

READING THOMAS HARDY

This major new reading of the novels of Thomas Hardy by leading critic George Levine disentangles the author's often elaborately distanced prose from his beautiful poetic and precise renderings of the natural world. Clear, direct, and minimally academic in his own writing, Levine provides an overview of Hardy's entire fictional canon, with extensive discussions of his early and late novels including his last, *The Well-Beloved*. In so doing Levine draws new attention to the way Hardy absorbed both the ideas and the writing strategies of Charles Darwin, and develops new perspectives first articulated in the literary responses of Virginia Woolf and D. H. Lawrence. Levine departs from the critical norm by reading Hardy in the context of his deep feeling for the natural world and all living things, and the implicit affirmation of life that sometimes drives his bleakest narratives.

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For Marge, one more time, who left me too soon
For Rachel who held me together
With a loving Hardyian nod to her canine and feline
assistants, Lucy and Trixie

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Preface

I

Why return, as readers have long been doing, to the bleak, dark, intensely pessimistic novels of Thomas Hardy? This book is my perhaps too personal answer to that question, representing a lifetime of changing engagement with the novels. There is something about Hardy's writing (sometimes, of course, not always) that transcends his excessive and defensive pessimism. His great novels have a peculiar vitality and power even as they seem to express a dark vision of some great evolutionary mistake, in which consciousness is a painful anomaly and individual lives are helplessly bound by a nature entirely indifferent, if not overtly hostile. Hardy the novelist has emerged from my lifelong engagement with him as a writer whose passion for art is a reflex of his passion for nature and of his sometimes bewildered recognition that something so beautiful, so abundant, so subtle, so vast is also inimical to the life for which he felt an almost universal compassion. It made him one of the great poets of life, attuned to its subtlest manifestations and uncannily alert to its abundant variations and significances. And so I want to offer here an almost celebratory reading of an alternative Hardy, one who can transform our perception of life and affirm it even in his dogmatic pessimism and his dramatization of its inevitable disasters and more than "little" ironies.

As an adolescent aspirant to serious literary criticism, I thought Hardy's novels weren't sophisticated enough. Their language was too often ponderously abstract and polysyllabic; their pervasive pessimism seemed to me too easy – I was, after all, an English major. Their diagrammatic manipulation of plots to make all things come out for the worst seemed too crude, though I was proud, in my sophistication, of being myself a thoroughly pessimistic sort of fellow. D. H. Lawrence, whose posthumously published "Study of Thomas Hardy" will be one of my constant points of reference throughout this book, was on my side: he puts it rather aggressively, "it is

not as a metaphysician that one must consider Hardy . . . nothing in his work is so pitiable as his clumsy efforts to push events into line with his theory of being, and to make calamity fall on those who represent the principle of Love" (*P*, p. 480). In spite of the impressive effort at that time of Albert Guerard to enlist Hardy, along with Conrad, in the ranks of twentieth-century modernism, Hardy's writing seemed to run counter to the ideal of art against which I had been learning to judge him: twentieth-century modernism's austere, complex, psychologically intense, sometimes cryptic experimentalism. The novels were anything but psychological studies, and, really, did Tess's note have to slip under the rug? Or, in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, did Elfride's earring really have to fall off during her awkward first kiss? And what was I to do with that grossly, exaggeratedly Malthusian figure of the child, little Father Time, in *Jude the Obscure*?

But an odd thing happened on the way to where I am today, geriatrically enlightened and perhaps too eagerly appreciative. Hardy got subtler, smarter, more sensitive, his novels richer and more moving. Hardy, it turns out, was not an awkward realist but a poet of a new way – a post-Darwinian way – of looking at the world. He was in touch with energies that the modernists, on the one hand, and the Victorian writers I was coming to love, on the other, did not by and large try to touch. His tendency not to dwell on the workings of the minds of his protagonists and to focus with almost symbolic intensity on the material objects that shape their world, his rejection of the happy-ending plot, and his symmetrical, almost mathematical manipulation of events turned out to be much more than simple ironic perversions of Victorian ideals. They were not only aspects of his determinedly artful, experimental, and nonrealist engagement with new Victorian understandings of nature and of mind; they were representations of deeply felt responses to this new world. The same D. H. Lawrence who condemned Hardy's philosophizing and plot manipulation found in Hardy a remarkable and daring visionary:

