

CHANCE AND CIRCULARITY IN HARDY'S TESS AND JUDE COMPARED

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Hardy's *Tess of the Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* have usually been deemed as two utterly disparate novels as regards both content and form. On the one hand, those who have approached *Tess* have tended to focus their attention upon *Chance* as the novel's governing principle and the index of Hardy's cosmic pessimism; by contrast, *Jude* has generally been examined as social critique rather than as a literary embodiment of a particular cosmogony. On the other hand, there seems to be critical consensus in seeing *Jude* as formally opposed to *Tess*: while the former is said to display an unquestionably circular pattern, the latter is regarded as exhibiting a repetitive and, some even conclude, linear design. Examining the two texts closely, however, one realizes, first of all, that actually the two novels are similarly preoccupied by two major ideas: contingency and randomness; secondly, that *Tess*, precisely because it is structurally repetitive, displays a cyclical pattern which brings it close to *Jude*. bearing this in mind, this paper will demonstrate that the highly ordered structural design that characterizes *Tess* and *Jude* corroborates, instead of subverting as it might appear, what spreads over the surface of the two narratives: Heredity under the guise of Chance

I

The spiritual crisis which beset the Victorian age today is but the shadow of a shadow; but for the contemporaries of Disraeli and Gladstone, it was a problem dramatically real, at once close and universal. It was a question of God or no God. Evolution in science meant revolution in religion.¹

The religious crisis which characterized the late Victorian age cannot be fully justified by a single factor, least of all by the mere publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. This work, rather than precipitating the religious crisis to which Henkin alludes above, paved the way for an extensive scientific debate and the development of new scientific, social, and anthropological theories represented by such writers as August

¹ Henkin, Leo J., *Darwinism in the English Novel, 1860-1910: The Impact of Evolution on Victorian Fiction*, New York: Russell & Russell, 1963, publicado por primera vez en 1940, pág. 10.

Weismann, Herbert Spencer and Andrew Lang. In turn, these new theories contributed to weaken further the image that man, until then, had more or less entertained about himself, namely, that of "a creature of divine fiat, set by God's deliberate choice on a rung of the ladder of organic being - a little below the angels (...) but many rungs above the beasts".²

Thomas Hardy was nineteen when *The Origin of Species* was published. That he read it and that he followed the debate which ensued around biological issues has been amply documented by those who have concentrated on his personal notes. Yet Hardy's response to the scientific revolution of his time evidences itself not only in his personal notes but in the *Weltanschauung* that permeates his imaginative writings too. More particularly, it manifests itself in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*.

As was anticipated earlier, two basic ideas would appear to converge in these novels. Tess, Jude and Sue are first and foremost marked by *Heredity*, a biological concept that Hardy, as Peter Morton suggests, might have borrowed from Weismann's writings.³ In Hardy's fictional world, however, this biological concept is paradoxically connected to the non-scientific idea of *Chance*. The connection is paradoxical, indeed, but only to a certain extent. Inasmuch as Darwin himself "was at a loss to account for hereditary processes", it is not surprising that the less scientific Victorian minds should understand such processes as the most extreme illustration of randomness.⁴ For these minds, there must have been nothing more beyond human control than the fact of inheriting personality traits from distant ancestors.

In *Tess*, Angel emerges as the spokesman of that common Victorian attitude towards heredity:

He was embittered by the conviction that all this desolation had been brought by the accident of her being a d'Urbervilles.⁵

Tess already possesses, albeit in a latent state, inherited traits when the casual encounter between the parson and her father takes place. The most important one amongst these would be a "reckless acquiescence in chance too apparent in the whole d'Urberville family" (*TD*, p. 324). This being so, a contingent event will be sufficient to set working the whole

² Morton, Peter, *The Vital Science: Biology and the Literary Imagination: 1860-1900*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984, pág 7.

³ Morton, pág 176.

⁴ Ebbatson, Robert, *The Evolutionary Self: Hardy, Forster, Lawrence*, Brighton: Harvester Press, and New Jersey: Barnes and Noble Books, 1982, pág 25.

⁵ Hardy, Thomas, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, ed. by David Skilton, with an introduction by A. Alvarez, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985, pág 332. All references in the text will be to this edition; the title will be abbreviated as *TD*.

machinery of Chance, whereby this latent hereditary feature soon becomes manifest.

