

THE CONVERGENCE OF THE TWAIN: HARDY'S ALTERATION OF PLATO'S PARABLE

It seemed that our two natures blent
Into a sphere from youthful sympathy,
Or else, to alter Plato's parable,
Into the yolk and white of the one shell.

(W. B. Yeats, 'Among Schoolchildren')

The reasons why Hardy's 'The Convergence of the Twain' is considerably better than the rest of his occasional poetry (better, indeed, than most occasional poems of the last two hundred years) are not far to seek. At least in England, the modern poet turns to writing about public events, if he does so at all, with a fatigued and uncomfortable sense of duty, but in the sinking of the *Titanic* Hardy found a prototypically clear example of a situation that had always preoccupied him. His natural tendency was to see the world in terms of juxtaposition and contrast, and this led inevitably to a fascination with meetings, with the sudden blind convergence of disparate objects or people. On a visit to Stockwell Training College in 1891, to take a minor but revealing instance, his attention was caught by its system of assigning each new girl to the care of a senior student: 'I gather that they are chosen blindly before arrival, from the names only. There must be singular expectancies, confrontings, and excitements arising therefrom.'¹ His poetry, in particular, rings the changes on these singular expectancies, confrontings, and excitements: appointments are made, kept, broken, missed, remembered, or regretted, while apparently mundane social calls lead to unexpected satires of circumstance or turn out to be visits to the dead in the local churchyard. The *Titanic's* collision with the iceberg is a stark and extreme version of these encounters, showing with unusual clarity the 'antinomial pattern' (as Samuel Hynes has termed it) into which they fall.² The ship meets its antithesis, and the result is not synthesis but destruction.

On a superficial reading, the sinking of the *Titanic* is simply one of those cosmic rebukes to human ambition that Hardy always records with a mixture of wistful regret and grim satisfaction. Yet this level of meaning is both expanded and complicated by the richly sexual connotations of the poem's language: ship and iceberg are lovers, destined at once to meet and be fatal to each other. The archaic 'twain' in the title does not just mean 'two' but carries the suggestion of a pair of lovers; Hardy himself often uses the word this way.³ Exploiting the convention that applies the feminine pronoun to ships, he describes the *Titanic* in obviously sensual terms: 'stilly couches she' (248).⁴ The iceberg is its 'mate', while their collision is an 'intimate welding' (with its echo of 'wedding') and a 'consummation'.

This aspect of the poem is plain enough to have struck most readers and attracted comment from the critics.⁵ But 'The Convergence of the Twain' does more than just

¹ Quoted in Florence Emily Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928* (London, 1962), p. 237.

² *The Pattern of Hardy's Poetry* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1961), pp. 46-48.

³ See, for example, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, p. 85; *The Well-Beloved*, p. 13; and *Jude the Obscure*, p. 348. All page-references for Hardy's fiction are to the Wessex Edition, 20 vols (London, 1912-31).

⁴ All quotations from Hardy's shorter poems are taken from *The Complete Poems*, edited by James Gibson (London, 1972). Parenthetical references are to the numbering of the poems in this edition.

⁵ See, for example, Hynes, p. 48.

confirm that Hardy is a sexual pessimist whose lovers usually come to unfortunate or tragic ends. It offers a paradigm, at once precise and suggestive, of a particular type of sexual relationship that fascinated him: a relationship that is apparently destined and inevitable, is based on deep affinity, and yet leads to destruction.

One general characteristic of 'The Convergence of the Twain' offers a clue to the nature and the sources of this underlying paradigm. Hardy is deliberately aiming at mythic resonance. The presence of capitalized abstractions like the *Pride of Life*, the *Immanent Will*, and the *Spinner of the Years* does not create the sort of conceptual straitjacket one finds elsewhere in his poetry (if nothing else, the heterodoxy of their origins prevents that) but introduces instead a complicated and delicate network of allusion. In particular, the poem endows the collision between the *Titanic* and the iceberg with significance by invoking a series of connected fables and traditions about human sexuality.

The most important source is *Plato's Symposium*. Ever since William R. Rutland dismissed Plato as an insignificant influence on Hardy,⁶ critics have usually attributed the presence of Platonic ideas in his work to the mediating agency of Shelley. Yet Hardy's interest in both Shelley and the Hellenism fashionable in the 1880s and 1890s prompted a more careful reading of Plato than is commonly realized; his notebook and diary show him reading several of the dialogues, being impressed by the *Cratylus*, and sufficiently interested in the *Ion* to debate the English rendering of a crucial passage in its argument.⁷

In the circumstances it is highly unlikely that Hardy would have neglected the *Symposium*, and in that work he would have found Aristophanes's bawdy and moving fable about the origins of sexuality. According to Aristophanes, humans were originally divided into three sexes: men, women, and a third sex which combined male and female characteristics in a globular unit. Their double attributes made the hermaphrodites strong enough to rival the gods, and so in retaliation Zeus disunited them: 'He cut men in two, like a sorb-apple which is halved for pickling, or as you might divide an egg with a hair.'⁸ Zeus's action introduced sexuality into human affairs. The original men became homosexual and the women lesbian, while the fragmented hermaphrodites became heterosexual lovers trying to recover their primordial wholeness:

So ancient is the desire of one another which is implanted in us, reuniting our original nature, seeking to make one of two, and to heal the state of man. Each of us when separated, having one side only, like a flat-fish, is but the tally-half of a man, and he is always looking for his other half. (*Dialogues*, 1, 522)

I am quoting from the standard Victorian translation of Plato, an edition that Hardy certainly knew.⁹ Shelley's version, which would obviously have held a special interest for him, is considerably looser and inserts an extra phrase into the last sentence of the quoted passage: 'the imperfect portion of an entire whole'.¹⁰ Hardy echoes Shelley's language in that declaredly Platonic novel, *The Well-Beloved*, where

⁶ *Thomas Hardy: A Study of his Writings and their Background* (1938; reprinted New York, 1962), pp. 32-33.

⁷ See, respectively, *The Literary Notes of Thomas Hardy*, edited by Lennart A. Björk, 2 vols (Göteborg, 1974), 1, 456-57; *Life*, pp. 217, 285.

⁸ *The Dialogues of Plato*, translated by B. Jowett, fourth edition, 4 vols (Oxford, 1953), 1, 522.

⁹ See *Literary Notes*, 1, 456-58.

¹⁰ P. B. Shelley, *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, edited by Mrs Shelley, 2 vols (London, 1840), 1, 108.

Jocelyn Pierston is described as seeking a woman whose nature would 'exactly supplement his own imperfect one and round with it the perfect whole' (p. 102), as well as at significant points in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* which I will later examine.

