Empathetic Hardy: Bounded, Ambassadorial, and Broadcast Strategies of Narrative Empathy

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Abstract  Pursuing my earlier theory of strategic narrative empathy, this essay shows Thomas Hardy’s bounded strategic empathy for his fictional creations, Wessex countrymen and women; his ambassadorial strategic empathy for animals and select members of despised outgroups; and his broadcast strategic empathy for feeling humanity in an indifferent, Godless universe. Hardy’s work demonstrates engagement with a variety of empathetic narrative strategies outlined in my *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), from the fellow-feeling of eighteenth-century moral sentimentalism, to the role-taking imagining of Romanticism, to the projection of feeling onto inanimate objects theorized by late-nineteenth-century German aesthetics as *Einfühlung*. Hardy’s diction and notes show his knowledge of the related concepts, sympathy and altruism. At the time, *sympathy* (feeling for someone) was differentiated from *empathy* (feeling with someone); and for Hardy, *altruism* (nowadays seen as a consequence of empathy and sympathy) included such empathy. Hardy’s strategic empathizing in his novels, in his epic poem *The Dynasts*, and in some of his shorter verses, I argue, links his representational strategies to his evolutionary meliorism and his belief that individual altruism might yet alleviate the painful drama of human existence. The essay details Hardy’s employment of aesthetic *Einfühlung* to represent inanimate objects, to feel with the dead, and, paradoxically, to imagine the evolution of consciousness on the part of the unfeeling Immanent Will.

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1. Einfühlung and Empathy

A contextualist reading of a late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century English author’s empathetic imagination might seem perfectly suited to match such a writer’s disposition, preoccupations, and developing knowledge of contemporary psychology with developments in the history of science. The articulation of Einfühlung and empathy as concepts separate from sympathy in psychology and aesthetics (Wisse 1987) occurs during Thomas Hardy’s reading, research, and publishing career (1871–1928). It might be predicted that Hardy, whose works reveal serious study of the psychology and neurology of his day (Björk 1987; Keen 2010), would be aware of developments in psychological aesthetics that so closely matched his own convictions about human emotions.

The timing is perfect. In 1873, the first important philosophical discussion of Einfühlung appeared in a work of visual aesthetics, Über das optische Formgefühl: Ein Beitrag zur Aesthetik (On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics) by Robert Vischer, just two years after Thomas Hardy published his first novel, Desperate Remedies (1871). There, Vischer describes a process of human engagement with inanimate forms, one that transports and transplants the viewer into the object, imagining the dead form as living (1993: 104). Mysteriously, magically, the spectator relates to the object in a way that reminds Vischer how a human being puts his trust in another human (ibid.); but at this early stage of development (1873), Einfühlung had not yet acquired its central meaning as a description of emotional attachment to other human beings. For Vischer, as for other German aestheticians and psychologists of perception in the late nineteenth century, Einfühlung, or “feeling into,” described an embodied (emotional and physical) response to an image, a space, an object, or a built environment. The term gained currency among art historians over the next two decades, as it accrued key elements of inward imitation of movement (later known as motor mimicry) and perspective-taking. For Hardy, who was trained as an architect, serious study of art theory and history was an early autodidactic project: his Schools of Painting notebook, dated 12 May 1863 (Hardy 1979a [1863]), records its start, and it was to continue, in more desultory fashion, through reading, museum visiting, and European travels. He certainly could have become aware of Einfühlung as early as the 1870s, though he does not refer to it in his notes, self-scripted biography, or letters to Bernard Berenson, the most likely art-historical source in English after 1895.1

1. For the relationship of Berenson’s tactile imagination to Einfühlung, see Wellek 1970: 173–74, 178.
Though Hardy was proud of his ability to read ancient languages and could get around in French, he gained most of his knowledge from works written in or translated into English. His German was weak, so transmission of *Einfühlung* to an English language context in the 1890s makes Hardy’s awareness of the concept and term more likely. In 1895, just as *Jude the Obscure* came out, the English novelist Vernon Lee (Violet Paget) introduced *Einfühlung* to a London audience (Colby 2003: 155–58); she later published the lecture (Lee and Anstruther-Thomson 1897) as articles in the *Contemporary Review*, a journal from which Hardy frequently made extracts. By 1913, Vernon Lee had adopted Lipps’s empathy for *Einfühlung*, a translation first made in Titchener 1909 that chimed with but distinguished the concept from sympathy. Her aesthetic theory thus shifted from *Einfühlung*’s motor mimicry (bodily sensations and muscular adjustments) to empathy’s inclusion of memories and awakened emotional states as key elements of an audience’s collaborative responsiveness to art, indeed to perception broadly construed. In her most elaborated version of the concept, Lee (1913: 68) argues that empathy is a constitutive element of “imagination, sympathy,” and describes it as “that inference from our own inner experience which has shaped all our conceptions of an outer world.” According to Lee, empathy regularized “the intermittent and heterogeneous sensations received from without the framework of our constant and highly unified inner experience.” This view certainly resonates with Hardy’s depiction of the limited, partial, and affectively charged perspective of human agents in a complex universe, an idea that he was to develop most fully in his long Napoleonic narrative poem, *The Dynasts* (1904, 1906, 1908).

*The Dynasts* relates history through dramatic scenes of famous individuals and ordinary citizens who do not realize that they are not in control of their own actions. Scenes of an Overworld populated by Phantom Intelligences (the Spirits and Choruses of the Years, Rumour, Sinister, Ironic, and the Pities; the Shade of the Earth, Recording Angels, and Spirit-Messengers) provide the explanations that human agents cannot perceive. One of these, the Spirit of the Pities, has the job of articulating the emotional responses to events, through its universal sympathy of human nature (Hardy 1995a: 7). Like Vernon Lee’s empathy, Hardy’s brief for the function of the Spirit of the Pities in *The Dynasts* mediates between inward emotionality and the events of the outer world, registering the impact of blows dealt by the uncaring Will. The Spirit of the Pities, though impressionable and inconsistent in its responses to human events, nevertheless provides an emotional version of their meanings that make better sense to humans than the dispassionate historicizing of the Spirit of the Years or the grim commentary of the Spirits Ironic and Sinister. Empathizing with the par-
ticipants in and victims of the events of *The Dynasts* is a fruitless task for the Spirit of the Pities, because it cannot act compassionately or altruistically to avert the disasters into which human agents blunder. Yet, for Hardy, this Spirit’s strenuous insistence on responding feelingly to such disasters assists readers’ comprehension of the workings of a vast, indifferent universe. To paraphrase Lee (1913: 68) on empathy, the Spirit of the Pities voices inferences about humans’ inner experience, in the face of assorted and confusing stimuli from the Immanent Will driving the universe. Hardy’s empathetic Spirit of the Pities testifies to the way inner experience feels, even if the human agents cannot understand the reason for their actions, and points with some hope to a future in which the Will, who impels those actions without knowing it, might evolve into consciousness.

Hardy often pointed out the cruel irony that evolution had resulted in an unfeeling universe populated by emotional creatures (Millgate 1985: 153, 227): that affective impulsions drive human and animal behavior was an article of faith in Hardy’s “evolutionary meliorism,” and he knew that literature “must like all other things keep moving, becoming” (Hardy 1984b: 319, 324) to keep up with natural, if gradual, change. As a poet of juxtaposed tones and moods, alternatively satirical, poignant, and humorous, he depended upon an empathetic reader, whose role he described thus: “I must trust for right note-catching to those finely-touched spirit who can divine without half a whisper, whose intuitiveness is proof against all the accidents of inconsequence” (Hardy 1984b: 322). Hardy was convinced that an intuitive and bodily responsiveness to art verified the alert consciousness of an onlooker. Not everyone was equipped to respond feelingly, and even fewer to craft the works that appealed to an audience of finely touched spirits. Artists enjoyed a Shelleyan status in Hardy’s understanding, and he described poetry and literature as “the visible signs of mental and emotional life” among humans (ibid.: 324). Where that life was evident, one might hope for the further evolution of an intuitive audience for art, and effective techniques for striking the right notes for them to receive.

In the same period as Hardy’s installments of *The Dynasts*, early-twentieth-century psychologists and aestheticians considered the relationships between empathy and the literary techniques that invited readers’ feeling responses. Informed by the experimental psychology of Titchener and the aesthetic psychology of Theodor Lipps, Vernon Lee’s book *The Beautiful: An Introduction to Psychological Aesthetics* (1913) solidified the place of empathy (*Einfühlung*) in English-language theories of aesthetic response (ibid.: 66–67). Empathy, asserts Lee, “explains why we use figures of speech” even when we know that a figurative phrase expresses the “exact reverse of the objective truth” (ibid.: 62). Lee was especially concerned
to explain human responses to the inanimate world (putting this habit of mind ahead of responses to art and to other humans). According to her, we understand better when we project bodily sensations, memories, and emotions onto the inanimate objects we behold and describe in figures of speech. The facts may confute figures of speech, but we authenticate the figures through our feelings. The mountain persists in rising above us, even though we know it is actually stationary or shrinking, through erosion (ibid.: 65–66). Paradoxically, “Without [empathy’s] constantly checked but constantly renewed action, human thought would be without logical cogency, as it certainly would be without poetical charm” (ibid.: 69). For example, vertiginous waves of empathetic feeling for the size of the mountain are checked by cognition (awareness that the mountain does not really “rise”) but come right back as we gaze up at its height. Again it seems to rise as we perceive it, trumping knowledge with the experience of embodied cognition—now of geological features, mass, and scale in relation to a small human body. For Lee, the vacillation between a felt perception and a known object of perception brings about both logic and aesthetic pleasure.

Like the early-twentieth-century aesthetic theorists who speculated about the operation of human emotions on understanding and responsiveness to artistic representations, Hardy explored different roles of the emotions in reaching or balking understanding. He not only theorized the emotional transaction between artist and audience, but also showed his fictional characters emotionally responding to things, events, and other people. Emotions were a strong force, but they did not invariably lead to improved perception, as in his aesthetic theory, where only a few finely touched spirits could catch the right notes, a musician’s metaphor for attuned perception. Hardy was a committed monist and materialist writer who read the evidence of his senses. He thought that the action of the emotions on and through human behavior led to tangles of unintended consequence and misunderstanding. He saw these as the basis for tragic narratives; characters responding to sexual desires, for example, inevitably reveal “monstrous dysfunctions of natural instinct and passion,” as John Kucich (2002: 131) puts it.

