

論 文

“A Backward Spring”: Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* and Hardy’s Poetry.

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I

Thomas Hardy’s work demonstrates a keen interest in the ebb and flow of life and the mortality of all living things. This view of nature may be, in part, the result of his rural upbringing, his home in Higher Bockhampton verging upon a remote heath. Hardy was familiar with the insects and animals that inhabited it, so that, as Robert Gittings observes, “The cottage home on the edge of the heath put Hardy into a companionship with all fellow creatures that never left him” (*Young Thomas Hardy* 38). Hardy documented the natural world of Dorset prodigiously in his novels but also in his poetry. In regard to the latter he remarked that “the mission of poetry is to record impressions, not conviction” (Florence Hardy, *The Later Years* 178). Hardy’s poetry can be understood as crystalizing his varied sense impressions derived from natural observation, but these impressions were themselves further underpinned by his broad cultural and scientific readings. The result when committed to poetry, therefore, was rather mixed in mood. While part pessimistic, Hardy’s poetry of the natural world also allows for the possibility of better times, perhaps best demonstrated by a comment expressed in the “Apology” to *Late Lyrics and Earlier* (1922) that while the world appeared to be moving backwards, this may be occurring “*pour mieux sauter*, drawing back for a spring” (*Complete Poetical Works: II* 325). This sentiment appears to be further articulated in his earlier poem “A Backward

Spring,” composed in April 1917, and published in *Moments of Vision* (1917), in which a number of flowers suffer the hardship of the unseasonably cold weather while awaiting the warmth of spring. It is further evidenced in other poems which deal with the subject of family lineage and the leaping forward of human heredity.

While a number of Hardy’s poems focus on the suffering of natural creatures others feature seasonal change and illustrate the perpetual cycle of life. The most significant influence upon his mixed treatment of the natural world was Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859). In a 1924 letter to Ernest Brennecke, Hardy disavowed the direct influence of Schopenhauer on his work, and instead pointed out that, along with the influence of “Huxley, Spencer, Comte, Hume, Mill,” his work displayed “harmony of view with Darwin” (Purdy and Millgate, *Collected Letters: VI* 259). Darwin’s *Origin* is, like many of Hardy’s own poems, balanced in its representation of the natural world. The “struggle for life” is mitigated, as Darwin writes, by “beautiful adaptations everywhere, and in every part of the organic world” (115). For Darwin, nature produces great beauty, but does so blindly while engaged in an ongoing and ceaseless natural competition, and one finds examples of this in many of Hardy’s poems such as “I Watched a Blackbird,” published in *Winter Words* (1928). Here, the beauty of the creature’s “crocus-coloured bill” (*Complete Poetical Works: III* 202, 3) is detailed even while its nest building appears to be founded on mere instinct, or as Hardy puts it, being “As if so sure a nest were never shaped on spray” (7). This unsettling and yet appreciative way of observing and cataloging the natural world in Hardy’s work can be connected to the *Origin*, and George Levine notes that, similarly to Darwin, Hardy’s novels pursue a similarly “instinctive commitment to attend to the minutiae of nature” (*Darwin The Writer* 191).

At the same time, Hardy’s poetic representation of Darwin’s ideas should be understood as exemplifying his own particular artistic interpretation of

them. Hardy's notion of his poetry as conveying "impressions" (Florence Hardy, *The Later Years* 178) of things and events, rather than accuracy, demonstrated his keen awareness of his own artistic agency. In his notes he recorded that the artistic process consisted in "so depicting the common events of life as to bring out the features which illustrate the author's idiosyncratic mode of regard" (Florence Hardy, *The Early Life* 294). In other words, Hardy was well aware that his writing represented his particular version of the world. His treatment of Darwinian and evolutionary ideas can also be better understood as exemplifying his own artistic interpretation of them. Hardy's representation of natural creatures, such as the blackbird, while demonstrating a Darwinian observation of the "minutia of nature", as Levine puts it, also illustrate Hardy's artistic power. Hence, a number of ideas that can be connected to the influence of Darwin are used in Hardy's poetry in creative and individual ways.

