Thomas Hardy: The Ache of Modernism

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THOMAS HARDY: THE ACHE OF MODERNISM

by

Kelly Tucker Roberts

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THOMAS HARDY: THE ACHE OF MODERNISM
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Introduction

"The ache of modernism" reflects the time of change Thomas Hardy lived in. The shift from agricultural to industrial communities was occurring rapidly as a result of the Industrial Revolution (which began in the 1760s) and the Agricultural Revolution (which began in the 1790s). Both revolutions affected communities drastically. The advent of new technology in the agricultural field eliminated jobs as well as changed the tenor of the pastoral quality of farming and hodges. Many farm laborers were displaced as family farms were bought up and turned into larger farms. As Virginia Hyman notes, "Hardy saw a direct relationship between historical processes and individual lives: both, like natural processes, were evolutionary; human character evolved as history evolved" (4). The roles of education, morality and social mobility were also impacted during this time. It was this agricultural evolution in combination with the clash between natural and social laws which is the central topic of this paper. Because characters such as Tess and Jude were limited by their social position, lack of education and societal views of marriage, they struggled. They represent many characters in Hardy’s novels struggling to survive in their ever-evolving world. In The Mayor of Casterbridge, Tess of the d’Urbervilles, and Jude the Obscure, Hardy presents the reader with characters who succeed or fail based on their ability to evolve.

Only a relative few critics commented on the successful or unsuccessful evolution of his characters. Therefore, while several critics are utilized, a great deal of my thesis relies on textual support and my interpretation of the times. Although there is
not much critical discussion of this topic, it becomes increasingly important in Hardy’s later novels because they represent a shift in Hardy’s thought process. His early novels are quite pastoral, while Hardy makes a social commentary in his later novels as he looks at the evolution of society and the effects on its inhabitants.

The Mayor of Casterbridge, Tess of the d’Urbervilles, and Jude the Obscure were chosen because they were written during a time period of great upheaval in England. Presented in order of their composition, they reflect the chronology of the historical period. The Mayor of Casterbridge demonstrates the introduction of mechanization in the agricultural industry and the effect it has on Michael Henchard as he tries to be successful. Tess of the d’Urbervilles shows Tess struggling with a need to support her family as the impetus for her struggle with traditional views of love and marriage versus her evolving natural morality. We see the contrast of Tess’s early agrarian upbringing with a larger world view at the climax of the novel in Stonehenge. Jude the Obscure also presents the concept of traditional views of love and marriage versus Jude’s, Sue’s and Phillotson’s oscillating views of morality. Education is also a major theme in Jude. Because of his rural, lower class upbringing, Jude’s goal to pursue a college education in an urban setting of Christminster is stymied because of England’s rigid social structure.

This paper will assess a character’s ability to succeed or fail based on his or her ability to evolve socially and/or morally. The successful social evolution that depends upon the character’s capacity to accept and adapt to the progressive agricultural developments presented by industrialization is perhaps best represented in The Mayor of Casterbridge. On the other hand Tess of the d’Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure strongly represent Hardy’s questioning of traditional theology. Moral evolution depends on the character’s ability to move from the dogmatic Christianity of England to a more natural, perhaps metaphysical, morality. This natural morality relies on an
individual's ability to make sound, moral judgments which will lead to his happiness in the midst of chaotic change. Hardy's questioning of traditional theology is evident in a letter to Florence Henniker:

I should care more for my birthdays if at each succeeding one I could see any sign of real improvement in the world—as at one time I fondly hoped there was; but I fear that what appears much more evident is that it is getting worse & worse. All development is of a material & scientific kind—and scarcely any addition to our knowledge is applied to objects philanthropic or ameliorative. I almost think that people were less pitiless towards their fellow creatures—human & animal—under the Roman Empire than they are now: so why does not Christianity throw up the sponge & say I am beaten, & let another religion take its place.

(Millgate 333)

In the conclusions of Hardy's aforementioned novels, if people are not allowed to find their own moral happiness, they are often tragic characters.

Growing up in Higher Bockhampton, Dorset, Hardy was in the thick of agrarian England. Many of the historical agrarian events which occurred must have impacted Hardy's portrayal of the Hodge. Hardy wrote of the stereotype of the Hodge in "The Dorsetshire Labourer" which first appeared in Longman's Magazine in July 1883:

This supposed real but highly conventional Hodge is a degraded being of uncouth manner and aspect, stolid understanding, and snail-like movement. His speech is such a chaotic corruption of regular language that few person of progressive aims consider it worth while to enquire what views, if any, of life, of nature, or of society, are conveyed in these utterances. Hodge hangs his head or looks sheepish when spoken
to, and thinks Lunnon a placed paved with gold. Misery and fever lurk in his cottage, while, to paraphrase the words of a recent writer on the labouring classes, in his future there are only the workhouse and the grave. He hardly dares to think at all. He has few thoughts of joy, and little hope of rest. His life slopes into a darkness not “quieted by hope.”

Hardy describes this man as observed by a visitor, perhaps from London. This is a significant example of reality versus illusion, the view of the urban citizen versus the reality of the life of the rural citizen. It helps to establish how easily the agrarian society and its members could be dismissed during this time of revolution. Although the man appears like this to the visitor, Hardy does say,

He [the visitor], would have learnt that wherever a mode of supporting life is neither noxious nor absolutely inadequate, there springs up happiness, and will spring up happiness, of some sort or other. Indeed, it is among such communities as these that happiness will find her last refuge on earth, since it is among them that a perfect insight into the conditions of existence will be longest postponed. (1)

Although Hardy was a champion for the agrarian communities and the complexities of them as people, the Hodge had no significant place in society and little chance to change his world. This is very similar to what happens to Michael Herichard in The Mayor of Casterbridge. When Farfrae and his new technological advances move into Casterbridge, Henchard is pushed to the wayside because his is just a Hodge.

Hardy may have been influenced by many historical events including the Tolpuddle martyrs. Although the event occurred in 1794, Tolpuddle was not far from Hardy’s home and the martyrs were of mythological proportion to nearby communities.
Six men were eventually arrested after they lead a group of laborers who decided that they would not work without higher wages. Some violence broke out: hay rickets were burnt and weapons were made. These six men were used as examples when they were sentenced to seven years transportation in a penal colony in New South Wales, Australia. Although the landowners quelled this early attempt at unionization, these men served as an inspiration to all laborers.

In England, the Com Laws were repealed in 1846. Com Laws were established to help landowners in a struggling European economy. High duties were placed on imports of grain until England could maintain a strong profit margin. This caused high inflation for all grain products, which resulted in less food for the poor. In 1840-42, England suffered a depression and membership in the Anti-Corn Law League grew. Many thought that the repeal of the Com Laws would provide greater financial benefits for the agrarian community; however, lower grain prices only provided lower wages for workers.

The rights and plight of the agrarian workers were also addressed in Parliament through the legislative process. Chartism attempted to help the agrarian community. Marjorie Bloy states, "Perhaps Chartism was a matter of feeling. It was an emotional reaction against a changing economy and society, which was unjust and bewildering to the working man—a cry for help. It expressed the resentment of conditions and movements which had promised so much, but which had failed the working man” (Bloy). Chartism developed as a result of several destructive economic conditions in England including Com Laws and terrible harvests in the 1830s. The purpose of Chartism was to gain fair wages for the working class, including agrarian workers, and to attain equitable voting privileges for all men. Although Chartism was unsuccessful, it was evidence of the deplorable condition of the working class in England and their desire to unite against unfair treatment.
Reform Acts, specifically those of 1832, 1867, and 1884 helped to increase voting equity in England. The Reform Acts of 1832 and 1867 primarily increased voting privileges for the working class living in industrial cities. The Reform Act of 1884 gave the vote to most of the agricultural community. However, this was probably too late for Hardy to see the impact on the communities he saw destroyed by industrialization. Women did not gain suffrage until 1918.