For Hardy, then, human feelings and impulses typically failed to lead to understanding and right decisions—nescience was one of his keywords—but his authorial empathy still provided a way into the thicket of memory and experience in his work. He recorded intense emotional fusion with others (alive and dead), with objects redolent of past lives, and with earlier versions of himself, in what he called “moments of vision” (Hardy 1917). He narrated his characters’ and speakers’ feeling connections with absent
others and the objects that provoked memories of them, as in “The Workbox” (Hardy 1984a: 117–18). He dramatized the physiological responses of his characters to things and to one another. He humanized material surfaces: “Here is the ancient floor, / footworn and hollowed and thin” (“The Self-Unseeing,” Hardy 1982: 206). He generalized from his own experience to that of others:

Childlike, I danced in a dream;  
Blessings emblazoned that day;  
Everything glowed with a gleam;  
Yet we were looking away!  
(Ibid., my emphasis)

To fail to perceive a moment in the moment and to grant it all its emotional force in retrospect describes an operation of empathy on the poet’s own memories, in which the dead past is reanimated through emotional fusion. *Einfühlung* and empathy resonate in Hardy’s poetry of bereavement.

The year Lee published *The Beautiful*, he wrote most of the poems that would appear in his elegiac sequence *Poems of 1912–13*, later published in *Satires of Circumstance* (1914). In the Emma poems, Hardy’s materialist, anti-supernatural philosophy seems to relent into a wistful credulousness, even a belief in ghosts, but Hardy the poet never stops the introspective investigation of the operations of his own (and his speaker’s) mind in mourning. His figures of speech and descriptions invest a landscape with a whole emotional history (in “The Going,” “I Found Her Out There,” and “Beeny Cliff,” among others), an effect stronger than memory. Empathetic feeling for his grieving self, for his younger persona and his beloved, and for the very places of their courtship in years past makes palpable to readers the emotional memories evoked by places and sensations. The empathetic imagining initiates a process of transferring private memories and sensations to a verbal form that makes them public. The representations of cliff top rides or ordinary days are not in themselves empathetic, but the process by which Hardy revisits and revivifies memories thematizes aspects of empathy. For instance, in “Under the Waterfall” (Hardy 1984b: 45–46) where the poet gives voice to the beloved’s perspective through a female speaker, Hardy describes how strong emotion marks the woman’s body forever, so an arm plunged into cold springwater inevitably recalls a par-

2. “Under the Waterfall” is the last poem in *Satires of Circumstance* before the elegiac sequence “Poems of 1912–13” begins. It can be regarded as a prefatory memory, spoken in the voice of the once-beloved wife before she dies, but set outside the poems that mourn her passing. Evidence that the episode belongs to Hardy’s and Emma’s courtship survives in Hardy’s sketch of Emma reaching for the glass, reproduced in Claire Tomalin (2006: illustration 14).
ticular day of courtship, when a drinking glass fell, irretrievable, into a “little abyss” (l. 37) in a springwater stream. The poem represents the physical evocation of memory twice, balancing on a fulcrum in which an interlocutor questions it:

‘Whenever I plunge my arm, like this
In a basin of water, I never miss
The sweet sharp sense of a fugitive day
Fetch back from its thickening shroud of gray’

(1–4)

‘And why gives this the only prime
Idea to you of a real love-rhyme?
And why does plunging your arm in a bowl
Full of spring water, bring throbs to your soul?’

(17–20)

‘And, as said, if I thrust my arm below
Cold water in basin or bowl, a throe
From the past awakens a sense of that time,
And the glass we used, and the cascade’s rhyme’

(39–42)

The bodily memory of the past, linking temperature, motion (the sudden plunge or thrust), sound, and the specific August picnic-day, regularly recurs (“whenever I plunge my arm”): the speaker can count on it happening every time. This emotion-generating recurrence of the fleshly sensation connects in the verse to the metaphor of an unbroken loving-cup, “that chalice of ours” (l. 48), from which the couple long ago “In turns there-from sipped lovers’ wine” (l. 52). As long as the bodily rush of feeling calls back the remembered day, as long as the dropped glass remains under the waterfall and contributes to its sound, the love-communion reactivates its immortalizing promises. Hardy and Emma’s marriage was in fact strained, and other love memories evidently leave a painful “smart” (l. 8). In direct contradiction of experience, though, the poem’s insistent reenactment of emotional fusion (of the physical response to cold water and passionate recollections), in “constantly renewed action,” testifies to the power of Einfühlung to animate a figure of speech, as Lee (1913: 69) theorized. Through its repetitions, the poem calls on readers’ empathy to feel what the speaker has felt, overwriting their own neutral experiences of arms reaching into cold water with her charged narrative reenactments. It also implicitly raises the question of whether the love embedded in the glass survives when the speaker’s particular arm can feel no more.
Hardy does not shy away from the question of whether an empathetic projection into an inanimate object persists when the living and feeling body is gone. It is one thing to imply that a dropped goblet preserves a love-memory after the loving person dies: indeed, “Under the Waterfall” enacts the indefinite prolongation of just such a joined memory and sensation. But can the imagination feel what the corpse cannot sense? According to the projective aesthetic theory of empathy, it can. In “Rain on a Grave” (Hardy 1984b: 50–51), Hardy projects himself into the burial place of his dead wife, Emma, flinching for her as the rain falls on her insensate body:

Clouds spout upon her
Their waters amain
In ruthless disdain,—
Her who but lately
Had shivered with pain
As at touch of dishonour
If there had lit on her
So coldly, so straightly
Such arrows of rain

(1–9)

As *Einfühlung* does not require an animate target for emotional projection, Hardy’s grieving imagination feels not just for, but with the unfeeling corpse. This retroactive empathy for a dead woman’s body paradoxically emphasizes both its lifelessness and its corporeality. Later in the poem, he wishes to swap places with Emma’s buried body, or better yet, to join her in the ultimate corporeal fusion, “Would that. . . . together / Were folded away there / Exposed to one weather / we both” (19–24). The conventional expressions of elegy, known well to Hardy from his studies of the classical and English tradition (Ramazani 1994: 33–68), could provide models for both his extreme death wish and his more moderated pleasure in the daisies that grow from the decaying corpse. He combines this with affective stages of projection, shared sensation, and withdrawal. We may venture this much: In Hardy’s Emma poems, a living body haunts itself using the projections of *Einfühlung*. This helps to solve the conundrum of these elegies, which show so much feeling for a woman with whom the writer was so manifestly out of sympathy. Guilt may have been the driver, but empathy was the device.

The coincidences of theme and form, the felicitously overlapping dates that document the migration of an emergent understanding of empathy in psychology and aesthetics into an English-language context through the popular media of the day, may verify Hardy’s awareness of the empathy
and *Einfühlung* concepts. The debut of empathy, so named, occurs during the very years when Hardy, a reader of psychological literature, might be expected to encounter it through his reading and conversation with scientists, but he never uses the word in his published works. (He did use other technical terms from psychology, such as the unconscious, magnetism, impulse, hallucination, hypnosis, insanity, reflex, sense-perception, psychic, and psychological.) *Einfühlung*, like empathy, is absent from the written record of Hardy's wide-ranging reading. Though he could have heard Vernon Lee speak about empathy or seen her essays on *Einfühlung* in the *Contemporary Review*, he did not make extracts from them in his *Literary Notebooks* (Hardy 1985). As Hardy did read and excerpt other essays by Vernon Lee (ibid., 1: 157, 165), he may also have read her psychological studies of empathy and aesthetics. Was Hardy aware of contemporary research on empathy? The absence of the word from his published work suggests unawareness of this new term, but a cluster of related words, including sympathy, lovingkindness, fellow-feeling, and most importantly, altruism, indicates his parallel interests.

Hardy’s discussion of altruism (under this name) suggests that he knew perfectly well what empathy was, how it worked, and what risks an artist ran in relying upon it. Altruism has been linked with empathy (feeling with) by psychologists throughout the twentieth century, as a potential consequence of empathetic response. In Hardy’s time, sympathy (feeling for) was associated with altruism. Indeed, sympathetic emotion and its subsequent benevolent action were often conflated in the single term *altruism*, following Auguste Comte (1798–1857), who coined the term (Comte 1858: 66). Hardy was a reader of Comte and Comteans. Among the materials prepared near the end of his life for his second wife, Florence Emily Hardy, to incorporate into *The Early Life and Later Years* (books that would be published after Hardy’s death as biographies by F. E. Hardy) was a manu-

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3. Such as his close friend Henry Head, the distinguished medical neurologist and editor of the journal *Brain* (Jacyna 2008). Earlier in his career, Hardy’s club, the Athenaeum, provided opportunity for contact with the many scientists and medical men among its members. Those encounters usually went unrecorded, but Hardy did make note of an 1893 conversation with James Crichton-Browne, a medical psychiatrist and co-founder of the journal *Brain* (Millgate 1985: 275).

4. Altruism is understood there as voluntary helping behavior that benefits another at a sacrifice to the helper, while the emotional response (feeling with) that sets up the conditions for helping is called empathy. The empathy-altruism hypothesis, as articulated and investigated by psychologist C. Daniel Batson (1991), demonstrates that empathy can spur pro-social behavior. For our purposes, it is most vital to see that in the nineteenth century the feeling with another has one name, while the helping that occurs as a result of the feeling has another name. In the nineteenth-century Comtean sources (Comte 1858, 1865), the two stages were understood as two parts of one phenomenon, altruism.
script note on “H’s Altruism.” The note, written in pencil on the back of an envelope postmarked 1927, conflates a definition of empathy with the term altruism:

It must not be forgotten that H’s own life & experiences had been smoother & happier than many—perhaps than the majority. It was his habit, or strange power of putting himself in the place of those who endured sufferings from which he himself had been in the main free, or subject to but at brief times. This altruism was so constant with him as to cause a complaint among his readers that he did not say “all’s well with the world” because all was well with him. It should really have caused commendation. (Hardy 1979a, original emphasis)

Following Percy Shelley on the role-taking imagination, Hardy describes his strange powers of perspective-taking, by which he puts himself in the place of sufferers. Shelley’s Defense of Poetry requires that a man “imagine intensely and comprehensively” (1852 [1840]: 16). Shelley calls this empathetic process identification, and Hardy adds the term altruism. Hardy’s early reading of Comte, his indebtedness to Herbert Spencer, and his study of the Darwinian, experimental psychology of Théodule Ribot, all led him to emphasize the altruism inherent in his “strange power of putting himself in the place of those who endured sufferings,” that is, inherent in his role-taking imagination, now seen as a core quality of human empathy.

2. Altruistic Emotions

Late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century theorists of human emotion (Spencer 1871, 1897 [1855]; Ribot 1897) sought to reconcile the philosophical claims of moral sentimentalism, which placed sympathy or fellow-feeling at the start of a set of responses that bound people into families, tribes, and nations, with a Darwinian emphasis on the individual organism’s success. Working with the older and more traditional term sympathy, derived from the influential accounts of David Hume (1978 [1739]) and Adam Smith (1976 [1759]), Victorian psychologists such as Herbert Spencer strove to explain the evolutionary origin, continuing benefit, and likely future course of tender feelings for others. While the attractive idea of human evolution lending itself to social progress sat well with Victorians steeped in the positivism of Comte, the claims of egoism were bolstered by Darwin, especially as understood by Herbert Spencer, who emphasized the survival of the fittest (1897 [1855]: 50). His influential extension of Darwinian theory in his books The Principles of Psychology (1855) and First Principles (1862) argued that the human mind developed from organic responses to the environment and that human society was the product of evolution
of egoistic individuals into social aggregates based on common interests. Thus, while he acknowledged the natural sympathy of humans for each other, particularly as expressed through the parental instinct, Spencer (1897 [1855]: 67–70) also thought that unselfish concern for others outside the family, let alone altruism, had developed late in human beings.

