Thomas Hardy's Tragic Vision: Writing Towards Proto-Modernist Modes of Fiction

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis offers a narratorial and textual examination of the tragic in Hardy's fiction and uncovers how his tragic vision of a changing world led him into proto-modernist forms of writing. By first positing Hardy within his milieu and exploring the ideas, beliefs and attitudes that gave rise to his expression of the tragic, the thesis proceeds to conducts a close textual analysis of the fiction. His early psychological use of environment and the construction of metaphoric landscapes evoke a disturbing sense of place, in which individuals are diminished and displaced by nature. In this mode, Hardy's agnostic, secular recasting of the tragic brings to the fore the material world, objects, animals and the non-human. Hardy's experimental use of fetichism and the primitive and his animism intensify the tragic situation in the middle fiction. Here, there is also a pronounced satiric strain in the writing, elements of the absurd and use of 'abstract imaginings' through which Hardy expresses what he called 'tragical mysteries of life'. The hybrid nature of the texts, with their fluid oscillations of mode, I argue, shapes the tragic effect and reflects Hardy's experimental and recursive procedures during this period. The final concern of the thesis is the fragmentation of experience in the later fiction, which focuses upon Hardy's depiction of the destructive forces of the unconscious and his use of shocks and interruptions in the short stories. The vision of isolated individuals failing to find fulfilment and connection with each other comes to the fore in these works. Hardy's later and more radical experiments in characterisation present unstable beings that are read as simulacras; amalgamations of nerves and sensations. Such a recasting of the human reflects a vital proto-modernist aspect of Hardy's writing, which subverts realist representations of the individual and anticipates the fractured, unstable characters of the modernists.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Hardy's life-long commitment to what he described in the 1912 General Preface as his tragic 'instinct for expression' (Orel (ed.) 49) continues to generate a vast amount of critical interest, demonstrating just how deep and pervasive a force the tragic is in his fiction. However, somewhat surprisingly, his tragic vision of a world in transition has not been directly equated with his proto-modernism. In focusing upon some of the major advances and changes in Hardy's experimental narrative techniques, this thesis examines how Hardy's continual reconfiguring of the tragic energised his writing of proto-modernist modes of fiction.

Hardy initially used the venerable genre of tragedy to make a place for himself in the literary world of his time. As many previous studies have argued, his use of fate, allusion and myth in the fiction is extensive and connects him to the ancients. However, more significantly, he dismantled those received ideas and forms of tragedy, opening them up and reinventing new secular and agnostic modes of the tragic. The growing satiric strain in his writing is also a force that subverts the conventional social codes inscribed within the power structures of tragedy. Underlining Hardy's proto-modernism of the tragic is the pervasive vision of isolated individuals failing to connect with others and find fulfilment in an increasingly oppressive, materialistic world. As I elaborate upon in the thesis, Walter Pater's vision of internal isolation and the impenetrability of the ego was a major proto-modernist influence upon Hardy's vision of a changing world. For Pater, personality and the self were viewed as problematic filters of reality and experience was broken down into an often overwhelming multitude of diverse impressions and sensations. All this suggested to Hardy new psychological and effective ways of shaping his tragic characters. Therefore, Pater's critique of the ego is a significant frame of reference between Hardy's tragic vision and modernism.

The fracturing of the self in Hardy is further reinforced through his foreshortening of the tragic in the short stories, a form of fiction that spans the gap between realism and modernism. Hardy's use of shocks and interruption and the temporal compression and ellipses of theses narratives, create an impression of fragile human life that can be disrupted and terminated at any one moment. As we shall see, such a mode of the tragic anticipates the more disruptive and existential stories of Woolf and Joyce.

Proto-modernism is a vague term, mainly because of the diverse and eclectic nature of the literary movement of modernism, which covers a wide range of narrative styles and modes that overlap with realism. For instance the fiction of Conrad, Lawrence, Woolf and Joyce is unmistakeably pervaded by realistically framed characters and environments. Thus, for clarity, my argument focuses upon some of Hardy's more experimental practices, for example, his mnemonic and psychological use of environment, the creation of symbolic and metaphoric landscapes and the deployment of an abstract realism and imagining that uncovers 'the tragical mysteries of life'. Not least is his shaping of strange, perversely self-destructive characters in the later works, which is the final concern of the thesis. Aesthetically, character in Hardy is in a perpetual state of flux and not a fixed homogenous phenomenon.

Instead of adopting a conventional generic and formal approach to tragic plot, character and setting, my critical method focuses upon the textual oscillations of mode that shape the tragic effect. Through satiric, surreal, farcical and absurd modes of writing, tragic meaning is continually being modified and reconfigured throughout the novels and stories. A primary purpose behind this reading is to uncover the versatile and expedient nature of the tragic rhythms that seem to pulsate through the texts. My emphasis upon textual vacillations, therefore, bears closer affinity with post-structural perspectives upon Hardy, rather than a generically and culturally encoded view of tragedy.

Hardy's writing procedure was highly recursive; he would frequently return to earlier projects and themes, reworking them in new ways. In parallel, he would often abandon a particular subject or expected line of interest to try something completely new; *The Hand of Ethelberta* is the creation of such a divergence. In his very first novel, *Desperate Remedies* (1872), Hardy demonstrated an experimental approach to the tragic that inspired a whole new way of writing fiction. There is, then, no continuous line of development in Hardy's experiments with the tragic, a point which is reflected in the trajectory of the thesis. A general chronological direction is followed, addressing the early fiction and finishing with the later works, but within that patterning there are frequent retrospective excursions. Hardy's exploration of the tragic is treated as an arc with intermittent spirals inscribed within it, or to use a motif that Hardy admired and to which he frequently referred, 'a looped orbit' which was Auguste Comte's symbol of human progress (Orel (ed.) 127). Hardy was no positivist, but he often thought of his own literary procedure as a 'looped orbit', advancing forward with intermittent points of recoil. This model reflects the underlying critical direction of the thesis and bears no relation to Comte's philosophical concept of positivism. Each work will,

therefore, be viewed as both a distinctive contribution to Hardy's literary endeavour and as a variant of the gathering proto-modernist strain in his writing.

The Critical Review

Firstly, George Steiner's work on tragedy raises questions about the nature of Hardy's modernisation and secularisation of the tragic. In *The Death of Tragedy,* for instance, he argues that 'tragedy is alien to the Judaic sense of the world... Christianity is an anti-tragic vision of the world' (Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* 4) and intuits that 'Christianity offers to man an assurance of final certitude and repose in God. It leads the soul towards justice and resurrection' (Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* 331, 332). For him, pure or 'absolute tragedy' (Steiner, *No Passion Spent* 129) is rare and even impossible in a modern world, a sentiment that Ibsen iterated. The argument is that once the authentic threat of a metaphysical power is removed, any moral framework falls apart and suffering can be explained away in strictly social, scientific and rational terms. Thus, for Steiner, absolute tragedy requires the menacing threat of an identifiable transcendent force that allows no possibility of redemption; victimisation and injustice are the essentials of tragedy for Steiner. This point of view reinforces the notion that Hardy is not attempting to write high or absolute tragedy, but rather engaged in the production of relative, immanent and perspectival modes of the tragic.

The tragic effect in Hardy's fiction is, therefore, shaped by a complex network of metaphysical, secular and spiritual discourses. This collection of voices and images which, for the characters and narrators, appear as only half expressed idiosyncrasies and feelings, makes any conclusive moral or ethical judgement about character, cruelty or injustice impossible to discern for the reader. This narrative complexity and density makes Steiner's more classical formulations inadequate. For him, absolute tragedy is 'the performative mode of despair' (Steiner, *No Passion Spent* 140), whereas Hardy's sense of the tragic is more nuanced and assimilates significant life affirming elements, with hope playing an important balancing function.

Differences between Steiner's reading of the *Bible* and Hardy's appropriation of its parables highlights the nature of Hardy's secularisation of the tragic. For Steiner, the book of *Job* is a 'black fable' (Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* 4) that stands at the interface between the ancient Judaic vision of the world and the Greek polytheism. Job's final recompense and redemption by God means that, for Steiner, it is not a tragic tale, despite the hero's suffering. Hardy's adaptation of the *Job* narrative, however, focuses upon the humanist elements and

self-condemnation, it mediates feelings of alienation and separation, essential elements of the tragic personality for Hardy. In this state, thoughts of suicide and self-annihilation flood in; hell is an intense feeling or state of mind rather than some transcendent construct and leads to a type of Schopenhauerian resignation of the will to live, as I will illustrate in the thesis. This fragile sense of self is, then, heavily configured by the immediate social and environmental conditions, yet also by something unknowable and mysterious in the very nature of human existence. Man's suffering remains an unsolvable mystery for Hardy.

Raymond Williams, like Steiner, also focuses upon the historical and cultural framing of tragedy and argues that tragedy is a particular learnt response to suffering and death; it is a highly structured set of perceptions and feelings, shaped by a distinct experience, time and place. Thus, one notes that in Hardy's time, an age of radical change and upheaval, debates and theories about tragedy were related to high-minded questions about empire, national identity, religion and morality. As Williams puts it:

> Tragic experience, because of its central importance, commonly attracts the fundamental beliefs and tensions of a period, and tragic theory is interesting mainly in this sense, that through it the shape and set of a particular culture is deeply realised... Tragedy is then not a single and permanent kind of fact, but a series of experiences and conventions and institutions. (Williams, *Modern Tragedy* 45, 46)

The dissonances between tragic experience, theory and art highlights the tense relationship that Hardy had with his readers, reviewers and critics. However, it was this very antithesis that inspired and generated some of his most powerful fiction. Also significant is William's point that tragic art 'structures feeling' in quite specific ways and that there is nothing inherently natural or essential about its formulation of experience, which is something that Hardy was fully aware of. Paradoxically this makes his fiction all the more powerful and vibrant[1]. His experiment in the tragic resonates that the tragic is an enduring and versatile medium and not 'a single and permanent kind of fact.'

Williams's *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (1984) marks the beginning of a new sociological phase in Hardy criticism that liberated Hardy from an earlier pastoral, humanist view, claiming that Hardy's novels capture the tensions of a continuing and changing world, what Williams famously described as Hardy's 'border country' (98). My Chapter Two and the section on isolation draws upon Williams's discussion of the disruptive

[1] See Raymond Williams. Forward to *Modern Tragedy*, 1966. London: Hogarth, 1992: 9. Williams's study discusses how Hardy uses tragedy to structure feelings and thoughts.

effect of environmental, social and class separation. As he says, 'Hardy does not celebrate isolation and separation. He mourns them, and yet always with the courage to look them steadily in the face' (117). Alienation and separation are essential ingredients in Hardy's sense of the tragic experience and in his structuring of the tragic situation. However, I argue that, once isolated and abandoned, Hardy uses the tragic to go beyond the social level, to penetrate deeper into mind, consciousness, the self or the 'soul'. Williams also acknowledges this imperative of tragedy in his earlier linguistic analysis of modern tragedies in *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* (1952). Williams provided useful insights into *Peer Gynt*, a play that, I suggest, throws light upon *Jude the Obscure* and had a significant impact on Hardy's later experiments in characterisation. Williams proposes that '*Peer Gynt* is a romantic fantasy ... it is a quest devoid of self-consciousness of the more usual kind.... the quest of Peer is, in a real sense, itself a fantasy... Peer has, in fact, no self' (65, 67). Such a search for truth and the intense dialogue between self and situation are also subjects addressed by Jeanette King's work on Hardy.

Indispensable background reading has been King's *Tragedy in the Victorian Novel* (1978) in which she argues that 'most critics… still clung to such supposedly Aristotelian concepts as the noble majestic hero, poetic justice, the cathartic ending and the rejection of ''low' characters' (3). Antagonistic tensions between Hardy and his literary milieu continued throughout his career as a novelist, but these only highlight just how radical and proto-modernist Hardy's tragic vision was. His dismantling of tragedy took that medium beyond the level of genre or cultural and moral configuration; what he called the 'tragical' becomes disseminated through varying degrees of intensity throughout all of his fiction.

King goes on to argue that, for Hardy, there was nothing intrinsically anti-tragic about the realist novel, as some Victorian intellectuals believed. As King illustrates, Hardy in fact used the language of prose to open up and reinvent a new democratic form of the tragic for a secular age. King notes, 'the novel was essential to its continuing existence and development' (King 14); this regeneration, for Hardy, leads simultaneously to an exposure of the artifice of realism and forms of tragedy.

While King claims that Hardy's sense of the tragic is fundamentally character centred, I lay greater stress upon Hardy's shaping of the tragic situation and the world beyond the human. For Hardy, Darwin's theory of evolution was the single most radical idea that transformed his vision of man's situation. In this context, Gillian Beer's *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (1983) has been informative in my formulation of textual oscillation and modulation in Hardy's writing.

Beer argues cogently that 'plot in Hardy is almost always tragic or malign' whilst the writing 'awakens us to sensation full of perceptual pleasure… Hardy's writing is characterised by creative vacillation, by a shiftiness which survives the determinations of plot' (239, 238, 246). Beer's reading of this dynamic between plot and style stands in stark contrast to generic or formal approaches to his major tragedies.

Hardy's aesthetic of the tragic deploys a range of narrative techniques and devices that obscure any straightforward interpretation of the action and events. As Linda Shires has argued, 'Hardy's aesthetic demands that readers grasp reality as objectively varied, changing, filtered by multiple and contradictory subjective impressions… [he] relies on multiplicity and incongruity' (Shires 147), thus, Hardy uses diverse points of view, subversive narrative voices and multiple perspectives to reinforce the sense of the tragic. However, I would suggest that Hardy also uses shocks and interruptions which have an alienating effect upon the reader, pre-empting the modernists' fragmentation of reality.

The Bahktinian heteroglossia of the later texts means that the writing goes beyond the limitations of generic ways of reading, as my divergence from Peter Widdowson's formulation about satire and tragedy illustrates. For Widdowson, an 'appropriate' way of reading Hardy's fiction is to substitute satire for tragedy (Widdowson, *Late Essays* 174), however, I argue for (in contrast to Widdowson's overly-polemical approach) an interaction between these two literary modes and how they are played out through continual textual oscillations. Widdowson's work finds echoes in Aaron Matz's *Satire in an Age of Realism* (2010) in which he argues that Henrik Ibsen's satiric revision of tragedy was a crucial influence upon *Jude the Obscure* and Hardy's later fiction. However, my approach to the play of the satiric in Hardy differs from Matz in that it seeks to uncover a much earlier thread of satire in his fiction. Moreover, *Jude* does not mark the end of satire, realism and the tragic as Matz implies in his chapter on 'Terminal Satire in *Jude the Obscure*'; far from being an ending, this novel initiates Hardy's most intense proto-modernist phase. Thus, *The Well-Beloved* and the five short stories that he wrote during the late 1890s illustrate that he continued to explore the disruptive effects of the unconscious, isolation and the fragmentation of experience, up until the publication of *A Changed Man and Other Stories* in 1913.

The condense narrative structure of the short story is a modernist form of writing that proved to be conducive to Hardy's episodic shaping of tragic situations. Sophie Gilmartin and Rod Mengham have explored the narrative strategies of the shorter fiction in *Thomas Hardy's Shorter Fiction: A Critical Study*. For them, Hardy's anxieties about the 'social and cultural policies of the West Country' (Preface vii) is reflected in the textual tensions between the

author, narrator and reader. Distance, division and separation become the central concerns of their narrative analysis and have suggested ways of viewing the shocks and interruptions as described in my section on the short stories.

Drawing upon Lacan and Derrida's ideas about desire, language and identity, Roger Ebbatson has illustrated how responsive the later short stories are to post-structural perspectives. As Ebbatson notes, 'the splitting and contradiction' (Ebbatson 7) within Hardy's writing is a major common denominator with the modernists. This study of the narrative frictions reinforces my approach to the later tales, in particular, 'Barbara of the House of Grebe', where Ebbatson focuses upon the suppressed, erotic aggression of the story.

Thomas Hardy: A Textual Study of the Short Stories by Martin Ray demonstrates how the textual evolution of the tales reflects Hardy's original and precise commitment to the tragic, which becomes diminished through serial censorship and bowdlerisation. For example, in 'The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid', Ray shows how Hardy's explicit references to suicide in the manuscript and proofs become deleted in the *Graphic*. Ray's work reinforces just how essential the tragic was to Hardy's writing procedure and underpins my central argument throughout the thesis.

Another source of critical material on the short stories is The Thomas Hardy Journal. For instance, Martin Malone's essay '"Lost Under the Stress of an Old Idea": Pre-Modern Epiphanies in Hardy's Short Stories' argues that Hardy's moments of revelation and vision are more narratively unsustained and provisional than Joyce's epiphanies. Expanding upon this point, I have suggested that tragic recognition can no longer be viewed as an absolute experience but is more disruptive and incisive in Hardy's short stories than Malone suggests.

The dynamic between tragic form and content in Hardy is the subject of Dale Kramer's instructive *Thomas Hardy: The Forms of Tragedy* (1975). Kramer's premise is that 'Hardy in each novel uses a dominant aesthetic feature, or organising principle, that informs the entire work and creates the peculiar quality of tragedy that distinguishes it' (21). Kramer's structural analysis of the major novels has opened up a number of questions about Hardy's struggle with form and generic tensions within it. My textual analysis in the middle chapters of this thesis contrasts with Kramer's formalist approach in that it uncovers disruptive narrative elements that strain against ideas of form. Fluctuations of mode destabilise any 'dominant aesthetic feature' or overarching infrastructure to the novels. In this way, the tragic becomes increasingly mediated by a type of Bakhtinian heteroglossia rather than by overarching plots. As I will elaborate in Chapter Three, tragic energy and tension is

regulated and muted in *The Woodlanders*, a novel that closes in a mode of futility, entrapment and stasis.

Also instructive in the formulation of my proto-modernist perspective on the tragic in Hardy has been Terry Eagleton's *The English Novel* (2005) in which he claims that 'for the ancient Greeks as for Hardy, a certain kind of botching or "missing the mark" is built into the world of human practice' (206). For Eagleton, Hardy's vision of the world is tragic, not because of the malign workings of some Will, but rather because 'in an evolutionary universe, it is the randomness of things... which is so destructive' (202, 203). By contrast, I view this randomness as an aspect of Hardy's vision that foreshadows the modernist fragmentation of experience, as Chapter Five will illustrate. Eagleton's essay 'Flesh and Spirit in Thomas Hardy' (2004) was particularly informative in that it examines the ways in which 'the material world in the novels is complexly inscribed with human significance, yet at the same time tends to block and thwart it by its very materiality' (14). By contrast, my reading of flesh and spirit in Hardy concentrates on how the conflict between the two endows the novels with a diametric shape, by which I mean a geometric balance or symmetry that is mapped out through the oppositions. In *A Laodicean*, in reference to Paula Power, Sir William de Stancy explains to George Somerset, 'we are diametrically different from her in associations, traditions, ideas, religion' (*A Laodicean* 40). Such diametric tensions provide the novels with a vital tragic symmetry and balance which strengthen the whole narrative flow of the works. Tess, for instance, is torn between the forces of the flesh (Alec) and those of the spirit (Angel). This is also a strategy that D. H. Lawrence deploys in his novels such as *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, where the conflict between flesh and spirit is played out through the fraught dynamic between the characters. However, in these novels, flesh and sexuality are empowered and viewed as liberating forces, whereas, in Hardy, desire and the body are cast in more negative and problematic perspectives. I argue that the war between flesh and spirit is not underpinned by a 'material, political' discourse (Eagleton, 'Flesh and Spirit' 22), but rather by an unfolding tension that gives the novels unity and balance. In the end, for Hardy, flesh triumphs over spirit because flesh in his evolutionist, agnostic universe is not simply equated to sin or lust, but to the needs of the body as a whole.

Eagleton's point that an evolutionary world is a highly ironic one, has led to ways of understanding the twists and turns in Hardy's shaping of circumstance and the world beyond the human. Often unheeded by the characters, nature performs its own dramas in the playing out of the struggle for existence. The physical, inanimate world is constantly evolving and is in a state of flux; the seemingly small and insignificant can turn into the important and vice

versa. For Hardy, evolution and tragedy are not antithetical paradigms, on the contrary, he uncovers strong affinities between the two. As Darwin himself repeatedly pointed out, destruction and extinction are also significant aspects of evolution. However, in Hardy, extinction is not the only or even primary, form of death; there are other emotional and spiritual ways of dying for him. Therefore, there is paradox and irony inscribed within the struggle for survival for Hardy and such dissonances come to the fore in his tragic vision. In this contradictory patterning, to die is not automatically catastrophic and to survive is not necessarily a triumphant achievement. Thus, some of the more unworthy characters live on at the end. In 1892, Hardy wrote that the most powerful tragedy depicts 'the worthy encompassed by the inevitable' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 265). Therefore, it is the nature of the struggle and the mode of suffering, rather than the act of dying or extinction that configures the sense of the tragic.

Hardy was always conscious of the artifice of realism; he exposed its representational tropes, devices and encodings, breaking them down into often overwhelming moments of vision, seemings and impressions. Thus, his later characters, those who most intensely embody tragic meaning, cannot be simply read as representatives of human beings, but operate rather as simulacra or entities in their own right. In this way, they expose the limitations and artifice of a realist method of characterisation. My view that character is not a cohesive organic whole or fixed agency in Hardy, but rather an unstable phenomenon in perpetual flux is informed by the post-structuralist formulations of Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, that cast the tragic characters in modernist terms: 'not people or subjects, they are collections of intensive sensations, each is such a collection, a packet, a block of variable sensations' (Deleuze and Parnet 36). That Hardy's later characters should lend themselves to a post-structural interpretation can be traced back to an aspect of the tragic hero and his inability to contain the internal and external energies that seek to destroy him. Thus, he gradually disintegrates.

My approach to Hardy's proto-modernism contrasts with that of Rosemary Sumner in her *A Route to Modernism. Hardy, Lawrence, Woolf* (2000), firstly in the central role that Hardy's tragic vision plays in his writing and secondly in the emphasis I place on the early novels. Hardy, Lawrence and Woolf share a tragic view of the world in which individuals become entangled in indifferent and oppressive environments and fail to find happiness and meaning in that world. Although Sumner examines the conflictual nature of experience in Hardy, she does not equate it to Hardy's tragic sensibilities, whereas I place Hardy's expression of the changes and shifts in the tragic at the centre of his proto-modernism and as

a principal driver of his experimental fiction. It is the degree of fear and pity that give rise to dissonance and fragmentation within the narrative frameworks of his novels. An examination of chance, fragmentation and incongruity uncovers early signs of Hardy's modernism, albeit in relatively undeveloped forms.

Whilst Hardy was remarkably consistent in his choice of subjects, what varies, with increasing intensity, is his experimental treatment of those subjects, for instance the frequency of shocks and interruptions that break up realism's narrative continuity – a growing strain through the texts. I also differ from Sumner's claim that *Two on a Tower* is the novel that most closely corresponds to Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. For me, the Isle of Slingers in *The Well-Beloved* has deeper metaphoric resonances with the narrative function of the lighthouse, as I illustrate in Chapter Three. Hardy's characters are continually leaving and returning to the Isle and 'the glaring eye of the lighthouse' (*The Well-Beloved* 60), which corresponds to the disruptive light effect of Woolf's central motif.

Jenny Bourne Taylor's essay, 'Psychology' (2013), explores Hardy's fascination with the more disturbing workings of the mind, which has suggested ways of reading the unconscious in his fiction. Michael Davis's essay, 'Hardy, *Tess* and Late Victorian Theories of Consciousness' (2012) has also informed my section on the unconscious in Chapter Five. I expand upon Davis's argument that Tess's perceptions owe more to Henri Bergson's radical, subjective formulation of consciousness rather than earlier evolutionary and physiological theories such as those expounded by T.H. Huxley, Herbert Spencer and G. H. Lewes. My view is that tragic perceptions of the world in the later fiction and the workings of the unconscious are played out in more nuanced terms than Davis suggests. The material substantial nature of existence is presented by Hardy as independent from fearful or fetichistic perceptions of it. For example, as I will illustrate, in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* the narrator reminds us that the world is not merely 'a psychological phenomenon' (85) as Tess's 'phantoms and voices' and 'fancy' (85) suggest to her. Thus, the later fiction juxtaposes a more contemporary subjective understanding of consciousness, such as that propounded by Henri Bergson, against earlier evolutionary views of psychology, such as those of Herbert Spencer. The tragic in Hardy is always predicated upon the coercive forces of the material conditions of life.

