Thomas Hardy's Optimism

Hope and Joy in Hardy's Poetry

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Contents

Abbreviations

All works by Thomas Hardy referenced in this book are cited parenthetically using the following abbreviations:

AN	Hardy, Thomas. *The Architectural Notebook of Thomas Hardy: Revised Edition*. Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society, 2007.
CL I	Hardy, Thomas. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy: Volume One 1840–1892*. Edited by Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate. 1978. Reprint, Oxford University Press, 1979.
CL II	Hardy, Thomas. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy: Volume Two 1893–1901*. Edited by Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate. Oxford University Press, 1980.
CL III	Hardy, Thomas. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy: Volume Three 1902–1908*. Edited by Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate. Oxford University Press, 1982.
CL IV	Hardy, Thomas. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy: Volume Four 1909–1913*. Edited by Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate. Oxford University Press, 1984.
CL V	Hardy, Thomas. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy: Volume Five 1914–1919*. Edited by Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate. Oxford University Press, 1985.

CL VI Hardy, Thomas. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy: Volume Six 1920–1925*. Edited by Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate. Oxford University Press, 1987.

CP I Hardy, Thomas. *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hardy: I*. Edited by Samuel Hynes. Oxford University Press, 1982.

CP II Hardy, Thomas. *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hardy: II*. Edited by Samuel Hynes. Oxford University Press, 1984.

CP III Hardy, Thomas. *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hardy: III*. Edited by Samuel Hynes. Oxford University Press, 1985.

CS Hardy, Thomas. *Thomas Hardy: The Complete Stories*. Edited by Norman Page. J.M. Dent, Orion Books, 1996.

DR Hardy, Thomas. *Desperate Remedies*. Edited by Mary Rimmer. Penguin, 1998.

DY Hardy, Thomas. *The Dynasts*. Macmillan, 1978.

FMC Hardy, Thomas. *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Edited by Rosemarie Morgan. 2000. Reprint, Penguin, 2003.

HE Hardy, Thomas. *The Hand of Ethelberta: A Comedy in Chapters*. Penguin, 1995.

JO Hardy, Thomas. *Jude the Obscure*. Penguin, 1998.

LD Hardy, Thomas. *A Laodicean or The Castle of the De Stancys*. Edited by John Schad. Penguin, 1997.

LIFE Hardy, Thomas. *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*. Edited by Michael Millgate. 2nd ed. 1984. Reprint, Macmillan, 1989.

LN I Hardy, Thomas. *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy: Volume 1. Edited* by Lennart A. Bjork. Macmillan, 1985.

LN II Hardy, Thomas, *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy: Volume 2. Edited* by Lennart A. Bjork. Macmillan, 1985.

MC Hardy, Thomas. *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. 2nd ed. Edited by Keith Wilson. Penguin Books, 2003.

PBE Hardy, Thomas. *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. Edited by Pamela Dalziel. Penguin Books, 1998.

PMN Hardy, Thomas. *Thomas Hardy's 'Poetical Matter' Notebook*. Edited by Pamela Dalziel and Michael Millgate. Oxford University Press, 2009.

PN Hardy, Thomas. *The Personal Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*. Edited by Richard H. Taylor. Macmillan, 1978.

PV Hardy, Thomas. *Thomas Hardy's Public Voice: The Essays, Speeches, and Miscellaneous Prose*. Edited by Michael Millgate. Clarendon Press, 2001.

RN Hardy, Thomas. *The Return of the Native*. Edited by Tony Slade. Penguin Books, 1999.

SSN Hardy, Thomas. *Thomas Hardy's 'Studies, Specimens &c.' Notebook*. Edited by Pamela Dalziel and Michael Millgate. Clarendon Press, 1994.

TD Hardy, Thomas. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Edited by Tim Dolin. 1998. Reprint, Penguin Books, 2003.

TM Hardy, Thomas. *The Trumpet-Major*. Edited by Linda M. Shires. Penguin Books, 1997.

TT Hardy, Thomas. *Two on a Tower: A Romance*. 1999. Reprint, Penguin Books, 2012.

WB Hardy, Thomas. *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved and The Well-Beloved*. Edited by Patricia Ingham. Penguin, 1997.

WL Hardy, Thomas. *The Woodlanders*. Edited by Patricia Ingham. Penguin Books, 1998.

