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**TRAGIC FATE AND HISTORY IN THOMAS HARDY'S
*THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE***

BY

TRISTAN PAGÈZE

**BACHELOR OF ARTS IN ANGLOPHONE STUDIES
UNIVERSITE BORDEAUX MONTAIGNE**

**MASTER'S DEGREE IN ANGLOPHONE STUDIES
UNIVERSITE SORBONNE NOUVELLE PARIS 3**

THESIS

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TRAGIC FATE AND HISTORY IN THOMAS HARDY'S***THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE*****By****Tristan Pagèze****B.A., Anglophone Studies, Université Bordeaux Montaigne, 2019****M.A., Anglophone Studies, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3, 2021****M.A., Comparative Literature/ Cultural Studies, University of New Mexico, 2023****ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores the operation of the tragic in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* by taking as a starting point the formalist approach to the genre of tragedy, before extending its definition to encompass the key concept of tragic conflict. This thesis argues that Hardy's tragic vision takes for object human history, and especially the effects of new, unveiled knowledge on the human psyche, thus locating the root cause of tragedy in these contingencies. This continuum between individual action and the larger historical causes that shape it is expressed via the narrator's discourse, and the discrepancy between his broader knowledge of his characters' situations and their blind recourse to a dominant power in charge. Then, using Michel Foucault's concept of the *dispositif*, this work analyzes the tragic fates of the novel's female protagonists. Finally, this thesis explores the progressive potentialities in *The Return of the Native* with regards to the social structure contemporary to its writing.

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Introduction

Among Hardy's great tragic novels such as *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Jude the Obscure*, *The Return of the Native* stands out in its conformity to the Aristotelian unities. In the words of Thomas Hardy, it is the only one in which "the unities are strictly observed, whatever virtue there may be in that [...] I, myself, am old fashioned enough to think there *is* a virtue in it, if it can be done without artificiality."¹ Besides concerns with degree of conformity to the Aristotelian unities, Hardy thought more of tragedy from the point of view of the individual whose inclinations lead to a disaster of some sort: "Tragedy exhibits the state of things in the life of an individual which unavoidably causes some natural aim or desire of his to end up in a catastrophe when carried out."² In an April 1878 note, Hardy would equate the term "Tragedy" with "Plot", as "the gradual closing of a situation that comes of ordinary human passions, prejudices, and ambitions, by reason of the characters taking no trouble to ward off the disastrous events, produced by the said passions, prejudices, and ambitions".³ In both commentaries, Hardy locates the genesis of tragedy in the individual's desires and aspirations, thus making it a matter of individual responsibility. With less emphasis on responsibility, a similar conception of tragic fate as intrinsic to the individual reappears in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), in its maxim that "Character is Fate."⁴ Such reflections on

¹ Hardy, Emily Florence. *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy*. New York: Macmillan, 1930. p.235.

² Hardy, Thomas. Millgate, Michael. *The Life and Works of Thomas Hardy by Thomas Hardy*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1984. p.182.

³ *Ibid*, p.123.

⁴ Hardy, Thomas. *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. London: Vintage Books, 2010. p.187.

the nature of tragedy and tragic fate reveal that these terms always convoke a certain conception of life, of human nature, of man's place in the time and place he inhabits, even of history; which necessarily have philosophical implications. In her work *Tragedy and the Victorian Novel: Theory and Practice in the Novels of George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and Henry James*, Jeannette King describes the semantics of the word in the Victorian context:

It was frequently used, as it is today, to mean an extremely sad and unexpected event. In fiction, as in life, it usually meant death or some equally final disaster. For many writers, however, the single event illustrated the nature of life in general, a pattern of continuous and inevitable – *not* expected – suffering. For them “tragedy” suggested a vision of life, a tragic philosophy, and it is in just such philosophical and moral terms that the comparison between tragedy and the novel is most often made.⁵

Within this semantic context, we can distinguish various approaches to Hardy's tragic novels in the scholarship and critical publications over the course of the twentieth century. Hardy's exclusion from F.R. Leavis's *The Great Tradition* as a “provincial manufacturer of gauche and heavy fictions”⁶ is imputed to his failing to meet the demands of the high genre of tragic realism, where George Eliot succeeds. In his *The Technique of Thomas Hardy* first published in 1922, James Warren Beach approaches the tragic in *The Return of the Native* from a compositional point of view by describing the Aristotelian unities that create dramatic tension while also locating inescapable, tragic, conflict between the two main protagonists of the novel, “the naked psychological forces pitted against each other as directly and fairly, with

⁵ King, Jeannette. *Tragedy and the Victorian Novel: Theory and Practice in the Novels of George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and Henry James*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978. p.2.

⁶ Leavis, F.R. *The Great Tradition*. New York: George W. Stewart, 1948. p.124.

as ingenious a balance of power, as in a game of chess.”⁷ As the conception of the tragic shifts from the neoclassical approach influenced by Aristotle’s poetics, what is really at stake when the “tragic” is being sought in Hardy’s novels is the *location of conflict* and the inexorable mechanics behind the unfolding of certain events. Indeed, such tragic conflict has repeatedly been found on the plane of dramatic action between the characters, as well as in the domains of psychology and desire. In a 1963 essay on *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, John Paterson sees a conflict between reason and passion taking place in Henchard’s psyche: “*The Mayor of Casterbridge* celebrates, first of all, the subordination of the passions that link man with nature to the reason that unites him with God [...] The precarious balance between reason and passion will be re-established only at the very end”⁸. Dale Kramer’s 1975 study of the *Forms of Tragedy* in Hardy’s novels locates the tragic conflict of *The Return of the Native* in the “psychic worlds” of the protagonists: “The uniqueness of *The Return of the Native*, among experiments in tragic form is that its two tragic protagonists – Clym and Eustacia – inhabit different psychic worlds and evoke for us different tragic reactions”.⁹ Another instance of the psychological localization of tragic conflict in Hardy’s novels is found in Rosemary Summer’s *Thomas Hardy, Psychological Novelist* (1981): “Clym, Knight, Angel, Sue and Jude are all examples of the problems of “advanced” thinkers (or those trying to be advanced) in a world which, while accepting industrial change (sometimes reluctantly) resists adamantly any challenge to its attitudes and preconceptions.” However, in her coining of the “psychological effects of being

⁷ Beach, James Warren. *The Technique of Thomas Hardy*. New York: Russel and Russel, 1962. p.95.

⁸ Paterson, John. “The Mayor of Casterbridge as Tragedy” in: Guerard, Albert Joseph, *Hardy: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs (N.J): Prentice-Hall, 1986. p.98.

ahead of one's time", Rosemary Summer's approach grounds such conflict in historical changes.

Likewise, while understanding the category of the tragic through the prism of conflict - and the inexorable mechanics behind the unfolding of events -, this thesis will also identify tragic conflict on multiple levels in the novel. First, the tragic is found in dramatic and psychological conflict between characters (this level of conflict is traditionally used to approach the tragic at play in Hardy's novels). Then, this thesis proposes to study tragic conflict as located in history. Indeed, Hardy's novels contain a tragic vision of history which is especially the case with *The Native*, as on multiple occasions the novel functions as a historical account of the conquest of pagan vitality by life denying Christianity. This is a point made by Paterson when he points out that the novel celebrated "a wisdom older than Christianity and fundamentally at war with it."¹⁰ In *Thomas Hardy and History*, published in 1974, R.J. White doesn't perceive the conquest of pagan wisdom by medieval Christianity as the tragic-historical content in the novel, but rather the disappearance of a certain English countryside, the English countryside: "[In] the half century between the repeal of the Corn Laws and the tragedy of Tess, a Wessex which was 'slipping out, changing the shape beyond what he remembered from his youth, receding into history', he [Hardy] was putting on record a history which he had lived on his pulses".¹¹ Another interpretation of the tragic historical content of Hardy's novel is found in Ian McGregor's *The Great Web: The Forms of Hardy's Major Fiction*, published the same year. For McGregor, Clym is the purveyor of a new relation between man and his

¹⁰ Paterson, John. *The Making of The Return of the Native*. Berkely: University of California Press, 1960: p.141

¹¹ White, R.J. *Thomas Hardy and History*. London: Macmillan, 1974. p.5.

environment into the immemorable Heath “in introducing Clym, Hardy has introduced a contemporary consciousness into Wessex”¹². My thesis focuses on another tragic conflict in the novel that corresponds to the discrepancy between what the mind of the human species is naturally inclined to believe and what scientific advancements reveal about the nature of the environment the species inhabits. This has the effect of destroying the traditional time scales with which humanity thought itself as well as its status and place in the world. Furthermore, the ability to perceive a knowing conscious God behind nature becomes impossible. This aspect of the tragic conflict in *The Native* is the cause of the main protagonists’ existential malaise and weariness that leads them to their *hamartia*. This thesis will argue that such conflict is rooted in epistemological shifts contemporary to Hardy’s writing of the novel as well as wider scientific and religious debates at the time.

Next, and most importantly, this thesis will demonstrate how tragic fate in *The Return of the Native* is inseparable from the *historical forces* found in the fabric of society via Michel Foucault’s concept of the *dispositif*. Among the critics who have grounded the tragedy of the novel in historical forces, G.W. Sherman considers that “Eustacia embodies the decadence of the bourgeoisie, who, for want of anything better, glorify the individual”¹³ and that the novel “presents a transitional study of character and environment from a peasant society emerging from the handicraft stage.”¹⁴ However, it is in D.H. Lawrence’s *Study of Thomas Hardy* that

¹² Mc. Gregor, Ian. *The Great Web: The Forms of Hardy’s Major Fiction*. Totowa (N.J): Rowman and Littlefield, 1974. p.110.

¹³ Sherman, G.W. *The Pessimism of Thomas Hardy*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976. p.140.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p.141.

the historical forces that Lawrence calls “society”¹⁵ and “the mere judgement of man”¹⁶ are shown to place the novel’s heroine, Eustacia, in direct conflict with the social fabric, thus precipitating her downfall: “What was there in their position that was necessarily tragic ? Necessarily painful it was, but they were not at war with God, only with society.”¹⁷ When it comes to the nature of the social fabric with which tragic fate is interwoven in Hardy’s novels, Jane Thomas gives a fascinating account of certain discursive practices present in the novel that are furthermore correlated with a legal apparatus and material dependence upon men to enforce patriarchal power¹⁸. In an article titled ““The Woman Shall Bear her Iniquity: Death as Social Discipline in Thomas Hardy’s ‘*The Return of the Native*’”, Sara A. Malton describes the adverse social order faced by Eustacia Vye using Michel Foucault’s concept of the panopticon, thus emphasizing the operation of self-disciplining behaviors based on the spatial disposition of the Heath. The connectedness between discursive practices, laws such as those in place until the Married Women’s Propriety Act of 1882, as well as *space* with the workings of rumor among the Heath people and the imperatives of marriage due to material dependence, show that Michel Foucault’s *dispositif* or “apparatus” is a relevant conceptual tool to map the social fabric that, although immanent and secular, leads the characters into a *tragic* fate. Finally, this thesis will address the question of the possibility of progress in the novel: since the tragic functions with the social fabric, is there any space for improvement, for imagining the social

¹⁵ Lawrence, David Herbert. *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. p.30.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ See the chapter titled “Policing the Self” in: Thomas, Jane. *Thomas Hardy, Femininity and Dissent*. London: Macmillan Press: 1999.

structure differently? Or does the novel merely constitute an attack on the idea of progress, on the progressive ideas Clym met in Paris which prompted him to return to his native land in the first place, in order to *change* it? Hardy's novel constitutes an attack on the idea of progress insofar as Clym's return in order to *change* Egdon Heath functions as his *hubris* leading to his downfall. Still, the novel's representation of the fates of women intertwined with the social fabric does lead to possibilities of questioning its legitimacy on the grounds of the ideals of the Enlightenment.

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Chapter I: Tragic Fate in *The Return of the Native*

1. The Return of the Native as a novelistic tragedy

The aura of cultural authority specific to the genre of tragedy is not only caused by the antiquity of the form but also by the limited number of plays and an authorship restricted to Euripides, Aeschylus and Sophocles. The sense of an immutable tragic form stems from the many attempts at systematization of the genre after its rediscovery during the Renaissance, in the course of the Elizabethan and classical centuries in Europe. The object of these stubborn attempts at systematization are the *poetics* of tragedy, its formalistic and thematic requirements (its notorious “three unities”) as well as the notion of an underlying philosophy or worldview requiring identification and systematization. If we go to the canonical sources, with Aristotle’s typology and codification of tragedy, we find criteria that de facto would exclude the novelistic form from the category of tragedy. Still, if the desired effect of tragedy is isolated from Aristotle’s *poetics*, the following text provides the possibility for a less restrictive understanding of what is tragic:

But again, Tragedy is an imitation not only of a complete action, but of events inspiring fear and pity. Such an effect is best produced when the events come on us by surprise; and the effect is heightened when, at the same time, they follow as cause and effect. The tragic wonder will then be greater than if they happened of themselves or by accident; for even coincidences are most striking when they have an air of design.¹⁹

¹⁹ Aristotle, S.H. Butcher, *The Poetics of Aristotle* (4th ed.). London: Macmillan, 1922. p.39.

From the point of view of desired effect, tragedy is a sequence of represented events, some of them arising by accident and others seemingly by design, inducing terror and pity in its spectators. In the midst of the French classic century, in his preface to *Bérénice* (1671), Jean Racine addresses what he perceives as the worship among his contemporaries of the formalistic apparatus serving the tragic dramatic effect over the effect itself:

La principale règle est de plaire et de toucher. Toutes les autres ne sont faites que pour parvenir à cette première. Mais toutes ces règles sont d'un long détail, dont je ne leur conseille pas de s'embarrasser. Ils ont des occupations plus importantes. Qu'ils se reposent sur nous de la fatigue d'éclaircir les difficultés de la poétique d'Aristote, qu'ils se réservent le plaisir de pleurer et d'être attendris, et qu'ils me permettent de leur dire ce qu'un musicien disait à Philippe, roi de Macédoine, qui prétendait qu'une chanson n'était pas selon les règles : « A Dieu ne plaise, seigneur, que vous soyez jamais si malheureux que de savoir ces choses-là mieux que moi ! »²⁰

In this preface, Racine makes the point of emphasizing the spectator's emotional response (pity and terror) and delimits the importance of the rules as simple means to produce this effect. Furthermore, the textual and dramatic underpinnings of the drama are believed to be better kept undisclosed, insofar as they could compromise the pleasure provided to the spectator.