While discussing Hardy's own creative representation of the natural world, this study will place it within a historical Darwinian and evolutionary framework. This discussion will first examine the way in which Darwin's model of the 'Tree of Life' is imaginatively used in Hardy's poetry by his narrator to express a sense of kinship and sympathy for the competitive state of natural creatures. These sympathetic human sentiments are shown to evolve and become more sophisticated over time. Further, such feelings are creatively demonstrated by Hardy's poetic narrators when relaying the Darwinian struggles of natural organisms, such as fauna and flora, in anthropomorphic terms. Finally, this discussion will address how interconnected aspects of nineteenth-century evolutionary theory influenced Hardy's representation of human heredity, such as poems where, as individuals pass away, family lineage is represented as leaping forwards across time. These three Darwinian aspects of Hardy's poetry therefore create a sense of life as both drawing backwards but also potentially springing forwards.

II

According to Hardy's notes, published in *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy*, "During his stay in London he attended, on April 26 1882, the funeral of Darwin in Westminster Abbey" while further adding that "as a young man he had been among the earliest acclaimers of *The Origin of Species*" (Florence Hardy 198). In calling Hardy an evolutionist, however, one must proceed with some care. This is due to the overlapping and complex relationship between religion and the different types of evolutionary theory which emerged during the nineteenth century. For example, many prominent Victorian scientists, such as anatomist Richard Owen, were natural theologians (Brooke, *Science and Religion* 294), while others, such as the geologist Charles Lyell, were opponents of early evolutionary theory such as Lamarckism (297). Tennyson, an amateur astronomer, held, according to Robert Bernard Martin, "an ambivalent attitude towards science which "unsettled" Tennyson's faith" (cited in Parnham, *Green Man Hopkins* 462) and posed what appeared difficult scientific questions of nature in *In Memoriam A.H.H.* (1850). Tennyson's treatment of such ideas in his verse was informed by his reading of Robert Chamber's *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844), and, as James Secord notes, Tennyson "followed the book's story of geological progress from simple in-vertebrate animals up through fish, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, and man" (*Victorian Sensation* 521). Tennyson's *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, therefore, tied evolution to an overarching spiritual belief, depicting a transmutation of the species that was represented as providential and progressive. The publication of *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, however, founded, as John Holmes argues, a "'Darwinian revolution', an epiphany in the history of ideas, marking a single radical break with the traditions of the past" (*Darwin's Bards* 5). It thus influenced a rich and varied series of poetic responses, such as Hardy's, to the problems posed by Darwin's theory of natural selection.

Hardy's poetry demonstrates, in its treatment of the natural world, a sense

of both conflict and emotional sympathy which can be connected to the influence of Darwin's 1859 work. Hardy's literary treatment of evolution specifically reflects Darwin's representation of all living things as being engaged in what he called "the war of nature" (*On the Origin of Species* 459). Darwin documented this conflict in his famous 'Tree of Life' passage from the *Origin*, detailing those who enjoy "that superiority which now makes them dominant in their own countries," while further representing the losers as a branch that "has decayed and dropped off" (171-2). But Darwin also described those who succeeded in the evolutionary struggle of life as the inheritors of a fortuitous and advantageous "divergence of character" (171).

In a number of Hardy's poems his narrators describe this Darwinian war of nature, but at the same time do so while evidencing a more imaginative and sympathetic mood. This is particularly demonstrated in "The Wind Blew Words," published in *Moments of Vision* (1917) where the narrator describes an imaginatively envisioned scene akin to a Darwinian tree:

The wind blew words along the skies,
 And these it blew to me
 Through the wide dusk: 'Lift up your eyes,
 Behold this troubled tree,
 Complaining as it sways and plies;
 It is a limb of thee.

'Yea, too, the creatures sheltering round -
 Dumb figures, wild and tame,
 Yea, too, thy fellows who abound -
 Either of speech the same
 Or far and strange - black, dwarfed, and browned,
 They are stuff of thy own frame.'

I moved on in a surging awe
 Of inarticulateness

At the pathetic Me I saw
 In all his huge distress,
 Making self-slaughter of the law
 To kill, break, or suppress.

(Hardy, *Complete Poetical Works: II* 181-82)

From the first stanza Hardy's tree, similarly to Darwin's model, is the center of conflict, the lengthening and shortening lines emphasizing not just the swaying of tree branches but the ebb and flow of life and death. Similarly to Darwin's tree of life, where the losers are those who have dropped off the branches, the narrator observes, in the final lines of the third stanza, a battle "To kill, break, or suppress."

