The Development of Pessimism in the Novels of Thomas Hardy

By Paul Redshaw

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Summary

Hardy is a complex writer and to work out some of his concepts can be difficult and often causes confusion. One example is the relationship between pessimism and meliorism. Hardy can be pessimistic in his writing and yet, he says that he hopes for future improvement. Critics have often struggled with such complexities, and as a result, their criticism has been inadequate. In this thesis, I take a balanced view: while recognising that Hardy can be pessimistic, I also examine the ways in which this can be compatible with his hope of meliorism through his writing.

In the first chapter of the thesis, I concentrate on Hardy's novel endings, to see how far his claims of meliorism can be supported. It is at the end of novels where we find out whether the conflicts that the characters have endured have been resolved. It is also where we discover what the future has in store for them. Jude and Sue's relationship, for example, ends in tragedy, however, Hardy is looking to the future by protesting that society must change if we are to avoid such suffering. It is also easy to forget Hardy's lighter novels, if we only emphasise the major tragedies, such as *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. One of the novels, which has largely been neglected by critics, which I examine is *The Hand of Ethelberta*. Here, Hardy is writing a social comedy that has melodramatic moments that have less serious implications than those of the tragedies.

In the second chapter, I put the novels further into the context of the Victorian period, to understand Hardy's attitude towards society and how this is reflected in his work. The period was a time of mutability, which saw the rise of the tragic novel, where we see many characters struggle against conflicting sets of values. Little has been explicitly written about the relationship between tragedy and pessimism in Hardy's novels; it is easy to mistake the sense of tragic doom with that of the kind of gloom that Hardy has often been accused of. Hardy was a story-teller of the ballad tradition, where tragedy is a central theme, and it is expected that events that involve unhappiness and suffering should occur.

To conclude the thesis, I discuss Hardy's development of pessimism after his last major novel, *Jude the Obscure*. Events such as war and the death of his wife dominate his writing, where he admits that he has lost some of the optimism that he previously may have had. However, some of his greatest poetry was written at this time, which expresses the immense loss of his wife - and also celebrates the time they had together - and questions why, as humans, we let horrific events, such as war, happen.

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Introduction: A Pessimistic Meliorist

Although there has been a lot of critical interest in the pessimism of Thomas Hardy, during my research I have found that it has only been partially dealt with or else the arguments put forward about it are unconvincing. For example, Roy Morrell patronisingly says that Hardy's novels are "fairly straightforward" and then contradicts himself by rightly saying that to "read him properly is difficult".[1] Then, to give his argument more weight, Morrell takes an essay that states an opposite view - Holloway's *The Victorian Sage* - and rips it to pieces. He uses it as an easy target, instead of choosing something more challenging. A more balanced and adequate view of Hardy's pessimism is needed, and I hope to contribute to such a view in this dissertation. Hardy is a very complex stylist and working out some of the difficulties in his work can be confusing.

Philip Larkin's essay, "Wanted: Good Hardy Critic", was written in 1966. He begins by stating "The fact is that Hardy doesn't seem to attract the best modern critics".[2] It is worth remembering that Hardy criticism has not stood still since then so Larkin's comments are now somewhat dated. One of the critics that Larkin refers to is Morrell, who has a "complete disagreement with the accepted authorities".[3] Larkin rightly states that these "authorities are not the authors of *After Strange Gods* or *The Great Tradition*, but Dr John Holloway, whom Mr Morrell spends his first chapter in chivvying".[4]

T.S. Eliot's criticism of Hardy in *After Strange Gods* is too harsh because he concentrates only on Hardy's faults as a writer. His extreme rejection of Hardy is worth examining to demonstrate the severe comments on the gloom of Hardy's world that critics often make.

Eliot begins his attack by stating that Hardy's "style touches sublimity without ever having passed through the stages of being good".[5] Admittedly, Hardy's concern for telling a story and concentrating more on theme than local effects can lead to serious flaws in his writing style. The speech at the end of *A Laodicean* illustrates one kind of bad writing. In an endeavour to impress, Hardy can load his novels with allusions and references and Paula's half-paraphrase of Arnold does sound quite preposterous:

'And be a perfect representative of "the modern spirit"?' she inquired; 'representing neither the senses and understanding, nor the heart and imagination; but what a finished writer calls "the imaginative reason"?'[6]

Hardy once accused critics of "the old game of sampling the poems or drama by quoting the worst line or passage only".[7] Maureen E. Mahon believes that it is easy to pick out Hardy's faults, and ignore his strengths as a writer, as there are plenty of examples of his "use of heavy, ponderous words, and a failure to write simply and straightforwardly" as the above passage seems to illustrate.[8] However, Hardy does not always write in this manner, as C.H. Salter reluctantly concedes - during his attack on Hardy in *Good Little Thomas Hardy* - that such criticisms are "not the whole story".[9] Sometimes classical allusions embellish characterisation, as with Sue, who in Jude's clothes, looks "boyish as a Ganymedes" or Alec who is aroused by the "Cyprian image of Tess".[10] One example of Hardy's clear and effective writing is Arabella's simple and direct statement, in *Jude the Obscure*, that "Poor folk must live". Another example is Tess's final moving words "I am ready",[11] after she has had her small piece of happiness.

Raymond Chapman praises Hardy's choice of words, which may seem inappropriately placed at first: Phillotson's hope for future happiness "lived with a forward eye"[12] startles the reader, who would expect to read 'an eye to the future'.[13] Hardy's use of adjectives as verbs is another effective technique, "he darked my cottage door" ("The Vampirine Fair"), "ears that have greened but will never be gold" ("The Eve of Waterloo"). Larkin finds it difficult to comprehend critics who find Hardy's use of words in the poetry clumsy, "I can't imagine why people say Hardy had no ear. In almost every Hardy poem...there is a little spinal chord of thought and each has a little tune of its own".[14]

Eliot argues that Hardy's characters appear to be only vehicles for emotions. George Eliot created characters through the narrator's analysis, dialogue and action. Often, they are more elaborately described from inside than Hardy's characters who are distinct types: Tess's passivity links her with Elfride; Arabella is a survivor and, like many of Hardy's women characters, is strong; Elfride, Paula Power and Sue are coquettes; Eustacia is a Hedda Gabler type, linked because they are trapped, suffering women. Like Hardy, Dickens is accused of creating characters that lack complexity. In *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster concludes that most of Dickens's characters are "flat", representing a single idea or quality. This is not always the case, as the first person narrative in *Great Expectations* allows us into Pip's mind so that we can see how he has learned from his experiences. And sometimes Dickens uses symbolism to express psychology, as in, for example, the case of Jaggers who is always washing his hands to clean himself from the dirt of crime.

Hardy's characters' actions often can be explained by their personalities, making the characters drive the plot, unlike some of the earlier novels where his characters are vehicles of

the plot. Geoffrey Thurley believes that Hardy gives us an insight into Boldwood's "self-created world", letting us into his mind and mental condition (although not to the same extent as with Jude or Sue).[15] The conflict in Tess's personality - her passiveness and her violent streak - takes her away from a stock character towards being a more complex creation. Tess agrees to leave home and find work because of her guilt for killing the family's horse, Prince. Her guilt is misplaced because it is her father's fault in drinking too much that forces Tess to drive in a tired state in the first place. Throughout the novel there are signs that she has the capability to break away from her passive nature, so killing Alec is unexpected, but not unbelievable. Similarly, Boldwood's mental condition is developed gradually, to climax in an act of violence when he kills Troy.

Eliot does not mention that *Jude* is such a psychologically interesting novel, especially in its portrayal of Sue. Sue is, indeed, a new character to us - we have not seen anyone quite like her before in Hardy's novels. Sue does not want to fit into a public role, she wants to be completely free, even of religious belief, but does not have the strength to carry it through. If she loved Jude then he would have some kind of claim upon her, however, her passion for him is shown only when she has lost him for good. Rosemary Sumner sees Hardy as a "Psychological Writer" in "the sense that Hardy knew what it feels like to be Sue, and what it is like to love her, with the unflinching analysis of her psychological disturbance".[16]

The object of attack by Eliot is the fiction. However, in this Introduction, I would also like to consider Hardy's poetry, which has had a lot of appreciative criticism in the last thirty years. The poetry, like the novels, has much variety. In the "Preface" to the *Late Lyrics*, Hardy stresses that the "change of key" from the graver poetry to the humorous has gone

unnoticed by critics. R.L. Purdy describes the *Late Lyrics* volume as "the most representative of Hardy's whole career".[17] Half the poems were written over a long period of time and there is a variety of themes, from "some grave, positive, stark delineations" to the "passive, lighter and traditional sort".[18] The lyrics are lighter than the sombre *Satires of Circumstance* and *Moments of Vision* and there are many songs, as if set to music, and "Best Times" is a celebratory poem.

In the same way, we cannot categorise the novels, by taking one or two of the bleaker ones (such as *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*) as representative of the novels as a whole. Hardy wrote many different types of novels: from the delightful pastoral *Under the Greenwood Tree*; the comic structure of *Far From the Madding Crowd*; the social comedy of *The Hand of Ethelberta*; the light and humorous *The Trumpet Major*; to the painful suffering and gloom of the tragic novels. There is also a variety in the order of the novels, rather than one bleak piece after another. For example, *The Return of the Native* comes between the light-weight second rate novels *The Hand of Ethelberta* and *The Trumpet-Major*. *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is a tragic novel (although not to the same extent as some of the later tragedies) and is chronologically placed after *Under the Greenwood Tree*.

The poetry, like the novels can be tragic, but critics sometimes do go too far when they confuse this with pessimism. Robert Graves, in *Goodbye to All That*, recounting a visit to Hardy, wrote that Hardy:

complained that they accused him of pessimism. One critic singled out an example of gloom in his poem on the woman whose house burned down on her wedding night. "Of

course it's a humorous piece," said Hardy, "and the man must have been thick-witted not to see that."[19]

If we trace the poem, we find it is Hardy's first published poem, a tragic ballad called "The Bride-Night Fire". Ballads were the most popular way to tell a story in nineteenth century rural Dorset, where the emphasis is not necessarily on pessimism, but on telling a dramatic story that the audience would enjoy, "stories of the supernatural, stories of successful and thwarted love, stories of triumphs, defeat, revenge, murder, betrayal, cattle-reiving".[20] Davidson says that Hardy "had no more notion than a ballad-maker of turning out a story to be either pessimistic or optimistic".[21]

Hardy had many defences of his pessimism, and can conflate his sensitivity to criticism of his own work with his sensitivity to universal suffering. Firstly, in his sensitivity to criticism, Hardy expresses his annoyance at being misunderstood on a number of occasions. What was meant to be an introduction to the *Late Lyrics* collection becomes an opportunity for Hardy to defend himself against critics who have thought him "wholly gloomy and pessimistic". He titles the Preface "Apology". Given the strong element of personal defence against unjust charges, it is likely that Hardy was thinking of Newman's *Apologia pro Vita Sua*. The title "Apology" suggests that, like Newman, he is defending the way that he thinks and feels.

Hardy regularly took the opportunity, in his writings, to make it clear that he did not want to be associated with the term 'pessimist': "pessimism, if pessimism it be",[22] "alleged to be pessimism";[23] "as a meliorist (not a pessimist as they say)".[24] Once he naively responded to a critic with this denial of his pessimism:

On reading his criticism, I went through my last collection of poems with a pencil, marking them S, N, and C according as they were sad, neutral, or cheerful. I found them in pretty equal proportions; which nobody could call pessimism[25]

There is something comical in imagining Hardy sitting at his desk going through his poetry checking to see if he is pessimistic or not. Then at other times, he argues that there is nothing wrong with pessimism asking why it should be "condemned": "That these impressions have been condemned as "pessimistic" - as if that were a very wicked adjective - shows a curious muddle-mindedness".[26] One should ask who it is that is being muddled-minded.

Hardy's second defence is his sensitivity to suffering. In *Life*, it is said about the *Late Lyrics* Preface:

Some of his friends regretted this preface, thinking that it betrayed an oversensitiveness to criticism which it were better the world should not know. But sensitiveness was one of Hardy's chief characteristics, and without it his poems would never have been written, nor, indeed, the greatest of his novels.[27]

Of course, it was, more or less, Hardy who wrote his biography under the name of his wife. He recognises that he may have gone too far in this Preface and questions whether it should have been written at all. But at least it gives us one reason for his constant denial of his pessimism: his oversensitiveness. This is why his work can be so gloomy, because he feels affected by the horrors that society can inflict upon people. It shows that he passionately

cares for humanity and he aims to make us aware that some kind of change is needed for the better.

In the *Late Lyrics* Preface, Hardy hopes that people will not mistake his "evolutionary meliorism" for pessimism. He insists that he was influenced more by the evolutionary works of Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, Comte, Hume and Mill, than the pessimism of Schopenhauer. Hardy calls his meliorism a "practical philosophy", as explained in the poem "In Tenebris II": "if way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst". However, his choice of word to begin the line, "If", suggests that there is some doubt whether there is any chance of meliorism.

If Hardy's claim of "evolutionary meliorism" throughout his work is to sound credible, we must see in what way he attempts to reach out to his audience and demand a "loving-kindness" that will bring the change needed. In the *Late Lyrics* Preface he wrote:

...my pessimism, if pessimism it be, does not involve the assumption that the world is going to the dogs...On the contrary, my practical philosophy is distinctly melioristic. What are my books but one long plea against "man's inhumanity to man" - to woman - and to the lower animals?

The word "plea" makes it sound as if he expects nothing to happen (in the *Late Lyrics* Preface he uses the word "questionings", which suggests a more watered down optimism and meliorism). If he had used the word 'protest' it would seem more challenging and would suggest that he is demanding change. Protest and tragedy - a form often used by Hardy - are

not compatible: protest is arguing for a change, but tragedy brings a sense that things are more determined. There is, then, an antagonism between Hardy's hope of amelioration and what has already been preordained by fate, which I will examine further in another chapter.

It could be argued that the personal emotions Hardy expresses, such as grief and remorse, are universal. Hardy believed, as is shown in *The Dynasts*, that we can relate to the feelings of others by recognising the pain we see in them. This is why we see close-ups of animals together with the people of different nations suffer in the carnage of Waterloo:

The worm asks what can be overhead,

And wriggles deep from a scene so grim,

What a foul red flood will be soaking him![28]

We have many characters suffering in the novels because of Hardy's commitment to social comment: there is one more stab in the back for Jude, when Arabella deserts him on his death-bed, but we do understand that she has to survive, and finding a husband is her answer. Jude and Sue are in conflict with religious belief that prevents them from being happy. We are made to ask whether we should live like this. If one part is touched the whole web is affected: concern for others will be found "by the pain we see in others reacting on ourselves, as if we and they were a part of one body. Mankind, in fact, may be and possibly will be viewed as members of one corporeal frame".[29] This is why his "evolutionary meliorism" stands a chance of working, or at least doing some good.

There have been many attempts to label Hardy's work, such as 'pessimistic stoicism', 'pessimistic determinist', 'fatalist', 'realist'. The best attempt at labelling Hardy is given by a chapter heading in Michael Millgate's biography - "Pessimistic Meliorist" – best, because it is contradictory, just as Hardy's opinions and responses in his fiction can be.[30] However, Millgate, because he is writing a biography, does not back up the description by a close reading of the texts. In my first chapter, I will look at whether Hardy's claim of meliorism is justified and discuss whether or not he does represent a hopeful outlook in some or any of his novels. The second chapter will then discuss in what ways Hardy is being pessimistic and how this is compatible with his alleged meliorism.

Chapter 1: Novel Endings

I

Gogol's short story, *Ivan Fyodorovich Shponka and His Aunt*, does not have an ending because the author's cook tore it out of his exercise book. The story deliberately ends with "Meanwhile Auntie had hatched a new plan which you will learn about in the next chapter". This ending is not satisfying because it leaves us longing to know what happens next. Frank Kermode writes of:

our deep need for intelligible Ends. We project ourselves - a small, humble elect, perhaps - past the End, so as to see the structure whole, a thing we cannot do from our spot of time in the middle[1]

Ian Gregor describes a 'closed' ending as one in which "there are no further links in the chain of causality, no further incidents, the resolution becomes imminent, and the reader is increasingly moved into a response which is also a judgement".[2] Endings leave a lasting impression on us. It is only when we reach the end that we can evaluate what has previously gone on and maybe decide whether the conflict - if there has been one - has been worth the consequences or whether there will be hope for the future. Take Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, for example. The novel is what Capote called "faction", something between fiction and fact, a dramatisation of a true event: the cold-blooded murder of a family of four in Kansas. Through Capote's telling of the two killers' life stories we begin to, not so much feel sympathy for them, but understand them better and question whether their executions are also

carried out in cold blood. So that the last image should not be of the killers - who are executed at the end - we move to the family's gravestones to remember that our sympathies should lie with them. It is this impression that stays with us, illustrating the commanding power of a final perspective.

