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### Eros and Expectations in Thomas Hardy's *The Well-Beloved*

Thomas Hardy's *The Well-Beloved* has not, as a novel, lived up to its name. The first critics of the work "affected to find unmentionable moral atrocities in its pages."<sup>1</sup> Half a century later Albert J. Guerard dismissed it as "not the worst book ever published by a major writer" but "certainly one of the most trivial."<sup>2</sup> Desmond Hawkins was subsequently even less equivocal: "As a novel, *The Well-Beloved* undoubtedly merits the derision it invariably receives."<sup>3</sup> Still more recently Robert Gittings has attacked the novel on different grounds, maintaining that it is a biographically based fantasy in which the author explores little more than his own continuing propensity to fall foolishly in love with younger women.<sup>4</sup> But most critics of Hardy's fiction either pass discreetly over *The Well-Beloved* or ignore it entirely.

That tide of pervasive condemnation and neglect has begun to turn. J. Hillis Miller, in his 1978 "Introduction" to the New Wessex Edition of the novel, argues that *The Well-Beloved* is "one of the most important nineteenth-century novels about art."<sup>5</sup> As Miller points out, the first 1892 serial version of *The Well-Beloved* was written to serve as a substitute for *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* when the prospective serial publisher of *Tess* objected to it on moral grounds. Then, after he had finished *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy returned to *The Well-Beloved* reworked much of it, and published it in 1897 as his final novel. The book does keep impressive company in the Hardy canon, and, Miller continues, "the relation of *The Well-Beloved* to *Tess* and *Jude* is in fact so close that one may claim the two greater novels cannot be understood in separation from their less famous sister" in which "the repetitive symmetries of Hardy's work as a whole" and the "motivating energy of Hardy's fiction" are both more evident.<sup>6</sup> On rather different grounds, John Fowles has also recently argued that *The Well-Beloved* is "infinitely the most important of all Hardy's books for a practising or intending writer of fiction to establish an attitude towards."<sup>7</sup>

Yet Miller himself admits that he does not fully resolve the crucial question he raises:

What is it that compels Jocelyn, like the protagonists of Hardy's other novels, to repeat again and again the same pattern of a love doomed to cause suffering and dissatisfaction? Only the hint of an answer can be given here.... The answer, however, will involve a recognition that Jocelyn does not really want to join himself to any of the Avices. Such a union would be a kind of incest.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, Fowles, addressing the same problem, argues a theory of the Freudian springs of art that fits neither Hardy as the author of *The Well-Beloved* nor Jocelyn Pierston as the sculptor whose career, as an artist and a case study, the book chronicles. In short, both the art of the novel and its artist/protagonist still require scrutiny. What is the pattern to Pierston's loves, which is also the pattern of *The Well-Beloved*, and why do obvious hints of incest (noted by Fowles as well as Miller) loom so large in each? To answer that question, one must trace out the connections set forth in the novel between subverted love, perverted Platonism, and Jocelyn's limitations as a man and an artist. Those connections also illuminate the pervasive ironies of the novel that Hardy, with appropriate irony, put forth as the inoffensive tale that *Tess* was not.<sup>9</sup>

The most obvious pattern in *The Well-Beloved* is baldly asserted by the titles of the three sections into which the novel is divided: "A Young Man of Twenty," "A Young Man of Forty," and "A Young Man of Sixty." As even Hardy's naming of these parts attests, his protagonist is caught up in a repetitious pursuit foredoomed to failure. The "young man of twenty" loves and loses Avice Caro. He repeats the same procedure again at forty and again at sixty. Some variety is provided by the fact that in each case it is a different Avice Caro; some further continuity by the fact that the three Avices are, of course, related. The first is the mother of the second; the second is the mother of the third. That sequence, as critics of *The Well-Beloved* have long observed, strains credulity. But Hardy, I would argue, was not with this novel aiming at credibility. The portrait of the protagonist is not realistic, serious; it is comic, fantastic; and the three parts, largely repeating each other, allow for a calculated balance of similarities in differences and differences in similarities whereby the author emphasizes the limitations of his main character—as a lover, a philosopher, and an artist.