Hardy's poetic interpretation of Darwin's tree is more sympathetic, however, taking on the form of an imaginative vision. This more broadly reflects the creative way in which Hardy represented natural phenomena in his writing as "impressions" (Florence Hardy, *The Later Years* 178). It further illustrates the imaginative ways in which Hardy emphasized the important connections between such phenomena. For example, a similar representation or "impression" of a tree surrounded by lifeforms is evidenced in his recorded notes taken from 1875. While sat under a tree to which a number of insects are drawn, Hardy employs his imagination to enhance them:

I sit under a tree, and feel alone: I think of certain insects around me as magnified by the microscope: creatures like elephants, flying dragons, etc. And I feel I am by no means alone. (Florence Hardy, *The Early Life* 141)

This creative aspect not only enhances such creatures but emphasizes Hardy's sense of sympathy and kinship. Hardy imaginatively transforms these insects in ways which appear to bring him the succour of companionship when removed from human company.

Hardy's creative and sympathetic interpretation of Darwin's ideas is similarly demonstrated in "The Wind Blew Words." Here the narrator envisions the wind as possessing speech, its words imploring him to look up

at the tree. This sequence leads the narrator to understand that humankind is but part of an interconnected natural conflict and, like the other members of the tree, may rise or fall. This effect appears to be consolidated in the third and final stanza where the narrator stares "At the pathetic Me I saw, / In all his huge distress." Most importantly, Hardy's narrator, rather like Darwin himself, is aware of the evolutionary connection he shares with the other inhabitants of its branches. The final line of the first stanza tells us that the tree "is a limb of thee" while the second stanza describes "the creatures sheltering round –" the wind advising the narrator in the final line "They are stuff of thy own frame." The line reflects Hardy's notes, made in 1890 and published in *The Early Life*, regarding the natural connections between humans, and how knowledge of this brings a sense of empathy:

Altruism, or The Golden Rule, or whatever 'Love your Neighbour as Yourself' may be called, will ultimately be brought about I think by the pain we see in others reacting on ourselves, as if we and they were a part of one body. Mankind, in fact, may be and possibly will be viewed as members of one corporeal frame. (Florence Hardy 294)

The last line of the first two stanzas establishes a sense of biological sympathy not just between humans but between the narrator and other species. This sense is accentuated when all three stanzas are individually perceived as tree-shaped, as the shorter bottom line of each can be seen as a base. Yet in the concluding stanza the penultimate and the final line ultimately sever this connection, the narrator ruing a naturally competitive state in which common species are "Making self-slaughter of the law / To kill, break, or suppress." The final effect is mixed, the poem being pessimistic in its perception of events and yet also altruistic in mood and feeling. The narrator, in his awareness of the common familial ancestry which exists between species, displays empathetic sentiments at odds with the evolutionary battle of life.

This higher sympathy, when connected to the legacy of evolutionary theory, is famously demonstrated in Peter Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid: A*

Factor of Evolution (1902). While Hardy may have encountered this text, there is no mention of it in his notebooks or his library catalogue. Instead, Hardy's poetic sympathy with fellow evolutionary lifeforms can be more fruitfully connected to what he called his loving-kindness. Peter Coxon has demonstrated this expression as originating in *The Book of Common Prayer* ("Hardy's 'Loving-Kindness'" 56) and possessing a quality which Ralph Pite has described as going "against the grain of evolutionary self-interest" (*Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life* 474). Yet, this reading of loving-kindness is not strictly true as Hardy saw it. While Hardy's notion of loving-kindness draws on a particular Christian quotation, such ethics are also compatible with (and can be traced to) the general influence of Darwin on his thought. In 1910 he wrote a letter to the Secretary of the Humanitarian League in which he noted that:

Few people seem to perceive fully as yet that the most far-reaching consequence of the establishment of the common origin of all species, is ethical; that it logically involved a readjustment of altruistic morals by enlarging as a *necessity of rightness* the application of what has been called 'The Golden Rule' beyond the area of mere mankind to that of the whole animal kingdom. Possibly Darwin himself did not wholly perceive it, though he alluded to it. (Florence Hardy, *Later Years* 141)

Hardy's interconnected Christian and Darwinian sense of loving-kindness, and the way it shaped his attitudes towards the natural world, is more explicitly expressed in "Compassion: An Ode" which was published in *Human Shows* (1925). The intention of the poem, composed on January 22, 1924, is, as is outlined in the subtitle, "In Celebration of the Centenary of The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals" (147). The first stanza describes "Mild creatures, despot-doomed, bewildered, plead...In deep dumb gaze" (Hardy, *Complete Poetical Works*: III 147, 7-9), reminding us of "the creatures sheltering round - / Dumb figures, wild and tame," (Hardy, *Complete Poetical Works*: II 181, 7-8) who are members of Hardy's tree in "The Wind Blew Words." Here, in the face of the evolutionary battle of life, Hardy's

s narrator celebrates the springing forward of another, more organized type of evolution. The opening line celebrates the emergence of a new life, that of the kindness and compassion of human society, relaying how, "Backward among the dusky years / A lonesome lamp is seen arise" (Hardy, *Complete Poetical Works: III* 147, 1-2). By the second stanza, Hardy's narrator has traced the evolution of this organization to the present day:

What was faint-written, read in a breath
 In that year - ten times ten away -
 A larger louder conscience saith
 More sturdily to-day. -
 (147-48, 11-14)

The RSPCA movement, and its demonstration of the human compassion for animals, is therefore shown as part of a developing process that, for Hardy's narrator, must and will continue. Just as Hardy's loving-kindness is taken from *The Book of Common Prayer*, so this poem ends with an expression from The Bible. Tracing the progress of the RSPCA organization, Hardy's poem concludes with a quotation from *Matthew* 5.7, a mighty voice calling "And 'Blessed are the merciful!'" (148, 29). Hardy's poetry thus illustrates that human beings, similarly to the creatures featured in Darwin's 'Tree of Life,' are a mere biological outgrowth of the natural world. At the same time, Hardy's narrator envisions humans as able, through the evolution of organized societies which promote compassion, to express a more developed sense of kinship and emotional sympathy with other species. Hardy, through his creative interpretation of Darwin's ideas, is therefore able to exemplify this important, more highly evolved, emotional human quality.

III

Hardy's poetic narrators display a sympathetic awareness of the ways in which humans share a biological relationship with other aspects of the natural world. This awareness is further informed by Hardy's "idiosyncratic

mode of regard” (Florence Hardy, *The Early Life* 294), or, as he states elsewhere, “impressions” (Florence Hardy, *The Later Years* 178) of natural phenomena. Hence, Hardy’s empathy for flora and fauna involves creatively representing it, personifying it in anthropomorphic terms. While a number of poems appear to rue the human-like suffering of plants and flowers, the flowering of specific life-forms is also celebrated. In some of these poems, Hardy depicts trees, flowers and plants as appearing to be “drawing back for a spring” (*Complete Poetical Works: II* 325), awaiting the return of the sun which may or may not arrive in time. This is often connected to the environment, and can be brought about by the changing of the seasons and the difference in temperatures, adding an extra element of fortune to survival. In the ‘Tree of Life’ section of the *Origin*, Darwin had represented the survivors of natural selection as the beneficiaries of arbitrary luck, enjoying a fortune, as he put it, “which by some chance has been favoured” (172). This fortune was specifically related to environment; flora and fauna may thrive or suffer, depending on whether they were suited to the climate and conditions. There are various accounts of this theme in Hardy’s verse, where environment, climate and seasonal change play a part in dealing out survival or death, and in such cases, such as the coming of winter, it is not necessarily the brightest or the most beautiful but instead the more simple and robust which survives and flourishes. Such verse can convey mixed sensations; one laments the death of the former group and draws solace from the endurance of the latter.

Hardy’s poetry also notes how the changing of the seasons offers life, and shows how the coming of the next spring lessens the sadness of winter death, illustrating the perpetual cycle of things. Hardy’s personified treatment of these aspects is part-imaginative, but can also be connected to his interpretation of Darwin’s account of natural beauty in the ‘Tree of Life’; Taylor notes that Hardy read this passage from *On the Origin of Species* and was impressed “with its ever-branching and beautiful ramifications” (*Hardy’s Poetry 1860-1928* 60). Yet, similarly to Darwin’s passage, the vitality, and

perhaps even joy, of these beautiful ramifications resonate briefly, subtly, and in some cases powerfully in Hardy's works. Such examples can be located in even the ostensibly bleakest and wintriest of Hardy's poems, especially when juxtaposed against the way in which similar ideas are expressed in his novels. This is true even when the natural environment is represented in Hardy's work as a malignant or sinister force.

