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Arabella, Jude, or the Pig? Selectivism and a New Definition of Aesthetic Quality

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Pepper's generally overlooked, fifth world hypothesis generates its own aesthetic theory, and its root metaphor of the selective act is particularly rich for understanding literature as well as human behavior. Goal-seeking activity can result in a fundamental change in the quality of lived experience; no other aesthetic theory adequately explains how art has the capacity to transform our lives. Hardy's characters rarely experience the exhilaration of purposivity—feeling themselves adapting to new situations—yet that quality is present in the novels as in a scene in which Jude and Arabella slaughter a pig. The humans' behavior is less purposive than the pig's whose five stages of response to death pre-figure the hero on his tragic journey of unfulfilment. The scene is also a black comedy of sex-negative family life. Hardy's reader is challenged to separate real from sham values if the sentient body is to survive modern civilization.

Stephen C. Pepper devotes the last chapter of *Concept and Quality* (1967) to the aesthetic theory that is generated by his new root metaphor, the purposive act. The new theory is a synthesis of the concepts derived from his previous work describing the four, relatively adequate world hypotheses: pleasure value from mechanism, complex integration of materials from organicism, vivid quality from contextualism, and appeal to the normal, discriminating response from formism. This synthesis results in a "descriptive definition of positive aesthetic experience as *satisfaction in felt quality*" (p. 566). Note how similar this is to the eclectic definition towards the end of *The Basis of Criticism in the Arts*: "*An object of beauty is a normal perceptual integration of feelings highly pleasant, and vivid in quality*" (Pepper, 1945, p. 141). As Efron has argued (1980), the whole chapter in Pepper's last book does not add appreciably to his earlier formulations.

Pepper's eclecticism has the weakness of ignoring active tensions between the philosophies. For example, to the extent that a Hardy novel may make a reader anxious or uncomfortable, the vividness of the reading experience is heightened but at the expense of the pleasure value. Other vivid material may not appeal to a normal response or be fully integrated into the art object, yet we would not like to see it edited. Pepper's new definition is a cryptic revision, which does not suggest any of the richness of his new root metaphor. Selectivism must have the capacity to generate its own unique definition of aesthetic quality if it is to be considered as philosophically serious as the other four hypotheses. Such a criterion of value would be some quality hitherto

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unarticulated or fully appreciated in great works of art. This paper will posit that perceiving art, as well as goal-seeking in other experiences, includes a powerful, survivalist emotion: feeling ourselves being transformed as we adapt creatively to new situations. I will call this quality *purposivity*.

The word *purpose* is as manacled by the forges of culture as the word *experience* was before Dewey (1934) liberated it. Dewey showed us that experience is not just what happens to an organism but is the qualitatively felt result of a completed and fulfilling interaction between organism and environment. We need to liberate *purpose* from its identification with mere goal-seeking behavior. *Purpose* is conscious formulation of an object of desire, but it also includes the pre-conscious and felt quality of behavior, encompassing the quickened feelings of the living perceiving themselves in the very process of adapting to new situations. *Purposivity* refers to the behavior and the feelings, concept and quality. Perhaps it is a paradoxical experience of feeling oneself surviving at the very moment the self is being transformed. I sensed it quickening Louise Bryant and John Reed in Warren Beatty's *Reds* as the lovers find their *personal relation works* only when their *work relates* them *personally* to a revolutionary social process. Such an explosive integration of the personal with the social eludes Jude Fawley with either of his women, Arabella or Sue. In Hardy purposivity is almost always truncated, potential fulfilment vividly yearned for but overwhelmed by negative personal, social and environmental factors. It is not Fate which determines the outcome in a Hardy novel—a common misconception among his readers—but the failures of the characters to overcome obstacles to the vital purposes categorized by Pepper (1967) as the eight *selective systems*. Each is a context that offers feedback to sustain appropriate behavior and signal mistakes that lead away from a purpose. When Jude and Arabella try to work together to slaughter the pig they raised, the social situation becomes so tense that both realize the failure of their marriage. Instead of feeling the exhilaration of adapting together in their new relation, each expresses irritability and frustration. Such analysis of purposivity in the action of characters is central to the selectivist's critical method.