Heredity is also thematized in *Jude the Obscure*. What Jude and Sue have received from the Fawleys' is, as Jude's aunt informs the reader, an unfitness for marriage:

Jude, my child, don't you ever marry. 'Tisn't for the Fawleys to take that step any more (...)"⁶

The difference with regard to Tess is that whereas she is totally unaware about what she has inherited until late in her life, Jude and Sue learn about their family unfitness for marriage very early in theirs. Jude is told about it when he is eleven; Sue apparently knows about it from her father early in her childhood: when Jude tells Sue that "it was always impressed upon (him) that (he) ought not to marry" because he "belonged to an odd and peculiar family - the wrong breed for marriage", the following dialogue between Sue and Jude takes place:

"Ah-who used to stay that to you?"

"My great-aunt. She said it always ended badly with us Fawleys."

"That's strange. My father used to say the same to me!" (*JO*, p. 174).

Sue, like Angel in *Tess*, interprets Heredity as a matter of Chance:

"O but there can't be anything in it," she said with nervous lightness. "Our family have been *unlucky* of late years in choosing mates-that's all" (*JO*, p. 175; my emphasis).

Sue's answer with regard to inheritance brings to the fore the second difference between Tess on the one hand, and Jude and Sue on the other: unlike Tess, they have not inherited a disposition to submit to chance from their forefathers, therefore they are biologically free to challenge the family pattern by getting married to their respective partners: Arabella and Phillotson. Both Sue and Jude are granted the freedom to choose how to act and, concurrently, to take full responsibility for their own errors.⁷

Some critics have also deemed Tess accountable for her own destiny. Leon Waldoff, for example, posits the following question: "In what way (...) does Tess fail to take the necessary trouble to ward off disaster (...)?", the suggestion being that disaster in her case is ultimately brought about by a *personality trait* (that is, not a biological mark).⁸ He then locates

⁶ Hardy, Thomas, *Jude the Obscure*, ed. with an introduction by Patricia Ingham, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, pág 8. All references in the text will be to this edition; the title will be abbreviated as *JO*.

⁷ Wright, Walter F., "Vision and Perspective: Structure in Thomas Hardy", *Studies in the Novel*, 4 (1972), 93.

⁸ Waldoff, Leon, "Psychological determinism in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*", in *Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy*, ed. by Dale Kramer, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979, pág 136.

the "strength of the novel" in "the characterization of Tess" and goes on to say that "an understanding of how her character shapes her fate is essential for an interpretation of the meaning of her tragedy." "This leads immediately to a careful consideration of the contingent episode that acts as the catalyst of Tess's tragedy: the episode of the horse's death (*TD*, p. 71).

One recalls that the horse's death is interpreted by the Durbeyfield household as a "misfortune" (*TD*, p. 72). The point that needs to be emphasized here is that for this unexpected event to have any significant effect upon Tess's life, two other factors will need to intervene: were it not for the accidental discovery of their "pedigree", it is plausible to surmise that the Durbeyfield family would have found an alternative path to overcome such a disastrous incident. Then, had they known about their family curse, their resorting to the d'Urbervilles' for help might have been circumvented, were it not for Tess's inherited tendency to comply with Chance. Therefore, one could conjecture that instead of a personal disposition it is her hereditary "passivity", understood as a compulsive submission to Chance, or a letting herself go with the turn of events as they come, that which actually impels Tess towards death. Put simply: Heredity itself prevents Tess from being able to "ward off", disaster. Taking undue responsibility for Prince's death, and eager to make amends for its loss, she agrees to beg her next of kin for help. But as Walter F. Wright accurately observes, it is often the case in Hardy's novels that when "the characters, with harmless or even noble intent, choose a reasonable course of action, Chance makes their choice itself the cause of disaster."¹⁰

As mentioned, Jude is ostensibly granted the freedom to challenge his family curse (the freedom which Tess herself lacks). Thus, Hardy would seemingly have left behind in this novel a view of the world where human beings are at the mercy of randomness and contingency. Indeed, it would appear that the first calamity in Jude's life, his marriage to Arabella, does not happen "by chance"; simply, it is brought about by Jude's compliance with social codes. Following this, however, Chance enters into Jude's and Sue's lives as if through the back door. It is a late entrance compared with Tess, but an entrance after all.

