

**“Nature’s Logic”:
Understanding Suffering in the Works of Thomas Hardy**

by
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ABSTRACT

Readers of Thomas Hardy are often disturbed by his unrelentingly bleak worldview. This paper will examine and attempt to refute pessimistic interpretations of the novels *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* using the phrase “nature’s logic” as an opening into the sometimes-cruel, sometimes-indifferent twists of fate that befall Hardy’s characters. Tess and Jude struggle to comprehend a world in which a just action does not always produce a reward; in fact, good intentions usually lead to suffering. This discrepancy between cause and effect is at the root of Hardy’s tragedy and reflects the failings of traditional wisdom to properly describe morality in the modern era. I examine this dissolution of the traditional moral paradigm and map the consequences of nature’s logic on Hardy’s characters. Because Hardy was a part of the burgeoning skeptical, scientific milieu of Victorian England, I chose Darwinism and natural selection as the primary lenses for unraveling the relationship between nature and suffering. Rather than their good deeds or sincere intentions bringing them success, Jude’s refusal to accept his hereditary and social molds and Tess’s submission to those same limitations cause their demise. Furthermore, I look at the way in which suffering is mediated through animal imagery, which suggests that humans are subject to the same laws of nature as all other living beings rather than being above them.

Chapter 1

Hardy's "Diabolical Business"

In a letter to John Addington Symonds in 1889, Thomas Hardy wrote,

A question which used to trouble me was whether we ought to write sad stories, considering how much sadness there is in the world already. But of late I have come to the conclusion that, the first step towards cure of, or even relief from, any disease being to understand it, the study of tragedy in fiction may possibly here & there be the means of showing how to escape the worst forms of it, at least, in real life. (Collected Letters 53)

The Hardy we see here was a man deeply concerned with the emotional reaction he engenders in his reader, and his conclusion is to use tragedy not as a depressant but as a moral balm. The letter was well-timed, for in two years he would release *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and a shortly afterwards *Jude the Obscure* (1895), two of his saddest stories. Hardy's use of misery is so pervasive in these novels that to this day he is consistently categorized as one of the most depressing novelists in the English canon. One book critic for *Guardian* recently wrote of her recurring failure to read *Tess*, being always thwarted by its relentless vendetta against the title character:

Mostly, I get as far as Tess's rape before hurling my copy across the room. On two occasions I've gritted my teeth past her bearing and burying a child named Sorrow, to be lulled into disastrous optimism by the appearance of sanctimonious, butter-wouldn't-melt Angel Clare. The whole diabolical business of the unread note and the wedding night, and the awful shredding sense of everything going horribly, irreparably wrong as he repudiates Tess – unlucky, unlucky Tess! – is just too much for my snivelling soul to deal with. (Williams)

This reaction, while particularly colorful, is a common one. Even Hardy's contemporary reviewers applauded his skill as a writer while experiencing similar disgust for the story's details: "So sordid is the tale [*Jude the Obscure*] sets forth, so unrelieved is the gloom of the incidents, and—to be frank—so unnecessarily coarse are certain details, that, were it not for the saving grace of the artist, and the evident purity of its motive, the whole thing would pass for a misdirected effort in decadent realism" (Clarke 239). The consensus seems to be that, although worthwhile, his novels are exceedingly unpleasant. However, there is a fine line between a challenging and a masochistic story. By addressing misery in *Tess* and *Jude*, I wish to defend Hardy against these accusations of hyperbolic cruelty. Intense, conspicuous suffering, I believe, is a thematic device used to probe the characters' reactions to the strange mix of fate and natural law that permeates his novels. This force, which I will refer to as "nature's logic" after a line from *Jude*, governs the lives of all his characters and is a conflation of Hardy's own ethical beliefs and his readings in Darwin. By understanding Hardy's beliefs on natural selection, ethics, and artistic theory, we can begin to make sense of what the book critic calls his "diabolical business."

While his tragic coincidences seem hyperbolic, Hardy's depiction of suffering is not artificial: quite the opposite. In 1892, a year after the publication of *Tess*, Hardy responded to a question about why the novel's ending was so dreary, stating, "For the simple reason that I could not help myself. I hate the optimistic grin which ends a story happily, merely to suit conventional ideas. It raises a far greater horror in me

than the honest sadness that comes after tragedy” (“An Interview”). Balking at “conventional ideas” was a theme with Hardy. Portrayals of social deviance caused his harshest criticism but also demonstrated his artistic fealty to the “honest sadness” of Wessex—although, ironically, by rejecting one storytelling trope, the happy ending, he invented a new one for himself, the sorrowful one. The truth as Hardy saw it, unfortunately, was not deemed appropriate by the fastidious English public, and he was pressured to bowdlerize many of his darker works. Because of the restraints of the typical novel, “Hardy had become increasingly frustrated with the moral constraints of English fiction and was wearying of the surreptitious tactics needed to counteract the docile self-censorship to which he was forced to submit with evident loathing” (Dolin 334). Always considering his novels as a means of financial gain, Hardy complied to the changes to the serializations, but he reverted back to his original vision for the novelization. There is a constant tension surrounding his work between public sentiment and private vision, between what his readers find tasteful and what he believes is artistic truth.

Throughout his career, Hardy repudiated facile readings of his work as bleak for bleakness’s sake. One such retort can be found in the “Apology” to his poetry collection *Late Lyrics and Earlier*. He quotes his own poem, “In Tenebris” to justify his harsh looks at pain: “If way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst” (*Complete Poems* 557). What he writes in *Tess* and *Jude*, from the abandonment of Tess by Angel to the death of Father Time, is certainly representative of the worst in life. Again, we see here his belief that to be exposed to suffering, to raise awareness of it, is to bring about its end. When Hardy’s friend and critic Edmond Gosse reviewed *Jude* after its initial publication, he asked, “What has Providence done

to Mr. Hardy that he should rise up in the arable land of Wessex and shake his fist at his Creator?" (qtd. in Page 388). To ask this, however, is to misunderstand Hardy's fiction as an invective against religion. Neither Hardy nor his characters are shaking their fists at a "Creator,"—Hardy did not believe in such a divine being—but at some ineffable cosmic chain of cause and effect that led to their suffering. It is also important to note that these novels are not a formal satire with a specific aim to abolish marriage or end class hypocrisy, but rather portraits of unfortunate and avoidable circumstances. As Hardy wrote in his preface to *Tess*, "a novel is an impression, not an argument" (xi). To interpret intense suffering as unnecessary stylization or social critique is to miss the point; rather than pessimistic polemics, Hardy created stories of deeply sensitive individuals groping through a moral quagmire.