CHAPTER 1

Hope and Joy in Hardy's Poetry

Introduction

The works of Thomas Hardy have often been perceived as pessimistic. Several of Hardy's contemporaries certainly thought this to be the case, with later critics adopting a similar stance. In an article published the day after Hardy's funeral, the poet Alfred Noyes described him as "a man who had renounced all hope both for himself and for the race" (1928). Virginia Woolf claimed that "if we are to place Hardy among his fellows, we must call him the greatest tragic writer among English novelists" (1932, 253–254). D. H. Lawrence agreed, arguing that this tragedy emanated from the setting: "It is the Heath … Here is the deep, black source" (1998, 14). Donald Davie later insinuated that Hardy's poetry carried the same dark legacy, arguing that "in British poetry of the last fifty years (as not in American) the most far-reaching influence, for good and ill, has not been Yeats, still less Eliot or Pound, not Lawrence, but *Hardy*" (1972, 3). In adding the caveat "for good and ill" Davie implied that Hardy's legacy had cast a negative pallor upon twentieth-century verse. Samuel Hynes argued that Hardy's poetic world was "dark, melancholy, retrospective – a world without joy, in which hope is a snare and love a catastrophe" (1961, 179). And Peter Allan Dale described Hardy's work as expressive of nineteenth-century "philosophical pessimism … of which Thomas Hardy becomes the preeminent English spokesman" (1989, 219).

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When we examine Hardy's large collection of letters, autobiographical notes, and writings, however, these descriptions of him seem remarkably ill-fitting. Instead, Hardy's own enjoyment of life is noticeably apparent. In Hardy's correspondences with family, friends, and acquaintances, his own joy-making and appetite for fun comes through strongly, and he repeatedly records his impressions of playful or enjoyable experiences. In an 1863 letter to his sister Mary, Hardy suggests that their forthcoming Christmas holiday should be "a 'bit of a lark"' (*CL I*, 5). This capacity for enjoying larks was still in evidence in his fifties. In an 1892 letter thanking Edward Clodd for hosting J. M. Barrie, Walter Besant and himself, Hardy writes, "An image of you as *the skipper*, (your best character on any stage) often rises before my eyes", further remembering "Barrie with his black nightcap, & Besant with a Rabelaisian gleam now and then" (*CL I*, 254).

This aspect of Hardy's character is also evidenced by his notes, such as his 1890 criticism of the sober J. H. Middleton, Slade Professor of Fine Art at Cambridge. Hardy, in quoting Sir Toby Belch's rebuttal of the puritanical Malvolio, from William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, found "fault with Middleton as having no sense of life as such" and possessing "an earnest, serious, anxious manner, as if there were no cakes and ale in the world, or laughter and tears" (*LIFE*, 236–237). In 1891 Hardy noted, disapprovingly, witnessing a friend of his at a ball "waltzing round with a face of ambition, not of slightest pleasure", before concluding "We are all inveterate joy-makers: some do it more successfully than others" (*LIFE*, 244). And in his poem "At the Aquatic Sports" (1925), Hardy's speaker intimates similar displeasure at others' lack of joy-making. Here two fiddlers and a singer, who are employed to accompany seaside events, "never face to the seaward view / To enjoy the contests, add their cheer" (*CP III*, lines 11–12). Hardy's speaker laments how, despite the laughter and fun taking place behind them, they remain oblivious of it, "So wholly is their being here / A business they pursue" (lines 13–14). What is noticeable about Hardy's view of life, therefore, though it has not often been a major focus of attention by scholars, is his awareness of the fundamental importance of enjoying it.

In Hardy's poems, novels, and short stories we frequently encounter a zest for life's pleasures, from accounts of musical performances and dances to detailed descriptions of food and drink. In *A Laodicean* (1881), Hardy evocatively describes the vital atmosphere of a dance, the music transforming the "whirling young people" who "meant not to know that they were mortal" (*LD*, 195). His comic ballad "The Dance at the Phoenix"

(1898) sees music and dance magically, if temporarily, revitalise the aged Jenny, so that "She sped as shod with wings" (*CP I*, line 93) as she danced around the room. The pleasures of alcohol are tactilely celebrated by Hardy across his works. In *The Woodlanders* (1887) Robert Creedle praises the wine, cider, and mead at Giles Winterborne's dinner party as being "good enough to make any king's heart merry — ay, to make his whole carcass smile!" (*WL*, 78). In *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), as Gabriel Oak enters Warren's Malthouse his "nose was greeted by an atmosphere laden with the sweet smell of new malt" (*FMC*, 47). And Hardy applies the same visceral power when describing the smell and appearance of food. In *The Trumpet-Major* (1880) he describes the local culinary aromas and sights of Casterbridge, such as the "smell of cinders and gravy" and "the pie-dishes from adjacent bakehouses" (*TM*, 119), further celebrating the "brilliant fry" of eggs, ham and kidneys cooked by Bob Loveday (103).