Before looking closer at that crucial scene in *Jude the Obscure* (Hardy, 1895/1977, pp. 83-88), we need to see two other implications of this root metaphor for critical theory. From the perspective of the artist and creativity, purposivity is the artist's coming to terms with psychic and somatic tensions. Hardy wrote stories as part of his re-creating his father's sensuality, particularly in regards to the elder Hardy's attraction and repulsion from his wife. The most recent biography of Hardy is a tentative step in the direction of understanding the importance of the father (Millgate, 1982). My own theory is that Hardy's working through his feelings about his father, particularly after his death in 1892, seemed to free him from storytelling, a medium he always denigraded, and enabled him to devote himself entirely to poetry. Having recreated his own psychic drama with ever more penetration of its layers,

Hardy finds in poetry a voice more personal and assured of its feelings. Writing must have been a psychological necessity for Hardy; he continued the practice into advanced old age, long after his finances and reputation were secure, keeping alive those childhood feelings that had had incomplete expression.

Purposivity is also relevant to aesthetic perception. One of the qualities of great works of art such as *Jude the Obscure* is that they will not let us go. Serious readers find themselves returning to the art object for further encounters and new perceptions. Pepper's chapter on the perceptive series in *The Basis of Criticism in the Arts* lays the groundwork for this feature of selectivism. No other theory adequately explains why perceptions can be felt over a lifetime of cumulative—if—intermittent results, even beyond the consummatory phase, which Pepper says is the goal of the contextualist reader. Selectivism provides an answer for why we are drawn back again. When faced with a particular challenge in a personal situation, the perceiver may select an appropriate work of art to aid in the attainment of actual goals. The aid may come in the form of new energy patterns that correspond to behaviors or feelings necessary for overcoming obstacles.

Reading Hardy has helped me to understand the dynamics in work, marrige, and communal activity by my *feeling with* the characters in a variety of situations. In other words, reading is a selective process with consequences for everyday life. Fully receptive reading presents a particular challenge for conditioned responses, and interpreting a text includes the informing context of the reader's personal situation at the time. This two-way communication makes possible a continuing process of evaluation of the text and re-valuation of the reader's own life. The usefulness of art is its capacity to critique habitual responses and sham values and to promote what Pepper (1967) calls the *natural norms*: deep bodily pleasure, shared experiences, success in work. Hardy is particularly significant from a selectivist point of view for his dramatizations of the negation of these values in modern civilization: repression, frustration, isolation, cultural and personality disintegration.

To return then to the presence of purposivity in the fiction, we can analyze the pig-sticking scene, and it will yield a complete purposive behavior with its accompanying emotional charge, a test case for a selectivist method. The episode has evidentally captured the imagination of readers from the first. In the scene Jude and Arabella, because of the tardiness of the pig-killer, decide to slaughter the animal themselves that they had raised for profit. They disagree on how the matter should be handled. Jude feels guilty about the killing but also wants to appear manly; his wife is business-like and quick tempered. Their irritability continues on into the next day and is instrumental in their estrangement. The reader's initial impression may be to note the incompatability of this married couple.