Hardy wrote several types of novels, so it is to be expected that there should be various types of endings. I wish to class them into three groups for the purpose of this discussion: the happily-ever-after, the unsatisfactory and the tragic endings. We will start with what I will call the happily-ever-after novel. Most stories set up some kind of conflict or problem for the main character, or characters, in the story to resolve.[3] A distinction is perhaps needed between the terms 'problem' and 'conflict'. One example of where a 'problem' may occur is in detective fiction where Sherlock Holmes, for example, is given a mystery to solve. Hardy concentrates more on the conflict, such as the opposing old and modern in *A Laodicean* and society's restrictions in *Jude*. Even in the simplest of children's stories it is easy to see that the characters have to overcome some kind of difficulty in order to make them live happily-ever-ever, so that the child is put at their ease: one of Enid Blyton's final chapters in *The Mystery of the Hidden House* is "A Neat Mystery - and a Neat Ending".

Aristotle wrote:

A beginning is that which is not itself necessarily after anything else, and which has naturally something after it; an end is that which is naturally after something itself, either as its necessary or usual consequent, and with nothing else after it[4]

This is the kind of ending we get in Hardy's first two published novels, *Under the Greenwood Tree* and *Desperate Remedies*, where we feel that everything has been resolved and that the weddings at the end symbolise the ideal marriage after overcoming the previous complications.

Hardy wrote *Desperate Remedies* to attract a wide audience, as the sensation novel was popular at the time. It is quite usual for a sensation novel to end happily after a complicated murder plot. There are a lot of similarities - a fire at an inn, bigamy, murder - between *Desperate Remedies* and Mary Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, which ends with "I hope no one will take objection to my story because the end of it leaves the good people all happy and at peace". If we take the "good" people in Hardy's novel to be Springlove and Cytherea, they do end happily married.

However, it is not that simple, because the mystery has a morbid conclusion to it, when we discover the body coming out of the prison is that of Manston, who has murdered his wife. He hanged himself after writing a full confession - a convention of sensational novels is to supply information through bits of paper - which is important to the reader because it advances the plot. Little attention is given to Manston now because we want to hear how the events have actually unfolded. From the sombre tone at the end of the confession, we enter into a lively, comic bell-ringing scene that is full of movement. The ringers report the happy wedding; Edward and his wife will "fill out now", "'tis nater's law",[5] their coming together has saved them "Good fortune came at last".[6]

There is little threat to the harmony of *Under the Greenwood Tree* and its ending resolves any problems neatly. Hardy concentrates on what Meredith had believed were the strengths of his (unpublished) first novel *The Poor Man and the Lady*: the rustic characters and scenery. *Under the Greenwood Tree* takes its title from a poem in *As You Like It*. Both Hardy and Shakespeare use conventions of comedy, which make us expect that the plot will drive towards marriage. As J. Dover Wilson writes, there is "a serene happiness, liable to develop into merriment in the conclusion".[7]

The action of *As You Like It* takes place in the Forest of Arden, whose name has echoes of Eden. Rosalind lives "in the skirts of the forest, like fringe upon a petticoat,[8] making it sound fenced-in, like Eden, which is surrounded by a wall in *Paradise Lost*. The ending of *As You Like It* is both joyful and satisfying because the lovers are matched up and Duke Frederick, now repentant, restores his banished brother to the dukedom; and it is no surprise that Hardy's novel should end with Dick and Fancy's marriage.

Auden wrote, "Eden is a past world in which the contradictions of the present world have not yet arisen".[9] The choir's Christmas carols are no longer appreciated and it is poignant that they sing "Remember Adam's fall",[10] a reminder of the loss of Paradise. The pastoral element of *As You Like It* argues the claims of country and court, which is expressed by the Duke, "Are not these woods/More free from peril than the envious court?"[11] *Under the Greenwood Tree* is set in the early Victorian period (1840s), but using the pastoral tradition to contrast a different way of life, Hardy goes forward into the future, contrasting the novel's society with the present Victorian society where modern technology is sometimes portrayed at heartless. From this perspective we lament the change that time has brought along with it.

It is by no means with little regret on the reader's part that these warm characters, in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, will become "useless ones".[12] Chapter Four is full of pathos that people do not care about their music anymore and there is a sadness in something once popular, which gives these characters enjoyment, dying out. On Christmas day Shiner runs out of his house shouting at the choir to stop singing carols. Hardy makes him look ridiculous by describing his arms waving like a capital X or Y. Further on, there is no reply from Fancy's house, as if she is not listening to them. She will play the new organ that Maybold has brought with him. It is not until the next chapter that she briefly appears to thank them. It is here that Dick is struck by love. To show the rustics' acceptance of the new society, they welcome her, and Maybold's new musical instrument.

The inevitability of time moving onward is also seen during the castle's fire in *A Laodicean*, a symbol for the fall of the old. There is significance in the tower clock finally stopping; it struggles to keep going, but it can not go on. Paula and George watch from the new gymnasium, another example of Paula's modern outlook. There has been a conflict running throughout the novel for her between the old and the new. First, she wants renovations to the castle, then she changes her mind, then, at the end, she wants a modern mansion (as if accepting that the past has gone), and then she wants her castle back. A new mansion is to be built nearby, like the railways that have been constructed. It suggests a new life for George and Paula, in a modern home, expressing Paula's acceptance of "the modern spirit".[13]

There are different degrees of meliorism to Hardy's endings. In *A Laodicean*, the twist comes at the very end when Paula says to Somerset "I wish my castle wasn't burnt; and I wish you were a de Stancy". She represses her true feelings at the end with a sigh that puts a doubt into our minds that this is not a perfect, although happy, ending. The final line of *Under the Greenwood Tree* is enigmatic because Fancy gives us a feeling of uncertainty, when she "thought of a secret she would never tell",[14] referring to her having once accepted Maybold as a lover. The duplicity of her nature is reflected in her name, 'Fancy'. The ending, however, does not spoil the feeling of happiness that occurs throughout the novel. In fact, Fancy is saying that the "secret" is all in the past now, so we must look to the future, where she "never would tell".

From the opening paragraphs of *Under the Greenwood Tree*, Hardy conveys his sensitivity to the sights, sounds and smells of the countryside, which run through to the final wedding celebrations. There are regenerating natural images of rain bringing green to the trees in the morning - apple trees bloom and bees produce honey. As a contrast, *The Woodlanders* has an elegiac, downbeat ending where Marty is at Giles's grave in harsh winter, "chilled by the damp ground".[15] Marty renews the withered flowers at the grave and promises to continue planting trees, but this is full of sadness, as the work will be done alone. Throughout the novel, she and Giles have been the two most natural characters - they plant the trees of the wood, representing a kind of growth. Marty is at one with the wood and she tells Giles that she feels the trees sigh because they start life "Just as we be".[16] Giles, too, is part of the landscape when he calls to Grace from the tree. It is significant that Giles is in a tree and Grace, who is after something more exciting outside the woodland, has trouble seeing him.

The rural characters predict an unhappy marriage for Grace and Fitzpiers, which brings an extra sadness; Melbury says "It's a forlorn hope for her; and God knows how it will end!"[17] Giles loves Grace, and Marty would like to have seen him happy with her, but we feel it is Marty that he should have married. It is very doubtful that Grace will be happy in the Midlands, away from the woodlands. Hardy wrote in *Life* "the heroine is doomed to an unhappy life with an inconstant husband".[18] Grace's neglected and withered flowers reflect her feelings towards Giles, and there is pathos in Marty waiting silently for Grace to visit the grave, because we know that she will not come. It appears that Giles has been forgotten and his name has not been mentioned since his death, months ago. The attention of most of the characters is now on the marriage, but ours - and Marty's - returns to Giles.

Happy marriages, which sometimes conclude Hardy's novels, do not always absorb tragic elements for some of the characters. In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, there is an unhappy ending for Boldwood, but not for Oak who marries Bathsheba. As with Manston's death in *Desperate Remedies*, there is a sombre atmosphere created in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, where Boldwood faces the gallows. Oak benefits from Boldwood killing Troy, and we feel that his happiness is based on another's misery. Boldwood's suffering is not shown, or described to us; Hardy spares us this to prepare for a happy ending.

In the last pages of *The Trumpet-Major*, John goes off to war and is killed, lonely and isolated, in contrast with Anne and Bob's happiness. Rather than concluding with a marriage, Hardy concentrates more on the Trumpet Major's fate, which saddens the end. As the soldiers say farewell on their way to unknown destinies, sadness is driven in because we are told what is to become of them: most of them will not survive, including John. John covers

up his real emotions to spare Anne's feelings, but this only emphasises the sadness of being a soldier who will possibly meet his doom.

There is something romantic in the idea of a soldier leaving his lover behind as he returns to war. In the novel Hardy describes the time as a "period when romance had not so greatly faded out of military life";[19] Anne cannot help being impressed by Bob who parades for her benefit in his new Lieutenant's uniform. John sounds more like Bob when he says that soldiers fall in love all the time, but we know that this is not true in his case. John bravely heads into the "black night":[20] into the unknown and out of the sight of those he loves. While the Trumpet-Major is fighting, Bob, his rival, will marry Anne, giving us a sense of unfairness.

E.M. Forster wrote "Nearly all novels are feeble at the end" and "If it was not for death and marriage I do not know how the average novelist would conclude".[21] *Jude*, like *Desperate Remedies*, *Far From the Madding Crowd* and *The Trumpet-Major*, ends not only with death, but with marriage as well. There is nothing to relieve us of the horror and the shock of the children's deaths, such as a happy reunion between Jude and Sue. Once we think the novel has reached its tragic climax with the children's deaths, there is more suffering to come: Sue conforms to the church and returns to Phillotson, Jude dies while Arabella secures herself another husband, and Sue realises too late that she loves Jude.

Weddings at the end of *Jude* are not the happy ones of *Under the Greenwood Tree*, but tragic ones - as Mrs. Edlin says "Weddings be funerals".[22] As early as *Desperate Remedies* Hardy attacks marriage, saying that it is too constraining and leads people, in their

desperation, to acts of extremes; his title is, after all, *Desperate Remedies*. Such a theme continues throughout Hardy's work, one clear example being the poem, "The Christening":

But chained and doomed for life

To slovening

As vulgar man and wife.

Here, Hardy's treatment of marriage is just as harsh as in *Jude*. In the second chapter of the novel, Jude's aunt warns Jude not to marry because of Sue's bad family history of marriage. All the marriages in this novel seem doomed: the pregnant bride, who Jude and Sue pass, has clearly been, and will be, mistreated; Arabella believes that Jude is not married because he looks happy; both Jude and Sue begin with unhappy marriages - to Arabella and Phillotson. To Jude and Sue marriage is only a loveless contract, and if their feelings towards each other alter there is no way out for them; the danger is making "a permanent contract on a temporary feeling".[23]

We see the fickleness and selfishness of Arabella who traps Vilbert, when Jude is dying, to secure her future. Hardy reflects Schopenhauer's belief that women trap a man when they look their best; after that they pay no more attention to their appearance. Nature:

has provided her with superabundant beauty and charm for a few years at the expense of the whole remainder of her life, so that during these years she may so capture the imagination of a man that he is carried away into undertaking to support her

honourably in some form or another for the rest of her life, a step he would seem hardly likely to take for purely rational considerations.[24]

It would be a bit extreme to argue a case for liking Arabella (as D.H. Lawrence does); however, we can understand her actions - that she has to survive without Jude to support herself. Women manipulating men into marriage is something we see in *The Hand of Ethelberta*, and it is a common theme in both the Romantic and Victorian period. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the mother wants to marry her daughters off to prosperous men regardless of how old or unsuitable they are. In *Emma*, Emma Woodhouse tries to be a matchmaker. She believes that Anne Taylor's marriage is due to her and tries to manipulate her protégée Harriet into marriage, into what she considers a 'good' marriage. In *Daniel Deronda*, Gwendolen decides to marry Grandcourt to save her family from living in a cottage, and to save herself from becoming a governess. It turns out to be an unhappy marriage. Marriage is not necessarily the way to happiness but it does secure respectability and this can take away some of the satisfaction at the end of a novel.

II

It is not true that Hardy's novels leave the end "not itself followed by anything" (Aristotle), because there does not feel to be a finality or a completeness to some of them. Hardy's endings are not always like *Under the Greenwood Tree* where continual happiness is implied, instead we feel as if there will be setbacks and difficulties in the future, rather than a fairy-tale ending. It may seem too simplifying to say that *Far From the Madding Crowd* ends with a happy marriage - that Oak who has endured finally gets what he has waited so long for. Yes,

there is a happy ending - of sorts - to this novel, if we say that Oak has won Bathsheba, who herself gets another chance of happiness. But it does not match the happiness of *Under the Greenwood Tree*. From *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873) to *Two on a Tower* (1882) we have a series of what I will call 'unsatisfying' endings, where we feel that there is more to come (the only exception is *The Return of the Native*, which I shall be dealing with in my next section).

Happily-ever-after endings in the adult world are not as straightforward as they appear to be in children's literature; the previous problems cannot be so easily forgotten. Angela Carter parodies the "Little Red Riding Hood" story in *The Werewolf*, making it a violent and shocking story. As it stands, "Little Red Riding Hood" is already a rather appalling story just below its surface; classic children's literature can often mask the grim or terrifying beneath its simplifying conventions. In Carter's version, the girl is no longer scared and defenceless, relying on the male woodcutter to come to her rescue, but, in a feminist reading, she strikes out to cut off the wolf's paw. In the cottage, with her father's knife, she holds down the grandmother, who is really a witch and who is eventually stoned to death by the villagers. The last sentence of the story ("Now the child lived in her grandmother's home; she prospered"), although happy, is unsettling. We wonder how such happiness could come so simply after such horrific events.

Hardy said that the heroine of a story often married the wrong man, to which the editor of The Cornhill replied "Not in magazines".[25] We can understand the pressure authors have to finish with an ending that the reading public would be satisfied with - but Hardy challenges this. In *The Trumpet-Major*, the narrator explains "Youth is foolish; and does a woman often let her reasoning in favour of the worthier stand in the way of her perverse desire for the less

worthy at such times as these?"[26] Anne and Bob get the marriage they want but Anne will suffer, unlike the strong-willed Ethelberta in *The Hand of Ethelberta*. There is an irony in Bob drinking to "the hussy's downfall"[27] when he hears of the woman (Anne) who has played foolishly with Festus' affections. We believe it would be an insufferably cruel union that Bob drinks to, and we feel that Anne will eventually become a victim. Bob falls in love too easily and slips up to admit "when a man is away from the woman he loves best in the port - world, I mean - he can have a sort of temporary feeling for another".[28] We find it likely that this will happen again - Anne is not a strong character as she often looks to the brothers for protection - and it is hard to believe that she could control Bob the way Ethelberta controls her Mountclere.

In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, vanity is one of Bathsheba's problems. The reason why Boldwood has little luck with her is because he fails to flatter her. At first he fails to notice her at the corn market, so Bathsheba sends him a Valentine's card as a joke. Troy's advances attract her and in the sword scene they mesmerise. She tells Oak "I want somebody to tame me";[29] he is incapable of this, whereas Troy succeeds. When Troy is supposedly drowned, she is forced to accept Boldwood's proposal on the basis of guilt and that he is a respected gentleman within the community. Troy's resurrection is too much for Boldwood, after finally getting Bathsheba's agreement to marriage, so he kills him. In the end, Bathsheba learns to accept a secure marriage with Oak. It is Troy who gives her the key to adapting when he presents her with his father's watch, which is inscribed "Love yields to circumstance".[30]

The novel begins badly enough for Oak; he is rejected by Bathsheba and he loses his flock of sheep in a tragic accident. Once he has paid off his debts he is left with nothing except the

clothes that he stands in. Bathsheba recognises his strength "What a way Oak had, she thought, of enduring things".[31] It is interesting that Oak owns a copy of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* as both Oak and Christian show determination to keep on going and never give up hope despite the obstacles put in their way. Oak is willing to adapt to the new situation by taking a realistic approach. He goes to Casterbridge market to find employment and when he realises his chances are slim of becoming a bailiff, he demotes himself to a shepherd. As this produces no results, he heads off to another market to try again. On the way, the fire at Weatherbury farm enables him to impress the workers with his skills and he therefore finds employment. His outlook is seen when everybody else seems to have given up on Boldwood being reprieved from his execution, "There's a chance yet" he believes.[32]

Throughout *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Bathsheba is mainly seen as a determined woman: it took courage for her to take on the responsibilities of a farm and to stay at the corn market, being the only woman there. She shows that she is no superhuman being and breaks down after Troy's shooting, she cries "how can I live! O Heaven, how can I live!"[33] Towards the end of the novel the children sing "Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom";[34] they are too innocent to know the meaning of what they are singing, but this fits Bathsheba's mood. The grieving process is perhaps a good thing as it shows that Bathsheba is accepting what has happened to Troy. When Oak appears on the scene the children sing "remember not past years" to give a feeling of future development.[35]

There is hope for her future with Oak. Water in the novel is often not a sign of growth. Water spurts out of the gargoyle and onto Fanny's grave, as if someone (perhaps some kind of god or Hardy himself) is having one last cruel joke at her expense. The flowers that are

placed on the grave (flowers are usually a sign of growth) become ruined with the mud. Water has also previously ruined Boldwood's crops and Troy is supposedly drowned in water. However, love can survive destruction. Although on Oak and Bathsheba's wedding day rain comes down, this time it is a sign of growth that will transform Bathsheba into a rose again.

