what is actually practiced by society at large. At the heart of this disparity is a fact that Hardy acknowledges much more explicitly in *Tess* than in *Return*: the fact that sexual impulses are a biological fact of life for both men and women. This is especially clear in the way Hardy describes the infatuation of Tess’s fellow milkmaids at Talbothays Farm with Angel Clare. In one scene, Hardy depicts Tess’s three friends at a window in their nightgowns, surreptitiously watching Angel as he works and gossiping about their love for him. One milkmaid, Retty Priddle, announces that she observed another, Izz Huett, kissing the shadow of Angel’s mouth on the wall while he wasn’t looking. They all admit that they are equally in love with him, beginning with Marian, who asserts that she “would just marry ‘n to-morrow!” to which one woman responds that she would do so, “and more,” drawing an agreement from the third (166).

Hardy underscores the sexual nature of their interest in the following chapter, noting that “Tess was woman enough to realize from their avowals to herself that Angel Clare had the honour of all the dairymaids in his keeping” (168) and setting the stage for the next day’s encounter between Tess, her friends, and Angel on a Sunday walk. The

four young women are walking to church when they encounter a flooded road, which presents a challenge because they are dressed in their Sunday best. They are saved from soiled dresses by a chance encounter with Angel Clare, who offers to carry each of them across the stream to Church unblemished. The obvious sexual metaphor is made more explicit through Hardy's description of the flood and what it means to be dressed in one's "Sunday best":

[The flooded road] would have been no serious hindrance on a week-day; they would have clicked through it in their high pattens and boots quite unconcerned; but on this day of vanity, this Sun's-day, when flesh went forth to coquet with flesh while hypocritically affecting business with spiritual things; on this occasion for wearing their white stockings and thin shoes, and their pink, white, and lilac gowns, on which every mud spot would be visible, the pool was an awkward impediment. (169)

The image of the lovesick young women, eagerly waiting for their chance in Clare's arms, sums up all that women of their position can hope for in the existing moral and social order: an honorable man who will transport them past natural pitfalls on the road to an "upright" society in which piety is really a hypocritical mask that offers an outlet for the acceptable expression of sexual urges. Angel's ability to ford the stream respectfully reflects his prerogative as a man within the existing order to dabble sexually without being socially ruined by it, a fact borne out by his previous experience with an older woman in London.¹⁸

This sense of the base lurking behind the pious is mirrored in the scene immediately before Alec d'Urberville's deflowering of Tess, as she is walking home from the country dance in Traintridge. D'Urberville, unlike Clare, is obviously a man with whom no woman's honor can be trusted, and Hardy's narrator marks the effects of his proximity on the village as a whole:

Every village has its idiosyncrasy, its constitution, often its own code of

morality. The levity of some of the younger women in and about Traintridge was marked, and was perhaps symptomatic of the choice spirit who ruled The Slopes in that vicinity. (89)

Hardy goes on to suggest that Traintridge “had a more abiding defect; it drank hard” (89). The rude and drunken behavior of the Traintridge residents is on full display as Tess and her companions are returning from a country dance, culminating in an attempt by one woman to start a fight with Tess, who is “rescued” by the sudden arrival of d’Urberville and spirited away on horseback. Hardy’s description of the villagers, who cruelly joke that Tess is “[o]ut of the frying-pan into the fire” (96) reinforces the notion that social judgment surrounding sexual behavior is, like the coquetry of the dairymaids’ Sunday best, based on a fundamental hypocrisy:

as they went there moved onward with them, around the shadow of each one’s head, a circle of opalized light, formed by the moon’s rays upon the glistening sheet of dew. Each pedestrian could see no halo but his or her own, which never deserted the head-shadow, whatever its vulgar unsteadiness might be; but adhered to it, and persistently beautified it; till the erratic motions seemed an inherent part of the irradiation, and the fumes of their breathing a component of the night’s mist; and the spirit of the scene, and of the moonlight, and of Nature, seemed harmoniously to mingle with the spirit of wine. (96)

The tragedy of Tess’s experience is that she, unlike the drunken inhabitants of Traintridge, is not blinded by the illusory light of her own personal halo. Indeed, Tess is inclined to judge herself as harshly as any character in the novel, if not more so. Early on, when the family horse Prince, who serves as the real “bread-winner” (59) for the household, is killed in an accident while Tess is driving, she receives the most cruel treatment at her own hands. This is, in part, because she is more able to understand the implications of her actions than her simple parents. As Hardy explains,

the very shiftlessness of the [Durbeyfield] household rendered the misfortune a less terrifying one to them than it would have been to a striving family, though in the present case it meant ruin, and in the other it would only have meant inconvenience. In the Durbeyfield countenances there was nothing of the red wrath that would have burnt upon the girl from parents more ambitious for her welfare. Nobody blamed Tess as she blamed herself. (58)

Hardy underscores this idea in the scene of the makeshift funeral that Tess's father holds for the horse. Surrounded by her sobbing siblings, Tess's "face was dry and pale, as though she regarded herself in the light of a murderess" (59).

Tess's overwhelming sense of guilt, in contrast to the vague shiftlessness of her parents, stands as a perfect demonstration of the Darwinian narrative of moral evolution.¹⁹ Darwin suggests that this development requires the "intellectual power" that enables an individual "to trace the more remote consequences of his actions," and a level of empathy that would cause the individual to focus on "not only the welfare, but the happiness of his fellow-men" (*Descent*, 103-4). Tess, unlike her parents, has more than enough reason and empathy to understand the gravity of the situation and to understand the role that she played in bringing it about. Her undoing is the fact that she is unable to perceive the role of others in bringing about the tragic circumstances of her life, or the hypocrisy of the system that continually adds to her sense of guilt and suffering. Thus she punishes herself for her part in the accident without acknowledging the role of others.

Perhaps most important is the fact that she is not, as Darwin suggests is necessary, able to "reject baneful customs and superstitions" (*Descent*, 103). It is in Tess's experiences with religion that Hardy most explicitly weighs in on the moral questions that her story poses.²⁰ We first see this when Tess is fleeing Alec d'Urberville's estate, several weeks after their first sexual encounter. Tess encounters a man with the peculiar Sunday habit of wandering the countryside, painting scripture on fences and bridges.

When the man stops their conversation to paint “THY, DAMNATION, SLUMBERETH, NOT”(108) on a stile, Hardy describes the contrast between the way Tess responds to the passage and the way that a more astute reader might:

Some people might have cried ‘Alas, poor Theology’ at the hideous defacement - the last grotesque phase of a creed which had served mankind well in its time. But the words entered Tess with accusatory horror. It was as if this man had known her recent history; yet he was a total stranger. (108)

When Tess asks the man what happens “if your sin was not of your own making,” the man simply replies that he “cannot split hairs on that burning query”(108). His job, he explains, is simply to travel the countryside, painting scripture on fences, barns, and signposts where it can be seen by travelers. When Tess comments that the text is “horrible....Crushing! Killing!” (108) the man seems delighted to hear it. He leaves no doubt as to whom he wishes to be “crushed” or “killed” by the text, moving to a blank wall where he intends to put up the text of the Commandment against adultery and telling Tess: “I must put one there - one that it will be good for dangerous young females like yourself to heed” (109), implying that Tess is dangerous simply because she is sexually attractive.

That final comment echoes Hardy's method in *Return*, laying out the arguments made by contemporary Christians and highlighting the defects of those arguments all at once. Hardy reduces the Christian approach to sexuality to one in which female sexuality is presented as a dangerous force that needs to be “crushed” and “killed” by an equally powerful mystical force. Far from acknowledging the complexity of the issue, the man simply shirks responsibility, saying that it isn't his job to “split hairs,” and choosing instead to wander the countryside unreflectively parroting things he has heard in the past that can serve as an admonishment to those for whom he feels no sympathy.

Significantly, the final advice that the man offers to Tess is that she should take in

a sermon from a local preacher, a man who turns out to be Tess's future father-in-law. While the sign-painter says that he is not "of [Clare's] persuasion now," he explains of the elder Clare, "'Twas he began the work in me," (109). For Tess this is significant because she will spend the course of the novel at the mercy of two men who receive their notion of purity from the elder Clare: Alec d'Urberville and Angel Clare. From the Darwinian perspective, the profound effect of Clare's ideas on the two men is crucial to Hardy's idea of morality because the two men's actions suggest the way that such a view of female sexuality could take hold of society and the pernicious effects of a failure to reasonably examine its influence.

D'Urberville's encounter with the elder Clare occurs sometime between Tess's departure from the Slopes and her ill-fated attempt to ask her in-laws for help while Angel is in South America. Returning from that failed trip, Tess discovers Alec in a barn delivering a fiery sermon to a group of locals. Hardy is careful to describe d'Urberville's conversion not as a rejection of his past ways, but as the incorporation of his sexual energy into a religious framework:

It was less a reform than a transfiguration. The former curves of sensuousness were now modulated to lines of devotional passion. The lip-shapes that had meant seductiveness were now made to express supplication. The glow on the cheek that yesterday could be translated as riotousness was evangelized to-day into the splendour of pious rhetoric; animalism had become fanaticism; Paganism Paulinism; the bold rolling eye that had flashed upon her form in the old time with such mastery now beamed with the rude energy of a theolatriy that was almost ferocious. Those black angularities which his face had used to put on when his wishes were thwarted now did duty in picturing the incorrigible backslider who insisted upon wallowing in the mire. (331)

As with Susan Nunsuch's understanding of Eustacia's power as a "witch" and the

need to counter it with demonic assistance, d'Urberville's conversion suggests something fundamental about the origins of society's understanding of female sexuality.

D'Urberville's sermon reveals many of the same assumptions about women, paired with the same desire to be "crushing" and "killing" in his rhetoric as the sign-painter. Just as the sign-painter suggests that beautiful women like Tess are dangerous, d'Urberville assumes that female beauty is a temptation that society must control, as though by simply being beautiful Tess is committing a crime. Hardy highlights this in a conversation between Tess and d'Urberville shortly after their encounter at the barn:

She turned from the stile over which she had been leaning, and faced him; whereupon his eye's, falling casually upon the familiar countenance and form, remained contemplating her. The inferior man was quiet in him now; but it was surely not extracted nor even entirely subdued.

‘Don't look at me like that!’ he said abruptly.

Tess, who had been quite unconscious of her action and mien, instantly withdrew the large dark gaze of her eyes, stammering with a flush, ‘I beg your pardon!’ And there was revived in her the wretched sentiment which had often come to her before, that in inhabiting the fleshly tabernacle with which nature had endowed her she was somehow doing wrong. (334)

D'Urberville goes on to ask why Tess doesn't keep her veil down, since she wears it "to hide her good looks," and Tess complies, despite the fact that she was simply wearing the veil "to keep off the wind" (334).

Hardy is careful to depict this idea of the perceived danger of female beauty as something more ubiquitous than the mistaken notions of a few religious zealots. Throughout the novel, Tess suffers as a result of her beauty. When she is first sent to meet the d'Urbervilles and petition them for help, Hardy describes the young girl as having "an attribute which amounted to a disadvantage...a luxuriance of aspect, a fullness of growth,

which made her appear more of a woman than she really was,” adding that she “had inherited the feature from her mother without the quality it denoted” (66-7). Ominously, Tess’s mature figure (accentuated by the careful primping of her mother) is the very thing “that caused Alec d’Urberville’s eyes to rivet themselves upon her” at their first meeting (66). Traveling to ask for help from her in-laws, Tess suffers from the same sort of attention on the road, in a way that is particularly tied to her social standing: “Whilst the clothes lasted which had been prepared for her marriage, these casual glances of interest caused her no inconvenience, but as soon as she was compelled to don the wrapper of a fieldwoman, rude words were addressed to her more than once” (300). Tess has so internalized the notion that she is somehow at fault for the actions of such men that she goes to great lengths to obscure her beauty, wearing “one of the oldest field-gowns,” covering her face with a handkerchief “as if she were suffering from toothache,” and “mercilessly nipp[ing] her eyebrows off” with a pair of scissors (304).

