**Killing the Pig**

Keywords: Thomas Hardy, *Jude The Obscure*, Arabella, Pigs, Slaughter, Food.

**Introduction**

This paper centres on a key scene in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude The Obscure* (1895) in which Jude and his first wife, Arabella, kill their pig. This scene will be considered in terms of key aspects of Hardy’s writing and of how the author and his novels have been received by readers and critics. Questions of realism – notably the extent to which Hardy may be said to both practice and resist that mode – will form a principal stand of the survey, as well as consideration of the author’s relationship to such interpretive categories as melodrama, sensation, and satire. For *Jude* was a controversial novel, and, not un-relatedly, Hardy’s last. James Adams states that ‘(t)he reception of *Jude* was one of the fiercest episodes in late-Victorian debate over the moral burdens of the novel.’ (2012. 393) Though he would continue to publish poetry for another three decades, *Jude*’s sustained critique of social and religious conventions, and the fierce (though by no means universal) criticism of the novel’s polemics, marked the closure[[1]](#footnote-1) of Hardy’s engagement with the literary form through which he had garnered his fame. The scene here under analysis is one of several that were bowdlerized for serial publication[[2]](#footnote-2) (Kramer. 1999. 166-167) and it will be contended that it was not merely the grisly particulars of slaughter that offended, but the scene’s intimate connections to the novel’s over-arching themes, including marriage, sex, and death. Relatedly, the paper will consider *Jude* and the pig-killing scene in terms of Hardy’s wider attitudes to animals and their use as food, including his engagement with the Victorian Humane Movement.

**Re-reading Arabella**

In Hardy’s novel Jude and Arabella must undertake the task of slaughter themselves because Challow, the pig-killer, has not arrived. The chapter, and especially their unexpectedly hands-on involvement, thereby provides an opportunity for the author to set out some of the crucial differences of temperament between the couple in the context of a ‘heightened’ occasion, one that has both moral and economic dimensions, in which their feelings will run high. Charting the relatively recent emergence of the study of food in literature, Joan Fitzpatrick observes that the presence of food in novels and other literary works ‘can help explain the complex relationship between the body, subjectivity, and social structures regarding consumption’, and that authors’ deployment of food-related themes and scenes are generally in the service of ‘something important about narrative, plot, characterization {and} motives.’ (Fitzpatrick in Albala, ed. 2013. 122). It is in precisely such a spirit of enquiry that this scene - merging aspects of animal husbandry, slaughter, and food preparation - is considered.

The introduction of Arabella to the story some thirty pages earlier frames her from the outset in terms of pigs, their carcases, rural practicality, and sex. While Jude walks through the countryside, talking to himself of his longed-for career as a clergyman and scholar, an unseen mocking voice calls ‘Hoity-toity’ and he is shortly struck on the head by an accurately-flung object, which Hardy discreetly terms ‘the characteristic part of a barrow pig, which the countrymen used for greasing their boots.’ (80) Jude sees three women washing pigs’ innards in a stream, all of whom protest their innocence. His attention is drawn to Arabella, one of the three:

‘ (A) fine dark-eyed girl, not exactly handsome, but capable of passing as such at a little distance, despite some coarseness of skin and fibre. She had a prominent bosom, full-lips, perfect teeth, and the rich complexion of a Cochin hen’s egg. She was a complete and substantial female animal - no more, no less.’ (81)

Hardy’s representation of Arabella forms a deliberate contrast to his portrayal of Jude’s subsequent partner, Sue. Hardy returns insistently to the physical characteristics of both women, part of a recurring authorial fascination with *embodied* female experience. Rosemarie Morgan draws attention to the manner in which his representation of female characters, unusually for a writer of the period, concentrates on a ‘palpability of female sensations that, with Hardy’s women, gives expression to their physicality’ (1988. ix)**.** Kristin Brady commences her analysis with the stark summary that ‘(f)rom their first publication, the works of Thomas Hardy have been explicitly and obsessively associated with matters of gender.’ (In Kramer, ed. 1999. 93) In the case of Sue and Arabella, their features are intended to convey an indexical relationship to their intellectual and moral being. Arabella’s capacity to *seem* attractive is presented – warningly - as our first impression; a tendency to duplicity that is later reinforced by her practice of making dimples and confirmed when she fakes a pregnancy to ensnare Jude. Mark Hennelly makes specific reference to both her lack of honesty and her porcine associations when he describes ‘the tricks of Hardy’s pig woman Arabella’ (Hennelly 1998: 16). If Arabella is frequently figured in animal terms, Sue is ethereal. Descriptions repeatedly emphasise that she is petite. She is ‘light and slight’ (136), and ‘light-footed’ (140). Jude calls Sue “you spirit, you disembodied creature, you dear, sweet, tantalizing phantom –hardly flesh at all.” (309)