Their love can overcome the threat of nature through hard work and it is this that brings them together into such a profitable partnership. There is little basis of love in their relationship and they are described as "tried friends";[36] but this is a good basis for a successful marriage and future happiness together. The shearing scene shows that Oak believes work and personal life go together. He shows Bathsheba how to hold the shears properly by holding her hands in his. In *Under the Greenwood Tree*, we know that Fancy genuinely loves Dick and that they both want happiness as their hands, in the washing scene, merge into the water as one. When Bathsheba and Oak's hands come together it is through work and not through mutual love. Bathsheba needs Oak to cure the sheep after she dismissed him. Afterwards she learns to drop her authoritative tone and admit that she needs him. She can always rely on him, "'Gabriel', she said, *automatically*" (my italics).[37] When Oak threatens to leave, her immediate thought is "What shall *I* do without you"[38] and that she will have to "rely on her own resources again"[39] and to "fight her own battles".[40]

Other Hardy characters fail because they aim too high in their search for the ideal. Jocelyn in *The Well-Beloved*, from a theme developed in Shelley's *Epipsychidion*, can only manage imperfect versions of the ideal; Melbury in *The Woodlanders* is socially ambitious and wants Grace to be something she is not; Angel in *Tess* falls in love with an ideal milkmaid and not

Tess herself. Oak proposes to Bathsheba when he has a realistic chance: Bathsheba has not received her inheritance from her uncle yet, and Oak owns his own farm. It is not a romantic love, such as Boldwood's appears to be later, the romantic love of "a mind crazed with care and love",[41] buying Bathsheba presents and being prepared to die for her. Oak's proposal is a "balance between poetry and practicality",[42] he talks about their future house where they will own a piano and hens. There is no mention of the value of his affections and this makes him the less foolish lover. When he works for Bathsheba he calmly admits that his feelings for her have gone, but he is evading them, as there would be no point loving her in his present situation. Not only does he have to endure seeing Bathsheba working out her problems with Boldwood and Troy, but she asks him for his advice.

Although Hardy tried to avoid 'closed' endings, he did have to find a way to conclude his novels. Gregor wrote "Nowhere is the sense of medium felt more strongly, even by the casual reader, than in a story about to end. For the novelist the problem is no longer how to tell his tale, but how to close it down".[43] I would like to examine what happens just before the end of Hardy's novels to question whether this makes the conclusion more effective, giving it more power, and building up the tension and suspense.

As they move towards their end, many of Hardy's novels involve travelling, bringing characters closer together: *A Laodicean* has George travelling around Europe, trying to track down Paula; Swithin, in *Two on a Tower*, is gradually distanced from Viviette, finally reaching South Africa, but he returns determined to renew his love. Tess and Angel are reunited after Alec's murder where they are truly happy together for a week. We know that Tess will eventually be caught and torn away from Angel. She is caught at Stonehenge at

dawn, where the brightness of a new day suggests relief that Tess will soon be out of her suffering. Hardy once defined tragedy as follows:

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[44]

Hardy is narrowing everything down to the scene at Stonehenge, where we know Tess will not escape. The heads of policemen moving in is an emblem of closing in, "They all closed in with evident purpose".[45] From the very beginning, Tess sees life as a "battle"[46] and she believes that we live in a "blighted"[47] world. After her seduction, Tess's journey takes her on a "crooked lane".[48] The journeys leading up to her death are endless, and mostly full of pain. It is as if she is being hunted across the country by the "Immanent Will" who is playing its sport with her: in one of many games references she is described as looking like a fly on a billiard table, and the blood on the ceiling of the guest-house mysteriously looks like the ace of hearts.

In *The Hand of Ethelberta*, we have a melodramatic ending that is quite different from the types of ending in the other novels: it is hard to take it seriously. It is quite preposterous and unexpected that we come across Mountclere's mistress after we think that Ethelberta has got what she has wanted. However, the upbeat comedy of *The Hand of Ethelberta* works in a way that *A Laodicean* does not. The melodramatic dash to the one destination creates suspense. We wonder whether the different characters will make it on time to stop the

marriage between Elthelberta and Mountclere. Everybody is dashing towards the wedding, all coming in different carriages and arriving only minutes too late - giving the narrative momentum to end the novel on.

The Hand of Ethelberta is a social comedy, a different kind of novel to *Tess*. Hardy treats the story in a comic way with the infusion of melodrama. The melodrama is not fundamental to the novel. (Melodrama is full of sensational and startling situations, often highly emotional and the melodramatic villain often puts the victims in peril. In *Tess*, we have a theatrical stage-villain in Alec, who uses phrases such as "my Beauty",[49] "you'll be civil yet!"[50] and "I will be your master again".[51] He has a twirled moustache, a roving eye and smokes a cigar suggestively, traits of an obvious villain. His appearance at Flintcombe Ash, where he carries a pitchfork amongst the flames and disguises himself, certainly and melodramatically establishes him as a Satan figure. Dare and Power, in a comical cartoon-like style (and with their strip-cartoon names), both produce weapons aimed at each other, in *A Laodicean*. First Power pulls his gun out and points it at Dare, and says "As a traveller I always carry one of 'em".[52] To which Dare replies "Moreover, while you, as a traveller, always carry a weapon of defence, as a traveller so do I".[53])

In *Under the Greenwood Tree*, the rustics add to the serenity and calm down Fancy's (and our) anticipation that Dick will not turn up for the wedding. They achieve this by telling comic stories of men that have not turned up before. In *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, Hardy uses comedy to trick us into believing that Elfride will either fall for Stephen or Knight, just before the revelation of Elfride's death. We enjoy the comic situation of seeing the rivals Stephen and Knight on the same train, trying to avoid each other's compartments and wishing the

other would leave the train. We are hit with the tragic news unexpectedly, and it comes as a shock to us, just as much as it does to Stephen and Knight. The next chapter the rivals continue to argue, but this time it is about whom she loved best and whom she died for. The arguing is no longer comic, but of two men dealing with the tragic news, who develop into "fellow sufferers" and "one soul".[54]

There is a balance between comedy and tragedy, in *Far From the Madding Crowd*. We might take a parallel from Shakespeare. In *The Merchant of Venice* and *Measure for Measure*, Antonio and Claudio respectively are threatened by death but are saved at the last minute, leaving Antonio financially secure and Isabella with a brother. Events could have gone terribly wrong for Oak and Bathsheba, which creates tension, as we want to find out whether they will be saved in one way or another from a tragic ending. Hardy builds up the suspense at the end, where we want to know whether Boldwood will be saved from execution, whether Oak will leave the farm, and whether Bathsheba will visit Oak in time to stop him, as we see her outside his house unsure of what to do.

In *The Woodlanders*, we are released from a tension that comes more strongly created than in *Far From the Madding Crowd*. The very gentle and subtle tone of the novel makes the shock at the end, where we believe that Grace has been trapped, even worse. Hardy gives us a lengthy, factual and informative description of man-traps and their degrees of cruelty, which skilfully creates suspense. This does not have the same impact of a tragic ending because it does not have the sense that events have led up to this - no connections have been made with what has gone on before. It seems much more of an accident, or a chance event, making it seem less like a tragic ending. The narrator tells us that Fitzpiers and Grace are at an equal

distance from the trap, which lies somewhere between them. We wonder who will be first to it: Tim had not counted on Grace being there. We prepare ourselves for a bloody and violent ending, as we can imagine Hardy plotting irony in one of the characters dying after Grace thinks of their future plans together. Indeed, Hardy does describe the horrific trap, stained with blood and material from a dress. We then move onto the comments of the events by the rustics, who debate about unsatisfactory marriages that have continued to be unhappy. The rustics, whose comedy relieves us from the tension of the previous scene, hint that Grace's marriage will be problematic.

Up until the very end anything can happen, a novel or play can turn around at the last minute. Even in a tragedy like *Macbeth* where there is so strong a sense of inevitability, "almost-attained happy endings" in Gillian Beer's phrase "are never quite obliterated."[55] And it is for this reason that we are kept so interested in the outcome. For example, in the final scene of *King Lear* one of several outcomes is possible. There is a false ending, where Albany's appearance represents some kind of order. Edmund seems to neatly round the story up with his "The wheel is come full circle" when he is reconciled with Edgar.[56] But then Edgar says "This would have seemed a period",[57] "would have" being the important phrase because there is still more to come. Kent, who we have forgotten about, appears and then Lear enters with Cordelia in his arms. An example in Hardy's novels of where we are kept guessing is in *The Hand of Ethelberta*, where the ending seems to overturn our expectations as it does in *King Lear*.

After Ethelberta and Mountclere's marriage has taken place, Ethelberta's happiness, from the reader's point of view, depends on overcoming one final obstacle: getting rid of

Mountclere's mistress. Yet again she schemes another plan, that she will only return to her husband on "the terms on which I will return to him".[58] It is Ethelberta who calls the shots in this novel and not the dominant man, as is usual in Victorian novels. Her future depends on it as it threatens "the *beginning* of my life here!"[59] (another sign that the end of Hardy's novels are just a beginning for some of the characters) and she is determined to get it right for the sake of the rest of her life. Sol talks about Ethelberta's duty towards her husband, but she does not worry about this. Men in many novels can get away with having mistresses, Alec d'Urberville for example. It is Tess who has to face the consequences just because she is a woman. Ethelberta is stronger than that and will not be a victim to a dominant husband. Not only is she physically stronger but she is mentally stronger. We think that she will get hysterical and run away screaming when she meets Mountclere's mistress, instead she devises a plot to stop their relationship.

A tragic ending is possible, with Mountclere's men waiting for Ethelberta to escape. The carriage that is sent to recapture Ethelberta reminds us of Huntingdon's in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, who forces his wife and child back to live with him. There is not the sense of danger that we feel in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* - Mountclere, with his "Hee hee" expression, is too farcical to take seriously. When it becomes apparent that Helen will not be able to reform Huntingdon she can only run away and hide from her husband. However, Mountclere is different because he will let Ethelberta dominate him. Ethelberta is able to reform him and save him from bankruptcy. Ethelberta says "Life is a battle...there is no seriousness in it...I care to succeed in society; but at the bottom of my heart, I don't care".[60] She has a detachment that Tess does not have. Tess losing her pureness in society means tragic consequences.

There is an unpredictable ending in *Two on a Tower*. Viviette is forced to marry 'the wrong man', the Bishop of Melchester, in order to retain her respectability after giving birth to Swithin's child. Her marriage to the Bishop was "hasty...and it betokened a want of temperate discretion".[61] We believe that the Bishop's death will bring Swithin back to her and they will live happily ever after. Swithin and Viviette's meeting occurs in the daylight of summer, which suggests that there will be a happy reconciliation. However, time, as well as freeing Viviette, has also "brought about his revenges".[62] Time can distort our memories of the past. Too often we look back at our lives in nostalgia, forgetting the bad times to reminisce about the good ones. After seeing her, Swithin momentarily realises that his feelings are not the same anymore, and is about to leave. The novel then turns around, as Swithin changes his mind, feeling that marrying her would be the right thing to do. Viviette then dies with "Sudden joy after despair".[63] This ending is hard to swallow, it is something we might see in a sensation novel, such as *Desperate Remedies*, where Miss Aldclyffe dies at the same time as Cytherea's premonition.

It is Tabitha, an old sweetheart, who catches Swithin's attention, to find that time has brought him love in another direction. It seems a bit inappropriate for Hardy to bring Tabitha in at the very end, immediately after Viviette's death, to suggest that there will be a future for them. She is a "bright spot" at the moment of Viviette's death.[64]

III

Hardy's last four novels and *The Return of the Native* (but excluding *The Well-Beloved*) are the major tragic novels, which brings us on to our next section: the tragic ending. *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and *Far From the Madding Crowd* have their tragic elements but not to the same extent as the later tragedies which have characteristics more in common with Shakespearean tragedy.

From its ending alone, *The Return of the Native* does not appear to be a tragedy, as it does not end with the tragic deaths, but with a marriage. Hardy gives us two endings to the novel, as he does in *The Well-Beloved.* Despite some critics hailing this as modernism for his experiments with form, it was merely to keep his serial readers happy. Hardy tells us that the more artistic should stay true to the original end where Venn disappears and Thomasin remains a widow. The ending to *A Pair of Blue Eyes* also seems contrived and the coincidences that occur are unbelievable. Serialisation caused problems for Hardy with this novel because he was running behind and did not know how the final chapters would shape up. This is quite evident in the train incident: the coincidence that the two lovers should be on the same train as Elfride's body is very clumsily managed, however, it neatly ends the story by bringing the characters all together.

The ending of *The Return of the Native* seems a little too long and drawn out, as Hardy contrives the ending to suit the serial readers. It becomes a little tiresome and it might have been better to end with the deaths after all, and to keep Venn as the mysterious, isolated figure who disappears into the unknown. Throughout the novel Venn is strangely always around when Thomasin needs him. Hardy created him as more of a mysterious folkloric figure, who frightens the rustic characters that have not seen a reddle-man before. It seems a

bit sudden for Venn to turn up in the last two pages with a normal skin colour, changed from all recognition.

An epilogue can have two main functions: it sets the perspective by a shift of time-scale and provides an element of after-history for the major characters. Time passing at the end is typical of Hardy's novels, as we have seen in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *A Pair of Blue Eyes, Two on a Tower* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles.* In the last chapter of *The Hand of Ethelberta* we advance two and a half years, where we see how the marriage has progressed. We do not expect Ethelberta to be happy, because she has never loved Mountclere but we do learn that she is in control and her terms have been agreed to. She becomes more estranged from Julian, which is symbolised in the scene where she passes him in silence in her carriage and rides into the distance, away from him. We cannot call this a happy ending because Ethelberta and Christopher Julian both marry people that they do not love. However, Julian's marriage to Picotee is some consolation to end this comedy with because Picotee, who has also endured in her love, finally marries Julian.

Under the Greenwood Tree is divided by the seasons: we begin with winter and finish with autumn. It gives us the sense that time is moving onwards through the seasons. Instead of the conclusion returning to bleak winter, the novel moves forward to summer, and Dick's wedding, to add to the happy ending effect. In *The Return of the Native*, the novel's cyclical time scale of a year begins and ends in November. However, the 'alternative' ending moves on from that and as a result lessens the impact of the big tragic end at the weir. If we are meant to learn anything by the deaths, it is soon weakened and cleared away by the happiness of marriage. What the ending does show is that something good has come out of tragedy.

One of the chapter headings in *The Return of the Native* is called the "Inevitable Movement Onward":[65] time and life have to go on. There is a reminder of this for Clym, who is not yet ready to move on from the past, when he walks into the cottage where "The ticking of the clock was the only sound that greeted him, for *not a soul remained*"[66] - it stresses that life now has changed since the tragedy. But, for the moment, Clym "frequently"[67] walks on the heath to think about the people who have lived there in the past. Clym is uninterested in going out to the May pole and has a reluctance to love; both are related because the May pole is a fertility emblem. If Clym went through with the idea of marrying Thomasin it would only be a marriage of convenience, to make living together economical and to please his mother's memory. He is still a "corpse"[68] and would ruin Thomasin's chance of true happiness and make her future bleak.

The name 'Blooms End' paradoxically suggests an end (for Mrs. Yeobright and the other tragic deaths), but it also suggests a new and prosperous start (for Clym's teaching and Thomasin's marriage). Thomasin symbolically puts on her summer dress and is ready to start living again. Both Venn and Thomasin deserve happiness after what they have been through. Venn's endurance has paid off, like Oak's, and he enters into a happy marriage with Thomasin. Venn looks to his future with a dairy, and sharing it with Thomasin away from Blooms End. Such love at the end is reminiscent of the earlier happy ending of *Under the Greenwood Tree*, where we feel that there will be few difficulties ahead for the couple. And, although Clym still lives at Blooms End, he has started to re-evaluate himself and continues with his ambitious educational plans. At the end, he preaches on the heath, which emphasises

that he is still part of that heath, and its associations with the past, prejudices and superstitions still remain. He realises that people on Egdon Heath are not ready for any drastic change yet.