Putting Aristotle and Racine aside, an insight into scholarly commentary on tragedy teaches us that totalizing definitions of the tragic plot are problematic and fail to address the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the tragedies written in Athens circa 5th century B.C. In an

²⁰ Jean Racine, *Bérénice*. Paris : Flammarion, 2019. p.7

essay titled “Myth into *Muthos*: The Shaping of Tragic Plot”, Peter Burian stresses the diversity of tragic narratives and argues against the assumption among critics that there is a true master narrative of tragedy: “[the most widely accepted master narrative] emphasizes *hamartia*, generally understood as the “tragic flaw” of overweening pride, and its punishment. The tragic hero, although caught in circumstances beyond his ken and control, is finally to be understood as destroyed by the gods (or fate) because of his own failings.”²¹ If there is no single tragic narrative, then, Peter Burian argues, we are presented with a set of characteristic story patterns. On the other hand, conflict is the common tragic feature transcending all plot variations. The characteristics of tragic conflict are its excess and the inexorability of the worsening strife between its protagonists, the only hope for reconciliation, for the reversing or cessation of the mechanics of destruction, lies in a sort of providence, such as the gods’ intervention: “The first and most obvious quality of tragic conflict is its extremity: it does not ordinarily admit of compromise or mediation [...] Where reconciliation of enemies does occur in tragedy, it is generally the result of direct divine intervention, as when Heracles persuades Philoctetes to fight at Troy”²². The tragic inexorability of fate in the 20th-century rewritings of classical tragedies such as Jean Giraudoux’s *La guerre de Troie n’aura pas lieu* remains the essential feature of the genre. Another example is Jean Cocteau’s choice of naming his 1932 revision of Oedipus Rex *La machine infernale*, alluding to mechanical, inescapable fate as a malevolent *machine*. In the words of the chorus in Jean Anouilh’s 1944 revision of *Antigone*: “Et voilà. Maintenant, le ressort est bandé. Cela n’a plus qu’à se dérouler tout seul. C’est cela qui est

²¹ Peter Burian, “Myth and *Muthos*: the Shaping of Tragic Plot” i.e.. Easterling et al, *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. p.181.

²² *Ibid.*

commode dans la tragédie. On donne le petit coup de pouce pour que cela démarre [...] Cela roule tout seul. C'est minutieux, bien huilé depuis toujours."²³

Before delving into the specific ways in which Thomas Hardy engages with and uses the motifs of fate (the Gordian mechanical knot, requiring providential intervention) and tragic conflict (irreconcilable and extreme) in *The Return of the Native*, it will be necessary to address the structural correspondence between classical tragedy and the novel. In *The Technique of Thomas Hardy*, and specifically the chapter dedicated to Hardy's sixth novel, titled "Drama: *The Return of the Native*, James Warren Beach emphasizes the highly dramatic quality of the novel, stating that *The Native* is "a novel in which the author is "strongly and consciously under the control of the dramatic idea."²⁴ Furthermore, the dramatic idea is expressed in the formal neatness and predominant consistency of tone in the novel. Furthermore, Beach situates Hardy into a category of authors including Victor Hugo, George Eliot, and Henry James, whose characteristic division of their novels into many titled parts pertains to a general "bias for the dramatic"²⁵. Indeed, *The Native* follows a five book structure of varying length, corresponding to the traditional five acts of classical tragedy. The five books are titled: *The Three Women*, *The Arrival*, *The Fascination*, *The Closed Door*, *The Discovery*. In meeting the demands of his publisher, Hardy also added a sixth book titled *Aftervourses*, that recounts the marriage of Diggory Venn and Thomasin Yeobright and Clym's renewed existence as a Tolstoy-like itinerant preacher. In the original magazine version of *The Native* published in *Belgravia* from

²³ Jean Anouilh, *Antigone* (1944). Paris : La table ronde, 2008. p.30.

²⁴ James Warren Beach, *The Technique of Thomas Hardy*. New York: Russel and Russel, 1962. p.88

²⁵ *Ibid.*

January to December 1878, Hardy included brief arguments attached to each of the five books. *The Three Women* “depicts the scenes which result from an antagonism between the hopes of four persons... By reason of this strife of wishes, a happy consummation to all concerned is impossible; but an *easing of the situation* is begun by the inevitable decadence of a too capricious love, and rumours of a new arrival”²⁶. The “too capricious love” refers to the love affair between Wildeve and Eustacia and the rumors of a new arrival concern Clym’s – the native’s – return. This note furthermore clarifies Hardy’s intention of setting his book in irreconcilable *agon*, perspectives of resolution reduced to a mere “easing” of the tension. From this established incompatibility of hopes, carefully constructed by means of a typology of characters (psychologies), an enclosed place (the Heath, unity of place) and the delimited time span of one year (unity of time) will follow the inescapable tragic mechanics of fate, the only hope lying in a highly unlikely providential intervention.

In his prefixed note to the second book, Hardy describes the effect of Clym’s return as “*giving a new bias to emotions in one quarter, [precipitating] affairs in another with unexpected rapidity.*”²⁷ News of Clym’s return has the effect of filling Eustacia with still undetermined ardent intentions and fantasies with regards to the Parisian diamond salesman. Further on in the chapter, it will have the effect of precipitating Damon Wildeve’s marriage with Thomasin Yeobright. Hardy specifies the tragic content of the third book dedicated to the reciprocal fascination and attraction between Clym and Eustacia, as “Clym’s passion for

²⁶ Hardy’s brief arguments preceding *The Native*’s parts in the original magazine are quoted in James Warren’s Beach “The Technique of Thomas Hardy”. p.95.

²⁷ Ibid.

Eustacia” that “hampers his plans, and *causes a sharp divergence of opinion, committing him to an irretrievable step.*”²⁸ In the end, Clym sticks to his plan of creating a school with the purpose of educating the natives of the Heath, under the influence of the Fourierist socialist idealism with which he came into contact in Paris. The “sharp divergence of opinion” and ‘irretrievable step’ alluded to by Hardy refer to Clym’s alienation from his mother, who disapproves of his marriage to a woman whom she considers unvirtuous. The degradation of Clym’s relationship with his mother foreshadows the events that will precipitate the morbid fates of the characters involved. Another controlled momentary easing of the tension is effectuated by Hardy in the following book, *The Closed Door*: “the old affection between, mother and son reasserts itself”; however, “a critical juncture ensues, truly the *turning point* in the lives of all concerned – *Eustacia has the move*, and she makes it; but not till the sun has set does she suspect the *consequences involved in her choice of courses.*”²⁹ The closed door is the door with which Clym’s mother is faced when she decides to make her first visit to the conjugal cottage where the couple whose marriage she disapproves of has been living. A series of circumstances makes it impossible for Eustacia, who is with Wildeve at this moment, to open the door to her mother in law. Mrs. Yeobright sees Eustacia’s face through the window and wrongly deduces that her son and his wife refused to let her in. Heartbroken and full of dereliction, she walks on the Heath to her death. In the aftermath of the tragic event, suspicion towards his wife arises in Clym’s mind, harsh words are exchanged and both parties end up living separately. The “move” Hardy outlines in his abstract concerns the renewed status of Wildeve in Eustacia’s mind following his inheritance of a large sum of money. The recent

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid, p.96

developments of fate prompt her to join Wildeva for a better life attuned to her ambitions. Unable to bring herself to such a decision, she changes her mind and leaps into the black pool of the millrace out of desperation in the fifth - and later penultimate - book. At this moment, the novel achieves its tragic climax, as Wildeva and Clym jump into the pool to save her. The three of them are fetched from the pool and only Clym survives. In the magazine publication, Hardy chooses to outline the content of this final act, *The Discovery*, as “*the natural effects of the foregoing misadventures.*”³⁰ Hardy’s wording in his introductory summary of the essential content of the five initial books of the novel reveal an awareness of the mechanistic inescapable ramifications of fate at the heart of his authorly intentions when writing the five acts of the novel. The means that Hardy uses to maintain and control the tragical intensity of the novel are not foreign to the Aristotelian’s rules for tragedy. As mentioned earlier, Hardy makes a novelistic use of the three unities.

In his chapter dedicated to drama in *The Return*, James Warren Beach outlines Hardy’s use of these unities towards the end of dramatic concentration. First, the novelistic unity of time is to be found in the time span of the story being “a year and a day”³¹, if we omit the sixth added chapter. The fact that all the scenes of the novel occur on the Heath has an effect not unlike that of the Aristotelian unity of space. Another discernable “unit” at work in the novel is conferred by the general gloominess of the Heath (unity of tone). Hardy significantly

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid*, p.86

chooses to open the novel with a contemplation of the Heath on a dark and rainy November evening. Moreover, the Heath inscribes a predisposition to “tragical possibilities”:

It was at present a place perfectly accordant with man’s nature – neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly; neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame; but, like man, slighted and enduring; and withal singularly colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony. As with some persons who have long lived apart, solitude seemed to look out of its countenance. It had a lonely face, suggesting tragical possibilities.³²

In this introductory personification of the Heath, we see an allusion to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, pertaining to the moral character of the tragic hero, that can neither be too good nor too wicked to inspire tragic pity in the spectator. The situation advocated for is the “intermediary” one: “There remains, then, the character between these two extremes, - that of a man who is not eminently good and just yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty.”³³

³² Hardy, Thomas. *The Return of the Native* (1878), New York: Norton, 2006. p.10.

³³ *Op. Cit.* p. 47.

2. Tragic fate when the gods have become silent

The trope of personification applied to an indifferent natural mass has the foreshadowing effect of placing the fate of man in a cosmos in which the ability to recognize a benevolent deity in the image of which he is made is cruelly compromised. This vertigo corresponds to a modern dislocation of man's status in the world, an effect of the uncovering of new laws of nature, that will be further addressed in the fourth part of this first chapter. In the chapter "My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is" dedicated to the portrayal of Clym, Hardy evokes the universal predicament in which humanity has come to find itself:

The truth seems to be that a long line of disillusionive centuries has permanently displaced the Hellenic idea of life, or whatever it may be called. What the Greeks only suspected we know well; what their Aeschylus imagined our nursery children feel. That old-fashioned rebelling in the general situation grows less and less possible as we uncover the defects of our natural laws, and see the quandary that man is in by their operation. (p.153)

The type of tragedy addressed here corresponds to a democratized, universal tragic fate, described by Schopenhauer in the following manner: "The true sense of tragedy is the deeper insight, that it is not his own individual sins that the hero atones for, but original sin, the crime of existence itself."³⁴ In his *Modern Tragedy*, Raymond Williams qualifies Schopenhauer's understanding of universal tragedy as the "secularization of fate"³⁵. Yet if the universal tragedy of existence dominated by blind fate is the type of *fatum* found in *The Native*, the structure of the book, its use of Aristotelian unities as well as its biblical, mythical, and classical references

³⁴ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*. London: Keegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & co, 1909. p.328.

³⁵ Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy*. London: Chatto & Windo, 1966. p. 37.

to art and the literary tradition prevents the novel from dereliction that would lead to inaction. The human material that Hardy dramatizes still has attitudes of seeking and crying out to transcendent categories such as god or fate. To this extent the cosmos of the novel with its agnostic narrator and the psychological space of his characters are at odds. Moreover, the novel's cosmos that excludes any sense of transcendence is also at odds with the imperatives of the genre of tragedy in which the characters eventually curse or seek help from a transcendent third party: God, the gods, or fate. Indeed, there is an ongoing tension between the story as a recognizable object infused with cultural references that place it within a literary tradition, recognizable tropes of the tragic and novelistic genres, and the co-present notion of an ungraspable impersonal will that blindly governs existence. The aforementioned passage on the "tragical possibilities" of the Heath seems to postulate *loneliness* as the cause behind foreshadowed tragic *hamartia*. What we see in the novel's tragic heroine Eustacia is a pattern of loneliness, boredom, frustration, and rebellion. However, her discontent with her living situation on the Heath stems from her overflowing vitality. In the chapter dedicated to her portrayal titled "The Queen of Night", Eustacia is depicted with the vitality of a Greek heroine or Goddess. Hardy goes into great detail to emphasize her Hellenic temperament, making her the daughter of a Corfiot he fantasizes to be a descendant of Homeric kings. The fact that her mother is a Saxon and her father a Corfiot echoes the tragic discrepancy of her overflowing divine or heroic "Greek" vitality with her hindered existence on the dark gothic Heath. In the chapter dedicated to Eustacia's characterization, Hardy takes care to endow his character with the tragic dignity of a Greek goddess, she is "the raw material of a divinity" (p.60), while her presence induces "memories of such things as Bourbon roses, rubies, and tropical midnight", and her mood recalls "lotus-eaters and the march in Athalie". The trope of mythical

transfiguration further characterizes her as belonging to the rank attributed to high tragedy; she is intensity Greek, heroic and divine: “The new moon behind her head, an old helmet upon it, a diadem of accidental dewdrops round her brow, would have been adjuncts sufficient to strike the note of Artemis, Athena, or Hera” (p.61).