The Chapter Plan

The first part of the thesis, Chapter Two, 'The Shaping of Hardy's Tragic Vision', is discursive and contextual, positing Hardy within his milieu. It examines the formation of Hardy's tragic sensibilities and discusses the experiences, ideas, beliefs and attitudes that gave shape to his agnostic vision of the world, but, most significantly, how his own formulation of those ideas became expressive through new modes of the tragic. The first section looks at the changing world into which Hardy was born, that is, one in the grips of radical economic and social change in the countryside. Change meant social progress for many, but for Hardy it was always tempered by a sense of loss and irrevocable displacement. Hardy's early vision of the world can be understood in terms of what he called 'a life twisted of three strands' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 36) – the three strands of the rustic, the scholar and the professional. The next significant phase in the shaping of Hardy's tragic vision was moving to London and his engagement with Shakespearean tragedy, the topic of section two. As his literary precursor, George Eliot's tragic realism showed Hardy how the genre could be reinvented for a modern age, however, I argue that her religion of man (originally a Comtean idea) and sympathetic regard for humanity, stands in contrast to Hardy's more disenchanted and critical view of man. Darwin and the scientific and philosophic visions of an expansive universe offered Hardy a means of perceiving the world beyond the human.

The contemporary philosophic and aesthetic ideas that he reconfigured in his tragic vision become the central focus of the final section of the chapter. Positivism dispelled metaphysical readings of the world, but its lack of coherent ideology left an empty space, out of which emerged Hardy's creative agnosticism. The eclectic mix of intellectual debates on these issues gave rise to Hardy's secular redefining of suffering and the tragic experience, in particular Arthur Schopenhauer's formulation of the resignation of the will. At the same time he turned towards the environment and therein found a fascinating source of tragic material and meaning.

Chapter Three, 'Experiments with Environment', focuses upon how Hardy is 'feeling his way to a method' (Preface to *Desperate Remedies*) of mediating the tragic in the early novels. Through the intense interaction between mind and environment he transforms the sensation novel into a dark, psychological and realist exploration of the self and consciousness. The opening section argues that there are significant signs in the early fiction of Hardy's proto-modernist method. The general tragic situation, for Hardy, includes the

inanimate world, animals, nature at large and the cosmos. These early psychic and spatial visions filter through into Hardy's semi-dream-like concept of 'Wessex'. Section two argues that, initially, Hardy deploys Wessex as a vehicle for a romantic mythological sense of time and place. In the retrospective novels of the 1870's, the sense of the tragic is configured by a past reality. Wessex then evolves from a dream of the past, that is, a world largely shaped by Hardy's imagination and memories, into a contemporary sense of place. This new, modern Wessex has a sharpened sense of tragic change and crisis, bringing the action closer to the world of the reader. The next section on *The Hand of Ethelberta* illustrates the growing satiric strain in Hardy's fiction, demonstrating his proto-modernism through questioning identity and the self within the secular, modern world. Finally, in Chapter Three, what I call Hardy's 'tragic landscapes' illustrates one technique by which he intensifies the human and non-human drama taking place in the world.

The focus of Chapter Four, 'Abstract Imaginings' of 'The Tragical Mysteries of Life' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 192), concerns Hardy's abstract expression of the tragic. As he wrote in 1887, 'I want to see the deeper reality underlying the scenic, the expression of what are sometimes called abstract imaginings' (192). Using this note as a starting point, the chapter concentrates primarily, but not exclusively, upon the middle fiction; the suppressed tragic tension and meaning of *The Woodlanders* reflects a new anti-catastrophic understanding of the tragic that ends in stasis and return. During this analytical period of his career, Hardy is boldly trying out new ways of realising the more disturbing realities of modern existence, such as isolation – the topic of the first section. The chapter then moves to a discussion of another isolating situation and condition for Hardy, that of marriage. Thus, 'Marriage and the Absurd' is the concern of the second section, the absurd being an aesthetic of Samuel Beckett's work. The final section explores Hardy's tragic use of the fetich (Auguste Comte) which foreshadows D. H. Lawrence's own mythical revival of the primitive.

Chapter Five, 'The Fragmentation of Experience', is concerned with the ways in which disintegration and fracture shape Hardy's tragic vision of modernity. As this chapter will illustrate, the fragmentation of experience and the self is a major concern of Hardy's that firmly connects him with the modernists. Section one examines the disruptive forces of the unconscious and how Hardy uses it as a tragic agency that anticipates Freud's theory of repression. For Lawrence, Freud's analysis was excessively repressive and misleading. As Lawrence put it, 'the true unconscious is pristine… the well-head, the fountain of real motivity' (Lawrence, *Fantasia* 207). In Hardy's expression of the tragic, which draws upon

Victorian spiritualism and folkloric ideas about the supernatural, the unconscious is a far more problematic subject. Tragic situations in the later fiction are intensified by an antagonistic dialogue between the conscious and the darker mysterious forces of the unconscious, which interrupt and subvert the desires and deeds of the characters. Continuing in this light, the second section addresses the tragic effects produced by shocks and interruptions and Hardy's foreshortening of the tragic in the short stories. This narrative strategy in the short stories serves a proto-modernist vision of man who is cast as impermanent, finite and unstable. At any one moment, his life can suddenly change direction and even be annihilated. This vision of the individual leads to an examination of Hardy's experiments in character in the final section of the thesis in which Hardy's characters are read as amalgamations and conglomerates of opposing forces, such as those of the flesh and the spirit, giving diagrammatic shape to the later novels. Far from being conventional, realist representations of human beings, certain characters are read as transmitting tragic metaphoric and symbolic meanings. Character in Hardy is provisional and in a constant state of flux and thus is an aspect of his later fiction that strikingly anticipates the shaping of character in Woolf and Lawrence.

CHAPTER TWO: THE SHAPING OF HARDY'S TRAGIC VISION

This chapter examines the experiences, contemporary ideas, beliefs and attitudes that shaped Hardy's tragic vision of the world. It begins by focusing upon the earlier development of his tragic sensibilities and how those were configured by the changing world into which he was born and grew up. Hardy identifies some of the social tensions inscribed within his early years as 'a life twisted of three strands' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 36), which is the title of the first section. The chapter goes on to examine the formulation of his earlier ideas about tragedy, his engagement with Shakespearean tragedy, the legacy of the tragic, in particular George Eliot's realism and Henrik Ibsen's modern revision of the tragic. The last section focuses upon the impact of Darwin, Schopenhauer and Hardy's agnostic imagination and how they led him into writing proto-modern forms of the tragic.

Section One: 'A Life Twisted of Three Strands'

Hardy was born into a changing countryside that was on the cusp of a new phase of industrial, economic and social expansion. As Raymond Williams has pointed out, between 1750 and 1830, the rural population in England doubled and, by 1873, the year Hardy began writing *Far From the Madding Crowd*, 'half of the country was owned by some seven thousand people, in a rural population of around ten million' (Williams, *The Country and the City* 186). Change and growth are inexorable principles of life and the laws of physics and nature, however, this section in the thesis is concerned with the scope, rate and pace of life in Hardy's England, his responses to them and how that shaped his tragic vision.

Hardy was born into a world in the midst of change and painful transition which had largely been instigated by the post-war depression of the Napoleonic years, when wages were already in crisis and grain prices high. This dramatically expanding agrarian market of the early nineteenth century meant that villages and rural towns alike felt the impact of the wider economic depression; they all formed part of 'a single crisis' (Williams, *The Country and the City* 98). However, when Hardy was born, the expanding railway network had not yet reached Dorchester, there was no national school system, and life-holding was still the principal form of tenancy agreement. There was, therefore, a strong sense of community, of personal history and social custom that tied that community together. The feelings of wonder, belonging and family must have been strong in his boyhood but, at the same time, the changes in the wider world would have unsettled him and instilled fears and anxieties of what

lay ahead. Significantly he records a moment when he expressed the desire not to grow up. As his ghosted biography records, he remembered lying on his back in a field, peering at the sun through his straw hat, 'thinking how useless he was … he came to the conclusion that he did not wish to grow up' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 20). Not wishing to grow up may be a boy's fantasy, but it does suggest that Hardy developed an early apprehensive sensitivity. Not growing up can be seen as a solution to change, albeit an imaginary one. Many of Hardy's characters express that type of resistance to life, to time itself, but, the moment of stillness and reflection falls back into the inexorable momentum of life – Hardy, the boy, does grow up. Like Jude Fawley, Hardy's early experiences showed him that man could be cruel and that he could inflict misery upon his fellow man. In the novel, this tragic recognition is dramatised as a shock and proves to be the first of a long series of shocks and awakenings in Jude's life. So many episodes in the novel explore different permutations concerning the shock of the real. The first, and most significant of these, is the 'shuddering' that seizes him when he realises that 'mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another' (*Jude* 18). As I will elaborate, this is a modernist description of anxiety which Hardy recasts in a variety of forms in the later fiction and which finds resonances with the works of Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf and D. H. Lawrence. The apprehension of growing up is framed in intense sensory and physiological terms: 'all around you there seemed to be something glaring, rattling, and the noises and glares hit upon the cell called your life, and shook it, and scorched it' (18).

Hardy's early fiction was experimental, fresh and vibrant, but the tragic pulse can be detected there from the beginning. For instance, the opening line of *Desperate Remedies* describes 'the long and intricately inwrought chain of circumstance' (*Desperate Remedies* 7), which is an ominous vision of reality that suggests an elaborate patter of change and accident. A few paragraphs later that precarious, contingent vision of life is reinforced when the narrator tells us that 'accident and a lover's contrivance brought them together' (8) – the persons in question being the lovers, Ambrose Graye and Cytherea Bradleigh, whose disastrous relationship forms the opening movement of the novel.

In a predominantly oral world, Hardy's early literacy and precocious development soon opened up his horizons. Encouraged, early on, by his mother, Jemima, and his regular attendance at church, he soon learnt to read Latin and discovered the epic world of Virgil's *Aeneid*, which she bought for him before he began going to the local school at Lower Bockhampton. The *Aeneid* would have inspired and excited Hardy's imagination, but its violence and horror must also have disturbed him to an extent. For example, the seventh book

begins with a fearful vision of the island of Circe: 'The roars of lions… grunts of bristled boars… and herds of howling wolves… fill the sad isle with horror and affright' (Dryden 173). Dryden's *Aeneid* is filled with violence, grotesque images and horror that would have left a deep impact upon the young Hardy's mind. He enjoyed the classics at school, but was bullied on one occasion and never forgot the traumatic event.

An experience that left an indelible mark on Hardy and that later proved to be a source of tragic inspiration, was the hanging of Martha Brown on 9th August, 1856, executed for poisoning her husband. However, local reports suggested that she had murdered her husband following years of having endured his abusive treatment of her. Hardy was sixteen when he somehow managed to get a ringside view of her public execution which was attended by some three thousand people, in itself, an insidious reflection of the general public's fascination with a morbid spectacle. Strangely, but also characteristically, what struck Hardy most was not the horror of the sight of the woman's body dangling on the end of the rope, but the curious sensuality of her womanly form as it wheeled in the rain. Michael Millgate claims that 'there is a strong sexual component' in Hardy's description of the scene (Millgate, *A Biography Revisited* 63) However, that sexual component may have been superimposed upon the original boyhood experience; Hardy himself was only too aware of how memory can distort fact and reality. The graphic spectacle of a dead woman's body is the primary tragedy behind the experience for Hardy.

Another hanging in Dorchester occurred a few years later. Early one morning Hardy rushed onto some high ground that overlooked Dorchester with the family telescope. Pointing the instrument in the direction of the gaol he saw the form of a 'murderer in white fustian' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 33). The telescopic distortion intensified the distant event, making it contiguous and fearfully close. That unnerving sensation of the horror of death is dramatised by Hardy for tragic effect in stories like 'The Three Strangers' and 'The Withered Arm'. In these tales the figure of the hangman embodies the macabre spirit and fearful power of execution. Such acts of violence upon the body are represented as instances of state-sanctioned killing; the hangman being part of the legislative apparatus intended to keep social order. However, what emerges from the fiction is Hardy's indictment of what he thought was a brutal and unjust regime. The hangman in his stories is thus often cast as a macabre figure that heightens the tragic tension within a narrative, even though he is also an ordinary man carrying out his job. In 'The Three Strangers' the figure of the hangman, 'the stranger in cinder-grey' ('The Three Strangers' 149), exudes a sinister 'creeping' (149) energy that spreads like a contagion over what might have been conceived as a light-hearted rustic yarn.

But Hardy wanted to infuse the story with a tragical mood and tension which he embodied in the hangman. As he puts it: 'my idea always was that a chill hangs over the party while the hangman was present' (Purdy and Millgate (eds.) iv, 323, 324).

By the time he was in his mid-teens, Hardy's horizons, like Jude's, had dramatically expanded. For Hardy, the young man, the local market town of Dorchester played a prominent role in the widening of his experiences and his lifelong ambiguous view of the town provided a rich source of tragic material for his representations of urban life. As he records:

> He saw rustic and borough doings in a juxtaposition peculiarly close. To these externals may be added the peculiarities of his inner life... a triple existence unusual for a young man... a life twisted in three strands – the professional life, the scholar's life, and the rustic life. (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 36)

This entwined triad identifies the three principal elements of a life in transition. It also serves as a way of viewing the 'external' and 'inner' transformations that he was undergoing during the critical stage of adolescence. It is by no means a comprehensive view, but these three aspects of his life had a determining influence upon his sense of self, identity and view of the world. In the fiction class and cultural differences become a driving force behind the tragic tension, for example, in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, when Elfride argues with her father over her engagement to Stephen Smith she murmurs: 'professional men in London… don't know anything about their clerks' fathers and mothers. They have assistants who come to their offices and shops for years, and hardly even know where they live' (*A Pair* 87). Her father rejects Smith because of his working class background, whereas she argues that class and culture do not make the man she is in love with. The tragic effect is produced by the continual tensions between town and country, tradition and modernity, an oral way of life and an educated, literate one; these must have also generated feelings of hope but also uncertainty and displacement within Hardy himself. Raymond Williams notably described this disturbance as Hardy's real 'border country' (Williams, *The English Novel* 98).

Change does not necessarily lead to tragic consequences, but Hardy's tragic vision draws upon the more painful aspects of it, such as loss, fear and a nervous anxiety about what lies ahead. There is a vast distance between the life and the work; a necessary dichotomy for a writer prepared to face the 'worst'. Change and experience only become defined as tragic when they are translated into art; the interceding conceptual stages are far too abstract and indeterminable to be accurately defined, although many biographers try to give the

impression that there is a direct correspondence between the life and the work. Reality or the real in the fiction becomes a central, complex dilemma that the characters have to struggle with, but it is a mistake to think that Hardy wrote tragic narratives because he himself suffered from emotional negativity or was in some way a pessimist. I would argue that in Hardy's case the opposite is true. He was able to write the sort of visionary, innovative fiction that he did, precisely because he had the necessary creative capacity to decompartmentalise himself, which gave him the strength to look at suffering and the darker side of nature and humanity.

Hardy's perception of himself in the above extract gives the impression that these three threads are in harmony, homogeneously entwined with one another. During this time he walked to the town, returning to the countryside in the evening. This experience is structured by walking, which allows for a close observation and deep connection with the environment. Walking is never depicted as a passive, ordinary activity in Hardy. His characters and narrators are deeply entangled in an ongoing drama of sensations and impressions that unfolds through walking. They are often not consciously aware of the experience, wandering about as in a day-dream, circumnavigating a point, or somnambulating, only able to recount the experience later. Walking is a primitive form of displacement, a far cry from the train, the modern iconic form of transport that shocks and disturbs the mind and encloses and separates the self in Hardy's later fiction.

By the time Hardy begins writing fiction, the growing friction between those social threads becomes a significant source of tragic tension; the rustic, the scholar or thinker and the professional town man, represent ways of life that are figured as irreconcilable. In *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, for example, class and cultural conflicts contribute towards the dramatization of the first crisis in the novel. In despair, Stephen Smith admits to Elfride's father that he has 'nothing to offer him in exchange for his treasure [his daughter]' (*A Pair* 118). In *The Return of the Native*, the tensions between the professional scholar and the rustic reach tragic dimensions. Clym Yeobright's fraught discussions with his mother centre on the idea of progress. Leaving the rustic world of Egdon to return, disillusioned, from the 'town bustle' (*The Return* 185) of Paris to become a teacher, has left him confused as to the nature of the world. A key issue that Clym embodies is the question of personal development or, as Mrs Yeobright puts it, 'doing well' (175). In her eyes, his passion for Eustacia Vye has blinded him and killed any hope of improving his life. As we shall see, such tensions in the social triad, as Hardy described it above, are played out in ever increasingly tragic ways throughout the fiction.

Hardy's overview of this changing world and the dilemmas produced by change on this scale is captured in his preface to *Far From the Madding Crowd*: '[a] modern Wessex of railways, the penny post, mowing and reaping machines, union workhouses, Lucifer matchers, labourers who could read and write and the national school children' (Orel (ed.) 9). This is a view of life described in terms of technology and social institutions, but the general tone of the preface does not celebrate or reaffirm a positive image of progress; rather the modern material world is obliterating the old one, the one of his childhood. This world picture is a tragic one because there is a fracture between the present and the past and this crisis deeply disturbs the conscious and unconscious self alike. To escape the turbulence of the present by retreating to a happier past is not an option for Hardy's characters, because the realms of the past and the function of memory are just as disturbing. However, there are frequent moments when sanctuary is possible, for instance, in chapter twenty-one, 'The Great Barn', in which the barn symbolises a synthesis between the old and the new: 'for once medievalism and modernism had a common stand point' (*Madding Crowd* 127). Such transcendent moments of cultural and historical synthesis are rare in Hardy's fiction, as the fissures between the past and the present take on increasingly tragic forms. Scientific naturalism opens up the fan of time emphasising its mutability and the concept of impermanence. But, set against this evolutionary conception of time is another one in Hardy; a vision of immutability and indestructibility, making the precarious finite lives of his characters seem all the more fragile and transient. Thus, the barn is still being used by the community in a way that it was originally intended for, it has survived natural processes of decay as is highlighted by 'the time-eaten arch stones and chamfers' (126). The barn is therefore a secular monument of 'the defence and salvation of the body by daily bread' (126) and is symbolic a life affirming discourse that runs throughout the novel: 'the gospel of the body' (133).

The novel is shaped and informed by a wide range of perspectives some of which are contradictory. For instance, the diverse authorial points of view in the prefaces, written some twenty years after the novel was published, contrasts sharply with the action of the story, set in the 1840s, and the intense struggle of life that it describes. In 1873 and 1874, when Hardy wrote it, there was in fact more economic depression in Dorset than in the earlier decades of the century. The elegiac and tragic retrospective of the prefaces is composed of a structure of feeling that shifts from a socio-historical view to one of a more personal nature. This discourse uses the traditional conceit of an imagined, happier past to which one can escape, fleeing the turmoil of the present. This is an illusion that is disabused more severely in the

later novels by a more tragic sense of the present. The contemporary setting of the later novels transmits a more immediate and urgent view of modernity that in turn shapes the overall tragic mode. There is no longer any possibility of finding refuge in a happier past, time obliterates and marches on.

In contrast, in *The Madding Crowd*, struggle, suffering and death is juxtaposed against a pastoral sense of time and place that emanates from Hardy's deep impulse to pay homage to a vanishing world of his childhood and beyond, which by the 1870s was already being eroded by modern agricultural improvements and expanding urbanisation. Hardy liked to see himself as a chronicler of a disappearing world, but this is an over simplification of the tragic vision mediated by the narrator who towards the end of the novel describes life as a 'mass of hard prosaic reality' (*Madding Crowd* 384). One way to survive this painful existence is to look at it in the face as the text metaphorically dramatises when Bathsheba lifts the lid of the coffin and says that: 'it was best to know the worst' (259).

Hardy, even as a boy, never actually experienced the world that he is describing in the novel, it is essentially an imagined world that has already disappeared by the time of writing it; it had already been lost to economic and demographic forces. The migration from the countryside to the urban centres had the most devastating impact upon village life and rural communities. The tragic effect of this demographic transition is vividly sketched out in the preface:

> The change at the root of this has been the recent supplanting of the class of stationary cottages… which has led to a break of continuity in local history, more fatal than any other thing to the preservation of legend, folk-lore, close inter-social relations and eccentric individualities. For these the indispensable conditions of existence are attachment to the soil of one particular spot by generation after generation. (Orel (ed.) 10)

Change is inevitable, but it often comes at an unacceptable cost for Hardy. 'Break of continuity' strikes a key note which reflects his ambiguous view of change, that it is both necessary and fractious. The sense of a permanent loss of a way of life is reinforced in the preface through reference to the destructive social effects of a modernity that has the power to disintegrate communities. However, in the novel Weatherbury survives the painful experiences of some of its inhabitants and now in tragic recognition and memory of their struggle, proceeds with caution.

If tradition and custom are illusions of permanence, change and the present are disruptive and annihilating processes in Hardy's tragic vision. More precisely, it is the scale and increasing pace of change of modern existence that is repeatedly emphasised by the text:

> In comparison with cities, Weatherbury was immutable. The citizen's *Then* is the rustic's *Now*. In London twenty or thirty years ago are old times: In Paris ten years or five. In Weatherbury three- or four-score years were included in the mere present, and nothing less than a century set a mark on its face or tone. (*Madding Crowd* 127)

Convergence, or what Hardy described in his first theory of tragedy in 1878 as 'the gradual closing in of a situation' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 120), is a teleological view of life shaped by the inevitability of catastrophe. When applied to the narratorial movement of the novel Hardy's theory is far too structural, however, it does suggest how the ironic incongruities of circumstance entangle the characters. For instance in the closing stage of *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Chapter 51 is actually entitled 'Converging Courses' (*Madding Crowd* 313). The talk of Weatherbury is the Christmas Eve party that Boldwood is surprisingly throwing: we are told that 'the announcement had had an abnormal and incongruous sound' (313); then when Boldwood and Troy converge for the last time, they destroy each other, albeit in different ways.

It is the conflicts between the two forces, stasis and mutability, which underpins so much of the tragic tension of Hardy's fiction. As I will illustrate, there is no smooth transition between the ancient and modern world in his work. This rupture is most dramatically realised in the last book of *The Return of the Native*, entitled 'Aftercourses', and opens with a chapter called 'The Inevitable Movement Onwards.' These titles synoptically indicate the culminating tensions of change and tradition at the end of the novel. Eustacia Vye, the woman that failed to escape the old rustic life for the new urban one, is now dead and Clym Yeobright who gave up that modern world has failed in his bid to find a meaningful, scholarly existence back home. The 'isolated and weird' (*The Return* note 7 to book six, 427) Diggory Venn has been rendered redundant as a reddleman and now becomes a money-minded farmer. The tragic component at the end of this novel lies not in dramatic catastrophe but, somewhat ironically, in the inexorable, forward movement of time that pays little heed to the desire and ambitions of men. The immutable spirit of Egdon Heath is, after all, the significant feature of its tragic omnipotence.

Section Two: Shakespearean Tragedy

A sense of the impact that Shakespeare had upon Hardy's early formulation of the tragic can be seen in his first recorded theory on tragedy:

> April [1878] – Note. A Plot, or Tragedy, should arise from the gradual closing in 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. (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 123)

This is a reflective and retrospective commentary by Hardy that can be understood as a reading of his own earlier representations of the tragic. It is a concept that foregrounds the driving force of the emotions and the will in human suffering, which he saw being dramatised in Shakespeare. In the early fiction, Hardy reconfigures an array of Shakespearean tropes, devices and themes to intensify the tragic situation: ghosts, illegitimacy, rebelliousness, jealousy, betrayal and the corrupting effect of power and will, all play a part in Hardy's emerging vision of the tragic. However, it was not until the early 1860s, when he moved to London, that he immersed himself in Shakespeare's works. In 1862, Hardy left Higher Bockhampton for London and his ghosted biography observes, 'he started alone for London' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 40). The word 'alone' and feelings of loneliness, generally, are frequently evoked in the *Life and Work*. Loneliness is a state of mind that takes on a wide range of forms in the fiction; often, as in this case, it is evoked through journeying and the absence of companions. This is the first major 'break' with Dorset in his life and, on arriving in the metropolis, his sense of self would have been subjected to the sheer scale and mass of London. Much later, Hardy captures the surreal mood of this social isolation in his symbolic victimisation of Little Father Time, an absurd character that points forward towards Samuel Beckett's casting of Estragon in *Waiting for Godot* (1949). However, as a young student architect with literary intentions, Hardy soon integrated with the social and professional world of London and made the most of the galleries, clubs, balls and theatres, transforming himself into that professional man alluded to earlier[2].