The lack of education for the Hodges played a large role in their plight during Industrialization, as portrayed by Henchard in The Mayor of Casterbridge. Henchard is hampered by his lack of formal education as Farfrae succeeds him. In Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Tess’s dreams of becoming a teacher are squelched when she has to leave school to help support the family. Without education, the working class had no upward mobility. As landowners began to farm bigger plots of lands during Hardy’s lifetime, tenant farmers became a thing of the past and the laborers became migratory. Hardy states in “The Dorsetshire Labourer,”

This annual migration from farm to farm is much in excess of what it was formerly. For example, on a particular farm where, a generation ago, not more than one cottage on an average changed occupants yearly, and where the majority remained all their lifetime, the whole number of tenants were changed at Lady Day just past, and this though nearly all of them had been new arrivals on the previous Lady Day. (7)

The sense of community disintegrated as a result. Women and children were often required to work with their husbands/fathers as part of the hiring deal although the wages were not increased. Independent women’s wages were much less than men’s. It became more and more difficult to merely survive. Finally, in 1873, the Agricultural Children’s Act of 1873 was passed and children were given laws to protect them and provide them with public education.
Within this rapidly changing society, Daniel Schwarz believes, "Hardy's novels question the central postulates of Christian cosmology by positing an imagined world where man cannot achieve salvation in a benevolent world created under the auspices of a just and merciful God" (19) and inherently the religious view of marriage was rigidly upheld. Hardy looks at and questions religion through his portrayals of Jude and Tess specifically.

The reader sees traditional marriages which are merely contractual obligations contrasted with relationships based on true love. Herbert Grimstitch states; "The point at which a convention becomes mischievous and dangerous is when it has outlived the necessity which gave rise to it, or when a situation arises cannot be properly dealt with by the application of rough-and-ready principles" (138).

Through this study of an evolving agrarian society, juxtaposed with the clash between natural and social laws, I will show the success or failure of the major characters in relation to their society. I will rely heavily on textual support as I examine the role of the hero(es)/heroine(s) and their foils as they embrace or reject the changes which played such a major role in their lives and embody Hardy's over-motif "the ache of modernism."
The Mayor of Casterbridge

In *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1887), Henchard and Farfrae are seen as the main characters Hardy uses to portray the issue of evolution, and the relative evolutionary success or failure of Henchard can be viewed from a moral and social perspective. Farfrae does not change, but represents the antithesis of Henchard's rigid rustic ways which collectively lead to his failure. Although Henchard socially rises from laborer to mayor, it is temporary because he cannot completely evolve. Henchard's pride will also play a role in this. Although Henchard does not evolve within society, he does develop morally in his evolution to natural morality. His daughter Elizabeth-Jane is a minor character who demonstrates this evolution towards natural morality as well.

This novel is set in a time of rapid change in England. Towns were springing up in the middle of the countryside where agriculture once dominated. Houses which once sheltered tenant farmers and laborers were being rapidly torn down to provide more farm land, leaving them homeless. "There were five houses cleared away last year, and three this; and the volk nowhere to go--" (*Mayor* 7). As a result, many lived in destitution. Casterbridge was a town which was experiencing this industrialization: "It had no suburbs--in the ordinary sense. Country and town met at a mathematical line" (29). A mill and many small businesses attracted people from other towns to come to trade and complete other business. However, in an interesting
juxtaposition, ancient Roman ruins existed in its midst. “Casterbridge announced old Rome in every street, alley, and precinct. It looked Roman, bespoke the art of Rome, concealed dead men of Rome” (70). This may be symbolic for Henchard’s place in Casterbridge. As Noorul-Hasan notes,

Henchard is, unquestionably, the native countryman, but the native country is not as obviously there. Casterbridge is not the country to which Henchard naturally belongs. There are only isolated elements in Casterbridge society which vestigially constitute the native country but in its more dominant and popular forms of life Casterbridge is a commercial town. (64)

Henchard’s lack of social success is not his own fault, but society’s. He didn’t come to Casterbridge with the intention of becoming mayor, or a corn factor; he came looking for employment.

Henchard’s moral development, early in the novel, is questioned by many readers. Henchard’s auctioning of his wife and daughter may be seen as morally reprehensible; however, this was not uncommon in the mid-nineteenth century and was actually still being done in Hardy’s adulthood. What appears to be the development of Henchard’s immoral character though, is actually quite the opposite. Shortly after he sold Susan, he questions his morality and repents:

I, Michael Henchard, on this morning of the sixteenth of September, do take an oath before God here in this solemn place that I will avoid all strong liquors for the space of twenty-one years to come, being a year for every year that I have lived. And this I swear upon the book before me; and may I be strook dumb, blind, and helpless if I break this my oath. (Mayor 20)
His upholding this oath, demonstrates moral fortitude. “Henchard’s character is rooted in a natural, native sensibility which instinctively adheres to an older pattern of conduct” (Hasan 73).

Twenty years later we find Henchard at the pinnacle of his success as mayor and corn factor. It is at this moment as well that we see his weakness as a businessman. As Susan and Elizabeth-Jane enter Casterbridge, they hear a conversation implying there’s no good bread in Casterbridge. When they question why, a woman responds,

Oh, ‘tis the corn-factor—he’s the man that our millers and bakers all deal wi’—and he has sold ‘em growed wheat, which they didn’t know was growed, so they say, till the dough ran all over the ovens like quicksilver; so that the loaves be as flat as toads, and like suet pudden inside. I’ve been a wife, and I’ve been a mother, and I never see such unprincipled bread in Casterbridge as this before. (Mayor 32)

As Geoffrey Thurley notes:

The idea of bad bread is somehow deeply disturbing: it is associated obscurely with the evil and menace that pervade the whole novel. Henchard the mayor is also the biggest corn-dealer. In some way then, he is responsible for polluting the very staff of life. Moreover, he never escapes the evil underside of the civilized mind. Again and again, he is caught up with the gross or sinister aspects of the old rusticity. (138)

I disagree with Thurley who implies that the sale was made on a more “sinister” level and Henchard was actually aware of what he was doing. I believe it is Henchard’s ignorance because he quite honestly states, “If anybody will tell me how to turn grown wheat into wholesome wheat, I’ll take it back with pleasure. But it can’t be done” (Mayor 38). Ironically, this is the same day which Donald Farfrae arrives in
Casterbridge and the comparison between the two characters begins. Farfrae also provides Henchard with a way the situation can be remedied.

Farfrae is a progressive Scotchman who has evolved before his introduction to Henchard. Farfrae’s evolution is intellectual; he is younger than Henchard and has been given many different opportunities for education. Even though he possesses this intelligence, he is not the hero in the novel. The hero is not always the brightest or the best. Henchard’s moral evolution makes him far more heroic than Farfrae. Farfrae is only stopping in Casterbridge on his way to America where he plans to, “[...] try my fortune in the great wheat-growing districts of the West. I have some inventions useful to the trade, and there is no scope for developing them here” (Mayor 48). He is already ahead of the agricultural business in England.

Hardy makes the difference between Farfrae and Henchard immediately obvious through contrasting them physically:

The man was of fine figure, swarthy, and stern in aspect; and he showed in profile a facial angle so slightly inclined as to be almost perpendicular. [...] His measured springless walk was the walk of the skilled countryman as distinct from the desultory shamble of the general laborer. (Mayor 5)

Hardy’s choice of diction in describing Henchard (perpendicular facial angle and springless walk) suggests that he is stolid rather than a “go-getter.” On the other hand, Farfrae is “[...] ruddy and of a fair countenance, bright-eyed and slight in build” (39). Hardy’s choice of diction here (bright-eyed), implies someone motivated and smart. Hardy then elaborates on their differences in the world of business and demonstrates that

Henchard’s resistance to the external change that Farfrae represents ultimately reflects upon himself. His conflict with Farfrae exposes his
essential nature. This inability to accept change is Henchard’s flaw, as it was Knight’s and Eustacia Vye’s, and as it will be Angel Clare’s and Sue’s. (Hyman 102)

Part of Henchard’s resistance to change may be a result of his lack of education and brains.

