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Hardy's Reading in Schopenhauer: Tess of the D'Urbervilles

by MARY ANN KELLY

*Necessity is the kingdom of nature;
freedom is the kingdom of grace.*

The World as Will and Idea, (I, 523)

THROUGH Hardy's notes, we can trace his reading in Schopenhauer from 1883 to 1912 and date particular transitions in his thought which indicate that he was progressively more inclined to accept certain areas of Schopenhauer's, and to a lesser extent Hartmann's, philosophy. The years following 1883 are the years in which Hardy wrote and revised *Tess*, conceived the epic poem *The Dynasts*, and recorded his reactions to both Schopenhauer and Hartmann.¹ Because Hardy was assimilating Schopenhauer's godless and fatalistic philosophy during this period, *Tess* demonstrates Hardy's darkest philosophical inclinations. During the composition of *Tess* Hardy seemed to be considering seriously Schopenhauer's conviction that consciousness was an evolutionary mistake that should be remedied.² In the light of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea*, *Tess* not only becomes a dramatization of the working of Schopenhauer's blind, irrational, and immutable Universal Will to live, but it also creates a clear impression of his dictum that, in this world, "*Determinism stands firm.*"³

The recurring idea of unconscious, instinctual behavior lends a determinism to *Tess* which can be explained by Hardy's reading in Schopenhauer during the years of the composition of the novel. In *Tess* Hardy implies that the individual's continual loss of happiness is directly related to the fact that he has no real conscious choices in life. Hardy's characters are always in a "narcotic haze," a "reverie," or a state resembling somnambulism where real conscious choices do not exist. In this manner Hardy portrays Schopenhauer's Will in action. He makes

1. See Walter F. Wright, *The Shaping of The Dynasts: A Study in Thomas Hardy* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1967), p. 39; W. R. Rutland, *Thomas Hardy: A Study of His Writings and Their Background* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1938), pp. 93, 96; Robert Gittings, *The Older Hardy* (London: Heinemann, 1978), pp. 114, 192.

2. For a general discussion of the death wish in Hardy's work, see Lawrence J. Starzyk's "The Coming Universal Wish Not to Live in Hardy's 'Modern' Novels," *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, XXVI (1971-72), 419-35, and Bruce E. Miller's "Motives of Annihilation in Hardy's Late Novels," *College Language Association Journal*, XIX (1975-76), 389-403.

3. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, trans. R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp (1883; rpt. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), III, 67. Future references are to this edition.

us see the unending cycle of pleasure and pain which Schopenhauer describes. He also points out that the struggle to attain happiness is futile, and that total passivity, or what Schopenhauer would call Nirvana, is essential to contentment.

Hardy stresses the idea that his characters behave according to blind impulses in order that we see them as helpless victims of a force beyond their comprehension, in this case a force like Schopenhauer's Will. Hardy creates the impression that a blind, pulsating, mechanistic, pervasive force dictates human behavior, and through his metaphors we see that his aim is apparently to portray Tess (and the other characters in the tragedy) a totally helpless victim of her "will" in the Schopenhauerian sense of the word—deterministic, pervasive, and irrational.

The "impulses" become most significant when a character's actions have the potential to destroy his contentment. For instance, the most serious consequences in the novel occur when Tess "abandons herself to impulse" and climbs into Alec's carriage.⁴ This impulse manages to set her on the road to destruction. Angel, too, on the night Tess confesses to him, feels incorrectly that he should "trust" his impulses: "He waited in the expectancy to discern some mental pointing; he knew that if any intention of his, concluded over-night, did not vanish in the light of morning, it stood on a basis approximating to one of pure reason, even if initiated by impulse of feeling; that it was so far, therefore, to be trusted" (p. 320). As we find out later, this tendency to trust emotional impulse destroys both Angel's and Tess's chances for contentment. When Alec reappears on the scene at Flintcomb-Ash, Tess has an "impulse . . . to pass on out of" Alec's sight—an impulse which only calls Alec's attention to her (p. 390). Tess writes to Angel that because of Alec's attentions she feels "pressed to do what I will not do" (p. 429). She appears to feel helpless and incapable of controlling the circumstances which impel her to accept Alec's offer, and, indeed, she is. Finally the most damning impulsion Tess gives way to is that which causes her to kill Alec. When she tells Angel, he is horrified at her "impulse" which results in Alec's death (p. 492). These are only the most significant impulses Hardy writes about in the novel. He uses the idea, even in less significant scenes, that the characters are "impelled" to act in certain ways.⁵

In light of Schopenhauer's philosophy, even Tess's murdering Alec is the result of blind compulsion, correct in nature: the larger Universal

4. Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1920), p. 84. All references are to this, the Anniversary Edition.

5. These impulses include: Clare's "impulses" to confront his father (pp. 201, 209); Tess's "impulsively whispered" kindness about the dairy girls (p. 274); Clare's being saved from "an incredible impulse towards folly" by Izz Huett (p. 345); Tess's "impulse" to put the pheasants out of their misery (p. 355); Tess's "impulsively" facing South America when she is desperate for Clare (p. 369); Tess's inscription in the church book written in a "season of impulse" (p. 376); Alec's "impulse . . . to take" Tess's hand (p. 405); and Clare's belief that the beauty of a character lay in its "aims and impulses" (p. 432).

