

**“THE CONVERGENCE OF THE TWAIN”:
ROMANTICISM AND NATURALISM IN THOMAS
HARDY’S TRAGIC NOVELS**

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

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ABSTRACT

Hardy considered Romanticism essential to human nature in every age. His admiration for the English Romantic poets never wavered, and the influence of Shelley and Keats on his fiction is overdue for reassessment. At the same time, Hardy maintained a predilection for French fiction in general, and Zola's Naturalism in particular, which has been underestimated. Hardy was openly envious of the greater freedom enjoyed by his French counterparts when portraying sexual relationships and lower-class mores. The convergence of English Romanticism and French Naturalism gives rise to Hardy's "original treatment" of tragedy, one which integrates his considered engagement with the philosophical and literary climate of the late nineteenth century.

The five tragic novels under review belong to the "Novels of Character and Environment", a title which summarises the interaction between Hardy's Romantic idealists and what Hardy called the "opposing environment". *Far from the Madding Crowd* is a mixed-genre novel in which Hardy makes his first excursion into tragedy with the portrayal of the maddened idealist, Boldwood. *The Return of the Native* takes Hardy's developing vision one step further, with its allusions to great tragedies of the past, Greek and Shakespearean, and its questioning whether Eustacia's despair or Clym's misery affords them tragic status. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy succeeds in creating a tragic protagonist of Shakespearean stature, whose crime against family unleashes forces of retribution which resemble the supernatural powers of Greek tragedy. Despite the innocence of her intentions, the heroine of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is pursued by a torturing destiny, crushed by a naturalistic conjunction of upbringing and ancestry. Finally, *Jude the Obscure* portrays a working-class protagonist who prefigures the anti-heroes of modern tragedy, yet is also an unobserved pioneer of a new ethic of loving-kindness. Whether tragedy arises due to a character flaw, the forces of Nature and social determinism, or a sinister "Immanent Will" reminiscent of Greek tragedy, these novels run the gamut of Hardy's tragic vision, from tragic-comedy through to a novel which anticipates modernist nihilism, pushing the tragic genre to its limits.

CUE TITLES

The following short-form designations are used for frequently cited texts. In the case of Hardy's novels, all quotations will be taken from the Norton Critical Editions listed below unless otherwise indicated.

- AB* *Adam Bede*. London: Blackwood, n.d.
- AM* *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret*. Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1972.
- CC* *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*. Ed. Dale Kramer. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999.
- CL* *Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*. Ed. R.L. Purdy and M. Millgate. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1978.
- CP* *Thomas Hardy: The Complete Poems*. Ed. James Gibson. Variorum Edition. London: Macmillan, 1979.
- FMC* *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Ed. Robert C. Schweik. New York: Norton, 1986.
- JO* *Jude the Obscure*. Ed. Norman Page. New York: Norton, 1999.
- LaM* *La Morte*. Ed. Calmann Lévy. Paris: Lévy, 1886.
- LIFE* *The Life of Thomas Hardy*. London: Macmillan, 1962.
- LM* *Les Misérables*. Ed. and trans. Norman Denny. London: Penguin, 1976.
- LN* *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*. Ed. Lennart A. Björk. 2 vols. London: Macmillan, 1985.
- MB* *Madame Bovary*. Ed. and trans. Geoffrey Wall. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992.
- MC* *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Ed. Phillip Mallett. New York: Norton, 2001.
- RN* *The Return of the Native*. Ed. James Gindin. New York: Norton, 1969.
- Tess* *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Ed. Scott Elledge. New York: Norton, 1991.

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INTRODUCTION

Romanticism will exist in human nature as long as human nature itself exists. The point is (in imaginative literature) to adopt that form of romanticism which is the mood of the age.¹

Hardy's *Literary Notebooks* indicate that, during the period when he was preparing materials for his major novels, he was engaged in researching aesthetic questions such as "Realism and Idealism", "Tragedy", "Imaginative Literature" and French "*Naturalisme*".² Michael Millgate argues that such quotations reveal Hardy's "ruminations" over "the relationship between the real and the ideal" in a way which has "direct relevance to some of the technical effects he was striving towards in his fiction".³ As Widdowson points out, Hardy was "a widely read intellectual" who was "closely familiar"⁴ with the contentious philosophical and literary debate occurring on both sides of the Channel concerning representation in art and literature. In this context, "Idealism" and "Imaginative Literature" might be taken as singling out English Romanticism, the movement which respects these ethical and creative faculties as essential to the practice of writing, and which respects the "universe-creating imagination" of the artist.⁵ Norman Page contends that "Hardy remained committed to a Romantic view of art as expressing the uniqueness of its creator's mind",⁶ while Widdowson emphasises his "consciously contradictory relationship with realism".⁷ Hardy's considered engagement with a range of literary genres including

¹ F.E. Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy* (London: Macmillan, 1962) 147; hereafter referred to in the form "*LIFE*".

² William Greenslade, "Hardy's Notebooks", *A Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Keith Wilson (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) 91.

³ Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982) 285.

⁴ Peter Widdowson, "Hardy and Critical Theory", *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Dale Kramer (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 74; hereafter referred to in the form "CC".

⁵ Jostein Gaarder, *Sophie's World: A Novel about the History of Philosophy* (London: Phoenix, 1996) 288.

⁶ Norman Page, "Art and Aesthetics", CC, 51.

⁷ Widdowson, CC, 74.

Romanticism, and realist or naturalistic fiction from both sides of the Channel, activates his work and contributes at every point to the development of his tragic novels.

Early reviewers were confused by the author's divergent literary allegiances. One critic stated that "Mr Hardy is not 'realistic' in the vulgar sense of the word" while maintaining that the author's "sympathies are manifestly with the French naturalistic school of fiction".⁸ This review failed to take into account the scope of Hardy's literary tastes, which included not only a broad range of English fiction and non-fiction, but also various styles of French fiction from Hugo's Romantic novels through to Zola's naturalistic writings. Yet the same critic noted his predilection for imaginative recreation, maintaining that his heroines were "idealized types, rather than portraits drawn from real life".⁹ Modern critics have become increasingly conscious of Hardy's debt to the English Romantics, although primarily in his poetry. For example, Page points to his ambivalent relationship with a Wordsworthian view of Nature, and to his "Keatsian idea of a work of art enshrining beauty and truth".¹⁰ Critical studies to date have largely overlooked the role played by Romanticism in Hardy's tragic novels. The Romantic idealism of his tragic heroes and heroines, constantly frustrated by a hostile or indifferent universe, itself contains the seeds of tragedy. Tragedy arises either as a conflict within the idealist, or as a conflict between the idealist's consciousness and the social and natural environment.

Hardy's account of *Jude the Obscure*, that it depicts "the contrast between the ideal life a man wished to lead, and the squalid real life he was fated to lead",¹¹ succinctly summarises this tragic worldview. For Hardy, the gap between man's dreams and his

⁸ D.F. Harrigan, *Westminster Review*, Jan. 1896; cited in R.G. Cox, ed., *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1970) 271.

⁹ Cox, 271.

¹⁰ Page, CC, 39.

¹¹ Letter to Sir Edmund Gosse, November 10, 1895, *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, eds. R.L. Purdy and M. Millgate, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982) 93; hereafter referred to in the form "CL".

ability to realise those dreams creates a sense of tragic futility: his protagonists are conscious of opportunities wasted and of possibilities not achievable in an uncaring universe. As he comments in his unacknowledged autobiography, “This planet does not supply the materials for happiness to higher existences”.¹² While it is not possible to assume, by a process of back-formation, that all preceding characters in Hardy’s fiction are disappointed idealists like Jude, viewing the dramatic conflicts which arise in terms of frustrated attempts to pursue a higher vision opens out a range of tragic perspectives on his major novels. For example, if one sees Boldwood in *Far from the Madding Crowd* as a Romantic trying to make reparation for past sins in his idealised passion for Bathsheba, he emerges as a painfully thwarted and tragically tortured figure at odds with his pastoral comic background.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines idealism as “the unrealistic belief in the pursuit of perfection”.¹³ Even according to this short definition, those who pursue idealism are seen as “unrealistic”, and by implication, doomed to fall short of realising the ideal they seek. In the West, idealism dates from the teachings of Plato, for whom the *eidolon* was the eternal, disembodied model or form of a person or thing, and was not a literary term. An idealist may aspire to a range of ideals, philosophical or ethical, a love ideal or a political ideal. Various kinds of sentimental and philosophical ideals are pursued by Hardy’s doomed Romantics, from *Far from the Madding Crowd* onwards. It is in *The Return of the Native*, with the figures of Clym, the radical educational thinker, and Eustacia, the doomed lover, that his Romantic idealism becomes noticeably more Keatsian or Shelleyan. Hardy’s

¹² *LIFE*, 218.

¹³ *Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. Angus Stevenson (Oxford UP, 2010), *Oxford Reference Online*, University of Newcastle, 5 April 2011.

approach diverges, however, from these Romantic poets' conviction of the likely benefits of radical politics or the pursuit of an erotic ideal. The clash between ideals and harsh reality rapidly becomes more devastating than in Shelley's overly optimistic version of social humanism.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of "idealism" goes on to note that it is often contrasted with realism in art or literature. Widdowson asserts that Hardy's participation in what he calls the "pan-European debate about Realism" is crucial to an understanding of the "affinity between his work and late-twentieth-century critical approaches".¹⁴ Linda M. Shires, even though she is one of the critics to identify his aesthetic as "radical" in its Victorian context, affirms the need for Hardy's narrative complexity to be "fully linked to the historical moment and the narrative traditions informing it".¹⁵ The apparently traditional critical approach I have adopted, examining the opposition between Romantic idealism and naturalistic versions of realism, has opened up new perspectives on the tragic novels.

In Hardy's world, the ideals and values espoused by his Romantic protagonists are never clear-cut. "Real" and "realism", too, are contentious terms in their application to his tragic novels. Hardy was never content to follow a single formula for tragedy. None of his novels can be adequately represented by equations like "realism + "idealism" or "French fiction" + "English Romanticism" = tragedy. Nevertheless, the presence of these dual tendencies in Hardy's work is a key to his evolving versions of tragedy. In this thesis, I will confine myself to investigating the "real", mainly as expressed through the techniques of French Naturalism, although with additional reference to the English realist tradition.

¹⁴ Widdowson, *CC*, 74.

¹⁵ Linda M. Shires, "The radical aesthetic of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*", *CC*, 147.

Central to the “ideal” is the vision of life epitomised by Julian in Shelley’s “Julian and Maddalo”: “we might be all/ We dream of happy, high, majestic” (ll.172-3).¹⁶ This thesis examines how the disjunction between what a man (or woman) wishes to be and what he or she actually becomes (due to the vicissitudes of fate, social constraints or human frailty) creates the tragic expositions in five of Hardy’s major novels.

“Realism” was used in France in 1835 as an aesthetic term “to denote the *vérité humaine* of Rembrandt”,¹⁷ before coming into vogue as a literary term. The realist movement in France began as a “conscious revolt against romanticism”;¹⁸ realists sought faithfully to represent everyday happenings without softening or exaggeration. Controversies over subject matter, and the alleged “immoral tendencies” of Flaubert and others associated with the school, led to realism being “used primarily as the antonym of ‘idealism’”.¹⁹ The attempt to depict “real life” in telling detail was achieved by the Dutch portrait painters in a reaction against neo-classical orthodoxy. Even though consciously opposing Romanticism, some of the first French realists like Flaubert continued to work with Romantic elements, although the intense emotions they depicted were treated with a detached and ironic edge.

Naturalism grew out of realism by taking to an extreme the documentary and scientific dimensions of the novel, and was heavily influenced by Darwin’s theory of evolution.²⁰ The main precepts of Naturalism are the “emphasis upon heredity and environment; the conception of man as the mere product of these; the emphasis upon the

¹⁶ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, eds. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002) 125. All quotations from Shelley will be taken from this edition unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁷ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966) 10.

¹⁸ William B. Newton, “Chance as Employed by Hardy and the Naturalists”, *Philological Quarterly* 30 (1951): 154.

¹⁹ Watt, 10.

²⁰ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1976) 217.

commonplace as to both character and plot”, as well as “the importance of physiology” and “the constricting influence of poverty”.²¹ The prime apologist for French Naturalism, Émile Zola, sought to apply scientific methods to the novel and to illustrate the deterministic effects of heredity and environment on his characters. Hardy, like many English critics of the time, used the terms realism and Naturalism interchangeably. His essay, “The Science of Fiction”, indicates his familiarity with the storm of controversy surrounding French Naturalism, especially as that storm centred on Zola’s work. He objected to the charge of brutality levelled against naturalistic writers and maintained that, “notwithstanding their excesses, errors, and rickety theories”, such French authors were “well-intentioned” in their “attempt to narrate the *vérité vraie*”.²² Hardy himself demonstrated a great ability to portray the “real truth”, particularly regarding the difficulties of relationships, the struggles of the poor and the plight of the dispossessed.

While the influence of French Naturalism is traceable in his work, Hardy remained reluctant to associate himself fully with writers of that school. Even though he applauded “la sincérité dans l’art”, the catchcry of the French realist movement, Hardy was far from advocating a scientific approach to plot and characterisation. He constantly stressed the role of imaginative and emotive power in fiction: the “most devoted apostle of realism, the sheerest naturalist, cannot escape ... the exercise of Art in telling a tale”.²³ Hardy went so far as to claim that “‘realism’ is not Art” since Art is a “disproportioning ... of realities, to show more closely the features that matter”.²⁴ In “Tragedy and the Whole Truth”, Aldous Huxley would add weight to this argument by suggesting that realism can dilute the purity

²¹ William B. Newton, “Chance as Employed by Hardy and the Naturalists”, *Philological Quarterly* 30 (1951): 167.

²² “The Science of Fiction”, *Thomas Hardy’s Personal Writings*, ed. Harold Orel (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1969) 136; hereafter referred to in the form “Orel”.

²³ “The Science of Fiction”, Orel, 134.

²⁴ *LIFE*, 229.

of tragedy, that to exclude irrelevant detail is essential to the tragic.²⁵ Not only does Hardy reserve the right to distort reality as he sees fit, he insists that the Romantic and even the sensational and supernatural have roles to play in tragic fiction: “We tale-tellers are all Ancient Mariners, and none of us is warranted in stopping Wedding Guests ... unless he has something more unusual to relate than the ordinary experience of every average man and woman”.²⁶

Despite such comments from the author himself, early twentieth-century criticism had Hardy firmly established as a realist writer whose main claim to fame was as the creator of Wessex, a geographical/ historical construct which has continued to be promoted in the interests of literary tourism. One might suggest that, while Hardy’s descriptions of rural life are authentic and true to the realist tradition, his desire to create the fictional world of Wessex would indicate to the attentive reader a tendency to romanticise his surroundings, to create a universe of the imagination as much as of sociological and geographical fact. Guérard’s ground-breaking 1949 work challenged the prevailing view by positing Hardy’s “deliberate anti-realism”.²⁷ Guérard focussed on his debt to Gothic and sensation novels, and discussed his juxtaposing implausible incident and plausible human character. For Guérard, Hardy’s “attitude towards literal realism was ambiguous”, but he conceded that Hardy was a “realistic observer” of personality and the environment.²⁸ During the 1950s and 60s, a number of studies examining the rise of the nineteenth-century novel continued to place Hardy in a cohort of writers like Dickens and George Eliot who

²⁵ Aldous Huxley, “Tragedy and the Whole Truth” in *Music at Night and Other Essays* (New York: Doubleday, 1931) 3-16.

²⁶ *LIFE*, 252.

²⁷ Albert J. Guérard, *Thomas Hardy: The Novels and Stories* (London: Oxford UP, 1949) 3.

²⁸ Guérard, 74.

were seen as exponents of Victorian realism.²⁹ Apart from two articles by William B. Newton linking Hardy with the French naturalists, there were few challenges to the English realist theory.³⁰ Phyllis Bartlett noted Hardy's frequent allusions to Shelley's poetry in his fiction but did not dispute the realist view of his novels.³¹

During the 70s and 80s, literary criticism moved away from the realist consensus and re-examined Hardy's philosophical and literary reflections. Linda Faye Tunick's 1980 dissertation revisited the realist debate, asserting inaccurately that Thomas Hardy "was responsible for converting the English pastoral tradition from Realism to Naturalism". We have already noted Hardy's reservations with regard to Naturalism; George Gissing and George Moore can lay a better claim to pioneering English Naturalism. When Tunick suggested that Hardy shed any "idealism inherent to Wordsworthian Romanticism and novelistic realism", she was ignoring a major feature of his aesthetic.³² David Baguley's 1990 analysis makes the welcome claim that Hardy's later, more naturalistic fiction was an important "point of reference" in the development of his novelistic tragedy.³³ Two more recent studies, Katherine Kearns' *Nineteenth-Century Literary Realism* (1996)³⁴ and Elizabeth Ermath's *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel* (1998),³⁵ have not offset the trend away from critical interest in the issue of realism.

²⁹ For example, Richard Stang, *The Theory of the Novel in England 1850-1870* (London: Routledge, 1959) and Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966).

³⁰ William B. Newton, "Chance as Employed by Hardy and the Naturalists", *Philological Quarterly* 30 (1951): 154-75 and "Hardy and the Naturalists: Their Use of Physiology", *Modern Philology* 49, 1 (1952): 28-42.

³¹ Phyllis Bartlett, "Hardy's Shelley", *Keats-Shelley Journal* 4, 25 (1955): 15-29; and "'Seraph of Heaven': A Shelleyan Dream in Hardy's Fiction", *PMLA* 70 (1955): 624-35.

³² Linda Faye Tunick, *"A More Natural Magic": Realism and Naturalism in the Victorian Novel*, diss. Washington State University, 1980, vii.

³³ David Baguley, *Naturalist Fiction: The Entropic Vision* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 97.

³⁴ Katherine Kearns, *Nineteenth-Century Realism: Through the Looking Glass* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996).

³⁵ Elizabeth Deeds Ermath, *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel: Time, Space and Narrative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1998).

Peter Widdowson has called attention to the inherent contradictions in Hardy's attitude to realism, what he calls his "potentially *anti*-realist thrust".³⁶ During my final revisions to this thesis, I have noted a resurgence of interest in the problematic issue of Hardy's realism, including Tim Dolin's article "On Hardy's Realism, Again". This study responds to Widdowson's argument regarding the "silent naturalizing processes of the dominant cultural apparatuses"³⁷ which uphold the critical orthodoxy of nineteenth-century realism. Dolin provides an in-depth account of Hardy's responses to the critical and literary movements at work during the historical moment which shaped his fiction. Had I found this article sooner, I would have given Dolin's arguments the full consideration they deserve. Instead it must suffice to say that, just as Hardy drew on and adapted poets like Shelley and Keats to elicit "that form of romanticism which is the mood of the age",³⁸ so too, as Dolin shows, he was inspired by Flaubert and Zola to produce a "progressive or critical realism"³⁹ which was to confront a new generation of English readers.

My line on Hardy's interpretation of French Naturalism derives from the author's own justification for his approach. His essay, "Candour in English Fiction", contrasts the restrictions imposed on English writers "by the proctors of opinion"⁴⁰ with the greater frankness enjoyed by their French counterparts. In the course of his discussion, Hardy touches on all the primary features of his tragic novels. "Candour in English Fiction" functions as a kind of manifesto validating his "original treatment" of tragedy and as such will be considered at length in subsequent chapters.

³⁶ Peter Widdowson, *Thomas Hardy* (Devon: Northcote, 2007) 16.

³⁷ Tim Dolin, "On Hardy's Realism, Again", *Literature as History: Essays in Honour of Peter Widdowson* (London: Continuum International, 2009) 40.

³⁸ *LIFE*, 147.

³⁹ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981) 134; cited in Dolin, 44.

⁴⁰ *LIFE*, 320.

Hardy's proposition in "Candour in English Fiction" was that "the prevalent views of life"⁴¹ required a new style of writing and therefore public taste was "arriving anew at the point of high tragedy".⁴² The ferment of ideas which were emerging in the second half of the nineteenth century, including Darwinism and new discoveries in geology and archaeology, rocked the foundations of belief for late-Victorian thinkers, leading to a crisis of faith. In his tragic novels, Hardy sought to express many of the preoccupations of his age, "philosophies and feelings as yet not well established or formally adopted".⁴³ While Hardy held back from creating an undiluted "novel of ideas", philosophical questioning increasingly underlined the fictional content of his novels to the point in *Jude the Obscure* where it threatened to overpower the plot and characterisation. This "enrichment by further truths" is an important aspect of what he describes as the "original treatment"⁴⁴ necessary to a revival of high tragedy.

For Hardy, this treatment must incorporate "some developments of naturalism in French novelists of the present day". A premise of "original treatment" was the acceptance of life as "a physiological fact": its "honest portrayal must be largely concerned with, for one thing, the relations of the sexes". Hardy's major tragic novels show a growing emphasis on the physiological aspects of erotic love. His interrogations of marriage and the problems of sexual relationships explode the trite formula of the courtship novel, "they married and were happy ever after". The desire to go beyond normative prescriptions for

⁴¹ "Candour in English Fiction", Orel, 126; hereafter referred to in the form "Candour".

⁴² "Candour", 127.

⁴³ *LIFE*, 320.

⁴⁴ "Candour", 127.

the novel reveals Hardy as a “true artist” prepared to explore territory previously uncharted in English fiction.⁴⁵

One of the first authors to steer the English novel towards a more “sincere school of Fiction ... that expresses truly the views of life prevalent in its time”,⁴⁶ Hardy sees himself in the role of a beleaguered visionary, not unlike some of his own tragic heroes or heroines. In the privacy of the autobiography he did not see published in his lifetime, he confided that the “very fact of my having tried to spread over art the latest illumination of the time has darkened counsel in respect of me”.⁴⁷ Being the advocate of an original approach to tragedy which laments “the triumph of the crowd over the hero, of the commonplace majority over the exceptional few,”⁴⁸ Hardy identifies himself with characters like Tess or Jude who display a superiority of intellect or finer feelings and so are at odds with their upbringing and social environment.

In this sense, Hardy’s approach to Romanticism is one tempered by a modernist sense of alienation and futility. Unlike the first-generation Romantics, Wordsworth and Coleridge, who found in Nature “the joy of elevated thoughts”,⁴⁹ his view of Nature is played out in a potentially more inimical post-Darwinian universe, a Nature defined by the struggle to survive. Wordsworth, though to some extent a pantheist, still maintains an implicit belief that we come into the world “trailing clouds of glory ... From God, who is our home”,⁵⁰ whereas Hardy’s view of God is more sceptical: “Write a prayer, a hymn, to the One not Omnipotent, but hampered; striving for our good, but unable to achieve it

⁴⁵ “Candour”, 127-28, 130.

⁴⁶ “Candour”, 126.

⁴⁷ *LIFE*, 320.

⁴⁸ “Candour”, 127.

⁴⁹ “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour”, ll. 95-6.

⁵⁰ “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood”, ll. 64-65.

except occasionally”.⁵¹ Even Coleridge’s *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, with its wild, irrational vision of a hostile universe, appears to revert to a more orthodox vision of created Nature at the end:

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small.
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.⁵²

Hardy’s Romanticism has more in common with politically and religiously subversive second-generation Romantics like Keats and Shelley, those “matchless singers” as Hardy describes them,⁵³ and to a lesser extent, Byron. These Romantic poets moved away from Nature as a source of inspiration and instead took up the pursuit of sensual experience and ideal love as themes. Byron’s influence is perhaps most evident in Hardy’s use of irony, and as such is filtered through the portrait of Byron in Shelley’s “Julian and Maddalo”. There, Byron’s fictional counterpart (Maddalo) undercuts the overly sanguine Romanticism and Utopian hopes of his friend, Julian (Shelley), by reminding him of the human fallibility on which architects of a better future must build. In some ways, Hardy’s tragic vision is closer to Keats’s than Shelley’s, since for Keatsian protagonists there is often a foreknowledge that the pursuit of an erotic ideal, “at the tip-top ... an orb’d drop/ Of light, and that is love”, will lead to disillusionment and the decay of the very senses that drove on the young lover. In his quest to be at one with the moon-goddess, Diana or Artemis, Keats’s Endymion learns that his companion on his wanderings must of necessity be “Sorrow”.⁵⁴ By accepting the melancholic truth that such is his condition in this “vale of

⁵¹ *LIFE*, 297.

⁵² *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 614-17.

⁵³ “Rome: At the Pyramid of Cestius near the Graves of Shelley and Keats”, l. 20, *The Variorum Edition of The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, ed. James Gibson (London: Macmillan, 1979) 105; hereafter referred to in the form “CP”.

⁵⁴ *Endymion*, I, ll. 806-8; IV, ll. 148-83.

Soul-making”,⁵⁵ Endymion is able to achieve a maturer relationship with a mortal woman, the Indian Maid. In *The Return of the Native* one looks in vain for traits of Endymion in Clym Yeobright, save that he is, by novel’s end, a familiar of Sorrow. Eustacia Vye does however set out, not to pursue, but to become the Queen Moon, thereby precipitating her own and others’ catastrophes. As Duncan Heath contends, Keats’s lyric intensity “is an expression of his tragic conception of existence”: beauty is the only absolute permitted to mortal man but its inaccessibility “can only be expressed as tragedy”.⁵⁶ Where Hardy goes beyond Keats is in establishing a new conception of “beauty in ugliness”.⁵⁷ In *The Return of the Native*, he describes the “mournful sublimity” of Egdon Heath as being more congenial to the modern age than are landscapes of “orthodox beauty”.⁵⁸

Millgate notes that Hardy “cherished from the first an elevated conception of the artist’s role”, particularly admiring Shelley as “a type of the artist as hero”.⁵⁹ Shelley’s influence on Hardy’s thought was greater than that of any other poet, Shelleyan Romanticism encompassing many of the novelist’s own aspirations. More than just an idealised view of erotic love, F.B. Pinion suggests that Hardy found in Shelley’s poetry “an exhilarating freedom and intellectual intrepidity, a scientific view of the universe consistent with Darwinism, and principles for social reform which were to make him sympathetic to much in the writings of Comte and later philosophers”.⁶⁰ Shelley’s beliefs were a precursor of the social “evolution”, based on Comtean Positivism, which Hardy alludes to in

⁵⁵ John Keats, letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 14 February-3 May 1819, *Selected Letters*, ed. Grant F. Scott (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2002) 290.

⁵⁶ Duncan Heath and Judy Boreham, *Introducing Romanticism* (New York: Totem, 2000) 119.

⁵⁷ *LIFE*, 121. I am indebted to Tony Slade’s notes on *The Return of the Native* (London: Penguin, 1999) 398, for pointing out this comment of Hardy’s.

⁵⁸ *The Return of the Native*, ed. James Gindin (New York: Norton, 1969) 3.

⁵⁹ Millgate, *Biography*, 374.

⁶⁰ F.B. Pinion, *Thomas Hardy: Art and Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1977) 148.

“Candour in English Fiction”.⁶¹ While there is nothing new about tracing a Comtean influence on Hardy, looking at Hardy’s questioning of Comte’s social reforms alongside his remodelling of Shelley’s political thought yields new insights into Hardy’s fictional tragedies.

Transgressive as Shelley’s erotic love ideal can be, he numbers among his imperatives the transformation of ethical ideals and of expectations about human potential. Shelley extends the role of the poetic visionary to remarkable lengths when proposing that “morality stems from an individual conscience guided only by imagination”.⁶² Shelley’s Romantic meliorism, his notion that human beings can transform themselves and their world if they have the courage of their own imaginations, is one which appeals to Hardy’s sensibilities, but he lacks Shelley’s “visionary belief in humanity’s potential to realize its highest ideals”,⁶³ and his own beliefs are at odds with the unchecked meliorism of a verse drama like *Prometheus Unbound*. Hardy’s own “evolutionary meliorism”⁶⁴ is one tempered with a Keatsian sorrow: “It is the on-going – i.e. the ‘becoming’ – of the world that produces its sadness.”⁶⁵ His vision is less transcendent than the Romantics’, his outlook modified by the “sincerity” of a Naturalism which takes a sober and long-term view of whether and when citizens and dreamers will rise above their oppressive circumstances. As such a qualified meliorism suggests, Naturalism and Romanticism need not be poles apart in Hardy’s aesthetic. In her guide to the Romantic movement, Lillian Furst points out that the distinction between “romantic” and “realistic” is in practice “more fluid than critical

⁶¹ “Candour”, 127.

⁶² Heath, 110.

⁶³ Katherine Kearney Maynard, *Thomas Hardy’s Tragic Poetry* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991) 29.

⁶⁴ “Apology” to *Late Lyrics and Earlier*, CP, 557.

⁶⁵ *LIFE*, 202.

theory would suggest”.⁶⁶ In his “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*” Wordsworth maintains that good poetry should arise from the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” at the same time as it realistically depicts “low and rustic life”.⁶⁷

Hardy’s synthesis of English and French movements lays the foundation for the “idealistic realism” of his tragic novels. While his realistic and naturalistic tendencies are much commented on, his debt to the English Romantics and how this nexus of literary genres informs his view of tragedy has been no more than hinted at. A reviewer in 1896 commented that Hardy’s “artistic combination of the real and the ideal” had produced a powerful framework surpassing “any of his French contemporaries”,⁶⁸ but gave little idea of the picture within the frame.

Romantic extremes of emotion undergone by characters engaged in a daily struggle with oppressive circumstances are the stuff of Hardy’s tragic fiction. Tess’s declaration that her love for Clare is “too desperate for human conditions, too rank, too wild, too deadly”, specifically references *Romeo and Juliet*: “these violent delights have violent ends”.⁶⁹ While Dickens often turned his realism to didactic ends, he too recognised that the novel was “capable of the greatest effects of tragedy” and insisted that the novelist must explore emotions and actions beyond the bounds of middle-class respectability: “The mystery of evil is as interesting to us now as it was in the time of SHAKESPEARE; and it is downright affectation or effeminacy to say that we are never to glance into that abyss”.⁷⁰ Hardy argued that without the opportunity to present a “sincere and comprehensive

⁶⁶ Lillian R. Furst, *Romanticism* (London: Methuen, 1976) 66.

⁶⁷ William Wordsworth, “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800/ 1802)”, *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems* (Ware: Wordsworth, 2003) 8, 7.

⁶⁸ D.F. Hannigan, *Westminster Review*, January 1896; cited in Cox, 274.

⁶⁹ Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (New York: Norton, 1991) 168.

⁷⁰ Stang, 26.

sequence of the ruling passions”, such as was found in the French fiction of his day, an English novelist would be too hampered to unleash the power of tragedy.⁷¹

During the 1950s and 60s there was a surge of critical interest in tragedy, and a general scrutiny of how classical and early modern tragedy related to nineteenth-century or modernist writings. Critical theory was basically divided into two schools of thought. The “death-of-tragedy” critics led by George Steiner⁷² felt that tragedy was not possible for the modern writer because of the collapse of a stable moral order. For Georg Lukács, the novel is a “post-tragic genre” which deals in a “degraded empirical existence”, thereby divorcing itself from the “spiritual essences” found in tragedy.⁷³ The “vision-of-tragedy” critics maintained, by contrast, that the writing of tragedy was “an essential act of the human imagination”.⁷⁴ Although critics on both sides of the debate neglected to consider the specific case of Hardy, their assumptions help to set out the premises which a theory of modern tragedy must address.

Richard Sewall identifies an underlying duality at the heart of post-classical forms of tragedy: the universals in conflict “must remain in perpetual and ambiguous tension – not in a state of balance ... not in a resolvable form”.⁷⁵ Terry Eagleton cites Lucien Goldmann’s *The Hidden God*, in which “tragic man” is “caught between an ideal which is compelling but increasingly absent, and an empirical world which is present but morally worthless”.⁷⁶ The tragic protagonist is thus driven to refuse the world, but simultaneously to have to re-create values from within the very world he spurns. Thus a student of divinity, as

⁷¹ “Candour”, 128.

⁷² George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber, 1963).

⁷³ Georg Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*; cited in Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003) 193.

⁷⁴ Maynard, 1.

⁷⁵ Dale Kramer, *Thomas Hardy: The Forms of Tragedy* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1975) 17.

⁷⁶ Eagleton, 208.

his ambition to become a scholarly churchman fades, and he turns instead to a spiritual love for a cousin in order to give meaning to an otherwise worthless existence, is passing from the toils of one desire into those of another. Even Henchard, that least idealistic of Hardy's protagonists, in his ambition to achieve a successful business enterprise is following his desire to realise all that he has within him. Jane Thomas identifies this "energy of the human spirit", as it struggles to "attain 'its little modicum of purpose', in relation to the impossibility of the Real", as the description of desire in Hardy's work.⁷⁷

The existential "energy" of such desire is the lineal descendant of the "dream" of self-realisation of which Shelley's Julian speaks.⁷⁸ Wordsworth likewise writes of that Romantic "hope", "Effort, and expectation, and desire", an imaginative faith not in the empirical world but in what "the invisible world" holds in store, "something evermore about to be".⁷⁹ While Hardy recognises the limitations of the empirical world, he retains a faith that Romanticism is an enduring component of human nature, and a conviction that the form of Romanticism most important to the late Victorian age was one "naturalised" by French fiction.⁸⁰ Without his faith in the persistence of Romantic idealism, Hardy would not have had the assurance that his "original treatment" of tragedy would be a sustainable genre on the eve of the twentieth century.

For Goldmann, the elemental gap between desire and the possibility of fulfilment "contains the seeds of a dialectical rationality".⁸¹ Tragedy in Hardy's work frequently arises from the dialectical opposition between his Romantic protagonists, driven on by an

⁷⁷ Jane Thomas, *Thomas Hardy and Desire: Conceptions of the Self* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013) 2.

⁷⁸ "Julian and Maddalo", ll. 172-73.

⁷⁹ *The Prelude* (1850), VI, ll. 599-608.

⁸⁰ See *LIFE*, 147.

⁸¹ Cited in Eagleton, 208.

“essential yearning that defines the human condition”,⁸² and the indifferent or apparently hostile universe they are forced to inhabit. In *Romance and Tragedy*, Prosser Hall Frye expands upon the notion of dialectic or duality, suggesting that the “genuine ‘clash’ of tragedy” lies in “the contradiction life is perpetually opposing to our human values and standards”.⁸³ He puts forward a theory of “tragic dissonance” which could well coincide with Hardy’s own conviction, arising from the incompatibility of man’s Romantic desires and aspirations with the actual conditions of life, “belittling as they may be, but always at odds with his higher nature”.⁸⁴ In Frye’s view, this dialectical tension between an idealistic vision of human potential and the constraints of a day-to-day reality devoid of meaning gives rise to Romantic tragedy.

Such irreconcilable dichotomies are sometimes also present within the makeup of the protagonists themselves. Widdowson describes this “dismantling of the illusion of coherent *character*” as part of Hardy’s deliberate “deconstruction of realism”.⁸⁵ While Hardy may indeed dismantle his characters as psychologically stable entities, his portrayal of the inconsistencies within their personalities comes paradoxically closer to a modern understanding of “realistic” character than some of the moral stereotypes portrayed by earlier nineteenth-century authors such as Dickens. Hardy’s tragic protagonists, racked by inner conflicts and self-doubt, torn between their sensual and spiritual desires as much as by opposing circumstances, prefigure many of the modern anti-heroes or heroines of latter-day fiction.

⁸² Thomas, 2.

⁸³ Prosser Hall Frye, *Romance and Tragedy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961) 98.

⁸⁴ Frye, 102.

⁸⁵ Cited in Dolin, “On Hardy’s Realism, Again”, 42.

D.H. Lawrence called into question Hardy's tragic metaphysic because of its deviation from a more visionary Romanticism, viewing it as "pessimistic, perverse and untrue because it was at odds with the affirmation of his 'sensuous understanding'".⁸⁶ What Lawrence failed to recognise were the dichotomies at the heart of his tragic vision. After Lawrence's *Study*, drafted in 1914 and peppered with his unique, psycho-sexual analyses of Hardy's characters, there was little further appraisal of Hardyan tragedy until the 1970s and 80s. Jean R. Brooks took a liberal humanist approach, suggesting that in the "tragic confrontation with futility and absurdity Hardy affirms some of the highest values men and women can achieve".⁸⁷ She defined his multi-faceted view of experience as "poetic" for the heightened emotions it allowed Hardy to project, and because of his use of language and imagery. Brooks implied but failed to inspect the Romantic component of Hardyan tragedy. By contrast, Jeannette King suggested that his "realistic tragedy" resulted from his adaptation of Greek dramatic conventions to contemporary people and situations. In King's view, "Heredity and environment, character and society, are each conceived as modern Fates".⁸⁸ Although King fails to identify a source for Hardy's attention to familial influences and class oppression, it derives in large part from French Naturalism and Zola.

In a recent prolegomenon to Hardy's life, work and criticism, Naturalism does not rate a mention and his fascination with the Romantics is considered only in relation to his poetry.⁸⁹ Dale Kramer's 1975 work, *Thomas Hardy: The Forms of Tragedy*, has been considered the definitive word on tragedy in Hardy's fiction, but its formalist arguments deny any adherence to either modern theories or Aristotelian traditions. Instead Kramer

⁸⁶ D. H. Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985) xxix.

⁸⁷ Jean R. Brooks, *Thomas Hardy: The Poetic Structure* (London: Elek, 1971) 15.

⁸⁸ Jeannette King, *Tragedy in the Victorian Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978) 26.

⁸⁹ Geoffrey Harvey, *The Complete Critical Guide to Thomas Hardy* (London: Routledge, 2007).

suggests that each novel has its own dominant aesthetic which “creates the peculiar quality of tragedy that distinguishes it”.⁹⁰ His openness to reading each tragic novel as a new version of tragedy remains welcome, but the range of critical approaches to Hardy since the 1970s has made it possible to look afresh at the mix of literary, philosophical, sociological and archaeological ingredients he pours into his fiction. As Brooks notes with respect to Hardy studies, “constant reassessment is essential to keep the balance between modern and historical perspective”.⁹¹ Since tragedy is a principal thread connecting Hardy’s major novels, it seems a critical reappraisal of his tragedies is overdue.

Cyrus Hoy has described the *peripeteia*, or reversal of fortune, which underpins tragedy as a “deep disparity between intentions and deeds ... the ideal at which one aims and the reality in which one is enmeshed.”⁹² Hoy’s narrative point reinforces the notion that some form of idealism is a necessary basis for tragedy. Richard Palmer identifies the Romantics as being “the first to drive a wedge between human experience and the Spirit and then to perceive tragedy either as a manifestation of that chasm or as a sign of humanity’s struggle to bridge it.”⁹³ Taking the opposite perspective, George Levine characterises realism as the “mode of disenchantment”, since it displays the “disparity between the human imagination of the real and the possibilities of the real itself”.⁹⁴ The investigation of a further congruence between Romanticism and realism/ Naturalism should provide the entry point to a deeper understanding of Hardyan tragedy.

⁹⁰ Dale Kramer, *Thomas Hardy: The Forms of Tragedy* (London: Macmillan, 1975) 21.

⁹¹ Brooks, 7.

⁹² Cyrus Hoy, *The Hyacinth Room: An Investigation into the Nature of Comedy, Tragedy and Tragicomedy* (London: Chatto, 1964) 308.

⁹³ Richard Palmer, *Tragedy and Tragic Theory: An Analytical Guide* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1992) 53.

⁹⁴ George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) 238.

Hardy's major tragic novels all attempt to bridge the gap between the Romantic ideals of life, love and liberty and the heartbreak, disillusionment and loss that attend on failure to realise these ideals. A recent study of his tragic poetry by Katherine Kearney Maynard generalises that tragedy "depicts the difference between our ideals and our reality, illustrating the difficult processes by which men and women recognize that things are not as they seem".⁹⁵ Maynard's account is perhaps based on the Platonic distinction between sensory appearances which delude, and reason which gives us a better understanding of the eternal forms which underlie the shadow-play of appearances. Hardy indulged in like reflections on the contradictions of experience: "I discovered, several years ago, that I was living in a world where nothing bears out in practice what it promises incipiently."⁹⁶

The clash of opposite hemispheres in Hardy's poem "The Convergence of the Twain" sums up what Draper calls this tragedy of "ironic discord".⁹⁷ Hardy images the human desire to progress towards higher goals, represented in the Titanic, coming into perhaps irremediable conflict with the "Immanent Will" of an opposing universe.⁹⁸ The *hubris* of those who built the ship in a presumptuous bid to subdue the environment presents a classic prerequisite for tragedy. In the face of "human vanity/ And ... the Pride of Life" (ll. 2-3) which planned the display of opulent mirrors and "Jewels in joy designed/ To ravish the sensuous mind" (ll.10-11), Hardy opposes an uncaring natural world where the "sea-worm crawls – grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent" and the "moon-eyed fishes"

⁹⁵ Maynard, 6.

⁹⁶ *LIFE*, 155.

⁹⁷ R.P. Draper, *Tragedy: Developments in Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1980) 217.

⁹⁸ Hardy derived "Immanent Will" from his readings in Schopenhauer. Robert Schweik reports that Hardy owned several translations of Schopenhauer's works, including *The World as Will and Idea*. Hardy at one time asserted that his "philosophy" was "a development from Schopenhauer through later philosophers". See Schweik, "The influence of religion, science, and philosophy on Hardy's writings", *CC*, 68.

ask “What does this vaingloriousness down here?”⁹⁹ Above this vision of a naturalistic universe indifferent to humans, he conceives the existence of an implacable entity, the “Spinner of the Years” (l. 31), actively arranging times and circumstances to crush humankind’s hopes. The clashing hemispheres of the poem are a memorable image of Hardy’s tragic vision, describing the ongoing conflict between human ideals and the physical and metaphysical forces which oppose them. What Frye, in *Romance and Tragedy*, terms the “tragic qualm”,¹⁰⁰ in the modern era is better known as existential *angst*: the realisation that the time is, to use Hamlet’s words, “out of joint” (I. v. 149). Like Hardy, Shakespeare intimates that noble natures may forever be out of joint with social compromise and vulnerable to failure in their intimate relationships. Hardy gives us reason to believe that the universe itself is out of joint – that an indifferent naturalistic universe, combined with a brooding “Immanent Will”, continues to frustrate all efforts on the part of idealists to rise above the mundane.

Some critics have censured the apparent inconsistency of Hardy’s style, which itself appears to be “out of joint”. Early reviewers were divided concerning the obvious contrasts in his work: for each critic who identified Hardy with sensational Gothic effects or Romantic tendencies, there were an equal, or perhaps even greater, number who identified him with “Zolaism” and a frankness “not hitherto touched in fiction, or Anglo-Saxon fiction at least”.¹⁰¹ What they failed to register was the number of effects achieved by Hardy’s mixed modes of expression, and how they worked to shock and extend his reader’s tastes and sensitivities. In his *Literary Notebooks*, Hardy underlined quotations from Anthony Trollope affirming that a good novel should be sensational and realistic, “both in

⁹⁹ “The Convergence of the Twain”, ll. 9, 13, 15, *CP*, 306-7.

¹⁰⁰ Frye, 98.

¹⁰¹ Cox, 254.

the highest degree”.¹⁰² While his juxtaposition of disparate elements may not always be perfect in execution, the sometimes jarring effect of competing styles extends the reader’s sympathy with intense states of mind and mood swings, like the Gothic elements in Coleridge’s and Shelley’s narrative verse. Also it can draw the reader’s attention to other possible interpretations beneath the realistic narrative surface. Hardy himself insisted that reproducing a natural object is “achieved by seeing into the heart of a thing”, that “realism” should be “pursued by means of the imagination” and employing “what M[atthew] Arnold calls ‘the imaginative reason’.”¹⁰³

Recent critics including Richard Nemesvari have suggested that a technique of Hardy’s is to generate generic expectations in his fiction, then subvert them “by introducing contrasting and at times contradictory genre discourses into his narratives”.¹⁰⁴

Hardy’s opposition to purely objective realism, and his use of “disproportioning” and “incongruity”,¹⁰⁵ challenge narrative conventions in ways both modern and postmodern.

Widdowson describes Hardy’s approach as demonstrating a “consonance” with later formalist concepts of “defamiliarization” and “denaturalization”.¹⁰⁶ Shires draws attention to Hardy’s propensity to undermine expectations of authorial reliability. Hardy frequently subverts traditional ideas of plot and character, introducing a complex mix of intertextual references which challenge “not just the decorum of a given genre but the decorums of the

¹⁰² Lennart A. Björk, ed. *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1985) 163; hereafter referred to as “LN”.

¹⁰³ *LIFE*, 147. Tim Dolin’s article drew my attention to this note of Hardy’s which so neatly sums up his creative synthesis of realism and imagination. See “On Hardy’s Realism, Again”, 46.

¹⁰⁴ Richard Nemesvari, “‘Genres are not to be mixed ... I will not mix them’: Discourse, Ideology, and Generic Hybridity in Hardy’s Fiction”, *A Companion to Thomas Hardy*, 102.

¹⁰⁵ Harvey, 200.

¹⁰⁶ Widdowson, “Hardy and Critical Theory”, *CC*, 74.

language”.¹⁰⁷ She suggests that his ruminations on the limits of mimesis in literature undermine “the very foundations of traditional representation and belief”. When such anti-realistic traits are added to Hardy’s sense of “alienated modern consciousness”, Shires has no hesitation in describing him as a “proto-modernist”.¹⁰⁸ Hardy embraces literary theories and philosophies which foreshadow the Modernism of the twentieth century and much that has come since.

Page draws attention to an Impressionist aesthetic in Hardy which values “individual perceptions and private associations” above realistic descriptions. He highlights Hardy’s depiction of characters whose heightened consciousness transforms “a banal external world into something dream-like”.¹⁰⁹ Shires points out that the author particularly admired the English father of Impressionism, Turner, and delighted in the “tragical mysteries” underlying his painterly distortion of reality. Hardy’s prose similarly evokes “the deeper reality underlying the scenic, the expression of what are sometimes called abstract imaginings”.¹¹⁰ As he comments in “The Science of Fiction”, it requires something beyond the experience of the outer senses to apprehend the “still sad music of humanity”,¹¹¹ quoting Wordsworth in order to define his own *angst* and the tinge of Expressionism as well as Impressionism in his tragic fiction.

This collision of styles in Hardy’s fiction reflects his deeply-held conviction about the discordancy of human existence. As Hardy declares in “Candour in English Fiction”, his “artistic instincts” are attuned to the great tragedies of the past – the “collision between

¹⁰⁷ Dennis Taylor, *Hardy’s Literary Language and Victorian Philology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 7; cited in Shires, “The radical aesthetic of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*”, CC, 157.

¹⁰⁸ Shires, 147-48, 161.

¹⁰⁹ Page, 39.

¹¹⁰ *LIFE*, 185.

¹¹¹ “The Science of Fiction”, Orel, 137. Hardy quotes from William Wordsworth’s “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour”, l. 92.

the individual and the general’ – formerly worked out with such force by the Periclean and Elizabethan dramatists”.¹¹² The clash between well-meaning individuals and inimical gods or Fates hearkens back to Greek tragedy, whereas the struggles of Hardy’s tragic heroes and heroines, often set against the comic relief of rustic characters, have links with Shakespearean drama. Just as Shakespeare used existing stories and adapted them to his own ends, so Hardy draws on traditional and contemporary literary sources, and on folklore and journalism, to create his many-layered tragic novels.

Many of Hardy’s novels had or still have an ur-novel or subplot which informs the major action. In addition, his novels include an interweaving of textual references ranging from classical myths and legends, through Biblical stories to nineteenth-century French fiction. His adaptation of existing material has been so prominent as to give rise, at a time before intertextuality was common, to the imputation of “plagiarism”, though even ninety years ago the charge was framed in inverted commas. Hardy himself conceded that “to plagiarise is the instinct, the characteristic audacity of almost every poet of the highest class”.¹¹³ Hardy stands accused, at times, of even the “literal lifting”¹¹⁴ of passages. Such intertextuality can lead to a somewhat “over-determined” characterisation of protagonists but is important in creating a feeling of tragic dissonance between the unreleased potential of the created characters and the inhibiting social niches that they are forced to inhabit.

The publication of variant early texts has resulted in a welcome explosion of knowledge about Hardy’s fiction, and made it possible to see submerged and overwritten outlines in the finalised later versions. Variant texts in the Oxford’s World Classics and Penguin Classics editions read at times like suppressed or unconscious thoughts, fears and

¹¹² “Candour”, 126-7.

¹¹³ *LN*, vol. 1, 108.

¹¹⁴ Alexander Hooper, “Hardy’s ‘Plagiarism’ ”, *The New Republic* February 29, 1928: 71.

motivations of the characters. The chapter in which Michael Henchard brings back a goldfinch as a wedding present for Elizabeth-Jane was cut for the American edition of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, restored thereafter, and then cut again a second time for the recent Penguin edition. This inclusion of this scene shows a softer, more sentimental side of the irascible Henchard, adding to our sympathy for him in his estrangement from those he has loved. It also shows a colder, less Cordelia-like Elizabeth-Jane, who can after all be capable of resentment and unforgiveness. Such scenes, absent or restored, do much to alter our estimate of the tragic stature of the protagonists.

Related to ur-novels and variant texts are the issues of censored passages and scenes in which much about the sexual interaction between characters had to be implied. That Hardy was required to suppress or modify scenes in order to have his novels published has been well documented. Examining the variant texts over a period of time is illuminating from both social and literary historical perspectives. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, the pivotal sexual encounter between Alec and Tess develops from an early version, in which Tess is drugged and raped against her will, into a scene revised to read more like seduction. The 1912 version of the novel contains contrary indications which can be used to justify either point of view. Learning to read the novels and characters both ways stimulates a postmodern reading of an unstable text, in which personalities are also unstable and the moral and social issues with which Hardy is dealing are invested with relativist uncertainty.

Hardy explored humanistic ideals more and more in his later work, as he came to regard the "application of ideas to life" (a phrase borrowed from Matthew Arnold) as the "real function" of literary writing. He was well aware that many readers would reject the philosophical questionings of his novels and that his "grave, positive, stark, delineations" would not appeal to "stereotyped tastes". In his "Apology" to *Late Lyrics and Earlier*,

Hardy defended abandoning “delineations ... of the passive, lighter, and traditional sort” so that he could unfold instead a charter of the human soul’s “eternal rights”.¹¹⁵

In this “Apology”, which is more a justification of his life’s work than the introduction to a short collection of poems, Hardy frames a philosophy which he claims to have been his through the earlier decades of his writing. Rather than a purely melioristic philosophy like Shelley’s, Hardy describes it as a qualified or “evolutionary meliorism”, which purports to explore reality stage by stage with a “frank recognition” of the best and worst in humanity.¹¹⁶ Such meliorism fell short of being a philosophy of transcendence. As Virginia Hyman points out, progress for evolutionary meliorists was primarily *ethical*, moving “out of the egotistic stage and into the altruistic one”,¹¹⁷ in line with Comtean theory. Hardy stood alongside those who wished that “pain ... be kept down to a minimum by loving-kindness, operating through scientific knowledge, actuated by the modicum of free will”. But he concluded with his customary scepticism that progress would only be made when “the mighty necessitating forces – unconscious or other ... happen to be in equilibrium, which may or may not be often”.¹¹⁸

In his *Literary Notebooks*, Hardy aligned himself with Trollope’s proposition, that “he who can deal adequately with tragic elements is a greater artist than the writer whose efforts never carry him above the mild walks of everyday life”.¹¹⁹ Defending himself against the charge of “pessimism” in his “General Preface to the Novels and Poems”,

¹¹⁵ *CP*, 558, 557.

¹¹⁶ *CP*, 557.

¹¹⁷ Virginia R. Hyman, *Ethical Perspectives in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat, 1975) 5.

¹¹⁸ *CP*, 558.

¹¹⁹ *LN*, vol. 1, 163-64.

Hardy contended that “Some natures become vocal at tragedy”.¹²⁰ The author himself judged his five tragic novels to be his finest,¹²¹ as have the majority of general readers.¹²²

In his “General Preface to the Novels and Poems” for the 1912 Wessex Edition of his collected works, Hardy classified his novels under three headings. The fictions I have focussed on are classed as “Novels of Character and Environment”, novels which, in Hardy’s view, “may claim a verisimilitude in general treatment and detail”. He is somewhat dismissive of the remaining novels, describing them as “Romances and Fantasies” or “Novels of Ingenuity”, further designated as mere “Experiments”.¹²³ This may be largely a self-protective assertion, designed to allay the often harsh critical reception of the latter two groups of novels and to align himself with the perceived orthodoxy which, as Widdowson argues, “associated literariness with realism”.¹²⁴ Modern critics, however, have begun to revalue the as-it-were uncanonical texts which disrupt “the myth of Hardy’s tragic realism”,¹²⁵ and embrace what Jane Thomas calls his “Experiments in Metafiction”.¹²⁶ While in no way disparaging the significance of the so-called minor novels, my own study, on Hardy’s evolving treatment of tragedy in fiction, has necessarily focussed on the five so-called major novels.¹²⁷

¹²⁰ “General Preface to the Novels and Poems”, Orel, 49.

¹²¹ Scott Elledge, “Preface to the Third Norton Critical Edition”, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (New York: Norton, 1991) vii.

¹²² Tim Dolin points out that recent critics have revalued Hardy’s disruption of the conventions of nineteenth-century realism, a change of emphasis which casts doubt on the ranking of these novels.

See “On Hardy’s Realism, Again”, 40-41.

¹²³ “General Preface to the Novels and Poems”, 44-45.

¹²⁴ Dolin, 39.

¹²⁵ Dolin, 40.

¹²⁶ Jane Thomas, “Hardy’s ‘Romances and Fantasies’ *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, *The Trumpet-Major*, *Two on a Tower*, and *The Well-Beloved*: Experiments in Metafiction”, *A Companion to Thomas Hardy*, 281.

¹²⁷ Although *The Woodlanders* is included in “Novels of Character and Environment”, the main characters, Giles Winterborne and Grace Melbury, lack higher ideals and are too passive or too inclined to compromise to qualify as tragic protagonists.

In the first of the five, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Hardy remakes pastoral romance into a novel that is partly comic, partly tragic. Aspiring farmer, Gabriel Oak, has to battle against a major threat to his livelihood, in a chapter Hardy dubs “A Pastoral Tragedy”,¹²⁸ but thereafter Oak displays a stoic resilience which leaves Hardy free to examine the inner workings of suffering, grief and loss on more susceptible characters, who may be either worn down or elevated by tragic circumstances. Plausible literary sources for Hardy’s tragicomic novel are the Shakespearean pastoral comedy, *As You Like It*, and some of Wordsworth’s realistic and elegiac pastoral poems in the *Lyrical Ballads*. Hardy’s Romantic transformation of Fanny is like that achieved by Wordsworth in “The Thorn”. The poor servant girl seduced by a dashing sergeant is a type familiar in many a folk ballad, but the Fanny who dies in childbirth after being abandoned by Sergeant Troy is an individual who attracts deeper pathos. By having his female protagonist, Bathsheba, break open Fanny’s coffin and read in her dead rival’s lineaments her own alter ego, Hardy raises his pastoral novel to new levels of psychological and tragic insight. Bathsheba’s other suitor, besides Oak and Troy, is the gentleman farmer, Boldwood, a man torn by anguish and inner conflict, who finds it difficult even to look upon his beloved. His delusion of ideal love holds in it the seeds of his descent into obsession and madness. Although Bathsheba is chastened by her experiences, and becomes elevated to the stature of a tragic heroine through her endurance of suffering, it is Boldwood who emerges as a Romantic figure of tragedy, tortured cruelly in his pursuit of Bathsheba, and condemned to a lifetime of regret in a private hell to which he has been assigned by the well-intentioned Oak.

¹²⁸ *Far from the Madding Crowd* (New York: Norton, 1986) 30. All quotations from the novels will be taken from the Norton Critical Editions listed in the Bibliography unless otherwise indicated.

By his allusions to Greek myth, and his adherence to an equivalent form of the classical unities pertaining to time and place, Hardy seems to be announcing that *The Return of the Native* is to be his first attempt at high tragedy in the novel. The primeval backdrop of Egdon Heath provides a naturalistic environment indifferent to human suffering, as well as a brooding, almost hostile presence. The performance of the Mummers' Play and the bonfire rituals embody the primitive beliefs of the heath-dwellers which persist beneath a veneer of civilisation in this most pagan of Hardy's novels. Clym's failure to enlist any of the rustics in his educational schemes suggests that they remain arrested in the early, fetishistic stage of development proposed by Comte in his theories of Positivism, the "ethical systems popular at the time",¹²⁹ which Clym brought back from his time in Paris. Eustacia's provincial isolation and Romantic delusions about the possibility of a grand passion indicate demonstrable links with Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Clym, too, is undone by his Romantic delusions. All that really attracts Clym and Eustacia is their *dream* of one another, like Madeline and Porphyro in "The Eve of St Agnes". Clym blindly imagines Eustacia a willing helpmeet in his idealistic vision of educating the masses, while Eustacia sees in Clym an escape from provincial boredom, a *passepartout* to glamorous Paris – or, at the worst, Budmouth. The untimely deaths of Clym's mother and of his wife Eustacia leave him suffering more from misery and depression than a tragic *agon*. By novel's end, the absence of anything approaching a cathartic affect makes *The Return* seem rather an experimental than a neoclassical tragedy. In fact, it might be read as Hardy's meditation, eighty years before George Steiner, on whether "modern" individuals were capable of attaining tragic stature or sustaining tragic intensity of feeling.

¹²⁹ *The Return of the Native* (New York: Norton, 1969) 136.

In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy takes a step back in time to the mid-nineteenth century when English agriculture was on the cusp of reform and modernisation. The period in which Hardy sets his novel enables him to draw on pagan folklore, and on a sense of continuity with the immemorial cycles of rural life and work. Intertextual references to biblical, dramatic and mythological sources imbue events with a *gravitas* which resonates with the great tragedies of the past. Adding to the depth of his recreation, Hardy also engages with the emerging science of archaeology to create a backdrop for the action which makes the small doings of the human characters seem insignificant in comparison to the epic time frame conjured up by the presence of artefacts linked to Romano-British or Neolithic peoples. The scale of the hill forts and barrows tends to dwarf the nineteenth-century protagonists, and paradoxically, to create a sense of modernist futility in their desires to build provincial empires or meaningful relationships.

Romanticism in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is less literary, expressed in the powerful emotions experienced by the chief protagonist and the more visceral Romanticism of music, a powerful force which stirs the feelings of the Casterbridge locals, and of Michael Henchard in particular. Naturalism, with its tenet that we are unable to break free from the constraining influences of our upbringing and environment, is undeniably present, especially in Hardy's depiction of the urban poor in Casterbridge. But Hardy's delineation of the mayor owes most to Victor Hugo's great Romantic novel, *Les Misérables*. This extended Christian parable of the reformed criminal, Jean Valjean, serves as an ur-narrative on which Hardy plays sceptical variations. While the emphasis on relationships is less to the fore in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* than in many Hardy novels, passion, both sexual and choleric, is portrayed as a dangerous force with far-reaching consequences. Henchard is haunted by his past misdemeanours which come back to disrupt his life and undermine his

hard-won prosperity. Unable to accept compromise in business or in relationships, Henchard's demise as a flawed ruler evokes comparison with the tragedy of *King Lear*. In accepting his isolation as fit punishment for his crime against his wife and child, Henchard acquires a certain nobility through suffering and comes to attain the stature of a tragic hero.

Hardy's fourth major novel, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, is firmly founded on Zola's theories of Naturalism. A major theme of the novel is "Nature's unconsciousness" of social laws, as outlined in "Candour in English Fiction".¹³⁰ There is an increasingly Zolaesque flavour to Hardy's descriptions of nature, and his plot is underpinned by heredity and the degeneration of a family in the manner of Zola's Rougon-Macquart series. Tess's dreams of becoming a schoolteacher and marrying for love are not unreasonable given her intelligence and beauty, but her dreams are shattered when her parents hatch an ill-conceived scheme to escape poverty by exploiting a dubious connection to the ancient family of the d'Urbervilles. This turns her beauty into a curse as she comes under the influence of the worryingly stereotypical nouveau-riche seducer, Alec d'Urberville. In his plot Hardy plays with the conventions of contemporary melodrama and traditional ballads, even while he crafts characters who are more innovative and three-dimensional in their psychology and philosophical beliefs. At the same time, Hardy creates some idyllic scenes worthy of the Romantic nature poets, even if the idyll generates false expectations in the hearts of the lovers who meet under such paradisaal conditions. The tragedy of Tess and Angel arises from unrealisable expectations: each puts the other on a pedestal. Their fall shatters the dream each had of the other, with tragic consequences.

Hardy's final novel, *Jude the Obscure*, incorporates many of his philosophical questionings in a fiction which at times resembles a novel of ideas but also pushes modern

¹³⁰ "Candour", 127.

tragedy to new extremes. As Jude Fawley struggles to be master of his fleshly cravings and his spiritual ambitions, as he and Sue Bridehead debate Hellenism and Hebraism, and as the two of them experience the heights of ideal love and the depths of financial and existential despair, Hardy builds up a dialectical complexity which holds the key to the novel's dénouement. At times this dialectic seems to have an autonomous function without serving the needs of plot and characterisation. Jude emerges as a dreamer infatuated by lofty ideals and unrealistic ambitions, but one who is capable of reassessing his intellectual stance and holding on to his own hard-won ethical position. His hopeless passion for the flighty Sue, who aspires to her own form of intellectual elitism, leads to an unstable clash of ideals which cannot be sustained. In *Jude the Obscure* Hardy mounts his most overt attack on the institutions of marriage, religion and education. Hardy's treatment of these themes links his novel with Octave Feuillet's *La Morte*, a novel of ideas which may have provided Hardy with an ur-narrative from which to refashion parts of his own. *Jude* is also the most Shelleyan of Hardy's major novels, although he makes more use of *Prometheus Unbound* than of Shelley's attack on marriage in *Epipsychidion* when working out the novel's conclusion. The critical conundrum posed by the ending of *Jude* is whether this novel succeeds in delivering a traditional tragedy or prefigures a grimly nihilistic, Theatre of the Absurd anti-tragedy.