Whether or not Hardy himself was deliberately pessimistic, the tone of his novels need not be interpreted as wholly dreary. George Levine denies popular fatalistic interpretations of Hardy's work, particularly in regards to Darwinian readings, as hopeless struggles against the indifferent machinations of nature. "Through all the darkness," Levine writes, "of a chance-driven, mindless world against which thought-endowed animals like humans have to struggle hopelessly, there glimmers steadily a strong moral vision and even a life-affirming Hardy" (37). Accusing Hardy of gratuitous cruelty is just as misleading as claiming that his world is completely devoid of meaning or satisfaction. There are glimmers of happiness, albeit fleeting, in the relationships of Jude and Sue, Tess and Angel. The novels do not posit that a happy couple is an oxymoron, but rather present examples of failed romances.

Hardy is not interested in an sadistic aesthetics of misery; he instead builds narratives of worst-case scenarios to be examined by the audience.

Hardy continually brings to attention not only suffering, but his characters' complaints about their misfortune. Neither Jude nor Tess ever formally shake their fists at God, as Gosse put it, but rather they bemoan a protean tendency of nature: a hiccup in the universe. This vague entity is given various euphemisms throughout Hardy's writing. Scrutinizing two specific terms in his poetry, Crass Casualty and the Immanent Will, may elucidate his own interpretation of nature during the writing of *Tess* and *Jude*. Crass Casualty, perhaps the best known of these phrases, originates in his poem "Hap" and suggests a world governed by pure chance: "These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown/ Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain" (ll. 13-14). The Immanent Will, a force which "stirs and urges everything," implies a more mechanical understanding of the universe: as near to a deliberate creator as someone with Hardy's agnostic beliefs could come (l. 18). There is, of course, no perfect word to label what can both thwart a marriage, stall education, and bring a child to commit suicide; the issue is too complex for that. Each new name Hardy generates implies that the old one was inadequate and suggests that there is a continuing and ultimately futile search for the perfect explanation. The depiction of nature in "Hap," published in 1866, is more chance-driven than the Immanent Will, which derives from "The Convergence of the Twain," published almost 50 years later. The Immanent Will, which is fully explored by Hardy in *The Dynasts*, reflects a more calculating interpretation of nature, one which can orchestrate the paths of an iceberg and the Titanic. This evolution in terminology indicates that around the time of *Tess* and *Jude*'s publication in the 1890s Hardy's beliefs about the social order and natural laws

that determine fate were somewhere between sheer randomness and the guiding hand of natural law. Out of this delicate mixture of chance and fate comes the force that Tess and Jude most frequently blame for their suffering.

Of all the euphemisms for nature used in *Jude*, “nature’s logic” comes closest to blending randomness with the design of a higher power. Although the phrase takes on various meanings throughout the two novels, a good definition might be the discrepancy between the predicted and actual effect of an action. For example, Jude feeds the crows he is supposed to scare away because Phillotson tells him to be kind to animals. Rather than being rewarded for following this advice, he is scolded and loses his job. In a way, it nature’s logic is a human invention to explain an empirical tendency, similar to natural selection or gravity, which is used as a scapegoat for suffering. Can’t blame yourself, your neighbor, or God? Then blame nature’s logic. The phrase first appears in an early section of *Jude* during which the eponymous hero is brooding over the discord and disorder of life: “Events did not rhyme quite as he had thought. Nature's logic was too horrid for him to care for. That mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another sickened his sense of harmony” (*Jude* 17). Even at eleven, probably too young an age to be thinking of such serious matters, Jude senses the imbalance between mercy and cruelty toward otherwise equal living beings. Nature’s logic, he discovers, is dissonant with concepts of mutual peace; it demands that one creature die so that another may live. This echoes natural selection, but Hardy is not thinking about survival in terms of reproduction: he sees it in the ability to be independent and prosperous. Sue later reinterprets nature’s logic, giving it more fatalistic resonance, by exclaiming, “O why should Nature’s law be mutual butchery!” (*Jude* 243). Nature’s logic has progressed from “mercy towards one set of creatures

was cruelty towards another” at the beginning of the novel to “mutual butchery,” becoming increasingly savage as the novel progresses to coincide with the increasing hardships against which Jude and Sue struggle.

It is impossible to discuss Hardy’s interest in natural law without mentioning his well-documented familiarity with the writings of Charles Darwin. Levine confirms scholarly certitude in Darwin’s influence on Hardy, stating that “virtually all commentators cite Hardy’s notation in his autobiography that he was ‘among the earliest acclaimers of *The Origin of the Species*’” (36). Hardy was very much engrossed in his radical, scientific milieu and drew from it liberally in the creation of his characters and plots. One of the most salient examples of Darwin’s influence on Hardy’s writing is in the emphasis placed on genealogy in the novels. It is not an exaggeration to say that Tess and Jude are, to borrow the language of Darwin’s famous voyage, long-beak finches living in an environment conducive to short-beak finches. That is to say, they have inherited traits that are unsuitable for survival in their respective homes. Jude might be a sympathetic and moral character, but if you want to prosper in 19th-century Wessex, it is better to be Arabella. Hardy’s invocation of Darwin and heredity implies that Tess and Jude were essentially doomed before their novels even began.

The task Hardy sets forth for himself is the dramatization of the laws of nature. As Gillian Beer notes, it is difficult to transform an abstract such as natural selection into easily comprehensible terms. As a result, “One of the persistent impulses in interpreting evolutionary theory has been to domesticate it, to colonise it with human meaning, to bring man back to the center of its intent” (Beer 7). Hardy may be bringing natural selection to bear on humans, but he also re-assimilates humans back

into the animal kingdom, showing how human and animals are governed by the same laws of nature.

Equating nature with law or logic occurs frequently in both *Tess* and *Jude*, particularly in association with suffering. “They writhed feverishly,” the narrator tells us about Tess’s fellow milkmaid’s arresting passion for Angel, “under the oppressiveness of an emotion thrust on them by cruel Nature’s law—an emotion which they had neither expected nor desired” (*Tess* 115). In this case, nature’s logic takes the form of romantic longing, yet it is unwanted and uncontrollable. In this sense nature’s logic is a desire, but it can also be a visual pattern, as in the case of Jude’s anxiety about the unnatural appearance of his pig’s blood: “The white snow stained with the blood of his fellow-mortal wore an illogical look to him as a lover of justice, not to say Christian” (*Jude* 55). There is no one medium of experiencing nature’s logic; it encompasses anything that disagrees with preconceived axioms. Even though it is by definition natural, there is still something unpalatable about it. This is a problem more with the assumptions of humans than the ontology of nature. Life consistently fails to meet the characters’ expectations. Similarly, in *Tess*, the narrator assumes the role of questioner, acknowledging a “course pattern” to life, but one that is beyond human understanding:

Why it was that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive; why so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus, the wrong man the woman, the wrong woman the man, many thousands years of analytically philosophy have failed to explain to our sense of order. (*Tess* 57)

The human demand for perceivable order is shown to be pathetically inept next to the mysteries of nature. Conventional logic cannot explain why such opposed entities should be allowed to collide.