While Arabella is literally and metaphorically connected to the flesh and earthiness of pigs[[3]](#footnote-3) through her family trades of pig-keeping and pork-butchery, Sue is repeatedly likened to birds. Jude, Sue herself, and the narrator all allude to her as a bird, and her releasing of the pigeons which were soon to be eaten emphasises the difference between her attitudes and Arabella’s in respect of animals and their slaughter. Ronald Morrison observes that ‘(w)hile Hardy at times compares all of his major characters to animals, he uses animals thematically to make vastly different points about each of them, depending on their perception of their social class.’ (Morrison 1998: 75) As will be discussed later, this figuration is far more ambiguous and riven than might initially appear, embodying a complex of ideas in which the author’s attitudes to society, class, animals and their treatment find a sometimes contradictory expression through his characters and their actions. Jude’s attraction to and relationships with both Arabella and Sue lend themselves to understanding via the associations different types of animals provoke in terms of social class – each partner impelling Jude in opposite directions. Whilst Sue’s avian associations map onto Jude’s aspirations to travel upwards, to link spiritual and intellectual development in the attainment of a degree and ordination, it is the earthy heft of Arabella that prevents him achieving this transcendence. The call of the flesh that she so successfully utters does not merely serve to keep him within his original social and occupational orbit, it does so in a way that specifically reminds readers of the closeness (anatomical, behavioural etc.) between pigs and people. Alison James describes the ‘conceptualisation of the pig as a mediator between the human and animal world’, pointing to their characterisation as ‘horizontal humans’ (James 1993: 31). It is clear that Jude’s sexual awakening and consequent entrapment in a lower social position are inextricably tied not just to Arabella’s piggishness, but to the piggish side of himself too.

The characterisation of the pig as a gross and unpleasant creature, and its invocation as a metaphorical figure for such defects, has a long history. As Julian Wiseman observes in *A History of the English Pig*: ‘(T)he domestic pig has been sadly and unjustly neglected’ (vii). While the most vitriolic account may be found in John Mills’ 1776 *Treatise* where he asserts that ‘all its ways are gross, all its inclinations are filthy, and all its sensations concentrate in a furious lust’ (cited in Wiseman, vii). At the time of *Jude the Obscure* pigs were, as they had been for centuries, a widely distributed poor man’s animal. Often owned on a one-per-household basis and fed on kitchen scraps, pigs existed in constant propinquity to human households. The fact of the pig living in such a close relationship with a family also, inevitably, influenced how the moment of slaughter would be regarded compared to other creatures kept or culled at a greater distance. It is certainly keenly felt by Jude himself, as will be discussed later. Although many of Britain’s poor would still have been familiar with pigs and their killing, Richard Nemesvari makes a pertinent distinction when he observes that, for many of Hardy’s *readers,* such familiarity had passed from common experience, an absence that makes the slaughter scene especially loaded in terms of its sensational possibilities.

‘(T)he graphic detail provided by Hardy generates a sensory shock to a readership increasingly removed from the realities of the modes of production that sustain it.’ (2011. 192)

Although there is a long-standing tradition of reading Sue both as the novel’s principal female protagonist and as a ‘New Woman’ – controversial herself in terms of her political attitudes and approach to marriage – there is a strong case for interpreting Arabella as simultaneously more central to the text than is often supposed and as a distinctively modern figure who, in a narrative of successive failures and disaster, manages to survive and thrive. Her role in the pig-killing manifests and anticipates many of her notable features. Victorian reader and critic Margaret Oliphant, offended by much of the content of Hardy’s final novel, reserved especial loathing for the character whom she described as ‘a woman so completely animal that it is at once too little and too much to call her vicious. She is a human pig, like the beast whom in a horrible scene she and her husband kill, quite without shame.’ (1896. 139) Michael Winterbottom’s 1996 film adaptation, *Jude*, certainly foregrounded pigs as elements of the *mise-en-scene* and invited readers to interpret the Jude/Arabella relationship in terms of a certain animality. Significantly, this includes the relocation of the seduction scene to the pig pen itself, with the couple having sex immediately adjacent to the pigs, whose sounds of grunting, squealing, and feeding are merged with their own. The downward trajectory of their relationship is also neatly charted by the gift of a piglet at their marriage which matures into the pig that will be slaughtered.

