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THESIS ABSTRACT

Ellen Ericson Kupp, "Thomas Hardy: Positivism and His Tragic Vision". M.A. Thesis, University of Durham, England. June, 1989.

This thesis constitutes an investigation into the presence of the philosophy of August Comte in the writings of Thomas Hardy, and seeks to explore the contrast between Comtean Positivism and Hardy's tragic vision. The interaction of Hardy's art with Comte's Positive philosophy is assessed in each of Hardy's writing genres, especially in light of critics' characterization of Hardy's works as "pessimistic".

Chapter One provides an overview of Auguste Comte, his philosophy and the Religion of Humanity that grew from it. Chapter Two is a preliminary examination of the points of intersection between Hardy and Comte's writings, and of Hardy's involvement with proponents of Positivism and the Religion of Humanity.

Chapter Three moves directly into Hardy's works with an initial analysis of the novels, noting specific occurrences of Positivist ideas and terminology within this genre. Several novels in particular provide fertile ground for the investigation of Hardy's attitude towards Positivism, and in Chapter Four Hardy's exposure of the failures of Positivism is investigated in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*.

Chapter Five is devoted solely to Hardy's major epic drama. *The Dynasts* presents a detailed and, for this thesis, significant dramatization of Positivism and tragedy, in the dialogue between the Spirits of the Overworld concerning the "pros" and "cons" of a Positivist worldview. *The Dynasts* argues a Positivist viewpoint at the expense of artistic cohesion, but allows the reader a glimpse at Hardy's convictions in the passionate power of his tragic verse. Chapter Six concerns the poetic genre of his work. Hardy's lyric poetry spanned his entire literary career; it is the artistic stream that carries and develops his sense of the tragic through his early faith, subsequent loss of faith, the philosophical meanderings of his middle years, and finally the universally tragic statements of his later years.

Positivism thus provides a useful vehicle for understanding the proper distinction between Hardy the pessimist and Hardy the tragedian. Ultimately the predominant perception of tragedy in Hardy's work overwhelms the philosophical moorings and optimistic hope engendered by Comte's Positive Philosophy, but the painful, poetic worlds which Hardy creates are richer and deeper through his explorations of Positivism.

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THOMAS HARDY:
POSITIVISM AND HIS TRAGIC VISION

ELLEN ERICSON KUPP

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THE DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY
IN THE FACULTY OF ARTS

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The material in this thesis is based entirely on the author's individual research. It has never previously been submitted, in part or in whole, for a degree in the University of Durham or in any other university.

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ABBREVIATIONS

On its first appearance, each work receives full citation in the footnotes; thereafter it is referred to within the text by author, date and page, e.g. (Selden 1985: 111). The exceptions to this are the primary works, which are abbreviated in the text according to the following table:

The works of Auguste Comte:

<i>System</i>	<i>System of Positive Polity</i>
<i>Positive Phil</i>	<i>The Positive Philosophy</i>
<i>Cat</i>	<i>The Catechism of the Positive Religion</i>
<i>Gen View</i>	<i>A General View of Positivism</i>

The works of Thomas Hardy:

UGT	<i>Under the Greenwood Tree</i>
PBE	<i>A Pair of Blue Eyes</i>
FMC	<i>Far from the Madding Crowd</i>
HE	<i>The Hand of Ethelberta</i>
RN	<i>The Return of the Native</i>
TM	<i>The Trumpet Major</i>
LAO	<i>A Laodicean</i>
TT	<i>Two on a Tower</i>
MC	<i>The Mayor of Casterbridge</i>
WL	<i>The Woodlanders</i>
TD	<i>Tess of the D'Urbervilles</i>
JO	<i>Jude the Obscure</i>
WB	<i>The Well-Beloved</i>
CP	<i>The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy</i>
DYN	<i>The Dynasts</i>
CL	<i>Collected Letters</i>
LNB	<i>The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy</i> , Lennart Björk, ed. (1985).

Three other texts by Hardy's first wife, Florence Hardy, are cited by the following abbreviations:

EL	<i>The Early Life of Thomas Hardy</i>
LY	<i>The Later Years of Thomas Hardy</i>
<i>Life</i>	<i>The Life of Thomas Hardy</i>

INTRODUCTION

This is the day, which down the void abysm
At the Earth-born's spell yawns for Heaven's despotism,
 And Conquest is dragg'd captive through the deep;
Love, from its awful throne of patient power
In the wise heart, from the last giddy hour
 Of dead endurance, from the slippery, steep,
And narrow verge of crag-like agony, springs
And folds over the world its healing wings.

Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance,
These are the seals of that most firm assurance
 Which bars the pit over Destruction's strength;
And if, with infirm hand, Eternity,
Mother of many acts and hours, should free
 The serpent that would clasp her with his length;
These are the spells by which to re-assume
An empire o'er the disentangled doom.

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
 To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;
To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
 Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.¹

It is slightly circuitous to begin a thesis on Thomas Hardy and Auguste Comte with an extract from the poetry of Shelley, but from the "form and spirit"² of Shelley's poetry Hardy drew significant inspiration. These last lines from Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound" are emblematic both of Thomas Hardy's tragic vision and of its resistance to the Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte. Hardy and Comte were not dissimilar. They stood on the common ground of the

¹Richard H. Shephard, ed., *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, vol. 1 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1888), p. 422.

²F.B. Pinion, *A Hardy Companion: A Guide to the Works of Thomas Hardy and their Background* (London: Macmillan, 1968), 1976 edition, pp. 107-8. See also pp. 213-14.



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nineteenth century in Europe; both abandoned traditional, orthodox forms of religion; both were influenced by the scientific advances and the development of evolutionary theory which were the intellectual fulcrum of their century; both shared a view of the universe in general as mechanistic, unsympathetic and cruel; and both sought a means of understanding and justifying human existence in the world in which they found themselves.

Where they diverged was in their response to the human condition. In rejecting Christianity, Comte translated the Christian concepts of salvation and redemption into terms of human possibilities and realized the Religion of Humanity. Individuals exercising and strengthening their altruistic instincts merge together into a unity, the great "Being" of humanity. Moral progress is the means by which humanity "re-assume[s] / An empire o'er the disentangled doom" (Shelley; Shephard 1888: 422). Comte's response to the human condition was optimistic and simple. The human being is master of his/her own destiny. There is no greater power beyond the known and knowable which operates over human life. Thus with perseverance, humanity can and will progress to moral "goodness".

Hardy's response was not so sanguine. He rejected the dogmatic and tyrannical aspects of Christianity in his youth, but was never able to rid himself of a longing for the religious dimension. Metaphysical questions about the nature of the universe were central to Hardy's work. Rather than gathering into a unity and overcoming the crushing, impersonal forces of the universe, the individual in Hardy's writings suffers, and suffers intensely. The infinite woes, the wrongs darker than death and a seemingly omnipotent power work to crush the individual. Humanity does not

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operate as master, but suffers as a victim in Hardy's world. It is against this backdrop, "from the last giddy hour / Of dead endurance, from the slippery, steep, / And narrow verge of crag-like agony," that an affirmation of the human spirit springs. For Hardy, the desire for moral progress is not instinctive. Indeed, if moral progress is to be made at all, and that is not assured, it is through a course of pain and sorrow. Human beings gain consciousness and nobility through defeat, if they gain it at all. This is the essence of Hardy's tragic vision. It does not allow him the scope for optimism found in Comte's Religion of Humanity, but it does allow him to make powerful and enduring statements about the human condition.

In holding his tragic view of life, Hardy has been often misunderstood. Perhaps the most common label attached to Hardy, both by his contemporary and present day readers, is that of "pessimist". Hardy took his criticisms hard and none more so than this. In the last decade of his life, Hardy expended considerable energy trying to disabuse his critics of this notion. In a conversation with Charles Morgan recorded in 1920 after Hardy's visit to Oxford to see a performance of *The Dynasts*, Hardy expressed his frustration with the fact that "critics approached his work with an ignorant prejudice against his 'pessimism' which they allowed to stand in the way of fair reading and fair judgement."³

Even some of his friends railed against his apparent gloominess. Frederic Harrison, a founding member of the London

³F.E. Hardy, *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy: 1892-1928* (London: Macmillan, 1930), p. 208.

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Positivist Society and a friend of Hardy's from the early 1880s, chided Hardy for his persistent pessimism given that Hardy had "everything that man can wish -- long and easy life, perfect domestic happiness, warm friends, the highest honour his Sovereign can give [the Order of Merit], the pride of a wide countryside."⁴

Hardy replied to this "stern pronouncement" against him in his Apology to *Late Lyrics and Earlier*, published in 1922. Hardy called Harrison's comments "casual and unreflecting", going on to say that what his critics and friends regarded as "pessimism" was, in essence, his attempt to make sense of the world around him. He wrote in the Apology: "what is to-day . . . alleged to be 'pessimism' is, in truth, only such 'questionings' in the exploration of reality, and is the first step towards the soul's betterment" Hardy went on to quote a line from "In Tenebris" written over 20 years earlier, "If way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the worst." What Harrison and a majority of Hardy's critics saw as expressions of pessimism were to Hardy an inevitable function of his tragic vision. If any of Hardy's so-called "queer" philosophizing failed to paint a particularly rosy picture of "this best of all possible worlds," Hardy apologized, but said, "[I] cannot help it."⁵

To come to a fair reading and fair judgement of Hardy's works then is to come to an awareness of the nature of Hardy's tragic vision. This provides a platform from which to explore the influence of Auguste Comte's Positive Philosophy and Religion of Human-

⁴Martha Vogeler, *Frederic Harrison: The Vocations of a Positivist*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 379, citing Frederic Harrison, *Novissima Verba*.

⁵Thomas Hardy, *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, James Gibson, ed., The New Wessex Edition (London: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 557-62.

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ity in Hardy's writings. The objective of this thesis is, first of all, to examine the presence of Comtean Positivism in Hardy's poetry, in his novels and in his epic-drama, *The Dynasts*. The second objective is to investigate the nature of the influence of Positivism in his works. We will find that Hardy's prevailing sense of the tragedy completely overwhelms the philosophical moorings and sense of hope engendered by the Positive Philosophy. Hardy's interest in Comtean Positivism is substantial, but not enduring because Hardy's vision extended beyond the bounds of this world and beyond the bounds of human possibilities. Hardy's world is richer, deeper and entirely more painful than Comte's. Nevertheless, Comte's philosophy offered to the nineteenth century, and to Hardy, the possibility of a bright horizon in the wake of the loss of traditional beliefs. Comte's humanistic creed appealed on the surface to Victorian sentiment, but failed, for Hardy, in its inability to assess human nature realistically.

In approaching this topic, it is necessary in Chapter One to examine Auguste Comte, his philosophy and the Religion of Humanity that grew from it. Chapter Two is an exploration of the points of intersection between Hardy and Comte's writings, as well as Hardy's interaction with proponents of Positivism and the Religion of Humanity. Having established that base, the remainder of the thesis will map the course of Positivism through the various genres in which Hardy wrote. Chapter Three is an initial analysis of the novels, noting specific occurrences of Positivist ideas and terminology in the novels as a whole. The novels provide a fertile ground for the investigation of different attitudes taken towards Positivism by Hardy, and Chapter Four looks more closely at Hardy's exposure of the failures of Positivism in *The Mayor of*

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Casterbridge, Tess of the D'Urbervilles and *Jude the Obscure*. *The Dynasts* presents a detailed, and in this thesis, a very significant perspective on Positivism, as the Spirits of the Overworld discuss the "pros" and "cons" of a Positivist world view. *The Dynasts* argues a Positivist viewpoint at the expense of artistic cohesion, but allows the reader a glimpse at Hardy's convictions in the passionate power of his tragic verse; this is the subject of Chapter Five. Chapter Six is an analysis of the poetry, in which genre Hardy was most at home. Hardy's lyric poetry spans the beginning of his career until the end; it is the ground swell that carries his tragic sense through his early faith, through his loss of faith, through the philosophical meanderings of his middle years, and finally to the universally tragic statements of his later years.

It is hoped that this examination of the influence of Comtean Positivism on the writings of Thomas Hardy will allow us more fruitful access into the richness of Hardy's creative works.

1. AUGUSTE COMTE: THE POSITIVE MESSAGE

Basil Willey, in *Nineteenth Century Studies*, began his chapter on Comte with the question, "Who now reads Auguste Comte?"¹ Though few attempt to wade through the verbosity of his writings today, in the midst of the nineteenth century Comte's Positive Philosophy received effusive acclamation from his early disciples. G.H. Lewes wrote of Comte in his *History of Philosophy from Thales to Comte*:

A new era has dawned. For the first time in history an explanation of the World, Society and Man is presented which is thoroughly homogeneous, and at the same time thoroughly in accordance with accurate knowledge.²

Leslie Stephen commented in 1869,

When some future historian of opinion deals with the speculations current at the present day, he will find few more remarkable phenomena than the development of the Comtist School.³

Comte's purpose was, in B.M.G. Reardon's words, "to organize our scientific conceptions and to systematize the art of social life,"⁴ or, as it was less graciously put by Ernest Renan, Comte "expressed in bad French what all scientific minds had done for the last two hundred years" (Reardon 1985: 237).

The use of the term "positive" was not the private domain of Comte. Positivism, in general, refers to a particular philosophy of human knowledge which "confine[s] the name 'knowledge' or

¹Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies: Coleridge to Matthew Arnold* (London: 1949; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 197.

²G.H. Lewes, *History of Philosophy from Thales to Comte*, vol. 2, 5th ed. (London: 1880), p. 690.

³Leslie Stephen, *Fraser's Magazine*, Vol. LXXX (1869), p. 1.

⁴B.M.G. Reardon, *Religion in the Age of Romanticism*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1985), p. 207.

1. Comte: The Positive Message

'science' to the results of those operations that are observable in the evolution of the modern sciences of nature."⁵ Questions of a metaphysical nature are dismissed as inaccessible and irrelevant. The history of positive philosophy is long and complex, and those who were adherents were diverse and numerous. Among many others, they include John Stuart Mill, John Morley, Herbert Spencer and Thomas Huxley. Comte's particular brand of positivism distinguishes itself from the others by its development of the Religion of Humanity. Comte saw that the human organism needed a religion, so he founded one based on the belief

that it is possible to achieve a state in which mankind, having clearly recognized its own invariable needs [through the pursuit of the sciences], will effectively harmonize emotional needs with rational prediction and thus be transformed into an 'organic' mankind within which conflicts cease to arise (Kolakowski 1968: 87).

Comte's belief in the inherently redemptive nature of humanity is the basis for his religion. For the purpose of clarification, within this thesis capital 'P' Positivism will refer to the specific branch of Positivism Comte espoused, while small 'p' positivism will refer to the more common understanding of the word currently used at the time as that which is in opposition to the metaphysical.

Auguste Comte died in 1857 with a mere handful of followers. That Comte's Positive Philosophy did not survive had much to do with "the verbosity and boring redundancy of his works, his conceit, his excessive love of 'system'--leading in his later life to something like monomania, and his reactionary propensities, which antagonized his own admirers." (Willey 1949: 197). It was,

⁵Leszek Kolakowski, *Positive Philosophy: From Hume to the Vienna Circle* (New York: Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1968; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 18.

1. Comte: The Positive Message

however, the twentieth century and World War I that ultimately rang the death knell for Positivism and its seemingly endless supply of optimism for humanity. Nonetheless, Auguste Comte's Positive Philosophy emerged "on the surface of the philosophy of the age"⁶ to such an extent that nearly all the major thinkers of the second half of the nineteenth century seemed to have studied Comte,⁷ and, further, "attempted to [fortify] their position against the Positive School" (Mill 1965: 2-3).

1.1. AUGUSTE COMTE

Although Comte is often credited with being the founder of the Positivist movement, he was more accurately the systematizer of the trends he perceived and the ideas he gleaned from his predecessors. He was the first who attempted a "complete systematization, and the scientific extension of it to all objects of human knowledge" (Mill 1965: 3).

Henri Saint-Simon, the nineteenth century philosopher and publicist, was Comte's mentor at an early stage. In August 1817, Comte entered his service as a secretary, remaining with him for six years as a disciple and later as a colleague. Comte found in Saint-Simon's work the seminal concepts of the three stages of history and the classification of the sciences, although he later denied that any of Saint-Simon's ideas were seminal in his works. Saint-Simon's failing, as Comte saw it, was both his inability to

⁶J.S. Mill, *Auguste Comte and Positivism* (University of Michigan Press, 1965), p. 1.

⁷T.R. Wright, *The Religion of Humanity: The Impact of Comtean Positivism on Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: University Press, 1986), p. 1.

1. Comte: The Positive Message

put his ideas into a systematic form and his "unscientific" religious practices, an ironic criticism considering Comte's penchant for the same in his late years. In a move characteristic of relationships throughout his life, Comte disassociated himself from his mentor, acridly calling him "a depraved charlatan"⁸ in his Preface to Volume Three of *System of Positive Polity*.

The other significant influence in Comte's life was Clotilde de Vaux. His relationship with her lasted only one year before she died in 1846. The year was marked with depression and anxiety similar to that which characterized Comte's relationship with his wife. After Clotilde's death, however, she became Comte's "guardian angel", his "Goddess of Humanity", his "Madonna". Comte appeared transformed emotionally and physically by his devotion to Clotilde's memory (T.R. Wright 1986: 14). George Lewes wrote of Comte's devotion:

the angel who had appeared to him in his solitude, opening the gates of heaven to his eager gaze, vanished again, and left him once more to his loneliness: but although her presence was no longer there, a trace of luminous glory left behind in the heart of the bereaved man, sufficed to make him bear his burden, and to dedicate his days to that great mission which her love had sanctified.⁹

His worship of Clotilde was an impetus for what he had always intended to be the end of Positive Philosophy, namely the Religion of Humanity.

Comte published two major works. *Cours de philosophie positive* was published in six volumes between 1830 and 1842. It is a chronicle of the intellectual developments throughout history, showing how each of the sciences evolved towards a basis on

⁸Auguste Comte, *System of Positive Polity*, vol. III, trans. J.H. Bridges and others (London, 1875-77), p. xviii.

⁹G.H. Lewes, *Comte's Philosophy of the Sciences* (London, 1853), p. 7.

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empirically verifiable laws, or how each of the sciences became positive. *Système de politique positive* was published in four volumes between 1851 and 1854. It was written after Comte's death and instituted the Religion of Humanity. In it the emphasis changed from a basis on strictly empirical laws to a more subjective method, namely "the ascendancy of the heart over the intellect" (*System I*: xii). It was the Religion of Humanity paradoxically that labelled him as a lunatic and established him as "the central figure of his century" (Willey 1949: 198).

1.2. THE POSITIVE PHILOSOPHY

The word "positive" was expanded by Comte from its eighteenth century meaning, in opposition to the metaphysical, to encompass eventually all aspects of his Positive system (T.R. Wright 1986: 18), which, according to Comte, was "nothing but good sense generalized and put into a systematic form."¹⁰ The qualities represented by the term "positive" are reality and usefulness, certainty and precision, relativity and an organic nature. T.R. Wright, using the first chapter from Comte's *General View*, entitled "The Intellectual Character of Positivism" defines Positivism negatively. It is

neither atheism, which gave an absolute answer to the question of a first cause, nor materialism, the encroachment of the lower sciences on the domain of the higher. It was not fatalism, since it acknowledged the modifiability of the external order, nor optimism, since it recognized all the defects in nature (T.R. Wright 1986: 18).

Fundamental to Positivism is the principle that all things are relative. We can only know about something as it stands in

¹⁰Gertrud Lenzer, ed., *Auguste Comte and Positivism: The Essential Writings* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 332.

1. Comte: *The Positive Message*

relation to other things. J.S. Mill writes:

We have no knowledge of anything but phaenomena; and our knowledge of phaenomena is relative, not absolute. We know not the essence, nor the real mode of production, of any fact, but only its relations to other facts in the way of secession or of similitude (Mill 1965: 6).

The relations between phenomena are observable and invariable. The job of science is to observe the laws which govern the external order of the world, but beyond that, human knowledge cannot venture. The essential nature of the laws and their ultimate causes are unknown and inaccessible to us. Although Comte came to realize the impossibility of obtaining exact, objective truth, he insisted in his philosophy on the "steady subordination of the imagination to observation". Comte believed that the Positive Philosophy "offers the vastest and richest field to human imagination, [but] restricts it to discovering and perfecting the coordination of observed facts".¹¹

Comte laid out at the beginning of the *Cours de philosophie positive* his "law of the three stages," which, according to J.S. Mill, was his most significant and unique contribution to the study of the sciences (Mill 1865: 12, 84-6). According to the law there is a progression in human thought incorporating three stages: the theological, the metaphysical and the positive. These three stages, which are evident in the intellectual development of the individual, are also clearly written in the history of humanity as a whole.

In the theological stage, humanity is consumed by the search for the ultimate cause or causes. Fetichism, the earliest and most primitive form of thinking, attributes divinity to inanimate

¹¹Auguste Comte, *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, vol. II, trans. Harriet Martineau (London: John Chapman, 1853), p. 68-69.

1. Comte: *The Positive Message*

objects. This is succeeded by polytheism, a community of gods working externally to nature, and then finally by monotheism, wherein one god is perceived as unique and supreme.

The second stage is the metaphysical stage. It "substitutes abstract causes or essences, usually regarded as entities in themselves, for supernatural agents" (Reardon 1985: 212). In other words, as Basil Willey explains, "'Nature' replaces 'God'" (Willey 1949: 199). The metaphysical stage is a transitional stage, and humanity, being now in need of a new system of understanding, moves on to the positive stage where "men now explain all facts in relation simply to each other, and in relation to more general facts, and social phenomena are studied in exactly the same way as those of chemistry or physics" (Willey 1949: 199). The search for the absolute is given up as illusory, and knowledge is understood as depending on observation and reasoning. "Positive knowledge thus combines certainty with utility, without aspiring to what in the nature of the case cannot be known" (Reardon 1985: 213).

Between the publishing of *Cours de philosophie positive* in 1842 and the publishing of *Système de politique positive* in four volumes in 1854, Comte's philosophy underwent a change in emphasis which led to the institution of the Religion of Humanity.