This ominous sense that fate is governed by obscure forces of nature is addressed by Tess and Jude using a vocabulary of questioning and ambiguity. Jude senses this elusive force, saying “All around you there seemed to be something glaring, garish, rattling, and the noises and glares hit upon the little cell called your life, and shook it, and warped it” (*Jude* 17). Hardy deliberately makes this “something” invisible yet powerful. The characters and narrators know it is there, but do not know how it works. “Why,” Tess asks in her quaintly ungrammatical words, “do the sun shine on the just and the unjust alike?” (*Tess* 99). Tess’s question is really three-pronged: why do bad things happen to good people?; why do good things happen to bad people?; and why are bad things allowed to exist in the first place? The badness of certain actions and characters interfering with the lives of good characters is a theme of the novels and the key to understanding Hardy’s preferred flavor of misery. Sue also senses this strange force that appears determined to keep her unsatisfied: “There is something external to us which says, ‘You shant!’ First it said, ‘You shant learn!’ Then it said, ‘You shant labor!’ Now it says, ‘You shant love!’” (*Jude* 265). Unable to comprehend why their lives fall apart, they turn to desperate questioning. They demand justification for an moral code that fails to adequately describe moral causality in the modernizing world. Tess’s question is an allusion to the Gospel of Matthew—“That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (KJV 5:45). Referencing Christianity reminds the reader

that these are characters who believe in a Deuteronomic schema of morality: if you follow the rules, they would say, everything will turn out all right. By showing these characters in misery and invoking mysterious nature's logic as the impresario of the cosmos, Hardy is demonstrating a flaw of this particular system of thought.

Although there are variously attempts to unravel these questions, more important than the answers is the act of questioning itself. Through these questions, Hardy illustrates the inevitable human habit of trying to explain the inexplicable. Collins also notes this tendency in Hardy's work, writing, "When the Nature machine produced in man the ability to recognize design, it accordingly extinguished his ability to understand irrational events and processes" (44). The cost of rationalization is the sense of dread that comes from that which is irrational. Tess and Jude, torn between reality and their assumptions, cannot understand an ostensibly disinterested series of events that nonetheless appears hostile to their existence. This cognitive dissonance manifests itself most frequently as intense depression. Jude can usually be found in some secluded area wishing himself out of the world: "he wished he had never seen a book, that he might never see another, that he had never been born" (*Jude* 27). This theme is manipulated and magnified throughout the novel, recapitulated as Sue's dark confession to Father Time: "But it seems such a terribly tragic thing to bring beings into the world—so presumptuous—that I question my right to do it sometimes" (*Jude* 246). It often appears that they are trapped in a moral vacuum where an action perceived to be noble will lead to traumatic consequences, such that life is no longer justified. There is an overarching sense that the right thing to do will merely bring about more torment.

In the following chapters, I will attempt to further explain the moral asymmetry between action and consequence by showing that Hardy uses a vocabulary of heredity to describe the misery of Tess and Jude. The fact that circumstances of birth constitute one of the formative, unchangeable factors of suffering links Hardy's characters to Darwinism and the inevitability of a person being locked into his genetic code. The plot of *Tess* is really one long chain of events, ending with Tess's death, and set off by the uncovering of ancestral information to Jack Durbeyfield. Jeannette King also notes the inescapability of suffering in light of Tess's genealogy, writing, "The 'phase' of the novel called 'the Consequence' shows her suffering to be a consequence not only of her seduction, but of her father's vainglorious attempts to reclaim his former aristocratic ancestry, and even of distant d'Urberville history" (97). Suffering not only results from poor decisions but is a consequence of factors over which characters have no control. Similarly, Jude is warned by Aunt Drusilla that he has inherited the Fawley curse, which dictates that his marriages will end disastrously. Other examples include Alec, who after purchasing the name d'Urberville can be seen as a false relative and anomaly in the genetic line, and Angel, who, by marrying Liza Lu, Tess's sister and ipso facto genetic double, offers a solution to Tess's death through genetic continuity.

Next, I would like to look at the preponderance of animal suffering in Hardy's work in relation to nature's logic. Animals are at times seen as objects deserving compassion, such as the crows that Jude feeds or the pig that he slaughters, and other times as symbols of the characters themselves, such as the accidental death of Prince and the frequent correlation of Sue with birds. Hardy creates this association to show that humans caught in the snare of malicious nature are tantamount to animals caught

in a hunter's trap. The protagonists who realize their moral equality with animals are the ones to suffer, while the antagonists who show no empathy towards other animals prosper. I am particularly interested in Elisha Cohn's work on understanding Hardy's ethics through understanding the place of animals in nature. As she argues, Hardy is continuously erasing the line between human and animal, and the ethical characters, such as Jude, are identified as those who treat animals humanely.

Finally, while the pious Jude and rustic Tess accept the basic axiom that if you do what is right and remain faithful, then your life will be prosperous, I want to show that Hardy deliberately portrays this schema as malfunctioning through the suffering in his work. Nature's logic is an answer to the nihilism that might emerge in the Age of Doubt from the disintegration of traditional ethics. It is also similar to, but not the same as God: an omnipresent yet unknowable force that influences the daily actions of the characters. For Hardy, however, a universe run by nature's logic is not devoid of value. Hardy shared with Darwin, Levine writes, a "deep sensitivity to the pains of this world that [pressed] them to a sense that life here and now—a fully secular life—is indeed worth living" (41). Natural selection, nature's logic, and conspicuous suffering do not necessitate a savage and hopeless universe, but they are useful in creating a model of how Hardy envisioned the nature of ethics in the post-Darwinian world.

Chapter 2

The Asymmetry of Intention

Suffering in Hardy's work takes on its most tragic form when it manifests as an asymmetry between ethically proper actions and their consequences. There is no karma in Hardy's universe: good deeds do not guarantee, or even imply, good fortune. Altruism in fact is more likely to bring about the opposite result. Hardy's characters act with good intentions, and this is what usually gives rise to their troubles. If Jude were an intellectual narcissist or Tess an adulterous wife, then their stories would be drained of their capacity to appall. Hardy's protagonists are instead humble country folk guilty only of desiring good lives for themselves and their families. By conventional wisdom, Tess and Jude's behavior should have allowed them to lead the lives they wanted. In Hardy's universe, however, good intentions counts for little more than signifying the protagonist for the reader. The mechanics of nature are independent from human desire, merit, or morality, and the innocent suffer, more than any other reason, because of their innocence.