However, many more recent readers have also discerned in the character of Arabella a range of qualities and skills that make her liable to interpretation as far more than a fleshy counterpoint to the cerebral Sue. Morgan notes Arabella’s ‘perceptual acuity, her discerning judgement, and her sharp intuition’ (1988. 144). Nemesvari commends her ‘assertively embodied sensuality/sexuality, and her awareness of the sometimes harsh requirements of existence {which}, generates an immanence that cannot simply be dismissed’ (2011. 186). Patricia Ingham also responds positively to her combination of guilt-free sexual agency[[4]](#footnote-4) and all-round gumption: ‘She is active, robust, resourceful, and at ease with herself and her own sexuality’. (147) Notably, one of the contemporary reviewers to acclaim *Jude* was sexologist and social reformer Havelock Ellis who – contra Mrs Oliphant – might reasonably have been expected to take a more progressive view of the work’s sexual politics and representation of marriage. Ellis argued for the work as ‘the greatest novel written in England for many years’ (15), postulating that Hardy’s claim to greatness lies in ‘his intense preoccupation with the mysteries of women’s hearts’ (9). Brady observes how Ellis’ reading of the author and his female characters foregrounded an interpretation implicit in many responses to his works – albeit valuing it more positively than most - that ‘Hardy’s construction of gender difference works in terms not of civilized Christian codes but of post-Darwinian anthropological theories about social behaviour.’ (in Kramer, ed. 1999. 96). Just as Darwin had earlier been derided in many quarters for proposing a scientific account of existence that linked people more closely to the rest of the living world, so Hardy was seen to develop characters impelled less by moral virtue and more by the shared animal instincts which contemporary science sought to chart across a range of new and evolving disciplines. When the reviewer for the New York *Critic* condemned the work for its ‘morbid animality [*…*] sickening to an ordinary decent mind […opining that…] we may as well accept a cage full of monkeys as a microcosm of humanity’ (cited in Adams, 2012. 394) he voiced a widely-held desire that novels should (continue to) interpret people and their motivations in terms of more elevated themes.

**The Killing**

Hardy’s chapter commences with the most fundamental aspect of the pig-killing, its timing. Their pig, like its medieval[[5]](#footnote-5) forebears, has fattened through the autumn and the onset of cold weather marks the coming of its time. Jude rises early to heat the copper in preparation for scalding the pig’s skin, though Arabella states that she prefers singeing as a method of removing hairs. Such details cement the impression of a writer familiar with his subject matter and setting down a version entirely adequate to the authentic lived experience of such an event in time and place. This dimension of the scene’s realism has not gone unnoticed by scholars whose primary interest in the topic is not rooted in the literary. For example, in *The English Pig: A History* Malcolmson and Mastoris describe Hardy’s account as ‘impressively convincing’:

‘Hardy, a close observer of west country life, undoubtedly knew what he was talking about. While this chapter had a dramatic purpose – the scene conveys the growing estrangement between Jude and Arabella, his ill-chosen wife – the detailed description is so precise and so compatible with the evidence provided by lesser writers that we can almost regard the chapter as much factual social observation as a component of narrative fiction.’ (93)

Early on Jude reveals his soft-heartedness and a want of practical knowledge when he is surprised that the pig has not been fed since the previous morning, expressing sympathy for its hunger. Arabella does not scruple to set him straight: “We always do it the last day or two, to save bother with the innerds. What ignorance, not to know that!” (109) Catching and tying the animal, which squeals much in the process, causes Jude to exclaim the fundamental moral contradiction of the neophyte pig-keeper at the critical moment: “Upon my soul I would sooner have gone without the pig than have had this to do!{…} A creature I have fed with my own hands.” (109) The transition from protector to executioner strikes him with vivid force, and, recognizing the inevitability of what must follow, he proceeds to the next moral way-station of the reluctant slaughterman, the decision to make the process as quick as possible. However, Jude’s desire to ‘make short work of it’ is in opposition to Arabella’s injunction “don’t stick un too deep!” (109). Her perspective is economically driven, a pragmatic calculation that affords no value to sparing the pig’s pain: “The meat must be well bled, and to do that he must die slow. We shall lose a shilling a score if the meat is red and bloody!” (110). For Nemesvari, this unflinchingly brutal justification of the pig’s protracted ordeal invites an additional metaphorical interpretation in terms of Jude and the class stratum to which he and Arabella belong ‘since they too must be ‘well bled’ to achieve maximum productivity in the service of their social superiors’ (192) and their feelings and capacity for pain were regarded[[6]](#footnote-6) as inconsequential compared to those of their masters. Equally, several contemporary reviewers of Hardy’s later works saw in certain recurring aspects - a seemingly ruthless treatment of characters, a pessimism – not a quasi-Marxist tone, nor ‘mere eccentricity but a more programmatic congruence with continental thought, particularly the vogue of Schopenhauer.’ (Adams, 2012. 358)