His feeling, his instinct, his sensuous understanding is, however, apart from his metaphysic, very great and deep, deeper than that, perhaps, of any other English novelist. Putting aside his metaphysic, which must always obtrude when he thinks of people, and turning to the earth, to landscape, then he is true to himself. (*P*, p. 480)

This is my theme, and by the time I wrote the first-written of the essays revised here, on *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (now Chapter 3), I had come to believe that Hardy's writing required a different sort of attention. I needed to account for his work's peculiar power that extended well beyond the

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tragic, symmetrical stories that climax in the disasters of *Jude the Obscure*; I needed to come to terms with what had seemed to me and many critics contradictory elements in his writing – realism that always threatened to break out of realist constraints; moral conservatism always on the edge of violation; a paradoxical combination of biological determinism with a tendency to write in “a female tradition”;¹ intuitive and deeply felt strong representations of vitality and energy, although always thwarted and denied; movingly sympathetic representations of nonhuman forms of life and of objects and landscapes: knowing readings of how nature signifies and demonstrations of nature’s meaninglessness. A man who didn’t want to be touched fills his novels with lovers who aspire to be touched (and women like Sue Bridehead, of *Jude the Obscure*, who resist touching even after making commitments to their lovers), whose desires drive plots and whose frustrations complete them. Each return to Hardy puzzled me even as it revealed to me new things about his writing and touched me with a new sense of what I can only call elemental feelings. Hardy’s writing thrusts me into a beautiful and often violently difficult nature thronging with myriad other kindred beings, and it still moves me in its revelation of the intricacies, variations, and abundance of life.

It wasn’t Hardy’s dark philosophy that made me return to him so often: I developed new respect for his repeated assertion that he was not a philosopher and was not aiming for any philosophical consistency. My adolescent resistance to the manipulations of plot was not entirely ignorant; it marked an undeveloped awareness of something else, more important, more directly alive than the ideas by which Hardy’s mind had been violated. The great power of Hardy lay not in dramatizations of a world we never made but in imaginations of the energies that drive life through all of nature. However derivative his ideas about the world might have been, Hardy was marvelously original when he looked out at that world and found a way to say what he saw. His seeing is infused with feeling, and the world he sees resonates with meaning.

Trying to account for what it is that makes Hardy so essential a novelist despite the obvious limitations I have suggested entailed for me a new look at old materials. I wanted to find a way to the Hardy who transcends his own philosophically dark vision by considering how he looks with unique intensity and precision at nature in all its forms. I wanted to represent a Hardy who dramatizes in every novel the way art transforms into meaning the tangled and mindless nature that he sees so precisely and so relentlessly. He claimed that novel writing was always compromised by the marketplace, but that his real vocation, his real love, was poetry. It is

true that Hardy's novels belong in the great tradition of English fiction, but their greatest power is in what I will be calling their poetry.

From the perspective of this book, Hardy's particular greatness as a novelist emerges most prominently in those sequences that may seem gratuitous if one focuses only on the movement of story, but that demand attention because of their own remarkable attention to the world that lies outside of the story a novel can tell. His writing in these sequences achieves the condition of poetry and, ironically perhaps, gives story its best life.² They depend on the local perspective employed in the passages, either that of a character or of the narrator himself; they entail radical shifts of attention from a central dramatic situation to an ambient world, often otherwise unobserved, sometimes caught by chance, out of the corner of a protagonist's eye, but always there in the eye of the narrator himself. In the last chapter, I will linger over several such sequences. These are the moments when Hardy breaks free of the constraints of the conventions of Victorian novel-writing within which he felt himself bound – it is when Hardy becomes most distinctively himself.

The poetry of his novels emerges as the prose twists away from story and from Hardy's philosophical revulsion from a world he never made – vast beyond human limits, subject to relentlessly unfeeling laws of growth and struggle, decay and death. That world, abstractly or even allegorically represented, is dark indeed, but there can be a breathtaking beauty in Hardy's writing about it. These passages reimagine the relation and the continuities between the human that makes for fictional narrative and the "natural."