The notion of nature as malevolent was a prevalent theme in the latter half of the Victoria era. As Morton notes, John Ruskin's 1884 *Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century* promoted the rather paranoid view of the deterioration of the English weather with Ruskin's "own blighted garden as a concentrated image of the corruption of nature" (*The Vital Science* 86). Ruskin's psychological state had deteriorated greatly by the time he gave these lectures, and yet, the image of nature as a garden filled with weeds was used, as Morton notes, "quite consciously by writers as diverse as Mill, Hardy, Gissing and, above all, by T.H. Huxley" (86). Certainly Hardy employed such themes in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, where the narrative appears to follow a deteriorating series of stages as the weather becomes progressively colder and darker. Ken Ireland notes that in *Tess* Hardy uses a pattern of Phases, documenting Tess's journeys around Wessex while she also journeys through the seasons from her rural innocence in "the fertility of the Blackmore Vale (Phase the First)," to the "edenic lushness of Talbothays (Phase the Third)," to the "wretchedness of Flintcomb-Ash (Phase the Fifth)," and finally to her tragic fate amongst the "starkness of Stonehenge (Phase the Seventh)" (*Thomas Hardy, Time and Narrative* 168). Moving through the seasons in this way appears to accentuate Tess's slow deterioration from youthful vitality towards death, but, additionally, and particularly with reference to the Flintcomb-Ash section, this suffering appears to be accentuated by the seasons. Unlike the harmony between man and nature which Hardy describes in the Talbothays passages, where Tess thrives, at Flintcomb Tess is ill-suited to the environment and the climate in which she finds herself. With its tragic narrative arc, the novel proceeds onwards to the even bleaker stage of Stonehenge. While the

architecture of Hardy's narratives are often tragic in shape and conclusion, beginning with life, and ending in death, his verse addresses similar ideas to his novels in a more balanced style.

This is the case with the ostensibly foreboding "A Backward Spring," published in *Moments of Vision* in 1917. From Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* to A. E. Housman's "Spring Morning," the season of spring has been widely employed in very different periods of English literature as a metaphor for renewal and rebirth. There is also another tradition, however, in which spring has been used negatively in late Victorian sonnets to represent the failure of personal rejuvenation (Holmes, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* 59-60). Hardy's poem can be better placed within the context of this latter tradition although unlike the sonnet form it has fifteen lines, and, being composed in the April of 1917, it can additionally be seen as a reference to the First World War. Hardy's poem begins in spring by representing the flowers' innocence, and yet appears to conclude with the prospect of their tragic fate in the coming winter:

The trees are afraid to put forth buds,
 And there is timidity in the grass;
 The plots lie gray where gouged by spuds,
 And whether next week will pass
 Free of sly sour winds is the fret of each bush
 Of barberry waiting to bloom.

Yet the snowdrop's face betrays no gloom,
 And the primrose pants in its heedless push,
 Though the myrtle asks if it's worth the fight
 This year with frost and rime
 To venture one more time
 On delicate leaves and buttons of white
 From the selfsame bough as at last year's prime,
 And never to ruminate on or remember

What happened to it in mid-December.

(Hardy, *Complete Poetical Works: II* 243)

The flowers are described anthropomorphically, and a sense of foreboding hovers gloomily over the poem, so that “The trees are afraid to put forth buds.” This sense of fear is connected to the flowers’ apprehension of winter’s chill, and thus death. The reluctance to “put forth buds,” however, is also related to a more general questioning of whether “it’s worth the fight.” The enjoyment of present bounties, and a consideration of the future’s possibilities, however joyous, must always be compromised by awareness of life’s darker probabilities, and in “A Backward Spring” the flowers fret and question “whether next week will pass / Free of sly sour winds.”

It is tempting to read Hardy’s treatment of the flowers in “A Backward Spring” in purely pessimistic terms, the poem appearing to resemble the verse of his poetic contemporary T.S. Eliot. *The Waste Land* famously introduces spring by declaring “April is the cruellest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / Memory and desire” (27 1-3). After winter’s long freeze, spring prompts, tempts and seduces; yet, in reawakening one’s feelings after such a long cessation of sensation, the new season also reawakens painful memories. Similarly, the myrtle reminds us of Eliot’s lilacs, and in the midst of its bloom it recalls the negative sensations felt during the previous winter. While the primrose pushes forth, the myrtle questions whether undertaking the same process yet again is really worth the effort. Further, like Eliot’s poem, Hardy’s piece reflects the Great War, the “heedless push” of the primrose seeming to reference the troops leaving their trenches and climbing towards the enemy guns. The apprehension of the flowers, with their reluctance to “put forth buds” reflects Hardy’s own notes on the war, his *Later Years* containing his reactions to a July 27, 1916 *Times Literary Supplement* article on “What is Militarism?” Hardy’s notes also record his own answer as “‘*apprehensiveness*’. The term would fit some of the facts like a glove” (Florence Hardy 172). The myrtle’s questioning of whether the enterprise is “worth the fight” also accentuates this connection

with the trauma of the war.