Hardy’s representation of the sharp distinction between Jude’s sensitivity and Arabella’s tough practicality reflected a reality of varied attitudes to slaughter, notwithstanding that most of the rural (and frequently urban) poor were accustomed to life alongside pigs from childhood. Charlotte Yonge, writing in 1892, observed of pig-killing day that ‘the tender-hearted little girls of the cottage hide their ears under the blankets’ while the boys ‘either hurry up, or else linger about, with all the horrid curiosity that used to attend executions, to behold the last struggles’. (cited in Malcolmson and Mastoris, 1998. 101) Although many such accounts describe a gendered divide in terms of revulsion/enthusiasm for the slaughter it is easy to imagine how the occasion brought pressure to display gender-appropriate attitudes that reflected cultural expectations. In several memoirs of country life, however, numerous men recall the private disquiet they experienced as boys e.g. : ‘I never quite liked the shrieks of the pig when it was noosed and dragged to the slaughter, and when its throat was dextrously cut I could never bear to look.’ (Ibid. 101). Hardy’s reversal of conventionally gendered attitudes serves, of course, to magnify the extent to which Arabella is rendered as more-than-usually conversant and comfortable with the facts of life and death, of the mechanics of procreation and dispatching. In stark contradistinction to the Victorian ideals of femininity upheld by Mrs Oliphant, she is a woman for whom bodies, blood, and our intimate inner workings hold few mysteries. Again, her professional adroitness with pigs’ carcasses and her sexual confidence/competence are linked suggestively by the many correspondences between the human and porcine body. Familiar with bladders, pizzles, and intestines, and able to deploy a ripening egg suggestively warmed in her cleavage as a prop in her seduction of Jude, Arabella is untroubled by the direct physical adjacency of life’s fundamentals. She and her co-workers have no qualms about talking sex while rinsing guts in the stream. Whilst Jude has endeavoured to shape an elevated worldview from books – an outlook unrelentingly crushed by experience - pigs have been Arabella’s primer, and they seem to have served her better. Hardy later provides the image of Jude’s cherished books, thrown on the floor and smeared by Arabella’s lardy hands when she has been rendering fat in the kitchen, as a potent symbol of the intersection of their domains and the debasement of his ambitions (114). Whilst Jude is angered by the inappropriate treatment of his books, and whilst Hardy also intends us to share his sense of affront, it is also inescapable that it is Jude’s own socially-transgressive use of domestic space that sets up the confrontation. Arabella’s occupation of the cottage kitchen and its surfaces to produce lard is entirely consonant with prevailing norms in respect of gendered-work and class. In a 2008 issue of *Victorian Literature and Culture* Daly and Forman argue for the special capacity of food-in-literature to ‘delineate a range of categories: cultural, class, and gender difference {…}, savage and civilized, animal and human.’ (in Maynard and Munich, eds 2008: 371) As the present study suggests, *Jude* is extraordinarily fertile in this respect, with characters and events that insistently press at category boundaries in respect of animals, food and killing.

Returning to the killing itself, in the event, Jude does over-stick it. Arabella slits the windpipe of the dying animal, not as a *coup de grace*, but so its noise does not attract the neighbours’ attention and the attendant implication that they are too hard-up to pay a professional. In a final convulsion the pig releases a large clot of black blood, Arabella remarking: “Artful creatures – they always keep back a drop like that for as long as they can!” In contrast to her later work, performed inside the cottage, her intervention and greater competence at the slaughter phase transgress what Alison James describes as the ‘gendered division of labour’ (James 1993: 39) that would conventionally apply at a pig-killing, unmanning Jude. Arabella’s involvement places her on the ‘wrong’ side of the symbolic binary oppositions of inside/outside, meat/offal (40). Having to take a direct, and unstintingly critical, role in the actual killing – traditionally reserved for men – she refuses to accept (or is obliged by Jude’s incompetence to go beyond) a mere inside-the-house role of transforming the less valuable innards into food. Rather, her scathing commentary addresses the central economic value of the pig, the price its joints and cuts of meat will command if spoiled, and goes directly to Jude’s ostensible position as principal provider for the family.

Written a century earlier, Anne Hughes’ *The Diary of a Farmer’s Wife 1796 - 1797* also demonstrates how a pig-killing could serve as a public measure of a family’s fortunes. In a February entry that describes the dynamics of sharing a freshly-killed pig she candidly reveals how the condition of rural neighbourly relations could easily be defined in terms of smugness, opportunism, and long-nurtured antipathies:

‘All the meat do make a goodly show set out on the pantrie slabs. Today did Parson Ellises madam send her grettins to me, and her rubbishy love, by Emma Jones; who do come to the washen this week, we bein bussie. Madam hav likely heard of the pigge killin and do hope for a passel of meat, which she will not get. I sendin her the pigges feet to be rid of them; I knowing right well she do hate them, havin no teeth to bite them.’ (19)

A gloriously frank diarist, Hughes’ several entries connected with the slaughter and subsequent flurry of cooking and preserving resonate with many of the themes and motifs found in other accounts, including the uses of offal and the preparing of lard. The practice of bringing in an additional skilled hand, particularly for the less pleasant aspects, is also evident in the entry: ‘Carters wife do come to help, and to clean the pigs innerds; a messie job that I do mislike.’ Tough and competent, Arabella is to a significant degree defined by her aptitude for such messy jobs, and by her capacity to translate her skills and herself into new arenas. She works serving drinks in a bar, parlaying her direct sexual charm into a decidedly contemporary career[[7]](#footnote-7) and developing a professional knowledge that enables her to recognize adulterated beer (90). Set against Jude’s successive failures to attain a series of diminishingly-lofty goals, Arabella’s easy peregrinations – including a sojourn and bigamous marriage in Australia – suggest someone far more constitutionally attuned to the opportunities for reinvention offered by modernity.