Hardy chooses to postulate Eustacia’s rebellious attitude against fate in his introductory chapter. However, the form of the novel and the epistemological grounds of the European nineteenth century make it impossible for this realist novel to refer without stylistic intent or poetic license to the “gods in charge” of destiny. The Destiny with which she is at odds is merely “a creature of her mind”: “She could show a most reproachful look at times, but it was directed less against human beings than against certain creatures of her mind, the chief of these being Destiny” (p.64). Her Destiny doesn’t lie in events shaped by divine intention but in the untimeliness of her temperament in relation to the time and place in which she is situated: “She had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman” (p.60). In the aftermath of the event precipitating the tragic *peripetia* of the novel resulting in Mrs. Yeobright’s dismissal at the door of her son and his wife’s cottage, Eustacia appears to be in a state of rebellion against some greater scheme that is, here as well, impossible to understand clearly outside of its necessary presence in the tragic “logic” of the novel: “she laid the fault upon the shoulders of some indistinct, colossal Prince of the world.” (p.275). Furthermore, the wording of fate in Eustacia’s discourse at the climax of the tragic *peripetia* of the novel, in her last cry of revolt against her fate before she commits suicide, remains in tune with an indeterminate notion of destiny to which is added her awareness of being crushed by “things” over which she has no agency:

How I have tried and tried to be a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me ! ... “ She cried in a frenzy of bitter revolt. “O, the cruelty of putting me into this ill-conceived world! ... I have been injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond my control... O, how hard it is of Heaven to devise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to Heaven at all! (p.303)

At this point, Eustacia addresses divine providence, complaining about the harshness of the heavens that shaped her destiny in a way she deems unjust. Eustacia’s tragic revolt at divine providence serves to ironically emphasize her untimeliness in the historical and special setting of the novel. The ironic discrepancy between her conceptualization of providence at this moment and, on another diegetic level, the narrator’s conceptualization of a universal “quandary” that the discovery of natural laws has made man aware has the effect of inducing tragic pity as a reader response. In his early *Theory of the Novel*, György Lukács establishes a connection between the hero of the novel and epistemological shifts in western history with regards to the idea of god and man’s capacity to recognize and appeal to divine providence:

[...] the hero of the novel, is the product of estrangement from the outside world. The autonomous life of interiority is possible and necessary only when the distinctions between men have made an unbridgeable chasm; when the gods are silent and neither sacrifices nor ecstatic gifts of tongues can solve their riddle; when the world of deeds separates itself from men and, [...], when interiority and adventure are forever divorced from one another³⁶.

At the heart of Hardy’s novelistic tragedy is a paradox between the inescapable mechanics of fate and the appeal to a providential being (the gods) to curse or to ask for help. Here the active

³⁶ György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (1916). Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1971. p. 66

Destiny, the malevolent prince against which Eustacia rebels, is located in what Lukács calls the “autonomous life of interiority”, the inner space of Eustacia’s mind where Destiny is a “creature” among others. Still, in this world in which “the gods are silent”, Hardy also induces his readers to perceive his character through the prism of Promethean transgression.

As we transition from the Heath folk’s bonfire on Guy Fawkes day into the scene of Wildeve’s secret meeting with Eustacia, the complexity of her scheming to arrange those meetings endows her with demiurgic qualities, as she sees Wildeve’s presence as “some wondrous thing she had created out of the chaos” (p.56). The demiurgic skills that Eustacia places at the service of her excessive vitality seek to intensify the thrill of love and secure her situation as a “splendid woman”. The ongoing motif of spying, overhearing, and navigating the indeterminate space of the Heath at night with her telescope and hourglass in hand (as technological means to tame the laws of distance and time common to the Heath folk) reinforces the weight of Eustacia’s demiurgic agency in the novel. This motif of demiurgic agency is also prevalent in Diggory Venn who intervenes to secure Thomasin Yeobright’s wellbeing, using his nomadic status and the indeterminate space of the Heath to “rectify matters” (p.200) in the likeness of a benevolent providence. Eustacia also uses her agency to transgress gender boundaries, disguising herself as a Turkish knight to smuggle into the Saint George mummery in order to organize her encounter with Clym, the man from Paris. Moreover, she acquires the costume by allowing the young man destined to be the Turkish knight to hold and caress her hand in exchange for it. The gendering of Eustacia’s demiurgic agency and her distinctiveness causes rumors about her being a witch among the Heath people, leading to her being stabbed with a needle in church by Susan Nunsuch, who accuses her of bewitching her children. Later in the novel, when Eustacia witnesses her husband joyfully

singing while partaking in the collective action of furze cutting, she is horrified. Clym responds by shunning Eustacia's Promethean rebellion and reaffirming his own world view that he claims is informed by experience: "Now, don't you suppose, my inexperienced girl, that I cannot rebel, in high Promethean fashion against the gods and fate as well as you. [...] the more I see of life the more do I perceive that there is nothing particularly great in its greatest walks, and therefore nothing particularly small in mine of furze-cutting." (p.214) The essential antagonism of Eustacia and Clym's psychologies and worldviews has been outlined by many Hardy scholars, notably Dale Kramer, who in his work titled *Thomas Hardy: The Forms of Tragedy* observes: "The uniqueness of *The Return of the Native* among experiments in tragic form is that its two tragic protagonists – Clym and Eustacia – inhabit different psychic worlds and evoke from us different tragic reactions. They resemble Antigone and Créon in that as tragic figures they draw upon different sources of vitality."³⁷ The psychological discrepancy between the two protagonists does serve as one of the main tensions operating in the novel, as a point of irredeemable tragic *conflict* from which the malaise of their marriage takes its origin. Still, the conflicting worldviews that the furze cutting scene crystalizes for us are determined by the characters' respective reactions to the universal "quandary", the recognition of the gods' silence, the blindness of fate, and the impossible appeal to divine providence to intervene in the unflinching mechanics of fate determined by natural laws.

Within the context of a novel that inclines towards the tragic from a structural, narrative, and thematic point of view, the question of each character's positioning with regards to godly

³⁷ Dale Kramer. *Thomas Hardy: The Forms of Tragedy*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975. p.50

providence proves revelatory of their function in the story, and of the author's own philosophical positionings. Indeed, transcendental intervention is the only means by which the inexorable mechanics of fate and of the laws of nature may be momentarily suspended or reversed. The transcendent categories of Justice and divine mercy also operate in a similar way. The disruption of an otherwise inexorable fate is found everywhere in the medieval Christian world, and specifically in the myth of saints. One can think of the myth of Saint Genevieve who, while Attila's army is heading straight towards the city of Paris, prompts the population to pray rather than flee, an activity whose outcome will be the unexpected detour of the army towards the city of Orléans. The intercession of the saint and the resulting intervention of godly providence annuls the inescapable mechanics of tragedy. One can also think of the myth of Joan of Arc who remains calm and composed during her burning at the stake, miraculously annulling the natural laws of physics. In his satirical treatment of Christian characters in the novel, Hardy takes particular care to attack the notion of a benevolent divinity operating through providence, while asserting the ungraspable nature of an ungoverned blind fate whose outcomes we interpret as "chance" or "fortune". This aspect of Hardy's attack on the anti-tragic Christian conception of providence is made most explicit in the gambling scene between Christian Cantle and Wildeve. Because of the uncovering of natural laws, the theological conception of a benevolent deity to which men can appeal through prayer or sacrifice becomes a mere farce and what remains are degraded forms of religion: superstition, childish fear-inducing doctrines, *fatum* and providence mutate into arbitrary chance or charlatanistic fortune telling riddles. At the stake of this overlooked passage in Hardy's novel is a caustic attack on Christian Cantle's degenerated, superstitious conceptualization of fate. Cantle, who embodies the caricatural Christian is used by Hardy throughout the novel to expose his awareness of an

obsolete and impotent Christianity. In this passage, Christian has been charged with the task of delivering money from Mrs. Yeobright after Thomasin's complaints about Wildeville not providing her with any money for her own spending. Upon running into Wildeville, Christian absent-mindedly reveals what he is carrying. Wildeville, for whom his wife's property is by right his, is upset at the idea of being uninformed of such commerce between his wife and her mother, and uses Christian's naïve conceptualization of fate to recover the money from him. Wildeville's scheme begins upon hearing Cattle's fetishization of dices as magical objects: "What magical machines these little things be, Mr. Wildeville :?" 'Tis a game I should never get tired of [...] That these little things should carry such luck, and such charm, and such a spell, and such power in 'em passes all I ever heard or zeed" (p.191). Upon this, Wildeville mollifies Cattle by telling him stories about the possible outcome of his "luck": "You ought to win some money, now that you've got them. Any woman would marry you then. Now is your time, Christian, and I would recommend you not to let it slip. Some men are born to luck, some are not"(p.191). Wildeville intoxicates Christian with whimsical tales of fortunes being made through petty chance before proceeding to gamble all his money from him. Christian, terrified at the realization of having lost Mrs. Yeobright's guineas cries out to the heavens and runs away like a scared animal: "Christian turned and flung himself on the ferns in a convulsion of remorse, "O, what shall I do with my wretched self?" he groaned? "What shall I do? Will any good Heaven have mercy upon my wicked soul?" (p.194)

3. A typology of characters: the pious and the rebellious

The type of Christianity satirized here, a medieval Christianity, corresponds to the same medieval religious world of saints, of expected providential intervention in the world to potentially suspend the mechanics of fate. In *The Native*, Christian belief in characters also functions as a flaw. However, the Christian flaw doesn't have the necessary dignity to be qualified as tragic insofar as it arises where vitality is decrepit. All the novel's main and secondary characters are at some point situated with regards to Christian belief, thus creating a typology of characters. This typology can be represented by two poles: the pious/martyr and the heroic/rebel. Eustacia occupies one extreme of this spectrum, as a character whose overflowing pure vitality places her beyond transcendent moral categories of good and evil. Her temperament is infused with a Nietzschean will to power, and her tragic rebelliousness against the order of things endows her with tragic dignity rather than with the stigmata of moralistic anathema. Here again, the extent to which Hardy goes to avoid the pitfalls of moral condemnation in the book's Victorian context of publication is worthy of notice. In essence, Miss Vye is in accordance with the eternal facts that govern humanity as they did in the classical world. Unlike Clym, Eustacia's vision of existence is not shaped by reaction against or negotiation with a world so foreign to the human conception of Justice:

She had the passion and instincts which make a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman. Had it been possible for the earth and mankind to be entirely in her grasp for a while, had she handled the distaff, the spindle, and the shears at her own free will, few in the world would have noticed the change of government. There would have been the same inequality of lot, the same heaping up of favours here,

of contumely there, the same generosity before justice, the same perpetual dilemmas, the same captious alteration of caresses and blows that we endure now. (p.61)

Next to Eustacia in this typology of characters we find Damon Wildeve, a decrepit romantic, the “Rousseau of Egdon” (p.188), whose source of vitality resembles Eustacia’s. Wildeve handles his dissatisfaction with his life on the Heath as an innkeeper although he is an engineer, through rebellious means and untimely sentimentalism: “To be yearning for the difficult, to be weary of that offered; to care for the remote, to dislike the near” (p.196). Eustacia and Wildeve’s common quality of superior vitality is most manifest during a dancing scene between the two characters after Eustacia’s realization that she won’t change her husband’s mind about not moving back to Paris: “The dance had come like an irresistible attack upon whatever sense of social order there was in their minds, to drive them back into old paths which were now doubly irregular” (p.220). After three successive dances, Wildeve leads his partner to a grassy mound a few yards away, and we are told that “From the time that he addressed her at the beginning of the dance till now they had not exchanged a word” (p.220). The ineffable nature of their dance reinforces the characters’ distinctive ability to dwell in pure life and forget about the world of convention. At the height of the novel’s tragic sequence of events, Eustacia and Wildeve both die, as if a petty bourgeois orderly existence obtained by compromising their vitality could not solve the *agon* they found themselves in. Furthermore, the repeated motif of sudden bursts of uncontrolled dancing in the novel is also a means of contrasting the “pious” Christian and the potentially rebellious pagan characters. At the beginning of the novel, the Heath folk lose themselves in a sudden outburst of dance around the bonfire:

And in half a minute all that could be seen on Rainbarrow was a whirling of dark shapes amid a boiling confusion of sparks, which leapt around the dancers as high as their waists. The chief noises were women’s shrill cries, men’s laughter, Susan’s stays and

pattens, Olly Dowden's "heu-heu-heu!" and the strumming of the wind upon the furze-bushes, which formed a kind of tune to the demoniac measure they trod. (p.16)

Christian Cantle is then shown standing nearby, uneasy, unable to join, and morally condemning what he is witnessing: "They ought not to do it – how the vlinkers do fly! 'tis tempting the Wicked one, 'tis." Setting aside the characters Cantle and Nunsuch who embody the superstitious dark age aspects of Christianity, most of the Heath folk are untouched by the Christian "flaw". Indeed, for the most part the Heath people's vitality has only been superficially tamed by the momentary "mediæval" doctrines:

The instincts of merry England lingered on here with exceptional vitality, and the symbolic customs which tradition has attached to each season of the year were yet a reality on Egdon. Indeed, the impulses of all such outlandish hamlets are pagan still – in these spots homage to nature, self-adoration, frantic gaieties, fragments of Teutonic rites to divinities whose names are forgotten, seem in some way or other to have survived *mediæval doctrine*." (p.468)

Next in this typology of characters in relation to Christian conceptions is Diggory Venn who uses his daemonic skills to try to change the course of things, working obscurely to secure the wellbeing of Thomasin throughout the novel. He successfully recovers her money from Wildeve through gambling with dice, equivalent to the act of defying fate. His successful mastery of fate in recovering Thomasin's guineas reinforces his daemonic dimension at this point in the novel. In the sixth additional book, Venn gets rid of the "mark of Cain" (p.71) that the trade of reddle has imprinted on his face, a mark that had previously prevented him from fully accessing bourgeois respectability, by changing his occupation to dairy farming and marrying Wildeve's widow. The change in the Reddleman's marginal and nomadic occupation into the world of petty bourgeois existence matches a 'Christian' change in his countenance:

“ To [Clym’s] astonishment there stood within the room Diggory Venn, no longer a reddleman, but exhibiting the strangely altered hues of an ordinary Christian countenance” (p.370). The most extreme characters on the “pious” pole of this typology are the secondary characters Christian Cantle and Susan Nunsuch. However, the main characters Thomasin and Clym both incorporate characteristics of the “pious type”.