Comte's desire for unity and synthesis were at the heart of this fundamental reworking of his theory. Comte desired intellectual unity and synthesis as a means of realizing moral and social unity for humanity. This eventually forced a change of emphasis from his originally rigid principle of empirical verification, to a more subjective mode wherein a theory is accepted "when it sufficiently explains the essential phenomena, without waiting for

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the objective verification" (*System III*: 21). A more cynical interpretation of this change in Comte is given by Mill:

A subjective synthesis must consist in the arrangement and co-ordination of all useful knowledge, on the basis of its relation to human wants and interests . . . [but] M. Comte's subjective synthesis consists only in eliminating from the sciences everything that he deems useless, and presenting as far as possible every theoretical investigation as the solution of a practical problem (Mill 1965: 185).

Comte realized a need for a "higher logic", an "ascendency of the heart over the intellect" (*System I*: xii) in light of the harshness of the world. His assertion of an objective reality that cannot be altered was not negated by this new direction. It was a result of the harsh, unalterable reality of the world that the Religion of Humanity was instituted, offering "a comforting fiction in the face of a hostile and meaningless universe" (T.R. Wright 1986: 21).

Central to the Religion of Humanity is humanity, the "Great Being". "Theological fiction" is replaced by the "true object of worship;" a "Being whose nature is relative, modifiable and perfectible" (Willey 1949: 207), and includes "the beings, past, future and present, which co-operate willingly in perfecting the order of the world" (*System IV*: 27). Solidarity with humanity in the present and continuity with it in the past and future are essential to constituency in the human race. Solidarity is important because humanity is not the sole property of one single individual, even though humanity cannot act apart from the individual. The interdependence of individuals goes without saying. For an individual to deny this is a self-contradiction, as Comte points out, "since the very language he uses is not his own" (*System I*: 177); to accept it is to enter into the mainstream of all human history.

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Continuity with the past and future encompasses keeping in touch with the history of the race, and by so doing, anticipating the future. Underlying the structure of the Religion of Humanity is the belief that although within less-than-perfect human nature there is a necessary invariableness; with perseverance and determination improvements can be made. Making improvements in its nature is, in fact, the main task of humanity. Positive ethics are founded on this hope for humanity, the basis of which is Comte's "cerebral theory". He believed that by exercise the more altruistic instincts, like muscles, would gain strength over the egoistical drives. It was a matter of disciplining the personal instincts and channelling them in useful directions. In this connection, the developing study of phrenology was a significant influence on Comte's cerebral theory (T.R. Wright 1986: 31).

The cerebral theory sets out that "ten 'affective motors'" drive the individual and are divided into two main classes: "the personal or egoistic and the social or altruistic." They are listed in order of increasing altruism, the first class consisting of self-preservation, and then sexual, maternal, destructive or military, constructive or industrial instincts. Love of power and love of approbation begin to bridge the gap between personal and social drives. Finally, attachment, veneration and benevolence or universal love are the culmination of the theory, leading individuals from love for themselves to love of family and community to, ultimately, love for humanity (T.R. Wright 1986: 31).

Comte's system incorporated aspects of determinism. In the Positive Philosophy it is necessary to acknowledge both the

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"immutable necessity of the external world" (Lenzer 1975: 326) and the "necessary invariableness of the human organism" (*Positive Phil* II: 113). It is then imperative for the "proper regulation of human life" that humanity fully grasps its limitations and then submits to the "irresistible economy of nature". It is left to humanity, through the individual, to better its condition in whatever limited ways are possible. "We are powerless to create: all that we can do in bettering our condition is to modify an order in which we can produce no radical change" (Lenzer 1975: 326-7). T.R. Wright explains the nature of Positive hope:

If the Positive Philosophy was optimistic, as is often claimed, it offered a very restrained form of hope, calling for a realistic appraisal of man's harsh predicament combined with a determined effort to achieve whatever amelioration was possible (T.R. Wright 1986: 22).

The ability to resign oneself to the conditions of the world is one of the sterling qualities nurtured by the Positive individual. This world view is not particularly enlivening, and is perhaps the reason why so many of the Positivists, including Comte, suffered from severe anxiety and depression. It was this "restrained form of hope" in the Positive Philosophy which flickered on into the twentieth century only to be doused by World War I.

Comte's Positivism took Christianity to task on a number of issues. Comte did not have a very deep regard for the Christian faith, a result primarily of his lack of sympathy for anything metaphysical and mysterious. He conceded, though, that it did play a useful role in the development of the human race. Comte had little regard for Christ, who he considered merely a product of his times, but he had great respect for St. Paul, whom he considered to be the real founder of Catholicism. St. Paul's concept of nature versus grace is expressed in Positivist terms as

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the "continuous struggle between Egoism and Altruism" (*System III*: 346-9).

The doctrine that comes under the most vitriolic attack is that of salvation because of its inherent selfishness. Individuals become so concerned with personal immortality and a heavenly future that the immediate needs of the world around them are neglected. Like Marx, Comte saw Christianity victimizing the poor, subjecting them to earthly deprivations in the hope of compensation in a future life. Positivist resignation to the harsh adversities of life carried with it no such lofty rewards as the Christian hope: merely a "permanent disposition to endure, steadily and without hope of compensation, all inevitable evils" (*Positive Phil II*: 45).

Comte also rejected Christianity apparently for basing its morality on the claim that acts of kindness are foreign to human nature. Positivism insists on exactly the opposite and finds its hopes on the capability of individuals caring for other individuals and for their world.

Comte assumes that science has settled the age-old controversy about human nature . . . by demonstrating the real existence of the altruistic instincts[,] whereas theology always spoke as though we had none but bad passions (Willey 1949: 212).

1.3. POSITIVISM IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Comte is, in a sense, the century in epitome, so that to study him is to find the clue to much that the *Zeitgeist*, in a less systematic way, was doing through other minds (Willey 1949: 198).

Having outlined the essentials of Positivist thought and belief, it now remains to consider its place in nineteenth century

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thought. Throughout history a necessary and absolute connexion had been assumed between religion and a system of ethics by all but a few moral philosophers. The moral behaviour of a society was considered to be determined "first, by inherited habit; and second, by an attitude to the universe; or a belief, however hazy, about the way in which the universe is organized."¹²

The England of the 1860's was unsettled by the advance of the industrial age, scientific discoveries and Darwin's publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859. These caused fundamental changes in the quality of life and forced a reconsideration of belief systems and priorities. Rather than being subject to the forces of nature people were beginning to discover that, due to developments in technology, they could claim control over their environment. This led to the social and religious reorganization of life and promoted a search for a new framework for belief about the world. The quest was to develop a system of ethics based, not on a religious understanding of the world, but on a scientific understanding, and to develop a system which would be accessible to all, not just to the academic élite.

During the years of the Victorian crisis of faith they found the Christianity in which they had been reared too limited for their intellects.¹³

This is what Auguste Comte had to offer; a non-religious morality with a little common sense, a little teaching on human nature and its power for doing good, and a little incentive. He believed that science could provide sufficient truths for the organization both of society and individuals.

¹²Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1975), p. 231.

¹³Frank Miller Turner, *Between Science and Religion* (Yale University Press, 1974), p. 1.

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The phenomenon of the Positive Philosophy also arose partly in reaction to the deficiencies of Victorian Scientific Naturalism. Whereas Christian doctrine was found to be too limited for the intellectual progress being made, the "new" science was "too restrictive for the range of [Victorian] ideals and aspirations" (Turner 1974: 1).

Comte offered a synthesis, providing for many satisfaction for both their religious hunger and their intellectual longing for a system. He and his handful of followers were at once respected, praised, included in lectures and articles, attacked and patently dismissed - anything but neglected. Comte received criticism and praise from all sides, from theologians, secularists and scientists who felt the need at least to distinguish their own views from those of Positivism. That Comte truly systematized the ideas of his age can be seen in the number of intellectuals who were caught using Comtean terminology unconsciously, and much against their will (Turner 1974: 164, 202).

Positivists were, however, criticized for inadequately dealing with the problem of evil, and for their "athletic optimism"¹⁴ at the notion of a Religion of Humanity. W.H. Mallock praised the Positivists for developing a system of morality without a supernatural overseer, but found that "their failure to see how unworthy humanity was of their worship was a credit to their generosity, but not their intelligence."¹⁵

Herbert Spencer and Thomas Huxley were particularly

¹⁴Virginia R. Hyman, *Ethical Perspective in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press Corp., 1975), p. 11.

¹⁵John Lucas, "Tilting at the Moderns: W.H. Mallock's Criticism of the Positive Spirit", *Renaissance and Modern Studies* X (1966), pp. 99-106.

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vociferous in distinguishing their views from Positivism as many scientists were being swept indiscriminately into the Positivist fold. Both attacked Comte for his "bookish" and shallow scientific knowledge, for his optimism about the evolution of humanity, and for his lack of a sense of mystery about the world. Spencer and Huxley understood the limitations of their profession and admitted that there was an unknowable element at the heart of the universe.

The Comtean philosophy of Positivism was by no means the only system attempting secularization in the nineteenth century. Marxism also offered a powerful and pervasive secular philosophy. The Marxist and Comtean view of religion was, at the outset, not dissimilar. In 1843 Marx wrote his famous dictum concerning religion, that it is "the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, the soul of a soulless environment. It is the opium of the people" (Chadwick 1975: 49). Comte concluded as well that religion was a source of mediation between humanity and a harsh, unpredictable world. Comte saw religion as a necessary comfort, however, and set about developing a philosophy which would undergird the individual in light of a cruel, heartless universe, believing that by transforming or improving individuals morally one can transform institutions, making revolution unnecessary. Marx was of another opinion.

If we want to change men's ideas, or to dissolve their illusions, we shall not do it in preaching atheism, or in undermining their beliefs by philosophizing. We shall change their conditions of work and life. To make religion vanish, we need not science but social revolution (Chadwick 1975: 59).

Both Comteans and Marxists worked hard at reforming society,

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despite the difference of approach.¹⁶

Throughout its history, Positivism woefully lacked committed supporters, whose numbers never grew to be more than one or two hundred at any time. Those who did adhere were

divided between a wealthy professional group, composed of doctors, lawyers, teachers and manufacturers, and a small group of working-men, many of whom were relatively independent and wealthy craftsmen.¹⁷

The fact that the adherents were primarily wealthy or from the upper class was particularly unusual in social movements. T.R. Wright describes the circle of people who lent their support to the Religion of Humanity as the "lunatic fringe of Victorian thinking" (T.R. Wright 1986: 2).

In the final analysis, Comtean Positivism proved insufficient for the religious and intellectual needs of the society and time that spawned it. Nevertheless, it is an extremely valuable tool for use in coming to a better understanding of Thomas Hardy's world. Although Hardy himself finally found the Religion of Humanity wanting, in his writings we will find many expressions of sympathy with some of the ideas put forth by Comte. Some of Hardy's characters portray aspects of Positivism sympathetically, being depicted in various fetichistic, theological or metaphysical stages. Hardy's desire to hold out some hope for humanity was not

¹⁶It is not readily apparent if there was much exchange between the ideas of Comte and Marx, although they were contemporaries. Interaction may have been limited due to Comte's refusal to read any new books after he published *Cours de philosophie positive* in 1842. There is a link of communication between Marx and Edward Beesly, a vociferous proponent of Comte and president of the Positivist Society. Beesly was outspoken in his defence of the working class and of the Paris Commune which earned him the praise of Marx, "who was fully aware of the source of [Beesly's] ideas" (T.R. Wright 1986: 113).

¹⁷Susan Budd, *Varieties of Unbelief: Atheists and Agnostics in English Society 1850-1960* (London: Heinemann, 1977), p. 199.

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unlike Comte's, but the means of realizing it were. Along with expressing agreement with certain concepts of Comte's philosophy, Hardy found it necessary to point out the destructive elements involved in maintaining Comte's vision in a world dramatically unsuited to his ideas. Hardy's tragic vision saw beyond the optimistic aspects of Positivism. In Hardy's world, the external order is much more elusive and submits with difficulty to attempts at rational systematization, precisely because of Hardy's belief in the mystical. Humanity, then, is much less able to govern its reactions to the forces of nature. For Hardy, humanity gropes impercipiently on Arnold's "darkling plain"; misunderstanding, suffering, making choices, living with the consequences, and in that way, "re- assum[ing] / An Empire o'er the disentangled doom" (Shelley; Shephard 1888: 422).

2. THOMAS HARDY AND THE POSITIVE PHILOSOPHY OF AUGUSTE COMTE

Thomas Hardy's attraction to Positivism and the Religion of Humanity is well documented and it will be the aim of this chapter to attempt to achieve some "unity and synthesis" in bringing together the many and diffuse points at which Hardy encountered and interacted with the Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte. Hardy's notebooks and letters reveal that although Positivism deeply interested and engaged him, he was by no means unaware of its short-comings. In a letter to Lady Grove in 1903 he wrote, "I am not a Positivist, as you know, but I agree with Anatole France when he says . . . that no person of serious thought in these times could be said to stand aloof from Positive teaching and ideals."¹

Positivism met with an initially enthusiastic response in England through J.S. Mill. After meeting with Saint-Simonian leaders in Paris in 1831, Mill wrote an unfinished series of articles called "The Spirit of the Age" in the *Examiner* (January through May, 1831). He was attracted, as were others, by Comte's synthesis of the current scientific trends with a new religion of humanity, incorporating what was perceived as a realistic, and in many ways novel approach to human development. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Comte captured the longings of the age, systematized them and created a religion which appealed to common sense, and to the heart. Many Victorians, like Mill, longed for a

¹Thomas Hardy, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, eds. Richard L. Purdy and Michael Millgate (Oxford: University Press, 1978-88), p. 53.

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belief structure which allowed for optimism and hope. Mill said, "I am not charmed with the ideal of life held out by those who think the normal state of human beings is that of struggling to get on" (quoted in Willey 1949: 169). Mill eventually became disillusioned with Comte's intellectual myopia and personal idiosyncrasies, but maintained a firm belief in, as T.R. Wright puts it, the "capacity of the Positive Philosophy to fulfil the social function hitherto played by religion" (1986: 43).

It was through such people as Mill, Harriet Martineau, G.H. Lewes, and J.H. Bridges that Comte's works became known and available in Britain. Harriet Martineau's translation of *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte* was published in Britain in 1853 and J.H. Bridges' translation of *System of Positive Polity* in 1875. Richard Congreve and Frederic Harrison were the founders of organized Positivism in the form of the Church of Humanity and the London Positivist Society. British adherents to Positivism were never numerous, subject to schism, and, at times, over-zealous, but nevertheless influential. Hardy also read the works of Edward S. Beesly and John Morley, whom he knew personally. He always kept a studious distance, but maintained contact with the Positive movement to varying extents throughout his life; through his reading of Comte and the contemporary proponents of Positivism, and through his acquaintance and correspondence with a number of prominent Positivists.

2.1. HARDY'S READING

Hardy's religious tradition was the Church of England. His family were regular church attenders; his father being an active

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member of the choir.² Hardy himself, throughout the course of his life, retained a particular love for the traditions and music of the church and a "belief in its civilizing and socializing functions" (Millgate 1985: 91). In the mid-1860's, however, he began to doubt the fundamentals of Christian belief (Millgate 1985: 96) and by the early 1870's he seems to have lost his faith completely. It is during this time that he first came into contact with the writings of J.S. Mill, whom he read in 1865 (Millgate 1985: 90), and with Comte, whom he was reading in May, 1870.³ By the early 1870's, Hardy's language had taken on Comtean overtones. In January 1874, shortly after the first instalment of *Far from the Madding Crowd* appeared anonymously in the *Cornhill* magazine, its authorship was attributed to George Eliot. Hardy was flattered by the comparison, but perplexed as to the reason. He attributed the mistake to the fact that he had "latterly been reading Comte's Positive Philosophy, and writings of that school, some of whose expressions had thus passed into his language, expressions which were also common to George Eliot" (Life, 98).⁴ Hardy's good friend and mentor, Horace Moule, gave him a copy of Comte's *A General View of Positivism*, translated in 1865 by J.H. Bridges. The marginal markings reveal that Hardy did indeed read the work and was particularly interested in the chapters on "The Intellectual Character of Positivism" and "The Influence of

²Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: A Biography* (Oxford: University Press, 1985), p. 38.

³F.E. Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy: 1840-1928* (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 76.

⁴For further information on this specific incident with George Eliot and for a comparison of Hardy's and Eliot's respective views on Positivism, see "Excursus on George Eliot" below.

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Positivism on Women". Millgate notes that Hardy's "outlook at this period seems, in fact, to have been of a quite strenuously idealistic and altruistic cast" (Millgate 1985: 91).

There is extensive evidence of Hardy's reading of Comte recorded in *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*.⁵ The greatest number of notations come from Hardy's thorough reading of *Social Dynamics, or the General Theory of Human Progress*, vol. III of *System of Positive Polity*, translated and edited by Edward S. Beesly and published in London in 1876. Lennart A. Björk points out that there is more material recorded in Hardy's Literary Notebooks from the *System of Positive Polity* than from any other single work.⁶ In 1880 Hardy entered some material from Comte's *Theory of the Future of Man*, vol. IV of *System of Positive Polity*, translated in 1877 by Richard Congreve (LNB I: 369). The notations all appear in Hardy's "Literary Notes I" which he used between the mid-1870's and 1888. It is difficult to date exactly when Hardy may have read the above works due to his lack of method in keeping his notebooks. His entries seem to have been made at irregular intervals and appear to be a collection of recordings from other notebooks, paper clippings and loose pieces of paper (LNB I: xxxvi). The notes themselves "seem to have been designed to concentrate his mind, to take firm hold of the ideas" (T.R. Wright 1986: 203).

The notes highlight Hardy's particular interests in the text. A significant number of the extracts are of an historical nature,

⁵Lennart A. Björk, ed., *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1985).

⁶Lennart A. Björk, *The Literary Notes of Thomas Hardy*, 2 vols. (Göteborg, 1974), p. 286.

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with particular attention given to the philosophical and social developments of the classic era and the Middle Ages. Annotations referring to the Catholic Church and the French Revolution are also prominent. Comte considered these eras to be the apexes of human development; the periods during which progress can be seen in the overall consciousness of the human mind. Hardy noted Comte's veneration of Catholicism and its worship of the Saints as a movement that "pointed to the conception of Humanity" and "might have graduated into Humanity at the end of Middle Age" (LNB I: 70-1).

In terms of the concept of progress, Hardy's notes also refer to Comte's "Social Dynamics . . . [the] fundamental motion of continuous [human] development" (LNB I: 72). Hardy diagrammed Comte's view of social progress as a "'looped orbit,' sometimes apparently backwards, but really always forwards" (LNB I: 76). Hardy was attracted enough by this idea to incorporate it into his own writings on two occasions; once in 1890 in an article entitled "Candour in English Fiction"⁷ and again in 1922 in the Apology to his *Late Lyrics and Earlier*, where he stated:

But if it be true, as Comte argued, that advance is never in a straight line, but in a looped orbit, we may, in the aforesaid ominous moving backward, be doing it *pour mieux sauter*, drawing back for a spring (CP: 562).

Hardy held this belief with reservation, though. He "forlornly" hoped that such would be the case, lamenting earlier in the Apology that "we seem threatened with a new Dark Age", a remark prompted by the "dark madness of the late war" (CP: 556-562). Hardy was "dominantly sceptical" of the Idea of Progress and "the

⁷Harold Orel, ed., *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings* (London, 1967), p. 126-7.

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gradual 'humanization' of man", while at the same time he acknowledges the potential merit of the concepts (LNB I: 312, 323). The "looped orbit" concept of history allowed Hardy room for his brand of pessimism, until 1914 and World War I when he finally realized that the "looped orbit" was an illusion and that humanity is incapable of moral progress, at least in Comtean terms.

Comte's Law of Three Stages figures largely in the notebooks. The majority of the notations concern the Theological stage, the first of the laws or stages in this theory of the intellectual development of humanity. Within the Theological stage there are three subdivisions: the Fetichistic, the Polytheistic and the Monotheistic. Fifteen of the notations refer to fetichism. Hardy seems to have found Comte echoing his own reverence for this most primitive of human belief structures. The following notes were copied or summarized from Comte's *Social Dynamics*:

Fetichism is the most spontaneous mode of philosophising, and useful even now, giving animation to language --

Fetichist method starts in the normal path of [the] true logic . . .

. . . the Fetichistic spirit . . . is superior to Theologism & Metaphysic -- being nearer to Positivity (LNB I: 77).

Hardy grew up surrounded by the Fetichistic practices and folklore of his native Dorset, and the term "Fetichism" and Fetichistic rituals find frequent light in his novels.

On the whole, the Theological stage is considered a "provisional" one (LNB I: 322) and Hardy copied out a significant number of Comte's bitter attacks on the crippling nature of Theological belief, and in particular Monotheistic or Christian belief, to the development of the human intellect. Again from

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Comte's *Social Dynamics* Hardy copied:

Science stood still for 15 centuries (Hipparchus to Kepler) because of the rise of Monotheism. . .

Monotheism . . . always in collision with Intellect (LNB I: 68).

Given the anti-metaphysical nature of Positivist belief, it is not surprising to find Comte's sharp criticisms of the concept of a single God among Hardy's annotations. From Comte Hardy extracted, "For omnipotence, omniscience, & moral perfection are irreconcilable' with a radically imperfect world" and "An omnipotent being can have no occasion either for wisdom or goodness" (LNB I: 68-9). These extracts echo a recurring theme throughout Hardy's works. He spent his life searching for the answer to this conundrum: how could a caring Being have created such a fractured and painful world? *Life* records that in January 1890, Hardy wrote, "I have been looking for God 50 years, and I think that if he had existed I should have discovered him" (*Life*: 224). Hardy was in agreement with Comte's reasons for his anti-theological stance. However, whereas Comte gave up the search for an ultimate "essence" due to its position outside the scope of human knowledge, Hardy continued to look for some meaning in the universe. In a letter to his Positivist friend, Frederic Harrison in 1905, Hardy promised to send a copy of Part Second of *The Dynasts*, and sheepishly added, "I suppose I shall catch it again for my 'Unconscious Will'" (CL III: 186) underscoring the difference between his world view and that of the Positivist movement.

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In an incisive article published in *Thomas Hardy: The Writer and His Background*,⁸ Lennart Björk points out Hardy's interest in "affective" psychology, or the primary role of emotions in human action and understanding, and the support that he found for that idea in his reading of Comte. Hardy found "a pervasive emphasis on the instinctive and affective elements in human behaviour" (Björk 1980: 108) and, as noted, quoted from *Social Dynamics*: "Feeling--the great motor force of human life" (LNB I: 68). Comte based his psychology on biology and sociology, relying for the biological aspect on Franz Joseph Gall's phrenology in developing his Cerebral Theory. Hardy visited a phrenologist once in London and so would have had some sympathy with Comte on this point. Hardy noted another passage from *Social Dynamics*:

"Biological Dependence" -- "The nobler phenomena are everywhere subordinate to those which are grosser, but also simple & more regular . . . Man is entirely subordinate to the World -- each living being to its own environment" (LNB I: 74).