By way of contrast, in John Steinbeck’s 1939 novel *The Grapes of Wrath* the pig-killing does not take place as part of a planned seasonal cycle, but is a hastily-convened occasion, precipitated by the wider economic, social and environmental forces that underlie the narrative. The Midwestern Joad family, their crops failing in the ‘dustbowl’ and farm mortgaged to the bank, are forced to quit their home and land. As the character Uncle John observes: “Can’t chill no meat in the heat a the day. Wrong time a year for slaughterin’. Meat’ll be soft if it don’ chill.” (111) In this respect the scene is one of many that charts the family’s reluctant separation from time-hallowed places, practices and skills and into a world that consistently de-values their prior identity. They are, to use a term that has become critically important to the study of food and culture, about to lose their connection to *terroir*. The Joads’ experience demonstrates that, for the poor, the direction of travel is not towards land-ownership but away. They buy provisions they once could have produced, and sell the vestigial implements of their independent agricultural selves and – henceforth, crucially – their labour. As migrants they will trade their former ‘grounded’ agricultural identities for work that continues to be in the agricultural sector but merely as replaceable transients on land and crops that are not their own. The Joads do not exchange their place for a new place, as they hope. Rather, when market forces supersede *terroir*, they exchange somewhere for nowhere.

The two pigs the Joads slaughter and salt down to feed them on their journey to California, utilising both the innate suitability of pork for such preservation and the shortly-to-be-lost folk knowledge of how to go about it, are a bridge between their former and future lives, the last of their *terroir*. Hardy too was concerned with characters at the tipping points between social strata, and with ways of life on the cusp of change. Just as in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891) where a key component of Tess’s downfall is the loss of a family home with the death of her father, the last copyholder, so *The Grapes of Wrath* charts a failure at the third generation and the ‘reversion’ of an asset to owners whose legal right to own is contrasted with the moral claim and tangible history of those about to be evicted:

‘Grandpa took up the land, and he had to kill the Indians[[8]](#footnote-8) and drive them away. And Pa was born here, and he killed weeds and snakes. Then a bad year came and he had to borrow a little money. An’ we was born here. There in the door – our children born here. And Pa had to borrow money. The bank owned the land then, but we stayed {…} That’s what makes it ours – being born on it, working it, dying on it.’ (38)

In its practical details the Joads’ pig-killing is a combination of elements shared with *Jude* (principally that it is an ‘on the farm’ operation, conducted outdoors) and of notable differences. Perhaps the most striking anomaly is that the proceedings are wholly focused on the effective preservation of the meat for salting, not on the utilization of other edible parts, such as blood and fat. After the animals are stunned with the blunt head of an axe and the key artery cut, their blood is left to stream onto the ground while the entrails are left for the cats and dogs. This contrasts sharply with the many sources that list, frequently with great enthusiasm, the host of pig by-products that follow a slaughter. David Brown’s list is a representative example of the many encomia to pig-based foods, the industrious preparation of which generally attend a killing: ‘liver sausage, black pudding, pigs pettitoes, potted ham and pork cheese, savoury ducks, pigs fry {…}, brawn and faggots.’ (60) It is not clear whether the Joads’ discarding of blood and offal is purely a function of the decision to make a speedy departure for California or whether this represents their regular approach. Perhaps it is noteworthy that no character laments the lack of opportunity, for example, to make blood sausages or any liver-based dishes. Elsewhere, Steinbeck rarely forgoes an opening to observe how the quality of his characters’ lives and their capacity for self-sustenance are systematically eroded by the profit-hungry forces ranged against them.

William Cobbett’s 1821 *Cottage Economy* stresses the value of a pig’s offal in providing nourishment from materials that would otherwise go to waste: ‘(I)n the mere offal, in the mere garbage, there is food, and delicate food too, for a large family for a week.’ (cited in Helou, 2004.8) Whilst this perspective certainly continued to hold in Britain through to the time of *Jude the Obscure* it is less clear that by the mid-Twentieth Century and in the U.S.A it would have been acknowledged as acceptable to the rural small-holder. Indeed, in Anglo-Saxon cultures the association between organ meats and poverty became sufficiently pronounced as to render them foods to be despised and avoided, markers of an abjection manifested in culinary practice. In the U.S.A ‘variety meats’ continue largely to be avoided by consumers, other than as part of several distinctive ethnic cuisines. In the case of families like the Joads, the centrality of foods such as chitterlings to the foodways of African Americans in the South may also have contributed to their rejection by poor whites anxious to articulate the difference between their respective conditions: even, perhaps especially, in hard times.