By examining Hardy's fictional tragedy as found in what have traditionally been considered his major novels, I believe it is possible to bring to light some new interpretations of this well-trodden ground. The convergence of his twin predilections for Romanticism and for French Naturalism may lead to a tragic clash of "hemispheres", but in

Hardy's case, these opposing elements come together in a type of "consummation"¹³¹ which fires his creative imagination. Hardy is never content to repeat himself: each novel represents a new attempt to unravel the ever-changing tragedy of imperfect human beings aspiring to energising ideas and lofty ideals in an implacable universe. As Lance St John Butler maintained, there was never a time when Hardy ceased, as he himself put it, "feeling his way to a method".¹³² Although drawing on the inspiration of Shakespearean and classical tragedies, Hardy, in Kramer's words, "explicitly admonishes that art must progress", and reserves his approval for the artist who, "not contented with the grounds of his success goes on and on, and tries to achieve the impossible".¹³³

¹³¹ "The Convergence of the Twain", l. 33, *CP*, 307.

¹³² Lance St John Butler, ed., *Thomas Hardy after Fifty Years* (London: Macmillan, 1977) 104.

¹³³ Kramer, 13.

CHAPTER 1: *Far from the Madding Crowd*

The most tragic woman is cowed by a tragic man ... (160)¹

Although *Far from the Madding Crowd* is not usually considered to be one of Hardy's "tragic" novels, closer study reveals elements of tragedy worthy of consideration. Dale Kramer states categorically, "*Far from the Madding Crowd* is not a tragedy", yet acknowledges that Hardy "works out some basic concepts of the mode within the story".² How Hardy accommodates tragic components within this, his first successful novel, will provide insights into how he develops these early indications in such fully-fledged tragic novels as *The Mayor of Casterbridge* or *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. It then becomes possible to ask, if *Far from the Madding Crowd* is not a tragedy, whether the pastoral romance can properly be called a comedy (in the Shakespearean sense), or whether, instead, its tragic elements outweigh the sum effect of the romance and the apparently comic resolution.

Assuming the most rudimentary definition of tragedy, we would expect a tragic novel to end unhappily. *Far from the Madding Crowd* does not appear to fall into this category since it ends traditionally for a pastoral romance, the heroine marrying her steadfast suitor. In Hardy's novels, however, constancy and persistence are no guarantees that a couple will live happily ever after. The rustic chorus affirms, even on the wedding night, that Gabriel will come to speak the words "my wife" in a much "chillier" way, given time (308). The misogynist edge of the rustics' banter undermines the comic resolution and

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, parenthetical references are to *Far from the Madding Crowd*, ed. Robert C. Schweik (New York: Norton, 1986); hereafter critical articles included in the edition are referred to using the cue-title "*FMC*".

² Kramer, 44.

suggests that darker forces may be at work (resentment, disappointment, unhealed psychological trauma) beneath the overtly happy ending.

For Shakespeare, tragedy ends with catastrophe, usually figured in multiple deaths, and comedy in an accord, often taking the form of multiple marriages. In *Don Juan*, Byron proposes a satirical nexus between marriage and tragedy, questioning the adage that “All tragedies are finished by a death, / All comedies are ended by a marriage” (III, 65-66).³ Neither tragedians nor comedians had been inclined to go beyond the mysteries of death or marriage, as Byron himself did in the darkening satire of his tourist romance. By linking the two concepts, Byron seemed to suggest that marriage itself is a type of death, certainly the death of romantic love. Similarly, in Hardy’s world of fiction, “some tragedies *begin* in marriage”.⁴

For Hardy, comedy always contains the possibility of tragedy. Although *Far from the Madding Crowd* could be superficially categorised as a comedy in the Shakespearean sense, with its mismatched lovers and comic rustic characters, human suffering is never far from the surface. As Hardy reflected in his personal notebooks, “If you look beneath the surface of any farce you see a tragedy”.⁵ Even the humorous moments in this novel are tempered with a sense of gravity and sober reflection, and make it impossible to forget the tormenting and fatal events leading up to the superficially happy conclusion. Despite the title, readers find themselves in the midst of characters mentally tortured by circumstances from which there is no reprieve.

³ Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, ed. T.G. Steffan, E. Steffan & W.W. Pratt (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982) 159.

⁴ R.M. Rehder, “The Form of Hardy’s Novels”, *Thomas Hardy after Fifty Years*, ed. Lance St John (London: Macmillan, 1977) 23 [my emphasis].

⁵ *LIFE*, 216.

In its early episodes, *Far from the Madding Crowd* appears to be a rural novel based on people whose lives are governed by the rhythms of the sheep-shearing and the hay harvest. Hardy gives the nod to pastoral verse via allusions to Milton's "Lycidas" (108) and later to Virgil (122). His detailed accounts of the day-to-day work of tending the sheep and the economic realities associated with farming are in line with the realist depiction of country life in paintings like Gustave Courbet's *The Gleaners*. J. Hillis Miller finds the detailed representation of such scenes an example of "realism" in Victorian fiction.⁶ Like Wordsworth, who challenged the conventions of the pastoral idyll in such narratives as "Michael: A Pastoral Poem" and "The Last of the Flock", Hardy takes up the cause of the rural labourer, exposes the economic precariousness of the adventure of rising above the condition of hired shepherd, and undercuts romanticised preconceptions of pastoral life. Gabriel is left destitute after the incident with his dog; Bathsheba too is faced with the threat of poverty if unable to pay the rent on her farm; and even Boldwood sustains a substantial loss when his disappointment in love leads him to neglect protecting his ricks in a storm. This is not to say that Hardy does not present at-times lyrical descriptions, worthy of a Romantic poet, of the natural world and the changing seasons. Nor is he immune from a certain nostalgia for the rural traditions which were disappearing even at the time of writing.

Hardy's realistic pastoral romance does not exclude the possibility of comic interludes or tragic reversals. Gabriel is made to seem a comic bumpkin in his early courtship of Bathsheba, although the reader is just as likely to laugh at some of Bathsheba's girlish ways. But when an unreliable sheepdog precipitates over a cliff the entire flock he

⁶ J. Hillis Miller, *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1970) 57.

has been independently building up, Farmer Oak undergoes what Hardy describes as “A Pastoral Tragedy” (30). The stoicism with which Gabriel meets this reverse enlarges his stature beyond that of a mere Corin or Silviu, the Shakespearean shepherds of *As You Like It*. His strength of character and courage in the face of adversity raise him from clown to hero. Beneath the farcical nature of the early episodes, full of misunderstandings and comic foibles, Hardy allows a darker current to unfold, of emotional and physical suffering.

The informed realism of the rural scenes caused some reviewers of *Far from the Madding Crowd* to pronounce it a work of George Eliot’s.⁷ Hardy dismissed the comparison, saying that Eliot was “not a born storyteller” nor had she truly “touched the life of the field”.⁸ This may be an example of Hardy distancing himself from his sources, however, since another reviewer suggested Eliot’s *Adam Bede* as a plausible influence on Hardy’s novel. The unnamed reviewer compared the cases of seduction in each novel, of a poor servant girl by a military man, and found that Sergeant Troy’s treatment of Fanny was more “consistent with his character”. He also found, in comparing Gabriel Oak with Adam Bede, that the former was “truer to nature”. Not only are some of the players quite similar, some of the incidents are also strikingly familiar. The reviewer notes that “the famous incident of the looking-glass ... is repeated with a slight variation by Mr. Hardy”;⁹ Fanny’s desperate journey into Casterbridge is reminiscent of “The Journey in Despair” made by Hetty in her heavily pregnant state; and both novels contain an eleventh-hour reprieve from the death penalty. Over all, the reviewer found that *Far from the Madding Crowd* compared

⁷ Cox, 32.

⁸ *LIFE*, 98.

⁹ Cox, 33.

favourably with *Adam Bede* for its “humour, its power of description, and character-drawing”.¹⁰

Although there was no question of plagiarism – such characters and incidents being the stuff of popular ballads of the time – other affinities, for example Hardy’s use of “semi-scientific phraseology” and his “striving after profundity of meaning”,¹¹ were also observed between Hardy and George Eliot. Hardy again downplayed any influence, explaining that “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”.¹² A more recent study has investigated yet further points of similarity with *Adam Bede*, Lawrence Jones going so far as to surmise that it provided Hardy with a “viable model for a pastoral tragicomedy”.¹³ Jones conjectures that Hardy learned from *Adam Bede* “how to combine pastoral realism with a strong plot that incorporates genuinely tragic elements and yet finally satisfies the ‘comic’ demands of Victorian convention”.¹⁴

While Hardy’s vision of tragedy would continue to expand and develop its own unique character, in this early novel he does seem to have benefited from Eliot’s “tragicomic” tale and realistic depiction of everyday life. In Chapter 17 of *Adam Bede*, Eliot’s narrator pauses to reflect on literary realism, concluding that her “strongest effort” is to “give a faithful account of men and things”.¹⁵ It is for this reason that she delights in

¹⁰ Cox, 32, 33, 44.

¹¹ Cox, 34.

¹² *LIFE*, 98.

¹³ Lawrence Jones, “George Eliot and Pastoral Tragicomedy in Hardy’s *Far from the Madding Crowd*”, *Studies in Philology* 77 (1980): 403.

¹⁴ Jones, 405.

¹⁵ George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (London: Blackwood, n.d.) 149; hereafter referred to as “AB”.

Dutch paintings, “faithful pictures of a monotonous homely existence”.¹⁶ Hardy took such notions on board, as indicated by his manuscript subtitle to *Under the Greenwood Tree*, “A Rural Painting of the Dutch School”. Leslie Stephen commissioned *Far from the Madding Crowd* after reading *Under the Greenwood Tree*, a “little rural story”¹⁷ that derives its title from the song in *As You Like It*.¹⁸ Stephen found “the descriptions of country life admirable”¹⁹ and encouraged Hardy to write something in a similar vein, but with more incident to capture and hold the attention of serial fiction readers.

In composing *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Hardy therefore not only drew on realistic scenes of rural life and pastoral romance but on a plot-driven narrative, as he had in *Desperate Remedies*. A reviewer of Hardy’s tragi-comic novel took him to task for the “violent sensationalism” which was thought to mar its “pastoral tone and idyllic simplicity”.²⁰ Yet rather than finding this alternation between romance and more realistic events a technical fault, *The Times* reviewer praised its “delicate perspective faculty, which transforms, with skilful touch, the matter-of-fact prosaic details of every-day life into an idyll or pastoral poem”.²¹ In due course Penelope Vigar would maintain that this is Hardy’s first work where “the distinction between romance and reality ceases to be an artistic flaw in the unity of the novel”.²² In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Hardy had begun to experiment with multiple genres, playing on everything from pastoral romance and

¹⁶ AB, 151.

¹⁷ Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist* (London: Bodley Head, 1971) 43.

¹⁸ *As You Like It* II, v, 1.

¹⁹ Letter from Leslie Stephen, 30 November 1872; in *FMC*, 340.

²⁰ Cox, 32.

²¹ Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist*, 95.

²² Penelope Vigar, *The Novels of Thomas Hardy: Illusion and Reality* (London: Athlone, 1974) 101.

melodrama through realism to the sensation novel, all the while bringing his own form of tragic vision to bear on the events portrayed.

In Eliot as in Hardy, the “tragic action inexorably flows through to its result”, although the addition of a conventional “comic” ending tends to mitigate the cathartic impact. Jones has suggested that this pattern is more suited to Eliot, given her emphasis on individual responsibility and the “painful justice of the moral law”.²³ Eliot’s didacticism lends credibility to this reading: her novels often track poor moral choices to their disastrous consequences. Hardy is more sympathetic to moral lapses or disputation, particularly when it comes to sexuality. Admitting variation and contestation of Eliot’s humanist ethics, Hardy’s is a fictional universe in which the characters’ moral aspirations and decisions have no determining influence on the play of events. Tragic irony affects the outworking of the plot by suggesting that his protagonists are victims of psychological and social compulsions beyond their control, adumbrating the determinism of the French naturalist school. Both authors tend to depict Nature as indifferent to human values and aspirations, but the tone of Eliot’s work has been described as “Wordsworthian”.²⁴ For Eliot, as for Wordsworth, contemplating the natural world bestows consolation and instruction. For Hardy, the philosophical influence of Nature has more to do with Comte and French Naturalism, particularly in the later novels.

While the detailed depiction of country life identifies the novels of Eliot and Hardy with English realism, this does not preclude the possibility of “small-r” romance. *Adam Bede* is as much a courtship novel as *Pride and Prejudice*: finding a suitable marriage partner is essential to the plot. Austen’s archetypal courtship novel also has free play in

²³ Jones , 419-20.

²⁴ Jones, 406.

parts of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, at least as regards the villains. Despite their different backgrounds, George Wickham and Sergeant Troy have some striking traits in common. Neither has much work to perform in the army or the militia. Both are womanisers who appeal to the fair sex in large part because of the figure they cut in uniform, Troy “brilliant in brass and scarlet” (127), Wickham a man “towards whom almost every female eye was turned” once “regimentals” had made him “completely charming”. Added to their pleasing exterior is their skill in speaking: Elizabeth felt the “most threadbare topic might be rendered interesting”²⁵ by Wickham, while Troy is famous for his “wondrous power of flattery” (132). Both men exhibit a taste for unsuitably young women: silly, credulous Fanny or foolish fifteen-year-old Lydia make easy prey for these idle seducers. Boldwood and Mr Bennet are equally unsuccessful in buying off these two villains and forcing them into a marriage. What might have seemed realistic enough to readers familiar with the landed gentry of the 1810s needed testing against the economic realities of the 1870s, in which the pressures and possibilities of courtship between an emergent lessee gentry, a class of professional farm managers (or bailiffs) and even the oddity of a lessee gentlewoman farmer could be imagined as possible and deeply engaging.

While Hardy’s pastoral “romance” is as realistic a courtship novel as either Eliot’s or Austen’s, Hardy places greater importance on the intensity of emotions experienced by his protagonists. To this extent, Hardy is more interested in “big-R” Romantic fiction. Particularly in the later novels, he posits a Shelleyan vision of erotic love which necessitates a more extreme response from his protagonists when this dream cannot be realised. His Romantic characters explore both the heights of passion and the depths of

²⁵ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London: Heron, 1968) 70, 74.

despair, exhibiting the tragic discrepancy between desire and fulfilment. In *Far from the Madding Crowd* Boldwood is unable to express the height and depth of his idealised passion for Bathsheba: “I cannot say how far above every other idea and object on earth you seem to me” (101).

George Eliot remains more sceptical about the possibility of ideal love and a romanticising of sexual love. She suggests that the convention of marriage itself is a prime site for Romantic disillusionment: “if you would love a woman without ever looking back on your love as a folly, she must die when you are courting her”.²⁶ The Romantic lover tends to “idealize the removed object” of his affections (30), not the object available to him or her in married life. *Adam Bede* and *Far from the Madding Crowd* have distinguishable accents when speaking of courtship and marriage, but these two fine Victorian novels are not so far apart in their accounts of the disturbing limitations of the marriage contract.

In *The Woodlanders*, Edred Fitzpiers is a self-styled transcendental philosopher ostensibly trying to establish a point of contact between “the material world and the ideal”. When he sets eyes on Grace Melbury, he exclaims, “Nature has at last recovered her lost union with the Idea”, his exclamation evoking the Platonic “Ideal” supposed to be “perfect and eternal and for ever separate from its shadow in the imperfect world of nature”. Fitzpiers eventually concludes, like Eliot before him, that this “structure of ideals was demolished by the intimacy of common life”.²⁷ The problem for many of Hardy’s mismatched couples is that they try to make initial impressions fit into their pre-existent vision of the beloved, with tragic consequences.

²⁶ *AB*, 136.

²⁷ *The Woodlanders* (London: Penguin, 1998) 133, 132, 394, 203.

In *Far from the Madding Crowd* the mismatching can largely be attributed to appearances giving a false impression of the beloved. This disparity between appearance and reality is a pervasive theme in Shakespearean drama, both comedy and tragedy. For example, Hamlet accuses Ophelia of deception, saying “God has given you one face, and you make yourselves another”, and exclaims against his mother “Seems madam! nay, it is; I know not ‘seems’”.²⁸ Shakespeare’s comedies, acted by boys dressed as women, are full of women dressed as men and of mistaken identities leading to a farcical network of romantic entanglements. The effect of Shakespearean drama largely depends on the dénouement: Juliet’s feigned death ends tragically for the star-crossed lovers of *Romeo and Juliet*; the myriad deceptions practised upon the couples in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* are magically resolved to bring about a comic resolution and multiple marriages. In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, the villain is brought to justice and the worthy suitor wins the hand of his lady love, yet the outcome and effect are not entirely comic. So many have suffered, and suffered intensely, along the way.

In both courtship novels and Shakespearean drama appearances can be deceiving, particularly where sexual attraction and identity are concerned. This is borne out in *Far from the Madding Crowd* by the radiant imagery associated with Troy. His entry into the novel via the illumination of the dark lantern allows him to appear in a sudden blaze of scarlet and gold that has on Bathsheba “the effect of a fairy transformation” (127). Instead of feeling insulted by his boldness, Bathsheba persuades herself that she has offended “a man who was only civil and kind” (130). Not only is his “gentlemanly” (129) appearance misleading, Troy is revealed to be an inveterate liar. This deceptiveness is personified in

²⁸ *Hamlet* III. i. 145-6 and I. ii. 76.

his acting the part of Dick Turpin at the sheep-fair, where he disguises even his voice to hide his true identity from Bathsheba.

Like many of Hardy's young protagonists, Bathsheba would rather maintain an idealised vision of her lover than face the truth. Blinded by the brilliance of Troy's exterior, she chooses to ignore his moral character. At first Bathsheba fights against her inclination, questioning Troy's pose and veracity: "Your words are too dashing to be true" (137). As the courtship proceeds, it becomes evident to others that Troy is no gentleman, yet Bathsheba persists in "believing cajoleries that she knows to be false" (147). The narrator points out that "Troy's deformities lay deep down from a woman's vision, whilst his embellishments were upon the very surface" (147).

Scenes between Bathsheba and her servants appear initially in the vein of light domestic comedy. To test the maids' opinions, Bathsheba at first claims to hate Troy, and the maids boldly proclaim him to be "a wild scamp" (153). Bathsheba then reacts wildly, and demands Liddy swear that "he's not a fast man; that it is all lies they say about him!" (154). The comedy has another dimension, however, since Bathsheba's love for Troy is driving her to "distraction and misery and agony" (153). Misreading the motives of others is a motor force of the comedy, while conflict within and conflict between characters are motor forces of the tragedy in this mixed-genre novel. Bathsheba suffers for the sake of love, and the decisions she makes have tragic consequences for herself and for others. The narrator suggests that Bathsheba's "culpability lay in her making no attempt to control feeling by subtle and careful enquiry into consequences" (147), a moralistic judgement

which Jones identifies as having overtones of George Eliot.²⁹ The following sentence, though, points to Bathsheba's struggle to choose between what she knows about Troy and what she feels about him: she "reck'd not her own rede" (147). The quotation, from Ophelia's response to Laertes in *Hamlet*, implies that Bathsheba will not heed her own advice while she has a chance to tread "the primrose path of dalliance".³⁰

Hardy portrays his heroine as the victim both of her naïve romanticised view of love and of naturalistic desires beyond her control. Against her better judgement, Bathsheba agrees to meet Troy alone, ostensibly to witness his sword-exercise. This passage is a masterpiece of evocative prose, marked by an overwhelming array of visually exciting images: "Beams of light ... all emitted in the marvellous evolutions of Troy's reflecting blade" (144) dazzle and hypnotise Bathsheba. The exercise is one in deception as well as dexterity, Troy having told her that the sword is blunt, when it is sharp enough to wound and kill. His proud boast that "My sword never errs" (146) and his discussion of the number of thrusts he will use are *double entendres* which would not have escaped the more knowing Victorian reader. The slicing off of a lock of Bathsheba's hair calls to mind Pope's "The Rape of the Lock", while the impaling of the caterpillar on her bosom has overtones of physical dominance. Bathsheba cries out "No – no! I am afraid of you – indeed I am!" (145).

Though Hardy perforce avoided explicit sexual description, these tacit conventions are sufficient to convey the balance (or unbalance) of the relationship between Troy and Bathsheba. It is not only Troy's physical strength, but the power of Bathsheba's responses, her desire and fear, that approach the determinism of the Naturalists. As a result of her

²⁹ Jones, 423.

³⁰ *Hamlet* I. iii. 46-51.

overwhelming physical responses, Bathsheba “felt powerless to withstand or deny him”. Troy’s exercise “brought the blood beating into her face, set her stinging as if aflame to the very hollows of her feet, and enlarged emotion to a compass which quite swamped thought”. At culmination, a “stroke resulting ... in a liquid stream” makes it clear why Bathsheba weeps at chapter’s end and feels, after the event, that she “has sinned a great sin” (146).

Richard Carpenter confirms the cogency of this sexualised imagery in Hardy which is able to convey to the reader the “*emotion*, if not the explicit content”³¹ of these erotically-charged situations. He suggests that what Bathsheba wants “on a conscious and rational level is denied by the subconscious desire to be dominated”³² by a more aggressive male than Gabriel, but Hardy’s depiction of Bathsheba is ambivalent on this score. As a rule, she resists being dominated by men, even by the force of the male gaze. Early in the novel, Bathsheba disparages the idea of being someone’s sweetheart – “I *hate* to be thought men’s property in that way” (27) – and expresses a desire for independence: “Diana was the goddess whom Bathsheba instinctively adored” having never “taken kindly to the idea of marriage in the abstract” (211).³³ Yet Troy evokes in her a mingled fascination and distress, a desire to be praised and even “to be mastered” (130). Bathsheba herself concedes that she is “too independent” and wants “somebody to tame [her]” (29). The multiple, sometimes contradictory interpretations which Hardy’s characters can attract and sustain may sometimes be read as conflicts between a character’s conscious personality and

³¹Richard C. Carpenter, “The Mirror and the Sword: Imagery in *Far from the Madding Crowd*”, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 18 (1964): 342-43.

³² Carpenter, 344.

³³ Simon Gatrell notes that this passage was inserted later as a counterbalance to the earlier impressions of Bathsheba as a thoughtless flirt. Hence we see certain contradictions remaining in the final version of the text. See “The Significance of Hardy’s Revisions”, *FMC*, 351.

unconscious impulses. Hardy draws psychologically complex characters who undermine any tendency on the reader's part to make facile moral judgements based on external appearances.

Hardy's connecting sexuality and visuality opens a range of characterisation in his novels, exposing the deceptions of flattery and vanity, and revealing the involuntary responses of men and women driven by the naturalistic forces of desire and fear. Just as Bathsheba is dazzled by Troy's *aurora militaris* (145), so Tess admits to Alec d'Urberville, "My eyes were dazed by you for a while".³⁴ Both women are led astray by male seducers who play upon their innocence and vulnerability in order to subject them to sexual encounters for which they were unprepared. Yet, from a naturalistic perspective, both women are simply yielding to physiological impulses: like Tess, Bathsheba "had too much womanliness to use her understanding to the best advantage" (146-7). The narrator in *Tess* questions why "so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus, the wrong man the woman" but tends to attribute it to a destiny the woman is "doomed to receive", which forever separates her from her previous self. Whether this "doom" appertains to some form of peasant fatalism, or to the deterministic forces of nature, is a question which "many thousand years of analytical philosophy have failed to explain".³⁵ Only hinted at in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, the conflict between naturalistic drives on the one hand, and metaphysical questioning on the other, becomes a prominent feature of Hardy's later tragedies.

Hardy's "original treatment" of tragedy as he describes it in "Candour in English Fiction" involves an increasing emphasis on French Naturalism and the deterministic forces

³⁴ *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (New York: Norton, 1991) 59.

³⁵ *Tess*, 57.

of nature.³⁶ In *Far from the Madding Crowd* Bathsheba and even Gabriel are not immune from being strongly swayed by their sight and other senses, and Troy himself is surprised when he catches sight of Bathsheba at the sheep-fair: he “had not expected her to exercise this power over him in the twinkling of an eye” (263). Gabriel observes Bathsheba unawares on a number of occasions: first, when she is looking at her face in the mirror; second, when Gabriel spies on her through a hole in the cowshed roof; and third, when she is performing a manoeuvre on horseback. Watching Bathsheba drives the staid farmer by stages to “distraction” (24). Gabriel’s spying has the biblical precedent of David who watches Bathsheba’s namesake bathing on the rooftop and is roused to a passion so intense that he commits adultery and murder.

The idea of passion as a physiological force beyond conscious control is taken up in *A Laodicean*, where Captain de Stancy is tricked by the unscrupulous Dare into spying on Paula Power as she performs her gymnastic exercises. Dare comments that the powerful visual stimulus has triggered a “fermentation” in de Stancy, “a purely chemical process”³⁷ which generates the unexpected and initially unwanted passion. As William Newton pointed out, Hardy was already indicating the biological sources of passionate love when Bathsheba sends her ill-judged valentine to Boldwood.³⁸ Unwittingly she throws “a seed” upon “a hotbed of tropic intensity”, in that season when the “vegetable world begins to move and swell and the saps to rise” (96), and provokes an analogous “sap” to rise in Boldwood as well.

³⁶ “Candour”, 127.

³⁷ Thomas Hardy, *The Laodicean* (London: Macmillan, 1975) 198.

³⁸ William Newton, “Hardy and the Naturalists: Their Use of Physiology”, *Modern Philology* 49, 1 (1952): 39.

The correspondence between the fecundity of nature and the arousal of human passion which Hardy articulates here is a commonplace in Zola. When Bathsheba comes to meet Troy in the hollow, the sun (a Zolaesque symbol of passion) sweeps the scene “with its long, luxuriant rays”(142), the ferns with “their soft feathery arms caressing her up to her shoulders”, and the floor of the hollow providing a “thick flossy carpet of moss and grass” (143). The sensual environment recalls that in *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret* [*Abbé Mouret's Transgression*], where the wilderness garden, Le Paradou, is “one great caress”, encouraging the lovers into intimacy by “spreading out beneath their feet couches of silkiest turf”. In the midst of “conniving nature”, the couples in both narratives succumb to the “soft voluptuousness” of their surroundings.³⁹ The scenes are also reminiscent of the *locus amoenus* of classical literature, itself frequently linked to sexuality. In *Adam Bede*, Eliot similarly creates a sensual haven which evokes Eden and a “timeless world of myth and pastoral innocence”.⁴⁰ Arthur Donnithorne feels himself transported back into an idyll, like a “shepherd in Arcadia” or “the first youth kissing the first maiden”,⁴¹ yet as Michael Squires points out, crossing a classical sacred grove with a Miltonic Eden means that “Pagan sensuousness has been modified by Christian responsibility”.⁴² In Eliot's world it is not possible to evade moral choices by evoking Zolaesque Nature or an Arcadian vale. In Hardy's ferny dell, it is only after the event that Bathsheba feels she has sinned, inadvertently crossing a moral boundary into unknown territory.

³⁹ Emile Zola, *Abbé Mouret's Transgression* (London: Vizetelly, 1886) 196, 204, 197; hereafter referred to as “AM”.

⁴⁰ Michael Squires, “Adam Bede and the *Locus Amoenus*”, *Studies in English Literature* 13 (1973): 671.

⁴¹ AB, 116.

⁴² Squires, 407.

Gabriel and Bathsheba's stormy encounter on the hay ricks is another episode in which Hardy evokes a scientific basis for human sexuality. Since the time of Galvani's experiments, naturalistic theories had evolved about sexual attraction being a form of electrical impulse. The effect of Troy's sword exercise upon Bathsheba had been "as quick as electricity" (144). What the sword exercise tells of Bathsheba's liaison with Troy, the rick-saving tells of her relationship with Gabriel. Gabriel demonstrates his loyalty, resourcefulness and courage, and his willingness to work *with* Bathsheba: all Troy displays is his bravado and showmanship. The bravery required for the sword exercise is all down to Bathsheba.

On the ricks, the bolt of lightning which runs down Gabriel's improvised lightning rod (a more useful implement than a sword) links the two in a kind of electrical embrace: "he could feel Bathsheba's warm arm tremble in his hand ... he could distinctly hear her rhythmical pants" (194). In the aftermath, Bathsheba does not weep but is able to "speak more warmly to [Gabriel] tonight than she ever had done" (196), having discovered a quieter but deeper brand of "animal magnetism". Bathsheba's new-found appreciation of Gabriel is a *coup de foudre*, literally a lightning bolt, a phrase used to describe love at first sight or a revelation of the beloved awakening unexpected emotions. Curiously, Troy also invokes the *coup de foudre* when referring to his first glimpse of Bathsheba: "The lightning works instantaneously. I loved you then, at once" (138). The impression is that such love can pass as quickly as it comes.

The Zolaesque idea that naturalistic forces work deterministically irrespective of individual happiness is one that Hardy entertains, without fully accepting, in his later novels. What Hardy does more consistently depict, in his fiction and his poetry, is a

naturalistic universe indifferent to the sufferings of mankind. His realistic chronicling of the seasonal vicissitudes which agricultural labourers must learn to bear and of the forces of Nature with which they contend introduces elements of determinism. It also pictures the natural universe as overwhelmingly more powerful than human operations or hopes taking place within it. As Dale Kramer points out,⁴³ the scene of the storm on the ricks is notable for the observation that “love, life, everything human, seemed small and trifling in such close juxtaposition with an infuriated universe” (194). An individual’s dreams of a better life are puny, no match for the insentient forces which govern his or her destiny. Similarly, when Troy is swept out to sea by the current, he is disconcerted to look back and note that his struggle for survival is a matter of indifference to the port of Budmouth which appears to be “quietly regarding his efforts” (248).

Troy’s discovery is akin to Henry Knight’s in the famous scene from *A Pair of Blue Eyes*: struggling for his life on the edge of a cliff, he comes face to face with the fossil of a trilobite. Instead of his life flashing before him, Knight has a vision of the whole evolutionary process of living things: “The immense lapses of time each formation represented had known nothing of the dignity of man ... He was to be with the small in his death”.⁴⁴ In the post-Darwinian era, the death of man is of no more significance than the death of a mollusc. The Romantics’ beneficent Nature which “never did betray/ The heart that loved her”⁴⁵ is transformed for Hardy into an uncaring set of astronomical, geological and biological processes, an outlook which owes something to French Naturalism and Comte, as well as to the discoveries of Darwin.

⁴³ Kramer, 35.

⁴⁴ Thomas Hardy, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1995) 172.

⁴⁵ William Wordsworth, “Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey”, ll. 123- 24.

Like the Naturalists, Hardy cuts across idyllic episodes to superimpose unpleasant images of an inimical universe. When Bathsheba flees her house after her rejection by Troy, she takes refuge overnight in a nearby thicket. The appearance of the natural world reflects the changing emotions going through Bathsheba's mind, vacillating between hope and despair. The day dawns with a blaze of beauty and a sense of renewal. The birds chirrup in the trees, a passing ploughboy comically rehearses the collect, and a team of horses revels in the fine morning. To this point, the scene is a pastoral idyll where "God's in his heaven – All's right with the world!"⁴⁶ But the rising sun reveals the noisome truth that "the general aspect of the swamp was malignant. From its moist and poisonous coat seemed to be exhaled the essences of evil things in the earth" (363). Likewise, in *Abbé Mouret's Transgression*, the Eden of *Le Paradou* is invaded by a long description of fleshy plants, "a crawling, writhing mass of the hideous nameless monsters that people a nightmare".⁴⁷ In the midst of otherwise luxuriant images of sensual delight, the two passages inject a note of discord, like that creeping into the relationship between the lovers.

Bathsheba's experiences in the thicket serve a similarly symbolic purpose, associating images of death and decay in the natural world with the disintegration of her marriage. It may even be the case that she has fled to the same "hollow amid the ferns" which was the scene of the sword exercise and Bathsheba's seduction: "looking into the place, it occurred to her that she had seen it by daylight on some previous occasion ... a brake of fern, now withering fast" (232). On the previous occasion, the ferny hollow was "plump and diaphanous ... radiant in hues of clear and untainted green" (142); now the ferns are dying and the hollow seems "a nursery of pestilences small and great" (233).

⁴⁶ Robert Browning, "Pippa Passes", ll. 228-29.

⁴⁷ *AM*, 190-91.

Undermining the pathetic fallacy beloved of the Romantics, Hardy unsettles the narrative, showing that the natural world and his protagonist are subject to decay and dissolution.

Overnight, as Bathsheba lies beneath the oak and beech trees in the hollow, “red and yellow leaves” (232) settle on her clothes and hair, like the leaves “Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,/ Pestilence-stricken multitudes” in Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind”.⁴⁸ In the morning, “multitudes” of these leaves blow away, “like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing” making Hardy’s citation of Shelley explicit. In the “Ode”, Shelley’s poet is engrossed by the idea that he and his works might need to pass through a period of autumnal decay like that of the natural world around him: “What if my leaves are falling like its own!” From this natural analogy he is nevertheless able to draw an apprehensive hope that he and his poetry may undergo a renewal in their season: “If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?”⁴⁹ In Bathsheba’s case, she gains strength from her night of autumnal melancholy. Shaking off despair, she takes up the reins of her life with “a freshened existence and a cooler brain” (232).

While Hardy appears to abandon faith in a Providence that shapes the affairs of men, he maintains, in this novel at least, a humanist belief in the ability of individuals to rise above their circumstances, even when fate seems to have set against them. He shares the Naturalists’ *angst* but his metaphysical convictions are not as fixed or scientific as those of his French counterparts. His novel, lacking the bitter and unrelenting irony which prevails in French naturalist literature, accords a measure of sympathy to his idealistic lovers as they seek to realise their dreams of happiness in a fallen world. Admitting the

⁴⁸ Shelley embodies here the epic simile found in Homer, Virgil, Dante, and Milton, in which the souls of humans are compared to fallen leaves driven by the wind. See *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, eds. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002) 298, Note 2.

⁴⁹ “Ode to the West Wind”, ll. 4-5, 3, 58, 70.

harsh realities of life, Hardy does not rejoice in them: temperamentally he remains a Romantic who must come to terms with the unsatisfied longings of the human heart.

Painfully aware of the fragility of love, Hardy questions the value of legalistic forms which may inhibit or compel the emotional life. He destabilises the traditional “happy ending” of the courtship novel, questioning whether marriage may not be a source of tragedy rather than comedy. Bathsheba’s desire for independence and her ambivalence towards her three suitors have devastating consequences for several of the novel’s major players. After she is tempted into marrying Troy, Bathsheba comes to see their relationship as a form of “spoliation by marriage” (211). When Bathsheba complains to Troy, “a few weeks ago you said that I was far sweeter than all your other pleasures”, the narrator shrewdly notes that had “the woman not been his wife, Troy would have succumbed instantly” to her entreaty (208). Even when Troy first returns to Weatherbury after their clandestine marriage, he is ready to confess to Boldwood, “I love Fanny best now ... Miss Everdene inflamed me, and displaced Fanny for a time. It is over now” (178). When Troy coins the phrase “All romances end at marriage” (209), he is broaching a theme which will become, in Simon Gatrell’s words, “a Hardyian cliché”.⁵⁰

The ultimate union between Gabriel and Bathsheba is termed by the narrator a *camaraderie*, “the only love which is strong as death” (303). This evaluation of marriage seems too pat for Hardy and would at first appear to be a sop to popular opinion, especially as it is framed by a religious allusion. The reference in the Song of Solomon 8:6-7 is rather to the heat of passion than to “good-fellowship”. However, in this courtship novel that also contrives to look at what can go wrong after marriage, it may be that Bathsheba and Gabriel

⁵⁰ Simon Gatrell, Introduction, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, ed. Suzanne B. Falck-Yi (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) xix.

have a better chance of success than most, since they already know “the rougher sides of each other’s character” (303). Despite their sexual problems, Sue and Jude in *Jude the Obscure* are described as being “true comrades”;⁵¹ and if Bathsheba and Gabriel’s *camaraderie* can be “superadded to love between the sexes” (303), then the tried affection between them might defy the gloomy auguries of Poorgrass.

In a traditional pastoral romance or courtship novel, the wedding should be the culmination of joy and fulfilment after a series of trials. Bathsheba, however, can only raise a smile at the antics of the rustics gathered to congratulate her and her husband. Likewise, Adam Bede on his wedding day experiences “a tinge of sadness in his deep joy”.⁵² In both these mixed-genre novels, the happy ending is tempered by first-hand knowledge of suffering. Bathsheba’s final acquiescence has left behind it a trail of stress and destruction which is not easily forgotten. Eliot added an “Epilogue” to *Adam Bede* which portrays Adam and Dinah some years in the future as a contented couple with children. In the process, she wrapped up the loose ends of the novel, assuring readers that the virtuous end happily. Hardy’s novel has a more open ending. Poorgrass’s cryptic allusion to Hosea is to a prophet who marries a prostitute in order to illustrate to the people of Israel what “harlotry” they have been guilty of, running after foreign gods. A plausible interpretation of Poorgrass’s text, “Ephraim is joined to idols” (308; Hosea 4:17), is that Poorgrass believes Gabriel has abandoned the true faith of bachelorhood by pursuing that dangerous course, marriage.

⁵¹ *Jude the Obscure* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985) 285. The Norton edition contains a misprint of this phrase; see p. 212.

⁵² *AB*, 461.

Bathsheba, too, seems to regret relinquishing her self-reliance for someone who is certainly faithful, but somewhat lacking in “small-r” romance, “pretty phrases and warm attentions being probably unnecessary” (303) to their relationship. The reader is led to wonder whether Bathsheba, who readily succumbed to the flattery and charisma of Troy, will be satisfied with the taciturn Oak. Although Millgate identifies Gabriel as “the romantic hero”⁵³ of the novel, the abiding impression is that “Gabriel is no Prince Charming”.⁵⁴ It seems that Bathsheba has abandoned any romanticised ideas about relationships and settled for a comfortable compromise without emotional peaks or troughs.

Although *Far from the Madding Crowd* could be seen as a tragicomic rather than a tragic novel, it is worth examining the characters in detail to establish which of them best meet the criteria of tragic hero or heroine. By the end of the novel, the major characters have each gone through harrowing experiences that changed them irrevocably. Gabriel’s “pastoral tragedy” apparently robs him of all his hopes of establishing himself as an independent farmer and securing Bathsheba as his wife. Gabriel is not impervious to misfortune and feels the loss deeply: “no more seemed to be left to him. He leant down upon a rail, and covered his face with his hands” (33). Yet Gabriel is ennobled by suffering and enabled to rise above despair by his concern for others. He responds to the loss of his prospects with a thankfulness that Bathsheba has been spared: “what would *she* have done in the poverty now coming upon me!” Though chastened and saddened by his experience, Gabriel’s “ordeal of wretchedness ... had given him more than it had taken away”, leaving him with “a dignified calm” and “indifference to fate” (34). This calm and stoic indifference are his mainstays throughout the novel.

⁵³ Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist*, 93.

⁵⁴ Roy Morrell, *Thomas Hardy: The Will and the Way* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1965) 59.

Above all, Gabriel demonstrates his altruism towards others. His personal interests are “not the most absorbing and important in his eyes”: he can look “meditatively ... upon the horizon of circumstances without any special regard to his own standpoint in the midst” (226). He actively cares for Bathsheba’s interests, looking after her flock and saving the ricks from damage in the storm. He exhorts Bathsheba to treat Boldwood with “true loving-kindness” (106), even though such advice runs counter to his own chances of happiness. Oak’s altruism may arise from a Christian faith or morality: Gabriel attends church and he prays, in contradistinction to some of Hardy’s later idealists, whose altruism is based on humanism or Comtean Positivism. Hardy’s plea for altruism or loving-kindness grows more prominent as his criticisms of Christianity become more overt, without ever fully aligning him with the systematic ethics of Comte or J.S. Mill.

Yet Gabriel’s acceptance of life’s reverses falls short of the will to “take arms against a sea of troubles”,⁵⁵ something stolid in his calm makes it questionable whether he has the stature of a tragic hero. If all Hardy’s characters were as indifferent as Gabriel is to his fate, we would not have the rich pageant of individuals who “struggle weakly under the empty Wessex sky, hope and pray, clench fists and curse, fight and fall”.⁵⁶ Despite having a “special virtue and dignity”⁵⁷ worthy of a hero, Gabriel’s response to misfortune is too prosaic to make him tragic. Again, Gabriel does not suffer a sudden fall from an elevated position; after his initial setback, his history is of a gradual rise to financial and marital good fortune. Nor is there a tragic flaw or *hamartia* in Gabriel except perhaps for an

⁵⁵ *Hamlet* III. i. 59.

⁵⁶ Jadish Chandra Dave, *The Human Predicament in Hardy’s Novels* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1985) 17.

⁵⁷ Clifford Leech, *Tragedy* (London: Methuen, 1972) 38.

awkwardness and reticence which prevents others from recognising his true worth, his virtues as “metal in a mine” (147).

To judge by appearances, Sergeant Troy is a candidate for tragic status. The natural son of a lord, he has a certain “nobility of blood” (130), a crest and a motto – “Love yields to circumstance” (138) – and the look of a gentleman. The sword exercises display his physical powers, daring and potential courage as a man of action. He sweeps Bathsheba off her feet in a whirl of passion, goes missing in what appears to be a suicide bid, and meets his end in what might appear a lovers’ quarrel. Although Troy’s class position is rendered ambiguous by his illegitimacy, he adopts all the mannerisms of class superiority. He also undergoes a dramatic (but again ambiguous) fall when he disappears and is believed dead, possibly having killed himself for love.

Tragic heroes are traditionally persons of elevated status and noble character who possess a tragic flaw, but Troy has too many to be a tragic figure. Rather than aspiring to a higher form of life, he “wasted his gifted lot” (130) and enlisted as a common soldier. By birth and career, he has more in common with such Shakespearean villains as the illegitimate Edmund or the army ensign, Iago. He does not elicit pity in the reader for his redeeming features. Rather than having a highly-developed consciousness, Troy demonstrates “a certain narrowing of the higher tastes and sensations” (131). Both a liar and a “trickster” (174), he tries to manipulate circumstances to his advantage, unlike the hero who struggles against the odds. Lacking firmness or resolve, he lives down to, rather than up to, the family motto of “yielding to circumstance”. When his betrothed, Fanny, mistakes the location of the church, Troy abandons his first plan of marrying her, allowing the bruise to his vanity to take precedence over his responsibilities. The narrator describes

him as a “person with much animal spirit” (243) who lives only for the moment. Unlike Oedipus or Hamlet, haunted by the past and fearful of the future, Troy does not look before or after.

Only after Fanny’s death is Troy faced with the realisation of his faults: “I have been a bad, black-hearted man” (231). He is unmanned and, for the first time in his life, gives up his sanguine confidence that things will turn out well for him. Troy has a moment of *anagnorisis* (self-recognition) but lacks the strength of character to reverse his course. When Troy purchases an elaborate tombstone and then plants an abundance of flowers on Fanny’s grave, the “futility of these romantic doings” is soon revealed. He has been motivated by “a remorseful reaction” (240) rather than by true repentance. When irksome fate rears its head in the form of a “gargoyle” that ruins the grave flowers, Troy is devastated: “the merest opposition had disheartened him” (244). Troy’s romanticised idea of himself as the “hero of his story” (243) is subverted by a random occurrence, which he interprets as “Providence” jeering at his first attempt to change his way of life (244). Troy’s self-image as a hero of romance is shallow and egotistical. Despite the violence of his end, Troy’s death is not tragic. Rather than a tragic waste, he has received his just deserts.

The victim of her former fiancé’s indifference, Fanny Robin dies giving birth to Troy’s child. Her death occurs under tragic circumstances and evokes pity, but is she therefore a tragic heroine? Fanny lacks the perspicacity to penetrate the motives of others and the self-knowledge that might have saved her. She neither foresees nor fights against the inevitability of her lot. Boldwood’s despairing assessment of her is “A silly girl – silly girl!” (89). Her excruciating journey on foot into Casterbridge borders on the melodramatic, especially the detail of the dog that supports her passage. Only her death elevates Fanny

above the commonplace: “The one feat alone ... by which a mean condition could be resolved into a grand one, Fanny had achieved” (228).

Added to this, “destiny” had “so shaped [events] as to chariot her” into the marital home of Bathsheba and Troy, which for Bathsheba had “turned her companion’s failure to success, her humiliation to triumph, her lucklessness to ascendancy” (228). Fanny unwittingly bests her rival, Troy declaring his true feelings were for Fanny, not his lawful wife. The beloved is never so desired as when inaccessible, particularly when separated by the chasm of death. Hardy often admits to this irony, as in the “Poems of 1912-13”, a lament to the memory of his first wife. Whereas Troy cast off Fanny’s devotion when she was alive, in death he treats her with “remorse and reverence” (230), and acclaims her his true wife “in the sight of Heaven” (231).

Bathsheba’s situation is compared and contrasted to Fanny’s. She too has been won over by Troy’s charms, and in different senses both become his “wife”. With regard to Troy, the usually perceptive and self-reliant Bathsheba becomes “a silly woman” as Fanny has been a “silly girl”: “I don’t know what I am doing since this miserable ache o’ my heart has weighted and worn upon me so” (154). Ironically, Bathsheba wonders to herself if she is “doomed to die in the Union”, not knowing that this fate is reserved for her rival, Fanny. Even Troy is surprised at the “unexpected revelation of all women being alike at heart, even those so different in their accessories as Fanny and ... his proud wife” (230-31). Bathsheba comes to see their histories as in parallel: “this woman is your victim; and I not less than she” (231). Fanny is Bathsheba’s alter ego, the woman Bathsheba might have become, were it not for inheriting the lease on Weatherbury Upper Farm and thereby achieving a level of self-determination. Fanny’s ruin and destruction are the mirror-image

of Bathsheba's marriage and apparent success. Fanny's corpse exiting on the brightly-coloured spring wagon covered with greenery (213) parallels Bathsheba's entry, seated on a "gaily marked" spring wagon "laden with household goods and window plants" (9).

The scene recalls the medieval mystery plays enacted on festival days, or Elizabethan pageants also performed on a cart or pageant moved about the city to entertain and instruct the populace. As William Leahy notes, this idea of pageantry "developed rapidly, drawing from folk, from history, from romance, the Bible, saint's legend and the tournament".⁵⁸ The kind of royal pageants which Leahy chronicles were royal processions, emphasising Elizabeth I's centrality as head of state and church. Bathsheba's symbolic entry into the novel also establishes her as a symbol of female power and self-determination, like the Virgin Queen who was either represented in "typically pastoral" pageants or was paraded through London "in a chair held by four personages representing a virtue".⁵⁹

Moral allegory as a component of the mystery plays developed to the point where in Elizabethan London, personifications of vice or virtue were drawn through the streets enthroned on wagons.⁶⁰ These personifications could include the Seven Deadly Sins, among which was "Vainglory", the modern equivalent of Vanity. The main precedent for the scene with Bathsheba atop her wagon is found in the seventeenth-century Emblem Books, collections of illustrated devotional and moralistic epigrams. In Francis Quarles's *Emblemes*, the figure of a female looking in her glass was the emblem of Self-Conceit or

⁵⁸ William Leahy, *Elizabethan Triumphal Processions* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) 8.

⁵⁹ Leahy, 88, 108.

⁶⁰ Over time, these Elizabethan entertainments became debased into more rustic displays. The allegorical personification of vice and virtue became reduced in folk tradition to satirical processions like the skimmington-ride in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Effigies of townspeople were paraded throughout the streets to mock or shame marital infidelity or abuse.

Vanity. The epigram above the picture reads, “Let him not that is deceived trust in vanity, for vanity shall be his recompense” (Job 15:31).⁶¹ Yet Hardy uses the emblem book not moralistically but for the psychological perspectives it offers on his characters.

When Bathsheba looks into her mirror, she imagines “likely dramas in which men would play a part” (55). Her careless dismissal of Gabriel’s kindness indicates that he is to be the first of a number of “hearts ... lost and won” (10). She is already exerting her queenly power over Gabriel, who tries to resist it by interpreting the scene as he would an engraving in an emblem book. After this first meeting, Oak describes Bathsheba’s chief fault of “Vanity” (11). While the narrator seems to be more sympathetic to this minor weakness, noting that “she blushed at herself” (9), it may be that vanity is the *hamartia* or tragic flaw which lies at the heart of Bathsheba’s tragedy. She displays vanity when she admits “I shouldn’t mind being a bride at a wedding ... But since a woman can’t show off in that way by herself, I shan’t marry” (28). Vanity causes Bathsheba to be piqued by Boldwood’s initial indifference, and leads to her girlish error in sending him a valentine. Vanity makes her susceptible to Troy’s “winning tongue”, just as Gabriel’s “want of tact” (23) and failure to flatter provoke her to reject him as a suitor. Wounded vanity prompts her pursuit of Troy to Bath, although she is also goaded by jealousy at the thought of being usurped by a rival.

By warning of the folly of mirror-gazing – “Believe her not: Her Glasse diffuses/ False Portraits ... She flatters”⁶² – the emblem of Vanity underlines the theme of deceptive visuality in the novel. Yet while the looking-glass may lie and flatter,

⁶¹ Francis Quarles, *Emblemes* (1635) 84 <<http://emblem.libraries.psu.edu/quarles.html>>.

⁶² Quarles, 85.

Bathsheba's moment of true revelation comes when she looks into Fanny's coffin. There she sees a mirror-image of herself in Fanny. Bathsheba sees what she could have become if their situations had been reversed. The disagreeable picture of herself as a victim of Troy's flattery and deception disabuses her of any remaining delusions about Troy and his motivations for marrying her. Her unsparing search for truth provides Bathsheba with a greater understanding both of herself and of others.

This strength of character transforms Bathsheba into a tragic heroine, not just another victim of Troy's. She possesses an independence of spirit which sets her apart from other women in the novel. Liddy comments that Bathsheba "would be a match for any man" (155). She undertakes to manage the farm without a bailiff. She enters the Corn Exchange to bargain on an equal footing with the men. A strong character in many ways, her womanly weakness is betrayed by her passion for Troy: "Bathsheba loved Troy in the way that only self-reliant women love when they abandon their self-reliance" (147). Her wilful blindness with regard to Troy's character leads to tragic consequences. She, like Fanny, has been seduced by Troy, perhaps physically as well as emotionally, judging by the imagery of the sword-exercise scene. Unlike Fanny, she has the self-possession to take the lead in asking Troy to marry her, and the wealth, position and personal attractions to tempt Troy to agree. Like Fanny, she is seduced and abandoned, but escapes social ostracism because her abandonment occurs *after* marriage. Troy cruelly annuls their relationship, praising Fanny's submissive nature over Bathsheba's "will – not to say ... temper" (180).

Bathsheba is ennobled by her suffering and the self-knowledge, as well as the concern for others, gained through her experiences. As the narrator comments, "Capacity for intense feeling is proportionate to the general intensity of the nature, and perhaps in all

Fanny's sufferings ... there never was a time when she suffered in an absolute sense what Bathsheba suffered now" (230). It is her empathy with Fanny in her coffin that is brought to an "absolute" climax of suffering when Troy discovers his two "wives" together and declares his love for Fanny to Bathsheba's face. Fanny has suffered blindly and unquestioningly whereas Bathsheba experiences a greater, self-aware anguish. Troy's ultimate rejection of her as his wife draws from her lips "a long, low cry of measureless despair and indignation" (231) which is linked to Christ's death-cry, "It is finished". That Bathsheba does not let herself decline into despair and death is another mark of her difference from Fanny. Despite the intensity of her suffering, she is able to rise above her circumstances and regain her power of self-determination.

Although Bathsheba can be seen as a Romantic in her strong emotions and her tendency to idealise the object of her love, Sergeant Troy, she is also a Romantic figure by reason of her self-generated values, values which inspire her to go beyond conventional expectations. Despite Gabriel's attempts to shield her from knowledge of Fanny's child, she prefers to pursue the truth no matter how terrible. She faces down her fears and the expectations of her household servants and removes the coffin lid. Bathsheba's *anagnorisis* transforms her from a girl, subject to the whim of her emotions, to a woman in full possession of her thoughts and actions. Despite the enormity of the revelation and the consequences for her marriage, Bathsheba maintains, "It was best to know the worst, and I know it now!" (228). Her words would be echoed in Hardy's poem "In Tenebris": "if way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst".⁶³ As a novelist, Hardy explores the depths of suffering as well as the heights of Romantic possibility. Bathsheba's search

⁶³ "In Tenebris II", l. 14, *CP*, 168.

for the truth, even though the truth brings home to her the foolishness of her decision to marry and the true character of her wayward husband, is like Oedipus' search for the cause of the pestilence visited upon his subjects.

Hardy's treatment of this scene is striking both from a stylistic point of view and also from a social perspective. The build-up to the opening of the coffin is reminiscent of a sensation novel in the use of its Gothic conventions. It is late at night and dark; Bathsheba is alone in a rambling old house, its architectural features described as "still retaining traces of their Gothic extraction" (59); there are hints of a disturbing family secret; the heroine acts like one in a trance, "quivering with emotion", viewing her own actions as being performed "by one in an extravagant dream" (228). Instead of the revelation of Fanny's maternity bursting upon her in a shocking way, Bathsheba is brought to an unexpected stillness, taken aback by the beauty and peace of the mother and child resting together in the coffin. There is a Madonna-and-child quality to Hardy's description which takes Bathsheba away from her immediate concerns into a mood of contemplation.

To gain the full sense of Hardy's reverential portrait, it is necessary to revert to his autograph manuscript of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, since Leslie Stephen was, as Millgate establishes in his biography, "anxious to be on the safe side" and would have been "glad to omit the baby"⁶⁴ from the serial version of the novel. Hardy's descriptions of mother and child were not restored until the 1993 Oxford World's Classics edition. Similarly, seeking to spare Bathsheba from any "immediate anguish", Oak undertook his own crude form of censorship when he rubbed out the last two words of the chalk writing on the coffin, "*Fanny Robin and child*", leaving visible "*Fanny Robin*" only (224).

⁶⁴ Millgate, *Biography*, 160.

The baby itself is described in terms borrowed from Charles Lamb's "On an Infant Dying as Soon as Born": "A curious frame of Nature's work ... A flow'ret crushed in the bud/ A nameless piece of Babyhood".⁶⁵ The quotation from this sub-Wordsworthian poem⁶⁶ evokes pity and a sense of wonder for the baby, which has, as Wordsworth would say, entered the world "trailing clouds of glory ... from God".⁶⁷ Lamb's lines serve to distract the reader from any negative connotations of illegitimacy, focussing instead on its purity and innocence. The baby's cheeks and little fists remind Bathsheba, incongruously to the modern reader, of "the soft convexity of mushrooms on a dewy morning". The image balances mortal decay with a hint of regeneration.

The same approach is taken to Fanny, whose hands "acquired a preternatural refinement ... fellows of those marvellous hands which must have served as originals to Bellini". The Venetian painter was renowned for the serenity and tenderness of his Madonna paintings. The analogy elevates Fanny to an icon of motherhood rather than recalling her circumstances, those of a ruined servant girl: "The youth and fairness of both the silent ones withdrew from the scene all associations of a repulsive kind". Also withdrawn is censure of an unmarried mother; in death Fanny is "a childlike, nesh young thing" (224), by nature "interesting" rather than "frightful".⁶⁸

Hardy's treatment of the unmarried mother draws on but goes beyond his folk and literary predecessors. The theme of the abandoned woman is a common one in

⁶⁵ Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, ed. Rosemarie Morgan (London: Penguin, 2003) 259, hereafter referred to in the form "Morgan edn". This edition uses Hardy's holograph manuscript and contains scenes deleted from the first volume editions.

⁶⁶ This quotation from "On an Infant Dying as soon as Born" is taken from Charles Lamb, *Poetical Works* (1836) 184. It is likely, however, that Hardy would have first read Lamb's poem in F.T. Palgrave's *Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics*, an influential anthology that encouraged the Victorian taste for the Romantic poets.

⁶⁷ "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood", ll. 64-65.

⁶⁸ Morgan edn, 259, 260.

seventeenth-century ballads such as “The Seeds of Love”, the song sung by Poorgrass about a young girl’s betrayal by “false young men”.⁶⁹ Bathsheba’s rendition of “The Banks of Allan Water” has a similarly prophetic role in the novel, looking forward to her own and Fanny’s plight: “a beautiful maiden loses her heart to a soldier in springtime, grieves over the falsity of his ‘winning tongue’ in summertime, ‘smil’d no more’ in autumn, and by wintertime is lying in her grave”.⁷⁰

Wordsworth was the Romantic poet who, for Hardy and George Eliot, exemplified in his *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) how folk songs and ballads about wronged women could be elevated into literary form. Although he demonstrates compassion for women forsaken by their lovers, Wordsworth is drawn to recreate extreme cases, “instances of dissolution, by nature frightful”.⁷¹ In the ballad, “The Cruel Mother”, the baby rises from the dead to confront the murderer, his mother. In Wordsworth’s reworking of this traditional ballad, “The Thorn”, Martha Ray has descended into madness after her lover deserted her and her infant has died. Her isolation and confusion make it uncertain whether the baby died of natural causes or was (as recounted in “The Cruel Mother”) killed by the deranged mother. While the narrator’s personal encounter with Martha leads him to question the rural community’s ostracism of her, Wordsworth’s focus is on the depression and extreme emotions aroused by Martha’s abandonment, as it is in a similar lyrical ballad, “The Mad Mother”. George Eliot also draws on similar seduction songs in *Adam Bede*. While to some extent sympathetic, Eliot tends to take a moralistic tone, representing Hetty Sorrel as an egotistical, foolish girl whose vanity contributes to her demise. Hetty’s attempt to hide

⁶⁹ Cecil J. Sharp, *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions*, 4th ed. (Wakefield: EP, 1972) 186-7.

⁷⁰ See Note 3 to Chapter XXII, Morgan edn, 372.

⁷¹ Morgan edn, 260.

her shame by killing her baby, whether by deliberate choice or in a fit of post-natal depression, again recalls both Wordsworth and the traditional ballads.

Hardy's depiction of mother and child as beautiful and natural in life as in death, inviting pity and identification on the part of a socially advantaged woman, was mounting a challenge to middle-class moral conventions. The coffin scene is a precursor of Hardy's later scene, in which Tess Durbeyfield walks in the woods during her pregnancy, feeling like a "figure of Guilt intruding into the haunts of Innocence", although the only statute Tess had broken was the "accepted social law".⁷² Again Hardy was questioning the social discrimination which imposed humiliation on women who had already suffered an injustice. Hardy's sympathetic treatment of a "fallen woman", primarily a challenge to Victorian morality, also questions the grimly pessimistic outlook of French Naturalism. The portrayal of Fanny and her child's beauty interrogates Zola's determinism, a fictional philosophy which would not have allowed Fanny to rise above her sordid circumstances.

Rather than an emotional or moral reflex, Bathsheba displays graciousness and independence in the face of the devastating revelation of Troy's seduction and abandonment of Fanny. Her tending Fanny's body before burial, and her tending the grave after, indicate a new level of maturity, an ability to rise above jealousy and anger. Although she now has incontrovertible proof of "compromised honour, forestalment, eclipse in maternity by another" (230), Bathsheba has gone beyond personal vanity. She has shunned any exactment of revenge on the dead rival and surrounded her with flowers to atone for any former vindictive feelings.

⁷² *Tess*, 67.

By caring for Fanny, then Troy, after their deaths, Bathsheba resembles Oedipus' daughter, Antigone, who defies caution and steps outside the law to ensure she pays due piety to her dead. After Troy is shot, Bathsheba's calm and self-control are astonishing to all around her. Even though, by law, Bathsheba has no right to remove her husband's body, she takes Troy back to her house and prepares him for burial, mirroring Antigone's determination to pay the respect due to her brother, Polynices. The surgeon is amazed, commenting that this "mere girl ... must have the nerve of a stoic!" (293), linking her with Gabriel and his capacity to endure: "Deeds of endurance which are ordinary in philosophy are rare in conduct" (291). Bathsheba's strong will and compassion raise her to the level of a tragic heroine, a queenly figure whose position does not depend on her worldly goods. Yet the "superhuman strain" (293) involved in maintaining self-control leaves her weakened and wishing for another death, her own.

In this longing she mirrors Boldwood – both "sitting in their respective homes in gloomy and sad seclusion" (254) – and might have remained a similarly reserved and isolated figure after Troy's disappearance. Bathsheba and Boldwood are a better match than would first appear. Both have passionate natures beneath a veneer of reserve – "Boldwood was, in vehemence and glow, nearly her own self rendered into another sex" (160) – but their passions are awakened by different objects. Whereas Boldwood is roused by the prospect of an ideal love, a passion which has little physical component, Bathsheba is swept off her feet by the powerful physicality of Troy, then won over by his flattery. According to the narrator, young, vain women like Bathsheba always want to be praised for their beauty and, despite their claims to independence, to be dominated by a man. As a suitor,

Boldwood is remote and diffident, faults compounded by his “fatal omission” of never once telling Bathsheba she is beautiful (130).

In his portrait of Boldwood Hardy explores the depths a lover may suffer for the sake of love. Although the influence of Shelley is not as prominent in this novel as in Hardy’s later fiction, in Boldwood Hardy describes a Shelleyan lover, someone for whom an ideal vision of the beloved becomes a dominant passion, enough to lead him into folly and obsession, madness and tragedy. Before Bathsheba, Boldwood has been oblivious to women’s attempts to court him: “Never was such a hopeless man for a woman!” (62). It is rumoured that Boldwood suffered “some bitter disappointment when he was a young man and merry”. Bathsheba at first refuses to credit that the strait-laced bachelor could have been jilted by a woman – “’tis the men who jilt us” – but the thought has a certain appeal for her: “’tis more romantic to think he has been served cruelly”. Imagining Boldwood as a tortured Shelleyan youth piques Bathsheba’s curiosity and prompts her to dispatch the ill-fated valentine. She remarks to Liddy, “He’s an interesting man – don’t you think so?” (76).