Hardy's letters after the publication of the novel reveal that he extracted this

scene and reprinted it in an anti-vivasectionist periodical, presumably for the edification of fellow animal lovers (Purdy and Millgate, 1980). Such a sentimental moral is implicit in the tale; however, I doubt any readers have been converted to vegetarianism as a result. In the context of the novel, the scene is part of the dramatic argument for more liberal divorce laws. Despite Hardy's disclaimers to his friends in these letters, the novel is a critique of marriage. A recent critic has refocused the discussion of the scene (Kincaid, 1979). (Pepper [1945] writes persuasively of the importance of criticism as a social institution, an integral part of the selective process of reading, which he sees as a collective enterprise.) Kincaid argues that Hardy maintains no coherent point of view on his material in this scene; the text offers multiple interpretations. He urges the reader to resist the desire for a univocal reading (the organicist's perspective) and to stop short of the ironic possibility that the text so thoroughly undercuts itself that no interpretation is possible (Pepper's "utter skepticism"). Kincaid's close reading demonstrates that the narrator contradicts himself about the meaning of the animal sacrifice. One cannot determine from the text whether or not he privileges Jude for his sensitivity, Arabella for her pragmatism, the pig for his human-like responses, or the hungry robin who chooses to fly away from the horror. Kincaid might have pointed out that the narrator is not a clear source for any view in the novel. Hardy is working from a new narrative distance, much more impersonal than his more direct but confused swaying between advocacy and condemnation of his heroine in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873/1978a), the other novel Kincaid finds incoherent, which indeed it is. The absence of Hardy as direct commentator serves to cover this author's ambivalence about such subjects as women and sexuality and thus offers up a potentially more coherent text; however, the issue of the slaughter of animals is really a red herring that leads away from the felt quality of the scene.

We can grant Kincaid his principle that competing patterns of organizing details may exist in a text; nevertheless, some lead nowhere while others either are richer or better fit the dominant emotional quality of the work. One way to discriminate between image patterns is to see that, in general, the conventional categories do not yield as much. For example, the images of Tess as wounded animal and pure, spiritual creature able to live above her body do not gibe with the more evocative images of Tess as a sexual body (Efron, 1967, p. 70). In *Jude* the images of the hero as fore-doomed or too sensitive for this world cannot long obscure the more telling implication that Jude's idealism gets in the way of his physical and intellectual life.

Kincaid is led astray by his conventional notions of tragedy. He comments, "Tragic heroes do not do such undignified things as jumping up and down on unyielding ice, trying to get themselves dead and failing," and "Tragedies end with a glimpse of restored order with somebody like Fortinbras taking control, not with some animal like Arabella out to repeat her chaotic entrap-

ments" (p. 204). This critic completely misses the tragic dimension to Jude's idealism because he accepts the traditional categories of animality and spirituality, the very concepts the novel calls into question. The hackneyed reading of Arabella as pig (simple contiguity need not mean metaphorical truth) is similarly belied by the context. Kincaid's own analysis demonstrates how the pig expresses human feeling in a direct way denied to the manipulative, emotionally stunted Arabella. There is something positive in Hardy's pig which is a corrective to both Jude's idealism and Arabella's practicality.

The irony of the episode is that the humans' behavior is less purposive than the pig's. Jude and Arabella fail to regulate themselves according to any of the feedback they get in the social situation. The narrator's detachment is justified in this vivid "art of relief" (Pepper, 1967) whose effect is a kind of emetic for the grinding, petty frustration of modern lives. The painfulness of the scene is that the reader may feel a disturbing identification with the bickering married couple while feeling with the pig in an unsentimental way that upsets conventional categories of response. Hardy is after much bigger timber than humane treatment of domestic animals. It is the search for survival of the sentient, sexual body in the alien world of industrial societies. Dramatically, in the pig Hardy finds his locus of positive value. No mere descent into the pathetic fallacy, Hardy's technique, the pig as purposive creature, depicts five stages of feeling. The cries of hunger caused by Arabella's cutting off his feed the day before are followed by the fear and surprise of being noosed. Then the animal struggles in a rage until he senses the hopelessness of his efforts. Finally, the animal undergoes the agony of the actual butchering by the hands of those who fed him. If we take these descriptions of raw feelings as the altered movement of energy in his body, then there is no anthropomorphism here but the record of what such a live creature might experience. These five stages of response suggest a tragic vision of the death process that belies the sham comfort about the acceptance of death offered in Kübler-Ross' theory (1969).

The pig's suffering sets up dissonant harmonic overtones throughout the novel. For Jude himself undergoes a prolonged and profound suffering of similar sequence. His cries for nurturing are not met by Aunt Drusilla; he feels noosed in a marriage gin with Arabella; he fears reprisal from society for his studies; he rages at injustice in taverns and on street corners; he despairs of success and then of any sustaining love from Sue; and he dies an agonized death from pneumonia and emotional exhaustion. There is no beautiful acceptance of mortality or glimpse of order to buffer the reader, and if this is not the material of modern tragedy, what is? Jude is the live creature who sympathizes with animals but wishes to deny his own animality in the mistaken effort to better himself.