Will compels her in that it, in part, exists outside her being, just as her individual will (a small part of the Universal Will) impels her from within.

Hardy further reinforces this idea of instinctual blind behavior with the use of a mechanical metaphor in which the universe becomes a kind of machine, running mindlessly, creating chaos. Life in Wessex, the world, is characterized by the "achromatic chaos of things" (p. 368). The metaphor first occurs when Hardy describes the reaping-machine "ticking." Its movement is systematic and monotonous, and it randomly and mindlessly destroys lives:

The machine had begun. . . . Along one side of the field the whole wain went, the arms of the mechanical reaper revolving slowly. . . .

Rabbits, hares, snakes, rats, mice, retreated inwards as into a fastness, unaware of the ephemeral nature of their refuge, and of the doom that awaited them later in the day when, their covert shrinking to a more and more horrible narrowness, they were huddled together, friends, and foes, till the last few yards of upright wheat fell also under the teeth of the unerring reaper, and they were every one put to death by the sticks and stones of the harvester. (p. 110)

The destruction the machine wreaks upon the unknowing victims is similar to the havoc wreaked by the Will upon men. Hardy also refers to Tess's work in the field proceeding with "clock-like monotony" (p. 111). These symbols are used by Schopenhauer as well to describe the working of the Will:

If we conceive of the human race and its actions *as a whole and universally*, it does not present itself to us, as when we contemplate the particular actions, as a play of puppets who are pulled after the ordinary manner by threads outside them; but from this point of view, as puppets which are set in motion by internal clockwork. . . . One compares the ceaseless, serious, and laborious striving of men with what they gain by it, nay, even with what they ever can gain, and the disproportion . . . becomes apparent, for one recognizes that that which is to be gained, taken as the motive-power, is entirely insufficient for the explanation of that movement and that ceaseless striving. (III, 115)

Schopenhauer also says that "these mechanical tendencies show most clearly that creatures can work with the greatest decision and definiteness towards an end which they do not know, nay, of which they can have no idea" (III, 96). This idea permeates *Tess*, even in the smallest instances.

Hardy tells us that Tess hears "a solitary cracked-voiced reed sparrow" greet her from bushes by the river "in a sad, machine-made tone" (p. 173). In the latter half of the novel the image of the world as a machine with many parts, working unceasingly and blindly, becomes more pronounced and more oppressive. The world is a machine, running with no conscious operator.

The unconsciously motivated instinctual behavior which Hardy writes about in *Tess* is related to two other notions which Hardy gleaned from his reading in Schopenhauer. The first is that traditional religious ideas

about a divine Providence must be replaced by an acknowledgement of a more pantheistic force in nature which reflects the indifferent Universal Will, and the second is that death, or the annihilation of consciousness, is preferable to a helpless life determined by blind irrational impulsion. The world is nothing more than a phenomenal expression of a metaphysical truth: that all life is one reflection of a universal, deterministic, irrational, compulsive, and unconscious Will to live. Life becomes a sentence under such conditions, and freedom of will, though it may appear to exist, is non-existent. When Hardy writes that the Vale of Blackmoor is Tess's world (p. 40) and that her world is blighted, he is using a metaphor to explain the macrocosm, the "cold accretion called the world" (p. 108). In the General Preface to the Anniversary Edition of his novels, Hardy wrote that his subjects were "beings in whose hearts and minds that which is apparently local should be really universal" (p. ix). The universality of his impressions, as they are expressed in *Tess*, is hinted at early in the novel: "Here, in the valley, the world seems to be constructed upon a smaller and more delicate scale; the fields are mere paddocks, so reduced that from this height their hedgerows appear a network of dark green threads overspreading the paler green of the grass. The atmosphere beneath is languorous. . . . Such is the Vale of Blackmoor" (pp. 9-10). Hardy repeatedly stresses that the Vale is a microcosm in which the world is reflected and that "its inhabitants [are] the races thereof" (p. 40).

When Hardy refers to birth as a kind of curse (p. 24), a constant regret (p. 97), and an "offence" (p. 116), he echoes Schopenhauer's notion that birth itself is original sin. Hardy refers to the penal sentence in M. Sully-Prudhomme, "You shall be born" (p. 311), and he characterizes life as a "plight" (p. 108), "a degrading compulsion" (p. 455). Tess is no less a "prisoner of the flesh" than her child, Sorrow, whose pathetic small life is cut short early. And Hardy calls his death an emancipation (p. 116).

Hardy repeatedly addresses the idea of the Will in Nature in his remarks as narrator. ("So the two forces were at work here as everywhere, the inherent will to enjoy, and the circumstantial will against enjoyment" [p. 365].) He creates the impression for us that an indifferent force, quite unlike what most men imagine Providence to be, is mirrored not only in human automatism, which is motivated by the work of the individual will, but also in the way that Nature works. Nature itself is only the phenomenon of the Will. Even inanimate objects reflect and embody the will to live. In Nature we see the beginnings from which individual consciousness, and thereby what is perceived as individual volition, mistakenly evolved.