This differed somewhat from Comte’s view, articulated in 1851 when he coined the term *altruism* (from the Italian adjective *altrui*, meaning others’ or other people’s) as a component of his new humanist religion, positivism. Comte used *altruism* to mean reflective emotions whose impulses worked to benefit others, with ethical consequences for the altruistic person, whose egoism is subordinated. That is, Comte’s altruism conflates the emotion and the subsequent behavior, intended to bring happiness to others. While Herbert Spencer (ibid.: 592–606) saw altruistic feelings as a late development, emerging out of sympathy through the intermediary “ego-altruistic” blend, Comte saw self- and other-directed feelings as equally innate and always at odds with one other. His positivist religion sought to create conditions in which egoism could be subordinated to benevolence toward others in the exercise of altruism. This highly influential idea was first presented in English by G. H. Lewes in 1853, picked up by John Stuart Mill, and championed by the English positivist Frederic Harrison (whom Hardy knew), and adopted, at least temporarily, by novelists and intellectuals primed by earlier moral sentimentalism (Lewes 1853; Dixon 2008: 234–35).

Hardy was among the Victorians who read G. H. Lewes’s Comte with care, and in his recollections of 1874, he acknowledged this commonality with George Eliot, with whom he had been linked in critics’ speculations about an unsigned early publication: “He had latterly been reading Comte’s *Positive Philosophy*, and writings of that school, some of whose expressions had thus passed into his vocabulary, expressions which were also common to George Eliot” (Millgate 1985: 100). It must be acknowledged that Hardy’s notes on Comte do not focus on altruism, though he does jot down a key premise, “Feeling—the great motor force of human life” from Comte’s *Social Dynamics* (Hardy 1985, 2: 68) and notes its importance as a driver of the “fundamental notion of continuous [human] development” (ibid.: 72). Yet Hardy could be skeptical, too. He certainly would not have fallen in with Comte’s credulousness about phrenology as proving the physiological basis of altruism. Though himself an unbeliever, Hardy faulted Comte for omitting Jesus from his calendar of “worthies,” thus rendering his positivist religion inimical to many who would otherwise accept it (Millgate 1985: 150–51). He clipped out a magazine article by John Morley, criticizing Comte and questioning his religion of Positiv-
ism as “hardly more than sympathy under a more imposing name” (Hardy 1985, 1: 80). This does not suggest that Hardy disapproved of sympathy; on the contrary, it was one of his keywords, appearing in his published work eighty-one times, bolstered by the adjectival sympathetic in twenty-eight instances. Sympathy was a fundamental ingredient of his self-declared “evolutionary meliorism,” by which “pain to all upon [the globe], tongued or dumb, shall be kept down to a minimum by loving-kindness” (Hardy 1984b: 319).

As his notebooks reveal, Hardy could have derived his Comtean conflation of sympathetic feeling and altruistic action directly from his reading of the French evolutionary psychologist Théodule Ribot. Hardy made extracts from the English translation of Ribot’s *Psychology of the Emotions* (1897), particularly noting Ribot’s categorization of types of emotion while accounting for the process of affective degradation. Hardy copied out Ribot’s scheme, “(1) the disinterested emotions, (2) the altruistic emotions, (3) the ego altruistic emotions, (4) the purely egoistic emotions” (Hardy 1985, 2: 63). The social and moral emotions that Ribot names “altruistic” consist of general benevolence toward the whole human race and family feeling, the absence of which result in “absolute indifference to every one” (Ribot 1897 [1896]: 430). Ribot (ibid.: 230) regards sympathy as the basis for the tender emotions, including altruistic and ego-altruistic feelings (in Spencer’s term). Yet Ribot’s explanation of the “sympathy” indicates that he applies this older term (used by Alexander Bain, Adam Smith, and David Hume) to a set of phases that were already being relabeled by German psychologists as *Einfühlung*/empathy: “The first, or physiological [phase], consists in an agreement of motor tendencies, a *synergia*; the second, or psychological, consists in an agreement of the emotional states, a *synaesthesia*; the third, or intellectual, results from a community of representations or ideas, connected with feelings and movements” (ibid.: 231). Ribot’s “sympathy” (ibid.: 232) contains the automatic motor mimicry, emotional fusion consisting in “feeling an emotion existing in another,” marked by bodily movements and facial expressions, and affective perspective-taking that leads to action on behalf of another. These are all elements of the older “sympathy” that were being assimilated to “empathy” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Hardy needed neither the new term, *empathy*, nor the scientific speculations about how sympathy generated altruism, to arrive at parallel conclusions from his study of literature and the behavior of the creatures around him. His novels document his observations of animal and human behavior. His literary allusions (especially to Shakespeare and classical dramatists) reveal his mining of earlier literature for insights into universals of charac-
ter, such as what he depicted in ordinary folk: stoical suffering arousing pity and fear (King 1978: 97–126). His poetry shows his dedication to introspection as a mode of discovery. In other words, these qualities do not require a course of reading in psychology to emerge in Hardy's work. He often also made notes of thinkers whose theories supported his own views. Thus, in Ribot's work, Hardy found confirmation of his views that individuals have different underlying emotional dispositions (Ribot 1897 [1896]: 166), that affective life develops from childhood (ibid.: 234–35), that animals as well as human beings show feelings (ibid.: 236–37), and that tender emotions are the source “of all altruistic, social, and moral manifestations” (ibid.: 236). Indeed, as historian Thomas Dixon notes, in *Two on a Tower* (1882) Hardy associates the word *altruism* with love, as transcending egotistical self-love and stimulating self-sacrificial impulses (Dixon 2008: 235).

But Hardy also shows how the feeling does not guarantee the consequent action (that is, he anticipates the separation of empathetic feeling and altruistic action into two stages, not invariably linked). In both of the word's occurrences in the novel, altruism describes a fleeting feeling of Lady Constantine's rather than an action taken, since her love for Swithin is powerful, but her self-love is stronger: “Then the instinct of self-preservation flamed up in her like a fire. Her altruism in subjecting her self-love to benevolence, and letting Swithin go away from her, was demolished by the new necessity, as if it had been a gossamer web” (Hardy 1993 [1882]: 244). Hardy suggests here not only the intensity of altruistic emotion, which stimulates at least temporary commitments to self-abnegation, but warns the reader of its fragility: self-preservation demolishes the strands of the gossamer web.

Théodule Ribot's use of the term *altruistic* as designating a kind of feeling would have resonated not only with these 1882 representations in *Two on a Tower*, but also with Hardy's earlier reading of Herbert Spencer. Ribot borrows the terminology of “altruistic,” “ego-altruistic” and “egoistic” emotions, as well as his usage of sympathy, directly from Spencer (1897 [1855]: 578–626). By “ego-altruistic emotion,” Spencer meant “sentiments which, while implying self gratification, also imply gratification in others” (ibid.: 595), while purely altruistic sentiments (such as generosity, pity, justice, and mercy) are uncommon precisely because of their unselfishness (ibid.: 607–16). Spencer (1871: 430) agrees with Adam Smith that “the root of all altruistic sentiments is sympathy,” which “gives rise to superior controlling emotions.” However, Spencer questions the inevitability of the process by which sympathy develops from the parental instinct and produces higher sentiments such as justice (ibid.; 1897 [1855]: 626). Spencer (1871: 430) sees human gregariousness as contributing to the expression of higher
sentiments, but he also observes that equally powerful needs, such as the predatory instinct that supports self-preservation, checks the development of justice. Thus the scientific Spencer separates the feeling and response that Comte fuses into one term, altruism, by questioning the stages in the process and allowing for the intervention of restraint, caution, and egoism. Spencer calls for an explanation of precisely how the expectation has developed that feelings for others lead to higher attributes and moral sentiments (not an inevitability, despite Spencer’s optimism about human progress). His own suggestion is that positive reinforcement (pleasurable feelings), religious sanction, and public approbation can combine to make concern for general human welfare habitual in an evolved society (ibid.: 431).

Although Hardy’s notes on Spencer’s science refer to an earlier work, Principles of Biology (1864), not to the essays in which Spencer describes ego-altruistic emotion, Hardy certainly read First Principles, extracted from his periodical essays, and owned a copy of Spencer’s Essays: Scientific, Political and Speculative (1865), as well as his two-volume Autobiography (1904) (Hardy 1985, 1: 335–36). Hardy’s letters also testify to Spencer’s influence on his thinking (Hardy to Lena Milman, July 17, 1893 in Hardy 1990: 85), and his view, recorded in spring 1890, that “Altruism, or the Golden Rule, or whatever ‘Love your Neighbour as Yourself’ may be called, will ultimately be brought about . . . by the pain we see in others reacting on ourselves, as if we and they were part of one body” (Millgate 1985: 235) matches the psychology and sociology of Spencer (Spencer 1897 [1855]: 618). Hardy was clearly profoundly influenced by the hope of improvement in the species expressed in Spencer, though he was convinced of the limited usefulness of the promptings of feelings, which so often in Hardy’s narratives lead characters into ironic traps: Michael Henchard, impetuously offering a job to Donald Farfrae because of his warm feeling toward the younger man, makes an enemy of the applicant Jopp, who will be the agent of the Mayor of Casterbridge’s undoing (Hardy 2008b [1886]); two brothers, in “A Tragedy of Two Ambitions,” allow their disgraceful father to drown so as to advance their sister’s marriage prospects, but live on in suicidal dread (Hardy 2008a [1894]).

Throughout his prose and verse, Hardy narrates circumstances in which the impulses of feeling beings get them into trouble, but his stories do not take the form of cautionary tales. Instead, they attempt to bind readers through fellow-feeling into one body, “as members of one corporeal frame” (Millgate 1985: 235), less likely to be pushed around by the Prime Cause.

5. On June 21, 1924, Hardy (1990: 386) wrote to Ernest Brennecke, “My pages show harmony of view with Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, Comte, Hume, Mill, and others, all of whom I used to read more than Schopenhauer.”
Thus suffering would lead to the evolution of a better situation for emotional humans.