**Re-reading Hardy**

The wealth of compelling detail in Hardy’s account – frequently in evidence when he turns his attention to rural labour and customs – is key to understanding traditional approaches to interpreting the author and his *oeuvre*. For many years Hardy was bracketed, though not without some unease, as a practitioner of tragic realism. Uneasily because, alongside the painstaking rendering of nature, country life and work, there were other elements that jarred. These included a tendency to melodrama[[9]](#footnote-9), an over-reliance on coincidence, and a variable prose style that could seem awkward, self-conscious. However, by the early 1980s a body of critical responses had emerged which sought to understand Hardy in quite a different light. (Widdowson, 1998. 5) *Inter alia* Terry Eagleton, John Goode, Raymond Williams, Penny Boumelha, Mary Jacobus and Elaine Showalter pioneered approaches to the author that saw the admixture of elements not as ‘flaws’ to be tidied away but as fundamental to the identity of his work. Most particularly in the case of *Jude the Obscure*, the novel that provoked the most vitriolic critical responses upon its publication, Peter Widdowson argues that satire, not tragedy, is ‘the most appropriate term’ to describe his work (8):

‘Close analysis of the discourses of absurdity in the novel – at once in plot, characterization and narrative style – is adduced in evidence, combined with a reading of Arabella as the novel’s satiric focus. This repositions her contra Jude and Sue, who are usually assumed to be the true protagonists, as a character whose presence and presentation demands more serious critical attention and explanation than it normally receives.’ (8)

It is worth noting that Arabella, through her recurring appearances and interventions, makes the story of *Jude the Obscure* happen as surely as her presence and goading makes the pig-killing happen. Compared to Jude and Sue, and despite their pretensions to learning, Arabella has by far the greater capacity to see the world as it is and take a reasoned view of how events will unfold. She outlasts Jude, continuing to work at her looks – curling her hair in the mirror – while he lies dying, and has those labours rewarded in the shape of the attentions of the quack physician Vilbert. In contrast to Arabella’s capacity to move on, the novel also makes her the bleak chorus to Sue’s future fortunes, observing in its final line: “She’s never found peace since she left his arms, and never will again till she’s as he is now!” (491) Morgan notes how ‘as Sue’s interpreter she is consistently reliable’, operating ‘from the vantage point of woman-perceiving-woman unfettered by sexual ideologies and preconceptions’ (144) and therefore able to read the woman with whom she has shared a husband far more accurately than the idealising Jude ever can. Her grasp of unpalatable realities is crystallised in her observations at the slaughter; firstly, that “Pigs must be killed” (110) and secondly, its immutable premise, that “Poor folks must live”. The reader, like Jude, may well experience horror at the event, but no viable alternatives are tendered:

“I know, I know,” said he. “I don’t scold you.” (111)

Significantly, Hardy donated the publishing rights for the pig-killing scene to the periodical the *Animals’ Friend,* published by the Society for the Protection of Animals, which would later become, with royal patronage, the RSPCA. (Morrison 1998: 67) His donation was, like his wider engagement with the Humane cause, not an unconditional assent to all the tenets of the movement, but a support tempered by pragmatism and life experience. Hardy wished to see practices improved in the transportation and slaughtering of animals, but could not straightforwardly digest the movement’s underlying premise; that the essential value of encouraging the working class to be less cruel to animals was in fostering broader behaviours of discipline and industry as well as inculcating a morality closer aligned to that of the class above. (Ibid:67-69) Whilst a strong strand of such thinking is evident in *Jude*, so too is it consistently problematized. For example, Schoolmaster Phillotson’s parting advice to the young Jude, “Be kind to animals and birds, and read all you can” (5), proves a woefully inadequate lodestar, earning him a beating from Farmer Troutham in the short-term and setting him up for a later rejection by Christminster. In the first instance its observance renders difficult the performance of his – class-appropriate – task of scaring the crows from the corn, and in the second it is precisely the pursuit of a socially, morally, and intellectually elevated life that leads to his being rebuffed.

The SPCA’s intertwining of issues of animal cruelty and social class ignored an obvious aspect of human/animal interactions of the period – namely that it was much easier to avoid cruelty to animals if one’s occupation, or absence of the need for an occupation, meant that one’s contact with animals was reduced or non-existent. For working class people involved in agriculture, for lower-income town and city dwellers who kept and would routinely kill a household pig, and for the many who continued to earn a living from animal-based transportation, such contact was inescapable. It is surely no accident that Hardy’s plotting repeatedly places his title character in situations that do not lead to the straightforward endorsement or application of the Humane worldview, but which unsettle, qualify, and worry at those ideals. Rather, the travails, botched endeavours and reversals of Jude suggest an author who, his own social aspirations notwithstanding, is still sufficiently grounded in rural actuality to recognize that a drawing-room manifesto does not translate easily into living practice.