In 'The Convergence of the Twain' itself, Hardy expresses the affinity of his symbolic lovers by **Plato's image of the severed parts of a circle or globe**. They are 'halves of one august event' and their collision 'jars two hemispheres'. At first reading, the second phrase simply describes the shock caused in America and England by the loss of the *Titanic*, but clearly the two hemispheres are also ship and iceberg, forming a perfect globe at the moment of contact. In 'The Destined Pair', in several respects a companion-piece to 'The Convergence of the Twain', Hardy again uses **the image of the completed circle for sexual union**: its lovers live far apart, unaware that 'the tracks of their feet | Were arcs that would meet' (898). And here, too, despite its apparent symmetry, the union is not harmonious. The poem ends with a disturbing question: 'Would Fate have been kinder | To keep night between them?'

The *Symposium* is not Hardy's only source for this concept of **affinity based on original identity**, since Plato's parable of the disunited hermaphrodites closely resembles other myths about human origins, and, like so much Platonic thought, became intertwined with Christian traditions. From Philo Judaeus onward, commentators on *Genesis* sometimes grafted it on to the story of Eve's creation from Adam's side.¹¹ Although Hardy probably never read Philo, his youthful piety could well have brought him into contact with the later hexamer commentaries who follow Philo's interpretation, and he is obviously aware of the connexion between Christian and Platonic tradition. In fact, he combines them in 'The Convergence of the Twain'. ***Titanic* and iceberg are not merely incomplete halves of the same sphere but also a primal pair resembling Adam and Eve.** The activities of the Immanent Will and the Spinner of the Years recall the role of God in *Genesis*. Just as God in *Genesis* 2.18 creates a companion for Adam, 'an help meet for him', so the presiding forces in Hardy's poem provide a 'mate' for the *Titanic*. The parallel with the progress of God's design for human affairs is completed by the daring and laconic use of 'consummation' in the last stanza: 'consummatum est'.¹²

In *Toward A Recognition of Androgyny* (New York, 1973), Carolyn G. Heilbrun has noted: 'Central to almost every religion is the belief that the original human pair were opposite-sex twins born at a miraculous birth and destined to be lovers' (p. 35).¹³ This has a clear bearing on Plato's lovers springing from an egg-like unity and on the Judaeo-Christian myth of Adam and Eve, whom many centuries of religious art have depicted in terms of fraternal resemblance, and so it is hardly surprising to find Hardy introducing the idea of **twin-like resemblance** in 'The Convergence of the Twain'. If the iceberg is the *Titanic*'s mate, it is a 'sinister mate',

¹¹ For Philo's interpretation and its appearance in later commentaries, see Arnold Williams, *The Common Expositor: An Account of the Commentaries on Genesis 1527-1633* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1948), pp. 5, 92.

¹² In fact, Hardy had already made an equally daring application of Christ's last words in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, where Bathsheba's cry of distress at Troy's rejection of her is called 'the τετέλεστα of her union' with him (p. 345).

¹³ As Professor Heilbrun points out, identical twins of the opposite sex are a medical impossibility, despite the frequency of their appearance in myth and literature. Twins of different sexes are fraternal rather than identical and resemble each other no more closely than brother and sister, except in point of age.

and in addition to its obvious meaning the adjective carries the suggestion that the iceberg is a left-handed or mirrored version of the ship. If the pair are 'halves of one august event', they are 'twin halves'.¹⁴

Yet Hardy did not necessarily have to explore mythology to find incestuous overtones to the union of his destined lovers; he needed only to read Shelley, who thought incest 'like many other *incorrect* things a very poetical circumstance'.¹⁵ That he did read Shelley is well known, and that he is already thinking of Shelley in 'The Convergence of the Twain' is suggested by the description of the iceberg as a 'Shape of Ice'. 'Shape' is one of Shelley's favourite words for the Platonic ideal underlying material reality; he uses it, for example, in the phrase 'One shape of many names' which Hardy borrowed as the epigraph to *The Well-Beloved*. The phrase comes from *The Revolt of Islam*, and in that poem, as well as in 'Epipsychidion', Shelley describes his lovers as symbolic twins. In the original version of *The Revolt of Islam* Laon and Cythna are actually brother and sister, while in the published version she still addresses him as 'Sweet brother of my soul!'. In 'Epipsychidion' the poet exclaims to Emily: 'Would we two had been twins of the same mother!'¹⁶

In striking tribute to the eclecticism of Hardy's knowledge and to the organizing power of his imagination, the account of the symbolic lovers in 'The Convergence of the Twain' derives from far-ranging and complex sources. From them he creates a paradigm of human love. His lovers are destined for each other and set on a course of inevitable meeting; their affinity is indicated by a twin-like resemblance; their union completes a circle or sphere. Yet Hardy has also altered things radically. He is not, like Plato, praising the beneficent power of love, nor, like Shelley, celebrating the ecstatic coupling of ideally liberated lovers. He is describing the sinking of a ship. Despite all the promise of cosmic harmony in the poem's imagery and the traditions from which it derives, the meeting of Hardy's lovers is a destructive collision. Life offers, to deny.

This view of human love, at once idealistically hopeful and cynically disappointing, underlies most — perhaps all — of Hardy's writing; his sense of the disparity between what the cosmos promises and what it actually gives is never more acute than when he applies it to sexual relations. But the paradigm I have deduced from 'The Convergence of the Twain' is particularly relevant to the fiction of the 1890s. Written during the years when the deterioration of his marriage, the death of his earlier love, Tryphema Sparks, and his various flirtations in London society all combined to provoke deep personal crisis, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *The Well-Beloved*, and *Jude the Obscure* present Hardy's most urgent and anguished exploration of love. At the heart of these books lies the simultaneous offer and denial of ideal union enacted in his later poem.¹⁷

¹⁴ In *The Dynasts* Hardy described the leaders of the contending armies in the same way: Kutozof and Ney are 'A pair as stout as thou, Earth, ever hast twinned!'; see the New Wessex Edition, edited by Harold Orel (London, 1978), Part Third, Act 1, Scene 9, p. 481.

¹⁵ *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, edited by Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols (Oxford, 1964), II, 154.

¹⁶ *The Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, edited by Thomas Hutchinson (London, 1919), *The Revolt of Islam*, I, 22 (l. 363); II, 47 (l. 1083); 'Epipsychidion', I, 45 (pp. 46, 64, 407).

¹⁷ I should like to acknowledge a general debt to J. Hillis Miller's stimulating introduction to the New Wessex Edition of *The Well-Beloved* (London, 1975); see pp. 12–14 and 21 for passages to which my discussion is particularly indebted.

In virtually all Hardy's novels the protagonists are flanked by two, and sometimes more, characters of the opposite sex between whom they choose or vacillate, but in his late fiction the device is used with special precision and develops special significance. Regarded in structural terms, the love-triangle formed by Jude, Sue, and Arabella is much the same as the earlier grouping of, say, Bathsheba, Oak, and Troy. Yet there is a vast qualitative difference. Troy turns out to be a very bad husband for Bathsheba, while Oak will obviously make a rather good one in his homely and unromantic way. By the time of *Jude the Obscure* the contrast between the different lovers has become altogether sharper and more urgent; Arabella is wrong for Jude and Sue is right for him in a much deeper sense. The protagonist's romantic career is no longer merely a matter of choices that prove in differing degrees wise or foolish, successful or unsuccessful. It has become a matter of radical affinity or radical misalliance.