A calculated balancing is obvious in even the first section. The first term in a three-part progression, the "young man of twenty" must be presented as, essentially, a given. Yet what is given is Jocelyn's proclivity to find "embodiments" (his term) of his "Well Beloved" in different

and diverse young ladies. The first Avice Caro thus has a long line of antecedents. Soon she has a successor too. Fearing he will suggest the old Portland Island custom of a trial union to test her fertility, Avice declines to meet her fiancé on the last night before he returns to London to make final arrangements for the marriage he has just hastily proposed. That same night he accidentally meets another young lady, Marcia Bencomb, and soon has a try at a different trial marriage. That trial results in a double romantic failure. It does not lead to a marriage with Marcia; it definitely ends the engagement with Avice.

Twenty years later the main problem with the next Avice is that she is not the original one. "Avice the Second was clearly more matter-of-fact, unreflecting, [and] less cultivated than her mother had been."<sup>10</sup> Pierston, now a Royal Academician, must admit to himself that he has fallen in love with "an uneducated laundress" (p. 96), a state of affairs that "shocked his intellect" (p. 101). But more than his intellect is shocked when he finds that he is the second man in his second Avice's life. He admits to her that it was he who jilted her mother, whereupon she has a secret to confess too. She also has left someone, but after the ceremony. The parallels (and the possibility that they might each transcend a previous mistake) do not appeal to Pierston. That character, as Hardy effectively demonstrates, is committed to his own right to rise above conventional ideas of propriety, but the women with whom he would rise must already be above suspicion. Old enough to be her father, he lectures the poor girl on how she "nearly brought scandal upon us both by your letting me love you. Really, you are a very wicked woman" (p. 138). He returns her, much against her will, to the island; buys back the husband by setting him up in business; and then oversees the reestablished union until a baby is born, a baby whom he asks her to christen Avice.

The first section of the novel is comedy; the second is comedy repeated as farce; the third is farce repeated as still more pointed farce. The baby born at the end of Part Two reappears, naturally, as the next Avice. Pierston plays once more his "role of *jeune premier*" to this third young lady who reminds him not so much of her mother as of "her granny" (p. 158). Only Hardy's cutting irony keeps the novel from becoming, at this point, too absurdly contrived. We can note, for example, how the still "fairly presentable" protagonist is described, early in Part Three, "as a pleasing man of no marked antiquity, his outline differing but little from what it had been when he was half his years"—providing the assessment is conducted in such dim light as "the dusk of evening" (p. 157). With appropriate unconcern for the

substance of Pierston as either a man or an artist, the sardonic narrator praises only this elderly swain's silhouette.

That Pierston has become merely the comic shadow of his formerly insubstantial self is suggested in other ways too. Formerly he had been at least superficially the man he fancied himself as being—an artist in perpetual pursuit of the beautiful led on by some new manifestation of the Well-Beloved in transient, mortal form. Such is not quite how things work in the third case. Pierston is sent for by Avice the Second who anticipates his passion for her daughter and manages the courtship even as the daughter believes that the visiting elderly man is courting her widowed mother. Management, moreover, is necessary. Pierston nearly botches everything by telling the girl that he “was [her] mother's and [her] grandmother's young man” (p. 172). She finally consents to marry a “fossilized relic” from her ancestral past only at the insistence of her dying mother who is determined that Avice the Third will have what Avice the Second wanted whether Avice the Third wants it or not.

Pierston's last attempt at marrying his Avice helps to unify the book, for his third failure is largely the inverse of his previous two. The second Avice had a husband whom she did not love; the third has a lover whom she has not yet married. Still more to the point, Pierston's engagement with the third Avice, like his engagement to the first one, is ended by a chance encounter. This time, however, it is the bride-to-be who betrays a promise for a more promising match, while it is the prospective groom who makes that betrayal possible when he fails to keep what at first seemed an unimportant appointment. Unexpectedly left alone, the third Avice goes to meet her young lover, intending to return all his previous gifts, but when she finds him seriously ill she brings him home with her to her mother's cottage. He thus takes Pierston's place in the bed, just as Marcia earlier took the first Avice's.