In a society where female beauty can simultaneously be treated with such suspicion and casual possessiveness, it is no wonder that Tess finds herself drawn to Angel Clare, the man she believes exhibits a “self-controlling sense of duty” in regard to the dairymaids who are so infatuated with him, a sense of duty “in the absence of which more than one of the simple hearts who were his housemates might have gone weeping on her pilgrimage” (168). Crucially, Hardy connects this sense of duty to Clare’s metaphysical views, in particular his rejection of religion. Hardy suggests that the purity of the dairymaids, including Tess, is safe with Clare because he is “a man with a conscience” (183), a conscience that is particularly informed by the idea that there is nothing beyond this life and the struggles and joys that one experiences in it:

This consciousness upon which he had intruded was the single opportunity ever vouch-safed to Tess by an unsympathetic First Cause - her all; her every and only chance. How then should he look upon her as of less consequence than himself; as a pretty trifle to caress and grow weary of;

and not deal in the greatest seriousness with the affection which he knew he had awakened in her - so fervid and so impressionable as she was under her reserve; in order that it might not agonize and wreck her? (183)

In this way, Clare's views are startlingly modern. Unlike d'Urberville, who abandons all notions of morality when he decides there is no threat of divine retribution, Clare is engaged in the process of constructing a system of morality that does not depend on any divine inspiration or regulation.

Unfortunately for Tess, while Clare may have rejected the rigid theology of his father, he has continued to cling to the notion of purity that informs the elder Clare's doctrine. Thus, confronted with her previous sexual experiences, he vehemently and cruelly rejects her, despite having revealed his own sexual dalliances only moments before. While his own confession is a source of relief, Tess's revelation amounts, in Clare's view, to a "grotesque...prestidigitation" (255) that reveals her as a completely different person than the woman he thought he knew.

It is at this moment that Hardy most clearly depicts the Darwinian concept of the struggle between various learned and instinctive behaviors. The force most clearly opposed to Angel's acceptance of Tess is his notion of purity, learned early on from his parents, a fact that he introduces in his own discussion of his sexual experiences:

Though I imagine my poor father fears that I am one of the eternally lost for my doctrines, I am of course, a believer in good morals, Tess, as much as you. I used to wish to be a teacher of men, and it was a great disappointment to me when I found I could not enter the Church. I admired spotlessness, even though I could lay no claim to it, and hated impurity, as I hope I do now. Whatever one may think of plenary inspiration, one must heartily subscribe to these words of Paul: "Be thou an example - in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." It is the only safeguard for us poor human beings. (251)

Clare's insistence on clinging to his understanding of the Pauline idea of purity, even in the face of his own agnosticism, suggests that he, like d'Urberville after him, is still "confusing theology and morals" (353). Moreover, it accords with Darwin's notion that "absurd rules of conduct, as well as ... absurd religious beliefs" that are "constantly inculcated during the early years of life, while the brain is impressable[sic]" can "acquire almost the nature of an instinct" (*Descent*, 101).

In opposition to this powerful force, Hardy presents three possible strategies that Tess could use to overcome Angel's objections, and they rely on the forces that Darwin suggests compete for control of moral decisions: base instinct, reason, and sympathy. Hardy outlines the first two in succession, arguing that Tess had an opportunity to defeat his arguments and that

It was based on her exceptional physical nature; and she might have used it promisingly. She might have added besides: "On an Australian upland or Texan plain, who is to know or care about my misfortunes, or to reproach me or you?" (269)

Likewise, Hardy repeatedly suggests that Clare's protestations could be overcome by pity for Tess, arguing that beneath his arguments there was "a back current of sympathy through which a woman of the world might have conquered him" (267) and observing as Angel is leaving that "[i]f Tess had been artful, had she made a scene, fainted, wept hysterically, in that lonely lane, notwithstanding the fury of fastidiousness with which he was possessed, he would probably not have withstood her" (278). Unfortunately for Tess, however, she has long since internalized the idea that she is somehow impure and at fault for her situation. And because she is unable to do away with the ideal of purity by which she is judged, she perceives that any attempt to persuade Clare might lead to a victory that is short-lived at best because "even if these assumed reproaches were not likely to be addressed to him or to his by strangers [in Australia or Texas], they might have reached his ears from his own fastidious brain" (269).

Clare's attachment to an ideal of purity learned from his parents at an early age and widely accepted by society around him serves as the focus for Hardy's project of moral husbandry in the novel. Hardy's exploration of Clare's unwillingness to accept that Tess may, in fact, be "a pure woman," and the tragic outcome of Tess's refusal to challenge that decision are the twin levers by which Hardy attempts to shift the moral center of the reader. While Hardy's exploration of the social construct of purity creates the opportunity to question that construct, Hardy's narration is peppered with declarations as bold as the subtitle of the novel itself, creating the sense that the narrator and reader are both aware of deeper truths that evade the characters themselves.

Meanwhile, Tess is presented as trapped between an instinctive willingness to learn from her experiences and move on and a society that refuses to allow her to do so. Thus Hardy suggests that without the judgment of society, Tess's experiences with d'Urberville, her pregnancy, the untimely death of her child "would have been simply a liberal education" (127). To be certain, it seems reductive to refer such a tragic series of events as "a liberal education," but in doing so, Hardy reveals the limited nature of his own optimism. Hardy's project of evolutionary meliorism is precisely that: an attempt to ameliorate the suffering of mankind, not by altering what he described in *Return* as "the defects of natural laws" and "the quandary that man is in by their operation," but rather by carefully examining the social systems that have been created in response to the operation of those natural laws with an eye toward making the best of a difficult situation. Hardy acknowledges that there is no changing the power of sexual attraction, or the fact that even briefly giving in to an irrational sexual urge can lead to a lifetime of obligation and difficulty. At the same time, he highlights the way that that struggle is compounded by a system that hypocritically dismisses a woman like Tess as fallen and inferior.

Hardy suggests that Tess's remorse is based on a fiction endorsed by those around her and her acceptance of their judgment, rather than any actual transgression on her part. As Hardy explains:

She might have seen that what had bowed her head so profoundly - the thought of the world's concern at her situation - was founded on an illusion. She was not an existence, an experience, a passion, a structure of sensations, to anybody but herself. To all humankind besides Tess was only a passing thought....Moreover, alone in a desert island would she have been wretched at what had happened to her? Not greatly. If she could have been but just created, to discover herself as a spouseless mother, with no experience of life except as the parent of a nameless child, would the position have caused her to despair? No, she would have taken it calmly, and found pleasures therein. Most of the misery had been generated by her conventional aspect, and not by her innate sensations. (119-20)

Hardy is most pointed when handling the "conventional aspect" of Tess's experience with d'Urberville, explicitly suggesting again and again the disparity between perception and reality. In one scene, Tess tortures herself with the notion that she could have been with Angel before she ever met d'Urberville, bypassing her downfall and eliminating the question of whether revealing her past would cause Alec to despise her. Hardy weighs in vehemently, observing that "[i]t was no mature woman with a long dark vista of intrigue behind her who was tormented thus; but a girl of simple life, not yet one-and-twenty, who had been caught during her days of immaturity like a bird in a springe" (224).²¹ Later, when Tess encounters a number of birds who have literally been caught in such traps and are dying, Hardy describes her feeling of being a fallen woman as "nothing more tangible than a sense of condemnation under an arbitrary law of society which had no foundation in Nature" (303).

The tragic outcome of the novel comes from the fact that both Angel and Tess only belatedly arrive at the realization to which Hardy's narrator has led the reader throughout the novel. First Angel, wandering the New World, sick and disillusioned, finds himself talking to a well-traveled stranger who easily decimates his notion of Tess's

impurity with the one thing Darwin suggests would be necessary to overcome his near-instinctive understanding of it: reason. To the stranger, Hardy explains, “such deviations from the social norm, so immense to domesticity, were no more than are the irregularities of vale and mountain-chain to the whole terrestrial curve” (36). Thus, the stranger explains, Clare was wrong to reject his wife because “what Tess had been was of no importance beside what she would be” (363).

Angel’s response to this argument is to approach the values he has taken for granted in a new light, putting them to a test of logic that they promptly fail:

His inconsistencies rushed upon him in a flood. he had persistently elevated Hellenic Paganism at the expense of Christianity; yet in that civilization an illegal surrender was not certain dis-esteem. Surely then he might have regarded that abhorrence of the un-intact state, which he had inherited with the creed of mysticism, as at least open to correction when the result was due to treachery. (364)

The passage perfectly encapsulates Darwin’s description of persistent superstitions and customs acting as inherited “instincts,” surmountable only by the application of logic and sympathy. In this way, it provides a sort of case study for the reader in the deliberate act of moral husbandry.

Hardy emphasizes the importance of examining these assumptions about purity by presenting Tess’s situation as part of something universal in contemporary society. Tess, suffering and alone in England, finally disabuses herself of the notion that Angel is a perfect man who will serve as her salvation and pens a brief letter to her husband in which she observes that she can never forgive him before ultimately giving in to Alec d’Urberville’s argument that being his mistress is the only way she can provide for her family. In this way, Tess finally gives in to an existing social order that hypocritically sanctions such behavior as a way for women to gain comfort at the expense of social dignity.²²

This pseudo-prostitution is the reason Joan Durbeyfield deliberately sends Tess to her first meeting with Alec d'Urberville in a dress that "imparted to her developing figure an amplitude which belied her age, and might cause her to be estimated as a woman when she was not much more than a child" (70). Joan's attempt to increase her daughter's sexual appeal is a transparent attempt to use the girl as a replacement bread-winner for the family by securing a marriage to d'Urberville. Indeed, when the girl returns home pregnant and single, her mother expresses with frustration that she "ought to have been more careful if [she] didn't mean to get him to make [her] his wife!" (110). Tess, for her part, was so unaware of the nature of sexuality, pregnancy, and their relationship to marriage that she responds to her mother in exasperation: "I was a child when I left this house four months ago. Why didn't you tell me there was danger in men-folk?" (111). In her innocence, Tess had viewed her move to The Slopes only in terms of the pressure to support her family through gainful employment.

The effect of this pressure on Tess is clear in her early encounters with d'Urberville. When he gives her "the kiss of mastery" (74) while driving her to his estate, Tess cannot bring herself to consider going home because she cannot imagine having to face her parents after abandoning her position at The Slopes "on such sentimental grounds" (80). After she has been at the d'Urberville estate for a few days, she finds herself less shy around Alec, although she experiences no feelings toward him "which could engender shyness of a new and tenderer kind" (87). All the same, Tess is "more pliable under his hands than a mere companionship would have made her, owing to the unavoidable dependence upon his mother, and ... upon him" (87).

This idea of Tess's submission to d'Urberville being a sort of socially-sanctioned prostitution is further supported by d'Urberville himself, who acknowledges that he owes Tess compensation as she is leaving The Slopes:

I am ready to pay to the uttermost farthing. You know you need not work in the fields or the dairies again. You know you may clothe yourself with

the best, instead of in the bald plain way you have lately affected, as if you couldn't get a ribbon more than you earn. (106)

D'Urberville implicitly admits that this largesse is payment for sex when he suggests that sex was the whole reason for his flattery and pursuit of Tess. He also acknowledges a further obligation if she becomes pregnant, saying that "if certain circumstances should arise - you understand - in which you are in the least need, the least difficulty, send me one line, and you shall have by return whatever you require" (106). Along with this frank admission comes an encouragement to exploit such transactions to her advantage:

I have no reason for flattering you now, and I can say plainly that you need not be so sad. You can hold your own for beauty against any woman of these parts, gentle or simple; I say it to you as a practical man and well-wisher. If you are wise you will show it to the world more than you do before it fades. (107)

In this way, d'Urberville is able to be the mouthpiece for both sides of the trap that Hardy suggests Victorian notions of purity and female sexuality present for women. On the one hand, he encourages her to rise up from poverty by cynically exploiting her sexual appeal and giving herself physically to a man she does not love. By the time he encounters her again, he adds to the chorus of condemnation that has dogged her since her pregnancy, suggesting that not only should she be ashamed of her sexual experience, she should view her own beauty as something shameful and dangerous, to be hidden from the world. In the end, Tess gives in to the former argument and becomes his mistress because doing so offers her family relief from poverty after they are evicted from their home (a difficulty which only arises after her neighbors are scandalized by her tending to the grave of her child). Angel Clare's new morality, hamstrung as it is by the influence of his parents' "mysticism," has nothing to offer a woman who does not live up to the abstract ideal that he had convinced himself Tess represented.