Hardy makes the point in his most magisterial and proleptic manner near the beginning of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, when he describes Tess's first encounter with Alec:

Enough that in the present case, as in millions, it was not the two halves of a perfect whole that confronted each other at the perfect moment; a missing counterpart wandered independently about the earth waiting in crass obtuseness till the late time came. Out of which maladroit delay sprang anxieties, disappointments, shocks, catastrophes, and passing-strange destinies. (p. 49)

The language is unmistakably Platonic. Angel Clare, whom Tess briefly glimpsed at Marlott, is not just a better partner than Alec; he is her 'missing counterpart', the separated half of an androgynous whole. When the pair meet again in the Vale of the Great Dairies, resolving the chord left incomplete at their first encounter, their union seems natural and destined: 'All the while they were converging, under an irresistible law, as surely as two streams in one vale' (p. 165). Tess yields to Angel's first embrace with 'unreflecting inevitableness' (p. 193); it is 'the gravitation of two into one' (p. 194). Angel's harp-music has enchanting and seductive powers which recall Apollo, and he himself completes the allusion when he compares Tess to Apollo's twin sister, Artemis (p. 167). Venturing out together into the early morning landscape, they feel 'as if they were Adam and Eve' (p. 167).

As one might expect from its reference to 'Platonic philosophers' (p. vii) in the preface and its use of a phrase from *The Revolt of Islam* as an epigraph, *The Well-Beloved* presents the same view of destined, affined love. Jocelyn Pierston's pursuit of the Well-Beloved is the result of an irresistible compulsion; and though the Well-Beloved migrates unpredictably from woman to woman, Pierston, Hardy insists, is an example not of fickleness but of fidelity to an underlying ideal. Moreover, as it is successively incarnated in the three Avices, the ideal bears a progressively stronger resemblance to Pierston himself. He feels separated from the first Avice Caro by class and cultural differences, but discovers a temperamental affinity with her daughter strong enough to make him posit 'some remote ancestor common to both families' (p. 106). The third Avice already bears Pierston's own surname, has inherited 'the voice . . . of a Pierston' (p. 158), and has even been brought up in his childhood home, using the same bedroom he inhabited as a boy.

Jude and Sue are drawn together by the same irresistible law that united Tess and Angel or impelled Pierston to pursue the three Avices. In his first draft of *Jude the Obscure* Hardy made Sue's presence in Christminster the cause of Jude's decision to

go there;¹⁸ in its final version she is still the 'quickenning ingredient' (p. 90) in his decision to go to the city, for his curiosity has been aroused by his aunt's account of their common tendency to bookishness and by the sight of her photograph. Hardy surrounds their gradual convergence with premonitory hints that make it seem fated; Sue's first note to Jude is 'one of those documents which, simple and commonplace in themselves, are seen retrospectively to have been pregnant with impassioned consequences' (pp. 115-16), while their first meeting near the site of Cranmer's, Latimer's, and Ridley's martyrdom is described with diagrammatic exactitude and elaborate symbolism.

Once they have met, their affinity becomes a common topic of their conversation, as well as of other characters' discussion of them. 'What counterparts they were!,' reflects Jude platonically (p. 172). He adapts a biblical quotation about man's relation with God to describe his closeness to her: "'I think and know you are my dear Sue, from whom neither length nor breadth, nor things present nor things to come, can divide me!'" (p. 290).¹⁹ Phillotson allows Sue to join Jude because "'They seem to be one person split in two!'" (p. 276), and goes on to spell out the Platonic and Shelleyan overtones of the phenomenon, complete with allusions to Laon and Cythna and to Bernadin de St Pierre's novel, *Paul et Virginie*. The narrator explicitly endorses their opinion; walking together at the Great Wessex Agricultural Show, Jude and Sue seem 'almost the two parts of a single whole' (p. 352).

As in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *The Well-Beloved*, these descriptions are supported by references to familial resemblance and twinning. Jude and Sue are actually cousins, and when he first hears her speak Jude 'recognized in the accents certain qualities of his own voice' (p. 103). Later, when Sue wears his clothes after her plunge into the river, he sees 'a slim and fragile being masquerading as himself on a Sunday' (p. 173): Nor is this merely a temporary illusion, for Jude and Sue have the power of telepathic communication that superstition has often attributed to identical twins: 'Indeed, when they talked on an indifferent subject, as now, there was ever a second silent conversation passing between their emotions, so perfect was the reciprocity between them' (p. 244).

One obvious point, which I have already made in my discussion of 'The Convergence of the Twain', emerges again from these descriptions. If Tess and Angel, Pierston and his three Avices, or Jude and Sue seem ideal lovers (destined to meet, meant for each other, and perfectly compatible) it is because they are similar, so strikingly similar that they can appear virtually identical. Their love is based not on the counterbalance of opposites nor on the creative friction of differing temperaments, but on a delight in similarity. They seek out, meet, and fall in love with a mirror image.

In fact, as relations between Hardy's lovers develop, they themselves ignore or attempt to eradicate the superficial differences of character that distinguish them. 'I know your meaning', Jude says enthusiastically when Sue is explaining her objections to the scale model of Jerusalem (p. 126), though in fact he is still in the dark about her rejection of the religion he cherishes. Later, Sue undermines his faith and introduces him to her own blend of Hellenism, John Stuart Mill, and the Higher

¹⁸ See John Paterson, 'The Genesis of *Jude the Obscure*', *SP*, 57 (January 1960), 87-98 (pp. 89-90).

¹⁹ See Romans 7. 38-39: 'For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God.'

Criticism. In the previous novels it is the man who takes the dominant role, shaping or trying to shape his partner into yet closer similarity to himself. Delighted to find in Tess the 'ache of modernism' (p. 160) he had thought peculiar to people like himself, Angel Clare offers to educate her in history, and rehearses his own arguments in favour of religious doubt: arguments she later repeats to Alec d'Urberville with devastating effect. In *The Well-Beloved*, Pierston allays his worries about the second Avicé's lack of social polish by planning to 'pack her off to school for two or three years' and 'enlarge her mind by a little travel' (p. 107). An earlier passage implies that, from Pierston's point of view, his affinity with the various women of the Caro family is a matter of their being the right clay and his being the right potter (p. 102); in his personal life as much as in his career as a sculptor he sets out to shape images in his own likeness.