Henchard’s lack of formal education is first shown when he displays surprise that the note which Farfrae sent him was indeed written by Farfrae himself. Henchard did not possess this skill. This was not his fault though; the society he was a part of did not support formal education for his class. Timothy Hands states “Too little education, as in the case of Henchard or so many of the rustics, can hinder achievement as well as enlightenment” (67). Virginia Hyman states: “[…] he embraces Farfrae as being more intelligent and forward-looking than himself” (101). This display of knowledge and skill makes Henchard want Farfrae to become a part of his business. Although his business had really been doing quite well in his traditional fashion, he thought Farfrae would be a real asset. “Henchard is a man of old-fashioned methods, and it is noticeable that until the advent of the innovating Farfrae these methods are not considered a disadvantage” (Grimsditch 97).

Henchard’s lack of education and skill in business is also evidenced when he admits to Farfrae: “In my business, ‘tis true that strength and bustle build up a firm. But judgment and knowledge are what keep it established. Unluckily, I am bad at science, Farfrae; bad at figures--a rule o’ thumb sort of man. You are just the reverse--I can see that” (Mayor 50).

This wouldn’t be such a debilitating quality if Henchard were willing to learn, or had a desire to, and could evolve as a businessman from sharing Farfrae’s skill, but he’s content letting Farfrae take charge of these aspects. It’s the combination of Henchard’s willingness to let Farfrae play this role, plus his pride which will cause his
decline. Ironically, Henchard says to him, "I shall often think of this time, and of how you came at the very moment to throw a light upon my difficulty" (Mayor 64). Later in the novel Farfrae’s enlightenment only ends up causing Henchard more difficulty.

Henchard continues to be impressed with his new employee’s skill, but again admits his inability to do, or care, about the things Farfrae takes such painstaking care with.

He stood behind Farfrae’s chair, watching his dexterity in clearing up the numerical fogs which had been allowed to grow so thick in Henchard’s books as almost to baffle even the Scotchman’s perspicacity. Henchard himself was mentally and physically unfit for grubbing subtleties from soiled paper; he had in a modern sense received the education of Achilles, and found penmanship a tantalizing art. (Mayor 76)

The shift of control or power becomes evident when the neighboring farmers, who used to discuss farming issues with Henchard, now seek out Farfrae. This is when Henchard’s pride and temper rise, leaving him to ignore how far Farfrae has brought his business, and how far he may sink without him. Grimsditch believes

The chief agency working to bring about Henchard’s ruin is the uncompromising rigidity of his own personality, to which must be added the occasional outbursts of violence or intemperance. This inelasticity of character manifests itself in his business dealings. (171)

Even the townspeople recognize Farfrae’s role, “Where would his business be if it were not for this young fellow” (Mayor 107). Henchard’s pride plays a large role here.

His lack of success in society also stems from this characteristic. Henchard can’t recognize that together, Farfrae and he might do quite well.
Hardy turns the complementarity into conflict by having Henchard resist both Farfrae’s growth and his own concomitant decline. Unlike the men of Mellstock Quire, Henchard is unwilling to accept the rise of the young man’s fortunes and the decline of his own. It is this resistance to change that causes his downfall. (Hyman 101)

This attitude adds to his problems in affecting change from which he would benefit. Henchard’s pride plays a dominant role here, taking over all rational thought and leaving him in a position which only inhibits his success. His pride, and society’s indifference towards education, prevents him from evolving.

In contrast, Farfrae’s evolution prior to his appearance in the novel makes him a success, and his progressive qualities are recognized by Casterbridge:

> Casterbridge had sentiment--Casterbridge had romance; but this stranger’s sentiment was of differing quality. He was to them like the poet of a new school who takes his contemporaries by storm; who is not really new, but is the first to articulate what all his listeners have felt, though but dumbly till then. (Mayor 54)

Farfrae’s new business is a grand success, and he invites the invention of new technology into Casterbridge by purchasing a corn-drill. This contrasts with Henchard because

Henchard is conceived as the only survivor of an ancient tribe, a primitive being with no more understanding of the niceties of social and commercial adjustment than of the new ‘horse-drill’ which replaces the venerable ‘seed-lip’ as an instrument of sowing. (Hasan 63)

This was an event for Casterbridge, “It’s arrival created about as much sensation in the corn-market as a flying machine would create at Charing Cross” (Mayor 167). In his
ignorance Henchard ridicules the machine while Farfrae announces, "It will revolutionise sowing heerabout" (169).

Henchard’s ignorance brings on his descent which is contrasted with Farfrae’s success. Henchard loses his business, Farfrae’s prospers; Henchard loses his home and land, Farfrae buys them; Henchard loses Lucetta, Farfrae marries her; Henchard loses the title of mayor, Farfrae is elected Mayor; Henchard loses his Elizabeth-Jane based on his behavior, and Farfrae marries her. This is not unlike the hero of a Greek tragedy, Henchard’s hamartia is his hubris which often gets in the way of making smart choices. Once highly respected in Casterbridge, he loses ‘everything because of it.

In the end of the novel, left with nothing, Henchard resembles the likable character which pervaded so much of the early part of the novel. Part of his evolution is evident in his newly defined pride— it is respectable pride, not the pride which blinds him from making good choices throughout the novel. Henchard’s attempt to give Elizabeth-Jane and Farfrae a wedding present demonstrates this.

Henchard’s love for Elizabeth is what ultimately humanizes him. It is this new feeling that makes his end seem tragic, for the new potential is not developed. When he returns to her wedding with the caged goldfinch, it is far different from the vain and egocentric young man who had sold his wife at Weydon Fair. (Hyman 104)

Elizabeth-Jane, fearing her father’s presence in town and in her life, recognizes this:

But though she did not know it Henchard had become a changed man since then—as far, that is, as change of emotional basis can justify such a radical phrase; and she need not to fear. In a few days Farfrae’s inquiries elicited that Henchard had been seen by one who knew him, walking steadily along the Melchester highway eastward at twelve
o’clock at night—in other words, retracing his steps on the road by which he had come. (Mayor 330)

Unfortunately, you can’t go home. Henchard realizes this and dies shortly after he is seen on the Melchester highway. Henchard’s new pride is evident in his will:

That Elizabeth-Jane Farfrae be not told of my death, or made to grieve on account of me.

& that I be not bury’d in consecrated ground.

& that no sexton be asked to toll the bell.

& that nobody is wished to see my dead body.

& that no murners [sic] walk behind me at my funeral.

& that no flours [sic] be planted on my grave.

& that no man remember me.

To this I put my name. (333)

Therefore, Henchard demonstrates evolution morally as he recognizes his flaws (like he did after the auction) and remedies them through death. This is how Hardy viewed Henchard as well for The Mayor of Casterbridge is “a story of a man of character.”

Henchard is not successful in society because he cannot change. Based on his disposition, he was set up for failure.

He is great only in his alignment with great natural forces, only to the extent that he is placed in the same dimension with a host of external symbols of a past civilization of which he himself is a potent symbol. His character commits him to a way of life which is deemed no longer necessary or desirable. In the visible microcosm of the novel, Henchard is a total outsider, a grotesque anachronism. (Hasan 61)

As a result of the changing times in Henchard’s life, he did survive for a while, although it was in what might be considered the “old” world.
Elizabeth-Jane has the benefit of being born in a different time. She craved to evolve through education:

The desire—sober and repressed—of Elizabeth Jane’s heart was to see, to hear, and to understand. How could she become a woman of wider knowledge, higher repute—"better," as she termed it—this was her constant inquiry to her mother. She sought further into things than other girls in her position ever did, and her mother groaned as she felt she could not aid in the search. (Mayor 28)

Susan’s marriage to Henchard gives Elizabeth-Jane this opportunity although Hardy does not develop her pursuit of education. He does, however, demonstrate her self-education in depicting her as thoughtful as she adapts to her new lifestyle. Hands states,

Though Hardy, unlike George Eliot, exercised little influence and no guidance over such elements, his study of the unostentatious Elizabeth-Jane is an acute study of female educational ambitions. Elizabeth is, to be sure, self-rather than school-education, but Hardy precisely defines her desires and he influences on them. (73)

If Henchard had the financial and social opportunities that Elizabeth-Jane did, his life may have been very different. “By bringing his characters into contact with modern ideas and new forms of life he (Hardy) is only exposing the inadequacy of those forms for a humanly satisfying experience” (Hasan 158).