In London he immersed himself in Shakespeare and attended productions of the tragedies at the *Drury Lane*, *Sadlers Wells* and *Princess's* theatres. He would sit in the front

[2] William Greenslade, 'Thomas Hardy and Friendship' in Phillip Mallett (ed.), *Thomas Hardy in Context*. Cambridge U. P., 2013: 23-25.

rows with his Singer's edition of the texts, as actor-managers like Sir Henry Irving, Charles Kean and Samuel Phelps performed their leading roles (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 54), with Hardy looking for discrepancies between the melodramatic Victorian performances and the original text that contained the real Shakespeare for him. However, at the same time he would have witnessed how tragedy could be adapted for modern audiences, something that he himself did in his early fiction. Hardy had read *Hamlet* in his youth when he was impressed, naturally enough for a nine year-old boy, with its plot, although he was disappointed that the ghost was absent at the end (29). Hardy's numerous underlinings and annotations in his Singer edition of *Hamlet* and his extensive quotations from the play in his early '*Studies, Specimens &c*' *Notebook* illustrate his early interest in Shakespeare's depiction of power, desire and ambition. The romantic pursuit of the ideal is a phenomenon that Hardy later transliterates as 'The Well Beloved' in his last novel. Here, too, the combination of power and desire only leads to a series of painful shocks and tragic revelations for Jocelyn Pierston.

In the first few years, Hardy mostly attended performances of the histories and romances, but, from about 1865 onwards, there is evidence of a growing interest in the tragedies. In the second half of the 1860s, Hardy's markings in the '*Studies, Specimens &c.*' *Notebook* show an increasing sophisticated interest in Shakespeare's language, method of dialogue and dark imagery. Thus, in 1865, Hardy went to see *Othello* and *Macbeth*, plays that examine the psychological and emotional alienation resulting from excessive desire and ambition. A few years later, in his *Othello*, Hardy marked lines concerning Iago's betrayal of Othello and how he plants jealousy and suspicion about Desdemona in the Moor's mind: 'Mark me with what violence she first loved the Moor, but for bragging and telling her fantastical lies'[3]. In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Liddy Smallbury, in trying to console Bathsheba Everdene after the discovery of the bodies of Fanny Robin and her child, describes the play as a 'nice dismal story' (*Madding Crowd* 269). Hardy's novel, like *Othello,* explores the destructive effects of passionate possessive love, 'love being an extremely exacting usurer' (22). Of course, Farmer Boldwood is one of love's victims, driven, like Othello, to distraction by jealousy.

Hardy's adaptation of Elizabethan metaphysical modes of love shifts the focus of interest to the psychological and affective damage that perverse forms of passion can have. In Hardy's secular universe, the self turns towards the significant other to an intense degree:

[3] See Dennis Taylor, 'From Stratford to Casterbridge: The Influence of Shakespeare', in Rosemarie Morgan (ed), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Thomas Hardy*, 137.

there is no effective or practical recourse to a transcendent power in Wessex, which further intensifies the vision of an isolated self in his fiction. The desperate emotional investment in human relationships is the source of the raw energy underpinning the tragic situation in Hardy. Such intense transference to the other by the self can only lead to disaster. Arguably, this corrosive dynamic is what Hardy initially took from Shakespeare, whose dramatisation of destructive passion frequently drives his heroes and heroines to distraction and madness. One figure that embodies such a disposition was Ophelia in *Hamlet*, a play that Hardy annotated extensively and studied for its psychological examination of a love-torn mind. There are more than five direct allusions to *Hamlet* in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* that are connected to the theme of destructive forms of love. Hardy underlined several passages that refer to Ophelia's infatuation with Hamlet and her resulting mental decline. One line that particularly seized Hardy's attention was 'Thou wouldst not think, how ill all's here about my heart' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 85). In Renaissance humanism, love could be closely associated with madness and therefore Hamlet's 'antic disposition' around Ophelia appears convincing to the court. For Hardy, love does not generally end in madness, but, as an emotion, it often has severe destabilising effects.

The psychological complexities of Hamlet's situation and Shakespeare's examination of a tormented conscience had a significant impact on Hardy's early experiments with tragic personality types. In this regard, Hardy's physiological method of tracing the inner turmoil of his characters upon their bodies is already prevalent in his early fiction. In *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, the narrator tells us that Henry Knight's forehead bears all the markings of 'the unmistakable pale cast' of thought, which is an obvious reference to Hamlet's elaboration upon the dilemma that 'conscience does make cowards of us all' (*Hamlet* 3.1.85). The allusion seems to fit Knight's morbid temperament and his general ambivalent feelings towards Elfride Swancourt in the novel. The very opening epithet to the novel's title is concerned with the fickle and transient nature of love: 'not permanent, sweet, not lasting' (*A Pair* 1), which warns the reader of Elfride's own emotional volatility that goes towards causing so much pain for Stephen Smith. The narrator stresses that the 'emotional experiences may deserve some record' and 'Elfride Swancourt was a girl whose emotions lay very near the surface' (7). As in Shakespeare, feminine passion can be perceived through the eyes of the heroine: 'in them was seen a sublimation of all of her; it was not necessary to look further: there she lived. These eyes were blue, heavenly blue' (8).

Also, Hardy's reading of *Hamlet*, as indicated by the notes he took from the play in the late 1860s, suggests his fascination with the tragic hero's vacillation and indecision. In his

edition of the play, Hardy annotated several passages concerning Hamlet's analysis of the tensions between will, intention and action. A key phrase that Hardy highlighted in this context was 'the readiness is all'[4]. But as Hamlet's fate proves, he persistently fails to act when the moment presents itself and conversely, impulsively kills Polonius in error. When the opportunity to kill Claudius presents itself, Hamlet refuses to act, not primarily because of any moral code or because of reasons of conscience, but because, in so doing, he will send the villain to heaven, for Claudius is at prayer.

A common denominator of Shakespeare and Hardy, is that in Shakespeare, human error, weakness and circumstantial accidents continually undermine the will of the protagonists. There is, of course, the allusion in Shakespeare to the destructive power of the supernatural, but this force is essentially a device that serves the wider, more fundamental human tragedy. Stephen Smith in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* fails to seize the chance to marry Elfride and Knight's slip on the cliff, in the end, only brings him closer to her. There are unknowable elements in the natural environment and 'things inherent in the universe' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 290) that dismantle the lives of Hardy's characters, but can no longer, of course, be defined through an idea of cosmic order, as in Christian and medieval systems of thought. The pattern of Elizabethan tragedy draws upon the inference of some malign power at work behind the scenes, reflecting what E.M.W. Tillyard termed a 'solidly theocentric' world (Tillyard 12) which overshadow man's actions in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. In contrast, Hardy's more humanist tragic vision is reflected in his annotations and notes from Shakespeare's texts which reflect the emotions of the post-Enlightenment and post-Romantic world. Hardy had a consummate fascination in the power of Shakespearean language and the poetic effects produced by the experience of suffering.

There is nothing morally or religiously 'rotten' in the state of Wessex that may serve as a possible explanation for the suffering that takes place there. In Hardy's secularisation of the tragic, religious considerations cease to have the same driving force for Hardy's characters as they do for Shakespeare's, and even when they struggle with questions of faith and Christian ideology, the narrator's point always undermines the authenticity upon which such internal monologues are founded.

The first phase of Hardy's London experience permanently transformed his view of the world, opening his eyes to some of the darker side of men and society. There were intermittent holidays back at home in Higher-Bockhampton and travelling to and from

[4] Jenkins, Harold Ed. *Hamlet*. Arden Shakespeare, 5.2.218.

London and the West Country was a formative experience that would provide a wide range of material for his early novels. Hardy had a way of burying an experience or emotion only to use it years later in his fiction.

However, the pollution of the city gradually took its toll on his wellbeing, so that, by 1867, he reported that his 'health had become much weakened' by the atmosphere of the metropolis (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 54). Arthur Bloomfield's architectural offices, next to the Thames, functioned as a tidal sewer for the city and Hardy frequently complained of the stench coming from the river. In that year, there was a marked deterioration in how he felt about the capital, which is reflected in his early fiction. Hardy later described London as 'a monster whose body had four million heads' and the individuals that lived there as 'all caged birds; the only difference lies in the size of the cage' (178). It was, then, with a great sense of relief, that Bloomfield agreed to Hardy's request to return home and fortuitously at the same time John Hicks, the Dorchester architect, required a draughtsman to work in his offices.

In London, Hardy had observed poverty, alcoholism and cruelty on a scale that he had never previously witnessed; he was shocked by the maltreatment of animals and the 'pandemonium' of Smithfield meat market, with its 'mud, curses, and cries of ill-treated animals' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 22). Paradoxically, this cacophony of noises and smells and the impact that the city had a significant influence upon Hardy's creative imagination, to judge from scattered entries in his notebooks. Change is inevitable, but the scale and pace of change during the mid-nineteenth century made it threatening for Hardy. He visualises that feeling of encroaching modernity in a note describing his first visit to the city with his mother: 'looking back at the outside of London creeping towards them across the fields' (22).

This manner of seeing the urban from 'the outside' displays Hardy's examination of the complex interaction between urban and rural environments in the novels. As Raymond Williams argues, 'this is not country against town, or even in any simple way custom against conscious intelligence. It is the more complicated and more urgent historical process' (Williams, *The Country and the City* 202). In his fiction, Hardy resists the allure of a simple opposition between city and country and does not pander to an urban, metropolitan readership wishing for edifying, pastoral tales. Instead, the intense interaction between town and country is played out through a complex and unstable dynamic between the individual and his ever-changing surroundings.

The characters are continually searching for something, they are on the move, walking across heaths to and from villages, towns and remote places. They also use other forms of

transport: gigs, carts, carriages and trains, but walking is the predominant form of journeying in the fiction. In this restless and shifting process, individual identities are played out and fall into decline, often isolating the wanderer both spatially and environmentally. As Ralph Pite has observed: 'Hardy's sense of how individuality existed and how communities were formed brought him into conflict with the more conventional understanding of locality and nation... accounts, that is, which made these terms into polar opposites of one another' (Pite, *Hardy's Geography* 24). Spatial oscillation is a significant factor in the creation and destruction of identity. There is no simple antithesis between town and country in the tragic fiction, rather, Hardy allows a wide range of oppressive environmental forces to converge upon the characters. As Hardy's tragic vision develops, the growing spatial, temporal and cultural tensions that he saw in the changing world around him become reflected in his fiction. The representation of these forces in the complex fictional form of George Eliot's pastoral tragedies would almost certainly have been influential.

Section Three: The Legacy of the Tragic

Back in Dorset in 1868, Hardy's reading and note taking habits widened and it was about this time that he discovered Eliot's novels. Her pioneering realism transformed the performance of the tragic that had previously been the domain of the Greeks, Elizabethan drama and the Romantic poets. Eliot's aim was to assimilate grand, tragic motives into her representation of the variety and complexity of ordinary domestic life, which marked a major advance in both tragedy and realism that Hardy both took up and extended. However, Eliot's plots and narrative structures also reflected a conflict in her appropriation of tragedy; her fiction contains a degree of vacillation, ambiguity and impasse and, for Hardy, her novels often fell short of the tragic realisation that they seemed to promise.

George Eliot's fiction had a profound early influence upon Hardy's secularisation of the tragic. However, her 'moderation and reverence' of the tragic, as she describes it in 'The Antigone and its Moral' (Byatt (ed.) 366), regulates the level of destructive energy. This simultaneously demonstrates how tragedy could be used to infuse meaning into the novel and illustrates the limitations that her realism imposed upon the expression of tragic meaning. Her moral realism, underscored by her commitment to a religion of humanity, withdraws from any anticipated tragic denouement, whereas Hardy's fiction expresses his deeper commitment to the destructive forces of the tragic. However, *Adam Bede*, perhaps above all her novels, reflects Eliot's synthesising of the coercive powers of tragedy with her moral realism.

This novel's tragic realism had a significant impact upon Hardy's early fiction. Published only three years after her essay 'The Antigone and Its Moral', Eliot famously outlines in the novel some of the tensions she was feeling about received ideas and forms of realism:

> I aspire to give no more than a faithful account of the men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed; the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you, as precisely as I can, what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness box. (*Adam Bede* 177)

This hardly amounts to a compliance with high realism that John Ruskin and George Henry Lewes advocated. Her position of trying to use a defective mirror to mediate the truth is almost untenable. A little later in chapter seventeen she writes: 'do not impose on us any aesthetic rules' (*Adam Bede* 180). In another essay entitled 'John Ruskin's Modern Painters vol. iii', Eliot's creativity collides with Ruskin's formulation of realism, that 'the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by the humble and faithful study of nature' (Eliot, *Essays* 368). Eliot's companion and literary mentor, George Lewes, underpins this type of mimesis as he argues in 'Realism in Art' (1858) that the novelist: 'must always be real – true... and bound to accuracy... he is not at liberty to falsify... every departure from truth in motive idiom or probability is to that extent, a defect' (Regan (ed.), *The Nineteenth Century Novel* 38). But the problem with tragedy, for Eliot, is a question of matter as well as means. Her subject was new for tragedy and realism: the ordinary lives of common people.

Elsewhere in chapter seventeen of *Adam Bede*, she castigates the 'picturesque sentimental wretchedness' of high art, in preference to 'the faithful representing of commonplace things' and 'everyday fellow-men' (*Adam Bede* 180). Her democratisation of the tragic was driven by the need to reveal the hidden misery that lay beneath the ordinary, small, contingencies of life that she saw represented in the domestic narrative paintings of the Dutch school. As she says, there is more significant and relevant suffering hidden behind the 'monotonous homely existence' (179) of these domestic servants than there is in all the high-tragedy of kings and queens. It is easy to forget these days what a major contribution Eliot made to the democratisation of the tragic in fiction, but without it, I would argue, Hardy could not have written the sort of fiction that he did.

The tragic makes itself felt early on in the novel: 'the existence of insignificant people has very important consequences in the world... to play no small part in the tragedy of life'

(*Adam Bede* 68). However, juxtaposed with this vision, is the continual dialogue about faith, a secular spirituality and 'man's religion' (11). The opening scene in the workshop dramatises Adam's humanism: his spirituality is founded upon the practical application of his conscience in his ordinary working life as opposed to the 'over-spiritual' (11) congregation that fill the churches. In his rustic voice, Adam declares that 'there's the sperrit o' God in all things and at all times – weekday as Sunday' (11). One is reminded, here, of Gabriel Oak's work ethic and everyday type of practical spirituality. But, unlike Adam, he does not have a temper and does not get aggressive. In *Adam Bede*, then, this juxtaposition between the spiritual and the tragic pulses that course through life providing a sustaining tension throughout the novel and is dramatised in the internal emotional dilemmas of the characters. Dinah Morris's attempts to save Hetty Sorrel's soul is a poignant case in point.

There is a tense point of possible salvation when Hetty goes to visit Dinah. The open-air preacher describes her fellow feeling, of hearing the voices of the parishioners in her most quiet moments, but, she fails to 'hear' Hetty, who also suppresses her sorrow and desperation. Eliot, as she so frequently does in this novel, gives expression to the tragic through her description of landscape. So, as Hetty leaves Dinah, 'the still twilight, with its dying western red, and its few faint struggling stars, rested on the farmyard, where there was not a sound to be heard, but the stamping of cart-horses in the stable' (*Adam Bede* 141). The accumulative sounds and images refract a sense of Hetty's despair. She does not die in the end, but her epic journeys in open countryside, her killing and burying of her baby, her harrowing confession to Dinah and her imprisonment for life, fulfil the tragic impulse that runs throughout the novel. Eliot uncovers the suffering that can hide in the most benign of settings, 'such things are sometimes hidden among the sunny fields and behind the blossoming orchards... the sound of the gurgling brook... would be mingled... with a despairing human sob' (364). The tragic has been reinstated into English countryside as opposed to the industrial city. A difference that highlights Hardy's more secular and agnostic form of the tragic is that, for Fanny Robin in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, there is no possibility of redemption and she is cast as more alienated by the community as a whole.

In this novel, then, Eliot breaches the gap between high tragedy and the drama of everyday life in the countryside and the medium of realism offered her the means by which she could explore her deeply felt moral and aesthetic agendas. As Philip Davis has observed, 'the realist novel was the holding ground, the meeting point, for the overlapping claims of secularisation and belief held together in a version of common life... equally hospitable to the non-believer' (Davis 144, 146). For Eliot and Hardy, realism, far from being a restrictive

medium, in fact offered opportunities for a wide and diverse expression of tragic ideas and experiences. The tragic and realism were wide, deep and pervasive for both of them. In the strong, authorial voice of *Adam Bede*, Eliot warns that 'the tragedy of human life is likely to continue for a long time to come' (*Adam Bede* 354). However, even that nascent narrative culminates in a mode of redemption, because 'deep, unspeakable suffering may well be called a baptism, a regeneration, the initiation into a new state' (427). Thus, in the end, Adam's ignorance and emotional pain has finally led to an awakening of his conscience and sympathy for others.

Hardy thought that Eliot shied away from the tragic:

> Who does not feel ~~that~~ ‹how›, George Eliot's creative and literary art was impaired, & at last worse than impaired, by her daily associations with science? Or would it be truer to say – I often thought it would – that the decline was due to her own ever deepening sense of the pain of the world & the tragedy of sentient being. (Björk (ed.), *Literary Notebooks* ii, n.2395, 208)

The implication is that Eliot's engagement with science 'impaired' her feeling for the tragic which was further eroded by 'her own ever deepening sense of the pain of the world'; Eliot baulked at suffering because of her sympathy for man. According to Hardy's view, tragic feeling and tragic art have reached a point of impasse in Eliot.

Greek tragedy's polytheism rubs up against Eliot's Christian humanism, producing a tension which is reflected in the discourse of her essay on tragedy. The dilemma that she wrestles with is how to transcribe 'a dramatic motive foreign to modern sympathies' (Byatt (ed.) 363). She actually points towards a possible answer when she asserts that whenever an individual's moral strength 'brings him into opposition with the rules which society has sanctioned, *there* is renewed the conflict between Antigone and Creon' (366). Thus, Eliot's essay reflects both her growing enthusiasm for the moral conflict between the individual and the general whilst at the same time highlighting the anomalies of transcribing a classical form of tragedy into modern fiction. Her essay ends in a compromise between 'the lofty words' of ancient tragedy that are 'not becoming to mortals' and a recognition that high language has to be tempered by 'moderation and reverence' (366). Thus, the humanist, driving force within her writing appears to grate against tragedy's explicit depiction of destruction and suffering. The essay, significantly, articulates the need for new forms of the tragic that reflect the problems of living in a modern, complex society.

Eliot's prescriptive ideas in her essay seek to appropriate the determining forces of ancient tragedy into realism. However, in practice this enterprise was fraught with moral and aesthetic dilemmas which are not resolved in her novels. Overall, throughout her body of work, the plots, twists and narrative structures of her novels reflect her 'sympathy for the individual lot' and override the destructive powers of tragedy. The conflict now becomes one between a moral realism which tries to accommodate the common individual and the high mode of Greek tragedy. Eliot's 'moderation and reverence' of the tragic (Byatt (ed.) 366), reflects the assimilating effect of her positive moral humanism, that ultimately refuses to allow human life to be destroyed by opposing powers, whether those be natural or social. Eliot's enduring faith in man is the major driving force behind her moral realism, which comes up against the classical tragic vision. Her sympathy for the individual with its underpinning concept of the religion of humanity[5], which she appropriated from Ludwig Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*, exerts a qualifying effect upon her interpretation of tragedy's nihilistic energies. In contrast, Hardy's more critical and agnostic vision of life and his increasingly '*un*-moral' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 439) examination of human perversity lead, I argue, towards a more subversive proto-modernist form of fiction. By this, in particular, I mean Hardy's increasingly disturbing vision of fragmented individuals, consciousness and experience, his symbolic expressions of an isolated self, entangled within a secular universe, the realisation of the apprehensive world beyond the human and his dramatisation of the absurdity of man. This ethical and aesthetic distinction between Hardy and Eliot is thus keenly felt in their different artistic formulations of the tragic.

At first, although Hardy initially denied it[6], her narratives demonstrated to him how the realist novel could be intensified and empowered by the tragic mode. It is important to note that Hardy and Eliot shared a common belief in one of tragedy's primary principles, 'conflict'. In her 'Notes on the Spanish Gypsy', Eliot centres upon 'the irreparable collision between the individual and the general' (Cross 425). The idea of conflict in tragedy was first made popular in the early-nineteenth century by Hegel in his famous essay, 'Tragedy as Dramatic Art', in which he argues that the 'collision of aims and characters' (Drakakis and

[5] A concept used by such critics as Kerry McSweeney in his *Middlemarch: Art, Ideas, Aesthetics.* London: Unwin Hyman, 1984; and Terry Eagleton in 'George Eliot: Ideology and Literary Form' in his *Criticism and Ideology*. London: Verso, 1976.

[6] Hardy's defensive reaction to the *Spectator's* speculation that *Far From the Madding Crowd* might have been written by George Eliot is noted in Millgate, Michael (ed.), *Life and Work*, 100. Whilst Hardy praised her as a philosopher he dismissed her as a story-teller.

Liebler (eds.) 24) is central to classical tragedy and that collision involves 'two equally justified powers' (25), a situation that could legitimately arise in both religious and secular forms. This opposition between two justifiable forces finds deep resonance in Eliot's own theory of the tragic, that proposes that tragedy's primary imperative was to show the clash of 'two irreconcilable ''oughts.''' (Cross 426). Such ethical framing largely derives from her religious background and consequent spiritual humanism. Here, too, there is a correspondence with Hegel's concept, that 'the true theme of primitive tragedy is the godlike. But by godlike we do not mean the Divine, as implied in the religious consciousness simply as such, but rather as it enters into the world, into individual action' (Drakakis and Liebler (eds.) 25, 26). This formulation of the divine has a closer affinity with Eliot's vision than Hardy's.

Both Eliot and Hardy read Hegel's writings on tragedy, but from very different points of view and with markedly different results. Eliot's humanist formulation of the divine in man found a deep affinity with Hegel's principle of the 'realized divine nature in the world' juxtaposed against 'the personal conscious life' (Drakakis and Liebler (eds.) 24) that she was able to read in the original German. But in the working-out of the collision and in the closing stages of her novels, that opposition is never fully reconciled; it is, rather, avoided. Hegel's influence on her is most directly felt in her treatise on tragedy as outlined in her 'Notes on the Spanish Gypsy' (1868):

> It is the individual with whom we sympathise, and the general of which we recognise the irresistible power... the collision of Greek tragedy is often that between hereditary, entailed Nemesis, and the peculiar individual lot, awakening our sympathy of the particular man or woman whom the Nemesis is shown to grasp with terrific force (Cross 425, 426).

This set of terms reflects Eliot's moral understanding of tragedy and is framed by a fine balance of negative and positive humanist points of view. In practice, an enduring sympathy for the individual moderated the full expression of tragedy's destructive power. For Eliot, the modern vision had to assimilate 'the importance of individual deeds and the all-sufficiency of the soul's passions in determining sympathetic action' (Cross 427). Sympathy, then, is the essential principle that lies behind her aesthetic of the tragic and differentiates her from Hardy's more sceptical examination of the individual and the world beyond the human. That loving regard for the individual means that classical tragedy's hamartia is interpreted as

'error' or 'mistake' rather than as a character flaw or defect; for Eliot, there is nothing inherently sinful or wicked about man.

In both form and content, this tension is played out in *The Mill on the Floss*, the novel that most explicitly reflects Eliot's adaptation of classical conflict. A comparison between this novel and Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* reveals two very different approaches to traditional tragedy. Their different representations of will and determinism acutely highlight their distinctive forms of the tragic. 'Character – says Novalis, in one of his questionable aphorisms – "character is destiny." But not the whole of our destiny... Maggie's destiny, then, is at present hidden, and we must wait for it to reveal itself' (*The Mill* 418). The undisclosed course of destiny haunts Maggie who has little sense of a predetermined pattern in her life. Whereas, Hardy's version of Novalis's dictum, 'Character is Fate' (*The Mayor* 112), expresses a more overwhelming sense of determinism, symbolically captured in Henchard's wedding present to Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane: the dead goldfinch at the bottom of a bird cage. This trope, I suggest, represents the spiritual death of Henchard's spirit, for the couple discover it about the same time that Henchard dies.

The flood that kills Maggie Tulliver is, on the other hand, less anticipated, although one could say there are some signposts, such as the opening description of the Floss as it winds itself down to the sea, 'how lovely the little river is with its dark changing wavelets!' (*The Mill*, 9) The novel is Eliot's testament to the omnipotence of nature; the ironic and satirical exclamation mark is there because the passage is just too benign. But these subtleties do not lead to a sustained tragic momentum in the plot, whereas, Hardy's narrative structures do fulfil their tragic imperatives. The methods that distinguish *The Mayor* from *The Mill* are indicative of the two writers' contrasting engagement with the tragic and realism.