Jude has also often been regarded as completely opposed to Tess in that tragedy in the former is, so it is argued, the result of a particular social fabric and not a matter of bad luck. Yet this account slights a crucial detail: the "(craziness) for books" which runs through the Fawleys' blood:

"The boy is crazy for books, that he is. It runs in our family rather. His cousin Sue is just the same, so I've heard" (*JO*, p. 8).

⁹ Waldoff, pág 196.

¹⁰ Wright, pág 93.

This obsession with books results in an uncommonly imaginative mind which incapacitates Jude for apprehending reality as it is. Furthermore, it is such as to make him the slave of his single dream: intellectual dedication in the city of Christminster. After Arabella forsakes him Jude sets off to Christminster. The question is that, while in *Tess* the Heredity issue added to the coincidental death of Prince, in *Jude* it adds to the coincidence of Sue's living in the city of Jude's dreams. Following all these hazardous incidents occur, Tess, Jude and Sue will find themselves hurled into a whirlwind of accidental misfortunes, random encounters, disastrous mischances. These will constitute turning points in their lives.

In *Tess*, the "misfortune" of laughing at Carr (*TD*, p. 111) results in the protagonist being raped by Alec. The unexpected death of Sorrow not only brings her close to the place where her ancestors lived (*TD*, p. 151), it also and more importantly leads her to the casual meeting with Angel. The letter of her confession accidentally slips under the carpet, the consequence being Angel's deserting her after the wedding. In need, she goes to Angel's parents, but "it was somewhat *Unfortunate* that she encountered the sons and not the father, who despite his narrowness, was far less starched and ironed than (they)" (*TD*, p. 377; my emphasis). This "unfortunate" event is followed by the casual encounter with Alec, which in turn coincides with the Durbeyfields' homelessness. All these accidental events drive Tess to return to Alec, and as she does so, Angel comes back -unexpectedly as far as Tess is concerned- from Brasil. It all ends up with Alec's murder and, eventually, with Tess's announced death.

Unlike *Tess*, not all the coincidental events in *Jude* turn out to be "malevolent". At Christminster, Jude arranges, for his first meeting with Sue, to see her at "the cross in the pavement which marked the spot of martyrdoms" (*JO*, p. 101). This fortuitous incident does not spark off catastrophe; rather, it functions as a foreshadowing of the protagonist's eventual tragic decline. Other peripheral accidents can be accounted for in *Jude*. To begin with, there is Jude's going with Sue to the very same inn at which he stayed with Arabella (*JO*, p. 254). Then, there is the random gathering of all the characters at the Great Wessex Agricultural Show (*JO*, p. 304), and again, three years later, at the same spot (*JO*, p. 326). Finally, one recalls the episode of the Training school, in which two accidents converge: first, Jude and Sue unpremeditatedly miss the evening train that should have taken them back to Melchester; second, nobody believes Sue's account because

The fact was that only twelve months before, there had occurred a lamentable seduction of one of the pupils who had made the same statement in order to gain meetings with her lover. The affair had created a scandal, and the management had consequently been rough on cousins ever since (*JO*, p. 145).

The severity with which Sue is punished makes her flee school and seek help in Jude. Although in this particular episode Chance looks somewhat "malevolent", it intervenes as a "beneficent" power on two other occasions. In effect, one recalls the note that Jude sends to Sue: there he arranges to go with Sue to Marygreen to pay Aunt Drusilla a visit. The encounter, although not prevented, is at least delayed by Arabella's chancing to be at the pub where Jude goes just before Sue's expected arrival (*JO*, p. 186). Their second meeting is also delayed by Chance: a note from Sue arranging this meeting reaches Jude's lodgings while he is away at Kennetbridge. He consequently misses the opportunity to see Sue, whereupon we read:

At last (Jude's) chimerical expedition to Kennetbridge really did seem to have been another special intervention of Providence to keep him away from temptation (*JO*, p. 204).

These two events demonstrate that Chance, although in a passing way, works as a kind of providential power inasmuch as it precludes tragedy. Yet it can also, and does indeed bring about misfortune in *Jude*. Actually the decisive moment in Jude's career is an "unpremeditated" kiss:

At a distance of twenty or thirty yards both had looked round simultaneously. That look behind was *fatal* to the reserve hitherto more or less maintained. They had quickly run back, and met, and embracing most unpremeditatedly, kissed closed and long.