Michael Henchard does succeed morally in recognizing how greed and desire caused him to lose all that was precious to him and finds peace in death as evidenced by his will. Henchard could not have succeeded in society because of his limitations. He was born in a time which focused on preparing him for a rural, agrarian occupation;
and beyond that, he may have not had the intelligence to utilize education. Elizabeth-Jane, although a minor character, does demonstrate moral and social evolution as she recognizes Henchard as "a man of character." She does this in spite of his former actions, such as selling her mother, and she does yearn to become more educated.

As I move into the next chapter on *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, the chronological shift is obvious. *Mayor* represents the earlier stages of the Agricultural Revolution in rural Dorset, while *Tess* demonstrates a more advanced stage. Hardy utilizes "Phases" to separate sections in the text for deliberate structure and to demonstrate the conflict between the natural and social worlds. Also in the discussion of this novel, I will focus more on Tess’s moral evolution as it relates to her relationships with Alec d’Urberville and Angel Clare. While the impetus for her evolution is based on societal changes and the economic needs of her family, her evolution is primarily moral. This is similar to Henchard’s evolution in that both follow and find peace in their own natural morality; however, it differs from Henchard’s initial sense of greed and desire for social success which we never witness in Tess’s character.
In *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, Tess Durbeyfield, Alec d’Urberville and Angel Clare demonstrate success or failure based on their ability to evolve from a very traditional, theological religion to natural morality. Angel serves as an agent of change in assisting Tess’s development of natural morality. Also, Angel’s own natural morality develops as a result of his relationship with Tess. On the other hand, Alec d’Urberville falsely represents the traditional, genteel society which won’t accept Tess’s natural morality.

Early in the novel we see Tess as different from the majority of the characters that surround her because she has been formally educated and wants to be a teacher. As Hands notes, Tess, so much a part of the past and of her natural environment in many ways; is different in this. Indeed, she is seen as a potential force for advancing this distinction: Hardy makes it clear in the novel, and made it even clearer in the manuscript that her ambition had been to become a teacher. (66)

She has seen her family struggle as laborers and has the intelligence to recognize her potential can be realized through insight and formal education.

However, the catalyst for Tess’s evolution towards natural morality occurs as her father suddenly recognizes that the family has a higher stature than they realized. The Parson tells him, “Don’t you really know, Durbeyfield, that you are the lineal representative of the ancient and knightly family of the d’Urbervilles, who derive their
descent from Sir Pagan d’Urberville, that renowned knight who came from Normandy’” (Tess 18). This will eventually lead Tess into a situation where she begins to develop her own sense of natural morality which differs from the rigidity of the morality of the society she exists in. Her parents’ pursuit of wealth and stature, combined with Tess’s sense of responsibility to her family, will later place her in a situation where she is raped. While she recognizes the injustice, society does not.

Tess’s dreams are initially dashed when John Durbeyfield couldn’t make a delivery because he was drunk. Her mother, father, and siblings pressure her to take over. After the lantern on her wagon goes out, the morning mail-cart crashes into their cart, killing the family horse which at the time was its only source of income.

Six helpless creatures who had never been asked if they wished for life on any terms, much less if they wished for it on such hard conditions as were involved in being of the shiftless house of Durbyfield. Some people would like to know whence the poet whose philosophy is in these days deemed as profound and trustworthy as his song is breezy and pure gets his authority for speaking of “Nature’s holy plan.” (Tess 35)

Feeling obligated to help the family and hoping to get some money from her wealthy relatives through a potential marriage, she goes to the d’Urberville estate because of her overriding sense of responsibility.

“Nature’s holy plan” is the primary facet which Hardy explores through Tess. It demonstrates her frustration with and desire for change in society. Those who believe in natural morality follow a religion not founded on tithes and hypocrisy, but founded on good hearts with good intentions. This is demonstrated through her ordeal with Alec d’Urberville, the birth of their baby, and her temporary evolution.
This is not unlike the natural morality practiced by Charlotte Bronte’s title character, Jane Eyre. Often juxtaposed with St. John Rivers and Helen Burns who follow religion in a very strict, dogmatic fashion, Jane, on the other hand, respects her own knowledge of morality when making good decisions, such as leaving Rochester when he wants her to become his mistress. Unlike Tess, Jane Eyre is rewarded for her natural morality in the end by her reunion with the “cleansed” Rochester. Tess’s natural morality, in the new order that Hardy portrays, will not be rewarded.

Tess’s parents see no danger in sending her to d’Urberville because they are merely out for their own financial gain that could be attained through her potential marriage to Alec d’Urberville. “Thus Joan has a mean, calculating strain, and is entirely lacking in that refinement of mind which her daughter possessed in such a high degree” (Grimsdish 32). John Durbeyfield likewise puts little thought into it. He “had more conceit than energy or health, and this supposition [the potential of Tess’s marrying a wealthy man] was pleasant to him” (58). Roy Morrell thinks

Some people, God help them, may still suppose, Hardy is saying, like Aeschylus long ago, or like Joan Durbeyfield, shifting the blame from her own shoulders, that fate can be blamed for Tess’s disaster. The reader may wish to believe this too: but surely I have shown where the real blame lies. (qtd. in Hands 169)

Hands elaborates, “This blame, Morell argues, is with Alec and Angel, with Tess’s family, with Victorian morality and society and let it not be forgotten, with the faults of personality present in Tess herself” (169).

In her new life on the d’Urberville estate, Tess appears different from her fellow peasants, more sophisticated and enlightened. As they are returning home late at night from a dance in Chasęborough, in which the passion of the scene seems to foreshadow what will happen to her, they laugh at the misfortune of another traveler.
Recognizing her difference from them, she goes on alone to meet her fate with Alec. After the rape, Tess, in her independence and suffering, will not take anything from him and returns home where she gives birth to a sickly child.

Her mother’s disappointed reaction when she returns home further demonstrates the dichotomy between them. “When Tess comes home from Trantridge, it is not the loss of her child’s innocence and unhappiness that Joan deplores: rather it is Tess’s unwillingness and inability to raise the family fortunes by a marriage with d’Urberville” (Grimsditch 32).

As the victim returns home, she is blatantly reminded of her continuing suffering. She sees a signpainter painting on a board, “THY, DAMNATION, SLUMBERETH, NOT” (Tess 95). This only leads her to question morality because, “She had been made to break an accepted social law, but no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly” (101). She sees herself as a victim, not someone to be judged by the unfairness of society where its laws don’t apply.

Thus she returns to pondering “Nature’s holy plan.” Obviously, Hardy also pondered this, and while many argue that he was a believer in Christianity, he felt that, “When Christian theology attempts to stand in the way of enlightenment, he is against it” (Grimsditch 149). This is reinforced much later in the novel as Tess is walking to Flintcombe-Ash and sees dead and dying pheasants who had hidden themselves from their hunters.

The contrast between the plight of the wounded birds and her own condition changes her perspective. Just as concern for her child had strengthened her independence from social convention and her concern for Angel’s life prevented her from suicide, so now the impulses of a soul who could feel for kindred sufferers as much as for herself frees
her from self-pity. Both she and the birds had been “mangled” by human cruelty, but while the birds are helpless, she is not. “I be not mangled and I be not bleeding, and I have two hands to feed and clothe me.” She realizes again, as she had realized after her experience with Alec, the “her gloom of the night [was] based on nothing more tangible than a sense of condemnation under an arbitrary law of society which had not foundation in nature.” (Hyman 116).

Hardy, through Tess, questions society’s morality and encourages the progressive change in philosophy to align with a changing society. According to Daniel Schwarz, “Hardy shows the irrelevance of that [Christian] myth [of a benevolent universe] within his imagined world and shows how his characters are educated by experience to adopt an alternative one” (19).

Sorrow’s death demonstrates Tess’s journey toward natural morality. Even the baby’s name aligns with Tess’s struggle, “So passed away Sorrow the Undesired--that intrusive creature, that bastard gift of shameless Nature, who respects not the social law” (Tess 111). Tess’s undesired baby produced sorrow and exemplifies her struggle to attain comfort with her own natural morality. Tess had found a sense of happiness in returning home and working in the fields. “But now that her moral sorrows were passing away, a fresh one arose on the natural side of her, which knew no social law. The baby’s offence against society in coming into the world was forgotten by the girl-mother; her soul’s desire was to continue that offence by preserving the life of the child” (Tess 108). Once the baby died, “she was plunged into a misery which transcended that of the child’s simple loss. Her baby had not been baptized” (108). Tess’s reverting to theological tradition in a time of stress is not unlike Angel Clare’s
behavior later in the novel. In moments of distress, Tess, like many, reverts to foxhole religion.