Just as the compatibility of Hardy's ideal lovers is based on their similarity, so the unfitness of his misallied lovers stems from their dissimilarity. *The Well-Beloved* treats this idea in only a muted form, but even here Marcia's down-to-earth practicality is set in contrast to the nervously imaginative temperament that Pierston shares with the three Avices. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* make the point emphatically: Alec is wrong for Tess, and Arabella is wrong for Jude, because they are radically different. For Jude, Arabella is 'a woman . . . whose life had nothing in common with his own except locality' (p. 48), and his mistake in marrying her lies in 'having based a permanent contract on a temporary feeling which had no necessary connection with affinities that alone render a life-long comradeship tolerable' (p. 80). In each of these three novels the bad lover intrudes into the action, destroying its promised formal shape and turning its expected harmonies to dissonance. Alec intervenes between Tess's first sight of Angel at Marlott and her union with him in the Vale of the Great Dairies; Marcia Bencomb appears just as Pierston is about to marry the first Avicé; while Arabella, interrupting Jude's recital of his future studies, interrupts in a larger sense his destined journey to Christminster ('Thither JF') and his union with Sue. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* the misalliances are actually brought about by aggression and trickery; Alec possesses Tess by deceit and violence while Arabella begins her courtship of Jude by throwing a piece of 'novel artillery' (p. 43) whose significance is unmistakable, and finally catches him by feigning pregnancy. Like Tess, Jude is 'caught in a gin' (p. 71).

The difference between these misallied couples, thrown up against each other by the ill-judged execution of the well-judged plan of things, is expressed in the same language. Hardy's ideal lovers are described in an assortment of terms whose common factor is a concept of spiritual refinement. For all her sensuousness, Tess is a 'pure' woman with an integrity that survives her physical misadventures intact, 'more finely formed' (p. 176) than the other dairymaids; while Angel is 'more spiritual than animal . . . less Byronic than Shelleyan' (pp. 246-47) Pierston's Well-Beloved is 'a lithe airy being, of no great stature' (p. 37), the female counterpart of his own passionate but unflinchingly temperamental. Despite his lapses into carnal pleasure, Jude is imaginative, a 'hungry soul' (p. 223) given to nervous excitement and impractical visions, while Sue, on whose nature this language concentrates with particular intensity, is 'so ethereal a creature that her spirit could be seen trembling through her limbs' (p. 224). By contrast, Marcia Bencomb has a rude Amazonian vigour, while Alec and Arabella are debased. With his cigars and his *droit de seigneur*,

Alec is the epitome of masculine debauchery; with her false hair and knowingness about adulterated beer, Arabella is the epitome of female coarseness.

In one sense, terms like 'pure', 'spiritual', and 'ethereal' are just useful generalizations about a person's temperament, tastes, behaviour, and attraction to or revulsion from sensuality. But the issue goes deeper than this, for as Hardy sees it refinement and debasement are part of a character's physical constitution. Alec's debasement is expressed in his 'badly moulded' lips (p. 44), Arabella's in her 'coarseness of skin and fibre' (p. 42). Sue's refinement is signified by 'the delicate lines of her profile, and the small, tight apple-like convexities of her bodice' (p. 225) and the 'nervous motion' (p. 105) of her physique. **This is Hardy's comment on the meeting of the debased with the refined in the scene where Alec rapes Tess:**

Why was it that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive; why so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus, the wrong man the wrong woman, many thousand years of analytical philosophy have failed to explain to our sense of order. (p. 91)

The impersonal language ('beautiful feminine tissue', 'coarse pattern', 'the coarse . . . the finer') here is not just the sort of convenient refuge that even the frankest Victorian novelist must seek when describing such an episode. And Hardy's outrage is not a sentimental protest against the destruction of innocence, for he makes it abundantly clear elsewhere that Tess's purity has not been forever defiled. His language is a lay approximation to the terminology of genetics, and his outrage is at the meeting of mismatched and radically different genes.

Behind the horror of misalliance with a radically different lover and behind the dream of meeting a lover so perfectly similar that he or she seems to duplicate oneself lies an ideal of genetic purity, of the same genetic stock hoarded and passed on without dilution to succeeding generations. As his poem 'Heredity' shows, Hardy was fascinated by the hereditary transmission of physical characteristics, but it is in the fiction of the 1890s that his interest is given its most complete expression. With Tess resembling the portraits of her d'Urberville ancestors and being resembled in turn by 'Liza-Lu, with the same face passing unchanged through three generations of Avices, and with Jude and Sue linked by physical characteristics derived from common ancestry, the characters in these novels seem to inhabit a bewildering hall of mirrors.

The poem 'Heredity' makes no reference to gender. **The family face is merely a version of the abstract force of Time, destroying the individual existence but ensuring the continuity of the type:** 'Flesh perishes, I live on' (p. 363). In Hardy's last three novels, though, hereditary transmission usually concerns an ideal of female beauty that offers Hardy's men the chance of recovering dead loves and re-enacting dead love affairs. Angel Clare can console himself with 'Liza-Lu after Tess's execution. Grieving over the death of the first Avice, Jocelyn Pierston returns to the Isle of Slingers to find her reincarnated in a daughter and, losing the daughter too, he later discovers yet another reincarnation in the next generation. On the evening of Phillotson's marriage to Sue Bridehead the possibility that had been offered so concretely to Angel and Pierston presents itself to Jude as a beguiling fantasy:

He projected his mind into the future, and saw her with children more or less in her own likeness around her. But the consolation of regarding them as a continuation of her identity

was denied to him, as to all such dreamers, by the wilfulness of Nature in not allowing issue from one parent alone. Every desired renewal of an existence is debased by being half alloy. 'If at the estrangement or death of my lost love, I could go and see her child — hers solely — there would be comfort in it!' said Jude. And then he again uneasily saw, as he had latterly seen with more and more frequency, the scorn of Nature for man's finer emotions, and her lack of interest in his aspirations. (p. 212)

Clearly, though nature does not permit children to spring unassisted from their mothers, the same effect of pure hereditary transmission can be achieved by the union of homozygotic parents or, in its most extreme form, by incestuous union.

Yet what is most striking about this passage from *Jude the Obscure*, with its implicit retrospective glance at the plots of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *The Well-Beloved*, is its ambivalent tone; Hardy seems both to share and to deride Jude's dream. Like his enthusiasm for Christminster or his pity for suffering animals, Jude's ideal of genetic purity marks him as a man of 'finer emotions': that is, of sentiments at once admirably exalted and dangerously opposed to the way the world actually works. Conceived on the level of myth or metaphor, twinning and physical similarity may seem an apt way of expressing ideal affinity; incest can be a very poetical circumstance. But once this definition of affinity is taken literally, the language of genetics invoked, and the issue of hereditary transmission raised, it presents itself in a very different light, for incest has traditionally been an object of taboo. The incest taboo, moreover, was of special interest to Hardy's contemporaries, and their discussion of the subject forms an implicit but powerful background to his last novels.

The suggestion that 'Liza-Lu might succeed Tess in Angel's affections is introduced by Tess herself:

'She is so good and simple and pure. O, Angel — I wish you would marry her if you lose me, as you will do shortly. O, if you would!'