This, then, is the gauntlet that Hardy throws down for his readers with *Tess*. Angel

Clare's failings make it clear that there can be no real progress for women like Tess without a re-examination of the fundamental logic of what it means to be "pure" in contemporary society. Hardy leads the reader, and eventually Clare himself, through that re-examination, laying out the logical flaws behind the traditional concept of purity, but not in time to save Tess. Tess, like all of Hardy's tragic protagonists, must be sacrificed in order to arouse the maximum amount of sympathy in the Darwinian struggle within the reader's own mind as he or she contemplates the moral question that Hardy places before them.²³

As Hardy's career progressed, he became more forceful in his use of tragedy as a way to arouse the sympathy of the reader. While the deaths of Eustacia Vye and her mother-in-law are certainly moving, the difficulties of their day-to-day lives seem as nothing compared to the suffering of Tess Durbeyfield. In *Jude the Obscure*, however, Hardy seems determined to outdo himself, pushing the suffering of his characters to a level that still seems shocking by modern standards. At its heart, though, the tragedy of Jude Fawley and Sue Bridehead is rooted in the same framework as Hardy's earlier tragedies. Jude's moral progress, like that of Angel Clare and, to a lesser extent, Clym Yeobright, is inextricably linked to his gradual rejection of theology and his attempt to craft a morality in its absence. And, like Yeobright and Clare, he is ultimately undone by the opposition of a society that clings to an irrational understanding of sexuality and the moral imperatives that surround it.

Fawley's first encounter with Arabella Donn, his future wife, begins with a literal intrusion of the phallic on his daydreams of intellectual pursuits, in the form of a pig's penis thrown at him over a hedge by the forward Arabella Donn. As Hardy develops the relationship between Jude and Arabella, he repeatedly describes the conflict between Jude's irrational, instinctive interest in Arabella and his rational realization that there is little about her to interest him besides sexual appeal. Fawley dismisses his own reservations, insisting to himself that talking to Arabella is "only a bit of fun" (65), while

at the same he is dimly aware

that there was something lacking...in the nature of this girl who had drawn him to her, which made it necessary that he should assert mere sportiveness on his part as his reason in seeking her; something in her quite antipathetic to that side of him which had been occupied with literary study and the magnificent Christminster dream. (65)

In this way, Jude resembles Clym and the other men who fall under the “spell” of Eustacia Vye. Indeed, Hardy goes on to explain that Jude perceives these things about Arabella “with his intellectual eye, just for a short fleeting while, as by the light of a falling lamp one might momentarily see an inscription on a wall before being enshrouded in darkness” (65). After that, it is clear that Jude’s base instincts have won control of his decisions and that he is as much Arabella’s automaton as Johnny Nunsuch is Eustacia’s:

In short, as if materially, a compelling arm of extraordinary muscular power seized hold of him, something which had nothing in common with the spirits and influences that had moved him hitherto. This seemed to care little for his reason and his will, nothing of his so-called elevated intentions, and moved him along, as a violent schoolmaster a schoolboy he has seized by the collar, in a direction which tended towards the embrace of a woman for whom he had no respect and whose life had nothing in common with his own except locality. (67-8)

Arabella, unlike Tess, shows no hesitation in exploiting the existing social order. She feigns pregnancy in order to secure Jude’s hand in marriage, an outcome that is desirable precisely because of the material advantages that marriage can confer:

she had gained a husband; that was the thing - a husband with a lot of earning power in him for buying her frocks and hats when he should begin to get frightened a bit, and stick to his trade, and throw aside those stupid books for practical undertakings. (82)

Jude, for his part, realizes that Arabella “was not worth a great deal as a specimen of womankind,” but he ultimately marries her because it was “the custom of the rural districts among honourable young men who had drifted so far into intimacy with a woman as he unfortunately had done” (80-1). Like Tess, Jude finds himself trapped between the urgings of nature and a social convention created in response to those urgings that is, at its heart, illogical. Interestingly, Hardy’s description of that trap is centered around the way that social conventions prevent evolutionary progress:

There seemed to him, vaguely and dimly, something wrong in a social ritual which made necessary a canceling of well-formed schemes involving years of thought and labour, of forgoing a man’s one opportunity of showing himself superior to the lower animals, and of contributing his units of work to the general progress of his generation, because of a momentary surprise by a new and transitory instinct which had nothing in it of the nature of vice, and could be only at the most called weakness. He was inclined to inquire what he had done, or she lost, for that matter, that he deserved to be caught in a gin which would cripple him, if not her also, for the rest of a lifetime. (85)²⁴

Hardy sharpens his criticism of Jude’s obligation to marry Arabella when it becomes clear that their marriage is rendered untenable by their fundamental differences. “Their lives were ruined,” Hardy observes, “by the fundamental error of their matrimonial union: that of having based a permanent contract on a temporary feeling which had no necessary connection with affinities that alone render a life-long comradeship possible” (64).

After his separation from Arabella and his initial encounter with his cousin, Sue Bridehead, Jude continues his moral development, with sexuality and matrimony serving as the focal point for his ongoing examination of the intersection of theology and morality. When, in a moment of passion, he kisses Sue, he realizes that he is at a crucial

turning point, at which he must either abandon his religious convictions or abandon his love for Sue:

He saw one thing: that though his kiss of that aerial being had seemed to him the purest moment of his faultful life, as long as he nourished this unlicensed tenderness it was glaringly inconsistent for him to pursue the idea of becoming a soldier and servant of a religion in which sexual love was regarded as at its best a frailty, and at its worst damnation. (233)

Reflecting on the influence of women on his ever-changing moral system, Jude once again returns to the image of the prevailing social order as a sort of trap, wondering to himself if the problem isn't actually "the artificial system of things, under which the normal sex-impulses are turned into devilish domestic gins and springes" (234).

Ultimately, Jude comes to reject this "artificial system," concluding that "People go on marrying because they can't resist natural forces, although many of them may know perfectly well that they are possibly buying a month's pleasure with a life's discomfort" (273).

Jude's thinking on the subject owes much to his own experience with Arabella, but also to Sue, who acts as a sort of mentor to him. Sue's own marriage to Jude's childhood schoolteacher, Phillotson, is also the product of the pressure to look respectable, though in her case it is an attempt to avoid false accusations of sexual impropriety. Unlike Jude, Sue does not find herself attached to a person that she cannot respect or who does not respect her. Rather, Sue's marital difficulty stems from her recognition of the fact that the marriage contract is understood as guaranteeing Phillotson access to her body:

What tortures me so much is the necessity of being responsive to this man whenever he wishes, good as he is morally! - the dreadful contract to feel in a particular way in a matter whose essence is its voluntariness...I wish he would beat me, or be faithless to me, or do some open thing that I could

talk about as a justification for feeling as I do! (230)

At the heart of Sue's protestations is the fact that she has come to understand that which eluded Angel Clare through most of *Tess*: contemporary notions of purity, matrimony, and Sue's sexual duties as a wife are derived from a primitive, mystical understanding of the world which serves to obscure the more practical purposes of the arrangement. Sue tries out this argument in a conversation with Jude about her experiences with Phillotson, wondering if it is wrong "for a husband or wife to tell a third person that they are unhappy in their marriage?" (227). Her answer hinges on the question of whether or not there is truly a supernatural element to the sacrament of 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 or grieves him or her? (227)

Ultimately, Sue decides that marriage is, in fact, nothing more than a "sordid contract," noting that "[w]hen people of a later age look back upon the barbarous customs and superstitions of the times that we have the unhappiness to live in, what they will say!" (232).

Sue's arguments, like those of the nameless stranger that Angel Clare encounters in the New World, seem to be directed simultaneously at the reader and at her fellow characters. And, like the stranger, Sue is persuasive, at least to Phillotson, through the combination of empathy and reason prescribed by Darwin as a remedy for superstition and ignorance. In an outburst that neatly sums up her entire argument, Sue asks of Phillotson, "What is the use of thinking of laws and ordinances....if they make you miserable when you are committing no sin?" (239). Interestingly, the philosopher she

turns to for support in her argument is Mill, citing a passage that parallels Jude's earlier questions about "social rituals" and their ability to cancel a man's ability to "[show] himself superior to the lower animals." The quotation from Mill once again draws attention to the connection between evolution, superstition, and faulty social systems:

Sue continued: "She, or he, 'who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation.' J.S. Mill's words, those are. I have been reading it up. Why can't you act upon them? I wish to, always." (239)

While Phillotson is not immediately persuaded by Sue's rational assault on the religious basis of marriage, his sympathy is ultimately aroused by the extremity of Sue's sexual aversion to him. Having moved to separate bedrooms, Phillotson accidentally goes to Sue's room while distracted with his work one night, a mistake that causes Sue to leap out of a second floor window in her haste to escape him. This, contrasted with her feelings about Jude (at one point Phillotson remarks to his friend Gillingham that Jude and Sue "seem to be one person split in two!" (245)), serves to convince Phillotson that Jude and Sue should be together, even though he "can't logically, or religiously, defend [his] concession to such a wish of hers; or harmonize it with the doctrines [he] was brought up in" (246).

As in *Tess*, Hardy structures his narration around the expectation that the reader is working through the same assessment as Phillotson, taking care to weigh in explicitly on behalf of Jude and Sue as a couple. In his discussion with Gillingham, Phillotson argues that Jude and Sue's "supreme desire is to be together - to share each other's emotions, and fancies, and dreams" (247). As Jude and Sue struggle with their uncertainty about getting married or simply living together unwed, Hardy confirms Phillotson's earlier impressions about the loving nature of their relationship, observing that the fact "[t]hat the twain were happy - between their times of sadness - was indubitable" and going so far as to suggest that the sudden and unexpected arrival of Father Time, Jude's son from his first marriage,

“brought into their lives a new and tender interest of an ennobling and unselfish kind” and “rather helped than injured their happiness” (301).

The fair at Stoke-Barehills, with its unexpected encounter with Arabella and her new Australian husband, offers a chance to contrast Jude and Sue’s relationship with the more typical relationship of the Cartletts. Jude and Sue are presented as the very picture of domestic bliss:

Sue, in her new summer clothes, flexible and light as a bird...went along as if she hardly touched ground, and as if a moderately strong puff of wind would float her over the hedge into the next field. Jude...was really proud of her companionship, not more for her external attractiveness than for her sympathetic words and ways. That complete mutual understanding, in which every glance and movement was as effectual as speech for conveying intelligence between them, made them almost two parts of a single whole. (304)

Arabella and Cartlett, meanwhile, are depicted as uncaring and quarrelsome, a demeanor that Hardy describes as “the antipathetic, recriminatory mood of the average husband and wife of Christendom” (308).

This “antipathetic, recriminatory mood” has its origins in the faults of the contemporary marriage contract that Sue and Jude have already debated, a fact which Hardy reaffirms in an earlier scene, when Sue and Jude set out to get married after the arrival of Jude's child from his first marriage, Father Time. At the Superintendent Registrar’s Office, they observe two couples waiting to get married. One couple, consisting of an “ill-favoured man, closely cropped, with a broad-faced, pockmarked woman on his arm, ruddy with liquor and the satisfaction of being on the brink of a gratified desire” (297), reinforces Jude’s notion of marriage as a contract that people enter because “they can’t resist natural forces” (273). The other couple seems to confirm Sue’s impression of marriage as “a sordid contract, based on material contrivance,” (227): “The

soldier was sullen and reluctant: the bride sad and timid; she was soon, obviously, to become a mother, and she had a black eye” (296). Sue, in an argument that seems as much intended for the reader as for Jude, offers this assessment of the two couples in defense of their own decision to leave the office unwed:

How terrible that scene was to me! The expression in that flabby woman’s face, leading her on to give herself to that gaol-bird, not for a few hours, as she would, but for a lifetime, as she must. And the other poor soul - to escape a nominal shame which was owing to the weakness of her character, degrading herself to the real shame of bondage to a tyrant who scorned her - a man whom to avoid for ever was her only chance of salvation(297-8).

Sue’s description of the two unfortunate women is striking, in that she could as easily be describing Tess Durbeyfield or Thomasin Yeobright.

Lest the reader suspect that Hardy is only commenting on the marriage of the poorer, less respectable members of society, Hardy follows this scene with a trip to the local church, where they watch another wedding from a back pew. While the service lacks the overt dysfunction of the two marriages at the registrar’s office, it seems clear that there is something ominous about the bride’s attitude toward the ceremony:

The contracting couple appeared to belong to the well-to-do middle class, and the wedding altogether was of ordinary prettiness and interest. They could see the flowers tremble in the bride’s hand, even at that distance, and could hear her mechanical murmur of words whose meaning her brain seemed to gather not at all under the pressure of her self-consciousness (298).

The passage suggests something insidious about the pressures involved in maintaining traditional middle-class respectability. The young bride’s “self-consciousness” suggests the influence of social pressures so profound that she is unable to rationally apprehend the

scene around her or its significance, reducing her to the unconscious recitation of sentiments that she is expected to express by those around her.