In *Middlemarch*, Eliot finds a synthesis between science and suffering in her characterisation of Lydgate. It is he who acts as the mouthpiece for a scientific methodology that rejects romance art and its dissemination of 'profuseness of indifferent drawing or cheap narration' (*Middlemarch* 164). Instead, he is excited by 'the imagination that reveals subtle actions inaccessible by any sort of lens... he is enamoured of that arduous invention which is the very eye of research' (165). But, rather like Casaubon before him, it is his obsessive egotistical ambition that drives him to despair. So, contrary to Hardy's reservations regarding the scientific impairment of Eliot's art, Lydgate, the medical man, actually embodies the tragic emotion and energy absent from her portrait of Dorothea. In fear of her own collapse into self, Dorothea recoils from loneliness and finds sufficient acceptance of her individual lot to marry Will Ladislaw. As Eliot advocates in her critique on tragedy, 'the utmost

approach to well-being in such a case is through large resignation and acceptance of the inevitable' (Cross 427).

Eliot's own transition from religion to secularism is reflected in her essay on tragedy: 'the will of God is the same thing as the will of other men' and where there is 'really no presiding moral sanction', the final judgement rests upon the character's own 'inward impulse' (Cross 427). As Dorothea explains to Celia, 'you would have to feel with me, else you would never know' (*Middlemarch* 822). A nurturing and wise submission, then, is not an act of defeat in Eliot's moral universe, but depicted as a final triumph of the individual over the general powers that seek to destroy her. Hardy, on the other hand, felt compelled to push his characters further towards annihilation and death and to expose them to greater degrees of physical and emotional suffering on the way. For Eliot, the suffering and destructive energies of classical tragedy rub up against the edifying influence of her humanism. This can be felt, to lesser and greater degrees in the closing stages of her novels, where the tragic tension dissipates into the continuing flow of life's supreme energy.

Overall, Eliot's legacy to Hardy was to show how the tragic could be used to infuse a novel with intensity and direction. She illustrated in *Adam Bede* where the tragic pulse of life throbs, in obscurity, below the surface flow of ordinary life in the countryside. Hardy then went on to explore more deeply this democratic mode of the tragic. In Eliot's middle fiction, a growing positive moral voice suppresses a fuller realisation of the more destructive side of existence. For her, there was always something inherently 'foreign to modern sympathies' (Eliot, *Selected Essays* 363) about classical tragedy; increasingly she struggled to transpose an equivalent energy into her realism. The destructive powers of the tragic conflicted with her humanist faith, a feeling that permeates all her writing. Realism, the mode which is able to represent common life, survives, intact, since the life force that it celebrates survives the tragic powers that seek to destroy it.

Eliot, then, engaged with mid-nineteenth century ideas on tragedy, configured by moral, cultural and high-minded debates that reflected the background and subjective values of the critics and reviewers themselves. These nineteenth-century reviewers expose a dichotomy between Victorian theories on tragedy as a genre and the tragic experience as it was practised by the novelists. Hardy's innovative modes of the tragic thus continually brought him up against these reviewers. As Raymond Williams has pointed out:

> Tragic experience, because of its central importance, commonly attracts the fundamental beliefs and tensions of a period, and tragic theory is interesting mainly in this sense, that through it the shape and

> set of a particular culture is deeply realised ... Tragedy is then not a single and permanent kind of fact, but a series of experiences and conventions and institutions. (Williams, *Modern Tragedy* 45, 46)

There is always a deeply felt tension between his aesthetic of the tragic in his fiction and the contemporary culture that it both drew upon and criticised. His persistent recasting of the tragic experience, the 'structure of feeling'[7], to use Williams's expression, re-encodes the tragic with new literary modes. This experimental procedure reinforces Williams's point that the art of the tragic cannot be read as 'a single and permanent kind of fact', but rather constantly evolves, re-designing the codes and ideas that it draws upon. This could equally describe the nature of Hardy's spirituality that underpins his tragic vision – his agnosticism. Although his agnosticism was not a particular philosophical or ideological position, as it was for T. H. Huxley, it is a principal component at the centre of his thought and imagination and in many ways it separates Hardy's thinking from Eliot's.

Henrik Ibsen also influenced Hardy's shaping of the tragic and this can be illustrated by a comparison between *A Doll's House* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles.* The impact of Ibsen's play is highly likely to have inspired Hardy's vision of Tess, that is, the suffering and death of a young woman within an oppressive, patriarchal society. Hardy was attending performances of Ibsen's plays in London about the time that he was conceptualising and composing *Tess*. Their plots culminate in an act of feminine defiance that transgresses both the legal and moral codes of the social system.

A Doll's House is clearly a critical commentary about the situation of women in a patriarchal social order, the oppressive machinery of which, for Ibsen, comprises the corrupt values of a bourgeois regime, money, marriage and the law; these are the external secular powers that act upon the Helmer family. Nora's personal tragedy comes down to a crisis of feminine autonomy and independence within a crumbling marriage, the marital breakdown having largely been brought about by financial pressure and the tyranny of having to keep up social appearances. Nils Krogstad, the blackmailer, is only a vehicle for the exposure of problems inherent within her marriage. The result of these forces culminate in Nora's crisis of self and womanhood. Ibsen's vision of an alienated and isolated woman that refuses to be subjugated by a modern patriarchy corresponds poignantly with Tess's struggles to assert her natural female identity in the face of such a patriarchal society. It is as though the world of

[7] See Raymond Williams. Foreword to *Modern Tragedy*, 1966. London: Hogarth, 1992: 9. Williams' study discusses how Hardy uses tragedy to structure feelings and thoughts.

the feminine is in antithesis to that of the masculine. As Ibsen outlined in his notes, 'there are two kinds of spiritual law, two kinds of conscience, one in man and another, altogether different, in woman' (Ibsen, *Notes for the Modern Theatre* 91). This gender conflict between spirit and consciousness is represented through a stark vision of reality; Ibsen thought that conventional religious tragedy was impossible in a modern world. In *A Doll's House*, he has recuperated something of the defiant tragic spirit of the heroine and recast it in secular terms, just as Hardy does in *Tess*. Like Nora, Tess wants to be recognised as 'Tess' and not just sexually desired by Alec d'Urberville and falsely idealised by Angel Clare.

In Act three of *A Doll's House*, when Helmer accuses Nora of abandoning her 'sacred duty' as a mother and a wife, she replies 'I have another duty equally as sacred... my duty to myself... I believe that first and foremost I am an individual' (McFarlane and Arup (eds.) 82). After a period of suppressed secrecy and silence the letter of blackmail is finally read out; Helmer cannot forgive her and it is at that point that she realizes that her marriage has been based on a delusion of false love; she has been living a lie and has lost herself. In revolting against the idea of remaining Torvald's 'little bird' or anyone's 'doll', Nora breaks free from the matrimonial cage and leaves her children behind. It is difficult to imagine Tess rebelling in such a way, but the question that Ibsen's ending poses is what happens to Nora after she walks out the door? Her vision of life beyond the world of the doll's house has echoes of Hardy's agnostic visions that are discussed later in this chapter: 'never see him again. Never, never, never. [*throws her shawl over her head.*] And never see the children again either. Never, never. Oh, that black icy water. Oh, that bottomlessness...!' (*A Doll's House* 75). The metaphoric significance of the dark fathomless depth of the fjord resonates with the vast and unenclosed wilderness of Egdon Heath in Hardy's novels and a fearful sense of sublime nature that diminishes the human – a topic that will be developed in Chapter Three.

Ibsen's expression of the tragic incorporates the spiritual, emotional and physical levels of conflict; a technique that has affinities with Hardy's physiological and spiritual vision of life that was becoming increasingly dark and satirical in the early 1890s. For Toril Moi, anti-idealism is at the centre of the modernist project which she identifies in Ibsen's early play, *Emperor and Galilean* (1873) 'a document of the historical moment in which Ibsen came to consciousness of the absolute bankruptcy of idealism' (Moi 9). Hardy's similar deconstruction of heroism and rebellion also acts as a springboard for his proto-modernist reinvention of the tragic.

Ultimately, for Hardy, the psychological and affective dilemma raised by the struggle to find meaning in an indifferent world was inextricably linked to the central aesthetics of the

tragic. One notes the moral ambiguities and obscured aetiology that surrounds Tess's violation in the chase and her killing of Alec. This causal and moral obliquity is far more pronounced in Hardy than in Eliot or Ibsen and helped him to make a place for himself in the literary world of his day; as Hardy summed it up: 'cause is neither moral nor immoral, but *un*moral' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 439). In his later novels, Hardy draws upon Ibsen's anti-idealist vision of man and expands upon it in his more satirical modes. When Hardy went to see Ibsen's plays in London in the 1890s, he would have found an affinity with the playwright's vision of isolated individuals struggling to find their truths in a secular world. That is the predominant humanist dilemma in the plays that the characters face. Ibsen's bourgeois world is a different environment from Hardy's rural, working-class one, but the rigorous examination of the self in crisis is common to both their work. One of Hardy's rare negative remarks about Ibsen implies that he lacked artistic sophistication and that his tragedies were too edifying and morally obvious. This is not to say that Ibsen does not use irony and satire to great effect and that Hardy does not have a didactic agenda, but rather that Hardy's satirical mode of the tragic produces a greater sense of distance and alienation with his readership than does Ibsen's less nuanced recasting of the tragic.

Section Four: Darwin, Schopenhauer and Hardy's Agnostic Imagination

'Agnosticism' was a term first coined by Thomas Henry Huxley in 1869 at the inaugural meeting of the British Metaphysical Society and, as such, was first used to delineate the boundary between the world of material phenomena and that of the First Cause, which is unknown. Huxley's speech was informed by a basic premise that he went on to develop in his essay 'From Science and Culture', that any true examination of life should not be 'devoid of a knowledge of what physical science has done'[8]. Agnosticism, then, as used by Huxley, denoted the borderline between an empirical, rationalist reality that can be scientifically observed and the unknown world that lies beyond it; Hardy is far more sceptical of science.

Hardy's tragic vision probes the unknown territory that Huxley had marked out. For Hardy there was no such clear line between the two spheres, because their parameters were constantly shifting. From Huxley, he noted 'it is the customary fate of new truths to begin as

[8] Cited in Otis, Laura, (ed.), *Literature and Science in the Nineteenth Century: An Anthology*. Oxford U. P., 2002: 6.

heresies & to end as superstitions... Irrationally held truths may be more harmful than reasoned errors' (Björk (ed.), *Literary Notebooks* i, n. 1269 and n. 1270, 146). The significance of the impact of positivism on nineteenth-century thought was that it dispelled metaphysical notions about existence. For many, this left an empty void and a spiritually vacuous vision of man, but for Hardy it opened up new 'tragical possibilities' (*The Return* 11) concerning life in general.

Huxley, the outspoken defender of Darwin and advocate of scientific investigation, believed that man had evolved above nature and that it was his ethical duty to control and manage the natural environment. However, in Hardy's tragic scheme of things, any such imposition of human sovereignty fails, usually with disastrous consequences, as in Damon Wildeve's attempt to cultivate the wilderness of Egdon or Henchard's attempt to outsmart the weather and his rival, Donald Farfrae. Hardy's vision of nature and man goes on to develop into a more complex proto-modernist dynamic in the later fiction when his characters are subjected to primitive and mysterious natural forces that disrupt their social conditioning. Wat Ollamoor's silence and his wild, misanthropic and antisocial energy in the 'Fiddler of the Reels' is a case in point and has parallels with D. H. Lawrence's depiction of dark primitive and psychic forces in *Women in Love*, in particular, the 'gladiatorial' wrestle between Birkin and Gerald, whose bodies 'interfuse' as they 'wrestled swiftly, rapturously, intent and mindless… the physical junction of two bodies clinched into oneness' (*Women in Love* 348, 349). Throughout Hardy's fiction, the power of nature becomes increasingly represented in symbolic and esoteric terms, as an uncontrollable energy that flows in and around the individual.

Hardy's perception of nature's coercive power also drew upon Herbert Spencer's synthetic evolutionary philosophy which blended scientific naturalism with proto-sociological ideas. As most commentators stress, for Spencer, evolution was synonymous with progress, yet he was also conscious of the destructive implications of evolution and frequently evoked menacing teleological visions of time and the cosmos. Visions of cataclysmic outcomes haunt his work. Thus, 'The Unknowable' which Hardy noted in *The '1867' Notebook* comes from Spencer's *First Principles* with an agnosticism that suggests the idea of noumena which are beyond man's comprehension. As Spencer puts it, 'positive knowledge does not, and never can, fill the whole region of human thought. At the utmost reach of discovery there arises, and must ever arise, the question – what lies beyond?' (i, 11). This is a question Hardy's narrators and characters will pose, as they venture into unknown

territory, both physically and mentally, their experiences become increasingly intense and disturbing, culminating in a resignation before the mystery of existence.

As will be illustrated in Chapter Three, that narrative of the unknowable is being performed in the early novels. What gives this world picture a tragic meaning is that in their ordinary social condition, obsessed with self and pursuing the significant other, the characters do not see, touch or feel in tune with nature. There are, of course, notable exceptions, 'moments of vision', in which the fetichistic and primitive instinct touches nature, as in the episodes of Tess in the garden at Talbothays and Clym's myopic experience on Egdon Heath. But these often disturbing moments are immediately cast back into the normal, purblind flow of life. What gives the Unknowable its tragic intensity in Hardy is that it is a fearful void full of imagined horrors. For Eustacia Vye, the unknown always fills her mind with 'terrible possibilities' (*The Return* 197) which, in her case, proves to be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The textual context of Spencer's 'The Unknowable' is also revealing and reads: 'that motionless state called death, which ends Evolution in organic bodies, typical of the universal death in which Evolution at large must end'[9]. Death is the final logical end for Spencer and Hardy; evolutionary organisms, including stars, will end in extinction. As Hardy notes from Spencer: 'a boundless space holding here and there extinct suns, fated to remain forever without further change' (Björk (ed.), *Literary Notebooks* i, 385). The logical outcome of evolution means that one day all life on earth is also doomed to extinction. A similar feeling of awe and terror in the face of the mystery of existence is experienced by the characters in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. As Henry Knight, the emotionally insecure man of science, declares: 'I am very far from knowing what life is. A just concept of life is too large a thing to grasp during the short interval of passing through it' (185). The incomprehensibility of life, that to know its truths is beyond man, and images of individuals out of synchronisation with nature, unconscious of its operations, forms a significant aspect of Hardy's vision in the novels.

Hardy thought that modern Victorian society imposed oppressive unnatural forces upon man's natural instincts, the most powerful of which was the sex drive. But the love of a man for a woman was not the only form of affection that Hardy was fascinated by and as his fiction demonstrates that form of romantic love always seems to fail. The camaraderie and affection shared by men also plays a significant part in Hardy's creation of tragic situations.

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[9] Björk (ed.), *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*, 1974 edition. vol i, notes to the text, 385. In this instance I have used this earlier edition of the notes, because the commentary is more extensive than in the 1985 edition.

In *A Pair of Blue Eyes* the friendship between Stephen Smith and Henry Knight is one such example of masculine affection and Michael Henchard's early feelings towards Donald Farfrae in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* are deeper than he himself wants to admit to.

Another personal experience that transformed Hardy's vision of the world was his loss of faith during his mid-twenties. However, biographical loss of faith readings[10] of Hardy have to be handled with care since they imply that he had a faith to lose. Ralph Pite suggests that 'Hardy's loss of faith... during his twenties was traumatic' (Pite, *The Guarded Life* 108) and reminds us that Hardy (in 1864) wrote the word 'Doubt' in the margin of his Bible next to chapter 44 of *Isaiah*, a passage concerned with human suffering and divine injustice on Earth. Later he erased the word, a gesture that for Pite suggests Hardy's 'guarded' scepticism in a predominantly Christian community (112). However, there is little evidence to support the view that Hardy ever took the Bible seriously as a young man. Given his sceptical and inquisitive turn of mind, it is likely that he would have doubted its literal truth from quite an early age.

Hardy's secrecy and ambivalence about his spiritual beliefs is also the result of the very fragile and volatile nature of belief itself. In *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved*, Hardy writes: 'what man's belief is fixed, and who shall enter into my mind and say what my belief is at any one time' (*The Pursuit* 161). Later, Hardy would deny being an angry village atheist or a non-believer, describing himself, more accurately, as a churchy agnostic. Philip Davis argues that 'for Hardy nothing – no secular humanism, no politics, not even the changes he sought in the social structure – could replace the old religious feelings: he never gets over them' (Davis 544). 'Old religious feeling' is a vague term; for Hardy it goes back to early primitive interactions with the environment – a time before the theological period.

After Darwin, there was little room for moralising; instead growth and development of organisms, with man being as one of them, was seen as the result of inexorable temporal processes. In the *Literary Notebooks* Leslie Stephen's view is cited:

> By Darwinism we are no longer forced to choose between a fixed order imposed by supernatural sanction, & accidental combination capable of instantaneous & arbitrary reconstruction, [but] recognise in society, as in individuals, the development of an organic structure by slow secular processes. (Björk (ed.), *Literary Notebooks* i, n. 1194, 132)

[10] For an example of this see Robert Gittings's chapter, 'Loss of Faith', in *Young Thomas Hardy*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978: 131-146.

Before Darwin, narratives depicted mythological experiences, supernatural events, mysterious appearances and disappearances and strange transportations to worlds beyond this one. As I will argue in Chapter Four, processes would still be interrupted, but there is always the underlining inexorable momentum of time in Hardy's secular naturalism. Time, he thought, flowed like a stream, it was not structured like a tree. In contrast, one only has to think of *Frankenstein*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Moby Dick* for a sense of pre-Darwinian tragedies that were framed by supernatural forces such as the power of evil. In these works, the destructive power of nature is represented as malign and monstrous and can be traced back to Shakespearean and Greek tragedy. By contrast, the above extract from Hardy's literary notes uses the language of social evolution and privileges sequential development, which, in Hardy's scheme of things, is painful and problematic. Random and chance events disrupt the flow of life and even end it for some of the characters, as will be emphasised in the examination of the short stories. In Hardy's vision, there is a tension between evolution and destruction, between life and death, between the struggle to survive and extinction.

Hardy developed a growing sensibility for 'the perception of the failure of things' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 127), which included the failure of individuals to survive in the face of natural forces. In the secularisation process, as the destructive power of nature is seen for what it is, divested of supernatural authority, the temptation is to challenge nature, harden oneself in the tragic paradigm of war, a struggle for power in which man can no longer be in harmony with the natural world. From Leslie Stephen, Hardy noted 'history depends upon the relation between the organism and the environment' (Björk (ed.), *Literary Notebooks* i, n. 1195, 132); Hardy's own sense of an environment in crisis is powerfully captured in his exploration of landscape. However, one notes that these environments are not altogether pessimistic, but hope appears at critical moments. Just as the sound 'of joy illimited' (Gibson (ed.), *The Complete Poems* 150) resonates from Hardy's darkling thrush over the bleak, winter landscape of Wessex, so too should readings of his fictive landscapes note subtle signs of hope encoded into their frameworks. There are, then, significant and often symbolic affirmations of life within the 'general drama of pain' (*The Mayor* 321), providing a respite from the suffering.

The limitations of knowledge, for Hardy, are a vital aspect of his tragic vision and the basically unknowable truth of existence. This incomprehensible part of reality opens up a whole new area of disturbing metaphysical possibilities for Hardy which poses more questions than solutions. As Sophocles's *Oedipus the King* illustrates, interrogation is, in fact, a significant structuring device in tragedy and one that Hardy made powerful use of in his

fiction. One crucial question that haunts Oedipus is whether he himself might be the perpetrator of the crime: 'O God! Did I, then, in my ignorance, / Proclaim that awful curse against myself?'[11]. Hardy's art of the tragic draws upon this ignorance and self-questioning; tragic recognition is so ingrained within it, indeed it is often the cause of our downfall. In Hardy's secularisation of tragedy, the loss of faith in ourselves and the betrayal of the self, replaces the old, religious notions of offending the gods or sinning against a Judaic God.

Leslie Stephen, whom Hardy thought had the greatest philosophical influence upon him, advised Hardy to study Matthew Arnold and as Hardy's extensive notes in the *Literary Notebooks* demonstrate, he paid close attention to Arnold's ideas on art and Greek culture. One such idea, for Hardy, was Arnold's concept of 'the imaginative reason'. As Hardy recorded: 'the main element of the modern spirit's life is... the imaginative reason... no other poets have lived so much by the imaginative reason' (Björk (ed.), *Literary Notebooks* n. 1018, 107). However, the phrase, 'imaginative reason' eclipses the tensions between the imagination and reason, in its conflation of the two distinctive human faculties. As Hardy began to formulate his own ideas, the realm of the imagination would reign supreme over such forms of reasoning as rationalisations or logic. Art and fiction had to be guided by feeling: 'it is an appeal to the emotional reason rather than to the logical reason; for by their emotions men are acted upon, and act upon others' (Orel (ed.) 115). Thus, the source of so much tension and chaos in Hardy's characters is this unfolding drama between the logical, rational level of consciousness and the passions or sentient side of their personalities.

It is in the difference between Hardy's 'low' modes of the tragic and Arnold's high art that one can begin to grasp a sense of Hardy's proto-modernism. For Arnold, tragedy was a means of ennobling the arts and society at large. Its purpose was primarily instructive and educational, about raising standards, reaching towards the best. Such cultural reformation is driven by an elitism that stands in stark contrast to Hardy's democratisation of ordinary life. Hardy acknowledged his debt to Arnold's imperative though, that writing should be 'a criticism of life' (Orel (ed.) 114) and deployed the tragic in his critique of class, marriage and the church. Ironically, the life that Hardy criticises through his fiction is the very one that Arnold was trying to promote, that is, a culture underpinned by a privileged way of life, based in metropolitan centres of values and power, hence Hardy's curt rebuke of Arnold's patronising view of provincialism: 'Arnold is wrong about provincialism' (Millgate (ed.),

[11] See Edith Hall (ed.). *Sophocles: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Electra*. Trans. H. D. F. Kitto. Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1994: lines 744,745, p73.

Life and Work 151). In practice, though, the cultural difference between these two artists is full of ambiguity, as Hardy, in order to advance his own literary career made good use of the cultural apparatus of London. What is clear is that Hardy and Arnold, as men of ideas, shared a common enthusiasm for secular and agnostic ways of thinking about the world in general.

Hardy's agnostic imagination, however, drew more heavily upon emotional creativity than it did upon Arnold's high minded 'reason'. Hardy notes that the driving force behind creativity was 'the emotional reason rather than… the logical reason' (Orel (ed.) 115). As Arnold puts it, we must transcend our 'ordinary self' by perusing 'right reason', the aim being to elevate 'our best self in the progress of humanity towards perfection, – for us the framework of society' (Garnett (ed.) 149) and the idea and study of tragedy, itself, is enlisted by Arnold in this pursuit of progress and education:

> The best art and poetry of the Greeks, in which religion and poetry are one, in which the idea of beauty and of a human nature perfect on all sides adds to itself a religious and devout energy... the idea of beauty, harmony, and complete human perfection... is wanting or misapprehended at present. (Garnett (ed.) 41)

Hardy's aesthetics of the ordinary stand up against Arnold's high-minded cultural project, with its imperative of the best and the possibility of a higher spiritual life and the ideal of perfection. The dialogue between the ordinary and the best is poignantly realised in *A Laodicean.* In the novel, as we shall see in more detail in Chapter Four, all that George Somerset and Paula Power managed to do to the De Stancy castle, that resilient 'fossil of feudalism,' (*A Laodicean* 18) is to begin to modernise and restore it. After Dare, the hybrid embodiment of alien, dark, natural instincts, has set fire to the castle, it lies smouldering in ruins. It is at this point that Paula and Somerset accept that their project has been defeated. Instead, they decide to build a 'mansion of independent construction... a new house from the ground' (378). Repeatedly, the novel dramatises the intransigent opposition between cultures; there is no smooth transition between medievalism, the social and historical past, and modernity. The tragic lies in the vision that the new obliterates the old and the allusion to Arnold's 'modern spirit' (379) only satirically reaffirms that the ideal of cultural elitism has failed. Rather, Hardy's tragic vision in the novel draws upon an opposing concept of the modern, that is, the 'antagonistic modern spirit' (169), as it is embodied in Paula.

John Addington Symonds turned against Christianity in a more explicit way than Hardy. Symonds was even more interested in the expression of male desire and read the model of ancient Greece from a homosexual point of view. In his youth, he adopted the

contemporary attitude of seeing in the Greeks, men able to express themselves freely and physically, unhampered by suppressive codes of Christian decorum. In his memoirs, he wrote 'here in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* – in the myth of the Soul and the speeches of Pausanias, Agathon and Diotima – I discovered the true *liber amoris* at last, the revelation I had been waiting for, the consecration of a long-cherished idealism... my soul was lodged in Hellas' (Symonds103).