No passing of time is allowed to put Henchard's death into perspective, as in *The Return of the Native*, so his death is made more immediate and full of pathos. We get to know Henchard from the inside, which makes the reader feel frustrated and angry that he has to start back at the beginning. Henchard dies alone as if no one cares what happens to him and we feel that society has learned nothing from his tragedy, like Tess's death where the only onlookers are Angel and Liza-Lu. Henchard does not want his story to be told, although his death has a great effect on us. Arthur Miller's discussion of modern tragedy modifies some of the conventions of tragedy. For example, he believes that the audiences will relate and sympathise to the "Common Man" just the same as a King.[69] Many of Hardy's characters are just ordinary villagers in a rural community. Therefore, few characters seem to know about the tragedy because the protagonist is not a prince or a king, like Hamlet or Lear.

Schopenhauer believed suffering in life is circular, as David Berman explains in his introduction to Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea*:

He imagines that we are all moving barefoot around a circle that is strewn with red-hot coals. In some places there are no coals, and it is these areas which we self-deceptively describe as happy or satisfying...In fact, they are little more than an absence or suspension of pain - like the momentary respite from an itch or thirst.[70]

It is such circularity that gives those who accuse Hardy of not being a meliorist plenty of ammunition. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Jude* both have a circular effect. As the characters try to move forward their attempts are thwarted and they return back to where they started having gained nothing and suffered for their efforts. Jude, for all his efforts, ends in the same position as he was at the start: married to Arabella. Sue goes back to Phillotson and back to the religion that she once criticised; "we must conform", she says.[71]

Both Jude's and Sue's marriages will be the same as before: Jude will feel that Arabella has tricked him again, and, at best, Sue's marriage will be satisfactory because Phillotson is kind to her. Interestingly, she misses out the word "love" in her marriage vows to Phillotson, but she will "honour and obey" him. Sue is being spiritually repressed, which is not compatible with her nature - she is Jude's free "bird". At one point, she nearly kills herself by jumping out of a window to escape her husband. On Jude's final visit to her, she is left in the church, while Jude walks out. Symbolically, both Sue and the church have left him out in the rain, eventually to die alone. The church tells Jude that he has done "the right thing" by marrying Arabella again.[72] Somehow we are not convinced that it is best for Jude and Sue, and we criticise the church for its lack of compassion. One character sums it up in the novel; he wonders why Jude and Sue cannot be happy "if it does not hurt other people".[73]

The novel has a figure of eight pattern to it, with the characters having to face the same problems yet again. There is a certain cruelty about believing that you are progressing only to be knocked back, not once but twice, in *Jude*. Phillotson, who returns to teach at the same school, phrases the circularity well towards the end of the novel, "Just as formerly,...a small thing to return to after my move upwards...a returning to zero".[74]

The Return of the Native, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* all start by gradually building up the tragedy from one or two people heading towards some destination. At the start of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Henchard and Susan walk down a road in silence, standing apart from each other, making it appear obvious that they no longer share the love they may have previously had. What is shocking is the extreme act that he suggests: the selling of his wife. Susan confirms our suspicion that he has been difficult to live with, by agreeing to go with Newson. Gregor talks about Henchard wanting to have a fresh start in life by selling his wife.[75] It is the idea of freedom and starting again that Henchard is attracted to, "if I were a free man again I'd be worth a thousand pound before I'd done o't'".[76] I think it is worth discussing a passage towards the end of the novel when Henchard returns to the same place, which makes the point that he has gained little from his experiences:

And thus Henchard found himself again on the precise standing which he had occupied a quarter of a century before. Externally there was nothing to hinder his making another start on the upward slope, and by his new lights achieving higher things than his soul in its half-formed state had been able to accomplish. But the ingenious machinery contrived by the Gods for reducing human possibilities of amelioration to a minimum - which arranges that wisdom to do shall come *pari passu* with the departure of zest for doing - stood in the way of all that. He had no wish to make an arena a second time of the world that had become a mere painted scene to him.[77]

Henchard returns down the same road at the end but there have been many changes during the many years that the novel covers. We are told from the very beginning of the novel that the markets are changing, "new periodical great markets of neighbouring towns were beginning to interfere seriously with the trade carried on here for centuries".[78] The stalls are "mechanical improvements", a phrase Hardy uses with both irony and acceptance.[79] Only the furmity-woman remains from the old days, and she is eventually phased out, living in the bad part of Casterbridge and making an appearance in the town's court. The ruins from the past in the novel are constant reminders of how time destroys, and Henchard himself becomes "a dark ruin".[80] On returning to the field, Henchard is visiting the past and he hears the sights and sounds of years ago. In doing so, Hardy puts emphasis on the long length of time in which Henchard has progressed to very little, despite his efforts. Then, he was a poor man looking for work with his wife and child. Now he has lost everything to Farfrae: Elizabeth-Jane (only when it is too late she returns to him), Lucetta, the mayorship, his house and furniture. His "weariness of the world" goes to show how tired and beaten he is from his battle with life.[81]

The Mayor of Casterbridge is similar to *King Lear* because the latter is set in the time before Christianity where there were gods, rather than a monotheistic God. In *King Lear*, the gods are not active and do not control any of the events in the play. However, Hardy is suggesting, in the above passage, that the gods are making life miserable, like C.S. Lewis in his pessimistic period when he believed that the world is a bad place and God is to be blamed for it. The gods "contrive", which suggests that they are actively involved in controlling the characters' actions. The word "arena" (a battleground for gladiators) makes it appear that Henchard is putting on a spectacle for the gods, like a puppet. The gods allow only a little

possibility of amelioration, reducing it "to a minimum". This is worse than definitely no amelioration because the little chance is very teasing, as if the "ingenious machinery" is daring, and playing with, the characters.

Morrell points out that Henchard fails because he does not adapt to the new way of life. He needs Farfrae to help him compete with the new, but he is too proud to accept the help. In some ways Henchard is similar to Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* because he does not have a "proper grip on the forces of life".[82] Loman practises his business on the assumption that it is personality that makes a successful businessman. He cannot compete in the new society where wealth is measured by material possessions. Both Loman and Henchard suffer from their inability "to gain [their] "rightful" position in society".[83]

In *Jude* it is society that is behind and needs to move on with time. Christminster university is full of ghosts as if the town is looking backwards and not willing to accept the modern ideas. Like Henchard, Jude and Sue do not fit into society and its conventions. Sue says "the social moulds [fail to fit] our actual shapes".[84] They are ahead of their time and it is likely that they would have survived in a society fifty years on. Henchard's problem (should it be a problem that he remains in the old way) is that he fails to adapt to the modern. Sue says, "let us go home without killing our dream".[85] Their dream does not conform to Victorian expectations and that is why they come across so much disapproval. Their "experiments" have failed. Society is too strict and confining, and if you dare to rebel, then you will have to deal with the consequences. Sue gives up and returns to Phillotson and her religion. Society is so repressive and cruel that Father Time feels that it would be better to be dead. Hardy mentions Schopenhauer by name in the novel, clearly indicating his influence:

Children can sometimes seem like innocent delinquents, sentenced not to death but to life...Would each of us not rather have felt so much pity for the coming generation as to prefer to spare it the burden of existence[86]

James Thomson's biographer, B. Dobell, wrote that pessimism rarely strikes the young because they have not yet formed a philosophy on life. It is what makes the depressive Father Time all the more unusual, because for children it is, according to Dobell, "too early to despair because one has not yet perfected any great deeds or attained a too settled philosophy of life".[87] Sue feels that the death of the children has been a punishment for their "experiments".[88] In *Jude*, Hardy wants society to adapt. Shelley's *The Masque of Anarchy* is concerned with radical political reform for the "fearless and free". Hardy was a keen reader of Shelley, and it was possible that he got the idea of Father Time from the poem:

My father Time is weak and grey
With waiting for a better day;
See how idiot-like he stands,
Trembling with his palsied hands![89]

The hands of time are waiting to move forward but are unable to unless society is ready to move on. Hardy believes that we need to adopt modern attitudes if we are to move on and progress. Jude and Sue agree that it is best not to be alive because society alienates them when they broke its conventions.

What is most striking about looking at Hardy's themes, with a thought to the endings in his novels, is the lack of pessimism. We begin to understand here what Hardy means about calling himself a meliorist. His themes are melioristic, and I think I have shown that he often concludes his novels looking to the future. However, we have not yet looked at the way in which his novels are pessimistic. Even if hope is foolish, people will grasp for it because it is all they have. But it is also this small hope that can be so frustrating and annoying for the characters that demand change. Future hope does not do anything to ameliorate their problems. Throughout the novels, Hardy does his best to make his characters unhappy and suffer a lot. It is little consolation that Hardy says, well, perhaps in years to come their lives would have been better. It comes too late, we care about the characters that we are reading about in the present moment who have little hope, especially in Hardy's later novels.

Chapter 2: Tragedy

In the last chapter, we looked at the role that society plays in Hardy's tragedies. I now wish to develop and examine this idea to discover if Hardy is being pessimistic about the period he lives in and whether he is justified in his criticism. I will also determine to what extent the relationship between tragedy and pessimism plays a role in the view we have of Hardy. In *The Psychology of Hardy's Novels*, Thurley links Hardy's pessimism together with predetermination. Thurley believes "we nearly always feel that the characters haven't a chance, that Hardy means them to be dragged down in the end".[1] However, tragedy need not be pessimistic, as Arthur Miller wrote in his essay "Tragedy and the Common Man":

It is the idea that tragedy is of necessity allied to pessimism. Even the dictionary says nothing more about the word than it means a story with a sad or unhappy ending. This impression is so firmly fixed that I almost hesitate to claim that in truth tragedy implies more optimism in its author than does comedy, and that its final result ought to be the reinforcement of the onlooker's brightest opinions of the human animal

When discussing Hardy's pessimism, it must be remembered that Hardy was writing in a period of social criticism and to take his writing out of context would be both unfair and misleading. Writers are products of their society, often writing about the conditions in society that affect them. Hardy's novels have often been praised for their "concern with the issues which the Victorian era was forced to face by developments in philosophy and science, and by social change".[2]

One great change of Victorian society was the Industrial Revolution, which had commenced in the eighteenth century, transforming people's lives. The cost of the Industrial Revolution was at the expense of humanity and the lives that became mechanical. Bounderby, in *Hard Times*, refers to the workers as hands, which is dehumanising for them: they are recognised only for the part of their body that is useful to the owners. Tess asks at Flintcomb-Ash "Do they want a hand here?",[3] unlike her happy times at Talbothays where she was a 'dairy-maid'. Hardy saw the unstoppable changes and the turmoil that challenged people's sense of security and confronted their firm beliefs. We can see, in all of Hardy's novels, modern technology establishing itself and disrupting the traditional way of working. The threshing machine in *Tess* is an example of the machine dehumanising the farm workers. The thresher worker is described as an "engineer" and not in human terms. He does not talk to the hands because there is little time for pleasantness, as the machine is only hired for a certain period. The thresher speaks with a northern accent, which suggests that technology is eventually reaching Wessex from the industrial regions of the North, places like Coketon and Milton in *Hard Times* and *North and South*.

Another important feature of Victorian society is the widespread experience of religious doubt. Before the Victorian tragic novel, tragic drama had only existed in two periods: the Greek (Aeschylus, Sophocles, Eurypides) and Renaissance periods (Shakespeare, Spanish and French tragedy). The reason for this is that tragedy seems to be written under certain social conditions. I.A. Richards believes that tragedy cannot be wholly religious or wholly secular, "Tragedy is only possible to a mind which is for the moment agnostic or Manichean".[4] Under the secular heading there is reason, freedom of action, responsibility, law and punishment; and under religion, there is faith and superstition, predestination or Fate, no

or limited responsibility and servant or victim of the Gods. There is no scope for tragedy if the characters have to do something because they are ordered to by the Gods: it would be considered disobedient to refuse. Freedom of choice is needed to give the character a dilemma and to create tension during the struggle. Similarly, it would not amount to tragedy if what the character does is completely his own choice and there is no God to influence them otherwise.

As we come to the Victorian novel, we can see that the conditions are present for tragedy to be written. Gerald Parson highlights the fact that religious belief changed and modulated into something different; he calls this mutability "A Changing Creed".[5] Between 1830 and 1880 - he writes - authority alters from the Bible, nature and professional clergy to nature and scientific professionals; nature changes from a static material system to an evolving material-moral system; natural law changes from God's will to Nature's way. Yet there is a sense of continuity: natural law, for example, did not change simply from God's will to Nature's way, it is not as clear-cut as that. Instead people tended to look at what part God plays in nature or how nature appears in the Bible - God's will did not just disappear. Faraday could justify his belief in science and religion by explaining them as two distinct entities that did not necessarily clash with one another.

In religious belief, Hardy is further down the road from some earlier Victorian writers: he is not grappling with questions of which is the true church, as Newman is in the 1840s or Hopkins in the 1860s. Instead he writes about characters who enter, or are part of, a society that has two sets of values, which can cause tension if they act according to one set of values, while society is still dominated by a different set of values. Angel, in *Tess of the*

d'Urbervilles, becomes part of the new order with his Evangelical background, whereas his parents stand for the limited moral values of a type of the Christian middle-class. Angel has a more liberal way of thinking, yet the irony is that his parents would have been more charitable to Tess's situation if she had approached them. Tess's confession shocks Angel back to the conventional values:

Then she grieved for the beloved man whose conventional standard of judgment had caused her all these latter sorrows; and she went her way without knowing that the greatest misfortune of her life was this feminine loss of courage at the last and critical moment through her estimating her father-in-law by his sons. Her present condition was precisely one which would have enlisted the sympathies of old Mr. and Mrs. Clare[6]

She has different notions of morality and consciousness from those of her own parents, who believe that you should look after yourself at all costs in order to survive. Joan Durbeyfield tells her to marry Alec so that they can all live in a nice house. Tess is different: she feels guilty and violated, something that her mother would not understand.

Christianity was threatened and alternatives within the broad spectrum of Christianity appeared in the nineteenth century. Many writers began as Church of England supporters but modulated by the end of the period. Trollope shows the change of belief in a light-hearted way in the *Barchester Chronicles*, using the question of belief as a background to the stories of the individuals. Hopkins converted to Roman Catholicism, responding to the change of religious belief and mutability of the period, to the horror of his family. We can clearly see

that he was reasoning out his beliefs from arguments "partly my own, partly of others", "common sense", "reading the bible" and "an increasing knowledge of the Catholic system".[7]

Hardy himself lost his faith and turned agnostic (as did George Eliot). For Hardy, it was not until he was in his twenties that his attitude towards life began to change, experiencing a loss of faith in the Christian God. At this time he moved to London and formed a close friendship with Horace Moule who influenced him intellectually and provided him with all the latest publications. Some people become startled and lost in a society where hope was being shattered. This sense of desolation is echoed in Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night*, where lost souls wander aimlessly through the streets:

Yet as in some necropolis you find
Perchance one mourner to a thousand dead,
So there; worn faces that look deaf and blind
Like tragic masks of stone. With weary tread,
Each wrapt in his own doom, they wander, wander,
Or sit foredone and desperately ponder
Through sleepless hours with drooping head.[8]

One of Hardy's earlier poems, "Neutral Tones", was written at the time when Hardy began to lose his faith in the 1860s. It describes a harsh, cold and desolate Godless world. The first stanza sets the scene for us and also sets the tone for the rest of the poem. Hardy uses images to do this and his initial set of images are based on the lack of colour, "the sun was white, as though chidden of God". The grey God, the creator of life, turns his back on this particular

scene. All warmth, life and colour are removed and the sun, which symbolises life, is drained.

The desolate second stanza introduces a couple (the poet and a lover) who are unable to communicate and get over problems that have existed between them ("Your eyes on me were as eyes that rove/Over tedious riddles of years ago") and their resentment towards each other ("a grin of bitterness"). There seems to be no hope for them because there is no life left in their relationship, even "The smile on your mouth was the deadest thing/Alive enough to have strength to die". The last stanza suggests the way in which this scene has come back to the poet. Whenever he is experiencing or thinking about death in love he is reminded of this episode of her "face, and the God-curst sun, and a tree,/And a pond edged with grayish leaves". This is an advance from where God turns his back on the sun, "white, as though chidden of God"; now God is more hostile and cursing towards nature.

If we take an example of nineteenth century literature that gives a more favourable evocation of Christianity, Victor Hugo would make an interesting contrast to Hardy. Hugo believes in the Christian doctrine of loving one another to overcome society's misery. In *Les Misérables*, it is the Bishop who saves Valjean from the police and then gives him the candlesticks to use wisely, "Love one another; he declared that to be complete; he desired nothing more and it was his whole doctrine".[9] Instead of isolating or condemning the unfortunate, society should work together and that is why the Bishop donates all his money to the needy, something that Valjean learns to do.