Björk comments that the "general idea of 'biological dependence' is central . . . to Hardy's view of man and his environment" and he quotes a passage from *The Return of the Native* illustrating the indelible mark of Egdon Heath on Clym Yeobright: "he was permeated with its scenes, with its substance, and with its odours. He might be said to be its product . . . ; his estimate of life had been coloured by it" (Björk 1980: 109).

The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy also reveal that he was familiar with the writings of his British Positivist contemporaries. Annotations from the works of John Stuart Mill,

⁸Lennart A. Björk, "Hardy's Reading", in *Thomas Hardy: The Writer and His Background*, ed. Norman Page (London: Bell and Hyman, 1980).

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Leslie Stephen, George Eliot, Harriet Martineau, George Lewes, John Morley and Frederic Harrison appear in the Notebooks. He read J.H. Bridges's essay on "Evolution and Positivism" in 1877, J.C. Morison's "Service of Man: An essay toward the Religion of the Future", and John Morley's *Diderot* (Björk 1974: 263). The latter was extensively marked and appears to reflect Hardy's general acceptance of Morley's positivism and 'religion of humanity.' Not all who espoused a positivist doctrine would have agreed with the specific tenets of Comte's Positivism. What the above list of personages indicates is that Hardy was aware of what was happening in the positivist movement in general.

2.2. POSITIVIST FRIENDSHIPS

The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy show that Hardy carried on correspondence with Edward S. Beesly, John Morley and, most importantly, with Frederic Harrison, with whom Hardy maintained a friendship that lasted forty years. Harrison was Hardy's most significant contact with Positivism. They met a few years after the opening of Newton Hall, a Positivist chapel in London, in May 1881, by which time Hardy's initial interest in Positivism had abated. Hardy never "modulated into the Religion of Humanity" (Vogeler 1984: 321-22), but was considered a distinguished guest at Newton Hall and apparently attended a number of lectures there. In a letter to Harrison on 17 June 1885, Hardy wrote, "I find Newton Hall conveniently near and am always glad if something is going on there. I have much missed the lectures since their close. We liked the last one best" (CL: 134). Hardy sent Harrison copies of his *Wessex Tales* and the first of three volumes

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of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, about which Harrison commented that it read "like a Positivist allegory or sermon" (Vogeler 1984: 321). There was a significant difference in the temperaments of the two men and this was alluded to in 1906 by Harrison in response to Hardy's gift to him of volume two of *The Dynasts*. Harrison quoted from Comte to outline the difference between his philosophy and the "cosmic pessimism" expressed in *The Dynasts*: "Everything is relative, . . . this earth is no paradise. Pain, want, and suffering are inscrutable facts . . . Death, even slaughter are . . . proportionately minor evils in the Universe." In response to *all* evil, Harrison exhorted Hardy not to "[ponder] on the dark side, nor hysterically [long] for any Heaven here or hereafter" (Vogeler 1984: 322).

Harrison sent Hardy a copy of *The Positive Evolution of Religion* in 1913, feeling that Hardy would be responsive and open-minded enough to accept it. On the other hand, Harrison added that poets always "come back to crave at the end, the unfathomable, the mystical, the indescribable" (Vogeler 1984: 323). This was actually a very apt description of Hardy, and it is unfortunate that Harrison could not appreciate this aspect of his personality. For Hardy, the search for the unfathomable and mystical and indescribable was the foundation of his greatest art.

2.3. POSITIVE INFLUENCE

Hardy, then, had considerable contact with the Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte. His art reflects that contact. Positivist words, images and ideas are strewn throughout Hardy's prose and poetry. His writings do not allow direct access into

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Hardy's personal convictions about Positivism, but they do provide a context wherein his relationship to Positivism is dramatically explored.

It is apparent from the above biographical information that Hardy felt some amount of sympathy with certain aspects of Comte's Positive Philosophy. It is also apparent that there were major differences between Hardy's world view and that espoused by the Positivists. For the most part, the aspects of Hardy's "philosophy" which made him a great tragedian were contrary to those which would have allowed him to be a committed Positivist.

To begin with, Hardy was more at ease with the ambiguous nature of the world than was Comte, and was critical of the French obsession with system (LNB I: 115, 120). Perhaps the fate of George's son, the dog that drove Gabriel Oak's sheep over the precipice in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, is a criticism of Comte's well-sewn system:

George's son had done his work so thoroughly that he was considered too good a workman to live, and was, in fact, taken and tragically shot at twelve o'clock that same day -- another instance of the untoward fate which so often attends dogs and other philosophers who follow out a train of consistent conduct in a world made up so largely of compromise (FMC: 87).

Hardy also viewed the universe on a much vaster scale than Comte. Comte's scope of interest and possibility spread to the limits of human nature. Humanity holds the reins of the future. For Hardy, rather than being in control, humanity is merely a small element within the larger universe. Martin Seymour-Smith writes in the Introduction to *The Mayor of Casterbridge*:

It has been remarked of the Greek tragedy . . . that 'the interest was not simply in the action as an exciting series of events, nor simply in the study of striking characters ... but in the meaning of the action as exemplifying the relation of man to the powers controlling the universe, and the relation of these powers to his destiny.' This is where the

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interest in Hardy's novels lies. He is massively humble, massively puzzled (MC: 21).

Hardy never ceases to question the nature of the power controlling the universe, whether in his poetry where he addresses "some Vast Imbecility" and a "man-projected Figure",⁹ in his novels where he summons the "President of the Immortals" (TD: 489), or in *The Dynasts* where he questions the motives of the "Immanent Will". Hardy never accepted the Positivist prohibition against metaphysical questionings, considered inaccessible to human knowledge. Indeed, the juxtaposition of an uncaring God or Will and an aesthetically beautiful, but pain-filled world peopled by intelligent, sensitive beings is the fuel for Hardy's tragedies.

Hardy also viewed humanity on a much broader scale than did Comte. At certain points Hardy would have agreed with Comte, that the world is hostile to humanity and that the only remedy for this lay in humanity's resignation to the inevitable combined with a tenacious determination to make the best of one's circumstances for the sake of the progress of the human race. In the final analysis, Hardy was unconvinced that humanity was making any headway against the morass of envy, jealousy and pride in which it was caught. Hardy's view of humanity encompassed more than its virtuous potential.

Hardy also differed from Comte in valuing the individual above society. In the Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte "individual existence is a fiction" (Kolakowski 1968: 87). The individual only has meaning as part of society; moreover, as part of a society in which there is a sense of cooperation and

⁹Thomas Hardy, *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, James Gibson, ed. (London: Macmillan, 1976), from "Nature's Questionings" p. 43, and "God's Funeral" p. 267, respectively.

2. Hardy and the Positive Philosophy of Comte

progress. The 'Great Being' of the Religion of Humanity is "constituted by the beings, past, future and present, which cooperate willingly in perfecting the order of the world" (*System* IV: 27). Hardy's characters are invariably crippled; few would have been considered to have contributed to the perfecting of the world, and his finest characters affirm the human spirit as individuals, standing against the flow of society and the natural world. We will examine them in more detail in the following chapters.

Hardy valued the virtues of "fidelity, compassion, [and] humility", as did Comte, but saw them as "of no avail in the universe."¹⁰ The nature of Hardy's tragedy is such that it might be said that it

drifts, a little hopelessly, on a grey current, pausing for a moment to find, in its eddies and backwaters, those qualities of nobility, patience, charity; but it is not concerned to show those qualities vindicated in conflict.¹¹

Hardy was too much of a realist to ignore the tragic side of human nature and his work is filled with the consequences of a flawed humanity.

Further, Hardy attacks Comte's belief that society is capable of establishing a moral and ethical standard under which individuals can grow and flourish. Hardy's characters stand out against the morals of the societies to which they belong. D.H. Lawrence said of Hardy's tragic heroines:

What was there in their position that was necessarily tragic? Necessarily painful it was, but they were not at war with God, only with society. Yet they were cowed by the mere

¹⁰David Cecil, *Hardy the Novelist* (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1943), p. 156.

¹¹T.R. Henn, *The Harvest of Tragedy* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1956), p. 73.

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judgement of man upon them, and all the while by their own souls they were right. And the judgement of men killed them, not the judgement of their own souls or the judgement of Eternal God.¹²

Hardy's heroes and heroines are mavericks on a Promethean scale, standing out against a society which would brand them, acting on the convictions of their hearts and suffering the tragic results.

The remainder of this thesis will look at the incidence of Positivism in the novels, *The Dynasts* and the poems, and will continue to explore the relationship between Positivism and Hardy's tragic vision.

¹²D.H. Lawrence, "The Study of Thomas Hardy", in *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*, Bruce Steele, ed. (Cambridge: University Press, 1985), p. 30.

3. POSITIVISM IN THE NOVELS

Thomas Hardy wrote fifteen novels in the course of his literary career. His first novel *The Poor Man and the Lady* was turned down for publication by Macmillan in 1868. His next novel, *Desperate Remedies* (1871) was published in book form by Tinsley but only after a deposit from Hardy of £75. He sold the copyrights for his subsequent two novels, *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872) and *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), for nominal amounts, but by the time of the publication of *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) "he was to refuse to sell the copyright for less than £300." R.G. Cox goes on to comment in his introduction to *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage* that "it did not take [Hardy] an unduly long time to establish a reputation: with *Far from the Madding Crowd* he can be said to have arrived."¹

With the exception of the first two, the novels were initially published in serial form in England and in America. British publications in which Hardy's fiction appeared include *Tinsley's Magazine* (PBE), the *Cornhill* (FMC and HE), *Belgravia* (RN), *Good Words* (TM), *Harper's Magazine*, published both in Britain and America, (LAO and JO), the *Graphic* (MC and TD), and *Macmillan's Magazine* (WL). In America, Hardy's novels appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* (TT), *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (JO), and *Harper's Weekly* (MC). Inherent in the task of writing under the pressure of serial publication were a number of problems, not the

¹R.G. Cox, ed., *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p.xvi.

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least of which was the fact that Hardy was forced to produce a tale in order to earn a living. Writing novels was not his first love, but he considered himself "a good hand at a story."² Hardy approached novel writing as an occupation or trade.

A further problem was created by the audience for which Hardy wrote. R.G. Cox points out that Victorian magazines and novels were likely to be read out loud to the entire family as a form of entertainment, therefore editors had to consider carefully the fitness of the material they published.

It seems safe to assume that many readers of Hardy's early books were looking for conventional and undisturbing entertainment, melodramatic in its turn of plot and liberally seasoned with the pathetic, but uplifting in tone and observing a strict moral propriety (Cox 1970: xx-xxi).

With the exception of a few scenes (e.g., the seduction of Fanny Robin in *Far from the Madding Crowd* and the relations between Eustacia, Wildeve and Thomasin in *The Return of the Native*), there was little to offend "family" sensibilities in the early novels, until the publication of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Critics of Hardy's early works focused praise on his powerful and evocative ability to "paint" a scene with words and faulted him on clumsiness of plot and phrase. An unsigned review in the *Spectator* (22 April 1871) is typical. The critic considered the then anonymous writer of *Desperate Remedies* an author with "talent of a remarkable kind--sensitiveness to scenic and atmospheric effects, and to their influence on the mind, and the power of rousing similar sensitiveness in his readers." The critic went on to say however that it was a story which was "disagreeable; . . . worked

²F.E. Hardy, *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy: 1840-1891* (London: Macmillan, 1928), p. 131.

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out by machinery always common-place, and sometimes clumsy" (Cox 1970: 4-5). From the latter criticism Hardy never really escaped in the course of his novel writing career.

As the novels progressed, criticism moved from style and form to content. Cox records that with the publication of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* the "issue of 'pessimism'" arose (Cox 1970: xxiv). With the publication of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* Hardy began to invade the Victorian conscience in such a way that critical discussion moved to the moral and philosophical implications of his work.

Hardy seemed at this point to be striking at the roots of conventional sexual morality and conventional religion, and in deploring his iconoclasm or welcoming him as a pioneer of enlightenment critics often allowed their literary judgements to become distorted (Cox 1970: xiv).

Hardy never took criticism very well and Cox notes that the criticisms he received after the publications of *Tess* and *Jude* seemed to "bewilder" and "embitter" him (Cox 1970: xiv and xv).

Jude was the last novel Hardy wrote.³ From 1897 onwards Hardy focused on his love of poetry and the writing of his epic drama *The Dynasts*. There are many conjectures as to why Hardy abandoned novel-writing. To a large extent it must have been due to the heated reception of *Tess* and *Jude*. He himself said after reading a review of *Tess* in *The Quarterly* (April 1892), "Well, if this sort of thing continues, no more novel writing for me. A man must be a fool to deliberately stand up to be shot at" (*Life*: 246). After the publication of *Jude*, the response of the critics was disheartening to Hardy because they seemed to miss the whole

³*The Well-Beloved* was actually published in book form after *Jude*, but had been completed earlier in 1892.

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point of the story. He wrote, "the experience completely [cured] me of further interest in novel writing (JO: 41). On the other hand, in his Introduction to *Jude*, C.H. Sisson believes the hypothesis that Hardy stopped writing due to the "vituperation *Jude* occasioned" is "so superficial and absurd that it need not detain us", due to the fact that affronting conventional morality promotes the sale of a book rather than curtailing it, and Hardy had seen and expressed too much of life in his writings to be shocked by the "trivialities" in the criticisms he encountered (JO: 13-14). In part, by the time of the publication of *Jude*, Hardy was secure enough to pursue a less financially remunerative, but more satisfying career as a poet.

In response to a question posed by Charles Morgan in 1920 regarding whether or not Hardy would write another novel, Hardy replied ". . .my stories are written" (LY: 207). Due to the sharp criticism that Hardy endured when he was perceived to have attempted to outline a philosophical or moral stance in his novels, he also began to long for the freedom of expression that he believed a poetic style would allow him. In October 1896 he recorded in *Life* a rather caustic statement which reveals his frustrations with what he felt to be the limitations of prose:

Perhaps I can express more fully in verse ideas and emotions which run counter to the inert crystallized opinion--hard as rock--which the vast body of men have vested interests in supporting. To cry out in a passionate poem that (for instance) the Supreme Mover or Movers, the Prime Force or Forces, must be either limited in power, unknowing, or cruel--which is obvious enough, and has been for centuries--will cause them merely a shake of the head; but to put it in argumentative prose will make them sneer, or foam and set all the literary contortionists jumping on me (*Life*: 285).

The key here is the term "argumentative prose", at which Hardy was not gifted. He was much better at creating an evocative,

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"passionate" scene than at stringing together series of events or ideas into cohesive narrative. His talents were much more suited to a poetic form, so that what Hardy perceived as negative reaction to his prose on the part of his readers was perhaps not so much a result of the form itself, but due to Hardy's abilities with it.

Hardy was a seeker, not a systematician, and attempted the "application of ideas to life" in his work. He entertained some of the concepts of Comtean Positivism throughout his novels, not so much in a consistent manner as in a persistent one. As was the case with other thinkers in whom Hardy had an interest, he chose to comment on aspects of Comte's philosophy which supported his world view. In the novels, then, there is no systematic rendering of the Positive Philosophy, but rather glimpses of the components that were of particular interest to him. Hardy never professed to be attempting anything more in his fiction than

simply an endeavour to give shape and coherence to a series of seemings, or personal impressions, the questions of their consistency or their discordance, of their permanence or their transitoriness, being regarded as not of the first moment (JO: 39-40).

Hardy was keenly attuned to the subtleties and tragedies of the human condition and he expressed these impressions of life in terms that transcended conventional morality. He "was an artist, not a propagandist."⁴

C.H. Sisson comments that what mattered to Hardy was "fidelity to the impression," not adherence to a certain "fashionable or unfashionable" view of morality (JO: 14). Perhaps this is why we

⁴Dale Kramer, *Thomas Hardy: The Forms of Tragedy* (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 18.

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find Hardy still using Positivist terms and concepts in his writings in the 1890's and into the twentieth century when such beliefs were no longer popular. If nothing else, the fact that Hardy entertained the concepts of the Religion of Humanity for so long reveals that he found some germ of truth in the philosophy that appealed to the side of his nature which hoped that there was a light beyond the darkness of the universe in which he lived. Ultimately, he was unable to sustain his belief in the Religion of Humanity. The novels reveal a part of his journey towards that conclusion.

The remainder of this chapter will be concerned with the specific occurrences of Positivist thought throughout the novels, where Hardy can be seen arguing both for and against a Positivist world view. From there, in the next chapter, I would like to look more closely at some of the later novels, specifically *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Tess* and *Jude*, because these are the novels which contain the greatest amount of Positivist material. Oddly enough, Hardy's interest in Positivism in his writing seems to grow as the movement is on the wane towards the end of the nineteenth century.

3.1. THE THREE STAGES

As noted above, one of Comte's most significant contributions to scientific theory and the development of sociology was his Law of the Three Stages. These stages, the Theological, the Metaphysical and the Positive were first applied to all the sciences and then perceived to operate on all levels of human history. They particularly seemed to have fascinated Hardy. Hardy's notes on Fetichism, the beginnings of the Theological

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stage, reveal his interest in and respect for this initial development in the human intellectual process. The use of the word Fetichism and descriptions of Fetichistic practices are found in a number of the novels. Hardy may very well have been interested in Fetichism from his own background and culture in the rural heart of Dorset. His ideas about Fetichism may not have originated with Comte, but in Comte Hardy found a kindred spirit.

In the first chapter of *The Return of the Native*, Hardy sets the scene in his descriptions of Egdon Heath. Austere and mysterious, the effect of the windy heath is such that "an emotional listener's fetichistic mood might have ended in one of more advanced quality" (RN: 106). Hardy is using the word "fetichistic" in a very Comtean sense, particularly in indicating that it is part of a continuum. At the end of the novel, Susan Nunsuch makes an effigy of Eustacia and burns it slowly over the fire while repeating the Lord's Prayer backwards three times. In the following chapter Eustacia is found drowned in the weir, implying that Susan's fetichistic practices were real and powerful.

Michael Henchard is described as "fetichistic" in his beliefs in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (MC: 84). In his remorse over having sold his wife and daughter, Henchard resolves "to register an oath . . . and to do it properly he required a fit place and imagery." He found such a place in the "sacrarium" of the nearby church where he dropped his head on the altar and swore on the Bible not to drink for twenty-one years. So strong and binding was this oath that he followed it to the exact day twenty-one years later.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles is full of references to "ill-omens" (TD: 61,84,254-5,281-2,390-1), and the Durbeyfield family

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is particularly characterized as superstitious. Regarding Mrs. Durbeyfield and Tess,

Between the mother with her fast-perishing lumber of superstitions, folk-lore, dialect and orally transmitted ballads, and the daughter, with her trained National teachings and standard knowledge under an infinitely revised code, there was a gap of 200 years (TD: 61).

Despite Tess's teachings, however, it is later said of her: "like all the cottagers in Blackmoor Vale, Tess was steeped in fancies and prefigurative superstitions" (TD: 84). Lennart A. Björk points out that in the novel, Tess is repeatedly "made to see Nature as animate" and "she is thus--in philosophical and religious terms--at a very primitive stage of human development" (Björk 1980: 111). In the scene where Tess descends into the Valley of the Great Dairⁱ_λ^es, she is torn between her upbringing and her education. Full of hope and thankfulness, she recites the "Benedicite", which is described as "a Fetichistic utterance in a Monotheistic setting." A certain reverence for the initial stage of intellectual development appears in the sentence that follows: "women whose chief companions are the forms and forces of outdoor nature retain in their souls far more of the Pagan fantasy of their remote forefathers than of the systematized religion taught their race at a later date" (TD: 158). Many of the terms Hardy uses here are taken from his annotation of Comte's *System*.

The novel carries a strong element of antipathy towards Christianity, with many similarities to Comte's view, particularly in the First Edition where "the full bitterness of the anti-religious note is heard."⁵ Regarding this aspect of *Tess*,

⁵J.T. Laird, *The Shaping of Tess of the D'U^rbervilles* (Oxford, 1975), p. 167.

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Frederic Harrison commented that the novel "read like a Positivist allegory or sermon" and was "saturated with human and anti-theological morality" (letter from Harrison to Hardy, 29/12/91, Dorset County Museum). Within the context of the letter Harrison warned Hardy that *Tess* might prove to be "too much . . . for our Pharisaical Philistines" and could cause the "orthodox public" to "take alarm". There is reverence for Christianity in its time and place, but a determined sense that its creeds do not meet modern realities. From Hardy's notation of the *System of Positive Polity*:

A self-contradiction in the conception of a single God. "For omnipotence, omniscience, and moral perfection are irreconcilable" with a radically imperfect world.

As time went on theological conceptions were undermined more and more by the belief in law, till miracles were rare, and revelations restricted. (LNB I: 69)

The scene in which Tess meets the sign painter seems to be an illustration of the latter notation; the sign painter's occupation being "the last grotesque phase of a creed which had served mankind well in its time," but now appeared to Tess as "crushing" and "killing". Further on in the novel, in what J.T. Laird describes as an "intensification of the anti-religious attitude" (Laird 1975: 167), an attack is levelled at the vicar of Marlott for his "tradesman"-like attitude toward the baptism and burial of Tess's child, and the church is criticized for the dogma which calls for "Sorrow . . . that bastard gift of shameless Nature" to be buried "in that shabby corner of God's allotment where he lets the nettles grow" (TD: 146). Presented thus, Christianity has lost touch with the soul-felt needs of the people it was meant to serve, by holding too closely to the letter of the law.

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3.2. THE CEREBRAL THEORY

Comte's Cerebral Theory is the basis for his faith in the progress of humanity as a whole. As noted above, Comte believed that altruistic drives are like muscles that with proper exercise will eventually overcome the more egoistical tendencies inherent in human nature, leaving humanity, in the end, characterized by loving-kindness. This basic struggle of the altruistic over the egoistic tendencies within humanity is prominent in the novels. It is translated into the terms of the struggle between "flesh and spirit", between "nature and grace", between the "intellect and the heart", between "social feeling and selfish aspirations", and between the "higher passions and the inferior". The struggle is very Pauline in nature. Again from Comte's *Social Dynamics* Hardy copied two extracts regarding St Paul, one of which is the following: "St Paul's theory of the antagonism of Nature & Grace" (LNB I: 68). Björk points out a number of passages in *Tess*, *Two on a Tower*, and *Return of the Native* which refer to St Paul and to the dichotomy between the flesh and spirit (LNB: 316-17). It is not necessary however to link these passages from Hardy's novels directly to Comte, for, in the words of C.H. Salter, "there is no reason to suppose Hardy derived his idea of St Paul from anyone but St Paul."⁶ In copying the passages from *Social Dynamics* though, Hardy is at least noting his assent with Comte's thoughts on Paul.