There is a life that throbs through many of the novels that only a few recent critics have engaged. "Alongside the doomed sense of weighted past and incipient conclusion," Gillian Beer has argued, "goes a sense of plenitude, and 'appetite for joy.'"³ In this book, I am looking for the Hardy whom Beer has claimed to find, and I find him represented best by two novelists: Lawrence and Virginia Woolf. Reading Hardy with novelists' eyes, they head straight for what is most original and vital. They recognize in Hardy a Darwinian way of looking at the world. Hardy's writing not only embodies his bleak interpretation of what Darwin argued, but it contains as well something of Darwin's meticulousness of description and emotional absorption in the tangled life he so scrupulously watched. The Darwin who helped shape Hardy's way of looking at the world had the eye of a poet and of a novelist as well as of a scientist. He looked at the world with an intensity and precision that could have been inspired only by an enormous appetite for nature. So, as in chapter after

chapter I invoke Lawrence and Woolf, Darwin must take a chapter to himself. There I discuss not so much Darwin's theories as his ways of seeing and describing the natural world. Elsewhere I have argued that with no illusions about the processes by which nature grinds out life through death, Darwin also finds the world extraordinarily beautiful, even enchanting.⁴ So while Hardy certainly took Darwin's theory as scientific confirmation of nature's indifference to human desire and intelligence, he found in the procedures of Darwin's prose a spur to explore nature's working with microscopic intensity and telescopic imagination. Moreover, he took Darwin's arguments to imply that humans have deep moral obligations not only to other humans, but to the whole world of conscious beings.

I make no claims that the understanding of Hardy that drives this book is new, only that it has not had an adequate hearing in the criticism. Lawrence's extraordinary rhapsody, "A Study of Thomas Hardy," despite its almost mystical pages of theories about life and sex, has been my primary influence here. Lawrence reads Hardy with a deeply personal engagement and in so doing focuses on just the most original and exciting aspects of Hardy's work. The "Study" is so far from the norm of recent Hardy criticism that I have felt a bit uneasy about finding it so revelatory and so useful;⁵ it nevertheless seems to me to capture the greatness of Hardy's novels as well as anyone ever has.

Lawrence's intimate, living relation to the novels themselves is liberating, and almost completely incompatible with the main line of current criticism. The readings might be condemned now as too personally engaged with the characters in Hardy's novels, as though they were real people not fictions. The current term of art to describe such criticism is "characterological." But Lawrence's Hardy, flaws and all, leaps into life off his pages. Lawrence's Hardy struggles with the social conventions that Lawrence fought more overtly. In Hardy's profound sensitivity to the forces of nature, Lawrence finds what he thinks of as Hardy's distinctive contribution to the "one bright book of life."

Not coincidentally, the criticism of another early twentieth-century novelist evokes a similar Hardy. Although the difference between Lawrence and Virginia Woolf might have made one anticipate antagonistic understandings, Woolf's gorgeous essay on Hardy, subsequently published in her *English Common Reader*, gets at what might be called the Lawrentian heart of the matter. Sensitive to Hardy's remarkable powers of description of nature, she notes that "He is aware in a larger sense of Nature as a force; he feels in it a spirit that can sympathize or mock or remain the indifferent spectator of Human fortunes." His stories, she says, are "watched by the

eyes of the gods and worked out in the presence of Nature" (VW, p. 223). In listing the great distinguishing qualities of Hardy's art, Woolf claims that "more than any other novelist," Hardy "brings before us" "a sense of the physical world . . . the sense that the little prospect of man's existence is ringed by a landscape which, while it exists apart, yet confers a deep and solemn beauty upon his drama" (225). Once again, it takes a novelist to get to the heart of the Hardyan matter.