In this “openly and insistently coincidental” book, the first and third section are conjoined in still another manner.<sup>11</sup> Through one of life's (or the author's) little ironies, the young lover who replaces Pierston is the step-son of the Marcia Bencomb who replaced Pierston's first Avice. Hardy thereby also connects the second section and the third; Pierston, in both, sublimates his own desires to sponsor paternally a young Avice improvidentially wed. Which further connects the opening section and the concluding one; the only role available to the protagonist, that of elderly patron observer of the young lovers, must be shared with Marcia, who soon arrives on the scene to force a recognition of the “revenge” brought in by the whirligig of time:

‘What do you mean to do?’ she asked.

'I do nothing: there is nothing to be done.... It is how I served her grandmother—one of Time's revenges.'

'Served her so for me.'

'Yes. Now she me for your son.' (p. 195, ellipsis in the original)

The novel concludes with still more ironic reversals. To consolidate this "parental relation with the young people" (p. 204), to have at least companionship in place of lost love, and to please the neighbours who insist the two elderly companions "ought to marry" (p. 203), Jocelyn weds Marcia. The wedding, with the rheumatic bride "wheeled into the church in a chair" (p. 204), is not auspicious. The older pair are hardly married before the younger couple fall to quarelling and talking of separation. As Michael Ryan observes, "all of the continuities [of the novel] ... are broken" at its ends, "and Hardy inserts enough ironic twists to guarantee that they cannot be repaired," the chief twist being the fact that Jocelyn "finally regains a lost love, but, ironically, it is the wrong one."<sup>12</sup>

Pierston's progress as a questing lover brings him, then, to an end that is, in comic bleakness, almost Kafkaesque. Furthermore, just as the comedy of the plot is darkened and exaggerated by repetition, so too is the comedy of the ending magnified by the possibility of still more repetition. For the ending, bleak as it is, is not necessarily final, and the impetus of the open conclusion Hardy provides carries the reader on to a series of increasingly fantastic other endings, each one more unlikely than the last. Despite rumors to the contrary, Pierston is still alive at the end of Part Three and his third Avicé is newly wed. Perhaps his proclivity for finding his Well-Beloved in a lineal sequence of Avices has only temporarily subsided. One can imagine a young man of eighty and even a young man of a hundred.

Jocelyn's romantic fiascoes underlie the structure of the novel, but it is his persistent Platonism transmogrified into a kind of personal fantasy (an ideal construct of his own life) that underlies and structures his different romantic fiascoes. To turn now to that Platonism, we should first note how confused Pierston himself is regarding the philosophy that governs, so he proclaims, his conduct. This confusion is especially exemplified by a crucial exchange in which Jocelyn and his painter friend, Somers, discuss the second Avicé:

'You were staring, as far as I could see, at a pretty little washerwoman with a basket of clothes?' resumed the painter.

'Yes; it was that to you, but not to me. Behind the mere pretty island girl (to the world) is, in my eye, the Idea, in Platonic phraseology—the essence and epitome of all that is desirable in this existence.... I am under a doom, Somers. Yes, I am under a doom. To have been always following a phantom whom I saw in woman after woman while she was at a distance, but vanishing away on close approach, was bad enough; but

now the terrible thing is that the phantom does *not* vanish, but stays to tantalize me even when I am near enough to see what it is! That girl holds me, *though* my eyes are open, and *though* I see that I am a fool! (pp. 117-18, ellipsis and emphasis in the original)

The contradictions are inescapable. To start with, Pierston confuses his philosophy even as he articulates it. His "doom," not his mission, is to seek the "essence" of all that is desirable; that "essence" is a "phantom" that previously vanished away. The problem now is that it does not. Pierston's "essence and epitome" is also, as he acknowledges, the product of his own questionable perspective. Avice is one thing to Somers and another thing to him. What lover—love traditionally being blind—would claim anything less? And finally, what does Pierston "see"—a transcendent perfection embodied in "the mere pretty island girl" or a "fool" who falsely posits such perfection to justify to himself an unlikely love?