At the same time, while Hardy's poem can be parsed in this way, it also signifies the influence of a Darwinian worldview. Interestingly, although Hardy's "A Backward Spring" chiefly concerns the budding flora, the collective term 'flowers' is not actually used. Instead Hardy documents each of the flowers in turn as different types, the "barberry," the "snowdrop," the "primrose" and the "myrtle" appearing as if in competition with each other for survival. It is the latter which chiefly symbolises the poem's pervading sense of transient ennui, set against "frost and rime" upon "delicate leaves and buttons of white." The poem concludes with the prediction that the same thing will happen to the myrtle, and indeed many of the other flowers, as previously "happened to it in mid-December." It appears that the struggle between the plants is at heart a Darwinian battle for survival, and yet, although some of the plants must fall, this is not wholly pessimistic. Hardy's Darwinian division of the flowers into natural categories indicates that certain types are clearly better fitted to survive longer throughout the year than others. The myrtle is the weakest of the flowers because it originates from warmer climes, and cannot adapt successfully to colder weather. Thus, in terms of natural selection, the fittest of the flowers is the snowdrop, being the strongest because it is suited to the British climate and thus fitted to its environment. Often blooming and surviving for longer in winter, the snowdrop signifies the poem's faint sense of hope, hence why "the snowdrop's face betrays no gloom."

This aspect can be further demonstrated by comparing Hardy's treatment of the snowdrop with the way it is represented in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's much earlier "A Barren Spring." Hardy was given a copy of Rossetti's *Poetical Works* by Florence Henniker in 1893, noting parts of "Spherical Change" in his notebooks (Lennart Bjork, *The Literary Notebooks* 60). Much earlier in *Desperate Remedies*, his first published novel, Hardy had described his heroine Cytherea Gray by referencing Rossetti's 1850 poem *The Blessed Damosel*. As Cytherea looks outwards from the open upper window she is described as

leaning “out upon the sill like another Blessed Damozel” (71). It is therefore quite likely that Hardy, being familiar with Rossetti's verse, would have read his sonnet “A Barren Spring,” part of his larger sonnet sequence from *The House of Life* (1870). The poem juxtaposes the changing of the season, and the arrival of spring, with the failure of personal rejuvenation. In the poem, Rossetti's narrator describes the new spring as meaning nothing for him, he being “twin'd / With the dead boughs that winter still must bind” (163, 6-7). Therefore, the speaker implores us to “Behold, this crocus is a withering flame; / This snowdrop, snow;” (9-10). Here, the crocus and the snowdrop are seen through the pessimistic prism of the narrator's personal ennui, but Hardy's Darwinian inspired vision affords a broader view of such natural details which transcends the narrator. Hardy's poetic speaker in “I Watched a Blackbird” marvels at the vitality of the creature's “crocus-coloured bill” (*Complete Poetical Works: III* 202, 3). Further, the impersonal narrator of “A Backward Spring” describes the individual prospects of flowers such as the snowdrop. This creates a more objective and varied effect, in which each flower's experience of spring is seen as different and unique.

In Hardy's Darwinian world, therefore, while the myrtle faces hardship, the snowdrop appears able to sturdily endure for longer. Hardy's spring is backward rather than barren, and while this indicates a regression of sorts, it also connotes something else. When backward is read in conjunction with spring as a noun, it can indicate that the season is late or has failed, but when spring is read as a verb it can signify the image of a crouched backward stance preceding a sudden jump forward. Hardy's use of the snowdrop is therefore thematically important, being a flower which proves not just capable of surviving the colder weather but which springs through the ground in January and February. While other flowers are yet to bloom, snowdrops remind onlookers, such as Hardy's poetic speaker, that the January weather is “drawing back for a spring” (*Complete Poetical Works: II* 325), becoming briefly colder but also signposting the oncoming April's warmer weather. Thus, while Hardy's poem appears pessimistic in tone, concluding with the

transience of the myrtle's beauty, this is subtly contrasted in the middle of the verse by the environmental robustness of the hardy snowdrop. Just as there will be inevitable losers, Hardy's poem also presents us with what appears will be a survivor in his creative interpretation of Darwin's universe.