Hardy's reliance on Schopenhauer's and Hartmann's annihilation theories is apparent in *Tess*. We see Tess long for death and extinction of consciousness from the first pages of the novel to the last. Her firm

belief at the end, that death is salvation, is clearly supported by Hardy. He is indeed Tess's apologist.⁶ And it is not mere coincidence that the last Phase of the novel in which Tess's "will proceeds to an act of self-annulment" is called "Fulfilment."

Hardy of course had both the notion that indifference lurked in the universe, and that death was often the only escape from suffering, long before he wrote *Tess*. But in *Tess* he clearly implies that since there is no free will, only impulsion, and that since the power beyond man is not only indifferent but irrational and blind, death is, in Schopenhauerian terms, clearly "salvation."

That Nature is a reflection of the Will is quite consistent with Schopenhauer's theory which holds that even inanimate objects possess will, indeed *are* will. Schopenhauer's theory holds that all phenomenological existence is Will, and in this sense a stone contains as much of the Will as do men. He says that "the will reveals itself as completely and as much in *one* oak as in millions" (I, 167).

The Will in Nature as a Substitute for Providence

HARDY always was skeptical of traditional religious myths, and in *Tess* he dismisses them entirely. He sees in Nature what he sees in man: mechanical impulsion reflecting the Will.⁷ From the early pages of *Tess* we see Hardy refer to the utter indifference with which Tess is treated at the hands of "Providence." We are told that Tess hoped to be a teacher but that "the fates seemed to decide otherwise" (p. 55). When Tess is seduced by Alec, Hardy asks, "Where was Tess's guardian angel? where was the providence of her simple faith? Perhaps, like that other god of whom the ironical Tishbite spoke, he was talking, or he was pursuing, or he was in a journey, or he was sleeping and not to be awaked" (pp. 90-91). Hardy implies that any God to whom Tess might pray is non-existent but that from force of habit Tess still clings to the myths she has been taught: she envisions "some vague ethical being whom she could not classify definitely as the God of her childhood, and could not comprehend as any other" (p. 108). Tess does, however, slowly realize that she doesn't "quite know the Lord as yet" (p. 134), and then she finally accepts the idea from Clare that there is no God to know (p. 408).

Schopenhauer writes that suffering is the ultimate teacher and that in his mind traditional religious notions, if looked at in a new light, all have essentially the same inspiration: "Hence, then, I say that the spirit of Christian ethics is identical with that of Brahmanism and Buddhism. . . . As Meister Eckhard also says, 'The swiftest animal that bears thee to perfection is suffering' " (III, 459). Hardy rejects the

6. See J. T. Laird, *The Shaping of Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), p. 122.

7. This idea is concisely presented in Hardy's poem, "The Subalterns."

traditional particulars of religious myths but does clearly indicate in *Tess* that he, too, finds suffering the ultimate teacher for mankind. He points out that traditionalists cling to religious admonitions because they are "killing" and "crushing" (p. 101) and that "Tess's passing corporeal blight had been her mental harvest" (p. 160).

Hardy tells us that Tess's suffering teaches her the weakness of traditional religious beliefs:

The calmness which had possessed Tess since the christening [of Sorrow] remained with her in the infant's loss. In the daylight, indeed, she felt her terrors about his soul to have been somewhat exaggerated; whether well founded or not she had no uneasiness now, reasoning that if Providence would not ratify such an act of approximation she, for one, did not value the kind of heaven lost by the irregularity—either for herself or for her child. (p. 120)

Tess, we are told, "might have ironically said to God with Saint Augustine: 'Thou hast counselled a better course than Thou hast permitted' " (p. 124). Later in the novel, Tess says, "I am forbidden to believe that the great Power who moves the world would alter His plans on my account" (p. 408). While Tess's doubts about the existence of a beneficent God increase, Hardy creates a backdrop which reflects the indifference of, indeed the non-existence of, such a sentient power. Laird writes that "this is the kind of cosmic background against which, we are reminded from time to time, Hardy's characters are playing out their little dramas of hopes and frustrations." Laird continues:

The presence of such a background is partly responsible for the sombre colouring of Hardy's novels and, in particular, for the ironic sense of the difference between what man deserves and what he actually receives from Life. It also helps to account for the quality of nobility that attaches to those characters who courageously carry on in the face of cosmic indifference, that lack of sympathy displayed by the Universal Will towards petty individual wills. (pp. 49-50)

Hardy tells us that we are witnessing "the ill-judged execution" of Nature's plan (pp. 48-49) and that "darkness and silence ruled everywhere around" (pp. 90-91). We are told that a "chronic melancholy . . . is taking hold of the civilized races with the decline of belief in a beneficent power" (p. 152) and that, in Angel's words, "it might have resulted far better for mankind if Greece had been the source of the religion of modern civilization, and not Palestine" (p. 203). From an anthropomorphic God or gods, man might not expect so much and thereby relieve some of the pain from receiving so little.