In the aforementioned furze-cutting episode, Clym responds to Eustacia’s reproach by telling her that he too would rebel against “the gods and fate” in “high promethean fashion”. Therefore, Clym whose life resembles what Peter Burian calls the tragic story pattern of the foundling’s return³⁸, has come to a philosophy of submission to “fate and the gods”, joyfully participating in collective agricultural labor. Moreover, his willingness to live according to the right “order of the world” is concomitant with his secular belief in a dominant power of a moral quality not lower than his own at the end of the novel. In the aftermath of the novel’s tragic succession of events, he is, in an all-too-human way, unable to conceive of a malevolent or mercilessly un-human dominant power behind the shaping of his tragic fate: “

He did sometimes think that he had been ill-used by fortune, so far as to say that to be born is a palpable dilemma, and that instead of men aiming to advance in life in glory, they should calculate how to retreat out of it without shame. But that he and his had been sarcastically and pitilessly handled in having such irons thrust into their souls he did not maintain long. It is usually so, except with the sternest of men. Human beings, in their generous endeavour to construct a hypothesis that shall not degrade a First Cause, have always hesitated to conceive a dominant power of lower moral quality than their own (p.365)

³⁸ *Op. Cit.* p.188.

Clym's attitude here distinguishes him from Eustacia who rebels and bitterly cries out to the heavens before committing suicide. His ethos of accepting the hardships through which fate has put him and of embracing a simple life also distinguishes Clym from the other more "heroic" characters. Wildevre rebels against the order of things by the means of escape from his current place. This is the offer he makes to Eustacia in this last nightly meeting: "Such a rare plant in such a wild place it grieves me to see [...] Do you want to go anywhere ? Do you want to escape the place altogether?" (p.323) Clym's life trajectory in the novel is also determined by his ethics of self-renunciation, a secular avatar of Christian thought. The affiliation of Clym's motivations with less discernable Christian ideas is hinted at on many occasions, notably in the words of his mother: "'it is right that there should be schoolmasters, and missionaries, and all such men," she replied. "But it is right, too, that I should try to lift you out of this life into something richer"(p.149). Eustacia too affiliates Clym with the Apostle Paul, when reflecting on his idealism and disregard for "outward things": "He's an enthusiast about ideas, and careless about outward things. He reminds me of the Apostle Paul." (p.268) From her "heroic" perspective, Eustacia sees an inadequacy between Christian moral excellence and worldly success: "the worst of it is that though Paul was excellent as a man in the Bible he would hardly have done in real life." (p.268). Clym himself explains his renunciation of an opulent but vain life devoid of any higher purpose by comparing his evolution to St. Paul's: "I get up every morning and see the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain, as St. Paul says, and yet there am I, trafficking in glittering splendours with wealthy women and titled libertines, [...] I cannot do it anymore" (p.150). The narrator also designates the man who transitioned from the diamond trade in Paris to

the vast enterprise of educating the Heath folk in order to include them in the grand march of progress as being affected by the type of madness found in priests and prophets:

Was Yeobright's mind well-proportioned? No. A well-proportioned mind is one which shows no particular bias; one of which we may safely say that it will never cause its owner to be confined as a madman, tortured as a heretic, or crucified as a blasphemer. Also, on the on the other hand, that it will never cause him to be applauded as a prophet, revered as a priest, or exalted as king (p.148)

Therefore, Clym is shown in a light that makes him simultaneously pious and heroic. At this point in the novel, he embodies the figure of a saint. At the furze cutting encounter with Eustacia, Clym compares himself to Lazarus, the beggar from the "Rich man and Lazarus" parable in the book of Luke, a character who became the patron saint of lepers in the Middle Ages: "My hook and gloves are like the St. Lazarus rattle of the leper, warning the world to get out of the way of a sight that would sadden them." (p.216)

In the course of the dispute with his mother about his return to the Hearth, Clym expresses his constitutive inability to enjoy the luxurious life - "I cannot enjoy delicacies, good things are wasted upon me" (p.168) – in response to which his mother accuses him of getting weary of doing well. Hardy slides in a particular Biblical reference in Clym's response ("I am not weary of that, though I am weary of what you mean by it. Mother, what is doing well?"). The passage of the Bible alluded to here is Galatians 6.9: "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." In the context of the novel, the passage is significant insofar as it refers to the theological notion of another, higher, world in which all the renunciations and the hardships endured in this world will be rewarded, therefore reinforcing the status of Clym in the novel as a secular "pious" character. The tragic conflict

here is that Clym's selfless vocation of becoming a "school-master to the poor and ignorant" (p.149) is misunderstood among Egdon Heath's inhabitants, for whom elevation can only be conceived of in purely material terms. Upon hearing about Clym's motivations for returning to Egdon, the Heath people immediately express merciless doubts as to the success of his unreasonable project: "He'll never carry it out in the world," said Fairway. "In a few weeks he'll learn to see things otherwise." "Tis good-hearted of the young man," said another. "But, for my part, I think he had better mind his own business" (p.168). As a "pious" character, Clym is discontent with the harsh state of affairs on earth, as the fanciful moon contemplation passage that follows his elegiac complaint of longing for "a world where personal ambition" is not "the only recognized form of progress" reveals:

His eye travelled over the length and breadth of that distant country- over the Bay of Rainbows, the sombre Sea of Crises, the Ocean of Storms, the Lake of Dreams, the vast Walled Plains, and the wondrous Ring Mountains – till he almost felt himself to be voyaging bodily through its wild scenes, standing on its hollow hills, traversing its deserts, descending its vales and old sea bottoms, or mounting to the edge of its craters. (p.167)

Such discontent predisposes him to Christian conceptions of fate characterized by a refusal of the tragic nature of existence on earth divorced from human conceptions of justice. Clym's mutation into a secular countryside preacher in the added sixth book of *The Native* is the outcome of his pious mind's encounter with tragic fate. Ironically, Clym's secular piety results from the stoicism his mother pragmatically made part of his upbringing. Thomasin's pious self-abnegation in the novel can also be traced back to her aunt Mrs. Yeobright. Mrs. Yeobright provides her son and niece with the instincts of abnegation for the sake of being equipped against the harshness of the world. However, if this aspect of her upbringing turns against her

intentions for her son, it has the effect of making Thomasin a model of Victorian womanly abnegation.

Within this typology of characters, Thomasin is the pious opposite of the heroic Eustacia. She renounces her vitality to acquire the respectability of her unhappy marriage with Wildeve. If Eustacia is the archetype of the powerful woman, Thomasin embodies the *good* woman. Deeply distraught by the rumors subsequent to the initial annulment of her wedding, she lives secluded and hidden from the Heath people's gaze. Deeply embittered by the injustice of her situation, she cries out: "Why don't people judge me by my acts? Now, look at me as I kneel here, picking up these apples – do I look like a lost woman?... I wish all good women were as good as I!" (p.98). In the scene of Wildeve and Eustacia's secret encounter on Guy Fawkes day, Wildeve expresses feelings of guilt about his affair with Eustacia while he is bound to marry such a virtuous woman: "I wish that Tamsie were not such a confoundingly good little woman" Wildeve says, "so that I could be faithful to you without injuring a worthy person" (p.59). Eustacia's response is revelatory of the discrepancy in character between her and the *good* Thomasin Yeobright: "But you must not sacrifice yourself to her from any sense of justice." (p.77) Furthermore, the incentive to save her virtuous image on Egdon Heath is for her a solid reason to accept Wildeve as husband. Overall, she chooses to be the woman of practicality at the expense of her desires and vitality: "'I agreed to it,'" Thomasin answered firmly. "I am a practical woman now. I don't believe in hearts at all. I would marry him under any circumstances" (p.136). Unlike Eustacia, she does not obey a dangerous appetite for perfection: "human nature is weak, and I am not a blind woman to insist that he is perfect." Thomasin's philosophy of life is dominated by a pious self-submission to circumstances and

to the world of convention, as well as a Christian belief in the idea of justice, of being rewarded for it in the long run.

In an article titled “The Return of the Native as Antichristian Document” published in *The Nineteenth Century Fiction* review in 1959, John Paterson comments on the significance of novel’s closing book in which Thomasin and Diggory, the two intermediary characters in the rebel/pious typology, marry. Paterson interprets the ending as a “domestic anticlimax”:

There is in fact a singular appropriateness in the novel’s ending, in the Christian and middle-class marriage of Thomasin and Diggory, that far transcends motives of editorial necessity or convenience. Interpreted as it is in a spirit of high comedy, this domestic anticlimax passes an ironical comment on, and in fact reconciles us to, the splendid but wasteful deaths of Wildeve and Eustacia.³⁹

Unlike with the other the main “pious” or intermediary characters (Thomasin and Venn with his newly acquired “Christian countenance”) in *The Native*, Hardy shows us Clym in the light of a sort of tragic *pity* at the end of the novel insofar as after he has been cowed and “ill-used” by fortune, he does not rebel against his fate. Indeed, the narrator’s comment on the difficulty for human beings to “conceive a dominant power of lower moral quality than their own” (p.365) and “invent excuses for the oppression which prompts their tears” (p.365) brings us back to the problem of the notion of a divine shaped fate in the context of the 19th century novel.

³⁹ Paterson, John. “The Return of the Native as Antichristian Document.” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1959, pp. 111–27. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3044163>. Accessed 16 Apr. 2023. p.127.

4. Geological time and the natural point of view

The “uncovering of natural laws” that causes the decentering of the status of man in the cosmos he inhabits also has a corrosive effect on man’s belief in an identifiable first cause as the origin of phenomena. Traditionally, this first cause is equated with divine power. But, as the narrator’s comment on Clym emphasizes, for Hardy, the belief in a first cause is not a matter of religious doctrine but of human psychology. Such a belief in a first cause, or in a recognizable, conscious, anthropomorphizable, dominant power governing the course of things is made impossible by the new epistemology of the age. In an article titled “The Literary Imagination and the Victorian Crisis of Faith: The Example of Thomas Hardy” published in *The Journal of Religion* in 1960, Nathan A. Scott talks of a “kind of metaphysical anguish that was suffered by the many sensitive men in the late years of the nineteenth century as a result of the profound dislocations following upon the intellectual movement with which Darwinism was affiliated.”⁴⁰ Hardy makes this “metaphysical anguish” present in the mind of his characters, as with Eustacia who arrives “at that stage of enlightenment which feels that nothing is worthwhile” (p.63). Furthermore, the conflict at the origin of this malaise is the inadequacy between traditional theological ways of explaining human existence and the uncovering of “natural laws” such as Darwin’s theory of evolution that notoriously influenced Hardy. In his autobiography, Darwin reflects upon the unreliability of the human mind understood as the result of a process operating since time immemorial: “Can the mind of man, which has, as I fully believe, been developed from a mind as low as that possessed by the

⁴⁰ Scott, Nathan A. “The Literary Imagination and the Victorian Crisis of Faith: The Example of Thomas Hardy.” *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1960, pp. 267–81. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1200786>. Accessed 20 Apr. 2023. p.279.

lowest animal, be trusted when it draws grand conclusions?”⁴¹. The fundamental conflict between what the mind of the human species is naturally inclined to believe and what scientific discoveries reveal about the nature of the cosmos and of the origins of man contributes to the deep tragic tone of the novel. Eustacia’s cry to the heavens before her final leap isn’t addressed to any father in heaven nor to any gods on Mount Olympus, it can only be echoed back to her by the incomprehensible vastness of the cosmos into which it is thrown. Hardy’s extensive use of a Greek conceptions of fate (“the distaff, the spindle, and the shears”) does not correspond to any belief or tangible reality. Besides the poetic and literary use of traditional conceptions of fate, the actual fate that Hardy adheres to is a vast determinism. An inquiry into the various causes operating in this determinism leads to the realization that they are ungraspable and incomprehensible by nature.

Hardy’s choice of opening his novel with a contemplation of the immemorial Heath serves to establish this irony and cruel discrepancy between the time span of natural phenomena and the self-centered human species that inhabits an environment shaped by the labor of millions of years. Only after the homage to the immemorial Hearth do humans intrude on the scene, in the second chapter significantly titled “Humanity Appears upon the Scene, Hand in Hand with Trouble”. Hardy chooses to confront his reader with the extreme time scales that govern the Heath. The time contained in these passages does not belong to the type measured while keeping in mind the span of human existence and history: “Every night its Titanic form seemed to await something; but it had waited thus, unmoved, during so many centuries, through the crises of so many things, that it could only be imagined to await one last crisis – the final overthrow” (p.10). Hardy also uses the time scale of geological periods to

⁴¹ Darwin, Charles; Barlow, Nora. *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin*. London: Collins, 1958. p.93.

reinforce the decentering effect: “Civilization was its enemy; and ever since the beginning of vegetation its soil had worn the same antique brow dress” (p.11). The “beginning of vegetation” here refers to the Ordovician geological period that began five hundred million years ago, the earliest known land plants being leafless and rootless vegetation that evolved from green algae before further evolving into the more complex plants that we know. Within the scope of such inhumanly immense time spans, the Heath still remained only superficially altered by the natural forces at stake: “everything around and underneath has been from prehistoric times as unaltered as the stars overhead, gave ballast to the mind adrift on change, and harassed by the irrepressible New. The great inviolate place had an ancient permanence which the sea cannot claim.” (p.11) Naturally, the Heath is oblivious to the infinitely small span of human history and activity: “With the exception of an aged highway, and a still more aged barrow [...] even the trifling irregularities were not caused by pickaxe, plough, or spade, but remained as the very finger-touches of the last geological change.”(p.11). Such obliviousness shatters the status of man in the traditional conception of a divinity like dominant power (such as the fatherly Christian god and the gods on Mount Olympus, to take those most mentioned in the novel.) The geological scientific point of view not only has the effect of dislocating man’s conception of his status in the cosmos, it also re-establishes the legitimacy of *older life* such as insects to inhabit the environment:

The air was warm with a vaporous warmth, and the stillness was unbroken. Lizards, grasshoppers, and ants were the only living things to be beheld. The scene seemed to belong to the ancient world of the carboniferous period, when the form of plants were few, and of the fern kind; when there was neither bud nor blossom, nothing but a monotonous extent of leafage, amid which no bird sang (p.195).