The hints of Boldwood’s passionate nature enable a hypothetical profile to be constructed of his sexual history. The first time we meet Boldwood he has come to the neighbouring farm to enquire after Fanny Robin. Bathsheba wonders, as should the reader, why Fanny is his concern. Liddy’s explanation – “as she had no friends in her childhood, he took her and put her to school, and got her her place here under your uncle” (62) – gives a history rather than an explanation of Boldwood’s interest. Even after Fanny’s death, it is Boldwood who undertakes to take charge of her body. Liddy puts his concern down to his

being a “very kind man”, and yet there are no other instances in the novel of Boldwood demonstrating a disinterested benevolence.

When Gabriel receives a letter concerning Fanny’s hopes for marriage, he passes it on to Boldwood to read, acknowledging the latter’s concern for Fanny Robin. Boldwood is much grieved by the news, exclaiming “Fanny – poor Fanny! ... I have much doubt if ever little Fanny will surprise us in the way she mentions” (89). Why should someone who, apparently, takes little interest in affairs of the heart jump to the conclusion that Fanny’s suitor will not marry her? His emotion-charged intuition and use of the expression “little Fanny” are in keeping with a parental interest. His detailed knowledge of Troy’s background and activities shows a greater than normal concern for Fanny’s welfare. Either he has gained his information from Fanny or he has made it his business to find out more about this suitor of Fanny’s.

The implication remains that Fanny is a love child, the offspring of a clandestine affair. When Boldwood catches up with Troy it is the problem of Fanny he addresses first: “I know a good deal concerning your – Fanny Robin’s attachment to you ... You ought to marry her” (176). Surprisingly he adds, “I don’t wish to enter into the questions of right or wrong, woman’s honour and shame, or to express any opinion on your conduct” (177). Apparently a past seducer himself, subject to fits of passion, Boldwood apparently sees something of himself in Troy and is unwilling, at this point, to pass judgement on him. Boldwood’s offer to settle a sum of money on Fanny, an irregular arrangement for a man with a reputation for financial propriety, becomes more plausible if it is the act of a concerned parent prepared to secure his daughter’s future by the offer of a dowry. The idea

of offering such a dowry to Troy would be likely to occur to a father used to paying maintenance for a child born out of wedlock.

The issue of illegitimacy thus emerges as a hidden sub-text to the narrative. Just as Leslie Stephen censored Hardy's manuscript, eliminating any direct references to Fanny's baby, so Hardy, sharing Stephen's anxiety "to be on the safe side", self-bowdlerised reference to Fanny's paternity. Boldwood himself has apparently suppressed local knowledge of his love child, so that only whispered rumours of an earlier heartbreak remain. The offspring of a clandestine affair, Fanny then falls prey to her seducer and gives birth to another illegitimate child. While any reference to hereditary influence has been buried in the text, there is a deterministic aspect to Fanny's unhappy fate. That Fanny should end as she does is reminiscent of Zola's *Rougon-Macquart* series in which each new generation perpetuates the failings of the one before. The uncovering of Boldwood's amorous past reflects Hardy's ability to achieve many of his desired effects without transgressing the bounds of the 1857 Obscene Publications Act. While giving ostensible consent to the bowdlerising of his novel by Stephen, he subtly destabilises the apparently inoffensive text by implanting clues which point to a more subversive novel.

If Boldwood is viewed as the likely father of Fanny, his scenes with Troy take on a sharpened significance and irony. Boldwood's desperate efforts to buy off Troy and make him marry Fanny fail miserably, Troy seeming to take his money at first, then taunting him to the point where Boldwood believes he must choose whether to save Fanny or Bathsheba from this vile trickster. Having failed to extricate Fanny from her hopeless situation, Boldwood suffers the humiliation of believing he must sacrifice his own hopes of matrimony so that Bathsheba can marry the worthless Troy. Learning that he is too late to

realise either of his schemes, on the one hand of saving Fanny from being ruined by Troy, and on the other of saving Bathsheba from a man he is sure will be her ruin, Boldwood is driven towards suicidal or even homicidal despair. His final words to Troy, “mark me, I’ll punish you yet!” (182), are prophetic.

At the time of Bathsheba’s arrival at Weatherbury Farm, Boldwood is living the life of a confirmed bachelor, his wild oats swept under the carpet. His parlour has the atmosphere “of a Puritan Sunday lasting all the week” (80). His arrangements are monk-like: the stables are “his almonry and cloister in one” where “the celibate would walk and meditate of an evening”; but, it is suggested, this apparent stillness is the result of the “perfect balance of enormous antagonistic forces”. Boldwood is a tense, inwardly conflicted personality, in whom powerful restraint represses a passionate nature; his equilibrium disturbed, he is “in extremity at once” (95). While he appears to be remote and enigmatic, it is “possible to form guesses concerning his wild capabilities from old floodmarks faintly visible”, though none have seen him “at the high tides which caused them” (96). Bathsheba will be shocked to discover the “astounding wells of fevered feeling in a still man” (161). References to monastic celibacy suggest a quasi-religious guilt and remorse. Boldwood walks with lowered gaze, as if wishing to keep apart from others, from women in particular. Piqued by Boldwood’s indifference, Bathsheba lights on the valentine as a ploy to “upset the solemnity of a parson and clerk too” (79), and her heedless missive upsets his precarious equilibrium: “If an emotion possessed him at all, it ruled him ... He was always hit mortally, or he was missed” (95). In a tragic irony, Liddy predicts that Boldwood will “worry to death” (79) upon receiving the valentine.

During the three months it takes Boldwood to pluck up the courage to speak to Bathsheba, the Shelleyan lover in Boldwood feels “the symmetry of his existence” being “distorted in the direction of an ideal passion” (80). The “great aids to idealization in love were present here: occasional observation of her from a distance, and the absence of social intercourse with her” and hence the “pettinesses that enter so largely into all earthly living and doing were disguised”. These factors contributed to Bathsheba’s undergoing a “sort of apotheosis” in his fancy (98). Boldwood romanticises Bathsheba according to the chivalric tradition where courtly lovers worshipped their ladies from afar as on a pedestal of virtue. Why she has to be set at such a chaste remove from Boldwood himself is evident: to fall twice would reduce the lover himself to the level of a common seducer, a Frank Troy.

At the sheep-fair, Boldwood places Bathsheba on a literal pedestal, “enthroned alone in this place of honour, against a scarlet background” (262). He idealises her as the cynosure of feminine virtue, perhaps not only to guarantee the propriety of his own behaviour but to make a symbolic restitution to Fanny’s mother. After Troy’s disappearance, Boldwood seems excited by the prospect of waiting six years to wed Bathsheba, by the “intangible ethereal courtship” this will allow. It gives him the opportunity to display the immutability of his passion: “this patience in delay would afford him an opportunity of giving sweet proof on the point” (256-57). He relishes comparing himself to Jacob, who worked fourteen years to prove himself worthy of Rachel (Genesis 29:15 - 30:15).

Boldwood “read all the dramas of life seriously” and is therefore not surprised “when they chanced to end tragically”. Yet such a reading blinds him to the comic dimensions of existence: “He saw no absurd sides to the follies of life” by being so fully

“acquainted with grief” (96). The biblical phrasing suggests Boldwood is a Christ-like figure, “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). Is Boldwood then a type of scapegoat who sacrifices himself for the woman he loves? By killing Troy, he selflessly saves Bathsheba from the mistakes of her past and takes the punishment upon himself. In his impulsive shooting of Troy in a moment of madness, Boldwood is a little like Tess who, pushed beyond her limits, kills her seducer and takes the punishment upon her own head.

Boldwood, however, is doomed never to find peace. Habits of self-denial and abstinence give him no solace. He cannot escape from the “fond madness” (254) that has so long ruled his existence. When Troy emerges dramatically from the darkness at the Christmas party, Boldwood sees him as “the impersonator of Heaven’s persistent irony towards him”. His reason shattered by “gnashing despair” (289), he attempts suicide, then looks forward to his execution as an equally satisfactory end. Even his hope of death is thwarted by the efforts of Gabriel and others, who have his sentence commuted to life imprisonment. For Boldwood this commutes the release of death to a life of torment. Locked and tortured in the prison of his frustrated desires and intentions, he leaves Bathsheba free to marry the placid and dependable Oak.

A tragic idealist, who would prefer death to the pain of a broken heart, Boldwood is “deeper and higher and stronger in feeling than Gabriel” (226), this intensity of feeling betraying him to tragic despair. Gabriel by contrast is able to accept his rejection more stoically. It is possible here to identify Hardy’s inheritance from the Romantic poets, like Shelley and Keats, who placed a high value on desire and the aspiration to a higher existence. For Ronald Draper, Keats’s legacy to Hardy was the hard-won truth of the odes,

that neither pleasure nor pain held the truth of human existence, but an elevated consciousness, “that ‘bitter-sweet’ experience which converts the ‘melancholy fit’ into tragedy”.⁷³

While Bathsheba emerges as the main character who undergoes what Jones describes as “the pattern of ‘learning through suffering’ that George Eliot so favoured”,⁷⁴ her triumph over her own state is muted. Through her experiences with Troy and Fanny, Bathsheba becomes more aware of the needs of others and is cured of any tendency to vanity. She meets her reverses with a stoic calm, and then settles for marriage with Gabriel, a working partnership lacking in glamour. If Bathsheba is the classical tragic heroine of the novel, Boldwood is the Romantic tragic hero. His suffering intensified by excess of sensibility, Boldwood rather than Bathsheba seems to be given the palm as the more tragic protagonist in this mixed-genre novel: “The most tragic woman is cowed by a tragic man” (160). Unable to put his experiences into perspective, his idealised passion for Bathsheba pushes Boldwood into madness and despair, not unlike the Madman in Shelley’s “Julian and Maddalo”. Unshakeable in his obsession, he is apparently oblivious to those around him until that moment when he recognises Bathsheba’s suffering and pulls the trigger of the rifle. Instead of a cathartic deliverance, this act converts his existence into a grinding horror.

Far from the Madding Crowd can thus be seen as an example of “genre-crossing”,⁷⁵ ranging freely between the parameters of both realism and romance to produce a novel replete with tragic possibilities. Taken from Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country

⁷³ R.P. Draper, ed., *Tragedy: Developments in Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1980) 209.

⁷⁴ Jones, 417.

⁷⁵ Rosemarie Morgan, Introduction, *Far from the Madding Crowd* (London: Penguin, 2003) xxx.

Churchyard”, the title comes to seem powerfully ironic: the rural setting is no pastoral retreat from the demands of modern life.⁷⁶ As Rosemarie Morgan points out, Hardy’s “microcosmic world is no less subject to ‘ignoble strife’ than any other”.⁷⁷ The concentrated strife of a confined rural community will be again exploited in Hardy’s next excursion into tragedy, *The Return of the Native*.

⁷⁶ In the milder irony of Gray’s “Elegy”, those furthest from the “madding crowd’s ignoble strife” (l. 73) are the dead in the country churchyard.

⁷⁷ Morgan edn, 394.

CHAPTER 2: *The Return of the Native*

Never mind what is — let us only look at what seems. (162)¹

In the first chapter of *The Woodlanders*, the setting is described as “one of those sequestered spots outside the gates of the world”, at first glance a place of inaction. And yet this rural scene (though “far from the madding crowd”) has the potential for “drama of a grandeur and unity truly Sophoclean ... by virtue of the concentrated passions and closely-knit interdependence of the lives therein”.² Hardy’s preoccupation with rural isolation, outdoors but almost claustrophobic, adds pressure to the rising action of *The Return of the Native*. While the restrictions of the setting conform to the Greek conventions for tragedy, the evocation of the Heath focusses the passions of the inhabitants in a way which is more Hardyan than Sophoclean. The setting itself is almost another player in the drama: the fact that the whole first chapter of the novel is devoted to a description of Egdon Heath not only sets the scene but alerts the reader to the role that the Heath will play in the dénouement. D.H. Lawrence described it as the “great, tragic power” in the novel.³

From the first, the stage is set for tragedy. The Heath has “a lonely face, suggesting tragical possibilities” (4). It is a landscape in keeping with a Darwinian, post-Romantic world. As Hardy was to comment in 1887, “I want to see the deeper reality underlying the scenic ... the ‘simply natural’ is interesting no longer”. Beauty in nature, the province of the Romantic poets, is seen as belonging to an earlier phase in man’s development “when the mind is serene and unawakened to the tragical mysteries

¹ Unless otherwise noted, parenthetical references are to *The Return of the Native*, ed. James Gordin (New York: Norton, 1969); hereafter critical articles included in the edition are referred to using the cue-title “RN”.

² *The Woodlanders*, 8.

³ Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy*, 25.

of life”.⁴ Clym, a modern thinker whose natural good looks are marred by “an inner strenuousness” (109), seems to be at one with the Heath, “permeated with its scenes, with its substance, and with its odours” (137). For this “native”, the sombre face of the Heath is in keeping with his world-weary sensibility.

In addition to its melancholic face, the Heath has an older, darker side: “The great inviolate place had an ancient permanence” (5) oblivious to the human drama playing out before it, “A Face on Which Time Makes But Little Impression” (2). The emphasis on the prehistoric aspects of the Heath drives home forcefully the power and vastness of the insentient landscape in contrast to its inhabitants. Likewise the geological aeons it takes for the landscape to change dwarf the span of human life. The struggle of one such life for fulfilment seems insignificant on the scale of millions of life-forms struggling through the millennia to survive in this forbidding landscape.

Hardy invokes classical myth to create a sense of brooding timeless power. Egdon is described as having a “Titanic form”, the Titans being an ancient race of earth-gods superseded by the pantheon of Olympian sky-gods, a race still capable of rearing up to disturb the Olympian order before their “final overthrow” (3). The idea of a chthonic presence is summoned up in mythological terms when the Heath at night is likened to a “Tartarean situation” (27). John Paterson points out that Mrs Yeobright and Olly Dowden’s night walk down from Rainbarrow is described as a descent into Tartarus, the gloomy classical underworld in which Zeus imprisoned the Titans.⁵ Yet to describe the living as already in hell is also a modernist strategy – witness Part 1 of T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*.

Hardy’s drawing on classical allusions works to translate the atmospherics of high tragedy to the novel form. He also preserves the structural conventions of Greek

⁴ *LIFE*, 185.

⁵ John Paterson, “The ‘Poetics’ of *The Return of the Native*”, *Modern Fiction Studies* 6 (1960): 216.

and Roman drama. Originally the action was to have been contained within five books, like the five acts of Senecan tragedy.⁶ In addition, Hardy sought out equivalents for the dramatic unities of time and place. Unable to restrict his novel to the compass of a single day, he nevertheless alludes to the unity of time by delimiting the action to the framework of a year and a day. The unity of place is gestured to, as has been noted, by enclosing the action within the confines of the Heath, a presence which overshadows the human drama played out around it and contributes to what Joseph Beach calls the “unity of tone”.⁷

The epigraph of Hardy’s second major novel comes from “The Song of the Indian Maid” in *Endymion*:

To sorrow
I bade good morrow,
And thought to leave her far away behind;
But cheerly, cheerly
She loves me dearly;
She is so constant and so kind.
I would deceive her.
And so leave her,
But ah! She is so constant and so kind.⁸

Read in the context of Act IV of Keats’s romance, the stanza refers to the pursuit of the ideal which, because it can never be fulfilled, requires the Romantic to accept melancholic defeat as essential to embracing the human condition. This excerpt bodes ill for the Keatsian protagonist, Endymion, at least at the point he first catches sight of the Maid and sees her as a sacrilegious distraction from his pursuit of the Moon-Goddess. Likewise the epigraph is ominous for Hardy’s love duo: Clym is caught up in a principled, abstract love for his fellow-man, but is distracted by his erotic love for

⁶ In a footnote to his 1912 “Preface”, Hardy states that “the original conception of the story did not design a marriage between Thomasin and Venn”, suggesting that “certain circumstances of serial publication” required the addition of the sixth book (307).

⁷ Joseph Warren Beach, “The Structure of *The Return of the Native*”, *RN*, 427.

⁸ Keats, *Endymion* IV, ll. 173-81.

Eustacia; she is consumed by the material desire for a passion which will remove her from her unsatisfactory life on the Heath. Rather than embracing sorrow in the Keatsian manner, both protagonists are self-deceived, imagining their esoteric aspirations will elevate them above their circumstances and provide them with a means of escape from their unsatisfyingly mundane existence.

Thomasin and Venn, who have both suffered reverses in love, are pragmatic secondary characters who have experienced Sorrow's "constancy" but carry on regardless and maintain a certain unimaginative equanimity. Venn's steadfastness and stoicism are reminiscent of Gabriel Oak's, but his thwarted and spasmodic courtship of Thomasin throws up none of the comedy witnessed in Gabriel's pursuit of Bathsheba. The amorous complications of the plot are unrelieved by any lightness of tone. Not only is marriage no guarantee of a happy ending in *The Return of the Native*; marriage and even the prospect of it are "a daily, continuous tragedy".⁹ The lively antics of the rustics provided Shakespearean comic relief in *Far from the Madding Crowd* whereas in *The Return of the Native*, the rustics comment soberly on the main players in the manner of a Greek chorus.

The references to Greek drama apparently reflect a desire to achieve high tragedy in this novel. As Lennart Björk suggests, Hardy "accentuated the tragic import by evoking the masters of the past, especially Aeschylus".¹⁰ Hardy himself considered good fiction as "that kind of imaginative writing which lies nearest to the epic, dramatic, or narrative masterpieces of the past". The classical references serve to raise the modern characters of the novel to the level of the "higher passions"¹¹ of the ancient world, but the light cast on these moderns does not always reflect well on them.

⁹ *Jude the Obscure* (New York: Norton, 1999) 183.

¹⁰ *LN*, vol. 1, 268.

¹¹ "The Profitable Reading of Fiction", Orel, 114.

The “native” of the title, Clym Yeobright, is linked on a number of occasions with Oedipus. After returning from Paris with the idea of setting up a school, Clym overstrains his eyes through excessive study and is reduced to a state of near-blindness. Distraught over the death of his mother, Clym cries out against his fate: “If there is any justice in God let Him kill me now. He has nearly blinded me, but that is not enough” (241). Hardy makes the Oedipus parallel explicit when describing Clym’s mouth as having “passed into the phase more or less imaginatively rendered in studies of Oedipus” (251). The 1878 version of the text likens Clym’s mouth to “studies of Laocoon”,¹² a priest who was killed by the gods for opposing their will in questioning the gift of the Trojan horse. A clear image of his tortured expression survives in the classical sculpture of the same name. The fact that Hardy amended “Laocoon” to “Oedipus” in the 1895 edition indicates his wish to identify overtly Clym’s tragic antecedent.

Although Hardy does not mimic the plot of the classical drama in which the tragic hero marries his mother, the character of Mrs Yeobright nevertheless possesses a mythological resonance, “projected back upon her through her association with Clym’s increasingly overt assimilation to his prototype, Oedipus”,¹³ as Penny Boumelha describes it. There is an intensity in the relationship between Clym and his mother which echoes the conjugal idea of the two becoming one flesh: “he was a part of her ... their discourses were as if carried on between the right and the left hands of the same body ... he could reach her by a magnetism ... superior to words” (149). Hardy is quick to point out that this love was undemonstrative, lest any hint of impropriety be implied, but the unresolved tension in the mother-son relationship is a factor in Clym’s

¹² Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, ed. Tony Slade (London: Penguin, 1999) 317.

¹³ Penny Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982) 57; hereafter referred to in the form “Boumelha, *Hardy and Women*”.

unsuccessful marriage to Eustacia. As Boumelha rightly points out, the full Freudian significance of the Oedipus legend was unavailable to Hardy at this time,¹⁴ but Hardy was well aware of the psychological complexities of the mother-son bond and its implications for successful sexual relationships. One is reminded of *Sons and Lovers* where Paul Morel *does* kill his mother Gertrude after his attempts at forming sexual relationships have broken down because of his devotion to his mother. Clym's marriage to Eustacia causes him to feel such guilt over the older Mrs Yeobright's death that he irrationally takes on the responsibility for it: "I cannot help feeling that I did my best to kill her ... may the whole burden be upon my head!" (239, 240). The association with the grief- and guilt-stricken Oedipus is striking.

Another mythological motif in the novel is the parallel between Clym and Prometheus. This son of a Titan, himself a god or demi-god, stole fire from the gods to benefit mankind but paid the price of an all-but-eternal punishment chained to a rock. Hardy's *Literary Notebooks* record that he was reading a version of *Prometheus Bound* during the time he was preparing to write *The Return of the Native*. In the novel, Hardy portrays Clym as a latter-day Prometheus, a purveyor of philosophical insights to rural labourers. Clym abandons his prestigious job in Paris in order to bring back to the people some of the "ethical systems popular at the time" (136), Comte's theories of Positivism.

To understand Clym's intellectual idealism, an outline of Hardy's debt to Positivism is of value. Hardy freely acknowledged his extensive reading of Comte,¹⁵ T. R. Wright calculating that Hardy's *Literary Notebooks* contain more material from Comte's *Système* than from any other single work.¹⁶ In a letter to Lady Grove, Hardy

¹⁴ Boumelha, *Hardy and Women* 58.

¹⁵ *LN*, vol. 1, 312.

¹⁶ T.R. Wright, *The Religion of Humanity: The Impact of Comtean Positivism on Victorian Britain*

stated his opinion that “no person of serious thought in these times could be said to stand aloof from Positivist teaching & ideals”.¹⁷ The attraction of Comte for Hardy was his propounding a semi-religious humanism free of Christian dogma. In his “Apology” to *Late Lyrics and Earlier*, Hardy expressed the hope that yet another alliance would be formed “between religion ... and complete rationality”.¹⁸ In the interim he accepted Positivism as the most nearly “complete synthesis” of objectivity and subjectivity available.¹⁹

Comte contended that human development traversed three stages, a first state of superstitious or theological beliefs, which could be subdivided into fetishism and various forms of theism; a second phase in which social and metaphysical thought emerges; and a final objective state based on scientific observation.²⁰ Clym’s desire to advance the Wessex natives “from the bucolic to the intellectual life” is Comtean, but his omission of “intermediate stages”, a “transitional phase” in which “social aims” are cultivated (135), suggests his scheme is too hurried and ambitious. Clym’s forward thinking is described as “unfortunate” because the “rural world was not ripe for him” (136). The Wordsworthian ideal which he embraces, of “Plain living and high thinking”,²¹ is overly esoteric for the unthinking Heath-dwellers, who are too engaged in material survival to spend time on ethical speculation. In fact, they are still caught up in the fetishistic phase, their fetish being the Heath itself.

As an idealist, Clym is likened to a John the Baptist “who took ennoblement rather than repentance for his text” (136). Like John the Baptist, who was prepared to live in a camel’s hair garment and feed on locusts and honey in the wilderness (Matthew

(Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 203.

¹⁷ *CL*, vol. 3, 53.

¹⁸ *CP*, 562.

¹⁹ Wright, 203.

²⁰ *Auguste Comte and Positivism: The Essential Writings*, ed. Gertrud Lenzer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975) 71.

²¹ Wordsworth, “Written in London, September 1802”, l. 11.

3:1-4), Clym is prepared to live an ascetic life on the Heath in order to bring enlightenment to the common man. In response to his Comtean ideals, Clym is prepared to give up a lucrative job as a jeweller in Paris and return to his humble beginnings. He even embraces the simple life of the furze-cutter, living for a time by the radical economics found in Shelley's notes to *Queen Mab*: "employments are lucrative in an inverse ratio to their usefulness: the jeweller, the toyman, the actor gains fame and wealth by the exercise of his useless and ridiculous art; whilst the cultivator of the earth ... struggles through contempt and penury".²² Positivism encouraged mankind to move from a state of egotism to one of universal altruism. Just as Prometheus was prepared to sacrifice himself for the good of mankind, so Clym was "ready ... to be the first unit sacrificed" (135). From the time of his return to Egdon, Clym self-consciously assumes the role of apostle and martyr.

When Eustacia first saw Clym, it was as though "the deity that lies ignominiously chained within an ephemeral human carcass shone out of him like a ray" (110), a plausible reference to Prometheus' bondage, chained to a rock. Clym actively identifies with the legend when he exclaims to Eustacia: "don't you suppose ... that I cannot rebel, in high Promethean fashion, against the gods and fate as well as you" (199). The comment also serves to identify Eustacia with Prometheus. Eustacia is first met with supervising the building of her own personal bonfire, a symbol of "Promethean rebelliousness" (12) against the deepening winter. Eustacia is Promethean by virtue of her fiery moral rebellion, her defiance of religious and social expectations. She is "a girl of some forwardness of mind" with "instincts towards social nonconformity" (57).

²² "Notes on Queen Mab", *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (London: Oxford UP, 1960) 804-05.

“Promethean rebelliousness” brings to mind Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound*, a dramatic poem which would have increasing significance for Hardy. The protagonist of Shelley’s verse drama, the ultimate revolutionary, liberationist and altruist, is the mythic exemplar of Clym’s aspiration, to bid defiance to an oppressive paternalistic God and erect in his place a humanist ideal of universal education and equality. In literary history, Prometheus was “the Romantic symbol of the ‘titanic’ champion struggling against oppression for humanity’s sake”.²³ Even Clym’s cerebral humanism has overtones of Romanticism. For Eustacia’s part, her Promethean rebelliousness expresses an inner restlessness born of her desire for transcendence, to escape her situation. Stifled by her restricted environment, she yearns to throw off conventional mores in her pursuit of a passion that will be as scandalous as it is ideal, it seems.

In her solitary status and with her self-generated values, Eustacia consciously assumes the role of a heroine of romance. She aspires to join what George Eliot disparagingly calls “that lofty order of minds who pant after the ideal, and are oppressed by a general sense that their emotions are of too exquisite a character to find fit objects among their everyday fellow-men”.²⁴ Eustacia’s one goal is to achieve a “grand passion” with a dashing lover, but the paucity of candidates on Egdon leads to oppression and frustration. Even on the point of eloping with Wildeve, she exclaims “He’s not *great* enough for me to give myself to – he does not suffice for my desire! ... If he had been a Saul or a Bonaparte – ah!” (275)

Her desire for greatness can only, she feels, be achieved through her sexuality, and it is ultimately self-focussed, taking on undercurrents reminiscent of Coleridge’s “woman wailing for her demon-lover”²⁵ or the excesses of Byron, the famous “epicure”

²³ Heath, 111.

²⁴ *Adam Bede*, 156.

²⁵ “Kubla Khan”, l. 16.

of the emotions and sexuality (77). In the opinion of Patricia Stubbs, Eustacia belongs with Hardy's *femmes fatales*, "whose potential for self-destruction and for destroying others arises from their excessively literal application of the idea that a woman's proper sphere is that of ... romantic love".²⁶ As Boumelha points out in her introduction, with avenues for women's self-expression in the nineteenth century so restricted, Eustacia is forced into "a kind of heroism passive in its dependency on others to fulfil it".²⁷ Her extravagant desire "To be loved to madness" (56) robs her of the capacity to judge potential partners and leads her ruthlessly to destroy those closest to her. She undermines Thomasin's marital prospects by her pursuit of Wildeve, rejects Wildeve when Clym arrives on the scene, causes a disastrous rift between Clym and Mrs Yeobright, then leaves Clym in a fatal bid to escape provincial reality by running away with Wildeve.

Eustacia's sexuality is more forceful, pre-emptive and "masculine" than Clym's. Fidelity in love "had less attraction for her than for most women ... a blaze of love, and extinction was better". Her "reckless unconventionality" aimed at snatching "a year's, a week's, even an hour's passion from anywhere it could be won" (56). Her disguise as the Turkish Knight for the Mummers' Play indicates Eustacia's taste for the masculine role in the active pursuit of a partner. Deen finds that, "What is suggested elsewhere in the novel" and "is clearly revealed here"²⁸ is that Eustacia's pro-active sexuality goes beyond a passive female role and beyond the confines of nineteenth-century respectability.

Eustacia seizes upon this adventure of playing in the folk drama as an opportunity to see Clym up close, being already "half in love with a vision" (94).

²⁶ Patricia Stubbs, *Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel, 1880-1920* (Brighton: Harvester, 1979); cited in Boumelha, *Hardy and Women*, 38.

²⁷ Penny Boumelha, Introduction, *The Return of the Native*, ed. Tony Slade, xxiii.

²⁸ Leonard W. Deen, "Heroism and Pathos in Hardy's *Return of the Native*", *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 15, 3 (December 1960): 211.

Before she even meets him, she has made up her mind that Clym should be her partner in the ideal passion she has been searching for: “She loved him partly ... because she had from the first instinctively determined to love him, chiefly because she was in desperate need of loving somebody” (112). The fact that she dresses as a knight in order to gain entry to the beloved’s house harks back to the very origins of Romanticism in the medieval *romance* or *romaunt*, a chivalric tale characterised by the quest for an ideal love.²⁹

Eustacia’s stratagem of spying on her intended to win him away from his family is reminiscent of Keats’s “The Eve of St Agnes”. Keats’s attraction for Hardy is indicated both by the epigraph of *The Return of the Native* and also by his quotation of a line from “The Eve”, “As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again” (l. 243), to celebrate Bathsheba’s rejuvenation at the close of *Far from the Madding Crowd*.³⁰ In Keats’s verse romance, the line describes the heroine Madeline, who has “hoodwinked” herself with a “faerie fancy” (l. 70) preparing for sleep and her maiden dream on the night of the Eve. The exotic, oriental tones of her situation, under threat from superstition and from an invasive spy in her castle bedchamber, are hinted at in another metaphor: the virgin is “Clasped like a missal where swart Paynims pray” (l. 241). In the Mummers’ scene from *The Return of the Native*, however, it is Eustacia who plays the part of the infidel and transgressive interloper. Eustacia is playing Porphyro (the pyr-phoros or “fire-bearer”) who has come across the frozen Heath, “heart on fire” (l. 75) for the beloved. It is Eustacia who has penetrated the “castle” of the high-born dreamer, Clym. Andrew Radford traces the derivation of the word “mummer” from the Danish “momme”, “one wearing a mask”.³¹ In her disguise as the Turkish knight,

²⁹ Heath, 3.

³⁰ *FMC*, 306.

³¹ Andrew Radford, *Thomas Hardy and the Survivals of Time* (Aldershot: Asghate, 2003) 27.

Eustacia masks not only her sex but her intentions. The ribboned helmet that impairs Clym and Eustacia's sight of one another at their first meeting symbolises the preconceived idealising vision each has, or will have, of the other which will prevent a realistic appraisal of their love object.

As in *Endymion*, there is an existing "dream within dream"³² in *The Return of the Native*. Like the slumbering Madeline on St Agnes Eve, Eustacia has a dream of her beloved, a knight in silver armour but with his casque down so that she cannot see his face (93). The vision of a knight in shining armour who will rescue her from durance on the Heath, is blindly projected on to Clym, and she becomes "infatuated with a stranger" (116). Physical beauty and vanity deceived the lovers of *Far from the Madding Crowd*. In *The Return of the Native*, the deceptiveness of appearances is complicated by courtly codes, unrealistic expectations and subterfuge, all three preventing the lovers from seeing each other clearly.

Eustacia saw Clym as a man "who knew glorious things, and had mixed in brilliant scenes – in short, an adorable, delightful, distracting hero" (200), a figure of romance who would transport her away from Egdon, just as Porphyro carried Madeline off from the snow-bound castle and feuding families, and bore her away "o'er the southern moors" (l. 351). Unable herself to "endure the Heath", Eustacia shuts her ears and eyes to the Clym who would rather live on Egdon than anywhere else in the world (147). The seeds of disillusionment and discord are sown early. When Clym tries to talk to Eustacia about a local Druidical stone, she turns the conversation to the boulevards of Paris (147). When Clym attempts to share his Comtean plan of education for the common man, Eustacia responds that she hates her fellow-creatures (146). Yet he persists in seeing her as a partner in his teaching scheme, just as Eustacia persists in the

³² *Endymion*, Book 1, l. 633.

belief that Clym will abandon his altruistic schemes and take her to Paris. Both are blinded by their romanticising or idealising visions of the other.

Just as Clym is misguided in expecting Eustacia to become a school marm, he also overlooks her sensuality. Encircled by a “blinding halo kindled about him by love and beauty” (159), Clym creates an idealised Eustacia in the manner of medieval or Shelleyan romance. He persists in seeing her like this despite Eustacia’s revelation of her less than innocent past: “I am older at this than you. I loved another man once” (155). The proposition that Eustacia makes Clym, if he will take her to Paris – ““If you go back again I’ll – be something,’ she said tenderly, putting her head near his breast” (157) – Clym is too naïve or cerebral to notice, or else he cannot reconcile this offer to become his mistress with his ideal of her. Like Boldwood’s for Bathsheba, his love remains “as chaste as that of Petrarch for his Laura” (159), encompassing a courtly elevation of the beloved and the reverence of the knight for his virtuous lady.

Clym’s countenance is that of a man oppressed by thought, beset by the “mutually destructive interdependence of spirit and flesh” (109). Eustacia’s body language is of a woman driven by passion: she sighs in her sleep and sees Clym’s face in every dream (158). Neither of their personalities is at rest; put together the couple run awry because of fundamental differences of character and motivation. Clym in his own way is deluded by dreams of greatness, but in his case, “panting after an ideal” takes the form of pursuing intellectual enlightenment. While his motives are ostensibly altruistic, Clym romanticises his asceticism: “I could live and die in a hermitage here, with proper work to do” (157). The eremitic life he projects for himself makes the inclusion of any woman incongruous, and it certainly cannot accommodate a woman with Eustacia’s ambitions. When she tells him explicitly, “there is not that in Eustacia Vye which will make a good homespun wife” (157), Clym persists in ignoring her

fantasies of Parisian decadence. He continues to weave his own dreams of saving the local populace from ignorance, making plans for a future life of service to humanity.

Despite the restrictions of Victorian prudery, Hardy finds ways of hinting at sexual dissatisfaction between Eustacia and Clym. Boumelha points out that, in the nineteenth-century literary context, the fact that their marriage is not followed by pregnancy is indicative.³³ When Eustacia comes upon Clym singing about nights of passion, the intensity of her reaction suggests a scarcely veiled frustration which goes beyond the “social failure” (198) of the marriage. When the couple’s argument becomes more heated, Eustacia bemoans the cooling of their marriage (199). In an ironic reversal of “The Eve of St Agnes”, Eustacia the fire-bearer has come to the frozen castle, but, unempowered to whisk away the dreamer, Clym, to sensual love and warmer climes, she herself has become “steeped in arctic fridity” (205). She feels justified in reverting to her premarital style and goes off “in search of events” (117) which she finds courtesy of her previous lover, Wildeve.

In the ur-version of the novel, her profile is said to resemble Lord Byron’s and her “chief-priest” to be the poet himself.³⁴ In many ways, Eustacia does present as a female Byronic hero. Byron describes the hero of his *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* as “the wandering outlaw of his own dark mind”,³⁵ a description which could equally be applied to Eustacia. Her appellation as “Queen of Night” (53) suggests a brooding and threatening character possibly to be linked with the jealous and vindictive Queen in Mozart’s opera, *The Magic Flute*. Eustacia’s “Pagan eyes, full of nocturnal mysteries” (53), and her “sudden fits of gloom”, “the night-side of sentiment which she knew too well for her years” (54), adumbrate a lowering sensuality reminiscent of Byron’s

³³ Boumelha, *Hardy and Women*, 59.

³⁴ John Paterson, *The Making of The Return of the Native* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963) 22.

³⁵ *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, Canto III, l. 20.

outsiders. Eustacia sighs after her early meeting with Wildeve: “it was no fragile maiden sigh ... but a kind of shudder” (52). The shudder may be one of disgust with herself that she could be brought so low as to toy with Wildeve for want of a better object, yet it also hints at sexual *frisson*. Hardy’s comment that Eustacia “had advanced to the secret recesses of sensuousness, yet had hardly crossed the threshold of conventionality” (77), is a cryptic addition to the novel as it stands. However, an earlier version, deleted in revision for the first edition, gives a more consistent picture: “Eustacia was weary of too many things ... she knew too much ... She had done with the dreams and interests of young maidhood”.³⁶ The impression she gives of lost innocence is reinforced by her world-weariness and impatience with conventional expectations. Her “smouldering rebelliousness” (54) makes a wandering exile of her in Wessex, a Byronic unbeliever who thinks of herself as irredeemably damned.

Paterson has suggested that Eustacia’s “literal and vulgar Byronism”³⁷ is all that remains from a more overtly pagan, even “satanic” image in the novel’s first version. Rather than merely exercising her sex appeal on Wildeve, she has called him up as the “Witch of Endor called up Samuel” (52).³⁸ She rejoices in her power over him as if he were “some wondrous thing she had created out of chaos” (49). Wildeve continues to be in her thrall, drawn to her in spite of his marriage to Thomasin, under the “spell that she had thrown over him” (218). In their second rendezvous on Mistover Knap, Wildeve is once more summoned into Eustacia’s presence by a bonfire (264). The meeting precipitates them into the ill-fated plan to escape the Heath and leads ultimately to their deaths.

³⁶ Cited in Boumelha, *Hardy and Women*, 53.

³⁷ Paterson, 81.

³⁸ See 1 Samuel 28: 7-19.

The fascination with flame which both attracts and consumes is contained in the covert signal between Wildeve and Eustacia. In former days “when Wildeve had used to come secretly wooing to Mistover” (210) he would let in at her window a moth which would then fly into the candle flame. The metaphor of the moth’s immolation in the flame points to an irresistible but fatal attraction. In Shelley’s *Epipsychidion*, the beloved is described as a “Sweet Lamp” (l. 53) and the poet “a dizzy moth, whose flight ... would seek in Hesper’s setting sphere/ A radiant death, a fiery sepulchre” (ll. 220-23). The Shelleyan association between love and death, between doomed passion and the impulse to self-destruction, foreshadows Eustacia’s own fate as much as Wildeve’s. Even after Wildeve has quit the scene, Eustacia is still transfixed by “the moth whose skeleton is getting burnt up in the wick of the candle” (214). Just like the poet, whose “moth-like Muse has burnt its wings” (l. 53), her Romantic dreams of a grand passion have been reduced to ash, leaving her unfulfilled and weary of life.

The other aspect of this perilous attraction to the flame is that the moth is deceived by appearances and so drawn unwittingly to its tragic end. Moths use what is called “celestial navigation”. Mistaking an artificial light source for the moon in a process called transverse orientation, they turn towards the smaller light, plummeting downwards in a spiral flight path that gets closer and closer to the candle until they are consumed. Similarly, Wildeve keeps turning back, like the poet, “toward the loadstar of [his] one desire”,³⁹ continually drawn back into a spiralling circle of intrigue.⁴⁰ Both Eustacia and Wildeve are deceived by romanticised longings for something beyond their current reality into a course of action which will eventually consume them. Eustacia is equally a victim of her own “perfeverid” (115) nature: Wildeve makes it

³⁹ *Epipsychidion*, l. 219 : the more common spelling is “lodestar”, i.e. guiding light.

⁴⁰ Fitzpiers in *The Woodlanders* also repeats the same quotation from *Epipsychidion* as he is drawn back again and again by his illicit passion for Felice Charmond.

clear that he “drew out” Eustacia before she drew him (52). Dalliance with the flame of sexual passion in the restricted context of Egdon is ultimately destructive both to Eustacia and to Wildeve.

What Eustacia regards as the Romantic’s quest for self-expression and fulfilment tends to be regarded as wilful promiscuity by the inhabitants of the Heath. Mrs Yeobright’s terse remark, “Good girls don’t get treated as witches even on Egdon” (141), links Eustacia’s overt sexuality with witchcraft. Paterson makes it clear that in the ur-version of the novel, Eustacia was to have been portrayed as a literal witch.⁴¹ In the final version, Eustacia could be seen more as the *victim* of witchcraft. She becomes the target of local gossip: “People say she’s a witch” (130) and even the target of outright attack. Eustacia is pierced with a needle in church, “so as to draw her blood and put an end to the bewitching of Susan’s children” (140). The superstitious inhabitants of the Heath recognise that her sensuality and self-generated morality do not conform to their values, and Eustacia becomes a marginalised figure to be regarded with suspicion.

Paganism and sensuality are also associated with Eustacia’s choice of role in the Mummers’ Play, which was originally a pagan celebration of death of the Old and the rebirth of the New Year. Hence another theme of the folk entertainment is revival of the dead, either as a “revived figure of sun and spring in purely pagan ceremonies” or a “revived Crusader” in the more Christianised versions.⁴² In most versions of the folk play, the hero is Saint George and his antagonist a foreigner, in this case the Turkish Knight played by Eustacia. In his casting of the play, Hardy prefigures Eustacia’s death as a pagan sacrifice in response to a perceived threat to communal values.

⁴¹ Paterson, *Making*, 81.

⁴² James Gindin, “Hardy and Folklore”, *RN*, 397.

As Hardy's use of ballad and folk song authenticated his portrayal of pastoral life in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, so in this novel folk traditions indicate continuity with the past and dramatise the conflict between pagan, Christian and post-Christian belief systems. The fact that Eustacia is attacked for being a witch in the context of a church service underlines the extent to which pagan beliefs persist under a veneer of civilisation. The Mummers' Play, a "fossilized survival" of fading traditions, indicates that the inhabitants of Egdon Heath remain, at some level, pagans (96). This creates an impenetrable barrier to enlightenment and makes them intolerant of outsiders like Eustacia. Superstition has them mired in the fetishistic first stage of the Comtean system. If Christianity has failed to advance them even from fetishism to monotheism in the first stage, Clym's ambition to elevate them to the second or third stage is doomed to failure.

According to Hardy, "the impulses of all such outlandish hamlets are pagan still" (298) and the novel abounds in superstitions and ancient nature rites. The "gipsying" at East Egdon is described as "a whole village full of sensuous emotion" where for a time "Paganism was revived" (203). The bonfires which open the novel themselves recall pre-Christian rites, "lineal descendants from the jumbled Druidical rites and Saxon ceremonies" (12) which had the sun as their principal object of worship. The religious idea, as J.G. Frazer would point out in *The Golden Bough*, was that by lighting fires, the priests could rekindle the dwindling fire of the winter sun into a brighter blaze.⁴³ These bonfires often included the burning of effigies. Frazer adds, "there are grounds for believing that anciently human beings were actually burned"⁴⁴ in such blazes. On the night of Eustacia's death, Susan Nunsuch fashions a wax effigy of Eustacia, which she then destroys by throwing it into the fire (277). This completes the

⁴³ J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (London: Macmillan, 1936) vol. 1, 332.

⁴⁴ Frazer, vol. 1, 106.

cycle of pagan fetishism established in the novel and portrays Eustacia (likened to a witch for her sexual power) as herself a ritual victim of witchcraft and superstition.

The burning of her likeness in the flames also symbolises the potential destructiveness of sexual passion in the context of this remote setting. If the rustics are playing out primitive fertility rites as they dance among the sparks on the ancient tumulus of Rainbarrow, Eustacia is playing with fire at a more sophisticated level. Her own bonfire evokes a more personal fertility rite, designed to rekindle Wildeve's flame and bring him back to her. Her use of the fire ritual for illicit amorous ends rather than as a gesture of community solidarity again establishes her as an outsider and potential scapegoat.

James Gibson sums up such motifs and frames of reference: "Hardy's problem is to write a novel about a deeply sensual woman without mentioning her sensuality too obviously".⁴⁵ By associating Eustacia with images of fire and heat, Hardy seeks to evince Eustacia's transgressive personality without drawing upon his own head the opprobrium of the Victorian reading public. One reviewer at least did lament the obliquity forced upon Hardy. Noting that "Eustacia Vye belongs essentially to the class of which *Madame Bovary* is the type", the reviewer complained that "this is a type which English opinion will not allow a novelist to depict in its completeness".⁴⁶ In "Candour in English Fiction", Hardy himself would bemoan the restrictions that prevented novelists of the day from being able to depict human nature in all its tragic aspects, which for him included a "sincere and comprehensive sequence of the ruling passions".⁴⁷

⁴⁵ James Gibson, "Hardy and his Readers", *Thomas Hardy: The Writer and his Background*, ed. Norman Page (London: Bell, 1980) 199.

⁴⁶ "Unsigned Review", *The Athenaeum*, November 23, 1878; cited in Cox, 47.

⁴⁷ Orel, 128.

It was in championing the cause of a more “sincere school of Fiction”, particularly as regards “the relations of the sexes”,⁴⁸ that Hardy came closest to championing the French realism of Flaubert and the French Naturalism of Zola. Hardy, possessing several of Flaubert’s works in his library, protested against the imprisonment of the publisher who brought out English translations of *Madame Bovary*.⁴⁹ Although Hardy recognised an affinity with Flaubert and created in Eustacia a character of the same “type” as Madame Bovary, he nonetheless made Eustacia a character discernibly different in the quality of her aspirations.

Brought up in a convent on a steady diet of poor-quality romance novels, Emma Bovary is unprepared for the realities of everyday life with an uninspiring marriage partner in a provincial village. Her attempts to bring excitement into her life lead to little fun and ultimate despair. Caught up in a descending spiral of adultery and debt, she is abandoned by her lovers and decides to end her life. Even her attempt at a Romantic suicide is thwarted by the intrusion of harsh medical reality. Instead of a graceful exit, Emma has to endure days of agony which Flaubert describes in every gruesome detail, including the black vomit which trickles on to her wedding dress as she lies in her open coffin. Flaubert ruthlessly chronicles how the banalities of Emma Bovary’s life combine to destroy her and annihilate her self-image as a heroine of romance.

Terence Cave has hailed *Madame Bovary* as the ultimate expression of the futility of attempting “to make the real world conform to the world of the imagination”.⁵⁰ For Cave the novel is “the tragedy of imagination dissipated and broken

⁴⁸ Orel, 126-27.

⁴⁹ Simon Curtis, “Hardy, George Moore and the ‘Doll’ of English Fiction”, *Celebrating Thomas Hardy: Insights and Appreciations*, ed. Charles P.C. Pettit (London: Macmillan, 1996) 105.

⁵⁰ Terence Cave, Introduction, *Madame Bovary*, trans. Gerard Hopkins (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1981) xiv.

on the wheel of reality”.⁵¹ Flaubert’s style refuses to indulge the emotions which the action of the novel provokes, “as though to make the point that the rhetoric of tragedy cannot coexist with the fiction of the commonplace”.⁵² But while Flaubert tends to treat Emma’s plight with detached irony, ranging between the farcical and the pathetic as he subtly undermines Emma’s *bourgeois* fantasies, Hardy’s tragic vision in *The Return of the Native* evokes a deeper level of pathos for his heroine. Eustacia resembles Emma in her passionate nature and self-delusion, the embodiment of a Romantic sensibility which is tragically out of step with her remote rural environment. More in love with the idea of herself as the heroine of her own Romantic tragedy than she is in love with either Clym or Wildeve, Eustacia is, like Emma Bovary, doomed to fall in the provincial society she inhabits.

Neither Eustacia nor Emma Bovary has any outlet for her energies beyond her marital and extramarital relationships, real or imagined. As a young girl, Eustacia describes catching sight of an officer of the Hussars at Budmouth: “I loved him till I thought I should really die of love – but I didn’t die, and at last left off caring for him” (158). The irony underlying Eustacia’s anecdote of her youthful self is highly reminiscent of Flaubert’s treatment of Emma Bovary’s imagined *amours*. The deceptive glamour of men in uniform also recalls Bathsheba’s infatuation with Troy, “brilliant in brass and scarlet”.⁵³

Eustacia and, to a lesser extent, Emma epitomise the *mal du siècle* (“world weariness”) which is the leading characteristic of French Romantic literature. This term refers to the sense of loss and disillusionment current in the early nineteenth century in France, leading to melancholy and an underlying weariness with life. Chateaubriand

⁵¹ Cave, xvii.

⁵² Eagleton, 181.

⁵³ *FMC*, 127.

coined the phrase in *Le Génie du Christianisme* (1802), suggesting that the *mal du siècle* is the result of a discrepancy between the true object of human desire, the infinite, and the terrestrial goals which human beings could actually achieve.⁵⁴ While Flaubert's heroine is naïve and wilfully deluded, Hardy's heroine is more self-aware and exhibits a deeper vein of melancholia, a greater capacity for existential *angst*. Emma is merely bored, whereas Eustacia is oppressed by the burden of existence. Where she approaches intellectual assent with Clym is their mutual "view of life as a thing to be put up with" (131-32).

While Hardy shares the modern sense of anguish at the unrelenting mechanism of the universe, he lacks the harder, almost nihilistic detachment of Flaubert's novel, "the ironic chill of disenchantment"⁵⁵ which exposes the futility of all Romantic aspirations. Hardy's sympathies go out to seekers after glimpses of perfection in a fallen world. As he describes it in *The Woodlanders*, an individual like Eustacia is a forerunner of a new personality type in whom "modern nerves" are combined "with primitive feelings"; thus she is doomed by her divided personality "to be numbered among the distressed",⁵⁶ and to be subject to disillusionment and despair. At the heart of Hardyan tragedy is the recognition that our inherent "longing for the infinite" is continually "baffled by the limits of our finite existence". Consciousness of this tragic dissonance can cause those with Romantic sensibilities to fall into a melancholy, into what Schlegel calls a "tragic tone of mind".⁵⁷

Eustacia's emotional responses may be extreme, but not beyond the reach of the narrator's compassion, a pathos tinged with a less marked irony than Flaubert's: "she had cogent reasons for asking the Supreme Power by what right a being of such

⁵⁴ *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French*, ed. Peter France (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995) 715.

⁵⁵ Geoffrey Wall, Introduction, *Madame Bovary* (London: Penguin, 1992) xv; hereafter referred to in the form "MB".

⁵⁶ *The Woodlanders*, 298.

⁵⁷ Palmer, *Tragedy and Tragic Theory*, 57.

exquisite finish had been placed in circumstances calculated to make of her charms a curse rather than a blessing” (201). Eustacia initially conjures images of “Bourbon roses, rubies, and tropical midnights” (54), romantic girlish dreams suited to the restless wife of a provincial doctor. But when her moods recall “lotus-eaters and the march in ‘Athalie’”, Racine’s tragic drama and her movements, “the ebb and flow of the sea” (54), Hardy has swung the amplitude of her melancholy towards a mood of wider cultural significance, akin to Chateaubriand’s *mal du siècle*. Hardy’s listing is at a different level to Flaubert’s catalogue of Emma’s preoccupations: “love, lovers, loving, martyred maidens swooning in secluded lodges ... dark forests, aching hearts ... little boats by moonlight, nightingales in the grove”.⁵⁸ The two lists might seem at first to be Hardy’s homage to Flaubert but are rather a contrasting of Emma’s trashy tastes with a European consciousness that Eustacia seems to have conjured out of nowhere — until her taste for reading Byron is remembered.

The main differentiating factor in Hardy’s treatment of Eustacia is that, although her attraction to the trappings of romance is mocked, the Greek and English frames of reference which Hardy introduces forbid Flaubertian mockery of Eustacia’s imagination at its Romantic heights. When she wishes Wildeve to be a Napoleon or Clym a suitor and husband capable of more than ethical ambitions and educational projects, it is possible to sympathise with her longing for greatness and passion, even while her blindness to any other aspiration than her own remains a levelling fault, perhaps a tragic flaw. While Emma Bovary is mocked for wanting to be a heroine of romance, what impels Eustacia towards being a tragic heroine is not made into the object of derision.

Hardy does not make it easy to warm to Eustacia, but he makes it impossible to dismiss her. Her question to Wildeve, “do I desire unreasonably much in wanting what

⁵⁸ MB, 28.

is called life – music, poetry, passion, war, and all the beating and pulsing that is going on in the great arteries of the world?” (221) – cannot be answered with a simple affirmative, and would bring most Romantics firmly on to her side. Eustacia’s dream of Paris, and even Emma Bovary’s fervent belief that it is the city where people “lived on a higher plane”, make Paris a metonym for escape from “the general mediocrity of life”.⁵⁹ While Clym regards the unpopulated Heath as offering freedom, for Eustacia “it is a jail” (75). She exclaims against her fate as Felice Charmond does against hers in *The Woodlanders*: “why were we given hungry hearts and wild desires if we have to live in a world like this?”⁶⁰

The tragedy for Hardy is that such highly-sensitised and melancholic characters are unable to fulfil their longings. As he puts it in his autobiography, “this planet does not supply the materials for happiness to higher existences”.⁶¹ Not only are these tortured Romantics unable to find happiness, they are unable to find peace. Felice invokes Shelley’s “Adonais”, when she asks “Why should Death alone lend what Life is compelled to borrow – rest?”⁶² In “Adonais”, Shelley’s elegy for his fellow Romantic, Keats or Adonais is said to have “awakened from the dream of life” (l. 344) and “outsoared the shadow of our night” (l. 352) so that the “unrest which men miscall delight/ Can touch him not and torture not again” (ll. 354-55). Ultimately the only recourse for the Romantic idealist, frustrated by the compromises and disillusionments of life in an imperfect world, is to “Die, / If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek” (ll. 464-65). Dissatisfied by the man who she hoped would be the fulfilment of her “youthful dream”, having seen “a promise of that life in him” (221) which she so

⁵⁹ *MB*, 46.

⁶⁰ *The Woodlanders*, 197.

⁶¹ *LIFE*, 218.

⁶² *The Woodlanders*, 197, Note 5. In “Adonais”, the subject of the elegy, Keats, is said in ll. 62-63 to take “his fill/ Of deep and liquid rest”. Hardy paraphrases l.186: “death, who lends what life must borrow”.

desperately sought, Eustacia is left feeling trapped. Her only means of escape from the mundanity of life seems to be in death: “’tis a consummation/ Devoutly to be wisht”.⁶³

Frank Giordano judges the “combination of Eustacia’s boredom and delusive dreaminess” as “characteristic of the egoistic suicide’s apathy and depression”.⁶⁴ Like Emma Bovary, Eustacia appears to run out of options. There are indications in the text that Eustacia’s mood becomes so despairing that she no longer cares what happens to her: “death appeared the only door of relief if the satire of Heaven should go much further” (201). This curious phrase makes one think of the title of one of Hardy’s verse collections, *Satires of Circumstance*. Another possible *hamartia* in Eustacia is her abdicating her right to choose, claiming to have been “crushed by things beyond [her] control” (276). Instead of taking charge of her situation, she allows random chance to dictate the course of events. Encountering Wildeve at East Egdon, she lets herself be persuaded to dance with him, her body language a “tacit acknowledgement that she accepted his offer” (204), and so re-ignites passion. When Charley inadvertently lights the bonfire which she knows will summon Wildeve to her side, she might have gone inside and avoided the encounter, but instead lingers by the fire, not caring about consequences: “her state was so hopeless that she could play with it” (264). Even at the point of elopement with Wildeve, Eustacia realises that to break her marriage vow for him “is too poor a luxury” (275), yet she continues on her course regardless: “having committed herself to this line of action, there was no retreating” (274).

Such a sequence of events should warn the reader not to judge too quickly whether Eustacia deliberately jumped or accidentally fell from the weir. Certainly, her apathy was such that she didn’t care whether she lived or died. Even though Clym

⁶³ *Hamlet* III. i. 63-64.

⁶⁴ Frank R. Giordano, Jr., “*I’d Have My Life Unbe*”: *Thomas Hardy’s Self-Destructive Characters* (Alabama: University of Alabama, 1984) 59.

believes that, in the week before her death, “she would have put an end to her life if she had been able” (287), he shows himself unable to read her character or motivations and is only going on hearsay. Hardy refrains from entering Eustacia’s point of view and leaves her end veiled in mystery. Perhaps, like Henchard, Eustacia makes a brave show of caring nothing for the opinion of her fellow Egdonites, but has become increasingly oppressed by the social ignominy and isolation into which she has fallen.

While an opposing environment may seem to mock the aspirations of the tragic protagonists, Hardy intimates that when circumstances allow, individuals retain some level of responsibility for exercising their ability to choose. Michael Henchard becomes the victim of human satire when the citizens of Casterbridge cart effigies of himself and Lucetta through the streets in the skimmington-ride. Driven to despair by a concatenation of reverses in his business and personal life, Henchard goes to Ten Hatches Weir to throw himself in the Frome. Seeing his own effigy apparently drowned in the river, Henchard takes the decision *not* to commit suicide: “the image o’ me ... kept me alive!”⁶⁵

In Eustacia’s case, the presence of an effigy links her, not with what Henchard takes to be divine intervention, but rather with a fatal pagan curse. The evening hour when Eustacia makes her first entry in the novel is imaged as the “corpse of day” (42). Her last night is likened to such “nocturnal scenes of disaster” as “the agony in Gethsemane” (275). Eustacia has prophesied that the Heath which has been “my cross, my shame ... will be my death” (69), suggesting less that her death will be a Christian martyrdom than that she will be sacrificed as a pagan scapegoat. Her “abyss of desolation” (278) takes place, not on the hill of Golgotha, but on the tumulus of Rainbarrow, “crouching down ... as if she were drawn into the Barrow by a hand from

⁶⁵ *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (New York: Norton, 2001) 225.

beneath” (275). This image suggests that her death may be a type of human sacrifice, like that supposed to have been enacted in Druid ceremonies.

The Heath remains a non-Christian or pre-Christian wilderness, indifferent or even hostile to humankind: “Civilisation was its enemy” (4). It is described as reaching its apotheosis “during winter darkness, tempest, and mists ... the storm was its lover, and the wind its friend” (4). The Heath could be seen as being responsible for Eustacia’s death, the raging elements combining to lead her astray, overwhelm her and cause her to fall into the weir. Again Hardy is exploring tragic possibilities without having recourse to explicitness: Eustacia could either represent a symbolic victim of the Heath, which she hates and so imagines is hostile to her, or the violent storm on the night of her death could be seen to objectify the troubled mind of a potential suicide. This type of Romantic pathetic fallacy differs from the French naturalist approach, in which too often “a drab kind of factual realism” takes the place of “evocation and imaginative suggestion”.⁶⁶

The epigraph, “My Mind to me a Kingdom is”, at the beginning of Book III, expresses the idea that one’s view of the world has the power to create one’s reality. In Coleridge’s “Dejection: An Ode”, he describes how “we receive but what we give, /And in our life alone does Nature live” (ll. 47-48). For the Romantics, beauty in nature had the potential to elevate the soul to something “of higher worth” (l. 50); but, according to Coleridge, Nature can only create its “strong music” (l. 60) in those who are “pure of heart” (l. 59). When the mind is in a state of despair, the “shaping spirit of Imagination” (l. 86) has the power to create “Reality’s dark dream” (l. 95), where the wind rages over a blasted landscape with showers, wintry cold and “tragic sounds” (l. 108). The chaos of Eustacia’s mind on the night of her attempted elopement is

⁶⁶ Gibson, “Hardy and his Readers”; cited in Page, 217.

expressed in “the chaos of the world without” (275), just as Lear’s inner torment is reflected in the tempest on his own tragic heath. By contrast, the innocent Thomasin is immune to distress and sees the Heath objectively: “the night and the weather had for her no terror beyond that of their actual discomfort and difficulty” (282).

In what prove to be her last words, Eustacia exclaims, “How I have tried and tried to be a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me!” (276) Rather than regretting a series of poor choices, Eustacia sees herself as a tragic figure who has struggled against an “ill-conceived world” (276). She elects to blame a hostile universe for preventing her achieving her dreams of greatness: “instead of blaming herself ... she laid the fault upon the shoulders of some indistinct, colossal Prince of the World, who had framed her situation and ruled her lot” (233). Such a “Prince” seems like one of the gods who oppose the protagonists in Greek tragedy, so that they struggle against an ineluctable fate.

On a literary level, tragedy in Hardy arises from the overthrow of the Romantic imagination at the hands of realism or Naturalism. In Boumelha’s words, Mrs Yeobright senior is “a character belonging to the tradition of realism ... a focus of the troubling disjunction in the novel between realistic and mythological modes of narrative”.⁶⁷ She bursts any bubbles of idealism or Romanticism that come her way. She dismisses Clym’s altruistic educational ideas as “Dreams, dreams!” (160), pointing out that the region “is overrun with school masters” and that her son lacks qualifications (159). When Clym persists in his notion of bringing enlightenment to the masses, she describes it as a “castle in the air built on purpose to justify this folly which has seized you, and to salve your conscience” (153). Mrs Yeobright’s function as a reality check to Clym’s illusion of self-sacrifice for a greater good is astringent but might have been

⁶⁷ Boumelha, *Hardy and Women*, 57.

salutary. He refuses to heed her warnings, however, blinded both by his attraction to Eustacia and his dreams of intellectual achievement.

Mrs Yeobright also acts as a catalyst in Eustacia's fall, precipitating the quarrel which leads to the separation of the couple. After the encounter where Clym's mother questions her daughter-in-law about her relations with Wildeve, Eustacia, "panting, stood looking into the pool" (192), her distracted gaze prefiguring her death by drowning. In an earlier dream, in which Eustacia danced with a silver knight (93), they both dived into a similar pool on the Heath and emerged in another world. At the time, Eustacia saw this as foretelling an ecstatic consummation, but it proves instead to be ominous of the disintegration of her idealised image of Clym. When the knight removes his casque to kiss her, "there was a cracking noise, and his figure fell into fragments like a pack of cards" (93). Eustacia's dream of a fulfilling passion will be shattered by the realities of marriage. The plunge into the pool foreshadows not mutual ecstasy but the death of romance.

The Return is a novel of velleities and uncertainties, particularly with regard to Eustacia. On the one hand, she appears to be too determined and self-willed to be a victim, but on the other hand, she struggles against her fate like a heroine of classical tragedy. There is a greatness in her death which "eclipsed all her living phases" (293), and is reminiscent of Fanny Robin's transfiguration in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Hardy emphasises her beauty, the "sense of dignity" and "stateliness of look" which surround her appearance at the end (293). Despite her many failings, her death can arouse a catharsis with reservations. Whether her death was the result of suicide or accident, or whether "accident" in the hostile universe Eustacia has constructed for herself was fate, it seems she might indeed have been "born for a higher destiny than this" (293) and her potential has, tragically, been wasted.