At the same time Hardy points out that Tess's actions are rooted in blind impulsion, he asks us to contemplate what sort of "Providence" would damn Tess for her mistakes. Hardy writes, "Some people might have cried 'Alas, poor Theology!' " at the biblical texts which haunt Tess. He says that some people consider them "the last grotesque phase of a creed which had served mankind well in its time" (p. 101). He asks us to consider, What kind of Providence would allow Sorrow's birth,

his death? What Providence would consign his burial to "that shabby corner of God's allotment where He let the nettles grow" (p. 122), and then finally allow the obliteration of his tiny grave in Tess's absence (p. 450)? Hardy's answer to such questions is that no sentient Providence would act so indifferently. Providence can only be the blind, indifferent force reflected in the stars' "cold pulses . . . beating . . . in serene dissociation from these wisps of human life" (p. 33). This indifferent force is reflected in all Nature, and its haphazard impulsion is the same impulsion present in man. Man embodies the Will to live and so does Nature.

Schopenhauer points out that since all religion is allegorical and since man needs metaphysics, "we see that in the main, and for the great majority, who cannot apply themselves to thought, religions very well supply the place of metaphysics in general" (II, 368). However, despite the fact that "religions are necessary for the people, and an inestimable benefit to them," religions must, "if they oppose themselves to the progress of mankind in the knowledge of the truth . . . be set aside" (II, 370). Schopenhauer sets institutional religion aside in search of the truth of things in themselves, as Hardy did. Hardy apparently felt with Schopenhauer that the irrational Will permeated Nature as well as man and that all phenomenal existence is will. All of nature in *Tess* is permeated with and mirrors the irrational Will, and it also replaces traditional ideas of a divine Providence.

Nature as the Helpless Agent of the Will

HARDY explains his notion of an "unsympathetic First Cause" (p. 199) and the indifference of Providence to man by using Schopenhauer's notion of the Will's blindness, and he as well as Schopenhauer sees this blind impulsion in Nature as well as in man. Schopenhauer writes that:

Nature never errs, her procedure is sure. . . . Everything is entirely in Nature, and Nature is entire in everything. She has her centre in every brute. It has surely found its way into existence, and it will surely find its way out of it. In the meantime it lives, fearless and without care, in the presence of annihilation, supported by the consciousness that it is Nature herself, and imperishable as she is. Man alone carries about with him, in abstract conceptions, the certainty of his death. . . . Against the mighty voice of Nature reflection can do little. (I, 362-63)

Because all of Nature is a reflection of Will, man, Nature, and existence itself are one unified entity. This organic conception of existence is impressed upon us by Hardy in *Tess*, and it complements the timeless universality of the impression Hardy creates in the novel as well. Hardy personifies Nature and implies that Tess is part of it as it is part of her. And both are Will, blind striving compulsion.

We are told that Nature reflects Tess's own sadness: "the occasional heave of the wind became the sigh of some immense sad soul" (p. 34).

Later Tess's perception of nature increases her suffering since it mirrors her guilt: "The midnight airs and gusts, moaning amongst the tightly-wrapped buds and bark of the winter twigs, were formulae of bitter reproach. A wet day was the expression of irremediable grief at her weakness . . ." (p. 108). All things are reflections of other things because the world is one phenomenal expression of the Will to live, its inherent sorrow, and its potential peace.

Hardy writes that Tess occasionally attains peace through communing with Nature. He points out that her recognition of the oneness of Nature and man somehow bestows moments of contentment in her troubled life: "On these lonely hills and dales her quiescent glide was of a piece with the element she moved in. Her flexuous and stealthy figure became an integral part of the scene. At times her whimsical fancy would intensify natural processes around her till they seemed a part of her own story" (p. 108). But these respites are rare. More often Hardy refers to "cruel Nature's Law" (p. 187). These bitter references to cosmic indifference as reflected in Nature's Law are first noticeable in Hardy's third layer of composition (Laird, p. 74). Laird notes that "during the later layers of the manuscript, we find that the object of the author's bitter comments on cosmic indifference is designated by a variety of names" (p. 75). The variety (Nature, the night, the will, the President of the Immortals) can be explained by the fact that Hardy was portraying the pervasive nature of the Will and by the fact that he was intent on conveying a general impression and not a system of philosophy wherein particular, narrowly defined terms would be more necessary. In *Tess* everything is a part of the universal harshness permeated by the Will. This idea is apparent in the following passage as it was emended by Hardy:

Men are too often harsh with women they love or have loved; women with men. And yet these harshnesses are tenderness itself when compared with the ~~harshness~~ universal harshness out of which they grow; the harshness of the position towards the temperament, of the means towards the aims, ~~+~~ [?] of today towards yesterday, of hereafter towards to-day. (Laird, p. 76)

In the following excerpt as well we see that Hardy's emendations clearly indicate his sense that Tess is one with Nature. The passage also reinforces the blind, pulsating, pleasure-seeking impulsion of the Will:

In reality Tess she *see-saw of her breath*
~~For the first time she felt that she~~ ~~was drifting into acquiescence.~~ Every ~~pore~~ ^{in revolt} every pulse
~~her~~ ~~wave of blood,~~ every pulse singing in her ears, was a voice that joined with Nature ~~to rave~~
 against her scrupulousness. (Laird, p. 124)

This oneness with Nature is stressed often in *Tess* and subtly conveys to the reader Hardy's point that although Tess often feels "herself in antagonism" to Nature, she is "quite in accord" (p. 108).