The kiss was a turning point in Jude's career (*JO*, p. 227; my emphasis).

It is precisely this kiss that causes Sue to divorce Phillotson and brings Jude and Sue together. Ironically, the second crucial moment in their lives is Father Time's murder of their children and his own suicide. What is relevant here is not the bringing into the novel a Malthusian episode for its own sake; rather, it is the fact that such a dreadful event springs from the utterance of words which, as Jude comments, "chanced to work badly":

"Your plan might have been a good one for the majority of cases; only in our peculiar case it chanced to work badly perhaps. He must have known sooner or later" (*JO* p. 357).

The incident brings Sue back to Phillotson, and Jude back to Arabella, eventually rushing Jude toward a pathetic death. More importantly, the fatal consequences of the episode hinge on the theme of heredity. In effect, one cannot sidestep that, as seen earlier, Sue and Jude have inherited a quasi-pathological obsession with books. In the case of Sue, however, it does not translate as an exorbitant imagination (as it did for Jude); on the contrary, it results in an overwhelming rational mind. Thus, that which Jude fails to perceive because of a blinding fantasy, Sue apprehends with her rational mind:

"You are one of the very men Christminster was intended for when the colleges were founded; a man with a passion for learning, but no money, or opportunities, or friends. But you were elbowed off

the pavement by the millionaires' sons" (*JO*, p. 156).

Sue's shrewd observation illustrates her capacity for making good sense of worldly matters. Yet at the same time, her rational mind prevents her from reconciling herself to Father Time's action: there is no rationality behind but mere Chance. That which reason cannot account for, superstition can. Hence her submission to the family curse and her resorting to a vindictive God as the sole justification of the tragedy:

"We must conform!" she said mournfully. "All the ancient wrath of the Power above us has been vented upon us, His poor creatures, and we must submit. There is no choice. We must. It is no use fighting against God!" (*JO*, p. 361).

One notices how these words call into mind a biblical verse:

I the lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me (*Exodus*, XX, 5).

Concomitantly, the two passages (Sue's observation and the biblical extract) echo that other excerpt from *Tess* in which we read:

But though to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children may be a morality good enough for divinities, it is scorned by average human nature (*TD*, p. 119).

Thus we see how religion and heredity - that is science - intermingle in Hardy's writings. Moreover, it becomes apparent that the world to which both novels point is one where religion has been irrevocably superseded by science.

Tess's death would seemingly corroborate that a divinity has indeed 'visited the sins' of her forefathers upon her. Similarly, *Jude* closes with the fulfilment of a family curse. This makes one wonder about the relevance of Chance in Hardy's fictional universe. Actually, what arises from the two novels is, in the end, a surprising feeling of ambiguity. It may appear on the surface that Chance dominates in these novels. However, even though Chance ostensibly lies behind Heredity, the latter eventually triumphs.

At this juncture one could speculate that, in a Victorian world suddenly overwhelmed by scienticism, Hardy would have aimed to present his reader with two imaginary worlds where Chance would be "given a chance", as if nostalgically striving to bring back an "old world" of romance. Although the world which one encounters in his novel is certainly not a world "meant" by a benign power, it is nevertheless one where there is still room for the inexplicable and the wonder that characterize the world of romance. Alternatively, Hardy would be presenting his reader with Heredity in the guise of Chance; naturalism concealed under romance. The logic of life or the illogicality of Chance, a physics or a metaphysics: these would seemingly be the terms in conflict. Two contradictory philosophies are

apparently simultaneously at work and produce an ambiguous *Weltanschauung*. In what follows I propose to examine the way in which the two narratives are structured with a view to elucidating how the underlying design relates to this outwardly dualistic conception of life.

II

So do flux and reflux -the rhythm of change- alternate and persist in everything under the sky (*TD*, p. 434).