At a later point in the novel, right before Mrs. Yeobright's death, the human species is designated as "the larger" animal. Mrs. Yeobright's state of physical weakness is contrasted with the dazzling vitality of the unseen life on the Heath: 'all visible animation disappeared from the landscape, though the intermittent husky notes of the male grasshoppers from every turf of furze were enough to show that amid the prostration of the larger animal species an unseen insect world was busy in all the fulness of life' (p.269). Within such vastness, the inquiries of science cannot work as a substitute for the traditional conception of divine shaped fate. Human attempts at recognizing and understanding the circumstances they are in prove to be impossible. What remains is the tragic compassion, the loving-kindness that this shared quandary requires.

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Chapter II: Historicizing Hardy's Tragic Vision in *The Return of the Native*

1. Hardy's tragic vision and the Victorian crisis of faith

It has been said that the tragic conflict in the background of Hardy's novels is the irreconcilable gap between human psychology and what science has taught us about the nature of the world we inhabit. This seemingly irreconcilable conflict is put forward in the opening chapter portraying the Heath and its suggesting of "tragic possibilities". As mentioned, Hardy uses the geological point of view as well as the species point of view in order to shatter the reader's habitual human-scaled representations of time, thus displaying a scientific awareness. Scientific breakthroughs in the previous century such as William Herschell's discovery of multiplicities of stars unbelievably far from planet earth, the *nebulae*, had the effect of stretching the human representation of space while also suggesting further discoveries to come. An impactful scientific publication closer to Hardy's time, whose influence on the writing of *The Return of the Native* is perceivable is Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830). In fact, in his conclusion to the *Principles*, Lyell emphasized the vanity of time spans used by his contemporaries when confronted with what the scientific study of our cosmos shows:

In vain do we aspire to assign limits to the works of creation in *space*, whether we examine the starry heavens, or that world of minute animalcules which is revealed to

us by the microscope. We are prepared therefore to find that in *time* also, the confines of the universe lie beyond the reach of mortal ken.⁴²

Evidently, Charles Lyell's discoveries seriously questioned what the Christian churches had been teaching for centuries. In a chapter dedicated to the fabric of society contemporary to Hardy in her *Thomas Hardy*, Patricia Ingham outlines the conflict between the geologic and the religious points of view at the time:

The length of time since the world was created in the way described in Genesis was calculated to be 6,000 years, a long but comprehensible period of time. A universal flood was also taken to be an actual meteorological event. But geologists, instead of confirming the tidy account of God creating species one by one and designing the world for humanity's benefit, drew a shocking picture which suggested divine neglect.⁴³

The other notorious scientific "bomb" among the educated classes of Europe was Darwin's *On the Origin of species* published in 1858. In Hardy's terms, Darwin's theory of natural selection is precisely the type of "natural law" whose uncovering show us the "quandary that man is in" by its "operation"⁴⁴. The process of natural selection was notably coined by Herschell as "the law of higgledy-piggledy"⁴⁵. In the Victorian context, the emerging doubts concerning the Biblical explanations for the genesis of the world came to be known as the "Victorian crisis of faith". Some reacted to such scientific discoveries by rejecting them; in others it aroused a sense of "divine neglect", of the absence of conscious design behind the

⁴² Lyell, Charles. *Principles of Geology*. Harmondsworth, Penguin: 1997. p.xi

⁴³ Ingham, Patricia. *Thomas Hardy*. Oxford University Press, Oxford: 2003. p.64.

⁴⁴ Hardy, Thomas. *The Return of the Native* (1878). New York: Norton, 2006. p.140.

⁴⁵ Beer, Gillian. *Darwin's Plot's: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth Century Fiction*. London, Ark: 1983. p.9.

inhabited world. In a letter to the physician Henry Acland, eminent Victorian figure John Ruskin would complain about geologists harassing him with their hammers: “If only the geologists would let me alone...I could do very well, but those dreadful Hammers! I hear the clink of them at the end of every cadence of the Bible verses.”⁴⁶ This “crisis of faith” experienced by certain strata of English society would lead to a major crisis within the Church of England after the publication of a book of essays titled *Essays and Reviews* in 1860, four months after Darwin’s *Origin of Species*. The book was comprised of seven essays written by members of the Anglican clergy. These essays notably argued for a historical exegesis of the Bible and insisted that Christians needed to engage with the latest scientific discoveries of geology and biology. The opening essay, *The Education of the World* by Frederick Temple, is in the words of Joseph Altholz, “a warmed-over sermon urging the free study of the Bible”⁴⁷. In his contribution to the volume, Benjamin Jowett put forth the idea that the content of the Bible had to be subject to historical scrutiny, like “any other book”⁴⁸. C.W. Goodwin’s essay *On the Mosaic of Cosmology* was “a critique of the attempted “Harmonies” between genesis and geology”⁴⁹. In 1869, biologist and anthropologist Thomas Huxley first used the term “agnostic”, whose Greek etymology means “unknown, unknowing, or unknowable”; the word qualifying someone who “thinks that the existence of anything or anyone behind material

⁴⁶ Cook, Edward Tyas ; Wedderburn, Alexander. *The Works of John Ruskin* (36). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009 p.115.

⁴⁷ Altholz, Josef L. “The Mind of Victorian Orthodoxy: Anglican Responses to ‘Essays and Reviews’, 1860-1864.” *Church History*, vol. 51, no. 2, 1982, pp. 186–97. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3165835>. Accessed 23 May 2023.

⁴⁸ Benjamin Jowett, "On the Interpretation of Scripture," *Essays and Reviews* (London, 1860), pp. 338, 37. Quoted in: Altholz, Joseph L. “The Mind of Victorian Orthodoxy: Anglican Responses to ‘Essays and Reviews’, 1860-1864.” *Church History*, vol. 51, no. 2, 1982, pp. 186–97. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3165835>. Accessed 23 May 2023.

⁴⁹ Altholz, Joseph, “The Mind of Victorian Orthodoxy”. p.186

phenomena is unknown or unknowable”⁵⁰. In other words, the existence of a transcendent being is not excluded, but considered as utterly inaccessible to human knowledge. Hardy’s friend and publisher Leslie Stephen would later claim the label “agnostic”.

Hardy himself had grown estranged from his early religious faith that was still lively enough in the 1860s to make him consider becoming a clergyman⁵¹. In fact, Hardy’s religious evolution is typical of the Victorian crisis of faith. After deciding to abandon prose for verse because of the caustic criticisms he was still facing in October 1896, Hardy would continue writing about a blind force governing the universe, revealing a long lasting painful engagement with a dislocated faith in some dominant unknowable power “in charge”:

Perhaps I can express more fully in verse ideas and emotions which run counter to the inert crystallized opinion – hard as rock – which the vast body of men have vested interests in supporting. To cry out in a passionate poem that (for instance) the Supreme Mover or Movers, the Prime Force or Forces, must be either limited in power, unknowing, or cruel – which is obvious enough, and has been for centuries – will cause them merely a shake of the head; but to put it in argumentative prose will make them sneer, or foam and set all the literary contortionists jumping on me.⁵² (Life, 285)

⁵⁰ Ingham, Patricia. *Thomas Hardy*, p.68.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.59.

⁵² Hardy, Florence Emily. *The Life of Thomas Hardy*. London, Macmillan, 1962. p.285.

2. From scientific awareness to historical consciousness

Like all the cultivated classes of the period, Hardy was aware of and profoundly interested in the hot scientific topics of the age, being himself, as a former architect, rational minded. Aside from the use of geological periods in the opening chapter, Hardy makes multiple references to contemporary medical terms, especially relating to the new medical field of psychiatry. The term “hypochondriasis” appears when Wildeva and Eustacia discuss her persistent “feelings of gloominess” (p.59). In a footnote to the second Norton Critical Edition of the novel, Phillip Mallett specifies the use of the term at the time as “used by Victorian doctors to describe a condition of morbid melancholy and irritability, supposed to be especially common in women.”⁵³ Alongside mythical, Biblical, and historical allusions, Hardy repeatedly alludes to scientific elements. Indeed, Hardy’s “scientific consciousness” and knowledge of contemporary scientific theory are inseparable from a larger historical consciousness. As seen in his quote on the pluri-secular displacement of the “Hellenic idea of life”, the advancement of human knowledge is understood as long processes accompanying human history while also potentially amounting to ruptures: “one last crisis – the final overthrow” (p.10). Furthermore, the advancement of human knowledge is given as having an inevitable effect on the evolution of human psyche and physical countenance. In the chapter dedicated to the portrayal of Clym, Hardy establishes a correspondence between Yeobright’s

knowledge of life and his physical features, before extending them to the whole of the “advanced races” that will be *shaped* by such knowledge:

The view of life as a thing to be put up with, replacing that zest for existence which was so intense in early civilizations, must ultimately enter so thoroughly into the constitution of advanced races that its facial expression will become accepted as a new artistic departure. People already feel that a man who lives without disturbing a curve of feature, or setting a mark of mental concern anywhere upon himself, is too far removed from modern perceptiveness to be a modern type. (p.143)

When meditating upon the consequences of the new disillusioning knowledge of life so prevalent in his century, Hardy places humanity in the picture, speculating on the erosive long term effects of this knowledge operating in history: “Physically beautiful men – the glory of the race when it was young – are almost an anachronism now; and we may wonder whether, at some time or other, physically beautiful women may not be an anachronism likewise.” (p.143) Hardy’s scientific awareness is rooted in a larger historical mindedness. Some scholars have read *The Return of The Native* as a revision of the conquest of Christianity in the likeness of Swinburne in his *Hymn to Proserpine (After the Proclamation of Christian Faith)*: “Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from thy breath”⁵⁴. In *The Decline of the Goddess: Nature, Culture, and Women in Thomas Hardy’s Fiction*, Shirley Stave argues for a correspondence between Eustacia and the goddess Persephone and between Clym and the figure of Christ, emphasizing the irreconcilable difference in nature between the two main characters as, on one level, determining the tragic succession of events, and on another level, reflecting the historical conquest of Christianity over a lost pagan unity of man and nature. In her analysis, Christianity is thought of simultaneously as an epoch and an idea that has replaced

⁵⁴ Swinburne, Algernon Charles. *Poems and Ballads and Atalanta in Claydon*. London: Penguin, 2000. p.67.

the essential unity of man and nature in the pagan world: “*The Return of the Native* ends with the seed of the destruction planted, but with nature still allowed a final moment of glory. Clym/Christ will eventually prevail; history has been written.”⁵⁵

Aside from his embodiment of Christ in the novel, Hardy is also seen as a representative of modern consciousness: “Although Eustacia ultimately rejects Wildeve as a lover, her choice in his stead is even more problematic and even more antithetical to the natural world to which Eustacia is bound. Clym Yeobright, like Angel Clare, represents modern consciousness, Hardy’s grim projection of where the human species is headed.”⁵⁶ The reading of *The Native* as a narrative about two antagonistic world views, and the eventual dominance of one over the other is also understood as a transition from “myth” into “history”: “Eventually, she accepts Clym’s values to the point of seeing herself as a “sinner”, an indication of how far she has lapsed from the pagan values she initially embodied. In Eustacia’s transformation we see the transition from myth to history, to a time when a land and a people consciously separate themselves from nature, beginning to perceive it as “other””.⁵⁷ This reading has the advantage of addressing the copresence of transcendent mythical characters (Venn, Eustacia) with social and economic realities. In his depiction of antagonistic worldviews that have shaped human

⁵⁵ Stave, Shirley A. *The Decline of the Goddess : Nature, Culture, Women, in Thomas Hardy’s Fiction*. London: Greenwood Press, 1995. p.63.

⁵⁶ Ibid. p.57.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p.51.

consciousness, Hardy regrets the prelapsarian one. As Paterson writes, *The Native* valorizes “a wisdom older than Christianity and fundamentally at war with it.”⁵⁸

As noted in the previous chapter, each character embodies a certain religious ethos. In *Thomas Hardy’s Women and Men: The Defeat of Nature*, Ann Mickelson identifies Mrs. Yeobright as embodying the Protestant doctrine of predestination: “acceptance of the Protestant work ethic which gives holy sanction to progress, self-improvement, and accumulation of wealth”⁵⁹. Hardy scholars have also written a great deal on Diggory Venn in this matter, with Jean Brooks even establishing a link between Venn and the mischievous and crafty god Loki in Nordic mythology⁶⁰. The historical preoccupation in *The Native* takes as its object shifts in religion, in man’s relation to nature, as well as the consequences of an unsettling new knowledge of life. In a poem written decades after the first publication of *The Native* titled “God’s Funeral”, Hardy would depict the death of the idea of God throughout history. God is first introduced in the poem as a “man-projected figure” that humans created but are no longer able to keep alive. The poet then proceeds to recapitulate the various historical stages that shaped this man-made figure: “Framing him jealous, fierce, at first, / We gave him justice as the ages rolled”⁶¹. The poem describes a long process of decay of this idea, within “Time’s stayless stealthy swing”, the grammatical subject responsible for the “mangling” of the

⁵⁸ Paterson, John. *The Making of The Return of the Native*. Berkely: University of California Press, 1960: p.141.

⁵⁹ Mickelson, Ann. *Thomas Hardy’s Women and Men: The Defeat of Nature*. Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1976. p.51.

⁶⁰ Brooks, Jean. *Thomas Hardy : The Poetic Structure*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971. p.184.

⁶¹ Hardy, Thomas. *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*. Edited by James Gibson. London: Macmillan, 1978. p.329.

“monarch of our fashioning” that has “quavered, sank; and now has ceased to be”, is “[u]ncompromising rude reality”. In the following stanzas, we find a nostalgic recollection of times when the idea of God was still unaffected by the opposing force of “rude reality” as well as the feelings of dereliction experienced by those whose myth advances towards its extinction “So, toward our myth’s oblivion, / Darkling, and languid-lipped we creep and grope/ Sadlier than those who wept in Babylon, / Whose Zion was a still abiding hope” (p.329). Hardy thus places the genesis of the idea of God in history, giving an account of its evolution and downfall into obsolescence due to conflicting forces operating within human history before speculating about the future:

And who or what shall fill his place?
Whither will wanderers turn distracted eyes
For some fixed star to stimulate their pace
Towards the goal of their enterprise?”...