The birds from the north which visit Flintcomb-Ash not only reinforce the idea that Tess is as helpless as a bird, but the haunting description of their arrival also suggests the idea of the Will's chaotic compulsion in Nature:

After this season of congealed dampness came a spell of dry frost, when strange birds from behind the North Pole began to arrive silently on the upland of Flintcomb-Ash; gaunt spectral creatures with tragical eyes—eyes which had witnessed scenes of cataclysmal horror in inaccessible polar regions of a magnitude such as no human being had ever conceived, in curdling temperatures that no man could endure; which had beheld the crash of icebergs and the slide of snow-hills by the shooting light of the Aurora; been half blinded by the whirl of colossal storms and terraqueous distortions; and retained the expression of feature that such scenes had engendered. These nameless birds came quite near to Tess and Marian, but of all they had seen which humanity would never see, they brought no account. The traveller's ambition to tell was not theirs. (p. 367)

The cataclysmic horror exhibited in Nature portends tragedy for Tess, while it reinforces the sense of the oneness of all phenomena. This idea occurs again when Hardy refers to the reflection of the stars overhead in puddles below. He writes that "the vastest things of the universe [were] imaged in objects so mean" (p. 296). All Nature and mankind appear to be one large organism. Laird writes that "Hardy's emphasis on Nature as norm is by no means confined to the Ur-text of *Tess*, and in *L*, we find Hardy broadening the theme to take in the Darwinian idea of man's kinship with his 'weaker fellows in nature's teeming family' " (p. 43). Hardy writes that, on occasion, "inanimate objects seemed endowed with two or three senses, if not five" (p. 157). In this almost sentient natural setting, Hardy says that Tess "becomes part and parcel of outdoor nature, and is not merely an object set down therein" (p. 111). She is "a figure which is part of the landscape" (p. 357).

Tess is also part of the past. In the D'Urberville mansion Tess

hoped for some accident that might favour her, but nothing favoured her. The shrubs on the Vicarage lawn rustled uncomfortably in the frosty breeze; she could not feel by any stretch of imagination, dressed to her highest as she was, that the house was the residence of near relations; and yet nothing essential, in nature or emotion, divided her from them: in pains, pleasures, thoughts, birth, death, and after-death, they were the same. (p. 380)

Because Hardy emphasizes Tess's oneness with both past and present phenomena, Laird believes that "Hardy sees much of the responsibility for Tess's effete-ness as circumstantial, rather than personal, and believes that she should not be judged too harshly by the reader for an inherited passivity and submissiveness" (p. 114). Hardy stresses the oneness of all men in all time so often that we cannot overlook the unified impression. Even when Tess and Angel are poles apart spiritually, they are "two limbs of one life" (p. 322), and to Tess Angel seems "to be her double" (p. 285).

There is even a sameness which characterizes life in Brazil and life in Wessex. Hardy describes the deaths of babies in Brazil in a manner

which is similar to Tess's experience with Sorrow: "Mothers from English farms trudg[ed] along with their infants in their arms, when the child would be stricken with fever and would die; the mother would pause to dig a hole in the loose earth with her bare hands, would bury the babe therein with the same natural grave-tools, shed one tear, and again trudge on" (p. 432). We are shortly thereafter told about Sorrow's obliterated grave, and we can't help seeing the universality of an indifferent Providence, randomly inflicting suffering and pain. This is the nature of existence. The earth, according to Schopenhauer, "rolls from day into night, the individual dies, but the sun itself shines without intermission, an eternal noon. Life is assured to the will to live; the form of life is an endless present, no matter how the individuals, the phenomena of the Idea, arise and pass away in time, like fleeting dreams" (I, 362). The immutability of the Will in time and the meaninglessness of the individual in history are ideas Laird clearly detects in Hardy's revisions. He examines Hardy's "melancholy lesson" in this excerpt from Hardy's second layer:

The season developed & matured. Another year's instalment of flowers, leaves, nightingales, thrushes, finches & other creatures, took up their positions in their allotted division *at being there, others stood in their place, when and neither* of time with no aspect of surprise, though only a year ago ~~they were not flowers, leaves, nothing of those things~~ *inorganic chemical* nightingales, thrushes, nor finches, nor anything more than ~~dead~~ particles of earth, water, & air. (p. 50)

We see the endless flux and change in phenomena, but not in the Will. Because Hardy recognizes that the deterministic Will is immutable, he also apparently believes that there is no reason for one to suffer endlessly. He suggests that Tess more than anyone else in the novel feels that the struggle in life is not worth what it yields. While her family is preparing to move, Tess listens to her siblings singing "In Heaven we part no more," and Hardy writes:

If she could only believe what the children were singing; if she were only sure, how different all would now be; how confidently she would leave them to Providence and their future kingdom! But, in default of that, it behoved her to do something; to be their Providence; . . . To her and her like, birth itself was an ordeal of degrading personal compulsion, whose gratuitousness nothing in the result seemed to justify, and at best could only palliate. (p. 455)

Tess's suspicion that birth is a degrading compulsion recurs in the novel, and this suspicion, along with her growing conviction about the absence of a beneficent Providence, is upheld by Hardy as universally valid.