The asymmetry of intention in Hardy's novels may be defined such that if a character does what she believes is helpful to herself or her family, such as when Joan Durbyfield sends Tess to the Stoke-d'Urberville estate to claim kin, the result will be tragic. Essentially, in order for one living creature to flourish, another must suffer. Hardy, however, shunned such precise definitions. As he wrote in the 1920 preface to *Tess*, he never attempted to create a "coherent scientific theory of the universe" (Hardy xiv). Rather, he creates a feeling that pervades his work that predicts that

nothing will end as a character hopes it will. Although natural law implies that within all the chaos of nature there is some order, it is not the kind of order a rustic worker would expect. The best way to describe it may be with an uncertainty principle: we cannot predict what will happen to characters based on their actions.

The first demonstration of asymmetry in *Jude* occurs within the first two chapters of the novel. The value Jude places on education, rather than benefitting him, presents us with the novel's first instance of undue suffering. The advice given to Jude by Phillotson, the schoolmaster and the symbol of his educational ambition, leads to the loss of his real job scaring crows from Farmer Troutham's field. Not only does Phillotson engender in Jude the exalted view of Christminster as the "headquarters" of education, he also gives Jude the mantra that will guide the rest of his life and lead to so many of his troubles: "Be a good boy, remember; and be kind to animals and birds, and read all you can" (*Jude* 47). The young Jude, we are told, was not one of Phillotson's regular scholars "who came unromantically close to the schoolmaster's life, but one who had attended the night school only during the present teacher's term of office," showing the reader that Jude's opinions are based not on fact, but on idolization (*Jude* 46). Had Jude been a full time student and realized the mental exhaustion and social isolation of higher learning, he might not have viewed education so reverently. We can also discern from this chapter that Jude magnifies Phillotson, the only academic in the insular Marygreen, as his intellectual mentor and hero. Phillotson's avuncular advice is embraced but almost immediately results in Jude's first failing when he is fired. Jude in fact does little during the first part of the novel except read and respect animals. There is a contrast in this scene between a boy feeding crows conventionally considered insignificant and bothersome creatures and

the social and natural laws that would not protect that same boy. How crushing it must be for him to discover that his values cannot be accepted by the rest of the community. Obviously, there are worse things in life than losing your childhood job—as Jude will eventually discover—but the scene establishes a bleak precedent for the rest of the novel. What Jude and the reader take away from the incident is that what is “right,” at least what Jude believes is right, will result in suffering.

The pivotal point in Jude’s life where he changes from an aspiring student to a despondent laborer is his rejection from Christminster’s universities. Though Jude’s intelligence and perseverance should qualify him for the life he desires, his birth into a poor, titleless family renders his dreams impossible. As the Master of Biblioll College advises, “I venture to think that you will have a much better chance of success in life by remaining in your own sphere and sticking to your trade than by adopting any other course” (*Jude* 95). This letter sums up one of the insurmountable obstacles of Jude’s life: he is a scholar born into the life of a stonemason. His academic aspirations are the culmination of Phillotson’s advice about reading, but they are meaningless because he lacked the foundations education he would have needed to enter a university. By orienting himself along the incorrect career path, Jude has alienated himself from two different social spheres: Christminster for being not educated, and Marygreen for being too educated, such that his readings on the highway were considered “dangerous practices” (*Jude* 28).

Whereas Jude’s suffering stems primarily from pursuing education and acting compassionately, Tess’s misery comes from sacrificing her own happiness for the good of the family. Her earliest moments of pain are the result of her parents’ misbehavior, beginning with her father reneging on his work duties. Hardy establishes

Tess early on as morally superior to her irresponsible parents. Perhaps the most telling image of the relationship between Tess and her parents occurs when she enters Rolliver's Inn and finds them drinking illegally. Tess's moral elevation is palpable: "hardly was a reproachful flash from Tess's dark eyes needed to make her father and mother rise from their seats, hastily finish their ale, and descend the stairs behind her" (*Tess* 18). Hardy reverses their roles, making Tess the parent and them the misbehaving children. And like a parent, she must bear her children's mistakes, as Jack's drunkenness will force Tess to go on the early-morning ride that will bring out Prince's death. Not only this, but at the tavern they will connive to use Tess, the comely maiden, for their financial gain. Joan Durberyfield plots away Tess's future, saying, "Well, Tess ought to go to this lady—Tess would. And likely enough 'twould lead to some noble gentleman marrying her. In short, I know it" (*Tess* 17). Unfortunately for Tess, this is exactly what happens. Nature's logic need not be so abstract as natural selection; in this case, is nothing more incomprehensible than Tess's own mother looking out for the interests of the family. Tess is subordinated by controlling, albeit good-intentioned, Joan into walking right into a bear-trap, the unscrupulous Alec d'Urberville.

As with Tess's mother, Alec forces Tess into a position of passivity. Most glaringly in the seduction scene, but also at the dairy farm, when Tess lashes out at Alec's incessant approaches: "Whip me, crush me; you need not mind those people under the rick. I shall not cry out. Once victim, always victim: that's the law" (*Tess* 261). Once again, a law, implicitly a law of nature, is invoked to describe the ethical dimensions of her relationship with Alec. She is his victim because that is simply what nature demands.

While nature's logic scorns Tess and Jude, it treats the antagonists like Alec and Arabella fairly well. Hardy generally avoided caricatures in his writing, yet some of his characters seem ostentatiously deplorable. Alec, with his wealthy background, swarthy manners, and devilish mustache, is painted as the stereotypical Victorian cad. The text, however, invites us to ask if he is wholly reprehensible or if his brief flirtation with evangelicalism and eventual financial support of the Durbyfields (admittedly, only to force Tess into marriage) redeems him in the slightest. Arabella is also treated fairly well. Perhaps she has no redeemable qualities, but not only is she continuously provided for throughout *Jude*, but at its conclusion, she is the only one left relatively unscathed. Whether or not we like her, she survives.

Those who are treated most cruelly by the impartiality of the laws of nature, however, are certainly Tess and Jude's children, Sorrow and Father Time. Although both of these briefly seen characters never commit a single crime, they die tragically and pointlessly. They are more symbolic instruments of suffering than real characters, a fact attested by their allegorical names. Sorrow evokes the sorrow her death brings Tess, but also, ironically, the escape from sorrow her death brings her. Father Time, a far more lugubrious character than even Jude, appears out of nowhere to claim the lives of Jude and Sue's children. Both these children are thrust upon parents unexpectedly, Sorrow by unwanted conception and Father Time by train, which adds not only to the burden on their parents, but also their sense that they do not belong in the world. Their deaths signify to us the loss of what once brought happiness and emasculation, since he cannot protect his own children. The birth of more children at the end of the book, thus represent the restoration of his happiness and manhood.