Morrison points to the relationship between Hardy and his wife Emma as profoundly relevant to the work’s yoking of the themes of animal cruelty and social class. Observing that ‘their mutual interest in the welfare of animals seems to have brought them together at key moments and to have caused additional conflicts at other times’, he places their support for the Humane Movement in the context of their deteriorating marriage and Emma’s sense of ‘social superiority over her husband’s family.’ (68) [[10]](#footnote-10) Observing that Hardy would, on occasion, distance himself from Emma’s fervent support for the Humane cause, Morrison does not go on to argue for signs of that distancing in *Jude*, though he certainly sees in the novel simultaneously an essential alignment with Humane ideology and ‘attempts to expose the falsehood that cruelty to animals is solely a lower-class propensity’ (70). Yet the textual evidence for a reading of *Jude* as nuanced by Hardy’s relationship with Emma, and particularly for an interpretive approach that sees the author developing a narrative imbued with Humane ideas but never straightforwardly harnessed to its ideology, is surely strong. We know that Emma was strongly opposed to *Jude,* asking Richard Garnett, Director of the British Museum, to intercede with her husband in order to prevent its publication. (Halliday 1978: 166) The work’s core narrative theme - the essential cruelty of binding marriage laws that keep unhappy couples together – doubtless lay at the core of her opposition, yet perhaps other dimensions of *Jude*, not least the animal qualities that would later see the work derided for its ‘hoggishness and hysteria’ (Halliday 1978: 172) bolstered her antipathy.

The events of *Jude*, not least the misfortunes of those who try to do right by animals, suggest an author not so much pursuing a cause with fervour as complicating and diluting it, deploying – variously – verisimilitude, horror, and pessimism. Drawing on his personal knowledge of rural life for key scenes involving animals, Hardy’s *Jude* suggests that applying Humane ideals can be far from simple. That his particular rural knowledge arose from birth in a social situation less elevated than his wife’s, less elevated than many men of letters of his generation, and about which he experienced a degree of resentment all serve to indicate that Hardy’s pig-killing scene requires understanding in terms of a complex set of factors. Widdowson describes the author as ‘obsessed by class and class relations’ (Widdowson 1998: 16), observing that ‘[o]ne inescapable manifestation of Hardy’s insecurity – closely interrelated with his class-consciousness – is his preoccupation with women, sex and sexuality’ (18). In making the gentle aspirational Jude an inept slaughterman and grounding the physiologically-literate Arabella in terms of an all-encompassing bodily, sexual, and economic competence that connects the human and animal worlds, Hardy refuses to develop an ideal humane character. Rather, Arabella’s unanswered joining of cruelty and necessity constitutes a *modus vivendi* that could scarcely be further from the worldview espoused by those he encountered in the context of his and particularly Emma’s, engagement with the SPCA.

*Jude the Obscure*’s pig-killing chapter is, then, more than a representative sample of Hardy’s rural realism. Simultaneously grim and carnivalesque, it is also a microcosm of his satire. Jude’s slaughter of the pig, following vacillation, ineptitude, and the surrendering of agency to Arabella, culminates in the dying creature kicking over the carefully preserved bucket of blood. The *grand guignol* excess of this crowning failure, blood sloshing over the snowy ground, anticipates the peak of Jude’s inconceivable misfortunes towards the end of the novel with the preposterous loss of all his children. The impression that this is ‘too much’ - in terms of straining for emotional and symbolic effect - is equivalent to the plangency when readers discover Jude’s eldest son’s self-destruction of the family because they are ‘too menny.’ Nemesvari characterises Hardy as ‘an author who throughout his career as a novelist continually employed melodramatic and sensationalist devices’ (1), observing that, in *Jude*, ‘Hardy combines tragedy with the ‘too much’ of melodrama to create sensationalist tragedy.’ (181)

Of the pig-killing, Nemesvari draws attention not just to the scene’s ‘graphic naturalism’ but to the force it acquires ‘from its insistence on representing the sensations of that animal leading up to and encompassing its death.’ (189) Arguably, those pages work because of the author’s capacity to allow readers to understand the event through the multiple perspectives of pig, Jude and Arabella. The fear and agony of the pig are conveyed as experiences essentially equivalent to human suffering[[11]](#footnote-11): ‘The animal’s note changed its quality. It was not now rage, but the cry of despair; long-drawn, slow and hopeless’. (109) Ingham argues for an appreciation of the scene as evidence of the author’s ‘horror at the cruel treatment of animals {which} was a persistent concern throughout his life.’ (147) Jude’s feelings during and after the killing, and especially his painful reflections on the ‘dismal, sordid, ugly spectacle’ (111) of the spilt blood, form the principal focus, Nemesvari observing that ‘Hardy encourages us to identify with Jude’s sensitivity even if he does not always completely endorse the idealism at its root.’ (193) Finally, whilst Hardy does not offer us a privileged insight to Arabella’s thoughts, and despite what might be regarded as the ‘opposing’ perspectives of Jude and the pig, it is impossible to read the scene without a degree of sympathy for Arabella too, who must endure a tardy pig-killer, an unhandy husband, and a uncooperative pig who conspire to make the enterprise unfold less successfully than it should.