And finally, there is the word of Hardy himself, in which he makes explicit the connection between the work art does and the conditions that prevail in nature, a connection that I will try to elaborate in this book's last two chapters:

So, then, if Nature's defects must be looked in the face and transcribed, whence arises the *art* in poetry and novel-writing? Which must certainly show art, or it becomes merely mechanical reporting. I think the art lies in making these defects the basis of a hitherto unperceived beauty, by irradiating them with "the light that never was" on their surface, but is seen to be latent in them by the spiritual eye. (LWTW, p. 118)

II

In this book, I am taking as exemplary of the wrong kind of Hardy the notorious sequence about little Father Time in *Jude the Obscure*, in which Jude's young son kills himself and all of Jude's other children. There is something tendentious and merely philosophical in the extravagant excess of it all. It is the most famous example of the way Hardy's plots often strain, with whatever devices he can seize upon, toward the fulfillment of a preplanned disaster. Lawrence characterizes such plot developments, not entirely unfairly, as morality plays. But Hardy is a greater writer hiding in plain sight, hunkered down behind a barricade of respectability and philosophical profundities, the disguised author of his own official biography, a doggedly reputable figure whose novels demonstrate anything but respect for the respectability he sought. This other Hardy, always full of contradictions, imagines a world driven by chance but represented in forms almost symmetrically shaped (as when Jude and Sue in *Jude the Obscure* virtually trade their positions in regard to religion and morality). This Hardy is an almost natural writer who unfortunately also often clogs his prose with evidences of respectability and learning; he is a lover of life and the living, yet committed to plotting a world into which it would have been better not to have been born. The poetry I am emphasizing emerges unexpectedly from page to page, often seemingly against the grain of the

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plots. In the first chapter I try to address this peculiar contradiction in Hardy, the pull to respectability, which Lawrence despised, and the deep love and admiration for forces of nature that are anything but respectable. One can see that tension played out in the center of the plot of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, which I discuss in that respect in a later chapter.

The urgency with which I have come in this book to rethink and reexperience Hardy derives partly from my sense that the great burst of theory-saturated criticism of the last few decades,⁶ even as it has often brilliantly sustained Hardy's position in the pantheon of English novelists and enriched awareness of the depth and complexity of his relentless narratives of loss and death, does not do justice to the Woolfian, the Lawrentian Hardy. The Hardy I have engaged here is the writer of extraordinary nature poems in the midst of complicated Victorian narratives, poems in which Hardy observes with Darwinian eyes, detecting the most minute movements of life in nature, reading traces of history in rocks and landscapes, dust and mud and leaves and trees, affirming a natural and instinctive life that persists as counterpoint to (sometimes intersecting with) his dramatic narratives of thwarted love and class distinctions. Most of the novels imply what I will be calling an "understory," in which the little moral dramas are expanded in time in a world where things are endlessly interconnected. Hardy requires, in representing that world, new modes of attention: "setting behind the small action of his protagonists the terrific action of unfathomed nature." His constant concern with off-angle perceptions, with the crucial importance of "seeing," observing, zooming and focusing in, is the requisite for this expanded understanding of what constitutes the real, and reshapes what is peripheral into what is central.

Reading Hardy requires as much attention to what might be thought of as mere context or "background description" as to the unfolding of story. Hardy was certainly a tale teller but even as his protagonists' fates spin downward, the world they occupy persists in its robust alternative life. The poetry notices not only the losses and failures and frustrations of the protagonists, but the violence and vitality of the world that surrounds them: in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Gabriel Oak's sheep are led over a cliff by a sweet young dog that will have to be killed for its error; in *Tess* there is a horse pierced and bleeding to death; in *Jude* there is a trapped rabbit screaming; and almost everywhere in Hardy's novels, we learn of snails whose shells seem always cracking underfoot, sleeping doves tumbling into the fire, moths crackling in the candle flame, sometimes as signals between lovers, fossils evoking epochs of extinction. Trees grind

moaning against each other, violent storms and fires destroy or change directions of lives, stars and meteors dizzyingly distant from their awed and shrinking observers play out dramas of movement sublimely beyond human capacity for feeling, at the very limits of human perception and understanding.

The novels are alive with delicate and precise images of ephemera, like moths and slugs and gnats and snails and birds and glowworms and leaves, registering freshly the busyness, intricacy, and profusion of life. These often tiny forms of life may seem from moment to moment mere backdrops to the human dramas with which the novels are primarily concerned – social manners, fine class distinctions, anxieties about morals, love, and money as they depend on and clash with each other. But the understories are far more than backdrop; they play out active elements essential to Hardy's imagined world, where the human dramas, driven by improbable twists of Chance, are chancy only to the conventional perceptions that Hardy's narratives attempt to transcend. As Woolf insisted, the human drama is inevitably entangled with lives and forces other than human. Hardy's writerly eyes detect these lives and forces everywhere, and their existence inflects the tone and feeling of his Victorian dramas and melodramas. But even as the novels give shape to reality so as to reverse the patterns of the usual Victorian plots, they do not make moral sense of the world. Driven by hypersensitivity to all forms of life and by compassion for individual human suffering in a world he never made, Hardy evokes in the novels alternate narratives, understories, usually fragmentarily revealed. One might well experience them as life-affirming.