Even though the preceding scene demonstrates Tess’s reliance on the accepted doctrine of baptism, it also shows her growth. Hasan states, “We ought to remember that Tess herself evinces no moral hesitancy or confusion. She can separate her rights and desirables from her wrongs and nullities with remarkable volitional and emotional economy” (137). When she baptizes the baby herself, her sister thinks, “She did not look like Sissy to them now, but as a being large, towering, and awful--a ‘divine personage with whom [Tess’s siblings] had nothing in common’ (Tess 111). And the parson affirms that this will be good enough for salvation. It is at this point that Tess, “has done away with the church and the clergy but retained the basic emotional understanding of the ritual because it has come to her naturally in the ordinary process of growing up within a certain culture” (Hasan 142). Phase the Second ends with Tess’s temporary evolution from theology to natural morality.

For Tess, as for all of Hardy’s characters who are capable of change, experience is a kind of refining or purifying process. Something is always lost, but something of greater value is gained. Experience is the means by which a character is moved from one phase of moral evolution to the next. (Hyman 109)

After the baby’s death, Tess begins to feel as though happiness could still be hers. Again she leaves home to find a new beginning, hoping that, “To escape the past and all that appertained thereto was to annihilate it” (Tess 115).

It is indeed through this that her evolving natural morality continues as a result of meeting Angel Clare while she is working as a milkmaid at Talbothays. Angel, has a religious philosophy which does not comply with his father’s, “the earnestest man in all Wessex, they say; the last of the old Low Church sort” (129), strict dogma. Since both
of Angel's brothers had taken orders in the Church, it was expected that he would too. However, while he loves the Church, he states his dismay with its inability to change: "I cannot honestly be ordained her minister [...] while she refuses to liberate her mind from an untenable redemptive theolatry" (131).

It is this sense of natural morality which causes Angel to recognize Tess as different from the other dairymaids as he and she philosophically converse:

He was surprised to find this young woman—though but a milkmaid had just that touch of rarity about her which might make her the envied of her housemates—shaping such sad imaginings. She was expressing in her own native phrases—assisted a little by her Sixth Standard training—feelings which might almost have been called those of the age: the ache of modernism. (Tess 140)

Although she has been limited by class, it is obvious she has the capacity to form her own philosophy of morality in a changing world. Hyman notes that,

By the time Tess arrives at Talbothays, she has, in terms of ethical evolution, left the theological stage of development and moved into the metaphysical. Through her experience she has reached the same level that Angel has achieved through his more formal education. Having by different avenues passed beyond the conventional belief in God and social conventions, they tend to form idealizations and abstractions based upon their moral perceptions. (111)

Angel continues to encourage Tess to expand her mind and at this point claims to see her as "a whole sex" (Tess 147), a very progressive thought for a late nineteenth century man. He doesn't see Tess as a woman who is there to "serve" as his wife, but more as an equal, one with whom he can grow intellectually and spiritually. As expected, they fall in love, and Angel proposes.
Again, we see the strictures of the societal norms weighing on Tess. After repeatedly refusing marriage, she agrees after promising herself that she will tell him of her past. As progressive as Angel is, she thinks that he should be able to understand her plight. She makes her confession to him after he confesses his own scandalous behavior: two days with a stranger in London. She responds after his confession, "Oh, Angel--I am almost glad--because now you can forgive me! I have not made my confession. I have a confession, too--remember, I said so (Tess 243). Comparatively speaking, Angel's is a far worse offense than being raped. Angel has committed his own immoral behavior, while Tess was a victim. As Grimsditch observes, He seems to attach very little importance to his own moral lapse, complacently accepting different codes of conduct for men and women. Well as he knows Tess, he seems unable to see that all her instincts are pure, and that it is far more through misfortune than through viciousness that she has fallen into sin. It is a strange trait in human nature that the "ethereal" lover can be absolutely harsh and callous once he perceives some falling-away from his ideal, or when he himself has deserted it. (119)

Angel's hypocrisy is surprising because he appeared to share Tess's natural morality. Seemingly, Angel's response to Tess makes him appear very theological, "Oh, Tess, forgiveness does not apply to the case! You were one person; now you are another. My God--how can forgiveness meet such a grotesque--prestidigitation as that!" (Tess 245) When his morality is on trial, he reverts back to standardized religion. What Angel doesn't realize though, as we hear Hardy's voice ringing true, is that "In considering what Tess was not, he overlooked what she was, and forgot that the defective can be more than the entire" (283).
Angel did initially present himself as someone who wished to follow a more natural form of morality than the dogmatic theological beliefs he was raised with. Hands states, “Angel reels off the Positivist clichés. Religion must be reconstructed: humanity, not God, should be the focus of reverence and attention” (119). Angel made this obvious when we first met him in Phase the Third and he reflected on a discussion he and his father had regarding his becoming a minister. And although he lapses into traditional theology after Tess’s confession at the end of Phase the Fourth, by the beginning of Phase the Seventh, “Fulfilment,” he does show evolution.

He had undergone some strange experiences in his absence; he had seen the virtual Faustina in the literal Cornelia, a spiritual Lucretia in a corporeal Phryne; he had thought of the woman taken and set in the midst as one deserving to be stoned, and of the wife of Uriah being made a queen; and he had asked himself why he had not judged Tess constructively rather than biographically, by the will rather than by the deed. (TESS 390)

In recognition of his error, Angel seeks Tess to see if there is any chance they can be together. Unfortunately, as a result of Angel’s condemnation of Tess, he once again serves as an agent of change in her life. “So utterly have her faith and hope been focused upon Angel that when she rejects him and resolves to forget him, she ceases emotionally to live” (Hyman 116). When this happens, her temporary evolution ends and her journey to Flintcomb-Ash is contrasted with her journey to Talbothays:

The difference between this journey and her early one to Talbothays is that this one is marked by her reduced hope for future happiness and her increased fortitude. Willing to accept her past and give up her idealization of Angel as she had earlier renounced her “D’Urberville a castles,” she moves forward toward the winter landscape of Flintcomb-
Ash purified of her former illusions and willing to persevere in the world of space and time. (Hyman 116)

In the final section of the novel, "Fulfilment," Angel returns to find her "married" to d'Urberville. Virginia Hyman notes, "Tess's rejection of Angel and her return to Alec mark the end of her period of mental and emotional stagnation and the beginning of her moral relapse and spiritual death." (118). Seeing Angel arouses Tess's anger and resentment towards Alec.

And then my dear, dear husband came home to me--and I did not know it! And you had used--your cruel persuasion upon me--you did not stop using it--no--you did not stop! My little sisters and brothers and my mother's needs--they were the things you moved me by--and you said my husband could never come back--never; and you taunted me and said what a simpleton I was to expect him! And at last I believed you and gave way! And then he came back! Now he is gone. (Tess 402)

She believed that the only way she could be free of her "bond" to Alec was to kill him. I believe she is responding to the societal norms she despises by committing this act. If Alec is dead, she will be free to be with Angel again. Her thought process represents her regression. She does not think society would accept her return to Angel, and logically it would not; however, Tess's paradox or even tragedy is that society also would not accept the murder of Alec. As Schwarz observes,

By "fulfilling" the promise of the beginnings, the endings imply that the world in which men live is closed and invulnerable to essential change. The title of Tess's last phase, "Fulfilment," implies, I think, something about Hardy's world-view and aesthetic. By fulfilment, he means the inevitable bringing to fruition of the pattern that derives from the
interaction of the central character’s psyche with the work in
which he (or she) is placed. (18)

Tess’s actions seem to follow from her situation. Hasan states, “If we do not feel
shocked by the murder, it is because the murder seems to be the natural response
considering the circumstantial provocation of a whole culture. (152).