⁶C.H. Salter, *Good Little Thomas Hardy* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 82.

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Hardy commented in his Preface to *Two on a Tower* that although it was an "imperfect story" he hoped that the account of the "evolution of altruism"⁷ in the character of Lady Constantine would prove "not unprofitable to the growth of the social sympathies" in his readers (TT: 29). In the story, Lady Constantine, an impoverished "older woman", is confronted with the moral dilemma of whether to marry the object of her passion and affection, Swithin St Cleeve, thus cutting him off from a sizeable inheritance; or whether to give him his freedom in order that he might pursue a promising career in astronomy with that inheritance. She considered that "in immolating herself by refusing him, and leaving him free to work wonders for the good of his fellow creatures, she would in all probability add to the sum of human felicity" (244). It was therefore her duty to set Swithin free so that "his zeal for progress" might not be abstracted from "his scientific spirit." At this point Lady Constantine departs from Hardy's previous romantic heroines by "becoming increasingly conscious of her feelings and deliberately 'schooling' them until she becomes a conscious and explicit symbol of a kind of love that is both altruistic and objective" (Hyman 1975: 88). The "altruism" suggested by her sacrifice of Swithin was an "unexpectedly grand [fruit] . . . forced forth by harsh pruning." "To love St Cleeve so far better than herself as this was to surpass the love of women" (TT: 245). Although at the conclusion of this debate it appears that the higher instincts have prevailed, as soon as Lady Constantine discovers that she is pregnant "the instinct of self-

⁷Virginia R. Hyman, *Ethical Perspective in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* (New York: Kennikat Press Corp., 1975), p. 39.

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preservation flamed up in her like a fire. Her altruism in subjecting her self-love to benevolence . . . was demolished by the new necessity" (257).

Not one to believe in fairy tale endings, as the novel concludes with the loving-kindness of Lady Constantine meeting the loving-kindness of St Cleeve, Hardy has the heroine die from "sudden joy after despair" (292). In this final twist of fate, Hardy's tragical sense crushes the almost happy ending. His tragedy does not entirely negate the acts of "loving-kindness" performed by Lady Constantine, but it does leave the reader wondering if her altruism is of any use in an uncaring universe. This ending reveals, if nothing else, Hardy's ambiguous feelings about what Lennart Björk refers to as "the basic positivist idea that the social feeling is as strong as selfish aspirations" (Björk 1980: 109).

The mental debate embarked upon by Lady Constantine illustrates the basic dichotomy of the human mechanism, as outlined by Comte: "emotions" against "understanding",⁸ "self-centred attitude" against a "sympathetic attitude", "self-love" against benevolence" (TT: 244). Virginia Hyman indicates the strong influence of Comtean Positivism on the characters and plot of this novel, and indeed, on all the novels (Hyman 1975: 18-26, 88-89). C.H. Salter, in his *Good Little Thomas Hardy* takes Dr Hyman to task on this point, however, finding that the use of such terms as "altruism" and "loving-kindness" do not echo Comte as Comte did

⁸Noted here to be particularly "hard work for a tender woman" (TT: 244). T.R. Wright points out that "the *Cours* describes [women] as mentally inferior but emotionally superior to men" (T.R. Wright 1986: 32).

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not use the terms; and further:

although Hardy's use of terms such as "fetichism" and "social ethics" almost certainly shows the influence of Comte, those terms and indeed the whole Comtean description of the ages of progress, refer to ideas which are not sufficiently distinct from ordinary concepts to affect the novelist's normal concern with goodness and badness (Salter 1981: 79).

Perhaps the truth lies in a middle ground between these two points of view. The genesis of some of the ideas and terminology can be traced back to Comte, albeit distilled through the likes of J.S. Mill, Leslie Stephen and others. However to ascribe undue influence is neither to the credit of Hardy or Comte.

Many other characters in the novels engage in a conflict between their grosser and higher natures. In *The Return of the Native*, Eustacia Vye's passions run rampant; the "fantastic" nature of those passions "lower her as an intellect" and leave her void of the vital "self-control" she needs in order to regulate her initial feelings for Clym Yeobright (RN: 174; T.R. Wright 1986: 213). In *The Hand of Ethelberta*, "Faith was one in whom the meditative somewhat over-powered the active faculties" (HE: 65-66; LNB I: 321); and Ethelberta was of a nature that required the "repression of animal spirits" (HE: 34). Captain de Stancy in *A Laodicean* practised for many years a "system of rigidly incarcerating within himself all instincts towards the opposite sex" only to find at the sight of the graceful Paula that this "chamber of his nature had been preserved intact" and was subject to exploitation (LAO: 201; T.R. Wright 1986: 213).

Along with Comte's hierarchical view of human affection, Hardy was also interested in his concept of "biological dependence". "Biological dependence" refers to Comte's assertion that the study of human psychology can be divided between the sciences

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of biology and sociology "in order to stay clear of theological and metaphysical speculations on human nature" (Björk 1980: 108). Emotional and intellectual functions therefore are to be studied in relation to "the various organic conditions on which they depend" (*Positive Phil* I: 461-2). As noted in the previous chapter, in his notebooks Hardy copied from Comte's *Social Dynamics*:

"Biological dependence"--"The nobler phenomena are everywhere subordinate to those which are grosser, but also simpler and more regular . . . Man is entirely subordinate to the World--each living being to its own environment" (LNB I: 74).

Although the following excerpt from *Far from the Madding Crowd* preceded the above notation,⁹ this concept of "biological dependence" is expressed in the scene where Bathsheba Everdene is pressed into the uncomfortable and unsolicited position of 'promising to promise' to marry Farmer Boldwood:

Bathsheba was in a very peculiar state of mind, which showed how entirely the soul is the slave of the body, the ethereal spirit dependent for its quality upon the tangible flesh and blood (FMC: 378).

Björk comments that "the general idea of 'biological dependence' is central . . . to Hardy's view of man and his environment" (Björk 1980: 109). It is most clearly seen in *The Return of the Native* where Clym Yeobright is described as a "product of Egdon Heath. "He was permeated with its scenes, with its sub-

⁹Hardy used his *Literary Notebook*, vol. I from the mid 1870's until 1888 (LNB I: xxxiii). Comte's *Social Dynamics*, from which this quotation came was published in 1876. *Far from the Madding Crowd* appeared in 1874. Hardy had been reading Comte earlier however. Horace Moule gave Hardy a copy of *A General View of Positivism* published in 1865 and he had been reading Comte's *Positive Philosophy* previous to the publication of *Far from the Madding Crowd* (*Life*: 98).

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stance, and with its odours . . . his estimate of life had been coloured by it" (RN: 231).

Although primarily sceptical about the possibility of the progress of humanity on the whole, *The Well-Beloved* presents a restrained form of hope for progress in view of the development of Jocelyn Pierston. The novel is an account in three stages "of the education of Pierston in human relationships" (WB: xxii). As a "Young Man of Twenty" Pierston is completely at the mercy of his passions in the pursuit of "the migratory, elusive idealization he called his Love who, ever since boyhood, had flitted from human shell to human shell an indefinite number of times" (WB: 103). By the time he enters the second stage of the story Pierston has begun to learn to channel his passions to more productive and publicly satisfying ends:

'It is odd,' he said to himself, 'that this experience of mine, or idiosyncrasy, or whatever it is, which would be a sheer waste of time for other men, creates sober business for me.' For all these dreams he translated into plaster, and found that by them he was hitting a public taste he had never deliberately aimed at (WB: 52).

As a "Young Man of Sixty" he grows in the consciousness that his pursuit of his 'Beloved' is, in the end, "bondage to beauty in the ideal" and unattainable. He settles his affections on Avice III, the granddaughter of the Avice whom he deserted in his youth, "the only woman he had never loved of those who loved him" (71), with a "cordial loving-kindness", not, as the world would suppose, with "the selfish designs of an elderly man on a maid" (191). At the conclusion of the novel and with "further intellectual expansion" (198) on the part of Pierston, the ideal of the 'Well-Beloved' is completely extinguished and Pierston is found engaged in many socially beneficial undertakings. Over the course of his

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lifetime Pierston succeeded in schooling his selfish aspirations into social benevolence.

Although more of a small 'p' positivist than a capital 'P' Positivist, Clym Yeobright in *The Return of the Native* developed intellectually in Paris "where he had become acquainted with ethical systems popular at the time" (RN: 230), perhaps a vague reference to Comtean Positivism. It is said of Yeobright that "he loved his kind" and wished to better their condition by imparting to them a knowledge "which brings wisdom rather than affluence." "He wished to raise the class at the expense of the individuals rather than individuals at the expense of the class" (230), which is very much the aim of the Religion of Humanity with its emphasis on the "Great Being", a corporate form of Humanity, rather than the individuals that come together to form it. Yeobright also seems to subscribe to Comte's "looped orbit" view of progress. He insists that "there is hope yet . . . I am only at an awkward turning. I wish people wouldn't be so ready to think that there is no progress without uniformity" (RN: 265; T.R. Wright 1986: 211).

The conclusion of the novel finds Clym pursuing the course of a humanitarian reformer lecturing on "morally unimpeachable subjects" and "[occupying] his tongue in the opinions and actions common to all good men" (474).

3.3. POSITIVE WORSHIP

Comte's love for and devotion to Clotilde de Vaux was the catalyst for a major change of emphasis in his philosophy, and resulted in the institution of the Religion of Humanity. After

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her death, Clotilde "became transfigured into his guardian angel and even the Goddess of Humanity, conscious idealizations of the real person he had known" (T.R. Wright 1986: 14). Comte encouraged all adherents to the Religion of Humanity to "[find] a woman to idealize" (T.R. Wright 1986: 35). Women are therefore central to Positive worship. The notion of idealizing and worshipping women is prominent in Hardy's novels, although for Hardy the idealization was more of an end in itself than a means by which to give oneself "more unreservedly to the service of Humanity" (*System I*: 192).

The account of Jocelyn Pierston's devotion to the memory of Avice Caro in *The Well-Beloved* comes closest to Comte's idealization of women. Although Avice was "the only woman he had never loved of those who had loved him", after her death "the soul of Avice . . . surrounded him like a firmament" (WB: 71). As with Comte and his Clotilde, Pierston "loved the woman dead and inaccessible as he had never loved her in life" (72) and found that "it was love rarefied and refined to its highest altar" (73).

In *A Pair of Blue Eyes* Elfride Swancourt is "worshipped" both by Stephen Smith (PBE: 86) and by Henry Knight; the latter says to her: "a religion was building itself upon you in my heart. I looked into your eyes, and thought I saw there truth and innocence as pure and perfect as ever embodied by God in the flesh of woman" (356). Bathsheba Everdene in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, similarly finds herself the object of two men's devotion. For Gabriel Oak, the image of Bathsheba was most "vividly" with him during the sleepless hours of the night. Farmer Boldwood's devotion however was of a destructive nature. Previous to his attachment to Bathsheba he was "without a channel of any kind for

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disposable emotion . . . no mother existed to absorb his devotion" (154). Bathsheba "becomes the central focus for his worship" (T.R. Wright 1986: 214). She is unobtainable through her own choice, not by death, and as a result the consequences are tragic, leading to the death of Farmer Boldwood and Sergeant Troy. Perhaps this is why Comte insisted on worshipping women in the "ideal", not in the "real".

Again unable to possess the real object, in *The Hand of Ethelberta* Christopher Julian discovers that

a woman who has once made a permanent impression upon a man cannot altogether deny him her image by denying him her company, and that by sedulously cultivating the acquaintance of this Creature of Contemplation she becomes to him almost a living soul (326).

Julian survives his adoration of Ethelberta by transferring his devotion to Ethelberta's sister, but the consequences of divorcing real women from ideals are tragic for many of Hardy's heroes.

Eustacia Vye is a vehicle for such tragedy. She was "the raw material of a divinity . . . she had the passions and instincts which made a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman" (RN: 118). Clym Yeobright, blinded by her divine qualities discovers too late that Eustacia is a real, flawed human being. Here Hardy seems to be illuminating the central flaw of worshipping a "Goddess of Humanity". Model goddesses do not survive in the real world. Comtean Madonnas are invalidated in Hardy's tragic world. T.R. Wright comments that "Hardy seems loath to deny his characters the delights and rewards of such worship but he clearly illustrates its dangers" (T.R. Wright 1986: 215).

Another aspect of Positive worship that figures in Hardy's work is that of "subjective immortality". The seventh and final

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sacrament of the Religion of Humanity is that of "Incorporation". Seven years after death a judgement is made to determine if a person should be "buried in the sacred wood surrounding the Temple of Humanity" (T.R. Wright 1986: 37). This indicated that the person is worthy in death, due to good works during life, of being remembered by those left behind, thereby attaining a "subjective immortality" as opposed to the ethereal brand of immortality offered in the Christian faith.

Giles Winterborne is an example of this in *The Woodlanders*. After his death Marty South and Grace Melbury attend his grave "with pious strictness" (WL: 413). Grace admits to her estranged husband that "I almost worship him" (415). Although by the conclusion of the novel Grace has given up her visits to Giles' grave, Marty continues with conviction and passion. It is in Marty that Giles will live on:

Whenever I get up I'll think of 'ee, and whenever I lie down I'll think of 'ee again . . . If ever I forget your name let me forget home and heaven! . . . But no, no my love, I can never forget 'ee; for you was a good man, and did good things!" (438).

In *The Return of the Native*, the deaths of Clym Yeobright's mother and of Eustacia allowed a reconciliation with them that he had not been able to achieve when they were alive. After Thomasin and Diggory Venn's wedding feast Clym sits alone in his deserted house and remembers his mother:

. . . to Clym she was almost a presence there, not as always. Whatever she was in other people's memories, in his she was the sublime saint whose radiance even his tenderness for Eustacia could not obscure (473).

On a lighter note, in *Far from the Madding Crowd* Black Bess, a faithful and courageous horse, was so convincingly portrayed in a play at the sheep fair that it was said of her:

If, as some thinkers hold, immortality consists in being

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enshrined in others' memories, then did Black Bess become immortal that day if she never had done so before (FMC: 405).

Finally, the cultivation of a sense of continuity with humanity through the study of history is another important component of Positive worship (although not exclusively so) which found its way into the writings of Thomas Hardy. In the words of T.R. Wright, the sense of continuity is a "conscious identification on the part of an individual with the historical progress of the race" (1986: 210). On arriving in Christminster for the first time Jude "heard the past announcing itself in the saints and prophets in the window-tracery, the paintings in the galleries, the statues, the busts, the gargoyles . . ." (JO: 132). Disappointed in his attempts to gain entrance to the University, Jude maintained a "pretty zeal in the cause of education" and joined

an Artizan's Mutual Improvement Society, . . . its members being young men of all creeds and denominations, . . . their one common wish to enlarge their minds (374).

Ethelberta Petherwin engages in a similar pursuit of education. She organizes an expedition to Milton's tomb in order to "quicken our memories of the great" (HE: 209) and as she reads a passage from *Paradise Lost* standing by the monument "she could be fancied a priestess of him before whose image she stood" (212). Hardy himself must have made such a pilgrimage. In the passage he adds a footnote referring to changes having taken place in the monument since the time of the first edition. Ethelberta expresses a similar interest in the ruins of Corvsgate Castle, for "what was left in any shape from the past was her constant interest, because it recalled her to herself and fortified her mind" (245).

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After her marriage to Lord Mountclere, Ethelberta considers it a great happiness to have access to his "splendid library . . . [with] all that has been done in literature from Moses down to Scott" (324). T.R. Wright has observed a connection here between this passage and the Positivist Calendar of great men, an important feature of the Religion of Humanity which assigns a different "saint" for each day of the year to encourage "both reverence and emulation" (1986: 37). Wright points out that the first month of the Positive Calendar is named after Moses and the eighth month, entitled "Modern Epic Poetry" includes Milton and Scott. Wright goes on to clarify that:

The point is not that Ethelberta is a Positivist but that some aspects of her character derive from Hardy's close study of Comte in the year in which the novel was written (211).

3.4. RESIGNATION

In his later years Comte moved away from the strictly objective methodology that characterized his early Positive Philosophy to allow room for a "subjective synthesis". There was, for Comte, a necessary "invariableness" in the external order of the world, of which, with the aid of the new advances in the study of science, humanity could discover the limits. In a passage from *The Catechism of Positive Religion*, Comte describes life as a "necessity admitting modifications" to which humanity can respond with "a compound of resignation and action."¹⁰ There was scope for human freedom within the external order. Working with that which can be altered, notably human nature, humanity can make a move

¹⁰Auguste Comte, *The Catechism of Positive Religion*, Paris, 1851, Richard Congreve, trans. (London, 1858), p. 61.

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towards moral and intellectual progress, and happiness. Hardy agreed with Comte regarding the need for resignation towards the unalterable aspects of the universe, but only a few of Hardy's characters managed to achieve a sufficient amount of resignation to the harshness of the world to accord themselves a modicum of happiness in it. Resignation, in Hardy's world, did not often lead to happiness.

Gabriel Oak is indeed an unusual character in Hardy's fiction. Of all Hardy's major figures, he is the only one to survive the narrative through consistent strength of character and common sense, and to be rewarded with some earthly pleasure at the end. In itself, the paucity of common sense in Hardy's other characters is a statement about Positivism, since common sense is needed in order to facilitate the progress of the human race. Ronald Blythe writes in the introduction to *Far from the Madding Crowd*,

[Oak] himself is redeemed by the modesty of his expectations . . . and his rewards for not struggling to discover something more ecstatic than 'a dim and temperate bliss' are a beautiful, hard-headed wife, the best farm in the place and masculine respect all around (FMC: 30).

In the initial pages of the book Gabriel suffers the great disaster of losing his flock of sheep, which not only dooms him financially, but takes away his cherished status of an independent farmer. However,

. . . there was left to him a dignified calm he had never known before, and that indifference to fate which, though it often makes a villain of a man, is the basis of his sublimity when it does not. And thus the abasement had been exaltation, and the loss gain (88).

Hardy here affirms with Comte that a dogged resignation to the world is a necessary ingredient in human happiness.

Elizabeth-Jane Henchard achieves a similar, albeit modified, success. With a dignified calm, Elizabeth-Jane watches Farfrae and

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Henchard vie for the attentions of Lucetta and ignore her presence altogether. At that point "she had learnt the lesson of renunciation, and was as familiar with the wreck of each day's wishes as with the diurnal setting of the sun" (MC: 250). By the end of the book she found herself in a "latitude of calm weather" and was able to teach those around her

the secret . . . of making limited opportunities enduring, which she deemed to consist in the cunning enlargement, by a species of microscopic treatment, of those minute forms of satisfaction that offer themselves to everybody not in positive pain (410).

For Hardy's most poignant and tragic characters, however, the results of their resignation to the cruelties they endure are not so happy. Such characters as Tess, Jude and Michael Henchard manage relatively to resign themselves to their fates, but in the process do not establish themselves as "hopeful" characters. Rather, the wreck of their lives produces a Promethean affirmation of the human spirit, which is much more important to Hardy.

4. THE FAILURE OF POSITIVISM IN HARDY'S FICTION

This chapter continues the discussion of the previous chapter. The novels continue to be the focus in our examination of the influence of Comtean Positivism on Hardy's writing, but in this chapter we will look at three novels in particular in which a conflict erupts between Hardy's interest in Positivism and his over-riding tragic vision.

W.D. Howells, in a review of *Jude* which appeared in *Harper's Weekly* (7 December 1895) remarked that with Hardy there came a "return of an English writer to the Greek motive of tragedy." In Howell's words,

He has given me the same pity and despair in view of the blind struggles of his modern English lower-middle-class people that I experience from the destinies of the august figures of Greek fable . . . In the world where his hapless people have their being, there is not only no Providence, but there is Fate alone; and environment is such that character itself cannot avail against it. We have back the old conception of an absolutely subject humanity (Cox 1970: 253-4).

In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* we see such a picture of tragedy, played out by the characters of the stories. Michael Henchard, Tess and Jude each in their own way are classical tragic figures. Each is confronted not only with the cruel turns of nature--chance and mischance--but with their own immutable characters. Hardy discovers dramatically through his characters aspects of their natures that cannot be schooled and contained within Comte's philosophy. The ill-turns of their circumstances are unrelenting and despite signs of nobility of character and good intentions, Hardy's heroes/heroines cannot and do not prevail. They suffer, and

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endure, and affirm life on a completely different level from Comtean Positivism. They discover themselves in their tragedies, not in their happiness. In the novels in which these characters are involved, the story line intersects with Positivism, either in beliefs espoused by the characters or in the manner in which the characters live their lives. The interaction between Positivist belief or action and the eventual tragic conclusions of the novels helps to illuminate further Hardy's disposition towards Comtean Positivism.

In his Introduction to *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Martin Seymour-Smith points out this connection between Hardy's fiction and Positivism:

The man who loved churches, church music and church services, but who rejected Victorian Christianity, was no simple-minded positivist--even though he studied the works of Comte, the father of Positivism. [Hardy] rejected the divinity of Christ, but remained massively puzzled about life. Positivism was an attempt to explain life, to make it coherent. Hardy did turn to it, but while we see it persisting with more or less intensity in his 'philosophy', we see it consistently failing in his fiction and poetry (MC: 15).

In the previous chapter we examined Hardy's "philosophical" interest in Positivism and the Religion of Humanity, and its appearance in his fiction. This chapter is an attempt to look more critically at *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* in order to examine the course of Positivism in them. Hardy's fiction states a case for the untenability of a Positivist belief system in a world which is vastly more complex and demanding than the Comtean system allows.

4.1. *THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE*

In the "Author's Preface" to *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy writes that "the story is more particularly a study of one man's

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deeds and character than, perhaps, any other of those included in my Exhibition of Wessex life" (MC: 67). Through this "study of one man's deeds and character", I believe Hardy explores the possibilities and limitations of one of the main premises of Positivism: that the human organism is capable of amelioration.