Hardy’s ambition, expressed in his notes, prefaces, and poems, was destined to be misunderstood, since many readers responded to his narratives as determinist and to his representations of the wrongness and cruelty of the world as pessimistic, rather than as diagnostic shocks designed to provoke the altruism of the future. To see Henchard’s suicide, Tess’s execution, Eustacia Vye’s drowning, or Farmer Boldwood’s shooting of Sergeant Troy as opportunities for the development of human sympathy that would improve the lot of the human species requires extraordinary imaginative extension on the part of readers. Yet this is just what Hardy asks, to some of his contemporaries’ incredulity. W. P. Trent protested about Hardy’s treatment of his characters in *Two on a Tower*, “It is a painful story. The Genius of Pessimism is slowly rising from the magic jar in which our author has endeavored to imprison him. It is almost too much to ask us to sit quietly by” (Cox 1979: 241). Hardy told William Archer in a 1901 interview that his “pessimism, if pessimism it be, does not involve the assumption that the world is going to the dogs . . . On the contrary, my practical philosophy is distinctly meliorist. What are my books but one plea against ‘man’s inhumanity to man’—to woman—and to the lower animals?” (Gibson 1996: 147–48). Yet reviews persisted in calling him a pessimist (Cox 1979: xxi, xxii, 69, 146, 239, 241–43, 287–89, 408–9).

This response was hardly inexplicable. Imagine, for instance, what it might have been like to be among the first readers of the poem that Thomas Hardy contributed in May 1912 to the Souvenir Programme for the Dramatic and Operatic matinee in Aid of the Titanic disaster fund, held in Covent Garden just a month after the event (Hardy 1984b: 11n). Over fifteen hundred people had died, but Hardy’s memorial poem “The Convergence of the Twain” (ibid.: 11–13) spares neither a word of grief for the dead, nor an expression of consolation for the bereaved. Hardy’s fiction demonstrates that he noticed drownings (twenty-two deaths by drowning occur in his novels and stories [Fincham 2008: 124]), but not one of the documented losses in the Atlantic rates a mention here. The poem addresses not the human cost of the Titanic’s sinking, but, dispassionately, the loss of the ship itself, an inevitability designed by the Immanent Will, a prime mover “that stirs and urges everything” (l. 18), including the iceberg that grows as the ship does. “No mortal eye could see / The intimate welding of their later history” (ll. 26–7) writes Hardy, as the ship and the iceberg head for each other “by paths coincident” (l. 29), until fate, the Spinner of the Years, commands that they crash together. Though the accident “jars two hemispheres,” suggesting the worldwide response to this first
modern disaster story, the poem mentions human feelings only negatively. The sunken ship lies far away from “human vanity, / And the Pride of Life that planned her” (ll. 2–3). “Jewels in joy designed / To ravish the sensuous mind” (ll. 10–11) cannot be seen in the dark. The only voice quoted in the poem belongs to the Spinner of the Years, who commands the moment of the crash; the only thoughts attributed to living beings occur in the minds of “Dim moon-eyed fishes” (l. 12). Emptied out of human sympathy, devoid of compassion, and at odds with the conventions of elegiac commemoration, “The Convergence of the Twain” would seem to illustrate both the determinism and the pessimism that Hardy’s critics saw in his work.

However, the poem is saturated with *Einfühlung*. The speaker directs the reader to imagine the circumstances of a lonely cold object on the seafloor. She is abandoned, furnace fires out, with “cold currents” making her steel chambers into “rhythmic tidal lyres” (l. 6) whose music no one hears. Hardy evokes a shudder of disgust on behalf of the dead ship when he describes the sea worm moving over her mirrors (l. 9) and employs plosives to spit out her “bleared and black and blind” jewels (l. 12). Embedded in imagery of burial, invasion of boundaries, and penetration by ice, the *Einfühlung* of the poem invites the reader to ignore the Titanic’s cargo of corpses and to suffer instead with the wasted fabric of the ship itself. Then Hardy’s narration shifts in the stanza break between sections 6 and 7, and he makes of the ship a romance heroine, personifying her construction as natural growth “In stature, grace, and hue” (l. 23). She does not know it, but she is being prepared for a wedding night that will kill her and send her to the ocean bottom. Small consolation that the “intimate welding” (l. 26) of the ship and Shape of Ice “jars two hemispheres” (l. 33). Hardy evades empathy with the drowned or sympathy for the bereaved, employing instead *Einfühlung* with the inanimate, feeling into the sensations of the insensate ship.

“The Convergence of the Twain” narrates the kind of world-shaking shock that, in Hardy’s most optimistic moments, he imagined as stimulating the evolution of altruism in the human species and feeling sentience in the Immanent Will. Hardy could incorporate death-dealing disaster into his way of thinking because he was a persuaded Darwinian and reader of Thomas Henry Huxley. He wrote, “The discovery of the law of evolution, which revealed that all organic creatures are of one family, shifted the centre of altruism from humanity to the whole conscious world collectively” (Millgate 1985: 373–74). In a note that reflects both his reading of Comte and his Darwinian convictions, Hardy remarks “These venerable philosophers [he had been reading Hegel] seem to start wrong; they cannot get
away from a prepossession that the world must somehow have been made to be a comfortable place for man” (ibid.: 185), rather than an uncaring universe. Hardy’s strategic empathizing did not assume an anthrocentric world.

In narrative fiction, authorial strategic empathizing takes three forms. The first is *bounded* empathy, on behalf of members of one’s own group (here it would be highly unusual not to find other people, but one might also discover an honored object, such as the flag, or a location such as the homeland). The second form, *ambassadorial* empathy, attempts to move more distant others on behalf of those represented empathetically, often but not exclusively other human beings. In the nineteenth century, compassionate representations of suffering animals advanced the cause of animal welfare through ambassadorial empathy for pit ponies, cab horses, and other working animals. While he exercised his bounded strategic empathy on behalf of ordinary people, highly recognizable to his compatriots as his rustics, Hardy’s ambassadorial strategic empathy stretched to members of despised outgroups and animals, especially horses, dogs, and sheep. Never one to don rose-colored glasses when it came to fellow humans, Hardy did not hesitate to show their cruelty, exclusivity, and domineering authoritarianism as well as their openness, kindness and compassion, studying what has been called “the light side and the dark side of group and intergroup behavior” (Liu and László 2007: 101).

But, for Hardy, what stymied the development of altruism was not just the prejudice, oppression, and stereotyping directed by humans toward others. He also perceived the universe itself as inimical to human beings, as revealed by the workings of chance and coincidence in many of his narratives in prose and verse. This points up the remarkable nature of Hardy’s most far-flung, *broadcast* strategic empathy: it calls upon every reader, and most often evokes compassion for universal objects of concern, like infants and victims of disasters. As in “The Convergence of the Twain,” Hardy’s empathy involved imaginative projection into the inanimate objects and abstract forces that make up what he depicted as the unconscious universe in which all humans must exist. Paradoxically, his broadcast strategic empathy shows Hardy at his most hopeful, albeit taking a Darwinian long view. At the end of *The Dynasts*, he speculates that the Will might yet evolve to consciousness as human beings already have: “Men gained cognition with the flux of time, / And wherefore not the force informing them” (Hardy 1995b [1908]: 252). Through evolution, pitiable humans might yet find themselves in a universe run by sentient forces, if not by a loving God. If the Immanent Will can know the effects of its actions, even it could develop altruism eventually. Because, for Hardy, altruism involved the first
feeling phase of empathy (his “strange power” [Hardy 1979b: 291]), a closer look at his empathetic representational strategies follows.

3. Hardy’s Strategic Empathizing

Narrative empathy embraces three distinct aspects of the narrative arts: its production, its reception, and the mediation of fictional representations and narrative techniques. Narrative empathy thus involves the authorial empathy of writers in the act of creation, the empathy of the audience(s) on the receiving end, and the textual evidence that bears the traces of strategic empathizing in narrative techniques and representations of fictional worlds. But this essay focuses on Thomas Hardy’s authorial strategic empathy and the textual evidence of the three varieties, described above, as traceable in his verse and prose narratives. Strategic narrative empathy on the part of authors indicates their manipulation of target audiences through intentional, though not invariably efficacious, representations designed to sway the feelings and even influence the beliefs of their readers (Keen 2008: 478–80). That actual readers’ responsiveness to the invitation to empathize varies with their dispositions and experiences I argue in Empathy and the Novel (Keen 2007: 65–100). I also argue there that the readers’ perception of a narrative’s fictionality enhances the likelihood of empathetic response to authorial strategic empathy, regardless of their identity and situational similarity or dissimilarity (ibid.: 28–35).

This runs counter to commonsense expectations about the greater impact of nonfictional narrative information on readers. In a study that set out to demonstrate that greater impact, for instance, Michael D. Slater presented subjects with prose excerpts about familiar or unfamiliar social groups. The findings actually demonstrated that impact on beliefs about unfamiliar social groups derived from fictional sources was equal or greater than that arising from nonfictional influences (Slater 1990: 327; cf. Goldstein 2009). Authors of narrative fiction, whether they intend to change beliefs or not, employ representational techniques aimed at moving the feelings of readers by evoking empathy.

What further complicates an apparently simplistic transactional model, in which authors straightforwardly achieve their goals of scripting readers’ emotional fusion with their creations, is the possible lack of evidence for such achievement. Surely Harper Lee is not the only novelist to advocate and model walking in another’s shoes to the end of altering large numbers of readers’ beliefs through the role-taking imagination. Yet the list of novels that have achieved the broad consensus of readers enjoyed by Lee’s To Kill a Mockingbird (1960) is very short indeed. As the vagaries
of the critical heritage, variable sales figures, changing fashions, books in
and out of print, canon formation and deformation all combine to dem-
onstrate, no one narrative fiction reliably evokes an empathetic response
from all its readers (Keen 2007: 139–40, 159–60). If there were a fail-safe
technique that invariably worked, authors seeking to evoke empathy in all
readers would use it. The “Proteus Principle” articulated by Meir Stern-
berg provides a salutary caution to theorists who would ascribe fixed uses
and effects to particular narrative techniques, including those that osten-
sibly promote empathetic response. Sternberg (1982: 112) urges, instead,
recognition of “many-to-many correspondences between linguistic form
and representational function.”