Tess’s arrest at Stonehenge, “the heathen temple,” is symbolic. Finding
happiness and contentment here, she nevertheless must be aware that she is sought
after. This has been her life: in her desire for natural morality, a more heathen life, she
was trapped by society’s standards and theology. Therefore, she cannot successfully
evolve. However, one might consider Tess successful when considering her request
for Angel to marry Liza-Lu if anything should happen her. Tess says,

Liza-Lu is so gentle and sweet, and she is growing so beautiful. Oh, I
could share you with her willingly when we are spirits! If you would
train her and teach her, Angel, and bring her up for your own self! She
has all the best of me without the bad of me; and if she were to become
yours, it would almost seem as if death had not divided us. (Tess 415)

With Angel as Liza-Lu’s agent of change, he could perhaps find happiness.

Hyman thinks,

With the recognition that the kind of happiness she had wanted for
herself and Angel is not compatible with the world of time and change,
Tess is left with the only alternative the ethical evolutionists considered
available: She renounces her hope for happiness and extends her
concern beyond herself. (120)

In opposition to Tess’s attempt at moral evolution, Alec d’Urberville represents
the traditional, genteel society which won’t accept Tess’s natural morality. Hardy
wrote in a letter to Edward Clodd:
The older one gets, the more deplorable seems the effect of that terrible ecclesiasticism--Christianity so called (but really Paulinism plus idolatry)--on morals and true religion: a dogma which the real teaching of Christ has hardly anything in common. (Millgate 110-11)

Exemplifying this dogma, Alec preaches religion only as he needs it to serve his own end. He can’t see beyond the words to the real meaning and admits his shortfall when Tess asks him if he has given up preaching,

Entirely. I have broken every engagement since that afternoon I was to address the drunkards at Casterbridge Fair. The deuce only knows what I am thought of by the brethren. Ah--ha! The brethren! No doubt they pray for me--weep for me; for they are kind people in their way. [. . .] believe that if the bachelor--apostle, whose deputy I thought I was, had been tempted by such a pretty face, he would have let go the plough for her sake as I do. (Tess 348-49)

Alec insincerely and briefly adheres to the theological, but is not capable of the evolution to natural morality.

His insincerity and incapability of developing natural morality is best demonstrated by his manipulation of Tess in Phase the Sixth. Alec plays on Tess’s feelings of responsibility again. “Ever since the occurrence of the event which had cast such a shadow over Tess’s life, the Durbeyfield family (whose descent was not credited) had been tacitly looked on as one which would have to go when their lease ended, if only in the interest of morality” (372-73). Because Tess had an illegitimate child, her family was homeless. When Alec gives her the opportunity to provide her family with a home, she submits. Hasan states, “Her final submission to Alec d’Urberville is motivated by the same force which first brought her under his sway. It
is because of her sensitivity to the needs of her family that she agrees to live as Alec’s mistress” (150).

I must disagree with Schwarz’s earlier interpretation that fulfilment means, “the interaction of the central character’s psyche with the work in which he (or she) is placed” (18). I don’t think Tess was completely satisfied with the end results of her existence. While she may have placed Liza-Lu in a positive existence, she did not completely attain this. I think Angel did. His recognition of his previous error and his devotion to Tess demonstrate this. Alec’s lack of commitment to anything, demonstrates his complete failure in terms of moral evolution.

Tess’s and Angel’s evolution are similar to Henchard’s evolution in that they all recognized a sense of natural morality which was not necessarily accepted by their society. In the next chapter I will show that in Jude the Obscure, Jude and Phillotson are also similar in that they recognized and pursued the same sense of natural morality, while Sue failed in this pursuit.
Jude the Obscure

Hardy’s last novel, *Jude the Obscure* presents Jude, Sue and Phillotson as characters who demonstrate success or failure based on their ability to evolve from the theological to natural morality. We also see these characters challenge the standards of education and the role of women in their society which demonstrates further frustration with their individual evolution. Hands notes, “Only later, culminating in *Jude*, would Hardy begin again to address anything like an overt political theme, but always his own writing reflects an interest (however non-politically aligned) in those aspects which his society was engaged in reforming” (63).

Jude initially struggles against a collegiate system, perhaps more broadly representative of the upper class as a whole, Christminster, which welcomes the sons of the wealthy or nobility with open arms, regardless of their intrinsic feelings about learning. Jude has the intelligence to perhaps get into university with some guidance, but has none. If he were to pay his way, “at the rate at which, with the best of fortune, he would be able to save money, fifteen years must elapse before he could be in a position to forward testimonials to the Head of a College and advance to a matriculation examination” (*Jude* 165). Hardy distinctly puts Jude in this situation to demonstrate the struggle of the working class, educated man trying to make something of himself within his own lifetime. “Had Jude not been poor, had he lived in other times, his career might have been very different. But Hardy only displays the ‘might-have-been’ to show the imperfection of the ‘things that are’” (Grimsditch 35-36). Merryn Williams thinks,
Like all true Hardy heroes, Jude wants to find something greater than himself to which he can give himself totally. In earlier novels, this had meant productive work on the land; in others it meant the cause of progress or learning. Jude belongs to a generation for whom work on the land has become irrelevant; instead he strains himself to the limit in the struggle to be a learned man who can find a home in the Christminster colleges. (108-09)

Though he has the intrinsic desire and love for education and the desire to become a member of the clergy, his social success is completely thwarted by the class structure of the university. Although unsuccessful in his struggle to reach his dreams, Jude does evolve from the theological to natural morality, making him successful in that sense.

Upon his arrival at Christminster, the buildings in the city are a symbol of this educational mecca.

What at night had been perfect and ideal was by day the more or less defective real. Cruelties, insults, had, he perceived, been inflicted on the aged erections. The condition of several moved him as he would have been moved by maimed sentient beings. They were wounded, broken, sloughing off their outer shape in the deadly struggle against years, weather, and man. (Jude 130)

Jude was dealing with illusion versus reality, both in what the buildings represented, and the potential the esteemed position he longed for held for him. Schwarz thinks, “That there is an inevitable disjunction between what a man would like to be and what he is, is the central philosophic premise of the narrator and the major metaphysical tenet of the novel’s world” (31). As hard as Jude tries, and as much as he may want to live this dream, he cannot.
As a last ditch effort, he writes to several heads of colleges to ask them what he might do to improve his possibilities of being admitted. He gets one response which only tells him what he already has begun to understand: “[J]udging from your description of yourself as a working-man, I venture to think that you will have a much better chance of success in life by remaining in your own sphere and sticking to your trade than by adopting any other course” (Jude 167).

Hardy represented in Return of the Native that the social success in a field of intellect and religion would not be possible in the existing society. As Grimsditch observes,

It is pointed out in The Return of the Native that the transition from the bucolic to the intellectual stage takes place through the intermediary stage of social advancement. There would seem to be no deep-laid reason for the permanence of this condition, much of whose force is derived from long-standing social divisions and from the immemorial juxtaposition of rank and culture. The possibility of reform can only be properly examined in an age in which there is some approach to equality of opportunity in education. (34-35)

Jude is living in an age where this equality does not exist. However, based on a wistful longing for Sue as a companion, Jude sees Christminster in a new light. “He began to see that the town life was a book of humanity infinitely more palpitating, varied, and compendious that the gown life. These struggling men and women before him were the reality of Christminster, though they knew little of Christ or Minster” (Jude 168). This was his reality, and one that he recognized would not be so bad if he could only have Sue. He began to see people and experience them for their own reality
in their own environment and appreciate them. Looking beyond the impossibility of his dreams, he recognized happiness could be found in love. In spite of his society-driven failure in Christminster, he might be able to achieve success as he develops a sense of natural morality and discards the rigidity of the religion he once lived and loved.