Death Wish: Annihilation

CONSIDERING that Hardy's world view in *Tess* is characterized by utter mechanical futility in which the individual is not able to make significant choices, it is not surprising that we find the accompanying impression that the individual life is, regrettably, dispensable. Since Tess's suffering is due to "something outside" herself (p. 360), but is also due to that insatiable will within her, she often feels in her helplessness that a cruel Master "who would have cuffed her" would be preferable to the utter indifference she feels at the hands of Providence (p. 406). Given the sad characteristics of her life, her repeated death wish is understandable, and Hardy makes her eventual death her salvation.

Because human existence is far from bearing the "character of a *gift*, [and] has entirely the character of a *debt* that has been contracted" (III, 391), Schopenhauer believes that "if we regard man as a being whose existence is a punishment and an expiation, we then view him in a right light" (III, 391). If one recognizes that no Providence exists but only the blind Will, he sees the only solution to suffering is total extinction: "Quietism, *i.e.* surrender of all volition, asceticism, *i.e.*, . . . consciousness of the identity of one's own nature with that of all things or with the kernel of the world, stand in closest connection; so that whoever professes one of them is gradually led to accept the others, even against his intention" (III, 433). Schopenhauer writes that "we are at bottom something that ought not to be: therefore we cease to be" (III, 306). "Death," he says, "is the great reprimand which the will to live . . . receives through the course of nature" (III, 306). Tess slowly realizes the nature of this reprimand. As she becomes more and more passive through the novel, she utters her death wishes with increased sincerity and greater knowledge of what her natural state should be.

Two of Schopenhauer's most eccentric points are that individual consciousness is a blunder and that birth itself is original sin. Hardy, from the beginning in *Tess*, suggests the same ideas. He describes the Durbeyfield children in terms that apply to all mankind:

If the heads of the Durbeyfield household chose to sail into difficulty, disaster, starvation, disease, degradation, death, thither were these half-dozen little captives under hatches *compelled* to sail with them—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 Durbeyfield. 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." (p. 24, emphasis mine)

Very early in the novel Tess herself wishes she "had never been born" (p. 97). Upon her return home from Trantridge Hardy says, "Her depression was then terrible, and she could have hidden herself in a tomb"

(p. 106). Even casual observers notice that "she wishes the baby and her too were in the churchyard" (p. 114). It seems that Hardy narrates each death wish expressed by Tess in order to stress the notion which he gleaned from his reading in Schopenhauer, that being born is an offense in the first place, and that therefore conscious life is a continual struggle against natural law.

Schopenhauer writes that true tragedy contains "the deeper insight, that it is not his own individual sins that the hero atones for, but original sin, *i.e.*, the crime of existence itself" (I, 328). When Tess tells those around her that her sin was not of her seeking, we may see this two ways: as referring to her affair with Alec and as referring to her existence itself.

Schopenhauer writes that death is equivalent to "salvation" (I, 301), and to stress this idea Hardy calls Sorrow a "prisoner of the flesh" (pp. 116-17) and, as we saw earlier, a "bastard gift of shameless Nature" (p. 120). Hardy writes that Sorrow's "offence," being born, is soon remedied when his death or "hour of emancipation" arrives (pp. 116-17).

Tess, herself a prisoner of the flesh, wishes for death intermittently, and often Hardy writes that she feels that "to escape the past and all that appertained thereto was to annihilate it" (pp. 125-26). She thinks frequently of "her own death . . . a day which lay sly and unseen among all the other days of the year, giving no sign or sound when she annually passed over it; but not the less surely there. . . . Of that day, doomed to be her terminus in time through all the ages, she did not know the place in month, week, season, or year" (p. 125). She almost yearns for the day because she thinks of life as "this hobble of being alive" (p. 159).