'If I lose you I lose all! And she is my sister-in-law.'

'That's nothing, dearest. People marry sister-laws continually about Marlott.' (p. 503)

Despite his initial reluctance, Angel is apparently about to act on Tess's suggestion at the end of the novel, when he and 'Liza-Lu stand outside Wintoncester jail 'hand in hand' (p. 507). Yet at both the time of the book's publication and the presumed date of its action such a marriage would have been prohibited by canon and civil law.²⁰

For most of the nineteenth century such a marriage would have been legal in the self-governing colonies; in *Jude the Obscure* itself, Arabella reminds Jude that marriage practices were rather more free in Australia. But in England where the propriety of marrying one's deceased wife's sister had been a matter of debate since the Reformation, such unions were finally outlawed by Lord Lyndhurst's Act of 1835. The Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 further declared that adultery between a man and his wife's sister was incestuous and constituted adequate grounds for divorce. Hardy was certainly familiar with this second law, for

²⁰ The only critic I have encountered who discusses the relevance of this issue to *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is Jan B. Gordon, in 'Origins, History, and the Reconstitution of Family: Tess' Journey', *ELH*, 43 (Autumn 1976), 366-88 (p. 385). Professor Gordon's discussion, however, is damaged by the mistaken belief that the Deceased Wife's Sister's Bill became law in 1869. For a full account of the Parliamentary controversies it aroused, see Cynthia Fansler Behrman, 'The Annual Blister: A Sidelight on Victorian Social and Parliamentary History', *Victorian Studies*, 11 (June 1968), 483-502.

he used it as a plot device in *The Woodlanders*; it is the new Act of Parliament that Melbury vainly hopes will free his daughter Grace from her marriage to Fitzpiers.²¹

Lord Lyndhurst's Act, however, began rather than ended the real debate about marriage with one's deceased wife's sister. In 1849 Stuart Wortley proposed a bill to legalize such unions, and so introduced a perennial topic of Victorian legislative and theological controversy, attracting the polemical energies of Keble, Pusey, and Matthew Arnold among many others.²² By the time that *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* appeared, the bill had been unsuccessfully presented to Parliament twenty-five times, its defeat usually being caused by the Bishops' opposition in the Lords. It did not finally become law until 1907, and even then adultery with a wife's sister remained incestuous.

In a society that sought to make an ideal of domestic life and to free it from all taint of illicit sexuality, the question of incestuous marriage, even if it were technical rather than real, generated extraordinary fervour. According to *The Times* of 1894 the Deceased Wife's Sister's Bill posed 'a grave risk to the integrity of the family' (16 June, p. 13). The risk, apparently, was already partly realized, for an editorial of 1850 spoke of incestuous marriages as lamentably common in rural areas. With a mixture of sadness and optimism, it concluded: 'If we could but pass down to the agricultural labourer some of the conventionalities with regard to marriage which are recognized in all the *saving* classes, we should have half solved the problem of his social improvement' (6 March, p. 5). The implication is clear: **the rural working classes are promiscuous and tolerate incest, while the middle classes are horrified by even technical incest. And this, of course, is the same point that emerges from Tess's dialogue with Angel. She comes from a rural community and a world of older sexual mores; he is bound by the taboos and restrictions of the Victorian gentleman.**

In larger historical terms, the belief that primitive communities encouraged incest and other forms of sexual promiscuity outlawed by more advanced cultures is a central tenet of Victorian anthropology. Originally proposed by the pioneer anthropologist John F. McClennan in his *Primitive Marriage* (1865), it was elaborated by men like Sir John Lubbock, Lewis H. Morgan, and Sir Henry Sumner Maine into a theory of society's evolution from **dangerous freedom to necessary restraint**.²³ The first volume of Herbert Spencer's *The Principles of Sociology*, published in 1876, summarized the argument: 'Still more are we shown that regular relations of the sexes are results of evolution, and that the sentiments upholding them have been gradually established, on finding how little regard is paid by many uncivilized and semi-civilized peoples to those limitations which blood-relationships dictate among the civilized.'²⁴

Although there is no direct evidence that Hardy was widely read in Victorian anthropology, his later fiction treats Wessex more and more from the standpoint of

²¹ See 'The Time-Scheme in *The Woodlanders*', in the New Wessex Edition of *The Woodlanders*, edited by David Lodge (London, 1974), p. 407.

²² See John Keble, *Against Profane Dealing with Holy Matrimony* (Oxford, 1849); E. B. Pusey, *Marriage with a Deceased Wife's Sister Prohibited by Holy Scripture* (Oxford, 1849); Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, edited by John Dover Wilson (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 108-81; and the extensive series of pamphlets issued by the Marriage Law Defence Union and the Marriage Law Reform Association.

²³ See, particularly, *Primitive Marriage: An Inquiry into the Origin of the Form of Capture in Marriage Ceremonies* (Edinburgh, 1865), p. 289; Sir John Lubbock, *The Origin of Civilization and the Primitive Condition of Man* (London, 1870), p. 70; and Lewis H. Morgan, *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (Washington, 1871; reprinted Oosterhout, 1970), p. 487.

²⁴ *The Principles of Sociology*, 3 vols (London and Edinburgh, 1876-96), 1, 636.

the scientific historian; from *The Mayor of Casterbridge* onwards the rural details in his novels seem less like fragments of personal recollection or casually-collected folklore and more like part of a deliberate investigation of a vanished culture. Herbert Spencer, moreover, is an admitted and major influence on Hardy's intellectual development.²⁵ With its careful review of earlier anthropology and its emphatic restatement of the dominant belief of the day, *The Principles of Sociology* alone would have given Hardy a thorough acquaintance with the Victorian view of incest.

It is not surprising, then, to find in his last three novels a microcosm of the contrast between civilized and primitive cultures which the anthropologists had already outlined. The difference between middle-class and working-class sexual attitudes, already apparent in the conversation about 'Liza-Lu, pervades *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Angel Clare comes from a community where sexual conduct is restrained by an elaborate code of taboos. Clare's parents choose Mercy Chant as a fitting mate for him on the grounds of her doctrinal respectability, and anxiously question him about the sexual purity of his proposed wife, Tess. They do things differently in Marlott and Trantridge. Tess's parents send her to the d'Urbervilles to 'claim kin' in instinctive obedience to some older pattern of endogamous marriage. On her return to Marlott, Tess's loss of virginity and her illegitimate child are accepted without moral censure. The same opposition reappears in *Jude the Obscure*, between the rural community where Arabella is abetted by her parents in frankly sexual designs on Jude and the middle-class urban world where the unmarried Jude and Sue are treated with hostility.