**Conclusion**

Whilst it would be difficult to argue for Arabella as a character whom the author presents as someone readers should *like[[12]](#footnote-12),* it is evident that more recent critical responses have sought to re-read her as someone more worthy of our consideration and even of something approaching *respect.* She may be relatively vulgar (certainly by the standards of literary characters at the time when *Jude* was published), intermittently guileful, and largely unencumbered by a moral compass, but she is more than redeemed by her absence of self-pity. In a work overwhelmingly characterised by bitterness, in which the two supposed principals[[13]](#footnote-13)see the utter annihilation of their dreams, it is notable that Arabella combines the pragmatist’s ability to not be fooled (this, despite a brief flirtation with Evangelism) with a seeming gift for cheery survival. Weathering many of the same miseries as Jude and Sue - miseries which that pair debate and rehash in a ceaseless round of prosy self-absorption - Arabella refuses to understand her life as a series of failures, focusing instead on securing achievable answers to ‘What next?’. If the target of Hardy’s satire is the hegemony of tragic realism in the Victorian (for him, contemporary) novel, a mode and tradition he undermines by amping up his later works with increasing degrees of melodrama and sensation, then Arabella is precisely a character to puncture the seriousness of the tragic realist approach. “Lord – you do talk lofty!” (472) She responds to Jude, when he balefully reports that he has set about hastening his own end by taking a long journey in the rain to see Sue, despite an inflammation of the lungs. “Won’t you have something warm to drink?” she suggests, curtailing his introspective account, and seeking to return his thoughts to sensible, practical, comforts. He declines, preferring to dwell, as he has throughout the narrative, on a perception of himself as a participant in a story which he has tried – with conspicuous non-success – to script. Finally, even his efforts to frame his own tragic realist demise are corroded and ultimately overturned by a narrator who takes us from the room where Jude lies dying to the Christminster festivities outside and his erstwhile wife preparing to move to the next phase of her life-story. As with his pig-killing, so in the wider narrative does Jude maunder and fumble every situation through to the fullest disaster that could be conceived, drawn so unerringly to catastrophe that the very plotted quality of his mortal journey deliberately subverts the impression of tragedy.

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1. He later revised his works for subsequent editions, but *Jude the Obscure* was the last novel Hardy wrote. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In *Harper’s Magazine.* The book publication restored the omitted/amended material. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Emile Zola’s description of a female pork butcher in *The Fat and the Thin* (1873) is more generous. Following an ecstatic account of the produce on display he observes: ‘She had the fine skin, the pinky-white complexion common to those whose life is spent in an atmosphere of raw meat and fat’.

   <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/5744/5744-h/5744-h.htm#link2HCH0001> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In parallel with recent critics’ and readers’ more sympathetic interpretations of Arabella it is notable that later accounts of pig-keeping have tended to proffer more favourable accounts of pigs’ sexual enthusiasm and appetites. In a summary very different to Mills’ censorious verdict David Brown’s *The Virgin Pig Keeper* (2010) describes the pig as ‘a socially lively, boisterous, highly intelligent, sexually uninhibited animal with an apparent keen and wicked sense of humour’ (1) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Many British medieval illustrated texts, for example Books of Hours, figured seasons and the calendar in terms of porcine time, using images of pigs (usually striped and hog-backed) being turned out into the woods to fatten and slaughtered later in the year. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Like animals in Descartes’ formulation. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Mrs Oliphant took a dim view of Arabella’s employment history, describing her as ‘the pig-dealer’s daughter, whose native qualities have been ripened by experience as a barmaid’ (1896. 139) Interestingly, this censure encompasses both her ‘traditional’ agricultural work with pigs and her more ‘modern’ front-of-house role serving drinks. A distaste for the earthy, fecund, and frank seems to motivate her horror of both. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Notably, this founding injustice is not acknowledged as such. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The low critical opinion with which melodrama was regarded at the time may be adduced from Havelock Ellis’ efforts to praise *Jude* in which he notes approvingly – and despite the welter of textual counter-evidence - “There is nothing here of the distressing melodrama into which Mr. Hardy was wont to fall in his early novels” (17). This awkward encomium is, as Nemesvari observes, “especially strained” (180). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. “Try to remember, Thomas Hardy, that you married a lady!” Is an example of a recorded snub from Emma (Williams 1976: 36) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. A century later, author John Berger described the same moment in similar terms: ‘The pig has intelligent eyes, and his fear was now intelligent. Suddenly, lunging and kicking, he fought like a man, a man fighting off robbers.’ (1979: 49-50) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Rosemarie Morgan observes that ‘it is not Hardy’s purpose to invite us to care for Arabella.’ (145) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Originally to have been titled *The Simpletons*, it is significant that this alternative to *Jude the Obscure* could be seen to hold true for Jude and Sue but not Arabella. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)