For Symonds and, I would argue, for Hardy, a puritanical Christianity imposed a negative effect upon modern aesthetics. Its vision of the body as so much sinful flesh was incongruous with nineteenth-century liberal art. In *Studies of the Greek Poets* (1873), which Hardy read with enthusiasm, Symonds argues the case for a homoerotic sensuality; for Symonds, the Greeks symbolised freedom of expression and intellectual integrity. He felt that Greek art represented a mode of timelessness, of universal beauty and truth lacking in contemporary nineteenth-century literature. Sculpture expressed the best form of Hellenism; through it artists could follow rules of *decorum* by works which could be produced in accordance with both good taste and high morality. However, Hardy was no Hellenist and was not inclined to look back with regret at some imagined golden age of Greek art and culture. As we shall see in the later analysis of the texts, Hardy's dramatisation of anti-idealism and his presentation of masculine beauty effectively oppose Symonds's Hellenism.

Hardy found it increasingly impossible to believe in the 'progressiveness' of man, and would have argued against 'our present state of exaltation'. In his *Apology* (1922), he criticised the Positivists. Instead, his ideological development can best be described in terms of a pessimistic meliorist, and the fine tension between positive and negative paradigms makes his aesthetics of fetichism[12], so fascinating. John Stuart Mill was also a positivist and, in the early years, Hardy found great solace in Mill's *On Liberty* (1869) which asserted the rights of the individual over custom and state control. In 1865, however, Mill criticised Comte's theory of fetichism on the grounds that 'there are either no, or very imperfect, historical records' (Mill 84) to support his model of human progress. Mill advocated that personal control over one's life could lead to wellbeing. In *On Liberty*, Mill proposed that 'over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign' (Mill, *On Liberty* 16). Therefore, freedom and happiness could be achieved through the assertion of the will over the suppressive forces of custom and the state. However, for Hardy, the endorsement of

[12] This is the nineteenth-century spelling of fetichism that Hardy uses throughout his fiction and in his literary notebooks, which he took from Auguste Comte's positivist concept of the history of civilisation.

liberal individualism was riddled with contradictions. His scepticism can be seen as arising out of scientific and positivist discourses, whose fundamental criteria for truth and facts was grounded in empiricism and experiences. However, experience itself becomes a problematic phenomenon for Hardy, fraught with dilemmas. In this respect, there is a close affinity between Hardy and Walter Pater's proto-modernist critique of 'personality' and 'experience' (Pater 119).

From *Marius the Epicurean*, Hardy made several notes demonstrating his interest in Pater: 'perpetual flux... the dissidence of an inward world... of his own vivid apprehensions... the exclusive certainty to himself of his own impressions' (Björk (ed.), *Literary Notebooks* notes 1549 to 1552, i, 206). Modernity, and the anxieties about the self that it was provoking, preoccupied Hardy and Pater alike. If experience could be viewed as in a constant state of flux, as a series of impressions of seemings, then this very fluidity could also lead to a dissonance between the self and the other and the surrounding world. An isolated self, struggling to find coherence and the fragmentation of experience, points towards a proto-modernist view of an alienated consciousness. As Pater puts it in his notorious 'Conclusion' to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873): 'experience, already reduced to a swarm of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us' (119). This concept of impenetrability becomes translated as a paradox and tragic irony of character. This conflict is further compounded by anomaly of human consciousness and perception – that we are part of the world as physical creatures and yet consciousness separates us from that world. The self is thus a part of reality and also distinct from it. For Pater, this dilemma is essentially ironic and it is the tragic irony of 'character' in Hardy too; it is an inevitable and natural formation of the self and yet its protective membrane is impervious to reality, life and truth. Pater's ideas about this conflict are likely to have shaped Hardy's characterisation of divided and fragmented individuals.

One possible answer to the intransigence of personality was a relinquishing of the will, which Arthur Schopenhauer so notoriously explored. Although Hardy had no German (unlike George Eliot) and had to wait till 1883 to read an English translation of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*, the philosopher's ideas would have been in the air in England throughout the 1870s. Schopenhauer's concept of The Will, as many have discussed, particularly in relation to *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* had a profound

effect upon the underlying metaphysical frameworks of Hardy's novels[13]. In contrast, this thesis focuses upon the idea of resignation in the face of the chaotic and painful forces that Hardy's characters have to face. The renunciation of the will is fraught with paradoxes; to choose to give up on life can be construed as the exercise of the individual's will and the will to live is not the same as desire, an emotion. The will in Hardy's tragic scheme of things is more helpfully seen in secular humanist terms as an energy that his characters are not fully in control of, which drives them through life. This compelling force creates friction and conflict as it comes up against other forces, such as the greater power of nature, chance, circumstance and time. In this light, Schopenhauer's idea of resignation opens up a range of questions that informs my reading of Hardy's tragic vision. Thus, the way in which Hardy's characters pass through the ordeals of chance and error, ending their lives in resignation, has close affinities with Schopenhauer's formulation of the will:

> It is the antagonism of the will with itself which is here most completely unfolded at the highest grade of its objectivity, and which comes into fearful prominence. It becomes visible in the suffering of mankind which is produced partly by chance and error... the complete knowledge of the real nature of the world, acting as a quieter of the will, produces resignation, the giving up not merely of life, but of the whole will to live itself. (Payne (trans.) 253)

The wide view is that there is something innately tragic about some forms of human experience. Suffering can no longer be considered in metaphysical terms, but can come about simply through chance and error, leading to a resignation of the will to live. This concept of resignation is powerfully reflected in Hardy's open ambiguous endings. In nineteenth-century England, the will, together with forms of desire, were often thought of as the centre of the personality, but in Hardy, the will drives the characters inextricably towards a disintegration of the self and finally to their doom. To relinquish the will, or to moderate the degree of self-determinism, to align it with those greater surrounding powers, in nineteenth-century England, is a profound spiritual dilemma that Hardy places before his characters. As I will illustrate in the analysis of the texts, these are some of the questions, together with Schopenhauer's related concept of suicide, which Hardy's tragic vision raises.

[13] 'Mind is seen as detached lucidity watching a world of matter in motion. This motion in things appears to be caused by an intrinsic power within them, a power to which Hardy, like Schopenhauer or Nietzsche, gives the name will'. J. Hillis Miller, *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P., 1970: 17.

Hardy, the writer of fiction, was not trying to offer up solutions to the problems of individualism and determinism: he abhorred didactic narratives or even fixed systems of thought that made claims to essential truths. One of Hardy's artistic goals was to represent a series of idiosyncratic impressions and seemings, rather than to didactically disseminate any particular argument or 'consistent philosophy... coherent scientific theory of the universe' (Orel (ed.) 48, 49). Ironically, the expression of such a wide range of ideas means that on the level of text, his fiction abounds with discourses that are in tension and to which there is no resolution. But there is, of course, a significant distance between the authorial voice, the narrator and the opposing views of the protagonists. This leaves no possibility of a Hegelian reconciliation at the end of the novels, but rather, throughout most of the fiction, we are left with a form of Schopenhauerian resignation.

In summary, this chapter has explored some of the ideas and attitudes that are likely to have shaped Hardy's reading of the changing world around him. His perception of that world in transition and the anxieties that it generated gave birth to his tragic vision that is reflected in his fiction. In the wake of Darwin's theory of evolution, Hardy could no longer believe in a supernatural or divine external power at work in the universe and under a wide range of contemporary ideas and theories, he created his own pioneering tragic vision of 'the quandary that man is in' (*The Return* 167). In complex ways, he drew upon his personal experiences and painted both an enchanting and disenchanting vision of life in the English countryside. However, he was no simple pastoralist, but absorbed the intellectual, literary and artistic discourses of his time, transforming received ideas and forms of tragedy into new proto-modernist modes of fiction. He was simultaneously a Victorian and a visionary who foreshadowed such modernist dilemmas about man's relationship with his environment, the will and personality, identity and the fragmentation of experience. From this discursive and contextual introduction, I now want to conduct a closer textual analysis of the fiction.

CHAPTER THREE: EXPERIMENTS WITH ENVIRONMENT

With Darwin and the spread of evolutionary ideas, Hardy turned towards the environment as a medium through which to express the tragic. This chapter analyses a range of ways in which Hardy uses environment to intensify not only the experiences, fears and anxieties of the characters, but also his general tragic vision of the world at large. This pioneering environmental technique illustrates an early proto-modernist strain in his fiction, which Lawrence and Woolf go on to explore in more radical ways. The general function of environment in Hardy, this chapter argues, is the intensification and expansion of the tragic situation. With this in mind, the chapter is divided into four sections: 'Mind, Memory and Environment in the Early Novels', 'The Dream and the Reality of Wessex', '*The Hand of Ethelberta*: Satire and the Social Environment' and 'Reading Tragic Landscapes'. The looped orbital trajectory of the thesis that I outlined in the Introduction, is most notable in the structuring of this chapter as there is a marked discrepancy between the chronological order in which the texts were written and the schema of my critical concerns.

Section One: Mind, Memory and Environment in the Early Novels

One innovative way in which Hardy anticipates the modernists is to use environment as a tragic, patterning device throughout his fiction. In so doing, the causes of suffering and destruction are not simply located within the individual's flaws or defects; there is nothing intrinsically tragic about the characters as there is in much conventional tragedy. Instead, through an intense physiological dialogue between character and environment, Hardy creates innovative, tragic patterns that provide the novels with cohesive structures. Hardy, this chapter maintains, very consciously deploys this environmental method as soon as he begins writing fiction, albeit in relatively underdeveloped ways. I want to begin by analysing the interaction between mind, memory and environment in his first novel, *Desperate Remedies*.

First, the overall geographical framework of *Desperate Remedies* has a unifying effect upon the novel's complex plot and has a much needed homogenising influence upon the story's 'long and intricately inwrought chain of circumstance' (*Desperate Remedies* 7). Notably, the action does not begin in what would become Wessex, but in London, and only afterwards moves to Creston on the West Country coast. The continual interaction between that area of the West Country and London provides the novel with a dynamic sense of place that magnifies the troubled mental states of the characters. Illegitimate and abandoned,

Aeneas Manston emerges out of the back streets of London where ‘the wickedness of the world’ (7) is rife. Later, it is in London that the reader is introduced to Manston’s alcoholic and destitute wife whose reappearance in his life has such a damaging effect.

The novel begins with Ambrose Graye proposing to Cytherea in a middle-class suburban setting – a conservatory in London. The light is ‘infinitely enhancing the freshness and beauty of the leaves’ (*Desperate Remedies* 9). The mood is explicitly romantic. However, it is in this iridescent domestic environment that Cytherea rejects Ambrose’s proposal of marriage, telling him that there is ‘something that divides us eternally’ (9). That ‘something’ is, we learn later, her illegitimate pregnancy: the resulting son, Aeneas, will grow into a man whose being does, indeed, prove to be divisive. The young and ambitious Graye is stunned when Cytherea mysteriously flees London, this ‘outlandish place’ (161), with her parents to the West Country. The city and country are not presented within a simple pastoral polemic; as the drama unfolds, it soon becomes clear that secrecy, misery and corruption are equally rife in the countryside.

Miss Aldclyffe inherits Knapwater House in the West Country, but far from being a place of retreat and refuge, the remoteness of the house and its damp atmosphere induces feelings and sensations of subterfuge and isolation in the reader. This seclusion and the descriptive passages magnify the dubious and misanthropic nature of Miss Aldclyffe and Manston and is highly symbolic of their psychic deterioration and weaknesses. Thus, the old Georgian mansion, built in the Greek classical style, looks down upon the still lake. The lower wings of the house and the rest of the outbuildings are dilapidated, being overpowered by nature: ‘ivory covered ice-houses... the whole mass of subsidiary buildings being half buried beneath close-set shrubs and trees’ (*Desperate Remedies* 65). The original Elizabethan fragment of the house, with its ‘destroyed gables’ (104) and bricked-up windows, is adjacent to the old court, whose stones have been pushed about by the ‘thrust of the grasses between them’ (104). It is into this neglected and crumbling environment that Cytherea Graye strays and it is here that she is mesmerised and seduced by Manston’s organ playing.

As a stranger, whose desperate financial circumstances have led her to this place, she is seemingly entrapped in this strange other world. In one of the novel’s most intensely psychological episodes, her anxieties become projected, fancifully, on to the nocturnal surroundings. In this mode the text describes her first sleepless night at the mansion: ‘ill at ease, and mentally distressed’, her mind haunted by the eerie moonlight and the ‘strange and gloomy murmur’ (*Desperate Remedies* 90). In her mind’s eye she sees the black water of the waterfall cascading down into a ‘deep cold hole… sad everywhere’ (90). This reads as a

visual psychic metaphor for her sorrowful and depressed state of mind. In the bed that she shares with the old, bitter lady of the house, this timid young woman shivers and jumps up at the wailing sound of a dog. The text, in these cumulative ways, dramatises the disturbed inner moral condition and feelings of the characters through environmental descriptions. Early in the novel, Cytherea Graye is gazing through a window of the town hall when she sees her father falling to his death from church scaffolding:

> Recollection of what had passed evolved itself an instant later… her eyes caught sight of the western sky, and without heeding, saw white sunlight shining in shaft-like lines from a rift in a slaty cloud. Emotions will attach themselves to scenes that are simultaneous – however foreign in essence these scenes may be – as chemical waters will crystallise on twigs and wires. Ever after that time any mental agony brought less vividly to Cytherea's mind the scene from the Town Hall windows than sunlight streaming in shaft-like line. (*Desperate Remedies* 5)

The underpinning psychological discourse of this passage is that memory is shaped by the most powerful and intense perceptions. Cytherea's traumatic experience is reinforced upon her psyche through the subliminal effect of the shafts of light. Memory emerges instantly and resonates as a ripple that diminishes in time. For all the characters in the novel, the physical environment acts as a kind of storehouse of painful memories and disturbing experiences that at any one moment can be reignited through the unfolding perceptions of place. Painful feelings can remain dormant until they are released through Hardy's treatment of the inanimate environment. Tom Paulin has argued that, in Hardy, 'certain images – not necessarily the most appropriate ones – can become fixed in the memory and hold intense experiences connected with them' (Paulin 30). This disruptive, mnemonic effect is a feature of those tragic temperaments and sensibilities and is not a general mental phenomenon. In this light, a common feature of psychology takes on tragic significance in Hardy.

Miss Aldclyffe visits her solicitor, Mr. Nyttleton in order to legally endorse her advertisement and engagement of a steward to manage Knapwater House. Hardy describes the entrance and the railings to Nyttleton's offices in a gothic mode: 'rust was the only active agent to be seen... the same insidious canker... staring blood red' (*Desperate Remedies* 107). The shuttered windows 'appear like the white and sightless orbs of a blind man' (111), which foreshadow the dead man's eyes in the shimmering, moonlit pool of *Far From the Madding Crowd*. The macabre descriptions of the physical surroundings and objects tacitly infuses the occasion of Miss Aldclyffe's visit with a foreboding and sinister tension that later also

becomes embodied in Hardy's characterisation of Manston. This tragical and dark sense of place, however, is not confined to the metropolis or urban areas in Hardy, so subverting any such simple pastoral opposition between London and the countryside in his novels.

In time, Cytherea's agony becomes less vividly felt or relived and is usurped by other forms of suffering. Hardy creates narrative patterns through the connectivity of memory and environment, but this is juxtaposed against the dismantling of consciousness.

Desperate Remedies illustrates, then, how Hardy deploys environment as a device for the recursive development of tragic states of consciousness. As he later reflected, 'a sensation novel is possible in which the sensationalism is not casualty but evolution; not physical but psychical… the effect upon the faculties is the important matter to be depicted' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 213). The oscillations between mind, memory and environment shape the novel's tragic effect and movement. The effect of painful, shocking experiences upon the faculties is, therefore, disruptive for the characters, but provides the novel with a recursive and repetitive pattern.

When Cytherea, having just been employed as a servant for Miss Aldclyffe at Knapwater House, is 'listlessly' gazing out at the beautiful garden with its colourful, neatly-arranged flower beds, she is enclosed in her small attic room, sitting, alienated from the ordered middle-class environment outside. The floral order of the garden, 'glowing most conspicuously' and the park beyond, intensifies her feelings of depression: all is 'lost upon her eyes' (*Desperate Remedies* 67):

> She was thinking that nothing is worthwhile; that she might die in a workhouse; and what did it matter? The petty, vulgar, details of servitude… the necessity of quenching all individuality of character in herself… to help on the wheel of this alien establishment, made her sick and sad. (*Desperate Remedies* 67)

By contrast with the previous example, this moment of social alienation is intensified by the oppressive effect of a normally edifying garden environment. The realist framework of seeing through a window structures the scene, but this time the focus is on the heroine's social ostracism that is only heightened by the floral order of the garden: its seemingly benign order and beauty overwhelms her and contrasts, sharply, with Cytherea's ugly feelings. Hardy's use of the window and the third person narrator also accentuates her loneliness by distancing the reader's perspective of her inner thoughts and feelings. Thus, she sits in her cramped servants' quarters longing 'to pursue some free, out-of-doors employment, sleep under trees or a hut, and know no enemy but winter and cold weather' (*Desperate Remedies* 67, 68). The

outdoors represents a sense of freedom, in contrast to the imposing atmosphere of the interior of the house that harbours a dark spirit that she acutely senses.

The sounds and images of Knapwater House continually prey upon Cytherea's mind – nowhere more vividly dramatised than in the persistent, inexorable rush of the waterfall. On her first night in the house she is agitated by its dark stillness. Unable to sleep beside her mistress she becomes aware of the waterfall's 'strange and gloomy murmur' (*Desperate Remedies* 91). Her fearful imagination mingles with and magnifies the sights and sounds of the night, increasing her anxieties. Thus, she imagines how the water appears in the moonlight: 'black at the head, and over the surface of the deep cold hole into which it fell; white and frothy at the fall' (90). All her sensory perceptions add to the 'wayward enmity to her quiet of mind' (90). The longer she stays within the sphere of the house, the more she deteriorates psychologically.

The setting of Carriford Church, where Cytherea is due to marry Manston, also functions as a powerful environmental conductor for the heroine's depressed spirits that, like the church, seem to be in a state of degeneration. Once again, the sunlight accentuates her morbid mood:

> Everything in the place was the embodiment of decay: the fading red glare from the setting sun... emphasizing the end of the day and all its cheerful doings, the mildewed walls... the wormy poppy-heads... the dank air of death which had gathered with the evening, would have made grave a lighter mood than Cytherea's was then. (*Desperate Remedies* 235)

The tragic tension is vividly reinforced through a morbid, poetic mode: 'the dank air of death', and the gloom of the dying day. Cytherea's secret dream of a happy church marriage is totally crushed by this experience with Manston. Throughout his fiction, Hardy will go on to use church settings to evoke tragic sensations of place that magnify the character's inner turmoil. This occasion anticipates the tragic tension to come when they get married.

The mnemonic effect of environment comes to the fore in the final scene of the novel. After Cytherea and Springrove are finally married, the wedding party returns to the house and the couple, descend in moonlight the steps to the lake and take out a skiff. The act of rowing on the lake triggers vague memories of the first time that they kissed in the bay at Creston. Springrove first thinks that he remembers the occasion 'exactly' (*Desperate Remedies* 407), but as she deconstructs his false, romanticised version she relates how she felt coerced into kissing him. She explains that she conceded to kissing him on the lips because she did not

want to be 'unkind' (407), so undermining any sense of resolution in this closing scene. This indeterminacy would not have happened if they had not descended to the lake and taken out the skiff, but because their surroundings changed, the text subverts the romantic mode with an element of human fallibility and deluded perception.

Desperate Remedies, then, provides significant instances of Hardy's early experiments in environment. In these cyclically connected 'moments of vision', Hardy intensifies tragic states of consciousness. What might have otherwise been a melodramatic, sensation novel is given continuity and coherence through Hardy's use of eidetic and mnemonic modes of writing. In the continual dialectic between environment and character, painful experiences are impressed onto the mind, waiting to be reactivated and distorted by a return to a similar place or a similar environmental experience. The text illustrates how Hardy's pioneering narrative technique transformed what might appear to be a sensation novel into an experimental proto-modernist examination of psychological weaknesses and the fallibility of memory. Hardy's use of environment simultaneously unites and fragments experience to tragic effect. It was a novel that, in fact, attracted Virginia Woolf who praised it as an illustration of his 'powerful and sardonic' imagination (Woolf, *The Common Reader* i, 245**)**. The eerie sound of the 'waterfall that echoes and booms through its pages' particularly captivated her, because it illustrated Hardy's 'larger sense of Nature as a force' (246). Woolf's own vision and structural deployment of the natural environment leads to her deeper exploration of levels of consciousness. At times, when Mrs Ramsay relaxes her concentration, she gazes out to the shore and at the waves whose crashing rhythm is 'open' like a 'ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beats the measure of life' (Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* 17). Woolf's psychological use of sea and waves has strong echoes of Hardy's tragic representations of environment in *Desperate Remedies*.

Hardy's chronological structuring of the novel points towards another proto-modernist practice, the manipulation and fragmentation of time. The time scheme of the novel ranges from 'the events of thirty years' to 'The events of three hours', the scale of one day being repeated five times in the novel. This opening and closing of the fan of time foreshadows, albeit in a preliminary way, the manner in which experience is organised but also compressed and fractured as it is in the twenty-four hour narrative of *Mrs. Dalloway.* The mutability of time passing and the transience of finite human existence are modernist concerns which Hardy's experimental tragic style anticipates. As I will elaborate in Chapter Five, Woolf's exploration of fragmented consciousness in *Mrs. Dalloway* finds strong echoes of Hardy's deployment of shocks and interruptions in his short stories.

Hardy uses experimental devices which he goes on to develop in increasingly modernist ways in other early novels. In *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, following Elfride's father's rejection of Stephen Smith, Elfride and Stephen are out on a coastal path together; they separate and she rides away on her pony: 'he saw her figure diminish and her blue veil grow gray – saw it with agonising sensations of a slow death' (*A Pair* 119). This is a relatively simple observation by the narrator, who explicitly points out that the landscape acquired 'the complexion of a tragedy' (119). Nonetheless, through the description of the landscape, the passage describes the painful sensation of his broken heart; a tragic emotion has the power to transform a simple scene into a disenchanting and totalising vision of the world. From here, the novel moves into a more complex and symbolic expression of environment.

The key episode in which Stephen visits Knight in his London office outlines the differences in their personalities and in particular their contrasting attitudes to Elfride:

> One stream only of evening sunlight came into the room... an aquarium stood in the window. It was a dull parallelepipidon... but... an errant, kindly ray lighted up and warmed the little world therein, when the many-coloured zoophytes opened and put forth their arms, the weeds acquired a rich transparency, the shells gleamed of a more golden yellow, and the timid community expressed gladness more plainly than words. (*A Pair* 129)

The parallelepipidon can be read as representing Knight's gloomy office apartment and his own sombre temperament which seems to enjoy only brief glimpses of light and happiness. 'Community' also suggests a comparison with the depraved crowd in the street below. Hardy often thought of the city as a constraining, enclosed environment, like a cage. In both cases, the 'errant, kindly' ray of light infuses the gloom for a moment with life's bright energy, suggesting that amidst life's tragedies there is a moment of hope to be seized. This episode outlines the differences in Smith and Knight's personalities and in their relationships with Elfride.

Elfride Swancourt's own volatile perception of herself is conveyed through a disturbing cosmic vision. In the growing light of dawn, on board a steam-coaster, voyaging from the London docks to the coast of Wessex, she peers at a fading star and sees in its diminishing light a mortal reflection of her own loveless existence. Becoming increasingly worried about the unexpected presence of Mrs. Jethway on board the steamer, she starts to imagine a life without Henry Knight. In fear of the old woman's bitter resentment and of her revealing Elfride's disastrous romance with her dead son, Elfride falls into a depressed state.

The tragic driving force in this episode takes the form of Mrs Jethway who believes that Elfride is guilty of a terrible crime: 'you killed my son,' Jethway cries (*A Pair* 271). On deck, gazing out to sea, Elfride imagines her own death as she sees a fading star in the light of dawn, 'dissolved into the day' (295), her ending envisioned as a cosmic escape, a redemptive moment of final illumination. This episode stands out as a unique experimental piece in Hardy's fiction as it is on board a ship. The heroine experiences a growing and intensifying fear, the boat functioning as a micro-world in which Elfride is imprisoned. It is as though the only way out for her is through death, which the star metaphorically predicts.

The tragic element in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* relies heavily on the reinforcing and repetitive effect of the graveyard at Endelstow church, where Elfride's first love and the family of the Swancourts lie buried and where Elfride herself will be entombed. The narrator satirically says that it is 'a delightful place to be buried in… there was nothing horrible in this graveyard' (*A Pair* 28). On one level it might be a picturesque site for the living, but there are horrors of the past buried beneath the grass, namely the tragic story of Felix Jethway, whom Elfride jilted. The churchyard is a reminded that death is a great leveller. It first appears to Stephen Smith as 'a mere profile against the sky, serrated with the outlines of graves and a very few memorial stones. Not a tree could exist up there' (24, 25). The barren and indistinctive optical effect has an unsettling, dehumanising effect, which reinforces that death can underlie the scenic in Hardy.