Hardy's works also demonstrate a humorous and joyous attitude towards the more serious aspects of human life. Authority figures often feature as the butt of Hardy's humour, as in *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876) when Lord Mountclere's brother is forced to stop at a rural village inn during a storm. The pompous Mountclere suffers the indignity of being offered "a conger eel, and pickled onions" (*HE*, 98) before being humiliatingly tasked by the lower-class Sol to lend a hand cooking bacon over an open fire. As Mountclere arrogantly fries the rasher by "tossing it about the gridiron in masterly style" he suddenly exclaims in horror "'Now the cursed thing is on fire!'" (399). While mocking officialdom, such comic passages also celebrate the pleasures of parties, music, food, and drink. In the short story "Old Andrey's Experience as a Musician" (1891), the aged protagonist passes himself off as a fiddler to gain access to the Squire's Christmas party and the dinner of "beef, and turkey, and plum-pudding, and ale" (*CS*, 504). But after the musically inept Andrey "held the fiddle upside down, the nut under his chin, and the tail-piece in his hand" the guests "crowd round him, thinking 'twas some new way of performing'" (505). The furious Squire turns him out of the house, but Andrey is readmitted to the feast by the Squire's wife.

While these joyous and comic episodes exist, critics have often seen such aspects of Hardy's work as whimsical and of little importance. Philip Larkin conceded that Hardy's work contained "buoyancy" and "relish" but argued that "it surely cannot be denied that the dominant emotion in Hardy is sadness" (1983, 172). Although such critics have identified

that tragedy and suffering are important factors at play in Hardy's work, they have failed to properly notice that they are not always employed for purely negative purposes. Instead, such features can be seen as functioning in tandem alongside Hardy's more zestful and joyous passages. Hardy's reasons for using pessimistic aspects are exemplified by a quotation from John Galsworthy's essay "Some Platitudes Concerning Drama", which Hardy deemed important enough to place near his writing desk at Max Gate. Galsworthy's quote explains that:

> the optimist appears to be he who cannot bear the world as it is, and is forced by his nature to picture it as it ought to be, and the pessimist one who cannot only bear the world as it is, but loves it well enough to draw it faithfully. (cited in Pinion 1968, 179)

Hardy represents the harshness of life with unflinching detail, but his passionate love and enjoyment of its more appealing aspects is also evident. These qualities perform an important balancing function in his work. In the final passage of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) Hardy tells us that while Elizabeth Jane's path was "suddenly irradiated at some half-way point by daybeams rich as hers … youth had seemed to teach that happiness was but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain" (*MC*, 322). The passage outlines how, for Hardy, life's brighter moments are not distributed equally or fairly, while emphasising their short-lived state. Hardy's awareness that the promise of such experiences cannot last informs two crucial aspects of his work. It underscores his sense of disappointment and tragedy, but it also serves to engender, in counterpoint, his passionate celebration of life. It is the inevitable disappearance of such "irradiated" experiences which accentuates their preciousness. And in his poetry Hardy ardently highlights the importance of human love, pleasure, and kindness in an uncaring universe, illustrating the necessity of enjoying brighter moments precisely because things must ultimately take a turn for the worse. While observing the hardships of life, Hardy further strives to provoke compassion, his poetry demonstrating his hopeful desire for improvement.

It is the intention of this book to place Hardy's brighter, more optimistic aspects in critical context, and to discuss the important balancing role that hope and joy plays in his work. Hardy's poetry is naturally more condensed than his fiction, and his poems function as individual thought acts. Hence these brighter examples appear more pronounced

and sustained. They play an important role in creating different effects, enabling him to emphasise moods that are not just pessimistic but joyous and hopeful. I am not, therefore, seeking to deny or underplay the significant existence of pain and sadness in Hardy's complex poetry. But in fully acknowledging these important brighter aspects, we can see his poetry more holistically as balancing an acute and profound understanding of life's hardships with an equally significant awareness and celebration of its pleasures. Hardy often laments the seeming meaninglessness of existence, while bemoaning the role that unlucky chance plays in stymying one's dreams. But he also observes that good fortune can occur, transforming lives in hopeful ways. At the conclusion of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, for example, Elizabeth Jane, wonders "at the persistence of the unforeseen" as a successful marriage and unexpected happiness accords her "such unbroken tranquility" (*MC*, 322).