Finally, the poem ends with the appearance of a mysterious light on the procession scene: “A pale yet positive gleam low down behind”, whose presence remains unresolved, although possibly hinting at future hope or possibly *progress*: “Thus dazed and puzzled’ twixt the gleam and gloom/ Mechanically I followed with the rest.” (p.330) In his novels and poems, Hardy proposes a vision of human history through the prism of ideas, whether religious or scientific, and their consequences on the human psyche and even physical countenance. With *The Return of the Native*, what is narrated is the conquest of the ancient, pagan unity of man and nature, of the “Hellenic idea of life” by what he calls the “mediæval doctrines” at first, and then by modern conscience and science that further deepen the gap between humanity and nature. Hardy’s eagerness to propose this narrative on the evolution of humanity throughout history is

found on the diegetic level as well as in the narrator's commentary. The existential *malaise* felt by Clym and Eustacia leading to the tragic events narrated is a direct consequence of these historical shifts.

3. Tragedy and the social fabric

However, a look into the antagonizing forces at play in the novel reveals that they are political, economic and social, even though the historical genesis of these forces is not addressed as such. In his introduction to *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Martin Seymour-Smith proposes a definition of tragedy as exemplifying the relation of man to the “powers controlling the universe”:

and it has been remarked of the Greek tragedy... that the interest was not simply in the action as an exciting series of events, nor simply in the study of striking characters... but in the meaning of the action as exemplifying the relation of man to the powers controlling the universe, and the relation of these powers to his destiny. This is where the interest in Hardy's novels lies. He is massively humbled, massively puzzled.⁶²

As aforementioned, in moments of tragic crisis, Hardy's characters cry out to the heavens, begging for some sort of providential intervention to suspend the unflinching mechanics of fate. Even though Hardy never ceases, in the words Ellen Ericson Kupp, “to question the nature of the power controlling the universe, whether in his poetry where he addresses “some Vast Imbecility” and a “man projected Figure”, in his novels where he summons the “President of

⁶² Hardy, Thomas. *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. London, Penguin Classics: 1986. p.21.

the Immortals”, or in *The Dynasts* where he questions the motives of the “Immanent Will”⁶³, he is nonetheless describing the lives of men and women caught in a social fabric whose immanence is far from excluding tragic potentialities. In the tragic heroine’s fate, encounters with patriarchal dictates and the mechanisms that enforce it play an essential part. In his *Study of Thomas Hardy*, Lawrence wrote of the heroines: “What was there in their position that was necessarily tragic ? Necessarily painful it was, but they were not at war with God, only with society. Yet they were cowed by the mere judgement of man upon them, and all the while by their own souls they were right. And the judgement of men killed them, not the judgement of their own souls or the judgement of Eternal God.”⁶⁴

With regards to “society”, the world of convention, Eustacia is described as remote from it rather than in active opposition. When Diggory Venn alludes to the potential rumors that could circulate on the Heath about her if she doesn’t make the right decision, she is shown as indifferent and unconcerned rather than in rebellion against the type of behavior expected from her as a woman:

This did not originate in inherent shamelessness, but in her living too far from the world to feel the impact of public opinion. Zenobia in the desert could hardly have cared what was said about her at Rome. As far as social ethics were concerned, Eustacia approached the savage state, though in emotion she was all the while an epicure. She had advanced to the secret recesses of sensuousness, yet she had hardly crossed the threshold of conventionality. (p.86)

⁶³ Kupp, Ellen Ericson (1989) *Thomas Hardy: Positivism and His Tragic Vision*, Durham Theses, Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/6542/>

⁶⁴ Lawrence, David Herbert. *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. p.30.

The circulation of rumors about Eustacia on the Heath appear as a direct consequence of the mechanisms enforcing patriarchal power in the society contemporary to Hardy's writing of the novel. Such rumors eventually meet the ears of Clym's mother, precipitating the rupture between Mrs. Yeobright and her son in the chapter "Sharp words are spoken, and a Crisis Ensues", after the engagement has been disclosed to her: "I might have believed you if you had kept yourself free from entanglements; but this woman – if she had been a good girl it would have been bad enough"(p.182). In the eyes of Mrs. Yeobright, Eustacia is marked by the stigmata of the "bad woman". The same category of the "bad woman" is what had caused Thomasin's seclusion and precipitated her marriage with Damon Wildeve. When she discovers that her niece's planned wedding didn't take place, Mrs. Yeobright's immediate concern is the family's reputation: "It is a great slight to me and my family; and when it gets known there will be a very unpleasant time for us. How can she look her friends in the face tomorrow? It is a very great injury, and one I cannot easily forgive. It may even reflect on her character." (p.38) What has to be preserved, what is at risk of being breached here is the "good woman" ideal. This ideal corresponds to the Victorian womanly archetype of domesticity and submissiveness as portrayed in Coventry Patmore's "angel of the house". The "ethos" of the ideal woman emphasizes woman's subservience to her husband: "Man must be pleased; but him to please/
Is woman's pleasure, down the gulf/ Of his condoled necessities/ She casts her best, she flings herself [...] Through passionate duty love springs higher,/ as grass grows taller round a stone."⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Patmore, Coventry. *The Angel in the House together with the Victories of Love*. London: G. Routledge, 1905. p.75.

The contrasting attitudes between Eustacia and Thomasin in the face of the social force of gender imperatives and representations will determine their respective fates in the novel: self-destruction in one case, or a petty bourgeois tamed existence in another. Attention to the opposing force of gender imperatives and representations imposed on these women reveal that the mechanics of tragedy are interwoven in the social fabric. Hardy's tragedy exemplifies the relation of woman to the powers controlling society, and the relation of these powers to their destiny. One of the ways this antagonistic force operates in the novel is through the spreading of *rumor*. The circulation of rumors not only has an essential function in the tragic unfolding of events, it also results in concrete acts of violence against Eustacia when she gets needle-stabbed by Catherine Nunsuch in church. Right before the chapter "Rain Darkness, and Anxious Wanderers", Eustacia's soon to come death is foreshadowed by Nunsuch frantically stabbing before burning an effigy of the girl she believes has bewitched her family:

From her workbasket in the window-seat the woman took a paper of pins, of the old long and yellow sort, whose heads were disposed to come off at their first usage. These she began to thrust into the image in all directions, with apparently excruciating energy. Probably as many as fifty were thus inserted, some into the head of the wax model, some into the shoulders, some into the trunk, some upwards through the soled of the feet, till the figure was completely permeated with pins. (p.295)

In an article titled "'The Woman Shall bear her iniquity': Death as Social Discipline in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*", Sara A. Malton explains the different outcomes of fate with respect to Eustacia and Thomasin by the internalization of self-regulatory mechanisms by the latter. When the rumors about her disrupted marriage to Wildeve appear among the Heath folk, Thomasin chooses to seclude herself, therefore restricting her life through fear of being seen as a "bad" woman. Malton argues that the mechanisms of self-

constraint in which Thomasin partakes are a consequence of the enclosed spatiality of Egdon Heath: “A self-contained social-unit, Egdon exhibits the capacity for stringent control that is accessible through perpetual confinement and surveillance.”⁶⁶ Similar to Michel Foucault’s Panopticon, the Heath is seen as a place where “the gaze is alert everywhere”. As a spatial disposition, the Heath lends itself to the type of social observation leading to self-regulation of individuals. Still, the harm comes from the Heath folk’s gossip and speculation that Thomasin fears. Before Clym’s expected return, she confesses to her mother: “The air is full of the story, I know; but gossips will not dare to speak of it to him for the first few days. His closeness to me is the very thing that will hinder the tale from reaching him early. If I am not made safe from sneers in a week or two I will tell him myself.” (p.100) The enforcement of the patriarchal social order in the novel occurs through a combination of the social gaze, a set of discourses that identify and classify women. Moreover, the self-regulatory mechanisms function with a legal apparatus concerning the status of women in 19th-century England. The English jurist and Tory politician Sir William Blackstone describes the status of the woman as a legal non-person as follows:

By marriage the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during marriage, or at least is incorporated or consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs everything: and is therefore called in our law-French a *feme-covert*.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Malton, Sara. A ““The Woman Shall Bear Her Iniquity: Death as Social Discipline in Thomas Hardy’s ‘*The Return of the Native*’.”” *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2000, pp. 147–64. JSTOR. p.150. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29533388>. Accessed 2 May 2023.

⁶⁷ Manchester, A.H. *A Modern Legal History of England and Wales 1750-1950*. London: Butterworths, 1980. p.393.

Until the *Married Women's Propriety Acts* of 1870 and 1882, everything that a wife owned or acquired during the marriage was by right the property of her husband, who had absolute control and disposal over it. The legal apparatus of the time explains Damon Wildevé's reluctance to give some sort of allowance to his wife: "Yes, Aunt. I would tell you if he were unkind." She added, blushing, and with hesitation, "He – I don't know if I ought to complain to you about this, but I am not quite sure what to do. I want some money, you know, Aunt – some to buy little things for myself – and he doesn't give me any" (p.180). Moreover, when Wildevé discovers that his mother in law is providing his wife with money without letting him know, he is infuriated: "Any person who had known the circumstances might have perceived that Wildevé was mortified by the discovery that the matter in transit was money" (p.189). Because of the multiplicity of devices used to enforce the patriarchal power in the novel, as well as the emphasis on internalized mechanisms of self-regulation, Michel Foucault's concept of the *dispositif* is a relevant tool to designate the network relating those elements.

The *dispositif* (apparatus) is a combination of heterogeneous elements (discursive, legal, spatial, etc.) aimed at shaping and limiting the field of action of individuals. In a 1977 interview, Michel Foucault proposes the following definition:

What I'm trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions — in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980. p.194.

Foucault's understanding of the *dispositif*, which is often translated as "apparatus", "deployment", "construct", or "alignment", corresponds to a totality that doesn't limit itself to the analysis of discourses, but includes a whole range of practices. The apparatus with which the female protagonist is confronted in Hardy's novel is the patriarchal apparatus which explains the relations that exist between the various legal, discursive, representational, and spatial elements that compose it. In this interview, Foucault emphasizes the historical character of the apparatus that emerges at a certain historical moment for specific strategic reasons: "I understand by the term "apparatus" a sort of – shall we say – formation which has as its major function at given historical moment that of responding to an urgent need. The apparatus thus has a dominant strategic function."⁶⁹ In 19th-century England, the patriarchal *dispositif* is renewed and enforced to answer the "urgent need" of controlling the existence of women in the aftermath of major social changes such as the industrial revolution and discoveries in the field of the sciences that undermined the authority of traditional religious discourses. As mentioned earlier, the multiplicities of discourses surrounding the archetype of the "good" woman as opposed to the "bad" or "fallen" are a part of a wider patriarchal apparatus that includes the circulation of rumors in the social space. In this regard, all the characters except Eustacia, participate in those self-regulatory practices by either submitting to this regime of representations occurring within discourse (Thomasin and Mrs. Yeobright) or by engaging in the local gossip (kept active by the Heath folk).

In *Thomas Hardy, Femininity and Dissent*, Jane Thomas explains how the discursive practices on the virtuous woman functioned with material reliance on men's patronage:

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.195.

The woman who failed to discipline herself or who sought agency and freedom outside the conventional boundaries of femininity was threatened and contained by the stigmatization of sexual looseness and punished by the withholding of male patronage, the consequences of which were severe in a society where women were systematically excluded from access to gainful employment in their own right.⁷⁰

The main female characters in *The Native*, Thomasin, Eustacia, and Mrs. Yeobright, embody three types of female subjectivity within the social space. The social order only recognizes two of those as being licit subject positions: the self-regulating “good” woman, and the maternal figure. In *Thomas Hardy’s Heroines: A Chorus of Priorities*, Pamela Jekel argues that in the Victorian male author’s eyes, Thomasin would be the fittest woman for marriage: “In her prosaic acceptance of the Heath and even of her fate, Thomasin is like no other character in the novel save Venn – likely their major compatibility – and in Hardy’s eyes, probably the only basis for marriage, however dismal it may seem.”⁷¹ Mrs. Yeobright’s status as a virtuous mother is insisted upon as she progresses towards her solemnly depicted death. Even though she is exhausted and not in her role as the elder woman, she decides to make a gesture towards a possible reconciliation with Eustacia for her son’s sake, accepting the discomfort:

Here she sat for twenty minutes or more ere she could summon resolution to go down to the door, her courage being lowered to zero by her physical lassitude. To any other person than a mother it might have seemed a little humiliating that she, the elder of the two women, should be the first to make advances. But Mrs. Yeobright had well

⁷⁰ Thomas, Jane. *Thomas Hardy, Femininity and Dissent*. London: Macmillan Press: 1999, p.72.