As Jude’s love of knowledge and desire to go to the university are espoused early in the novel, so is his capability for acceptance of natural morality. As a child given the job of chasing seed-stealing birds from planted fields, he is fired for allowing the birds to feed, realizing there’s enough for humans and animals to share. “Jude comes upon the scene at the age of eleven years, and it is at once apparent that he is no ordinary boy, but a child full of ambition, possessing a preternatural solicitude for the animal world and an unusual insight for one so young” (Orimsditch 34). This behavior is also evident in his adult life in the pig-killing scene. He wants to slaughter the pig quickly; Arabella wants it to slowly bleed to make the meat worth more. Again, we see his sensitivity to creatures when he mercifully kills a crying rabbit caught in a trap. This behavior, plus his undying love for Sue Bridehead, makes his acceptance of a natural morality understandable.

Sue Bridehead is an intriguing character in her beliefs and hypocrisy. She is like a child learning to walk, who teetering between two objects of support, makes a mad dash for the coffee table in order to keep from falling. Sue is introduced to us as an employee in an ecclesiastical warehouse. She teeters between the theological and natural morality. It is not long after her introduction that we see her hiding two pagan statues of Venus and Apollo from her partner, also her landlord, fearing that her natural morality will be questioned. When asked about what she is hiding, she says they are statues of “Two saints [. . .] St Peter and St--St Mary Magdalen” (Jude ‘142). Rather ironically, Sue is not unlike Mary Magdalen who was a “fallen woman” in love with
Jesus. That relationship is not unlike Sue's interactions with Jude and Phillotson. Also, this may have been foreshadowing Sue's inability to adhere to her less-than-conventional beliefs when the forces of pressure or punishment are present. Hands notes,

For, however modern she may seem, Sue follows the all but universal 'destiny of other New Women of fiction of the period--Evadne in Sarah Grand's The Heavenly Twins (1893) or Hadria in Mona Càird's The Daughters of Danaus (1894)--towards breakdown, nervous prostration, and conventional religion. (72)

Sue says she fits in with the world of men better than she seems to with the world of women and she explains this to Jude:

My life has been entirely shaped by what people call a peculiarity in me. I have no fear of men, as such, nor of their books. I have mixed with them--one or two of them particularly--almost as one of their own sex. I mean I have not felt them as most women are taught to feel--to be on their guard against attacks on their virtue; for no average man--no man short of a sensual savage--will molest a woman by day or night, at home or abroad, unless she invites him. (Jude 202)

Holding this view, Sue seems unable to love someone in an intimate, equal fashion when the societal constraints of marriage exist. Nineteenth century society looked at love and intimacy outside of marriage as unacceptable, regardless of its purity. This belief seems to be Hardy's as well, as seen in his letter to Edward Clodd, "What you say is pertinent and true of the modern views of marriage are a survival from the custom of capture & purchase, propped up by a theological superstition" (qtd. in Millgate 100). This is indeed the concept from which the major conflict in the novel
evolves and the characters demonstrate their ability to evolve or fail. Sue is not successful in that she does not accept natural morality.

Phillotson, who does evolve morally, is greatly admired as a teacher by Jude, and inspires his desire to go to Christminster. Phillotson says, “You know what a university is, and a university degree? It is the necessary hallmark of a man who wants to do anything in teaching. My scheme, or dream, is to be a university graduate, and then to be ordained” (Jude 48). Perhaps Jude’s failure was foreshadowed by his mentor’s: “Phillotson, like Jude, desires to enter the University and afterwards take orders. He starts a little farther up the ladder than Jude, but makes no more progress and remains a village schoolmaster” (Grimsditch 176). Although neither is successful in becoming a member of the clergy, Phillotson does demonstrate success in accepting natural morality through his actions with Sue.

Marriage is the catalyst through which Hardy challenges religion and society’s standards. Through Jude, Arabella, Phillotson, and Sue, Hardy presents two views of marriage: one based on love, self-respect and respect for a partner, and one based on “that of having based a permanent contract on a temporary feeling which had no necessary connection with affinities that alone render a life-long comradeship tolerable” (Jude 115). The status quo of existing marriages was based on the fact that it was a contract binding two people, with no attention to happiness or suitability.

Based on Jude’s desire to become a member of the clergy, and his theological roots, Jude’s initial feelings regarding marriage are quite conventional. As a result of his instinctual, animalistic desires, Jude is bound to Arabella in a legal, yet dissatisfying marriage. It’s dissatisfying for two reasons: Arabella is an illusion and her basis for the marriage relies on falsehoods. Although seeming to be a beautiful, young, innocent woman, Arabella is not. She creates dimples by sucking her cheeks in and her long, flowing locks are physically attached each morning. And she has not spent her entire
life on a pig farm, but has worked as a barmaid because while she sat at home in boredom, all she did was eat.

When she faked pregnancy, Jude acted conventionally. Even though he acts “properly,” he has begun to question society’s view of marriage:

There seemed to him, vaguely and dimly, something wrong in a social ritual which made necessary a canceling of well-formed schemes involving years of thought and labor, of foregoing a man’s one opportunity of showing himself superior to the lower animals, and of contributing his units of work to the general progress of his generation, because of a momentary surprise by a new and transitory instinct which had nothing in it of the nature of vice, and could be only at the most called weakness. He was inclined to inquire what he had done, or she lost, for that matter, that he deserved to be caught in a gin which would cripple him, if not her also, for the rest of a lifetime? (Jude 107)

That “gin” is not unlike the gin which Jude freed the dying rabbit from to put it out of its misery. He recognizes he needs to be freed from a similar trap. It is this thought, plus Sue’s tendency towards natural morality, that helps move Jude from a conventional to a more natural view of marriage.

‘At first Jude and Sue’s relationship appears to be quite platonic, but love develops. However, there are some obstacles, beyond Jude’s marriage, to the evolution of their relationship.

“You forget that I must have loved you, and wanted to be your wife, even if there had been no obstacle,” said Sue, with a gentle seriousness which did not reveal her mind. “And then we are cousins, and it is bad for cousins to marry. And—I am engaged to somebody else.” (Jude 223)
Sue's engagement to Phillotson is the primary obstacle. It is obvious that this engagement and marriage will not fulfill what Sue views as a happy relationship because she does not love him. Her lack of passion for Phillotson is symbolized by her physical appearance. When she went to Training College in Melchester, a recommendation made by Phillotson, Sue lost the vibrancy and progressive quality she once possessed, yet a bit of it still existed.

Her hair, which formerly she had worn according to the custom of the day, was now twisted up tightly, and she had altogether the air of a woman clipped and pruned by severe discipline, an under-brightness shining through from the depths which that discipline had not yet been able to reach. (Jude 184)

This indicates her suppressed potential for evolution; however, after her marriage to Phillotson, Sue's true beliefs surface and Phillotson's evolve.

Sue explains to Phillotson that while she likes him as a friend, she cannot live with him in a conventional marriage. She recognizes that she let the standards of her own ideology slip, "But I was a coward--as so many women are--and my theoretic unconventionality broke down" (Jude 284). It is then that she asks Phillotson for something which society would not find acceptable: "We shall both be dead in a few years and then what will it matter to anybody that you relieved me from constraint for a little while?" (285). More surprising than the request is the devoutly religious Phillotson's comment about this to his professional friend,

I know I can't logically, or religiously, defend my concession to such a wish of hers; or harmonize it with the doctrines I was brought up in. Only I know one thing: something within me tells me I am doing wrong in refusing her. I am simply going to act by instinct and let principles take care of themselves. (293-94)
He begins to understand the complexities involved in love and marriage beyond the conventional view, and knows that when it comes right down to it, nobody should be bound to a life of unhappiness. Phillotson knows her love for Jude is stronger than his legally sanctioned marriage to her. When he learns that his resignation as schoolmaster has been requested based on his behavior he states, "I don’t care, I don’t go unless I am turned out. And for this reason; that by resigning I acknowledge I have acted wrongly by her; when I am more and more convinced every day that in the sight of Heaven and by all natural straightforward humanity, I have acted rightly" (312). This is an amazing example of character growth; his attitude reflects natural morality. Even when he re-marries Sue at the end of the novel, he questions if, perhaps, they should wait, "If she is really compelling herself to this against her instincts—merely from this new sense of duty or religion—I ought perhaps to let her wait a bit" (445).