The novel opens with the rather shocking scene in which Michael Henchard sells his wife and daughter at a fair. Henchard is portrayed as a drunken, greedy, violent and crude man for whom the reader has little sympathy. At the moment of the sale his egoistical drives have completely overwhelmed any sense of compassion or love that would have kept a sensible man from committing such an egregious act.

To emphasize Henchard's sole culpability in the affair, Hardy contrasts the environment inside and outside the furmity-tent in which the sale took place:

The difference between the peacefulness of interior nature and the wilful hostilities of mankind was very apparent at this place. In contrast with the harshness of the act just ended within the tent was the sight of several horses crossing their necks and rubbing each other lovingly (79-80).

Henchard is without motive for the act. There is no calamity or cruelty of nature which forces him to sell his wife, or which would create any sympathy for his character in the reader. It is his character; he is cruel, selfish, proud and seemingly heartless.

Henchard redeems himself out of this morally destitute state, however. The following chapter finds a repentant Henchard swearing a "fetichistic" oath on an altar in a church. Realizing that his drinking was the root of his problems, he swears not to drink again for the space of 21 years--a year for every year of

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his life he had already lived. He then begins a search for his wife and daughter, but in vain.

The novel then jumps a span of 18 years and finds Henchard in the town of Casterbridge. It is readily apparent that he has kept his oath. Henchard is described by a local as the "celebrated abstaining worthy" and furthermore, a pillar of the town. "He's the powerfulest member of the Town Council, and quite a principal man in the country round besides" (102-3). Henchard, having schooled his selfish and egoistical nature into abeyance, gained wealth and respect, and was making a worthy contribution to the society of Casterbridge. Susan, the wife he sold 18 years earlier, returns and he rights his wrong by courting and marrying her, and is grateful to have his daughter back. At this point it looks as though he has been successful, if not in bringing about the progress of humanity as a whole, at least in making some positive progress with his own nature, channeling his "fleshly" desires into socially acceptable ends.

His passions are strong within him though. The murky side of his nature is not altogether hidden. His "loud laugh" revealed that "its producer's personal goodness, if he had any, would be of a very fitful cast--an occasional almost oppressive generosity rather than a mild and constant kindness" (100).

The intermediate section of the novel deals with the waning of Henchard's star. Events begin to play against him. Henchard's business has grown so successfully that he can no longer deal with it all himself. He hires Donald Farfrae to alleviate some of his burdens. Farfrae is so brilliant in business and attractive to women, especially Henchard's ex-lover, that rather than helping, he is employed in the story slowly to unravel the careful barriers

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Henchard has built in order to keep the ugly side of his nature in check. Henchard sinks into fits of jealousy and greed, alienating those he loves and foolishly gambling away his home and livelihood until the tables are completely turned. Farfrae stands as the bankrupt Henchard's master, living in Henchard's home with Henchard's "what-you-may-call wife" (302). It is clear that Henchard is driven by his passions and acts unreasonably in the circumstances. He alone is to blame for his fall from power and wealth.

At any of the points along the downward slope of Henchard's decline, Hardy could have redeemed him again, perhaps to illustrate Comte's concept of the "looped orbit" of progress, wherein with every two steps forward there occurs one step backwards. Hardy chose rather to release Henchard from his drinking oath (the twenty-one years having expired to the day) and thus further exacerbates Henchard's problems. Henchard continues to sink until, through deceit, he finally alienates the affections of Elizabeth-Jane, the only person left in the world whom he loved. "And thus," writes Hardy,¹

Henchard found himself again on the precise standing which he had occupied a quarter of a century before. Externally there was nothing to hinder his making another start on the upward slope, and by his new lights achieving higher things than his

¹It is argued that the narrative voice which occurs here, and indeed in all of Hardy's fiction is "not that of Hardy the man ... but of an anonymous narrator, representing a dramatized version of Hardy" (Laird 1975: 192). J. Hillis Miller writes: "His goal seems to have been to escape from the dangers of direct involvement in life and to imagine himself in a position where he could safely see life as it is without being seen and could report on that seeing. To protect himself and to play the role of someone who would have unique access to the truth--these motives lie behind Hardy's creation of the narrative voice and point of view which are characteristic of his fiction" (J. Hillis Miller, *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire* [Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1970], pp. 41,43).

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soul in its half-formed state had been able to accomplish. But the ingenious machinery contrived by the Gods for reducing human possibilities of amelioration to a minimum-- which arranges that wisdom to do shall come *pari passu* (without preference) with the departure of zest for doing-- stood in the way of all that (MC: 395).

Hardy vividly illustrates through Henchard that "Character is Fate" (185). There are no avenues for redemption through the Religion of Humanity for the flaws of character Henchard suffered. There is, however, one note of hope at the end of the novel, but it is in the nature of Hardy's style of tragic tradition and not Comtean. In death, Henchard achieves a kind of catharsis or purging of his soul. He dies alone and destitute leaving behind him a will requesting, in essence, that his existence on earth be completely forgotten. It is a tribute to Elizabeth-Jane; a final act of selfless kindness to her. In the words of Martin Seymour-Smith, "Henchard's death is a sacrifice to ensure her achievement of limited but reasonably secure serenity of mind" (58). The Positive hope of the gradual amelioration of humanity does not occur in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, although it could have. Hardy affirms the tenacity of the human spirit in the light of all it must endure, but Positive possibilities do not come to fruition in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* because in Hardy's fictional world there is no room for them to do so.

4.2. *TESS OF THE D'UBERVILLES*

From *The Mayor of Casterbridge* we move on to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and a look at the figure of Angel Clare. Angel is the character in all of Hardy's novels who seems to have progressed furthest in terms of Comte's three stages to embrace a Positive stance. The mixture of Angel's embrace of Positive

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Philosophy and his interaction with the "pure" figure of Tess creates the fuel for the tragic consequences of this novel.

The character of Angel Clare offers a critique of the Comtean view of Christianity. With the exception of Christ, many of the great men and women of the Christian faith are included in the Positivist's Calendar, indicating Comte's admiration for the place of Christianity in history. Clare idealizes medieval times, as Comte did, as a time "when faith was a living thing" (TD: 165). In a discussion with his father about his vocation, Angel gives the following explanation for not taking orders:

I love the Church as one loves a parent. I shall always have the warmest affection for her. There is no institution for whose history I have a deeper admiration, but I cannot honestly be ordained her minister, as my brothers are, while she refuses to liberate her mind from an untenable redemptive thelatry (170).

What Angel finds unacceptable in Christianity is that worship is no longer focused on living issues, but on issues of theological debate. Angel's brothers engage in a worship of theology which removes them from the human concerns around them --the very concerns that Christianity should be addressing.

Again in argument with his father, Angel declares, "My whole instinct in matters of religion is towards reconstruction." Angel's father despairs of being able to send him to university:

"What is the good of your mother and me economizing and stinting ourselves to give you a University education, if it is not to be used for the honour and glory of God?" his father repeated.

"Why, that it may be used for the honour and glory of man, father" (171).

Angel considered himself "wonderfully free from the chronic melancholy which is taking hold of the civilized races with the decline of belief in a beneficent Power" and began to see "something new in life and humanity" (174).

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Angel holds to a belief in the Positivist view of moral progress. He considers it "probable that . . . improved systems of moral and intellectual training would appreciably . . . elevate the involuntary and even the unconscious instincts of human nature" (226). Elements of Positive worship also characterize the relationship between Angel and Tess. Tess is Angel's "Madonna" figure and he worships her idealized essence as Comte worshipped his dead Clotilde. Tess and Angel would meet and walk at daybreak, in the "non-human hours" when,

she impressed him most deeply. She was no longer the milkmaid, but a visionary essence of woman--a whole sex condensed into one typical form. He called her Artemis, Demeter and other fanciful names (187).

In the light of dawn her features were "those of a divinity who could confer bliss" (187). Again on the way to their wedding Tess is described as "a sort of celestial person, who owed her being to poetry--one of those classical divinities Clare was accustomed to talk to her about when they took their walks together" (279).

Tess similarly idealizes her "Angel" (281), but her view of herself was based far more in the "real". She was distinctly uncomfortable with Angel's perception of her. She knew only too well her faults and weaknesses, even before her encounter with Alec d'Urberville, and was aware, although perhaps not in a fully conscious way, of the dangers of this kind of worship. On the morning of her departure to meet Alec, Tess allowed her mother to make her up into an image of beauty. Tess's immediate response to the finished product was, "I declare there's a hole in my stocking-heel!" (89). When Angel called her "fanciful names" in the early morning hours, she would simply reply: "Call me Tess". And in her trepidation and sense of foreboding immediately follow-

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ing her marriage, she whispered a silent prayer to her god, Angel, "O my love, my love, why do I love you so! . . . for she you love is not my real self, but one in my image; the one I might have been". She was afraid that their mutual idolatry "might be too desperate for human conditions--too rank, too wild, too deadly" (281).

It was exactly that. In the course of their wedding night confessions, Angel confessed to an indiscretion with a stranger and was forgiven by Tess. When Tess told of her acquaintance with Alec d'Urberville, however, there was no forgiveness from Angel. Tess's confession had given her "flesh", a real image. To her horror, Angel no longer saw the woman he had loved existing in the form of her body. The sleep-walking scene that follows emphasizes the death of Angel's idealized love (see Pinion 1968: 48). Angel's assumed moral superiority and his idealization of Tess are so extreme that rather than being a means of moral rejuvenation, "his idealisation of Tess actually dehumanizes him"; Angel's adherence to "the rigid ethical code with which he supplants Christianity is seen to narrow rather than broaden his sympathies" (T.R. Wright 1986: 208), and leaves Angel with "not so much heart", an accusation Angel levelled against his overly "churchy" brother Cuthbert (TD: 220).

The couple separate: Tess initially to her parents and Angel to Brazil to set up in farming. Conditions are harsh in Brazil, so much so that Angel's outlook is radically changed. He comes to recognize the injustice of his judgement of Tess.

What arrested him now as of value in life was less its beauty than its pathos. Having long discredited the old systems of mysticism, he now began to discredit the old appraisements of morality . . . Who was the moral man? Still more pertinently, who was the moral woman? The beauty or ugliness of a character lay not only in its achievements, but in its aims

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and impulses; its true history lay, not among things done, but among things willed (421).

With this vaguely Positivist sentiment warming within him, Angel returns to England to find his Tess, but, as Hardy would have it, he is too late. Tess is living in Sandbourne with Alec, having been persuaded to do so by necessity and Alec's contention that Angel would never return to her. Realizing that she had lost Angel again, Tess despairs, and in her despair kills Alec with a knife.

This is the cathartic moment in the tragic plot of this novel. In this deed Tess has both professed her love for Angel and sacrificed herself for that love. By murdering Alec, Tess recovers her self-esteem and self-worth. But she cannot escape the socially determined consequences of her actions. In the face of Tess's sacrifice "tenderness was absolutely dominant in Clare again" (475). In the ruin of the life of Tess, Angel achieves a selflessness, a gaining of consciousness. It is not a result of the schooling of the social instincts over the selfish; it is in light of the stunning tragedy of a life destroyed that there is supplied to the desperate ending of this story an element of hopefulness. The hope derives from the dignified and "pure" manner in which Tess lived and died. It is not a Positive hope, but a hope born of tragedy--that in the wreck of this human life there is that which goes beyond the social and religious mores which have been trespassed by the killing of Alec, and honours the integrity and determination of Tess. Her action was impulsive and tragically wrong, but it was the only way she saw of escaping from the masquerade of her life with d'U^rberville. After a few blissful days in resumption of her marriage with Angel, Tess bravely and unhesitatingly accepts the consequences of her actions. Her

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spirit is a testament to the magnanimity of the human spirit in general.

It could perhaps be argued that in the ending of *Tess* there is a kind of Positivist element of hope. From a summit, Angel and 'Liza-Lu, "a spiritualized image of Tess" (488) watched for the black flag that would indicate Tess' death. When it is over, they "joined hands again, and went on" (489), suggesting that the image of Tess will live on in 'Liza-Lu, as will her best attributes which have now been "purified by death". Thus Tess has achieved a kind of "subjective immortality" through Angel and 'Liza-Lu. Such an interpretation may be too much to ask of this ending though. In the face of Tess's tragic death, Angel and 'Liza-Lu, and Hardy himself, can only be content with the reserved hope that life goes on--not that life goes on to a better end.

4.3. *JUDE THE OBSCURE*

The last of Hardy's novels, *Jude the Obscure*, received a great amount of negative criticism from critics and readers, and consequently led Hardy to feel that he had "lamentably failed" (*Life*: 272) in trying to get his ideas across in this novel. The narrative of *Jude* discusses a wide range of issues, from the cruelties imposed on living creatures by a malevolent universe to the cruelties imposed on living creatures by other living creatures (e.g., rigid marriage laws and an inequitable, inaccessible education system); from the limitations of human possibilities to, I believe, the failure of certain aspects of a Positivist belief structure in a universe which is more complex than the structure allows.

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The reading lists of both Jude and Sue as well as the quotations and expressions of the narrative voice in the novel reveal, says C.H. Sisson, "if nothing more--at least a representative sketch of the furniture of Hardy's own mind" (JO: 21). As with the other novels, we must observe Hardy's words in the Preface to *Jude*. His writings are "simply an endeavour to give shape and coherence to a series of seemings, or personal impressions", not an effort to outline a cohesive philosophy or argument (40). Taking the above into consideration, Hardy uses Comtean terminology in creating both the characters of Sue and Jude, but only to see the incidences of Positivism in the novel would be to misread the book as many of Hardy's contemporary critics did. Seen as a whole, the novel affords a better look at Hardy's specific reaction to Positivism.

Hardy uses the dynamic of the relationship between Jude and Sue as a vehicle for illuminating different aspects of Comte's three stages. Jude and Sue are juxtaposed along the continuum of the three stages. Jude represents an early Theological stage. At the age of sixteen, Jude knelt on a roadside bank and recited Horace's "Carmen Saeculare" to the setting sun and rising moon "under the sway of a polytheistic fancy" (75). He is later described as "full of the superstitions of his beliefs" (183). His high regard for Christminster and the Cathedral also mark him in the Theological stage. Sue, on the other hand, has "progressed" further in intellectual development and is closer to the Positive stage of Comte's scheme.

C.H. Salter agrees that the references to Jude's fetichism are Comtean but argues that Hardy

does not have Comte's law of development through three stages: he does not have the remotest vestige of a "meta-

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physical" stage, and while he cannot be expected to disagree with the definition of the Positive stage . . . he never uses the term in his fiction (Salter 1981: 77-78).

Hardy does not make any references to a "metaphysical" stage in his writing. Hardy does not attempt a complete explication of Positive theory anywhere, particularly in his fiction. He has, however, described the character of Jude Fawley in terms that can be ascribed to the initial Theological stage of Comte's three stages, and has described Sue Bridehead in terms that can be seen as relevant to the Positive stage. In doing so, Hardy sets up a dialectic in the relationship between Jude and Sue, and exposes the weaknesses of both characters.

Sue's dialogue includes terminology and concepts from Comte's three stages. In reference to Christminster, Sue calls it "a place of fetichists and ghost-seers" (JO: 205). Jude admits to his attachment to Christminster and to the fact that he is "spectre-seeing always", whereupon Sue haughtily mocks him, "You are in the Tractarian stage just now, are you not? . . . let me see -- when was I there? -- In the year eighteen hundred and -- " (205-6). In saying "Let me see -- when was I there --", Sue points out that not only is Jude still in the Theological stage by his attachment to an out-dated movement of the church, but that she has progressed beyond such an attachment and is more mature and modern in her beliefs.

As noted earlier Hardy copied from Comte's *Social Dynamics*: "Monotheism . . . always in collision with Intellect"; and, "Science stood still for 15 centuries . . . because of the rise of monotheism" (LNB I: 68). This belief of Comte's in the antipathy between the intellect and Christianity is echoed by Sue. In an argument with Jude she states: "Intellect in Christminster is

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pushing one way, and religion the other; and so they stand stock-still" (JO: 206). Later she describes to Jude how she re-arranged the chapters of her Bible in the proper chronological order, deriding "the four-and-twenty elders, or bishops" who had organized the book originally, including chapter headings which "[explained] away the real nature of the rhapsody" (206). Referring specifically to the Song of Solomon she goes on to insist

that to explain such verses as this: "Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women?" by the note: "The Church profeseth her faith" is supremely ridiculous! . . . I *hate* such humbug as could attempt to plaster over with ecclesiastical abstractions such ecstatic, natural, human love as lies in that great and passionate song! (207)

Sue points out the dichotomy between a theological reading of Solomon's Song and her progressive intellectual reading. From Sue's perspective, the Ecclesiastical interpretation stretches the words to refer back to the Church, when, in reality, the Song of Solomon refers to the primacy and beauty of human love. Ecclesiastical and intellectual readings of Solomon's Song are, for Sue, completely separate and at odds with one another, inciting her to passionate and fervent argument.

Robert Gittings in *Young Thomas Hardy* presents a convincing argument for the idea that although critics of *Jude* in the 1890's considered Sue to be a representative of "the New Woman' of that era",² she was not a woman of the 1890's but a woman of the 1860's. He bases this theory on a number of different aspects of Sue's characterization, including her loss of faith, which is very "typical" of the 1860's. Gittings believes that Sue replaces her

²Robert Gittings, *Young Thomas Hardy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 139.

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faith with the "Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte made fashionable in the 1860's among English intellectuals by Mill's exposition of it in 1840, and Harriet Martineau's . . . in 1850" (Gittings 1975: 140). Women of the 1860's would have been familiar with the works of J.S. Mill, says Gittings, who was then in vogue due to the exposition of his principles in a magazine called *The Englishwoman's Journal*. Sue, who is a "ferocious pedant" (JO: 507) quotes twice from Mill's essay "On Liberty" (286-87). As we have already seen, Sue uses "terms that would be familiar to any reader of Comte" in her religious arguments with Jude (Gittings 1975: 140). As Positivism was virtually dead as a "popular" movement by the 1890's, it was not, as Jude laments to Widow Edlin, that Sue and his ideas "were fifty years too soon to be any good to us" (JO: 482) but that they were 30 years too late.

Jude's enthrallment with Sue contains elements of Positivist worship. In the words of T.R. Wright, Sue is Jude's "Comtean angel" (Wright 1986: 208). She was "more or less an ideal character". He "saw in her almost a divinity" (JO: 139, 199). Having received a photograph of her from his aunt, Jude places it on his mantelpiece and kisses it. He does not know why, but it cheers him to have her "presiding over his tea" and unites him with "the emotions of the living city" (132). These positive effects of Jude's worship of Sue are replaced by disillusionment and finally despair when, contrary to the course of normal human relationships, Jude is never able to have the "real" Sue. Hardy seems to be emphasizing again the dangers of this kind of worship.

Jude engages in the "deadly war waged between flesh and spirit" (39) in which a number of Hardy's other characters are involved. The antagonism between nature and grace, translated

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into Comtean egoism and altruism, is apparent throughout the novel. We meet Jude as a boy with high ideas and desires which are foiled by Arabella, who represents pure egoism. Although Jude is aware intellectually that Arabella is "no vestal", he is completely overcome by his "fresh and wild pleasure" in her. Arabella tricks him into a marriage that ruins his already slim chances of making a life for himself at Christminster. Jude reflects upon the ritual of marriage, which for him has served to cancel "a man's one opportunity of showing himself superior to the lower animals, and of contributing his units of work to the general progress of his generation" (JO: 107).

Jude later recovers and realizes that his early plans to go to Christminster had "no foundation in the nobler instincts", and plans anew to enter the Church as a licentiate, aiming at "the ecclesiastical and altruistic life" (JO: 181). These plans are again thwarted by his strong attraction to Sue, who is basically an egoist, although of a more refined nature than Arabella.

To look at the novel as a whole, the essence of its tragedy derives from the unsustainability of Jude and Sue's "progressive" aims. Here we see Hardy once again questioning the Positivist assumption of the inevitability of human progress over time. This hope in humanity is an inextricable part of the Victorian *Zeitgeist* and not the sole claim of Auguste Comte, but in *Jude* Hardy can be seen to be attacking the premises upon which Comte based his idea of progress.

In his *General View of Positivism*, Comte makes humanity out as "the arbiter, within certain limits, of its destiny":

Accepting the truths of science, [Positivism] teaches that we

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must look to our own unremitting activity for the only providence by which the rigour of our destiny can be alleviated.³

In the life of Jude we see this idea being destroyed. Jude's destiny is indeed rigorous. For all of his hopes and intentions, Jude is thwarted by the people and events of his life. The reader develops a sympathy for the character of Jude. Indeed, in the words of W.D. Howells,

the character of Jude himself is, in spite of all his weakness and debasement, one of inviolable dignity. He is the sport of Fate, but he is never otherwise than sublime; he suffers more for others than for himself.⁴

Nevertheless, there is a power beyond him that works against him. Beside Jude's basic lack of material resources, into his path are thrown the obstacles of Arabella, Sue, his rejection by the dons at Christminster, his rejection by the members of the Artizan's Mutual Improvement Society, the deaths of his children, and finally the desertion of Sue. For Hardy, unlike Comte, there is always a force in the universe, malevolent or not, and it is against this force that Jude can make no progress, despite his "unremitting activity". Jude commits suicide, in effect, by going to Sue for the last time in the rain. Sue refuses his supplications to return to him and at this point in the novel, Jude finally realizes that "All . . . has been spoilt for me by the grind of stern reality" (JO: 473). With no hopes to sustain him, Jude lets his life flow out of him and dies alone.

In the case of Sue, the tragedy of her life is not brought about so much by forces outside, but by the powerful emotions that

³Auguste Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, J.H. Bridges, trans. (New York: Robert Speller and Sons, 1957), pp. 33, 392.

⁴W.D. Howells, "Pleasure from Tragedy", *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, R.G. Cox, ed. (London: Routledge and Paul, 1970), p.254.

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run rampant within her. Sue is similar to Angel Clare in that their failure as persons involved too dogmatic a grip on logical assumptions while ignoring the personal realities around them. This does not necessarily provide a critique of Positivism (although Hardy was not uncritical of Comte in this area) so much as it questions too singular an adherence to any one philosophy.

Sue pays lip-service to her desire for human development. She intellectually assents to the concept, but myopically achieves exactly the opposite. Her relationship with Jude was not one of personal desire and passion. She longed "to ennoble some man to high aims" (207) and that man was Jude. Ignoring Jude's growing passions and her own feelings, Sue marries the middle-aged Phillotson, causing Jude considerable turmoil as he attempts to "mortify by every possible means his wish to see her, nearly starving himself in attempts to extinguish by fasting his passion-ate tendency to love her" (250).