However, it is not through Christian doctrine that Hardy sees change coming. In the poem, "The Darkling Thrush", "Some blessed hope", not necessarily Christian but some kind of hope, lies in the bird for the next century. In this poem, Hardy is saying that we have to become individually responsible because there is no God to change society for us. If we know what we are up against then, maybe, we can evolve and show each other some of the kindness that the Bishop shows Jean Valjean. Darwin wrote that a tribe "who were always ready to give aid to each other and to sacrifice themselves for the common good, would be victorious over most other tribes".[10]

The publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) had a great effect in the period. Hardy was one of Darwin's earliest supporters. We can find evidence of this from the beginning of Hardy's novel writing career, where the phrase "natural selection" is mentioned in *Desperate Remedies*.[11] The natural sciences of physics and astronomy had developed in major ways from the 16th Century onwards with consequences for the imagination to which some Romantic poets (Wordsworth, Blake, Keats) were hostile. Chronologically, Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* had come between the Romantic period and Hardy.

Before Darwin, some Romantic poetry presents a Nature that is fundamentally benign, though other visions can be voiced. For example, in "To J.H. Reynolds", Keats pictures himself sitting by the seashore:

but I saw

Too far into the sea, where every maw

The greater on the less feeds evermore. -

But I saw too distinct into the core

Of an eternal fierce destruction,

And so from happiness I far was gone

The poem shows the violence of a world where even pretty robins are destructive, in this fierce and savage view of nature. The Romantic poets attempted to explore an affinity between the natural world and the human spirit and mind. Wordsworth believed that the world was good and that we are all cared for. However, he tells us in the *Prelude* that he grew up with a fear and love of nature. *Tintern Abbey* is a poem of doubt and struggle, he says "If this/Be but a vain belief", stressing the "If", because he is asking what if his belief is not true after all. As the poem develops, he links religion and nature together, which gives assurance to his sister, Dorothy:

My dear, dear Sister! And this prayer I make,

Knowing that Nature never did betray

The heart that loved her

In "Frost at Midnight", Coleridge travels back in time and an identity is established between his own childhood and his son's. He prays that, unlike his own lonely and isolated childhood, his boy shall live in a world of nature, "like a breeze". Instead of studying Latin, as Coleridge did, his child will study God's language of nature "lovely shapes and sounds". Latin is an ancient language, but in the poem's last stanza summers alternate with winters to suggest a natural language that is more renewing and everlasting. Coleridge wants an eternal

language to identify with, such as nature's crags and cloud, which reminds us of Wordsworth's natural images.

Wordsworth's nature is not fundamentally alien or hostile to man - so he differs radically from Hardy. In *Tess*, Hardy intrudes on the narrative to comment "Some people would like to know whence the poet...gets his authority for speaking of "Nature's holy plan".[12] The coming together of machinery made by man and the natural environment can be seen in "The Convergence of the Twain". The poem describes the sinking of the Titanic and illustrates the unthinking, uncaring force that draws the two objects (a ship and an iceberg) together with such tragic consequences:

Alien they seemed to be:

No mortal eye could see

The intimate welding of their later history,

Or sign that they were bent

By paths coincident

On being anon twin halves of one august event

Hardy did not agree that man and nature are compatible, developing the doubts of *In Memoriam*, where Tennyson is often questioning:

Are God and Nature then at strife

That Nature lends such evil dreams?

So careful of the type she seems,

So careless of the single life

Tennyson's images of nature do not suggest that it is God who is in control, "Nature, red in tooth and claw". Notice, also, the similarity of the word "type" to Darwin's word "species". Hardy finds that nature is not only the beautiful place that most of the Romantics describe, but also a world of floods, destruction and disease. "The Convergence of the Twain" is a sombre reflection on man's arrogance; we are prone to flatter ourselves and we become resentful when proved wrong. Man exists in a universe that takes no heed of individual suffering. It is the "last of the optimists", we are told in *Jude the Obscure*, who think "How the world is made for each of us";[13] or, as in *Two on a Tower* where "nothing is made for man".[14]

In the introduction to the Penguin edition of *On the Origin of Species*, J.W. Burrows writes "Darwin seemed to have cut the emotional ties between man and nature...Nature, according to Darwin, was the product of blind chance and a blind struggle, and man a lonely, intelligent mutation, scrambling with the brutes for his subsistence".[15] Here we can draw a comparison to Hardy's view that:

Nature seems to have moods in other than a poetical sense: moods literally and really - predilections for certain deeds at certain times, without any apparent law to govern or season to account for them. They read her as a person with a curious temper. Thus: she does not scatter kindnesses and cruelties alternately, impartially or in order...but heartless severities or overwhelming kindnesses in lawless caprice.[16]

Schopenhauer, in *Studies in Pessimism*, believed that Christianity has separated humans from the animal world. He qualifies this by pointing out that we give no thought to conducting experiments on animals, because they are merely "*things*".[17] Hardy noted this in the poem, "Drinking Song", "Next this strange message Darwin brings...We all are one with creeping things". To talk about man in the same terms as animals is difficult to come to terms with as it implies man is not special at all, merely another animal battling with nature for existence. In *The Woodlanders*, this is extended even to the vegetable kingdom where the trees are competing for dominance, "wrestling for existence, their branches disfigured with wounds resulting from their mutual rubbings and blows".[18] It is the same for all the wildlife, "Owls that had been catching mice in the outhouses, rabbits that had been eating the winter-greens in the gardens, and stoats that had been sucking the blood of the rabbits".[19]

Geology, astronomy and the life sciences meant that science gave a new way of reading the past. Before Darwin, estimates had been made on how old the earth is. Archbishop Ussher, in the 17th century, said it was created at 9.00 a.m. on October 26, 4004 BC. Genesis was disputed because the age of the earth was scientifically proven not have been as recent as 4004 B.C. In the 18th Century, the Frenchman Bouffant said he could measure it by heat loss and put it at 75,000 years old. Darwin, with the scientific advances in the period, developed these figures by saying that it was four hundred million years old. No longer could the world be measurable in human terms. The vastness of the world and universe is explored in *Two on a Tower*. Viviette warns Swithin "I think astronomy is a bad study for you. It makes you feel human insignificance too plainly".[20] There is a contrast between the universe and the tower, where there is a sense of confinement and lack of space. When away from the tower, Swithin

can travel the vast world and easily lose contact with Viviette. She is like the North star to him, sinking "lower and lower": she is drawing apart from him as her happiness sinks. They become just two stars in a universe of billions of stars. They do not concentrate enough on what is under the vast sky: their own lives.

The panoramic technique that Hardy sometimes uses makes his characters seem insignificant. Tess is like a "fly on a billiard-table of indefinite length, and of no more consequence to the surroundings than that fly", giving her presence a diminishing impact when mapped onto the Wessex landscape.[21] Hardy contrasts the natural image of a fly to a billiard table to show how incompatible they are - there is no reason for them to blend together.

The beginning of Chapter 28 in *Far From the Madding Crowd* starts with a large landscape spanning a mile. The panoramic technique directs us towards Sergeant Troy, as seen through the eyes of Bathsheba who "saw a dim spot of artificial red moving round the shoulder of the rise. It disappeared on the other side".[22] The "dim spot" is Troy who seems unnatural on the landscape. The dimness contrasts with the sun, which is described as a "bristling ball of gold in the west"; 'bristling' is such a charged word that it exposes Troy's artificiality in his surroundings. It acts as a distancing technique: it is not Troy that is in focus, but the landscape.

By contrast, Giles Winterbourne blends into the wood and becomes a "dark grey spot",[23] in the same way as Clym when he works on the land as a furze cutter, he is "inwoven"[24] and inseparable from Egdon Heath. We have many natural images of Clym working alongside

the natural images of wildlife as he becomes unrecognisable now as the ambitious Paris man that he used to be. Clym is described as, "This man from Paris...was a brown spot in the midst of an expanse of olive-green gorse, and nothing more".[25] All he is, in comparison with the surroundings, is an unimportant and insignificant spot. As we close in, we see the importance of the characters' lives, just as we focus on Knight on the cliff-face after going back through thousands of years of history. Tess becomes "no insignificant creature to toy with and dismiss; but a woman living her precious life".[26]

In the 'sword demonstrating' scene in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Hardy wonderfully contrasts the differences between the natural Bathsheba and the unnatural Troy. He attempts to seduce her in this sexually charged scene - his sword is an obvious symbol. It is an attack on Bathsheba's freedom of movement, just as his spurs had previously "hitched" and "entangled"[27] onto her skirt, as if to trap her. Troy uses Bathsheba's farming words to appeal to her, but he only understands them in a destructive way, "Cut two, as if you were hedging - so. Three, as if you were reaping - so. Four, as if you were threshing - in that way".[28] He does not understand the organic and its undestructive associations. The caterpillar, which crawls on Bathsheba's breast, shows an affinity between the two, yet Troy dominates by killing the creature.

I would like to take a look at *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and *The Return of the Native*, where nature can be seen as awesome and powerful, and where nature and man are sometimes seen in a hostile relationship together. When Knight is clinging onto the cliff face in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, we can see a man struggling with nature for his life. Hardy takes great care to emphasise the power of nature: he says of the wind, "an inverted cascade is there - as perfect

as Niagara Falls - but rising instead of falling, and air instead of water".[29] Then there are numerous references to the height of the cliff so we can appreciate its vastness, for example "six hundred and fifty" feet. There follows a paragraph that lists what the cliff is bigger than, "three times the height...a hundred feet higher...just double the height".[30] The *Return of the Native* begins with a chapter describing Egdon Heath. Emphasis is given to the size of the heath. The difference between the heath and the sky on the horizon does not matter, they are both part of the natural universe and make man feel tiny in comparison.

Knight knows that there is an upward blowing wind, and throws a stone over the edge to demonstrate its power. The wind is responsible for blowing his hat away, but this should be no surprise because there has always been such a strong wind there. Knight cannot blame it as a misfortune. Nature, then, is not tricking him in any way, so when the storm does come it does not seem to be contrived and unexpected. Similarly, it is no freak act that the rain should be so hostile on a summer's day towards him, making his attempts to climb over the muddy slope futile. Knight has previously noted that the rain is blowing over in his direction. It is just how we perceive the experience, as the narrator explains, our mood determines how we look at something. The sea would have been to others a "deep natural blue", but to Knight it is "distinctly black".[31]

We cannot help but compare this scene to the *Poems of 1912-13*, where Hardy sees his wife Emma, disappear with time into the past. Like Knight, who stares at the fossil to remind him of his own significance, Emma does not become insignificant because of the times that she and Hardy had, which mattered so much to them:

Measurement of life should be proportioned rather to the intensity of the experience therein contained than to its actual length. Their glance, but a moment chronologically, was a season in their history.[32]

Hardy looked back on this novel when his wife died because it reminded him that it is the quality of time they had together which is more important. The novel suggests that love conquers over time - as in the *Poems of 1912-13*, where Hardy finds the same consolation, "It filled but a minute. But was there ever/A time of such quality" ("At Castle Boterel").

The title of the first chapter of *The Return of the Native* is "A face on which time makes but little impression". In the poem, "Where the Picnic Was", Hardy explains that some things remain the same - the sea is eternal - but in comparison man is transient. Egdon Heath seems to control time as the labourers finish work when the heath darkens. It has been around a lot longer than the creation of man and will remain long after man has gone too. It "gave ballast to the mind adrift on change, and harassed by the irrepressible New":[33] the new will come and go, yet the heath will remain the same. From this description we close in on the white road to see what happens when man comes onto the scene "Hand in Hand with Trouble".[34] The "Storm was its lover and the wind its friend"[35] suggests that the heath is setting up the scene for a tragedy, as Shakespeare does in *King Lear*. The tragic potential of the opening chapter has been fulfilled at the end where "It was a night which led the traveller's thoughts instinctively to dwell on nocturnal scenes of disaster in the chronicles of the world".[36]

An important sentence in *The Return of the Native*, tells us what can happen when character and environment, collide. Eustacia calls it "the cruelty of putting me into this ill-conceived world! I was capable of much; but I have been injured and blighted and crushed by things!"[37] Eustacia does not fit in with her environment, and it is the heath that eventually kills her. Before Eustacia leaves the house to escape from the heath, we are told that it will be a stormy night (just as we are prepared for the on-coming weather in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*). The clouds bring darkness and the wind is strong: it is the scene of tragedy that Hardy describes in the opening chapter. Eustacia, like Knight and Elfride, is helplessly suffers from "exposure to weather",[38] without a God to guide or protect her. Knight and Elfride think rationally and it is their quick thinking that gets them out of trouble. It is Elfride who makes the rope out of her clothes to drag Knight up, and it is Knight who cautiously makes sure that she has secured the rope tightly. Eustacia shows the "chaos of her mind and the chaos of the world without",[39] the heath has a "cruel obstructiveness".[40] Earlier, she fails to see its beauty and realises "'Tis my cross, my shame, and will be my death!"[41] Her inability to escape from it prompts her death.

On the other hand, the heath is kind to Clym because he is "so inwoven with the heath in his boyhood that hardly anybody could look upon it without thinking of him".[42] He survives the tragedy because he is in tune with his natural surroundings. Clym knows the heath well, he holds on to the weir's rail so that the wind would not pull him in, whereas Eustacia falls in and drowns. The heath will also protect little Eustacia as it forms "a soft mat" for her, and it is a "soft natural carpet" for Venn's horse.[43] Little Hintock, in *The Woodlanders*, is in an enclosed area but Fitzpiers and Mrs. Charmond are outsiders who do not adapt to the natural setting. Consequently, Mrs. Charmond (who wears a wig made from Marty's natural hair)

becomes lost in the wood and Fitzpiers orders the cutting of the tree that eventually kills Marty's father.

Eustacia feels herself trapped by her environment. Her portrayal can be compared to that of Hedda Gabbler, who has to commit suicide in order to be free of the conventions that repress her. Hedda kills herself because of society's view that a woman should act servile and respectful towards her husband, ignoring all of her interests and desires. Hedda is given her own name in the title of the play (rather than Hedda Tesman) because she wants to maintain her independence. She is trapped throughout the entire play in the room, to symbolise confinement in marriage - the piano is a constant reminder of her happier times.

Hardy often stresses the tensions caused by human life not being satisfied in a world that is incompatible with our desires and the trouble that these inadequacies cause. In *Tess*, this desire is described as "the inherent will to enjoy, and the circumstantial will against enjoyment".[44] In this way, Hardy's world could be considered bleak, as the Godless world is always present in the background of his novels. Schopenhauer wrote that we can never be happy because we shall always have desires, or a "Will". This leads us to having to endure life in the best way that we can, "The never-satisfied wishes, the frustrated efforts, the hopes unmercifully crushed by fate, the unfortunate errors of the whole life, with increasing suffering and death at the end, are always a tragedy".[45] Schopenhauer is more concerned with suffering rather than tragedy, due to our lack of fitting with the world in which we find ourselves, which is a source of tragedy that Hardy is writing about.

D.H. Lawrence talks of characters who "stand alone" in Hardy's novels, breaking conventions in a sudden and unexpected way.[46] Lawrence said that man must go right through with his convictions, Macbeth, for example, does not call it a day half way through the play. There must be a supreme struggle in tragedy, otherwise there would not be a tragedy. A.C. Bradley wrote "If we do not feel at times that the hero is, in some sense, a doomed man...we have failed to receive an essential part of the full tragic effect".[47] A sense of tragic doom is necessary when reading tragedy. In Hardy's last two novels, *Tess* and *Jude*, there is a greater sense of the inevitable right from the start, due, I think, to his increasing pessimism. They deal in harsher attacks on society, and its rules and conventions, more than ever before. The more the characters suffer, the more critical Hardy becomes towards society, bringing a stronger call for meliorism.

We may clarify further whether we have any control over our lives or not by examining a Shakespeare play, *Macbeth*, which deals with this question. Shakespeare deliberately makes the issue ambivalent to discuss free choice and the influences beyond Macbeth's control. For example, in the second Act, Macbeth sees a dagger, and questions whether it is an illusion or delusion. The witches tell Macbeth at the beginning of the play what his fate will be, but we cannot be sure how powerful the witches are. The word "wyrd", from which 'weird' sisters comes is an Anglo-Saxon word meaning fate.

Use of the term 'Fate' gives us the feeling that something has already been planned and cannot be stopped: there are no choices involved. The characters then become "puppets" rather than psychologically interesting and capable of controlling their own decisions, actions and destinies. If the characters are controlled by a Supreme Power, then they hold no

responsibility for the process of meliorism, if it opposes the desires of the gods. Hardy's repetitive use of terms in his novels and poems such as "doomed", the "First Cause", "Immanent Will", "President of the Immortals", "Crass Casualty" fail to make it clear whether his characters are individually responsible or not and therefore, whether they are able to change what happens to them.

We may focus the discussion by looking in a little detail at the restrictions suffered by some figures in Hardy. Jeannette King writes of tragic novels "Although characters move freely within this world, there is the sense of an enclosed arena, offering no escape from the tragic predicament".[48] The amount of control that a character has varies in the Victorian novel, King adds, "The structure of *Adam Bede* suggests that the individual can halt the tragic cycle, preventing the pattern from being repeated".[49] The following passage from *Tess* is interesting in the way that Hardy achieves a sense of restriction and, at the same time, independence and freedom:

Thus the thing began. Had she perceived this meeting's import she might have asked why she was doomed to be seen and coveted that day by the wrong man, and not by some other man, the right and desired one in all respects - as nearly as humanity can supply the right and desired; yet to him who amongst her acquaintance might have approximated to this kind, she was but a transient impression, half forgotten.