In one of his earliest poems "Hap" (1898), originally composed in 1868, his speaker tells us that "—Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain, / And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan..." (*CP I*, lines 11–12). At the same time, Hardy's speaker acknowledges that happiness—even if short-lived or thwarted—is just as possible as hardship, so that "These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown / Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain" (lines 13–14). This latter, more hopeful aspect is emphasised in "Ditty (E.L.G)" (1898), composed two years later in 1870. Here, Hardy commemorates his West Country romance with his first wife Emma Lavinia Gifford, celebrating a place "That no spot on earth excels, / --Where she dwells!" (*CP I*, lines 44–45). Hardy's love-struck speaker recognises the part good fortune played in their encounter, noting "What bond-servants of Chance / We are all" (lines 39–40).

These examples of joy and hope can be separated into four general thematic groups, encompassing the natural world, romance, companionship, and art. Hardy's earliest known poem, "Domicilium", for example (*LIFE*, 8–9), celebrates the natural flora and fauna which surrounded his family home. In such poems, Hardy's speakers imaginatively admire how natural lifeforms may operate in ways beyond the ultimate perception of human beings. In "Domicilium", plants which climb the walls of his abode are perceived as seeming "to sprout a wish" (*LIFE*, line 4) to ascend higher, his speaker adding the caveat "(If we may fancy wish of trees and plants)" (line 5).

Hardy's awareness of the importance of love and companionship is demonstrated in poems such as "In Vision I Roamed" (1898) (*CP I*), but also the 1909–1910 composed "A Plaint to Man" (1914), where Hardy writes of:

> The fact of life with dependence placed
> On the human heart's resource alone,
> In brotherhood bonded close and graced
>
> With loving-kindness fully blown,
> And visioned help unsought, unknown.
> (*CP II*, lines 28–32)

Human love, compassion, and community were important for Hardy in the absence of religion. He was brought up with High Church principles, and ardently defended them in youthful debate (*LIFE*, 33) but during the mid-1860s he appeared to lose his faith, leaving him no longer susceptible to unquestioned acceptance of Church dogma (Pite 2006, 125). Love and kindness are represented in his poetry as essential and hopeful qualities within a secular worldview.

The same is true of Hardy's attitude towards art, such as music, which helps his poetic speakers to strive for brighter moods. In a 1901 poem, "To Life" Hardy's speaker attempts to replace pessimism with optimism through the creative powers of the imagination. He appears worn down by knowledge "Of Death, Time, Destiny –" (*CP I*, line 6) but, in the final stanza, creatively draws upon the artistic metaphor of music as he states:

> I'll tune me to the mood,
> And mumm with thee till eve;
> And maybe what as interlude
> I feign, I shall believe!
> (lines 13–16)

In such poems, while faced with the harsh realities of life, Hardy frequently refuses to close the door on the possibility of things becoming better. Indeed, by choosing to look on the bright side of things this yields the effect of bringing about a potentially happier state of being which is no longer just mumming or pretence.

Such poems illustrate something significant about Hardy's attitude towards life; by choosing to strive for happiness, this can increase his chances of achieving such a mood. By contrast with his novels, Hardy's poetry is less tragic in tone and, as I will discuss in this book, offers numerous examples which contain a more pleasure-seeking quality that, while tempered by gloomier aspects, can appear surprisingly hopeful. In elucidating the balancing function of joy and hope in Hardy's poems of the natural world, love, human relations, and art, I will examine exactly why this rather overlooked aspect of his work is important, and what it can give us.

Optimism in Hardy's Complex Poetry

Thomas Hardy's large collection of poetry is psychologically complex and appears to shift between opposite moods. As Hardy lost his religious faith he grew to believe that the universe was indifferent to human suffering, representing a harsh environment for human sensibilities. Many of his poems thus question the point of personal ambition in the face of apparent cosmic meaningless. At the same time, they celebrate scenes of pleasure and enjoyment and can hopefully imply that such aspects will continue to reemerge for future generations. Hardy's poetry thus bemoans the fact that personal pleasure is finite, and yet emphasises that it is precious and must be seized. While the former aspect has been the subject of rigorous critical attention, the latter aspect has not been addressed in substantial detail.