A Pair relies heavily upon Hardy's use of the environment to accentuate the characters' fearful states of mind. He describes the general setting of the novel as 'the remotest nooks of Western England… the wild and tragic features of the coast… the region of dream and mystery' (Orel (ed.) 7). This extract from Hardy's Preface to the 1912 Wessex Edition of the novel (published shortly before the death of his wife in that year) expresses a certain romantic sense of a time and place that he associates with some of the happiest days of his life with Emma. In conjunction with this mournful tone, the environmental framing of the preface shifts between gothic, realist and allegorical modes of expression infusing the cliff with an overriding tragic energy. It is: 'one enormous sea-bord cliff… described in the story as being without a name' (7). The environment in this novel conveys both the contingent experience of nature and its universal mythological power. Throughout, Hardy evokes the presence of similar metaphysical powers working through the minds of his characters and the natural surroundings. Thus, in the most memorable episode of the novel, inanimate nature seems to snare Frank Knight's consciousness:

> By one of those familiar conjunctions in which the inanimate world baits the mind of man when he pauses in moments of suspense, opposite Knight's eyes was an imbedded fossil, standing forth in low relief from the rock. It was a creature with eyes. The eyes dead and turned to stone, were even now regarding him. (*A Pair* 213)

The evolutionary component in this passage has received much critical attention. However the psychological aspect of the whole episode is also an important feature. Knight's fear is not momentary but is developed by Hardy over the course of two chapters. Even before Knight gets into trouble, Elfride finds the appearance of the cliff 'horrid... it makes me shudder' (*A Pair* 206). Such coastal descriptions in the novel have echoes of the imaginary in King Lear and D.H. Lawrence's psychic and expressive landscapes, rather than any backcloth for a sensational yarn.

In this episode, the wind blows Knight's hat off and then, ominously, it begins to rain, with the narrator remarking that 'a slight superficial wetting' makes the grassy slopes of the cliff more slippery. Knowing the cliffs better than he, Elfride senses the danger that Knight is in before he does. Knight then looks down and 'two glances told him a tale with ghastly distinctness' (*A Pair* 209). When Elfride scrambles to safety, he is left alone with 'the inveterate antagonism of these black precipices' (213). The episode is structured by an apprehensive dialogue between Knight and the cliff that seems to him to possess an inherent power bent on destroying him.

As the ordeal continues, Elfride disappears out of sight and Knight's hope and courage falters. The tragic tensions arises from Hardy's foregrounding of an apprehensive environment. The fossil seems to stare back at Knight, acting as the initial agency for an intense psychological and ontological drama: 'the eyes, dead and turned to stone, were even now looking at him' (*A Pair* 213). This is a fetichistic form of consciousness that Hardy took from Comte and which he recasts to tragic effect in this scene. As Hardy noted: '"Thought depends on Sensation" (- sensations on Environment -)' and 'Fetichism – looks on all objects in nature as animate' (Björk (ed.), *Literary Notebooks* i, n. 731 and n. 754, pp. 74, 77). In a similar schema to Comte's, perception, thought, fear and place all become entwined in this scene in the novel. The vertiginous topography of the cliff, together with Hardy's earlier allegorical descriptions of it, signal the potential of Nature's destructive power, drawing the reader deeper into the vision: 'he could only look sternly at Nature's treacherous attempt to put an end to him, and strive to thwart her' (*A Pair* 213). The tension is created by a struggle for survival in the face of an oppressive fetichistic fear. Knight is a man of science, a

geologist, and so can command authoritative scientific knowledge about the earth. The problem is that 'at this dreadful juncture' his knowledge is useless; in fact possession of it has a reverse effect since he is only too aware of the insignificance of his own lifespan compared to the age of the fossil and the geological age of the earth.

The drama between environment and mind reflects a vision of Knight's finite self: 'time closed up like a fan before him. He saw himself at one extremity of the years, face to face with the beginning and all the intermediate centuries simultaneously' (*A Pair* 214). There is a physical opposition, here, that enacts a wider metaphorical and tragic meaning – that man and the natural environment are engaged in a conflictual relationship. Rebecca Welshman has argued that the earlier phrase of the narrator, 'those familiar conjunctions' (213), suggests that 'the creature and the man share the same context' (Welshman 35). However, the text enacts a deeper antithesis between man and nature. The moment of suspense is thus described as 'this dreadful juncture' (*A Pair* 213). Moreover the wind is not just indifferent or neutral, but torments Knight 'with exceptional persistency… it was a cosmic agency, active, lashing eager for conquest' (214). Just as Gabriel Oak in *Far From the Madding Crowd* never forgets the vision of his destroyed flock, so Knight will never again go near the cliff. The tragic irony of this episode is that, in a parody of the chivalric code, Elfride saves Knight, who is later cast in an anti-heroic vein and abandons her. Whilst he survives, she dies. In Hardy, the laws of nature pay no heed to man's feelings or his moral condition.

This section has illustrated that during a time when Hardy 'was feeling his way to a method' (Orel (ed.) 3), he uncovered means to show how environment could be drawn on to develop the more disturbing states of mind of his characters and to intensify the tragic experience. In so doing, he takes readers beyond the sphere of the individual, allowing them to look more closely at the world surrounding and beyond the human, as Woolf and Lawrence would do later. From the evidence of his first-published novel, Hardy is experimenting, at an early stage of his writing, with proto-modernist techniques in his handling of the tensions between mind, memory and environment.

Section Two: The Dream and the Reality of Wessex

Hardy's vision of individuals struggling to find a place for themselves in an unstable and changing world can also be traced in the evolution of his invented world of 'Wessex' which he describes in the 1912 Preface to Far From the Madding Crowd as 'a partly real, partly dream-country' (Orel (ed.) 9). By examining the continual fluctuations between the

'dream' and the 'real' components of Wessex, in particular the shift in emphasis from a world encoded with ancient and mythical associations to a world that is both contemporary and threatening, this section will illustrate how that transition affects the tragic vision in the texts. Wessex is the environmental agency that expresses Hardy's increasingly tragic perception of the world. Wessex reflects something essentially tragic and the characters that reside there can be undefined and mysterious. As the idea of Wessex strengthens and expands, it increasingly takes on metaphoric meanings that anticipate D. H. Lawrence's and Virginia Woolf's more metaphorically fertile deployment of environment.

In his fiction, Hardy first used the term 'Wessex' in *Far From the Madding Crowd* to capture a retrospective vision of a world into which he was born and to which he looked back, nostalgically, as fast-vanishing. It follows that the tragic mode of the narrative is largely pastoral and mythical – encoding a story of a past of which he had no direct experience. The historical details and 'facts' of this Wessex are grafted on to his early, boyhood memories and the stories passed on to him by his grandmother, parents, family and friends. Of course it is this sense of a lost world that gives the novel its elegiac quality. In the novel, the principal symbols of old Wessex are Norcombe Hill, the village of Weatherbury, Warren's Malthouse and the Great Barn – all surviving monuments to an increasingly remote, world that Hardy preserves in his descriptions of them. Set against these emblems of an organic, enduring community, are the disruptive fears, struggles and suffering of the characters.

Norcombe is 'indestructible' and 'immutable' (*Madding Crowd* 9), evoking a transcendent sense of time and place. Never is the reader so far from the madding crowd of modernity than at this point in Hardy's fiction; it is a moment that will never fully be recaptured. The description of Norcombe Hill is a post-romantic one since it is contextualised by the gentle roll of the earth representing the passage of time: 'to persons standing alone on a hill during a clear midnight such as this – the roll of the world eastward is almost a palpable movement' (9). Standing on the surface of the earth, the hill is configured, here, by cosmic change in which everything is in movement; this duality between stillness and movement shapes the life of this Wessex.

As the novel proceeds, Hardy makes clear that life and nature can be violent and destructive: storms damage hay ricks, pregnant ewes fall to their deaths, a dog is shot, Fanny Robin dies with her newborn, illegitimate baby in a Casterbridge workhouse; Farmer Boldwood murders Sergeant Troy and, in prison, descends into madness, yet Weatherbury and Wessex survive. It was in *Far From the Madding Crowd* that Hardy first used the term

'genius loci', the spirit of place (*Madding Crowd* 142). He does so in a passage that describes not a pastoral Wessex but a dystopic and disruptive sense of place. The dense, fir plantation behind Weatherbury farm is the setting for Bathsheba's first emotional entanglement with Sergeant Troy. It is described by Hardy in unsettling and ominous terms. They encounter each other on the 'darkest point of her route... a vast, low, naturally formed hall… the floor being covered with a soft dun carpet of dead spikelets and mildewed cones' (141). For Hardy, fir plantations, unlike woods of oaks, elms and beeches, carry ominous and tragic connotations since as an alien species (not indigenous to the southern regions of England) it is an arboreal outsider, planted, solely, for utilitarian purposes. Its menacing, towering form also blocks out light and life and accentuates the obscurity of a scene in which life is reduced beneath its branches. Its imposing form thus directly contributes towards Bathsheba and Troy getting 'hitched' and 'hooked'. In hindsight, given their ensuing, disastrous relationship, one can see how Hardy symbolically anticipates their fateful involvement in this bleak, forbidding description of arboreal place. An equally tragic environment is Farmer Boldwood's home, Little Weatherbury Farm: 'this place was his almonry and cloister in one: here… the celibate would walk and meditate of an evening till the moon's rays streamed in through the cobwebbed windows or total darkness enveloped the scene' (105). The gothic imagery, here, serves to magnify Boldwood's moody loneliness and isolation. He is powerfully cast in this scene as a pitiful figure on the brink of emotional and psychological collapse.

Following the success of the novel, which prompted Hardy's growing literary fame from the mid-1870s, 'Wessex' became associated with a particular region of Dorset which his readers wished to seek out. In this way, Wessex became increasingly identified with 'a real place' – an actual region of England. These literary pilgrims came in search of a corresponding geographical site as a means of authenticating and intensifying their reading of the novel and by implication all the other novels. The danger that this search posed for Hardy, motivated as it was by a desire for factual verification, was that it would detract from the metaphysical, sublime power of Egdon, that energises and intensifies the tragic mode of the whole novel and, by association, Wessex as well. *The Return of the Native* thus marks a critical point in the continual, ongoing dialectic between the real and the dream. In his postscript to the novel, Hardy said that he wanted 'to prevent disappointment to searchers for scenery' (Orel (ed.) 13). To partly appease these curious readers, Hardy provided a map of the scene of the action, however the corresponding real-life Dorset locations can only be vaguely identified since he substitutes imaginary place names and deliberately disorientates

his readers by rotating the actual points of the compass. Hardy was worried that, in the writing of *The Return of the Native*, his 'merely realistic dream-country' had become 'solidified into a utilitarian region which people can go to' (1895 Preface, *Madding Crowd*).

In the prefaces to the novel, Hardy kept insisting that Wessex was purely an imaginary place and that the places described under the names given had very little correspondence with any real life locations. By providing such a freely-drawn sketched map, Hardy created cartographical and fictive tensions that held in place both the dream and the real. This influences the general representation of the tragic: too real or historical and Wessex loses its sense of mystery, awe and universal application; too dream-like and the suffering of the characters evaporates into a type of fantasy state that has little bearing upon the world outside of the novel. If Wessex becomes only tenuously connected to the readers' own world, then the tragic effect is weakened since their imagination, ideas and feelings are not fully awakened by the story. In trying to regulate such concerns, Hardy withdrew the map from the later editions of *The Return of the Native*, all too conscious that, for some inquisitive readers, Egdon could lose its mythical power and meaning.

Even in this early tentative outlining of Wessex, Hardy realised that it had the potential to influence the terms on which he was engaging with the reader. However, once he was committed to the idea, he effectively threw himself into a literary project that would demand the continual fine tuning between the dream and the real. In the early stages of Hardy's career, the principal means of earning a living was through what he called the 'trade' of writing fiction for popular magazines (Millgate, *A Biography Revisited* 214) and Wessex appealed to the imagination of such a readership. Editors of family serials had to take into account their readership's appetite for identifying the precise location and setting of the novels. In an age of radical social and economic upheaval, I would suggest, these editors and readers were hanging on to the dream of the countryside, but to care about the tragedy of Hardy's characters meant that they, to varying degrees, needed to willingly suspend their belief in that dream. The expansion of Wessex, together with Hardy's experiments in the tragic, enabled him to question the meaning of the 'real.' For Hardy, the 'real' denotes a highly subjective, idiosyncratic perception of life that draws upon the exercise of the imagination. In this composite sense, Wessex, and the experiences and suffering that it frames, was an amalgamation of the dream and the real.

If, initially, Hardy deployed 'Wessex' to capture the imagination of an urban, educated readership by offering them a type of rural vision that they wanted to feel existed, then he partly succeeded in doing so. As Peter Widdowson has argued, in an age of industrial

transition, urbanisation and international tensions 'there is a need for a literary culture in which there is a complex relationship between forms of romanticism and patriotism and the formation of a pastoral myth of rural England – often recalling a past, more glorious heritage' (Widdowson, *Hardy in History* 61). Hardy's early, dream-like conception of Wessex grew into an environment that also dismantled Victorian pastoral idealisation about the countryside. Thus, the dystopic and disenchanting element within Wessex continually subverts that stereotypical view of rural England.

When Hardy returned to Dorchester in 1883 and moved, shortly afterwards, to his newly-built home, Max Gate, his perception of Wessex and his tragic vision of a changing world underwent a further significant transformation: in his conception of Casterbridge, it was given a cultural and social focal point. During this period, Hardy became fascinated by the town's local history and regularly read documentary accounts of its past, (most notably from the *Dorset County Chronicle*) and began compiling his *'Facts' Notebook.* The imaginative way in which he observed and adapted these reports and articles in the fiction of the 1880s reflects how his tragic sensibility was operating and how that procedure was being shaped by an historical sense of place. At this time, Hardy recorded a note that reflects how he sees history and the passing of time: 'history is rather a stream than a tree; there is nothing organic in its shape, nothing systematic in its development. It flows on like a thunderstorm-rill… a straw turns it one way and a tiny barrier of sand the other' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 179); the smallest events can change the course of time and history; this breaking down of history is powerfully dramatized in *The Trumpet Major* with its three temporal modes of myth, political history and the lives of ordinary country people. It is the history of these small lives that is transcribed onto Wessex, as though it erases grand, culturally important events, supplanting them with the deeds of country workers, farmers, labourers and milkmaids.

The Trumpet Major juxtaposes two very different types of history, the official kind which documented significant political events, and the obscured one dealing with the individual experience of ordinary people. The mythical and legendary is also embodied in Hardy's characterisation of Miller Loveday, who is 'the representative of an ancient family of corn-grinders whose history is lost in time' (*Trumpet Major* 18). This 'ancient family' were neither wealthy, nor possessed any political power and, therefore, their history has not been recorded. What is known and can be ascertained about their heredity has been handed down, orally, through the local community, as 'unwritten history' (18). The narrator satirically comments that Overcombe Mill, itself, is situated in a remote nook of Wessex where there is 'no society' (12). There is a significant conjunction in the novel of individual obscurity and

written history; Anne Garland witnesses the official visit of the King, who is parading along Weymouth Esplanade:

> Anne now felt herself close to and looking into the stream of recorded history, within whose banks the littlest things are great, and outside which she and the general bulk of the human race were content to live on as an unreckoned, unheeded superfluity. (*Trumpet Major* 93)

The most important record of history that Wessex preserves is that of 'the littlest of things' and the seeming 'superfluity' of the small lives of the characters. Their experiences come to the fore whilst political history recedes into the background. The fear of Napoleon's invasion of England provides an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty which leaves its mark on their tense, romantic dealings with each other. These small lives are embellished with a degree of authenticity through Hardy's use of actual place names, such as Dorchester, Blandford, Weymouth and Exeter, which provide a factual environmental framing of Wessex. However, by the time Hardy comes to write *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Wessex had been firmly established as an emblem for Hardy's fictive world and actual place names were no longer necessary.

In *The Mayor*, Hardy most emphatically consolidates Wessex, providing it with a provincial capital, Casterbridge, which is easily equated with Dorchester in most readers' minds. With it came a complex set of social, cultural and identifying values – some positive, others negative – that are played out within its urban setting. Some of the more disruptive aspects of the town are expressed early on in the novel through the rustic discourse of its residents, amongst which Buzzford the dealer plays a prominent role when he says that 'Casterbridge is an old, hoary place of wickedness' (*The Mayor* 51), because history has it that the townsfolk rebelled against the King as he says 'one or two hundred years ago in the time of the Romans' (51). What he is sure about is that many were hanged on Gallows Hill and quartered, their body parts being distributed about the country 'like butcher's meat' (51). Buzzford's confused understanding of the town's local history seems to reflect Hardy's own mixing of the dream or, perhaps, nightmare of Wessex, and the reality of Dorset. This virtual reality of place intensifies the novel's expression of the tragic. If Hardy were trying to capture what he thought was the essence of Dorchester in his representation of Casterbridge then, in so doing, he has also distilled the tragic centre of Wessex, inextricably linked to the fate of Michael Henchard.

The dynamic between environment and character becomes magnified through Hardy's dramatisation of the tragic predicament and Henchard's increasingly antagonistic relationship with the town. Henchard's rise to fame and fortune has largely been due to his sobriety, will and ambition which have allowed him, in turn, to take full advantage of the thriving political and economic power of Casterbridge, which is, itself, dependent upon the local agrarian economy: 'Casterbridge was in most respects but the pole, focus or nerve knot of the surrounding country life… [it] lived by agriculture at one remove further from the fountain head than the adjoining villagers – no more' (*The Mayor* 60, 61). By introducing these symbiotic connections early in the novel, Hardy constructs a framework of opposing power structures that shapes Henchard's alienation from the community.

One of the first dramatisations of Henchard's alienation from this organic community is his public humiliation at the hands Donald Farfrae, his future usurper. After Henchard has been saved from the fiasco of the 'grown wheat', his standing in the local community is shaken more seriously by a confrontation with Farfrae in the corn yard over his treatment of Abel Whittle, one of the less diligent workmen. This process of social alienation ends with the pitiful image of Henchard's lonely circumnavigation of Casterbridge and final journey across Egdon Heath. Henchard's lonely death can be read as an indictment of the ruthless social and economic forces of a modern Wessex, which Hardy thought were potentially destructive. The closing vision of Wessex in the novel is, once again, shaped by the menacing presence of Egdon. This representation of a Wessex in crisis is returned to in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, one of his most explicitly tragic novels.

In this novel, Wessex undergoes a major expansion and reaches out into a modern world providing the general tragic situation with a sense of immediacy, bringing it closer to the Victorian reader. In this sense, the tragic is now more real than dream, more present and urgent. In this parallel Wessex, the 'ache of modernism' (*Tess* 124) is more intensely felt. The word is distinctly 'modernism' and not 'the modern' or 'modernity', which signals the imposing presence of a whole culture, ideology and way of living, not just new technology or new ways of farming. From Marlott in the north-west of South Wessex to Wintoncester in Upper Wessex the reader discovers Wessex through Tess's 'pilgrimages' through the landscape. But this is also metaphorically a journey from a rural past to a modern, urban present and Hardy's representation of a Wessex in transition is inextricably linked to his heroine's plight; her restlessness and journeying somehow symbolise a territorial upheaval taking place in Wessex.

Displacement, migration and flight are shaping forces in the novel's tragic patterning and in how the reader experiences a Wessex in the throes of upheaval. As Hardy noted, migration in the 1880s had a devastating effect upon the rural community in Dorset: 'there being no continuity of environment in their lives, there is no continuity of information, the names, stories, and relics of one place being speedily forgotten under the incoming facts of the next' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 336). This is the disenchanting aspect of rural existence for Hardy and one that he bears witness to in *Tess*. The narrator ominously describes the beginning of her nocturnal journey through the heavy clay valley of Blackmore Vale where superstitions linger: 'she plunged into the chilly equinoctial darkness as the clock struck ten, for her fifteen miles' walk under the steely stars' (*Tess* 344). The mode is deeply metaphoric, equating Tess's physical journey with her spiritual and emotional decline into darkness, which is a narrative technique that Hardy uses throughout the novel and one that points towards the modernist, more radical, metaphorical mode of experiencing environment, such as in D. H. Lawrence's *St Mawr,* where in the Mexican desert 'man was always let down… always some mysterious malevolence… coming out of the livid rock-fastness in the bowels of those uncreated Rocky Mountains' (151). In a similar vein, there is some kind of dark spirit that is being oppressed through Tess's Wessex, but that force remains mysterious and unidentified and, therefore, has a greater tragic power than if Hardy had tried to explain it.

After the contemporary landscape of Wessex in Tess, Hardy once again recuperates the dream and imaginative component of his world by relegating its realism; this shift in emphasis can be seen in *Jude the Obscure*. Here, the tragic realities of modernism refuse to be suppressed. Thus, the now 'merely realistic dream-country' (1895 Preface, *Madding Crowd*) conveys a false impression of the tragic mode of Jude, which could be read as the obliteration of the dream of Wessex by the painful realities of the present. Many of the descriptive passages in the novel draw heavily upon imaginary visionary modes of perception and environment. One reason for this may have been Hardy's own ambivalent feelings about Berkshire that must have been influenced by his mother's tales and tragic past, in particular the poverty and alcoholism that she had experienced in her family home in the village of Fawley. When Jude revisits Christminster towards the end of the novel, he says: 'I see… those spirits of the dead again' (*Jude* 392) and in the novel there are several disturbing, spectral descriptions of place. Edmund Gosse remarked that Hardy was on unfamiliar and dangerous territory in North Wessex where the action is set:

> Berkshire is an unpoetical country, 'meanly utilitarian', as Mr. Hardy confesses; the imagination hates its concave, loamy cornfields and dreary, hedgeless highways... In choosing North Wessex as the scene of the novel Mr. Hardy wilfully deprives himself of a great element of his strength. (Millgate, *Career as a Novelist* 332)

However, Gosse failed to appreciate that the Wessex Hardy was now interested in was not the same one of his previous novels, but a more sinister and alienating environment that directly appealed to his imaginary and tragic sensibilities; tragic because this contemporary Wessex is encoded with displacement, loss and obliteration.

Feelings of loss and abandonment are instilled into the drama from the start. The very opening scene is one of migration, separation and sadness: the village schoolmaster whom Jude is so fond of is leaving to go to Christminster, the city of light and dreams. The eleven year-old Jude breaks down in tears when Mr. Phillotson bids him farewell. We are also told that 'Marygreen is a small sleepy place' (*Jude* 11), but the pastoral name of the village is an anomaly since the community is marked by depletion and social decline. The only edifying monument to the past is the ancient well on the green: 'the well shaft was probably the only relic of the local history that remained absolutely unchanged' (12). The original church, 'the ancient temple to the Christian divinities', has been 'obliterated' (12); this powerful term captures the ruthlessness of modern economic and social changes in the countryside. Its once beautiful pastures and downs have been destroyed by the utilitarian drive of intensive farming, the agricultural context of Jude's miserable experience in the field of Farmer Troutham.

The final view of Wessex in *Jude the Obscure* mediates a bleak and sorrowful sense of place because the point of view is adjacent to the Brown House where Jude's ancestors tragically died. Jude is on his way back from Marygreen and, having seen Sue for the last time, pauses on the ridgeway: 'there are cold spots up and down Wessex in autumn and winter weather; but the coldest of all where north or east wind is blowing is the crest of the down by the Brown House' (*Jude* 390). Metaphorically and literally, Jude has turned his back on Wessex and Sue, returning to Christminster where he knows he is going to die, suffering as he is from an inflammation of the lungs, aggravated by his recent long journey in bad weather. For the last time, he comes to the milestone on the ridgeway where he carved the pointing hand together with his inscription 'go hither', which has been 'nearly obliterated' by moss (390). These are Jude's memorial inscriptions upon Wessex; his name is now etched

upon the environment of Wessex in a similar way to that of his parents – as a tragic marker upon a landscape.

The narrator is 'the chronicler of these lives' (*Jude* 401) as he describes himself in the final chapter, suggesting a disinterested, objective recorder of events, as though Hardy is emotionally withdrawing from his main protagonist in the closing stages of the novel. This is a common technical feature in the latter phases of Hardy's novels that reinforces the impression of abandonment that permeates so many of the endings. However, this does not mean that Hardy turns away from Jude, for he artistically remains deeply committed to what he described as 'my poor puppet' and to his contemporary new Wessex.