The true morality of Hardy's novels is in the life they shadow forth on the margins of drama and melodrama, a life represented with extraordinary originality and sensitivity. The morality is in the distinctiveness of Hardy's art – the great defense against the off-angle forces of society and nature that attempt to impose moral norms on an experience always too wild and vital to be contained. It is the art that gives shape and meaning, exploiting the Darwinian powers of finding life in the most obscure places, and reading meaning in apparent randomness, history in every object.

The counterpoint makes for painful harmony, a re-imagination of reality, often startling both in its revelations and in its beauty. The abundance and complexity of the world, its very refusal to bend to the desires of the humans who make themselves protagonists, is a recurring motif in Hardy's novels. Hardy's art might be taken as the work of finding order and meaning in that abundance and apparent randomness, as it were, scouring the fields with Tess to find the obscure garlic hidden in the grass.

It makes something beautiful of mindless processes and hopelessly complex entanglements. This enterprise is intimated as early as Hardy's first and extravagant novel, *Desperate Remedies*, whose epigraph is from Walter Scott: "Though an unconnected course of adventure is what most frequently occurs in nature, yet the province of the romance-writer being artificial, there is more required from him than a mere compliance with the simplicity of reality" (*DR*).

Not that reality is really simple. Hardy would have remembered Darwin daringly affirming, after the most elaborate exposition of complicated connections, "not that in nature the relations can ever be as simple as this" (*OS*, p. 73). The "simplicity" is rather apparent randomness, working like Darwin's natural selection, not according to some intelligent design (like the design of the romancer) but according to the possibilities allowed by the rigid laws of nature within the totally contingent, accidental conditions of the moment. The simplicity is entanglement, a complexity so enormous that its interconnections are not intelligible except through the cunning of science or the artifices of art.

I will be insisting throughout that a major aspect of Hardy's novels is his art of hearing the counter melodies and writing the understory. He regularly shifts focus and alerts attention. He attends to the limits of particular perspectives (as Hardy recognized that astronomy had to do and was doing in his own time), of seeing what's on the periphery, of coming to terms with a world always in motion, so charged with life and movement and physical energy that any single "story" would be inadequate and has to be recognized as part of something larger, impersonal, and aimless. That "reality" remains fundamentally indifferent to the human desires that make for the beginnings, middles, and ends of story. The capacity to hear that counter melody, to read the understory of these phenomena, is one of the distinguishing marks of Hardy's narrators and the occasional keen-eyed protagonists who, like Giles Winterborne of *The Woodlanders*, suffer for their perceptions. At one point in *Desperate Remedies*, in one of those sage discussions among minor rural figures who populate the Wessex novels, Farmer Springrove and his friend are discussing death. Fatalists both, they yet register what I take to be one of the central aspects of Hardy's art. A surprising death, in fact any sudden unlikely event, Springrove says, "is just a discovery of your own mind, and not an alteration in the Lord's" (ch. 21, p. 450). The "Lord's" intention is the adamant (if vital) reality governed by irreversible laws that we dream beyond, that we plan beyond, that we fail to see (often until it is too late), and that we imagine are malleable. Our subjectivities miss what is adamant

and irresistible about the world out there in favor of what we desire out there to be like. There is after all no “Chance” in Hardy’s chance-saturated world – the rules of the world do not change; our minds at their keenest, at their most artful, come to notice them and make art of them.

Hardy’s novels are, then, novels of vision, or, perhaps more precisely, novels of sensibility. Even when the plots point predictably downward, their worlds tingle along the edges of perception. The novels engage a fundamentally nonhuman world too abundant and complicated to be contained; they are alert to what ordinary life overlooks but that is intrinsic to it. They become shaping narratives of discovery even if the protagonists cannot make those discoveries themselves, and they evoke, in their darkest moments, compassion for the living figures who are doomed both by society and by the laws of nature.