This epigraph is crucial when it comes to dealing with the structural pattern of *Tess* and, indeed, *Jude*. As pointed out in the introduction, critics have often supported the idea that, whereas the structural design of *Tess* is linear, that of *Jude* is circular. Peter J. Casagrande is a case in point: according to this scholar, there would be 'a contrast between a linear, phasal and developmental movement in *Tess* and a spatial cyclical pattern in *Jude*'.¹¹ Similarly, Hillis H. Miller argues that *Tess* "calls attention to the pattern of linear sequence in the powerful emblematic effect of topography".¹² Paradoxically, just as linearity is emphasized in a certain number of studies about *Tess*, so is repetition. At times, *Tess* is even described as being at once linear and repetitive. Such is the case of Miller, for whom *Tess* would also be "structured around manifold repetitions".¹³ There is, however, a sense of contradiction in so wishing to bring together linearity and repetition when dealing with *Tess*: for what is repetition but a return to the starting point, indeed, a cyclic pattern. Actually, such is the pattern that underlies, not just *Jude*, but *Tess* as well. Hence the epitaph: *Tess* and *Jude*, as we shall see, constitute a "flux" structurally speaking, yet one that "refluxes", that is to say, that flows back to the point at which the flux originated.

Undoubtedly, *Jude's* journeying differs from *Tess's* displacements in *geographical* terms. David Sonstroem's study of *Jude's* itinerary provides a remarkably accurate visual scheme which highlights the "length" and "frequent shifts in direction" of *Jude's* course and the irony that results from his ending at Christminster, the city of his impossible dream.¹⁴ This scheme evidences that, however spatially extensive *Jude's* course is, he ends up not very far from where he first started -Marygreen. Like Arabella, he traces a very short line. Yet his line differs from his wife's in that it is complemented by Sue's: a journeying which starts at Christminster and ends at Marygreen.

¹¹ Casagrande, Peter J., *Unity in Hardy's Novels: Repetitive Symmetries*, Kansas: Kansas University Press, 1982, pág 202.

¹² Miller, Hillis H., "Fiction and Repetition: *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*", in *Forms of Modern British Fiction*, ed. by alan Warren Friedman, Austin, Tex., and London: University of Texas Press, 1975, pág 59.

¹³ Miller, pág 45.

¹⁴ Sonstroem, David, "Order and Disorder in *Jude the Obscure*", *English Literature in Transition*, 24 (1981), 6-15.

Interestingly, the most absolute circumference results when joining Jude's and Sue's lines together. Furthermore, their changing places would indicate that the distance which separated Jude and Sue at the beginning has never been bridged nor shortened. Thus, Jude and Sue actually shape the axis of the novel's cyclical pattern, and their respective courses enhance the feeling of entrapment, of the impossibility of breaking through a gyratory wheel which does not seem to stop for them to step out. But there is another circumference, a self-contained one this time, and which is drawn by Phillotson: after a number of removals, he too ends up at Marygreen, the point from which he started. The pattern described by Arabella's displacements stands out: she, like Jude, draws a line that goes from Marygreen to Christminster; yet, having no complement, the line remains a line. In fact, she is the only one whose journeying is not cyclical, hence pointing to her being the only one to have found the loophole which will enable her to achieve freedom.

Reaching beyond a purely topographical level, one discovers a similar spatial circularity in *Tess*. Actually, its concentric design is shaped by the transformation of metaphorical sceneries into literal ones. As Charlotte Thompson shrewdly observes, the outstanding feature about *Tess* is that

foreshadowings and their realizations necessarily organize themselves into symmetries, the more striking of which emerge in the novel's framing ends, where they lend the appearance of circularity and reinforce the impression of a history repeating itself in cycles.¹⁵

Tess would be framed upon a transformation of figurative, initial materials into literal, final ones. For example, the first appearance of Tess in the novel occurs in the course of a pagan ritual, the May dance, which takes place in an enclosure surrounded by a "wicket-gate" (*TD*, p. 50), that is, "a figurative cage" which will later find its counterpart in a "a literal prison": the place at which Tess ends up, one which likewise "(boasts) a wall and a wicket", hence "bespeaking captivity" too.¹⁶ Then, just as her first appearance happens at the 'token sites of a token May rite', the last time we see her he is at Stonehenge, a pagan site.¹⁷

In addition, displacements at a physical level are paralleled by psychological movements in both novels. As Jude literally moves from Marygreen to Christminster, so does he psychologically move 'from religious

¹⁵ Thompson, Charlotte, "Language and the shape of Reality in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*", *Journal of English Literary History*, 50 (1983), 730.

¹⁶ Thompson, pág 731.