A major effort to re-appropriate and unify the diverse environments of the novels, under the banner of Wessex, took place in Hardy's extensive revisions of 1892 and 1895 when the maps and alterations to place names, locations and distances were conducted. This consolidation of contemporary Wessex brings the tragic experience of the characters closer to the Victorian reader. The tragic simultaneously takes on a sense of local contingency and a transcendent universalism that speaks of the basic human emotions, in particular fear, grief and loss. With the contemporary later novels, Hardy draws the Victorian reader closer to the tragic situation and, in this context, the tragic mode becomes intensified and more acutely felt.

Wessex lives on after Jude's death and re-emerges in *The Well-Beloved* that opens with an environmental description, whereas the previous text, *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved*, starts with Pearston's melodramatic burning of his love letters. What Hardy calls 'the Isle of Slingers' is, in actuality, the peninsula of Portland Bill off the coast of Dorset; Hardy emphasises the distinctive independence of the place which many might argue is not there in the 'real'. In *The Well-Beloved*, the defiant rock is only tenuously attached to the mainland of Wessex, but spiritually and culturally it is a distinctive and special place, in antithesis with the rest of the modern world. Its opposition to civilisation and its pagan history have parallels with Egdon Heath and even the cliff with no name in *A Pair of Blues Eyes*; each possess a primordial power that opposes Christianity and modern society. In *The Well-Beloved* 'the manners of the isle were primitive' (*The Well-Beloved* 182) and the church at Deadman's Bay, now a ruin, has slipped down the cliff having been claimed by this 'stronghold of the Pagan divinities, where Pagan customs lingered yet' (186). The pagan spirit that lies within the rock infuses its natives with its sustaining power, but Pierston, like Clym Yeobright, quite unconsciously forsook that energy when he left and, on his return, is metaphorically and emotionally destroyed by it.

The novel is set on the outer edges of South Wessex; Hardy once again resurrects the myth and immutability of his Wessex. As with Egdon Heath, it is presented as lonely and slighted: 'this lonely... towering rock… cast up by rages of the sea' (*The Well-Beloved* 179). Time has sculpted the Isle over the ages and given it a chronological depth and density. Thus, it is described as once a stronghold of the ancient Britons – the 'Vindilia Island' (179) of the Romans – a rich source of stone for building a modern Wessex. Hardy also emphasises its sheer material mass: 'the unity of the whole island as a solid and single block of limestone' (179), endowing it with an imposing geological presence in which 'all now stood dazzlingly unique and white against the tinted sea, and the sun flashed on infinitely stratified walls of oolite' (179). This physical description of the isle forms part of Hardy's innovative use of the environment in the telling of this tragic story of obsession.

The topography, together with Hardy's metaphoric and symbolic deployment of environment, all function as narrative devices in the shaping of the tragic story. As the drama progresses, the southernmost treacherous region, that of Cave Hole, Beal Light and the waters of The Race, becomes increasingly featured in the most tense scenes in the novel. This narrative use of environment points towards Virginia Woolf's narratorial deployment of the lighthouse in her novel *To the Lighthouse*. It, too, is a culminating symbol of failure and anti-idealism: 'there it loomed up, stark and straight, glaring white and black... the waves breaking in white splinters like smashed glass upon the rocks' (*The Well-Beloved* 165). The Beal lighthouse features prominently in Hardy's framing of the first kiss between Pierston and the first Avice; its repetitive beam feels like 'a deep, hollow stroke like the single beat of a drum' (186) and, in the intervening sound of the waves in Deadman's Bay, Pierston can hear the spectral sound of all those that have drowned there over the years. Hardy closes the encounter ominously: 'in that solemn spot Pierston kissed her' (186). The landscape is described as solemn, but the suggestion is that it has a mysterious energy, capable of influencing the kiss and the lives of the lovers.

In the end Pierston is finally defeated by modernity and the new contemporary Wessex, of which the isle, being shaped by time, also forms a part. He resigns to this other encroaching Wessex, extinguishes his artistic temperament and so ends his days in pitiful compliance with its immanent power. He even becomes an instrument of its destructive force by demolishing monuments to the old Wessex, 'the old fountains and the mullioned Elizabethan cottages' (*The Well-Beloved* 336), replacing them with new houses of hollow walls perforated by ventilators. When one compares this mundane vision of a man with that

of the promising, innovative sculptor that he once was, one gets a sense of the extent of his destructive obsession with the 'well-beloved'.

One of Hardy's last visions of approaching modernity and the new Wessex occurs in 'A Changed Man'. The historical perspective is ambiguous because the content recalls The Reverend Henry Moule's heroic exploits during the cholera epidemic of 1854 and yet the story was composed in 1900. That bifocal composition of the narrative is vividly caught in the opening description of the road to London and the surrounding countryside, where a white 'riband' of road passes through the 'innumerable rustic windings, shy shades, and solitary undulations' ('A Changed Man' 1) of the familiar hinterland of the old Wessex, that includes the district of Durnover and Mellstock village, towards the encroaching 'busy and fashionable world' (1). There is an indistinct uniformity, 'a smooth bland surface' (1) that characterises the new Wessex, which now only lies four hours train journey away. The long connecting road, then, reads as a symbol for the interface between the old dream-like, Wessex of Hardy's fading memories (the world of the 1850s) and the new, uncertain Wessex that is being shaped by the cultural and social influence of the metropolis.

Captain Maumbry renounces such a vain, fashionable social life for a religious one of communal servitude. His decision also proves to be problematic in that it raises issues of change and transition. Nonetheless, his choice stands as a condemnation of the new 'busy and fashionable world' that has already transformed the reality of existence for Hardy by 1900. The new, contemporary Wessex has arrived by the time of writing the story, and these tensions between past, present and future can be actively felt in the text. This friction is a significant, contributing force in the shaping of the tragic vision of Maumbry's world: it is a corrupt and diseased world that has to be purged of its defects in a way similar to the purgation of his own guilt and shame. Therefore, Hardy's closing vision of Wessex in the story is not just one of heroic deeds or one in transition, but the vision of a world in crisis.

It is impossible to feel the tragic force of the fears and sufferings of characters without a sense of the problematic changes and transitions that their Wessex is being subjected to. However, for Hardy the author, the Wessex that evolved was a complex fictive one, shaped by the unfolding abstract synthesis of the 'dream' of the past, the 'real' of the present moment of writing and his anxieties of an uncertain future. He frequently conflates those temporal elements, inviting the 'good and idealistic reader' to join him in 'the anachronism of imagining a Wessex population living under Queen Victoria' (Orel (ed.) 9). In this light, Hardy's 1912 definition of Wessex, that most commentators refer to, misleadingly suggests a clear distinction between 'a partly real, partly dream country' (9). However, as the textual

analysis in this section has stressed, Hardy's Wessex does not simply project a tragic retrospective view of a disappearing agrarian Wessex that commentators as David Cecil first argued for[14], but is also a lens through which to view the disruptive changes of a contemporary, modern world.

Hardy first excavated the ancient name of Wessex in the pages of *Far From the Madding Crowd* and then went on to use it as an integral device in his examination of the darker side of the human condition. Fear, suffering and loss are inherent in man and become mediated through and inscribed upon the environmental patterning of Wessex. A flexible and robust conception of Wessex was essential to Hardy's proto-modernist experiments in the tragic, because it permitted him a fictive device that encompassed the old and the new and that looked out, with trepidation, into the wider world beyond its boundaries.

Section Three: *The Hand of Ethelberta*: Satire and the Social Environment

Of *The Hand of Ethelberta*, Hardy said that he made 'a plunge in a new and untried direction' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 105). This assessment is only partly true, since he had experimented with social satire before in his first, unpublished novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady* (1868). The production of *The Hand of Ethelberta* is one illustration of a recursive pattern described by Hardy's creative imagination (and identified elsewhere in this thesis) since the novel reworks a subject using a satirical and comic mode, previously, but not systematically, deployed. The growing satiric strain in Hardy's fiction is an illustration of his proto-modernism because it directly engages with questions of identity and dilemmas of the self within a secular society – themes that concerned both Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence. Thus, in *The Rainbow* we are informed about Ursula Brangwen: 'her everyday self was just the same. She merely had another, stronger self that knew the darkness' (Woolf, *The Rainbow* 450). Ursula shuns classroom education and the niceties of the social world but is drawn towards the world beyond the human, the laws that govern nature at large, which she observes at work through the microscope. In similar ways, Ethelberta's stronger and truer self is energised by the natural world beyond man's false and pretentious society. But having to live in that world she suffers from 'the repression of animal instincts' (*The Hand* 12). In Hardy's novel, the satire is firmly aimed at society, in particular at its segregating class structure and values. However, the novel goes far beyond the sphere of social criticism,

[14] See Cecil, *Hardy the Novelist*. London: Constable and Co., 1943: 20.

penetrating the realm of the modern psyche. Alienation, isolation and loss of a sense of self come under close examination. Through the textual oscillations of comic, satiric and tragic modes, the novel progresses. Therefore, rather than diminishing or impeding the tragic tensions within the novel, the social satire uncovers the deeper painful realities of Ethelberta's innermost self.

Satire runs deep in Hardy; it was there as soon as he started writing fiction in the late 1860s. Whilst Hardy was trying to publish *The Poor Man and the Lady* in 1868, he outlined what, for him, were a few key aspects of satire:

> Unmitigated utterances of strong feeling against the class to which these readers belong …the upper classes of society... feelings inserted edgewise so to say; half concealed beneath ambiguous expressions… the passion of love forms a prominent feature in the thread of the story. (Purdy and Millgate (eds.) i.7)

However, the precepts laid out in this letter to Alexander Macmillan were not fully adhered to and the novel proved too offensive for Macmillan to publish. Hardy seems to have failed in his insertion of half-hidden, 'edgewise' feelings and toned-down social criticism. In his defence, he thought that the readers at Macmillan had been deceived by the writing's 'naive realism... seeming actuality... affected simplicity', but later conceded that 'the satire was obviously pushed too far – as sometimes by Swift and Defoe' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 63). The allusion to Defoe is significantly ambiguous because, whilst it connects Hardy to the long English tradition of satire, Hardy's comments on and use of Defoe in the fiction only highlight the extent to which his darker, more complex satire differs from the eighteenth-century form of the genre. As Aaron Matz argues, 'it was realism, with its harsher, blunter, and ultimately more credible procedures... that finally assumed the mantle of the satiric heritage' (Matz, *Satire in the Age of Realism* x). Defoe was also a realist, but *The Hand of Ethelberta* shows how Hardy's 'naive realism', which exposes the artifice of the genre, presides over a continual vacillation between modes of social satire and the tragic.

For Ethelberta Petherwin, Defoe 'is the master of delusion' (*The Hand* 119) and so is she in many ways, but she is also the victim of deeper delusions about reality and her own art, of which she is largely unconscious. The key episode of Ethelberta's first public performance introduces some of those tensions. She lives an imagined life through her poetry, through which she tells 'her pretended history of adventures… with a great appearance of truth and naturalness' (118). Ironically, it is through this art of pretence that she gets in touch with the truth about herself, what gives her life meaning and through which she can express her

feelings. In the public performance of her poetry, she feels 'the full power of… self-command' (120). Conversely, in having to conceal her working class origins, her social life becomes the lie that she has to perform. At this stage of the novel, Hardy withholds the tragic tension, allowing the satiric mode to flourish. The heroine does not break down or run from the situation as many of Hardy's more explicitly tragic heroines do. In this episode, the narrator suggests 'a modern critic has well observed that he had the most amazing talent on record for telling lies; and Ethelberta, in wishing her fiction to appear like a real narrative of adventure, did wisely to make Defoe her model' (119). The reference to a 'modern critic' is also significant and points towards Hardy's engagement with the critical discussions about satire that were prevalent in the 1870's. Hardy's lifelong friend, the critic Edmund Gosse's ideas on this topic are likely to have had an impact upon his writing during this period. Gosse was one of the first of his contemporaries to recognise the need for a radically new form of satire, as Matz quotes him:

> Modern life is too complex and too delicate to bear such satire as thrilled through the fierce old world… Modern satire laughs while it attacks, and takes care that the spear-shaft shall be covered up in roses… As the ages bring in their advancements in civilization and refinement, the rough old satire becomes increasingly impossible. (Matz, *Satire in the Age of Realism* 111)

Gosse's essay, 'Ibsen, the Norwegian Satirist', appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1873, a year before Hardy and he first met[15] and three years before Hardy began writing *The Hand of Ethelberta* and so it is likely that Hardy would have been familiar with Gosse's ideas about modern satire. The complexity of modern life and the dilemmas of the self and identity in a secular and changing world, are the raw material out of which Hardy formulates new modes of satire.

In the novel, for the first time in his fiction, Hardy uses the phrase 'a satire of circumstance' (*The Hand* 99), deploying it just before Ethelberta gives a trial rehearsal of her poetry in front of her brothers and sisters. Christopher Julian, in love with Ethelberta, calls on her at Arrowthorne Lodge, but he is greeted at the door by her sister Picotee who also has strong feelings for him. After a brief, uncomfortable chat, she directs him to her sister in the copse: 'unable, like many other people, to enjoy being satirised in words because of the irritation it caused him as aimed-at victim, he sometimes had philosophy enough to

[15] See Anne Thwaite. *Edmund Gosse: A Literary Landscape: 1849 – 1928*. Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1985: 222.

appreciate a satire of circumstance, because nobody intended it' (99). For Julian, the way of overcoming the ironic and disturbing feelings caused by the encounter is to depersonalise them, transferring them into a notion of 'a satire of circumstance'. His idea of an indiscriminate power at work in the world allows him to 'persuade himself' (99) or, rather, delude himself, that he is not the victim of personal ridicule.

There is, then, a double layering of satire in the text: Julian's emotional distancing and the narrator's satirical language that undermines his turn of mind. This episode illustrates how Hardy incorporates the tragic within the satire of social deception. Thus Julian's protective philosophy of 'a satire of circumstance' does not prevent his emotions from becoming entangled in a romance with Ethelberta and it is here that the tragic reality of emotions lies. Hardy, then, has developed a more sophisticated mode of satire than Defoe's generic formulation, or at least the form of it that he was struggling with in *The Poor Man and the Lady*. In *The Hand of Ethelberta*, there is a more subtle blending of satire and the tragic, the text frequently oscillating between the two.

Tragedy intriguingly becomes one of the topics of conversation in Chapter Seven, the first social occasion in the novel. At a dinner party in Mr. Doncastle's London town house, 'high art' and Ethelberta's poems, her 'humorous rhapsodies' (*The Hand* 56), are being scrutinised by the guests. An old lady interjects that, for her part, she prefers something 'merry' to any tragedy; her view is that there is enough 'misery' in ordinary everyday 'experiences' without having 'gratuitous grief inflicted upon us' (58) by a tragedy. In reply, a gentleman with 'a bad shirt front' (58) alludes to the beautifully tragic endings of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* and concludes that 'it is an old and worn argument – that about the inexpedience of tragedy – and much may be said on both sides' (59). By looking past the overtly satirical framing of this episode, with its use of dialogue and comic characterisation, the passage questions the expediency of classical and Elizabethan modes of the tragic for modern times. By extension, this implies the need for modern, perhaps satirical, modes of the genre.

The literary episode in *The Hand of Ethelberta* can also be interpreted as an expression of what Hardy himself might have been feeling about the negative reviews of his own work, especially as the novel was written at the time when he was reacting against opinionated and judgemental reviews of *Far From the Madding Crowd* and against being typecast as a pastoralist. Some of that anger and indignation at authority and the establishment, I suggest, can be felt in *The Hand*, in particular the negative representation of society and its mores.

After Christopher Julian's encounter with Ethelberta, he 'adopted a sombre train of reasoning to convince himself that, far from indulgence in the passion of love bringing bliss, it was a folly, leading to grief and disquiet' (*The Hand* 97). One of the greatest follies that Hardy's tragic satire exposes is, in general, that of passionate romantic love. In this regard, the characters fall foul of committing the same or very similar mistakes; they do not learn sufficiently from their romantic experiences to prevent them from repeating similar errors in their next encounter. The satire and the tragedy of love in this novel are informed by the idea that love contains the seeds of its own destruction; a light-hearted satire of circumstance develops into a painful and sad loss of happiness and love. Despite his efforts, Julian is proved unable to prevent Ethelberta from marrying the grotesque Lord Mountclere. This tragic component is contained within the novel's satire on love.

Havelock Ellis described Ethelberta's circumstance as an 'impossible situation' (Cox (ed.) 116), because she is obliged to financially provide for her siblings and thus marries into money at the start of the novel. The nature of her passions and desires could likewise be described as 'impossible', because Ethelberta's personal dilemma is that she is looking for something rare in Hardy's fictive world, a man who can both provide for her and also nourish her artistic self. Following her disastrous encounters with Ladywell and Alfred Neigh, she comes to the conclusion that she does not want 'to ensnare a husband just to provide incomes for her and her family, but to find some man she might respect, who would… enable her to further organise her talent' (*The Hand* 210). This dilemma exemplifies one of the tragic elements about the human condition for Hardy which his fiction enacts – that it seems virtually impossible for anyone to share a happy and fulfilling relationship with another. There are secondary characters that perceive this in others, as Mr. Chickerel does in his daughter.

Chickerel, butler to the Doncastles, is the voice of wisdom and perception in the novel. As a butler, he is in a lower social class and, therefore, according to one of Hardy's ideas about satire, in the ideal observational position: 'the defects of a class are more perceptible to the class immediately below it than itself' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 56). Chickerel's observation and advice to Ethelberta illustrate the tension between feelings and the conformist pressures exercised by class:

> All human beings enjoy themselves from the outside, and so getting on a little has this good in it, you still keep in your old class where your feelings are, and are thoughtfully treated by this class: while by

> getting on too much you are sneered at by your new acquaintance.
> (*The Hand* 66)

Her father can see that in marrying into the Petherwin family Ethelberta has risen quickly up the social scale, but that it has also damaged her. Chickerel's domestic working class position, therefore, allows him to see the dangerous nature of his daughter's situation and how detrimental it has been to her emotionally and psychologically. As he concludes: 'better have been admired as a governess than shunned as a peeress' (*The Hand* 372). However, the choice between the two has not been such a simple one for Ethelberta who has been torn between her duty to her family and her duty to herself. Cruelly, she has even been mocked and laughed at as a lady by her brothers.

Strangely, for a Hardy novel, there is a lot of laughter and authorial commentary alluding to laughter in the text. Laughter is a facet of human behaviour that draws together satirical and tragic aspects about social behaviour and plays an important part in the novel's critique of class. The narrator even grades laughter according to the class status of the characters; the basic formula being that the upper classes produce an affected utterance, 'Ha-ha-ha!... a slight laugh from far down the throat', which stands in stark contrast to the deeper belly sounding 'Ho-ho-ho!... of the remote provinces' (*The Hand* 56). There is a layering of satirical intention here, since Hardy is attacking the superficial laughter of London's higher classes – a cacophony of utterances in the novel that mock the working classes: the disdainful laughter of Lord Mountclere illustrates the corrosive effect of that human expression. The wider implication is that the upper classes' sense of humour and values, are less authentic than that of the servants and working classes. There is an underlying destructive meaning to this discourse of laughter and humour that the novel depicts – the isolation and separation that results from ridiculing others. In this sense, the satiric in Hardy is akin to the tragic situation, because they are both concerned with the estrangement of others and self-alienation. These are the insidious effects of laughing at others that Hardy embodies in his critical portrait of Mountclere.

In the last chapter of the novel, there is a marked change of mode from the predominantly satirical realism of most of the novel, to one of gothic melodrama. On the night of their wedding, Lord Mountclere discovers Ethelberta's plan to escape from him and gleefully outmanoeuvres her. He eventually conceals himself in her carriage and bursts out in an cynical laugh, 'Hee-hee-hee!... his eyes gleamed like a couple of tarnished brass buttons' (*The Hand* 392). A psychological climax is reached when Ethelberta can no longer suppress

her emotions; they alight in front of a cottage in the grounds of Lychworth Court, where, 'as if by an ungovernable impulse, Ethelberta broke into laughter also – laughter which had a wild unnatural sound; it was hysterical. She sank down upon the leaves and there continued the fearful laugh' (394). Her paroxysm draws upon the conventional gothic trope of the hysterical woman, but her theatrical performance also contains a degree of psychological realism and evokes elements of tragic pity. At this point, she is cast by Hardy as being on the brink of madness.

Drained of hope but driven by her instinct to survive, she concedes to a pitiful compromise with Mountclere; compromise being another facet of Hardy's modernisation of the tragic denouement, having a close affinity to resignation (a topic frequently returned to throughout the thesis). Thus, driven by her need to look after her siblings and to ensure her own survival, she condemns herself to live out her days with the grotesque Mountclere, perpetuating the lie and inner tragedy of her life. This satirical evacuation of the self and process of dehumanisation is symbolically enacted in the closing spectral vision of her: 'they assisted the viscountess to a chair, the door was closed, and the wind blew past as if nobody had ever stood there to interrupt its flight' (*The Hand* 394). Through this spectral vision, the text dehumanises her and magnifies her feelings of alienation and self-betrayal. With the wind that blows over the place where she once stood, Hardy seems to be metaphorically saying that she has become a non-individual – insubstantial and apparitional – because she has lost so much of what makes a person an individual.

In this experimental novel, Hardy uses the social environment and satire to express deeper, tragic issues about a self in crisis and problems of identity. Although *The Hand* received mixed reviews (something that Hardy would have been prepared for) it was a financial success, so allowing him a chance to pause and take stock of the type of writer he wanted to become. Subsequently, in 1876, he embarked upon an intensive reading and note-taking programme that can be most immediately felt in the ideas and discourses running through *The Return of the Native*. It is, perhaps, because of these reasons that *The Hand* marks such an important point in Hardy's move towards more radical proto-modernist forms of the tragic, such as those that are inscribed in his shaping of landscape, which is the next significant landmark in his fiction.

Section Four: Reading Tragic Landscapes

Hardy's expressive landscapes can be seen to be proto-modern because they offer up metaphoric and symbolic ways of reading life. Often obliquely and indirectly, they express sensations and meanings that are outside the scope of his characters and narrators. They take the reader beyond the human experience, into the natural world and the unknown. The landscapes exhibit meanings that open up the tragic situations, thus also displaying Hardy's proto-modernist use of them. Lawrence also embellishes his landscapes with similar layers of meaning. For example, in *The Rainbow*, when Tom Brangwen drowns in the flood at the marsh. The descriptive passages are infused with a multiplicity of tragic meanings and visions; one of the most powerfully tragic is the description of Wiggiston:

> A mass of homogeneous red-brick dwellings… The streets were like visions of pure ugliness… everything was amorphous, yet everything repeated itself endlessly… The rigidity of the blank streets, the homogenous amorphous sterility of the whole suggested death rather than life… The whole place was just unreal, just unreal. (Lawrence, *The Rainbow* 343, 344)

Hardy wrote that 'my art is to intensify the expression of things, as is done by Crivelli, Bellini, & c. so that the heart and inner meaning is made vividly visible' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 183). This section of the thesis draws upon this well-known Hardyan aesthetic by examining the diverse ways in which his landscapes express tragic meaning and how they intensify the tragic situation. As Michael Irwin has argued, '[Hardy's] landscapes everywhere offer tacit commentary on the changeability and brevity of life, on conflict and mutual dependence, on destruction and adaptation, on the instinct to survive and procreate, on the processes of ageing and erosion' (Irwin 14). Expanding upon this reading, the following selection of landscapes performs a vital narrative function in developing and magnifying the tragic tension of the immediate situation and, by extension, reinforces the wider tragic patterns of the novels.