Hardy's *Literary Notebooks* reveal that during this period he was reading an article entitled "The Ethics of Suicide", in which pagan and Christian attitudes to this moral dilemma are compared. Excluding a God who has fixed his canon against self-slaughter, suicide becomes a logical solution to the problem of human suffering and was advocated by Roman philosophers such as Seneca. But this is not only true for classical Stoics: the author of "The Ethics of Suicide" acknowledges the "growing scepticism of the age" has weakened religious beliefs and produced "a gloom and dreariness of mind which may easily fall prey to some temporary access of hallucination or despair".⁶⁸ Such "dreariness" tallies with Eustacia's emotional despair and Clym's philosophical searching. He has painfully arrived at "that stage in a young man's life when the grimness of the general human situation first becomes clear" (149).

Hardy identifies the sense of fragmentation and alienation of those whose intellectual honesty forces them to search out the sceptical writers of the later nineteenth century. The "modern condition of things", as Hardy describes it, leads to an *ennui* which parallels his own – "the melancholy of regretful recollection, of bitter speculation, of immortal longings unsatisfied".⁶⁹ Such an analysis of the "modern" mind derives in part from Matthew Arnold, one of the first English critics to define "the emotional price of modernism".⁷⁰ Clym has been described as "Arnoldian",⁷¹ grappling as he does with the rootlessness of those who have abandoned any belief in Providence and have tried to establish some form of secular humanism in its place. Hardy describes Clym as possessing the "typical countenance of the future" (131), a face which reflects an increasing disillusionment with "natural laws, and see[s] the quandary that man is in by their operation" (132). Hardy's narrator adds that in France, "it is not uncustomary to

⁶⁸ "The Ethics of Suicide", *The Saturday Review*, June 17, 1876, 770-71.

⁶⁹ Millgate, 501.

⁷⁰ David De Laura, "'The Ache of Modernism' in Hardy's Later Novels", *Journal of English Literary History* 34 (1967): 380.

⁷¹ Millgate, 203.

commit suicide at this stage; in England we do much better, or much worse, as the case may be” (149).

Clym’s deliberations on the problem of existence as “a cause of depression” (115) mirror the metaphysical dilemma of another tragic hero, Hamlet, who also wrestles with “To be, or not to be”. According to Emile Durkheim, “the bond that attaches people to life relaxes because the bond that attaches them to society is slack”.⁷² Hamlet appears dissociated from the Danish court, grieving for a lost father, estranged from his mother, isolated from his friends and struggling in his relationship with Ophelia. Clym at the end of the novel is a similarly isolated figure who has failed in his close relationships, is estranged from his community and absents himself even from Thomasin’s wedding feast.

In common with Hamlet, Clym also displays “unmanly grief” upon the death of a parent. The king chides Hamlet that he is not alone in losing a parent – “your father lost a father; /That father lost, lost his”⁷³ – just as Eustacia points out, “You give yourself up too much to this wearying despair ... Other men’s mothers have died” (240). The worship of woman, especially a mother-figure, is another bond Clym has with Comte’s Religion of Humanity. Although Comte began with a philosophy based on scientific or sociological theories, he came to place a greater importance on the affections and to elevate the role of women as affective mentors. After the death of his beloved, Clotilde de Vaux, Comte transfigured her into an icon and established the central figure of positivist reverence a “Goddess or Madonna” figure.⁷⁴ After the deaths of Clym’s wife and mother, his mother remains an abiding presence for Clym, a “saint whose radiance even his tenderness for Eustacia could not obscure” (314).

⁷² Emile Durkheim, *Suicide*, 1897, trans. J.A. Spaulding and George Simpson as *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1951) 215.

⁷³ *Hamlet* I. ii. 98, 93-4.

⁷⁴ Wright, 32.

John Paterson notes that the “disaffection for life”, the “corruption of spirit or failure of nerve” which Clym exhibits, is characteristic of Hamlet.⁷⁵ Like Hamlet, afflicted with the “craven scruple/ Of thinking too precisely on th’event”⁷⁶, his “wearing habit of meditation” (109) robs him of the capacity for decisive action. But rather than trying “take arms against a sea of troubles”,⁷⁷ Clym has a view of life as “a thing to be put up with” (131-32). For all his talk, he never actually realises his idea of educating the poor. After the quarrel with Eustacia, Clym takes no active steps to regain her until it is too late. Posing as a man of thought and a man of sorrows provides further excuses for his never emerging as a man of action. His times are no more out of joint than Hamlet’s, and Clym does nothing to set them right.

In a myriad of classical allusions, Hardy’s male protagonist is compared to numerous tragic heroes, but such comparisons invariably seem to expose how he falls short of tragic status. Paterson concludes that Clym is obliged at the end of the novel to assume the “sublime insight and humility of King Oedipus at the last station of his tragic progress”⁷⁸ without having earned it. Even though Clym has passed through real suffering, his moral lectures still lack conviction and the power to convince: “some said that his words were commonplace, others complained of his want of theological doctrine; while others again remarked that it was well enough for a man to take to preaching who could not see to do anything else” (315). His self-imposed isolation is self-dramatising and unjustified. When a dance at East Egdon is mooted, he declares: “I still stick to my doom. At that kind of meeting people would shun me” (201), even though his only afflictions at this point are his weakened eyesight and reduced financial circumstances. When he claims after Eustacia’s drowning that “She is the second

⁷⁵ John Paterson “Composition and Revision of the Novel”, *RN*, 344.

⁷⁶ *Hamlet* IV. v. 39.

⁷⁷ *Hamlet* III i. 59.

⁷⁸ Paterson, “Composition and Revision ”, 344.

woman I have killed this year” (293), we are inclined to agree with the level-headed Venn that he is exaggerating his guilt for dramatic effect. Clym’s tragedy is that he never experiences the *anagnorisis* of Oedipus: he is blind to his real situation, and that of others, until it is too late.

Hardy’s novel calls into question not just Eustacia’s desire for a grand passion but Clym’s Positivist idealism. Even the rustics are quick to perceive that his scheme for enlightenment is unrealistic: “He’ll never carry it out in the world” (135). His overly cerebral approach to life is shown to be just as invalid as Eustacia’s overly emotional approach. Boumelha describes the novel as turning upon what proves to be a double tragedy: “the man’s tragedy is primarily intellectual, the woman’s sexual.”⁷⁹ In both cases, Clym and Eustacia’s social context reveals them in a different light to the idealised vision they have of themselves. Eustacia in fact exhorts him to maintain a wilful blindness to objective reality: “Never mind what is — let us only look at what seems” (162).

The Return of the Native begins and ends on Rainbarrow, the elevation commanding views over Egdon Heath, a structural symmetry which focusses attention on the Heath’s problematic significance. Despite his dreams of enlightenment, Clym is unable to transform this pagan tumulus into a Mount of Transfiguration. D.H. Lawrence thought the “the real sense of tragedy” in Hardy’s novel derived “from the setting”, a vast indifferent background “which matters more than the people who move upon it”.⁸⁰ Individual lives may be played out on its surface, but the Heath remains “singularly colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony” (4). Hardy’s hostile view of the Heath contrasts with Wordsworth’s pantheistic vision: “Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her”. For Clym, who romanticises Nature in Wordsworthian fashion, the

⁷⁹ Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women*, 48.

⁸⁰ Lawrence, 25, 28.

Heath is “exhilarating, and strengthening, and soothing” (147), expectations which do not prepare him for the sudden antagonism of the storm on the night he belatedly sets out to find Eustacia and is almost drowned in the attempt. Although Clym idealises the Heath, it shows him no special favours. In fact, it could be said to “betray” Clym, bringing about the death of both his mother and his wife. Nature in Hardy’s work does not “lead from joy to joy” or “impress with quietness and beauty”:⁸¹ in fact, the ugliness of the Heath is a sombre reminder of the harsh struggle for existence, reducing humans to the level of animals.

In *The Return*, the naturalistic descriptions emphasize “human insignificance”⁸² in comparison to the vastness of the Heath: “a sense of bare equality with, and no superiority to, a single living thing under the sun” (164).⁸³ Clym in his furze-cutting gear appears as “a brown spot in the midst of an expanse of olive-green gorse, and nothing more” (197). Similarly, Thomasin is “a pale-blue spot in a vast field of neutral brown, solitary and undefended except by the power of her own hope” (127). Humans in this post-Darwinian universe have no special status: Mrs Yeobright’s dying moments are contrasted with the “fulness of life” of the surrounding insect world and the joyous transcendence of a heron in flight (226). Rather than feeling pity for her suffering, the reader is invited to see her death as part of the cycle of life.

This naturalistic worldview is also expressed in Hardy’s emphasis on physiological reactions. As Phillip Mallett points out, this “intimacy of the relation between the physiological and affective in Hardy’s work is unprecedented in English fiction”,⁸⁴ although central to French Naturalism, and derived from Comtean precepts.

Comte was “so persuaded of the physical basis of our affective life” that he felt

⁸¹ “Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey”, ll. 123-24, 125-28.

⁸² *Two on a Tower* (London: Macmillan, 1952) 32.

⁸³ Virtually the same description appears in *Desperate Remedies* (London: Penguin, 1998) 230.

⁸⁴ Phillip Mallett, “Hardy and Philosophy”, *A Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Keith Wilson (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) 26.

physiological explanation alone was sufficient to explain physical attraction.⁸⁵ Eustacia is surprised by the “sudden rush of blood” (203) which the sight of Wildeve arouses in her. During the course of their dance, Eustacia’s “pulses began to move too quickly for longer rumination”, physical responses taking precedence over mental processes. Even the light was of a type which “drives the emotions to rankness” (204), reviving “tropical sensations” (205) in the dancing couple. The prominence of physiology involves an element of determinism, which views human beings as the victims of irresistible impulses. Eustacia wonders whether her renewed attraction to Wildeve is merely the product of environmental factors (205); Wildeve is happy to see himself as the victim of a naturalistic force beyond his control, the “curse of inflammability” (50).

In Hardy’s work, however, an unmistakeable element of fatalism, an “all-pervading sense of some sinister power behind events”,⁸⁶ counterbalances the physical causality of heredity and environment espoused by the Naturalists. In this novel replete with classical allusions, the characters frequently attach a meaning to events which approaches a Greek concept of the gods and Fate. According to Chapman, Hardy constantly “asserts that sense of a controlling power which has always been deemed to be as basic to tragedy as the assertion of individual will”.⁸⁷ However this “controlling power” is a shifting referent in Hardy’s work which encompasses everything from determinism to random chance.

When Eustacia pauses momentarily to “observe herself as a disinterested spectator, and think what a sport for Heaven” she was (264), her words recall Gloucester’s “As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods/ They kill us for their sport”.⁸⁸ In the 1895 “Preface”, Hardy linked Egdon with “the heath of that traditionary King of

⁸⁵ Mallett, 25.

⁸⁶ Newton, “Chance as Employed by Hardy and the Naturalists”, 170.

⁸⁷ Raymond Chapman, “The Worthy Encompassed by the Inevitable”: Hardy and a New Perception of Tragedy”, *Reading Thomas Hardy*, ed. Charles C. Pettit (London: Macmillan, 1998) 144.

⁸⁸ *King Lear* IV, i, 38-9.

Wessex – Lear” (1). But Lear’s heath is not the same Heath Eustacia wanders during the storm on her last night of existence, nor are Gloucester’s pagan gods from the same pantheon as the “Prince of the World” (233) whom Eustacia imagines is thwarting her every attempt at self-realisation. The Heath they traverse is different for each of the major characters. Eustacia demonises the Heath and invests it with a primitive genius whose personal antagonism allows her to ignore her own shortcomings. Clym idealises the Heath, and its furze-cutting inhabitants, but always remains an outsider: the rustics whom Clym seeks to elevate through education think that he would do better to “mind his business” (135). For Eustacia and Clym, the Heath is an overwhelming imaginative stimulus which impacts on their sense of self. Yet not all Egdonites derive a sense of their own tragedy from the Heath: to Thomasin, there were no “demons in the air” and “Egdon in the mass was no monster whatever” (282-83). Although Venn looms out of the darkness at times like some *genius loci*, looking to the rustics like “the devil or the red ghost” (25), he is shown to belong to the Heath; a denizen of the Heath who knows its ways and for whom it holds no fears.

Rather than a narrative in which Hardy fails to create protagonists of tragic stature, *The Return of the Native* can be regarded as an experiment in which Hardy tests whether “modern” characters, suffering different strains of *mal du siècle*, are capable of sustaining a tragedy of Sophoclean or Shakespearean dimensions. Clym and Eustacia struggle as much with their own romanticised delusions as with an opposing environment. Even when the scales fall from his eyes after the death of Eustacia, Clym still lacks the *anagnorisis* which could transform him; he remains bound to his rock of suffering. It raises the question as to whether Clym and Eustacia are comparable to the heroes and heroines of traditional tragedy or prefigure modern anti-heroic types. Many of Hardy’s young idealists could be seen as suffering “the tragic waste and unfulfilment

of those who ‘prophetically’ live out the modernist premises”.⁸⁹ Despite their failings, Hardy continues to protest there is some value in the struggles of his protagonists: he takes them to the depths of *nescience* so that his readers can bear witness to an existential conflict rather than the deterministic hopelessness of French Naturalism. *The Return of the Native* “offers a tragic vision which contains the terror and the pity, but not the assurance of a continuing restored stability, or an explanation of why things are as they are”.⁹⁰

Despite the depths of human tragedy played out on its surface, nothing has really changed on the Heath. While *The Return of the Native* perhaps fails to achieve the tragic catharsis of *King Lear*, it paves the way for more epic tragedy in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Hot-headed and superstitious, Henchard commits a crime against family more heinous than Lear’s and spends the rest of his life struggling to overcome the natural and supernatural forces which have been unleashed by his folly. But unlike Clym or Eustacia, Henchard is capable of *anagnorisis*, and when the revelation comes it is of indisputably tragic proportions.

⁸⁹ De Laura, 381.

⁹⁰ Chapman, 153.

CHAPTER 3: *The Mayor of Casterbridge: A Story of a Man of Character*

But the bitter thing is, that when I was rich I didn't need what I could have, and now I be poor I can't have what I need! (178)¹

The Mayor of Casterbridge represents a departure from the progressive sequence of Hardy's tragic novels, taking a significant step backwards in time. In lieu of a contemporary drama, this novel evokes an earlier agrarian economy where more primitive ways of life had continued unchallenged for centuries. A large, powerful figure, the eponymous hero of the story embodies these ancient rural traditions and superstitions and is unable to accommodate to the rationalisation of old agricultural practices or to the rationalistic dispelling of long-held beliefs. Through the course of the novel Michael Henchard is identified with patriarchal figures of folkloric and biblical significance. His struggles align more readily with the "higher passions"² of the ancients than did Clym and Eustacia's. By contrast with Clym, that ineffective intellectual, Henchard is a man of action, for better or worse, and has an epic quality which enables him to carry the weight of mythological analogies more convincingly. His powerful emotions and the *peripeteia*, or fall from grace, which he undergoes, make him a more authentically tragic protagonist than is to be found in *The Return of the Native*.

Underlying the tragedy of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is an older, European Romanticism. Henchard's brooding presence evokes the proto-Romantic movement in German literature and music known as *Sturm und Drang* [Storm and Stress], a precursor of Romanticism in its reaction against rationalism. Henchard's outbursts of strong emotion

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, parenthetical references are to *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, ed. Phillip Mallett (New York: Norton, 2001); hereafter critical articles included in the edition are referred to using the cue-title "*MC*".

² "The Profitable Reading of Fiction", Orel, 114.

followed by periods of gloom and melancholy make him a typical *Sturm und Drang* protagonist. Although later English Romanticism also values the subjective view of the individual, the German movement gave expression to violent, sometimes antisocial behaviour and emotions rather than to idealistic aspirations and feelings.

The *Sturm und Drang* hero is “at odds with his world and doomed to destroy himself through his passionate, obsessive nature”,³ a description tailor-made for Hardy’s mayor. The primary literary exponent of this genre was Goethe,⁴ to whom Hardy devotes extensive entries in his *Literary Notebooks*. In “Candour in English Fiction”, he lists *Faust* and *Wilhelm Meister* among the “great works of the past”.⁵ Like Goethe’s Faust, Henchard is “a vehement gloomy being who had quitted the ways of vulgar men without light to guide him on a better way” (89). The quotation is taken from an essay in which Thomas Carlyle interprets Goethe’s Faust as a man who is “the slave of impulses, which are stronger, not truer or better,” than the common man’s and whose acts are “the more unsafe that they are solitary”.⁶ Henchard is likewise an isolated figure who shuns most relationships and tends to act impulsively. His choices are based on instinct rather than on rational thought: “the momentum of his character knew no patience” (145), just like Goethe’s Faust who “curses patience more than all the rest”.⁷

The Faustian parallel is unwittingly reinforced by Henchard himself when he hears that Farfrae has bought his furniture: “Surely he’ll buy my body and soul likewise!” (171) Faust, like Henchard, is a man “stung into fury, as he thinks of all he has endured and lost” who either “broods in gloomy meditation” or bursts into “fiery paroxysms”. He shares with

³ Heath, 38.

⁴ Terry Eagleton notes that Goethe’s Romantic novel of unrequited love, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, had a dramatic impact on late eighteenth-century readers and beyond. See *Sweet Violence*, 180.

⁵ “Candour”, 130-31.

⁶ Benjamin Sankey, “Henchard and Faust”, *English Language Notes* 3, 2 (December 1965): 124.

⁷ Sankey, 124.

Henchard the conviction that “whenever he is not successful, fortune has dealt with him unjustly”, a habit of mind which leads to Faustian “disillusionment and bitterness”.⁸

Henchard is likewise prone to periods of “moody depression” which coincide with “isolated hours of superstition” when he is convinced that “some power” is “working against him” (145).

Goethe is linked aesthetically to Beethoven, who drew on the author’s writings as lyrics for some of his songs. Beethoven was declared by E.T.A. Hoffman, the German author and critic, “a purely romantic composer”. For Hoffman, Beethoven’s musical Romanticism “sets in motion the machinery of awe, of fear, of terror, of pain, and awakens that infinite yearning which is the essence of romanticism”.⁹ Such a description evokes the archetypal pity and terror which is the “machinery” of tragedy. The sense of “infinite yearning” which can never be fulfilled corresponds to the tragic discrepancy between Henchard’s deeply-felt emotions and the way his life is played out.

Beethoven’s brooding figure, irascible nature and periods of depression in themselves recall Hardy’s mayor, for whom “music was of regal power” (223). The musical motif running through *The Mayor of Casterbridge* takes the place of the more literary Romanticism usually encountered in Hardy’s novels, but functions similarly: both relate to what stirs the characters’ deep emotions and aspirations. When we first meet Henchard, he is walking apart from his wife and child, preferring to lose himself in the contemplation of a ballad sheet (5). He is described as one whose being resonated with music: certain tunes “would make [his] blood ebb and flow like the sea” (176); the “merest trumpet or organ tone was enough to move him, and high harmonies transubstantiated him”

⁸ Sankey, 124.

⁹ David Charlton, ed., *E.T.A. Hoffmann’s Musical Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) 97-98.

(223). Henchard's Romantic yearnings towards something beyond the common sphere are emotional rather than intellectual. Even in his fits of depression, if he "summoned music to his aid" he was able to bear the weight of his existence (223). Accordingly, he calls upon the choir at the hotel to "strike up a tune ... in hopes of getting altogether out of [his] minor key" (176). He claims, "If I could afford it, be hanged if I wouldn't keep a church choir at my own expense to play and sing to me at these low, dark times" (177).

Henchard will even invoke the power of music as a weapon, at one point calling upon the choir to perform Psalm 109 when he spies Farfrae walking past with his former mistress, Lucetta. These "comminatory verses" (177), in Henchard's superstitious mind, have the power to call down a curse upon Farfrae and effect the revenge upon his rival which he fails, Hamlet-like, to enact in person: "I could double him up like that – and yet I don't" (178). When Henchard does arrange a fight to the death with Farfrae, he is unable to carry it through because Farfrae arrives humming a snatch from "Auld Lang Syne", the air he had sung on his arrival in Casterbridge. Not only does this song remind him of his former friendship with the young man, it recalls his emotions: "Nothing moved Henchard like an old melody" (205). The corn merchant also blames the power of music for Farfrae's gaining the advantage over him: "it was partly by his songs that he got over me, and heaved me out" (178). Indeed, "the young man's composition so commanded his heart that Farfrae could play upon him as on an instrument" (208).

On his first night in Casterbridge, Farfrae favoured the assembled company with songs of his native Scotland, completely taking "possession of the hearts of the Three Mariners' inmates" (43). Henchard, too, had been entranced: "When the Scotchman sang his voice had reached Henchard's ears through the heart-shaped holes in the window-shutters", leading him to conclude "How that fellow does draw me!" (45) Music in the

novel is shown to have the power to bypass the reason and influence the emotions directly. Even the reticent Elizabeth-Jane, “a girl characterized by earnestness and soberness of mien” (44), is drawn to Farfrae through the medium of music: “she could not help pausing to listen; and the longer she listened the more she was enraptured” (41). In turn, Farfrae’s initial attraction to Elizabeth-Jane is recounted in musical terms. When he meets her on the stair, he starts to softly hum the tune “Bonnie Peg”, and having “started himself on a flight of song”, he is not at once able to check his momentum (45).¹⁰

The narrator suggests that every time and place has its own version of Romanticism. Even Casterbridge “had sentiment – Casterbridge had romance” (43). The emotions of the “bruckle folk” (42) of Casterbridge are unlocked by music which speaks to the heart rather than to the intellect. Elizabeth-Jane comments to Farfrae, “you seemed to feel so deep down in your heart; so that we all felt for you” (73). The sentimental nature of his singing is able to penetrate even the rough exterior of the Casterbridge worthies “who were only too prone to shut up their emotions with caustic words” (41). The locals came to view Farfrae “through a golden haze” (43) of emotion which reminds them of “flowers and fair faces”. These are visions they had forgotten in the struggle to survive, “what with hard winters, and so many mouths to fill” (42). Like a Romantic poet, Farfrae imparts a fresh vision, a “sentiment of a differing quality” which takes the Casterbridge locals beyond their day-to-day existence. Through his music, “he was to them like the poet of a new school”, the “first to articulate what all his listeners have felt, though but dumbly until then” (43).

The musical Romanticism portrayed in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is of a more visceral kind than the often refined idealism of the Romantic poets, and the more potent for

¹⁰ In *Desperate Remedies*, Cytherea is moved by the power of Manston’s musical performance in spite of herself, “swayed into emotional opinions concerning the strange man before her”. See *Desperate Remedies* (London: Penguin, 1998) 139.

making direct contact with the listeners' emotions. The novel evokes some of the more extreme "storm and stress" emotions portrayed in Goethe's novels, such as the suicidal impulse in *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, or the outbursts of revengeful rage and greed exemplified in the unfinished *Prometheus*.¹¹ Unlike Shelley's hero who is "the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature",¹² Goethe's Prometheus exemplifies "intransigence rather than altruism". Henchard's "'Titanic' self-assertion"¹³ is more Goethean than it is Shelleyan.

Writing of the German Romantics in *The Story of Goethe's Life*, the critic G.H. Lewes asserts "they proclaimed 'Mythology and Poetry, symbolical Legend and Art to be one and indivisible'".¹⁴ This Romantic aesthetic relates to Hardy's elaborating mythological frameworks for his tragedies. Hardy underlined Goethe's quotation from Schlegel, that the "deficiency of all modern Art lies in the fact that the Artists have no mythology".¹⁵ In order to create a more potent dramatic persona for his mayor, Hardy aligns Henchard with mythological and legendary personages, ranging from King Lear and King Saul though to figures of ancient folk rituals, and even to Dionysus, the god who presided over the birth of tragedy.

According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, the word tragedy is connected with the Greek word *tragos*, meaning goat, and *ōidē*, song. Tragedy relates to the song performed by the half-men half-goats, the satyrs of the dionysiac cortège.¹⁶ Music is considered to be the most Dionysian of the arts, "since it appeals directly to man's

¹¹ Alan C. Leidner, "A Titan in Extenuating Circumstances: Sturm Und Drang and the *Kraftmensch*", *PMLA* 104, 2 (March 1989): 178.

¹² Shelley, "Preface", *Prometheus Unbound, Shelley's Poetry and Prose* (New York: Norton, 2002) 207.

¹³ Leidner, 178.

¹⁴ *LN*, vol. 1, 261-62.

¹⁵ *LN*, vol. 1, 15.

¹⁶ In *A Handbook of Greek Literature* (London: Methuen, 1964) 131, H.J. Rose suggests that this may equally be a reference to the figure of the Dark-man or Dionysus who wore a black goat-skin cloak.

instinctive, chaotic emotions and not to his formally reasoning mind”.¹⁷ Henchard’s obsession with music provides a strong link to Dionysus (Bacchus), especially when added to his weakness for strong drink. The worship of Dionysus fostered intoxication, which could lead to self-destructive passions and actions. Henchard sells his wife and daughter during a drunken stupor and later claims, “I was not in my senses”. (220) The unusual detail that Henchard’s “dark pupils ... always seemed to have a red spark of light in them” (52) is suggestive of the Dionysian practice of adding hallucinogens to wine. The maenads were depicted as having red eyes with dilated pupils.

Dionysus was also associated with unbounded passions and with fierce, untamed animals such as leopards or bulls.¹⁸ There are references to Henchard’s passionate temperament: “unruly volcanic stuff beneath the rind” (87); “a man who knew no moderation in his requests and impulses” (60); “the kind of man to whom some human object for pouring out his heat upon – were it emotive or were it choleric – was almost a necessity” (95-6). His characteristics are frequently compared to those of wild animals: “Henchard’s tigerish affection” (71); “his diplomacy ... wrongheaded as a buffalo’s” (88); his satisfaction “fierce in its strength” (51). The incident in which he wrestles a bull and overpowers it (157) is indicative of his brute strength and relates to legendary accounts of bull-wrestling in ancient texts.

The infant Dionysus is dismembered but then resurrected by the intervention of Zeus. The various myths of the god’s death and rebirth link him, not only with the withering and regeneration of crops, but with the combats and careers of the tragic heroes portrayed during the Dionysian festival in Athens. During these celebrations, an image of

¹⁷ <http://www.historyguide.org/europe/dio_apollo.html> 9 July 2012.

¹⁸ P.E. Easterling, “A Show for Dionysus”, *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997) 45.

the god was carried into the theatre and watched over all the tragedies performed in the temple precinct of Dionysus. In linking Henchard's story with Dionysus, Hardy conjures up some of the most ancient associations of tragedy.

Dionysian and Apollonian are also terms used by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) to describe the two driving principles in Greek culture. In opposition to the excesses of the Dionysian, the Apollonian way was based on rational thought, structure and harmonious form. Nietzsche believed that both forces were present in Greek tragedy, and that genuine tragedy could only be produced when the tension between both was played out.¹⁹ In the context of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Henchard's struggles with Farfrae could be seen in terms of a classical opposition between the passionate and irrational Dionysian tendencies of Henchard on the one hand, and the Apollonian desire for reason and order exemplified by the young Farfrae. Lucetta comments that Scots like Farfrae are "free from Southern extremes" and have achieved a balance between sentimentalism and rationalism. The narrator confirms that "the curious double strands in Farfrae's thread of life – the commercial and the romantic – were very distinct" (122) and well regulated.

Dionysus was also a god of plant growth and fertility, who played a role in the Eleusinian Mysteries and the agrarian cult of Demeter.²⁰ The initiation into these "highest mystic truths" included the ritual display of "an ear of corn in silence reaped".²¹ That Henchard's fortunes depend entirely on the corn and grain trade and that he is finally undone by a change in the weather at harvest time link him with the English folklore character of the Corn-King or Corn-God, "a fertility figure traditionally associated with

¹⁹ <http://www.historyguide.org/europe/dio_apollo.html> 9 July 2012.

²⁰ Easterling, 45.

²¹ Hippolytus, "The Refutation of all Heresies" in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 5 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994) 3.

thriving abundance in the agricultural world”.²² The English word “corn” was originally a general term for all wheat and grains. As the novel opens, Henchard is portrayed as someone whose basic livelihood depends on the harvest, dressed as he is in the traditional garb of the hay-trusser. The food and liquor that he and his family seek out in the furmity tent is a mixture of fermented grains. Henchard’s stated ambition is to set up in the fodder business, but in order to obtain prominence as a corn merchant, he seems convinced that he must first sacrifice his wife and child.

By the time Susan and her daughter re-enter Henchard’s life, he has effectively become the “king” of the local corn trade: “Never a big dealing in wheat, barley, oats, hay, roots and such-like in this county but Henchard’s got a hand in it” (29). At the time of their arrival in Casterbridge, there are nonetheless signs his potency is on the wane. The locals have begun calling his leadership into question because of the “bad corn” and “grown wheat” (30) he has been supplying. Henchard himself recognises that his power is diminishing and feels the need to advertise for a new “manager of the corn department” (31). Enter Farfrae the pretender – young, vital, and possessing a secret power to revitalise the bad crop of his predecessor.

Hardy uses folklore, which would have been familiar to some contemporary readers, to identify his corn merchant with the character of the Corn-King. The well-known song, “John Barleycorn”, was widely distributed throughout England during this period via the medium of the ballad sheet, an example of which Henchard is reading at the opening of the novel. In this ballad, the corn is personified as a man who is buried in the soil, grows up and is then cut down at the legs and ground up for flour. The song also refers to barley

²² Radford, 134.

being turned into brandy, and so provides a further vernacular reference to Henchard's drunkenness, which leaves him "legless" overnight in the furmity tent.

In the Corn-King ritual, a person selected from the tribe is treated as a king for a period of time, and then sacrificed so that his blood will fertilise the fields. The fact that the remains were scattered over the fields may be a mythical way of recording the sowing of the grain, rather than human sacrifice, in the view of J.G. Frazer.²³ Henchard's fall could nevertheless be paralleled with a fertility rite in which one person is sacrificed to ensure the revitalising of the community. Frazer notes that an effigy of the corn-god may have come to be buried instead of a human victim so that new life would be symbolically restored. In Casterbridge the Mixen Lane locals construct an effigy of Henchard for the skimmity-ride and later "bury" the effigy in the water in an unwitting repetition of an ancient fertility ritual. When Henchard, on the point of suicide, comes across his double in the river, he is turned aside from his original intention and "resurrected" to a new life.

The "Mummers' Play" in *The Return of the Native* enacts a similar ritual of sacrificing the old to restore the new.²⁴ H.J. Rose notes that there exists to the present day in Greece mumming-plays which involve conflict between a "Fair-man" and a "Dark-man" and so enact "the almost world-wide combat between Summer and Winter". Rose proposes a link between Dionysus (as *Melanthos* or Dark-man) and "a contest in which the power of fertility was for some reason killed ... or at least endangered by a formidable adversary".²⁵ The scene is set for an archetypal encounter between the dark, brooding Henchard, rooted in the legendary past, and the newcomer Farfrae, with his "fair countenance" (31).

²³ J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, Ch. 41.

²⁴ R.J.E. Tiddy, *The Mummers' Play* (Trowbridge: Redwood, 1972) 71.

²⁵ H.J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Literature* (London: Methuen, 1964) 131, 133.

Henchard's way of doing business is old-fashioned and god-like, subjecting his employees to his outbursts of ill-humour or his equally oppressive good will. Farfrae, the rational exponent of modern labour relations, opposes this "tyrannical" (77) manner of dealing with employees. As the representative of the old order, Henchard had "used to reckon his sacks by chalk strokes ... measure his ricks by stretching with his arms, weigh his trusses by a lift, judge his hay by a 'chaw' ... now this accomplished young man did it all by smooth ciphering, and machines, and mensuration" (83). When Farfrae eventually takes over the business, Abel Whittle confesses, "'tis better for us than 'twas ... We work harder, but we bain't made afeard now ... No busting out, no slamming of doors, no meddling with yer eternal soul" (168). Farfrae managed to achieve higher levels of production, and yet this "modern" scientific approach is remote and lacks the emotional involvement of the old ways.

The new scientific regime is epitomised in Farfrae's advocacy of the mechanised seed-drill: "No more sowers flinging about their seed broadcast ... Each grain will go straight to its intended place". As Elizabeth-Jane observes adroitly, "Then the romance of the sower is gone for ever ... How things change" (129). The struggle between Henchard and Farfrae is essentially a contest between the heart and the mind, between a Romantic view of agricultural Britain and the demands of efficiency and pragmatism. The traditional methods exemplified by Henchard are rooted in both history and folklore, which lend a sense of security and continuity, and also bestow awe and mystery on the rhythms of the weather and the seasons. No doubt Farfrae's new scientific management style will lead to business efficiency and a more equitable workplace. But at what cost, if the emotional and religious associations of the seasonal cycle are unravelled and lost?

As an outsider, Farfrae has no historical ties with Casterbridge or its inhabitants, and is able to take an objective view of it in the present. The sentimentality which Farfrae displays when singing of his homeland proves to be superficial: he has no intention of going back to Scotland. He confesses to Elizabeth-Jane, “it’s well you feel a song for a few minutes, and your eyes they get quite tearful; but you finish it, and for all you felt you don’t mind it or think of it again for a long while” (73). Farfrae is candid but lacks depth of feeling. When Henchard tries to explain how he suffers from “gloomy fits”, Farfrae’s response is inadequate: “Ah, now, I never feel like it” (62). Abel Whittle’s moving account of Henchard’s last moments draws no more response from Farfrae than “Dear me – is that so!” (251)

Even to affairs of the heart, Farfrae applies more logic than passion. It is after “an exceptionally fortunate business transaction” that Farfrae turns his thoughts, with their regulated ranking of “the commercial and the romantic” to the question of marrying Elizabeth-Jane: who else was “so pleasing, thrifty, and satisfactory in every way”? (121) But his chance encounter with Lucetta puts him in her power, she “sensibly getting the upper hand in these exchanges of sentiment” (160). Like many a character in courtship novels, he is taken in by superficial appearances, and deceived as to true character. After her death, “Time, ‘in his own grey style,’ taught Farfrae how to estimate his experience of Lucetta” (227). The quotation from Shelley’s *Epipsychidion* contrasts the idealisation of the beloved with Farfrae’s coolly practical evaluation of Lucetta. The “insight, briskness, and rapidity of his nature” enables him to evade nimbly “any looming misery” (227). In this, he is the polar opposite of the Romantic lover whose “moth-like Muse has burnt its wings”.²⁶ Farfrae does not belong to the Romantic “band of the worthy” whose “hearts insist upon a

²⁶ See *Epipsychidion*, ll. 53-57.

dogged fidelity” to a lost person or cause (227). His are superficial attractions rather than ideal passions, and although he has been “burnt”, his pragmatism enables him to look to the future rather than mourn the past.

While Hardy shares what Radford calls the “Victorians’ passion for possessing the lost things of the past and making them part of their own experience”,²⁷ he also recognises the need for progress. In the essay, “The Dorsetshire Labourer”, which Hardy wrote during this period, he accepts change that will better the conditions of rural workers. While not deploring progress *per se*, Hardy nevertheless regrets that country people whose lives were interwoven with the land by continuous occupation over many generations have had those bonds weakened. Their “seclusion and immutability” lent individuality and “artistic merit” to the rural workfolk in the eyes of self-confessed “romantic spectators” like Hardy. By contrast, “a new comer [like Farfrae], who takes strictly commercial views of his man ... cannot afford to waste a penny on sentimental considerations”. Hardy concludes, perhaps with a sigh, “It is only the old story that progress and picturesqueness do not harmonise”.²⁸

George Levine contends that, in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy succeeds in reconciling the dual demands of romance and reality, incorporating the techniques of romance into a realistic social, historical and geographical context, while at the same time “claiming kinship with great tragedy”.²⁹ Unlike Hardy’s other major novels, there is little reference to the aspects of French Naturalism drawn from nonhuman Nature. The denizens of Mixen Lane, who recall similar slum dwellers in Zola’s fiction, supply the main reference to Naturalism. Mixen Lane’s urban degeneracy is imaged as a “mildewed leaf in the sturdy and flourishing Casterbridge plant” (193), but Hardy’s liberal social awareness

²⁷ Radford, 9.

²⁸ “The Dorsetshire Labourer”, Orel, 182, 181.

²⁹ George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) 243.

moderates any purely naturalistic determinism. Hardy does not condone the criminal activities of the Mixen Lane subculture, but he recognises that included in their number are rural folk forced off their land “due to the iron hand of necessity” (194). The town itself has an unwholesome effect on such newcomers, however. Casterbridge is described by one of the locals as “a old, hoary place o’ wickedness” (42), whose criminal past exerts a demoralising influence on the current inhabitants.

The period of composition of this novel coincided with the construction of Hardy’s house, Max Gate, which he designed on the outskirts of Dorchester (renamed Casterbridge in Hardy’s Wessex). For Hardy, the return to his native Dorset reflected a desire to rediscover his roots and to establish a permanent home. Not only did Hardy have a deep-seated attachment to local folklore and the history of his birthplace, he was also drawn to the emerging science of archaeology. During the construction of the driveway at Max Gate, the graves of two or more Roman soldiers were unearthed, a discovery which prompted Hardy to give a scientific paper on the remains to the Dorset antiquarian society.³⁰ Hardy’s sympathy was with contemporaries such as Sir Mortimer Wheeler who insisted that “the archaeologist is digging up, not *things*, but *people*,” believing that the science of archaeology must be “seasoned with humanity”.³¹ Hardy’s notion of history emphasises the continuity of all human experience which, for him, is immortalised in a type of collective memory built up from shared reminiscences and discoveries.

As Radford expresses it, “Hardy broods over the landmarks of local topography because they are encrusted with ancestral imprints”.³² Every scene in *The Mayor of*

³⁰ “Some Romano-British Relics Found at Max Gate, Dorchester”, Orel, 191.

³¹ Harold Orel, “Thomas Hardy and the Developing Science of Archaeology”, *Thomas Hardy Annual* 4 (1986): 24.

³² Radford, 4.

Casterbridge is imbued with greater significance due to the ancient historical setting and the effect that it exerts on the latter-day inhabitants. Hardy was intrigued by the notion that these concealed remains might provide clues to not just the physical, but also to the mental development of later generations. Hardy's description of the lingering malign influence of former misdeeds further demonstrates his belief in the continuity of human experience.

From the first moment in the novel when Henchard pauses to take stock of his surroundings, he is struck by the appearance of the uplands, "dotted with barrows, and trenched with the remains of prehistoric forts" (15). Hardy notes that some of these historic circles or earthworks were chosen "for appointments of a furtive kind", such encounters being coloured by "something sinister" which lingered there (56). The narrative is underpinned by a sense of foreboding, as if the presence of ancestral beings still lingers in the vicinity of their burials.

Not only the Romans but the ancient Celtic peoples reshaped the Dorset landscape in prehistoric times. The multi-layered setting of the novel stresses the immutability of human experience, the sense that even though times may change, the passions and dramas played out in this place remain largely unchanged. Henchard's wife, Susan, is buried in "the still-used burial-ground of the old Romano-British city", her "dust mingled with the dust of women who lay ornamented with glass hair-pins and amber necklaces" (102). The emphasis on Roman antecedents may also reflect the novel's concern with the rise and fall of a provincial empire. Henchard achieves emperor-like status within his own sphere, playing out a drama of brief and confined proportions against the wider historical backdrop.

Andrew Radford has extensively studied the influence of both earlier and contemporary scientific discoveries on Hardy's work. He notes that the two sciences of geology and astronomy "were often connected in that they both opened up perspectives that

seemed to dwarf humankind and its history”.³³ In his *Literary Notebooks*, Hardy quotes from a contemporary review expressing this idea: “To look on our own time from the point (of view) of universal history, on history from the point of view of geological periods, on geology from the point of view of astronomy – this is to enfranchise thought”.³⁴ While these new perspectives on human history broadened the outlook of Victorian thinkers, they also contained the germ of an idea which, taken to its logical outcome, led to a sense of “existential emptiness”.³⁵

A universe where the individual “gains no special attention from the forces that are unconscious and therefore supremely indifferent to his hopes and efforts”³⁶ reappears forcefully in *Two on a Tower* where Swithin St Cleeve concludes “nothing is made for man”. Yet he embraces the study of astronomy which is “almost tragic in its quality”. Rather than the universe being the creation of a benevolent deity, his scientific study reveals “monsters of magnitude without known shape”. Such “Immensities” make him “feel human insignificance too plainly”, making it almost “not worth while to live”.³⁷

The unimaginable lengths of time encompassed by geology, combined with the unimaginable distances presented by astronomy, serve paradoxically to introduce a modern, dispassionate view of human suffering. In trying to accommodate new scientific ideas in his literary creations, Hardy embraced two conflicting viewpoints. On the one hand, he is the self-educated Victorian with an amateur fascination for science, and on the other, the forward-looking philosopher who does not flinch from applying post-Darwinian logic to social change. His fiction embodies ideas which straddle the great divide between the

³³ Radford, 117-18.

³⁴ *LN*, vol. 1, 162.

³⁵ Radford, 118.

³⁶ Kramer, *The Forms of Tragedy*, 35.

³⁷ *Two on a Tower* (London: Macmillan, 1952) 32-33.

moral and religious conservatism of the Victorian era and the iconoclastic views which would result in modernist nihilism.

Pitted against the vast dimensions of time and space represented by archaeological sites such as Maiden Castle, a “pre-historic earthen fort of huge dimensions”, a human being like Henchard could seem “but an insignificant speck” (233). Yet Henchard himself has an appreciably quasi-primeval presence, with his “facial angle so slightly inclined as to be almost perpendicular” and his “fine figure, swarthy, and stern in aspect” (5), like an archaic survival. His larger-than-life figure dwarfs those around him. “Constructed upon too large a scale” (139) to discern small nuances of expression, or to “give his mind to ... finikin details” (60), Henchard favours in body and mind the half-classical, half-folk games which he organises in competition with Farfrae’s modern entertainments. If not an epic hero, Hardy’s mayor does call to mind the local kings of ancient times, like Lear. In common with Lear, Henchard commands our attention and our pity, if not always our admiration.

In the period of roughly fifteen years which elapsed after the episode of drunkenness in which he sold his wife and child, Henchard becomes a sober pillar of society whose greatest aim is to keep his “shady, headstrong, disgraceful life as a young man absolutely unopened” (58). Note the archaeological image: it is as if Henchard’s previous life has been buried in a tomb which he hopes will lie forever undisturbed. Yet the novel indicates that despite such hopes “at length the truth will out”.³⁸ After Susan Henchard’s death, one of the Mixen Lane crew comments: “little things a’ didn’t wish seen, anybody will see; and her wishes and ways will all be as nothing!” (93). The plot of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* turns on the idea of secrets being unearthed – not so much

³⁸ *Merchant of Venice* II. ii. 79.

mysterious or valuable artefacts as the hidden acts and associations of characters with whom, as readers, we come to feel we have much in common.

Just as Hardy and his contemporaries were beginning to ponder the effect which the discovery of ancient artefacts might have on forming a sense of regional identity, there was another emergent science looking at what folk customs and festivals revealed about past religious practices. James Anson Farrer, a social historian with an anthropological interest in comparative religion that makes him a predecessor of J.G. Frazer's, proposes that "Like old Roman or British remains, buried under subsequent accumulations of earth and stones ... uninjured during all the length of time, [folk-beliefs] have lain unobserved ... just beneath the surface of nineteenth-century life, as indelible records of our mental history and origin".³⁹ Radford argues that Farrer must have influenced Hardy's thinking. One of Hardy's recurring themes is the lingering power which collective memory continues to exert over an apparently civilised population. While maintaining a veneer of Christianity, many of Hardy's characters continue to operate within a system of pagan beliefs and superstitions which owe more to prehistory than to post-Enlightenment education. Attending church, "they professed so much and believed so little" (142). The mid-nineteenth century rural folk of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* remain superstitious and, as the narrator explains, "saw in the god of the weather a more important personage than they do now ... Their impulse was well-nigh to prostrate themselves in lamentation before untimely rains and tempests" (140).

As the foremost representative of the old ways, Henchard has "something fetichistic" (16) about his beliefs. He has a peasant fatalism and attaches superstitious

³⁹ James A. Farrer, *Primitive Manners and Customs* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1879) 276; cited in Radford, 77-78.

significance to inanimate objects and natural events. Feeling that his power is slipping away, Henchard consults a weather-prophet in order to have the upper hand in the commercial battle with Farfrae. In this, he repeats Saul's actions when, about to go into battle with David, he seeks out a medium to call up the prophet Samuel. In both cases, the knowledge gained is to no avail. Saul is informed that "the Lord hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand and given it to thy neighbour, even to David" (I Samuel 28:17). Similarly, though the prophet's weather forecast proves to be true, Henchard is ruined and Farfrae empowered to take possession of his business, his house and possessions, his former lover and potential wife, and eventually his title as mayor.

The story of King Saul, usurped by the young shepherd boy who has been anointed as the future king, can be seen as an Old Testament version of the Corn-King myth. Saul, the aging monarch, commits a capital mistake and his position as the anointed king is removed from him and bestowed on David. The initial friendship between Saul and David turns to hatred as the tension of their respective positions grows, until finally Saul is defeated in battle and David takes his place as king. Julian Moynahan has made an exhaustive study of the extended parallels between the Henchard-Farfrae conflict and the Saul-David conflict.⁴⁰ For example Henchard is subject to "gloomy fits" (61) like Saul, who was soothed by David's playing of the harp. In similar fashion, Henchard longs for music as a solace in his distress, "for with Henchard music was of *regal* power" (223) [my emphasis]. Saul and Henchard are both described as tall, dark and strong, whereas Farfrae is "ruddy and of a fair countenance, bright-eyed, and slight in build" (37), coinciding with the description of the young David as "ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and

⁴⁰ Julian Moynahan, "The Mayor of Casterbridge and the Old Testament's First Book of Samuel: A Study of Some Literary Relationships", *PMLA* 71 (1956): 118-30.

goodly to look to” (1 Samuel 16:12). Like David, Farfrae attains great favour among the common people, especially the women, thanks to his personality, looks and abilities: “Henchard, who had hitherto been the most admired man in his circle, was the most admired no longer” (78).

What is to be made of this “strategy of association”?⁴¹ As previously noted in *The Return of the Native*, Hardy makes extensive use of literary and biblical references to give greater resonance to his characters. In order to portray Henchard as a tragic figure worthy of our consideration, Hardy uses extensive allusions to raise Henchard to the level of a tribal king, whether it be the moody, impulsive Saul of the Old Testament, or the archetypal figure of the Corn-King, sacrificed to ensure the continued prosperity of the horde. Just as the pagan myths were partly obliterated by the rise of the new order of Judeo-Christian morality, so the novel demonstrates that even that drama of struggle and redemption may now be overtaken by the commercial scientism that Farfrae seems to personify.

Archetypal, biblical and literary parallels structure *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, which also contains many echoes of *Les Misérables*, the 1861 novel by Victor Hugo. Both novels commence with a down-and-out character who reappears unexpectedly as the prosperous mayor of a small town. Hardy was familiar with the work of Hugo and listed him among those representing the distinctive genius of French literature.⁴² Hugo was one of Hardy’s favourite French authors,⁴³ Hardy describing himself as a “Victor-Hugo-ite still”, and commenting that he considered Hugo’s *misérables* superior to those of Dickens because of their “universality”.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Moynahan, 118.

⁴² “British Authors on French Literature”, Orel, 140.

⁴³ *LN*, vol. 1, 359.

⁴⁴ *CL*, vol. 3, 81.

While Björk asserts that he had “not detected any allusion to Hugo in Hardy’s creative writing”⁴⁵ beyond the use of this term, the links between *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Les Misérables* are compelling once the connection is uncovered. In his novel Hardy uses Hugo’s expression, “*misérables*”, to describe “all the failures of the town; those who had failed in business, in love, in sobriety, in crime” (170, 169). Not only is this a direct clue to the hidden literary relationship; it indicates that Hardy had in mind the denizens of Paris when describing the more disreputable citizens who inhabit the slums of this regional centre. The inhabitants of Mixen Lane represent a new development in Hardy’s depiction of the underprivileged classes. Instead of the comical rustic chorus of the pastoral novels, we now have a more sinister poor: “Vice ran freely in and out certain of the doors of the neighbourhood; recklessness ... shame ... theft ... even slaughter had not been altogether unknown here” (193).

Both *Les Misérables* and Hardy’s *Mayor* have for their protagonists men of large stature and great physical strength. Each has committed a criminal act for which he seeks to atone by a reformed life. When Henchard realises that he cannot undo his drunken misdeed, he takes an oath to avoid drink for twenty years. In *Les Misérables*, Jean Valjean steals silver candlesticks from a bishop who, upon discovering the theft, seizes the opportunity to make the ex-convict promise to reform his life.

Although the reformation of the two men is superficially similar, and each resurfaces in a position of wealth and authority as both mayor and local magistrate, a chasm separates the inner life of the protagonists. While Henchard’s actions are outwardly orthodox, Hardy stresses that it is superstition which elicits Henchard’s oath to change his ways. Once the period of abstinence has expired, Henchard immediately returns to drink

⁴⁵ *LN*, vol.1, 359.

and morbid bad temper. Valjean, on the other hand, experiences a true epiphany: Hugo records that “he was a changed man, enacting in his life what the bishop had sought to make of him. It was more than a transformation; it was a transfiguration” (*LM*, 208).⁴⁶

The French protagonist is motivated by Christian idealism: even at his lowest, Hugo maintains that Jean Valjean possessed “an element of the divine”, his heart having “become misshapen ... under disproportionate misfortune” (*LM*, 98). More pessimistic about the prospects of reforming individual human nature, Hardy’s mayor is the kind of recidivist Hugo’s Javert believes in. Those like Henchard who act out of passion are doomed to repeat their offences against the moral code. While Valjean uses his influence as mayor to help the poor and build up the prosperity of the whole community, Henchard, by contrast, is still motivated by personal ambition and gain. When we first see him as mayor, Henchard is seated at a feast, “dressed in an old-fashioned evening suit, an expanse of frilled shirt showing on his broad breast; jewelled studs; and a heavy gold chain” (28). Not only does this opulence contrast with the poorer members of society left standing outside, it illustrates his disregard for their plight. When a question arises about the bad bread, Henchard becomes angry, being more concerned for his reputation than for the “poor folk who had to eat it whether or no” (30). This fatal flaw of *hubris* is one which traditionally leads to destruction in classical tragedy.⁴⁷ The corruption of the wheat is also a metaphor for corruption in the state due to hidden guilt in the leadership, comparable to the Thebes of Sophocles, or the rottenness in *Hamlet*’s “state of Denmark”.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Parenthetic references are to the Penguin Classics edition of *Les Misérables* (London: Penguin, 1976), translated and with an introduction by Norman Denny; hereafter referred to in the form “*LM*”.

⁴⁷ Henchard later confesses that he became alienated from his wife and baby “because of my cursed pride and mortification at being poor” (240).

⁴⁸ *Hamlet* I. iv. 89.

Both men spend their middle years alone, all their affections centred on an adopted daughter. For twenty-five years Valjean “had been alone in the world, never a father, a lover, a husband, or friend ... all the loves that his life might have contained were now merged” (*LM*, 391). Similarly, Henchard speaks of himself as “a lonely man” (60). Cosette and Elizabeth-Jane fill the empty place in their adoptive father’s hearts; each becomes a constant and invaluable companion. As both girls emerge as beauties, their fathers grow more possessive of them. When, with the appearance of Marius, he senses a rival, Valjean feels “a return of an old, wild savagery”, and begins to question his fate: “I who have been the most wretched of men am now to be the most deprived ... without a family, without wife or children or friends” (*LM*, 777). Similarly Henchard’s affection towards Elizabeth-Jane “grew more jealously strong with each new hazard to which his claim to her was exposed” (222). In Hardy’s novel, the rivalry is exacerbated by additional factors. Farfrae, the potential suitor for Elizabeth-Jane, has also snatched away Henchard’s hope of remarrying Lucetta, and the Scot’s sounder business practice has led to the collapse of Henchard’s commercial fortunes. Having once regarded him as his only friend, Henchard comes to look upon Farfrae as his enemy. Henchard bemoans his lack of family and friends in like fashion to Valjean: “Susan, Farfrae, Lucetta, Elizabeth – all had gone from him, one after one, either by his fault or by his misfortune” (223).

Hugo maintains “it is the quality of suffering that it brings out the childish side of a man” (*LM*, 780). When Henchard feels threatened by the unexpected return of Elizabeth-Jane’s real father, “the sudden prospect of her loss caused him to speak mad lies like a child, in pure mockery of consequences” (221). Henchard invariably acts impulsively, without stopping to think, whereas Hugo describes in great detail Valjean’s wrestling with his conscience. When accused by Javert as an ex-convict, Valjean’s first thought “was to

throw in his hand, to give himself up” (*LM*, 209). He quickly steadies himself, however, and spends time trying to decide on the best course of action. By contrast, when he is accused by the old furmity-woman, Henchard immediately caves in and admits his guilt without pausing to consider his options or responsibilities. Henchard has been in a sense waiting for this moment of discovery for twenty years and readily complies with what he sees as his inescapable fate. Hugo encapsulates the underlying premise of both novels when he writes: “Do what we may to shape the mysterious stuff of which our lives are composed, the dark threads of our destiny will always re-emerge” (*LM*, 193). Valjean and Henchard both struggle like Oedipus to escape their doom, only to have their worst fears befall them.

Under threat of penal servitude, Valjean is tempted by thoughts of suicide, but is prevented by his “profound religious abhorrence of any act of violence, even against himself” (*LM*, 1098). After losing wealth and position, Henchard contemplates throwing himself into the Frome. Both men are finally driven by the intensity of their suffering to the point where they surrender the will to live. Mortified by the loss of their respective “daughters”, they absent themselves from the marriage preparations so as not to mar the happiness of the new bride and groom. Henchard eventually manages to end his life through self-imposed deprivation, refusing food and shelter until he collapses. This is also the case for Valjean, who takes to his bed, refusing to eat and expressing a wish to be buried “in any plot of ground that comes handy” (*LM*, 1199), with a stone to mark the spot but no name on the stone. Henchard’s written request to be buried in unconsecrated ground, without mourners, and to be totally forgotten (251) appears to be seeking a similar but more extreme oblivion. In an ironic twist, the musical curse which he tried to invoke

upon Farfrae has come back upon his own head, with his own name utterly defaced from the memory of posterity.⁴⁹

The two authors differ, however, in their treatment of scenes. Even though deeply engaged with the social and political movements of the time, Hugo was “first and foremost ... a romantic”.⁵⁰ While his books are filled with endless detail, “this factual realism is constantly at war with the poet”.⁵¹ In Hugo’s novel, the *dénouement* comes in time for a death-bed reconciliation. Cosette and Marius realise that Valjean has sacrificed himself in order to ensure their happiness and the three seek forgiveness of each other. Valjean then dies in a state of blessedness, surrounded by loved ones and affirming the goodness of God. Henchard dies alone, without the comfort of religion or loved ones. In Hardy’s novel, Elizabeth-Jane and her new husband, Farfrae, find Henchard half an hour too late. Filled with bitterness and regret, his passing affords no opportunity for forgiveness or reconciliation. Hardy’s sceptical analysis of human failings inevitably refuses the Christian forgiveness and atonement which crown the French novel.

Hardy modifies the plot of Hugo’s labyrinthine but essentially simple tale of redemption to create a character-driven plot, and a fiction that reveals as many levels as an archaeological dig. While Hugo’s novel portrays a hero of saintly status who struggles against the odds and is finally vindicated, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* presents an inherently flawed character who is in the main responsible for his own downfall, making poor choices which result in a cascading series of falls. Early in the novel, Hardy quotes from Novalis, “Character is Fate”, inviting the reader to apply the notion of the *hamartia* or tragic flaw to Henchard’s “vehement, gloomy being” (89), who, like Faust, is the “slave of

⁴⁹ See *MC*, 177.

⁵⁰ Norman Denny, Introduction, *Les Misérables*, 7.

⁵¹ Denny, 9

impulses”.⁵² When he is ruined by his disastrous trading practices, Henchard’s first thought is that “somebody has been roasting a waxen image” of him,⁵³ but the narrator is quick to ascribe the blame to his own rashness: “the momentum of his character knew no patience” (145). When he discovers that Elizabeth-Jane is not his real daughter, “he could not help thinking that the concatenation of events this evening had produced was the scheme of some sinister intelligence bent on punishing him”. Again, the narrator points out that the circumstances “had developed naturally”, and that this apparently “ironic sequence of things” was a consequence of his own impatience (97). When he arrives before the wedding feast, he appears as “a dark ruin, obscured by ‘the shade from his own soul upthrown’” (246). The quotation from Shelley’s *The Revolt of Islam* reinforces the impression that Henchard will never cease attributing the collapse of his hopes and dreams to a hostile deity rather than to his own character flaws.⁵⁴

Despite his many faults, Henchard does achieve tragic stature through his deepening experience of suffering. When he finds out that Elizabeth-Jane is not his daughter, Henchard’s first response is “I am to suffer, I perceive” (96). His acceptance recalls the power of endurance of other Hardy stoics, like Gabriel Oak or Giles Winterborne. But even after this first recognition, Henchard’s passionate nature still goads him into blaming others, engaging in further subterfuges and wanting to exact revenge: “Misery taught him nothing more than defiant endurance of it” (97). Once again he is caught up in a storm of emotion, like a *Sturm und Drang* protagonist, but his first thought is that “the blasting disclosure was what he deserved” (96). Unlike other Hardy stoics, his

⁵² Sankey, 124.

⁵³ Compare this with Susan Nunsuch’s burning of Eustacia’s waxen image.

⁵⁴ Shelley, *The Revolt of Islam*, Canto 8, Stanza 6, 3245.

past misdeeds, and failure to acknowledge them, leave him guilt-ridden. Lacking patience, he slips easily into defiance and anger at his fate.

Despite a desire to make amends for his past, the Faustian Henchard is tormented by his fiery temper and rash thoughts: “Why should I still be subject to these visitations of the devil, when I try so hard to keep him away?” (232). Even though he is moody and bitter, and frequently behaves rashly, Henchard evokes sympathy due to the nobler feelings which at times restrain his impulses. Although tempted to ruin Farfrae’s happiness by reading out Lucetta’s love letters, Henchard is unable to carry out his plan “in cold blood” (187). When he tries to take Farfrae’s life in a fight, he cannot follow through and collapses “in the abandonment of remorse” (207). His ability to deal bravely and fairly with his creditors on the one hand, and on the other, the admission of guilt for his harsh and inconsiderate treatment of Elizabeth-Jane, go a long way towards redeeming his character.

Henchard’s self-abnegation towards the end of the novel is evidence of a kind of greatness which only emerges through suffering. From being someone who was proud and used to worldly honours, he is so humbled by his failures in business and relationships that he becomes almost womanly in his tenderness. He cherishes Elizabeth-Jane after the night of Lucetta’s death, “keeping the kettle boiling with housewifely care, as if it were an honour to have her in his house” (219). He schools “himself to accept her will ... as absolute and unquestionable” (229). The apologetic wedding-gift of the caged goldfinch, which dies unheeded after Elizabeth-Jane turns away from her stepfather, adds the poignancy of a small, innocent death to the larger scale of Henchard’s impending demise. Elizabeth-Jane’s rejection of him completes the cycle of humiliation and robs Henchard of the will to live: “he did not sufficiently value himself to lessen his sufferings” (246).

In his determination to “extenuate nothing” (248), Henchard invites comparison with Shakespearean protagonists, like Othello and Lear.⁵⁵ The comparison to King Lear appears in the opening chapter, in which Henchard’s crime against family is committed, and he waits the full novel for the tragic consequences to be laid at his door. His final hours on Egdon Heath, “that ancient country whose surface had never been stirred”, with its “blasted clump of firs” (249), cannot help but recall Lear’s wanderings on a similarly blasted heath.⁵⁶ Henchard’s last words in the novel to Abel Whittle, “can ye really be such a poor fond fool as to care for such a wretch as I” (251), recalls Lear’s Fool which reminds him that he is “a very foolish, fond old man”.⁵⁷ Henchard’s selling of his wife is comparable to Lear’s betrayal of Cordelia, unleashing forces of retribution “which will not be satisfied with less than the total humiliation of the offender and the ultimate restoration of the order offended”.⁵⁸ Rather than a storm on the heath that reflects Lear’s tormented mind, tempests in the novel are unleashed first upon Henchard’s attempted entertainments (81) and later on the crops, “rain and tempest ... like living in Revelations” (143), during the final days of the harvest. The first storm ruins his reputation amongst the townsfolk, the latter his business, but the subsequent decline in Henchard’s fortunes could be attributable to his offence against the moral order and be regarded as a punishment like that in classic tragedy. According to Paterson, the “inexorability with which the guilty past asserts, as in *Hamlet* and *Oedipus*, its claim to recognition and atonement”⁵⁹ recalls the determined intervention of a supernatural power such as that which punishes transgressors in the *Oresteiad*.

⁵⁵ Phillip Mallett links Henchard’s attitude to *Othello* V. ii. 342, where Othello asks that those who will tell his story should “Nothing extenuate”. See *MC*, 248, Note 4.

⁵⁶ Hardy identifies Egdon Heath with Lear’s heath in his preface to *The Return of the Native*, 1.

⁵⁷ *King Lear* IV. vii. 60.

⁵⁸ John Paterson, “*The Mayor of Casterbridge as Tragedy*”, *Victorian Studies*, 3 (1959):152.

⁵⁹ Paterson, 153.