Only a few chapters later, Sue recants and leaves Phillotson to live with Jude. She is not concerned with the lack of respectability of the act, but wants only to "produce 'Human development in its richest diversity'. . . [which] is to my mind far above respectability" (287). Phillotson is destroyed both personally and professionally by her desertion. She ^{never marries Jude, but} _{lives with him} until after the suicide/murder of Father Time and her children. Then, caught up in the fervour of a new-found religious conviction, she leaves Jude and returns to Phillotson despite her feelings of aversion towards the man, almost as a means of self-flagellation. In doing this Sue ennobles neither herself nor either man to "higher aims", but rather destroys any hope of a "normal" life for all concerned. Phillotson is further

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demoralized by living with a woman who can not stand the sight of him and Jude "kills himself in defiance of a life made empty by Sue's apostasy."⁵

It is clear that in pursuing the idea of human development, Sue has achieved something very different from the Positive ideal. Her attempts result in a state of pointless and destructive vacillation, with no progress achieved for anyone.

Unlike Angel, Sue never reaches a point of self-awareness and release. The novel has no cathartic action which brings a significant moment of consciousness for either Jude or Sue. The separation of Sue's intellect and heart cries out for some Comtean "synthesis", but finds none.

It would also appear that in the characters of Angel and Sue, Hardy is challenging Comte's premise that in the process of human progress moral development goes hand-in-hand with intellectual development. With Angel and Sue the opposite is clearly the case. Hardy's caveat to his readers is that human beings are far more complex emotionally and intellectually than Comte's Philosophy allows. Despite good intentions and logical thinking Angel, and especially Sue, are tossed like ships on the stormy sea of their human emotions and are not capable of bringing about their own advance -- or the improvement of the human lot -- in any way.

Dale Kramer, in his book *The Forms of Tragedy*, writes that Hardy's last novels

affirm that life is lived in uncertainty. Powerful forces on all sides -- and within the individual -- present challenges whose fearsomeness depends in part upon the impossibility that the individual can know the ultimate worthiness of his

⁵Dale Kramer, *Thomas Hardy: The Forms of Tragedy* (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 15-16.

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antagonists, or indeed himself or his own values (Kramer 1975: 164-5).

Comte is much more certain about the capacity of individuals to know and respond positively to their milieu. There is no echo of that in the novels of Thomas Hardy. Rather, we see a subject humanity struggling against circumstances that they do not understand and do not necessarily deserve. Hardy's writings celebrate the struggle; they celebrate the human spirit's tenacity under crushing circumstances. Hardy's major tragic figures exemplify a kind of fortitude that allows them to rise, if only momentarily, above "Destruction's strength" (Shelley; Shephard 1888: 422); a kind of fortitude necessary for life in Hardy's fictional world.

5. THE DYNASTS

Hardy considered writing *The Dynasts* for a substantial number of years. His interest in the Napoleonic Era grew from one of an historic nature in his early years to a poetic nature as he matured. Raman Selden, following Aristotle, describes the difference between the historian and the poet in this way:

. . . one describes the thing that has been and the other a kind of thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars.¹

The events of *The Dynasts* are based directly on historical accounts of the Napoleonic Wars, but Hardy soon realized that his writing about them could not be contained within their historicity. He saw the history of the human race in the arena of human experience represented by the events of the Great War, and he saw it as primarily tragic.

In terms of form, Hardy drew upon his reading of Greek tragedy. Hardy's Phantom Overworld and the Greek chorus have in common their position as intermediaries between the human world and the world of the gods, or in Hardy's case, the Immanent Will. Whereas Greek gods intervene directly in the lives of their human subjects and are knowable and accessible, the Immanent Will is portrayed as distant, uncaring, and unknowing as well as unknowable. Hardy's spirits observe a human puppet show. Humanity is, like Prometheus, bound and alone, moving in foreordained circles,

¹Raman Selden, *The Theory of Criticism from Plato to the Present* (London: Longman, 1988), p. 49-50.

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but exhibiting, in spite of all, a resilience of spirit which is the heart of Hardy's tragic vision. Humanity is the tragic hero of this drama, rather than Napoleon, who remains an egoist throughout.

The Spirit of the Pities is the primary embodiment of a Positive viewpoint in this drama. It argues for compassion and intercession on behalf of the suffering human creatures they observe, and holds a belief in the gradual moral progress of humanity, in Comtean terms. After an initial section on the origins of *The Dynasts* this chapter will focus on the debate carried on between the Spirit of the Pities and the other Intelligences, most prominently the Spirit of the Years. The Spirit of the Pities argues passionately, but not ultimately convincingly, that there is cause for hope in the human condition. Even though the Pities have the final word, Hardy so poignantly portrays the gruesome tragedy of the human being throughout that the Pities' conclusion reflects an undeniable shallowness. Hardy appears to argue for a Positivist answer for humanity's sufferings, but what comes across to the reader in the end is Hardy's inevitable tragic vision.

5.1. GENESIS

Hardy's fascination with the Napoleonic Era began long before the actual writing of his epic drama, *The Dynasts*, in 1898. The genesis of *The Dynasts* was in Hardy's boyhood at the knee of his grandfather and others, men of the rank and file who had fought in the Peninsula or at Waterloo. War stories turned to legends, aided by Hardy's reading of his grandfather's copies of "A History

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of the Wars", a magazine about the Napoleonic Wars, and eventually led to the creation of *The Trumpet Major* and *The Dynasts* (EL: 21). Boyhood imagination and enthusiasm about the subject matured to what Walter Wright, in his book *The Shaping of The Dynasts*, calls a "semischolarly antiquarian curiosity",² as Hardy's interest in specific incidents grew. Hardy began to see beyond the actual historicity of the events of the war to the story they had to tell about the history of the human race in general. "Fact and philosophical belief were to emerge together in Hardy's consciousness as he strove to interpret the wars of Britain and Napoleon" (W. Wright 1967: 99).

Notations in Hardy's library books, in his "Book of Observations", and in letters begin emerging in 1865 regarding his interest in the Napoleonic Wars. He wrote to his sister Mary in October 1865 about the death of Lord Palmerston, War Secretary during the latter years of the Napoleonic Wars. He describes to Mary the placement of Palmerston's grave "between Pitt's and Fox's" (EL: 68), showing his keen interest in the great men who led Britain into the War.

By 1868 it is clear that Hardy was developing a good general knowledge of French History and the French Revolution (W. Wright 1967: 99-100). But Hardy wanted more than mere facts about the battles of the War, and in 1870 he visited veterans of the Battle of Waterloo in the Chelsea Hospital for the first time. He made subsequent trips in 1875, 1876 and 1878, usually on Waterloo Day (EL: 103, 139, 146, 161). He began to glean impressions, remini-

²Walter F. Wright, *The Shaping of the Dynasts* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), p. 98.

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scences and personal anecdotes about camp life, listening to the Battle of Waterloo fought again and again in the minds of the old soldiers. He was to use these gleanings masterfully in *The Dynasts* as the ground work for his rich descriptions of the major battles, and the pathetic state of human beings caught up in events beyond their control.

Emma Hardy, Hardy's first wife, wrote her "Diary of a Journey to Holland" as a detailed account of Hardy's interest in the actual places of the War during their trips in September 1874 and June 1876. On the first trip, Mrs. Hardy noted her husband's interest in Napoleon's tomb, the Tuileries and St. Cloud (W. Wright 1967: 101). During the second trip, the Hardys visited Waterloo, partaking in a guided tour of the battle site and a visit to the museum. They also attempted unsuccessfully to ascertain the exact location of the Duchess of Richmond's house, the venue for a grand ball the night before the Battle of Waterloo. Again, Hardy was not looking for facts, but gathering sensory data, feelings and images that later would aid him in realizing his epic.

He continued collecting impressions, data and personal stories between 1882 - 1886. July 1886 finds this record in his biography: "the remainder of his spare time in London this year appears to have been spent in the British Museum Library and elsewhere, considering the question of *The Dynasts*" (EL: 240). The form that all his gathered information was to take was further explored in a notation on 4 March 1886.

The human race to be shown as one great network or tissue which quivers in every part when one part is shaken, like a spider's web when touched. Abstract realisms to be in the form of Spirits, Spectral figures, etc (EL: 232).

The image of the world functioning as a web, where the force of

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human actions and interactions cause a quivering, rippling effect on the whole world, humanity and nature combined, emphasizes the interconnectedness of Hardy's world. From a Comtean perspective, this interconnectedness or unity would be inherently hopeful, the reverberations working to the good and for the progress of the human race as a whole. For Hardy, the thread that bonds human and animal existence is one of suffering, and the reverberations send shock waves of pain throughout the natural world.

In March or April of 1890, Hardy wrote:

Altruism, or The Golden Rule, or whatever "love your neighbour as Yourself" may be called, will ultimately be brought about 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 (EL: 294).

This indicates that Hardy too held some belief in a hopeful outcome for the sufferings of humanity, but the process would not be an easy one. In *The Dynasts* the image of the "web" is transposed into one of a vast "nervous system". In the Fore Scene, the peoples and countries of Europe are illuminated:

A new and penetrating light descends on the spectacle, enduing men and things with a seeming transparency, and exhibiting as one organism the anatomy of life and movement in all humanity and vitalized matter included in the display (DYN: 27-28).

In Part First, this scene is repeated and further describes the workings of the system:

. . . a preternatural clearness possesses the atmosphere of the battle-field, in which the scene becomes anatomized and the living masses of humanity transparent. The controlling Immanent Will appears therein, as a brain-like network of currents and ejections, twitching, interpenetrating, entangling, and thrusting hither and thither the human forms. (DYN: 172)

This view of the inter-workings of humanity is clearly a frightening one, and one which causes the Pities great anguish.

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Humanity is blind to the fact that it is controlled by the "pulses of the Cause." People are puppets who only "dream / Their motions free, their orderings supreme" (DYN: 28), and therein lies the tragedy of their existence.

Hardy's use of the term "altruism" in his notation in March or April of 1890 is significant in linking his thoughts with Comte's philosophy. Altruism is the key to the Comtean hope for humanity. Hardy expresses the hope that altruism will eventually come about as humanity educates itself, so to speak, in viewing and reacting to the pain of others in the world. Hardy links the idea of pain with the development of altruism, distinguishing his thoughts from Comte's Positive Philosophy. For Comte, the transition from egoism to altruism is a natural and "happy" one. Hardy, and many of his contemporaries (Stephen, Mill, Huxley and Spencer), saw the egoistic nature of humanity as being far more persistent. Virginia Hyman in *Ethical Perspective in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* writes:

Since altruism required giving up one's selfish desires, it required the necessary sacrifice of hopes for personal happiness. Unlike Comte, the later English ethical evolutionists believed that you cannot be both selfless and happy (Hyman 1975: 23-22).

This is borne out in Hardy's writings in such characters as Tess, Michael Henchard and Giles Winterborne, who each progress to a pinnacle of selflessness, and then die. In *The Dynasts* Admiral Nelson meets such a fate after exhibiting a selfless heroism and patriotism on the deck of the "Victory".

Hardy's notebooks remain silent on the subject of *The Dynasts* until October 1896 when he returned to the site of the Battle of Waterloo during a holiday with Emma, his first wife. At the time of his visit, the title for the drama was the following: "Europe

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in Throes. Three Parts. Five Acts each. Characters: Burke, Pitt, Napoleon, George III, Wellington ... and many others" (LY: 57). His comments on viewing the actual location of the battle point out the ironic nature of the difference of the scene to him then as opposed to during the time of the battle.

To Field of Waterloo. Walked alone from the English line along the Charleroi Road to 'La Belle Alliance'. Struck with the nearness of the French and English lines to each other. Shepherds with their flocks and dogs, men ploughing, two cats and myself, the only living creatures on the field (LY: 57).

This contrast between the peaceful field as Hardy saw it and the bloody one that his research was uncovering inspired Hardy to write what Walter Wright considers one of the most celebrated passages in *The Dynasts* (Wright 1967: 266). The Chorus of the Years describes the upcoming destruction of the small inhabitants of the field, emphasizing again the interconnectedness of all creatures in the "great web of human doings". We will look at this passage in more depth later in this chapter.

There is, relatively, silence regarding *The Dynasts* until Hardy began writing Part First in 1902. It is apparent at this point that Hardy had clearly identified the period of time, the focal personages and the form that his unwritten work was to take. He also understood that this work would be a significant personal challenge, different than anything he had attempted before.

It is quite clear, therefore, that the writing of *The Dynasts* was not just a whim. The gestation period of what Hardy considered to be "his greatest work"³ spanned his creative lifetime. He was driven to put an order to the collected impressions of his childhood, the gleanings of his historical and philo-

³See Harold Orel's Introduction to *The Dynasts*, p. viii.

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sophical readings and to the discoveries from his trips abroad and from his discussions with veterans of the War. In his Preface to *The Dynasts*, Hardy admits that *The Trumpet Major*, completed some 20 years earlier was "the first published result of these accidents", but it left him hugely unsatisfied.

I found myself in the tantalizing position of having touched the fringe of a vast international tragedy without being able, through limits of plan, knowledge and opportunity to enter into its events. (DYN: 3)

Hardy felt that he had something to add to the telling of the Napoleonic Wars, particularly in light of the fact that little attention had been paid to the significance of Britain's role in the conflict by continental writers on the subject.

Most significant, at least for our purposes, is that Hardy finally wanted a stage or medium for the further exploration of his philosophical wanderings. He had been criticised and frustrated in his attempts to do so in *Tess* and *Jude*, and consequently felt that he had reached the limits of his novel writing career. He chose to put a "vast international tragedy" on an even vaster canvas of ethereal spectres, viewing from an Overworld a writhing and tormented terrestrial ball. This left him immense scope for promoting his controversial ideas about an uncaring Immanent Will.

More subtly, he explores the possibilities of Positivism in *The Dynasts*. It is a strain that runs throughout the work and climaxes in the final chorus of the Pities with the Immanent Will gaining "consciousness" or human kindness as a result of the same happening in humanity itself.

As with the novels, Hardy's intentions must be clearly noted from the outset. He was not a systematician and he did not pro-

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pose to outline a consistent philosophy in his work. In his Preface to *The Dynasts*, Hardy explains that the doctrines of the Spirits or Intelligences

are but tentative, and are advanced with little eye to a clear metaphysic, or systematized philosophy warranted to lift "the burthen of the mystery" of this unintelligible world. The chief thing hoped for them is that they and their utterances may have dramatic plausibility enough to procure for them, in the words of Coleridge, "that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith" (DYN: 5).

If such was Hardy's intention, it remains to consider whether or not *The Dynasts* succeeds in leading the reader to that moment of the "willing suspension of disbelief". In looking at the work with Comtean Positivist glasses, so to speak, one finds that Hardy does not justify the hopeful, and in certain senses, Positivist ending of *The Dynasts* by what has gone before it. The hopeful ending seems out of step with the bloody, tragic battle scenes and the descriptions of human puppets motivated by a thoughtless Will that precede it. The remainder of this chapter will look more closely at this dichotomy.

5.2. THE POSITIVE SUBSTANCE

Of particular interest in the following pages is Hardy's development of a Positivist viewpoint throughout the work, embodied in the Spirit of the Pities. The fact that *The Dynasts* was written after the turn of the century makes it unique in that Hardy wrote it at a time when all but the most stoutly naive of souls had given up the hope that humanity was in the process of perfecting itself.

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The action of *The Dynasts* is viewed through the eyes of an intermediary Overworld. The Spirits of this Overworld comment continually on both the nature and the designs of the Immanent Will, and the frailty and helplessness of the human world, and they carry on the philosophical debates that accompany the action of the drama. Hardy uses the Spirits to clash and contrast with each other. The Spirits, "who themselves are automata in the mind of the sleeping 'It' or Immanent Will, discuss the affairs of men, mere puppets in the Universal view of the Spirits" (Gittings 1978: 156). They are commentators on the events they observe below them, functioning in the same capacity as a Greek chorus.

They debate the central issue of the epic-drama, that of determinism or necessity versus free will. The Spirit of the Years argues for an automated, mechanized, wholly determined Universe, while some of the other Spirits, notably the Spirit of the Pities, plead the cause of a humanity that, at the very least, has free will enough to feel and bleed. Throughout the work, the Spirit of the Years holds to its view of an uncaring Immanent Will and a mechanized humanity despite the arguments presented by the sensitive and passionate Spirit of the Pities. The Spirit of the Pities and its choruses represent youth, hope and compassion. In his Preface, Hardy refers to the Pities as "the Universal Sympathy of human nature" (DYN: 5). The Years call the Pities "Sprite of Compassions" (DYN: 39). In the Fore Scene, the Spirit of the Pities is asked to describe the attributes of the person it would like to substitute for Napoleon in leading the events on the world below, supposing that the Pities had such power. The Chorus of the Pities answers:

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We would establish those of kindlier build,
In fair Compassions skilled,
Men of deep art in life-development;
.....
Those, too, who love the true, the excellent,
And make their daily moves a melody (DYN: 23-24).

This is by far the most optimistic picture of humanity presented in the drama, even if it is merely a wish of the Spirit of the Pities. The desire for human beings who are inherently kind and compassionate, and who have a mastery of "deep art in life-development" rather than destruction, emulates the Comtean vision for humanity. The Pities hold this hope from the beginning of *The Dynasts* to the end, from which they are not deterred. They believe that rather than being mere puppetry, humanity feels and "bleeds" and that "each has parcel in the total Will" (DYN: 24). As such, humanity can effect the Will, even to the point of bringing It to a consciousness of Its workings in the human world. The Pities' hope in the modifiability of the human spirit, leaving aside its influence on the Immanent Will, is specifically Comtean and central to the Religion of Humanity.

In the Fore Scene, the Pities acknowledge the accepted attributes of the Immanent Will:

Still thus? Still thus?
Ever unconscious!
An automatic sense
Unweeting why or whence?
Be, then, the inevitable, as of old,
Although that so it be we dare not hold! (DYN: 21)

The Pities are not content to leave the matter alone, however, and quickly add that though the Will has been unconscious heretofore, perhaps that is not the way it will always be.

Meet is it, none the less,
To bear in thought that though Its consciousness
May be estranged, engrossed afar, or sealed,
Sublunar shocks may wake Its watch anon? (DYN: 22)

"Sublunar shocks" refer to the acts of humanity that are soon to

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play upon the stage of this drama. The Pities hope, as does Hardy, that the immense tragedies of the War will shock to consciousness the Will, who is described as "a knitter drowsed, / Whose fingers play in skilled unmindfulness" (DYN: 22). As the drama continues, so does the debate between the Spirit of the Years and the Spirit of the Pities. At the death of Admiral Nelson the Pities complain of the cruelty and needlessness of his slow demise. That "shapes whom . . . Necessitation sways" should feel pain is a gross injustice:

Things mechanized
By coils and pivots set to foreframed codes
Would, in a thorough-sphered melodic rule,
And governance of sweet consistency,
Be cessed no pain, whose burnings would abide
With that which holds responsibility,
Or inexist (DYN: 147).

The Chorus of the Pities then cries for the "Mover" to pay, if indeed it is responsible for humanity's actions, not humanity itself. The Spirit of the Years replies,

Nay, blame not! For what judgement can ye blame?--
In that immense unweeing Mind is shown
One far above forethinking; processive,
Rapt, superconscious; a Clairvoyancy
That knows not what It knows, yet works therewith (DYN: 147).

In essence, the Spirit of the Years claims that Chance is to blame for the sufferings of the human world. The Will knows not what it does.⁴

As the pathos of the drama escalates, the Pities are found longing to pray to "some Great Heart" in the hopes that it "haply may / Charm mortal miseries away!" (DYN: 416-17) This bears a resemblance to the Positivist object of worship, the Great Being.

⁴See further discussions of the same nature between the Spirit of the Years and the Spirit of the Pities, pp. 171-172; 195-196; and 344-46.

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The Great Being includes "the beings, past, future and present, which co-operate willingly in perfecting the order of the world" (*System IV*: 27). With the Positivists, the Pities look for some movement afloat which will bring an end to the cruelty and chaos they observe.

Continuing on, after the death of the King of England, rumours of and speculations about a bloody struggle between Russia and France become rife. The Spirit of the Years adds what it knows to the accumulated knowledge of the British by whispering in Perceval's ear a confirmation of the spectacle to come on the continent. To the Pities' lament over the new cross that humanity will have to bear in the form of the war to come, the Years responds by reiterating the immutable nature of the Will:

No less through regal puppet-shows
The rapt Determinator throes,
That neither good nor evil knows!

The ever-optimistic Pities reply:

Yet It may wake and understand
Ere Earth unshape, know all things, and
With knowledge use a painless hand,
A painless hand! (*DYN*: 437)

That knowledge plays a role in turning the Immanent Will's consciousness to the plight of humanity, and consequently in changing its nature from uncaring to caring, has parallels in the Positivist's hope for humanity itself. As we have previously seen, the Positivist ideal is for humanity, individually and collectively, to progress intellectually along the three stages of development, from the Theological to the Metaphysical and finally to the Positive. It was assumed that in the Positive stage humanity would come to a true understanding of its own nature, which would lead it into a state of moral and social harmony. The

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Positivists did not consider, however, that the opposite might happen. As Napoleon nears the apex of his pompousness and tyranny, the Chorus of the Ironic Spirits muse on the Will being influenced not by the good and compassionate side of humanity, but by the evil and self-seeking side.

The Will Itself is slave to him,
And holds it blissful to obey!--
He said, "Go to; it is my whim

"To bed a bride without delay,
Who shall unite my dull new name
With one that shone in Caesar's day.

"She must conceive--you hear my claim?--
And bear a son--no daughter, mind--
Who shall hand on my form and fame

"To future times as I have designed;
And at the birth throughout the land
Must cannon roar and alp-horns wind!"

The Will grew conscious at command,
And ordered issue as he planned (DYN: 406).

It is interesting to note here that Hardy considers both the good and the evil side of human nature. His concept of humanity was not limited, as was the Positivists', to viewing only the pure and best qualities of human nature. Hardy saw the seamy side as well.

Hardy concludes *The Dynasts* on what is for him an uncharacteristically optimistic note, with the Immanent Will gaining "consciousness" as it observes the same taking place in humanity as a whole. The triumph of "altruism" (represented by the masses of humanity, the British army together with the Allies) finally defeating the arch-egoist (Napoleon) is a derivative of Comtean Positivism, but the manner in which this takes place is uniquely Hardy's.