However that last question is answered, the reader still sees Pierston attempting to equate folly and philosophy:

There was a strange difference in his regard of his present folly and of his love in his youthful time. Now he could be mad with method, knowing it to be madness: then he was compelled to make believe his madness wisdom. In those days any flash of reason upon his loved one's imperfections was blurred over hastily and with fear. Such penetrative vision now did not cool him. He knew he was the creature of a tendency; and passively acquiesced. (p. 111)

The stern Socratic dictum, "Know thyself," is modified to a less demanding maxim, "Know thyself and go with the flow." Pierston can then be more honest regarding himself and the sundry attractions of his Well-Beloveds, whose "imperfections" no longer need be "blurred over" or hidden from sight. The issue is not to learn to recognize the good but to learn not to mind recognizing the bad.

More significantly, he can "be mad with method, knowing it to be madness" because he also knows it really does not matter. One more or less imperfect Well-Beloved will soon be followed by another. That continuing sequence is also justified—indeed required—by still more confused philosophy.

To use a practical eye, it appeared that, as he had once thought, this Caro family—though it might not for centuries, or ever, furnish up an individual nature which would exactly, ideally, supplement his own imperfect one and round with it the perfect whole—was yet the only family he had ever met, or was likely to meet, which possessed the materials for her making. It was as if the Caros had found the clay but not the potter, while other families whose daughters might attract him had found the potter but not the clay. (p. 111)

Hardy has his protagonist muddle together Plato and Aristotle, essence and material versus efficient causes. Yet Pierston's dubious dichotomy of pottery and clay, which can hardly explain either an observed imperfect human being or an imagined perfect one, still serves him well. If the potters have not the proper clay or the proper clay is worked only by inferior potters, no vessel will suffice. Pierston, Hardy demonstrates, idealizes in order not to obtain his ideal. Or, differently put, we see him save the ideal only through the sacrifice of each temporary embodiment of the ideal. The trap of egotism (the expectations of the I) takes on a metaphysical cast. It is desirable to desire the ideal. Yet too great a commitment to the ideal (as Angel Clare in *Tess* and Sue Bridehead in *Jude* also discover) is disastrously self-limiting. Of course Jocelyn Pierston is neither an Angel nor a Sue. Issues seriously treated in those two other novels—consider Angel's unreasonable demand for purity in *Tess* or Sue's agonized decision to leave Jude and return to Philotson—are mocked in *The Well-Beloved*, mocked by both the actions from which they arise and the philosophy that underlies them.

Pierston's philosophy, bordering on a parody of Platonism, also borders on a theory of art. Paul Ward has even argued that *The Well-Beloved* is Hardy's one *Künstlerroman*.<sup>13</sup> Yet it is hard to imagine a less flattering portrait of the artist as a young man, as a middle-aged man, and as an elderly man. It is also hard to give Jocelyn Pierston much credence as an artist.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the very ineptness with which Pierston conducts his quasi-Platonic search for an ideal love has been seen as a "joining of the themes of unfulfilled desire and artistic creation."<sup>15</sup> The novel can then be read, in Norman Page's phrase, as "a fable of the artist's nature and condition."<sup>16</sup> For Page, the point of the fable is that the "persistence of youthful emotions in undiminished vigour is the source of . . . creativity as an artist; but, for the man, it is a penalty and a burden."<sup>17</sup> The consideration that most older men courting women young enough to be their daughters are neither suffering nor in the service of art does not lend much credence to such an interpretation of the novel. Nor can we readily accept Ward's formulation of "a private man who yearns for love" but who must go "philandering" because of "the fickleness of a creative temperament" and a need for the "inspiration" provided by new experiences.<sup>18</sup> Again we have "The Artist's Dilemma" (Ward's title) presented in terms which better describe the rake's progress.