Millgate affirms that the novel “resumes with more sophistication and less obtrusiveness the attempt earlier made in *The Return of the Native* to recapture certain aspects of the techniques and experience of tragic drama”.⁶⁰ Further, the novel’s focus on the confines of Casterbridge achieves a unity of setting equivalent to that maintained in classical drama and in Hardy’s previous novel. Lawrence Starzyk, however, insists that Hardy’s *Mayor* goes against classical traditions in its moral foundations.⁶¹ Hardy’s free thinking and Henchard’s lapses into superstition and irrationality preclude the possibility of a stable moral law in the universe of the *Mayor*. In the absence of any divine order governing the affairs of men, the predicament for Hardy consists in humanity “being the only species possessed of rational or moral consciousness in a world governed by nothing more meaningful than chance”.⁶² For the overburdened human consciousness, modern existence is “tragical ... simply because it is perceived as such”.⁶³

Whether the tragedy of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is seen as a crime against traditional morality or whether Hardy’s anti-traditional views evoke a sense of bleak modernist nihilism, the tragedy of Michael Henchard hinges no less on the essential poignancy of the human condition, the tragic discrepancy between his desires and the objective dynamics of the universe. Henchard can therefore be identified as a Romantic hero, one of those “stubborn figures in romantic poetry and fiction who refuse to submit to their own limitations and demand more from the world than it can give them”.⁶⁴ His cry is one of frustration at the discrepancy between what might have been and what has come to

⁶⁰ Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist*, 364-65.

⁶¹ Lawrence J. Starzyk, “Hardy’s *Mayor*: The Antitraditional Basis of Tragedy”, *Studies in the Novel* 4, 4 (1972): 592-607.

⁶² Keith Wilson, Introduction, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (London: Penguin, 1997) xxxvii.

⁶³ Starzyk, “Hardy’s *Mayor*”, 601-02.

⁶⁴ Irving Howe, *Thomas Hardy* (New York: Macmillan, 1967) 100, Note 1.

pass. When he first appears in the novel, Henchard complains, “a fellow never knows these little things till all chance of acting upon ’em is past” (9). Later he laments “when I was rich I didn’t need what I could have, and now I be poor I can’t have what I need!” (178)

George Levine deems Henchard a “hero of romance” because he is a “man of large feeling and deep need”.⁶⁵ His neediness, however, leads him into error— “he knew no moderation in his requests and impulses” (60) – taking him beyond romance into a spiralling tragic fall. Quick to take offence and doggedly stubborn, Henchard is doomed to failure on an epic scale, in business and in his relationships. From the cataclysmic break-up of his first marriage, to the domineering love-hate relationship with Farfrae, the loss of Lucetta and his possessive will to control Elizabeth-Jane’s life and prospects, he tends to destroy any reciprocal feelings in those close to him and ends a lonely and disenchanted man. J. Hillis Miller deems *The Mayor of Casterbridge* “a nightmare of frustrated desire”.⁶⁶

On each major occasion of his life when Hardy’s mayor feels that things are going to change for the better, the cup of happiness is snatched away just as he is putting it to his lips. When Farfrae appears at the very time Henchard is needing a new corn manager, the mayor sees his arrival as “Providence” (51), both commercial and personal, the corn-factor being “a lonely man” in need of a friend. His “sudden liking” (47) for Farfrae leads the mayor to treat him like “a younger brother” (70) and to share the secret of his life with him. Later, when Farfrae bests the older man in business practice and in his courtship of Lucetta, Henchard feels doubly betrayed, “bitterly hurt” (77) and “incensed beyond measure” (87). Similarly, just when Elizabeth-Jane agrees to call him father, Henchard discovers that she is

⁶⁵ Levine, 246.

⁶⁶ J.Hillis Miller, *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1970) 147.

really Newson's daughter. Instead of the "moment and act he had prefigured for weeks with a thrill of pleasure" (99), he is now consumed by "bitter disappointment" (98), the news making a mockery of all his hopes.

Again he is alone: "Henchard's wife was dissevered from him by death; his friend and helper Farfrae by estrangement; Elizabeth-Jane by ignorance" (94). Lucetta's timely arrival in Casterbridge produces an excitement "pleasurable" to "Henchard's gloomy soul" (114). In the past he had only felt for Lucetta "a pitying warmth", but her air of inaccessibility transforms her into "the very being to make him satisfied with life" (133). Again he finds Farfrae has "Popt in between th'election and [his] hopes".⁶⁷ After a thwarted attempt at suicide, Elizabeth-Jane offers to return and care for him, and the prospect of happiness is again on offer: "he was developing the dream of a future lit by her filial presence, as though that way alone could happiness lie" (219). No sooner has Henchard expressed this hope than Newson arrives to filch his prize. His late bid to restore his relationship with Elizabeth-Jane, when he stands on the doorstep on the day of her wedding "to ask forgiveness for his fraud" (242), backfires horribly. Instead of a merely physical separation he has the anguish of an irreconcilable parting from the only one he hoped would have a "little unsatisfied corner ... in her just heart without him" (242).

Like Cordelia, Elizabeth-Jane acknowledges Henchard as her father and seeks to "return those duties back as are right fit".⁶⁸ But unlike Cordelia, Elizabeth-Jane is not a perfect and unconditional source of forgiveness; she is a believable character rather than a

⁶⁷ *Hamlet* V. ii. 66.

⁶⁸ *King Lear* I. i. 97.

mere “doll of English fiction”.⁶⁹ Although she later relents, “her heart softened towards the self-alienated man” (248), it is too late to make her peace with him. Elizabeth-Jane’s religious view is at variance with the unquestioning faith of virtuous Dickensian heroines. Unlike “good people” who “trust Providence will settle it all for the best”, Elizabeth-Jane finds Providence “a different sort of feller”.⁷⁰ Like Henchard, she feels a sense of foreboding about chance, fearing many a “slip ’twixt cup and lip” (243). She forbears from displays of happiness: it would be “tempting Providence to hurl mother and me down, and afflict us again as He used to do” (69). Like Henchard, she feels forever thwarted, wondering “what unwished-for thing Heaven might send her” in place of her desires (136).

Unlike Henchard, Elizabeth-Jane seeks out a philosophy to help her cope with reverses: “She had learnt the lesson of renunciation, and was as familiar with the wreck of each day’s wishes as with the diurnal setting of the sun” (136). She has formulated for herself the advice of Cytherea’s father in *Desperate Remedies*, “Cultivate the art of renunciation”.⁷¹ Musing on the value of “that chaos called consciousness” (92), Elizabeth-Jane’s experience teaches her that one’s “brief transit through a sorry world hardly called for effusiveness” (252). In describing Elizabeth-Jane as a character who took life seriously, the narrator paraphrases a remark about Goethe: “never a gloom in Elizabeth-Jane’s soul but she well knew how it came there” (68).⁷² She felt about the circumstances of life “that they were a tragical rather than a comical thing” (44), her outlook thus paralleling Hardy’s: “the world in his eyes has rather more of the tragedy than the comedy about it”.⁷³ The

⁶⁹ Hardy coined this term in a letter to H.W. Massingham in 1891, where he declared that “the doll of English fiction must be demolished, if England is to have a school of fiction at all” (*CL*, vol. 1, 250). He had in mind idealised heroines like Florence in Dickens’s *Dombey and Son*.

⁷⁰ *Desperate Remedies*, 161.

⁷¹ *Desperate Remedies*, 17.

⁷² See *MC*, 68, Note 2.

⁷³ *LIFE*, 174.

continuing theme of sorrow permeates not just the tragic experiences of the main character, but also the lives of those who are superficially successful. Even though Elizabeth-Jane appears at the end to have achieved marital and financial prosperity, like Bathsheba, she is not effusive, her youth having taught her “that happiness was but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain” (252).

Henchard lacks Elizabeth-Jane’s philosophical bent and learns the lesson of renunciation too late. He continues to rail against his fate, positing the existence of “some sinister intelligence bent on punishing him” (97). When he is kept from suicide by the appearance of his “double” in the water, Henchard at first attributes this to the intervention of Providence and is buoyed up by a sense of being “in Somebody’s hand” (226). But as so often before Henchard’s short-lived hope serves only to cast him into a more profound despair: “the emotional conviction that he was in Somebody’s hand began to die out of Henchard’s breast” (226) as circumstances overtake him. The bleakness of Henchard’s hard-won insights, his final existential despair, “anticipates the wasteland of modernist alienation”.⁷⁴ Not only does Hardy preclude the intervention of Providence in human affairs; he explores a tragic vision in which circumstances appear to conspire against the possibility of human happiness or restitution. To quote Michael Millgate, Hardy’s is the melancholy “of immortal longings unsatisfied; it is the melancholy of one who has suffered ... ‘the abridgement of hope’”.⁷⁵

Rather than ascribing the tragic demise of his protagonists to character or fate alone, or indeed the “unsympathetic machinations of a hostile divinity”,⁷⁶ Hardy toys with a myriad of tragic possibilities which each have a part to play in the final outcome.

⁷⁴ Wilson, Introduction, xxxvii.

⁷⁵ Millgate, *Biography*, 501.

⁷⁶ Wilson, xxxvii.

Henchard's character is drawn on a heroic scale, his impressive figure and monumental passions in line with many traditional figures of high tragedy. But, as we have seen, Henchard also possesses a certain mythical quality drawn from his strong connection to the land and to the cycles of the grain harvest. He is the "John Barleycorn" who is cut down and buried to ensure the continuity of life. Henchard could also be seen as a latter-day Dionysus figure, subject to destructive fits of passion, particularly when intoxicated. In Hardy's version of these tragic themes, the combat between the old and the new king, and the death of the king of the waning year, is not unconnected with the religious *frisson*, the *catharsis*, generated by the ancient tragedies performed during the Great Dionysia in Athens.

In all the traditional folklore rituals, the fallen protagonist springs up again and the cycle repeats. In Hardy's tragic novel, however, there is to be no resurrection. The former mayor's self-immolation at the end of the novel, and his written request to be forgotten by his loved ones, and by posterity itself, indicate that he is the last of his tribe. Seen in this light, Farfrae's vanquishing of Henchard in the novel represents more than a defeat of the waning king – it represents the termination of the whole seasonal cycle of the dying king-god. Hereafter the mythical god-like figures of the past will be replaced by impassive modern men of science – little men of business like Farfrae, outsiders without any emotional ties to the land or to its mythical associations. We can see here an example of what Paterson calls "the author's insurgent romantic sympathies": despite Henchard's violation of the moral law, Hardy tends to "revile the mediocrities who have supplanted his doomed and suffering protagonist".⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Paterson, 172.

Chapter XLIV, which concerns Henchard's attempt to bring about a reconciliation with Elizabeth-Jane, was originally included only in the American first edition of the novel and later restored, in modified form, to English editions.⁷⁸ The instability set up by this textual variant reflects Hardy's vacillation about the character of Henchard. The reinstatement of the "gold-finch episode" not only adds a sweetness and poignancy to the later Henchard, it reveals a level of nobility which elevates his status more to that of a traditional tragic hero than a modernist anti-hero. If Henchard suffered previously from worldly ambition and *hubris*, his self-abnegation is now complete. He repents of the "cursed pride" which led him to commit what he now admits was a crime against Susan and his child (240). Even to approach the newlyweds in his reduced state involves some self-abasement. Henchard has to overcome his "haughty sense that his presence was no longer required" (242) and to humble himself before his bitter rival and adopted daughter. But Henchard's attempt to "plead his cause before her, to ask forgiveness for his fraud" (242), is thwarted before he can even get the words out. Magnanimously he takes the blame for Elizabeth-Jane's rejection upon himself: "I have done wrong in coming to 'ee – I see my error" (247).

Elizabeth-Jane's later discovery of the dead goldfinch, a wedding gift as well as a "token of repentance", is found too late for her to "make her peace with him" (248). The unearthing of a body which she proceeds to re-bury recalls the archaeological leitmotiv running through the novel. This telling discovery reveals Henchard not as a moral monster but as an older man capable of some sensitivity and remorse, despite belonging to the patriarchal authoritarianism of the past. Elizabeth-Jane may be able to bury the gold-finch, but the memory of her step-father's suffering will remain with her for the rest of her life.

⁷⁸ See "A Note on the History of the Text", *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, ed. Keith Wilson, xlv.

The Henchard who sentimentally purchases the goldfinch as an act of reconciliation and then shoulders the responsibility for the young lovers' rejection has more in common with Hugo's Romantic hero, Jean Valjean, than any naturalistic or modernist protagonist. Yet as he returns to the Heath, Henchard goes on to experience all the bitterness of a post-Christian death, a death in which revelation and repentance are in vain. In losing his business and his standing in the community, he has come to realise that his ambition was futile and his wealth ephemeral compared with family affection. His appreciation for Elizabeth-Jane grows to the point where the "privilege of being in the house she occupied" outweighs the "personal humiliation" (233) engendered by his reduced status. The tragedy is that in the end "his attempts to replace ambition by love had been as fully foiled as his ambition itself": he experiences the "super-added bitterness of seeing his very recantation nullified" (240). In wanting an unmarked grave and all remembrance of him to be quickly erased, Henchard demonstrates the completeness of his self-recognition. He accepts that the punishment of a lonely death bereft of any human or divine consolation befits his crime.

In classic tragedy, there is usually a restoration of the natural order which counterbalances the pity and terror of the catharsis. The composite tragedy of Hardy's novel, however, encompasses traditional elements as well as modernist desolation and existential despair which admit no possibility of restoration. We are not witnessing a single death only, but the death of a whole way of life – an earlier world where passionate, larger-than-life, almost mythological figures struggled against the inconsistencies of an indifferent Nature. In its place has arisen a new world where small, measured individuals succeed by "making limited opportunities endurable" and are contented with "minute forms of satisfaction" (252). Any feeling of *catharsis* that we experience as readers is magnified by the terror we feel that henceforward death is to be nothing more than nothingness; it is

magnified by outrage that a “forward-looking” man like Farfrae can feel so little for his friend and foe of the past. With all his passions and faults, Henchard “was a man, take him for all in all”: our sense of loss derives from recognising that we “shall not look upon his like again.”⁷⁹

⁷⁹ *Hamlet* I. ii. 186.

CHAPTER 4: *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

What Power delights to torture us? I know
That to myself I do not wholly owe
What now I suffer ...¹

After *The Mayor of Casterbridge*'s tale of a Titanic struggle between opposing forces, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* focusses once again on sexual relationships as the major source of tragedy. If *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is the tragedy of a man whose character flaws dominate his fate, *Tess* could be seen as the tragedy of a woman whose fate is determined primarily by external forces beyond her control. Not only is Tess betrayed and manipulated by her family and the men in her life, she is declared to be the victim of an Aeschylean deity. The "President of the Immortals" (314)² has been remorseless in his pursuit of the unwitting Tess. In his unacknowledged autobiography, Hardy maintains that this phrase was "but a literal translation"³ of line 169 in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, as if this were sufficient justification for the invocation of the Greek god, Zeus, in this nineteenth-century tale of seduction. Yet the phrase also recalls *The Return of the Native* and Eustacia Vye's laying the blame for her downfall "upon the shoulders of some indistinct, colossal Prince of the World" (*RN*, 233).

Hardy's protagonists at times appear to struggle against unknown and unknowable entities in the manner of the heroes and heroines of classical tragedy. Hardy himself insisted that the "motives", the driving forces behind the drama in *Tess*, are "those of the Periclean & Elizabethan tragic dramatists".⁴ The ironic reference to "Justice" at the end of the novel invokes comparison with the demand for revenge or punishment of wrongdoing in Greek tragedy. Transmuted elements of Aeschylus'

¹ Shelley, "Julian and Maddalo", ll. 320-22.

² Unless otherwise indicated, parenthetical references are taken from *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (New York: Norton, 1991); hereafter critical articles included in the edition are referred to using the cue-title "*Tess*".

³ *LIFE*, 243.

⁴ Letter to Roden Noel, April 22, 1892, *CL*, vol. 1, 265.

Oresteia may be found in Hardy's *Tess*, though the sacrificed virgin and/or victim of rape is identical with the mother who avenges herself on the rapist, and it is the mother who pays at her execution for the guilt of killing not her husband but her rapist.

Whether or not readers accept that such a realignment of the Aeschylean gods may be read literally or is rather an ironic designation of the malign forces arrayed against Tess, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* remains a tragedy of thwarted intentions, of lost opportunities, of unrealised potential. Tess herself – with her innocent ambitions to help her family, her hope of finding a partner who values her for herself, and her aspirations to rise above her situation – remains the most appealing of Hardy's heroines. Readers who sympathise with Tess are outraged by her execution at the hands of a conservative patriarchy that refuses to face the facts of her being victimised, exploited and criminalised.

To understand more fully what forces conspire first to destroy first her hopes, then herself, it is useful to turn from the novel's ending to its title page, and consider the subtitle's praise of Tess as "A Pure Woman". In Hardy's "Preface to the Fifth and Later Editions", Hardy takes issue with Christianising the word "pure" so that it means no more than "chaste", when his meaning had been that she was "all woman" or a "perfect specimen of womankind".⁵ With his subtitle Hardy sought to establish that his heroine was someone of selfless motives, warm affections and natural responses, whose blameless intentions are undermined by others and by unforeseen circumstances. To Tess it seems that the "pure woman" is "the one [she] might have been" (168), were it not for the seemingly implacable forces which oppose her every aspiration.

⁵ *Tess*, x.

Hardy inserted the subtitle at the last moment, feeling that it summed up the impression “left in a candid mind of the heroine’s character”.⁶ Claiming, perhaps disingenuously, it was “an estimate that nobody would be likely to dispute”, he recorded he had been dismayed to find that it was “disputed more than anything else in the book”.⁷ In the face of criticism, Hardy still maintained that his “heroine was essentially pure – purer than many a so-called unsullied virgin”.⁸ That Tess was, in contemporary parlance, a “fallen woman”, driven to commit both murder and adultery, yet was designated by Hardy as “pure” was a throwing down of the gauntlet to Victorian conservatism. The moral conservatives who protested against his depiction of Tess were declaring themselves to be constituents and punitive servants of the “President” of the novel’s conclusion.⁹

Hardy’s essay, “Candour in English Fiction”, appeared in January 1890 at a time when the author was beset with difficulties finding a publisher for *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*. Well aware that a large component of the reading public was deeply conservative in their beliefs and moral presumptions, Hardy justified giving writers the freedom to address serious themes by reference to Greek and Shakespearean tragedy. Hardy felt that the time was ripe for a tragic fiction which would permit the “sincere and comprehensive sequence of the ruling passions”, contending that examination of “catastrophes based upon sexual relations” has always been proper subject matter for literature, and that the only problem was a “question of treatment”.¹⁰ He advocated a treatment of sexuality, including adultery, like that found in French novels of the day, which exhibited a candour not permitted in English fiction. Victorian critics had

⁶ Margaret Oliphant, one of Hardy’s most vocal opponents, described it as an “exasperating” afterthought in *Blackwood’s Review* in 1892; cited in Cox, 219.

⁷ “Preface to the Fifth and Later Editions”, *Tess*, xii.

⁸ Letter to Roden Noel, May 17, 1892, *CL*, vol. 1, 267.

⁹ A contemporary hostess was reported to seat her dinner guests according to their position on whether Tess was a “Poor wronged innocent!” or “A little harlot!” who deserved hanging. See *LIFE*, 245.

¹⁰ “Candour”, 128, .

stigmatised French literature as “vicious”, as having a pernicious effect on English morals. An English crusader had attacked “the novelists of France” as knowing “no subject to interest the public except those connected with breaches of the seventh commandment”.¹¹ Hardy retaliated that the “crash of broken commandments is as necessary an accompaniment to the catastrophe of a tragedy as the noise of drum and cymbals to a triumphal march”.¹²

He also set out to treat issues such as sexual discrimination and exploitation, poverty, education and class disadvantage, with a new candour. His *Literary Notebooks* demonstrate that he was reading French Naturalism widely and finding the frank treatment of these issues exemplary. Hardy wrote out a long quotation from the *Revue des deux Mondes* on the subject of Naturalism: “Any work which is going to portray man as kind, life as easy, and nature merciful”, Brunetière argued, “will necessarily be untrue and will depart from the role of art”. The French critic conceded that art might also seek to “create a diversion and a respite from the worries of life”. Hardy commented in the margin on the importance of introducing “so much of painful truth as to make the public feel it *is* the truth” tempered with enough art to “gild with little pleasures”.¹³

While “little pleasures” are few and far between in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, Hardy does gild some episodes of Tess’s painful journey with lyrical descriptions of her as a Romantic child of nature. Her idyllic encounters with Angel in the morning twilight depict an otherworldly state of bliss: the “spectral, half-compounded, aqueous light which pervaded the open mead impressed them with a feeling of isolation” (102). Despite her nagging guilt concerning her past experiences with Alec, Tess also

¹¹ Margaret Oliphant, “The Anti-Marriage League”, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, January 1896: 136.

¹² “Candour”, 129.

¹³ F. Brunetière, “Le Personnage sympathique dans la littérature”, *Revue des deux Mondes*, 53 (Octobre 1882): 939-40; cited in *LN*, vol.1,158 [My translation].

possesses an underlying appetite for joy, the desire to “snatch ripe pleasure” (139), which drives her to accept Angel’s offer of marriage. In this sense, Tess resembles an English Romantic heroine drawing strength from her verdant surroundings and enjoying a glimpse of a hopeful future. Walking towards her new life at Talbothays through the green fields on a fine spring morning, “some spirit within her rose automatically as the sap in the twigs”, and with that spirit comes “hope, and the invincible instinct towards self-delight” (78, 79). Tim Dolin suggests that “Tess is a figure for poetry itself” in her association with “primitive passions”.¹⁴ Angel describes Tess as “brim-full of poetry ... She *lives* what paper-poets only write (128). On her wedding day, Hardy heightens the effect, portraying her as an ethereal Shelleyan Muse enveloped in a “luminous mist”, a “sort of celestial person, who owed her being to poetry” (167).

Tess’s “inherent will to enjoy” is opposed by a “circumstantial will against enjoyment” (224-25) according to the narrator, who further suggests that these “two forces were at work here as everywhere” (224.) A somewhat different, universalising narrator ascribes her misfortunes to an existence “vouchsafed to [her] by an unsympathetic first cause” (121), a blind, unconscious power elsewhere termed the “Immanent Will”. Hardy writes in his autobiography “every object, and every action, is composed ... of the qualities pleasure and pain in varying proportions”,¹⁵ prefiguring Freud’s late work on the life-force and death-wish, *eros* and *thanatos*. This dualism is an intrinsic feature of the tragic vision for modern critics such as Richard Palmer, who defines tragedy as containing “an inseparably balanced attraction and repulsion”.¹⁶ The interplay of Romantic hopefulness and naturalistic despair in Hardy’s novel is deep and intricate, and whilst it might seem that one is dominant or “real” at one point, the other a

¹⁴ Tim Dolin, “Melodrama, Vision and Modernity: *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*”, *A Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Keith Wilson (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) 338.

¹⁵ *LIFE*, 217.

¹⁶ Palmer, 120.

diversion or “gilding” in another episode, the contestation between the perspectives is the stuff of this narrative tragedy.

While Hardy was indebted to the French Naturalists for the “slice of life” approach, he maintained the importance of “Art” in ordering, and even deforming realistic elements. In the chapter from his *Life*, “Observations on Many Things”, he comments, “Art is a changing of the actual proportions and order of things”. The artist intent on producing high art both “increases the sense of vraisemblance” and chooses “to depict evil as well as good ... [The] choice of evil, however, must be limited by the sense of worthiness”.¹⁷ Hardy differs from the French Naturalists in that he does not depict the sordid and depraved for their own sake but identifies the worth of a character’s struggle to overcome evil.

A keen follower of literary movements and debates on both sides of the Channel, Hardy copied into his *Literary Notebooks* numerous quotations from contemporary French novels as well as from articles on French literary movements. He translated an article on “La Littérature Réaliste” (1886)¹⁸ in which the anonymous critic discussed at length the “new art” which “seeks to imitate nature in her unconsciousness, her moral indifference, her absence of choice”.¹⁹ In *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* Hardy also “seeks to show Nature’s unconsciousness ... of those laws framed merely as social expedients by humanity”,²⁰ and to make this a basis for the tragedy. Victorian society might frown upon Tess’s seduction (or rape) and pregnancy, but the narrator insists that Tess had broken no natural law but “an accepted social law” (67).

The narrator identifies his heroine as a natural woman with natural instincts: had she found herself alone with her baby on a desert island, she would have “found

¹⁷ *LIFE*, 228-9.

¹⁸ As previously discussed, French Naturalism grew out of realism, and the terms were often used interchangeably by critics.

¹⁹ “De La Littérature Réaliste”, *LN*, vol.1, 219.

²⁰ “Candour”, 127.

pleasures therein" (71). In Part II of the narrative, Tess retains a vestige of belief in "some vague ethical being", a belief which causes her to feel like "a figure of Guilt intruding into the haunts of Innocence" when she walks during early pregnancy among the sleeping birds or the skipping rabbits. But her imagination is at one with the fertility of her surroundings: "her whimsical fancy would intensify natural processes around her till they seemed a part of her own story" (67). The misery Tess experiences as a single mother is "generated by her conventional aspect, and not by her innate sensations" (71).

A like conflict of natural instincts with moral and religious conventions is foregrounded in Zola's *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret*, which served Hardy as an urnarrative for *Tess*. He read the English translation shortly before commencing work on *Tess* and quoted it at length in his *Literary Notebooks*. Lennart Björk has drawn attention to a "potentially significant overall similarity"²¹ between the two novels. In each, a young woman who is a child of nature and a man constrained by conventional morality are drawn together by the fertility of their natural surroundings. Tess and Albine are the daughters of nature, Angel and the abbé the repressed men. The meetings between the lovers "impressed them with a feeling ... as if they were Adam and Eve" (102) in an Edenic setting ("Le Paradou" in Zola's novel). Both men later abandon their lovers due to scruples regarding chastity.

D.G. Mason goes further than Björk in his comparative analysis of the two novels, identifying incidents and idioms which Hardy borrowed from Zola.²² The famous scene where Angel carries Tess after the other milkmaids across the flooded path echoes a similar scene in which Serge, the abbé, takes the reluctant Albine in his arms and carries her across a stream to save her getting her clothes wet. The unsettling effect of the ancestral portraits in the manor house where Angel and Tess spend their

²¹ *LN*, vol. 2, 571.

²² D.G. Mason, "Hardy and Zola: A Comparative Study of *Tess* and *Abbé Mouret*", *Thomas Hardy Journal*, 7, 3 (October 1991): 88-102.

wedding night was also inspired by *Abbé Mouret*. In both cases the paintings bear a disturbing resemblance to the heroine. Serge comments in an uneasy interval, “You haven’t noticed ... that painting of a woman over the door there, have you? It is like you.”²³ Mason spotlights the incident of Tess and Angel washing their hands in the same bowl of water: when Angel questions which fingers are his and which are hers, Tess replies, “They are all yours” (170). In *Abbé Mouret*, Albine offers her hands to Serge in like fashion.²⁴

Identifying the influence of Zola on Hardy’s early conceptions of *Tess* is not so much to point the finger at plagiarism as to investigate how Hardy has transformed Zola’s naturalistic parable into his own novel. *Abbé Mouret’s Transgression*, despite its sub-title “A Realistic Novel”, is basically an allegory; Zola adapts the Adam and Eve story to explore physiological and religious passions in his characters. By contrast, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* owes little to allegory, the novel’s more-rounded characters struggling against a naturalistic array of material and class constraints, societal and ethical dilemmas. Whereas Zola’s Albine is an unreflecting child of nature, Hardy’s Angel falls in love with his idealistic impression of Tess as a child of nature, an impression he holds on to despite all the evidence that she is an intelligent and thoughtful young woman striving to overcome the disadvantages of a deprived rural background.

Conforming to Zola’s naturalistic precept that human beings are powerless to withstand the forces of nature, Albine and Serge are drawn together by their voluptuous surroundings: “It was the garden which had plotted and willed their sin”.²⁵ In Hardy’s novel, rather than blithely succumb to unconscious nature, Tess struggles against the

²³ Émile Zola, *Abbé Mouret’s Transgression* (London: Vizetelly, 1886) 198, hereafter referred to in the form “AM”.

²⁴ AM, 201.

²⁵ AM, 212.

forces propelling her into Angel's arms. Though tempted to yield to her passion during Angel's approaches to her – "every wave of her blood, every pulse singing in her ears, was a voice that joined with Nature in revolt against her scrupulousness" (139) – Tess retains a "religious sense of a certain moral validity" (142) which she feels attaches to her past union with Alec. By contrast with Albine, a simple country girl wholly overcome by the emanations of her surroundings, Tess is capable of moral and metaphysical reflections which place her as a Victorian or a Romantic heroine. (One thinks of George Eliot's Dorothea, or the daughter of Shelley's Maddalo). Her sensitivity poses moral dilemmas for her and makes her abandonment by Angel the more compelling and cruel.

Angel is notwithstanding a more conscious and conscientious man than the abbé. An illness has robbed Serge of any memory of his previous life and he reverts to a child-like state in which sensual enjoyment is all he knows. While Angel is undoubtedly attracted to Tess, "driven towards her by every heave of his pulse" (121), he "had himself well in hand", being "in truth more spiritual than animal" (151). Being a more spiritual man than the lapsed abbé does not necessarily make Angel a better one: "with more animalism he would have been the nobler" (191). A "believer in good morals" (176), he avoids taking any premarital advantage of Tess, but is quick to harden his heart against her on their wedding night. Overcoming the naturalistic infatuation of his senses, Angel forgets all Tess's spiritual, intellectual and emotional attributes that, combined with "her exceptional physical nature" (191), first captured his heart.

In *The Well-Beloved*, Hardy had written his own allegory about the distress of pursuing the ideal woman through generations of real women and family allegiances. Hardy would note that his theory was later to be taken up and developed by Marcel Proust, who, like Angel, laments that "the young woman that you end up marrying is

not the same as the one that you fell in love with”.²⁶ This pursuit of a Platonic ideal owes much to Shelley’s influence on Hardy. That influence is evinced by the epigraph to *The Well-Beloved*, “One shape of many names”, taken from *The Revolt of Islam*.²⁷ After Tess’s revelation of her past to Angel, he charges her with a fraud: “the woman I have been loving is not you”, he complains, but “Another woman in your shape” (179).

As the traditional faith embraced by the abbé is found wanting, so too is the Comtean “Religion of Humanity” espoused by Angel Clare. Angel’s idealising of a woman, a prominent facet of late Positivism, is a pivotal factor in his relationship with Tess. In the case of Serge, his veneration of the Virgin parallels Angel’s “mythical adoration of the virginal Tess”.²⁸ Angel attempts to place Tess on a pedestal, “creating an ideal presence that conveniently drops the defects of the real” (192), but his Comtean or Shelleyan²⁹ vision of the beloved is inadequate. When the real Tess emerges, he is unable to love her since, to him, “she was another woman than the one who had excited his desire” (192). Like Clym Yeobright before him, Angel is an idealist, a pseudo-intellectual who, though subject to erotic desires, has trouble accommodating his ideas with his desires in an actual relationship. Even on their wedding day, Tess recognises that Angel is in love with a Platonic *eidolon* rather with her: “she you love is not my real self, but one in my image” (168).

Despite Comte’s emphasis on scientific objectivity, Wright notes that he “can also be seen as a Romantic, with his emphasis on feeling and his idealisation of the Middle Ages”.³⁰ Angel is similarly attracted to families with medieval genealogies: “lyrically, dramatically, and even historically, I am tenderly attached to them” (130).

²⁶ “Ainsi, la jeune fille qu’on épouse n’est pas celle dont on est tombé amoureux” [my translation]; Marcel Proust, *Ombre*, vol. 2, 158-59; cited in *LIFE*, 432.

²⁷ *The Well-Beloved* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) xliii.

²⁸ Mason, 97.

²⁹ Shelley was in fact considered one of the Positivist saints. See Wright, *The Religion of Humanity*, 37.

³⁰ Wright, 8.

Angel prizes Tess's lineage more highly than she does, for its "imaginative value" (269). He also retains an affection for the traditional church which is at odds with his free thinking and marks him as a "dreamer", a "moralizer on declines and falls" (269). Dairyman Crick's folkloric tale of the cattle kneeling on Christmas Eve causes Clare to exclaim: "it carries us back to medieval times, when faith was a living thing" (87). Hardy would later echo Clare's nostalgia for "so fair a fancy" in his poem, "The Oxen", the poem's narrator "Hoping it might be so".³¹ The characterisation of Angel explores a tension between progressive thought and wistful longing which was also evident in Hardy's own psychological makeup: the author describes himself as an "evolutionary meliorist", while maintaining a Romantic affection for bygone eras, for "days ... Bound each to each by natural piety".³²

By contrast, Tess is forward-looking and down-to-earth about her identity and her ambitions. When Angel tries to make her fit his "visionary essence of woman", calling her "Artemis, Demeter, and other fanciful names", she flatly rejects the classical allusions: "Call me Tess" (103). As for her "useless ancestors", "she almost hated them for the dance they had led her" (80). Whereas Tess "really wished to walk uprightly" (82), her own parents are shiftless and apathetic, all too ready to latch on to the dream of former greatness. Her father, using his lineage as an excuse for drunkenness and self-inflating pride, lives in a haze of faded d'Urberville glory. When he falls ill, he comes up with an absurd plan to send round "to all the old antiqueerians", feeling sure that "they'd see it as a romantical, artistical, and proper thing to do" to keep up an "old ruin" such as himself (273). For her part, Tess's mother concocts an ill-fated plan to "claim kin" with the Stoke-d'Urbervilles, a scheme which she imagines will turn Tess into a "lady".

³¹ "The Oxen", *CP*, 468.

³² William Wordsworth, "My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold", ll. 8-9.

Tess desires only to make her own way in the world: she resolves that “there should be no more d’Urberville air-castles in the dreams and deeds of her new life” (78). She has no defeatist presentiment that she must be limited by her deprived rural background or by the naturalistic processes of biology. Capable of rising above both conventional morality and the vicissitudes of life, Tess is not a French Naturalist’s but a Romantic idealist’s woman. She is indeed “like one of Shakespeare’s women”,³³ Rosalind for example in *As You Like It*. Like Tess, Rosalind is exceptional “for her virtues” (I. ii. 291) and her ability to calmly endure misfortune (I. iii. 79-84). Her lover, Orlando, somewhat foolishly, as it were Angel-ically, equates Rosalind with a Platonic ideal, but Rosalind bemoans “how deep I am in love” (IV. i. 209), recalling Tess’s loving Angel with “impassioned thoroughness” (159). Both heroines are distinguished by innate wisdom and warm affections which “show more bright and seem more virtuous” (I. iii. 78) as they move among their peers.

When, in *A General View of Positivism*, Comte contends that “we have to look to the poorer classes for the highest type of womanly perfection”,³⁴ he is suggesting that women like Tess are untainted by any ambition for mere social elevation, and are in touch with their own feelings and desires in the manner of a naturalistic heroine. Literary Naturalism is in part derived from philosophical Positivism, in particular from Comte’s emphasis on human physiology and scientific objectivity. In the second half of the nineteenth century, novelists began to apply the philosopher’s “innovative positivist view of the world” to their own writing.³⁵ According to Elliott Gosse, it was symptomatic of the Victorian era to attempt synthesis of new ideas. For this reason, the Darwinian concept of evolution “was not confined to the study of biology but spread to

³³ “Julian and Maddalo”, l. 592.

³⁴ Auguste Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, trans. J.H. Bridges (New York: Speller, 1957) 274.

³⁵ “Naturalism in Art and Literature”, *Science Encyclopedia*, <http://science.jrank.org/pages/7914/Naturalism-in-Art-Literature.html>.

the humanities as well”.³⁶ Hardy’s view of life as “a physiological fact”³⁷ sums up the distinguishing aspect of Naturalism on which he himself draws most in his later fiction.

A contemporary of Hardy’s, French writer and critic Yetta Blaze de Bury, who wrote on both French and English fiction, noted in her study of English novelists that physiology in *Tess*, in such titles as “The Maiden”, “Maiden No More” and “The Rally”, regulates the phases of the book in naturalistic terms reflecting the heroine’s “vital and organic development”.³⁸ The resilience which Tess demonstrates when walking towards Talbothays dairy to start a new life is likewise attributed by Hardy to the “recuperative power” of “organic nature” (78). *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* frequently displays what Boumelha calls “Zolaesque naturalism”,³⁹ an example being the scene where the milkmaids are described as “writhing feverishly under the oppressiveness of an emotion thrust upon them by cruel Nature’s law”. In *Jude the Obscure*, a similar naturalistic description of the young women at the Training-School underlines the determinism of their birth as members of what the narrator deems “The Weaker” sex: “the penalty of the sex wherein they were moulded, which by no possible exertion of their willing hearts and abilities could be made strong while the inexorable laws of nature remain” (*JO*, 112). The narrator’s description in both cases exhibits a scientific detachment from the girls’ feelings and an emphasis on the demands of physiology: “The differences which distinguished them as individuals were abstracted by this passion, and each was but portion of one organism called sex” (115).

³⁶ Elliott B. Gosse, Jr, “Psychic Evolution: Darwinism and Initiation in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*”, *Tess*, 423.

³⁷ “Candour”, Orel, 127.

³⁸ Y. Blaze de Bury, *Les Romanciers anglais contemporains*; cited in William Newton, “Hardy and the Naturalists: Their Use of Physiology”, *Modern Philology*, 49, 1 (1952): 39 [my translation].

³⁹ Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women*, 37.

While Hardy maintained “I am read in Zola very little”,⁴⁰ Lennart Björk has conjectured that “Hardy’s appreciation of the French writer may well have been more pronounced” than he cared to profess.⁴¹ In addition to *Abbé Mouret’s Transgressions*, his *Literary Notebooks* contain extracts from *Germinal* in translation, and from *L’Assommoir* and *La Terre* in the original French. A further example of Naturalism in *Tess* is the sensual atmosphere created at the Chaseborough dance, where the “*débris* of peat and hay, mixed with the perspirations and warmth of the dancers ... [formed] together a sort of vegeto-human pollen” (48), a pollen which induces licentious behaviour in the dancers. In *Germinal* also, the dust raised from the floor by the dancers mixes with body odours of the dancers to create a fusty atmosphere.⁴² Given his familiarity with a range of Zola’s work, we may wonder at Hardy’s reluctance to acknowledge a greater debt to Naturalism, but remembering that Hardy commenced work on *Tess* in 1888, the year that marked “the climax of the Zola controversy”⁴³ in England, makes it easier to understand his circumspection. As Hardy records in “The Science of Fiction”, certain writers of the French school, notably Zola, were subjected to accusations of “brutality”,⁴⁴ and it was such attacks as these that Hardy was anxious to avoid.

Zola’s influence upon Hardy’s early conception of *Tess* was nonetheless profound, and lingers in his depictions of fertility, human and natural. Even his heroine is more sensuous than previous female characters. The young Tess has a “luxuriance of aspect which made her appear more of a woman than she really was” (30), a portrayal recalling Zola’s description of Albin’s “softly rounded and voluptuously expanding outlines” (*AM* 138). The emphasis on sensuality marks a departure from the austerity of

⁴⁰ *LIFE*, 273.

⁴¹ *LN*, vol. 1, 385.

⁴² *LN*, vol. 2, 475.

⁴³ Clarence R. Decker, “Zola’s Literary Reputation in England” *PMLA* 49 (1934): 1145.

⁴⁴ “The Science of Fiction”, Orel, 136.

such works as *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Likewise the pastoral *Far from the Madding Crowd* opts for a more restrained “English” view of rural life. The sensuality of the settings in *Tess* is at its most overt in the Zolaesque description of the Var valley. There “the rush of juices could almost be heard below the hiss of fertilization”, while the “ready bosoms” of the inhabitants are “impregnated by their surroundings” (116). As has been shown, this paean to “prodigal fecundity”⁴⁵ recalls similar Nature descriptions in Zola.

According to Colette Becker, Zola’s *Faute de l’Abbé Mouret* represents “a hymn to the sun, symbol of passion and fertilisation”.⁴⁶ In Hardy’s novel too the warmth of the sun is linked with human desire: just as “Clare was oppressed by the outward heats so was he burdened inwardly by a waxing fervour of passion” (116). Hardy’s having the landscape of the Var Vale “lying in a swoon” (116) under the mid-day sun calls to mind Zola’s image of a “burning countryside ... wallowing in passion”.⁴⁷ An extract from the French novel which Hardy copied into his *Literary Notebooks* again stresses the dual connotations of heat: “the hills, still hot with the setting luminary’s farewell kiss, seemed all tremulous and quivering ... the valley ... animated with a throbbing life”.⁴⁸ In *Tess*, Hardy’s plays on the word “tremulous” (144) to evoke his lovers’ state, “balanced on the edge of a passion”. Powerless to resist the sway of Nature, Tess and Angel find themselves “converging, under an irresistible law” (101).

Whatever Hardy’s debt to the tenets of Naturalism, he continued to dissociate himself from Zola because he disagreed with the scientific detachment of the French Naturalists’ account of human behaviour. Where Zola reduces human beings to the level of animals, Hardy retains a vision of humanity coloured by compassion and the

⁴⁵ J.T. Laird, *The Shaping of Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1975) 54.

⁴⁶ Colette Becker, “un hymne au soleil, symbole de la passion, de la fécondation”, Introduction, *AM*, 19 [my translation].

⁴⁷ “la campagne ardente prenait un étrange vairement de passion”, *AM*, 140 [my reduced translation].

⁴⁸ *LN*, vol. 2, 474.

possibility of moral choice. While provisionally accepting the Darwinian perspective that “We are all one with creeping things”,⁴⁹ Hardy maintained the Comtean tenet, that the “higher passions must ever rank above the inferior – intellectual tendencies above animal, and moral above intellectual – whatever the treatment, realistic or ideal”.⁵⁰ When Tess subjects the injured pheasants to a mercy killing, “with the impulse of a soul who could feel for kindred sufferers” (219), she is transcending a purely naturalistic outlook in her unselfish concern for her fellow creatures. Although she claims to be suffering less than the wounded birds, the reader is made aware of the emotional and metaphysical stress she has to bear when snapping the birds’ necks. Therein lies one of the major sources of tragedy in Hardy. Aspirations towards finer emotions and metaphysical ideals produce the highly-developed temperaments we find in his novels, but also inflict greater suffering on the individuals who have such sensitivity. Hardy’s heroine is an exceptional young woman whose response to a hostile social environment transcends the *ennui* and hopelessness that would be expected of someone from the working classes, if she appeared in a novel by Zola.

Grant surmises that by 1868 Zola had surely “dipped into Darwin” and could not fail to have been influenced by Positivist philosophy “which by this date had won wide acceptance and was part of the intellectual atmosphere”.⁵¹ The philosopher, Hippolyte Taine, who sought to apply Comte’s scientific objectivity to art and literature, was certainly a major influence on Zola’s determinism. Taine taught his Beaux-Arts students “an evolutionary approach toward human nature”, and insisted on “the importance of family genes in determining the ways in which people reacted”. He advocated studying the human environment, the “societal implications ... shaping an

⁴⁹ “Drinking Song”, *CP*, l. 49.

⁵⁰ “The Profitable Reading of Fiction”, Orel, 114.

⁵¹ Elliott M. Grant, *Émile Zola* (New York: Twayne, 1966) 44.

individual”.⁵² Zola’s dissertation on the form of the novel, in which he maintained that the Naturalist is both an “experimental novelist” and a “practical sociologist”,⁵³ puts Comte’s philosophical ideas into fictional practice. The premise of Zola’s theories originated with Comte, who prophesied that the new discipline of sociology, of which he was “the instrument”,⁵⁴ would in due course become the apogee of all the objective sciences.

The major work in which Zola sought to flesh out his theory of fiction is the Rougon-Macquart series of twenty novels which trace the progressive moral decline of a family through successive generations. Zola describes this series as “the scientific study of a family with the inevitable consequences and the fatalities of its lineage”, as well as a study of the breakdown that results from “the social and physical action of the environment.”⁵⁵ Himself “preoccupied with the decline of his own family”,⁵⁶ Hardy was saddened by the decay of that line from grander days. Hardy’s “aesthetic and emotional” preoccupation⁵⁷ with genealogy as well as his debt to Zolaesque sociology can be traced in both the plot and the characterisation of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*. Laird notes that the theme of heredity “would appear to have been of little significance in the Ur-version of *Tess*”⁵⁸ and that it comes to greater prominence as the novel develops. Only in the later version of the manuscript does the novel open with Tess’s father identifying with the ancient family of the d’Urbervilles, a boast that gives rise to the ill-conceived scheme to “claim kin”. The adoption of the title *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* also underlines the importance if not the authenticity that Hardy came to place on the

⁵² “Naturalism in Art and Literature”, *Science Encyclopedia*,
<<http://science.jrank.org/pages/7914/Naturalism-in-Art-Literature.html>>.

⁵³ Émile Zola, *Le Roman expérimental*; cited in Grant, 49.

⁵⁴ W.M. Simon, *European Positivism in the Nineteenth Century: An Essay in Intellectual History* (New York: Cornell UP, 1963) 5.

⁵⁵ Grant, 45.

⁵⁶ William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 151.

⁵⁷ Peter Morton, “Neo-Darwinian Fate in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*”, *Tess*, 435.

⁵⁸ Laird, 84.

ancestry of his heroine and its contribution to determining her fate. As the plot unfolds, however, Tess's ancestry appears to be significant less as a determinant of her character than a projection of the way others view her through the prism of their own preconceptions.

William Greenslade notes that English writers of Hardy's era were "vulnerable to the explanatory lure of forms of biological determinism".⁵⁹ Hardy invokes a Zolaesque determinism when Angel attributes Tess's loss of chastity to a "want of firmness" inherited along with the declining status of the d'Urbervilles: "Decrepit families imply decrepit wills, decrepit conduct" (182). The notion of degeneracy is also entertained in *The Woodlanders*, a novel which in many ways serves as a precursor to *Tess*. The link between vegetative decomposition and human degradation is made explicit by the narrator's comment that, in the autumnal woodlands, "the Unfulfilled Intention ... was as obvious as it could be among the depraved crowds of a city slum". Throughout the novel vegetative decay is associated with human degeneracy: "The leaf was deformed, the curve was crippled, the taper was interrupted; the lichen ate the vigour of the stalk, and the ivy slowly strangled to death the promising sapling".⁶⁰ Such an "Unfulfilled Intention" plays a part when Tess's youthful promise is "strangled" by her constricted and unenlightened surroundings, her good intentions thwarted and ultimately unfulfilled. Her life experience and the little love she enjoys fall far short of her dreams and aspirations.

When, in a fit of youthful pessimism, Tess refers to the star on which she lives as a "blighted" world (21), her speculation draws attention to those settings in Hardy's novel where the vegetative world is cankered or decaying. Her metaphysical speculation

⁵⁹ Greenslade, 5.

⁶⁰ *The Woodlanders*, 52. J.W. Burrow points out that this particular quotation refers to Darwin's account, in Chapter III of *The Origin of Species*, of the competition for survival. See *The Woodlanders*, 386, Note 5.

resembles Hamlet's jaded view of the world as an "unweeded garden", possessed by "things rank and gross in nature".⁶¹ In *Desperate Remedies*, the "wet old garden" in which Cytherea meets Manston is an overgrown hollow rank with wet leaves.

Overcome by "the sensuous natures of the vegetable world",⁶² Cytherea finds she is powerless to resist Manston's masterful sexuality: she feels she is "drifting with closed eyes", submitting to a tide of naturalistic forces beyond her control. Interspersed with these "sensuous natures", however, are disturbing reminders of "things rank and gross in nature", a Keatsian "swarm of wailing gnats",⁶³ and clumps of poisonous mandrakes.⁶⁴ In *Tess*, even the most idyllic scenes have a certain undercurrent of repulsive decay. When Tess wanders in the overgrown garden at Talbothays and is caught up listening to Angel's harp wafting on the summer breeze, she is "conscious of neither time nor space", but her escape from the time-bound flux of becoming is short-lived. As her reverie dissipates, she re-enters both becoming and unbecoming, growth and decay: the "rank-smelling weed-flowers" stain her hands "with thistle-milk and slug-slime" (96-7). Visionary as she is, Tess cannot escape the cycle in which growth and fertility give way to entropy and death.

Angel's music has the power to "raise up dreams" and drive away "horrid fancies", providing a transitory escape from the cycle of decay and death, the "hobble of being alive" (97). When Tess describes her imaginings – "numbers of tomorrows just all in a line, the first of them biggest and clearest, the others getting smaller and smaller as they stand farther away" but all of them "fierce and cruel" (97) – she is expressing

⁶¹ *Hamlet* I. ii. 135-37.

⁶² This is reminiscent of the "hollow amid the ferns" of *Far from the Madding Crowd* where Bathsheba is overwhelmed by Troy's masterful sword display.

⁶³ See Keats, "To Autumn", l. 27.

⁶⁴ *Desperate Remedies*, 230. F.B. Pinion suggests that Hardy's description of the ruined garden echoes that of Shelley's "The Sensitive-Plant". See *A Hardy Companion: A Guide to the Works of Hardy and their Background* (London: Macmillan, 1968)165.

“in her own native phrases” (98) a precocious world-weariness not unlike that of the older Macbeth:

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time.⁶⁵

Whereas Angel has been conditioned by his intellectual studies to adopt a type of fashionable agnosticism, Tess is a natural philosopher sensitive to the trials of existence, expressing “sensations which men and women have vaguely grasped for centuries” without recourse to words ending with “-logy and -ism”. The ordeals of her young life have accelerated this philosophical development: “Tess’s passing corporeal blight had been her mental harvest”. Tess matured almost overnight “from simple girl to complex woman”, the change adding “a note of tragedy” (98) to her voice.

Tess’s metaphysical intuitiveness, “that touch of rarity” (98) which sets her apart from the other milkmaids, is what draws Angel to her. She is brought to his attention by her admission that she has sometimes felt her soul leave her body when contemplating a distant star (94). In their early conversations, each confides an existential *angst*, not unlike Clym and Eustacia’s discussing life as “a cause of depression a good many have to put up with”.⁶⁶ Virginia Woolf complained that Hardy’s philosophising, or rather his making his rural characters express thoughts and theories which jolt the reader out of sympathy with them, was the blight of his novels.⁶⁷ Yet a new generation of Hardy critics, notably Peter Widdowson, have been intrigued by Hardy’s dislocation of social-realist axes in his novels, finding this an anticipation of the techniques and theories of Modernism.⁶⁸ Hardy manipulates and moves between generic boundaries, mixing high tragedy and low comedy, philosophical debate, realistic and naturalistic themes and

⁶⁵ *Macbeth* V. v. 19-21.

⁶⁶ *RN*, 115.

⁶⁷ Virginia Woolf, “The Novels of Thomas Hardy”, *Hardy: The Tragic Novels*, ed. R.P. Draper (London: Macmillan, 1991) 74-77.

⁶⁸ Peter Widdowson, *On Thomas Hardy: Late Essays & Earlier* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).

Romantic idealism, then throwing strokes of melodrama and Gothic superstition into the mix. In *Tess*, he created a character capable of transcending what might otherwise have been a commonplace history of seduction and of reinventing herself as a person of tragic stature. In George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, another tale of seduction of an innocent girl by a country squire, Hetty Sorrel is a foolish, unthinking girl, who panics, flees and in the end kills her baby in a vain bid to avoid social stigma. Hardy sets the bar much higher by creating a sensitive and intelligent working-class heroine, one capable of enlisting reader sympathies as she reflects on the vagaries of existence and fights to achieve self-determination.

Given the decline that Tess's presumed ancient family has suffered, her rural childhood and the reduced and, at times, degrading circumstances of her upbringing, no French naturalistic author would imagine Tess Durbeyfield a sociologically plausible character. In 1893 *The World* acclaimed *Tess* "a French theme treated in the English manner, but mark the tremendous difference between the two methods!"⁶⁹ Although sensitive to her surroundings, Tess is not a mere product of her environment. Nor is she a completely innocent and Romantic child of nature like Wordsworth's Lucy. Rather Tess resembles Maddalo's daughter in Shelley's "Julian and Maddalo", a "lovely child, blithe, innocent and free" (l. 167), but equally a "serious, subtle, wild, yet gentle being" (l. 145). A Romantic protagonist with self-generated values and understanding, Hardy's creation breaks free of the shackles of biological and sociological determinism. Her desire to transcend her background is based on an instinctive faith in human capabilities: "We might be otherwise – we might be all/ We dream of happy, high, majestic (ll. 172-73). Her self-respect, her optimism and her capacity to endure, even under the most adverse circumstances, seem to be based on a melioristic faith that she

⁶⁹ *CL*, vol. ii, 36.

can develop beyond the limitations that social circumstances or heredity impose. But even as he suggests to his English readers there are more things in Tess Durbeyfield than are dreamt of in a Positivist's philosophy, the naturalistic side of Hardy foresees a limit to the scope of her development, and the tragic artist adumbrates a limit to its term.

When Angel calls Tess "the belated seedling of an effete aristocracy" (182), the phrase is derisory but contains a germ of truth. Throughout the novel, the d'Urberville connection has an obscure but detectable impact on Tess's destiny. Some keepsakes, the d'Urberville seal and spoon, suggest her descent is genuine and this is corroborated by Tess's resemblance to the portraits of the d'Urberville women. From early in the novel, Tess is portrayed as a natural aristocrat, seemingly elevated above her social and familial environment. Mrs Crick reflects on Tess's first appearance at the dairy: "Tess had looked so superior ... that she was of a good family she could have sworn" (159) – "too good for a dairymaid" (155). While Tess is as affected by the demands of harsh reality as the other milkmaids at the dairy, she is distinguished from them by her sense of self-worth: she "knew herself to be more impassioned in nature, cleverer, more beautiful than they" (116). Despite the fact that other members of her family have degenerated to the point where any link to gentility is obscured, Tess appears a throwback to an aristocratic past, at least to her fellow farm workers, and even to her seducer. After her initial submission to Alec, she steadfastly refuses to become his "creature" by taking anything from him (60-61). Even Alec is forced to admit her innate gentility: "One would think you were a princess from your manner in addition to a true and original d'Urberville" (60). Later, he calls her "the real article of which I am but the plated imitation" (247). Her descent from the ancient family of the d'Urbervilles may be genuine, but its ultimate effect on her fate is problematic and subject to interpretation.

If Hardy's account of Tess's lineage has complications and velleities, no less has his account of the critical event of her young life. The authorial veil drawn over the circumstances of the night in *The Chase* has led to long-standing critical debate about whether it was rape or seduction. Assaying the textual instability of the episode can provide evidence for both interpretations. In the 1891 version of *Tess*, Alec is portrayed as a recognisable villain of melodrama, equipped for a premeditated rape: he "took a druggist's bottle from a parcel on the saddle, and after some trouble in opening it held it to her mouth unawares". Tess is also portrayed as the traditional innocent heroine, more concerned about spoiling her "pretty frock" than any immediate danger.⁷⁰ In the 1912 version Hardy has modified the episode, putting Tess in a situation which looks more like seduction. Alec calls her "dear", pulls off his coat and "put[s] it round her tenderly" to keep her warm (56). Hardy also omits an 1891 passage in which local cottagers, with "good and sincere hearts ... patterns of honesty and devotion and chivalry",⁷¹ are stirring nearby. He removes the idea that a violation repugnant to community values was taking place. In all versions, however, the comment by the field-women that "A little more than persuading had to do wi' the coming o' [Tess's baby]" (70) and their report that Tess was heard "sobbing" are retained, evidence which tips the balance in favour of rape.

Conversely, the 1912 version implies that Tess was a willing participant when she admits, "My eyes were dazed by you for a little, and that was all" (59). Hardy's shifting text is able to support both interpretations of the event, but, in the final analysis, given Tess's age and naivety, Alec remains guilty of violating her innocence and robbing her of her youthful dreams of bettering her situation. The degree of compliance with Alec's intentions in the end becomes irrelevant: Tess does not deserve the painful

⁷⁰ *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, ed. Tim Dolin (London: Penguin, 1998) 72, hereafter referred to in the form "Dolin edn".

⁷¹ Dolin edn, 74.

consequences which are to haunt her for the rest of her life and ruin any prospects of a successful career or marriage. In his epigraph to *Tess* – “Poor wounded name! My bosom, as a bed, shall lodge thee” (xvi) – Hardy expresses his personal sympathy for this suffering maiden, who, like the heroes and heroines of classic tragedy, has to “bear the whips and scorns of time/ The oppressor’s wrong, the proud man’s contumely,/ The pangs of despised love”.⁷²

Despite her painful awakening to the “danger in men-folk” (64), Tess retains a personal sense of honour and reserves the right to make decisions about her future. She roundly berates Alec for assuming she is like his other conquests: “I didn’t understand your meaning till it was too late” (60). Tess’s innocence has been stolen but not her self-reliance. The narrator notes that Tess does not leave Trantridge until “some few weeks subsequent to the night ride in the Chase” (58). This hidden clue escaped critical attention for some fifty or so years after its insertion, but suggests that Tess has stayed on with Alec on her own terms, long enough for her to deduce that she might be pregnant. Her parting refusal to tell Alec that she loves him, even though she “may have the best o’ causes for letting [him] know it” (61), hints that she has suspected her pregnancy. This is confirmed by Tess’s subsequent confession to her mother and her response, “yet th’st not got him to marry ‘ee! ... Any woman would have done it but you” (63). Despite such a pressing claim for marriage, Tess has “honour enough left” (63) not to make herself beholden to a man that she does not respect. In the aftermath, Tess’s status as a Romantic heroine, able to make decisions which shock her mother, surprise Victorian readers but are consistent with her own ethical development, is intact in both versions of the episode.

⁷² *Hamlet* III. i. 70-72.

Her “independent character” (231) nonetheless impinges on her relationship with Angel and serves to exacerbate the rift between them. In the narrator’s account, “Pride ... entered into her submission” to Angel, “a symptom of that reckless acquiescence in chance too apparent in the whole d’Urberville family” (199). Inverted pride and stubborn endurance of untoward circumstances prevent her humbling herself and delay her asking for help from Angel’s family. Turning back from her last-ditch effort to see the Clares constitutes what the narrator identifies as “the greatest misfortune of her life” (236). It leaves Tess open to all her successive misfortunes: Mercy Chant will steal her boots, the spiteful Farmer Groby will make a slave of her, and Alec will again prey on her in her desperate circumstances. Alec identifies this innate sense of pride when he comments that Tess would rather starve than ask for money from her in-laws (280).

Moreover, this independent spirit will one day lead Tess to retaliate against her oppressor in an act which recalls the vengeful *hubris* of her ancestors. The threat of retaliation is presaged via that macabre motif, the d’Urberville coach. Hardy is playing with the properties of Gothic fiction when he suggests Tess’s encounter with a coach on her wedding day sparks off a submerged ancestral memory. Alec takes the coach as confirmation of Tess’s aristocratic heritage, believing that the “sound of a non-existent coach can only be heard by one of d’Urberville blood” (279). As he blithely relates the tale of the d’Urberville coach, he little realises that he is painting himself into the scenario: “One of the family is said to have abducted some beautiful woman ... in the struggle he killed her – or she killed him – I forget which” (279). Hardy’s coach scenario possibly draws on Shelley’s *The Cenci* (1819), in which the victim ultimately takes revenge upon a rapist. Beatrice has suffered rape at the hands of her tyrannical father, Count Francesco Cenci, and she instigates his murder.

While Hardy appears to enjoy excursions into the melodramatic Gothic past, the point he is making about female independence is modern. *The Cenci* was considered unstageable in its day not just because of its veiled references to incest but also because of the suggestion that a female victim could turn the tables on male domination. Just as the heroine of *The Cenci* was denied justice by a paternalistic legal system, so Tess is unable to escape from male persecution. When she finally snaps, and strikes out at Alec, she too is unable to obtain mercy on the grounds of extenuating circumstances and must pay the full penalty of the law. After Alec's murder, Angel recalls the tradition of the ill-omened coach: "the d'Urbervilles had been known to do these things". He still does not fully appreciate Tess as her own person. Reverting to populist theories of heredity, Angel is able to credit that an "obscure strain in the d'Urberville blood" led to this "aberration" (304) on Tess's part. A modern reader, reluctant to give credence to such deterministic propensities to violence, has a different understanding of the psychological forces which have driven Tess to breaking point. Hardy himself questions the "science" of naturalistic theories of heredity through his characterisation, sometimes attributing Tess's actions to familial traits, at other times subverting such theories by underlining her independence of thought.

Northrop Frye confirms that in classic tragedy, the hero or heroine falls "as a result of *hubris* and *hamartia*", pride and a tragic flaw.⁷³ Though it seems unlikely Tess is acting out of ancestral *hubris*, a curious blend of assertiveness and acquiescence does mark her dealings with Alec at Flintcomb-Ash Farm. One minute she is the aggressor, passionately striking him on the mouth with the gauntlet she is holding, as if challenging him to a duel. The narrator suggests that this slap is the "recrudescence of a trick in which her armed progenitors were not unpractised" (260-61), but the next

⁷³ Northrop Frye, "Anatomy of Criticism", in Richard H. Palmer, *Tragedy and Tragic Theory: An Analytical Guide* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1992) 43.

minute she invites him to punish her: “I shall not cry out. Once victim, always victim: that’s the law” (261). Here Tess does more than ironically question the settled prejudice against a woman in her situation. Driven to the end of her emotional and physical resources after Angel’s abandonment of her, she is asking for nothing less than her death at Alec’s hand.