Through the asymmetry of intention, Hardy repeatedly reverses our expectations of what consequences his characters' actions will bring. He takes the assumption of an orderly, calculated universe and then dismantles such a view with narrative judgment: "Some people would like to know whence the poet whose philosophy is in these days deemed as profound and trustworthy as his song is breezy and pure, gets his authority for speaking of 'Nature's holy plan'" (*Tess* 15). Plan, no; pattern, yes. Critics often compare plot twists and coincidences such as the Tess's wayward letter do Angel or Sue marrying Phillotson to the randomness inherent in the schema of nature set out by Darwin. There is a delicate mixture of chance and design in the novels, even if the only design is that there will be chance. There are parameters for what is allowed in the fictive world—Jude may study Greek and Latin; Tess may take her father's place bring beehives to town—but within that organization there is always the possibility for the unexpected.

Chapter 3

Heredity, Genealogy, and Natural Law

Misery in *Tess* and *Jude* is not just a momentary feeling, but a curse that can be passed down through generations. In an inversion of natural selection, it is not the biologically advantageous traits, but the harmful ones in which Hardy is interested. He conflates evolutionary processes with folkloric curses to explain the suffering of Jude and Tess. The narrator of *Tess* entertains this toxic version of inheritance at the end of Phase the First:

One may, indeed, admit the possibility of a retribution lurking in the present catastrophe. Doubtless some of Tess d'Urberville's mailed ancestors rollicking home from a fray had dealt the same measure even more ruthlessly towards peasant girls of their time. But though to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children may be a morality good enough for divinities, it is scorned by average human nature; and it therefore does not mend the matter. (*Tess* 57)

The construction of the first sentence leaves ambiguous who would be desiring this retribution. God? A law of nature? The spirits of those abused “peasant girls?” The source is deliberately left clouded, begging more questions from Tess as well as the reader. What he is clear on, however, is the incompatibility of what is “good enough for divinities” and what satisfies “human nature.” Hardy is not using his novels to claim that heredity is evil because it can be used to bring about suffering; rather, heredity is part of the disinterested mechanics of nature: one can be born into luxury

just as easily inherit a family curse. Tess and Jude are experimental subjects, demonstrating what happens when evolution works against you.

Inherited traits in Hardy's universe, rather than the advantageous traits in which Darwin was interested, are usually detrimental or at best ineffectual. Heredity, after all, fails to help Tess find a mate: "Pedigree, ancestral skeletons, monumental records, the d'Uberville linements, did not help Tess in her life's battle as yet, even to the extent of attracting to her a dancing-partner over the heads of the commonest peasantry. So much for Norman blood unaided by Victorian lucre" (*Tess* 9). The narrator flippantly juxtaposes Tess's noble "Norman blood" with the banality of a country dance, undermining the weight her father attaches to his new-found heritage. However glorious her family may be, it can do little to help her attract a mate. Here, heredity lacks the functionality that we typically attribute to it. It instead acts as just another factor inhibiting happiness and progress.

Rural Wessex is not depicted as universally uninhabitable, but simply incompatible for Jude and Tess. Natural inclination, geographic situation, social standing, mental aptitude, and personality make a peaceful life in Wessex impossible for them. Unlike Darwin, who is interested in variation, reproduction, and survival, Hardy is preoccupied with how individuals can function in the societies in which natural selection places them. The novels are in this way about characters finding the proper sphere in the world: Jude wants the position he rightly deserves in Christminster, and Tess wants a simple, peaceful life with her parents at Marlott. The glimmer of Christminster on the horizon, therefore, represents for Jude an escape to his proper sphere: a possibility to correct the cosmic miscalculation that placed an aspiring academic in a humble country town.

The irony, of course, is that whether or not he would do well at Christminster, no one wants him either there or in his hometown. He finds himself in a hopeless situation, unable to realize the life that he wants and powerless to return to his childhood in Marygreen. Jude has the ill-luck of being born into an area of the globe where his preternatural thoughtfulness and compassion makes him lazy and foolish rather than precocious, while his Marygreen upbringing will prove to be anathema in Christminster, where he is cast aside as nothing more than a naïve laborer. This is not his fault, nor the fault of his neighbors or the headmasters, but rather the social and cultural customs as it has developed out the control of any single person. Sue is clearly aware of how hopelessly out of place her and her lover are when she states, “the social moulds civilization fits us into have no more relation to our actual shapes than the conventional shapes of the constellations have to the real star-patterns” (*Jude* 238). The restrictions placed on them by their heredity, social class, and birthplace reveal to Jude the ugly fact “that a man is not born free. Each person is ushered into the world in a certain spot in space and time. He has certain ancestors. He finds himself with a certain role to play in his family, in his community, in his social class, in his nation, even on the stage of world history”(Miller 2). The various conditions of his birth have come together to make the role Jude fancies for himself impossible. Both, however, find themselves constantly stymied by other characters operating with an inimical worldview.

Hardy’s emphasis on genealogy is part of a broader preoccupation with various conditions that restrict people to certain lifestyles, but at the root of this is an anxiety about the past and how it haunts the present. Tess, with her august family line and frequent association with vegetation and nature, “embodies that connection to deeper

time, to genealogical legacy” (Padian 229). In Hardy there is a presence of the past that resonates with the enormous stretches of time that natural scientists like Darwin and Lyell posited. “That awareness of an unfathomable past whose individualities are wholly lost, and rarely human,” Beer writes, “is one of the traits in Darwin’s writing to which Hardy most sensitively responded” (Beer 36). The past is at once an alien abstraction, continuously being erased by the presence, but also an ineluctable influence on the present. When Hardy writes, “The site whereon so long had stood the ancient temple to the Christian divinities was not even recorded on the green and level grass-plot that had immemorially been the church-yard, the obliterated graves being commemorated by eighteenpenny cast-iron crosses warranted to last five years” (*Jude* 12), he conveys the disrespect for the past that characterizes modern man and the replacement of the timeless with ephemera. There is a constant effort to erase the past; however, no matter how much renovation is done it will eventually resurface.

Heredity is simply a quantifiable reading of the past, not as some vague agent called history bearing down ominously on his characters but as natural mechanisms. This idea of the automatic transmission of suffering was influenced by Hardy’s reading in the revolutionary biological and philosophical texts of his age, texts which decentralized man and placed him at the whim of natural forces. “Hardy and Darwin,” Beer observes, “concur in that chance and change are not intermitting conditions in their work. Rather, they are the permanent medium of experience and thus of language” (Beer 229). It is a truism that some people are born d’Urbervilles and some are not. From Tess’s subjective perspective, it is pure randomness that she contains Norman blood; for Darwin, it is an inevitable side-effect of heredity. Someone has to be a d’Urberville, and it happens to be Tess.

While a bloodline can only be inherited, a name can be purchased. Alec Stoke-d'Urberville, through buying the d'Urberville name, parodies heredity by usurping Tess's lineage. His relation to the d'Urberville line is only nominal, so that he does not inherit the sins of the ancient ancestors, as Tess does, reaping the rewards of the name without absorbing the cursed lineage. Moreover, he perverts the family line by purchasing it for the sake of self-elevation. Alec displays a sadistic awareness of this parody by, "jestingly calling [Tess] his cousin when they were alone" (*Tess* 46). There is no blood relationship, yet he relishes in addressing Tess in this familial moniker.