The lack of empirical evidence that any one narrative technique or
aspect of craft consistently evokes a predictable response from readers
reminds those who would decode narrative empathy at the textual level
that readers’ identities, dispositions, taste, education levels, experiences,
and cultural contexts may act to derail narrative empathy as often as they
secure the intended response (Keen 2007: 92–99). Readers bring differ-
ent levels of commitment, expertise, and effort to their part in reading, as
Meir Sternberg (1985) and Peter J. Rabinowitz (1987) have theorized, with
the result that they may either opt for an authorial audience or remain at
odds with the text’s invitation. Even for readers opting for the authorial
audience, the genre of the narrative and readers’ individual aims in read-
ing can alter both the speed of evaluation and the emotional experience.
László and Cupchik’s empirical studies show that action-oriented stories
“characterized by excitement, curiosity or surprise” receive faster readings,
while experience-oriented narratives that “concern empathy or identifica-
tion” receive slower readings (László 2008). In discourse processing inves-
tigations, slower reading pace of emotionally evocative passages is often
interpreted as a sign of empathy (Miall and Kuiken 1994), but no one has
demonstrated that the faster reading associated with strong traits of nar-
rativity (curiosity, suspense, and surprise) is decoupled from empathy. I
think that future empirical investigation will reveal that readers’ empathy
is involved in their responses to narrativity, not just to emotionally charged
representations that invite identification with characters. Nor does empa-
thy just pertain to representations of other peoples’ feelings in narrative.
It may be a factor in the illusion of immersion in fictional worlds, through
spatial orientation and directional cues. It may be involved in both curi-
osity and suspense (high-empathy young readers have already been shown
to excel in grasping causal connections between plot events [Bourg 1993]).
It probably will even cause faster reading in response to curiosity and sus-
pense, alternated with slower or even arrested reading in reaction to sur-
prise and the second-order sympathetic emotions for characters, such as concern, apprehension, pleasure, or satisfaction.

Despite these complications, a comprehensive theory of strategic narrative empathy may still emerge and be subjected to systematic empirical evaluation. To that end, it is worth examining works of writers who hope to reach multiple audiences, from the immediate in-group or coterie, to the contemporary audience, to the potential posterity audiences, for traces of their strategic empathizing. (We may also find evidence of the three varieties of strategic empathizing within the covers of a single work.) Writers who work in a variety of narrative genres make perceptible choices for such scrutiny. A ballad’s generic contract differs from an epic’s or a novel’s, and an individual author’s differentiated forms of expression may reach different readers.

Hardy fits all these characterizations. He wrote in many different narrative subgenres (ballad, dramatic monologue, epic poem, short story, and novel), adopting distinct voices for various audiences. As for multiple audiences for an individual work, Hardy was acutely aware of them. He consciously adapted his work to make it appropriate for first publication in journals such as Cornhill or the Graphic, with family magazine readerships, but he placed the self-censored excerpts in magazines such as the Fortnightly Review, to reach more sophisticated adult readers. He restored bowdlerized passages for later book publication of novels that had first appeared in magazines guarded by anxious editors such as Leslie Stephen.

Not only the textual history, but also the reception history of Hardy’s work bears the traces of critical preferences for one of his varieties of strategic empathizing over the others. His critics hesitated neither to sort out their preferred targets of sympathetic representation, nor to criticize Hardy’s representational strategies (Cox 1979). For instance, many of his reviewers preferred his humorous portraits of Shakespearian rustics to his call to comprehend the fate of disempowered tragic agents in a cold universe. Yet they also often complained about the high-flown philosophical discourse given to these rustics, which made them seem unreal and unlike the peasants of critical preconceptions. For Hardy, the task of crafting the expressive language of his agricultural laborers had to avoid the Scylla of dialect transcription (incomprehensible to many readers) and the Charybdis of making them talk like books (ibid.: xix). He did not want them to appear grotesque, for that worked against his goal of depicting the men and their natures sympathetically (Hardy 1878).

6. This is evident in the original reviews of Hardy’s novels, collected and excerpted by R. G. Cox, Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage (1979). For an account of the gap between the responses of Hardy’s actual readers and his hopes for his implied audience, see Wright 2003.
Few in his own time understood as well as William Lyon Phelps, writing in 1910, that, for Hardy, the two themes, sympathy for ordinary humans and contempt for a heartless God or fate, are intertwined:

his pessimism is mainly caused by his deep manly tenderness for all forms of human and animal life and by an almost abnormal sympathy. His intense love of bird and beast is well known; many a stray cat and hurt dog have found in him a protector and a refuge. He firmly believes that the sport of shooting is wicked, and he has repeatedly joined in practical measures to waken the public conscience on this subject. As a spectator of human history, he sees life as a vast tragedy, with men and women emerging from nothingness, suffering acute physical and mental sorrow, and then passing into nothingness again. To his sympathetic mind the creed of optimism is a ribald insult to the pain of humanity. (Quoted in Cox 1979: 413)

By far the majority of Hardy’s critics complained about his pessimism, rather than recognizing his critique of optimism (see Cox 1979). Hardy asserted in his preface to the Wessex Edition of his works that he had never intended to advance a consistent philosophy, recording instead impressions of the moment, over the course of a forty-year career. “That these impressions have been condemned as ‘pessimistic,’” Hardy complained, “—as if that were a very wicked adjective—shows a curious muddle-mindedness.” He sought only the truth, he claimed, but he acknowledged that he was attuned to a certain register: “Differing natures find their tongue in the presence of differing spectacles. Some natures become vocal at tragedy, some are made vocal by comedy, and it seems to me that to whichever of these aspects a writer’s instinct for expression the more readily responds, to that he should allow it to respond” (Hardy 1912: xiii).

That the critical resistance at the time to Hardy’s treatment of his tragic characters has been reversed in subsequent generations reminds us that a novelist’s strategic empathizing may meet a responsive audience only in later periods. Such empathizing on behalf of members of despised out-groups may even help to shift the boundaries of a culture’s empathetic circle, if the fictional representation meets favorable circumstances for translation into political and social change. In his 1912 postscript to the Wessex edition of Jude the Obscure, Hardy (2002: xlv) cited his contemporaries’ observation that Ruskin College, founded at Oxford for workingmen in 1899, “should have been called the College of Jude the Obscure.” Belief in an individual author’s ability to effect change through fictional representations, however, can be shattered when the work meets an uncomprehending or hostile audience, unready to stretch beyond a comfort zone hedged about by conventional morality. Thus Hardy had earlier reported that “the only effect of [Jude the Obscure] on human conduct that I could
discover [was] its effect on myself—the experience completely curing me of further interest in novel-writing” (ibid.: xliv). To rephrase this complaint in a positive form, Hardy regarded novel-writing and altering human conduct as ideally linked. As Harvey Curtis Webster (1947: 189) long ago observed, “Hardy not only shows us the worst contingencies that a man may be called upon to meet; he also shows us that much of the misery man suffers in remediable by greater social enlightenment.” His strategic empathizing, in bounded, ambassadorial, and broadcast forms, reveals a lifelong project of attempting to improve human conduct, in a modest version of the positivist religion of humanity, tempered by skepticism.

Strategic empathizing may call upon similarity with the reader or familiarity of character types or circumstances; it may attempt to transcend differences and move beyond predictably biased reactions to characters representing outgroups or stigmatized behavior; or it may involve a broad call upon universal human experiences as the basis of its efforts to connect through shared feelings and emotional fusion. The three terms I use to distinguish varieties of authorial strategic empathy stress the directional quality of authors’ imaginative extension and the potential reach of their representations. Bounded strategic empathy addresses an in-group, relies on experiences of mutuality, and stimulates readers’ feeling with familiar others. For Hardy’s readers, this meant primarily his charming girls and young lovers, like Bathsheba Everdene and Gabriel Oak, “the faithful, modest, sensible hero” of Far from the Madding Crowd (W. P. Trent, in Cox 1979: 237). This kind of empathy is often invoked by the bards of the dominant culture. While bounded strategic empathy may run the risk of preventing outsiders from joining the empathetic circle, it has advantages of inspiring trust through recognition and a sense of rightness. Though other-directed (like all empathy that does not turn into egoistic personal distress), bounded strategic empathy may be marked by signs of both “similarity” and “here-and-now” bias, with limiting effect to match (Hoffman 2000: 13–14).

Ambassadorial strategic empathy addresses distant others with the aim of overcoming both similarity and here-and-now bias, calling forth the empathy of targeted others for needy strangers, or for the disenfranchised, despised, or the misunderstood among us, often with a specific end in mind. The term is derived from missions of embassy on behalf of others. Appeals for justice, recognition, and assistance that transcend the self-interest of the group often take this form, and may be marked by contextual clues,

7. Personal distress is an aversive empathetic reaction to another’s suffering. It is self-directed rather than other-directed, and it causes withdrawal from the stimulus rather than helping behavior (Eisenberg and Eggum 2009).
as I have earlier theorized: “ambassadorial empathy is most marked by the relationship between the time of reading and the historical moment of publication, when the text gets sent out in the world to perform its ambassadorial duty by recruiting particular readers to a present cause through emotional fusion. That is, ambassadorial strategic empathy is time sensitive, context and issue dependant” (Keen 2008: 486). Bounded strategic empathy may also respond to a specific situation, but it does not attempt to win the attention of an outside audience. While ambassadorial strategic empathy needs to explain as it renders the situation to strangers, for whose attention it appeals, bounded empathy may rely on accustomed, routine, or even proverbial understandings shared by the in-group to which it is addressed.

Historical and contextual analysis, as well as scrutiny of the critical response, can recover the evidence of all three forms of strategic empathy at work. Yet the particularity of both bounded and ambassadorial empathy may dilute the emotional response of a temporally remote audience. That is, a critic may recognize that an emotional appeal has been made to a specific audience—for instance, to Christian slave owners in the antebellum American South—without sharing their feelings at all. The original purpose may be revealed in the text, but the feelings remain unactivated. A narrative that survives its original context to evoke readers’ empathy in a posterity audience, years or generations after its first appearance, transcends bounded and ambassadorial forms of strategic empathy. For this phenomenon, so noticeable when a reader responds to an ancient text, a third term is helpful.

Broadcast strategic empathy, so named because its appeal is scattered widely like seeds thrown across a field, calls upon every reader to experience emotional fusion with the target, by emphasizing our common human experiences, feelings, hopes, and vulnerabilities. Narrative empathy in the form of an author’s broadcast strategic empathizing employs universals to reach everyone, including distant others and later readers. It transmits the particularities that connect a far away subject to a feeling reader of virtually any description. Broadcast strategic empathy also attempts to overcome both the similarity and here-and-now biases that can limit the range of less robust empathy effects, but it does so by emphasizing commonalities that persist across time, distance, and cultural barriers. It may be as detailed as its ambassadorial relation, or as confident of recognition as its bounded cousin, but broadcast empathy denies any limit to its appeal.

Gaining a better sense of the narrative techniques employed by authors to effect strategic empathizing is an ongoing project, and empirical verification of readers’ empathetic responses to these techniques will require
further research. Readers may and do sometimes respond indifferently to appeals to their feelings. This is not a matter of readerly incompetence; it reflects differences in readers’ dispositions and experiences. I do not expect to find a neat match between authors’ strategic empathy and a record of actual reader-response from the three kinds of audiences (the in-group; the remote readership; and the universal audience, including readers from later generations). The higher-level Proteus Principle would caution against such overconfidence. However, I do anticipate that a combination of rhetorical narrative poetics, contextual analysis of narrative works that attempt to evoke empathy, and case studies of individual writers’ aims and techniques will allow the differentiation of bounded, ambassadorial, and broadcast strategic empathy.