Hardy's final tool in his argument about the nature of the marriage contract is the person who understands and exploits the existing system so well: Arabella. While Tess Durbeyfield and Thomasin Yeobright recoil in horror from their disillusioned views of marriage, Arabella is much more pragmatic. As she explains to Sue:

Life with a man is more business-like after [marriage], and money matters work better. And then, you see, if you have rows, and he turns you out of doors, you can get the law to protect you, which you can't otherwise, unless he half runs you through with a knife, or cracks your noodle with a poker. And if he bolts away from you - I say it friendly, as woman to woman, for there's never any knowing what a man med do - you'll have the sticks o' furniture, and won't be looked upon as a thief. (283)

Despite having reduced marriage to the notion of exactly such a contract in an earlier conversation, Sue is horrified by Arabella's argument, returning to Jude to exclaim that it has "made [her] feel more than ever how hopelessly vulgar an institution legal marriage is - a sort of trap to catch a man" (285).

Arabella's notion of marriage gets an even darker treatment in her prescriptions to Phillotson, to whom she offers advice on his failed marriage:

Yes [Sue wanted to leave]. But you shouldn't have let her. That's the only way with these fanciful women that chaw high - innocent or guilty. She'd have come round in time. We all do! Custom does it! it's all the same in the end! However, I think she's fond of her man still - whatever he med be of her. You were too quick about her. *I* shouldn't have let her go! I should have kept her chained on - her spirit for kicking would have been broke soon enough. There's nothing like bondage and a stone-deaf task-master for taming us women. Besides, you've got the laws on your side. Moses

knew. (328)

Arabella goes on to cite Scripture to Phillotson: ““Then shall the man be guiltless; but the woman shall bear her iniquity.” Damn rough on us women; but we must grin and put up wi’ it!” (328-9).

Coupled with Jude and Sue’s arguments and the circumstantial evidence of the marriages around them, this passage represents the most explicit argument that Hardy makes on a subject that he returned to throughout his career. And, as with *Return* and *Tess* before it, the argument in *Jude* is couched in the familiar Darwinian framework of the conflict between reason, sympathy, sexuality, superstition, and the customs produced by that superstition. As in the earlier novels, Hardy’s narrator is careful to offer explicit support for Jude and Sue’s viewpoint, suggesting repeatedly that they are the exceptional couple precisely because they are loving and happy and offering a parade of couples who fit Hardy’s pessimistic description of typical married life. And, as in the earlier novels, Hardy pairs this rational argument with the emotional hook of tragedy, allowing the social order around Jude and Sue to punish them for their refusal to conform, deepening the sympathetic connection between the reader and the characters and encouraging the reader to reflect on why it is that there is no space for Jude and Sue in contemporary society.

Jude and Sue’s downfall begins after the agricultural fair where they encountered Arabella and Cartlett, when their neighbors begin to have suspicions about the legitimacy of their marriage:

The society of Spring Street and the neighborhood generally did not understand, and probably could not have been made to understand, Sue and Jude’s private minds, emotions, positions, and fears. The curious facts of a child coming to them unexpectedly, who called Jude father and Sue mother, and a hitch in the marriage ceremony intended for quietness to be performed at a registrar’s office, together with rumors of the undefended

cases [their divorces from Arabella and Phillotson, respectively] bore only one translation to plain minds. (310)

This judgment, made in complete indifference to the actual quality of their relationship, translates to an immediate effect on the couple in their day-to-day lives, beginning with simple gestures, like the refusal of “neighbouring artizans’ wives” to meet their eyes as they pass, and “the baker’s lad and the grocer’s boy” leaving off their habit of tipping their hats to Sue as they pass (310). Unfortunately for Jude and Sue, their highly developed social instincts and sense of empathy make them particularly sensitive targets for such treatment, as Hardy explains:

Nobody molested them, it is true; but an oppressive atmosphere began to encircle their souls, particularly after their excursion to the [Agricultural] Show, as if that visit had brought some evil influence to bear on them; and their temperaments were precisely of a kind to suffer from this atmosphere, and to be indisposed to lighten it by vigorous and open statements. (311)

As in the cases of Thomasin and Tess, Jude and Sue’s degraded social status also has a very real effect on their material well-being, an effect that is worsened by Jude and Sue’s own good nature. When Jude is dismissed from a contract doing work on a local church because of his relationship with Sue, he refuses “to make any fuss,” (315), arguing that he “wouldn’t wish to injure [his employer’s] trade-connection by staying” (315). Shortly afterward, Jude is dismissed from his position on the committee of the local Artizans’ Mutual Improvement Society. Hardy describes the society as a group of “young men of all creeds and denominations, including Churchmen, Congregationalists, Baptists, Unitarians, Positivists, and others,” adding that “[a]gnostics had scarcely been heard of at this time” (315-6). The expulsion of Jude from such a nominally progressive group suggests the same threat of outdated moral codes and customs that led the large-minded Angel Clare to reject Tess based on the unconscious effect of his father’s theology. It also

underscores the desperate situation in which Sue and Jude find themselves, as they seem to be well beyond the vanguard of contemporary political and moral philosophy.

The final blow for Jude and Sue comes in the form of the murder-suicide of their children, which happens shortly after Sue confirms Father Time's suspicion that they have been refused lodging "because of us children" (342) and the ensuing revelation that Sue is expecting another child. The suicidal Father Time, with his one-line note of explanation, "*Done because we are too meny[sic]*" (345) becomes the symbol of Jude and Sue's struggle to defy social convention throughout the novel and the vengeance that society takes on them for doing so:

The boy's face expressed the whole tale of their situation. On that little shape had converged all the inauspiciousness and shadow which had darkened the first union of Jude, and all the accidents, mistakes, fears, errors of the last. He was their nodal point, their focus, their expression in a single term. For the rashness of those parents he had groaned, for their ill-assortment he had quaked, and for the misfortunes of these he had died.
(346)

This final line is crucial. While Father Time's groaning and quaking are produced by the foolish union of Jude and Arabella, founded on a dishonest exploitation of existing customs, his death is attributed to the misfortunes of Jude and Sue, misfortunes that result primarily from the approbation of society due to an illogical social standard rather than their merits as a couple. It is society's disapproval of Jude and Sue that keeps Jude from work, driving him to work in the rain so that he becomes ill. The same disapproval keeps Sue from supporting the family by teaching and ultimately keeps them from gaining decent lodging in a rainstorm. At every step of the way, a rational assessment of the couple could have prevented their misfortunes, and with them the death of their children.

For Sue, this event is the impetus for a wholesale rejection of everything she believed, an atavistic reaction triggered by her own sense of guilt and loss:

Vague and quaint imaginings had haunted Sue in the days when her intellect had scintillated like a star, that the world resembled a stanza or melody composed in a dream; it was wonderfully excellent to the half-aroused intelligence, but hopelessly absurd at the full waking; that the First Cause worked automatically like a somnambulist, and not reflectively like a sage; that at the framing of the terrestrial conditions there seemed never to have been contemplated such a development of emotional perceptiveness among the creatures subject to those conditions as that reached by thinking and educated humanity. But affliction makes opposing forces loom anthropomorphous; and those ideas were now exchanged for a sense of Jude and herself fleeing from a persecutor. (351)

This passage contains the clearest elucidation of the bedrock principles beneath Sue's beliefs, and it comes only as she rejects them. Sue's notion of the "somnambulist" First Cause is strikingly similar to the Hardy's description of the unconscious Immanent Will of *The Dynasts*, just as her process of creating a judgmental God out of her suffering and guilt is similar to Tess's conversion of a "wet day" to "the expression of irremediable grief at her weakness in the mind of some vague ethical being."

When Sue, acting on this anthropomorphized sense of "opposing forces," insists that she and Jude "must conform!" and that "the ancient wrath of the Power above us has been vented upon us, His poor creatures, and we must submit," (351), Jude does his best to argue with her, pointing out that they are not in fact "fighting against God," as Sue suggests, but "against man and senseless circumstance," (351). Sue acknowledges the fact, noting that she is "getting as superstitious as a savage," but at the same time says that "whoever or whatever [their] foe may be," she has "no more fighting strength left; no more enterprize" (351). All of the arguments made by Hardy's narrator to this point have prepared the reader to see things from Jude's point of view, a decision made easier by the pathos of Sue's needless suffering.

That suffering is increased, rather than lessened, by Sue's deepening religious convictions, which only provide things for her to despise about herself. Sue begins to insist that she and Jude "should mortify the flesh - the terrible flesh - the curse of Adam!" (353), going so far at one point as to suggest that she "cannot humiliate [herself] too much" and that she "should like to prick [herself] all over with pins and bleed out the badness that's in [her]" (354). Ultimately, Sue announces her intention to leave Jude for Phillotson in order to accomplish this mortification of the flesh and rejoin the man she has come to believe she is married to in the eyes of Heaven.

In this way, Sue's self-sacrifice is different, and perhaps more shocking, than those which led Thomasin Yeobright to marry the unworthy Damon Wildeve in *Return*, and Tess to become Alec d'Urberville's mistress. Thomasin's choice to return to Wildeve after she is jilted is an attempt to regain the respectability of both herself and her family, while Tess's decision to become d'Urberville's mistress is motivated by the material needs of her mother and younger siblings. Sue, however, is focused on neither her material needs nor on the judgment of those around her. Instead, she is convinced that all of the tragedy of her time with Jude is the product of divine judgment, a notion that would have been utterly foreign to the Sue Bridehead of earlier years. Hardy explicitly describes this change in Sue as the upending of her internal moral calculus, noting that "[t]he blow of bereavement seemed to have destroyed her reasoning faculty" (368), a change which ultimately brings about "the self-sacrifice of the woman on the altar of what she was pleased to call her principles" (395). This sacrifice is all the more tragic because she repeatedly asserts that she still loves Jude, both to Jude himself (359) and later to Widow Edlin (399). The fact is ultimately confirmed by the always-perceptive Arabella, who, at Jude's funeral, asserts that Sue has "never found peace since she left [Jude's] arms, and never will again again till she's as he is now!" (413).

For Phillotson, the other victim of society's inability to understand the new ideas on which Jude and Sue have been acting, Sue's decision to leave Jude creates a complex

moral dilemma. “No man had ever suffered more inconvenience from his own charity, Christian or heathen,” Hardy argues, “than Phillotson in letting Sue go” (365). He continues:

He had been knocked about from pillar to post at the hands of the virtuous almost beyond endurance; he had been nearly starved, and was now dependent entirely upon the very small stipend from the school of this village where the parson had got ill-spoken of for befriending him. He had often thought of Arabella’s remarks that he should have been more severe with Sue, that her recalcitrant spirit would soon have been broken. Yet such was his obstinate and illogical disregard of opinion, and of the principles in which he had been trained, that his convictions on the rightness of his course with his wife had not been disturbed. (365)

Despite this conviction, however, Phillotson agrees to take Sue back as his wife, a decision worth examining in detail.

At first glance, Phillotson's willingness to accept Sue seems like a decision driven by social advantage, not unlike Thomasin's decision to marry Damon Wildeve in *Return*. Certainly Phillotson is experiencing a similar punishment at the hands of his fellow man, as Hardy explains in his description of the schoolteacher's motivations:

[A]rtifice was necessary, he had found, for stemming the cold and inhumane blast of the world's contempt. And here were the materials ready made. By getting Sue back and re-marrying her on the respectable plea of having entertained erroneous views of her [a reference to the claim in their divorce suit that Jude and Sue had slept together while Sue was still married], and gained his divorce wrongfully, he might acquire some comfort, resume his old courses, perhaps return to the Shaston school, if not even to the Church as a licentiate. (365)

At the same time, Phillotson's position is somewhat more complicated than that of

Thomasin or Tess. Hardy carefully honed his depiction of the schoolteacher's decision to re-marry Sue, making revisions with each successive edition of the novel to increase the sense of Phillotson as a deeply conflicted man rather than simply being a principled man who has abandoned his modern ideas in the face of social pressure.

Hardy depicts this conflict as the result of something fundamental about Phillotson himself, an instinctive trait that has a profound effect on his moral decision-making. This “obstinate and illogical disregard of opinion, and of the principles in which he had been trained” (365) leads him into conflict with those who would argue against his re-marrying Sue. Thus, Hardy observes, “[t]he instincts which had allowed him to give Sue her liberty now enabled him to regard her as none the worse for her life with Jude” (365).