In the ill-judged execution of the well-judged plan of things the call seldom produces the comer, the man to love rarely coincides with the hour for loving. Nature does not often say 'See!' to her poor creature at a time when seeing can lead to happy doing; or reply

'Here!' to a body's cry of 'Where?' till the hide-and-seek has become an irksome, outworn game. We may wonder whether at the acme and summit of the human progress these anachronisms will be corrected by a finer intuition, a closer interaction of the social machinery than that which now jolts us round and along; but such completeness is not to be prophesied, or even conceived as possible. Enough that in the present case, as in millions, it was not the two halves of a perfect whole that confronted each other at the perfect moment; a missing counterpart wandered independently about the earth waiting in crass obtuseness till the late time came. Out of which maladroit delay sprang anxieties, disappointments, shocks, catastrophes, and passing-strange destinies.[50]

Angel and Tess are described as "two halves of a perfect whole", but there is no Providence to bring them together and Tess does not have a "guardian angel". We are told that the tragedy could have been avoided if only he (the "right" man) had danced with Tess at the very beginning. In "The Convergence of the Twain", it is "coincidence" that brings the "two halves of a perfect whole" together. But such perfection is rarely "conceived as possible" because events rely on such a vast amount of chance. The word "jolts" complements the word "maladroit", as such a plan cannot be perfected. On the other hand, Angel is "waiting" and acts "independently", which suggests that he does not have to do anything because it is the "social machinery" that starts its cogs in motion to bring about his eventual meeting with Tess. He is powerless in deciding what will happen, giving a sense of man's hopelessness against nature.

In Plato's *Symposium* it is the gods who are in control. Aristophanes says that men are halves of original wholes, which were of three sexes - male, female and hermaphrodite - who attacked the gods. The gods begin to plan the punishment, when Zeus has an idea "I will cut each of them in two; in this way they will be weaker, and at the same time more profitable to us by being more numerous...If there is any sign of wantonness in them after that, and they will not be quiet, I will bisect them again". Plato talks about the desire for love and how the two halves wander around in the state of longing until the two halves meet. Plato asks:

suppose Hephaeston with his tools were to visit them as they lie together, and stand over them and ask: "What is it, mortals, that you hope to gain from one another?"...Is the object of your desire to be always together as much as possible, and never to be separated from one another day or night? If that is what you want, I am ready to weld yon together, so that, instead of two, yon shall be one flesh; as long as you shall live a common life, and when you die, you shall suffer a common death, and be still one, not two, even in the next world".[51]

In *Tess*, Hardy mentions the "ill-judged execution of the well-judged plan", making it appear that a fate has already been decided by a God or gods; in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy speaks of the "ingenious machinery contrived by the Gods for reducing human possibilities of amelioration to a minimum".[52] The gods' playing with Tess becomes an "outworn game",[53] which is linked to "ended his sport with Tess"[54] later in the novel, as in *King Lear*, where "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods;/They kill us for their sport".[55] Throughout the novel there are references to sport, as if Tess is being hunted down; she is "on a billiard-table",[56] the "President of the Immortals" is playing a game with her. It seems cruel

to think that there is no real purpose, but only a way for the gods to pass time in their boredom. Hardy uses the word "outworn" to suggest it is time for change, and change must be driven forward by "human progress", making society more responsible for what happens.[57]

Rather than the Fatalism the characters often refer to, Hardy refers to a concept - from now on we shall call it the "First Cause". F. B. Pinion describes it as "one of the elements of chance that combine with circumstance to determine fate".[58] If we examine the issues in more general terms, Hardy's "First Cause" cannot be compatible with Fate, otherwise there would be a paradox: chance cannot exist if something has already been determined. Shakespeare in *Macbeth* deals with this question. Macbeth says that "If chance will have me king, why chance may crown me/Without my stir";[59] in other words, he does not need to act if Fate has already decided to make him a king. It is interesting that he uses the word "chance", which is not determined as Fate is, making the distinction between chance and Fate ambiguous.

If Hardy's "First Cause" relies on chance, it would be worth while examining how chance works, in the various ways, in the novels. On one hand, chance is responsible for the outcome of events, just as Desdemona's handkerchief is pivotal in tragically releasing Othello's jealousy. *Tess* is tragic because Tess's suffering could have easily been avoided if Parson Tringham had not told Tess's father about his ancestry; if Angel had only danced with her at the beginning; in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, if Fanny Robins had turned up at the right church; and if Henchard, in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, had not lost his temper. On the other hand, chance has a minor role. We may ask what would have happened if Giles had not refused to move his wagon for Mrs. Charmond's carriage in *The Woodlanders*. But it is not

chance that is working here because it is the agent who is responsible for Giles' eviction, not Mrs. Charmond, who does not realise what has happened to Giles.

There is sometimes a reason behind chance. The more we examine it, the more we can explain it as something more than coincidence. Elfride relies on a horse to decide the direction that she will take, which will also decide whether she will marry or not. Morrell questions whether it is chance that decides the direction she take.[60] She is not happy with her first choice, so she leaves it to her horse to decide. She is content with the horse's decision, so she accepts it. She could have easily stopped the horse and turned to go the other way. What the episode also achieves is, it gives us the impression that the horse's action is independent and that there is no fateful power making decisions or forcing her actions. The horse heads in one direction for one reason only, it thinks there is food there. Morrell writes:

Every choice, including a choice not to choose, is one's own choice...One may ask for advice; but in choosing whom to ask, one has already chosen what kind of advice one wants...whether one ought to take the advice or to ignore it. It is still, in fact, one's own choice.[61]

The weather prediction episode, in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, demonstrates how Henchard's character, and nothing else, is responsible for what happens to him. He tries to share the responsibility by blaming Jopp for not disagreeing or stopping him, but it is entirely Henchard's decision.

It is the same with Tess and the confession that she posts underneath Angel's door. The coincidence is built up and tension is created and handled very well. We share Tess's experiences and ask whether or not she will confess to Angel - Hardy keeps us guessing all the time. The simple reason for the confusion is the lack of communication that the letter is associated with. In *The Return of the Native*, it is because Clym and Eustacia have fallen out that Clym has to write to his wife, rather than resolving their disagreement in a more effective way. Chance cannot be blamed for the eventual tragedy because we are told that even if Eustacia had received Clym's letter earlier it would have had no effect on her decision to leave, "Even the receipt of Clym's letter would not have stopped her now".[62] Notice the crucial stress on 'now', which shows her strong desire to escape from the heath. She realises that she could not be happy living on the heath, especially as Clym has given up on his ambitions.

Chance cannot be blamed because Tess still has time, before the marriage, to tell Angel the truth. It is because of her honesty that she feels she has to tell him about her past, and it is her anxiety at his reaction that lead her to write the note and pass it on indirectly. Mrs. Durbeyfield's prediction, towards the beginning of *Tess*, believes that fate will bring Tess and Alec together in wedlock. She says "I tried her fate in the *Fortune-Teller*, and it brought out that very thing".[63] But it cannot work out in this way, because it is not in Tess's character to love in such a calculated way. Tess is not worldly wise and it is her ignorance of men that leads Alec to seduce her easily. Her beauty is a "fault" because it will cause her many problems. It is because of her face that Alec, who melodramatically calls her "my Beauty",[64] is attracted to her.

Hardy intrudes into the narrative of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* to tell us that "Character is Fate":[65] it is character more than chance that drives the plot forward. Animal images are used to describe Henchard, his diplomacy is "as wrongheaded as a buffalo's",[66] he is "tigerish"[67] and a "netted lion".[68] His temper and headstrong character are demonstrated to us from the beginning when he sells his wife in a fit of temper that comes out of a deep-seated frustration. Henchard sells the corn too quickly, "recklessly"[69] in Farfrae's opinion, because "the momentum of his character knew no patience".[70] The irony is that Henchard was right all the time when he predicted a "disastrous garnering".[71]

Henchard and Farfrae are opposites: Farfrae takes a more modern and scientific approach - we first see him rejuvenating Henchard's corn. This impresses Henchard who admits "I am bad at science, Farfrae...You are just the reverse - I can see that. I have been looking for such as you these two year".[72] Under Farfrae, Henchard's business improves. Deals made by word and memory, and measurements made by the length of an arm, are replaced with written agreements, accounts and recorded details. It is Henchard's irrational jealousy that begins a conflict that distances himself from Farfrae. When Henchard acts foolishly towards Abel Whittle, who always arrives late for work, we begin to side with the more reasonable Farfrae. Farfrae, in the narrative, becomes the more familiar "Donald".[73]

Henchard, on his own, cannot compete with Farfrae, and he becomes blind to the mistakes he is making. For example, Elizabeth-Jane can see that Farfrae is in love with Lucetta, whilst Henchard only has suspicions. She can also see that Jopp is a bad choice, but Henchard refuses to listen to her. Jopp has a grudge against Farfrae, he is more interested in revenge rather than fair play to make the business profitable. He gets the job partly because he knows

about Henchard's past in Jersey. Unfortunately, he does not have the business sense of Farfrae and his standards have dropped since he missed out on the post the first time; "characters deteriorate in time of need", just as Henchard's will.[74]

Henchard's next bad choice is trusting superstition to predict the weather. It is a pivotal episode because from here Henchard's business and standing in the town start to decline on a "turn of the scales".[75] Subsequently, Farfrae begins to do better. Our sympathy goes out to Henchard when the narrator adds to his misfortune by juxtaposing, "Meanwhile Donald Farfrae prospered".[76] Fall, the weather forecaster, is the last resort for information: people are embarrassed to admit that they believe in forecasts. There are similarities between Fall and Henchard: they are both outcasts in society because they are superstitious in a modern society. Fall lives out in the isolated country where it is difficult to get to, the narrator warns that it is a "crooked and miry" way.[77] Later in the novel, Henchard is living in such a place.

Superstition plays a major role for many of Hardy's characters. In his novels, there are many types of superstition. One example is that which is connected with natural phenomena; the comet in *Two on a Tower* is a sign of famine; human life is friendly with nature in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, where the swarming bees are an excellent sign for the community. These examples suggests that nature and man are connected, that nature can help us and to ignore the signs would be foolish - it means that nature is not indifferent or hostile towards the characters. There are also the unnatural phenomena, where the characters are not sure what they are dealing with: Venn is thought to be the devil; Fitzpiers has "sold his soul to the wicked one".[78] Witchcraft is involved in *The Return of the Native*, when Susan Nunsuch stabs Eustacia with a knitting needle to stop her spells. Hardy attacks society's cruelty and

backwardness when Susan Nunsuch burns the wax doll designed to "bring powerlessness, atrophy, and annihilation on any human being against whom it was directed";[79] a tradition that was slowly dying out. Henchard believes "some sinister intelligence" is controlling his life:

Henchard, like all his kind, was superstitious, and he could not help thinking that the concatenation of events this evening had produced was the scheme of some sinister intelligence bent on punishing him. Yet they had developed naturally. If he had not revealed his past history to Elizabeth he would not have searched the drawer for the papers, and so on.[80]

Hardy said, in an interview with William Archer that "scepticism is only skin deep".[81] Henchard says he does not believe in superstition "I don't believe in such power",[82] but like "all his kind" it is something he cannot ignore. We are told in *Jude* that when the saints were upon the earth "devils used to take husbands' forms o' nights, and get women into all sorts of trouble".[83] The dismissal of it as "only a tale" gives the story an air of mystery and puts the idea more firmly in some of the more superstitious characters' minds. Similarly, Mrs. Yeobright says about Eustacia "People say she's a witch, but of course that's absurd".[84]

Scepticism and superstition can lead us on to the charge of unrealism that can be brought against some of Hardy's tragedies. We need to discriminate different kinds of unrealism as we find them in, for example, Hardy, *Jane Eyre*, and *Great Expectations*. Sometimes chance and coincidence do not pass us by as easily as they do in *Jane Eyre*, where chance events are set up gradually so we are more likely to be taken in by the unlikely events. For example, we

are told that Jane's uncle may be rich towards the beginning, so her unexpected inheritance at the end does not lack plausibility. The novel ends happily with the union of Jane and Rochester. Rochester survives the fire that conveniently kills his wife. He is now free to marry Jane, who returns to him after hearing his telepathic message (Jane lives in a house, which she randomly goes to after needing shelter - it happens to belong to her cousin, St John Rivers). If that is not enough, Rochester regains his sight. Hardy is often unconvincing: we still see the meeting in the train, in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, as unrealistic, or the 'misplaced letter' convention happens too frequently for it to go unnoticed - as if Hardy has run out of ideas on how to further the action. Thurley, in *The Psychology of Hardy's Novels*, points out that Hardy tries too hard to make the events meaningful that the "coincidences creak" and that "his intentions are so obvious that they need no comment".[85]

Great Expectations is a fairy-tale novel of rags to riches, where the coincidences pass by us unnoticed, or at least we accept them more because of the kind of novel it is. Dickens often wrote about a lost or rejected child who endures numerous sufferings that the poor of the Victorian period had to face. The child usually discovers the secret of his identity and is rewarded with happiness and prosperity - *Oliver Twist*, *Bleak House*, and *David Copperfield* are all variations of this theme.

The motif of the male Cinderella is at work here, reaching Dickens no doubt via the eighteenth century fiction of Fielding and the earlier nineteenth century fiction of Scott - it goes further back to Shakespeare's romances, Greek Romances and Greek New Comedy. Pip and Magwitch (a magician and witch rolled into one) both use a powerful sense of fantasy and imagination. Magwitch dreams of giving Pip everything that he never had. The irony is

that Pip is not a prince, his world does not live up to its expectations and he does not enjoy its trappings. Pip creates his own fairytale world after he visits Miss Haversham's house. At the forge, they believe Pip's story because they want to - Satis House is another world to theirs. Other fairytale characters include Estella the princess; Miss Haversham the fairy godmother (who turns out to be a witch); Magwitch the ogre (but we discover he is really a gentleman); Clara the fairy; and the two giants Joe and Orlick.

In Hardy, it is not such fairy-tale patterns but the folk-fatalistic patterns of ballad that underlie many of his novels. Jean Brooks writes:

The situations that produce tragedy are ballad situations: family tensions, the clash of irreconcilable passions, the inconvenient return and the long-kept secret, social barriers, unpredictable accidents[86]

"The Bride-Night Fire" and "The Trampwoman's Tragedy" are ballads where love, jealously, love-triangles and violent deaths are the common themes. After *Tess* was written, Hardy gave a definition of tragedy, "The best tragedy - the highest tragedy in short - is that of the WORTHY encompassed by the INEVITABLE".[87] In "The Trampwoman's Tragedy", "O deadly day" foretells the tragic events that are about to happen, brought about by a misunderstanding with the trampwoman's lover. It results in his execution, her friend's murder and a child that is "dead-born". Like many of the characters in the novels, the trampwoman - who does not understand her lover's jealousy - does not deserve the consequences of her mistake. Similarly, Tess, Eustacia and Henchard do not deserve the disproportionate punishments they have to endure; as Tess says "Once victim, always victim".[88] "The Trampwoman's Tragedy", like *Tess*, has a triangle of lovers where both

stories end with death. Hardy makes it clear that Tess is faultless by calling her a "pure" woman. Davidson writes "Tess of the d'Urbervilles, whatever else she may be, is once more the deserted maiden who finally murders her seducer with a knife in the effective ballad way".[89]

We feel that Hardy's tragic characters are doomed because of the inevitability that tragedy brings. We dealt with endings in the last chapter, in this chapter I will look at the beginnings of Hardy's tragedies to examine the question of inevitability. T.S. Eliot wrote "In my beginning is my end".[90] Throughout the history of tragedy we can find examples of the end result being predicted from the beginning; we know from the sixth line in *Romeo and Juliet* the two lovers will die:

A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;

Whose unadventur'd piteous overthrows

Doth with their death bury their parents' strife[91]

Hardy often gives us a few signs of what is to come, early in his novels. In *Tess*, the cock crowing is a Dorset superstition that bodes sickness or death; the rose that Alec gives Tess pricks her and makes her bleed, which according to superstition is an omen that bad will come to Tess; at Prince's burial, Tess's "face was dry and pale, as though she regarded herself in the light of a murderess";[92] Prince's blood stains Tess's white frock and she gets blood on her hand, at the end of the novel, the white ceiling of the guest house is stained with Alec's blood and Tess's hands are stained with her murderous deed.