Hardy's many critics have insightfully identified the sophisticated ways in which his work engages with life's harsher aspects. These critical approaches can be divided into a number of different groups, but broadly speaking, Hardy's readers have tended to engage with three general facets of his work. The first of these readings focuses on how Hardy's novels, short stories, and poetry often illustrate that living things are imprisoned by natural laws, and that this lack of freedom is further traceable to the influence of Charles Darwin. A second general response identifies how Hardy views sexual relationships and romantic love as ultimately unfulfilling and disappointing. The third approach observes that Hardy, in his elegiac remembrance of past artifacts, and his usage of graves and churchyards, is frequently obsessed with death, which overshadows his work.

Hardy's critics have observed how, in his poetry, humans and animals appear bound by natural laws that cannot be overcome. Hardy saw nature as being analogous to an Immanent Will, whereby all living things were impelled forward by unseen forces. Several scholars, therefore, have connected Hardy's view of the Will to the influence of Arthur Schopenhauer (Kelly 1982; Jacobson 1996). Christopher Janaway describes Schopenhauer's concept of the Will as "fundamentally 'blind' and found in forces of nature which are without consciousness at all" (2010, 227). Hardy, however, denied that the German philosopher's ideas were a significant influence on his work (*CL VI*, 259), and Robert Schweik has also noted that "Schopenhauer's influence on Hardy's writings appears to be limited" (2005, 69). Further, Hardy did not totally eschew the idea of free will, explaining in a 1907 letter to Edward Wright regarding *The Dynasts* (1904 June 8) that "whenever it happens that all the rest of the Great Will is in equilibrium the minute portion called one person's will is free" (*CL III*, 255). In the same letter, moreover, Hardy wrote that he saw the Will as becoming "conscious thereby; & ultimately, it is to be hoped, sympathetic" (255).

Other critics have attributed the greatest source of Hardy's view of nature to the influence of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) which undermined the Biblical conception of plants and animals as created by God. Studies examining Darwin's literary influence have been increasingly prevalent since the 1980s (Buckland 2013, 24). Several scholars have insightfully showed how Hardy's novels and selected poems have been influenced by Darwinian ideas such as competition, the role of chance in natural selection and deterministic heredity (Ebbatson 1982; Beer 1983; Morton 1984; Radford 2003). As I will address further on, however, Darwin's work can also be seen as an important source of optimism for Hardy.

When in 1920 Vere H. Collins told Hardy that he had classified his poems into types, Hardy apparently exclaimed, "I see there are most poems on 'Love and Marriage'" (cited in Gibson 1999, 139). Unsurprisingly, Hardy's treatment of love has been the focus of continual attention by a wide range of different scholars, several discussing his poetry in terms of its solipsism or sense of disappointment. Hardy's structural representation of sexual love, for example, has been examined in terms of how listlessness continually replaces infatuation (Miller 1970; Irwin 1998). Jane Thomas has noted that, for Hardy's lovers, romantic possession often culminates not in satisfaction but "at best, indifference and, at worst,

bitter disappointment and the troubling resurgence of desire for someone or something else" (2013, 72). These observations are deeply revealing, illustrating how romantic disappointment pervades Hardy's work as a tangible quality. But in counterpoint, a number of Hardy's poems mark the intensity and lasting importance of mutually enjoyed acts of passion. And elsewhere, Hardy's poems celebrate more commonplace forms of love, such as human companionship and familial affection.

Hardy's poetic focus upon deceased figures and past artifacts has been astutely discussed by a wide range of writers (Armstrong 2000; Robson 2004; Tomalin 2006). Jahan Ramazani has insightfully observed how Hardy's elegies feature a wide range of topics and psychological states, containing moods of sadness, bitterness, anger, and guilt (1994, 33–52). More recently, Galia Benziman has revealingly demonstrated how Hardy revises the elegy in his focus upon people's unsteady remembrances of the deceased, arguing that Hardy shows the elegy itself to be "inconsistent, contradictory and guilt-ridden" (2018, 2, 31). It is certainly true that Hardy's elegies can often function as a source of guilt and anxiety for his self-aware speakers, but his poems about the deceased also open up possibilities. A number of Hardy's poems which deal with dead figures, such as artists, musicians, and poets, creatively draw upon their image in brighter ways. This helps to place Hardy's poetry within a more hopeful and enduring artistic tradition.