Phillotson's decision-making process is also clearly influenced by another, more primal instinct: his sexual interest in Sue. Hardy hints at this in his discussion of Phillotson's instinctive unconventionality, explaining that Phillotson “wished for [Sue] still, in his curious way, if he did not love her, and apart from policy, soon felt that he would be gratified to have her again as his, always provided she came willingly” (365). Phillotson himself seems uncomfortable with admitting the role of his physical interest in Sue. While he describes her as “a luxury for a fogey like [himself]” (373), he struggles to explain to others why he chooses to re-marry. When Phillotson is discussing Sue's return with his friend Gillingham, Hardy observes that Phillotson “did not care to admit clearly that his taking Sue to him again had at bottom nothing to do with repentance of letting her go, but was, primarily, a human instinct flying in the face of custom and profession” (354). The aging schoolteacher is thus caught between a survival instinct that pushes him toward the chance to regain respectability and employment, a physical interest that can be gratified, an instinctive unconventionality and a highly developed sense of empathy. And while the latter two elements of his character exert a powerful pull, causing him to suspect on his wedding day “for the second or third time” that “he was not quite

following out the humane instinct which had induced him to let [Sue] go” (376), he ultimately takes her back.

At the wedding, the man who gives Sue away is Phillotson's friend Gillingham, one of the people who first argued against Phillotson's plan to take her back. This is particularly interesting because Gillingham serves as the voice of traditional middle-class respectability and morality in the novel. Rather than suggesting that Phillotson should not marry Sue because she was unfaithful, or because she is tainted by her experience with Jude, Gillingham initially offers an unexpected defense of Sue and Jude's romance:

Gillingham replied, naturally, that now she was gone it were best to let her be; and considered that if she were anybody's wife she was the wife of the man to whom she had borne three children and owed such tragical adventures. Probably, as his attachment to her seemed unusually strong, the singular pair would make their union legal in course of time, and all would be well, and decent, in order. (366)

This argument serves to underscore the bizarre nature of Jude and Sue's situation. While they have been treated as though they committed an unnatural and unforgivable sin, Gillingham suggests that everything could be erased with a quick trip to the courthouse, an argument that raises the question of why they should have been treated so harshly by their neighbors in the first place. This argument is made more explicitly by the Widow Edlin in her attempts to dissuade Sue from marrying Phillotson:

Pshoo! You be t' other man's. If you didn't like to commit yourselves to the binding vow again, just as first 'twas all the more credit to your consciences, considering your reasons, and you med ha' lived on, and made it all right at last. After all, it concerned nobody but your own two selves. (372)

Unfortunately for Sue (and Jude), her profound sense of being the target of God's wrath precludes her noticing that she has merely been the target of her neighbors' callousness

and judgment, much less the fact that their approbation could be eliminated if she chose to marry Jude. As such, she views her return to Phillotson, her true husband in the eyes of God, as the only way to begin the process of atonement, a process that will ultimately lead her to what Jude describes as “a fanatic prostitution”(368).

Sue’s atavistic turn to religious zealotry is one of the most stunning developments in any of Hardy’s tragic novels, perhaps because there is such a distance between Sue’s views at the beginning of the book and those that she claims to hold at the end, and perhaps because at her most extreme, Sue represents a more distant position on the evolutionary continuum than any of Hardy’s other forward-thinking protagonists.²⁵ Clym Yeobright, for instance, is presented as expressing ideas that are common to urban intellectuals of his time, which predates the novel’s publication by half a century. Angel Clare’s worldview, translated through Tess to Alec d’Urberville is described as typical of the work of Mill or Voltaire, placing him squarely in the intellectual conversation of Clym’s era, as well. Sue, on the other hand, is different. While her principles are similar to those of Clym and Angel, she comes the closest to elucidating the ideas that Hardy himself would most clearly explain in the “Apology” and *The Dynasts*. Likewise, she seems far less encumbered by the sort of superstition that influences both Clare and Yeobright, at least until her final regression. And the stand that she takes in living with Jude unmarried is definitely a more daring application of principle than either man hazards in the earlier novels. For this reason, an examination of what is unique about Sue can help shed light on Hardy’s viewpoint.

Sue is almost recklessly unconventional, especially when it comes to her sense of empathy for others and the feelings of remorse that that sense can engender in her. Thus, when she first encounters Arabella and jealously insists Jude send her away, she goes out the very next day to meet with the woman whom she saw just hours before as her rival. As Hardy explains:

There was no limit to the strange and unnecessary penances which Sue

would meekly undertake when in a contrite mood, and this going to see all sorts of extraordinary persons whose relation to her was precisely of a kind that would have made other people shun them, was her instinct ever, so that the request [to see Arabella] did not surprise [Jude]. (281)

Hardy's description of Sue suggests a very highly evolved sense of moral obligation to others, one that operates precisely according to the mechanism described by Darwin. Sue is dismissive of Arabella out of a basic, possessive instinct, only to repent later when she thinks of Arabella's situation and resolve to do better in the future. This resolution is the victory of Sue's higher social instinct over her primal and possessive urges regarding Jude. What is unique about Sue is the free rein that this highly evolved sentiment has in affecting her actions. Part of the answer may lie in the other unique element of her character.

Sue herself suggests, early in her relationship with Jude, that her life "has been entirely shaped by what people call a peculiarity in [her]" (167):

I have no fear of men, as such, nor of their books. I have mixed with them - one or two of them particularly - almost as one of their own sex. I have not felt about them as most women are taught to feel - to be on their guard against attacks on their virtue. (167)

As a result, Sue has received an educational experience that would be denied many women. She recounts her time sharing a flat with an undergraduate with whom she had a strictly platonic relationship, during which time they would "go about together - on walking tours, reading tours, and things of that sort - like two men almost" (167). Sue credits many of her advanced ideas to her time with the young man.

Jude, every bit as lovesick in his pursuit of Sue as her unfortunate undergraduate came to be, expands on this. In the days before her first marriage to Phillotson, Jude wishes he "could only get over her sense of sex, as she seemed to be able to do so easily of it," precisely because she could be a great "comrade" (173). Sue herself explains the

nature of her feelings for Jude when they are first living together, saying “My liking for you is not as some women’s perhaps. But it is a delight in being with you, of a supremely delicate kind” (255). Jude describes Sue as a “spirit,” a “disembodied creature,” and a “tantalizing phantom - hardly flesh at all!” (259). Later, when Sue insists that she has behaved like a fallen woman and that is why she is being punished by God, Jude asserts the opposite, calling attention to her near indifference to matters of sex:

Your natural instincts are perfectly healthy; not quite so impassioned, perhaps, as I could wish; but good, and dear, and pure. And as I have often said, you are absolutely the most ethereal, least sensual woman I ever knew to exist without inhuman sexlessness. (353)

Hardy himself elaborated on this aspect of Sue’s character in a letter quoted in his biography. Responding to a question from Edmund Gosse about the possibility that Sue’s muted sexuality might suggest homosexual tendencies, Hardy explains that

there is nothing perverted or depraved in Sue’s nature. The abnormalism[sic] consists in disproportion, not in inversion, her sexual instinct being healthy as far as it goes, but unusually weak and fastidious. Her sensibilities remain painfully alert notwithstanding, as they do in nature with such women. One point illustrating this I could not dwell upon: that, though she has children, her intimacies with Jude have never been more than occasional, even when they were living together (I mention that they occupy separate rooms, except towards the end), and one of her reasons for fearing the marriage ceremony is that she fears it would be breaking faith with Jude to withhold herself at pleasure, or altogether, after it; though while uncontracted she feels at liberty to yield herself as seldom as she chooses. (*Later Years*, 42)

In this way, Sue may be the polar opposite of the young Jude. Unencumbered by a strong sense of sexual desire, her internal Darwinian conflict is dominated by her well-

informed reason and her acute sense of sympathy. Sue's character suggests something more than the sexual restraint Angel Clare displays. Rather, she has an almost inhuman advantage in that certain instinctive drives are quieted to the point that her moral decision-making process is fundamentally different from those of Hardy's other protagonists. Ominously for Sue, her apparent indifference to matters of sex also puts her in company with Diggory Venn, whom Hardy depicts as the only man on Egdon immune to the overwhelming charms of Eustacia Vye. Unlike Venn, whose peculiarities lead him to a detached and itinerant lifestyle, Sue chooses to remain a part of the society that she critiques, a decision that brings her into direct conflict with the existing value system that she has rejected and sets the stage for a dramatic Darwinian conflict.

Seen in this light, the story of Jude Fawley, from his early ambitions to his dalliance with Arabella to his time in the city and the education he ultimately receives from Sue, is the story of a fundamental evolutionary turning-point. Indeed, it is the story of the central moment in both the Darwinian development of a higher morality and in Hardy's own project of evolutionary meliorism - the moment when the selection of moral traits ceases to happen unconsciously and begins to be controlled by a process of methodical selection. Sue's near sexlessness suggests a sort of genetic mutation that gives freer rein to her reason and empathy, the two forces Darwin suggests are responsible for the improvement of morality.

The ideas that Jude receives from Sue serve as the capstone to an educational program he had already begun, one which allows him to carefully approach his own morality, stripping away ideas grounded in superstition and custom that are ultimately unjust. When Sue becomes mired in religious mania, Jude continues, adding the lessons of his tragic experiences to the education he has already received. Moreover, Jude himself places the experience in the context of an intellectual journey from superstition and ignorance to a more rational view of the world, a journey which Sue is no longer able to navigate with him:

One thing troubled [Jude] more than any other; that Sue and himself had mentally travelled in opposite directions since the tragedy; events which had enlarged his own views of life, laws, customs, and dogmas, had not operated in the same manner on Sue's. She was no longer the same as in the independent days, when her intellect played like lambent lightning over conventions and formalities which he at that time respected, though he did not now. (353)

This aspect of Sue's relationship with Jude is simply the latest iteration of the concept of moral mentorship with which Hardy had toyed throughout the tragic novels. Clym Yeobright dreams of serving as the mentor to the denizens of Egdon Heath, but he is limited by his own failures of perception and lack of self-awareness. Despite Angel Clare's desire to avoid directly influencing her with his modern notions, Tess Durbeyfield ultimately absorbs many of his ideas, but only partially, in a way that she is later unable to pass on in her failed attempts to argue with Alec d'Urberville on the subject. In other words, it is the fatal flaws of Yeobright and Clare that keep them from successfully passing on their new ideas and ensuring the survival of a new moral system. In Sue and Jude, however, Hardy manages to return to the subject in a way that most highlights the danger presented by those in society who choose not to reflect on their own values and the effects that they have on others.

Sue is hardly without her faults. But, unlike Yeobright and Clare, she is not nearly so hampered by the legacy of old superstitions and customs, and as such is not prevented from effectively leading Jude down the path toward a more active engagement with his own morality. Indeed, under Sue's tutelage, Jude reaches a point of moral and intellectual development that Angel Clare only approaches at the end of *Tess*, after his encounter with his own broad-minded mentor figure. Yeobright, arguably, never arrives at that point. Furthermore, both Sue and Jude accomplish this intellectual and moral development as members of the working class with little formal education.

Jude and Sue's material, academic, and professional disadvantages, in relation to Hardy's earlier protagonists, serve to emphasize the notion that their moral and intellectual achievements are available to all who are willing to engage in a sympathetic, reasoned examination of their own values and their origins. By focusing less on the flaws of either mentor or student, Hardy draws the reader's attention to those around Jude and Sue who refuse to question their own moral judgments or the influence they have on others. Jude himself emphasizes this role of society in one of the final scenes of the book, arguing that he and Sue were doomed to failure by the simple fact that they arrived at their ideas before the general public was ready to accept them:

As for Sue and me when we were at our own best, long ago - when our minds were clear, and our love of truth fearless - the time was not ripe for us! Our ideas were fifty years too soon to be any good to us. And so the resistance they met with brought reaction in her, and recklessness and ruin in me! (405)

Jude's words serve as a challenge to the reader, one that Hardy refined throughout his career as tragedian. The time for bold acts of moral husbandry is coming, Hardy suggests, and in fifty years' time, notions such as those of Jude and Sue will seem commonplace. For the reader, then, Hardy implies two options: joining in that process of carefully-reasoned moral revision or joining in the "opposition" that brought Jude and Sue, and indeed all of Hardy's protagonists to their tragic ends.

Chapter Three The Dream of a New Reformation

'My whole instinct in matters of religion is towards reconstruction; to quote your favorite Epistle to the Hebrews, 'the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain'

-Angel Clare, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*²⁶

From *The Return of the Native* to *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy's work as a tragic novelist can be seen as an attempt to develop his method of engaging the reader in a discussion about the nature of morality and how it has evolved, a development that led him to increasingly dramatic and shocking subject matter in an attempt to sway the sympathies of the reader. The vehement and negative responses of many members of the reading public, meanwhile, suggest that Hardy woefully underestimated the obstacles that stood in the way of his project of evolutionary meliorism through fiction. This was a fatal flaw, as his method of applying Darwin's ideas depended on the assumption that he and his reader were bound to draw the same conclusions about his protagonists and their struggles. Failing that, Hardy's ideas certainly depended on the idea that readers would respond to the suffering of those protagonists with sympathy and understanding, an assumption that turned out to be a bridge too far for many of Hardy's contemporaries.