⁷¹ Jekel, Pamela L. *Thomas Hardy’s Heroines: A Chorus of Priorities*. Troy: The Whiston Publishing Company, 1986. p.94.

considered all that, and she only thought how best to make her visit appear to Eustacia not abject but wise. (p.231)

When Clym perceives his wife to be responsible for the death of his mother, he sees her through the various discursive categories all relating to illicit female subjectivities in the social space. During the crisis of confrontation between both characters after Miss Yeobright's death, he alludes to her being a potential prostitute: "I shall no doubt be gratified by learning in good time what a well-finished and full-blown adept in a certain trade my lady is" (p.273). Eustacia, whom Clym once revered as a "cultivated woman", is now seen through the category of "mistress" and even "witch": "Do you brave me? do you stand me out, mistress ? Answer. Don't look at me with those eyes if you would bewitch me again!" (p.274) In these critical stages of the novelistic tragedy, the confrontational crisis amounts to Eustacia being branded a "murderess": "May all murderesses get the torment they deserve!" (p.268)

Within the logic of the dominant discursive practices used to enforce patriarchal power, Eustacia's heroic status leads her to be gendered as somewhat masculine on some occasions, as in her the chapter dedicated to her portrayal: "She was in person full-limbed and somewhat heavy" (p.60). Insights into her mental space in the previous chapter, in which she summons Wildeve from the Guy Fawkes night, reveal a traditionally gendered as masculine desire for and competence with power: "I determined you should come; and you have come! I have shown my power. A mile and a half hither, and a mile and half back again to your home – these three miles in the dark for me. Have I not shown my power?" (p.58) Still, within the logic of the discursive apparatus in which the text inevitably participates, this thirst for power is qualified with the categories of illicit female subjectivity: "I merely lit that fire because I was

dull, and though I would get a little excitement by calling you up and triumphing over you as the Witch of Endor called up Samuel” (p.58). Although Eustacia is given a “masculine” drive for power in this chapter, her sexual desire is never given as intrinsic or spontaneous. She, in the passive voice, has ‘yielded’ herself: “you may tempt me, but I won’t give myself anymore.” (p.57) In her study of gender in Hardy’s novels, Patricia Ingham emphasizes the progressive quality of representing female sexual desire as spontaneous: “Central, therefore, to the change which gives Hardy’s heroines glimmers of a possible new self is the existence of spontaneous sexual attraction felt by Grace Melbury, Tess, and Arabelle towards Edred Fitzpipers, Jude Fawley, Angel Clare, and even, to an extent, Alex d’Urberville.”⁷²

However, Eustacia’s desire for her lover is not given as spontaneous. The desire originating from her boredom has been reawakened and aroused by her knowledge of a *rival*:

The man who had begun by being merely her amusement, and would never have been more than her hobby for his skill in deserting her at the right moments, was now again her desire. Cessation in his love-making had revived her love. Such feeling as Eustacia had idly given to Wildeve was dammed into a flood by Thomasin. She had used to tease Wildeve, but that was before another had favoured him. (p.85)

Here, the sexual act referred to by the cessation of “love-making” is not appreciated as such for its intrinsic value, it is rather one of the components of an economy of love taking place in Eustacia’s psychology. Within the context of patriarchal discourse practices operating in the novel, female desire is necessarily *mediated*, whereas male desire is endowed with the privilege of spontaneity, of being aroused by the intrinsic characteristics of its object. When learning

⁷² Ingham Patricia, *Thomas Hardy*. p.140.

that another man wishes to marry Thomasin who no longer depends on Wildeve and can afford the luxury of choice, Eustacia's desire for the man vanishes:

What curious feeling was this coming over her? Was it really possible that her interest in Wildeve had been so entirely the result of antagonism that the glory and the dream departed from the man with the first sound that he was no longer coveted by her rival? (p.83)

The lover is not desired for his intrinsic qualities, he is desired for the value he holds in another woman's eyes, here referred to as the "rival". Within this economy of desire taking place in Eustacia's mind, the element of class plays a determining role: "What was the man worth whom a woman inferior to herself did not value? [...] Her social superiority over him, which hitherto had scarcely ever impressed her, became unpleasantly insistent, and for the first time she felt that she had stopped in loving him." (p.84) The heroine's desire functions in a similar mediated way with her second lover and husband. Before Clym's arrival, she overhears furze-cutters discussing his return from Paris and noting that he and Eustacia "would make a pretty pigeon pair" (p.95), partly because Miss Eustacia has "as much in her head that comes from books as anybody about here". Having only encountered the man in the chatter of the furze-cutters, the content of the conversations has the effect of filling her imagination that would lead to her organizing the encounter at the Saint George play: "That five minutes of overhearing furnished Eustacia with visions enough to fill the whole blank afternoon [...] She could never have believed in the morning that her colourless inner world would before night become as animated as water under a microscope, and that without the arrival of a single visitor" (p.96). Here, the genesis of desire in Eustacia's mind doesn't require the presence of the desired object to take place, and the signifier "Paris" is powerful enough to make this possible.

At the moment when Clym asks Eustacia to marry him, she is aware of the flawed nature of her desire and tries to warn him: “Yes I know that we shall not love like this always. Nothing can ensure the continuance of love. It will evaporate like a spirit, and so I feel full of fears [...] I shall ruin you. It is foolish of you to meet me like this. Kiss me, and go away forever” (p.170). Then, after Clym makes a formal proposition, Eustacia reconsiders and proceeds in asking for descriptions of Paris: ““But you must answer me. Shall I claim you some day – I don’t mean at once?” ‘I must think, Eustacia murmured. ‘At present speak of Paris to me. Is there any place like it on earth?’” (p.171). Clym then gives descriptions of the various places that Eustacia mentions: The Tuileries, the Louvre, Versailles, etc. In the final stages of the novel, when Wildeve tells his former lover he has plans to travel to Paris using the eleven thousand pounds he has just inherited, this utterance of the word “Paris” sparks memories of “Parisian desires” in her mind: ““Back to Paris again’, she murmured in a voice that was nearly a sigh. She had never once told Wildeve of the Parisian desires which Clym’s description has sown in her” (p.253). The adjective “Parisian” to qualify her desire makes it dependent on the third element of “Paris” and the whole range of representations attached to it. At this point, the mediated nature of Eustacia’s desire for Clym is made explicit. On the other hand, Clym’s desire for Miss Vye doesn’t operate with a third element. In the aforementioned dialogue between both characters, when Clym formulates his demand, his declaration of love to Eustacia contains a description of her physical, intrinsic, features: “I love you to oppressiveness – I, who have never before felt more than a pleasant passing fancy for any woman I have ever seen. Let me look right into your moonlit face and dwell on every line and curve in it!” (p.170) Clym’s love for his future wife takes its origin in the physical body of the latter and for this reason convokes the senses: “Only a few hairbreaths make the difference between this face and

faces I have seen many times before I knew you; yet what a difference – the difference between everything and nothing at all. One touch on that mouth again! There, and there, and there.” (p.170) Even though Clym’s physical attraction for the young woman would have likely been perceived as excessively sensuous by the contemporary readership and also materializes an incoherence in his otherwise world-denying character, the representation of feminine desire as inherently mediated and male desire as having the privilege of the intrinsic constitutes a discursive practice serving the patriarchal *dispositif*.

In *Mensonge Romantique et Vérité Romanesque*, René Girard identifies the capacity of literature to reveal the triangular structure of desire: the desiring subject imitates a model and desires the objects that that model desires: “Pour qu’un vaniteux désire un objet il suffit de le convaincre que cet objet est déjà désiré par un tiers auquel s’attache un certain prestige. Le médiateur est ici un rival que la vanité a d’abord suscité, qu’elle a, pour ainsi dire, appelé à son existence de rival, avant d’en exiger la défaite.”⁷³ Arguably, Eustacia’s desire for Wildeva as depicted in the novel corresponds to a triangular structure with Thomasin as the imitated model (“Her lover was no longer an exciting man whom many women strove for, and herself could only retain by striving with them” (p.92)). However, the novel doesn’t contain any hints as to a secret admiration by Eustacia for Thomasin whom she considers as a socially inferior woman. With Clym, the third element that transfigures the object of her desire is a place, not an imitated model. More specifically, the transfiguration of Clym is dependent on the workings of her imagination of that place, and we can see behind her grandfather’s allusion to the “romantic

⁷³ Girard, René. *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*. Paris: Grasset et Fasquelle, 1961. p.22..

nonsense in her head”, hints of a potential romantic intoxication similar to that of Emma Bovary, whose desire imitates that of her literary heroines. Nevertheless, the mechanics of Eustacia’s desire can be understood as what Girard calls the “désirs de tête” of Stendhal’s Parisian characters. In the Parisian world of Stendhal,

Tous les désirs y portent sur des abstractions ; ce sont, nous dit Stendhal, des « désirs de tête ». Les joies, et surtout les souffrances ne s’enracinent pas dans les choses ; elles sont « spirituelles » mais en un sens inférieur qu’il convient d’élucider. Du médiateur, véritable soleil factice, descend un rayon mystérieux qui fait briller l’objet d’un éclat trompeur.⁷⁴

Therefore, the ability to love an object spontaneously for its intrinsic qualities is the privilege of the male character. The discrepancy between masculine spontaneous desire and feminine mediated desire functions as a central tragic conflict in the novel that shapes the fates of Eustacia, Clym, and Wildeve. To the extent that these differences in the conception of masculine and feminine desire emanate from the discursive practices of the patriarchal apparatus in operation in the society contemporary to Hardy’s writing of the book, the tragic is here again interwoven with the fabric of society. The patriarchal *dispositif* is not only reflected in the content of the book but also has an influence on its writing. The magazine *Belgravia* in which *The Return of the Native* was first published in twelve successive instalments would have potentially been read out loud in a family context for the purpose of entertainment. In *Thomas Hardy, the Critical Heritage*, R.G. Cox explains how the sensibility of Hardy’s audience would have influenced his writing: “It seems safe to assume that many readers of Hardy’s early books were looking for conventional and undisturbing entertainment, melodramatic in its turn of plot and liberally seasoned with the pathetic, but uplifting in tone

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.30.

and observing a strict moral propriety.”⁷⁵ Andrew Enstice argues that Captain Vye is “little more than a device”⁷⁶ in the novel to meet the demands of an audience that required some sort of paternal figure to look over the heroine. Hardy would later enter in conflict with the moralism of his age with the publication of *Tess of the d’Urberville* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). With these novels, Hardy questioned the moral conventions around sexuality as well as religion. This is especially found in the critical responses to his books that had to address such views, either to condemn or to welcome them.

3. The Possibility of Progress

During their first encounter after the mummer’s play, Eustacia and Clym engage in a dialogue in which a divergence of opinion emerges. After she has been assaulted by Susan Nunsuch in church, Clym tells Eustacia that there “is no use in hating people – if you hate anything, you should hate what produced them”, to which she answers: “you mean Nature? I hate her already” (p.160). The origin of this understanding of humanity as “produced” rather than “naturally” determined can be traced to “ethical systems popular at the time” (p.147) with which he had become acquainted in Paris. Indeed, this conception of humanity as produced and therefore potentially changeable comes from the philosophy of Auguste Comte. In the context of the Victorian crisis of faith, Comte’s system had the advantage of proposing a non-metaphysical religion of science and humanity that in addition offered perspectives for the

⁷⁵ Cox, Reginald Gordon. *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*. New York: Routledge, 1995. pp. xx-xxi

⁷⁶ Enstice, Andrew. *Landscapes of the Mind*. New York: Saint Martin’s Press, 1979. p.87.

improvement of mankind. In his study on positivist philosophy, Leszek Kolakowski summarized the positivist creed as follows: “it is possible to achieve a state in which mankind, having clearly recognized its own invariable needs, will effectively harmonize emotional needs with rational prediction and thus be transformed into an ”organic” mankind within which conflicts cease to arise”⁷⁷ In the fourth volume of his *Cours de philosophie positive*, Auguste Comte specifies the progressive aim of his philosophical project, the “philosophie positive”: “Cette philosophie pourra seule dévoiler la vraie nature de la progression sociale, c’est-à-dire, caractériser le terme final, jamais pleinement réalisable, vers lequel elle tend à diriger l’humanité, et en même temps faire connaître la marche générale de ce développement graduel.”⁷⁸ He posits the existence of a fundamental instinct “qui pousse directement l’homme à améliorer sans cesse, sous tous les rapports, sa condition quelconque, ou, en termes plus rationnels mais équivalents, à toujours développer, à tous égards, l’ensemble de sa vie, physique, morale, et intellectuelle, autant que le comporte alors le système de circonstances où il se trouve placé.”⁷⁹

As the narrator tells us, Clym owed “much of this development” to his study of such progressive systems of philosophy in Paris. Clym’s “scheme” to found a school in order to educate the Heath folk to improve their position in society is to be understood as fundamentally *progressive*. He wishes to “raise the class at the expense of individuals rather than individuals at the expense of the class” (p.147). Clym’s return is a return *in order to change*. When his

⁷⁷ Kolakowski, Leszek. *Positivist Philosophy: From Hume to the Vienna Circle*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972. p.87

⁷⁸ Comte, Auguste. *Œuvres. IV, Cours de Philosophie Positive*. 4^{ème} vol: *Partie dogmatique de la philosophie sociale*. Paris: Anthropos, 1969. p.44

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p.45.

mother confronts him about the absurdity of his “teaching scheme”, Clym explains he is indifferent to affluence and motivated by the improvement of mankind: “There is no chance of getting rich. But with my system of education, which is as new as it is true, I shall do a great deal of good to my fellow-creatures” (p.172). The young man judges that the Heath people need “somebody to buckle to and teach them how to breast the misery they are born to”.(p.150). Within the tragic structure of the novel, Clym’s intention to change the Heath functions as his *hubris*, his rebellion against the higher order of things. Indeed, the narrator asserts that “a well-proportioned mind” would never have “allowed Yeobright to do such a ridiculous thing as throw up his business to benefit his fellow-creatures”(p.150). If in the same passage Clym’s unreasonableness is celebrated as resembling that which produces prophets, priests, and kings, he is nonetheless “punished” by fate for it. His initial faith in the improvement of a humanity seen as *produced* is eroded by the succession of events that fate puts the protagonist through. By the end of the novel, such ideas are abandoned for itinerant preaching: “He left alone creeds and systems of philosophy, finding enough and more than enough to occupy his tongue in the opinions and actions common to all good men” (p.336).