While the darker psychological aspects of Hardy's poetry, such as listlessness, guilt, and regret have been addressed in revealing detail by previous critics, several readers have identified brighter examples in some of his works. An influential text in this process was Roy Morrell's 1965 work *Thomas Hardy: The Will and the Way*, which shifted analysis of Hardy's plots and characters away from focus upon deterministic pessimism, such as the Will, towards the role of social structures upon individuals' lives (1965, xi). Subsequent scholars have placed Hardy's worldview in a less pessimistic context. Angelique Richardson, for instance, has highlighted the hopeful conclusion of *The Dynasts* (1904–1908) while noting that although Hardy draws upon the theories of Eduard Von Hartmann "he rejects von Hartmann's bleaker views that the world is governed by the unconscious in favour of the idea that consciousness is gradually increasing" (2004, 173). Further, Suzanne Keen has argued that while his worldview "might be described as skeptical and

materialist (pointing towards Schopenhauer), Hardy's poetic ontology is infused with fervent feeling, not limited to the despair that pessimism regarded as the consequence of the human organism's plight" (2014, 102–103).

Hardy criticism has also increasingly identified brighter aspects in his fiction. Juliette Berning Schaefer, for instance, has discussed the ways in which several of Hardy's short stories use humour to brighten his portrayals of life and "provide both entertaining and enlightening views of humankind" (2019, 120). Jane Thomas has indicated the optimistic potential of art in Hardy's work, and his appreciation for "the creative act itself as a means towards the attainment of a satisfaction and fulfillment that will outlast the originating artist" (2013, 14). The existence of happiness in Hardy's representations of the natural world has been examined by George Levine who has contextualised his novels within a Darwinian framework (2017). Elsewhere, John Holmes has discussed Hardy's poetry within the context of Darwinism, and in his analysis of several poems, such as "At Castle Boterel" (1914), has located strains of imaginative hope within the verse (2013, 129). Nonetheless, while Hardy criticism has over the last few decades identified brighter aspects in his writing, no study has developed these observations fully. I intend to build more broadly upon these brighter critical observations in ways that encompass and yet also transcend Hardy's reading of Darwin's evolutionary theory. In doing so, I will show how those critically discussed categories of Hardy's poems (such as the natural world, love, relationships, and artistic renderings of the dead) contain important examples of Hardy's optimism.

Hardy's Evolutionary Meliorism

My book argues that the examples of joy and hope encountered across Hardy's poetry closely connect to what he eventually called his evolutionary meliorism (*CP II*, 319), which combines two distinct ideas. The latter term, meliorism, draws upon Hardy's intellectual and artistic influences, denoting the idea that human life can be improved by endeavour. Hardy's meliorism is evidenced in the ways in which his poetic subjects can, through struggle, suffering, and turmoil, find ways to create happiness. The evolutionary aspect both reflects and transcends Hardy's reading of the *Origin*, drawing further imaginative inspiration from the teleological notion of evolutionary theory which was originally proposed by the French biologist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck in his

Philosophie Zoologique (1809). While this was discarded in the 1860s in favour of Darwin's ideas, in "the later 1800s, Lamarckists continued their namesake's quest" seeking to answer questions such as whether the morphology of different creatures could be "the result not of the hand of a Creator but of environmental changes affecting that life" (Ward 2018, 8). Hardy's evolutionary aspect, therefore, is underpinned by a complicated Darwinian and less extreme Lamarckian influence. This reflects the ways in which individual human skills can have a wider impact on communities and later generations, and thus effect incremental social improvements. It also connects to how Hardy's poetry can offer the possibility of future hope, often in ways which may transcend the speaker. In his later years, Hardy employed the expression evolutionary meliorism in his letters and essays. In the "Apology" to *Late Lyrics and Earlier* (1922), for example, Hardy referred to his writing as "the exploration of reality, and its frank recognition stage by stage along the survey, with an eye to the best consummation possible: briefly, evolutionary meliorism" (*CP II*, 319).

According to J. O. Bailey, Hardy's development of the term evolutionary meliorism mapped on to three gradually less negative stages in his poetry. The first stage, Bailey argues, in the 1860s, was pessimistic (1963, 570). This aspect of Hardy's early poetry, which was influenced by a loss of faith and what appears to have been the end of a promising love affair, has also been noticed by Robert Gittings, who argued that there is a "concentrated gloom that seems to gather over all Hardy's doings in the year 1866" (1978, 141). For Bailey, Hardy's second stage did not begin until 1886, when he developed his concept of the Will, while the third stage of Hardy's poetry commenced after the publication of *The Dynasts* in 1908, when he finally developed his idea of evolutionary meliorism (1963, 570). While Hardy did not use the term until later in life, it appears to represent the final articulation of a long-established position. Hardy consulted various philosophical, scientific, and aesthetic sources throughout different stages of his life. In his literary notebooks, which likely commenced in 1876 (*LN I*, xxi), he recorded optimistic as well as pessimistic passages from different philosophical, artistic, and scientific sources, belying any expectation that his reading focus was consistently negative. Examining the way in which Hardy records such passages can give us a wider understanding of the more life-affirming as well as negative ways his sources, such as Darwin, may have influenced him.