Hardy's personal writings, as well as the notes appended to the various editions of his novels, abound with shock and consternation at the disconnection between his own views and those of his readers. Perhaps the most overt example is the response to the subtitle of *Tess* ("*A Pure Woman, Faithfully Presented*"), which makes explicit his

assessment of Tess Durbeyfield's character. In his preface to the fifth edition of the novel, Hardy notes that the subtitle

was appended at the last moment, after reading the final proofs, as being the estimate left in a candid mind of the heroine's character – an estimate that nobody would be likely to dispute. It was disputed more than anything else in the book. (29-30)

The outrage at the notion of Tess as “pure woman” was nothing compared to the response to *Jude*, which culminated in an oft-cited incident of an American clergyman burning the book and sending Hardy the ashes (*Later Years*, 39). In his introduction to later editions of the novel, as well as his correspondence with those who took a more favorable view of it, Hardy repeatedly expressed his frustration with the public response to *Jude*. In one letter, he noted that it was

curious that some of the papers should look upon the novel as a manifest on “the marriage question”(although, of course, it involves it), seeing that it is concerned first with the labours of a poor student to get a University degree, and secondly with the tragic issues of two bad marriages, owing in the main to a doom or curse of hereditary temperament peculiar to the family of the parties. The only remarks which can be said to bear on the *general* marriage question occur in dialogue, and comprise no more than half a dozen pages in a book of five hundred. (*Later Years*, 40)

In another letter, Hardy bemoaned the way readers focused on the most sensational elements of the book at the expense of the message which they were crafted to convey, arguing that

the only point in the novel on which I feel sure is that it makes for morality; and that delicacy or indelicacy in a writer is according to his object. If I say to a lady "I met a naked woman," it is indelicate. But if I go on to say "I found she was mad with sorrow," it ceases to be indelicate.

And in writing *Jude* my mind was fixed on the ending. (*Later Years*, 43)

The disconnection between Hardy and his readers on this point is best illuminated by a comment in the preface to the Wessex edition of the novel: "Artistic effort always pays heavily for finding its tragedies in the forced adaptation of human instincts to rusty and irksome moulds that do not fit them" (29). Hardy's description of the central conflict of the novel is a succinct representation of the conflict at the heart of his entire project of evolutionary meliorism. Hardy's claim that *Jude* was only minimally about the question of marriage, despite the fact that the entire plot of the novel hinges on the issue, goes a long way to explain his perspective. Having spent decades developing his ideas, Hardy viewed it as obvious that social standards surrounding marriage in *Jude* were meant to be the opening through which he would entice readers into a discussion about moral evolution in general. Likewise, he saw it as unexceptional to suggest those ideas were so ubiquitous in contemporary fiction that the negative response to *Jude* was simply part of a larger trend of authors struggling to portray the evolutionary process. In hindsight, however, it is easy to see how the broader discussion was lost on many readers who were already scandalized by Hardy's arguments about marriage and sexuality.

In this way, it seems that Hardy himself fell victim to the problem which plagued Clym Yeobright in his attempts to educate the residents of Egdon Heath. Just as Yeobright "may have been called unfortunate" because "the rural world was not ripe for him,"

(*Return*, 190), Hardy seems to have labored under a similar delusion about the openness of the English reading public to the ideas that he expressed in his fiction. Perhaps this explains why Hardy, looking back on *Return* as he readied the Wessex editions of his work, remarked, “I got to like the character of Clym before I had done with him. I think he is the nicest of all my heroes and *not a bit* like me” (*Later Years*, 150). Hardy’s ironic tone suggests an all-too-sincere expression of his failure to acknowledge the gulf between his presumptions about Victorian society and reality.

In hindsight, however, Hardy should have been able to anticipate that gulf from the time that he published *Return*, simply by gauging the response to one of the novel’s most enigmatic characters: the reddleman Diggory Venn. Venn is a peculiar character, one whose role in society has no real parallel within either *Tess* or *Jude*. In many ways, he belongs among the ranks of Hardy’s morally advanced characters, along with Clym, Angel, Sue, and Jude. In this way, the changes that Hardy was forced to make to Diggory’s character for publication serve as indicators of the struggle that Hardy would have with the reading public throughout his career as a tragic novelist.

Diggory Venn exists in the world of Egdon Heath as a sort of man out of time. To many of the residents of the village, he is either a holdover from a previous era, a malevolent bogeyman with which to scare children, or both. The position of reddlemen in the social order is complicated by the fact that they see themselves very differently than others do. As Hardy observes early in the novel:

The reddleman lived as a gipsy, but gipsies he scorned. He was about as thriving as traveling basket and mat makers; but he had nothing to do with them. He was more decently born and brought up than the cattle-drovers

who passed and repassed him in his wanderings; but they merely nodded to him. His stock was more valuable than that of peddlers; but they did not think so, and passed his car with eyes straight ahead. He was such an unnatural colour to look at that the men of round-about and wax-work shows seemed gentlemen beside him; but he considered them low company, and remained aloof. Among all these squatters and folks of the road the reddleman continually found himself; yet he was not of them. His occupation tended to isolate him, and isolated he was mostly seen to be.

(100-1)

What sets Venn apart from most reddlemen is the fact that he has chosen his profession in a deliberate attempt to flee society. In a passage that calls to mind the later description of Clym's physical appearance, Hardy observes that

[t]he reddleman who had entered Egdon that afternoon was an instance of the pleasing being wasted to form the ground-work of the singular, when an ugly foundation would have done just as well for that purpose. The one point that was forbidding about this reddleman was his colour. Freed from that he would have been as agreeable a specimen of rustic manhood as one would often see. A keen observer might have been inclined to think, which was, indeed, partly the truth, that he had relinquished his proper station in life for want of interest in it. Moreover, after looking at him one would have hazarded the guess that good-nature, and an acuteness as extreme as it could be without verging on craft, formed the framework of his character. (101)

Venn, in other words, displays all the caring, concern, and intelligence of Hardy's other advanced characters, coupled with the same sort of indifference to social status.

At the same time, Venn's disdain for the existing social order expresses itself in a resistance to the sort of sexual impulsiveness that threatens to overpower many of his fellow Egdonites. Likewise, Venn seems unconcerned with traditional notions of chivalry that govern the "acceptable" expression of interest between the sexes. These elements of Venn's character invite comparison to Sue Bridehead's "noncorporeal" nature and can be most clearly seen when Diggory discovers that Eustacia Vye is the source of Damon Wildeve's inconsistent behavior towards Thomasin:

He had determined upon the bold stroke of asking for an interview with Miss Vye – to attack her position as Thomasin's rival either by art or by storm, showing therein, somewhat too conspicuously, the want of gallantry characteristic of a certain astute sort of men, from clowns to kings. The great Frederick making war on the beautiful Archduchess, Napoleon refusing terms to the beautiful Queen of Prussia were not more dead to difference of sex than the reddleman was, in his peculiar way, in planning the displacement of Eustacia. (109-10)

It is particularly telling that Diggory is immune to the effects of "differences of sex" when dealing with Eustacia, the woman whose "magical" powers of attraction are at the heart of Hardy's argument about the way sexuality has been misapprehended over the centuries. Certainly the difference between Diggory and other men is not lost on Eustacia herself:

She seemed to feel, after a bare look at Diggory Venn, that the man had

come on a strange errand, and that he was not so mean as she had thought him; for her close approach did not cause him to writhe uneasily, or shift his feet, or show any of those little signs which escape an ingenuous rustic at the advent of the uncommon in womankind. (111)

It is equally important that Diggory achieves what other men cannot through his selfless love for Thomasin, specifically in an attempt to secure her marriage to a man other than himself. As he confesses to Eustacia in their interview, he would have preferred to marry Thomasin himself, but because she rejected him for another, he explains that “if she cannot be happy without him I will do my duty in helping her to get him, as a man ought” (169). Eustacia’s reaction to Diggory’s explanation of his motives is a testament to how out of place such selflessness is in the existing order of things:

Eustacia looked curiously at the singular man who spoke thus. What a strange sort of love, to be entirely free from that quality of selfishness which is frequently the chief constituent of the passion, and sometimes its only one! The reddleman’s disinterestedness was so well deserving of respect that it overshoot respect by being barely comprehended; and she thought it almost absurd. (169)

As a result of these fundamental elements of his character, Diggory, like Sue, approaches decisions with a dramatically different moral calculus than those around him, including the advanced Clym Yeobright, who is blinded by the twin instinctive urges of sexual attraction and filial attachment. The contrast between the two men is most on display in an exchange between Venn and Yeobright shortly after the deaths of Wildeve and Eustacia. When Clym claims that Eustacia is “the second woman [he has] killed this

year,” Diggory is shocked, arguing that Yeobright “may as well say that the parents be the cause of a murder by the child, for without the parents the child would never have been begot” and suggesting that the most important thing is that Clym’s “aim has always been good” (377).

Diggory’s sentiment echoes the ultimate epiphany that Angel Clare experiences in his travels abroad in *Tess*, specifically the notion that “[t]he beauty or ugliness of a character lay not only in its achievements, but in its aims and impulses; its true history lay, not among things done, but among things willed” (*Tess*, 363). The difference between Clym’s and Diggory’s understanding of the situation is important, particularly given Hardy’s explanation of Clym’s inability to view the matter rationally:

[Clym] did sometimes think he had been ill-used by fortune, so far as to say that to be born is a palpable dilemma, and that instead of men aiming to advance in life with glory they should calculate how to retreat out of it without shame. But that he and his had been sarcastically and pitilessly handled in having such irons thrust into their souls he did not maintain long. It is usually so, except with the sternest of men. Human beings, in their generous endeavor to construct a hypothesis that shall not degrade a First Cause, have always hesitated to conceive a dominant power of lower moral quality than their own; and even while they sit down and weep by the waters of Babylon, invent excuses for the oppression which prompts their tears. (382)

In other words, Yeobright falls victim to the same sort of logic that leads Sue to argue that she and Jude are punished by a vengeful God for a happiness that is immoral. Diggory’s

opposition to the argument places him in the company of Angel Clare at the very end of *Tess*, or of Sue before her religious conversion, in “the days when her intellect scintillated like a star.”

Diggory’s relatively advanced position on the continuum of moral development is unsurprising when his entire story is taken into account. The son of a successful dairy farmer with a comfortable future ahead of him, Diggory abandons his life as a farmer after he falls in love with Thomasin and proposes marriage, only to be rejected largely because he is only a farmer and not, as Thomasin observed in a letter that Diggory still carries years later, “a professional man” (102). But, as Hardy points out, while the Egdonites may consider Diggory’s chosen profession a step down, he has actually managed very well for himself:

During the interval he had shifted his position even further from [Thomasin’s] than it had originally been, by adopting the redden trade; though he was really in very good circumstances still. Indeed, seeing that his expenditure was only one-fourth of his income, he might have been called a prosperous man. (102)

Diggory’s favorable position is confirmed by Eustacia, the consummate judge of suitors. Having been informed by Wildeve that Venn could be a rival for Thomasin’s hand, Eustacia’s assessment of Diggory is that “[h]is figure was perfect, his face young and well outlined, his eye bright, his intelligence keen, and his position one which he could readily better if he chose” (166).

Diggory, like Clym Yeobright and Angel Clare, is marked by the peculiarity of choosing a profession that is perceived as below his status, even peculiar for one of his

social standing. But it is Hardy's choice of professions for Venn that is particularly striking. In the novel, Hardy simply describes reddle as "the bright pigment so largely used by shepherds in preparing sheep for the fair," adding, in a sinister tone, that it "spreads its lively hues over everything it lights on, and stamps unmistakably, as with the mark of Cain, any person who has handled it half an hour" (100). Without more context, this limited description of Diggory's profession creates more questions than it answers. Further reading on the subject of reddle, or ruddle, however, reveals the importance of Diggory's trade in understanding his relationship to Hardy's project of evolutionary meliorism.