A case study of an individual author’s techniques cannot answer all the questions about how strategic narrative empathy works (when it does work), but it can provide suggestive patterns and a template for subsequent research on the intersections of authorial temperaments, representational strategies, and evocative content. Hardy makes a good subject for such research, because of his artistic temperament, well described by James Gibson. He notes “Hardy’s feeling that we lived in a flawed world.” Commenting on the word “common lot” in Hardy’s poem “To an Unborn Pauper Child” (Hardy 1982 [1901]: 163), Gibson (1994: 6) writes of the poet’s sensitivity to the shared suffering of all living beings:

This sympathy for individuals and his compassion for all of Nature’s creatures (and his sympathy for animals is everywhere present) result from the universality of his vision. We live on a blighted world but we are on it together, and for Hardy, our only hope is that lovingkindness—a word he uses again and again—would spread among the peoples of the world and we would realise that we are all members of one family, one community.

To move from this broad view to the particulars of Hardy’s artistry of empathetic engagement is the next step. Attention to elements of craft, Hardy’s representations, and the contexts involved in his strategic empathizing reveals a blend of thematizing of broad topics for general sympathy (the rural poor, the unborn, the mentally or physically ill), targeted representations of individual subjects that invite compassion (a slaughtered pig, starving birds, a fallen woman), and foregrounding by way of striking words and phrases (as in “The Convergence of the Twain,” discussed above). Hardy’s narrative techniques for representation of consciousness,

8. An exemplar of Hardy’s diction, “The Convergence of the Twain,” uses odd locutions to retard reading pace and stall comprehension as he builds sympathy for the “alien” forms of
his manipulation of pace and location, and his experiments with externalized, behavioral narration reinforce his sympathetic themes. The variation in the individual targets of Hardy’s own empathy and Einfühlung highlight his tactics for stimulating altruism, beginning with empathy for a range of sufferers, from people alive and dead, to dumb animals, to insensate fossils and material objects. Hardy’s lifelong mental habits, we recall, involved the “*strange* power of putting himself in the place of those who endured sufferings from which he himself had been in the main free, or subject to but at brief times” (Hardy 1979b [1927]: 291–92). Part of what was “*strange*” about Hardy’s empathy was that it did not depend on shared experience or even shared humanity. Hardy’s self-proclaimed other-directedness prompts a close look at those sufferers in his representations.

I begin with Hardy’s bounded strategic empathy, by which he drew his literate, middle- and upper-class contemporaries’ attention to the individuality and humanity of people they categorized as peasants. To contemporaries, his “rustics” or “peasants” were among his most successful representations, not only because they were often humorous characters, but also because they were sympathetically drawn (see Cox 1979). Hardy saw his depictions as portraits and composites made of individuals rather than as representative types. Even when employing them as a Greek chorus commenting on the tragic action of higher-class characters in the narrative, Hardy individuated each member of the group. In his own view this distinguished him from those who would stereotype an agricultural laborer as “Hodge.” He worked against such generalization in his fiction and in more polemical writings for magazines, such as his essay, “The Dorsetshire Labourer” (1883): “It seldom happens that a nickname [Hodge] which affects to portray a class is honestly indicative of the individuals composing that class” (ibid.: 252). Once you get closer to agricultural laborers, Hardy suggests, you do not see a group of undifferentiated Hodges. He goes on to describe an imaginary stay with rural workfolk that would erase such habits of generalization. His novels and stories provide readers with proxy visits with their countrymen and women, offering a route to the familiarity that would disabuse readers of set views about laborers’ uncouth speech, uncleanliness, misery, and laziness. In fact, Hardy’s depiction of the speech, individualized dress, beliefs, behavior, work habits, and leisure practices of countryfolk and women was one of the most appreciated aspects of his early fiction,9 in *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), *A Pair of Blue

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9. For a selection of complimentary reviews, see Cox 1979.
Eyes (1873), Far from the Madding Crowd (1874), and The Return of the Native (1878). He did not just display quaint laborers with their folk customs, however; he emphasized the economic realities that shaped their lives, and even when employing them in a group to provide a Greek chorus as a backdrop to the main action, he insisted on their individual humanity.

This shows the depiction of the ailments from which they suffered. Some of Hardy’s country folk, such as Thomas Leaf, exhibit the symptoms of mental retardation (presumably the source of G. K. Chesterton’s [1988 (1936): 262] disparaging remark about Hardy as “the village atheist brooding on the village idiot”). Others, like Michael Henchard and Farmer Boldwood, are depressed or monomaniacal (exhibiting symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder). Further, specific characters suffer from sleep paralysis, the hearing disorder tinnitus, and Hardy even captures the uncontrollable blurs of speech of a character, Andrew Randle, who is afflicted with Tourette’s syndrome. The effect of these fine-grained distinctions of personality among characters who might otherwise blur into an indistinguishable background is to invite recognition of them as individuals, though they are seen from the outside and identified, as flat characters, by their distinctive ailments.

Thus William Worm, a minor servant-class character from A Pair of Blue Eyes, complains of the “frying o’ fish” and “fizz, fizz, fizz” (Hardy 2005 [1873]: 211) that he experiences inside his head due to tinnitus, each time he appears in the novel. In a reunion scene in that novel, members of the protagonist Stephen Smith’s family gather at his childhood home to welcome him back to the neighborhood. Awkwardly for the anxious and class-conscious Stephen, the gathering includes lower-class neighbors and servants, including William Worm, doing his comic-pathetic turn as a man afflicted with a hearing impairment. Hardy does not focus the reader’s attention on Worm’s ailment, for the bounded empathy exercised and invited by Hardy here does not depend on author or reader being a tinnitus sufferer. Hardy instead counts on the recognition of a familiar circumstance in a small nineteenth-century rural community, where people of middling and lower orders rub along together. Writing to more educated, class-conscious contemporaries, Hardy serves up Worm as a version of that local figure, well known by his typical conversational gambits, who evokes compassion, irritation, and embarrassment from the socially mixed group. Hardy foregrounds Stephen’s adolescent embarrassment, emphasizing the social sensitivities of a child who feels he has outgrown his parents’ social circle. Hardy calls here on situational empathy, a variety of empathy that requires little imaginative extension, since it depends upon
memory and is spurred by recognition of a familiar scenario. To feel the currents of emotion running through the scene, all readers need is to know how the return of the educated child to a humble household often involves embarrassment mixed with pleasure. Yet if Hardy uses Worm to provoke Stephen’s mortified response (allying the reader with the educated young man rather than with the servant), he also preserves Worm’s individuality, giving him lines and a role in the scene.

The bounded empathy exercised around the appearance of William Worm combines Hardy’s deployment of a character type with the greater complexity afforded by others’ responses to him. Worm’s suffering elicits affable expressions of interest from the other characters: “Have ye ever tried anything to cure yer noise?” (Hardy 2005 [1873]: 212), they ask, and Worm explains his Christian resolution to live with the condition (if only he can report on it to his friends at every opportunity). Having warmly conjured up Worm’s pitiable and mildly exasperating presence, Hardy deftly sketches Stephen’s immature resolution “to avoid the vicinity of that familiar friend” in future (ibid.: 214). Stephen’s class-crossing pretensions to the hand of Elfride make him ready to disavow his parents’ old friends, and his mother colludes with his discomfort, blaming the “rough nature” of Stephen’s father for the awkward social mixture of people from the lower and more respectable classes in their household (ibid.: 217). The invitations to a highly social form of empathy criss-cross the passage, ranging from straightforward pity for William Worm, to shared embarrassment with Stephen, to recognition of the currents of feeling provoked by the returned son who sees the parental home through critical eyes. This bounded empathy makes no stressful demand on readers habituated to the servants’ comedy of Shakespearean subplots, but it nudges those readers away from comfortable generalizations about country people toward recognition of their particular qualities.

Ambassadorial empathy asks an audience to stretch beyond immediate experiences and easily recognized situations to feel with others who are less commonly placed within the empathetic circle. In this regard, Hardy’s contemporaries noticed his special attention to the feelings of animals. In the middle of the scene discussed above (from *A Pair of Blue Eyes*), a pig gets slaughtered, not an unusual event in a farmhouse of the period. Hardy’s straightforward description of the “fatted animal hanging in the back kitchen . . . cleft down the middle of its backbone” refers to a

10. Patrick Colm Hogan (2001) differentiates *categorical* empathy, which relies on matches in identity, and *situational* empathy, which depends on a reader’s memory of an experience quite similar to that represented as undergone by a character.
familiar sight. But the meditation of the pig-killer on the personalities of his porcine victims adds something different: an odd invitation to regard even pigs as individuals. According to the butcher, specific pigs he has known were afflicted by rheumatism, melancholy, deafness and dumbness (ibid.: 213). Here Hardy gives his own attentiveness to the personalities and experiences of farmyard beasts to a butcher, whom readers might otherwise expect to regard the animals with callousness. Indeed, a disregard for the feelings of intelligent animals could be seen as a prerequisite for the job of killing them.

Famously, Hardy’s character Jude Fawley fumbles a job of pig-butchering because of an excess of sympathy for the animal, whom Hardy represents as crying with rage and despair at his situation (Hardy 2002 [1895]: 58–59). Hardy’s text uses impersonal and personal pronouns to mark the boundary between animal and meat: while the pig lives and suffers, it is still a gendered living being. Hardy’s empathetic imagination shuttles among three points of a triangle, catching Arabella’s exasperation at Jude’s tender-heartedness, Jude’s horror and relief when the animal dies quickly, and the pig’s own perspective: “The dying animal’s cry assumed its third and final tone, the shriek of agony; his glazing eyes riveting themselves on Arabella with the eloquently keen reproach of a creature recognizing at last the treachery of those who had seemed his only friends” (ibid.: 59). Hardy makes his readers visualize the slaughtered pig as a being with a face, whose “lips and nostrils . . . turned livid, then white” (ibid.). Hardy foregrounds the facial expressions and physiognomy that humans and animals share. Though these are not the beautiful lips of doomed Tess, they starkly represent the slaughtered animal in his last moments of life. Hardy’s fixation on mouths that issue cross-species communications (Tess whistling to the captive birds; the pig crying to its betrayers) models recognition of commonalities of physiology and feeling that invite the leap from immediate involuntary motor mimicry to all-encompassing sympathy, or compassionate concern.