¹⁷ Thompson, pág 731

belief to scepticism'.¹⁸ And as Sue goes from Christminster to Marygreen, so does she move 'from scepticism to religious belief'.¹⁹ Then, as he does at the level of physical displacement, Phillotson shapes a circle of his own at a psychological level by changing 'from conventionality to unconventionality and back again to conventionality'.²⁰ According to David Lodge, Arabella would move 'from worldliness to religiosity and back to wordliness'.²¹ This is not altogether accurate. True, she is a worldly woman at the beginning of the narrative: one recalls that she marries Jude out of material interest. Then, realizing that 'there was no prospect of his bettering himself or her', she decides to abandon him (*JO*, p. 71). Likewise, the reason why she later wants to legalize her marriage with Carlett is that "she had a chance of improving her circumstances and leading a genteel life" (*JO*, p. 200). Then, at the Kennethbridge fair, we learn that since the death of her husband six weeks earlier she has taken up going to church and has become a 'chapel member' (*JO*, p. 331). But that there has not been any real conversion to piety becomes apparent in the course of a conversation between her and Sue, the subject being the former's dead husband: "'He died suddenly, six weeks ago, leaving me none too well off'" (*JO*, p. 327). Needless to say that the reason behind her remarrying Jude is simply material expediency:

With the money he had earned he shifted his lodgings to a yet more central part of the town. But Arabella saw that he was not likely to do much work for a long while, and was cross enough at the turn affairs had taken since her re-marriage to him (*JO*, p. 421).

Therefore, Arabella differs from the rest of the cast in that she walks on a straight line without stumbling from beginning to end, both geographically and psychologically speaking. In a way, she emerges as the very epitome of what Hardy's contemporary, Ruskin, would see as the goddess of the European 'practical' religion of the Victorian Age: 'Britannia Agoraia', the 'Goddess of Getting on'.²² From a Darwinian point of view, Arabella would be a survivor, always succeeding in adapting herself to new circumstances and environments. Once again, she alone proves herself capable of breaking through the walls of the metaphorical prison they all seem to inhabit.

The circularity of the psychological pattern drawn by Jude, Sue, and Phillotson in *Jude* is paralleled by Alec's and Angel's psychological

¹⁸ Lodge, David, "Jude the Obscure: Pessimism and Fictional Form", in *Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy*, pág. 196.

¹⁹ Lodge, pág. 196

²⁰ Lodge, pág. 196

²¹ Lodge, pág. 196

²² Ruskin, John, *The Crown of Wild Olive*, London: Unwin, 1901, págs 96-97, 102-108.

progress (or rather, lack of it) in *Tess*. In effect, the changes undergone by Alec at this level constitute the reverse of those undergone by Phillotson. At the beginning of the narrative, Alec is the worldliest and the most irreligious of all the characters. He then converts to Christianity under the influence of Angel's father. Finally, he gives up Christian morality and takes Tess back as his mistress. Angel progresses along similar lines: at first he is one who does not care for conventionalities and has withdrawn from religion. At the turning point of the novel, that is, when Tess confesses her past relationship with Alec, he becomes an almost fanatically moral being. By the end of the narrative he returns to unconventionality by accepting Tess even when he knows that she has been living with Alec and, indeed, that she has murdered him. Tess's psychological evolution, however, diverts from the patterns above described. As Peter J. Casagrande comments, she develops 'from an innocent maid to a mature woman of tragic understanding'.²³ It is as if Tess, like Arabella, had finally managed to transcend an overwhelmingly circumscribed reality. This would perhaps explain why *Tess* has been so often regarded as being less pessimistic in comparison with *Jude*: for while Jude and Sue remain within the cell, Jude even dying within it, Tess dies only after finding the exit of it.

The feeling of enclosure which arises at both spatial and psychological levels increases as one moves into a third plane. David Lodge, commenting on *Jude*, remarks that its plot, 'considered in its bare outline as a design or structure, is strikingly symmetrical: the two marriages, the two divorces, the two remarriages'.²⁴ This is correct, but only to some extent. In reality, the allegedly 'symmetrical' design is disrupted by Arabella: she differs from the rest in that the possibility of remarrying remains open for her. In like manner, Tess's death opens a door for Angel to remarry. Furthermore, with the opening of that door, the narrative enables Liza-Lu to take over Tess, whereby one is left with the prospect of possible happiness. This contrasts with *Jude*, at the end of which one is left with the impression that there is no possible way out.