The Well-Beloved, a novel built on rigid structural antitheses, treats this opposition more emphatically than either its predecessor or its successor. London and the Isle of Slingers, the poles of Jocelyn Pierston's life, are the names for two different and irreconcilable sexual codes. In London the fashionable Mrs Pine-Avon becomes, after her marriage to the painter Somers, the embodiment of Mrs Grundy, 'giving sharp, strict regard to the current literature and art that reached the innocent presence of her long perspective of girls' (p. 170). On the Isle of Slingers, older customs still prevail. The practice of trial marriage, of allowing engaged couples to live together before marriage in order to test the woman's fertility, may be dying out, but the local memory is still strong enough to stop Mr Bencomb objecting to his daughter's compromising stay with Pierston, as a middle-class London father would undoubtedly have done. Above all, Slingers is an 'isle of intermarriages' (p. 139). Hardy says that there are only 'half-a-dozen . . . surnames in the whole island' (p. 4), but for the purposes of the novel there are really only three — Bencomb, Pierston, and Caro — and of these only the last two play a major role. The Pierston and Caro families are already linked by common ancestry (or so, at least, Pierston believes), and in the course of the book they describe a complex pattern of interbreeding. After nearly marrying Jocelyn, the first Avice marries her cousin Jim and so retains her maiden name after marriage; also after flirting with Jocelyn, the second Avice marries his distant cousin, Isaac Pierston; and, if she had gone through with her projected marriage to Pierston, the third Avice would, like her grandmother, have kept her maiden name as her married name.

²⁵ See, for example, the letter where Hardy waspishly recommends a reading of Spencer, among other contemporary thinkers, to a clergyman who had innocently written to ask how he reconciled the existence of evil with a belief in God's goodness (*The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, edited by Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate (Oxford and London, 1978), 1, 174).

Yet though Hardy accepts the anthropologists' definition of the difference between modern and primitive sexuality, he reaches very different judgements on these states. The codes of restraint that men like Herbert Spencer celebrate as evidence of progress are to him objects of bitter discontent. His last novels are a crescendo of protest against taboos and conventions, especially those governing the relations of the sexes. 'Let us off and search, and find a place | Where yours and mine can be natural lives', urges the speaker of 'The Recalcitrants' (319), and this yearning for a world where lovers can find a refuge from the prohibitions of modern society appears with increasing intensity and frustration in Hardy's last novels. Ideal lovers like Tess and Angel or Jude and Sue become first unwitting rebels against, and then martyrs to, modern sexual attitudes. Angel and Tess enjoy their idyll at the Vale of the Great Dairies, but it is only a brief episode before the inhibitions in which society has indoctrinated them reassert themselves. They next meet as fugitives from the law. Tess and Angel at least enjoy their summer in the Vale of the Great Dairies, in a lush and uninhibited world of natural fertility, but all Jude and Sue have is a night at a shepherd's hut. Everywhere else they encounter taboos, and are forced into a desperate and unremitting movement from railway carriage to Temperance hotel to lodging house.

Read in this light, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *The Well-Beloved*, and *Jude the Obscure* seem like polemical replies to contemporary anthropology, protests against the artificial restraints of civilization in the name of primitive unfettered Nature. And so, in a sense, they undoubtedly are. Yet Nature is always uncertain and often treacherous in Hardy's work, and the blame for the unhappy fates of his ideal lovers cannot simply be laid at society's door. Rather than standing as a simple indictment of modern prejudices, the failure of Tess's affair with Angel or Jude's with Sue seems at once over-determined and curiously inexplicable. Even the plots conspire against the lovers, keeping them apart at the right moment, distracting them with less-suited partners, and then finally bringing them together at the wrong moment. When they do come together some lurking inner doubt makes them snatch at excuses for not consummating their union, for parting again, or for feeling guilty about their love. Even for a man brought up in the middle-class proprieties, Angel is surely too quick to abandon Tess, and Tess herself, even for a woman brought up in a fatalistic culture, is too quick to let him go. By the same token Jocelyn Pierston, for a man apparently dedicated to the pursuit of his romantic ideal, is remarkably adroit at letting all three Avices slip through his hands.

If Hardy's late novels present an ideal of human love, they manage at the same time to regard its fulfilment with doubt and foreboding. The Platonic and Shelleyan allusions in *The Well-Beloved*, for example, are twisted to ominous effects quite alien to the spirit of their original authors. The epigraph, 'One shape of many names', which the novel invites us to apply to the Well-Beloved herself, refers in its original context in *The Revolt of Islam* to an evil spirit.²⁶ Two oblique references to Aristophanes's fable work in the same unexpected way. Describing the storm from which Pierston and Marcia shelter, Hardy writes that the sea 'had something of a supernatural power in being able to close up and join itself after such disruption, like Satan's form when, cut in two by the sword of Michael, "The ethereal substance closed, | Not long divisible"' (p. 25). The drive to reunion after separation clearly

²⁶ I am indebted for this point to a footnote in the New Wessex edition of the novel (p. 194 n).

recalls the behaviour of the hermaphrodites, but the connotations Hardy attaches to it reverse those of Aristophanes; the separation is the act of a just, not a jealous, god and the reunion affirms, not love, but the persistence of evil. A few pages earlier Hardy describes the winds blowing from Deadman's Bay as 'an imaginary shape or essence from the human multitude lying below' (p. 12): 'There could almost be felt the brush of their huge composite ghost as it ran a shapeless figure over the isle, shrieking for some good god who would disunite it again' (p. 13). Like the description of the sea, this clearly alludes to Aristophanes's fable but inverts its significance. The *Symposium* tells of an originally united soul disunited by a malevolent god, but *The Well-Beloved* speaks of originally separate souls who suffer the unwelcome fate of being united and seek the offices of a good god to restore them to their separate identities.

The fear of union at which these images hint appears more explicitly in both the narrator's comments and the characters' behaviour. Tess's marriage to Angel is surrounded with omens of disaster. Pierston's pursuit of the Well-Beloved finally seems not a blessing but a curse from which he is lucky to be released: "'I have lost a faculty, for which loss Heaven be praised!'" (p. 210). And Jude's and Sue's discovery of ideal affinity is often described as the working-out of a curse. For all their profound attraction to each other Hardy's ideal lovers all experience the 'sudden Sapphic terror of love' (p. 95) that strikes Pierston with increasing force as the action of *The Well-Beloved* develops. They recoil from physical union with an intensity that their avowed reasons (the inappropriateness of the occasion, or their objections to the marriage laws) never fully explain.