The Spirit of the Pities presents two arguments for its belief in the Will being "great and good". In the first instance,

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the Spirit of the Pities argues that "Men gained cognition with the flux of time, / And wherefore not the Force informing them."

A Semichorus of the Pities argues further:

Yea, Great and Good, Thee, Thee we hail,
Who shak'st the strong, Who shield'st the frail,
Who hadst not shaped such souls as we
If tendermercy lacked in Thee! (DYN: 703)

The Semichoruses of the Pities then launch into what T.R. Wright terms "a kind of Magnificat to the Will" (T.R. Wright 1986: 217), ending with the final, triumphant stanza:

Exultant adoration give
The Alone, through Whom all living live,
The Alone, in Whom all dying die,
Whose means the End shall justify! Amen (DYN: 704).

The Spirit of the Pities then adds that it shall evermore sing so, despite the efforts of the Spirit of the Years to convince it otherwise. The Spirit of the Years and its Choruses make one final attempt to reason with the Pities, but the latter have the final word:

But--a stirring thrills the air
Like to sounds of joyance there
That the rages
Of the ages
Shall be cancelled, and deliverance offered from the
darts that were,
Consciousness the Will informing, till It fashion all
things fair! (DYN: 707)

Hardy claimed this ending as uniquely his own. In a letter to Edward Wright, 2 June 1907, he wrote:

That the Unconscious Will of the Universe is growing aware of Itself I believe I may claim as my own idea solely--at which I arrived by reflecting that what has already taken place in fractions of the Whole (i.e., so much of the world as has become conscious) is likely to take place in the Mass; and there being no Will outside the Mass--that is, the Universe--the whole Will becomes conscious thereby; and ultimately, it is to be hoped, sympathetic (CL III: 255-56).

The idea of the Will being, in actuality, the mass conglomeration

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of individuals possessing the highest human qualities is very similar to the Comtean concept of the Great Being.

5.3 THE IMPLICATIONS

Throughout all of his works, Hardy's strength is his ability to delineate the injustice, cruelty and tragedy inherent in the life of the common, ordinary person. Much as Hardy looked for some "blessed Hope, where of he knew / And I was unaware", he remained unconvinced that there was reason for much optimism. While writing *The Dynasts*, Hardy was able to maintain his faith in the Victorian idea that a slow, but steady progress is inevitable in the process of history as a whole, but he was to find that belief unsustainable in the face of the events of 1914. Hence he renounced the ending of *The Dynasts* just a few years after its publication. It is recorded in *Later Years* that "[Hardy] would probably not have ended *The Dynasts* as he did end it if he could have foreseen what was going to happen within a few years" (LY: 165).

Early critics noted that when Hardy moved into the realm of the philosophical, his verse suffered. Hardy was vexed by A.B. Walkley's unsigned review in the *Times Literary Supplement* (15 January 1904), and commented in a letter to Frederic Harrison (16 January 1904; CL III: 98): ". . . the Positive view of the Universe in the book being the unforgivable sin, and, according to the critic's absurd theory, destructive to poetry!" This indicates not only that A.B. Walkley saw the Positivist influence in *The Dynasts*, but also that the influence was the reason for the poor quality of some of the verse. This sentiment is echoed in

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another unsigned review in the *Edinburgh Review* (April 1908, CCVII, p. 421; see Cox 1970: 371-385). The critic writes that the influence of "Mr. Hardy's philosophic theories . . . is chiefly negative", and later rather caustically adds, again in reference to Hardy's philosophical views: "Naturally enough there is not the intoxication of poetry in a hogshead of this watery philosophy." Similarly, John Buchan (*Spectator*, 20 February 1904, p. 292; see Cox 1970: 341-344) praises the "epic grandeur" of the overall conception of *The Dynasts*, but felt that in the execution "Hardy's reach must be held to exceed his grasp." The "constant harping" of the various Spirits on matters philosophical led Hardy into "the very worst lyrics and the most turgid meditations."

Perhaps it is that the allegiance of Hardy's heart is revealed in his writing. That he is not able to convince his readers ultimately of the progress of humanity towards consciousness and loving-kindness is indicative of his own convictions. The conclusion to *The Dynasts* seems unsustainable given the nature of the characters and events that precede it in the drama.

In terms of artistic cohesion, the After Word hardly seems the place for Hardy to use the Spirit of the Pities to argue that humanity has grown in its consciousness and loving-kindness, and is consequently influencing the Immanent Will along the same lines, in light of the madness and destructiveness which is the substance of this drama. In the primary human character, Napoleon, Hardy leaves no room for even a glimmer of hope of consciousness or awareness. His monomaniacal obsessions and disregard for human life in relation to his own ambitions are even more appalling in light of the fact that he never takes responsi-

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bility for his actions, blaming rather the forces at work in the universe which drive him. The ultimately cowardly act of walking away from the Battle of Waterloo into a peaceful exile after he had been the cause of such a vast loss of human life finally leaves the reader with a perception that a grave injustice has been done in the world for which there is no remedy.

The exception to this is found in some of the military officers who show courage, compassion and integrity in carrying out their parts in the drama. Such figures as Wellington, Fox, Pitt and Ney, along with the men who fought at their sides, display bravery and tenacity in the midst of the chaos of the battlefield. They are overrun as individuals by the universal course of events. Nevertheless, they assert themselves as free human beings in their determination "neither to change, nor falter, nor repent" (Shelley; Shephard 1888: 422).

Rather, where Hardy is at his best, and consequently where the reader enters into *The Dynasts* as a drama and "suspends disbelief", is in the vivid descriptions of the battles and the pathos that followed. After the Battle of Austerlitz, the scene is described in an evocative stanza:

But mark that roar--
A mash of men's crazed cries entreating mates
To run them through and end their agony;
Boys calling on their mothers, veterans
Blaspheming God and man. Those shady shapes
Are horses, maimed in myriads, tearing round
In maddening pangs, the harnessings they wear
Clanking discordant jingles as they tear! (DYN: 468)

Hardy effectively arouses a vision of horror at the senseless brutality of the battle with the powerful images of men wanting to die rather than endure any more of the pain that has been inflicted on them, and boys pathetically calling out for their

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mothers who are too far distant to hear. The double and inner alliteration and the rhyme of the last lines cause the images to flow and reveal Hardy's art at its best. "Those shady shapes / Are horses, maimed in myriads, tearing round / In maddening pangs." These lines focus attention on the suffering of innocent animals, and in doing so emphasize the tragic injustice of war.

The most poignant of all descriptions immediately precedes the account of the Battle of Waterloo. The Chorus of the Years, even from its lofty viewpoint, is aware of the sufferings in store for the minute and innocent participants in the battle to come.

Yea, the coneys are scared by the thud of hoofs,
And their white scuts flash at their vanishing heels,
And swallows abandon the hamlet-roofs.

The mole's tunnelled chambers are crushed by wheels,
The lark's eggs scattered, their owners fled;
And the hedgehog's household the sapper unseals.

The snail draws in at the terrible tread,
But in vain; he is crushed by the fellow-rim;
The worm asks what can be overhead,

And wriggles deep from a scene so grim,
And guesses him safe; for he does not know
What a foul red rain will be soaking him!

Beaten about by the heel and toe
Are butterflies, sick of the day's long rheum,
To die of a worse than the weather-foe.

Trodden and bruised to a miry tomb
Are ears that greened but will never be gold,
And flowers in the bud that will never bloom. (DYN: 651)

Rather than detailing the strategies of the actual battle to come, Hardy describes the effect on the innocents of Nature. He effectively dons the mantle of the poet as opposed to the historian, and causes the reader to enter into the tragedy of the event in a more emotive way than a strictly historical perspective would allow. This view of the battle also emphasizes the "web" image of the connectedness of the human and natural world, the one inevi-

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tably effecting the other. Most of Hardy's readers would not have experienced the confusion and pathos of a battlefield, but all would know the pleasure of a walk through an open field, observing coney, swallows, moles, larks, snails, worms, butterflies and flowers "in the bud". The destruction of such a peaceful environment brings the reader fully into contact with the implications of war.

The images developed in this passage suggest the truly tragic nature of *The Dynasts*: individuals caught up in the necessity of the forces of the universe, while at the same time feeling, bleeding and suffering. It is humanity as a whole which can be called the tragic hero of this epic-drama, because in the midst of all the senseless suffering there are those who exhibit resiliency of spirit, in spite of all. There is hope, not of a cheerful and assured ending as Positivism would allow, but in the individual suffering, and doing so with dignity, determination and endurance, and in his or her suffering affirming the tenacity of the human spirit.

In attempting to offer a Positivist position in his drama, Hardy actually denies the same. His tragic verse crushes the facile optimism of Positivism and transcends the bounds of the Positive belief structure. The emotion, passion, power and connectedness of Hardy's successful poetry reveal that his vision extends beyond the rather circumspect and happy view of humanity that Positivism embodies. It is a vision of a humanity which suffers grievously, but at its best, with "Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom and Endurance" (Shelley; Shephard 1888: 422).

6. THOMAS HARDY: A DARKLING POET

In the many contradictions and variations, we see an essentially simple, humble mind seeking for the light; sometimes by examining trifles, sometimes by speculations on a cosmic scale, but in either case, seldom able to rest for long in any conviction and making poetry out of this inability.¹

Thomas Hardy's 941 poems² weave through the various intellectual and emotional phases of their author's life: dabbling with a sense of reverent cynicism at traditional, Christian concepts of God, perceiving intimately and accurately the complex intricacies of human nature and the natural world, sniping at the folly of, at best a bumbling and at worst a cruel, Prime Mover, hoping against hope for a certain "positive gleam" (CP: 328) to illuminate the darkness, and ultimately despairing both at humanity's condition and humanity's impercipient.

Hardy was a seeker, not a systematician. In terms of influences, he had many; in terms of commitment to ideologies, he had none. Where there are moments of hope in the pervading gloom of Hardy's work and philosophy, the hope is of a Positive nature. There are faint gleamings of belief in a more enlightened and caring humanity, which Hardy occasionally attempts to fan to flame, but ultimately he finds fault and despairs. His poetry, more than his novels and *The Dynasts*, reveals the courses of his emotional and intellectual life. Hardy himself asserted that

¹Kenneth Marsden, *The Poems of Thomas Hardy: A Critical Introduction* (London: Athlone Press, 1969), p. 81.

²According to F.B. Pinion, there are 918 poems in the eight published volumes of Hardy's poetry, plus an additional 23 which remained uncollected until recently; F.B. Pinion, *A Commentary on the Poems of Thomas Hardy* (London: Macmillan Press, 1976), p. xi.

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"there was more autobiography in a hundred lines of his poetry than in all his novels" (*Life*: 392).³

The strength of Hardy's poetry lies in his ability to perceive, indeed his persistence in perceiving, the world around him. Hardy observed and recorded. Unlike Comte, Hardy's world view is not limited to physical and natural details as ends in themselves, but as particulars with universal significance. Comte denied metaphysics, but Hardy could not. Hardy's poetry leaves us with both a vivid account of rural Wessex life and a penetrating account of his search for a creed sufficient to replace the Christianity of his childhood. Throughout his life Hardy remained deeply religious even though developments in "Queen Science" destroyed his belief structure. His was the tragedy of the Victorian doubter, caught between an extinguished creed and an impenetrable gloom. Hardy considered Positivism against this background in an attempt to see a pathway through, and his poetry reflects it.

It is the purpose of this chapter to look at the specific instances of Comtean Positivism in Hardy's poetry, with the question in mind: does Hardy here too, in the poetic genre, find Positive Philosophy wanting? In his poetry, Hardy's vision extends beyond the necessary limitations of Comte's world. For Comte, humanity is a self-contained unit, acting and reacting within itself to achieve progress through the pursuit of moral happiness. Hardy's humanity bursts the bounds of such limitations, interacting in a deeper spiritual dimension not so much for progress, but for truth; moral progress being brought about by

³Admittedly, F.B. Pinion believes that in this case Hardy's "hyperbole sprang from exasperation" (Pinion 1976: xi).



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pain and sorrow rather than happiness. For Hardy, the human spirit, at its best, arises out of the necessity that surrounds it, exercising its freedom to choose, more often than not with tragic consequences, but always finding that the human spirit is not as containable and predictable as the Comtean model would suggest.

6.1. SUBJECTIVE IMMORTALITY

One of the most visible concepts of Positivism that finds a place in Hardy's poetry is that of subjective immortality, where, according to Comte, those who are worthy achieve an "ideal resurrection" in the minds of the living (*System I*: 210). This idea is contained in the poem "In a Museum".

Here's the mould of a musical bird long passed from light,
Which over the earth before man came was winging;
There's a contralto voice I heard last night,
That lodges in me still with its sweet singing.

Such a dream is Time that the coo of this ancient bird
Has perished not, but is blent, or will be blending
Mid visionless wilds of space with the voice that I heard,
In the full-fugued song of the universe unending. (CP: 430)

In the tones of a single contralto voice the poet hears the song of the universe. Part of the ancient bird's song lives on in the voice that was heard in the night. The song has "blent" into the "full-fugued song of the universe unending", heard by modern ears. Humanity is connected with its past by such remembrances, "resurrections" of the past ages in present day minds. The poet here acknowledges the debt of the modern to the ancient.

Comte viewed humanity as a whole and from a lofty perspective. Hardy, however, brings the concept of subjective immortality down to the personal, common level of the individual, at which

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point the idea begins to break down. For Hardy, there is no escape from the inevitable tragedy of death in any kind of hope of an after life. Two poems, "His Immortality" and "Her Immortality" stress the point that living on in another's memory is, as T.R. Wright puts it, as "short-lived" as life itself (1986: 215). In "Her Immortality", a loved-one who has passed away tries to comfort her sorrowing lover who longs to end his life and join her in the grave. In ending his life, however, he would end hers. She pleads with him:

'A Shade but in its mindful ones
Has immortality;
By living, me you keep alive,
By dying you slay me.'

'In you resides my single power
Of sweet continuance here;
On your fidelity I count
Through many a coming year.'

The lover rallies and swears not to die in order to "lengthen out thy days". His death is inevitable, and in his death he will take with him the remembrance of her existence.

But grows my grief. When I surcease,
Through whom alone lives she,
Her spirit ends its living lease,
Never again to be! (CP: 55-56)

"Her" immortality then is linked directly to the living thoughts of the one who remembers her. In the last stanza, the narrator expresses his anguish at the thought that when he dies, she will die a second and more permanent death, "Never again to be!" When the memory of a loved one is no longer remembered by the living, she or he is gone indeed. F.B. Pinion believes that this poem points to Hardy's acceptance of "the rational, Positivist view" of immortality, but qualifies it in relation to George Eliot's view.

This rationalistic view offers little hope for the majority; not many can expect to join 'the choir invisible' of 'the

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immortal dead' who live in others' memories, as George Eliot hoped to do (Pinion 1976: 18).

"His Immortality" follows a similar theme. It begins on a hopeful note:

I SAW a dead man's finer part
Shining within each faithful heart
Of those bereft. Then said I: 'This must be
His immortality.'

This is a quintessential expression of Comte's concept of subjective immortality. It is not just that the man is remembered, but that his "finer part" lives on in those who mourn him. Comte believed that "[our] best attributes are purified by death" and assimilated into the minds of the living (T.R. Wright 1986: 21).

The poem continues, however:

I looked there as the seasons wore,
And still his soul continuously bore
A life in theirs. But less its shine excelled
Than when I first beheld.

His fellow-years-men passed, and then
In later hearts I looked for him again;
And found him -- shrunk, alas! into a thin
And spectral mannikin.

Lastly I ask -- now old and chill --
If aught of him remain unperished still;
And find, in me alone, a feeble spark,
Dying amid the dark (CP: 143).

At best, the immortality of a person lasts for one generation, at least with any substance, which, in the end, is not immortality at all. For Positivists, subjective immortality fulfils their compelling human desire for life after death. Disillusioned with Christianity, and therefore without a hope for eternal life, Hardy considers the Positive alternative in this poem, but finds, as with other aspects of Positivism, that although on the surface the concept looks attractive, closer inspection finds it wanting.

"The Souls of the Slain" written in December 1899 describes the return of slain soldiers in spirit form to their homes, where

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they intend "To feast on [their] fame!". A "senior soul-flame" informs them:

‘I’ve flown there before you’, he said then;
‘Your households are well;
But -- your kin linger less
On your glory and war-mightiness
Than on dearer things.’ -- ‘Dearer?’ cried these from the
dead then,
‘Of what do they tell?’

Much to the disappointment of many of the "frameless souls" what is remembered about them is not their brave deeds on the battlefield but

‘Deeds of home; that live yet
Fresh as new -- deeds of fondness or fret;
Ancient words that were kindly expressed or unkindly,
These, these have their heeds.’

The slain souls respond,

--‘Alas! then it seems that our glory
Weighs less in their thought
Than our old homely acts,
And the long-ago commonplace facts
Of our lives -- held by us as scarce part of our story,
And rated as nought’

Then bitterly some: ‘Was it wise now
To raise the tomb-door
For such knowledge? Away!’
But the rest: ‘Fame we prized till to-day;
Yet that hearts keep us green for old kindness we prize now
A thousand times more!’ (CP: 92-96)

In choosing to look at the idea of subjective immortality from the perspective of those being remembered, Hardy points out yet another fault. Some of the spirits are pleased to be kept alive in the hearts of their loved ones because of their commonplace, homely acts, while others are bitter that their heroic acts are not remembered chiefly. The "souls of the slain" have no control over how they are remembered. Is it perhaps better than not to be remembered at all?

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"The Phantom Horsewoman" explores this adverse side of subjective immortality further, presenting an even darker possibility: that of the memory of a loved one causing a sort of madness. In the poem a picture is drawn of a grieving man being driven mad by the vision of a "phantom of his own figuring".

Of this vision of his they might say more:
Not only there
Does he see this sight,
But everywhere
In his brain - day, night
As if on the air
It were drawn rose bright --
Yea, far from that shore
Does he carry this vision of heretofore:

A ghost-girl-rider. And though, toil, tried,
He withers daily,
Time touches her not,
But she still rides gaily
In his rapt thought. . . (CP: 294)

This is not a poem about a man happily remembering the woman he loved. The tone is sad. The man is in "a careworn craze" of bereavement. She rides in his thoughts unaltered by the effects of time, while he is bound by his temporality and "withers daily". Thoughts of her gay riding do not promote the man to higher moral planes, but only serve to emphasize the difference between them, and his physical decay. The results of dwelling on his loved-one's memory underline the conflict between timelessness and temporality. Comte considers the question of immortality only on a temporal plane. There is no coming to terms with anything beyond that. Hardy recognizes the tragic nature of the human lot caught between knowable, frightening temporality and unfathomable timelessness.

Hardy, "Who holds that if way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst," (CP: 168) looks at the other side of Comte's concept. If the attributes of the dead live on in

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the memories of the living to good purpose, those same memories have the potential of working ill.

Finally, in "The To-Be-Forgotten", also written in 1899, we see Hardy's tragic vision overwhelming and negating the Positivist brand of immortality. Beyond death is a second death, and then oblivion. The narrator of the poem stands in a graveyard talking with old friends who have passed away. They are distressed, not about being dead,

But that our future second death is near;
When, with the living, memory of us numbs,
And blank oblivion comes!

The dead men lie amongst those who have died a second and deeper death, past all remembrance. This causes them to despair.

'We here, as yet, each day
Are blest with dear recall; as yet, can say
We hold in some soul loved continuance
Of shape and voice and glance.

'But what has been will be --
First memory, then oblivion's swallowing sea;
Like men foregone, shall we merge into those
Whose story no one knows.

'For which of us could hope
To show in life that world-awakening scope
Granted the few whose memory none lets die
But all men magnify?

'We were but Fortune's sport;
Things true, things lovely, things of good report
We neither shunned nor sought . . . We see our bourne,
And seeing it we mourn' (CP: 144-45).

The poem points out that beyond the grave there is no control over how or even if a person is remembered and that only a select few are granted a "memory that none lets die". In the last stanza of "The To-Be-Forgotten" the dead acknowledge the tragic reality of their fate with Promethean fortitude. They are "but Fortune's sport", lacking sufficient control over their mortal lives even to ensure that their memories will live in posterity, which is the

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basis for the Positivist hope in subjective immortality. Pinion translates "bourne" in the penultimate line as "limit" (Pinion 1976: 50), suggesting that beyond the grave the dead have finally become conscious of the tragedy of their situation, and they are left to mourn.

6.2. RESIGNATION

Another concept essential to the Religion of Humanity is that of resignation, particularly with regard to a universe which is unknowable and apparently thoughtless and cruel. In "The Graveyard of Dead Creeds" Hardy realizes the importance of traditional and orthodox forms of religion in setting the stage for the acceptance of the new religion of Positivism (*Life*: 146; Pinion 1976: 208).

'Out of us cometh an heir, that shall disclose
New promise!' cried they. 'And the caustic cup

'We ignorantly upheld to men, be filled
With draughts more pure than those we ever distilled,
That shall make tolerable to sentient seers
The melancholy marching of the years' (CP: 694).

The irony of the poem is that the pure draughts are not expected to reveal the whole Truth, but rather to allow those of conscious mind to endure the dreary march of Time. "[True] resignation" writes Comte, "is a permanent disposition to endure, steadily and without hope of compensation, all inevitable evils." This kind of resignation, very different from Christian resignation which has as its end an "ineffable felicity", can only proceed from knowledge; "from a deep sense of the connection of all kinds of natural phenomena with invariable laws" (*Positive Phil* II: 45).

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"Drinking Song" chronicles the advance of Science over the ages. Each new advance dispels a scientific or popular belief previously held, thus proving humanity's fallibility and insignificance. The final response is to

Fill full your cups: feel no distress
At all our great thoughts shrinking less:
We'll do a good deed nevertheless! (CP: 908)

The tone of this poem is rather light-hearted, suggesting that humanity ought not take its fallibility too seriously. It acknowledges both the limitations of our knowledge of our world, and the need to make the best of the situation regardless. Once again the search for ultimate Truth is put aside in favour of just doing what one can in order to make life endurable. The Truth is too hard to bear.

In his last decade, Hardy distanced himself from the optimistic outlook of Positivism, and a bitterness of tone began to emerge in his poetry. "Nothing Matters Much" was published in *Human Shows, Far Phantasies, Songs and Trifles* in 1925. The title derives from his Positivist friend, Benjamin Fossett Lock, who used the phrase as a personal expression of resignation (Pinion 1976: 231; cf. T.R. Wright 1986: 216). The poem is a lamentation on the death of Lock, a distinguished county-court judge in Dorset, and ironically so since what is remembered of him is that "often would he shape in word / That nothing needed much lamenting." The poet does lament however:

And while I think of his bleak bed,
Of Time that builds, of Time that shatters,
Lost to all thought is he, who said
 'Nothing much matters' (CP: 801).