A more sophisticated discussion of *The Well-Beloved* as a parable of art is provided by John Fowles, who conjoins his assessment of the novel with a Freudian analysis of the psychic impetus to art. The artist, Fowles argues, retains a painful memory of the lost magical unity that

once existed between his mother and himself as an infant and therefore strives, as an adult, to create alternate versions of that unity. He would discover in the female characters whom his male protagonists, as surrogates for himself, pursue, a surrogate for the missing mother. Thus "the markedly repetitive nature of [artistic] endeavor" as well as "the sense of irrevocable loss (or predestined defeat) so characteristic of many major novelists, and not least of Thomas Hardy in particular."<sup>19</sup>

This reading of the novel-writing process leads to a reading of *The Well-Beloved*, which, for Fowles, is the most naked of Hardy's novels and the one in which he fully realizes the futility of his endeavour as a novelist as well as the various guilts attendant on that profession (betraying his wife by flirting with his fictional heroines behind whom lie his three maternal cousins, Martha, Rebecca, and Tryphena Sparks, behind whom lies his mother and his incestuous attraction to her). The novel represents "fiction at the end of its tether."<sup>20</sup> Its portrayal of the protagonist lampoons the processes whereby the author has created him, which explains, Fowles suggests, why "incest plays so large a part in the novel" and also why "*The Well-Beloved* [seethes]... with the suppressed rage of the self-duped."<sup>21</sup> Briefly put, the novel demythifies the myth of the artist on which it centers. However, Fowles continues, the book also embraces the same pseudo-incestuous Freudian myth of artistic creation that it demythifies:

This is the redeeming secret behind all the self-disgust in *The Well-Beloved*. If superficially the three Avices may be seen ... (by Pierston-Hardy) as the trumpery puppets of his own morbid and narcissistic imagination, more deeply I view them as something quite contrary: the maternal muses who grant the power to comprehend and palliate the universal condition of mankind, which is, given the ability of the human mind to choose and imagine other than the chosen or the actual course of events, a permanent state of loss.<sup>22</sup>

This intriguing thesis accounts for much of the resonance of *The Well-Beloved* and yet it is not finally convincing. Fowles's posited motivating force for the whole process of art is a male quest that turns on a sexual dichotomy. The artist is a "he" in pursuit of a "she." Hardy, however, simply does not thus polarize that quest. Avice the Second's admission to Pierston that she has "loved *fifteen* a'ready!" (p. 114) forces him to acknowledge that "here was this obscure and almost illiterate girl engaged in the pursuit of the impossible ideal, just as he had been himself doing for the last twenty years" (p. 114). Even worse, he has been one of the fifteen. She admits that she loved him for about a week—until she recognized how old he was, which occasions a second and a rather more comic revelation on Pierston's part: "This



seeking of the Well-Beloved was, then, of the nature of a knife which could cut two ways. To be the seeker was one thing; to be one of the corpses from which the ideal inhabitant had departed was another; and this was what he had become now, in the mockery of new days" (p. 114). That "mockery" shows his claim to a philosophical and/or spiritual quest to be a sham. With a double standard as obvious as Angel Clare's in *Tess*, Jocelyn Pierston views his own pursuit of the Well-Beloved as evidence that he is a superior man, an artist, but sees that same pursuit in the second Avicé as merely demonstrating that she is "a very wicked woman!" (p. 138). The novel is not, then, a Freudian parable of the artist but rather a parodic rendering of a pseudo-artist who hides his own dubious behaviour behind his solipsistic theories of artistic creation as much as he also hides it behind his solipsistic philosophy, those two refuges from judgment being, in the end, very much the same thing.