The following passage may be interesting to us because it shows why Tess is destined to suffer. It is where Tess's tragedy really begins: with her first meeting with Alec:

He watched her pretty and unconscious munching through the skeins of smoke that pervaded the tent, and Tess Durbeyfield did not divine, as she innocently looked down at the roses in her bosom, that there behind the blue narcotic haze was potentially the 'tragic mischief' of her drama - one who stood fair to be the blood-red ray in the spectrum of her young life. She had an attribute which amounted to a disadvantage just now; and it was this that caused Alec d'Urberville's eyes to rivet themselves upon her. It was a luxuriance of aspect, a fulness of growth, which made her appear more of a woman than she really was. She had inherited the feature from her mother without the quality it denoted. It had troubled her mind occasionally, till her companions had said that it was a fault which time would cure.[93]

Alec obscures Tess's vision, like the mist over Christminster, through a screen of smoke. The "haze" is similar to the "scoff" that is kicked up in the barn, shortly before the seduction scene, or the fog during the seduction. It seems as if Tess's vision is not allowed to be perceptive. She "innocently" looked down at the roses, which contrast with Alec's intentions: she is there to claim kin and he is to take advantage and trick her. His first trick is to make Tess believe that he is a d'Urberville and not a Stoke. To Alec, Tess is "half forgotten" and he laughs at her naiveté at the end of the chapter. We are left with the impression that he does not care about Tess and that the future with him will only lead to unhappiness. It can only get worse: "Out of the frying pan into the fire",[94] one character

comments as Tess escapes her rowdy companions by jumping on the horse with Alec, who will then seduce her.

In the last two major novels, heredity becomes a central theme, unlike any of the previous novels where it is briefly referred to: Boldwood's uncle is rumoured to have been mentally unstable. In *Jude*, according to Aunt Drusilla, because something "never was", it must follow that it "never will be".[95] Drusilla warns Jude not to marry because of the bad luck that the family seem to have. Similarly, in *Tess*, Mrs. Durbeyfield's "'It was [past] to be [future]"[96] makes it appear that the past and the future are bound to together to form the inevitable. It gives us the feeling that Tess and Jude are trapped in the past.

We are told that Jude is "destined to suffer"; he "was the sort of man who was born to ache a good deal before the fall of the curtain upon his unnecessary life should signify that all was well with him again".[97] He will go through unnecessary pain, which makes us question whether it is, or is not, better not to have been born at all to avoid this suffering. Jude feels as if he is unwanted in Marygreen and feels a burden to his Aunt Drusilla. He calls the land he works on "ugly". The fresh lines of the field wipe out its history to give a sense of time moving on, yet underneath the history can be found, but Jude is unable to see it. We are given descriptions of a past ordinary and happy country life of "sun", "love", and "seeds", which give the impression of growth. Now the field is "ugly" and barren. To Jude the field represents a difficult existence; the field "echoed" the sound of Jude being punished for neglecting his duty, which contrasts the "echoes of songs" of the past.[98]

The farmer, who embodies the strict conventions of society, punishes Jude for showing kindness. Hardy is being ironical when he points out that the new church is the building to which the farmer "subscribed, to testify his love for God and man".[99] It is also where the sound of the farmer beating Jude appears to come from. Hardy points out the contradiction of society's beliefs, that one man, "God's gardener",[100] can be kind, yet another who is religious is taught to be cruel. Angel shows the hypocrisy of his religious beliefs in his unfair rejection of Tess, because she is not pure: "the man be guiltless; but the woman shall bear her iniquity", as Hardy puts it in *Jude*.[101]

Jude sympathises with the birds, because "They seemed, like himself, to be living in a world which did not want them".[102] Animals are often similarly unwanted and neglected in the tragic novels and are comparable to the plight of the main characters. Tess strangles the pheasants that, like her, have been hunted down. She cannot bear to see them in so much pain, so she puts them out of their misery. There are other similar incidents in *Jude*: Jude is careful not to crush any worms on his way home, to show that he is sympathetic to living creatures who are perhaps trodden on by mankind; he wants to put the pig to a quick and painless death; Sue wants to free the pigeon and both of them want to free the rabbit that is caught in a trap. Henchard's present to Elizabeth-Jane is a caged bird. The bird, like Henchard, is trapped in cage (as Henchard is trapped in his arena once the tragedy has begun), neglected and left to die. Phillotson, in a humane act, sets Sue free to be with Jude. Some, such as the farmer, might call it a "weakness of character" and we ask whether it is a bad thing to care for others.[103] It is this "weakness" that makes Jude different from the rest of society.

Jude cannot see that Christminster is "not for such as you" and that he and Sue will only become martyrs in the city.[104] In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian is trying to escape from the "City of Destruction" to the Celestial City, a place that he describes with hope and optimism:

There shall be no more crying, nor sorrow; for he that is owner of the place will wipe all tears from our eyes...There we shall be with Seraphims, and Cherubim, creatures that will dazzle your eyes to look on them. There also you shall meet with thousands, and ten thousands that have gone on before us to that place; none of them are hurtful, but loving, and holy[105]

This is what Jude believes that Christminster will be like and he talks about it with equal enthusiasm: "Where is this beautiful city, aunt - this place where Mr. Phillotson is gone to?"[106] this "heavenly Jerusalem".[107] Phillotson is a good example of someone who has previously gone to "that place", but, as we find out, has not had the desired experience and returns to Marygreen. Christminster is in the direction of the field where Jude is treated cruelly. The field is a kind of Slough of Despond for those living in Marygreen. The villagers know little about Christminster and have little contact with it. The way there is "neglected and overgrown" and it is a "long and tedious ascent" followed by a "bleak open down".[108] It will be a tough journey.

Jude's "heavenly Jerusalem" may seem unearthly when he prays and the mist, as if by some miracle, clears up in front of him. Again, it is another example of how you look at something: we are told that it was already "waning" a little, so the fact that Jude prays is

irrelevant.[109] Jude is being tricked throughout the novel; the dead languages are a "shabby trick"; Arabella tricks him into marriage, twice; her dimples and hair, which Jude thinks are real, are not. In this way, Jude's hopes are continually being raised, as they are when the sun tempts him towards Christminster by reflecting the city into his eyes. It is not a clear view that he is getting, it is a "vague city became veiled in mist", "faintly", or perhaps "miraged".[110] Hardy may have had in mind Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, where Camelot is described as a magical city:

So, when their feet were planted on the plain
That broadened toward the base of Camelot,
Far off they saw the silver-misty morn
Rolling her smoke about the Royal mount,
That rose between the forest and the field.
At times the summit of the high city flashed;
At times the spires and turrets half-way down
Pricked through the mist; at times the great gate
shone
Only, that opened on the field below;
Anon, the whole fair city had disappeared[111]

In *Jude*, the view soon loses its shine and goes out quickly, like "extinguished candles",[112] before Jude can get a chance to grasp it or to see what Christminster is really like. It is no longer the "city of light",[113] yet Jude wants it more than ever. The "Black heaven" is put into the background, while a holy halo irradiates the city to make it appear closer and more

accessible. Jude can even feel the wind that has blown over, giving him a physical contact between him and the city. The passing carter puts it into a rational perspective, "Yes. There do seem a spot a bit brighter in the nor'east".[114]

In the last sentence of the chapter, Jude says about university life "It would just suit me".[115] Such a simple and short statement makes us think that it will not be like that at all. Jude calls Christminster "a castle",[116] but it an unfortunate use of the word as a castle is designed as a defence and not easily accessible to outsiders. Ironically, he helps to keep up its defence by restoring it in his role as a stonemason, symbolically suggesting that Jude should remain in this line of work (as the Dean suggests) and not be an academic. Although "the tree of knowledge"[117] grows there, we ask ourselves of its value as it does not listen or adapt itself to modern society and its people, such as Jude. We wonder why Jude is so determined, and prepared to endure, in order to enter a university that is hostile towards him. It is Jude that has something to teach society: human kindness. Jude sees ghosts of great men who have studied at the university, but it needs to create great men of the future rather than being stuck in the past. Jude would be living in the past if he accepted a place there.

Although Jude shows determination to go to university, he soon discovers that he has to give up. When Arabella throws the pistle it is symbolic of Jude's changing priorities. When it hits him, he is thinking about Christminster and when he looks up it is Arabella who attracts his attention. When Jude does finally make it into Christminster, he discovers that he will never be able to afford a university education. Instead, he finds work as a stonemason and turns to alcohol. His willingness to surrender is shown when he is asked to leave his church contract restoring the Ten Commandments. Rumours about Jude and Sue make him

an unsuitable person to do such work. Instead of putting up a fight, he leaves peacefully. Later he resigns from the Artizans' Society. Jude and Sue have to move about to places where they are not known.

T.H. Huxley may provide a context for this discussion when, linking the blameless Oedipus with Hamlet, he speaks of "the sempiternal attraction of the latter" as "the appeal to deepest experience of that history of a no less blameless dreamer, dragged, in spite of himself, into a world out of joint; involved in a tangle of crime and misery".[118] This view of Hamlet has affinities with Hardy's Jude; Sue says "Joseph the dreamer of dreams...O my poor friend and comrade, you'll suffer yet".[119] Rather than facing the struggle and fighting it, in *Tess* and *Jude*, Hardy seems to be suggesting that not to have been born is best. Father Time hears how society has hunted his parents down, so he kills himself and the other children to end all of their troubles "It would be better to be out o' the world than in it, wouldn't it?"[120] Towards the end of the novel, the inevitable suffering has happened. When Jude dies, his window is left open and he can hear the festival's church bells and organ music, it is a pleasant and warm day. Reflecting on his "unnecessary life", he quotes Job who said, "*Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived*".[121] Job, according to Huxley, "takes refuge in silence and submission".[122] Jude continues to quote Job to express how we should relieve suffering, "Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it."[123]

Tess manages to shut society out by keeping the shutter closed when she and Angel have their week of happiness at Bramshurst Court. The shutters keep the outside from coming in, even the sun's light and warmth. Tess's ultimate relief will come with her imminent

darkness: death. Leaving the house means abandoning their happiness and, again, having to face a world that has tortured Tess; "All is trouble outside" she says.[124] The caretaker sees how happy and content they look and leaves them alone. In the scene from Donne's *Sun Rising*, the lovers scorn the "Busy old fool, unruly sun...Thou, sun, art half as happy as we". The scene in *Tess* is an escapist idyll, but, unlike *Sun Rising*, the whole episode is soaked in the sense of doom, which makes it fundamentally opposed in tone to Donne's poem because of the delights of the outside world. We can contrast the setting to Tess's life at Talbothays:

> **It was a typical summer evening in June, the atmosphere being in such delicate equilibrium and so transmissive that inanimate objects seemed endowed with two or three senses, if not five. There was no distinction between the near and the far, and an auditor felt close to everything within the horizon. The soundlessness impressed her as a positive entity rather than as the mere negation of noise.** [125]

Arthur Miller describes a tragic hero as having an "unwillingness to remain passive".[126] Tess's tragedy is brought about by the interaction between the passivity that she shows towards society and her sudden and violent actions when she rebels from it. The moments when she christens her child and walks away from Alec are when she demonstrates her own will and strength. It is also hinted that she will have blood on her murderous hands later in the novel: when she is soaked in her horse's blood, when Alec's rose cuts her and when she lashes out at Alec causing him to bleed.

Whenever Tess is in trouble she appears to be sleepy as if she does not want to face the cruel realities of life. There are different episodes of sleep, where she is weary, sleepy,

exhausted and when Angel is sleepwalking. Tess's tiredness causes the accident when she drives Prince to the market after saying that we live on a blighted star. Prince is killed by a "pointed shaft", linking it symbolically with Alec's seduction of Tess, who falls asleep after her ordeal.[127] Alec takes advantage of her weariness, as he does with her exhaustion caused from working at the threshing machine. At Flintcomb-Ash, Hardy skilfully describes Tess's torture at working in such a dreadful place. Tess is in a dream-like state remembering her happy times at Talbothays – the contrast is striking. At The Chase, "Darkness and silence ruled everywhere around. Above them rose the primaeval yews and oaks of The Chase".[128] Pliny wrote that the "Druids choose oak-woods for their sacred groves...After due preparations have been made for a sacrifice and a feast under the tree",[129] which links the scene to the sacrificial image of the sleeping Tess at Stonehenge, where she is ready to die; showing a willingness to take whatever may come, as she does when she lies passively in Angel's arms when he sleepwalks even though it could kill them both.

Tess passively agrees to her mother's wish to claim kin, although it sounds so cold and calculating to her. When she arrives, she lets Alec feed her strawberries, although she does not feel comfortable with him. In the seduction scene Tess "passively sat down"[130] and let Alec take control. In *Tess* and *Jude*, Hardy seems to pick on the characters who do not put up a fight, the long and drawn out endurance is painful to watch and it makes the novels more pessimistic. Stevie Smith wrote:

But to witness suffering and not be able to help? How will our little one react to that? You so much wish to alleviate. That is practical positive and desirable. You cannot. You cannot imagine yourself in the sufferer's place. Already this begins to be

dangerous. The livelier your imagination the greater your pity. And the greater your fear. This is already dangerous.[131]

If we look back to *Far From the Madding Crowd*, we can see an early example of a character who experiences nothing but unrelieved suffering and little joy: Fanny Robin. She is an early equivalent to Tess and Jude in that respect. *Tess* and *Jude* are different from the other novels because we concentrate on one or two characters who endure throughout the novels in unrelieved suffering. They endure to the end, making the novels almost unbearable to read. The difference is that Fanny's appearances in *Far From the Madding Crowd* are not too frequent. By the last third of the novel her suffering is over because she is dead and away from the uncaring society.

The chapter "On a Casterbridge Highway" is painfully slow and Fanny's suffering is drawn out. Her endurance and determination are remarkable. Tess's journey to seek help from Angel's parents only lasts for a couple of paragraphs whereas Fanny's journey takes a whole chapter. The distance is frequently emphasised, "Less than a mile!",[132] but Fanny copes with the situation with a positive attitude - she breaks down the journey, taking each milestone at a time. The milestones are marked out in the narrative for our benefit too. It slows down the journey, prolongs, and dwells on, the agony as we count the posts ahead that Fanny still has to pass:

She passed five more.

'It is only five further.'

She passed five more.

'But it is five further'

She passed them.[133]

Yet even this system works to her disadvantage when she calculates the number of steps in a mile that she still has to travel, "A hundred times six, six hundred. Seventeen times that. O pity me, Lord!"[134] Usually what is a relatively short distance becomes to her almost like starting over again. The shade mocks her slowness as the sun makes it glide effortlessly past her crawling body. Her suffering is still not over: next comes the stone bridge on the outskirts of Casterbridge and then finally the walk to the union door.

It is sometimes difficult to see the point in Hardy's novels. Fanny's journey, for example, becomes pointless because she, and her child, do not survive it. We ask ourselves whether we needed to read about her continuous torment. Victor Hugo wrote in his Preface to *Les Misérables*, "so long as ignorance and misery remain on earth, books like this cannot be useless". Hardy is showing us how unfair society is to people who are too modern to accept its conventions. By examining Jude and Sue's suffering Hardy shows us why things need to change in the future.

Victor Hugo believed that the French Revolution may have cause suffering for the people, but it will eventually advance and improve society. Hardy similarly believed that the future will be less horrific because lessons will have been learnt from previous experiences. It is not true to believe that Hardy disliked change. Although he fondly remembers his childhood, growing up near Dorchester, he is not so naive as not to see change as inevitable and believes we must modify ourselves along with it: "Times have changed from the times they used to

be", says Mail in *Under the Greenwood Tree.*[135] The rustics discuss Maybold who is an outsider coming into the community to change the lifestyle that they are used to. The tranter understands that they have to accept the new situation. Maybold makes a genuine point that the old is not necessarily bad, it is just that the new is better.

We can clearly see a development of society improving in the novels. Talbothays, in *Tess*, is next to a railway and prospers because of it. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Farfrae is good for the community because he offers secure employment and his scientific methods improve the running of his business. In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, believing in hope pays off for Oak. In *The Woodlanders* there are new divorce laws. Unfortunately, they do not help Grace, because she has apparently not suffered enough - a sign that Hardy is asking for more social improvement. Jude says that they are making divorce easier for people who want to separate. Sue believes that "In fifty, ay, twenty years, the descendants of these two will act and feel worse than we. They will see weltering humanity still more vividly than we do now".[136] Mrs. Edlin tells "Fifty-five years ago, come Fall, since my man and I married! Times have changed since then",[137] but at least time is changing, and there is a chance of improvement.

Conclusion: After the Novels

Hardy once wrote:

No man's poetry can be truly judged till its last line is written. What is the last line? The death of a poet. And hence there is this quaint consolation to any writer of verse - that it may be imperishable for all that anybody can tell him to the contrary; and that if worthless he can never know it, unless he be a greater adept at self-criticism than poets usually are.[1]

Just as we cannot sum up a novel properly without reading to the end, we cannot discuss Hardy's pessimism without examining the work after the novels until his death in 1928 – in order to get a more overall picture.