Hardy tells us that "there was very good reason" (p. 160) for Tess to consider her life a sentence. Her thoughts are characterized by laments in which she longs for the peace of extinction: "My soul chooseth strangling and death rather than my life. I loathe it; I would not live away" (p. 160).⁸

For all these death wishes, it is not until the end of the novel that Tess truly "wills" to die. With greater conviction and with greater cause to

8. Tess's other death wishes include the following: "But O, I sometimes wish I had never been born!" (p. 244); "I can put an end to myself. I am not afraid" (p. 298). After Clare's negative reaction to her confession, she concedes that she is thinking "of putting an end to [herself]" (p. 305); Hardy's report of Tess's feelings: "If they could only fall together, and both be dashed to pieces, how fit, how desirable" (p. 316); "They would go out of the world almost painlessly" (p. 318); "Sheer experience had already taught her that, in some circumstances, there was one thing better than to lead a good life, and that was to be saved from leading any life whatever. Like all who have been provisioned by suffering, she could, in the words of M. Sully-Prudhomme, hear a penal sentence in the fiat, 'You shall be born,' particularly if addressed to potential issue of hers" (p. 311). Speaking of her death, Tess says, "I wish it were now" (p. 353); "There was revived in her the wretched sentiment which had often come to her before, that in inhabiting the fleshly tabernacle with which Nature had endowed her she was somehow doing wrong" (p. 395); "I will obey you like your wretched slave, even if it is to lie down and die" (p. 294); "Bygones would never be complete bygones till she was a bygone herself" (p. 391); "I could die in your arms!" (p. 428). At the door of her ancestral sepulchre, Tess says, "Why am I on the wrong side of this door!" (p. 464); and "My sin will kill him [Angel] and not kill me!" (p. 487).

utter such a wish, Tess addresses Angel at Stonehenge, "with a strange unwillingness to move": "I fear that what you think of me now may not last. I do not wish to outlive your present feeling for me. I would rather not. I would rather be dead and buried when the time comes for you to despise me, so that it may never be known to me that you despised me" (p. 498). Tess's wish is now based on the sure intuition that it is better to be dead than to continue the ceaseless struggle in the face of futility. When Angel tells her that she is lying on an altar, she says, "I like very much to be here" (p. 502). Her fulfillment is near.

It is only after Tess dies that we see absolute motionlessness (p. 508). Tess looks at death, sees it as inviting, and the wheel of Ixion stands still. When Tess elects to discontinue the struggle, she recognizes, as Schopenhauer would say, that "opinions change with time and place; but the voice of nature remains always and everywhere the same, and is therefore to be heeded before everything else" (III, 251). This insight allows Tess to face death serenely. We recall that she has suspected all along that she is like "thousands and thousands" of others.

Schopenhauer says that our "powerful attachment to life is . . . blind and irrational," and that "knowledge . . . discloses the worthlessness of life" (III, 252). Tess tells Angel, "What must come will come" (p. 498), and in her comment we see that she acknowledges an intuitive awareness of the determinism Hardy has described throughout the novel. She says, "I don't want to go any further" (p. 502). Her wish to cease struggling is wise.

Even at the prospect of no afterlife, Tess serenely faces death. She asks Clare, "Do you think we shall meet again after we are dead?" Hardy says that Clare "kissed her to avoid a reply" (p. 503). Still, Tess sleeps and awaits the inevitable.

Hardy's metaphor at the end of the novel saying that "the President of the Immortals . . . had ended his sport with Tess" (p. 508), suggests again that life is a "tiresome outworn game." That "'Justice' was done" indicates Hardy's bitter awareness of Schopenhauer's idea that death is the exaction and desert of all who are born, of all who commit the original sin. Death is justice, but we sense an irony in his remark from our wishful point of view.

While Hardy surely did not intend to diminish the significance of Tess's suffering or the meaning of her life, we cannot help recalling the other deaths in the novel, often gratuitously and cruelly inflicted by Nature. Tess is only one among many whom we have watched. Her death is somehow no more cruel a fate than Sorrow's relatively long and pitiful demise and no more cruel than the burial of innocent babies in Brazil who suffer intensely before dying. Tess's death is different, though, in that she realizes that futility is inherent in life and "willingly" dies. She loses her individual consciousness, but the world itself, the Will itself, is immutable.

Schopenhauer says that "even . . . crude points of view contain the assertion that the living being suffers no absolute annihilation through death, but continues to exist in and with the whole of nature" (III, 262), but he feels that any belief in a consciousness after death is absurd because just as there is no consciousness before birth, men will in death return to such "nonexistence." Tess, despite her suspicion that there is no immortality, seems to grasp at the idea that her individual existence will continue when she says that she "could share" Clare with Liza "willingly" when they are spirits (p. 503). She tells Clare that Liza "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" (p. 503). The idea that all men grasp at some kind of immortality is treated in Schopenhauer. From his observations, however, there is but one kind of immortality:

From the fact that we now exist, it follows, if well considered, that we must at all times exist . . . The really essential part of things, of man, of the world, lies permanently and enduringly in the *Nunc stans*, firm and immovable; and that the change of the phenomena and events is a mere consequence of our apprehension of them by means of our form of perception, which is time. (III, 283)

In *Tess* the setting at Stonehenge infuses the final scenes with a sense of eternally passing time, and yet the monoliths suggest immutability. The eternal movement of time makes the passing of individual lives more poignant, and this idea is expressed again in the final reference to the knights and dames in the D'Urberville ancestry. The scene at Stonehenge also tells us that Tess is a "willing victim," whereas before she was simply a victim. She joins the elements.