Some at least of this revulsion stems from that dislike of physical sex which is a recurrent and troubling aspect of all Hardy's writings. But a large part, and the part which has the most direct bearing on the conduct of his ideal lovers in the later novels, stems from the contemporary attitude to incest. Hardy may object to the belief in progress expressed by men like Herbert Spencer, but he could not free himself from the innate horror of incest that permeated their accounts of primitive cultures. Such freedom would have been especially difficult for him to achieve since the Victorians had provided the incest taboo with scientific justification. The anthropologists worked in the shadow of Darwin's *The Variation of Plants and Animals under Domestication* (1868), which argued that heterozygosity, or crossing, is beneficial and homozygosity, or interbreeding, is harmful: 'It is a great law of nature, that all organic beings profit from an occasional cross with individuals not closely related to them in blood; and that, on the other hand, long-continued close interbreeding is injurious.' Interbreeding brings about 'the combination and consequent increase of morbid tendencies common to both parents' and its offspring are characterized by 'loss of size, constitutional vigour, and fertility, sometimes accompanied by a tendency to malformation'. Few Victorian scientists were more cautious than Darwin in applying the results of their observation of plant and animal life to man himself, but about interbreeding he is unusually assertive: 'In the case of man, the question whether evil follows from close interbreeding will probably never be answered by direct evidence, as he propagates his kind so slowly and cannot be subjected to experiment; but the almost universal practice of all races at all times of avoiding closely-related marriage is an argument of considerable weight; and whatever conclusion we arrive at in regard to the higher animals may safely be extended to man.'²⁷

²⁷ *The Variation of Plants and Animals Under Domestication*, 2 vols (New York, 1868), II, 144-45, 153-54. It should be noted, incidentally, that Darwin found the idea that human society began in a state of sexual promiscuity 'extremely improbable' (*The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 2 vols (London, 1871), II, 362).

Rephrased in more confident language, Darwin's argument was taken up by contemporary anthropologists as providing an obvious explanation for humanity's progress beyond incestuous promiscuity and as a powerful justification for the incest taboo.²⁸

With his general interest in Victorian science, his admiration for Darwin, and his fascination with heredity, Hardy certainly knew this argument and was impressed by it.²⁹ It plays, to be sure, no part in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* or *The Well-Beloved*, where the transmission of hereditary characteristics through interbreeding is presented as, if anything, progressive rather than deteriorative, an evolution towards refinement and purity. The cruel face of the Norman d'Urbervilles is beautified in Tess's 'fine features' (p. 277) while 'Liza-Lu, in turn, is 'a spiritualized image of Tess' (p. 506). The third Avicé is, to Jocelyn Pierston's enchanted gaze, 'a glorification of the first' (p. 161). But in *Jude the Obscure*, the last novel and the one which enacts Hardy's love-paradigm in its starkest form, Darwin's argument becomes the focus for Hardy's suspicion of ideal affinity and its underlying dream of genetic purity. Jude and Sue are propelled towards each other as if by natural instinct, and encouraged to listen to nature rather than modern convention; yet, if obeyed, the same instinct can unleash frightening and destructive consequences.

From the start Jude and Sue stand in a paradoxical relation to the past. On the one hand they seem violently uprooted. Jude is an orphan, ignorant of his parents' lives, transplanted to a decaying village for which he never cares and which never cares about him. He is a lonely boy sitting in a deserted cornfield whose history has been expunged by the harrow. When we first hear of her, Sue is leading an aggressively independent life in a city whose traditions she despises. Yet at the same time they are both burdened by family history. The Fawleys, to whom they trace a common ancestry, are an 'odd and peculiar family — the wrong breed for marriage' (p. 201). As the novel proceeds (and this is one of its most important lines of development) they learn about their family past and find in it ominous portents for their own lives. As a boy Jude hears from Drusilla that the Fawleys should not marry; later he learns in more detail that his parents separated and his mother committed suicide soon afterwards. He and Sue are told by Widow Edlin that a common ancestor was hanged for attempting to steal the body of his child back from his estranged wife.

Under the influence of this news Jude and Sue see themselves in the shadow of a hereditary curse:

'How horrid that story was last night! It spoils my thoughts of to-day. It makes me feel as if a tragic doom overhung our family, as it did the house of Atreus.'

'Or the house of Jeroboam', said the quondam theologian. (p. 341)

Tess of the d'Urbervilles and *The Well-Beloved* have also presented people suffering under curses and dooms, and their protagonists have undergone similar moments when they confront history and so confront themselves. Tess finds in the portrait of

²⁸ See, for example, Sir Henry Sumner Maine, *Dissertations on Early Law and Custom* (London, 1883), pp. 227–28. The prevailing view does not seem to have been seriously challenged until Durkheim's essay, originally published in *Année Sociologique* in 1898, which raised the obvious objection that although taboos against incest are ancient the theory that incest leads to malformed offspring is relatively recent. See *Incest: The Nature and Origin of the Taboo*, translated by Edward Sagarin (New York, 1963), p. 61.

²⁹ The fact that Hardy took the trouble to read Dr August Weissmann's *Essays Upon Heredity and Kindred Biological Problems*, a highly technical answer to Darwin's theory of pangenesis, shows how sophisticated his interest in such matters could be. See *Life*, p. 230.

her ancestors chilling confirmation of the fear she had earlier confided to Angel: a knowledge of history would merely teach "that I am one of a long row only" (p. 162). For Pierston the moment comes over the body of the second Avic: 'As he sat darkling here the ghostly outlines of former shapes taken by his Love came round their sister the unconscious corpse, confronting him from the wall in sad array, like the pictured Trojan women beheld by Aeneas on the walls of Carthage' (p. 202).

All three scenes show the protagonists caught in the mesh of history. The past is an unsought and unwanted legacy that can thwart conscious aspiration and destroy the chance of happiness. But the sense of despairing entrapment goes much deeper in *Jude the Obscure*. Tess and Pierston come to unhappy ends (she hanged at Wintoncester jail and he living out a disillusioned old age) but they are still able to plan, however deludedly, for future generations. Tess proposes that Angel should marry 'Liza-Lu, while Pierston modernizes the Isle of Slingers and advises the third Avic in her marital problems with Henri Leverre. Jude and Sue are denied even this slender consolation. Their legacy is carried in their genes, and so, apart from destroying their own lives, it can darken the future for those who come after them.

I suggested earlier that the ideal lovers in Hardy's last novels belong to a distinctive genetic type; they are all refined and pure. In Jude and Sue these qualities are exaggerated to dangerous extremes. Refinement has become crippling hypersensitivity, a fatal nervous attenuation. For all its repulsive aspects, Arabella's coarseness involves a useful energy; resilient and adaptable, she is admirably equipped for survival. The Fawleys, in contrast, seem delicate and exhausted. As Drusilla warns, they lack 'sprawl' (p. 14) or vigour. Jude himself quickly bears out the truth of this judgement as he lies on his back regarding the prospect of adult life with timorous revulsion: 'All around you there seemed to be something glaring, garish, rattling, and the noises and glares hit upon the little cell called your life, and shook it, and warped it' (p. 15). Sensitivity to suffering quickly becomes a hopeless anguish robbing him of the desire to hold his own in the world. He learns that his mother drowned herself and, as if to demonstrate the power of heredity, he himself attempts suicide immediately after. In Sue, the same qualities take the form of nervous vulnerability and a tendency to more subtle self-punishment. The last surviving representatives of a 'cross-grained, unfortunate, almost accursed stock' (p. 105), the couple seem like members of a species on the verge of extinction.