Can we see *The Return of the Native* as putting forward a certain stance on the idea and the possibility of progress in human history ? Setting the narrator’s commentary aside as well as the function of tragic hubris filled by Clym’s project of *improvement* in the novel, does *The Native*’s conception of mankind in relation to history allow for the agency of humans over their fate? What are the politics of Hardy’s image of social hierarchy in the novel? In *The Historical Novel*, György Lukács typologizes the nineteenth-century novel through the prism of the idea

of progress, recent history being seen through the lens of the “defenders” of progress⁸⁰ as opposed to the forces of reaction. He is not looking for miraculous instances of orthodox Marxism in the cultural productions of these periods but rather for implicit progressive perspectives (as in the novels of Balzac and Walter Scott whose politics were otherwise reactionary). Lukács defines the works of Sir Walter Scott and of Balzac as *historical novels*, insofar as the realist depictions of the societies in which these stories unfold potentially reveal the arbitrariness of the social hierarchy in place and its inherent contradictions. From a Marxist perspective, Lukács furthermore argues that a novel’s ability to portray the individuality of characters as derived from the historical peculiarity of their age also contributes to creating an adequate historical conscience among the public for the sake of improving the social structure. From the Lukácsian perspective, Hardy does remain faithful to some of the social issues of the time such as the desertion of the Anglican churches by the working class, as well as societal preoccupation with the education and potential social mobility of this segment of society. In 1851 a census in England and Wales recorded very poor church attendance by the laboring classes due to the class segregation in place in the churches:

One chief cause of the dislike which the labouring population entertain for religious services is thought to be the maintenance of those distinctions by which they are separated as a class from the class above them. Working men, it is contended, cannot enter our religious structures without having pressed upon their notice some memento of inferiority. The existence of pews and the position of the free seats are, it is said, alone sufficient to deter them from our churches.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Lukács, György. *The Historical Novel*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1963. p.27.

⁸¹ Golby, John M. *Culture and Society in Britain: 1850-1890: A Source Book of Contemporary Writings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1986. p.286.

Preoccupations with the education of the working class among the elites are reflected in economist Alfred Marshall's 1873 interrogation in a paper at Cambridge about whether the "amelioration of the working classes has limits beyond which it cannot pass."⁸² Still, if these contemporary issues are present in Hardy's novel, they are not portrayed in relation to an unreasonable, let alone arbitrary or contradictory social organization. The vision of history in *The Native* is concerned with the conquest of Christianity on the old pagan idea of life, the advent of "modern consciousness", the discrepancy between human psychology and what scientific discoveries reveal about inhabited time and space, rather than with the social structure or man-made institutions. Character is not given as relating to the age but rather described in continuity with the environment from which it emanates. The native's return to his original place has the effect of revivifying him, in accordance with elusive laws relating ancestry, place and physiognomy: "the paleness of the face which he had brought with him from Paris, and the incipient marks of time and thought, were less perceptible than when he returned, the healthful sturdiness which was his by nature having partially recovered its original proportions" (p.176). In the novel, individuality is perceived exclusively as derived from ancestry and natural environment. The sense of an organic, immobile society unaffected by the industrial revolution is prevalent in the portrayal of the Heath and its inhabitants. This trait corresponds to what Lukács calls "legitimist romanticism", a "reactionary ideology" that conceives of history as "silent, imperceptible, natural, organic" and in which "man's activity" is "ruled out completely"⁸³. Besides the sense of utter permanence symbolized by the Heath in the novel, the absence of any reference to contemporary industrialization characterizes the

⁸² Marshall, Alfred. *Memorials of Alfred Marshall*, London: Macmillan, 1935. p.102. Quoted in Ingham, Patricia, *Thomas Hardy*. p.45.

⁸³ Lukács, György. *The Historical Novel*. p.26.

treatment of history in the novel as partaking in reactionary romanticism. This is notably seen in the narrator's comment on time in Egdon not being homogenized by modernity:

On Egdon there was no absolute hour of the day. The time at any moment was a number of varying doctrines professed by different hamlets, some of them having originally grown up from a common root, and then become divided by secession, some having been alien from the beginning. West Egdon believed in Blooms-End time, East Egdon in the time of the Quiet Woman Inn. Grandfer Cattle's watch had numbered many followers in years gone by, but since he had grown older, faiths were shaken. (p.113)

Furthermore, Egdon is repeatedly described as being remote from history, its permanence giving ballast "to the mind adrift on change, and harassed by the irrepressible New" (p.10), it is a place that has "slipped out of its century" (p.149). If the treatment of history in the novel is marked by immobilism, elements of legitimist romanticism are most found in the furze cutting scene. At this moment, Clym is shown engaging in the ancient seasonal activity with great joy. Moreover, the reason why he is participating in manual labor is that he has made himself temporarily blind from excessive reading for his school project. At this moment, his return on the Heath is no longer a transgression. He, the son of a farmer, is participating in the cosmic order of the Heath rather than trying to change it. Soothed by the rhythm of repetitive work, "in the full swing of labour he was cheerfully disposed and calm" (p.211). The sense of cosmic order is apparent in the portrayal of his harmony with the life of the Heath:

His daily life was of a curious microscopic sort, his whole world being limited to a circuit of a few feet from his person. His familiars were creeping and winged things, and they seemed to enroll him in their band. Bees hummed around his ears with an intimate air, and tugged at the heath and furze-flowers at his side in such numbers as to weigh them down to the sod. The strange amber-coloured butterflies which Egdon

produced, and which were never seen elsewhere, quivered in the breath of his lips, alighted upon his bowed back, and sported with the glittering point of his hook as he flourished it up and down. [...] Litters of young rabbits came out from their forms to sun themselves upon hillocks, the hot beams blazing through the delicate tissue of each thin-fleshed ear, and firing it to a blood-red transparency in which the veins could be seen. None of them feared him. (p.21)

Clym's participation in the cosmic order of the Heath provides him with bliss, and he starts to sing. The motif of the peasant singing while working is a common feature of reactionary-romantic depictions of a pre-industrial, pre-revolutionary, society. It is found in the works of antimodern thinkers of the twentieth century such as Charles Péguy who in a 1913 text titled *L'argent*, wrote about l'ancienne France" in which "everyone sang" in the midst of labor: "tout le monde chantait [...] Dans la plupart des corps de métier on chantait. Aujourd'hui on renâcle."⁸⁴ In Péguy's portrayal of "old France", the workers are portrayed singing all day: "On ne pensait qu'à travailler. Nous avons connu des ouvriers qui le matin ne pensaient qu'à travailler. Ils se levaient le matin, et à quelle heure, et ils chantaient à l'idée qu'ils partaient travailler."⁸⁵ This rare moment of bliss in the novel implies the temporary restoration of an immutable cosmic order in which Clym participates passively, instead of trying to change it after entering in contact with the latest Parisian philosophical speculations. In this regard, *The Return of the Native* constitutes an attack on the idea of progress and specifically on the type that has projects for the elevation of the working class. In the rural context of imaginary Wessex that is meant to resemble the southwestern English countryside, such projects of changing the social structure constitute a transgression against a cosmic order not unlike the tragic hero's

⁸⁴ Péguy, Charles. *L'argent*. Paris : Editions F.V. 2017. p.11.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p.12.

transgression of the divine creed by his *hubris*. However, *The Return of the Native* holds progressive potentialities with regards to the condition of women. As aforementioned, the heroic transfiguration of Eustacia and the might of her vitality hindered by unfavorable circumstances alongside the pettiness of the characters who taunt her, constitutes a subversion of the patriarchal apparatus' set of discourses on women. She is immune and above the qualifications ascribed to her, such as "witch", "mistress", or "hussy". On multiple occasions in the novel, the treatment of women by what we see as the patriarchal apparatus is criticized on the grounds of the ideals of the Enlightenment. When Clym comes to know that Thomasin and her aunt arranged for her to get married just in time for his return, and that the wedding was precipitated by harrowing concerns about the young woman's reputation, Clym remarks : "Tamsin has not gone outside the door, and I have been ashamed to look anybody in the face; and now you blame me for letting her do the only thing that can be done to set that trouble straight" (p.140). Clym rejects the conception of marriage as a way for her to save her image from shame and being branded as a "bad" woman within the discursive web of the patriarchal apparatus. He reads the situation as unfair on the grounds of reasonableness and justice, rather than showing a preoccupation with a preservation of honor or of order: "I'll tell you what," said Yeobright again, in a tone which showed more slumbering feeling still. 'I don't think it kind to Tamsin to let her be married like this, and neither of us there to keep up her spirits or care a bit about her. She hasn't disgraced herself, or done anything to deserve that" (p.141). The novel's progressive potential with regards to the condition of women is also found in Diggory Venn's recovery of Thomasin's guineas that her controlling husband had seized, believing it was by right his and taking offense at the prospect of not having been informed of the transaction. Here the enforcement of justice towards Thomasin by the reddleman takes

precedence over Wildeve's enforcement of legal backed patriarchal dominance, thus revealing the unreasonableness and unfairness of the condition of women at the time and emphasizing it for a contemporary readership.

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Conclusion

The first chapter considered tragedy in its formalist definition as a starting point before extending its definition to encompass tragic conflict. In this first approach, tragedy consists of a set of means to produce certain emotional effects and responses. In pursuing the analysis of tragedy in *The Return of the Native*, it becomes evident that the novelistic tragedy also participates in a certain tragic philosophy, a vision of human nature, but most importantly a conception of the world, its rules, and its order; the transgression of which brings hardship and disaster to the protagonists. Behind all novelistic attempts at the genre of tragedy is found a willingness on behalf of the writer to *inform* the reader about the ways of this world, even potentially serving as a warning and a call for responsible action. In *The Return of the Native*, the underlying tragic philosophy repeatedly takes history as its object, and this thesis analyzed the various tragical narratives about the history of humanity: the conquest of Christianity over pagan wisdom, the conquest of modern consciousness upon the mythical Heath, the effects of a “long line of disillusioning centuries”⁸⁶ on the human psyche, the world weariness and existential malaise and *ennui* that predisposes one to bad choices, to “tragical possibilities” (p.10). As the

⁸⁶ Thomas Hardy. *The Return of the Native* (1878), New York: Norton, 2006. p.153.

section on the geological point of view in the first chapter and the section on the Victorian crisis of faith shows, the root cause for such dislocations in belief is located in shifts in the sphere of human knowledge, the “uncovering of natural laws” (p.153), as well the fall into obsolescence of the idea of God as had been known for centuries. This is a first occurrence of the genesis of tragedy being located in history. In this regard, the usual emphasis on individual responsibility in the unfolding of tragic fate - an approach to which Hardy himself adhered in his notes - becomes undermined. We are made aware of the characters’ ultimate lack of agency over their fate by the narrator’s insistence on a tragic discrepancy between his own wider historical understanding of their *situation* and his agnosticism, whereas the characters necessarily take recourse to the transcendent categories of God, the “Prince of the world” (p.175), Destiny, and Justice when faced with unflinching catastrophe. He knows well that these cries are blind psychological reactions. This discrepancy, this tragic conflict, also functions to support the unity of *tone* of the novel. Hardy offers a critique of naïve belief in divine Providence, higher justice and the prospect of reaping the fruits of self-sacrifice made in this world in the next. These naïve beliefs, whether Christian or of secularized Christianity do not stand a chance when confronted with the weight of this new, modern, tragic awareness. As the third section of the first chapter demonstrates, the degree of adherence to “medieval” Christianity (Christian Cantle, Catherine Nunsuch) or secularized Christianity (Clym and Thomasin) typologizes the characters and their degree of vitality. In this thesis, we examined two poles of the “pious” and the “rebellious” in the character dynamics at play. Furthermore, characters who attempt to “take matters into their own hands” by shaping their fates and that of others by themselves are either punished or bound to renounce such demiurgic qualities: Eustacia and Wildeve die, while Diggory Venn changes his activity and marries.

In *The Return of the Native*, the conflict between individual vitality and the Christian “order” that hinders it (and has been doing so throughout history) exemplifies the opposition between the individual and the *dispositif* that I argue as being the root of tragic action. As I contend, if the cosmos of the novel is devoid of any transcendence – the space of the gods, of the shaping of fate - it is nonetheless far from being devoid of tragic possibilities. This type of immanent tragic fate is interwoven with the fabric of society. In *The Native*, the segment of the social fabric that determines the fates of the main female protagonists Eustacia Vye and Thomasin Yeobright is, in the words of Michel Foucault, a *dispositif*, the patriarchal apparatus. To reprise Foucault’s definition of the apparatus:

A thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements.⁸⁷

Therefore, elements of the patriarchal apparatus in *The Native* are: discursive practices that shape licit and illicit female subjectivity (the “good” woman, the “wife”, the “mother” as opposed to the “hissy”, the “witch” or the “prostitute”), the circulation of *rumor* within an enclosed social *space*, the ensuing self-regulatory mechanisms applied to oneself and the policing behavior applied to others, a legal apparatus allowing for men’s sovereignty over their wives possessions, the material reliance on the patronage of men for subsistence. Within the sphere of representation and discourse, the novel also participates in the discursive practices

⁸⁷ Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge : Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980. p.194.

serving the patriarchal *dispositif* in its representation of female desire as necessarily mediated, operating under the regime of economical calculation, determined by the social gaze, rivalry, class and interest. In this regard, male desire holds the privilege of spontaneity and is given as being aroused by the inherent characteristic of its object. In Hardy's novel, the difference in nature between Eustacia's mediated desire and Clym's spontaneous desire is an essential cause of the tragic unfolding of events leading first to the death of Mrs. Yeobright, and eventually to those of Wildeve, Eustacia, and Clym's survival as a broken man preaching in the Egdon area.

Since tragic fate is interwoven with the social fabric, and the social fabric is historically generated – or “man-made”, as it were -, the final part of this thesis addressed the possibility for progress, for improvement of the social structure in *The Return of the Native*. It is precisely progressive philosophical systems encountered in Paris that lead Clym to return to his native land to improve it by building a school adapted to the needs of its inhabitants. Clym's *hubris* of wanting to change the order of the world is among the major mistakes made by the latter, and it is arguably the idea of *progress* that Hardy makes a point to critique here. However, Hardy's attack on the type of naïve progressist idealism in which Clym partakes doesn't exclude perspectives of social progress from being present in the novel. Indeed, even through the prism György Lukács' model of the “historical novel”, we do not see *The Native* as revelatory of the arbitrariness of the social structure contemporary to its writing. Still, the progressive value of *The Native* is found in its criticism of the condition of women at the time made on the grounds of the enlightenment ideals. This critique is more specifically made through the eyes of Clym who deems Thomasin's seclusion to be unjustified and unreasonable, also overlooking his mother's comments on his future wife's status as a “bad woman.”

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