William Youatt, one of the experts on animal husbandry cited by Darwin in his discussions of scientific breeding, explores the uses of reddle in several of his books. In *The Complete Grazier and Farmer's and Cattle-Breeder's Assistant*, Youatt explains that "[a]fter sheep have been clipped it is usual to mark them with ruddle or other colouring matter... The same method may be employed with some to class them at future stages of their growth" (281). This system of marking, Youatt explains, is crucial to the process of developing a breed:

Where a pure as well as a mixed breed of sheep is reared on the farm it will become necessary in order to avoid mistakes to distinguish those of the first breed with a different mark from that employed for the sheep of the second. ... This system might be still furthered and each sheep branded on the cheek with a number. A judicious breeder would then find it conducive to his interest to keep a register in which the number of each sheep might be marked and where also such observations as relate to the

coupling and crossing of the breeds and experiments he may wish to try upon the animal should be carefully entered. A careful breeder who is solicitous to improve flocks will in such register notice the defects or other of his sheep, their respective states of health or disease, the nature of their wool, the profit they yield &c. It will thus be easy to ascertain what individuals it is proper to dispose of each year as well as those from which it will be advantageous to breed. At length, the object proposed will be obtained, namely the improvement of the different breeds and the deriving from them the greatest profit.” (281-2)

Simply put, the profession for which Diggory has abandoned conventional respectability (a move not unlike Clym or Angel abandoning urban success for rural simplicity) is one that is central to the process of scientific breeding and selection. This curious fact, along with all of the peculiarities of Venn’s personality and moral character, cement his position among the breeders of morality in Hardy’s work.²⁷ Indeed, there is reason to argue that in some ways Venn is more developed than Clym himself in this area.

It is for this reason that the public response to Diggory’s story is so telling when it comes to Hardy’s relationship with his readers. While the novel ultimately included a happy ending for Venn, one in which he returns to “normal” life and social acceptability, marries Thomasin, and enjoys both the fruits of his own savings and his wife’s inheritance from the unfortunate Damon Wildevve, Hardy himself intended no such outcome for Diggory. As he explains in a footnote:

the original conception of the story did not design a marriage between Thomasin and Venn. He was to have retained his isolated and weird

character to the last, and to have disappeared mysteriously from the heath, nobody knowing whither – Thomasin remaining a widow. But certain circumstances of serial publication led to a change of intent. Readers can therefore choose between the endings, and those with an austere artistic code can assume the more consistent conclusion to be the true one. (396)

Given Venn's similarity to Hardy's other morally advanced characters, as well as his identification with the scientific breeding that was so central to the ideas of both Hardy and Darwin, it is easy to see how Hardy felt that his original plan for the novel included "the more consistent conclusion." Diggory's voluntary position at the margins of acceptable society is analogous to the space that Angel Clare and Tess's sister are forced to occupy by the end of the *Tess*, or in which Jude and Sue find themselves when it is discovered that they are unmarried. By choosing to remain where he is, Diggory avoids the punishment that is meted out by society toward Hardy's other morally advanced characters.

Hardy's understanding of how Diggory's position would be interpreted, however, depends on his mistaken assumption that the scientific agnosticism that formed the bedrock of his ideas was as much a given to his readers as it was to himself. Rather than nodding in agreement at his assertion that such an advanced character as Diggory could have no place in the mid-century rural setting of *Return*, Hardy's audience was more prepared for a story that rewarded Diggory's caring and patience with material and romantic success, a storyline that was more consistent with the plots of countless novels that had come before.²⁸

This misunderstanding of how his readers would respond to Diggory suggests

something more than a simple mistaken assumption about the reading public's interest in happy endings. The failure to accept Diggory on Hardy's terms is a failure of the fundamental premise of Hardy's project of evolutionary meliorism. Hardy assumed that his readers were, like himself, eagerly awaiting a scientifically-informed conversation about the way morality could be understood and improved, a conversation whose importance would trump traditional notions of narrative and aesthetics. Hardy approaches this issue head-on in his description of Clym Yeobright as the forerunner of a new aesthetic standard, suggesting that in the future pensive men like Clym will be considered beautiful precisely because "[p]eople already feel that a man who lives without disturbing a curve of feature, or setting a mark of mental concern anywhere upon himself, is too far removed from modern perceptiveness to be a modern type" (185). In hindsight, however, it seems clear that Hardy was too willing to generalize, to project his own ideas and feelings onto the whole of society. While Hardy may have felt that the English people in general were ready to throw over traditional standards of beauty in favor of a new ideal based on thoughtfulness and an understanding of "the defects of natural laws, and... the quandary that man is in by their operation" (*Return*, 185), the response of many readers suggested otherwise.

The same disconnection between Hardy and his readers is evident in the response to the setting of his work and the way it is presented. Much has been made of Hardy's decision to ground so many of his novels in the fictionalized rural landscape that he named Wessex. Certainly Hardy himself suggests that there is something profound about the nature of the Dorset countryside, something about the vast stretches of heath and pasture that would resonate with contemporary society in a way that would mirror their

appreciation of the thought-worn face of Clym Yeobright. While it is tempting to view Hardy's obsession with the Dorset countryside as a matter of nostalgia or conservatism, Hardy himself attributed his appreciation of Wessex to a coming revolution in aesthetics and philosophy.²⁹

In the first chapter of *Return*, Hardy argues that “[h]aggard Egdon appealed to a subtler and scarcer instinct, to a more recently learnt emotion than that which responds to the sort of beauty called charming and fair” (34). Going so far as to compare the “dignity” and “majesty” of the heath to those of a prison, he goes on to suggest that in the near future Egdon Heath would be seen as an aesthetic ideal:

It is a question if the exclusive reign of this orthodox beauty is not approaching its last quarter. The new Vale of Tempe may be a gaunt waste in Thule; human souls may find themselves in closer and closer harmony with external things wearing a somberness distasteful to our race when it was young. The time seems near, if it has not actually arrived, when the chastened sublimity of a moor, a sea, or a mountain will be all of nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind. (34)

With Modernism lurking just around the corner, there is a real prescience to Hardy's argument that in due time the “more thinking among mankind” would find “a gaunt waste” to be “absolutely in keeping” with their mood. But for Hardy himself, the attempt to infuse his work with such an aesthetic was yet another source of friction between the writer and his readers. This is particularly true because Hardy, with his focus on the ameliorative value of scientific knowledge, was effusive in his use of scientific

jargon, a choice that he assumed would resonate with a reading public that was hungry for new ideas and scientific discussion. Far from appreciating the attention that Hardy lavished on biological and anthropological details in his descriptions of Wessex, however, many of his most vocal critics were particularly frustrated by the intrusion of scientific language on what they perceived as the familiar stormy moors and heaths of English literature. Richard le Galliene, reviewing *Tess* in *The Star* discussed

A defect in Mr. Hardy's style which is continually making one grind one's teeth, like "sand in honey." One cannot call it euphemism, for euphemism tends to "favour and to prettiness." It seems rather to come from sudden moments of self-consciousness in the midst of creative flow, as also from the imperfect digestion of certain modern science and philosophy, which is becoming somewhat too obtrusive through the apple-cheek outline of Mr. Hardy's work. ... Mr. Hardy continually delights in those long Latin and Greek words that seem to be made out of springs rather than vowels.

Think how absolutely out of colour in Arcadia are such words as

"dolorifuge," "photosphere," "heliolatries," "arborescence,"

"concatenation," "noctambulist," – where, indeed, are such in colour? –

and Mr. Hardy further uses that horrid verb "ecstasise." (*Critical*

Heritage, 178-9)

Le Galliene's objections suggest that at least some members of the reading public were not so ready as Hardy hoped to tear down the walls of the old Arcadia and erect a new ideal in their place. Andrew Lang, in a review in *Longman's Magazine*, was even more succinct, suggesting that

[i]f [a critic] be struck by such a defect of style as the use of semi-scientific phraseology out of place, he must say so; he must point out the neighbourhood of the reef on which George Eliot was wrecking her English. (*Critical Heritage*, 242)

Such responses suggest the failure of Hardy's most fundamental assumptions about the interest of the general public, and even many literary connoisseurs, in the ideas that informed his work.³⁰ That failure would ultimately be the downfall of his project of evolutionary meliorism through tragic fiction. Although he continued to work with the same ideas throughout his career, ultimately producing some of the clearest elucidations of those ideas in verse (including *The Dynasts*), Hardy never returned to novel writing after *Jude*. In a letter written amidst the furor over *Jude*, he suggests that he hoped to be able to

express more fully in verse ideas and emotions which run counter to the inert crystallized opinion – hard as a rock – which the vast body of men have vested interests in supporting. To cry out in a passionate poem that (for instance) the Supreme Mover or Movers, the Prime Force or Forces, must be either limited in power, unknowing, or cruel – which is obvious enough, and has been for centuries – will cause them merely a shake of head; but to put it in argumentative prose will make them sneer, or foam, and set all the literary contortionists jumping upon me, a harmless agnostic, as if I were a clamorous atheist, which in their crass illiteracy they seem to think is the same thing. (*Later Years*, 57-8)

This retreat from fiction, then, is also a retreat from a broader audience. Yet while Hardy

decries the “literary contortionists” who would twist his meaning, he still clings to the assertion that his ideas about theology are commonplace and have been for ages, despite the fact that his own experience with the reading public suggested that precisely the opposite was true.

At the same time, it is worth noting that despite Hardy's opposition to the supernatural element of Anglican theology, his intention was never to argue for the dissolution of the Church. Like Angel Clare, Hardy maintained a great fondness for the Church despite his inability to accept the Bible as literally true. His personal writings suggest that he envisioned a central role for the Church in the great age of moral husbandry that he imagined was approaching, if only the Church could be made to understand and adapt to what Hardy saw as a near universal disillusionment with the message that congregations received week after week.

Shortly before the release of the third part of *The Dynasts*, Hardy made a series of notes in his diary about an article which he considered writing, entitled “The Hard Case of the Would-be Religious. By Sinceritas” (*Later Years*, 121). Hardy synthesizes the article in his notes with the observation that “[m]any millions of the most thoughtful people in England are prevented entering any church or chapel from year's end to year's end” (121) before going on to explain that the article would deal with the idea of religion “in its modern sense entirely, as being expressive of nobler feelings towards humanity and emotional goodness and greatness, the old meaning of the word – ceremony, or ritual – having perished, or nearly” (121).

Building on these basic principles, Hardy goes on to paint an image of his own understanding of the need for religious reform which neatly captures both his ideas about

religion and morality and his difficulties with the way society responded to those ideas:

We enter the church and we have to say, 'We have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep', when what we want to say is, 'Why are we made to err and stray like lost sheep?' Then we have to sing, 'My soul doth magnify the Lord', when what we want to sing is, 'O that my soul could find some Lord that it could magnify! Till it can, let us magnify good works, and develop all means of easing mortals' progress through a world not worthy of them.'

Still, being present, we say the established words full of the historic sentiment only, mentally adding, 'How happy our ancestors were in repeating in all sincerity these articles of faith!' But we perceive that none of the congregation recognizes that we repeat the words from an antiquarian interest in them, and in a historic sense, and solely in order to keep a church of some sort afoot – a thing indispensable; so that we are pretending what is not true: that we are believers. This must not be; we must leave. And if we do, we reluctantly go to the door, and creep out, as it creaks complaining behind us. (*Later Years*, 121-2)

This passage, written at a time when Hardy was uncertain about the future of a work that represented the most detailed, careful explication of his own ideas, is freighted with the disappointment and frustration that dogged Hardy throughout his career. Yet even at his most frustrated, Hardy maintains that the Church is “a thing indispensable” to modern society. Hardy's idea of the necessity of the Church underscores the fact that he saw the ideas of Darwin as a means of reforming the Church rather than obliterating it.

In the “Apology” at the beginning of *Late Lyrics and Earlier*, Hardy asks the reader “what other purely English establishment than the Church, of sufficient dignity and footing, with such strength of old association, such scope for transmutability, such architectural spell, is left in this country to keep the shreds of morality together?” (*Poems*, 561). He continues, describing what “may indeed be a forlorn hope, a mere dream,” the dream of

an alliance between religion, which must be retained unless the world is to perish, and complete rationality which must come also unless the world is to perish, by means of the interfusing effect of poetry - “the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; the impassioned expression of science.”
(561-2)

Hardy's argument suggests that he viewed himself and other scientific moralists as the heirs to the tradition of the Reformation and the great theological scholars, a notion that is reinforced by a passage in his biography:

His vision had often been that of so many people brought up under Church of England influences, a giving of liturgical form to modern ideas, and expressing them in the same old buildings that had already seen previous reforms successfully carried out. He would say to his friends, the Warden of Keble, Arthur Benson, and others, that if the bishops only had a little courage, and would modify the liturgy by dropping preternatural assumptions out of it, few churchgoers would object to the change for long, and congregations would be trebled in a brief time. (*Later Years*, 176-7)

Lurking behind this optimistic vision of congregations all over England objecting only briefly to the sudden removal of all the articles of faith from their religion is a starry-eyed view of church reform that amounts to something like a willful blindness about both contemporary England and the history of the Church. Hardy fails to acknowledge the bitter struggle that was necessary for the “previous reforms successfully carried out,” implying instead that a far more dramatic revision of theology could be carried out in a short time with little difficulty, a fact that history has not been borne out in the century that has elapsed since Hardy penned that argument.