In his late novels, *Tess* and *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy demonstrates a growing naturalistic tendency to attribute the sufferings of his protagonist not just to chance, or to character, such as Tess’s “feminine loss of courage at the last and critical moment” (236), but to the systematic oppression arising from gender, class and economic conditions. *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* illustrates the decline of traditional rural practices, using Tess’s family to exemplify the plight of rural workers and tradesmen uprooted from their homes. Hardy describes the depopulation of villages where formerly “the majority of the field-folk ... had remained all their lives on one farm, which had been the home of their fathers and grandfathers” (277). These “depositories of the village traditions” had then to “seek refuge in the large centres” (277) with the accompanying loss of folk lore, agricultural knowledge and identification with the land.⁷⁴ Also chronicled are the spread of the industrial revolution and the incursion of agricultural technology, both of which combine to persecute the traditional field-worker. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the appearance of the seed-drill is not seen as posing a dire threat: at worst, it raises a sigh for the lost romance of the sower. In *Tess*, the steam-powered threshing-machine is a “red tyrant” (255), and Tess the unhappy feeder of this “insatiable swallower”, this “buzzing red glutton” (262). Likewise in Zola’s *Germinal*, the mine is a monster that “swallowed the men by mouthfuls of twenty and thirty at one time”, “panting louder and louder with its thick and heavy breath”, while “gobbling its

⁷⁴ This process of deracination is further tracked in *Jude the Obscure* where the protagonist abandons his rural heritage and becomes an itinerant worker moving from town to town.

ration of human flesh”.⁷⁵

Instead of being linked to images of lush fertility as in the Talbothays idyll, Tess at Flintcomb-Ash is reduced to an insignificant part of a naturalistic wasteland. The field is discoloured “a desolate drab ... a complexion without features”, the sky “a white vacuity of countenance” (223), so that the overall effect is an abstract juxtaposition of white and brown surfaces upon which the field-women are seen to be “crawling ... like flies” (224). Howe contends that nothing in Zola “surpasses these pages for a portrayal of human degradation”.⁷⁶ The dwindling of human beings to insects recalls the depiction of Egdon Heath in *The Return of the Native*, where human beings appear as insignificant spots of colour on an indifferent landscape,⁷⁷ or Tess’s arrival in the valley of Blackmoor, standing “still upon the hemmed expanse of verdant flatness, like a fly on a billiard-table”. Even in that season of promise, Tess is seen to be “of no more consequence to the surroundings than that fly” (82), a naturalistic vision of human beings as ephemerals consumed in the universal struggle for survival.

In a strictly naturalistic novel, Tess would be seen as a victim of forces beyond her control rather than as an exceptional individual struggling to maintain her identity. *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, however, is more than an indictment of social injustice. Hardy employs the themes of naturalistic fiction for his own ends, as sources for the “opposing environment”⁷⁸ which he considers essential to tragedy. Although aware of the impact of poverty and social change on the lower classes of rural society, Hardy’s focus is on the psychology of individuals reacting to their changing circumstances. In his own words, the highest tragedy “is that of the WORTHY encompassed by the

⁷⁵ Hardy’s abridged quotations with variations from Émile Zola, *Germinal, or, Master and Man* (London, 1885); cited in *LN*, vol. 2, 475.

⁷⁶ Irving Howe, *Thomas Hardy* (London: Weidenfeld, 1968) 124.

⁷⁷ *RN*, 197, 127.

⁷⁸ *LIFE*, 274.

INEVITABLE”.⁷⁹ While poverty and gender oppression restrict Tess’s freedom of choice, Hardy’s creation breaks free of the constraints of biological determinism: Tess fights to retain her self-reliance rather than succumb blindly to moral degradation.

While Tess often exhibits pride and self-reliance in her dealings with others, when it comes to Angel, she shows an all-too-complete submission to his will: “she adhered with literal exactness to orders which he had given and forgotten ... she asserted no rights, admitted his judgment to be in every respect the true one, and bent her head dumbly thereto” (268). It may be that Tess’s fatal flaw is not so much ancestral *hubris* as a tendency to feminine submissiveness in relationships, what the narrator identifies as her d’Urberville tendency to “acquiescence” (199). Despite all her efforts at self-determination, Tess comes to play the pawn in a game of male domination, at the mercy of Angel’s emotional and spiritual hold on her and of Alec’s physical and economic dominion over her. Alec threatens, “I was your master once; I will be your master again” (261).

In the fields of philosophy and religion, Tess blindly accepts Angel’s authority, putting aside her hard-won ideas and hanging “upon his words as if they were a god’s” (269). Hardy has Tess deify Angel in religious terminology: “his love for her ... made her lift up her heart to him in devotion” (151). Angel’s certainty of his moral superiority makes him an inadequate mentor for Tess, who has, in truth, advanced further towards intellectual self-determination than Angel. Her “triumphant simplicity of faith” (252) in Angel causes her to adopt his opinions without question and throw in her “spiritual lot” (253) with him. While Angel puts Tess on a pedestal of purity and naturalness, Tess idealises Angel as all-knowing and all-wise: “She tried to pray to God, but it was her husband who really had her supplication” (168). As her idealisation

⁷⁹ *LIFE*, 251.

becomes idolatry, “she herself feared it to be ill-omened” (168), invoking the doomed lovers, Romeo and Juliet.⁸⁰

The issue of religious belief and practice in *Tess* has been largely ignored by critics. It has been, and will be in this thesis, more fully explored in *Jude the Obscure*. When Angel, the lapsed agnostic, proposes that “it might have resulted far better for mankind if Greece had been the source of the religion of modern civilization, and not Palestine” (124), he is prefiguring Sue Bridehead’s, and later Jude’s, Hellenism and free-thinking iconoclasm. Where previous novels were underpinned by references to classical mythology and, to a lesser extent, English folklore, in *Tess* Hardy intimates that the decline of faith within the established church is a precursor to the widening recourse to humanism and Positivism among his protagonists. The spectrum of faith in the novel extends from Angel’s father, “a firm believer” (90) who “had to the full the gift of charity” (236), to Angel’s brothers who are theological prigs, and finally to the condemnatory pietism and fundamentalist extremism of the “ranter”, with his fire-and-brimstone preaching. It is with such fanatical nonconformists that Alec d’Urberville throws in his lot during his brief conversion. Just as the novel shows old families, rural traditions and monastic buildings to be decaying, so too religious beliefs are crumbling. The “poor Theology” (62) of the itinerant ranter, daubing biblical graffiti and threats of damnation across the countryside, is deplored as “the last grotesque phase of a creed which had served mankind well in its time” (62).

The evidence in the novel of a progressive decline in faith illustrates Comtean theory, specifically the Law of Three Stages:

The human mind inevitably developed from a first, theological stage in which it explained the world in terms of the will of anthropomorphic gods, (can be subdivided into fetishism, polytheism, monotheism etc.) by way of a second in which it explained the world in terms of metaphysical abstractions, to a third and

⁸⁰ See *Romeo and Juliet* II. v. 9: “these violent delights have violent ends”.

final, positive stage in which it explained the world in terms of scientific truth.⁸¹

According to Comte's notion of the progression of human intellect, the religion of the traditional church, which Angel describes as "untenable redemptive theolatriy" (90), should be making way for an ideology based on human reason. In Part II of the novel, when Hardy describes Tess's use of a psalm as "a Fetichistic utterance in a Monotheistic setting" (81), he is employing phraseology taken directly from Comte's *Système*.⁸² Like Angel, Tess follows a Comtean progression from theism to humanism, but in her case, it is an individual journey rather than the consequence of studying the Higher Criticism or assenting to a series of rationalist arguments. She refuses to acknowledge the condemnatory theology promulgated by the sign-writer – "Pooh – I don't believe God said such things" (63) – falling back instead on her instinctual sense of justice. When she baptises her child, Sorrow,⁸³ Tess has moved beyond formalism and terror of divine retribution: "she, for one, did not value the kind of heaven lost by the irregularity" (75). Though "not in the van of thinkers", the narrator regards Tess as having progressed beyond Solomon, whose idea of life "was a most inadequate thought for modern days" (217). She alone seems to have grasped the tragedy of modern life: "All was, alas, worse than vanity – injustice, punishment, exaction, death" (218).

Unique among the novel's characters, Tess seeks out natural justice, taking responsibility for the salvation of those she loves. Tess's self-sacrificing love of her husband and family acts out Hardy's avowed ideal of evolutionary meliorism, and is aligned as well with the increasing "subordination of egoism to altruism"⁸⁴ promoted by Comte. When Alec rebounds from his flirtation with evangelical Christianity, Tess suggests that he could at least continue to practise "the religion of loving-kindness and

⁸¹ Simon, 4.

⁸² Wright, 211.

⁸³ Note the link with the personification of Sorrow in Hardy's epigraph to *The Return of the Native*.

⁸⁴ Wright, 213.

purity". Her language derives from Angel's "ethical system without any dogma" (259), Positivism or the "Religion of Humanity". Tess takes the idea beyond an ethical theory, however, living out her altruism in practice, and putting the needs of her husband and the Durbeyfield family above her own. Howe argues that Tess seeks to "break past the repressions of the Protestant ethic and move into the kindlier climate shared by Christian charity and pagan acceptance".⁸⁵ The narrator describes her as "Apostolic Charity herself returned to a self-seeking modern world", paraphrasing 1 Corinthians 13:5: "nothing that he could say made her unseemly; she sought not her own; was not provoked; thought no evil" (189). Even her "mood of long-suffering" (199) derives from verse 4 of the same chapter on charity, a virtue reinterpreted by Comte as universal altruism.

Angel's Positivism comes out of books and he proves to be incapable of living out his humanist theories in practice. To Howe, Angel seems "a timid convert to modernist thought who possesses neither the firmness of the old nor the boldness of the new".⁸⁶ When Tess interrogates natural justice, "why the sun do shine on the just and unjust alike", she qualifies it by saying "that's what books will not tell me". Quick to condemn her for not wanting to take up a course of study, and even for expressing "such bitterness" (99), Angel reverts to conventional notions of morality. Despite his overt agnosticism, Angel shows himself "the slave to custom and conventionality when surprised back into his early teachings" (208). An "appreciative humanist" (130), Angel fails in humanity when it comes to real people and situations, "swayed by the antipathetic wave" which warps such literal idealists "once their vision finds itself mocked by appearances" (189). Hardy also recognizes Positivism's "insufficiency to

⁸⁵ Howe, 111.

⁸⁶ Howe, 122.

cope with human sexuality”.⁸⁷ Angel loved Tess “rather ideally and fancifully than with the impassioned thoroughness of her feeling for him” (159), a love “more especially inclined to the imaginative and ethereal ... less Byronic than Shelleyan” (151). That Romantic contrast again recalls Shelley’s “Julian and Maddalo”.

In Shelley’s narrative dialogue, the Byronic Maddalo is a charismatic figure, both proud and passionate. In Julian Shelley represents himself, a believer in the “power of man over his own mind”. Like Angel, Julian is a Romantic idealist who advocates the “extinction of certain moral superstitions”⁸⁸ which for him inhibit social progress, including the elimination of “the leaden laws” (l. 163) of traditional religion. Just as Angel idealises Tess as a “fresh and virginal daughter of Nature” (95), Julian builds his abstract hopes for the future of mankind on the example of Maddalo’s young daughter: a “lovelier toy sweet Nature never made” (l.144) . Tess is the kind of woman upon whom a Julian or an Angel could construct his idealist vision for humanity, but in doing so the idealist tends to exclude the independent thoughts, experiences and feelings of an adult woman. Angel does recognise that “Tess was no insignificant creature to toy with and dismiss” (121), but is unable to reconcile his dream of Tess with the real woman. The collapse of Tess’s dreams of fulfilment with Angel sees her walking alone along a road of suffering like that of the Madman in Shelley’s dramatic poem, deserted by a haughty lover, and “wandering heedlessly” (l. 324). Like Tess, the Madman had begun devoted “to justice and to love” (l. 381) but has ended wishing for death rather than a prolongation of his pain and despair.

Rather than turning to books to provide the answers to her existential yearnings, Tess reverts to ancient beliefs that were “pantheistic as to essence” (135), seeing God in

⁸⁷ Wright, 213.

⁸⁸ Shelley, Introduction, “Julian and Maddalo”, *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose* (New York: Norton, 2002) 120.

everything. In her religious instincts, Tess is “older than the d’Urbervilles” (310), older than Christianity. Though she can adapt to the modern, a part of her is untouched by it, and as one of the “impassioned, summer-steeped heathens in the Var Vale” (123), she can restore her vitality by immersing herself in sunny fertile Nature. Despite her education and religious training, Tess is still comfortable with some pagan beliefs and fatalism, still “steeped in fancies and prefigurative superstitions” (31-32). When, for example, Tess goes to seek help from Angel’s parents, but is prevented from seeing them by unfavourable circumstances, she interprets these as “untoward omens” (236). As Andrew Radford points out, it is not a coincidence that her ancestor is called “Pagan d’Urberville”.⁸⁹ Alec calls Tess “an infidel” (253), while Angel “used to say at Talbothays that [she] was a heathen” (311). Coming to the end of her journey at the solar temple of Stonehenge, Tess announces, “now I am at home” (311).

In his chapter “Killing the God”, Andrew Radford suggests that Hardy develops a mythic infrastructure for *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* like that in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* by chronicling “the death of a figure traditionally associated with the blossoming organic fecundity of an agricultural milieu”. He identifies Tess with both Demeter/Ceres and her daughter Kore, the “maiden” otherwise known as Persephone. According to Radford, Hardy mounts an “extended parallel” in *Tess* “between the traditional ballad narrative of the violation of female innocence” and the myth of the abduction and rape of Persephone.⁹⁰ That the development of this mythological motif is not complete or coherent is due in part to the Demeter/Persephone symbolism being a relatively late addition to the volume. In early drafts, the club-walking scene at Marlott was described as a “vestal rite”, stressing Tess’s innocence. Later, the club-walking

⁸⁹ Radford, 182.

⁹⁰ Radford, 160-61.

was termed a “local Cerealia”,⁹¹ conferring connotations of fertility and virgin sacrifice on the custom. Alec’s loading Tess and her basket with overflowing fruit and flowers to create a figure of Cerealian abundance is, however, insufficient to sustain the mythological parallel. When Angel loads Tess with such mythological labels as “Artemis, Demeter, and other fanciful names” (103), he is mistaken in acclaiming her a fiercely chaste Artemis figure, but his identifying her with Demeter is equally inappropriate. A regenerative process does occur in “The Rally” which might prefigure the return of Persephone/Tess in spring and summer, but for this mythological parallel to be effective, the bitter winter of Flintcomb-Ash should have been undergone exclusively while Tess was in Alec’s sway, and Tess’s mother should be a heartbroken Demeter instead of an active agent in her rape/seduction. There is, finally, no sense of a restoration of the natural cycle at the close of Hardy’s novel. As witnessed in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, the times have grown too modern and out of joint to permit such a closing of the cycle or the sense of an ongoing regenerative process.

Rather than linking Tess to the fertility goddess, Demeter, a sinister late addition to the novel links Tess to the Phrygian mother goddess, Cybele, whose worship exacted blood sacrifice. In the 1892 version, the narrator described the chalk tableland at Flintcomb-Ash as “bosomed with semi-globular tumuli – as if Cybele the Many-breasted were supinely extended there” (220). This mimics a description in *Abbé Mouret*: “It was as if some mighty Cybele had fallen on her back, with upstarting bosom”.⁹² The benign goddess of fertility has apparently been usurped by a goddess of sacrifice and destruction, an impression reinforced by the mention of the flints’ “bulbous, cusped, and phallic shapes” (223), shapes that recall the orgiastic rites of the

⁹¹ Laird, 88.

⁹² *AM*, 105.

priests of Cybele. The priests emasculated themselves with flint knives in worship of their goddess, rites that Hardy twice refers to in his *Literary Notebooks*.⁹³

En route to Flintcomb-Ash, Tess is caught up in a death-haunted musing on the time to come when her “bone would be bare” (218). Hounded by the aggressive taunts of a man who will later be identified as Farmer Groby, Tess experiences “bodily fear” (216) and takes refuge in a copse by the roadside. She finds, however, no escape for her “hunted soul” (217). Hearing strange noises through the night she awakes to find herself in the midst of a flock of wounded pheasants, driven there by a shooting party and left to die writhing in agony. Tess is another hunted animal, driven there by “rough and brutal” men (218) who have persecuted her beyond her limits of endurance. In executing these bleeding victims Tess evokes the worship of the dark earth-mother, Cybele, who demanded sacrifice if the fields were to flourish. The later death of Alec d’Urberville brings together both the ritual of blood-letting and the sense of divine retribution, a ritual *frisson* aestheticised and tamed, but always potent in the poetics of classical tragedy.⁹⁴ Tess may be seen in the case of Alec as an agent of natural justice meting out punishment to the unworthy.

These primitive mythological resonances sounding beneath Tess’s tragic journey do not preclude her story being equally embedded in those folkloric traditions on which the Romantics drew. When we first encounter Tess’s mother, she is singing her favourite ditty, “The Spotted Cow”. This belongs to a family of seduction songs in which milkmaids are led off into secluded woods and emerge from the bushes maidens no more. At the end, the couple either marries or, more often than not, the young woman is left to deal with the consequences alone. In traditional folk ballads, this is the

⁹³ *LN*, vol. 2, entry 1708, refers to “frantic devotees...who mutilate themselves after the manner of the Phrygian worshippers of Cybele”. See also the note to entry 1879 in volume 2.

⁹⁴ In the *Oresteia*, having killed both her husband and Cassandra, Clytemnestra gloats over the bodies, characterising herself as a matriarchal earth goddess made fertile by the blood of sacrifices.

end of the story, but in Hardy's treatment it marks the commencement of Tess's, Hardy himself explaining that "the great campaign" of his heroine "begins after an event in her experience which has usually been treated as fatal to her part of protagonist, or at least as the virtual ending of her enterprise and hopes".⁹⁵ In previous novels Hardy delved into what came after comedy's conventional "happy ending" of marriage; in *Tess* he interrogates what is hidden by the stereotype of the "fallen woman", even daring to question whether "once lost always lost" was true of virginity (78).

Paradoxically, Tess goes forward as both the agent of her own destiny and the innocent victim of a tragic fate. At crucial points in the plot, Tess wears the white dress of a figure of sacrifice. She first appears to Angel in a white dress at the Marlott club-walking, prefiguring her later suffering at his hands. She resumes the outfit when she sets out for Trantridge, putting herself at the mercy of Alec d'Urberville, and again on the fateful night of her violation at The Chase. Using the Aeschylean model to interpret her tragic execution, Tess herself is apparently sacrificed to appease divine and mortal "Justice" (314), indicating the capriciousness of the principalities and powers governing human affairs. In his preface to the novel, Hardy himself draws attention to the link with Shakespeare's *King Lear*:

As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods;
They kill us for their sport. (IV. i. 36-37)⁹⁶

The casual injustice of aristocrats, slaughtering harmless pheasants in order to satisfy a bloodthirsty desire for "sport" can be seen in parallel with the story of Tess, who like the helpless birds, ends with her neck broken, in her case on the gallows, so that the "President of the Immortals" can conclude "his sport with Tess" (314).⁹⁷

The colour red, "the colour of blood", also signals Tess's victimhood, as Tony

⁹⁵ Thomas Hardy, "Preface to the Fifth and Later Editions", *Tess*, ix.

⁹⁶ "Preface to the Fifth and Later Editions", *Tess*, xi.

⁹⁷ Compare this with Eustacia, described in *The Return of the Native* as "a sport for Heaven", *RN*, 264.

Tanner points out.⁹⁸ At the club-walking, Tess alone wears a red ribbon (7). “Madder stains on her skin” spot her whiteness when she is drawn through the garden by the sound of Angel’s harp (96). At the horse Prince’s accidental death, she is “splashed from face to skirt with the crimson drops” (22). When a thorn on the rose given to her by Alec pricks her chin, she thinks it “an ill-omen” (32). Penetration images such as the pricking thorn and the impaling of Prince align sexual defloration with violent death. Describing Alec as the “blood-red ray in the spectrum of her young life” (30) alludes not only to his robbing Tess of her innocence: it prefigures his own murder with a carving knife, and the growing “scarlet blot” (301) on the ceiling below the rented rooms.

Such imagery identifies Tess as a victim, and as a scapegoat. Sacrifice of a chosen victim to appease the gods was a widespread ancient practice, as was the sprinkling of blood for the ritual cleansing of guilt or sin. At Stonehenge, Tess lies on the “altar stone” on which the Druids were supposed to have offered human sacrifices to the sun. At sunrise, she is taken away to her execution by figures whose dark outlines identify them with the standing stones around the “altar”. Angel holds “one poor little hand” and observes that “her breathing now was quick and small, like that of a lesser creature” (312). Rather than bidding a reader ask whether that was the hand that thrust the knife into Alec, the narrative works to elicit pathos for Tess in her weak and vulnerable state. Modern law enforcement is made to seem as cruel and barbaric as a pagan sacrifice, an anachronism in a society that fancies it is finding its way to a more humane set of mores. In Shelley’s “Julian and Maddalo”, the Madman’s talk of “the red scaffold” asking for “some willing victim”⁹⁹ calls to mind that even modern trials sometimes single out a scapegoat, regardless of the state of mind of the accused or the

⁹⁸ See “Colour and Movement in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*” in *Hardy: The Tragic Novels*, ed. R.P. Draper, 184.

⁹⁹ “Julian and Maddalo”, ll. 375-76.

complicity of others.

Although Tess has striven heroically against the reverses which have dogged her young life, Angel's desertion robs her of her resilience. When Tess returns to Marlott after the death of her father, she can see no way to retain her hopes for herself, nor any means by which she can support her now homeless and destitute family. Alec continues to stalk her unremittingly, and it becomes clear to Alec as well as Tess that she will be unable to support her mother and siblings unaided. Evicted from their home due to the social stigma attached to Tess's sexual history, the family journey to Kingsbere, the ancestral home of the d'Urbervilles, where Tess's mother foolishly imagines they will find welcome and support. Camping with her mother and the children at the d'Urberville tomb until, as Joan imagines, "the place of your ancestors finds us a roof" (286), Tess is overcome by a deepening depression and sense of helplessness. The weight of unmet responsibility and crushed hopes wear down Tess's ability to "suffer/ The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune".¹⁰⁰ Tess arrives at a significant terminus in her journey when she reaches the entry to her ancestral sepulchre: "Why am I on the wrong side of this door!" she cries (287).

Evelyn Hardy has identified in Hardy's female characters a "tendency towards martyrdom and self-sacrifice".¹⁰¹ Burdened by an over-developed sense of responsibility for "the rehabilitation of her family" (42), Tess consistently fails to protect her own interests. Regarding herself "in the light of a murderess" (24) after the death of the family horse, Tess reluctantly co-operates with her mother's scheme to "claim kin", and thus falls prey to her seducer. Feeling that she is the sole provider for the family leads her to an act of martyrdom in which she surrenders her last shreds of dignity and self-determination. The novel does not show Tess's final capitulation to

¹⁰⁰ *Hamlet* III. i. 58.

¹⁰¹ Evelyn Hardy, *Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography* (New York: Russell, 1970) 231.

Alec but we understand that her struggle to maintain her sense of self is over. Her body has “dissociated from its living will” (299) and the Tess that travels to Sandbourne with Alec has undergone a type of spiritual death. As Hardy stated in an interview, Tess remained “to all intents and purposes a pure woman till her last fall. Then she was as a mere corpse drifting in the water to her end”.¹⁰²

Frank Giordano has extensively studied what he calls Tess’s “potent death instinct”.¹⁰³ She expresses a preference that she “had never been born” (149), wants to hide in a tomb (65), and wishes she and her child were both in the churchyard (70). Marriage to Angel offers her a chance of happiness, but exacerbates her guilt about her past and a desire for punishment: “She would pay to the uttermost farthing” (175). Hardy here examines both the double standard in Victorian sexual politics and its internalisation by those it stigmatised. No matter what the man has done, the woman bears the brunt of ignominy and suffering: “The Woman Pays” (178). Rejected by Angel, Tess thinks of putting an end to herself in the flooding river, so as to avoid burdening him further (183). Yet a part of Tess’s acceptance of suffering may not only be an excessively altruistic wish to rid Angel of an encumbrance, but a wish to escape the burden of existence.

At Flintcomb-Ash, Tess finally relinquishes her fiercely-held faith in her absent husband, recognising that “Angel Clare himself, had, like others, dealt out hard measure to her”. In the throes of a “sudden rebellious sense of injustice” she expresses in a letter her renewed sense of being “wronged”. Like Elizabeth-Jane before her, Tess finally admits to herself the injustices committed against her. In exclaiming against Angel, Tess is also railing against the harshness of her fate: “Never in her life – she could swear it from the bottom of her soul – had she ever intended to do wrong; yet these hard

¹⁰² “News Notes”, *The Bookman* 2, 7 (April 1892): 6.

¹⁰³ Giordano, 161.

judgments had come". Momentarily at least her reflections free her from the burden of self-blame: "Whatever her sins, they were not sins of intention, but of inadvertence, and why should she have been punished so persistently?" (281) Like Shelley's Madman in "Julian and Maddalo", also betrayed by his lover, Tess cannot find an answer to her existential suffering:

What Power delights to torture us? I know
That to myself I do not wholly owe
What now I suffer ... (ll. 320-22)

The dénouement of *Tess* has unexpected aspects. At the end of Part VI, Tess has struggled both to admit Angel's physical and emotional desertion, and to resist Alec's "cruel persuasion" (300). When we meet Tess again, she appears in the *déshabillé* of a kept woman, "her voice sounding hard" and "her eyes shining unnaturally" (298). Her outfit and attitude are that of a *demi-mondaine* like Nana in Zola's eponymous novel, one who dresses fully only in the evenings and spends her days in a *peignoir*.¹⁰⁴ In the place of the child of nature, in tune with her own feelings and values, Angel encounters an emotionally hardened and jaded woman, a Zolaesque Tess who has "spiritually ceased to recognize the body before him as hers" (299). Tess is now what she would have been in the hands of a French naturalistic novelist, her resistance overcome by poverty, her self-reliance soured by a life of self-hatred and noisome dissolution. Alec persecutes her in the relationship he has coerced her into accepting, nagging and taunting, calling Angel "by a foul name" (304), then resorting to "more and sharper words" (301). The quarrel which culminates in the murder is reminiscent of *Thérèse Raquin*. At the end of Zola's novel, as a result of the escalating domestic disharmony

¹⁰⁴ Zola, *Nana* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977) 74.

that follows hard on the demise of her first husband, the heroine plans to stab her lover with a carving knife.¹⁰⁵

Angel's sudden appearance, however, shocks Tess out of her naturalistic apathy. Flickers of the old Tess emerge: her vocal tones "resuming their old fluty pathos" rather than the "hard" tones of her persona as Alec's mistress (298). She apparently forgives Angel in an instant and lays all blame on Alec: "I hate him now, because he told me a lie – that you would not come again; and you *have* come!" (299). More than his treatment of her, Tess cannot forgive Alec for undermining her faith in her husband: "And at last I believed ... and gave way!" (300). Upon Angel's return, Tess simultaneously experiences the frustration of her dreams of happiness and the resurgent hope that she might escape from Alec and pursue her relationship with Angel unencumbered. Both Tess and Angel are initially "baffled" by a situation that neither expected and neither can resolve. No power of self-determination is left to them, both seeming "to implore something to shelter them from reality" (299). Angel's blithe assumption that his return and apology will make everything right appears a cruel joke in the face of all that Tess has suffered. As for Tess, what has made her capable of murder is a form of dissociation from her true self: "I have done it – I don't know how" (303). Angel supposes that in a moment of "mad grief ... her mind had lost its balance" (304).

Tess in her madness reveals the shadow side of her identity as a strong self-generating Romantic. No longer like Julian or Maddalo's daughter, she resembles the Madman, one of those Shelleyan souls

Who patient in all else demand but this:
To love and be beloved with gentleness;
And being scorned, what wonder if they die
Some living death? (ll. 207-10)

¹⁰⁵ Zola, *Thérèse Raquin* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1970) 249.

At the end of her emotional resources, Tess resembles Boldwood or Clym Yeobright, who wish for death but are condemned to endure an existence darkened with depression and racked with suffering.

What re-emerges after Tess's dissociation is a Tess who recovers the innocence of her own intentions. Her motives in killing Alec derive, at least in part, from an altruistic desire to protect her husband: "my sin will kill him and not kill me!" (301). In a mad twist to the ethic of loving-kindness, she avows that she "owed it" to Angel to kill Alec. Tess is just as incensed by what she perceives as Alec's "wrong" to Angel as she is by Alec's violations of herself. Yet her ulterior motive for doing away with Alec arises equally from her death wish and re-awakened self-loathing. Feeling that sooner or later Angel will come to despise her, Tess does not wish to outlive his renewed love for her (308). The desire for retribution and possibly suicide which emerged in the haystack episode, when she struck Alec on the mouth with the heavy gauntlet, comes once more to Tess's recollection. Again, there is a mad logic at play. The murder of Alec she feels will wipe out her past, restore her innocence and also restore Angel as he was before her wedding-night confession, "the one man on earth who loved her purely, and who had believed in her as pure" (304).

Angel's sufferings in Brazil have not embittered him, but have softened his censoriousness about human frailty: "Tenderness was absolutely dominant in Clare at last" (304). He returns broken down in health but emotionally transformed. As his mother exclaims, "it is not Angel – not my son – the Angel who went away" (290). Through his experiences, he has learned to judge Tess "by the will rather than by the deed" (292), a revelation tested when he learns of Tess's revenge upon Alec. He now chooses a role he should have taken on before, as Tess's protector rather than her judge: "I will not desert you ... whatever you may have done or not have done" (304).

Unlike naturalistic authors, Hardy does not allow his heroine to descend into disillusionment and despair, instead restoring her to a state of child-like innocence and dependence on Angel. Killing Alec purges Tess of guilt by “extinguish[ing] her moral sense altogether” (304). She regresses to the mentality of a child of nature like Zola’s Albine. The wanderings of Tess and Angel in Phase 7, “The Fulfilment”, recall those explorations within the walled security of the garden which forge the relationship between Albine and Serge in *Abbé Mouret’s Transgression*. Angel and Tess’s time together in the empty mansion represents a sort of consummation of their relationship, but it is the escapist and temporary fulfilment of the Romantic dreamer: “All is trouble outside ... within was affection, union, error forgiven” (308).

Despite the lovers’ brief respite from reality, the agents of law and retribution, like the implacable forces of Greek tragedy, close in upon Tess and Angel: “outside was the inexorable” (308). Faced with her impending execution, Tess possesses an inner peace which makes the prospect of death more a consummation than threat. At her arrest she announces, “I have had enough; and now I shall not live for you to despise me” (312). Her words “I am ready” (313), embrace her capture and execution and echo Hamlet’s acceptance: “the readiness is all ... what is’t to leave betimes?”¹⁰⁶ Beatrice exhibits a similar calm acquiescence in *The Cenci*, going to her execution with the words “We are quite ready. Well, ’tis very well”.¹⁰⁷

Many Shakespearean tragedies, with their professedly God-centred belief systems, conclude with the promise of a compensatory afterlife. Horatio pronounces on his friend the benediction, may “flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!”¹⁰⁸ By contrast, a humanist perspective denies the possibility of heavenly consolation, and leaves imperfect worldly love and justice as the only compensations. In *Tess of the*

¹⁰⁶ *Hamlet* V. ii. 21-23.

¹⁰⁷ *The Cenci* V. iv. 165.

¹⁰⁸ *Hamlet* V. ii. 359.

d'Urbervilles no hope of eternity alleviates the sense of present misery. The Durbeyfield children's rendering of "Here we suffer grief and pain ... In Heaven we part no more"¹⁰⁹ brings Tess to tears because she no longer shares their simple faith: "If she could only believe what the children were singing ... how confidently she would leave them to Providence and their future kingdom!" (282).

Tess's acceptance of her untimely death bespeaks her sense of peace and reconciliation, but the question of the afterlife remains problematic. When Tess questions Angel as to whether they would meet again, "Like a greater than himself ... he did not answer" (312), invoking Christ's silence before the high priest. Despite Tess's wish to be told she and Angel will be together in eternity because they "love each other so well" (311), Angel cannot bring himself to entertain the notion of a Romantic, *Wuthering Heights*-style union beyond the grave. The absence of hope marks a departure from such Shakespearean tragedies as *Romeo and Juliet*, where the sight of the lovers united in death brings the warring families to an unprecedented accord. It brings Tess's confrontation with death into the ambit of *King Lear*, an uncompromising pagan worldview unalleviated by religious or Romantic consolations.

Even in a naturalistic novel, fertility and reproduction provide a sense of posterity. Gillian Beer has pointed out, "Fecundity for Zola is life's answer to death".¹¹⁰ In a post-Darwinian universe, the "only immortality is to live in others".¹¹¹ For Hardy likewise, the "eternal thing in man" comes down to heredity alone, "Projecting trait and trace/ Through time to times anon".¹¹² But neither Zola's fertility nor heredity provides a solution for Tess and Angel, who have no offspring to carry on their line. Tess pins her hope for continuity on a scheme that Angel should marry her sister, Liza-Lu, "a

¹⁰⁹ The chorus of Thomas Bilby's hymn, first published in 1872, begins "O, that will be joyful!"

¹¹⁰ Gillian Beer, "Finding a Scale for the Human", *Tess*, 452.

¹¹¹ Morton, "Neo-Darwinian Fate in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*", *Tess*, 437.

¹¹² "Heredity", *CP*, 434.

spiritualized image of Tess” (313). In this way “it would almost seem as if death had not divided [the couple]” (311).

In *The Well-Beloved*, the pursuit of a Platonic ideal of beauty drives Jocelyn Pierston on a quest to find a spiritualised version of his beloved through three generations of the same family. Tess claims that Liza-Lu is just such an idealised version of herself, “all the best of me without the bad of me” (311). Tess suggests that she could share Angel willingly with Liza-Lu “when we are spirits” (311). This idea of spirits united in death revisits Shelley’s *Epipsychidion*, where the poet expresses the wish “in the fields of immortality/ My spirit should at first have worshipped thine” (ll. 134, 133), possibly in the Elysian fields, the classical abode of the blessed after death, or in some Platonic pre-existence. The designation of Liza-Lu as Angel’s future wife appears to be Tess’s final attempt to imagine a Romantic re-creation of her brutal death. Giving Angel Liza-Lu may appear to Tess like an atonement for her sins; to Angel, taking care of Liza-Lu may appear like an atonement for his sins against Tess.

Hardy also took the working title for *Tess, Too Late, Beloved!*, from *Epipsychidion*. The provisional title highlights regret for opportunities lost, promises unfulfilled, potential dissipated, of Hardy’s draft novel. The whole sequence of Tess’s life is one of missed chances or mistimed events. At their first meeting Angel fails to ask Tess to dance and he “instinctively felt that she was hurt by his oversight” (10). In an anguish of regret she complains to Angel, “Why didn’t you stay and love me when I – was sixteen ... and you danced on the green” (154). Joan Durbeyfield expresses misgivings after sending Tess to the d’Urberville mansion: “I was thinking that perhaps it would ha’ been better if Tess had not gone” (38). When Angel returns to find Tess at Sandbourne, and she relates the story of his sleep-walking across the From with her in his arms, Angel exclaims, “Why didn’t you tell me next day! ... It might have prevented

much misunderstanding and woe" (307). "Fate" has been against them, their course "so starless" that Angel's enlightenment regarding Tess's worth does indeed come too late.¹¹³

Tess "had hoped to be a teacher at the school, but the fates seemed to decide otherwise" (35). In his novels, Hardy's tragic vision is often of aspirations crushed by "uncompromising rude reality".¹¹⁴ Tess discerns the discrepancy between "what might have been" and the pattern of her life, "wasted for want of chances!" (99) Whether her sufferings can be ascribed to fate, a malign deity or the indifference of a purposeless, mechanistic universe, Tess's attempts to find happiness in life are constantly thwarted by circumstances beyond her control. Her wish to be a teacher or find happiness in marriage are perfectly reasonable, but Hardy's definition of tragedy precludes any explanation for the vagaries of fate or mischance: "a tragedy exhibits a state of things in the life of an individual which unavoidably causes some natural aim or desire of his [or hers] to end in a catastrophe when carried out".¹¹⁵

Tragedy in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* integrates not just the determinism of the naturalists but also "the accidents and coincidences of romance".¹¹⁶ Before the wedding, when Tess tries to give Angel a written confession of her past, the letter goes missing, hidden under a carpet. When she then tries to confess her faults in person before their wedding day, Angel refuses to listen. Seeking work at Flintcomb-Ash, Tess comes under the power of the very man attacked by Angel before the wedding as he seeks to protect her honour. Tess's misreading of Angel's father, based on overhearing his priggish sons talking, occurs "at the last and critical moment" (236), and but for that mismeeting she might have been saved from penury. Her failure to approach Angel's

¹¹³ *Epipsychidion*, ll. 130-32.

¹¹⁴ "God's Funeral", *CP*, l. 34.

¹¹⁵ *LIFE*, 176.

¹¹⁶ Newton, "Chance as Employed by Hardy and the Naturalists", 175.

parents precipitates Tess in a downward spiral that leads her back into the clutches of Alec d'Urberville. Angel's eventual return from Brazil and attempted reconciliation is tragically too little, and comes "too late" (298).

Not wanting to believe that Tess's violation by Alec was simple bad luck leads the narrator to propose an elaborate theory of retribution: "Doubtless some of Tess d'Urberville's mailed ancestors rollicking home from a fray had dealt the same measure even more ruthlessly towards peasant girls of their time". Losing faith in the notion of a trans-generational retribution, the narrator next asks "where was the Providence of her simple faith?" (57) Later the field hands concur that "it mid ha' gone hard wi' a certain party if folks had come along" (71). But as the narrator in *Jude the Obscure* reminds us, "nobody did come, because nobody does".¹¹⁷ In his early *Study* Lascelles Abercrombie pointed out, "Mr Hardy's metaphysic is... tragical ... for who knows better than he how the senseless process of the world for ever contradicts the human will?"¹¹⁸

In his *Literary Notebooks*, Hardy's pencilled comments on "La Littérature Réaliste" refer to the "triumph of the crowd" over the hero.¹¹⁹ The notion reappeared in "Candour in English Fiction", where Hardy contrasted the classical treatment of tragedy, where the hero set an example based on moral foundations, with the modern treatment, which recognises the more frequent "triumph of collectivity over the individual",¹²⁰ or, as Hardy rephrases it, "the commonplace majority" subjugating "the exceptional few".¹²¹ The French article suggests that such an approach to tragedy is "realistic, naturalistic" and even "democratic", treating as it does the tragedy of common men and women rather than persons of high status.¹²² In *Tess*, we find a

¹¹⁷ *Jude the Obscure* (New York: Norton, 1998) 27.

¹¹⁸ Lascelles Abercrombie, *Thomas Hardy: A Critical Study* (New York: Russell, 1964) 19-21.

¹¹⁹ Annotations to "De La Littérature Réaliste", *LN*, vol. 1, 407.

¹²⁰ "De La Littérature Réaliste", *LN*, vol. 1, 219.

¹²¹ "Candour", 127.

¹²² "De La Littérature Réaliste", 219.

remarkable synthesis of these modern naturalistic concepts with classical notions of tragedy. Tess is not just the victim of naturalistic pressures, being rather one of the “exceptional few” – in other words, a Romantic heroine. As Irving Howe suggests, the “romantic element” in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* is Hardy’s “insistence upon the right of the individual person to create the terms of his being, despite the pressures and constraints of the external world”.¹²³ Tess is a working-class “aristocrat” with a true sense of self-determination, a “pure woman” overcome as much by the shortcomings of those around her as by the vagaries of fate. She also is a victim of patriarchal prejudice, a casualty of the “commonplace majority”. Although initially aware of her own superiority, Tess recognises that she was “in the eyes of propriety far less worthy” (116) than those around her. The disparity between Tess’s intrinsic worth and the condemnation which she undergoes gives rise to the emotional power of the novel.

Tess of the d’Urbervilles engenders a dual cathartic effect, the feeling of outrage and terror that someone of great worth has been lost at the first climax, when the protagonist capitulates to Alec, and the feeling of pity, that someone of great understanding, a natural philosopher, has been understood “too late” by Angel, and not understood at all by a punitive legal system, a “Power” that “delights to torture”.¹²⁴ As a contemporary reviewer commented, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* “must take its place among the great tragedies”.¹²⁵

¹²³ Howe, 111.

¹²⁴ “Julian and Maddalo”, l. 320.

¹²⁵ W. Watson, “*Tess of the d’Urbervilles*”, *Academy*, 41 (1892): 125.

CHAPTER 5: *Jude the Obscure*

One hope within two wills...
And one annihilation ...¹

Jude the Obscure is the last of Hardy's major novels, and the one which most outraged contemporary readers. One critic was quick to identify *Jude* with "Zolaism",² as the story "has to do with some things not hitherto touched in fiction, or Anglo-Saxon fiction at least".³ Another concluded that, while the inspiration to treat "subjects hitherto considered immoral" may have come from France, Hardy's "original treatment" of his theme constituted "an assault on the stronghold of marriage".⁴ One reviewer, however, was more favourable and, in fact, more astute in identifying that the author's "artistic combination of the real and the ideal" – or his collocation of naturalistic and Romantic elements – gave his novel a power which "surpasse[d] any of his French contemporaries".⁵ Those who were repelled by the urban Naturalism of *Jude* failed to take into account the high aspirations of its protagonist. Hardy himself conceived the novel as being "all contrasts": the "'grimy' features of the story go to show the contrast between the ideal life a man wished to lead, and the squalid real life he was fated to lead".⁶

The reviewers' outrage at what they took to be a polemic against the institution of marriage failed to recognise that other social institutions, such as the university system and the traditional church, were also being subjected to critical scrutiny. In *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy explores a range of social possibilities, as well as ideological and theological

¹ *Epipsychidion*, ll. 584, 587.

² Letter to Sir Edmund Gosse, November 20, 1895, *CL*, vol. 2, 99.

³ William Dean Howells, *Harper's Weekly*, December 7, 1895; cited in Cox, 254.

⁴ Margaret Oliphant, "The Anti-Marriage League", *Blackwood's Magazine*, January 1896, 136, 141.

⁵ D.F. Hannigan, *Westminster Review*, January 1896; cited in Cox, 274.

⁶ Letter to Sir Edmund Gosse, November 10, 1895, *CL*, vol. 2, 93.

positions, a dialogue he refers to as a “series of seemings” (5).⁷ He draws back from taking a polemical stance on any of these issues; however, the social and intellectual range of his characters’ attitudes, debates and speculations give *Jude the Obscure* the dialectical complexity of a novel of ideas. If there is little of the rapid wit or the satirical clash of opinion and behaviour found in the fictions of Voltaire, this is because the characters do not fully understand the positions they stumble to articulate, and never quite grasp the ramifications of the systems they adopt. Jude, Sue and, to a lesser extent, Phillotson suffer the plight of moderns setting out to negotiate the maze of contemporary thought.

If the certainties of the past are found wanting, the late Victorian and early modern alternatives also fail to satisfy. Sue’s blithe espousal of Hellenism cannot sustain her at her moment of crisis, and she is left to collapse into a pit of guilt and self-castigation. Jude’s fervent pursuit of early church doctrine is rejected once he finds a more immediate object to pursue in the person of Sue. Their attempt at a free and irregular union is marked by moments of happiness in years of mutual misery. To live freely within institutional constraints is impossible for these idealists; to dispense with institutions and beliefs is to give themselves up to vagabondage, social alienation and self-destructive conflict. Contemporary reviewers and twenty-first century readers alike can identify social criticisms on the one hand, and failings of the major characters on the other, but underpinning the novel’s “seemings” is the terrible metaphysics of tragedy and loss.

⁷ “Preface to the First Edition”. Unless otherwise indicated, parenthetical references are to *Jude the Obscure*, ed. Norman Page (New York: Norton, 1999); hereafter critical articles included in this edition are referred to with the cue-title “JO”.

In his 1895 preface to *Jude*, Hardy identified the novel as a “tragedy of unfulfilled aims”.⁸ One might rather suggest that Jude’s is a tragedy of unfulfillable aims. Jude’s high aspirations and lack of ability to compromise or to settle for lesser, more attainable goals mark him as doomed to failure from the start. In his attempt to pursue his dreams, he is distressed by the widening gap between his imaginings and the vicissitudes of daily life. His dream of raising himself to new heights in the rarefied atmosphere of Christminster is again and again undermined by the naturalistic influences of heredity and his social environment. A more deeply anti-Romantic disillusionment awaits him, however. Not only can he not be all he dreams of;⁹ he is disabled by his own weaknesses. Yet when Jude finally, on his death bed, recognises the total failure of his aspirations, Hardy contrives to impart a hint of the moral greatness of his last tragic hero. However subverted by the cruel circumstances of his life, Jude has managed to remain true to his ideals.

One conflict between naturalistic impulses and Romantic aspirations frequently represented in *Jude the Obscure* is the antagonism between the desires of the flesh and the longing for spiritual and intellectual enlightenment. Penny Boumelha identifies Jude’s sexuality as a “disruptive force”¹⁰ diverting him from his intended course. The choice of the unusual name “Jude” warrants a look at the foreshadowing of the protagonist’s fate in the Epistle of Jude. It warns of “ungodly men” infiltrating the early church, “dreamers” who “defile the flesh” and “reject authority” (Jude: 4, 8). By the end of the novel, Jude is no longer a young man with dreams of ordination but a disenchanted agnostic who has burnt his religious books and been heard using “terribly profane language about social

⁸ “Preface to the First Edition”, *JO*, 5.

⁹ “Julian and Maddalo”, ll.172-73.

¹⁰ Penny Boumelha, “*Jude the Obscure*: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form”, *Jude the Obscure: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. Penny Boumelha (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000) 63.

conventions” (315). Jude is distracted from his scholarly and ecclesiastical ambitions by two women who turn him into exactly the kind of person his patron saint warns against. While Hardy’s narrative is more sympathetic to Jude’s difficulties than is the biblical epistle, the main character is shown struggling against his sensual nature in the attempt to realise his higher aspirations. Hardy described the novel as telling of a “deadly war waged between flesh and spirit”:¹¹ Arabella’s “throwing of the pizzle at the supreme moment of his young dream”, when Jude is envisaging himself as “a beloved son”¹² of Christminster (32), was seen by Hardy as initiating this conflict.¹³

St Jude is also known as the patron saint of lost causes, a prefiguring of what would become of Jude’s hope of taking a degree at Christminster. Christminster is a pseudonym for Oxford, identified by Matthew Arnold as the “home of lost causes”.¹⁴ The Christian name is given by the parents, so in terms of Zolaesque determinism, the first name might indicate a propensity for lost causes. Jude’s family name may also be a clue to his destiny. Radford associates Fawley with “folly”.¹⁵ Alternatively, *Faw* is recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as a dialect word coming from the Scandinavian for “fall”, a type of orthographic pun, indicating that Jude is destined to *fall* short of his moral ideals. The noun, *Faw*, meaning gypsy, was a usage current until the late nineteenth century. Thus the surname may allude to the curse of the Fawleys: they lead peripatetic, unstable lives offering little prospect of material success. Because of their irregular union, Jude and Sue become an “obscure pair” leading “a shiftless, almost nomadic, life” (243). Despite their higher aspirations, Jude and Sue end up like gypsies, compelled to move from place to

¹¹ “Preface to First Edition”, *JO*, 5.

¹² The quotation from Matthew 3:17 identifies Jude with Christ.

¹³ Letter to Sir Edmund Gosse, November 10, 1895, *CL*, vol. 2, 93.

¹⁴ Matthew Arnold, “Preface”, *Essays in Criticism*, First Series (London: Macmillan, 1898) xi.

¹⁵ Radford, 188.

place as itinerant workers or fair people and incurring the disapproval of middle-class households. Earlier working titles for the manuscript version, “The Simpletons”, or “Hearts Insurgent”, indicate that from the first draft the relationship between Jude and Sue was pivotal to the tragic unravelling of events.

As in Zola’s Rougon-Macquart dynasty, heredity and upbringing play a significant part in determining the character and fate of family members. Both the title of Hardy’s novel and the references to Jude as obscure in his birth and life highlight the naturalistic determinants of the eponymous hero. The choice of *Jude the Obscure* over other working titles emphasises Hardy’s pessimistic sense that the odds against his protagonist realising his educational and career hopes were all but insuperable, given the deprivation and poverty of his youth. Doomed by this epithet, and labelled by the implications of his Christian and family names, Jude is cast from the beginning as a tragic figure, to be dragged down like Orestes by the sins of his forebears, as well as by social conditions which militate against his Romantic visions of greatness. Contemporary critics recognised immediately the naturalistic implications of Hardy’s Jude, seeing in him another Tess, a “kind of flicker in the socket” of a “decayed and wasted race”.¹⁶ The deterministic aspects of Jude’s heredity and social class all but condemn him to failure.

The portrait of Jude’s impoverished life in Christminster is, in fact, a departure for Hardy. Having referenced urban poverty in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*’s Mixen Lane, he now depicts in detail the life of a single university-city *misérable*. In externals, the city milieu in *Jude the Obscure*, with its tawdry bars and bleak garrets, could be the setting of one of Zola’s Rougon-Macquart novels. The lives of those in Christminster’s slums are as degraded by poverty, drunkenness and immorality as are any of Zola’s characters. While

¹⁶ Edmund Gosse, *Cosmopolis* (January 1896); cited in Cox, 266.

French cities had been considered more potent sources of vice, there was a growing recognition of similar depravity in the urban slums of England.

Greenslade comments that the idea of social “degeneration” was “an important source of myth for the post-Darwinian world”.¹⁷ He goes so far as to suggest that the theory of degeneration was “an enabling strategy by which the conventional and respectable classes could justify and articulate their hostility to the deviant, the diseased and the subversive”.¹⁸ With Jude’s itinerant lifestyle, de facto wife and weakness for drink, he would have been labelled as one of the “undeserving poor”. The concept which was current in the late-Victorian era fuelled notions of “depravity as an evolutionary mistake”.¹⁹ Patricia Ingham quotes a contemporary writer who deplored the improved conditions of town life which had enabled “thousands of such persons who would have died even fifty years ago” to survive.²⁰ Natural selection and Malthus combine in a form of social Darwinism that replaced compassion and social responsibility with class prejudice, an antipathy fuelled by pseudo-scientific theory.

The ethical dilemma raised by the struggle to survive forms one of the many threads of philosophical and sociological questioning woven into the fabric of *Jude the Obscure*. The “nicely balanced forces” of extinction, predation and survival, which excited a sense of wonder and enquiry in Darwin,²¹ produced in Hardy an existential *angst*. The underlying cruelty involved in natural selection is disturbing enough in the animal realm, but takes on an even more disturbing edge when applied to human populations. Ingham suggests that, “once human beings are woven into the evolutionary picture, the moral values and

¹⁷ Greenslade, 1.

¹⁸ Greenslade, 2.

¹⁹ Patricia Ingham, Introduction, *The Woodlanders*, xxix.

²⁰ Ingham, *The Woodlanders*, xxix.

²¹ F.B. Pinion, *Thomas Hardy: Art and Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1977) 35.

emotional associations that attach to the ideas of struggle, survival and being the fittest to survive become inescapable”.²² By enlisting our sympathy for “Jude, the obscure, the unwanted”, Hardy calls into question the arbitrariness of the whole “order”, according to Roy Morrell.²³ While Hardy was able to assent to Darwinism as objective biological science, he was far from comfortable with its application to social issues. Greenslade draws attention to this ambivalence in Hardy, to his working “both with and against the grain of these explanatory myths”.²⁴ Where Hardy differs from Zola and other social naturalists is in eliciting a degree of compassion for the casualties in the struggle for existence. He looks beyond inherited and social determinants to uncover the hopes and fears of individuals caught up in vicious cycles of aspiration and class discrimination, poverty and despair, rather than condemning them as members of a depraved underclass who should die out courtesy of natural selection. Hardy as story-teller gets inside the head of such a *misérable* and shows that he, too – in fact he more than others – has Romantic aspirations which are negated by the vicissitudes of fate or social competition, as well as by the weaknesses inherent in his own makeup.

One of the working titles for *Jude the Obscure* was *The Dreamer*, a title focussing on Jude’s Romantic aspirations and his yearnings for love: his “dreams were as gigantic as his surroundings were small” (20). Jude’s aspirations soar against a naturalistic or pragmatic backdrop, a perspective which forewarns that he cannot help but fall short of realising such dreams. A French critic who identified the protagonist as “Jude le rêveur”²⁵ picked out a key motif in the novel. Sue renames her cousin “Joseph the dreamer of

²² Ingham, *The Woodlanders*, xxix.

²³ Roy Morrell, *Thomas Hardy: The Will and the Way* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1965) 103.

²⁴ Greenslade, 6.

²⁵ Blaze de Bury, 59.

dreams” (162), but when she later exclaims, “Oh you dreamer!” (219), she has begun to be sceptical of the predictive truth of his visions. Jude is representative of the Romantic individual in every age who desires to transcend or remake his circumstances: “It had been the yearning of his heart to find something to anchor on, to cling to – for some place which he could call admirable” (22). Disenchanted with his surroundings, Jude is possessed by a desire for the “Ineffable”, the “sense that there is some felt thing just out of sight that will not stay to be examined”.²⁶

As a boy, Jude sees Christminster as the pinnacle of all his hopes. It is the “heavenly Jerusalem” (18) where people live “on a lofty level” (22), a “city of light”, “manned by scholarship and religion” (23). He pictures his old teacher, Phillotson, as one of those enlightened beings, “promenading at ease” within the radiant glow of Christminster (20), like the angelic figures in Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace.²⁷ These biblical references indicate a melding of spiritual, intellectual and Romantic ideals which makes Jude’s disillusionment more complete and more devastating. On the night of his entry into Christminster, he glimpses “decrepit and superseded” medieval buildings, already at odds with his dreams of perfection, but he maintains his vision by allowing “his eyes to slip over them as if he did not see them” (64). Only in the light of day is his “perfect and ideal” city revealed as “the more or less defective real” (68). His meeting with Phillotson destroys “at one stroke the halo which had surrounded the schoolmaster’s figure in Jude’s imagination” (82). Instead of the “imaginative world he had lately inhabited” (92), Jude is confronted with reality. While Christminster’s decaying material fabric is an outward sign of educational and spiritual stagnation, it equally portends the crumbling of Jude’s hopes. It is not, however,

²⁶ Kearns, 55.

²⁷ Daniel 3:25.

the cause of Jude's downfall, so much as it is one more instance of the many rude awakenings which the dreamer must suffer. Once arrived in the place where the "tree of knowledge grows" (23), he has no idea how to set about picking its fruit.

Jude's Romantic longings will not be quenched, however; one unfulfillable desire mutates into another. In place of his hope of ordination, Jude substitutes the vision of his cousin Sue: "she remained more or less an ideal character, about whose form he began to weave curious and fantastic day-dreams" (72). After the collapse of his vision of Christminster, the failure of the vision of Sue seems likely, even as she begins to metamorphose into other fantasies. First, the "poetized locality" of Christminster begins to "precipitate itself on this half-visionary form" (73): Jude then replaces Phillotson's fallen halo on Sue, whose picture shows her in a "broad hat with radiating folds under the brim like the rays of a halo" (63). He masks his attraction to her person in religious terms: she is a saint who "seemed to look down on him and preside over his tea" (69), but she becomes as well a Keatsian-Shelleyan beacon, "a kindly star, an elevating power" (74).

When he goes to Cardinal College to catch a glimpse of her, he experiences a blissful fusion of secular and divine love: he might be "ensphered by the same harmonies" as his beloved, raised into a "sustaining atmosphere of ecstasy" (75), where he and she will become, as foreseen by Shelley, "one/ Spirit within two frames".²⁸ When Jude fondly imagines Sue as a "companion in Anglican worship, a tender friend" (74), he is not only deceiving himself as to the nature of his attraction, but also mistaken about Sue's free thinking. With typical irony, Hardy subsequently has his heroine go out and purchase two plaster figures of Apollo and Aphrodite, then juxtaposes her reading of the anti-Christian Swinburne with Jude's fervent recitation of the New Testament. Hardy's narrative montage

²⁸ *Epipsychidion*, ll. 573-74.

dramatically portrays the jarring antithesis between Jude's religious and erotic fantasies about Sue and Sue's unintentionally provocative but deliberately anti-Christian experiments with paganism.

Jude is not only deluded about Sue's religious beliefs, but about his own. The scene in Cardinal College shows him "ensphered" in layers of fantasy – of being at one with the beloved, even though she is unaware of his presence – and of the unison he experiences being a religious state of mind, rather than an erotic projection. The "atmosphere of ecstasy" which surrounds him has more in common with Shelley's experience of "extacy" in "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" than with any mystical enlightenment. In his "Hymn", Shelley makes it clear that calling on the "name of God and ghosts and Heaven" is a "vain endeavour" (ll. 27-28), a course which recedes into darkness and oblivion once the poet is enthralled by the Spirit of Beauty, just as Jude's religious tendencies fade once he becomes enraptured by Sue. The figure of Intellectual (or ideal) Beauty is a recurrent symbol in Shelley's poetry, a Platonic *eidolon* appearing as a woman who casts a sphere of light and harmony about her person. Jude is portrayed as a Shelleyan lover who partakes in the dream of *Epipsychidion*, that lovers who have "One hope within two wills" can become "one/ Spirit", without foreseeing that such a fusion will lead them into "one annihilation" (ll. 573-74, 587).

John Paterson's study of the manuscript reveals that originally Sue Bridehead, rather than Phillotson, was the focus for Jude's dreams of going to Christminster, suggesting a romantic rather than intellectual impetus behind Jude's fatal fascination. In the ur-version of the novel, Sue appears in Part 1 as a girl of precocious intellect who was adopted by the head of a College in Christminster. For the orphan Jude, Christminster acquires a hold over him "from the one nucleus of fact that the *young creature of his flesh*

& blood whom he had never seen was actually living there”.²⁹ In Shelley’s *Epipsychidion*, the poet addresses his beloved ideal as “Sweet Spirit! Sister of that orphan one” (l.1), his own soul fragmented and isolated until it finds its *epipsychidion* (or soul outside the soul) in the person of the beloved. The lover of *Epipsychidion* goes so far as to wish “Would we two had been twins of the same mother” (l. 45).³⁰ In the person of his cousin Sue, Jude unites his desire for family with his metaphysical and intellectual yearnings.

Equally important, but initially suppressed by Jude in his mystical vision of Sue, is his desire for erotic fulfilment. Shelley’s translation of Plato describes the lover’s long-standing search for oneness, “intimately to mix and melt and to be melted together with his beloved, so that one should be made out of two”.³¹ In Plato’s *Symposium*, Socrates explains how the lover of the beautiful climbs from the bottom rung, the love of things as they bloom and wither in Becoming, to the top of the ladder, where one loves the immaterial, ideal beauty as it resides in Being.³² Aristophanes, on the other hand, has previously proposed that love is what compels any one man and any one woman – partial and craving fragmentary beings, mere hemispheres – to be drawn to each other so that they can be completed in a perfect sphere. Both notions are combined in Shelley’s luminous sphere imagery:

We shall become the same, we shall be one
 Spirit within two frames, oh! wherefore two?
 One passion in twin-hearts, which grows and grew
 ’Till like two meteors of expanding flame,
 Those spheres instinct with it become the same,
 Touch, mingle, are transfigured; ever still

²⁹ John Paterson, “The Genesis of *Jude the Obscure*”, *Studies in Philology*, 57, 1 (1960): 89.

³⁰ The wish combines allusions to The Song of Solomon 8:1 and 5:1, in which the beloved is addressed as “my sister, my spouse”, and to the lovers Laon and Cythna in *The Revolt of Islam*.

³¹ Plato, *The Symposium*, Shelley’s translation (1818) in *Essays: Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, vol.1, ed. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (London: Moxon, 1852) 90-91.

³² Plato, *The Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985).

Burning, yet ever inconsumable ... (*Epipsychidion*, ll. 573-79)

The lover will only be completed with the “soul out of his own soul” (l. 238) when he unites physically with the beloved. Shelley’s fusion of Platonic models means that Shelleyan desire is not “Platonic” in the contemporary sense of the word: it is intensely spiritual and intensely sexual at the same time.

Jude idealises Sue in the manner of a Shelleyan lover. His desire is to achieve a transcendent state by eschewing the everyday and pursuing a vision of the beloved, a vision in which all his intellectual, spiritual and erotic aspirations are combined and consummated. Devotee of Shelley as he was, Hardy was also an inveterate sceptic about the possibilities of human fulfilment. While sympathising with Shelley’s or Julian’s dreams of “love, beauty and truth”, Hardy sides with Maddalo in recognising that human nature is “weak – and we aspire/ How vainly to be strong!”³³ Jude’s failed marriage to Arabella compellingly demonstrates his weaknesses, both in giving vent to his “animal passion for a woman” (75) and in failing to recognise Arabella as a deceptive schemer. That he knows little more about Sue, and will also fail to examine her behaviour and opinions critically, bodes ill to any bid to marry the passional and intellectual components of Jude’s nature. In Sue’s presence he marvels at “what a comrade she would make” (123), but is unable to “get over the sense of her sex” (122).

Hardy’s scepticism about fulfilment extends into a metaphysics in which the marriage of intellectually compatible minds in sexually compatible bodies is an impossible aspiration. In the poem, “The Convergence of the Twain”, when “consummation comes”,

³³ “Julian and Maddalo” ll. 174-78.

it “jars two hemispheres” (l. 33):³⁴ rather than uniting disparate parts, a cataclysm is created by the fantasy of unity. Hardy’s poem is a brooding invocation of the futility of human aspiration in the face of a hostile universe. Coming into contact with the “Pride of Life” or “vaingloriousness”, the “Immanent Will” (described elsewhere as the “circumstantial will against enjoyment”)³⁵ works to sink all idealisms or hopes of progress, instead bringing human and nonhuman “hemispheres” into calamitous collision.³⁶ To thwart human idealism in the shape of the Titanic, it is as if this “unsympathetic first cause”³⁷ coldly and deliberately prepared a “sinister mate” so that the “convergence of the twain” would destroy life and hope.³⁸ Rather than a fusion of souls and bodies, the union of Jude and Sue might be seen as bringing about a disaster that will inevitably engulf others.