A better reading of the protagonist as an artist would point out that the same confused relationship exists between the sculptor and his statues as between the lover and his various Well-Beloveds. The artist admires his work in prospect but not in retrospect. He admires not so much aesthetically as pseudo-erotically. In brief, driven privately and professionally by the same forces, Pierston is aesthetically disappointed with each individual sculpture as soon as he has completed it, just as the charms of each Well-Beloved recede in the face of possibly winning her favours. Indeed, the sculptor finds his finished works all "failures" precisely because they do not capture completely the feminine essence that he would, with each particular statue, both define and possess. He is a thwarted Pygmalion perpetually producing Galateas who refuse to come alive.

With this failed Pygmalion we also have another locus for the subverted and sublimated incest that has already been seen as "play[ing] so large a part in the novel." The Pygmalion myth—the man who loves and is loved by the perfect woman whom he himself has created—is, I would argue, a transformation defusing the "impossible" relationship it describes—the father marrying the daughter whom he has fashioned into his own image of an ideal young woman. The covert incest runs not, as Fowles suggested, between the son and a recreated mother but between the father and an imagined daughter. That change in direction might seem insignificant (since it is the essence of incest to confuse family categories) but it does emphasize a difference in focus. Fowles posits a finally "tragic" quest with significant by-products (great art); Hardy portrays a finally comic quest with insignificant by-products (mediocre art). Far from being a major artist or a fictional portrayal of Hardy himself, the protagonist of *The Well-Beloved* is a

comic figure who, as a man and an artist, is in perpetual pursuit of the perfect daughter of his imagination.

Incest between a man and his mother represents, as both Sophocles and Sigmund Freud have amply emphasized, an abrogation of the father and a concomitant claiming of inauthentic authority. Incest between a man and his daughter represents an abrogation of the wife and a concomitant claiming of inauthentic license. Jocelyn Pierston, with his quasi-incestuous relationships, achieves neither authority (in his life or his art) nor license, but he clearly aims more for the latter than the former. He would, in short, prefer the run of his world to the ruling of it. Pierston will not, therefore, be bound by circumstance (i.e., marriage) or time, and, a young man of twenty, of forty, of sixty, he would stand ever on the brink of beginning. Previous failures are merely, he would have it, preparation for the real life to come.

To occupy his chosen position, Pierston avails himself of a crucial aspect of incest—its denial of time. Whether the male participates again in the drama of his own engendering or the drama of his daughter's engendering, a generation of his life is at least figuratively erased. With Pierston, of course, there is no reparticipation, no engendering, yet his subverted pseudo-incests serve him as well as might the real thing and at considerably lower psychological cost. He is returned, with Avice the Second, to the drama of Avice the First, and with Avice the Third to the dramas of the two previous Avices. He has it to do over again and he does. Completely. To retain his stand still on the brink of beginning, the relationship is each time re-enacted to its non-consummated irresolution, whereupon Pierston justifies non-consummation by suddenly emphasizing the paternal component of that relationship and becoming a temporary substitute father to Avice the Second and a permanent step-father-in-law to Avice the Third. Pierston has the run of his world, but to have that run he must, Hardy shows, run in futile and sterile circles.

The novel traces those circles but does not, as its harsher critics have long insisted, imitate them. Hardy's art is rather more subtle than his protagonist's, who, a late nineteenth-century sculptor, still persists in a long outmoded (and unsuccessful even by his own standards) attempt to mold ideal female forms, as if the forms could exist independent of their artistic expression. The author of *The Well-Beloved* was forced, by the demands of his publishers and public, to confront the same problem that he has his protagonist wilfully embrace—the problem of portraying an ideal not to be found in real life.<sup>23</sup> Hardy solved this dilemma by being ahead of his time, not behind it. The audience required fiction suitable for even "the most fastidious taste."<sup>24</sup> He will give them something different from the offending virtues of Tess, the

disgusting misadventures of Jude. What could be purer than an artist in perpetual pursuit of the beautiful? Then, with consummate irony, Hardy demonstrates the foolish philosophy and the sublimated incest inherent in his protagonist's quest. In short and to conclude, *The Well-Beloved* is, as Fowles argued, "fiction at the end of its tether," but at that end we see an intricate comic dance that stretches the boundaries of the novel, not the novel strangling itself in protest against the psychic costs of authorship and the limitations of the form.