Separately regarded, Jude and Sue are bad breeding stock; their union could produce only a fatal intensification of common genetic weakness. It would bring about that 'combination and consequent increase of morbid tendencies common to both parents' which Darwin thought the main result of interbreeding. Enumerating the reasons why he should not fall in love with his cousin, Jude reminds himself that 'in a family like his own where marriage usually meant a tragic sadness, marriage with a blood-relation would duplicate the adverse conditions, and a tragic sadness might be intensified to a tragic horror' (p. 105). Later, he and Sue are 'possessed by the same thought, ugly enough, even as an assumption: that a union between them, had such been possible, would have meant a terrible intensification of unfitness — two bitters in the one dish' (p. 201).

Such passages go far towards explaining the nameless horror that overshadows Jude and Sue, and the sense that their sexual union would violate something much deeper than middle-class propriety. From the start their affinity has made Jude regard Sue not only as uniquely attractive but as uniquely taboo. The role of

Drusilla Fawley illustrates the point. It is she who is Jude's main source of information about Sue, and it is she who stresses their familial resemblance most emphatically. Yet the burden of her advice is that Jude should have nothing to do with Sue. At Christminster Jude receives her letter expressing the 'fear that Jude would not be strong-minded enough to keep away from his cousin Sue Bridehead and her relations' (p. 102). Obviously this is rather like telling a child not to push beans up its nose, and so it is no surprise that Jude should surrender to the lure of the forbidden.

At least one scene implies that the source of the taboo lies in the sort of children issuing from such a union. In one of their half-hearted attempts to get married, Jude and Sue enter a church and see a wedding in progress. The spectacle reawakens their familiar sense of being 'unlike other people', and cursed with 'peculiarities' that make them unsuitable for marriage, especially to each other (p. 345). Jude hints that this arises from their family history. Surprisingly, Sue argues that they are not really unlike other people, but merely the harbingers of a terrifying future race:

'Everybody is getting to feel as we do. We are a little beforehand that's all. In fifty, a hundred years, the descendants of these two will act and feel worse than we. They will see weltering humanity still more vividly than we do now, as "Shapes of our own selves hideously multiplied" and will be afraid to reproduce them.'

'What a terrible line of poetry! . . . though I have felt it myself about my fellow-creatures, at morbid times.' (p. 345)

The line from Shelley's *The Revolt of Islam* ushers in an openly apocalyptic moment. In their hypersensitivity and their nervous delicacy, Jude and Sue are merely prophetic of humanity's future. They themselves look with horror into a future of 'shapes of our own selves hideously multiplied', afraid to reproduce.

The sense of nameless future horror grows increasingly urgent as the book proceeds. Jude and Sue begin by being confident of their power to free themselves from the past and create a worthwhile legacy; he sits on the Brown House gazing at Christminster with visionary rapture, while she is aggressively modern. Yet they find themselves trapped by the past (genetic, as well as social and intellectual) and confronting a future that can only accentuate present anguish to unbearable intensity. When Jude first saw Christminster it looked like the New Jerusalem, but on Remembrance Day it resembles Judgement Day in its more frightening aspect: 'Carriage after carriage drew up at the lower door of the college, and solemn stately figures in blood-red robes began to alight. The sky had grown overcast and livid, and thunder rumbled now and then' (p. 391).

It is Father Time who draws the parallel between this ominous occasion and Judgement Day, and it is on Father Time that the apocalyptic elements in *Jude the Obscure* concentrate. In his character all Jude's and Sue's fears about future generations are realized, and all their sense of violation of some lurking taboo brought into precise focus. Symbolically, he is the child of their union. Literally, he is the son of Arabella and, probably, of Jude, but he enters the book in so deracinated a state — an intensification of Jude's own childhood condition — that neither the reader nor the other characters ever associate him with that marriage. At first, indeed, he seems to have come from nowhere and belong to nobody. He arrives as a 'solitary boy' (p. 332) bearing a key and a ticket. Jude himself tries to dismiss the whole issue of his parentage: "'What is it, after all? What does it matter when you come to think of it, whether a child is yours by blood or not? All the little ones of our

time are collectively the children of us adults of the time, and entitled to our general care" (p.330).

This is a momentary naivety from a man whose own life is so overshadowed by heredity. History cannot be escaped so easily. Nor, in fact, does Time want to escape it. He seems eager to belong to a family and to become Jude's and Sue's child. He asks Sue at their first meeting, "'Is it you who's my *real* mother at last?'" (p. 335), and adopts his father's name. By the time of their visit to the Great Wessex Agricultural Show, the trio seem a perfectly ordinary family group. After Time's death Hardy emphasizes his achieved symbolic status as the child of Jude and Sue: 'He was their nodal point, their focus, their expression in a single term. For the rashness of those parents he had groaned, for their ill-assortment he had quaked, and for the misfortunes of these he had died' (p. 406).

But his role is already apparent from Time's first appearance in the book. With his 'small, pale child's face', 'large, frightened eyes', 'steady mechanical creep' (pp. 331, 333), and air of world-weary melancholy, he exhibits the loss of size and constitutional vigour that Darwin attributed to the products of incestuous unions. In Time, Jude's and Sue's characteristics are combined and intensified; he is two bitters in the same dish. Their hypersensitivity has degenerated into oppressive brooding melancholy; he travels without curiosity, sees flowers and thinks only of their imminent decay, and takes the lack of lodging-houses as a sign of his cosmic unwantedness. The self-destructive impulse of Jude's youthful attempt at suicide and Sue's more subtle acts of self-immolation has intensified to horrifying proportions.

Time's suicide and murder of his siblings brings Jude's and Sue's relationship to its final crisis. Their own belief in natural affinity is brought up short against so dramatic a proof of the tragic consequences of their love. Sue cries: "'O my comrade, our perfect union — our two-in-oneness — is now stained with blood!'" (p. 408). Her own sense of sexual guilt, never far below the surface, is reawakened, and even Jude is touched by the same feeling: "'You were a distinct type, a refined creature, intended by nature to be left intact. But I couldn't leave you alone!'" (p. 414). Hardy insists that Sue's belief in the vengeance of an angry god is simply hysterical guilt; the lovers are merely victims of nature's mechanical indifference to their aspirations. Their affinity, so deep as to make them seem like the two halves of Plato's egg, promised to make their union the satisfying completion of the incomplete sphere. Yet it turned out to be a dangerous and destructive collision, like the meeting of the *Titanic* and the iceberg. As so often in Hardy's world, nature appeared to offer what in fact it denied:

'We went about loving each other too much — indulging ourselves to utter selfishness with each other! We said — do you remember? — that we would make a virtue of joy, I said it was Nature's intention, Nature's law and *raison d'être* that we should be joyful in what instincts she afforded us — instincts which civilization had taken upon itself to thwart. What dreadful things I said! And now Fate has given us this stab in the back for being such fools as to take Nature at her word!'. (pp. 408-409)³⁰

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