An even darker implication of the pig-sticking scene is the light it sheds on the theme of the sex-negative family. Arabella had just confessed that she was not really pregnant. In the absence of a real baby, the pig is a kind of surrogate

child that the newlyweds raise together. Out of the profit motive they sacrifice the animal, but it is the coldness of the marriage which leads to the stunting of children. (Is Hardy thinking of his own conception out of wedlock that forced his father's reluctant betrothal?) The narrator speaks of the "eloquently keen reproach of a creature recognizing at last the treachery of those who had seemed his only friends" (p. 85). This comment offers a striking parallel with Father Time's reproach to Sue for becoming pregnant with another child. The boy's "eloquence" takes the form of a pathetic suicide note and slaughter of the fragile family that Sue and Jude could not handle along with their economic and personal problems. Father Time was the son of the loveless Arabella; he approaches puberty in despair, modulated by cries and fears reminiscent of Jude and Arabella's pig.

The novel depicts grim family life as no other, culminating in "the coming universal wish not to live" (p. 356), an attempt to nullify the purposive, natural will to survive. *Jude the Obscure* portrays individuals, groups, and a whole culture in the absence of fulfilment turning towards death and away from all positive value. It is an environment in which only the lower animals maintain a pure survival wish. Thus, Hardy makes a claim for a mere pig as the locus of positive value. To my mind, no other novel details so poignantly the futile rebellion against the natural, survival instinct. (Some novelists try to negate the purposive body. Evelyn Waugh, for example, attempts dramatic arguments for repressive civilization and the need for an ethos of self denial. However, when only the house of civilization endures, the fiction is unconvincing. In Hardy's late novels no ideal remains intact.)

While the implications of the pig-sticking scene open out in many directions, Hardy's art is not incoherent. Admirable for its eschewal of the quest for certainty, Kincaid's reading falters because of his conventional notions of tragedy and the animal. Nor does a sentimental reading, a plea for domestic animals, lead very richly into the novel. And then there are the idealistic readers who tend to admire Jude's yearning for a university education but ignor the cry of his body for sexual and emotional fulfilment. Arabella's is not the voice of the body; she is sensual and a survivor but offers the low-grade sexuality of post-industrial society in which persons are sexual consumers lacking in tenderness and passion. Sue and Jude do feel tenderness for each other, and this takes them a long way toward psychic health against the formidable forces of social disapproval and their own guilt. In the end, it is the failure of the family over generations to promote positive sexuality that leads to Father Time's acute emotional deprivation, Sue's regression, and Jude's neurotic restlessness. The felt quality of the pig-sticking scene is the surprising assertion of pig-alivedness in the face of all sham values: self-denial, the profit motive, manly behavior, domestic practicality, and compulsory marriage. Faced with a choice, the reader selects the pig over Arabella or Jude.

In *Tess of the d'Urbevilles* (1891/1978b) Hardy is still holding out for the

ideal of purity. In *The Well-Beloved* (1897/1978c) he attempts to deny that the physical has anything to do with Pierston's pursuit of his ideal woman. However, in *Jude the Obscure* Hardy has his most uncompromising novel, the sustained critique of idealism which attempts to lead live creatures away from their bodies and creative adaptation with their environment. In the metaphor of the purposive act, Pepper affirms that existence is a struggle for survival. Pepper's behaviorism does not negate the subjective element of experience because in this theory purposive acts are pervaded with feeling. The reader may derive little comfort from *Jude the Obscure*, but one cannot help reflecting how seriously we in our culture need to promote survival value. Though natural selection is only one of eight selective systems in Pepper's theory, it is the one most unique to selectivism. It is a philosophy of naturalism without the determinism of a Zola or Crane; as a theory of human behavior, it mediates the view of the experimental psychologist with the craft of the creative novelist and the purposive needs of the perceptive reader.

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