IV

This theme is explored more substantially by Hardy in poems where human individuals are imagined as able to extend their lineage into the future through biological heredity. The theme of human heredity and its connection to Darwin's ideas was an important and substantial topic for Hardy, and is often encountered in his fiction and poetry. In his novels, as a number of critics such as Morton (*The Vital Science*) and Dale (*In Pursuit of a Scientific Culture*) have argued, his representation of the topic appears more negative, and connects heredity to the once prevalent nineteenth-century idea of degeneration. This is not so much the case with his poetry, especially not in verse published during the twentieth century after degeneration had largely fallen out of favor, which interprets the subject of heredity in a more subtly optimistic manner. Hardy's verse contains various examples of how human heredity carries one's facial features and genetic imprimatur onwards, and conveys the idea that while humans will die they can at least live on through their progeny. In this way, through their continuous lineage, human beings seem to be part of something larger, and seem to count collectively as members of a family unit.

Hardy's particular interpretation of Darwin, and the way this creatively manifests in his work in both pessimistic and more hopeful fashion, can be demonstrated through examining his treatment of human heredity. This theme is employed in Hardy's novels, such as *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, where, at the end of the novel Tess's younger sister Liza-Lu appears to take her place at Angel's side, and while Tess will not live on immortally through salvation, the text indicates that Tess's indirect biological descendants

may succeed her. The source of this idea may lay in Hardy's post-*Origin* readings; Morton notes that in 1890, while revising *Tess*, Hardy read the Neo-Darwinist August Weismann's *Essays Upon Heredity* (*The Vital Science* 199). Weismann's pre-Mendelian writings on natural selection offered support for Darwin's theories of natural selection, and also allowed for the possibility of biological degeneration. This has led Morton to argue that Hardy's readings of Weismann possibly shaped his negative treatment of heredity in novels such as *Tess* and *Jude* (199), and Parnham, in his study of both *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *The Woodlanders*, argues that the characters of Elizabeth Jane and Marty offer examples of this (*Green Man Hopkins* 49). Dale widens this analysis further, comparing *Tess* with *Jude the Obscure*, and connecting the theme of Tess' degenerative condition with "Jude Fawley and Sue Bridehead, cousins whose genetic 'flaw' (Jude's family name contains the word) makes them and their offspring as openly 'degenerate'" (*In Pursuit of a Scientific Culture* 238).

While Morton, Dale and Parnham argue that the theme of biological degeneration pervades Hardy's narratives such as *Tess*, the prospect of hereditary advancement, as opposed to degeneration, is also evident. Tess refers to Liza-Lu, her successor, as possessing all of her good qualities without her bad ones. In light of reading Weismann's *Essays*, Hardy appears to play in his novels with different aspects of the theme of heredity, such as degeneration. The topic is also addressed in some of his later verse, which followed William Bateson's translation of Mendel's *Principles of Heredity* (1902) which Hardy may possibly have read. The poem "Heredity" which was published in *Moments of Vision* (1917), and was written, as Morton documents, "about fifteen years" (199) after *Tess*, represents a more ambiguous view which can be interpreted in positive and negative ways. In the verse the narrator transcends the "oblivion" of death by the handing down of his biological data to future generations:

I am the family face;
Flesh perishes, I live on,

Projecting trait and trace
Through time to times anon,
And leaping from place to place
Over oblivion.

The years-heired feature that can
In curve and voice and eye
Despise the human span
Of durance--that is I;
The eternal thing in man,
That heeds no call to die.

(Hardy, *Complete Poetical Works: II* 166-67)

While this poem is about human lineage, it is pertinent that the narrator does not appear to be human. While elsewhere Hardy creatively anthropomorphizes flora and fauna, here he bequeaths what appears to be a gene with human qualities. By making a gene the speaker of the poem Hardy creates an effect which is somewhat unnerving and even chilling. The speaker, in despising “the human span / Of durance,” conveys the tacit impression that he, she, or it, also extends this sentiment towards humanity. In transcending the generations, therefore the face survives as a template while the individuals themselves die. Yet the first stanza also creates the effect that something alive will persist, and that this is tied to humanity. The meter of the first stanza lengthens, line by line, as it relays the “family face” enduring and “leaping from place to place” until suddenly restricting and shortening in the last line. This gives the forceful sense that the threat of “oblivion” has been reduced or even prevented by something which is alive and is springing or “leaping” forwards. Further, if the speaker is a human gene, then its narration is also relatable to readers at a particularly visceral level, demonstrating “In curve and voice and eye” important visual and acoustic human markers. The poem’s mood is thus mixed, being somewhat cold and detached and yet also strangely consoling. It gives us the sense that the

individuals who hand down their progeny are part of, and indeed contribute towards, a continuing and ongoing process.