In many ways, however, Hardy's comparison of his own efforts to those of Reformation thinkers is apt, if in a somewhat different way than he originally intended. Luther, like Hardy, aimed at beginning a conversation within the Catholic Church, a conversation that would ultimately allow the Church to retain its position in the community while correcting what he viewed as substantial errors in its theology. And, like Luther, Hardy was destined to be disappointed in his lifetime as his ideas ultimately led to schism and struggle. For Hardy, the Twentieth Century did not bring the broad, democratic discussion of morality and its origins culminating in careful acts of moral husbandry that he envisioned. Rather, it brought the collapse of many of the oldest institutions in England and on the Continent, a decline in congregations, the rise of the sort of violent nationalism that he disparaged in *Jude*, and the shocking destruction of a World War in his lifetime. Hardy's biography notes that “the war destroyed all Hardy's belief in the gradual ennoblement of man, a belief he had held for many years...He said he would probably not have ended *The Dynasts* as he did end it if he could have foreseen what was going to happen within a few years.” (*Later Years*, 165)

Despite this, however, Hardy continued to urge reform, both within and without the Church. Moreover, he eventually achieved a position within the literary world that gave some real weight to those urgings. As unlikely as it may have seemed to Hardy at the time that he was receiving the ashes of *Jude* in the mail, at the time of his death Hardy was considered one of the leading lights of English literature, numbering among his friends and acquaintances many of the greatest literary minds of his own generation and the generation to follow. His place in public opinion, far from its nadir at the end of his career as a novelist, is reflected by the fact that his pallbearers included not only literary colleagues but the heads of the major colleges and the prime minister himself. Hardy's work has continued to be a staple wherever English literature is taught, at the university and even high school level, a fact which has kept the discussion of all his protagonists and their struggles alive more than a century after they were first introduced.

And, just as Jude's claim that his and Sue's ideas "were fifty years too soon to be any good to us" (405) appears prescient in hindsight to many readers, much of what Hardy predicted has come to pass, or very nearly. By the time of his death in 1928, a revolution in aesthetics and literary style was certainly taking place, one which would bear out his prediction in *Return* that "[t]he new Vale of Tempe" might be "a gaunt waste in Thule" (34).³¹ Most notable, however, is the fact that the work of moral husbandry that Hardy envisioned has begun to take place outside of the church. The work of sociobiologists such as E.O. Wilson has brought new scientific scrutiny to bear on the idea of the internal struggle between instinct and learned behavior posited by Darwin. At the intersection of science and philosophy, thinkers such as Dawkins, Dennett, and Hofstadter have popularized the discussion of the evolution of cultural products and the

exploration of their origins. On campuses throughout the world, the dissection of gender roles, social structures, religion and morality has become one of the primary tools used in the study of art and literature, a development that has perhaps done more than anything to democratize the conversation that Hardy once hoped would take place among the novel-reading public. And while it hardly seems likely that such conversations will lead to the sort of near-immediate results Darwin at which marveled in discussing the prowess of the eminent breeders of his time, it is hard to avoid the suspicion that Hardy might see in contemporary academic, philosophical, and scientific discussion something of the reformation that he envisioned nearly a century ago.

Notes

- 1 *Poems*, 97-8.
- 2 Phillip Mallet's "Hardy, Darwin, and *The Origin of Species*" delves into many of the specifics of *Origin*, including the role of instinct in morality, but engages only minimally with the novels. Mallet overlooks the crucial transition from unconscious to conscious selection, and his focus on *Origin* precludes engagement with the extensive discussions of morality in *Descent*.
- 3 The lines quoted by Hardy in the passage come from Wordsworth's Intimations Ode, a choice choice which highlights the optimistic nature of Hardy's intention in the "Apology." Hardy's philosophical progress from the bleak disillusionment of "Hap" to the more optimistic embrace of the ameliorative potential of Darwin's ideas squares nicely with the optimistic resolution of Wordsworth's poem, in which the author expresses the hope that people could find cause for hope "[i]n the primal sympathy / Which having been must ever be" and "[i]n the soothing thoughts that spring / Out of human suffering."
- 4 Sumpter's argument echoes those of other critics who seize on Hardy's affinity for scientific ideas while attempting to separate them from his philosophical views. DeWitt, for instance, argues that Hardy sees the "human" and "scientific" views of the world as fundamentally incompatible.
- 5 Mallett focuses on this idea of successive variation, particularly in connection with the idea of individuals becoming adapted to their location, arguing that this is visible in Diggory Venn's adaptation to Egdon Heath and the way that Tess's sister comes to occupy a place that Tess herself could not.
- 6 Caminero-Santangelo, who also focuses on the influence of Huxley, arrives at similar conclusions. Like Hyman and myself, he sees Hardy as concerned with the ability of

each individual to participate in a broad, democratic discussion of ethical principles. In this discussion, he argues, Hardy “bases ethics on a human consciousness with an awareness of those structures of society and nature which contribute to human misery and misfortune”(60). Lacking the overarching narrative provided by Darwin, Caminero-Santangelo concludes that Hardy “does not seem to believe that science...could offer valid possibilities for ethical progressive action”(60).

7 *Poems*, 168.

8 *Jude*, 172.

9 Joan Durbeyfield's outdated beliefs have been explored by a number of critics. Eakins' discussion of the pagan tradition in *Tess* is particularly insightful. More recently, John Rodden has drawn attention to similarities between the ways that Joan Durbeyfield and the Reverend James Clare are described, suggesting that both figures occupy childlike roles at the opposite ends of a spectrum between religion and nature(304). Rodden connects this observation to Ian Gregor's notion of Hardy's fiction as a “Great Web,” arguing that both are strands of the same web of belief. For the purpose of my argument, I would take this further, suggesting that the similarities between Durbeyfield and Clare arise from the fact that both parents are designed to demonstrate the Darwinian principle of early education forming a sort of acquired instinct. Angel explicitly states that his notion of purity comes from his father, just as Tess has, since her time in the cradle, absorbed her mother's teachings on the subject, exemplified by the ballad of the gown “That never would become that wife That had once done amiss”(213)

10 In relation to the other characters in the novel, Diggory has been sparsely treated.

Hagan focuses on Diggory's diabolical appearance and reduces him, at best, to an ill-informed meddler. Sandy Cohen focuses on the relationship between Clym and Diggory but overlooks many of their similarities as well as the significance of Diggory's choice of professions.

- 11 William Cohen, Graeme Tytler, and Alexandra Farrell all explore the issues of physiognomy in Hardy's novels, particularly *Return*. Tytler and Farrell both provide insights in terms of the influence of Darwin's *Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* on Hardy's depiction of his characters' appearances.
- 12 Sue's method of altering her Bible to be read "in chronological order" suggests a more anthropological interest in Christianity as a cultural product that evolved over time, a pursuit that reflects the other anthropological influences on both Darwin and Hardy himself.
- 13 See Zeitler on Hardy's interest in anthropology and his connection to contemporary experts in the field.
- 14 See Ferguson on the political significance of Bonfire Night in Hardy's time.
- 15 See Rutland, Schweik, and Tomalin on Hardy's sources for these ideas. Rutland offers one of the earliest readings of the influence of Strauss based on an analysis of Hardy's own copy of *Das Leben Jesu*, while Schweik and Tomalin discuss the influence of Feuerbach's ideas.
- 16 Both Malton and Ramel explore the relationship between sexuality and accusations of witchcraft, although both seem to ascribe to Hardy views of the characters who pass judgment on Eustacia as a "witch." Ramel goes further, linking social punishment of Tess with the punishment of Eustacia, arguing that both women are punished for "an

enjoyment which is somewhat in excess of what the community considers acceptable”(65).

- 17 Schoenfeld advances the interesting argument that Eustacia “was a sexually experienced woman,” a choice that Hardy made in an attempt “to show that sexuality for women should be as acceptable for women as it was for men”(194-5). This is particularly relevant given his later depictions of women who are punished for expressing sexual desire.
- 18 The question of whether Tess's initial encounter with d'Urberville or her subsequent time with d'Urberville at The Slopes represent a seduction or a rape has been a matter of much critical conjecture. Davis notes that the apparent ambiguity (or perhaps the dual nature of Tess's experiences with d'Urberville) serve to challenge the reader's notions about the nature of purity. Schoenfeld further connects Tess's experiences to those of Eustacia Vye, suggesting that Eustacia “was a sexually experienced woman,” and arguing that the stories of both Eustacia and Tess were part of “Hardy's attempts to show that sexuality for women should be as acceptable as it was for men”(194-5). Parker's reading of the subject focuses on the connection between the story of Tess's seduction and murder and rural values systems of ballads that involved the same plot. While Parker sees this connection as muddying the waters of Hardy's argument, I would suggest that it is simply part of a larger attempt to incorporate the anthropology of rural England into his arguments about the origins of morality.
- 19 Schoenfeld provides a fascinating contextualization of the “shiftlessness” of the Durbeyfield family and contemporary developments in land ownership, economics, etc.
- 20 See Ponsford on Hardy's use of “narrative response”(489) to weigh in on behalf of his

protagonists, particularly Tess.

21 See Fischler on the imagery of gins, traps, and springes in Hardy's novels and their connection to social conventions.

22 See Heffernan on Alec d'Urberville's exploitation of social standards regarding female purity and the implications for Hardy's argument about those standards (10).

23 Giordano emphasizes the role of tragedy in generating sympathy, arguing that

“[s]uffering and suicide are transmuted in [Hardy's] works to enforce a saving sympathy”(184).

24 See Tomalin on Hardy's own experience with his first marriage and the possibility that he had been “trapped' by Emma. As Tomalin argues, Hardy's poetry about Emma suggests an experience that led him to be much more deeply conflicted than Jude is about his marriage to Arabella.

25 There is a wealth of critical material dealing with the idea of Sue as “New Woman,”

proto-feminist, etc., beginning especially in the late 1970s. Blake, Cockshut, and

Fernando all make strong cases about the nature of Sue's feminism and Hardy's

position on the issues. More recently, William Deresiewicz, in his discussion of

Hardy's portrayal of friendship between men and women, makes several interesting

observations about the connection between Sue's physical and emotional states.

Drawing on Hardy's description in the postscript of Sue as an “emancipated bundle of nerves”(468) of the sort produced by modern ideas, Deresiewicz argues that Sue “is a

'bundle of nerves' *because* she is emancipated. Her physical desires pull her in one

direction, her intellectual and social desires in another”(60). While this argument

dovetails nicely with the Darwinian notion of internal moral conflict between base

instincts and reason, Deresiewicz instead argues that Sue's nervous energy comes from

“the conflict between a determining Darwinism and a doomed idealism with which Hardy opposes it”(60), ultimately giving in to a reductionist reading of Darwin by suggesting that “[i]f Hardy's name for the morality of Darwinism is 'business,' his name for the morality that opposes it is 'loving-kindness’”(61), an argument that overlooks the central role of altruism in Darwin's ideas about morality.

26 *Tess*, 144.

27 In this way, Diggory is one of a line of sympathetic protagonists marked by their connection to plant and animal husbandry. Gabriel Oak, the long-shunned shepherd of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, is pictured as spending his nights re-reading manuals of animal husbandry. Donald Farfrae, the romantic interest in *Mayor of Casterbridge*, is the impetus for the introduction of modern machinery and other methods of more scientifically-informed plant husbandry. Oak, with his long-suffering love for Bathsheba Everdene, suggests an earlier, more conservative version of Diggory Venn, while Farfrae's character combines many of the features of both Diggory Venn and Clym Yeobright, including Yeobright's blindness to the effects of his attraction to the female protagonist of the novel.

28 Franke offers a fascinating reading of the challenges of serial publication and Hardy's attempt to turn those challenges to his advantage in the publication of *Tess*.

29 Sorum seizes on this idea in a discussion of Hardy's Wessex, arguing that the Wessex landscape is carefully crafted to help create a sense of empathy with his protagonists. Likewise, Keen draws on the work of Nineteenth-Century German Aesthetics to suggest that Hardy builds empathy for his characters through his description of the inanimate objects that surround them. Keen's ideas are of particular interest because of the connection he draws between empathy and altruism.

30 See Richards on the subject of contemporary critical response to Hardy's figurative language and recent attempts to re-evaluate what his detractors perceived as deficiencies.

31 See Meyers on the influence of Hardy on the Modernists, particularly through *The*

Dynasts.

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