The analysis above elaborated evidences that the novels under consideration are structurally and thematically much more alike than it would appear at first sight. Ultimately, the architectural design of the two novels, resulting from the juxtaposition of concentric structures, is that of a labyrinth: a pattern which suitably translates the idea of the insignificance of individual action in these fictional worlds.

²³ Casagrande, pág 202.

²⁴ Lodge, pág 196.

III

According to Peter Morton, the Darwinian paradox would have brought about an equally paradoxical response in Victorian literary circles.²⁵ Darwin was torn between an optimistic belief in the improvement of the human species and the frightening natural logic that his own studies illuminated. This tension was mirrored in literature: in the work of Wilde, for example, or in Carroll's Alice stories of the mid-sixties which, as Dwight Culler observes, 'dissolves away almost all formal artistic structure, leaving the crazy disorder of pure farce'.²⁶ This 'crazy disorder of pure farce' contrasts with the structure of *Tess* and *Jude*: throughout these novels, the impression one gets is that Tess's, Angel's, Jude's and Sue's lives have been merely unlucky. Yet 'suddenly, to the retrospective eye (...) the pattern is there'.²⁷ Hence the two novels might be described as 'farcical tragedies'. In effect, to paraphrase the narrator in *Tess*, there would seemingly be no "Nature's holy plan" (*TD*, p. 62) whatsoever within the worlds they represent respectively. For a while, the reader is held in suspense: along their pilgrimage in search of happiness, the protagonists may have a stroke of good luck at any time. But as both narratives advance, this hopeful feeling gradually fades away. In the end, a conflict emerges: one which would be obliquely hinted at by the narrator's conclusion about Tess's fate: "Justice" was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess' (*TD*, p. 489) -and, one may add, with Jude and Sue. The epigraph has often caught the attention of Hardy's critics. Yet these have recurrently failed to appreciate how the word 'sport' perfectly describes what we are confronted with in the two novels: for what is 'sport' but playful randomness within the boundaries of a strict set of rules. Everything may appear to happen by accident, but one feels there is always somebody from above pulling the strings and making sure that everything reaches its pre-determined end. Sport, indeed, or Chance within the enclosure of Circularity: a 'combination of the inexorable and the gratuitous'.²⁸

If one takes formal design as that which is inexorable, and fabulistic randomness as that which is gratuitous, it may be said that the underlying structural pattern of *Tess* and *Jude* simply subverts the metaphysics of Chance that provides the surface of the narratives. Yet Chance, as seen earlier, may also be conceived as Heredity's mask, that is to say, as disguised

²⁵ Morton, pág 4.

²⁶ Morton, pág 4

²⁷ Miller, pág 65.

²⁸ Beer, Gillian, *Darwin's Plots*, London, Boston, Mass., Melbourne and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983, pág 258.

²⁹ Wilde Oscar, *The Critic as Artist, in The Portable Oscar Wilde*, selected and edited by Richard Aldington, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978, pág 105.

logic, or an order under the guise of randomness. Thus, the underlying pattern does nothing but emphasize the principle of heredity which Oscar Wilde himself defined as 'the last of the Fates and the most terrible': on which 'has hemmed us round (but) we may not watch (...) or see', what he poetically calls 'Nemesis without her mask'.²⁹ One could even go as far as to propound that, from a scientific viewpoint, in so trying to impose some rational order on what looks like utter randomness, Hardy would be acting Mendelian, at a time when Mendel's genetic experiments had not yet been accepted by the bulk of scientists who preferred to embrace Darwin's non-statistically based eugenics.

Design and Heredity -randomness and Chance: these are the concepts which link Hardy's novels with the Darwinian aesthetic imagination of his own times and which in turn open the door to the modern tragedy. faced with a godless science and a pre-ordered world where human freedom and will-to-live would appear to have no room, Hardy asserts his own freedom by creating the imaginary worlds of *Tess* and *Jude*: two worlds dominated by Chance, in turn subordinated to Science, in turn subjected to an artistic Creator ultimately deciding what the design is to be. As Miller states, Hardy as artist 'transforms the fated into art and therefore transcends the power of the Immanent Will'; his art is 'a victory of consciousness over suffering'³⁰. The point is, by turning reality into fiction, he succeeds in '(nullifying) it, (in holding) it at distance, (in making) it over into a linguistic form which renders it less dangerous'.³¹

³⁰ Wright, pág 94.

³¹ Wright, págs 94-95

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