In his dreams of erotic fulfilment, Jude fails to take into account Sue’s idealised view of relationships. Like Jude, Sue is blinkered and refuses to acknowledge that which is repugnant, notably for her the demands of sexuality. This is exemplified by her airy assertion that “no man short of a sensual savage – will molest a woman by day or night” (118). Sue is “venturesome” with men, being “childishly ignorant of that side of their natures” (140), and when no longer a child, still practises a wilful ignorance. Her ideal was to “go on living always as lovers ... and only meeting by day” (203). Sue adopts what she takes to be another Shelleyan invocation to Intellectual Beauty –

Seraph of Heaven, too gentle to be human
 Veiling beneath that radiant form of woman
 All that is insupportable in thee
 Of light, and love, and immortality!³⁹

³⁴ “The Convergence of the Twain”, *CP*, 306-07.

³⁵ *Tess*, 224-25.

³⁶ “The Convergence of the Twain”, ll. 3, 15, 18, 33.

³⁷ *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, 121.

³⁸ “The Convergence of the Twain”, l. 19.

³⁹ *Epipsychidion*, ll. 21-24

– as her self-description, but fails to recognise the erotic component in Shelley’s adaptations of the Platonic vision of ideal beauty. In seizing on this isolated quotation to justify the continuation of her non-sexual relationship with Jude (194), she is not only misinterpreting *Epipsychidion* but also her own latent needs.

Hardy’s portrayal of Sue became increasingly complex as he revised the novel. Patricia Ingham points out that the Wessex Edition of the text contains suggestions of stronger feeling than in the original version published 1895, and includes actual confessions of love from Sue. In the manuscript, Sue was described as unfit for marriage “possibly with any man”⁴⁰ which is then modified to “possibly with scarce any man” (173) in 1912. The final version of Jude’s parting from Sue at Shaston, in which they “kissed close and long” (171), replaces the earlier “kissed each other”.⁴¹ Ingham suggests that these small but significant changes make Sue’s motives less clear and emphasise the “elusiveness of her curious double nature”.⁴² In Dale Kramer’s opinion, “Sue’s range of extreme decisions deflects attempted comprehensive analysis”.⁴³ Her flirtatiousness, her jealousy of Arabella and her “love of being loved” (191) betray a level of self-deception or feminine guile ultimately at odds with the elevated vision of herself as a Platonic *eidolon*. Her subconscious desires appear to clash with the feminist opinions she holds about women’s independence in a male-dominated society.

Apart from her sexual inconsistency, Sue possesses in abundance those mental and emotional affinities with Jude which “render a life-long comradeship tolerable” (58). Even the betrayed schoolmaster is forced to acknowledge the “extraordinary sympathy, or

⁴⁰ Note to p. 229, *Jude the Obscure*, ed. Patricia Ingham, World’s Classic Edition (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985) 443, hereafter referred to in the form “Ingham edn”.

⁴¹ Note to p. 227, Ingham edn, 443.

⁴² “Note on the Text”, Ingham edn, xxiv.

⁴³ Dale Kramer, “Hardy and readers: Jude the Obscure”, *CC*, 173.

similarity” between Sue and Jude, as though they were, as Aristophanes would have it, “one person split in two” (182). Yet Phillotson’s conception of their relationship fails to take into account the intellectual and sexual disparities which divide the two cousins. The “intimate welding” of these particular “twin halves”⁴⁴ will lead to discord rather than the Shelleyan dream of fulfilment in which the “Twin spheres” might “Touch, mingle” and be “transfigured”.⁴⁵ Hardy continues to draw on Shelleyan associations when he has Phillotson refer to Jude and Sue as “Laon and Cythna” (183), the lovers in *The Revolt of Islam*. According to Robert Gittings, the poem remained a life-long “obsessive favourite”.⁴⁶ In Shelley’s original conception of the poem, Laon and Cythna were brother and sister, rather than cousins like Sue and Jude. Inherited likeness is no guarantee of compatibility, however, as the doom of Shelley’s tragic and incestuous lovers attests. Consanguinity may contribute to natural affinity in Shelley’s poem, but not in Hardy’s novel. Rather than increasing Sue and Jude’s potential harmony, it adds, in Boumelha’s judgement, “an incestuous *frisson* to their sense of ... hereditary doom”.⁴⁷

From the start of the novel, marriage is spoken of in the Fawley clan as a dangerous undertaking, a flying in the face of what Hardy elsewhere calls the “hereditary curse of temperament”.⁴⁸ As Aunt Drusilla puts it, “’Tisn’t for the Fawleys to take that step any more” (13). In this the plebeian Fawleys recall the aristocratic d’Urbervilles with all their supposedly inherited faults and legendary coach. Jude’s aunt hints at a painful episode from family history, a wife who went mad and refused to let her child be buried. This scenario is later played out in the novel: not one, but three children die, and Sue suffers a breakdown,

⁴⁴ “The Convergence of the Twain”, ll. 27, 30.

⁴⁵ *Epipsychidion*, ll. 345, 578.

⁴⁶ Robert Gittings, *The Young Thomas Hardy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978) 120.

⁴⁷ Boumelha, “Sexual Ideology”, 59.

⁴⁸ Letter to Mrs Florence Henniker, November 10, 1895, *CL*, vol. 2, 94.

refusing to give up her dead children and rejecting Jude. The chapter on *Tess* included discussion of Zola's naturalistic studies of inherited family defects in his Rougon-Macquart novels, and how the influence of heredity may have contributed to Tess's tragedy. What was of interest in *Tess* was the protagonist's own scepticism about the theory as a shaping force in her destiny. By contrast, Jude is more willing to entertain the idea that a "tragic doom" (222) might overshadow the family and that this might not augur well for his relationship with Sue. In a family "where marriage usually meant a tragic sadness, marriage with a blood-relation would duplicate the adverse conditions, and ... be intensified to a tragic horror" (74). The "hereditary curse" of the Fawleys does not, however, restrain Jude from seeking out his cousin. In fact, as Jude confesses to Sue, the "enmity of our parents gave a piquancy to you in my eyes" (194) and only intensified his desire to seek her out. It seems that Jude deliberately courts disaster. As in Shelley, where pursuit of the *epipsychidion* culminates in "one life, one death,/ One Heaven, one Hell, one immortality,/ And one annihilation" (ll. 585-87), so over Jude and Sue hangs an inherited doom both naturalistic and ancient, like the fate determined by blood-guilt and ancestry in Greek tragedies. The tragedy of *Jude the Obscure* is, in the end, more modern than ancient: the clash of worlds that makes the final catastrophe inevitable is a collision between Shelleyan idealism and Zolaesque determinism, rather than any classical curse.

Romantic notions of life and love espoused by both Jude and Sue play a part in their failure to achieve a stable relationship. A shared motive for their continued postponement of marriage is the desire to "live on in a dreamy paradise" (214); they are at one in their desire to keep clear of institutional conformity but oblivious as to what this might cost them. After observing both a registry office ceremony and then a church wedding, they decide to abandon their attempt to get married so as to avoid "killing [their] dreams" (226).

Sue at times exhibits an air of complacency and sense of superiority over lesser beings who feel the need for a foothold in a social, temporal existence. As against Sue's blithe claim that "we have returned to Greek joyousness, and have blinded ourselves to sickness and sorrow" (234), Arabella dismisses Sue and Jude's "mutual responsiveness" as being that of "Silly fools – like two children" (232). Arabella's dismissal of their immersion in each other and their blindness to the realities of the outside world is no doubt inflected by some jealousy, but, representative as she is of insensitive realism in the novel, her assessment that their innocent dreams will be shattered is accurate. While the couple's intimacy is more appealing than the callous pragmatism Arabella brings to her unions, the traits she identifies as childish lead to Sue and Jude's undoing. Arabella's advice to Sue about what Jude needs from a relationship may be a calculated insult, but acts as a salutary dose of realism in Sue's airy vision of herself as a "seraph of Heaven, too gentle to be human" (194). The intrusion of Jude's overtly sensual ex-wife into Sue's fantasy of prolonged non-sexual union precipitates Sue's decision to make her relationship with Jude a physical one. In time, this capitulation on Sue's part will bring the couple face to face with the realities of childbirth, social isolation, sickness and penury, leading ultimately to the disintegration of their tense and fragile family.

At first, the lovers tried to avoid the legal contract of marriage altogether, seeing it as "fetter'd love" (214). Like Shelley and Mary Godwin before them, they have idealised "mutual love alone"; no "ecclesiastical or civil formality" constitutes marriage for them.⁴⁹ For Sue, the legal obligations of marriage are "destructive to a passion whose essence is gratuitousness" (214). What Sue formulates as a libertarian principle, Aunt Drusilla has earlier referred to as a family failing: "There's sommat in our blood that won't take kindly

⁴⁹ Georg Brandes, *Naturalism in Nineteenth Century English Literature* (New York: Russell, 1957) 214.

to the notion of being bound to do what we do readily enough if not bound" (58). Some of the opinions expressed in the novel nevertheless seem more appropriate to Hardy's stated intention to employ the marriage laws "as the tragic machinery of the tale"⁵⁰ than to the personality of the character who enunciates them. Sue's assertion that "it is foreign to a man's nature to go on loving a person when he is told that he must" (203) adopts an apparently masculine perspective, one which may be more Hardy's opinion than her own. Her remark that a marriage constitutes a licence "to be loved on the premises" (203) has a mordant irony also redolent of Hardy.

Jude's reference to Sue and himself as "pioneers" of modern views that are "fifty years too soon to be any good" (315) is prophetic. Their decision to eschew marriage is a courageous social experiment which prefigures the breakdown of marriage as a hegemonic institution in the twentieth century. Sue herself affirms, on the basis of wishful thinking it seems, "Everybody is getting to feel as we do. We are a little beforehand, that's all" (225). Irving Howe maintains that "*Jude* played a part in the modern transformation of marriage from a sacred rite to a secular and thereby problematic relationship";⁵¹ but a particular relationship in Hardy's work does not fail or succeed only because it does not comply with the social code. Even without formal marriage, the relationship between Sue and Jude is fraught with difficulties. Howe further suggests that Jude and Sue "anticipate that claustrophobic and self-destructive concentration on 'personal relationships'" which is characteristic of the twentieth-century novel. He regards the couple as suffering from the

⁵⁰ "Postscript", *JO*, 7.

⁵¹ Irving Howe, *Thomas Hardy* (New York: Macmillan, 1967) 134.

modern dilemma of “thoughtful and self-reflective persons who have become so absorbed with knowing their experience, they are unable to live it”.⁵²

The Widow Edlin can be seen as the novel’s outside observer, a one-woman Greek chorus who traces the evolution of marriage from a light-hearted fling which provided the excuse for a celebration, to an undertaking laden with fears and misgivings: “Weddings be funerals ’a b’lieve nowadays” (314). It seems that Hardy’s characters have moved to a diametrically opposed point in a cycle which began with *Far from the Madding Crowd*. There, only a tinge of foreboding overshadowed the wedding of Gabriel and Bathsheba. The widow’s affirmation that “times have changed” prompts the reflection that it is not marriage that has changed but the people who enter into it. A “weak, tremulous pair” (225), Jude and Sue are newly emergent types. Sue has been identified as a nineteenth-century “New Woman”, an intellectual who seeks to maintain her sense of self rather than submerge it in marriage. If Jude is not so often credited with being a New Age Guy, he is nevertheless “horribly sensitive” and “checked by the dread of incompetency” (225). Later, Hardy would speculate that the “nerves” of a vanguard of humanity were evolving to an abnormal level, and as a consequence that the planet did not any more “supply the materials for happiness to higher existences”.⁵³ For over-sensitive individuals such as Jude and Sue, the attempt to find happiness in a permanent relationship only compounds their individual difficulties.

More than seventy years before, Shelley had denounced the power of social custom to ruin men’s and women’s lives with “leaden laws/ Which break a teachless nature to the

⁵² Howe, 145.

⁵³ *LIFE*, 218.

yoke”.⁵⁴ In *Epipsychidion*, Shelley identified the restrictive bonds of marriage as a

Christian imposition:

I never was attached to that great sect,
Whose doctrine is, that each one should select
Out of the crowd a mistress or a friend,
And all the rest, though fair and wise, commend
To cold oblivion ... (ll.149-53)

For Hardy the problem of marriage was a secular rather than a religious issue. In his postscript to *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy called matrimony “the famous contract – sacrament I mean”, ironically deferring to contemporary norms about the sanctity of marriage. His opinion, that “a marriage should be dissolvable as soon as it becomes a cruelty to either of the parties”,⁵⁵ sought to free relationships of religious and social fetters. The epigraph from Milton to “Part Fourth” of the novel reinforces this view: “Whoso prefers either Matrimony or other Ordinance before the Good of Man and the plain Exigence of Charity ... is no better than a Pharisee” (157).

Paterson points out that what began, in the draft of *Jude the Obscure*, as a critical examination of the education system became an “equally critical examination of the sacrament and institution of marriage”.⁵⁶ The manuscript of the novel discloses a heavier emphasis on the issue of marriage. Although Hardy reinstated much of the sexual content which had been bowdlerised in the serial version, the manuscript contains some trenchant condemnations of marriage which were not restored to published editions. After learning that Sue has submitted to marital relations with Phillotson as a form of penance, Jude exclaims, “Why doesn’t she see that any code which makes *cruelty* a part of its system – the cruelty of forcing a woman into union with a man she does not love, or a man with a

⁵⁴ “Julian and Maddalo”, ll.163-64.

⁵⁵ “Postscript”, *JO*, 7.

⁵⁶ Paterson, “The Genesis of *Jude the Obscure*”, 87.

woman ... cannot possibly be moral?"⁵⁷ Patricia Ingham links Jude's question with Hardy's own description of a bad marriage as "one of the direst things on earth, and one of the cruellest things".⁵⁸

In his revised preface to *The Woodlanders*, Hardy wrote about "the question of matrimonial divergence, the immortal puzzle – given the man and woman, how to find a basis for their sexual relation".⁵⁹ He devotes half of this preface, written a month after his preface to *Jude*, to the discussion of marriage as a secular "covenant", and he refers to "one or two others of this series" of novels which treat the same question. The preface to *The Woodlanders* and the novel itself serve as precursors to *Jude*; rather than depicting unhappy alliances, they seriously question the intrinsic value of marriage itself. Grace's father not only muses on why "a woman once given to a man for life took, as a rule, her lot as it came ... for the first time he asked himself why this so generally should be done". Grace herself asserts that she is not bound to her husband "by any divine law, after what he has done: but I have promised and I will pay". Her plight is reminiscent of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* where the section heading, "The Woman Pays", underlines the double standard which exacted punishment on women for staying within, or for straying outside, the marriage bond. Revisiting the vows she made in wedding Fitzpiers, Grace wonders "whether God really did join them together".⁶⁰ Having discounted marriage as a sacrament, the novel goes on to question the value in perpetuating an unworkable and (from a woman's perspective) inequitable model of heterosexual union.

⁵⁷ Note to p. 422, Ingham edn, 450.

⁵⁸ *CL*, vol. 2, 98; cited in Ingham edn, 450.

⁵⁹ *The Woodlanders*, 368.

⁶⁰ *The Woodlanders*, 216, 307, 354.

Similar criticisms of marriage from the male perspective can be found in a novel published in 1886 by Octave Feuillet, *La Morte* [The Dead Woman]. Hardy translates a passage from this work in his notebooks, and Björk notes that “several utterances” in the novel are similar to those in *Jude*.⁶¹ Frederick Green nominates Feuillet “the most Victorian of all the nineteenth-century [French] novelists” for his portrayal of well-bred characters and preoccupation with a transcendent morality. Green also notes Feuillet’s ambition, to “create powerful characters and tragic situations”, before going on to disparage his fiction for its overriding “idealism”.⁶² Despite Hardy’s scepticism, affinities between the two authors can be found. Like Hardy, Feuillet is concerned with the disappointed hopes of Romantic idealists and with chronicling the decay of religious belief in the nineteenth century. Like Hardy, he multiplies the barriers between lovers; a typical plot premise is to have the lover of one woman marrying another. Troubled by the impact of Darwinism, Feuillet upholds the ideal of an evolutionary meliorism which will result in “la perfection finale de l’univers”.⁶³ There are other indications that Hardy could have been influenced by or shared affinities with Feuillet. For example, the title of Hardy’s first unpublished story, *The Poor Man and the Lady*, which he completed in 1868, is suggestive of Feuillet’s *chef d’oeuvre*, *Le Roman d’un Jeune Homme Pauvre* [The Story of a Poor Young Man], published ten years earlier.

After the death of his first wife, the hero of *La Morte*, Bernard, marries a second wife, Sabine, who shares many personality traits with Sue. Her intelligence marks Sabine as a “New Woman” but her strategic opportunism is in stark contrast to Sue’s naivety. On

⁶¹ *LN*, vol. 1, 391.

⁶² Frederick C. Green, *French Novelists from the Revolution to Proust* (New York: Ungar, 1964) 267.

⁶³ [The final perfection of the universe] Octave Feuillet, *La Morte*, ed. Calmann Lévy (Paris: Lévy, 1886) 253; hereafter referred to in the form “*LaM*”.

occasion, Sabine dresses in men's clothing, as Sue does at Jude's flat, and engages in "raillerie voltairienne" (*LaM*, 209), recalling Jude's finding Sue "quite Voltairean" (121) in argument. Sabine "pousse la logique un peu loin" (*LaM*, 266), indeed pushes logic a bit too far at the expense of her husband's feelings, just as Sue rides roughshod over Phillotson when quoting J.S. Mill. In common with Sue, Sabine withholds herself at will from her husband, not in her case because of a weak sex drive, but to assert her independence from the one man.

Even at the start of the novel, Bernard describes modern marriage as an "aventure redoutable" (*LaM*, 5), a fearful adventure. His assessment echoes the Widow Edlin's observation in *Jude* on how much more redoubtable the marital state has grown. Bernard speculates that the institution is outmoded and should be discarded,⁶⁴ Dr Tallevaut concurring that in the not-too-distant future, when intellectual women like Sabine become the norm, marriage will cease to be viable.⁶⁵ Sue exclaims at how "hopelessly vulgar an institution legal marriage is" (213) and concludes that, with no religious basis, marriage is a "sordid contract, based on material convenience" (166). Bernard laments that marriage is no more than "une convention sociale" (*LaM*, 280), based on "l'attrait passager de deux corps" (*LaM*, 279) [the transitory attraction of two bodies]; Jude that it is a "social ritual" based on a "transitory instinct" (52). Sabine rails against swearing eternal love to the one man, while it is left to Hardy's narrator to comment on the absurdity of Jude and Arabella vowing that "at every other time of their lives ... they would assuredly believe, feel, and desire precisely as they had" (48). Bernard's recognition that he could only have Sabine by marrying her resonates with the disabused narratorial comment in *Far from the Madding*

⁶⁴ "L'institution serait-elle donc périmée et le mieux ne serait-il pas d'y renoncer?" *LaM*, 228.

⁶⁵ "Le mariage ... cesserait d'être viable", *LaM*, 230.

Crowd: “men take wives because possession is not possible without marriage” (103).

While Bernard would concur with Hardy’s take on marriage as a “daily, continuous tragedy” (183), Feuillet’s *La Morte* lacks the metaphysical dimension of Hardy’s tragedy, in which no philosophy or faith compensates human beings for the clash between flesh and spirit, or between aspirations and the social institutions which condemn such aspirations to unfulfilment.

At the outset, Jude is a Romantic hero in the style of Feuillet’s leading men, for whom, as Doumic writes, “dreaming of an ideal, even a chimera, is a sign of nobility”.⁶⁶ In due course, Sue will see in Jude a “tragic Don Quixote” (162), someone with exalted Romantic aspirations but blind to reality. Like Jude, some Feuillet idealists are haunted by a death-wish, and some make spectacles of themselves by their sensual disorders, much as Jude debases himself when weakened by drink and sexual frustration. In Doumic’s words, “reality takes its revenge upon them”, and they fall even lower than nonentities who have never known an ennobling aspiration. In Feuillet and Hardy alike, the Romantic spirit is a gauge of suffering: those prone to Romantic aspirations live to find their highest aims disappointed and unsatisfied.⁶⁷

La Morte ends with the death of Bernard, his health, like Jude’s, ruined by *chagrin*. In the course of his suffering, he expresses the futility of scientism: science cannot “fill the terrifying void left in the moral world by the extinction of the old worn-out religions”.⁶⁸ His conclusion is that we now feel “alone and as it were abandoned in the immense universe ...

⁶⁶ René Doumic, *Portraits d'Ecrivains*, Première Série (Paris: Perrin, 1924)157. This, and the following quotations from Doumic, are my translations.

⁶⁷ Doumic, 158.

⁶⁸ “Le vide effrayant que laissaient dans le monde moral les anciennes religions épuisées”, *LaM*, 212.

where the struggle for existence is the only law and a cruel one”,⁶⁹ echoing the view expressed in *Jude* that “cruelty is the law pervading all nature” (251). While Feuillet elsewhere implies that society is thereby “condemned to emptiness, to nothing but a complete moral nihilism”,⁷⁰ his novel demonstrates that there are still men of honour, such as Dr Tallevaut or Bernard, who uphold their ideals in a universe on the verge of collapsing into absurdism. In this, he prefigures the existentialism of writers such as Camus.

While there are superficial similarities between *La Morte* and *Jude the Obscure*, there is a world of difference between Bernard, the morally and economically comfortable *bourgeois* whose security has been temporarily rocked by Sabine, and Jude, born into a life of emotional, physical and moral uncertainty, who struggles to find his way in the face of overwhelming disadvantages. Bernard is too cosy, too insulated from the rigours of existence, to be a tragic hero. *La Morte* is also far from conveying the raw emotional impact of *Jude the Obscure*. Like Hardy’s novel, Feuillet’s can be classed as a novel of ideas, but not much more. Even the ideas are made to appear less compelling by the lightweight emotions of the protagonist.

Feuillet achieves a sentimental hopefulness by having Bernard convert to the religion of his first wife on his death-bed. An otherwise disillusioned ending is counterpoised by a sense of personal consolation. As in *Les Misérables*, though on a much smaller scale, any pity and terror aroused by the outworkings of the plot are alleviated by Christian optimism so that the net effect is one of redemptive pathos. No heavenly consolation shines through the tragedy of Jude’s death, however. In its place, Hardy’s exploration of philosophical and religious themes probes the depths of his characters’

⁶⁹“Nous nous sentons seuls et comme abandonnés dans l’immense univers ... la lutte pour l’existence est la loi unique et cruelle”, *LaM*, 288.

⁷⁰ Doumic, 145.

emotions so that we can feel their *angst* as we do Janine's in Camus' "The Adulterous Woman".⁷¹ Jude's demise marks the collapse of all his aspirations, the failure of divine and of human love. Jude dies in despair, certain there is no "résurrection personnelle" (*LaM*, 304) for him.

In the course of *Jude the Obscure*, which can be read as a type of anti-*Bildungsroman*, Jude must contend not only with the marriage question but with the problems of work, social change and education which shape his development or devolution. Still clinging to the vestiges of Romantic idealism, he is compelled by reduced circumstances to undertake "meditations on the actual"; his mind is exercised by "the mean bread-and-butter question" rather than the "phantasmal" (68). In the process, he experiences an epiphany, discovering that "here in the stone yard was a centre of effort as worthy as that dignified by the name of scholarly study" (69). Hardy seems to invoke a Ruskin-like appreciation of honest toil, as well as some depreciation of the scholarly ambition Jude has thought of as the only ennobling pursuit. Jude's illumination in the stone-yard is quickly dispelled "under the stress of the old idea" (69), the *idée fixe* of pursuing a university education, but for a moment he recognises it may be preferable to scale down his ambition of becoming a bishop to a humbler wish of serving as a curate: "that might have a touch of goodness and greatness in it; that might be true religion" (103). As in Clym's asceticism, there is a certain narcissism in Jude's dreams of becoming the great scholar or the morally great curate.

Looking inward, Jude fashions himself as a self-consciously Romantic figure, whose path to greatness lies in pursuing his aspirations against all odds. He grows

⁷¹ Albert Camus, "The Adulterous Woman", *The Art of the Tale: An International Anthology of Short Stories*, ed. Daniel Halpern (New York: Penguin, 1986) 173-83.

melancholic reflecting that “by caring for books he was not escaping common-place nor gaining rare ideas, every working-man being of that sort now” (55). The core of Jude’s failure is to be found not in his idealism, but in the dreams he will not shake off. Chasing after “One shape of many names”⁷² leaves him with no power to gauge these dreams against the demands of everyday life. His plight is that of Shelley’s callow visionary, as yet untested by social realities: “In many mortal forms I rashly sought/ The shadow of that idol of my thought”.⁷³

In *The Woodlanders*, the similarly obsessed, but more pretentious Fitzpiers also pays court to Romantic ideals of womanly perfection, in some ways prefiguring Jude’s pursuit of love and intellectual beauty. In common with Jude, Fitzpiers is a “dreamer” who prefers “the ideal world to the real”. Though he lays claim to being an “idealist”,⁷⁴ Fitzpiers’ search is devoid of any tinge of moral idealism. Unlike Jude, he is arrogant and self-serving: love for him is “an idea which we project against any suitable object in our line of vision”. He admits to having been “possessed by five distinct infatuations at the same time”.⁷⁵ What he sanitises as Romantic idealism is in truth amorous adventurism.

By contrast, Jude is naïve, well-meaning and faithful in his fashion. His self-description as one of the band of “men called seducers” (269) is pathetically ironic since, far from taking advantage of his partners, he is at their mercy – first Arabella, with her aggressive and mercenary attitude to sexuality, and then Sue, with her brand of intellectual flirtation. The epigraph to Part 1 of the novel, drawn from the first book of the

⁷² Shelley, *The Revolt of Islam*; cited on the title page of *The Well-Beloved* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998).

⁷³ *Epipsychidion*, ll. 267- 68.

⁷⁴ *The Woodlanders*, 134, 112.

⁷⁵ *The Woodlanders*, 115, 209.

Apocrypha,⁷⁶ prefigures Jude's malleability in the hands of the two women who between them will create his "torturing destiny":

"Yea, many there be that have run out of their wits for women, and become servants for their sakes. Many also have perished, have erred, and sinned, for women ... O ye men, how can it be but women should be strong, seeing they do thus?" (9)

Unlike Jude, Fitzpiers has no aspirations towards becoming a servant of the women in his life and is incapable of Jude's unselfish devotion: "his differed from the highest affection as the lower orders of the animal world differ from advanced organisms".⁷⁷ Patricia Ingham notes the ironic reference to Darwin's *Origin of Species*,⁷⁸ much of *The Woodlanders* turning on ideas of evolutionary development and the struggle for survival. Hardy apparently agreed with a contemporary reviewer who remarked, "Science tells us that, in the struggle for life, the surviving organism is not necessarily that which is absolutely the best in an ideal sense".⁷⁹ Perhaps Fitzpiers' promiscuity may be an evolutionary adaptation, if, as Ingham suggests, the "lack of a moral sense can work as an aid to social survival and financial success".⁸⁰

Fitzpiers has more in common with Arabella, who uses her sexuality to advantage in every situation and is gloriously unhampered by moral concerns. Looking to provide for her widowhood, Arabella flirts with Vilbert while her husband is on his death-bed. Jude, by contrast, is scrupulous in his dealings with, and sensitive in his feelings towards, those he believes weaker than himself. For this solicitude towards women, Arabella calls Jude a "tender-hearted fool" (55) and is quick to exploit what she sees as his weakness. Arabella is a survivor in the Darwinian sense, a realist who will not allow sentiment to get in the way

⁷⁶ 1 Esdras 4:26.

⁷⁷ *The Woodlanders*, 209.

⁷⁸ *The Woodlanders*, 401.

⁷⁹ *LN*, vol.1, 40.

⁸⁰ Patricia Ingham, Introduction, *The Woodlanders*, xxviii.

of satisfying her own needs and urges. Her philosophical pretensions are restricted to the repetition of proverbs like “Poor folks must live” (54) and “Weak women must provide for a rainy day” (316), adages which justify her pragmatic and self-serving decisions.

Time and time again, Jude is the loser as others manipulate his naivety and play on his sensitivity. He lacks discernment and is only too ready to idealise people not worthy of his reverence and love, or to pursue ideals of scholarship and religion which are outmoded. As a child, he is tricked by Vilbert, who fails to deliver the promised grammar books, but young Jude fails to learn from the experience and become less gullible. His disappointment over the long labour involved in learning languages should have alerted him to the possibility that his dream of ordination might be still more difficult to realise. His gullibility is charming and forgivable in one who is young, but lingering on into adulthood, it marks him as a dreamer incapable of adapting to his social environment.

The adult Jude tries to find fulfilment in relationships, but the carnal and ideal beauties he pursues again fail to meet expectations. Even though he knew “in the secret centre of his brain that Arabella was not worth a great deal as a specimen of womankind”, he “kept up a factitious belief in her” (48). Susceptible to her amorous trickery, Jude allows himself to be coerced into an unwanted marriage. He lets his “passing discriminative power” be blocked out by the pleasure of having found a “new channel” (36) for his dreams: his “idea of her was the thing of most consequence” (48). His vision of Sue, while more elevated, proves to be equally ill-founded. Jude makes his beloved into a figure of worship, a “good angel” who will deliver him from harm (149). The disjunction between his insight and vision is epitomised in a passing complaint to Sue: “you are often not so nice in your real presence as you are in your letters” (131).

Sue has her own elevated views on life and seeks fulfilment through reading and study. Her thinking has a Positivist cast, the so-called “Religion of Humanity”. An avid disciple of J.S. Mill, the English interpreter of Comte, she condemns in Comtean phraseology. Sue dismisses Christminster as a “place full of fetichists and ghost-seers”, saying that the “traditions of the old faith” must be “sloughed off” if the intellectual side were to flourish (120). She accuses Jude of being in the “Tractarian stage” (121), alluding to Comte’s Three Stages: first and lowest was theological belief (which included Tractarian dogma), after which one rose through metaphysical abstraction to arrive at the third stage, scientific truth.⁸¹ When she derides Jude for being “full of the superstitions of his belief” (105), she is implying that she is two full stages higher in her intellectual evolution. Yet her philosophising sounds an inconsistent and jarring note. If *Jude* is in fact a novel of ideas, it is one in which issues are tested not so much by debate as by how characters manage to live out the ideas they espouse. Sue’s protestation to Phillotson about J.S. Mill’s teachings – “Why can’t you act upon them? I wish to, always” (177) – indicates more about her inconsistency than her understanding of the originality of thought and action which she advocates. This is the same young woman who, after being turned out of her teacher training school, is frightened into marriage by a fear of social disapproval. There is a yawning chasm between her “theoretic unconventionality” (176) and her emotional development. Although she appears more free-thinking than Jude, she, like Angel Clare before her, is unready to brave social condemnation for her professed convictions. Her logic is “extraordinarily compounded” (173); in practice, she is less able to live according to her precocious ideals than is Jude.

⁸¹ Auguste Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, trans. J.H. Bridges (New York: Speller, 1957) 35-36.

Hardy himself was an avid reader of Comte and believed that “no person of serious thought in these times could be said to stand aloof from Positivist teaching”.⁸² His writings frequently reflect his assent to the Positivist hierarchy of human faculties which rated intellectual tendencies above physical, and moral above intellectual. The “constant internal warfare between flesh and spirit” (154) can be transposed into a Positivist opposition of egoism against altruism. Jude’s plans of study are a “call to higher labours” (105), the pursuit of “high intellectual culture” which Comte saw as calling out the “noblest sympathies” of mankind.⁸³ Conversely, Jude’s indulgence of carnal passion with Arabella ruled out any chance of “showing himself superior to the lower animals, and of contributing his units of work to the general progress of his generation” (52). Sue apparently subscribes to the Comtean view that moral perfection “is principally due to the influence of Woman over Man”,⁸⁴ when she admits that she did “long to ennoble some man to high aims” (122). Jude chooses to regard Sue as his “guardian-angel” who keeps him from his dual temptations to sensuality and strong drink (278). She has, according to Jude, “so little animal passion” that she can afford to “act upon reason” in this matter, a procedure which “poor unfortunate wretches of grosser substance” (204), such as Jude, find difficult.

When Sue laments the fall of Eve and expresses the wish that “some harmless mode of vegetation might have peopled Paradise” (178), she is quoting from Gibbon’s *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*,⁸⁵ a “historian so ironically civil to Christianity” (65) as to make him one of Sue’s preferred authors, and also a historical source for Hardy’s

⁸² *CL*, vol. 3, 53.

⁸³ Comte, 33.

⁸⁴ Comte, 288.

⁸⁵ Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. Oliphant Smeaton, vol. 1 (London: Dent, 1911) 466.

analysis of the marriage question and the early church.⁸⁶ The thesis of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* is that classical civilisation was undermined by the dissemination of Christianity. In representing the founders of the Church as an uncultured rabble bent on disturbing the harmony and tolerance of the classical world, Gibbon played ironic games with the expectations of his readers, in the eighteenth century and beyond. Chapter XXIII of Gibbon's history which Sue reads in her room, concerns Julian the Apostate who was brought up a Christian, but publicly renounced the Christian faith and re-instituted paganism on being proclaimed Augustus. Swinburne's "Hymn to Proserpine" is a monologue or meditation of the apostate emperor. Hence the quotation which follows upon her reading of Gibbon's chapter (78), and the line which completes the couplet:

Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from thy breath;
We have drunken of things Lethean, and fed on the fullness of death (ll. 35-36)

Swinburne refers to Julian's supposed dying words: "Vicisti, Galilae" ("Thou hast conquered, O Galilean").⁸⁷ Sue's life experiences re-enact Swinburne's "Hymn to Proserpine", her anti-Christian and Hellenic ideals finally overthrown as she feeds full on what the poet portrays as a religion of death.

Swinburne was a Hellenist like Sue, enthused about reintroducing the intellectual qualities and values of classicism into a Victorian culture which seemed prudish and puritanical. Positivists also insisted on the "union of the Present with the Past", and promoted a return to Greece and Rome which would inspire them to live in the presence of the "great predecessors" as if "with absent friends".⁸⁸ Jude wonderingly remarks on this aspect of Sue's Positivist inclinations when he comments that she is like "one of the women

⁸⁶ Patricia Ingham notes Gibbon was added to the spectres Jude imagines upon entering Christminster in Hardy's 1895 revision of the text. See "Notes on the Text", Ingham edition, xxiv.

⁸⁷ Footnote, *JO*, 78.

⁸⁸ Comte, 287, 291.

of some grand old civilization” (213). Like other Hellenists, Comte idealised classical civilisation and sought to “enter into the esthetic beauty of the Pagan creeds of Greece and Rome, without any of the scruples which Christians could not but feel when engaged on the same subject.”⁸⁹ *Jude the Obscure* develops Angel Clare’s free-thinking fancy, that “it might have resulted far better for mankind if Greece had been the source of the religion of modern civilization, and not Palestine” (*Tess*, 124). Clare’s Hellenism echoes the views expressed in Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy*, as does Sue when she affirms “we have had enough of Jerusalem ... There was nothing first-rate about the place ... as there was about Athens” (86-7). Arnold advocated the “greater tolerance” that would come “through the application of Hellenic enlightenment to social and religious problems”. The tolerance would empower freedom of thought and mitigate the English tendency to ‘hebraise, to take a narrow, mechanical view, to stick to the letter of the law’.⁹⁰

As a counterpoint to Sue’s Hellenism, Jude the theological student represents what Arnold dubs “Hebraism”, linking him to the Jewish covenant and Old Testament law. Jude’s name links him to Judaism, and at various points in the novel he is associated with Job, the archetypal Old Testament figure of suffering. On his death-bed, Jude’s adumbration of his death derives from Job 3:3: “Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived” (318).⁹¹ When faced with exclusion from the Christminster colleges, Jude quotes from Job 12:3: “I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you” (96). Jude’s thinking is patterned

⁸⁹ Comte, 339.

⁹⁰ Dorothy Reimers Mills, *The Influence of Matthew Arnold’s “Culture and Anarchy” on the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, diss. Oklahoma State University, 1966, 2.

⁹¹ Patricia Ingham notes that this whole section was not present in the manuscript or the serial, but was added in 1895; see Ingham edition, 464. The inclusion of these lamentations from Job 3: 3-20 strengthens Jude’s identification with Job, as well as fulfilling a structural role in completing the cycle of birth and death in the novel.

by narratives derived from his biblical studies and the lives of the church fathers, just as Sue's are by her reading of the classics.⁹² As a result of his unconventional relationship with Sue, Jude breaks with Hebraism; he burns his religious books and turns his back on inflexible church dogma. From that point, he and Sue attempt to do "that which was right in [their] own eyes" (243). Jude's aim is to live by the spirit of the law rather than conform to the letter. His new credo restores the novel's epigraph to its New Testament context: "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Corinthians 3:6).

Binding laws are made into an object lesson in the novel. The plot of *Jude*, its two failed marriages both entered into on mistaken presumptions or false premises, raises questions about the indissolubility of marriage. Sue's pathetic repentance, after the death of her children, and her desperate bid to make atonement by returning to her first husband, demonstrate the futility of imposing inhumane laws upon human sexuality. Sue's return to Phillotson is lamented as a "fanatic prostitution" (283), designed to inflict penitential suffering on herself, Jude's use of the term "fanatic" recalling Gibbon's using this appellation for the early Christians. The futility of religious legalism is manifested in Arabella's comment that the "bishop himself" (292) is pleased about Sue's remarriage, even though the reader knows that Phillotson is being "orthodoxly cruel to her" (288). The bishop's hypocrisy is compounded by Arabella's sanctimonious assertion regarding her own first marriage, a pose which Jude recognises as mere "cant" (294). In parallel fashion, the parson "highly approved" (300) the eventual remarriage of Jude and Arabella, despite its doubtful legality; Jude is trapped into the ceremony while in a drunken stupor. In his right mind Jude identifies this "meretricious contract with Arabella" as "degrading,

⁹² When the two describe the "tragic doom" overshadowing the Fawleys, Sue alludes to the tragedy of "the house of Atreus" while Jude chimes in with a reference to "the house of Jeroboam" (222).

immoral, unnatural” (306). The etymological meaning of “meretricious” is “characteristic of a prostitute”, from the Latin *meretrix*. Sue and Jude prostitute themselves to the letter of the law in remarrying their previous partners.

The deaths of the children push to the limit every philosophical or religious stance which Jude or Sue have assumed. At first they sit silently, “more bodeful of the direct antagonism of things than of their insensate and stolid obstructiveness” (268). The narrator comments, “affliction makes opposing forces loom anthropomorphous” (269). Faced with this devastating loss, Sue and Jude “mentally travelled in opposite directions” (270). While the crisis kills off any vestiges of faith in Jude, Sue reverts to a primitive religious penitentialism, choosing to uphold the consequences of the law, the Old Testament “ministration of death” (2 Cor. 3:7). Never a particularly successful exegete of Hellenism, Sue rejects Arnold’s “ideal, cheerful, sensuous pagan life”,⁹³ abandoning what she has come to see as the “utter selfishness” of “loving each other too much” (266). Instead, she embraces, with frightening fervour, a desire to “mortify the flesh” (270). In renouncing her old self, she is trying to expiate her guilt over the children: “I cannot humiliate myself too much” (271). To Sue it seems that the “Power” of the Old Testament has vented his “ancient wrath” (269) upon the sinning couple and taken their children, the fruits of their sin, as punishment. Having been consumed by “a sense of Jude and herself fleeing from a persecutor” (269), she turns and seeks to abase herself before a torturing Power who metes out her dues in suffering and “in fullness of death”.⁹⁴

In his Religion of Humanity, Comte maintains that “each individual in the course of his growth passes spontaneously through phases corresponding in a great measure to those

⁹³ Arnold, *Essays in Criticism*, 209.

⁹⁴ Swinburne, “Hymn to Proserpine”, l. 56.

of our historical development”,⁹⁵ these three phases being the theological, the metaphysical and finally the objective or scientifically evaluated. As a result of the tragedy, Sue spontaneously reverts to a primitive theological phase. Jude, by contrast, appears to have undergone a Positivist progression such as Comte describes: after the children’s deaths he abandons his theological and metaphysical speculations and resolutely faces the objective facts. When Sue claims that it is impossible for them to fight against God, Jude quietly maintains that they are only fighting against “man and senseless circumstance” (269), that anything else is mere superstitious projection. He also grows more determined to live out his humanistic ideals of loving-kindness. Rather than shaking Jude’s beliefs, the deaths of the children enlarge his “views of life, laws, customs, and dogmas” (270). His refusal to attribute any blame to Sue’s ill-advised conversation with Little Father Time is conspicuously sane, and reveals a depth of acceptance: “Things are as they are, and will be brought to their destined issue” (266). Rather than accusing Arabella of trickery or Sue of desertion, Jude reproaches himself for his part in the failure of these relationships.

His refusal to compromise his ideals is contrasted with the position of his former mentor. It was Phillotson who imparted into Jude the ethical stance which would become his *raison d’être*: “be kind to animals and birds, and read all you can” (11). Phillotson and Jude shared dreams of a university education and ordination, and both sought the love of the same woman. Phillotson’s aspirations flagged faster than Jude’s, permitting him to settle for respectability as a schoolmaster and accept a marriage lacking in intellectual sympathy and reciprocal passion. Using Matthew Arnold’s poem, “The Buried Life”, Ward Hellstrom interprets Phillotson’s career as one of backsliding, of ideological failure: “To compromise one’s ideals is at once to deny one’s idealism and to deny one’s ‘genuine

⁹⁵ Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, 404.

life”. Phillotson’s name phonologically echoes “Philistine” in the Arnoldian sense of the word; he is both a victim and a representative of the middle-class indifference to art and intellectual culture: “Thwarted by society in his attempt to cultivate his best self, he accepts values that violate his humane instincts and produce not his *best self* but his *ordinary self*.”⁹⁶ Phillotson is possessed of a “humane instinct” (290) and releases Sue from their first marriage in “an act of natural charity” (196). Rather than continue being “cruel to her in the name of the law” (186), he bears the brunt of middle-class disapproval, is hounded from his teaching position and forced into social exile. Phillotson comes to recognise, however, that to “indulge one’s instinctive and uncontrolled sense of justice and right” was not “permitted with impunity” (282). When he remarries Sue, he re-aligns himself with middle-class norms. Phillotson abandons the “principle of justice, charity, and reason”, and lets “crude loving-kindness take care of itself” (282).

Despite repeated rejection, Jude refuses to compromise his ideals and continues to regard Christminster as “the centre of the universe” (252). Like the poet in *Epipsychidion*, he keeps turning back “toward the loadstar of [his] one desire” (l. 219). In taking his family back to Christminster, Jude is yielding to his obsession rather than considering what is best for Sue and the children, driven by a fatal attraction which will precipitate a major crisis in his struggling family. Their tenement is overshadowed by Sarcophagus College, a deathly shadow which, to Sue’s mind, casts “four centuries of gloom, bigotry, and decay into the little room” (261), and throws a pall over the young family. Observing the effect of the dwelling upon the children, particularly the over-sensitive Father Time, Sue muses on the “strange operation of a simple-minded man’s ruling passion, that it should have led Jude,

⁹⁶ Ward Hellstrom, “Hardy’s Scholar-Gipsy”, *The English Novel in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. George Goodin (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1972) 298, 206.

who loved her and the children so tenderly, to place them in this depressing purlieu” (261). A.C. Bradley notes that many of Shakespeare’s tragic protagonists exhibit this “fatal tendency to identify the whole being with one interest, object, passion, or habit of mind”.⁹⁷ The death of their children has a catastrophic impact on Sue and Jude, and at another level, on the novel itself. The enormity of Father Time’s suicide and misguided mercy killings seems to collapse the realistic surface of the novel and the poise of the novel of ideas. Neither the characters nor the novel seems capable of recovering equilibrium.

Have these two dreamers been so preoccupied with each other and their intellectual Romanticism that they have neglected to provide the physical and emotional stability their children need? “Haunted by his dream”, Jude turns his back on honest stone-mason’s work and turns a deaf ear to the “freezing negative that those scholared walls”, the colleges of Christminster, “had echoed to his desire” (261). Sue and Jude’s fastidious reluctance to marry exposes Father Time and the younger children to schoolyard bullies and social opprobrium. It forces the family into an itinerant life with no regular income. Sue, particularly, seems insensitive to Father Time’s emotional needs. When Jude is forced to seek lodging apart from the family, little Jude becomes distressed: “a brooding undemonstrative horror seemed to have seized him” (261). He becomes obsessed by the thought that it is because of the children that his ailing father had to lodge elsewhere. Instead of trying to comfort and reassure him about their situation, Sue resorts to her default setting of philosophical speculation and complaint: “All is trouble, adversity and suffering!” she exclaims, adding that it “would be better to be out o’ the world than in it” (261). Her exclamations are inappropriate in this child’s presence, and when she unwisely

⁹⁷ A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London, 1904) 13; cited in Eagleton, 234.

confides in him, as to “an aged friend” (262), that there is soon to be another baby, she reinforces Father Time’s pre-existing sense that children are an unwanted nuisance, an apprehension referred to in his suicide note: “Done because we are too menny” (264).

Taking a naturalistic view, it is possible to interpret the suicide and murders as the social consequence of Darwinian theories taken to a logical but unbalanced extreme. Reading and brooding upon Malthus’ theory of human over-population gave Darwin the last piece of the evolutionary puzzle, that competition between species and between members of species eliminated those not equipped to survive. According to Malthus, fecundity was a danger to be suppressed by what Gillian Beer calls “draconian measures among the human poor”.⁹⁸ Hardy is playing out such ideas in the context of intimate family relationships and questioning the validity of social Darwinism, particularly as employed by those who seek to excuse their lack of compassion towards the less fortunate. What makes Little Father Time’s entry into the Malthusian-Darwinian debate so disturbing is not that its logic differs from that of a class ideologue who deplores the survival of the poor in slums as contrary to the laws of science: it is its weirdly personal application. Little Jude is a child trying to do the right thing, to win his stepmother’s approval. Like Sue, his understanding and experience of life lag behind his intellectual capacity. He is described as “Age masquerading as Juvenility” (217). An adult in his philosophical outlook, Little Father Time remains a child in his level of social awareness, listening to adult conversations but misunderstanding the tone and context. Sue’s squeamishness regarding the facts of life leaves him with only his own childish interpretation of events to fall back

⁹⁸ Gillian Beer, *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1983) 34.

on. The suicide and murders represent a logical step from his coldly expressed deduction that “whenever children be born that are not wanted they should be killed directly” (262).

If we go back to Little Father Time’s first appearance on the train, we can explain his psychology as part of a degenerative familial process traced in Zola’s *Rougon-Macquart* novels. This pale, solitary boy with the large, frightened eyes and the key around his neck is lacking in animation: he “would try to smile, and fail”; his face “appeared not to care about what it saw” (217). Effectively abandoned by Arabella, little Jude exhibits many of the characteristics of an unwanted child. He has not been christened, since it would “save the expense of a Christian funeral” if he died (220). Deprived of a secure family upbringing, he is devoid of emotional warmth and the normal childish enjoyment of life. In view of his apparently premeditated execution of the other children and himself, he could be described as sociopathic. The ability to form close relationships has been programmed out of Little Father Time by the deterministic forces of heredity, isolation and a less than functional family environment. From Arabella, he has inherited a lack of sensitivity to the feelings of others, without her social dexterity; and from Jude, he has taken on a depressive tendency unrelieved by his father’s Romantic hopefulness.

Little Jude’s lack of sympathy towards his fellow creatures appears in a morbid attitude towards creation in general. At the Wessex Agricultural Show, he is unable to take a normal childish interest in the attractions due to his over-developed awareness of universal transience: “I can’t help it. I should like the flowers very very much, if I didn’t keep on thinking they’d be all withered in a few days!” (234) As in Zola’s stories of familial degeneration, Father Time has inherited Jude’s sensitivity, which has been heightened to morbidity. Unable to find lodgings at Christminster, Jude merely looks “discomfited”, whereas the boy becomes acutely “distressed” (259). When the family is

again rejected because of too many children, the “small child squared its mouth and cried silently, with an instinct that trouble loomed” (259). The stressed parents are unaware of the trauma that this repeated rejection and failure to find a home have on the hypersensitive child.

The seeds of despair were sown in little Jude, even before he came to live with his father. As a child, Jude senior had always felt “his existence to be an undemanded one” (17). His son takes this conviction a step further, thinking not that he is passively unwanted, but that others would be the happier and better off for his removal. Before Father Time arrives, Jude pronounces over him the refrain taken from the book of Job: “Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived” (216; Job 3:3). This prophetic word is taken up in a literal sense by the child, “I ought not to be born, ought I?” (260). The attending doctor diagnoses little Jude’s suicide as a modern manifestation of the “coming universal will not to live” (264), a form of existential despair which, in little Jude’s case, is a product of his heredity and upbringing.

Conceivably, Hardy might have observed similarly traumatised children among the itinerant rural families he described in the 1883 essay “The Dorsetshire Labourer”.⁹⁹ In the case of little Jude, the lack of permanence and of consistent parenting leads to feelings that the traumatic events of his upbringing are somehow his fault, a form of depression and low self-worth like that which sometimes presents in refugee and migrant children. When Father Time arrives from Australia, Arabella quickly dispatches him as though he were a parcel, his ticket stuck in his hatband and the key for his luggage around his neck. Due to her “usual carelessness” (217), Jude and Sue are unprepared for his arrival and the child is abandoned on a lonely platform late at night. When he enquires of Sue, “Is it you who’s my

⁹⁹ Ore1,168.

real mother at last?”, he reveals the insatiable need to belong which consumes his “little hungry heart” (219).

At the cost of allowing Hardy an extraordinary prescience about developments in child psychology in the twentieth and indeed the twenty-first century, it is possible to make Little Father Time into a credible though unsettling portrait of the effects of child neglect. On the other hand, the cataclysm produced by the boy’s unforeseen response to the family’s housing crisis and the narrator’s shaping of events invite his being read also as a symbolic figure, an expressionistic character dropped on to a flattened naturalistic stage. He irrupts into the novel like a sinister *deus ex machina* who, instead of superhumanly resolving the characters’ irreconcilable differences and the plot’s major conflict, raises both to a new level of horror and discord. Little Father Time’s very name intrudes into the naturalistic fabric of the novel, calling up a vision of an aged man bearing an hourglass and scythe which is at odds with his youth: “his face took a back view over some great Atlantic of Time, and appeared not to care about what it saw” (217). Father Time may also recall the Greek god Cronos, who carried a scythe with which he severed heaven from earth, and cut off his father from his posterity.

The description of little Jude as “an enslaved and dwarfed Divinity” (217) suggests a tenuous identification with the incarnation of Christ. As a consequence of this identification, his death is interpreted as a bizarrely Christ-like sacrifice. “For the rashness of those parents he had groaned, for their ill-assortment he had quaked, and for the misfortunes of these he had died” (264-65) is a parody of Isaiah’s prophecy of the Messiah’s coming: “he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities . . . the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:5-6). Norman Holland has pointed to the staging of the three deaths being “suggestive of the scene of the

crucifixion”.¹⁰⁰ The placement of the bodies, however, indicates that the other two children were secondary figures, whereas Little Father Time has chosen to embrace death: “On that little shape had converged all the inauspiciousness and shadow which had darkened the first union of Jude, and all the accidents, mistakes, fears, errors of the last” (264). Jude’s son becomes the scapegoat in a grotesque parody of the crucifixion, with this difference: in the universe of Hardy’s Jude, the sacrifice is to no avail.

If, early in his Christminster career, Jude is aligned with Hebraism and the Early Church fathers, he equally becomes an oblique latter-day Christ. On arrival in the university city, he appears as a “young man with a forcible, meditative, and earnest rather than handsome cast of countenance”. He has a “dark complexion, with dark harmonizing eyes”, a “black beard of... advanced growth” and a “great mass of black curly hair” (62). This portrait of Jude is compatible with the prophecy of Christ as dark and thoughtful, an unprepossessing man with neither “form nor comeliness” (Isaiah 53:2). “Obscure” also links Jude with Christ, Gibbon frequently deriding the early Christians as an “obscure” sect, one that “grew up in silence and obscurity”,¹⁰¹ as its adherents followed their “obscure teacher”.¹⁰² Jude himself is quick to discount any such resemblance, recognising “what a poor Christ he made” (101), “the human” in him being “more powerful ... than the Divine” (164).

Negative Christic associations are quickly found in the epigraph Hardy takes from Swinburne’s “Hymn to Proserpine”: “Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean: The world has grown grey from thy breath” (78). New and Old Testament allusions in *Jude the Obscure*

¹⁰⁰ Norman Holland, Jr., “*Jude the Obscure*: Hardy’s Symbolic Indictment of Christianity”, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 9 (1954): 53.

¹⁰¹ Gibbon, vol. 1, 430.

¹⁰² Gibbon, vol. 2, 7.

often appear disturbing and tasteless, not only to Victorian sensibilities, and none more so than the pseudo-crucifixion of the children which precipitates Sue and Jude into a world “grown grey” through suffering. Yet the consistent pressure of such references – when the crumbling medieval buildings of Christminster are made to seem as outdated as its ceremonies of worship, or when the “original church” of Marygreen is dismantled, and its stones recycled for “pig-sty walls” (12) – is to make late nineteenth-century Christianity seem a ghoulish parody of its pristine self, as distasteful in historical fact as Swinburne’s “ghastly glories of saints, dead limbs of gibbeted Gods” (120).¹⁰³

The failure of Christianity to accommodate to changing mores was an underlying theme in *Tess*. In *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy goes beyond a passing disappointment with religion and creates a powerfully dissonant satire. Not just the clergy, but the whole scheme of traditional religion fail to provide comfort or hope to the groaning creation. The death of the children is accompanied by the refrain from the College organ, “Truly God is loving unto Israel”, while two clergymen argue about the best position to adopt when celebrating communion (265). Liturgical formalism is more than irrelevant: it is a mockery of the suffering that individuals endure. Terry Eagleton suggests that the description of Jude’s final agony forms “an aggressive parody of a Victorian deathbed scene”.¹⁰⁴ As an accompaniment to Jude’s suffering, the notes of the organ can be heard celebrating Remembrance Day, a celebration previously linked in the novel to the Passover and the death of Christ. One of the last utterances on the Cross was “I thirst” (John 19:28); Jude also calls for water, desperately calling to Sue in his delirium. His wish to be out of the world is now consummated, in an ironic reversal of Christ’s “consummatum est” – “It

¹⁰³ Swinburne, “Hymn to Proserpine”, l. 44.

¹⁰⁴ Eagleton, 238.

is finished” (John 19:30). Rather than fulfilling what he set out to do, everything Jude hoped to achieve has been undone by an unforeseen concatenation of setbacks and disasters.

The carnival atmosphere of the Christminster games reinforces Jude’s exclusion even at the moment of death: he remains “an outsider to the end of [his] days” (258), alone, unloved, and irrelevant to the lives of others. The shouts of the graduates act like the antiphonal responses in the singing of a psalm, or like a derisive commentary on Jude’s identification with the suffering of Job, as he wills to put an “end to a feverish life which ought never to have been begun” (308). The noises off recall the scene at the agricultural fair in *Madame Bovary* where the speech-making councillor “psalming out his phrases”¹⁰⁵ interjects antiphonally between the protestations of undying love made by Emma’s would-be seducer. Rodolphe’s sweet nothings in the ear of Emma Bovary are constantly interrupted by cries of “Seventy francs!” and “Manures!” ironically undercutting any sincerity in the sentiments expressed and in Emma’s vision of herself as a heroine of romance. Interspersing Jude’s lamentations from the Book of Job with the “Hurrah!”s of the nearby university crowd robs Jude’s death of solemnity and of any Romantic pathos. The bitter irony also mitigates the tragic affect, and threatens to rob the tragedy of its catharsis.

Jude the Obscure marks a new phase in Hardy’s work, one which has been hailed by critics like Norman Page as a precursor to literary Modernism. From Page’s perspective, Hardy could be seen as going beyond the confines of traditional tragedy, and experimenting with a feverish, noisy, nihilistic ending. The figure of Jude, solitary, disenchanted, and wandering through a series of urban settings which neither know of nor care for him,

¹⁰⁵ Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (London: Penguin, 1992) 118.

approximates to the attributes and alienation of twentieth-century anti-heroes. In his preface, Page suggests that *Jude the Obscure* pushes the boundaries by being the first major British novel with a “working class hero”,¹⁰⁶ indeed “the first modern novel”.¹⁰⁷ In departing for Christminster, Jude breaks his ties to his rural birthplace; when not dwelling in his adopted city, he drifts from place to place, and from job to job. The narrator aligns Jude’s ambitions with a “social unrest which had no foundation in the nobler instincts”, “an artificial product of civilization” (103) in the modern era. Instead of a sympathetic appraisal of Jude’s aims, the narrator identifies him as part of a growing demographic, “thousands of young men” detached from their heritage and searching to find their place in the world through education. Under the narrator’s sociological microscope, Jude’s aspirations are reduced from a quest for self-realisation to the “modern vice of unrest” (69).

In his disorientation, Jude could appear unexceptional, a modern Everyman subject to all the failings that flesh is heir to and incapable of making sense of a disappointing world. Tragedy arises from the gap between the aspirations of high-minded individuals like Jude and Sue, their Romantic wish to fulfil their potential, and the physical, emotional and social constraints which lead them into lives of degradation and despair. Although Jude rouses feelings of pity and feelings of terror at the depths to which he falls, *Jude the Obscure* withholds a catharsis from many of its readers. Howe suggests that a reflective reader, beset by “the unspoken miseries of daily life”, may share in the protagonist’s feeling of futility,¹⁰⁸ but in Howe’s opinion, a “somewhat passive ‘modern’ sadness”¹⁰⁹ pervades the novel.

¹⁰⁶ Norman Page, “Preface to the Second Edition”, *JO*, ix.

¹⁰⁷ Page, xi.

¹⁰⁸ Howe, 135.

¹⁰⁹ Howe, 139.

In *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy portrays a thinking man and woman who have lost the sense of providence and are reduced to searching for meaning in a universe, the “First Cause” of which “worked automatically like a somnambulist” (269). Not being mad, Jude does not rail against the frame of things like Shakespeare’s *Lear*, nor cower before a malevolent God like Sue; but neither does he bear his suffering and resign himself to his fate, as did the Stoics of ancient Greece. The world which had once seemed to Jude like “a stanza or melody composed in a dream” is exposed as “hopelessly absurd at the full waking” (268-69). The “Universal Will” is so devoid of meaning that little hope can be sustained for improvement of the human condition. Jude is increasingly conscious of “the scorn of Nature for man’s finer emotions, and her lack of interest in his aspirations” (141). Read in this way, the novel ceases to be a traditional tragedy at its close. It becomes an extended cry of despair which resonates not only with modernist but with postmodern, absurdist works like Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. Jude’s childhood discovery that “nobody did come, because nobody does” (27),¹¹⁰ apparently anticipates Vladimir and Estragon’s pointless vigil.

Whether this last novel of Hardy’s points to new, half-envisaged literary potentialities remains a relevant question. Irving Howe suggests that the series of cataclysmic events initiated by the deaths of the children disjoins the literary genres of nineteenth-century realism and Romanticism, and fills the rift with elements of what could be called Expressionist distortion.¹¹¹ *Jude the Obscure* appears to signal the death of Romanticism, at least in Hardy’s novels. When an ailing Jude pays a last visit to Sue, hoping to exacerbate his illness and so die a Romantic death, he is thwarted. As if to

¹¹⁰ Compare this with the title of Hardy’s poem, “Nobody Comes”, *CP*, 743.

¹¹¹ Howe, 140.

remind him of his youthful discovery, that he is “not a sufficiently dignified person for suicide” (59), Jude recovers. Jude must resume the mundane duties of everyday life. His death occurs later, in a random fashion depriving it of Romantic cachet.

The fact that the final words of the novel are given to Arabella also appears to sound the death-knell of Romanticism. Belatedly, Arabella acknowledges “the extraordinary sympathy” (182) between Sue and Jude: “She’s never found peace since she left his arms, and never will again till she’s as he is now” (322). The factitious *mise en scène* of this last affirmation of enduring devotion appears to rob Romantic love of its authenticity. Coming from the representative of pragmatic realism in the novel, Arabella’s declaration reeks of insincerity. It parodies the scene from *Wuthering Heights* in which Cathy, having a vision of her grave, tells Heathcliff, “I won’t rest till you are with me. I never will!”¹¹² There is no mystical union in the grave or beyond it in Hardy’s universe, no more for Jude and Sue than for Tess and Angel, who claimed to “love each other so well” (*Tess*, 311). Sue’s only hope for peace lies in the one annihilation of death.

Hardy nevertheless declared that “Romanticism will exist in human nature as long as human nature itself exists. The point is (in imaginative literature) to adopt that form of romanticism which is the mood of the age”.¹¹³ In *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy prefigured, among other styles, what appears to be an anti-Romantic, grittily modernist realism. Rural scenes are bleak, compared to the lush and idyllic valleys of *Tess*. There is nothing about the hamlet Marygreen in which Jude grows up to awaken his sense of beauty – “How ugly it is here!” (13) – or to awaken homesickness once he has left it. In previous novels, realism manifested itself in naturalistic descriptions of heaths and farms, and in the

¹¹² Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (New York: Norton, 1990) 98.

¹¹³ *LIFE*, 147.

broaching of social and sexual issues previously considered taboo in Victorian fiction. In *Jude*, Nature is portrayed in all its grimness, shorn of any belief in a higher power.

According to Irving Howe, Hardy's developing agnosticism was fostered by his reading of J.S. Mill and also T.H. Huxley, for whom there was "no alleviation for the sufferings of mankind except veracity of thought and wisdom, and the resolute facing of the world as it is".¹¹⁴ Jude's youthful hopes of advancement in Christminster, the city of light as he imagined, give way as he uncovers "real Christminster life" among struggling men and women who "knew little of Christ or Minster" (96).