While Hardy's readings of *The Origin* are not recorded in his assorted notebooks (Keen 2014, 24), they contain quotations sourced from different writers who make use of Darwinism to support negative but also more optimistic points. In terms of the former, a short segment from Carl du Prel's *Philosophy of Mysticism* (1899) was likely chosen by Hardy because of its reference to the suffering of life, the quote relaying how "'As the fundamental Cause of all earthly suffering we find Darwin's struggle for existence'" (*LN II*, 95). Several pages further on in the same volume, however, Hardy logged a 1901 passage from an article by Egan Mew that compared Ibsen's spiritual challenge with the good-natured way that Darwin had popularised his theory; that is to undertake mankind's "reforming" (*LN II*, 120). Placed together, these two quotes indicate Hardy's awareness of the pessimistic implications of Darwin's natural selection but also, in the face of this, its role in progressive reform. Therefore, while Bailey has argued that Hardy's early poetry was pessimistically influenced by figures such as Darwin (1963, 570), we can see such sources as also contributing to a more hopeful stance which can be located across his body of work. Among his important scientific and artistic reading sources, John Addington Symonds, Matthew Arnold, and Walter Pater can be seen as important influences on Hardy's meliorism, while Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and Edward Clodd, helped shape the evolutionary aspect of his thought.

Hardy described his "practical philosophy as distinctly meliorist" in a 1901 interview, which was published in the *Pall Mall Magazine* (cited in Gibson 1999, 70). Meliorism was a belief which was particularly prevalent during the nineteenth century, and the term may possibly have been coined by George Eliot (Blackburn 2016, 299). Hardy also used the term on various occasions, and his meliorism held that life could be improved by the application of human effort. This is illustrated by Hardy's 1918 letter to Arnold Bennett, in which he declined to sign a Manifesto for the prevention of future wars, remarking "I think better of the world, as a meliorist (not a pessimist as they say). The instinct of self-preservation, & an ultimate common-sense at present obscured, will I think hinder the evils foretold from arising" *(CL V*, 278).

The idea that the world could be improved was also an important part of Auguste Comte's *System de Politique Positive*, published in English in four volumes between 1851–1854. Hardy later credited Comte as an important influence on his thought (*CL VI*, 259) and in his literary notebooks made copious notes from *Vol III* (*LN I*, 67–78). Further, in the

"Apology" Hardy cited Comte's observation that even backward steps might presage future advancement, so that "advance is never in a straight line, but in a looped orbit" (*CP II*, 325). Hardy's view of meliorism functioned, as Larkin observed of his work in general, as a medium for "asking man to grow up", associating "awareness of the causes of pain with superior spiritual character" (1983, 172). Larkin's use of "spiritual" in this context, and its importance for Hardy, can perhaps best be understood as being synonymous with morality, maturity, sensibility, and an empathy with the real world.

This awareness of pain and suffering is a pronounced aspect of Hardy's work, and underpins his meliorism. In poems such as "The Caged Thrush Freed and Home Again (Villanelle)" (1898) Hardy highlights the discomfort endured by different lifeforms. The thrush-speaker bemoans how humans and animals "cannot change the Frost's decree," (*CP I*, line 13). For Hardy, awareness of this "decree" is unavoidable, but he does not always stress it for maudlin purposes, nor does he wish his readers to wallow in despair. In "Candour in English Fiction" (1890) Hardy placed this aspect of his work in a larger artistic context, noting that "All really true literature directly or indirectly sounds as its refrain the words in the *Agamemnon*: 'Chant *AE*linon, *AE*linon! but may the good prevail'" (*PV*, 100). In Aeschylus' play, the Chorus's lamentation "*AE*linon" (sorrow, or woe) informs the audience that something bad will occur, but also includes the possibility of hope. In Hardy's work, similarly, an acknowledgement of present and future hardship is juxtaposed by the desire that things may be improved.