This idea is associated more strongly with human and familial qualities in the later "The Rover Come Home," published in *Human Shows* (1925), whereby a global traveler arrives home after years abroad. Hardy's narrator describes him as having experienced adventures and hardship in America, the southern Americas, Cape Horn, East India and the Behring Strait, detailing his catalogue of adventures, battles and struggles. Finally, upon his arrival home he is described as talking by the fireside, and in the third and final stanza, Hardy's narrator asks us:

And what is written in his glance
 Stressed by such foreign wear,
 After such alien circumstance
 What does his face declare?
 His mother's; she who saw him not
 After his starting year,
 Who never left her native spot,
 And lies in the churchyard near.

(Hardy, *Complete Poetical Works: III* 127-28, 17-24)

There are aspects to the poem which can seem reductive; the description of the traveler's mother as being buried after having "never left her native spot" appears to imply a Hardyian irony. Read in this way, it appears that traveler, for example, cannot escape his fate, being drawn back to and dying in his hereditary place of origin. Yet, this also strengthens the sense of hereditary connection and human kinship which exists between mother and son. Further, the poem can also be read as exemplifying a diametrically opposite sentiment, noting how such descendants, in carrying on the family lineage, can potentially spread it far and wide. In "The Rover Come Home" the mother's lineage, geographically restricted during her own life, appears boundless, and her visage and features spring outwards to far wider vistas through the travels of her son. Hence, while he far eclipses her own life, the

son's features "stressed by such foreign wear" also carry the mark of his mother. While he eventually returns home, Hardy demonstrates in this poem the possibility for the lineage of ordinary men and women to spread far and wide across the globe. By implication, therefore, the mother's heredity may not just be carried onwards but quite possibly outwards across the globe by later family generations.

V

Amidst the sense of hardship, tragedy and death in Hardy's work, his poetry also contains instances where natural lifeforms are shown to endure and even prosper. The perpetual curtailing and flowering of life one finds in Hardy's poetry is indicative of his rural Dorset background, but at the same time can be seen as adapting the ideas of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. It therefore allows us to locate, as George Levine has identified in his novels, a "prevailing sensation in Hardy's work equally strongly related to his understanding of Darwin" (*Darwin The Writer* 187). Indeed, Darwin's "beautiful adaptations" (115) are sometimes represented in Hardy's poetry in rather surprising and life-affirming ways. For Darwin, nature arbitrarily produced beauty while engaged in ceaseless natural competition which provided both winners and losers. It is true that, like in Darwin's *Origin*, animals and plants which are not fitted to their environment will fail, and they are often shown to suffer in Hardy's work. But significantly, the winners of such struggle are also noted and represented.

Further, Hardy's art is empathetic in mood, emphasizing in creative and anthropomorphic ways the connections between humans and natural lifeforms. This is of course not to ignore that Hardy's poetry sometimes demonstrates, to borrow Herbert Spencer's famous phrase, a "survival of the fittest" (*Principles of Biology* 445). What can be considered the fittest or the highest form of survival, however, in Hardy's mind, is the development of sophisticated human values such as kindness. Therefore, the human subjects

and narrators of his poems, while represented as part of the biological tree of life, are able to extend their sympathy and kindness to animals. Such sentiments are shown to spring forwards, becoming collectively organized and structured in the form of groups and societies, such as the RSPCA, from what were simple origins. Moreover, in a number of his poems, Hardy's narrators demonstrate an evolved sense of empathy with the sufferings and successes of natural creatures and other lifeforms. His poems indicate awareness that, while Darwinian competition condemns some species to evolutionary failure, it also affords other species evolutionary success. Certain forms of flora are shown to better endure inclement conditions, such as a colder than usual springtime, through possessing a hardy nature. Hardy's poems also additionally show how the human victors of such struggles possess the power to extend their lineage through biological heredity. Human genes and family visages are imagined in Hardy's art as transcending individuals, springing forward from successive generation to generation. Hardy's creative representation of the Darwinian world therefore helps his readers to notice something significant. Namely, it helps us to remember that, even when life appears to be taking a backward turn, the future possibility of better times cannot be discounted. Hardy's poetry reminds us, therefore, that even when the year is at its coldest and the day is at its darkest, we may individually and collectively be readying for a spring forward.

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