This eternal flux, the great blind impulsion that characterizes all existence, is suggested in Hardy's final sentence, which implies that it is Angel and Liza who will have to endure the continued consciousness of life; these two "went on" while Tess is mercifully spared. She returns to her "true being" as Schopenhauer would say, since one's "true being continues after death because it is false that it is destroyed" (III, 288). It is only consciousness that is destroyed.

Hardy's reading in Hartmann upheld what Schopenhauer said about extinction. In *The Philosophy of the Unconscious* Hardy found more substantiation for the idea that death was liberation. In the light of Hartmann's philosophy, when Tess dies, her own individual volition ceases to be and is hurled into nothingness, but this for Hartmann is not nearly enough. For Hartmann the entire world's consciousness must be hurled into nothingness, and *all* processes ceased "without any residuum whatever whereby the process might be continued."⁹ Therefore, despite Tess's individual peace, in the light of Hartmann's philosophy there is no meaningful redemption at the end of the novel.

9. Eduard von Hartmann, *The Philosophy of the Unconscious*, 3 vols. in 1, tr. William Chatterton Coupland (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1930), III, 142.

In a Schopenhauerian interpretation, however, we have witnessed the freeing of one will, one consciousness, and, as a result, we have witnessed redemption. In Schopenhauerian terms, the "veil of Maya" has been lifted, and in Tess's final recognition there is an almost holy awakening to the truth of existence.

The final impression in *Tess* is that Tess indeed finds salvation in death, in the annihilation of her individual consciousness. She has free will and experiences peace when her "intellect rises to the point where the vanity of all effort is manifest," to use the words that Hardy copied from Schopenhauer (Wright, p. 41).

To read *Tess* in the light of Schopenhauer's philosophy is to see the novel as a study concerning the futility of all effort in life. It is to see tragedy in an unconventional light, as Schopenhauer characterized it: tragedy is not a part of life; it is life. Birth itself is original sin, existence is wrong, consciousness is error, volition is an obstacle to be overcome, free will is a total misconception, and death is salvation.

Tess's own individual tragedy mirrors the tragedy inherent in the world itself. Her flaw, like the world's, is continuing to will to live. Not until she comes to realize the vanity of all effort at the end of the novel does she feel peace. We pity her situation, but we see reflections of her own terrible suffering all around her. Life is characterized by an irrational compulsion to live when everything in life suggests to us that there is no purpose, no hope, and no free will. Life is determined by the blind impulsion of an irrational and pervasive Will, and in this type of vacuum, freedom is the cessation of willing, the annihilation of consciousness; freedom is extinction, the correction of a mistake.

READING *Tess* in the light of Schopenhauer's philosophy reveals Hardy's most fatalistic tendencies, those so fatalistic that no passion in life can be rendered significant. The severity of the fatalistic impression of existence presented in *Tess* was, I believe, a passing one for Hardy and was probably heightened at this time because he was assimilating Schopenhauer's complex portrait of the Will in the very same years he was writing and revising *Tess*. On first reading, Schopenhauer's philosophy is, in many ways, enticing and exciting material. Its debt to Buddhism and mysticism establishes a refreshingly different vantage point (for the agnostic) from which to view existence. When confronted with the daring nature of many of Schopenhauer's pronouncements, Hardy's agnosticism and his predisposition to pessimism apparently made him quite susceptible to being influenced, however temporarily, by Schopenhauer's logic, especially when one considers Hardy's disdain for philosophers who attempted to justify man's plight rather than to explain it.

I doubt that Hardy thought that Tess's "passion" for her baby, for Clare, and for her family was meaningless in itself. It is only meaning-

less in the context of Schopenhauer's philosophy and in the presence of the irrational Will with which man must contend. If an individual can forget the purposelessness of his life, the utter futility of his hopes and desires, then his passions have meaning, though the meaning is for the moment. This is the paradox that exists in Schopenhauer and in Hardy. Man must forget the futility of existence or choose not to be informed, as Tess did for a long time, in order to feel passion, in order to exist meaningfully, and, lastly, in order to maintain a sense of wonder in the face of despair.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles is Hardy's penultimate novel, followed only by *Jude the Obscure*. In his last work, *The Dynasts*, Hardy presents his polished vision of the working of the Universal Will in all its complexity. In this work, Hardy tends to grasp for something hopeful: determinism seems to co-exist with free will. Hardy ends the poem by suggesting that increased consciousness might "inform" the Will. Yet, even in this, Hardy was hesitant. Wright points to "the *tentative, qualified* cry of hope as Hardy brought his last great work to a close" (p. 309, emphasis mine). These last works convey the dominant impressions Hardy had of existence, which, despite their bleak consistency, were not without equivocation on his part. Though Tess for long stretches seems to have lost her sense of wonder, even she regains it before her death. Hardy, like Tess, never really lost his sense of wonder, though he felt, as Tess did, that the struggle was often too much; in the Preface to the Anniversary Edition of his works, he wrote: "The more written the more seems to remain to be written; and the night cometh" (p. xiii).

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