When Sue initially leaves Phillotson, she and Jude live together, celebrating their new-found freedom. She seems to be portraying a progressive attitude as she continually refuses Jude’s requests for marriage. "I don’t like to say no, dear Jude: but I feel just the same about it now as I have done all along. I have just the same dread lest an iron contract should extinguish your tenderness for me, and mine for you, as it did between our unfortunate parents" (Jude 323). Hyman thinks, Sue is unable to agree to marriage with Jude, for she fears it will force her into a conventional relationship and she is unsure of her ability to engage in a new kind of relationship within the conventional forms.

When she recognizes that their unconventional way of living is forcing them into a nomadic type of existence, she contents herself with only a pretense of marriage which convinces no one. (167)

However, Sue’s ideologies may not represent her true self, because it seems that they may not be her own. She was greatly influenced by the undergraduate she once lived
with and may have just adopted his ideologies instead of developing her own. Hyman states,

What [Hardy] shows is that the values Sue professes are, in themselves, negative ones: Sue’s desire for freedom is shown to be escapist; her desire for happiness, egocentric and destructive; and her scorn for social conventions and religion is based on ignorance rather than knowledge. Furthermore, although she seems intellectually advanced by the ideas she professes, it is soon made clear that these ideas have been acquired second-hand from the undergraduate she had known earlier. (167)

After the death of their children in Christminster, Sue reveals her theological perspective about marriage to Jude.

“But I have made up my mind that I am not your wife! I belong to him--I sacramentally joined myself to him for life. Nothing can alter it!”

“But surely we are man and wife, if ever two people were in this world? Nature’s own marriage it is, unquestionably!”

“But not Heaven’s. Another was made for me there, and ratified eternally in the church at Melchester” (Jude 426).

Jude earlier commented, “My good heavens--how we are changing places!” (422) and it is obvious that this is certainly true. Thus, Sue reverts to traditional theology, failing in her initial ideologies, while Jude has made the opposite transition to natural morality.

Sue re-marries Phillotson because the death of her children made her question her unconventional behavior. Seeing their deaths as punishment from God, she immediately attempts to repent through the righteous re-marriage.

Such is the dreadful “conversion” of Sue, which leads her to offer herself up as a human sacrifice on the alter of Propriety. After her
assertion of freedom, after Jude’s emancipation under her guidance, comes the ghastly tragedy, which, through the shock to her overwrought nervous system, drives her back to a submissiveness that is half insane. (Grimsditch 146)

Hyman notes,

As Jude reminds her, Sue’s religious hysteria has no relationship to her advanced views; rather, it is expressive of the very medievalism she had always abhorred. She begins to feel, in a way that she had not felt before, the conflict between flesh and spirit. Her reaction to this conflict is more medieval than either pagan or modern. She sees her remarriage to Phillotson as a means of resolving the conflict. It will be a kind of penance, an exercise in self-discipline, a means of mortifying the flesh.

(170)

While Sue reverts to the restrictive theological, Jude remains true to natural morality in recognizing the farce of their re-marriages and the progressiveness of his relationship to Sue. According to Pinion,

They (Hardy’s views on church) are linked with marriage laws, and reach their peak when Sue, assuming that the loss of her children is retribution for sin, or insolence to God, returns to Phillotson, though she does not love him. A bitter, almost Aristophanic, commentary is implicit in Jude’s remarriage to Arabella; “It’s true religion,” he says. Sue, “creed-drunk” and Jude, “gin-drunk,” sacrifice themselves in remarriages which are wholly unsatisfactory but conventionally sanctified. (168)
Jude sees minds uncluttered by the vision of an angry God, and one who respects his creatures who act morally, even if it’s not conventional. “As for Sue and me when we were at our own best, long ago—when our minds were clear, and our love of truth fearless—the time was not ripe for us! Our ideas were fifty years too soon to be any good to us” (Jude 482).

Although Jude dies the most tragic of deaths, at least he died in peace in that he held to the beliefs he had learned to be true. “Thus, like Hardy’s other great tragic characters—Michael Henchard, Eustacia Vye, and Tess—Jude is a catalyst for change” (Hyman 153). Phillotson also did all he could to give Sue what she needed, be it marriage or freedom, regardless of the belief system he had been indoctrinated with which demonstrated his evolution to natural morality. It was only Sue, the last character one might think would do this, who failed. Part of the blame for Sue’s failure to evolve though can be placed on the time period. She was expected to follow a theology that pervaded her lifetime and many before, and was not expected to question or challenge it.

Thus, like Henchard and Clare who proceeded him, Jude succeeded. Although the primary female characters, Tess and Sue did not succeed in their evolution, their attempts were certainly remarkable and inspirational for the time period they existed in.
Conclusion

Thomas Hardy wrote *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* in a time of great change and perhaps with great purpose. Hyman writes,

Hardy saw himself as time’s surrogate, not only in illuminating the past but in stimulating his readers to move into the future. His plots imitate the inexorable movement of time, and his characters reveal varying degrees of ability to adapt to it. His novels not only express his view of the past and the present but attempt to restructure the responses of his readers in such a way as to accommodate them to the only future he believed possible. By becoming time’s surrogate, Hardy hoped to provide his contemporaries with time’s illuminations soon enough to make them its victims. (3)

Through demonstrating the attempts of his characters to succeed in a rapidly evolving society he showed his readers the potential for success and the weaknesses that flawed them.

Henchard in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* demonstrates a successful moral evolution as he transcends egotism and returns to natural morality at the end of the novel. His daughter Elizabeth-Jane, a minor character, is a lesser example of successful evolution to natural morality. His social evolution is not successful as he cannot adapt to the changes posed by industrialization.

In *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, Tess demonstrated both success and failure. “Tess is at once the most natural and most human of Hardy’s creations” (Hyman 106). Although raped by Alec, the fact that they had a child together binds them according to
Roberts 45

religion. Tess evolved through this and towards natural morality as she sees the frailties of traditional religion and attempts to establish her own happiness; however, her evolution, and thus her success, can be seen as temporary. On the other hand, Angel’s progression is almost completely opposite of Tess’s. He is initially seen as following natural morality, shifting back to traditional theology, and at the end of the novel, again adhering to natural morality making him a successful character. Alec d’Urberville is a character who best represents the genteel, landed aristocracy who really places no value on morality, but does what suits him best.

In Jude the Obscure, Jude progresses from traditional theology as exemplified in his moving beyond dreams of becoming a member of the clergy and his marriage to Arabella; to natural morality as demonstrated in his relationship with Sue.Bridehead. Thus, he successfully evolves. Hardy wrote to Florence Henniker regarding this,

[...] but you know what I have thought for many years: that marriage should not thwart nature, and that when it does thwart nature it is no real marriage, and the legal contract should therefore be as speedily canceled as possible. Every kind of reform is met with the objection that it would be impossible, would have monstrous results, yet therefore takes place, and the impossibility vanishes. (qtd. in Millgate 246-47)

His mentor, Phillotson, is also a successful character. He begins with the same desires as Jude, but ironically, based on his marriage to Sue, he evolves to natural morality. Sue is an unsuccessful character who represents her views as aligning with natural morality, but eventually succumbs to the constraints of traditional religion.

This was an important study. After reading many of Hardy’s earlier, more bucolic novels, it changed my impression of Hardy’s intentions. While I enjoyed the earlier novels, I was compelled by his later works as I’m sure many of his contemporaries were. He provided realistic stories demonstrating the early
Agricultural Revolution as depicted in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. He then showed Tess in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* moving from a very traditional agrarian society, with very traditional values, to natural morality. My favorite part of this was having the concluding scene with Tess at Stonehenge. Having her in this pagan setting must have been shocking to many contemporary readers, but was so appropriate for her attempt at evolution. Finally, Jude’s physical move to Christminster in *Jude the Obscure* was representative of an attempt at upward mobility in a society that wasn’t ready to provide equal opportunity for all even though success in the new social order demanded such attempts.

The great beauty of this—and all literature I believe, is its timelessness. Although written in the nineteenth century, Hardy’s Darwinian message is timeless. If one were to question whether Hardy was a successful character in light of this study, he would be deemed successful. He not only evolved in his belief system, but used the novel to examine the new world and present his observations to society. He grew up in an age of change and was one of the first writers to discuss the ache of modernism. His message is as potent today: evolve, adapt or fail.
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