Hardy’s representations of suffering animals and his support for antivivisection activism (shared with his first wife, Emma) are well known (Campbell 1973; Marks 1995; Morrison 1998). From his earliest fiction, he described the emotions and motives of dogs, sheep, horses, even birds and worms (in Jude the Obscure, “The Darkling Thrush,” and The Dynasts, for example). As Michael L. Campbell (1973: 68) observes, Hardy’s fictional characters can be classified into three distinct types by their attitudes toward animals: the overly sensitive compassionate characters, who shrink

11. For another perspective on Hardy’s faces, see Cohen 2006.
from the harsh world; those who are one with the natural world and its facts of life and death; and those who are so self-oriented that they scarcely notice nature unless it has a use for them. He certainly did not expect everyone to conform to the model of the sensitive Jude, or even to the competent and attentive Gabriel Oak. He hoped, though, for a shift in attitudes, extending the Golden Rule’s protection of others to the animal kingdom: “Few people seem to perceive fully as yet that the most far-reaching consequences of the establishment of the common origin of all species is ethical” (Millgate 1985: 376–77). In 1909, Hardy explicitly linked his attitude toward animals to his reading of Darwin, writing “The discovery of the law of evolution, which revealed that all organic creatures are of one family, shifted the centre of altruism from humanity to the whole conscious world collectively. Therefore the practice of vivisection . . . has been left by that discovery without any logical argument in its favor” (ibid.: 373–74). But we cannot be certain that Hardy’s reading of Darwin included The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals (1872), from which he took no notes. Hardy could have found there not only many images of the facial expressions of animal and human emotion, but also confirmation of his materialist view of the human species, since Darwin argues for continuities of human with animal emotions. Such relatedness certainly resonates with what Hardy wrote about vivisection: inflicting it on animals is “wrong, and stands precisely in the same category as would stand its practice on men themselves” (Millgate 1985: 374). It is no surprise, then, to discover that, in Hardy’s ambassadorial empathy, we often find feelings for animals and humans entangled, as in Jude the Obscure.

While ambassadorial strategic empathy often correlates with a contemporary cause—in this case, the prevention of cruelty to animals—Hardy’s active empathizing on behalf of fellow-creatures went far beyond anti-vivisection activism. There was no lobby working for the birds that eat farmers’ seed out of the fields or for worms that come to the surface after a rainstorm. But young Jude Fawley is overcome by fellow feeling for the hungry birds: “He sounded the clacker till his arm ached, and at length his heart grew sympathetic with the birds’ thwarted desire. They seemed, like himself, to be living in a world which did not want them. Why should he frighten them away? They took upon them more and more the aspect of gentle friends and pensioners” (Hardy 2002 [1895]: 9). Stirred to sympathy

12. Hardy’s reading of T. H. Huxley would have reinforced this point. See, for example, Huxley’s “On the Relations of Man to the Lower Animals” in Evidence as to Man’s Place in Nature (1863), which denies a psychical distinction between the feelings of men and beasts.
13. Hardy could have read a précis of this work in Ribot’s The Psychology of the Emotions (1897 [1896]), from which he did make extracts.
with the birds, Jude lets them settle for a meal on Farmer Troutham’s field and luxuriates in his charity, linked as it is to self-pity: “A magic thread of fellow-feeling united his own life to theirs. Puny and sorry as their lives were, they much resembled his own” (ibid.). In language that emphasizes the uncanny connection forged by sympathy as described by Adam Smith and David Hume, the magic thread of fellow-feeling overlooks drastic differences between the human boy and the flock of rooks, thereby also revealing Jude’s low self-esteem. Hardy heightens this effect in the following scene. Beaten by the farmer who employs him for dereliction of duty, the punished child skulks away, his fundamental disposition unaltered: “Though Farmer Troutham had just hurt him, he was a boy who could not himself bear to hurt anything” (ibid.: 11). Beholding “scores of coupled earthworms lying half their length on the surface of the damp ground, as they always did in such weather at that time of the year,” Jude picks his way through “on tiptoes, without killing a single one” (ibid.). Hardy’s empathetic effort in this sequence of scenes uses Jude’s pity for animals as a conduit for readers’ empathy for Jude himself; even a reader who heartlessly crushes bugs on the sidewalk can still receive Hardy’s embassy on behalf of a sensitive soul.

Hardy’s ambassadorial strategic empathy runs in an elliptical orbit from self out to far-off other, where the threads of fellow-feeling touch the remote lives of worms, birds, pigs, dogs, sheep, fallen women, drunkards, and suicidal children. The extension of the imagination made on behalf of these sufferers flows back in its return trip to the author’s self. Hardy is always asking his readers for understanding of his own way of feeling and thinking, through proxies such as his fictional characters. For example, shaken by the realization that grown-up life will bring responsibilities that seem to be fulfilled only through cruelty, Jude wishes “If he could only prevent himself growing up! He did not want to be a man” (ibid.: 12). Critics have identified Jude’s death wish with Hardy’s reading of Schopenhauer, whose pessimistic philosophy also emphasizes animal rights (Schweik 1999). Hardy himself documents a source closer to home than his reading, as the textual links between his description of Jude’s feelings and his own experiences demonstrate. Comparison of the fictional and autobiographical passages show that Hardy drew Jude’s experience from his own boyhood. Of Jude’s state of mind, he writes:

Nature’s logic was too horrid for him to care for. That mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another sickened his sense of harmony. As you got older, and felt yourself to be at the centre of your time, and not at a point in its circumference, as you had felt when you were little, you were seized with a
sort of shuddering, he perceived. All around you there seemed to be something glaring, garish, rattling, and the noises and glares hit upon the little cell called your life, and shook it, and warped it. (Hardy 2002 [1895]: 12)

This description catches the perils of living inside a body endowed with a highly empathetic disposition, subject to the “shuddering” response of empathetic distress (Eisenberg and Eggum 2009). The personal distress at perceiving the feelings of others most often causes withdrawal from the stimulus: Jude intuits that as “his existence [is] an undemanded one,” he should simply not grow up (Hardy 2002 [1895]: 12). Hardy went through the same thought process as a child. Lying, like Jude, with the sun shining through the “interstices of the straw” hat with which he has covered his face, the boy Hardy reflected “on his experiences of the world so far as he had got” and came “to the conclusion that he did not want to grow up” (Millgate 1985: 20) and would prefer to die while still a child. Callously telling his mother his “conclusions on existence, thinking she would enter into his views,” Hardy learned to his great surprise that “she was very much hurt” at her son’s death wish, “which was natural enough considering she had been near death’s door in bringing him forth” (ibid.: 20).

Although in later life Hardy was to welcome serious illness and regret recovery (“A Wasted Illness”), he was not after all a suicide, and he lived into his eighties. His sensitive disposition remained unchanged. Near his death he recalled his early feeling for animals, as when he picked up a dead bird that his father had struck with a stone: “It was light as a feather, all skin and bone, practically starved. He said he had never forgotten how the body of the fieldfare felt in his hand: the memory had always haunted him” (Millgate 1985: 479). Another early memory involves an exercise in taking the perspective of an animal: “He recalled how, crossing the ewe-leaze when a child, he went on hands and knees and pretended to eat grass in order to see what the sheep would do. Presently he looked up and found them gathered around in a close ring, gazing at him with astonished faces” (ibid.). Ambassadorial empathy on Hardy’s part loops back to the perceptive self, fusing “how do they feel?” with “how does it feel for me to feel with them?”

Rather than succumbing to the empathetic personal distress that this dispositional openness to others’ perspectives brought on, Hardy channeled it into a productive life of fictional world-making. That his works often brought members of despised outgroups into the representational circle suggests one of the ethical uses of his ambassadorial empathy. Hardy wrote compellingly about suicidal depression, divorce, illegitimate birth, and many other experiences he did not directly share. In a cen-
tury of reform, he did his part to bring attention to neglected individuals whose perspectives were unlikely to command the attention of investigative journalists or compilers of Parliamentary blue books. Lennart Björk rightly emphasizes the relationship between Hardy’s psychological vision and his social criticism, which made efforts at ameliorating reforms that would lighten the burden of living for afflicted humanity (Björk 1987). Yet an account of Hardy’s empathy that stops with either his feelings for sufferers or his focus on his own sensitive feelings would miss a significant element of his imaginative effort, deployed on behalf of inanimate objects and impersonal forces. For this, we must turn to Hardy’s strangest, even alienating exercise of strategic empathy.

When strategic empathizing particularly invites character identification it may be prompted by recognition, shared experience, narratorial instructions to engage in perspective-taking, or far simpler invitations to travel with a character, in Wayne Booth’s phrase. A common strategy of authorial empathizing involves revelation of characters’ inner thoughts and feelings. But, as I have argued elsewhere (Keen 2010), Hardy employs what Dorrit Cohn (1978: 11–14) calls quoted monologue and narrated monologue (free indirect discourse, erlebte Rede) far less often than his contemporaries, relying instead on dialogue, description of behavior and bodily states, and psycho-narration (i.e., narrator’s summaries of characters’ thoughts and inward states). The author directs attention to externals of character speech and behavior, rather than providing thought-transcripts, and detailing circumstances that place his fictional people in highly recognizable milieus.

A significant exception to this pattern occurs in the novel *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, in the famous “Cliff without a Name” scene, where Knight, Stephen’s rival, clings to a cliff face while Elfride runs for help (Hardy 2005 [1873]: 199–206). During her several minutes’ absence, Knight’s thoughts are detailed by Hardy in a blend of techniques: his usual psycho-narration; uncommon outbreaks of narrated monologue (“Was he to die? . . . He had hoped for deliverance, but what could a girl do?” [ibid.: 201]); and extremely rare quoted monologue (“‘She will never come again; she has been gone ten minutes,’ he said to himself . . . ‘As many more minutes will be my end,’ he thought” [ibid.: 202]). In a situation of extremity, pelted by rain and fatigued, Hardy’s character certainly evokes empathy and also sympathy from readers. Those who have physical experience of rock climbing or who have had near-death experiences may be especially primed to feel with Knight. Hardy’s narrative technique charts the increasing desperation of Knight by providing more and more direct thought transcript, until the narrator decorously closes access to the character’s mind when
he gives up hope of rescue: “Into the shadowy depths of these speculations we will not follow him” (ibid.: 203). The remarkable aspect of this passage resides not in Hardy’s modest experiments with mixing modes of representation of consciousness, though that is a striking feature of the episode, but with its invocation of Einfühlung for inanimate objects in the natural environment.

Hardy’s broadcast strategic empathy ambitiously employs Einfühlung with dead (no longer animate) creatures and with inanimate objects that never lived, in order to evoke a salutary awareness of humanity’s insignificance in the universe. Hanging by his arms on the cliff face, Knight “could only look sternly at nature’s treacherous attempt to put an end to him, and strive to thwart her” (ibid.: 199). Right in front of his eyes he sees “an imbedded fossil, standing forth in low relief from the rock. It was a creature with eyes. The eyes, dead and turned to stone, were even now regarding him” (ibid.: 200). Face to face with the embodied, though fossilized perspective of the trilobite, Knight perceives its regard and feels himself into its long-lost animation: “It was the single instance within reach of his vision of anything that had ever been alive and had had a body to save, as he himself had now” (ibid.). Sufficiently “fair geologist” to identify the trilobite, its phylum, and its period, Knight’s Einfühlung extends beyond the individual fossil to the “extremity of the years, face to face with the beginning and all the intermediate centuries simultaneously” (ibid.). Rather than the conventional life-review of near-death experiences, time itself collapses “like a fan before him” (ibid.). Knight’s mind projects a temporally elliptical sequence of images that moves backward from prehistoric humans to “the lifetime scenes of the fossil” animating the stone surroundings, round to the “present and modern condition of things” (ibid.: 201). Scientifically minded Victorians were primed to contemplate “the immense lapses of time each formation represented . . . know[ing] nothing of the dignity of man” (ibid.: 200), but to ponder geological time at the moment of one’s death enacts an extraordinary dissociation from humanity through association with rock remnants of prehistoric life: “He was to be with the small in his death” (ibid.).