Just as Tess is haunted by her d'Urberville ancestry, Jude is pursued by a cursed genealogy that forbids his marriage to Sue, the one person that will make him happy. Aunt Drusilla often warns him of this curse, foreshadowing the love rectangle with Phillotson and Arabella: "Jude, my child, don't *you* ever marry. 'Tisn't for the Fawleys to take that step any more" (*Jude* 13). Jude and Sue, cousins born in the same house, compound their family curse by marrying within the Fawley line, creating a double-transgression. At Aunt Drusilla's funeral, the curse's truth sinks in:

"She was opposed to marriage from the first to last, you say? murmured Sue.
"Yes. Particularly for members of our family."
Her eyes met his, and remained on him awhile.
"We are rather a sad family, don't you think, Jude?"
"She said we made bad husbands and wives. Certainly we make unhappy ones. At all events, I do, for one!." (*Jude* 165-166)

Once again, however, Jude is trapped. They can neither renounce their love for one another, live in intolerable separation, nor remain together and suffer social humiliation.

If looking back to heredity can uncover a chain of causality leading to the present, it can also offer predictions of the future. Tess's final wish to Angel before her capture is for him to watch over and marry her sister, his sister-in-law Liza-Lu. Biologically speaking, Tess and Liza-Lu are as similar as possible (without being twins), and the text goes through great lengths to equate them. Tess believes they are essentially interchangeable, saying, "O I could share you with her willingly when we are spirits! . . . She has all the best of me without the bad of me; and if she were to become yours it would almost seem as if death had not divided us" (*Tess* 311). Tess has reimagined her sister as a clone of herself. Shortly after we see that Angel has apparently obeyed Tess as he stands next to Liza-Lu, the "tall budding creature, half girl, half woman—a spiritualized image of Tess, slighter than she, but with the same beautiful eyes," during Tess's execution. Afterwards, they then walk away, hand-in-hand, in a scene reminiscent of the end of *Paradise Lost*, leaving contritely to begin a new family and future. In the narrative, Liza-Lu has become a simulacrum for Tess. On one hand, she loses her own identity and becomes a doppelganger impelled by Tess's dying wish, a zombie leading her dead sister's life. On the other, she is still a d'Urberville and offers the potential for the continued propagation of their family line—and a new opportunity for the President of the Immortals to resume his sport.

The ending of *Jude*, however, is not nearly as rich in genetic possibility. Father Time, the child of Jude and Arabella and an allegory for deep time with a vengeance, murders Jude and Sue's children, ironically, in an attempt to relieve their suffering. It is the act of one family line destroying another and then self-destructing. Unlike the d'Urberville line, which is sustained at the end of *Tess*, the Fawleys die out with Jude and his children. The genetic line has been severed. In this case, Sue essentially got

what she asked for when she said, “But it seems such a terribly tragic thing to bring beings into the world—so presumptuous—that I question to right to do it sometimes” (*Jude* 246). In a variation on Malthusian thought, Sue is crushed by the ethical dilemma of childbirth. It is presumptuous not only for assuming she has the right to bring life into the world, but in assuming her children even want to live.

While reducing the plot mechanics of *Tess* and *Jude* to a catch phrase of the Age of Skepticism would be to oversimplify a tangled and equivocal subject, Darwinism, heredity, and genealogy are vital themes of these novels. Rather than a strict one-to-one repurposing of natural selection, Hardy takes the language of Darwinism and the pervasive feeling that the world is run by laws and adapts it for suffering. Nature’s logic is not a clearly definable law but a sensation that Hardy’s characters can only begin to understand. Kevin Padian seems to disagree about the naturalistic tendencies of suffering, attributing them to society (itself an outgrowth of nature) instead: “Hardy saw this uncaring, mechanistic Universe not in the vicissitudes of Nature but in the mechanisms of society: in the inhumanity of British laws of marriage and divorce...in the forms of land enclosure that dispossessed rural people from their homelands and, moreover, in the crushing anonymity of the Industrial Age and its heartless machinery” (224). However, this would be to try to say suffering is part of nature, or suffering is part of society when it is part of all these things. The operations of society, like the operations of nature, are neither moral or immoral, but amoral, acting not by chance but by cause and effect. Jude gets kicked off the farm *because* he feeds the chickens; what he cannot comprehend is why this should be so. Tess does not ask, “why is Alec d’Urberville allowed to prosper?” She asks, “why do the sun shine on the just and the unjust alike?” The language is coded not in terms of

personal ethics or social Darwinism, though those ideas lurk in the background, but in a counterintuitive (super)natural force that could—but not necessarily does—reward cruelty and punish good deeds.

Chapter 4

“Fellow-mortal”: Animal Sympathy and Empathy

For someone with such a supposedly cruel conception of nature, Hardy maintained a strong affinity for its creatures through his life. “From the start,” Claire Tomalin records, “he felt a sense of kinship with animals, and pity for their sufferings. When his father threw a stone at a fieldfare in the garden, killing it, the child picked it up, and to the end of his life remembered the lightness of the half-starved frozen bird in his hand” (18). Animal carcasses are typically objects of revulsion, but young Hardy directly handles it, creating a tactile connection that mimics his emotional connection to the felled fowl. For his father, the bird was a target; for Hardy, it represented quite vividly the transience of life.

The Hardy we see here, unique in his deep sensitivity to the natural world, is identical to the persona of the lone animal sympathizer, feeling “pity for their suffering,” which permeates his work. Hardy’s preternatural compassion for animals was a distinguishing attribute, and one which his characters, who are already social contrarians, share, separating them from the rest of the Wessex community. Animals serve not only as beings deserving of compassion but also function as ethical litmus tests. By measuring the psychological and emotional distance between animals and humans, Hardy orients readers to the relative “goodness” of a character. Moreover, it is in the suffering of animals that Jude and Tess glean their first intimations of nature’s logic, recognizing in the animals the same natural mechanisms controlling themselves.

Sympathy towards animals is inextricable from Hardy's concepts of ethical beliefs. As Cohn demonstrates, the assumption that animals were ethically equivalent to non-living objects was called into question during Victorian times by evolutionary thought: "The changing status of agency in Hardy's work reflects nineteenth-century uncertainty about whether animals' consanguinity with humans, and, more broadly, the biological instability of the human species, should shape ethical thought" (495). Human control over animals is only shown to be uncertain in the minds of Jude and Tess, who see animals less as inferiors than as "fellow-mortal[s]" (*Jude* 55). Animals are placed in diminutive, vulnerable positions, usually injured by human hunters, where mankind's unsympathetic treatment of other living beings becomes apparent. They appear at formative moments in the novels; understanding their purpose, and more importantly the purpose of their suffering, elucidates Hardy's judgments of his characters' morality.