Like so much other Victorian literature, like the science that Hardy read and followed, his novels – as the critic and sage John Ruskin put it in a very different context – not only teach his readers how to see but also suggest the overwhelming urgency of seeing. A keen observer can discover the phenomena at work even before they occasionally and catastrophically impinge on the course of human affairs. The narrator and in fragmentary ways the protagonists infer significance from every object, for objects are rarely merely objects – they are histories, intimations of unseen life, hints at improbable connections in a Darwinian world in which everything is related to everything else, and all things have deep histories. The visible world, the sensibly accessible world, is charged with life and meaning, as it is in Darwin’s prose as well; but it must be seen, and it might be said that Hardy’s novels teach us to see it. History is built into the present. It is readable in rocks and ruins, in faces and bodies, in stars and in insects, even in dust. The present is incomprehensible without it. Art is a crucial means of discovery.

The fragmentary plots of ephemera and vastness are implicitly juxtaposed with human drama, more or less Victorian-realist in texture; unlike the realist plots, radically unlike Hardy’s own plots, these parallel phenomena are without beginning, middle, and end – saturated with history and always happening. Their presence, marginal to the perceptions of most of the protagonists, poetically and critically essential to the narrator, is intrinsic to the Victorian dramas that play out in the world that they too occupy. While Hardy does not pause to moralize them, his practice of evoking the details of their reality implies something of the way George Eliot famously put it: “If we had a keen vision and feeling of ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel’s heart

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beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence.”⁷ Mistaken for George Eliot in his earliest novels, Hardy fills his own with passages that record the other side of silence.

Hardy’s extraordinary attentiveness to the multiplicities and particularities and significances of nature is the strongest evidence for my larger argument, that he is far more loving of this theoretically cruel world than he is normally taken to be. Hardy may not be an original thinker, but he is an original “seer.” His acts of attention to the worlds in which his protagonists move are, as in the writings of his much admired Darwin, acts of love; Hardy’s world reverberates with significances that only the finest sensibilities of his characters and the apparently detached consciousness of his narrators can detect. No English novelist is as sensitive to the abundance and complexity of the natural world. It might seem ironic, but just that sensitivity pushes Hardy to focus on the centrality of human consciousness. For it is the extraordinary power of that consciousness that makes it possible for little human beings to range between the vast realities of the starry universe and the minutiae of insect life with equal comprehension – and with awe.

So there is an irony in the directions Hardy’s fictions take that parallels the irony of the implications of Darwin’s own ostensibly materialist thinking. The unthinking, indifferent natural world has somehow produced a creature capable of thinking and of recognizing that world’s incapacity to think at all. The express tension in Hardy between the natural world and the consciousnesses that suffer from being able to see it and think about it requires him, after all, to dramatize consciousness itself, in all its paradoxical tensions. His detached narrators look down on the experience they narrate from a great height. But they have insight into it that the characters themselves, by and large, do not; they call our attention to things that, as mere thinking participants, we could not see on our own. As the consciousness of characters within the narratives expands, the pain of knowing grows. Apparently not a psychological writer for whom the action is thrown inside, he produces novels of considerable psychological complexity, leaving it to the reader to understand the implications of actions and events and things; the world of things implies a world of consciousness perceiving them, and, indeed, a world elsewhere.

The idea of a world mindlessly created and run, aimlessly in motion, regardless of human desires, certainly was crucial to Hardy’s famous pessimism, but it was also crucial to his ambivalence about human consciousness and sensitivities. These make his protagonists exceptionally vulnerable to pain, but they also make the art that creates them possible.

Darwin also lies behind Hardy's expressed and dramatized compassion for virtually all living things, for we are all quite literally related, we are all similarly entitled to attention and care. Heightened attention and shifts of focus are Darwinian attributes as well; these strategies allow Hardy to represent the external world, the world that is not inside us, in ways that invoke inwardness after all. The power to recognize and represent that external world, that nature of intricate entanglements, becomes both the most distinctive human power and the means to the fullest extension of what I will sentimentally characterize as love. At the heart of virtually all of Hardy's strategies of defense, imaginations of disaster, and imaginations of vitality lies Darwinian thinking and feeling.