In the post-novel poems, there is a noticeable shift from hope to pessimism, due to events in Hardy's life, such as war and his wife's death. Hardy, in his war poetry, was hopeful that people would see how senseless war is. *The Dynasts* ends on an optimistic note as it mentions the melioristic "loving-kindness" that we discussed in the Introduction. In the last scene, the Semichorus I of the Pities says:

Nay; - shall not Its blindness break?
Yea, must not Its heart awake,
Promptly tending
To Its mending

In a genial germing purpose, and for loving-kindness' sake[2]

The Dynasts recreates the sensations and sights of the Napoleonic wars. As a child, Hardy had a fascination for Napoleon from the talk of others and the survival of relics. The element of romance (that can be found in *The Trumpet-Major*), strategy and tactics appealed to Hardy's imagination. In "The Sick Battle-God" (from the *Poems of War* collection), he writes about the battles which were over relatively quickly and very few soldiers were injured:

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.

However, Hardy was doubtful of the common approval to send troops to fight the Boers. As the war turned bloodier, Hardy was realising that his interest in it was turning to revulsion. In *The Dynasts*, the Spirit of Irony stresses how different war is from the Spirit Sinister's romantic vision of war. Likewise, in *War Poems*, the romance of a soldier heading off to fight for his country has disappeared. Hardy saw troops sail from Southampton and he concentrates on the lives of the people left behind. "A Wife in London" is ironically poignant when the wife receives a letter from her husband "Page-full of his hoped return" after she has learnt that he has already been killed in battle.

As "The Sick Battle-God" moves on to the present war, the poet sarcastically comments that the Sick Battle-God's haloes "rayed the very gore,/And corpses wore his glory-gleam". The *War Poems* were written at the turn of the last century and were written with a tone of optimism for the next century. The last line of the poem, "The Sick Battle-God" - and of the *Poems of War* collection - is hopeful, "The Battle-god is god no more" (notice that "God" no longer has a capital 'G', signifying the Battle-God's demotion). Hardy believed that there would be meliorism and improvement between the attitudes of people and of different nations.

Hardy's optimism had disappeared with the outbreak of the First World War. It is believed that Hardy "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".[3] In *Life* it is written:

It was seldom he had felt so heavy at heart as in seeing his old view of the gradual bettering of human nature, as expressed in these verses of 1901, completely shattered by the events of 1914 and onwards. War, he had supposed, had grown too coldly scientific[4]

Pinion confirms that "Pessimism may have darkened Hardy's last years, as he saw western Europe heading for disaster".[5]

Hardy was trying to find a meaning to what appeared to be a meaningless and senseless war. In "I Looked Up From My Writing" he questions the value of his poetry in such a time of madness, "Of one who wants to write a book/In a world of such a kind". "'And There Was A Great Calm'" was written on the signing of the Armistice and questions war on many

levels. In the first stanza, the philosophical abstractions (that can also be found in *The Dynasts*) ask "Why?" Hardy also devotes the main body of the poem to the viewpoint of the "bereft, and meek, and lowly", the front-line soldiers and even the animals. The abstractions return in the final stanza and the only answer that the Sinister Spirit can give us is "It had to be!" As this is so unsatisfactory, the Spirit of Pity asks again "Why?" At the end of the poem, and of the war, there is another lull, "all was hushed". This is deceptive as there is a doubt whether this is the calm before another explosion (like the calm that started the war to begin with), or the calm after the final explosion.

It is in "Drummer Hodge" that Hardy protests about the carelessness with which the lives of ordinary people are treated in war. "Hodge" is a nickname for a common West country labourer. Hodge was not a prominent fighting hero but an ordinary Drummer who dies for a cause and in a country that he does not fully understand. Hodge is not given any kind of decent burial service, but is thrown into the earth "Uncoffined - just as found". Boer words, such as "kopje-crest", "veldt" and "Karoo" emphasis the strangeness of the surroundings.

Hodge is a more universal figure than Rupert Brooke's *The Soldier*. Hardy is uttering the cry and sorrow of both countries at war, whereas Brooke is deeply patriotic. We should remember the soldier as one who died for his country:

A body of England's, breathing English air,

Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home...

Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;

And laughter, learnt of friends and gentleness

His corner of the field will be "under an English heaven". For Hodge, however, there is an eternal cycle in process. The strange and "foreign constellations" become "His stars" and he has become a part of that land. He creates life, as a tree will spring from his death.

The metamorphosis of the dead is a recurring motif in Hardy's poetry. Part of the reason that people may find Hardy pessimistic is because of the way that he dwells on death. Writing about the love for his dead wife is one of many responses Hardy had towards death, but some other poems about death could easily be described as morbid. For example, we can find graveyard poems (such as "Friends Beyond" and "Channel Firing") in previous collections that are just as light and humorous in tone as "Voices from Things Growing in a Churchyard" from the *Late Lyrics* collection. In the poem, the poet is not mourning a loss but shows a growth of what happens after death: Fanny Hurd becomes flowers, Bachelor Bowring leaves on a wall. What could be a morbid poem is made humorous by the identity of the characters with their natural images, and the refrain "All day cheerily,/All night eerily". The words "cheerily" and "eerily" reflect the haunting and comic lightness of the poem.

In the early poems, such as "Neutral Tones" and "Hap", Hardy was reacting to the loss of faith in the Victorian period. In the later poems, overwhelmingly Hardy's main theme is death. John Powell Ward states that Hardy wrote over three hundred poems on the themes of love and marriage, but topics such as death overwhelm that.[6] Millgate argues that the death of Hardy's wife gave him the opportunity to indulge in his morbidity.[7] A poem called "The Sound of Her" is about the sound of his wife's coffin being screwed down. Hardy's second wife said that he is going too far here and he was persuaded not to publish it.

It is easy for people to find Hardy guilty of trying to find as many possible ways to contrive and repeat the same theme of death, as in *Poems of 1912-13* for example. It is not strictly true to believe that the poems are in a chronological order. For example, "Rain in a Grave" (31 Jan. 1913) precedes "The Voice" (12 Dec. 1912). However, there does seem to be some kind of development that runs along with time, which charts Hardy's different stages of grief. In one of the first poems to be written, "The Going", Hardy deals with the immediate loss of his wife, "Why did you give no hint that night" - as if he blames her. In the second stanza, Hardy has to cope with the silence of his life without her. He once wrote:

My life is intensely sad to me now without her. The saddest moments of all are when I go into the garden and to that long straight walk at the top that you know, where she used to walk every evening...I almost expect to see her as usual coming in from the flower-beds with a little trowel in her hand.[8]

In the poem, too, he similarly thinks that it is a cruel trick for him to believe that he sees his wife for a "breath". This is a startling use of the word. It suggests surprise, as we almost hear Hardy gasp as his imagination deceives him for a glimpse. It sickens him emotionally and physically.

It seems that Hardy cannot face the shock directly, so he travels, in his mind, to the past. He asks remorsefully why "latterly did we not speak" and suggests that they could have revisited the places that they went to when they had first met and were at their happiest. "After a Journey" is the first of six consecutive poems all written in 1913 on this theme,

"Yes: I have re-entered your olden haunts at last;/Through the years, through the dead scenes I have tracked you". The title (as in "The Going") suggests that Emma has also made a journey: to "vanish" from Hardy's life.

"At Castle Boterel", like "The Voice" and "The Going", brings us back to the present: "And to me" as the present reality eventually catches Hardy up. The waggonette is symbolic as he is moving onwards just as time does. Hardy repeats the word "shrinking" to give the effect that each moment Emma moves a little further away from him and more into the past as she becomes a "thin ghost" bereft of her previous light and warmth. In "The Voice", Hardy begins to doubt whether it is Emma he hears, "Can it be you that I hear?", "Or is only the breeze". He wants some kind of confirmation "Let me view you, then". In "After a Journey" the voice of the cave is "still so hollow/That it seems to call out to me from forty years ago".

In "Where the Picnic Was" (added later in 1919), Hardy comes to terms with the fact that she has gone. There is no sorrow or regret anymore - he has passed all that - and the ghost has gone. Hardy realises that he cannot recreate the past and this makes him appreciate the good times even more: his memories cannot be taken away from him. Hardy explains that some things remain the same - the sea is eternal - but in comparison human life is transitory.

In *Late Lyrics*, there are several poems about his wife Emma, but they are more nostalgic than the tone of remorse that we are used to. "The Dream is - Which?" is not simply a poem where Hardy, as an old man, looks back to a happier past, as we may have come to expect in the *Poems of 1912-13*. Hardy has moved on and developed. In the poem, Hardy presents two

separate worlds and asks us which one he is dreaming. The poet looks at happy times where he and his lover are laughing by a river and at country-dances, radiant with love. The images are more lively and active than *Poems of 1912-13*, "laughing", "splashed", "tumbling", "rapid", "dance", "weightless". It appears to be that this is in the present tense because of the words "I am", "We sit" and "We dance". Hardy contrasts the energetic youthful scenes in each stanza with slow old age. He talks passively as if the old age is the dream, "as if" and "As no such scene". The climax is at the beginning of each stanza because of the rhyming couplet, which leads to a tailing off towards the end giving a falling effect as if he is falling into the old age dream.

The distinction between life and death is also made in "Reminiscences of a Dancing Man", where the poet looks back to many years ago to a lively scene of dancing, "trilling sound", "wild whirling figures". In the last stanza, the poet wonders where the dancers are now, "Is Death the partner" and asks "Do their spectres spin like sparks".

The final stanza of "The Dream is - Which?" is a reversal; he is not "bent and thin" or "treading a lonely stair", but he has "wandered through a mounded green/To find her, I knew where". He is no longer "faltering forward", as he is in "The Voice" (in the *Poems of 1912-13*). Rather than being confined to "haggard rooms", he is outside where the lovers enjoyed their happy times. Unlike the previous stanzas, he has an active purpose, "To find her". He has learnt a more mature and deeper love than the playful youthful lovers have.

It is in the poem "Afterwards", written in 1916, that Hardy tells us how he would like to be remembered:

If I pass during some nocturnal blackness, mothy and warm,

When the hedgehog travels furtively over the lawn,

One may say, 'He strove that such innocent creatures should come to no harm,

But he could do little for them; and now he is gone.'

Hardy was a loving observer of nature. The real focus in this poem is not himself, but birds, leaves, animals and stars. The tone of this poem is optimistic about life - the pictures of life are moving and convincing, as the above stanza demonstrates. Hardy campaigned against cruelty towards animals. His fondness for living creatures is portrayed in the hedgehog, who also has a right to live, as any other creature does. On the other hand, it is easy to see how contradictory Hardy can be: as a contrast to "Afterwards", in an earlier poem, "In Tenebris I", there is no hope for the poet, who believes that life is not worth living:

Black is night's cope;

But death will not appal

One who, past doubtings all,

Waits in unhope.

The final line of Hardy's poem ends with a gloomy and pessimistic word, "unhope". It is very powerful word because we would expect the weaker 'hopeless' but this is not as strong to describe someone who is in such absolute despair: "unhope" is the extreme opposite of 'hope'. Hopeful images are quickly destroyed in the poem. Even a bird, which usually symbolises cheerfulness, faints with dread in the cold world. The poet cannot suffer any

more because he has suffered as much as he is capable of. Nature is bleak, but this does not frighten the poet because his own soul is even bleaker.

In the chapter on Hardy's endings, we saw how the conclusions leave a lasting impression on us and can influence our reading of the whole text. Similarly, the poems written towards the end of Hardy's writing career leave us with a bleak impression of Hardy. Hardy did care compassionately for life – his horror of how society treats human and animal life is quite evident in *Tess* and *Jude* - but some readers and critics seem to have lost sight of Hardy as "a man who used to remember such things". Given Hardy's complex nature, it is easy to understand how he has gained a reputation of being a pessimist. I hope to have shown in this dissertation that this is unfair as there is more to Hardy's work than that and we should not take his pessimism out of proportion and misrepresent the large body of work by doing so. Hardy's rejections of the charge of pessimism or his claims to be a meliorist are not as ill-founded or evasive as they have sometimes been taken to be.

Introduction: A Pessimistic Meliorist

[1]Roy Morrell, *The Will and the Way*, University of Malaya: Kuala Lumpur Campus (1965), p1

[2]Philip Larkin, "Wanted. Good Hardy Critic", in *Required Writing*, London: Faber (1983), p168

[3]Roy Morrell, in his foreword to *The Will and the Way*

[4]Philip Larkin, "Wanted: Good Hardy Critic", p169

[5]T.S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods*, London: Faber and Faber (1934), pp54-5

[6]*A Laodicean*, Harmondsworth: Penguin (1995), p481

[7]*Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings*, edited by Harold Orel, London: Macmillan (1967), p56

[8]quoted in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, ed. by S. Elledge, New York London: W.W. Norton (1991), p101

[9]C.H. Salter, *Good Little Thomas Hardy*, London: Macmillan (1981), p141

[10]*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, edited by David Skilton, Harmondsworth: Penguin (1985), p384

[11] ibid, *p487*

[12]*Jude the Obscure*, edited by Dennis Taylor, Harmondsworth: Penguin (1998), p357

[13]Raymond Chapman, *The Language of Thomas Hardy*, Basingstoke: Macmillan (1990) p18

[14]Philip Larkin, "The Poetry of Hardy", in *Required Writing*, London: Faber (1983), p176

[15]Geoffrey Thurley, *The Psychology of Hardy's Novels*, Queensland: University of Queensland Press (1975), p84

[16]Rosemary Sumner, *Thomas Hardy: The Psychological Novelist*, London: Macmillan (1981), p2

[17]quoted in F.B. Pinion, *A Commentary on the Poems of Thomas Hardy*, London: Macmillan (1976), p162

[18]Hardy, *Late Lyrics* "Preface", *Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy*, London: Macmillan (1930)

[19]Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, Harmondsworth: Penguin (1960), p250

[20]Geoffrey Grigson, *Penguin Book of Ballads*, Harmondsworth: Penguin (1975), p9

[21]A.E., Davidson, *Conrad's Endings*, Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press (1984), p19

[22]*A Conversation Between Thomas Hardy and William Archer* (pamphlet), Guernsey: The Toucan Press (1979)

[23]*Late Lyrics*, "Preface"

[24]F.E. Hardy,*The Life of Thomas Hardy*, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan (1975), p328

[25]quoted in Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, pp250-1

[26]general preface of *Jude* "Mellstock Edition", p34

[27]*Life*, p415

[28]*The Dynasts*, London: Macmillan (1954), Act vi, Scene viii

[29]*Life*, p224

[30]Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: A Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1982), Chapter 21

Chapter 1: Novel Endings

[1]Frank Kermode. *The Sense of an Ending*. New York: Oxford University Press (1967). p8
[2]Ian Gregor. *The Great Web*. London. Faber (1974). p105
[3]Philip Larkin called it a "beginning, a muddle, and an end" (from *The Wordsworth Book of Quotations*).
[4]Aristotle, *The Art of Poetry*. Oxford: Clarendon Press (1940). p21
[5]*Desperate Remedies*. Harmondsworth: Penguin (1995) . p448
[6]ibid, p452
[7]quoted in Ejner J. Jenson, *Shakespeare and the Ends of Comedy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press (1991). p2
[8] William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*. edited by H.J. Oliver, Harmondsworth: Penguin (1968). 3.2.328-30
[9]Auden. *The Dyer's Hand*. London. Faber (1975). p409
[10]*Under the Greenwood Tree*. edited by David Wright. Harmondsworth: Penguin (1985). p60
[11]*As You Like It*. 2.1.3-4
[12]*Under the Greenwood Tree*. p73
[13]*A Laodicean*. p481
[14]*Under the Greenwood Tree*. p226
[15]*The Woodlanders*, edited by Patricia Ingham, Harmondsworth: Penguin (1998). p366
[16]ibid. p64
[17]ibid, p440
[18]*Life*. p220
[19]*The Trumpet-Major*. edited by Linda M. Shires. Harmondsworth. Penguin (1997), p300
[20]ibid. p301
[21]quoted in F.B. Pinion, *Hardy the Writer*. London: Macmillan (1990). p211
[22]*Jude*. p398
[23]ibid, p69
[24]Arthur Schopenhauer. *Essays and Aphorisms*, selected and translated by R.J. Hollingdale. Harmondsworth: Penguin (1970). p81
[25]quoted in F.B. Pinion. *A Hardy Companion*. London. Macmillan (1968). p35
[26]*The Trumpet-Major*. pp295-6
[27]ibid. p295
[28]ibid. p289
[29]*Far From the Madding Crowd*. edited by Ronald Blythe. Harmondsworth: Penguin (1985). p80
[30]ibid. p230
[31]ibid. p354
[32]ibid. p448
[33]ibid. p444
[34]ibid. p451
[35]ibid. p452
[36]ibid. p458
[37]ibid. p441
[38]ibid. p453
[39]ibid. p455
[40]ibid. p201
[41]ibid. p446
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