In "In Tenebris", written in 1895-96 perhaps in response to the acerbic reception of *Jude*, Hardy summed up the despondent, bleak and gritty, interrogative Naturalism of his novel as putting into practice the prescription "if a way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst".¹¹⁵ *Jude the Obscure* is an uncompromising scrutiny of the worst that can happen to someone who wants to fulfil his ambitions in love and self-realisation, but it is not a warning that there is no "way to the Better". In a preface to his last collection of poems, Hardy quotes his own line from "In Tenebris" in order to affirm that the personal philosophy underpinning his writing has been to explore "reality ... with an eye to the best consummation possible: briefly, evolutionary meliorism".¹¹⁶ Not unlike Shelley, Hardy adhered to the belief that humankind could continue to develop an improved way of life if that development was directed by altruistic ideals. Defending himself in the preface from allegation of a hopeless "pessimism", Hardy maintained that his "'questionings' in the exploration of reality" had been steps "towards the soul's betterment and the body's

¹¹⁴ Howe, 13.

¹¹⁵ "In Tenebris II", l. 12, *CP*, 168.

¹¹⁶ "Apology", *Late Lyrics and Earlier*, *CP*, 557.

also”.¹¹⁷ Unlike Shelley’s, Hardy’s meliorism was “evolutionary”: he did not claim that those taking the first steps towards such advancement would not suffer, or that they would not fall by the wayside, perhaps taking others with them. What made Hardy’s theory a non-deterministic variation of evolution was the suggestion that such intellectual and spiritual leaders set an example for those coming after. While looking at the worst that Darwinian theory taught about human nature and the struggle for existence, Hardy’s philosophy also suggested that elements of Romantic vision were needed to show the way forward.

For Hardy, romantic love is no guarantee of happiness or fulfilment; in fact he chimes in with the sentiments of the Madman in “Julian and Maddalo” when he claims that “Love sometimes leads astray to misery” (l. 349). Jude, the eternal dreamer, is a lot like this “love-devoted youth” (l. 373) who, “as one from dreaming/ Of sweetest peace”, woke and found his state one of despair. Like the Madman, Jude is “left alone” by the one he loved best (l. 396). Subjected to poverty and shame, as is Jude, the Madman remains true to his creed: “I am prepared .../ To do or suffer aught, as when a boy/ I did devote to justice and to love” (ll. 379-381). One who “loved and pitied all things” (l. 444), the Madman has much in common with Jude.

From childhood, Jude is notable for his loving-kindness towards the whole of creation. Scaring crows from the corn, young Jude is struck by a “flaw in the terrestrial scheme ... what was good for God’s birds was bad for God’s gardener” (15). The Darwinian dilemma, “mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another” (17), sickens him. He finds it impossible to walk without crushing earthworms; the birds have to go hungry in order that the farmer can raise his crops. As a newlywed, Jude cannot reconcile himself with slaughtering animals: “I would sooner have gone without the pig

¹¹⁷ *CP*, 557.

than have had this to do” (53). His sensitivity is more developed than those around him and he is correspondingly less well-adapted in the struggle to survive. Rather than seeking to triumph over the lower creatures, Jude is united with them by the “magic thread of fellow-feeling”, a revelation that their lives “much resembled his own” (15). Jude’s sensitivity could be seen as a *hamartia* or tragic flaw which leads to tragedy: he was “the sort of man who was born to ache a great deal” (15). Jude’s sympathy with suffering creation might also be seen as the instinctive altruism which Hardy envisaged would be the leading shoot of his own philosophy of social-evolutionary meliorism.

“And yet shew I unto you a more excellent way”, Paul advises the Corinthians in the chapter of his epistle that deals with Charity or loving-kindness.¹¹⁸ There remains another way of looking at Jude’s death, a way that regards him as heroically upholding a cause to the end. If Jude is seen, not only as a dreamer and idealist, but as an apostle of loving-kindness to all creatures, his death can be viewed as that of a man who has instinctively, sometimes unknowingly, upheld an ideal. Such an assessment of Jude provides an alternative to the interpretation of *Jude the Obscure* as a bleak absurdist novel. It enables the narrative to be read as a traditional tragedy, in which Shelleyan idealism is melded with naturalistic elements to produce an ending that is bleakly modernist but also provides a catharsis, sorrow and fear that someone who has had wisdom to impart has died neglected, his understanding undervalued by himself as well as by those he has loved. The concept of evolutionary tragedy on which Hardy based his vision – that “terrestrial conditions” were unprepared for the “development of emotional perceptiveness among the creatures subject to those conditions” (269), and that the more conscious and perceptive of

¹¹⁸ I Corinthians 12: 31.

these creatures must therefore endure unbearable suffering – attained a new level of definition in this final novel.

The randomness and cruelty of Darwinian evolution gave the lie to a loving and interventionist God being present in natural process. Long before Darwin, Shelley had, in *The Revolt of Islam*, ridiculed the notion of a personal God as an outmoded conceit superseded by objective science:

What is that Power? Ye mock yourselves, and give
A human heart to what ye cannot know:
As if the cause of life could think and live! (Canto VIII, v, 3235-37)

In “God’s Funeral”, Hardy himself would refer to such a deity as a “man-projected figure” (l. 21),¹¹⁹ while in “A Plaint to Man” God questions the conscious being he is supposed to have created,

Wherefore, O Man, did there come to you
The unhappy need of creating me –
A form like your own – for praying to? (ll. 4-6)

The “Plaint” concludes that the time has passed for human beings to seek “visioned help”; they should learn to depend instead “on the human heart’s resource alone ... With loving-kindness fully blown” (ll. 29, 31).¹²⁰

In his Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley equates the notion of God the Father with Jupiter, king of the gods, and styles this king god “the Oppressor of mankind”. Prometheus addresses Jupiter as “Almighty”, but this “Champion” of mankind, because he refuses to share in Jupiter’s “ill tyranny” (I, 17-18), is doomed to suffer unending pain. Lying chained to the rock, Prometheus is alarmed when a phantasm from the underworld repeats the curse that he once laid on the tyrant king, that Jupiter should suffer the “self-

¹¹⁹ CP, 327.

¹²⁰ CP, 325-26.

torturing solitude” of knowing himself the author of evil while he beholds others capable of good. In the moral crisis of the verse drama, Prometheus retracts his curse: “I wish no living thing to suffer pain” (I, 305).

With this declaration, Prometheus makes the fall of the tyrant inevitable since, as the atheist Shelley had already indicated in *The Revolt of Islam*, omnipotent gods who exact retribution exist only as projections of human fear and hatred. Sue’s punitive Old Testament God haunts her after the death of her children only because she is shocked into fearing that such a God does indeed exist, and that the deaths of her children are punishment for her godless professions and for living in sin with Jude. Shelley’s more metaphysical Jupiter has been created out of Prometheus’ fear that the material universe is hostile to human aspiration and progress. *Jude the Obscure* might thus be read as a rethinking of *Prometheus Unbound* at the close of the nineteenth century, when the Darwinian natural universe again shaped as inimical to humanist visions.

Jude’s “weakness” in dealing with his fellow creatures, particularly where women are concerned, does not enable him to prosper or perhaps even survive in a hostile universe, but it does make him into a sympathetic idealist wrestling with dilemmas, such as gender equality and the humane treatment of animals, troubling other forward thinkers in late-Victorian England. In a world devoid of Providence, it is up to the individual to take a Promethean stand against cruelty and for loving-kindness. In his “Apology” to *Late Lyrics and Earlier* Hardy declares it an imperative that suffering should be “kept down to a minimum by loving-kindness”, and, like Jude, he includes the “dumb” as well as the “tongued” animals in the scope of his ethic.¹²¹ Robert Schweik points out that Hardy saw mankind as having a newly-formulated moral responsibility towards animals as well as

¹²¹CP, 557.

humans,¹²² a direct consequence of his insight into the implications of evolutionary theory: “The discovery of the law of evolution ... shifted the centre of altruism from humanity to the whole conscious world collectively”.¹²³ In his self-epitaph, “Afterwards”, Hardy hoped to be remembered as one who “strove that such innocent creatures should come to no harm” (l. 11), an epitaph which could equally be applied to Jude. Yet the poet recognises that such striving is often in vain: “he could do little for them; and now he is gone” (l. 12).¹²⁴

Jude’s childish puzzling over life’s victims, whether animal or human, initiates a central theme in Hardy’s novel. The uncharacteristic focus on the protagonist’s childhood allows Jude’s tender-heartedness to take on its full significance in the novel’s exposition and the development of this central character. It poses the question whether one who has had a revelation of the importance of loving-kindness towards his fellow creatures will not have to suffer and be martyred as a result. Once associated with Prometheus’ suffering, Jude’s hyper-sensitivity is elevated to the stature of the heroic, the tragic. Shelley described Prometheus as “the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends”.¹²⁵ Hardy’s hero falls short of such perfection, but his determination not to harm others is, if doomed to failure, a worthy cause. To fall short is human, to suffer through millennia is given only to demi-gods.

In Act 1 of *Prometheus Unbound*, the Furies torment Prometheus with their reports of how much humanity is suffering since Prometheus, in defiance of Jupiter, gave them aid.

¹²² Robert Schweik, “The influence of religion, science, and philosophy”, *CC*, 63.

¹²³ *LIFE*, 345. Compare this with Tess’s mercy killing of the wounded pheasants.

¹²⁴ *CP*, 553.

¹²⁵ Shelley, “Preface”, *Prometheus Unbound, Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, 207.

Hardy seems to model Jude's death on this Promethean anguish, where the suffering that he experiences is as much mental as physical, tortured by terrible mocking ironies: in Jude's case, "'the hell of conscious failure', both in ambition and in love" (101). In place of the three Furies, Hardy substitutes three women who aggravate his suffering, whether consciously or unconsciously – Sue, Arabella and the Widow Edlin. Sue's propensity to toy with Jude's affections in the early part of their relationship, in combination with her sexual inconsistency once they have become a couple, constitutes a "torturing destiny" for Jude (191). She even admits that her strategic withdrawal of affection is specifically designed to cause suffering to Jude: "I hope it will hurt him very much" (173). Despite his devotion to Sue, Jude realised that even when together, "she was treating him cruelly" (119), and that "she would go on inflicting such pains again and again ... in all her colossal inconsistency" (140). The mental and emotional pain which Jude suffers after their parting causes him to experience a prolonged torture reminiscent of Prometheus'. Jude links himself with martyrdom when he passes the scene in Christminster of the martyrs' "burning place": "I'm giving *my* body to be burned" (296). Ironically, his first meeting with Sue has been on this very spot. Not only does the repetition give a structural balance to their meeting and parting; it signifies that Jude's love for Sue was to be a martyrdom.

Jude relates a verse from 1 Corinthians 13 to the martyrdoms: "Though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing" (296), the quotation emphasising the centrality of charity or loving-kindness in his ethical understanding. As a penance for what she sees as the sin of loving Jude, Sue rejects loving-kindness in favour of the letter of the law. In her final, penitential phase, Sue chooses a nightgown reminiscent of the "very sackcloth o' Scripture" (286). Widow Edlin decries her harsh literalism as "condemn[ing] to hell your dear little innocent children ... I don't call that religion" (287).

When Jude comes to see her for the last time, Sue represses her “last instinct of human affection”, stopping her ears with her hands “till all possible sound of him had passed away” (307). Unlike Prometheus or Jude, Sue chooses salvation for herself above love of others. Jude muses: “I’d have sold my soul for her sake, but she wouldn’t risk hers a jot for me. To save her own soul she lets mine go damn” (295). Jude is forced to conclude that Sue is “not worth a man’s love” (306), a nail in the coffin of his faith in their mutual love.

His torment on Sue’s behalf is exacerbated by Arabella, who gives him a blow-by-blow account of Sue’s remarriage to Phillotson, in ceremonial preparation for which she has burnt her embroidered nightdress “to blot [Jude] out entirely” (294). Arabella spares no detail to save Jude’s feelings; she enjoys turning the knife. “In such mental pain from the loss of Sue” (298), Jude is indifferent to Arabella’s tricking him into remarriage. Legally empowered to harangue Jude again, she mocks his intellectual abstraction and continued devotion to Sue. He is further tortured when the Widow Edlin supplies him with too much information about Sue’s sexual capitulation to Phillotson. Adding to his distress is the realisation that the mortification Sue heaps upon “her poor self” (315) is a consequence of his final visit to her. Just as the three Furies compound Prometheus’ agony by their accounts of how much humanity is suffering, so the three women combine to torment Jude.

Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound* invokes the figure of Christ to portray the plight of those who pursue loving-kindness above self: “One came forth, of gentle worth” (I, 546), “a youth/ With patient looks nailed to a crucifix” (I, 584-85). The suffering Christ is used as an emblem of the “wise, the mild, the lofty and the just” (I, 605) like Prometheus, or those like Jude who try to espouse high ideals. Both Christ and Prometheus

endure
 Deep wrongs for man, and scorn and chains, but heap
 Thousand-fold torment on themselves ... (I, 594-96)

However, in the poem, the sacrifice of Christ does not overthrow the tyranny inherent for Shelley in the idea of God the Father, portrayed here as Jupiter. At the point of Christ's death on the cross, "the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom" (Mark 16: 38), symbolising the end of the previous separation between God and man. In Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, the "painted veil" is also "torn aside" (III, 190, 192), but here it symbolises mankind's primitive beliefs and fears which have now been stripped away with the downfall of "Jupiter, the tyrant of the world" (III, 183). Thanks to Prometheus, mankind is now free to be "King/ Over himself: just, gentle, wise" (III, 196-97). This is a fulfilment of Comte's prophetic vision of man becoming "the arbiter ... of his own destiny" which "has something far more satisfying than the old belief in Providence".¹²⁶

Jude's "neat stock of fixed opinions" drop away "one by one" till he comes to a rule of life consisting of inclinations which did him "and nobody else any harm" (256). "Acting by instinct" (256), Jude has discovered a truth greater than the law and is able to reflect, "I have never behaved dishonourably to a woman or to any living thing. I am not a man who wants to save himself at the expense of the weaker among us!" (301). Like Prometheus, Jude chooses the good of others above his own well-being, and undergoes a kind of martyrdom.

At the time of the couple's break-up, Sue herself applies 1 Corinthians 13 to Jude. She identifies Jude as a worldly failure due to his "generous devotion" to her. In her eyes, his selflessness is to his credit: "the best and greatest among mankind are those who do themselves no worldly good" (284); "Every successful man is more or less a selfish man";

¹²⁶ Comte, 33.

and the “devoted fail” by worldly criteria since “Charity seeketh not her own” (284). More familiar with Corinthians than Sue, Jude confirms that, in regard to “that chapter we are at one ... Its verses will stand fast when all the rest that you call religion has passed away” (284). He is paraphrasing Paul’s teaching that, though philosophies and knowledge may fail, “Charity never faileth”.¹²⁷

In his later writings, Hardy comes to place a higher value on *caritas* or loving-kindness than on idealisations of fallible erotic love. In “A Broken Appointment”,¹²⁸ the narrator reproaches the woman for lacking “That high compassion which can overbear/ Reluctance for pure lovingkindness’ sake” (ll. 5-6). Though the woman addressed in the poem evidently does not love the narrator in the romantic sense, to soothe a “time-worn man” would be to add to the “the store/ Of human deeds divine in all but name” (ll. 15, 11-12), fulfilling the Shelleyan vision of a compassionate Utopia. In another late poem on the theme of loving-kindness, “Survivor”,¹²⁹ the narrator reflects that, although he has failed to live up to the ideals of his youth, a “voice” still speaks to him from Corinthians affirming that “*the greatest of things is Charity*”.¹³⁰ In some of these contexts “loving-kindness” and “Charity” are interchangeable, but in others Hardy uses “loving-kindness” to refer to an ethical code unsupported by revealed religion, a code that will retain its usefulness when “religion has passed away” (284).

Jude is excluded from taking a Christminster degree and from rising above the disadvantages of his birth through education. He is manipulated into and out of the institution of marriage by two women who each take advantage of his credulous gentleness.

¹²⁷ 1 Cor. 13:8.

¹²⁸ *CP*, 136.

¹²⁹ *CP*, 698.

¹³⁰ 1 Cor. 13:13.

While the outward conditions of his life make him appear a failure, Jude maintains his integrity, having adhered to ideals of love and forbearance in spite of circumstances. He retains a sense of quest, of continuing to aspire towards what Comte pronounces “high intellectual culture”, philosophy which “calls out our noblest sympathies”.¹³¹ Laid out in his coffin, he is surrounded by volumes of the classics and his Greek testament, “roughened with stone-dust where he had been in the habit of catching them up for a few minutes between his labours” (321). Having abandoned worldly ambition, Jude does not give up on the life of the mind. Though the speeches of the Remembrance Week crowds appeared to mock the efforts of this working man, after death “there seemed to be a smile of some sort upon the marble features of Jude” (321). It is left up to the reader to interpret that smile and the meaning of his death.

In *The Revolt of Islam*, Shelley refers to “innocent and free/ Heroes, and Poets, and prevailing Sages” who die without having realised their hopes but not before they leave, as a legacy to those who come after, “All hope, or love, or truth, or liberty,/ Whose form their mighty spirits could conceive”.¹³² Jude has not become a sage or a poet, or even a reader of Shelley, yet the wish not to harm his fellow creatures qualifies him as a Shelleyan hero. Living as he has under the codes of an “old civilization” (282), his vision of a more compassionate existence has led him and his soul-mate, Sue, to live lives at odds with those incapable of envisaging a more equitable future. As he tells Sue, “the time was not ripe for us! Our ideas were fifty years too soon to be any good to us” (315). In the final hymn of *Prometheus Unbound* Demogorgon acclaims the golden age that will be ushered in when Love enfolds the world in “healing wings” and the “Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom and

¹³¹ Comte, 33.

¹³² Shelley, *The Revolt of Islam*, IX, xxviii, 3713-14, 3718-19.

Endurance” (IV, ll. 561-62) of heroes such as Jude have their reward. What these Promethean heroes have undertaken –

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than Death or Night;
To defy Power which seems Omnipotent;
To love, and bear; to hope, till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates ... (IV, 570-74)

–will ensure “Life, Joy, Empire and Victory” (IV, 578) in the age to come. In his own copy of *Prometheus Unbound*, Hardy double-scored these last two lines.¹³³

Yet on his death bed Jude can no longer see past the wreck of his hopes. What has come of his dream of pursuing a saintly intellectual life in the city of light is to find a city crumbling into ruin, torn in two by empty formalism and hedonistic materialism. What has come of his exacting ideal of not harming his fellow creatures but treating them with loving-kindness is, first, the monstrous death of his children, and second, losing his intellectual partner to a perverse penitentialism. In his Beckettian despair, a depressed Jude has experienced “the Worst”, but can see no “way to the Better”. The loss of such a man evokes a sense of waste in readers, in some the catharsis of traditional tragedy, in others a nihilistic *anomie*.

The reader is invited to see Jude as a “pioneer” (277) of a social experiment which would pave the way for future generations. Deprived as he must be of Hardy’s evolutionary perspective, Jude’s vision of what might be achieved “fifty years” in the future is obstructed by the immediate horror that his ethical experiment has inflicted on those he loved. To feel the full tragedy of Jude’s loss, a reader must be prepared to look beyond his despair, and to admire the hard-won but not impracticable ethic that the “dreamer” has developed. As in the legend of the opening of Pandora’s box, and the unleashing of its evils

¹³³ Phyllis Bartlett, “Hardy’s Shelley”, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 4, 25 (1955): 17.

on the world, the story of Jude's tribulations leaves "Hope" as the only remnant and remedy in a nihilistic modern world. "Hope creates" from the wreck of Jude's dreams the "thing it contemplates", a melioristic vision of a "Way to the Better".

CONCLUSION

Tragedy may be created by an opposing environment either of things inherent in the universe, or of human institutions.¹

The grouping of fiction entitled “Novels of Character and Environment” has been examined in this thesis using the paradigm of a tragic dissonance between Hardy’s Romanticism and his portrayal of a harsh and indifferent naturalistic reality. Over the course of this study, “Character” has been linked to a tragic flaw in his protagonists, for example a blind adherence to Romantic ideals, and “Environment” has been related to the circumstantial forces that oppose realisation of those ideals, whether these consist of social constraints, naturalistic influences of class, upbringing or heredity, or an aggregate of universal energies, the “Immanent Will”, which is conceived of as behaving like the gods in ancient Greek tragedy. Each novel redacts the struggle of Character with Environment, and so builds up a series of complex, multi-layered narrative tragedies. The two co-ordinates which have been singled out for attention, Romanticism and Naturalism, intersect to produce the various expositions and parabolas of Hardy’s tragic vision.

As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, Hardy regarded Romanticism as intrinsic to the dynamism of human personality. The task for the artist and writer was to “adopt that form of romanticism which is the mood of the age”.² Each novel selected from the “Character and Environment” series depicts different facets of Romanticism manifested in the personality of the protagonists who suffer in pursuit of their own version of Shelley’s “One shape of many names”.³ In Hardy’s last-published minor

¹ *LIFE*, 274.

² *LIFE*, 147.

³ Shelley, *The Revolt of Islam*, Canto I, xxvii, 363.

novel, *The Well-Beloved*, Pierston is a sculptor obsessed by his search for the ideal woman, both in his relationships and in his art. In his sculptures, his constant drive is to re-create embodiments of the Platonic ideal. In what Hardy calls “a fanciful exhibition of the artistic nature”, the author reveals his conviction that there is “underlying the fantasy followed by the visionary artist the truth that all men are pursuing a shadow, the Unattainable”.⁴ For Hardy, all Romantics attempting to realise an ideal are bound to fail because the goal for which they are striving is unattainable. Rather than to resignation and acceptance of one’s flawed capacities, the impossibility of realising these higher ideals leads to heartbreak, disillusionment and self-destruction.

All of Hardy’s protagonists who embrace the pursuit of an ideal are granted fleeting moments of joy in a trajectory overridden with sorrow and pain. In their Romantic aspiration towards a higher plane of existence, they often fall into deep depression. Wordsworth describes the extreme emotions of poets or idealists who seek to transcend the mundane in “Resolution and Independence”:

from the might
Of joy in minds that can no further go,
As high as we have mounted in delight
In our dejection do we sink as low ... (ll. 22-25)

Those possessed of an artistic or idealistic temperament tend to sink lower than those who have never cherished an ennobling vision. Hardy explores the extremes of emotion in his Romantic protagonists as they scale the heights of erotic obsession or lofty ambition before tumbling into the depths of despair. Trying to live their dreams, they end in a nightmare of suffering; circumstances or the Immanent Will conspire to thwart them and to humble them.

⁴ *LIFE*, 287, 286.

Prosser Hall Frye has described Romanticism as “first and foremost, a literature of the senses and the emotions”.⁵ Hardy’s older protagonists, Boldwood and Henchard, are, if anything, more prone to extreme emotions than their younger counterparts. Boldwood’s apparent stillness was the result of a balance of “enormous antagonistic forces”, but once his equilibrium was disturbed by Bathsheba’s missive, he was “in extremity at once” and overcome by “wild capabilities” (*FMC*, 95, 96). In Henchard’s case, he was “the kind of man to whom some human object for pouring out his heat upon – were it emotive or were it choleric – was almost a necessity” (*MC*, 95-96). His bursts of anger and fierce affection prove destructive to those closest to him, leading to a decline into guilt, recrimination and ineffectual remorse.

Racked by Romantic extremes of emotion, Hardy’s protagonists reflect the experience of the self-made poet, Thomas Chatterton, as characterised by Wordsworth in “Resolution and Independence”. Chatterton had shown signs of genius from the age of seventeen, but dogged by isolation and poverty, had poisoned himself. It was of him that Wordsworth wrote:

We poets in our youth begin in gladness;
But thereof come in the end despondency and madness. (ll. 48-49)

Like Wordsworth’s young poet, Hardy’s mature Romantics begin activated by desire or hopes of a better life, whether of Shelleyan love or self-achievement, but end in disillusionment and self-reproach, frequently entertaining a death-wish. Boldwood and Henchard are tracked in the final stages of their journeys into “despondency and madness”. In the case of Hardy’s younger Romantics, not only are their individual dreams doomed to failure, their tendency to idealise their potential marriage partners means that their relationships, as well as their dreams of self-improvement, descend

⁵ Prosser Hall Frye, *Romance and Tragedy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961) 341.

from the “gladness” of young love into desperation, bitterness and despair. Hardy’s protagonists exhibit different manifestations of the Romantic temperament, but undergo a similar journey from early hopefulness into world-weary depression or other forms of mental disturbance.

In its early chapters, *Far from the Madding Crowd* appears to be developing as a pastoral romance. In Boldwood, however, Hardy introduces an unconventionally heart-rending figure of erotic obsession, a character who plumbs the depths of Romantic suffering and loses everything in dancing attendance on the young woman who is the object of his idealised passion. Entering as if a peripheral character, Boldwood is elevated by his suffering to tragic dimensions. Boldwood is the first of Hardy’s studies of erotic obsession, a condition that can precipitate its victims into madness and death. After shooting Troy, Boldwood attempts suicide in two different ways, bids which are thwarted with the best of intentions and the worst of results. After Boldwood’s arrest, numerous articles which he purchased and labelled “Bathsheba Boldwood” are discovered, all “pathetic evidences of a mind crazed with care and love” (*FMC*, 295). *The Return of the Native* opens with an epigraph from Keats’s *Endymion*, the personification of Sorrow introducing the themes of loss and dejection from the start. Both of Hardy’s protagonists fail to realise their idealistic ambition or dream of self-transcendence, and both fall into Romantic melancholy and self-loathing, Eustacia into a reckless disregard for self which leads to her death by accident or suicide, Clym into a morbid self-reproach and sorrow.

The *leitmotiv* of music in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* evokes a less intellectualised form of Romanticism. Music “sets in motion the machinery of awe, of fear, of terror, of pain, and awakens that infinite yearning which is the essence of

romanticism”.⁶ The eponymous mayor, lonely and disaffected, tries to find an outlet for his overpowering emotions in Susan, Farfrae, Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane, but only succeeds in alienating the affections of those closest to him, and ends rejected and alone. Henchard’s final attempt at reconciliation with Elizabeth-Jane is met by hostility and unforgiveness, pushing him over the edge into deep depression. His attempt at suicide is aborted after being visited by his skimmity-ride double. His last hope dashed, Henchard withdraws from society and dies alone on the Heath from self-imposed deprivation. Not mad like Lear, Henchard is overcome by despondency, with the added burden of grimly accepting this banishment is his due.

Tess of the d’Urbervilles returns to a more contemporary evocation of Romanticism in the person of Tess, idealised by Angel as a Shelleyan or Wordsworthian innocent, a child of Nature. In love with a projected image of Tess, Angel rejects the real woman when she discloses her past to him. Tess has likewise idealised Angel, putting aside her own ideas and hanging “upon his words as if they were a god’s” (269). Her unquestioning acceptance of Angel’s authority facilitates his mistreatment of her and leads to extremes of physical and mental suffering in her abandonment. In the end, Tess snaps and commits murder in a state of self-dissociation: “How wickedly mad I was!” (308). This uncharacteristic act of violent retaliation sets her free from her oppressor but also realises her death-wish, at the hands of an unfeeling justice system. In *Jude the Obscure*, the ideals embraced by Jude and Sue are drawn from opposing religious and philosophical sources; the marriage of these true Romantic minds is truly fraught with peril. Driven to madness over the death of her children, Sue abandons Jude to embrace a penitential fanaticism, while Jude dies alone in despair, his death the drawn-out consequence of a failed attempt at suicide.

⁶ David Charlton, ed., *E.T.A. Hoffmann’s Musical Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) 97-8.

In these narratives of relationships based on a love ideal or an idealisation of the beloved, Hardy is focussing on “the immortal puzzle – given the man and woman, how to find a basis for their sexual relation”.⁷ Relationships based on Shelleyan notions of free love or on identification of the woman with Intellectual Beauty seem necessarily to have the seeds of tragedy implanted in them. The epigraph to Part 1 of *Jude the Obscure* underlines the preponderance of catastrophic outcomes in the pursuit of erotic love: “many there be that have run out of their wits for women ... Many also have perished, have erred, and sinned, for women ...”.⁸ Hardy traces a continuum of increasingly destructive sexual relationships to its furthest point in *Jude the Obscure* where Jude and Sue have to witness the death of their children before their own disintegration, spiralling into madness, despair and death.

The Romantic imagination does not provide a path of escape or transcendence for Hardy’s idealists: in fact it appears that “reality takes its revenge upon them”.⁹ In the modern fictional world of his tragic protagonists, “[all] that is left of transcendence now is the yearning for it”.¹⁰ While their Romantic sensibilities can make his characters seem naïve and misguided, Hardy does not underestimate the degree to which their “opposing environment” undermines these idealists, maladjusted to contemporary mores by their attunement to future expectations. In the terms of this study, “things inherent in the universe”¹¹ refers to the deterministic constraints of heredity and environment which the French Naturalists regarded as defining their characters’ horizons. The influence of physiology, inherited traits and broader socio-economic factors gave naturalistic characters no scope to change direction or to develop beyond their sphere.

⁷ Thomas Hardy, “Preface to 1896 Edition”, *The Woodlanders*, 368.

⁸ *JO*, 9. The passage is drawn from the Apocrypha, 1 Esdras 4: 26, 27.

⁹ Doumic, 158.

¹⁰ Eagleton, 208.

¹¹ *LIFE*, 274.

In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, the influence of physiology is manifested primarily in the infatuations of the visible. The mismatched couples, deceived by appearances and irresistible forces of sensuality, make foolish choices, based on no genuine knowledge of their prospective partner. In *The Return of the Native*, physiology again comes into play sexually, but it is in the primeval presence of Egdon Heath that all the naturalistic forces opposing the dreams or expectations of the tragic protagonists converge. Any scheme to lift the heath dwellers out of their apathy into a higher plane of consciousness or more brilliant way of life is doomed to failure. Despite their inherent weaknesses, Clym and Eustacia might have been happy elsewhere, Eustacia in a livelier place like Budmouth or Paris, Clym in a setting where he could have implemented his scheme for education of the working classes. The lesser figures of Wildeve and Mrs Yeobright also come to grief in the opposing environment of the Heath, a wilderness replete with adders and capable of dealing out its own nonhuman venom.

By contrast, in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, a retreat from Egdon Heath into a constricted built environment makes social degeneration more important than the forces of Nature. The inhabitants of Mixen Lane, modelled on Zola's figures of urban vice and corruption, are naturalistic catalysts in the downfall of the mayor that serve to expose his shady past with Lucetta and his crime against family, the sale of his wife. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, social and environmental factors are both equally oppressive, the naturalistic influences of physiology, heredity, poverty, social disadvantage and rural displacement all conspiring to burden Tess with excess of responsibility for her family's welfare. Despite her best efforts to overcome the constraints of her upbringing and make choices based on her own aspirations, the deterministic aspects of Tess's family heritage leave her open to exploitation by a succession of men.

In *Jude the Obscure*, the demands of physiology are intensified to the point where Jude's educational aspirations are derailed by his sexual needs and weakness for strong drink. After an obscure rural background has deprived Jude of the wealth and family connections needed to rectify his early educational disadvantage, the old university in which he seeks to make his way is at best indifferent to his efforts to better himself. Naturalistic obstacles oppose him at every turn. Social prejudice tells against his irregular union with Sue, and illness and penury make it impossible for him to adequately support his growing family. The introduction of Little Father Time into the trembling family balance pushes it over the brink. It is possible to make naturalistic sense of little Jude by examining his upbringing and the lack of parental security in his early years. But in the deaths of the children, Hardy perhaps over-eggs the pudding, pushing his characters past the squalid bounds of French Naturalism, and even the bounds of tragedy, into new, expressionistic or absurdist dimensions of horror.

Despite the increasing Naturalism of his later novels, Hardy complicates the interpretation of the forces opposing his tragic heroes and heroines by his allusions to Greek tragedy, allusions that suggest his protagonists fall foul of a mysterious Will which is "inherent in the universe". A superstitious Michael Henchard cries out against what he sees as supernatural interference in his schemes, complaining that there is "some sinister intelligence bent on punishing him" (*MC*, 97). Eustacia Vye exclaims, "destiny has been against me!" (*RN*, 276). With both these protagonists, the narrator draws attention to the aphorism "Character is Fate" (*MC*, 89). A malign Destiny was hardly needed to undo characters so flawed and prone to harmful choices. In the case of an innocent victim like Tess, however, the narrator questions why "so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus, the wrong man the woman" (*Tess*, 57), but proffers no more satisfactory explanation than the fatalistic "It was to be" (*Tess*, 58). In Hardy's tragic

novels, naturalistic forces interact with an overarching Power, variously described as “fate” or “destiny”, or an “Immanent Will”. Whether or not any such metaphysical or supernatural agency exists outside the minds of his troubled protagonists, the point of agreement between determinism and fatalism lies in the ultimate “helplessness of ... individual will”¹² to combat the forces arrayed against it. This combination of “things inherent in the universe” opens up a chasm between the character’s aspirations and the possibility of fulfilment, which, for Hardy, creates tragedy.

Of all the “human institutions” contributing to the “opposing environment”, it is marriage which elicits consistent opprobrium in Hardy’s narratives, and which acts as a synecdoche for the tragic dissonance between desire and fulfilment. In the course of his novels, Hardy explores a complex series of marital mishaps: Bathsheba’s courtship by three different suitors; problems with marriage licences in the case of Wildeve and Thomasin; Eustacia’s and Mrs Yeobright’s machinations to bring about the marital outcomes each prefers; Henchard’s complicated history of wife-selling and dalliance, followed by the reappearance of both wife and mistress with demands that he regularise their unions; Tess’s unconsummated marriage to Angel, followed by Alec’s reasserting his claim on her as his mistress; Tess’s murder of her tormentor and elopement with her legal husband; Arabella’s deceiving Jude into marrying her; Jude and Sue’s deliberations on whether to get married at all, the fraught question of their previous unions, and finally the torment of Sue’s return to Phillotson, and the misery of Arabella’s tricking an apathetic Jude into remarriage. While even this incomplete inventory of marital woes sounds farcical, Hardy avers that if “you look beneath the surface of any farce you see a tragedy”.¹³ Not only are the marriage laws inequitable and cruel, the probability of finding a compatible partner is beset with difficulties in

¹² Beach, “The Structure of *The Return of the Native*”, *RN*, 429.

¹³ *LIFE*, 215.

Hardy's universe. When the keen edge of suffering is superadded to the problems of the institution, marriage emerges as a significant nexus in the Romantic, naturalistic and humanist dilemmas which Hardy explores in his tragic novels.

References to Greek and Shakespearean tragedy become increasingly explicit over the trajectory of Hardy's five major novels, but the architectonic of each novel is individual, a new and different expression of his evolving tragic vision. At the climax of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Bathsheba experiences a classic *anagnorisis*, a self-recognition as she comes face-to-face with her less fortunate other, Fanny, lying with her child in the coffin. Despite the shock, she gains a new perspective on herself and her profligate husband, which enables her to rise above her own reverses in her concern for others. The physician who attends her after the shooting of Troy recognises, in her stoic bearing of the violence, and her own suffering, the nobility of a tragic heroine.

Still traumatised by the death of her first husband at the hands of her obsessed would-be fiancé, Bathsheba's second marriage to the long-suffering Oak is no simple comic resolution, but a many-stranded tragicomic conclusion to the novel. Far from an escapist romance, *Far from the Madding Crowd* is a novel in which the mis-matings and mis-marriages are a test run for the plot engines in the quartet of tragic novels to come. The impression that Boldwood's ideal passion makes *him* the tragic protagonist of *Far from the Madding Crowd* is subversive to the novel's comic romance and reflects Hardy's commitment to a more extreme, Romantic form of tragedy. The figure of the thwarted Romantic idealist is one that Hardy will go on to develop in subsequent narrative tragedies.

In *The Return of the Native*, the mismatched lovers Clym and Eustacia are doomed from the start by their unrealistic expectations of each other. Allusions to Greek gods and classical drama appear to intimate that Hardy is setting out to write nothing

but a tragedy, in which the suffering and emotions of his principal characters will be raised to the “higher passions”¹⁴ of the ancients. In the event, the main characters fail to achieve the pitch of passion and mythological *gravitas* expected, and the reader cannot sufficiently identify with them to arouse a full catharsis. The declamatory extravagance of Eustacia and the positivist didacticism of Clym have as much to do with melodrama as with high tragedy in the classical tradition. Despite its mythological framework, *The Return of the Native* could be seen more as a naturalistic tragedy than a Hellenic tragedy, the forces of Nature personified in Egdon Heath overwhelming the protagonists and preventing them from achieving their dreams.

Rather than against any of the supernatural powers suggested by the allusions to Greek tragedy, it is against their own weaknesses and failures of understanding that Clym and Eustacia contend. Clym is too ineffectual and deluded to realise his moral and educational schemes for the local rustics, while Eustacia labours under the delusion that she is the heroine of her own romance, driven by a futile quest to find Byronic passion among the inhabitants of the Heath. In *The Return of the Native*, Hardy insinuates that, for some modern temperaments, it is as much their own psychological deficiencies as the “opposing environment” which precipitates the tragic outcome. Hardy’s two protagonists struggle, not against earthly or universal injustice, but with a Keatsian “Sorrow”¹⁵ or melancholy, even a modern depression, as they discover how circumstances and persons conspire to frustrate their ideals and expectations.

Hardy’s addition of a Book Sixth to *The Return of the Native*, when the novel might have had a five-act Shakespearean structure and a starker, more dramatic climax, could be read as an acknowledgement that the less extreme, more patient characters have been able to endure suffering and find ways of pursuing relationships that enhance

¹⁴ “The Profitable Reading of Fiction”, Orel, 114.

¹⁵ See Keats, *Endymion*, IV, 148-83. Hardy draws from this song for his epigraph to *The Return of the Native*.

their daily existence without destroying the happiness of others. It may also be that Hardy modulated the course he first took, towards pure tragedy, and replaced it with a more modern admission, that some aspirations are impossible to realise for moderns not made of stern, classical stuff. Clym's disappointment, as his attempts at humanist preaching fail to win adherents, has a modernist quality of *anomie*, in some ways more compelling and true to his dejection than the tragic climax of Book Fifth. At the conclusion of *The Return of the Native*, one is reminded of the final lines of T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men":

This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper. (ll. 30-31)

The Mayor of Casterbridge, the first of Hardy's major novels to achieve a fully tragic conclusion, exhibits a powerful protagonist racked by inner and outer conflicts. Having committed a drunken crime against his family and been rejected by them, Henchard's impulsiveness and suffering bring to mind the deeply flawed Lear, and Shakespearean tragedy more generally. The only daughter Henchard believes he has, Elizabeth-Jane is reminiscent of Cordelia: confronted by the unkindness and the rages of an errant father-figure, Elizabeth-Jane displays an almost equal patience and forbearance. The decline of the beleaguered mayor follows the implacable Oresteian curve of Greek tragedy, any deviation in the hero's conduct being punished by supernatural or at least comprehensive forces of retribution. Despite attempts to escape his nefarious past and live a reformed life, Henchard is pursued by his misdeeds: "Do what we may to shape the mysterious stuff of which our lives are composed, the dark threads of our destiny will always re-emerge",¹⁶ comments Victor Hugo in regard to the fate of his own mayor, Jean Valjean.

¹⁶ Hugo, *Les Misérables* (London: Penguin, 1976) 193.

Hardy gives his tragedy a modern, counter-Hugoite turn of the screw by denying Henchard the possibility of forgiveness, rejecting the Christian hope which shapes *Les Misérables*. Elizabeth-Jane's bid to forgive and be reconciled with her stepfather comes too late, leaving loose ends which are more characteristic of modernist than traditional drama. Elizabeth-Jane has to learn to live without the possibility of resolution, her regret and remorse being both "deep and sharp" (252). Henchard's lonely death on the heath, and his request to be buried in an unmarked grave, conclude the novel with a bleakness anticipating T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* or the seeming hopelessness of *Four Quartets*:

What was to be the value of the long looked forward to,
Long hoped for calm, the autumnal serenity
And the wisdom of age? Had they deceived us,
Or deceived themselves, the quiet-voiced elders ...
The wisdom only the knowledge of dead secrets
Useless in the darkness into which they peered ...¹⁷

In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy has created a figure of Shakespearean stature woven into a sobering tale of ambition and irresponsibility, love and loss. The epic scope of the story is built on the very foundations of classical tragedy, but its conclusion resonates with a modern post-Christian hopelessness. Hardy's genius is that he is able to make the reader sympathise with a deeply flawed protagonist who is not incapable of remorse, and who realises too late that it is only love which will satisfy his craving for self-worth. Henchard's acknowledgement of his wrongdoing and the stoicism with which he meets his suffering lend him a certain nobility, his tragic stature becoming increasingly evident as his humiliation and isolation deepen. The catharsis evoked at the fall of this provincial Corn-King is the most focussed and powerful to be found in any of the tragic novels.

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, the narrative stance towards the protagonist is

¹⁷ "East Coker", ll. 73-80.

gentler, more sympathetic, not only because of her sex, but because of the purity of her intentions. Far from assigning blame, the narrator advocates on Tess's behalf, affirming her innocence and selflessness in the face of the naturalistic and societal forces which oppose her attempts at self-determination. A Romantic idealist in her hope of rising above her circumstances through education and hard work, Tess remains practical and less of a dreamer than Hardy's other idealists. Born into a rural underclass like Jude Fawley, she too is naïve and vulnerable to exploitation by others, but labours under the added disadvantage of her sex. The tragedy is not one of a flawed character or flawed intentions but of "what might have been", the pattern of her life "wasted for want of chances" (99). If being born a Durbeyfield gives Tess little or no chance of escaping a sordid end, from the narrator's perspective, it is her d'Urberville ancestry that equally dooms her to punishment.

It is worth examining how readers and critics have attempted to unravel the sense of injustice and lost potential aroused in contemplating Tess's fate. The reference to the Aeschylean "President of the Immortals" invokes a hostile supernatural entity, but the frequent adopting of Tess's point of view tends to dispel any sense that she might be, like an ancient Greek protagonist, subject to a fatal curse. The Greeks saw human events, Prosser Hall Frye contends, as being regulated in accordance with "an abstract principle of absolute justice" which did not allow for an offender like Tess to plead "the purity of [her] intentions" and thereby "escape the physical consequences".¹⁸ As Frye points out, the Greek position is no longer tenable in the modern era in which affixing absolute moral blame to an individual is avoided by "a kind of compromise ... transferring human responsibility from act to intention". Hardy's placing of the word "Justice" in inverted commas calls into question older, absolute judgments of right and

¹⁸ Frye, 52.

wrong, and accentuates the unsettling discrepancy between the purity of Tess's intentions and the tragic consequences of her actions. The disparity between what we know of the heroine's character and her subsequent career gives rise to a "disheartening consciousness of inconsistency", an inconsistency which Frye regards as "one of the duties of the tragic dramatist to reinforce and deepen by his treatment".¹⁹

According to Frye, some critics have maintained that tragedy should no longer be possible in an age with no moral absolutes, because the resolution is "purely human" and has "no vestige of divinity about it". Our lingering feeling about Tess is one of human sympathy, because we identify the "superiority of the victim over the forces to which [she] succumbs". Frye calls this solution "sentimental and lenitive; there is no reassertion of the moral order as in traditional tragedy."²⁰ Rather, readers experience a modern sense of *nescience*, as there is no answer to the narrator's rhetorical questions, "where was Tess's guardian angel?", "where was the Providence of her simple faith?" (57). Hardy creates a new synthesis drawing on the tradition of tragic Romantic loss but enlarging it by evoking the modern sense of futility in a post-Providential universe.

Allied to this feeling of tragic dissonance is a sense of indignation at the naturalistic forces and social prejudices which conspire to bring about the fall of the tragic heroine. Tess's experience highlights the gulf between natural impulse and moral conventions: falling pregnant to Alec opens up a "social chasm" which was "to divide our heroine's personality thereafter from that previous self of hers" (58). Through no fault of her own, Tess was to be judged and condemned by "human institutions", the church, middle-class society and the justice system, with no consideration for mitigating circumstances.

¹⁹ Frye, 95.

²⁰ Frye, 106.

The novel provides, as has been noted, a dual catharsis, the outrage and terror when Tess submits to Alec and dissociates from her true self, and the feeling of pity, that her scrap of happiness is taken from her, when she is arrested and hanged. The regret lingers that someone of great worth has been lost, yet each catharsis is reduced by a nagging sense of frustration. It is hard for post-Victorian readers to accept that a woman of superior intelligence and sensibility should be hamstrung by her shiftless, dependent family and victimised by self-seeking men. To the degree that Alec and Angel are representative of ongoing forms of sexual and social oppression – different versions of the double standard that continues to be applied to women – *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* has continued to resonate with contemporary readers. The synthesis of Romantic and naturalistic tragedy which involves readers in an attempt to discern the distinction between absolute and relative standards of judgement indicates that in *Tess* Hardy has imparted a new, ethical inflection to that clash between the Romantic individual and the “opposing environment”. This “original treatment” may lessen or extend the purely cathartic effect, but it has imbued the novel often regarded as his masterpiece with an enduring affective power.

In *Jude the Obscure*, the most Shelleyan of Hardy's major novels, the ending may be read as a nihilistic tragedy affording no catharsis or a more open conclusion that points, after “a full look at the Worst”, towards what might be a “Way to the Better”.²¹ As such, it is a novel which reaches beyond nineteenth-century empirical certainty into postmodern nescience or uncertainty, embracing multiple possible interpretations. In *Jude*, we have a flawed hero, prone to the frailty of his human nature, who anticipates such modern anti-heroes as Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. Like Willy, Jude has unrealistic dreams of success which collapse when confronted by the

²¹ “In Tenebris II”, l. 14, *CP*, 168.

harsh realities of wealth and privilege. Jude adumbrates the breed of “working-class hero” who would become a feature of modern explorations of tragedy. His dreams elevate him above his surroundings, but not to his advantage, when pursuing either his educational ambitions or his ideal of love. Pitted against Jude’s aspirations are blighting and terrible manifestations of the “opposing environment”.

Cyrus Hoy has described the *peripeteia* (or reversal of fortune) which underpins tragedy as a “deep disparity between intentions and deeds ... the ideal at which one aims and the reality in which one is enmeshed”.²² In Hardy’s terms, Jude’s *peripeteia* is the “contrast between the ideal life a man wished to lead, and the squalid real life he was fated to lead”. The discrepancy between our dreams of an ideal and life as we know it is, for Hardy, a fact “to be discovered in *everybody’s* life”,²³ although for Jude the discrepancy is more painful than for most. Despite his heroic struggles, Jude is “fated” to stumble and fall, never learning fully how to disentangle his worthless fantasies from his admirable ideals.

As Hardy worked out the characterisation and plot of *Jude the Obscure*, the novel was overtaken by a complex of philosophical oppositions and debates which pushed the working-class tragedy towards a novel of ideas. Jude and Sue’s talk and scholarly tastes traverse much of Victorian intellectual life, from Hebraism to Hellenism, Comte to J.S. Mill. Yet entering Christminster, Jude passes into an “opposing environment” almost as “grimy”,²⁴ as depraved and filled with despair, as the back streets of French Naturalism. *Jude the Obscure* has been viewed as a precursor of the modern novel. Its urban setting is littered with the detritus of Jude’s hopes and the

²² Cyrus Hoy, *The Hyacinth Room: An Investigation into the Nature of Comedy, Tragedy and Tragicomedy* (London: Chatto, 1964) 308.

²³ Letter to Sir Edmund Gosse, November 10, 1895, *CL*, vol. 2, 93.

²⁴ Letter to Sir Edmund Gosse, November 10, 1895.

accumulation of his sense of futility, the “butt-ends” of his “days and ways”.²⁵ This reading of *Jude* sees him beset by “the unspoken miseries of daily life”²⁶ and the pangs of existential *angst*. Ultimately failing to qualify for any of the roles he aspired to, deceived and abandoned by the two women in his life, he descends through rejection and poverty into irremediable depression. Read in this way, the novel ceases to be a tragedy and becomes a protracted cry of despair.

Another reading of the novel would view Jude as a new breed of sensitive idealist, a Shelleyan and existential hero maintaining the ideal of loving-kindness in the face of an absurd universe. In a note written after the publication of *Jude*, Hardy advocated that, since the old theologies had had their day, what was needed in fiction and drama was to make “an independent plunge, embodying the real, if only temporary, thought of the age”.²⁷ Hardy’s portrait of an impoverished scholar, who seeks through self-improvement and philosophical study to overcome the opposition of social class and privilege, is identified as part of a growing demographic in the nineteenth century. Despite personal failure, Jude is a pioneer, born tragically too soon: “the time was not ripe for us! Our ideas were fifty years too soon to be any good to us” (315).

Jude, and to a lesser extent, Sue, question the value of the human institutions of marriage, religion and higher education, trying to live by the spirit of the law rather than the letter of the law. In *Jude the Obscure*, as in his later poems, Hardy came to place a higher value on disinterested loving-kindness, than on intellectual and technological progress, or even the love between men and women. Hardy regarded Comtean altruism as a modern reformulation of the Christian virtue, Charity.²⁸ Comte maintained that without Love, human beings would waste their energies either in “ill-conceived” and

²⁵ “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, l. 60; T.S. Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 15.

²⁶ Irving Howe (New York: Macmillan, 1967) 135.

²⁷ *LIFE*, 319.

²⁸ *LIFE*, 224.

“useless studies” or in “barren” and “dangerous contention” for position in the world.²⁹ As Jude pursues his philosophical journey, he eventually abandons his “useless studies” of theological texts and his dreams of preferment in favour of an ethic, decisions and acts which did him “and nobody else any harm” (256).

For Comte, universal altruism was a truth “known to the tender-hearted from personal experience”.³⁰ Jude’s tender-heartedness, evident from childhood, could be seen as a tragic flaw which prevents him from making his way in the world. Yet Jude also demonstrates an innate nobility: his new-age determination not to harm other beings on the planet is elevated to the status of a worthy, if doomed cause. What makes the novel’s ending not only dual in the interpretations it can sustain, but double in its affective power, is that Jude himself, on his death-bed, is no longer aware of having been a consistent apostle for a humanist ethic of loving-kindness. Instead, his consciousness is flooded with depression and alienation from the world he is departing.

In John Fowles’ postmodern homage to the nineteenth-century novel, *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, the author explores a love relationship no less fraught than Jude and Sue’s. Fowles offers, not just an ending susceptible of more than one interpretation, but a double ending, something more designedly postmodern, in that the reader, rather than the author or publisher, is left to choose between the endings. Charles Smithson, who has ruined his reputation and staked everything on his pursuit of Sarah Woodruff, finally tracks her down and proposes marriage. But Sarah, dressed in the uniform of the “New Woman”, belongs to an emerging type who, like Sue Bridehead, “does not recognize the necessity for most of her sex to follow marriage as a profession”.³¹ In what could be seen as a melodramatic declamation, Smithson accuses Sarah of perversely manipulating his affections: “You have not only planted the dagger

²⁹ Auguste Comte, *A General View of Positivism* (New York: Speller, 1957) 13.

³⁰ Comte, 246.

³¹ “Postscript”, *Jude the Obscure* (New York: Norton, 1999) 8.

in my breast, you have delighted in twisting it”.³² Whether or not Fowles’s heroine was partly based on Sue Bridehead, Sarah’s sexual and intellectual inconsistencies inflict torment on Smithson like that Sue inflicted on her lover.

In the first ending of *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, the author makes it clear that behind Smithson’s words is the pathos of “tragedy”. Smithson is turned from his anger and resentment by meeting his child, a daughter he has never known but who brings about a reconciliation between the lovers. In this suitably Victorian ending, Smithson’s idealising love for Sarah is to be fulfilled. The protagonists both feel that suffering was a necessary part of their destiny: in Sarah’s fatalistic opinion, “It had to be so”, and for Smithson, with more conventional piety, “it had been in God’s hands” (*FLW*, 392). In the second ending, there is no reference to tragedy and Smithson bitterly concludes that Sarah “[f]rom the first ... had manipulated him” (*FLW*, 397). As he emerges into the street and a future devoid of hope, Smithson sees himself as “the last honourable man on the way to the scaffold” (*FLW*, 397). Denying that any “intervening god” can bring human affairs to fulfilment, the narrator commends Sarah and Smithson for acting out of their authentic selves and choosing an unhappy parting rather than a factitious union. The reader is forbidden from considering this “a less plausible ending to their story” (*FLW*, 398).

In Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* much depends, not on how one character interprets another’s words, but on how a reader weighs what Jude has achieved and failed to achieve struggling in social contexts with which he has always felt at odds. Compared with Fowles’s first attempt at a happy ending or with the postmodern unhappy ending, the death of Jude at the close of Hardy’s novel is more able to inspire pity and terror. The comparison makes Jude’s life seem more significant, even heroic. Even as a

³² John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (Frogmore, St Albans: Triad/ Panther, 1977) 388, hereafter referred to in the form “*FLW*”.

disillusioned idealist, there is an ethical dimension to Jude's depression, an unwillingness to set himself adrift in the currents of *anomie*, that sets him apart from the somewhat petulant despair of Charles Smithson. In spite of the dual Shelleyan and naturalistic perspectives available in Hardy's deathbed scene, his conclusion is less postmodern and existentialist than Fowles's. The dual interpretative perspective it allows is closer to that of *A Passage to India*. E.M. Forster's modernist novel eschews interventionist godhead and institutionalised religion as folly and sources of prejudice. Calling upon Krishna, Professor Godbole cries, "Come! Come to me only" but on every occasion, "The God refuses to come."³³ Although the metaphysical framework of *A Passage to India* confirms, in line with Jude's revelation, that "nobody did come, because nobody does" (*JO*, 27), Forster's novel indicates, as does Hardy's, that some experimental ethic might still be salvaged from an indifferent universe by those of good faith.³⁴

All of Hardy's five tragic novels could be interpreted as having dual endings. While Hardy complied with the demands of publishers and morally conservative readers by modifying the tragic outcome to provide endings in which the quietly stoic characters are rewarded with marriage, he contrived to subvert the "happily ever after" formula. Questioning Byron's truism, "All tragedies are finished by a death, / All comedies are ended by a marriage",³⁵ Hardy comes to propose that "some tragedies *begin* in marriage".³⁶ The *dénouements* of all his major novels include marriages but these do little to dispel, and most often they intensify, the participants' sufferings.

³³ E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (London: Penguin, 2005) 72.

³⁴ Forster suggests in the novel that the way to break down institutionalised prejudice in northern India is being pioneered by a band of suffering forerunners. Fielding, Aziz and Mrs Moore might be numbered among Jude's unforeseen followers.

³⁵ Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, III, 65-66.

³⁶ Rehder, "The Form of Hardy's Novels", 23 [my emphasis].

At the end of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, the possibility that Bathsheba and Oak will “live happily ever after” is ironically brought into question by Poorgrass’s comic suggestion that “it might have been worse” (*FMC*, 308). Poorgrass and the inclement weather cast doubt on the couple’s prospects and on Bathsheba’s attempt to recover a subdued happiness with Oak. At the second ending of *The Return of the Native*, the marriage of Thomasin and Venn – patient characters, yet somehow dull and peripheral to the main drama – place Eustacia’s ideas of romance and Clym’s Comtean schemes as too extreme to prosper on the Heath. By his own account, Hardy begrudged having to add this ending to his experimentally tragic novel, but he never retracted it. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Elizabeth-Jane’s marriage to Farfrae could be seen as pandering to the requirements of a traditional resolution, if Elizabeth-Jane were not already noticing Farfrae’s emotional shallowness. She acknowledges that her fleeting happiness was “but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain”. Filled with remorse the part she has played in Henchard’s lonely death, Elizabeth-Jane is soberly aware of “the persistence of the unforeseen” in human affairs (*MC*, 252). In *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, Angel’s acceptance of Liza-Lu as a substitute partner is overcast by the questions, would Angel be legally able to marry his sister-in-law, and would he again act prudishly if not able to formalise the union. More importantly, does Angel’s ready acceptance of Tess’s proposition demonstrate a devotion to her memory, or a betrayal of it, a failure to mourn? When it comes to *Jude the Obscure*, the final marriages appear a fanatic self-prostitution in Sue’s case, and a descent into drunken dissipation in Jude’s. If Sue and Jude’s de facto relationship brought little happiness, marriage for the sake of respectability is satirised as the ultimate betrayal of any true dealing between them, a betrayal of their precious “two-in-oneness” (*JO*, 265).

The dual endings in Hardy’s novels, the subverting of conventional generic

expectations of comedy and tragedy, and the provision of freedom to seek less generically stable readings of the text, prefigures modern or postmodern fragmentation. Hardy often plays with reader expectations, creating a type of relativist uncertainty. It can never be decided whether Eustacia dies by accident or design; nor, depending on the choice of text, can it be stated even in legal terms whether what Tess undergoes in *The Chase* is rape or seduction. Hardy's five major novels continue to pose absorbing questions about the dimensions of narrative tragedy, and about the complex psychology of his characters who exhibit, at times, inconsistent motivations and behaviours. This postmodern play of undecidability allows readers to bring their own ethical stance to reading the novels, and to make up their own minds about the tragic outcomes.

In his 1880 essay, "Naturalism on the Stage", Zola claimed that historically the French had two distinct literatures, fictional and dramatic, and even two distinct styles, so that "a subject which could be put into a book could not be placed upon the stage".³⁷ While Zola advocated applying the principles of the naturalistic novel to the stage, there have been few genuine attempts at this type of theatre, apart from isolated examples such as Strindberg's *Miss Julie* (1888). Hardy's applying the principles of tragedy to the contemporary novel bridged a much wider divide, between the classical and Shakespearean stage on the one hand and naturalistic fiction on the other. In addition, as has been argued, Hardy drew heavily on the English Romantic poets, a movement that often sought its ratification in Shakespeare. In his later career, Hardy became more involved in the theatre, combining all these influences when writing verse drama like *The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall*, or when supervising adaptations of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* for the stage. His increasing preoccupation with performance reflects his awareness of how the producer, the director, the actors and the audience all

³⁷ "Naturalism on the Stage", *The Experimental Novel and Other Essays*, trans. Belle M. Sherman (New York: Cassell, 1893); cited in Bernard F. Dukore, *Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1974) 698.

bring their own perceptions to bear in the totalising effect of a dramatic production. As Shakespeare can be produced and acted variously to spotlight particular aspects of a play, so Hardy's tragic fiction can be read in multiple ways. The manifold, sometimes contradictory interpretations which his characters sustain could be read as a tragic conflict between conscious personality and subconscious or naturalistic desires, creating characters that defy morally absolute condemnation or praise.

Just as Shakespeare is known to have reworked plots and characters from Plutarch, historical chronicles and other playwrights, Hardy derived plots and scenes from novels such as Hugo's *Les Misérables* for *The Mayor of Casterbridge* or Zola's *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret* for *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. As Shakespeare drew from the mythological tales in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, so Hardy alludes to ancient Greek and Shakespearean dramas in his novels, his intertextual references serving as a springboard for his own tragic visionings. His evolving conception of tragic narrative goes beyond these foundational premises, but he often leaves hints and fragments of the original, destabilising his reworking and leaving it open to different interpretations. Examining the different revisions of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Simon Gatrell has suggested that the same principle can be applied to all of Hardy's fiction:

If we can make valid generalisations about the ways that Hardy approached his writing, the kinds of things he was interested in altering, heightening, deleting, augmenting, not only in the broad thematic or character concerns ... but also in the more detailed areas such as style ... then I think we will understand more clearly the nature of Hardy as creative artist.³⁸

The textual variants republished in recent critical editions of the five tragic novels reveal Hardy's enduring curiosity about the breadth and depth of his characters' personality and experience. His ongoing revision of his novels leads to narrative hints and loose ends, and the possibility of reinterpretation based on this textual instability.

³⁸ Simon Gatrell, "The Significance of Hardy's Revisions", *FMC*, 351.

References in Hardy's novels to the emerging sciences of archaeology and anthropology, and to advances in the longer-established sciences of astronomy, biology and geology, betoken his fascination with the rapid expansion of knowledge of the human and nonhuman universe in the nineteenth century. By questioning assumptions formerly considered as the known parameters for existence, scientists and philosophers were also providing the basis for a new material and moral relativism. Hardy's awareness of these scientific thought-adventures, when combined with the probings of the novelist and poet into the insatiable and irreconcilable in the human heart, produced narratives which interrogate moral absolutes and human institutions.

The author's prescient insight into his protagonists' psychology, drawing on and extending naturalistic physiology and the Romantic poets' understanding of the imagination, enables him to draw modernist characters before the rise of Modernism. He has been identified as a "proto-modernist",³⁹ in the vanguard of recognising the unresolvable dilemmas of existence in a post-Providential universe. Richard Sewall suggests such a duality defines post-classical tragedy. The universal assumptions which come into conflict in such tragedies "must remain in perpetual and ambiguous tension – not in a state of balance ... [and] not in a resolvable form".⁴⁰ Sewall's neat formulation would seem an apt point at which to conclude, but it is equally important to recognise that Hardy's fiction defies reduction to a single formula. Examining the convergence of Romanticism and Naturalism, and how this convergence helped to create what Hardy modestly termed his "impressions"⁴¹ may contribute to an understanding of his tragic novels, but should not delimit his "original treatment". Hardy's genius resists categorisation; he experiments with new combinations and mutations of tragic elements in each novel to create not just a new form of tragedy, but a new constellation of tragic

³⁹ Shires, "The radical aesthetic of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*", CC, 161.

⁴⁰ Kramer, *The Forms of Tragedy*, 17.

⁴¹ Thomas Hardy, "Preface to the Fifth and Later Editions" of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*; cited in Orel, 27.

possibilities. His series, “Novels of Character and Environment”, and beyond that the canon of his fiction, make up a literary world in which one need never tire of finding, and never fear not finding, new patterns and insights. To adapt what he himself wrote of Shelley and Keats, Hardy is one of the “matchless singers” and the matchless novelists of European literature.⁴²

⁴² “Rome: At the Pyramid of Cestius near the graves of Shelley and Keats”, l. 20, *CP*, 105.

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