## NOTES

1. The phrasing is quoted from Hardy. See Florence E. Hardy, *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy: 1892-1928* (London: Macmillan, 1930), p. 59. However, as Robert Gittings points out in his *The Older Hardy* (London: Heinemann, 1978), p. 90, Hardy rather exaggerated the degree of negative criticism: "Most reviewers were puzzled, but generally respectful, and often relieved that [*The Well-Beloved*] was not another *Jude*."
2. Albert J. Guerard, *Thomas Hardy: The Novels and Stories* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1949), p. 68.
3. Desmond Hawkins, *Hardy: Novelist and Poet* (London: Newton Abbot, 1976), p. 121.
4. Gittings, pp. 70-71.
5. J. Hillis Miller, "Introduction," to Thomas Hardy, *The Well-Beloved*, The New Wessex Edition, General ed., P. N. Furbank (New York: St. Martin's, 1978), p. 12.
6. Miller, pp. 14-15.
7. John Fowles, "Hardy and the Hag," in *Thomas Hardy After Fifty Years*, ed. Lance St. John Butler (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 30.
8. Miller, p. 21.
9. The irony begins even with the prospectus that Hardy provided to Tillotson and Son, the publishing firm that wanted another serial substituted for the unacceptable *Tess*. The final paragraph reads: "There is not a word or scene in the tale that can offend the most fastidious taste; and it is equally suitable for the reading of young people, and for that of persons of maturer years." As Helmet E. Gerber notes, in "Hardy's *The Well-Beloved* as a Comment on the Well-Despised," *ELN*, 1 (1963/64), 52, "Hardy already held . . . [his] tongue in his cheek as early as the letter and prospectus he sent to Tillotson's." Michael Ryan, in "One Name of Many Shapes: *The Well-Beloved*," in *Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Dale Kramer (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 174, also notes the "unmistakable irony" of this prospectus. The entire prospectus is quoted in J.I.M. Stewart, *Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography* (London: Longman, 1971), p. 158.
10. Thomas Hardy, *The Well-Beloved* (1897; rpt. New York: St. Martin's, 1978), p. 96. Subsequent references to this readily available New Wessex edition of the novel will be made parenthetically in the text.
11. Bert G. Hornback, *The Metaphor of Chance: Vision and Technique in the Works of Thomas Hardy* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio Univ. Press, 1971), p. 73.
12. Ryan, p. 188.
13. Paul Ward, "The Artist's Dilemma: An Interpretation of *The Well-Beloved*," *The Thomas Hardy Yearbook*, 3 (1972/73).
14. For a fuller discussion of Pierston's limitations as an artist and how those limitations are attested to in the text, see my "On Reading *The Well-Beloved* as a Parable of Art," forthcoming in *The Thomas Hardy Yearbook*.
15. Ryan, p. 172. But Ryan, it should be noted, does not see the novel as simply conjoining these two themes. Instead, he suggests that Hardy "pretend[s] to present a straightforward account of a Shelleyan, Platonic 'aesthetic temper,' while simultaneously mocking and undermining that very notion" (p. 173). Although the focus and intention of his argument are different from my own, I am obviously indebted to his approach.
16. Norman Page, *Thomas Hardy* (London: Rautledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 116.
17. Page, p. 117.

18. Ward, pp. 31-32.
19. Fowles, p. 31.
20. Fowles, p. 30.
21. Fowles, pp. 37 and 30.
22. Fowles, p. 40.
23. Hardy's most explicit views on this general subject are set forth in "Candour in English Fiction," *New Review*, 2 (January 1890), 15-21.
24. See note 9.