Hardy highlights the suffering of different creatures to provoke empathy and compassion, qualities which, for Hardy, may lead to gradual improvement and a better world. Both aspects are reflected in Hardy's "In Tenebris II" (1898), which tells us, "if way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst" (*CP I*, line 14). Hardy's speaker further describes how "delight is a delicate growth cramped by crookedness, custom, and fear" (line 15), observing that opportunities for happiness are stymied by life's harshness. But, despite this, the word "growth" implies that its wider cultivation is potentially possible. This reflects Hardy's note on "Altruism" from 1890, in which he wrote that it would "ultimately be brought about I think by the pain we see in others reacting on ourselves, as if we and they were a part of one body" (*LIFE*, 235). Hardy's view of humanity striving to grow up through identifying and overcoming suffering can therefore be placed in a practical and hopeful context.

John Addington Symonds's views on the possibilities for human advancement also influenced Hardy. He copied passages from Symonds's "The Philosophy of Evolution" (*LN II*, 32–33) into his notebooks. Symonds argued that there could be "some satisfaction surely in contributing to the advance of humanity" and that for humankind, "Without being Positivists, we may learn this lesson from the church of Auguste Comte" (1890, 39). Hardy believed that such advances could be enhanced by the ennobling power of art, being influenced by Matthew Arnold's 1869 *Culture and Anarchy,* and recording the importance of his "'imaginative reason'" (*LIFE*, 151). Like Arnold, Hardy saw art as something which could nourish humankind, additionally reflecting his reading of Walter Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), which attempted to stress how art could capture the most vital moments of human life. The examples of joy and hope in Hardy's work reflect these reading influences, and connect to his meliorism.

The evolutionary aspect of Hardy's meliorism is more complex, and indicates a combined Darwinian and Lamarckian influence. In addressing the effect of Charles Darwin's work upon him, Hardy noted that he was "among the earliest acclaimers of *The Origin of Species*" (*LIFE*, 158). The competitive impulse of the natural world, described by Darwin in *The Origin* as "the struggle for life" (1985, 115), is mirrored by the natural competition sometimes found in Hardy's writing. For example, in *The Woodlanders*, the descriptions where "the lichen ate the vigour of the stalk, and the ivy slowly strangled to death the promising sapling" (*WL*, 52), appear to symbolise the competition that exists between Giles and Fitzpiers. At the same time, we can connect Darwin's influence upon Hardy to his use of the expression "loving-kindness" articulated in "A Plaint to Man" (1914) (*CP II*, line 31) and elsewhere. Hardy used the term to signify altruism, being, as he saw it, the highest and most empathetic of moral positions. The expression reminds us of Hardy's idea of a developing Will, referenced in 1907, and its implied manifestation in human form, describing his hope that it was becoming conscious and possibly sympathetic (*CL III*, 255). The expression "loving-kindness" was likely adapted by Hardy from *The Book of Common Prayer* and implies a quality which counters the evolutionary idea of competitive self-interest (Coxon 2018, 56). Such ethics, nonetheless, are also compatible with and reflect the general influence of Darwin's evolutionary theory on Hardy's thought.

In *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) Darwin approached the question of morality specifically from the position of natural history. He stressed that morals developed out of the social instincts of animals, and the work reached a wide and varied audience (Richardson 2013, 57, 69). In 1910 Hardy wrote a letter to Henry Salt, Secretary of the Humanitarian League, in which he explained how altruism was also reconcilable with Darwin's theory:

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

Hardy traces the hopeful development of altruism in his poem "Compassion, An Ode In Celebration of the Centenary of The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals" (1925). The intention of the poem, originally composed on January 22, 1924, is—as is outlined in the subtitle—to celebrate the one hundred years anniversary of the R.S.P.C.A. The poem reflects Hardy's comments (in his letter to Salt) regarding the altruistic implications of Darwin's theory, but this sense of loving-kindness towards all living creatures also connects to Hardy's evolutionary meliorism. Hardy's speaker tells how "Much has been won — more, maybe, than we know —" (*CP III,* line 26), the use of hyphens here intimating that this movement is extending and advancing. Two utterances are imagined by the speaker; '"Ailinon!' / A mighty voice calls: 'But may the good prevail!"' (lines 27–28) echoes the refrain from the *Agamemnon* which Hardy quotes in his essay "Candour in English Fiction" (1890) (*PV*, 100). The poem then concludes with a quotation from Matthew 5.7, as a second voice calls "And 'Blessed are the merciful!'" (line 29). While quoting the New Testament, this latter voice also articulates the aims of the R.S.P.C.A. movement, Hardy's speaker informing us "And on we labor hopeful" (line 27). This indicates Hardy's evolutionary meliorism, forecasting the establishment of more enlightened and altruistic attitudes which he attributes to progressive human effort.