Tess and Jude's sympathy shrinks the distance between humans and animals, showing that they are both subject to the same laws of nature. Darwin played a direct role in creating Hardy's deep concern with eliminating the boundaries between animals and humans:

Few people seem to perceive fully as yet that the most far-reaching consequence of the establishment of the common origin of all species, is ethical; that it logically involved a readjustment of altruistic morals by enlarging as a *necessity of rightness* the application of what has been called "The Golden Rule" beyond the area of mere mankind to that of the whole animal kingdom. Possibly Darwin himself did not wholly perceive it, though he alluded to it. (376-377)

His aim here is to elevate animals to the plateau of human morality, not to animalize, and therefore barbarize, humanity, but to temper human hubris. By redistributing

empathy equally throughout the animal kingdom, Hardy hoped that people would just as soon hurt a wild bird as their neighbor. Reading Darwin bolstered in Hardy the anti-anthrocentrist philosophy that existed within him since his childhood.

Although the ill-treated of animals is used to explore the ethical dimensions of nature, it also develops into a social code, one which Jude and Tess are compelled to disobey. “In order to suggest that human intervention can and should prevent the suffering of animals,” Cohn writes, “Hardy comes to favor a more traditional aesthetics of sympathy over the narrative style associated earlier in his career with effacing human agency and individuality” (499). Hardy sets his characters by themselves standing above animals, such as with Jude and the hungry crows or Tess vainly attempting to stop up Prince’s profuse bleeding. By doing this, he not only maximizes sympathy, but establishes wounded animals as dependent on human intervention, and conveys the Sisyphean task of caring for them in a society in which they are marginalized. Sympathy towards animals is almost always expressed as anomalous behavior. It is not necessarily that the rest of the world reviles animals; they are too preoccupied or indifferent, much like the God of “Hap,” to intervene in animal suffering. In novels concerned with a rejected would-be scholar and fallen-women, the image of the outcast comes already weighted. There is a sense that indifference to animals is part of a healthy, productive lifestyle; those who do experience compassion are social outliers.

By associating Jude and Tess so closely with animals, Hardy harmonizes their sentiments with nature rather than civilization, such that they appear out of place among mankind. Jude is forced from community to community on a interminable search for a permanent home, first in the Marygreen where his fervent reading is

viewed with apprehension by the humble villagers and then to Christminster where he is an outcast for not reading enough. Tess too experiences deracination as she flees from social judgment and pursues financial security. Each new venue, however seemingly secure, will prove inimical to the heroes. Just as laws govern the wilderness, so do they dictate social conformity. Their animalism represents a problem of belonging when, wherever they go, they are treated as sub-human.

The moment in *Jude* that best expresses the conflict between the ethics of animal killing and the necessities of rural life is the pig slaughtering scene at the end of Part First. When the butcher is late one night, Jude is placed in the unfamiliar and uncomfortable position of executioner where he must choose between listening to his conscience or his utilitarian wife. What is at stake is not the death of the animal, its fate has already been decided; rather, the issue under question is killing the pig in the most painless and therefore ethically admissible way possible. Jude is reluctant to bleed the animal slowly, exacerbating its pain but sparing the muscle from being saturated with blood, because he does not identify the pig as property but as a “fellow-mortal” (55). Arabella, however, views the pig only as a commodity to which she owes no ethical consideration. Comically, she seems most upset when Jude kicks over the bucket of the animal’s blood: “Now I can’t make any blackpot. There’s a waste, all through you” (54). Her only emotional reaction is frustration at Jude’s mercy and the spoiling salable goods.

The ethical accoutrements of Prince’s death, however, are a bit more tangled. Prince, after all, is not killed for food, but by Tess’s (understandable) negligence. The absurdity of the early-morning journey itself is shown from the perspective of a non-human: “The poor creature looked wonderingly round at the night, at the lantern, at

their two figures, as if he could not believe that at that hour, when every living thing was intended to be in shelter and at rest, he was called upon to go out and labour” (*Tess* 20). The line gives a sense of the unnaturalness of human business practices, when compared to the normal operations of the animal kingdom; there is even a judgment that Tess is doing something wrong by not being asleep, as biology dictates. This perspective calls into question the entire edifice of human market and trade. Hardy also makes a deliberate effort to show that Tess is the only person significantly disturbed by the death. “’Tis all my doing—all mine!” Tess cries at Prince’s death, “No excuse for me—none”(23). Tess’s reaction, however, is oddly out of sync with her family’s, who act as if a tractor broke down. Her profound regret is not that of someone who killed a piece of property, but one who murdered a fellow living creature.

Hardy does not only reposition Tess and Jude in a sympathetic relation with animals, he places the whole of humanity on an equal level with animals. One way he accomplishes this is by demonstrating the innate animal tendencies in humans, displaying the animalistic, uncontrollable passions of the characters. This appears most clearly with sexuality, which is the ubiquitous cause of conflict in his novels. Arabella Donn, the seductress, and Alec d’Urbervilles, the feckless playboy, are the incarnations of the sexual drive. They operate by half-alluring, half-entrapping their victims, and it is only after they have stung that we realize the full extent of the damage. Arabella is associated with animality and sexuality the moment we encounter her, as she launches “the characteristic part of a barrow-pig” at Jude, striking him abruptly in the face (*Jude* 33). The pig genitalia itself is evocative of uninhibited libido, but the very dismemberment of the body part gives it further Freudian

overtones. Jude has already been associated with pigs earlier in the book, when he “went out, and, feeling more than ever his existence to be an undemanded one, he lay down upon his back on a heap of litter near the pig-sty,” showing him to be not above abiding with animals (*Jude* 16). In light of the pig slaughtering scene, pigs become coded as an expression of Arabella’s control over Jude, such that it is not only the pig’s castration, but, symbolically, his.

Animals, as representing the natural world, provide a link between the human characters and nature, showing that people are part, rather than distinct from it. The novels, thus, are not only concerned with how nature treats humans, but how humans treat nature. The relationship between man and beast is a tenuous one; for the provincial Wessex denizens, animals are not “fellow-mortal[s],” as they appear to Jude, but commodities. Not only are they commodities, however, but, in the provincial setting of Wessex, they are often necessities of survival. As Arabella tells Jude, “Poor folks must live” (*Tess* 54). The loss of a horse’s life, as with Prince, is only an economic loss; a slow death, while excruciating for the pig, is necessary because it will improve the quality of the meat. Therefore, animals offer an alternate view of nature not an antagonistic presence conspiring against man, but as a ripe harvest to be mercilessly devoured. Humankind is not outside the scope of nature but part of it, both controller and controlled.