Knight’s empathetic enlivening of the inanimate trilobite into “lifetime scenes of the fossil” (ibid.), his attribution of agency to the torturing rain and the cliff whose features speak grimness and desolation could seem like a recurrence of animism or superstition, but Hardy makes clear that they are imaginary, an effect brought on by the physical circumstances: “There is no place like a cleft landscape for bringing home such imaginings as these” (ibid.). A rejoinder to the faithful testimony of the eighteenth-century hymn “Rock of Ages,” by Augustus Montague Toplady, in which
the mortal clinging to the rock finds refuge and hopes for salvation, Hardy’s scene on the cliff emphasizes the insignificance of human life in a material world that seems bent on extinguishing it. This is neither the first nor last time that he juxtaposes vastnesses of time and space with the perspectives of the feeling human creatures inhabiting them. It is not a consoling vision. He refers to himself as a “time-torn man” in the poem “A Broken Appointment” (Hardy 1982 [1901]: 172). Space was no kinder than time in Hardy’s imagination. When he enlivens wastes, endowing landscapes such as Egdon Heath with facial features and personalities, animates abstract forces such as the Phantom Intelligences, and feels into the perspectives of fossils or worn church pavement stones, he exercises Einfühlung that is not reciprocated. As we have seen earlier, Hardy was committed to the altruism that follows, in the Comtean model, from the exercise of the role-taking imagination. Yet he disbelieved in a benevolent God or even a sentient Creator, so he could not pretend that his feelings were returned by the universe. Indeed, he imagined worse.

Hardy bends his perceptions to explore the point of view of The Spirit of the Years in The Dynasts, who places human action in the long view of historical narrative. This voice conveys that humans, even world-historical figures, neither understand nor control the meaning of their actions, which are driven by the unconscious Immanent Will. Personifying compassion in the person of the Spirit of the Pities, Hardy worries that the evidence suggests not simply an indifferent universe but a sadistic Creator:

\begin{quote}
The tears that lie about this plightful scene
Of heavy travail in a suffering soul,
Mocked with the forms and feints of royalty
While scarified by briery Circumstance,
Might drive Compassion past her patiency
To hold that some mean, monstrous ironist
Had built this mistimed fabric of the Spheres
To watch the throbings of its captive lives,
(The which may Truth forfend), and not thy said
Unmaliced, unimpassioned, nescient Will!
\end{quote}

(Hardy 1995a [1904, 1906]: 386, ll. 50–59)

A “mean, monstrous ironist” for a Creator, who watches “captive lives” suffer in a misaligned universe would be worse even than an unknowing and unfeeling Immanent Will. The fact that anyone in this universe has evolved to feel for self and others is either a cruel joke or worse, a vicious design. Though the Spirit of the Years chides the Pities, “Mild one, be not too touched with human fate” (ibid.: 386, l. 60), Hardy glosses in the pas-
sage quoted above a negative ethical consequence of the exercise of *Einfühlung*. If projective imagining on the part of humans endows the lifeless and motiveless universe with feelings, then it transforms the Immanent Will from an indifferent force into a torturer.

Hardy generalized from his own experience as an empathizer to the whole human species. He plans in one of his notebook entries for a representation of life in which “The human race [is] to be shown as one great network or tissue, which quivers in every part when one point is shaken” (Millgate 1985: 183). For Hardy, this unity of the human species in one fabric simultaneously guarantees its interconnection and renders it vulnerable to pains suffered by its members. For full altruism to come out of human role-taking, imagination requires further evolution and not only of human beings. Hardy’s own *Einfühlung* shows in his projection that the Immanent Will, “the dreaming dark, dumb Thing / That turns the handle of this idle Show” (Hardy 1995b [1908]: 254, ll. 79–80), should one day break out of blindness, wake to feeling sentience, and tend “To Its mending / In a genial germing purpose, and for loving-kindness’ sake” (ibid.: 255, ll. 98–99). To bring on this evolution of a feeling and conscious Force out of an “Inadvertent Mind” (ibid.: 252, l. 17), according to Hardy, requires the gradual amelioration of human suffering that he called Altruism and described in terms of empathy.

4. Conclusion

This essay on Thomas Hardy’s targets of strategic narrative empathy provides a case study of a single author employing all three modes, bounded, ambassadorial, and broadcast empathy, over the course of a career of writing. It supplements my earlier theorizing about strategic empathy with a sampling from a writer whose discursive and literary articulation of altruistic representational goals parallels the elaboration of empathy and *Einfühlung* by psychologists and aestheticians in the same years. The chronology of the examples I employ shows, moreover, a development in Hardy’s work, with bounded empathy obvious in his earliest fiction (especially his pastoral novels such as *Under the Greenwood Tree* and *Far from the Madding Crowd*), ambassadorial empathy for animals and outgroups showing forth in his mature fiction, and broadcast empathy in the strange form of *Einfühlung* for inanimate objects and impersonal forces in his narrative poetry (mainly a product of his later years). Yet close analysis of passages from Hardy’s narratives, as in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, shows a characteristic blend of situational empathy, personal distress, and broadcast *Einfühlung*.
within a novel that provides an early example of Hardy’s ambassadorial errand on the part of auto-didactic young men who would attempt to transcend artisan-class origins.

As early as 1873, then, the year of Vischer’s discussion of *Einfühlung*, Hardy was already employing all three modes of strategic empathy in his narrative fiction. Rather than surmising a *Zeitgeist* that would explain Hardy’s prescience about empathy and *Einfühlung*, this essay examines Hardy’s reading journals and reflections in his ghosted biography to confirm the importance to him of Darwin, Huxley, and Spencer on the commonalities of humans and animals, of the French Darwinian psychologist Ribot on egoistic and altruistic emotion, and of Comte’s positivism as an early influence on his evolutionary meliorism.

That *altruism*, a term so often coupled with empathy in twentieth-century investigations of human social psychology, should precede the terminology and theorizing of both empathy and *Einfühlung* it is vital to recall. The early formulations of other-directed emotion that Hardy read, starting with Comte and including Spencer and Ribot, described altruism as a feeling for others that would lead to actions on their behalf. In late-twentieth-century psychology, the feeling and the action would be separated, as C. Daniel Batson’s “empathy-altruism hypothesis” indicates. This separation allows for investigations of the conditions under which empathy does (or does not) lead to altruism, as well as consideration of more self-interested motivations for altruistic action, such as expectation of reciprocity. It also opens up a way of studying failures of empathy, whether because of egoistic personal distress and withdrawal, or because of diffusion of responsibility, by which an individual in a crowd absolves himself of responsibility to act and becomes a bystander rather than a helper. I have argued elsewhere that the empathy-altruism hypothesis, which has been shown to work among real people (Batson 1991), does not automatically function in the same way when it comes to narrative empathy (Keen 2007). That is, I am in agreement with Meir Sternberg’s (1982) caution against “package-dealing,” in resisting the analogy that would equate the use of empathetic narrative techniques in fiction with real-life empathy-altruism. We should not expect, and we do not in fact find, reliable evidence of altruistic results in the social and political realm of tens of thousands of empathy-inducing narratives. We should ask, instead, what interferes with the transmission of fellow feeling induced by narrative fiction and/or the altruism that was Comte’s positivist dream.

In Hardy’s narratives of self-thwarting characters, driven by impulsions that they scarcely register, we find clear delineations of the obstacles to altruism that balk even the most feeling beings, such as Tess and Jude. To
explain why things just cannot improve as quickly as we might wish, Hardy depicts the near-irresistible force of class prejudice, limiting gender roles, legal and economic obstacles, and group pressure to conform, as well as his characters’ vulnerability to criminal manipulations, sexual desire, and emotional natures. That humans live such short lives, in the evolutionary time-scale, made an impression on Hardy, one that is reflected in his faith in meliorism; it is *evolutionary* meliorism, and may be helped along, but cannot be rushed. We find in Hardy’s notes of 1881 evidence of his struggle to reconcile his Darwinism with his observation of humans’ emotional natures. He names here Law what in later narratives he calls Cause and Immanent Will, an unthinking motive force:

“May 9. After infinite trying to reconcile a scientific view of life with the emotional and spiritual, so that they may not be interdestructive I come to the following:

“General Principles. Law has produced in man a child who cannot but constantly reproach its parent for doing much and yet not all, and constantly say to such parent that it would have been better never to have begun doing than to have *over*done so indecisively; that is, than to have created so far beyond all apparent first intention (on the emotional side), without mending matters by a second intent and execution, to eliminate the evils of the blunder of overdoing. The emotions have no place in a world of defect, and it is a cruel injustice that they should have developed in it.

“If Law itself had consciousness, how the aspect of its creatures would terrify it, fill it with remorse!” (Millgate 1985: 153)

Though he deplores the injustice of evolved feelings, Hardy never abjures the emotional nature that time and again leads his characters into traps they cannot escape. Bathsheba Everdene impulsively teases Farmer Boldwood with a valentine, starting a chain of events that leads from Boldwood’s obsession to his murder of his rival for Bathsheba’s affections. Eustacia Vye flees into Egdon Heath in an escape attempt that leads to her drowning. Michael Henchard sells his wife in drunken exasperation and can never evade the consequences of his action. Jude entangles himself disastrously with Arabella and Sue Bridehead, with tragic results for himself and his offspring. Though readers have found his narratives pessimistic or deterministic (Cox 1979), they have rarely complained that Hardy’s characters’ plights are unmoving. His narratives take advantage of readers’ emotional dispositions to involve them in the experience of his fictional beings. Though we may point to areas of potential reform, where Hardy’s fiction might have influenced readers’ attitudes (workingmen’s access to education, availability of divorce, treatment of unwed mothers), his aim was grander still. By mobilizing readers’ empathy on behalf of
others, Hardy’s lovingkindness and altruism might look like grim responsibilities. He should be congratulated, he asserts, for sticking to the task of perspective-taking, as in the long run, the universe itself could be awakened to its senses, learn to pity, and evolve into a feeling Prime Mover:

must not Its heart awake,
Promptly tending
To its mending,
In a genial germinating purpose, and for loving-kindness’ sake?
(Hardy 1995a [1904, 1906]: 5.255; italics in original)

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