Lock's statement is meant to be intrinsically non-tragic, conforming to Comte's philosophy. Hardy, however, disagrees. In his

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view things do matter and they matter very much. By the time that this poem was published in 1925, Hardy was not able to look at the tragic wrongs of the world with the kind of uncomplaining endurance exemplified in the life and sayings of Benjamin Fosssett Lock.

6.3. HOPE IN THE DARKNESS

There are a number of poems written between 1899 and 1910 which are very optimistic about the fate of humanity; indeed they contain some rays of hope in what Hardy portrays for the most part as a rather hopeless world. "The Unborn", probably written in 1903, and revised in 1905 (Pinion 1976: 86), was originally called "Life's Opportunity", and in its initial version carried a more positive tone. The poem describes the inhabitants of the "Cave of the Unborn":

Their eyes were lit with artless trust,
Hope thrilled their every tone;
'A scene the loveliest, is it not?
A pure delight, a beauty-spot
Where all is gentle, true and just,
And darkness is unknown?'

The Unborn read in the anguished heart and "sunken face" of their visitor that in truth the world is not as bright as it would seem from their limited perspective. There are two markedly different final stanzas for the poem, the original one and the one published in 1905.

A voice like Ocean's caught from afar
Rolled forth on them and me
For Loving-kindness Life supplies
A scope superber than the skies.
So ask no more. Life's gladdening star
In Loving-kindness see (Pinion 1976: 86).

In contrast to the above, which contains a note of hope for humanity in the preponderance of "loving-kindness", the stanza that ap-

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peared at the end of the published poem is much more grim.

And as I silently retired
I turned and watched them still,
And they came helter-skelter out,
Driven forward like a rabble rout
Into the world they had so desired,
By the all-immanent Will (CP: 235).

In this final stanza, the Unborn become puppets of the "all-immanent Will", driven and without order, similar to the view of humanity Hardy expresses in *The Dynasts*. At this point in his life, it would seem that Hardy vacillates between these two views of humanity; one in which there is a possibility for humanity to control its destiny by acts of loving-kindness, and the other in which individuals are merely puppets with no recourse at all in controlling their future lot.

Another important poem with Positivist leanings is "A Plaint to Man". Written in 1909-10, it was originally entitled "The Plight of a Puppet" (Pinion 1976: 99), reinforcing the idea that God is merely a human creation and projection. God laments to the creator-man that the time has arrived for the truth to come out:

And now that I dwindle day by day
Beneath the deicide eyes of seers
In a light that will not let me stay,
And to-morrow the whole of me disappears,
The truth should be told, and the fact be faced
That had best been faced in earlier years:

The fact of life with dependence placed
On the human heart's resource alone,
In brotherhood bonded close and graced

With loving-kindness fully blown,
And visioned help unsought, unknown (CP: 266).

Hardy here joins the chorus of Victorian thinkers disillusioned with orthodox theology by the advance of "Queen Science". God is what humanity has made of him; any hope for the future lies in humanity. In his commentary on the poem F.B. Pinion cites the

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connection between Hardy's philosophical expressions in this poem and Comte's premise "that since nothing about God is knowable, man's religion and aims should be centred in the evolution and progress of the human race" (Pinion 1976: 99).

"God's Funeral", written about the same time as the above poem, is a moving lament over the loss of a familiar faith. Hardy truly sorrows at this loss, or this gaining of "consciousness". Stanzas III and IV represent God in all of his glory and loving-kindness. Stanza VI goes on to reveal that God is but a "man-projected Figure", as in "A Plaint to Man". Then in Stanza XI, humanity is no longer deceived:

'Till, in Time's stayless stealthy swing,
Uncompromising rude reality
Mangled the Monarch of our fashioning,
Who quavered, sank; and now has ceased to be.

The stanzas that immediately follow are a sensitive and emotive lament over the comforting faith that Hardy too had "prized". The question now arises of "who or what shall fill his place?", and the answer is vague:

And gazing, to my growing sight there seemed
A pale yet positive gleam low down behind,

Whereof, to lift the general night,
A certain few who stood aloof had said,
'See you upon the horizon that small light --
Swelling somewhat?' Each mourner shook his head.

And they composed a crowd of whom
Some were right good, and many nigh the best. . .
Thus dazed and puzzled 'twixt the gleam and gloom
Mechanically I followed with the rest (CP: 327-9).

Pinion connects Hardy's phrase "positive gleam" to Comte's Positive Philosophy, particularly in relation to Positivism's goal of the "welfare and progress of mankind, through altruism and education" (Pinion 1976: 100). In Hardy's terminology, altruism and education can be translated into 'loving-kindness' and 'scien-

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tific knowledge' which appear in his *Apology to Late Lyrics and Earlier*.

The scepticism of the mourners in the next stanza could be for a number of reasons, given Hardy's misgivings about many aspects of the Positive religion. One reason for the shaking of their heads stems from Hardy's belief that Comte erred in excluding Christ from among the worthies listed in his *Positivist Calendar*, whose inclusion

would have made Positivism tolerable to thousands who, from position, family connection, or early education, now decry what in their heart of hearts they hold to contain the germs of a true system (*Life*: 146).

It would appear that although the narrator of the poem saw the "positive gleam", he was left "dazed and puzzled", not certain of it. Perhaps the last two lines begin to spell out Hardy's doubts about the efficacy of Positivism in replacing orthodox faith. Having given up his Christian beliefs, he finds himself caught between the "gloom" of a meaningless, mechanized universe and the Positive "gleam" of human progress through altruism. The poignancy of Hardy's tragic voice comes from his inability to find a clear path through the "gloom". Comte's answer in the form of his Positive Philosophy was not sufficient for Hardy's needs.

6.4 PROGRESS

Although Hardy maintained certain reservations about the Religion of Humanity from the outset of his interaction with it, the poems of his late life reflect his complete abandonment of the central hope of the Religion of Humanity, the idea that humanity

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was slowly, but surely getting better and would eventually reach the point of perfection.

In "A Night of Questionings" a worldly wind sweeps around the graves of five groups of men (paupers, clergy, sailors, soldiers and criminals) and asks them, "What of the world now?" They all answer that the world has not changed and join in the chorus "No more I know." The final group, the criminals, express themselves in the most pessimistic way:

'Men have not shown,
Since you were stretched that morning,
A white cap your adorning,
More lovely deeds or true
Through thus neck-knotting you;
Or that they purer grow,
Or ever will, I trow! --
No more I know.' (CP: 728)

In a poem that was written in 1906 but not published until after his death, Hardy no longer sees humanity's actions tending towards loving-kindness and goodness. "Thoughts at Midnight" begins with the condemnation: "Mankind, you dismay me / When shadows waylay me!" In his darker moods, Hardy began to perceive a reality about humanity which was less than the rosy picture painted by the Positivists. The failure of civilization to progress was not the fault of an Omnipotent Will, but the fault of humanity itself. The poet was not waylaid by individual acts of meanness or by false teachings or by immoralities,

But by your madresses
Capping cool badnesses,
Acting like puppets
Under Time's buffets;
In superstitions
And ambitions
Moved by no wisdom,
Far-sight, or system,
Led by sheer senselessness
And presciencelessness
Into unreason
And hideous self-treason (CP: 836).

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The problem lay with Human nature in general, not with the individual. To find the solution to the human predicament within humanity is to no purpose. Without vision or purpose or understanding there is little hope left within humanity for its own salvation.

"And There Was a Great Calm" was written on the signing of the Armistice, 11 November 1918 and was included in *The Times Armistice Supplement* (Pinion 1976: 171). It was the Great War that finally disillusioned Hardy and the majority of Positivism's surviving adherents, and prevented them from retaining any optimism for the future of human nature. In Stanza V, it seems that as soon as humanity came to the conclusion that their future betterment was without hope, War, the reason for their despair, ended.

So, when old hopes that earth was bettering slowly
Were dead and damned, there sounded 'War is done!'
One morrow. Said the bereft, and meek, and lowly,
'Will men some day be given to grace? yea, wholly,
And in good sooth, as our dreams used to run?' (CP: 589)

"We Are Getting to the End" is a final lament at the loss of the great dream. The poem appeared in *Winter Words*, published posthumously in October 1928. By the time Hardy had written this poem,

He had learned the danger of being too positive, had declared that his views were but 'seemings', and come to the conclusion that experience extends beyond the bounds of rational apprehension (Pinion 1976: 236).

In the words of the poem:

We are getting to the end of visioning
The impossible within this universe,
Such as that better whiles may follow worse,
And that our race may mend by reasoning (CP: 929).

In the last decade of his life, Hardy abandoned, as a whole, any belief in Positivism, particularly in relation to its stand on the

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moral progress of humanity. "Christmas: 1924" is a flippantly bitter testament to this:

'PEACE upon earth!' was said. We sing it,
And pay a million priests to bring it.
After two thousand years of mass
We've got as far as poison-gas (CP: 904).

Hardy, however, did maintain his friendship with Frederic Harrison, although in a modified tone after their heated exchange which resulted in Hardy's Apology to *Late Lyrics and Earlier* in 1922 on the subject of his pessimistic nature. Later evidence of Positivism's, and Harrison's, influence on Hardy is found in a poem written on Good Friday, 1927, entitled "Unkept Good Fridays". The poem echoes a view expressed by Frederic Harrison in *The Positive Evolution of Religion* that Christ was just one of many saviours of humanity; the "Good Fridays" of the others "oblivion hides" (CP: 826; Pinion 1976: 239).

As a final note to this chapter, I would like to look at "The Darkling Thrush", written 31 December 1900. The mood is sombre and dark, like the mid-winter weather on the English countryside. It echoes Arnold's "Dover Beach", where a disillusioned humanity is pictured struggling in ignorance and darkness, stripped of its faith and intellectual certainty:

for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.⁴

⁴Matthew Arnold, *The Poetical Works of Matthew Arnold* (London: Macmillan, 1905), pp. 226-27.

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The word "darkling" means literally "in the dark", and the image it brings to the poem is one of utter despair at the state of blindness in which humanity tries to exist. Hardy's "The Darkling Thrush" expresses a similar despair, echoing the poet's fervourless mood and outlook in the bleak and comfortless description of the English winter. Out of the gloom, however, comes "a full-hearted evensong / Of joy illimited", albeit from "An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small", a poignant representative of "joy". It leads to the final stanza in which the poet muses on the contrast that has confronted him:

So little cause for carolings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he know
And I was unaware (CP: 119).

In the last lines Hardy shows a tentative willingness to admit that he may suffer under a kind of intellectual myopia. Perhaps we see here a chink in the armour of Hardy's predominantly tragic world view that allowed him to consider Positivism. Hardy's attraction to Positivism in the form of his readings, his correspondence, his visits to Newton Hall and his friendships with such Positivists as Frederic Harrison and Benjamin Fossett Lock can be seen in the poet's attraction to the thrush, joyfully flinging "his soul upon the growing gloom". The poet reserves a final judgement on the enigmatic thrush, recognizing the limitations of his own vision, and the possibility that the thrush may be more percipient of the truth of Nature than he is himself. Hardy is the darkling poet, convinced neither of the reality or the insanity of the thrush's song, but attracted, nevertheless, to

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the thought that the human spirit could sing such a joyful song in the midst of such gloom.

Hardy's poetry, written over the course of his lifetime, is dominated by his tragic vision of a humanity which suffers grievously and unremittingly. Out of confusion, injustice and harshness, the human spirit arises and is affirmed. At best, for Hardy, the human spirit suffers and endures because it knows that there is more than the immediate, physical world. It does not sing a song of "joy illimited" for this knowledge. The Positive view of human capacity is, in the end, too limited and shallow for Hardy.

CONCLUSION

C.H. Salter, in his book *Good Little Thomas Hardy* takes Virginia Hyman to task for over-ascribing the influence of Comtean Positivism in Hardy's fiction. Salter states that although Hardy's use of certain terms "almost certainly shows the influence of Comte", Comte's ideas and terminology are not sufficiently different from those "in the air" at the time to enable us to attribute them specifically to Comte (Salter 1981: 79). There is some truth in this statement. Salter is not without foundation in his caveat against assigning too much direct influence to Comte.

It must be admitted, then, that Virginia Hyman, in her *Ethical Perspective in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, does link a number of Hardy's passages to Comte which would better have been attributed to a more general nineteenth century "Spirit of the Age". She is not without foundation, however, in finding significant elements of Positivism persisting throughout Hardy's writings. A fertile ground for understanding Hardy lies somewhere between allowing too little and ascribing too much influence to Comte.

It has been the intent of this thesis, first of all, to come to an understanding of the philosophy of Auguste Comte and to assess Hardy's interaction with Comte's writings and followers. The core of our study has concerned the investigation of how, in essence, Hardy employs Positivism within the limits of the dramatic structures of his novel-writing, *The Dynasts*, and his poetry. We have found, I believe, a persistent strain of Positivist terminology and ideas throughout. In developing his charac-

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ters and ideas, Hardy has engaged in a dialogue, so to speak, with the tenets of Comte's Positive Philosophy and the Religion of Humanity.

Hardy attempts to explore and elaborate the implications of Positivism. The characters in his novels are woven into a web, some strands of which can be seen as influenced by Positivism, but in the shaking and quivering of lives that goes on in the novels, the Positivist strands are found to be weak and unsupportive. Hardy's tragic characters, Tess, Jude and Sue, Michael Henchard, among others, are each enmeshed in an existence which bursts the limitations of Positivist belief. Comte's concepts are but lamp posts along the way to an understanding of the workings of the universe, an endeavour to find some light in the gloom. Comte's belief in the instinctive and progressive nature of altruistic tendencies within the human organism is seen as simplistic and unrealistic in light of the woes and wrongs suffered by his characters. Their attempts to control their destinies and school their instincts are met by more seemingly capricious and crushing circumstances. The affirmation of their human spirits does not come in terms of Comtean Positivism, but in terms of Hardy's tragic vision.

We have also seen, in looking at *The Dynasts* and his poetry, that the strength and power of Hardy's art transcends his Positivist leanings. In contrast to George Eliot, whose poem "O may I join the Choir Invisible" was used as a Positivist hymn and whose novels end with glowing affirmations of Positivist belief,¹ Hardy's most moving and memorable verse deals with the blindly

¹See "Excursus on George Eliot" below.

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tragic nature of human existence.

Investigation of Positivism in the writings of Thomas Hardy has provided a useful vehicle for appreciating the distinction between Thomas Hardy the pessimist, as some would see him, and Thomas Hardy the tragedian. Positivism was *one* of the perspectives through which Hardy attempted to find a hopeful solution to a tragic problem. That there are threads of Positivism with its inherently hopeful tendencies, and that those threads spread over almost the entire course of Hardy's literary career, suggests that Hardy was not determined to see only the worst of all possible worlds. Hardy used Positivism in his writing, and in using it rose above it, and rising above it, Positivism became the material for his tragedy. In considering a philosophy which holds a belief in an optimistic outcome for humanity, Hardy fueled the poignancy of his own inevitably tragic conclusions.

Hardy's tragic, Promethean outlook held a hope for humanity. It was not a hope which originated in humanity's victory over nature, rather it was a hope derived from the defeat of humanity's efforts to come to terms with the forces of nature working from without and within. *This* provided Hardy's vision for humanity:

to hope till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.
(Shelley; Shephard 1888: 422)

AN EXCURSUS ON GEORGE ELIOT

The first instalment of *Far from the Madding Crowd* appeared unsigned in serial form in the January 1874 edition of the *Cornhill Magazine*. In its critical response, the editor of the *Spectator* hazarded a guess that the story's author might be George Eliot, and "if it was not the work of George Eliot then her equal had entered the literary scene" (FMC: 19). Reviews in *The Examiner*, *Athenaeum*, *The Academy*, *The Westminster Review*, and *The Saturday Review* all hit upon some connection with George Eliot, either for the similarities in their use of rustic dialect, in their description of pastoral scenes, or for their ample use of "moral reflections and aphorisms".¹

Hardy was nonplussed by these comparisons. In *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy*, it is recorded that Hardy thought Eliot a great thinker,

one of the greatest living . . . though not a born storyteller by any means--she had never touched the life of the fields: her country-people having seemed to him, too, more like small townfolk than rustics; and as evidencing a woman's wit cast in country dialogue rather than real country humour, which he regarded as rather of the Shakespeare and Fielding sort (EL: 129).

Hardy was evidently flattered to be compared with George Eliot, certainly one of the most eminent English novelists of the period. Despite the critics, he supposed that the comparisons were due not to similarities of style, but to the fact that he had been reading Comte's *Positive Philosophy*, "some of whose expressions had thus

¹Robert Gittings, *Young Thomas Hardy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 222.

passed into his vocabulary, expressions which were also common to George Eliot" (EL: 129).

There are no blatant references to Comtean Positivism in the opening chapters of the novel, with the possible exception of a mention of Saint-Simon in Chapter VIII (FMC: 105). As already noted, Hardy may have been displaying his scepticism of the movement in his description of the fate of Gabriel Oak's sheep dog (see the full citation above, p. 33). There is also a generally positivist description of Gabriel Oak after his de-flocking. Gabriel is shown to have developed the quality of resignation, evidenced by "a dignified calm" and an "indifference to fate" (FMC: 88). F.B. Pinion does not feel that there are any Positivist expressions or references present in the opening chapters of *Far from the Madding Crowd*.²

Eliot was intimately connected with the Positivist movement, although she was never a wholly committed disciple. Positivist expressions were evident in her major novels to a great extent (all but one were published before the appearance of *Far from the Madding Crowd*). Eliot's link with Auguste Comte and Positivism commenced late in her philosophical development when she was in her early thirties. She studied Harriet Martineau's translation of *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte* and Bridges's translation of *The System of Positive Polity*. Of the latter she wrote in a letter to Mrs. Congreve that it filled her with "a moral glow" and "gratitude . . . for the illumination Comte has contributed to my life."³ She also read *Comte's Philosophy of the*

²F.B. Pinion, *A George Eliot Companion* (London: Macmillan Press, 1981), p. 245.

³George Eliot, *George Eliot Letters*, ed. G.S. Haight, 9 vols. (New

Sciences written in 1853 by George Lewes, who was considered by Comte to be the leader of Positivism in Britain (this was not an official role on Lewes' part), and with whom Eliot lived for almost 25 years. In 1859 Eliot became friends with Mr. and Mrs. Richard Congreve, and, in fact, Mrs. Congreve became one of Eliot's most devoted friends.

Eliot was an advocate for Comte and Congreve against accusations that they were atheists, and offered to share in the publishing costs of Congreve's translation of the *The System of Positive Polity*. Frederic Harrison was therefore perplexed by Eliot's reticence to commit herself wholly to the Positivist movement. He approached her, as he had approached Hardy, to ask that she write a distinctly Positivist novel, which she likewise refused to do. She did, however, allow her poem "O May I Join the Choir Invisible" to be used as a part of the Positivist Liturgy. The poem expresses the idea of subjective immortality,

O may I join the choir invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better by their presence.⁴

George Eliot's husband, J.W. Cross, whom she married after the death of Lewes in 1878, wrote of Eliot's debt to Comte,

For all Comte's writing she had a feeling of high admiration, intense interest, and very deep sympathy. I do not think I ever heard her speak of any writer with a more grateful sense of obligation for enlightenment.⁵

For all her sympathy with Comte, however, she was not blind to the deficiencies of his philosophy.

Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1954-78), vol. IV, p. 333.

⁴George Eliot, *The Legend of Jubal and Other Poems*, Cabinet Edition (Edinburgh, 1881).

⁵F.B. Pinion, *A George Eliot Companion: Literary Achievement and Modern Significance* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 64.

As with Lewes and Hardy, Eliot's enthusiasm waned after the publication of Comte's *System of Positive Polity* in 1854. It was Comte's attempt to found a social doctrine and to institute the Religion of Humanity. They all found the Religion of Humanity wanting, most particularly in that it allowed for no sense of mystery in the universe. Eliot served to soften Lewes's view of the later system though, and in doing so revealed her willingness to see some good even in what she considered a negative aspect of Positivism. Quoting Lewes:

My attitude has changed now that I have learnt (from the remark of one very dear to me) to regard it as an utopia, presenting hypotheses rather than doctrines, suggestions for future inquirers rather than dogmas for adepts,--hypotheses . . . to be confirmed or contradicted by experience.⁶

Besides Positivist expressions, the works of Eliot and Hardy expound a number of common Positivist themes: the uncontrollable and impartial force of nature on humanity, requiring resignation in the face of what is unalterable, and action where change is possible; the sub-ordination of self-interest to altruism and the general progress of humanity as a whole; and the ascendancy of feelings over logic and tradition. Neither Hardy's nor Eliot's fiction can be considered overwhelming espousals of Positivist theories, but they stand, rather, as critiques of Positivism, a series of "experiments in life" (*George Eliot Letters* VI: 216), where Positivist ideas and concepts were tried and sometimes found wanting.

The difference in Hardy's and Eliot's approach to Positivism must spring from the differences in their personalities. Hardy, by far the more inclined towards pessimism by nature, was

⁶*Fortnightly Review*, vol. III (1866), p. 404-5.

certainly the more masterful with tragedy. The tragedies of Jude, Tess and Eustacia Vye fully eclipse the death of Hetty Sorrel in Eliot's *Adam Bede* and the insipid drowning scene at the end of *Mill on the Floss*. Whereas in the final analysis Hardy was never able to concede the great end of the Religion of Humanity, i.e., the perfection of the human race, Eliot was much more willing to acknowledge and hope for the progress of the human spirit. Her novels end in songs of affirmation for humanity. The last paragraph of *Middlemarch* referring to Dorothea is almost a Positivist manifesto:

Her full nature, like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength, spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.

This is a notably more hopeful conclusion than appears in any of Hardy's fiction.

The conclusion to *Mill on the Floss* repeats an affirming adage: "Nature repairs her ravages." In its first edition it is followed by: "repairs them with her sunshine, and with human labour." In a second edition a qualifier is added: "--but not all."

In the greatest of Hardy's novels, with perhaps the exception of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, no such clear-cut optimism is evinced. His novels conclude with tragedies. He depicts life as going on, but on a much more limited scale. Hardy affirms life and humanity in his tragedy, Eliot in her hope.

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