The world is readable as Darwin read it: all things are creatures of time who leave their traces and intimate important histories; the world is mindless and all modes of order (including Hardy's almost obsessive way of ordering his narratives neatly) are artful human impositions on an entangled nature; nature is entirely indifferent to human desire; human intelligence and sensibility in their fullest development outleap their adaptive functions. Developments out of natural selection, they both give humans the advantage in the struggles for existence and make them particularly vulnerable to the indifference and complexity of the forces of nature. And yet they are the condition for the creation of order and of art. Hardy invents a strategy of narration (embodied often thematically in the novels) that keeps him as narrator invulnerable as he reveals the richness and dangerousness of the ambient world. Hidden behind the orders of his language, he tells stories of figures who dare to follow the irrational orders of their feelings, and who are thus admirably doomed. Art is something Hardy hides behind. It is also an opening to life. It is the life in Hardy that matters most.

Acknowledgments

This book was originally conceived as a gathering of my essays on Hardy sprinkled through the years. It became quite another thing, a new argument about Hardy. Some of the materials, large pieces and small, are scattered throughout this book:

- “Thomas Hardy’s the *Mayor of Casterbridge*: Reversing the Real,” *The Realistic Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), ch. 11, pp. 229–251.
- “The Cartesian Hardy: I Think Therefore I Am Doomed,” *Dying to Know* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), ch. 9, pp. 200–219.
- “Shaping Hardy’s Art: Vision, Class, and Sex,” in John Richetti, ed., *Columbia History of the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 533–559.
- “Hardy and Darwin: An Enchanting Hardy?” in Keith Wilson, ed., *A Companion to Thomas Hardy* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 36–53.
- “Hardy’s ‘Inward Turn’: From Mindless Matter to the Art of the Mind,” *The Hardy Review*, 15 No. 2 (2013), pp. 11–26.

Abbreviations

Below is a list of novels and critical studies to which reference is frequently made in the course of this book. With each entry, I provide an abbreviation that will facilitate reference in the text. The editions of Hardy's novels listed here are sound but very various, for they are the ones with which I have regularly worked and which I have used in teaching. The date in brackets is the date of original publication. In the text, I accompany page numbers with chapter numbers so that the quotations may be found in any of the many other editions of Hardy's novels now available.

Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species: A Facsimile of the First Edition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), *OS*.

Thomas Hardy, *Desperate Remedies* (London: Macmillan and Co, Ltd., 1926 [1871]), *DR*.

Thomas Hardy, *Under the Greenwood Tree* (London: Penguin Books, 1985 [1872]), *UGW*.

Thomas Hardy, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (London: Macmillan, 1975 [1873]), *PBE*.

Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd* (Boston: Riverside Press, 1957 [1874]), *FM*.

Thomas Hardy, *The Hand of Ethelberta: A Comedy in Chapters* (London: Macmillan, 1905 [1876]), *HE*.

Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (London: Penguin Books, 1982 [1878]), *RN*.

Thomas Hardy, *The Trumpet Major* (London: Macmillan, 1974 [1880]), *TM*.

Thomas Hardy, *Two on a Tower* (London: Macmillan, 1975 [1882]), *TT*.

Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge: A Study of a Man of Character* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co, 1977 [1886]), *MC*.

Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders* (The New Wessex Edition) (London: Macmillan, 1974 [1887]), *W*.

List of Abbreviations

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- Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988 [1891]), *TD*.
- Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* (London: Penguin Books, 1978 [1895]), *JO*.
- Thomas Hardy, *The Well-Beloved: A Sketch of a Temperament* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1991[1897]), *WB*.
- Thomas Hardy, *Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Lennart A. Björk (New York: New York University Press, 1985), *LN*.
- D. H. Lawrence, "A Study of Thomas Hardy," in *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence* (New York: The Viking Press, 1936), *P*.
- Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist* (New York: Random House, 1971), *MMTH*.
- Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1982), *MMB*.
- Michael Millgate, ed., *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* (Athens, OH: University of Georgia Press, 1985), *LWTH*.
- J. Hillis Miller, *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, Harvard University Press, 1970), *DD*.
- Virginia Woolf, "Thomas Hardy," in *The Second Common Reader* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1960 [1932]), *VW*.