Interestingly, Hardy’s conception of nature explicitly leaves out any animals that are harmful to humans. There is no scene with the threat of wolves or similar beasts. Rather, man himself is always the ferocious one, forcing his will upon his fellow man or fellow creature. In exerting control over nature, man domesticates and therefore changes it: “. . . man’s agency in the development of particular properties

demanding in plants and animals is compared with the activity of nature in selection and preservation of the characteristics most useful to the individual of the race themselves. Man breeds plants and animals to serve man's ends" (Beer 28). In subordinating animals, man creates a sort of artificial nature's logic and, in relegating animals to the realm of "other," deprives himself of the ability to empathize with them. This is not necessarily the fault of society, but rather due to the inability of humans to empathize with lesser beings. Jude and Tess, however, are not able to separate animals into different spheres and therefore see at work in animal suffering the same enigmatic forces that cause their own suffering. Jude and Tess's sympathy for animals displays the traits that make their survival in the English countryside impossible: sensitivity.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

If one of the greatest pleasures of literature is the vicarious act of inhabiting the lives of fictional characters while the body remains safe in reality, then reading Thomas Hardy is the most masochistic strain of this phenomenon. So systematic and calculating is the misery afflicting his characters that it seems that, if not a sadistic author, some larger force is conspiring against them. By reading Hardy we become a part of those characters who suffer relentlessly from the failings of marriage, education, sexuality, and other trappings of a modernizing Britain. His novels, however, are not merely criticism leveled against social institutions. While it is true that “work of fiction may frequently raise social and moral problems, the artist’s main intention is to explore them freely rather than take hard-and-fast public positions” (Howe qtd. in Page 394). Social critiques are part of broader explanation of what it is like to live at a particular moment in England and be subject to certain social codes and natural laws.

For Hardy, conspicuous suffering is not only an aesthetic template, but an assault on the novel itself. Hardy’s provocative themes are part of a re-imagining of what it means to write an English novel. As he set out in one letter, “I have felt that the doll of English fiction must be demolished, if England is to have a school of fiction at all” (*Collected Letters* 67). *Tess* and *Jude* are a part of a new, gritty realism that Hardy sought to forge at the end of his novel-writing career. In one sense, the sorrow of *Tess* and *Jude* are compensation for the decades of literary niceties and Victorian

mannerisms that preceded them. Within this new conceptualization it was also necessary to make space for the scientific and philosophical ideas of his time. Hardy's novels show this radical conception of nature as indifferent in action and trace out all its ramifications. Nature can be brutal to humans, he demonstrates, but humans can also be brutal to nature. With his characters' suffering, he weaves the image of one global ecosystem in which animal and human coexist uneasily. He then shows this ecosystem to be subject to the caprice of natural law.

Through the suffering of innocents, be them human or non-human, and prosperity of the wealthy Alec or vicious Arabella, Hardy's writing posits that there is no way to predict the fate of a character based solely on his or her "goodness." This not only upsets basic assumptions about morality, but undermines the expectations of the readership. The stock narrative of any popular novel is: there exists a character with a problem, the problem gets worse, the character solves the problem, cue happy ending. This is what audience are trained through reading other typical novels to look for and is found, to varying degrees, in Hardy's earlier work. By the time he wrote *Jude* and *Tess*, however, he was an older man, a recognized man of letters, and was financially secure. He could afford to take the narrative risks that made those novels so captivating.

Nature's logic take on its most tragic overtones when it impedes the social and romantic satisfaction in some couples and permits it in others. Hardy's answer to "why do the sun shine on the just and unjust alike" is a matter of cause and effect; Jude fails to attend a university not because the gods willed it otherwise or because the world is nihilistic and ruled by blind chance, but because he was not given a fair opportunity, and perhaps because his desire to matriculate in the first place was misplaced.

Suffering is part of a logical (and perhaps predictable) causal series that highlights humankind's wasted opportunities to ease the burdens on each others' lives. Jude's slaughter of his pig is instructive of how minor changes in our own behavior can ease the suffering of fellow living beings, both human and animal. Scenes such as these may seem overtly didactic, especially from an author who subscribed to a non-polemical philosophy of fiction, but these novels are more than social prescriptions: they are analyses of the relationship between man and nature.

This relationship, as well as the novels' plots, are driven inexorably by a certain logic of nature that destabilizes the notion that the protagonists had any free will at all. Their decisions are made for them, either by their families, social superiors, or heredity. The events of *Tess* begin well before the first page with the noble family of the d'Urbervilles, who first arrived in England with William the Conqueror in 1044 (*Tess* 1). Their French lineage is suggestive of hostile invasion, of an unnatural presence, and also of a forgotten history that stretched far before the Battle of Hastings. Parson Tringham ignites the plot with this revelation to Jack Durbeyfield, which then twists and turns to the inevitable catastrophe. Hardy's plots are non-teleological—life continues after the deaths of Jude and Tess. *Tess* ends with the joining of Liza-Lu and Angel: a new relationship and new opportunity for the d'Urberville bloodline to sneak on into the future. Although Jude dies childless, and with him the Fawley line, Sue lives on, suggesting an incompleteness to the story. In the final moments, the point of view shifts from Jude to Arabella. The world, Hardy suggests, is larger than one character, and life in Wessex carries on even after the protagonists' deaths. A man has died, but many have and many will. Time moves on unfazed.

Rather than scrutinizing a few anomalous instances of great misfortune, Hardy is using extreme examples to demonstrate what he saw as a flaw in an ethical schema. This makes sense when we consider that Hardy was an agnostic, if not an atheist, at this point in his life, and put more stock in his personal view of compassion, tinted through Darwinism, than traditional Biblical interpretations of morality.

Good intentions lead to suffering because in Hardy's world only those willing to do what it takes to survive will survive. This also explains why the novel's villains are not as miserable as the protagonists: they are capable of subjugating others to misery in order to increase their own happiness. A universe without a God does not carry the same moral obligations or consequences. The moral indifference of nature, however, does not mean for Hardy that people should act without morals. A world with no consequences for cruelty infinitely elevates kindness.

What was said of Darwin can be said of Hardy: "He did not *invent* laws. He *described* them" (Beer 46). Rather than inventing a system of morality and nature, which would leave his audience contented, Hardy strove to reproduce the laws of nature as he understood them. *Tess* and *Jude* are not about the impossibility of being happy without also de-humanizing our fellows, relegating our animals to the domain of lifeless chattel, and subscribing to an amoral conception of the natural law. He was rather trying to show that a certain paradigm, the "be a good boy or girl and everything will turn out well in the end," idealization of morality had been superannuated by natural science, and it was not the place of literature to encourage such fantasies. There is an important distinction between illustrating reality and prescribing behavior, one which, I believe, Hardy gainsayers often confuse. There are forces at work in our lives—social law, genetics—which limit what one can accomplish, whether that be

something measurable, like attending a university, or simply being happy. These barriers, however, do not restrict the ability to act in accordance with one's conscience.

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