The painter, J. M. W. Turner, was probably one of the greatest early influences upon Hardy's conception and formulation of landscape in his fiction. In the *Life and Work*, Hardy talks of Turner's pictures as 'a landscape *plus* a man's soul.... what he paints chiefly is *light as modified by objects*' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 225). Hardy's italics are suggestive of how Turner's chiaroscuro effect inspired his own impressionist landscapes and the meaning that Hardy also wanted to express. For instance, in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, Hardy describes a

London street scene in this mode: ‘gaslights glared from butchers’ stalls, illuminating the lumps of flesh to splotches of orange and vermilion, like the wild colouring of Turner’s later pictures’ (*A Pair* 133). One of Hardy’s earliest tragic landscapes in the fiction is his construction of the setting for the first physical and electrical touch between Aeneas Manston and Cytherea Graye in *Desperate Remedies*. The foundations of a ruined mill in the midst of a meadow set the scene for this anti-romantic encounter between the two. In a similar style to Turner, Hardy portrays ‘the sun, resting on the horizon-line from below copper coloured and lilac clouds’ (*Desperate Remedies* 230) and describes how ‘all dark objects on the earth... were overspread by a purple haze’ (230). Just before Manston is about to touch her, she looks out upon the surrounding countryside:

> The stillness oppressed and reduced her to mere passivity. The only wish the humidity of the place left in her was to stand motionless. The helpless flatness of the landscape gave her, as it gives all such temperaments, a sense of bare equality with, and no superiority to, a single entity under the sky. (*Desperate Remedies* 230)

Her moment of vision is shaped by the horizontal landscape, which reduces her to the level of the natural world, a technique that Hardy goes on to develop throughout his fiction in increasingly abstract and sophisticated modes. In this respect Hardy proves to be remarkably consistent in his landscape method that persistently expresses something tragic about the character’s inner self or the general situation. What gives this vision an added apprehensive intensity, is that Cytherea senses that Manston is about to declare his desperate love for her; their clothes touch and he pleads: ‘will you try to love me?’ (*Desperate Remedies* 230). Feeling the trembling sensation of his ‘pitiful’ hand she is paralysed, powerless to withdraw her hand from his. Looking around her through the autumnal haze she perceives the only remains of the old garden ‘the fragment’ of a hedge ‘choked with mandrakes’ that she imagines are crying out in shrieks (230). The whole scene instils feelings of entrapment, ‘purposeless and valueless’ (230) in her and the landscape is designed to develop the tragic situation that Cytherea finds herself in, that is, one of emotional blackmail, feeling torn between helping her brother with his disability by marrying Manston and her revulsion towards the villain of the novel.

Hardy was particularly interested in landscapes that expressed destructive energies, whether natural or human, or that reflected some kind of spiritual isolation. In this regard the influence of Meindert Hobbema was significant. As J. B. Bullen has argued, Hardy ‘was drawn to... certain kinds of landscape painting that integrated human figures and natural

settings. He found the work of Giovanni Boldini and Meindert Hobbema particularly significant, since they exemplified for him the impress of the human presence upon the inanimate' (Bullen, 'Hardy and the Visual Arts' 219). Hardy's visualisations of lonely figures walking along empty roads and across bleak landscapes have echoes of the feelings of isolation which Hobbema's landscapes express. In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, this contrast between integration and alienation, between belonging and loneliness, forms an integral part of Hardy's imagining technique and embellishes the novel with a dramatic tragic intensity.

Even pastoral scenes, such as the moment when Oak contemplates the stars on Norcombe Hill, only serve to sharpen the destructive effects of the tragic incidents. Increasingly in the novel the pastoral mode is disrupted by unruly passions, desires and descriptions of environment that convey feelings of fear and isolation. William Greenslade has described Hardy's narrative technique as the 'poetics of remoteness... symbolic geographies which expose how states of abandonment, loss, uselessness and erasure are produced by the shaping power of cultural and social processes' (Greenslade, 'Out of the Way Places' 45, 43). Added to these social constructs of place, remoteness in the novel is also partly due to elegiac and mythological visions of Wessex.

Chapter Five, 'Departure of Bathsheba: A Pastoral Tragedy' was originally entitled 'a farming episode', but that first neutral heading in the manuscript was replaced by one that points towards abandonment and a more catastrophic event, thus offering a more accurate prolepsis. What is not indicated, but soon becomes apparent, is Hardy's attention to the topographical details of this episode of destruction. The very contours of the landscape are realised as a form of tragic stage set: 'on the further side of Norcombe Hill was chalk-pit… two hedges converged upon it in the form of a 'V,' but without meeting' (*Madding Crowd* 31). In this way, Hardy constructs a converging terrain which sets the stage for a potential disaster, especially if it is read in the light of the chapter heading.

Oak, after having been emotionally disturbed by Bathsheba's vigorous rejection of his proposal of marriage, has neglected his duties as a shepherd and falls asleep, leaving his new young dog outside to eat a dead lamb. This oversight by Oak is often overlooked by commentators but it is instrumental in the cause of the disaster. The raw meat makes the dog agitated, which in turn leads him to driving the herd off the edge of the chalk pit. Hardy's description of the outcome produces one of his most strikingly poetic and gothic visions of annihilation:

> Oak raised his head, wondering what he could do, and listlessly surveyed the scene. By the outer margin of the pit was an oval pond, and over it hung the attenuated skeleton of a chrome yellow moon, which had only a few days to last – the morning star dogging her on the left hand. The pool glittered like a dead man's eye, and as the world awoke a breeze blew, shaking and elongating the reflection of the moon without breaking it, and turning the image of the star to a phosphoric streak upon the water. All this Oak saw and remembered. (*Madding Crowd* 33)

The reader experiences the scene from Oak's point of view. As he raises his head, coming out of disbelief, he surveys the devastation, but remains silent, unable to articulate his thoughts and suppress his emotions. Hardy uses the third person narrative to draw out Oak's inner feelings; the gothic imagery reflects and intensifies the psychological distress Oak is experiencing – the hovering, 'attenuated skeleton of a chrome yellow moon' and the pool glittering 'like a dead man's eye'. One notes the poeticism in the rhythmic flow of the narrative induced by the smooth syntax, romantic imagery and alliteration: 'pit', 'pond', 'pool'. Sensory perceptions, emotions and memory all converge in an intense confrontation between Oak and his catastrophic situation. 'Pit' also has insidiously hellish connotations and a star is transformed into something ugly – 'a phosphoric streak'.

The experience is transitory and the moment passes, because Oak does not react negatively to the incident. Hardy's hero is not overwhelmed by the situation, but rather strengthened by it, despite the fact that his stock was not insured. As the narrator sums up: 'he had passed through an ordeal of wretchedness which had given him more than it had taken away (*Madding Crowd* 34). At the end of the episode the young dog that drove the herd off the edge of the chalk-pit is 'tragically shot' (33), but, as a farmer and shepherd, Oak is obliged to destroy a bad dog. The experience cannot be described as tragic for Oak, but his error in feeding the dog meat is a major contributing factor in the disaster. The tragic infused into the landscape is the destruction of the pregnant ewes and not Oak's loss; the killing of the dog and the annihilation of the sheep is a symbolic result of the folly and weakness of man. This destruction of life forms part of the novel's wider pattern of antagonistic forces that extends beyond the human, which Hardy perceived as being played out in nature and life in general. The humane Oak actually embodies the positive values of endurance, strength and hope and he is, perhaps, placed better than anyone to sense, in the ensuing episode, the 'throb of tragic intensity' (45) that pulsates through Fanny Robin's wrist.

The human struggle is most vividly embodied in Hardy's characterisation of Fanny and Farmer Boldwood. Once again the landscape tacitly expresses their inner turmoil, loneliness and isolation. Following his receipt of Bathsheba's Valentine card, Boldwood has been waiting for word from her, but none comes. In despair he retires to his bedroom, taking the card with him and the 'mysterious influences of the night' (*Madding Crowd* 88) begin to take effect, in particular the power of the strange moon:

> His window admitted only a reflection of its rays, and that pale sheen had that reverse direction that snow gives, coming upward and lighting up his ceiling in an unnatural way, casting shadows in strange places, and putting light where shadow used to be. (*Madding Crowd* 88)

The optical inversion, eerie moonlight and shadows, function as illuminations of Boldwood's 'abnormal distortion' (*Madding Crowd* 87) and emotional disorientation. Unable to sleep, he jumps out of bed and reopens the envelope in case there is something else inside it that he might at first have missed. At dawn he goes outside, leans on a gate and gazes out into the distance. It is in this context that Hardy then offers one of his most spectral winter landscapes:

> The fields and the sky were so much of one colour by the snow that it was difficult in a hasty glance to tell whereabouts the horizon occurred; and in general there was here too that before mentioned preternatural inversion of light and shade which attends the prospect when the garish brightness commonly in the sky is found on the earth and the shades of the earth are in the sky. Over the west hung the wasting moon, now dull and greenish-yellow, like tarnished brass. (*Madding Crowd* 89)

Hardy's visualisation of such a disenchanting landscape incorporates some of his favourite motifs and tropes: the blurred horizon, the absence of man, the translucent and spectral moonlight and a snowy landscape. There are echoes of Shelley's concept of poetic vision from *In Defence of Poetry*, in which he attributes dangerous, distortive powers to the self: 'all things exist as they are perceived... "The mind is its own place, and of itself can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven..." It compels us to feel that which we perceive' (Shelley 698). Boldwood's moment of vision is, therefore, structured by his unfolding tragic relationship with Bathsheba. Hardy's exploration of the self is facilitated through realist, poetic and tragic uses of landscape in this novel. A tragic-realist novel has to sustain a narrative teleological momentum and so these pauses in the action are forever being recast

back into novel's central flow. Hardy's innovative formulation of landscape is an essential feature of the novel's tragic, realist achievement.

Leslie Stephen said of *Far From the Madding Crowd* that he 'admired the poetry which was diffused through the prose' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 318), but Hardy's natural descriptions are also everywhere infused with a tragic genius loci. For example, Hardy's environmental description for the episode in which Joseph Poorgrass drives Fanny Robin's coffin to Weatherbury from Casterbridge:

> Joseph Poorgrass looked round upon his sad burden as it loomed faintly through the flowering laurustinus, then at the unfathomable glooms amid the high trees on each hand, indistinct shadowless and spectre-like in their monochrome of grey... the fog had by this time saturated the trees, and this was the first dropping of water... the hollow echo of its fall reminded the waggoner painfully of Dust to Dust. (*Madding Crowd* 246)

The sound of the water drops provides a fitting elegy for Fanny Robin's tragic life and death, but Poorgrass adds insult to injury when he then stops at the Buck's Head and gets drunk. In this way, Hardy adds an element of satire to the tragic episode of the chapter which ends in Oak's reprimand of Poorgrass's disgraceful neglect of duty.

Hardy also continually demonstrates his skill in using landscape to depict the world beyond the human, ranging from insects to perceptions of infinity and the unknown. In *The Return of the Native* the displacement of man is mediated through empty landscapes, a spectacle also present in Hobbema who gave Hardy feelings of stillness and a soulful sense of beauty, such as in Hobbema's *The Avenue, Middleharnis* (1689). Echoes of such pictures of stasis and emptiness are treated by Hardy with a post-Romantic austerity. Even before man appears upon the scene, Hardy establishes a strikingly tragic sense of place in his construction of Egdon Heath. This type of landscape technique was probably inspired by his visit to the Rhine a couple of years earlier, when, in 1876, he and Emma visited Heidelberg on the Rhine and he noted the nebulous impressionistic effect of his perception:

> Looking west one evening from the top of the tower on the Konigsstuhl, Hardy remarks on a singular optical effect that was almost tragic. Owing to the mist the wide landscape itself was not visible, but the Rhine glared like a riband of blood, as if it serpentined through the atmosphere above the earth's surface. (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 113)

Significantly, the vision is not completely tragic but 'almost', because the related human drama is predominantly a happy one: the honeymoon, or holiday, of the two newly-weds. Hardy's perception of the scene is, therefore, influenced by positive emotion and hope. In his note, the nebulous vision of a river that 'glared like a riband of blood' has strong echoes of Turner's dark, impressionist landscapes that Hardy so admired. Turner's creations suggested to Hardy ways of creating his own atmospheric natural visions, such as the famously awesome creation of Egdon Heath:

> 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. (*The Return* 11)

In fact, the spirit of the heath is hardly in perfect accord with man's lesser nature; some of the characters are hateful because they believe they have been slighted. The heath seems to endure at the end, but the characters die or submit to its power. It is easy to forget just how radical such an opening to a novel was at the time; however, it works to set up a tragical sense of place where we expect things to go wrong. As Hardy knew, the Greeks invested their landscape with the supernatural presence of the gods; they mythologised the land, the spirits of the gods were everywhere and they were in everything. For Hardy, landscape was inscribed with myth, religion and ancient history that could all be called upon to intensify the tragic action. However, Hardy's reinvention of such a tragic environment is not simply transcendent; it is flattening, immanent and psychologically overwhelmingly.

The open landscapes of *The Return of the Native* have a reductive and levelling effect on Clym Yeobright's consciousness. Literally and metaphorically, Egdon has the power to flatten him; even in the halcyon early days of his romance with Eustacia he is levelled thus. After being kissed by Clym, Eustacia walks off into the distance leaving him alone on the heath. Then, suddenly:

> The dead flat of the scenery overpowered him, though he was fully alive to the beauty of that untarnished early summer green... there was something in its oppressive horizontality which too much reminded him of the arena of life; it gave him a sense of the bare equality with, and no superiority to, a single living thing under the sun. (*The Return* 206)

‘Arena’ here has connotations of violence and enclosure; indeed the whole description looks ominously towards the tragedy that is about to unfold between the two characters. In this realistic mode Hardy uses the ‘horizontality’ of the landscape to express Clym’s fragile and sensitive masculinity. For many, such an open, natural space might mean freedom and expansion, but not for Clym. His heightened sense of self is crushed by such vistas. This preliminary form of tragic landscape expressionism is an example of how Hardy anticipates the modernists, who further reinforce the intrinsic metaphoric and symbolic meaning of environmental descriptions.

D. H. Lawrence, for one, was inspired by Hardy’s expression of Egdon Heath’s awesome power, in particular its primordial life force: ‘Egdon, the primal, impulsive body would go on producing… eternally, so the will of man should destroy the blossom yet in bud … he must learn mind and will with the primal pulses that rise in him’ (Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy* 28). In *The Rainbow*, Lawrence sets the intellect, consciousness and knowledge of man against the dark, unknown omnipotence of nature. However, for Lawrence, that primitive power constitutes less a destructive energy than a life source with which civilised, modern man is in conflict. In Lawrence’s novel, the rainbow symbolically rises above the false corrupted mining towns of Beldover and Nottingham. Likewise, the surrounding natural environment of the Cathedral spiritually transcends any religious form of experience within the church. Lawrence criticised Hardy for allowing his characters to be defeated by society, which, for Lawrence, was a weakness of liberal, humanist tragedy. In his view, Hardy’s characters are set against ‘the vast, unexplored morality of life itself’ as it is embodied in the heath (29) and are defeated by it. However, Lawrence fails to perceive the complexity of the relationship between the heath and the characters that *The Return* dramatises. For example, in the case of Eustacia, Lawrence declares that she does not know what she wants, whereas, in the novel, she proclaims that she ‘wants to be loved to madness’ (*The Return* 71) in order to ‘drive away the eating loneliness of her days (71). Her inner emotional turmoil and isolation is played out through her surreptitious and solitary journeys across the heath. An early vision of Eustacia is as a distant ‘form’, standing alone and motionless on Blackbarrow, but as soon as the other Egdon folk arrive, she sneaks away ‘with the glide of a water-drop down a bud, and then vanished’ (18). Later, she first hears about Clym Yeobright’s return through listening in to a conversation between Mrs Yeobright and Thomasin and Hardy demonstrates Eustacia’s own feelings through a description of the heath, ‘the evening was chilly; the spot was dark and lonely’ (115, 116).

The landscape also mediates feelings of human isolation and alienation on a temporal plane; Egdon is forever mutating: 'on Egdon there was no absolute hour of the day. The time at any moment was a number of varying doctrines' (*The Return* 129). As a spectacle, the heath is alive, pulsating and constantly mutating – when the characters fall out of synchronicity with Egdon, the consequences can be destructive, if not fatal. Tragic situations occur when characters are thrown out of harmony with the pace and rhythm of nature. Thus, for Clym Yeobright 'the rural world was not right for him. A man should be only partially before his time: to be completely to the vanward in aspirations is fatal to fame' (172). Clym's dissatisfaction is framed in cultural and ideological language, whereas Eustacia's conflict with Egdon is figured in spatial terms; she wants to escape the heath which, for her, has become a prison. Symbolically and psychologically, the heath appears to be in opposition to her will, but society and her inability to integrate with others are also contributing factors in her downfall. Her antagonistic relationship with Egdon can, therefore, be read as a reflection of her wider psychological struggles in life: it is as though the heath mirrors a darkness within her. In Book five, Chapter eight, 'Rain, Darkness, and Anxious Wanderers', elemental forces converge to bring an end to Eustacia and Wildeve; Hardy symbolically represents the oppressive power that nature wields over Eustacia:

> It began to rain and blow hard as the evening advanced. The wind rasped and scraped at the corners of the house… it was one of those nights when cracks in the walls of old churches widen, when ancient stains on the ceilings of decayed manor-houses are renewed. (*The Return* 349)

Another curious purpose of opposing environments is that distinctive environments, whether spatially or temporally defined, can themselves be presented by Hardy to be in conflict with one another. Such an opposition is intriguingly played out in *A Laodicean*, a novel which is concerned, throughout, with the tensions between nature, medievalism and modernity. Thus, instead of any sense of linear historical development between these natural, social and cultural environments there is dissonance and opposition between them, the inexorable power and momentum of nature ruling over all other environments of civilisation. Early in the novel there is an episode that illustrates such a tension of opposites that has within it a significant element of tragic tension.

A railway cutting and tunnel is the setting for a tense romantic encounter between Paula Power and George Somerset. In reply to Paula's question as to whether one should be prouder of a railway cutting or a castle, her admirer and architect Somerset replies: 'from a

modern point of view, railways are, no doubt, more to be proud of than castles. To design great engineering works requires no doubt a leading mind' (*A Laodicean* 81). However, it is in his actual experience of engineering that his mind is fully opened to the hidden wonders of industrial architecture: 'Somerset looked down on the mouth of the tunnel. The popular commonplace that science, steam, and travel must always be unromantic and hideous, was not proven on the spot' (81). The uncovering of the beauty of modern civil engineering here, is, therefore, contrasted with the medieval architecture of a castle.

At first, this passage seems marginal to the advancement of the plot, but this early sequence quickly moves from the character's ideas and reflections to a description of environment that demonstrates the omnipotence of nature: 'on either slope of the deep cutting, green with long grass, grew drooping young trees of ash, beech, and other flexible varieties, their foliage almost concealing the actual railway which ran along the bottom, its thin steel rails gleaming like silver threads in the depths' *(A Laodicean* 81). Nature has overwhelmed even this massive industrial feature of the landscape.

The impression is that the cutting, rails and brickwork are overwhelmed by natural growth that appropriates an industrial construction into a natural organic environment. Then the moment of tragic tension takes place when, in trying to climb out of the cutting, Paula and Somerset are nearly killed by a train crossing the track because they are looking the wrong way into the tunnel: 'it rushed past them, causing Paula's dress, hair, and ribbons to flutter violently, and blowing up the fallen leaves in a shower over their shoulders' (*A Laodicean* 83). In this way, Hardy constructs a dramatic episode that is framed by a set of opposing environments. It is too limiting to read the description of the train rushing into the tunnel as a curious pseudo-erotic fantasy; rather Hardy uses a mode of pathetic fallacy to intensify the feelings of the characters. As Michael Irwin has argued, 'these emotions are also aggrandized by association with the lush vegetation, the massive railway cutting, the speeding rattling train' (Irwin 121, 122). In this light, the figurative meaning of the railway cutting and the near death incident is only revealed later, when in Somerset's search to find Paula he returns by train to the same spot near the cutting and looks out of the carriage window at 'that once beloved tract of countryside... the images which met his eye threw him back to a point of emotion to very near where he had been before' (*A Laodicean* 330). He thought he could 'return hither with controllable emotion' (331), but he is overcome by loss and absence. Somerset and Paula do eventually meet on the beach of Etretat in Normandy, but, because of the company of family and friends, Paula is unable to tell him about the deception that Dare has perpetrated upon them.

Another proto-modernist aspect of Hardy's landscapes is their metaphoric function, which most vividly comes into operation in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, where the landscape is inscribed within theatrical paradigms which contextualise the human drama. Henchard's uncontainable corruption infects the environment of a tent in which he is auctioning his wife. The marquee and the characters within it become 'degenerated' (*The Mayor* 10) and the atmosphere becomes 'lurid' (14). Once the sale of his wife has closed, the hay trusser staggers to the entrance of the tent and looks outside. Hardy effects a stark contrast, here, between the chaos of human drama that depicts the suffering and cruelty of abandonment and the tranquil harmony of nature. Two horses are rubbing each other's neck outside the tent: 'the difference between the peacefulness of inferior nature and the wilful hostilities of mankind was very apparent at this place' (14). The horses demonstrate an affinity and connection with each other that the humans seem incapable of. The evening landscape beyond Weydon-Priors is verdant and peaceful, as opposed to the previous degenerate activities of the fair: 'to watch it was like looking at some grand feat or stagery from a darkened auditorium. There was a natural instinct to abjure man as the blot on an otherwise kindly universe; till it was remembered that all terrestrial conditions were intermittent' (14). The rhythmic natural world beyond the 'darkened auditorium' contrasts starkly with the events that have taken place in the tent. It is a world beyond Henchard's grasp, even when he is not drinking. Metaphorically, he never completely escapes that psychological darkness. Hardy's theatrical construction of the episode is designed to express Henchard's inner turmoil, a chaos that is ignited by the hag's concoction. This palpable contagion spreads, contaminating the whole atmosphere of the tent. These metaphorical scenes and landscapes indirectly cast comment upon the psychological and affective weaknesses and follies of the characters. However, like allegorical modes, these perspectives are open and ambiguous, not definitive, moral judgements of the events or the characters.

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, through the use of his expressive series of landscapes, Hardy provides intensity to the scene in which Tess is attempting to survive in the closing phase of the novel. Having been rejected by Angel, her intense feelings of shame prevent her from settling back at home in Marlott. Forced to find work in winter, she decides to join her friend Marian on a bleak and desolate farm picking swedes: 'thus Tess walked on; a figure which is part of the landscape; a field woman pure and simple, in winter guise' (*Tess* 280). Her individual femininity has been subsumed by the earth and yet she displays all the signs of 'young passion' and womanliness. The community that she comes across is decayed and almost extinct:

> Before her, in a slight depression, were the remains of a village. She had in fact reached Flintcomb–Ash. There seemed to be no help for it; hither she was doomed to come. The stubborn soil around her showed plainly enough that the labour and demand here was of the roughest kind. (*Tess* 281, 282)

There is a convergence of two resilient powers in this episode – Tess's endurance and the tough soil. Landscape is now depicted as Tess's enemy whereas in Blackmore Vale it was her sanctuary. In this 'starve acre place' (*Tess* 283) the hostile climate amplifies her desperate isolation:

> Here the air was dry and cold, and the long cart-roads were blown white and dusty again within a few hours after rain. There were few trees or none... In the middle distance ahead of her she could see the summits of Bulbarrow and of Nettlecombe-Tout, and they seemed friendly. (*Tess* 281)

This frozen wasteland performs a tragic function by intensifying Tess's struggle as a psychological landscape that corresponds to a nadir in her decline. This is no idyll of shepherds and sheep, but, rather, a scene of endurance and hard labour: 'the swede field in which she and her companion were set hacking was a stretch of one hundred odd acres on the highest ground of the farm composed of myriads of loose white flints in bulbous, cusped and phallic shapes' (*Tess* 285). Such a barren picture of nature corresponds to another of Hardy's tragic landscapes visualised in Hardy's 'The Darkling Thrush' (1900): 'The Century's corpse outleant... the wind his death lament... the ancient pulse of germ and birth was frozen hard and dry' (Gibson (ed.), *Complete Poems* 150). In this elegiac poem, however, there is an utterance of hope not present in the corresponding episode of the novel. In the closing verses of the poem, it is the bird's 'ecstatic sound' which carries 'some blessed hope' (150). As this thesis has sought to argue, there is usually hope in Hardy's representations of tragedy in the fiction; the stories they relate are ones of loneliness, pity and apprehension, but they also display a celebration of life.

At Flintcomb-Ash, the girls are bent over working in a cold white landscape; a picture that has strong visual echoes of Millet's 'The Gleaners', with its row of peasant woman toiling in a bleak wasteland. The landscape expresses the hard barren facts about Tess's own endurance and suffering. Circling above this landscape are 'strange birds from behind the North Pole... gaunt spectral creatures with tragical eyes' (*Tess* 288). In an anthropomorphic description, the nameless birds have knowledge of the 'cataclysmal horror'

(288) of nature of which the girls are ignorant. The harsh environment has dehumanised Tess, in striking contrast to the sensual descriptions of her person and the environments through which she moved at the beginning of the novel. The landscape is also a means of visualising her depressed psychological and affective state in a mode resembling that of a pathetic fallacy.

Hardy's landscapes do not directly express feelings of pity and isolation, nor do they always transmit dark or disturbing messages about character. At the end of *Tess* the episode at Stonehenge is infused with a mythical feeling of peaceful resignation. The seventh and final phase of the novel is entitled 'Fulfilment' and can be read, I suggest, as a celebration of Hardy's Wessex. In the penultimate episode of the novel Hardy constructs a sublime spiritus loci. He revives the ancient, Druidical spirit so as to elevate his heroine and the structuring of the environment here expands upon Tess's purity, resignation and self-sacrifice.

After so much suffering, Hardy seems to finally deliver her from the hands of men. In stark contrast to other, more disturbing depictions of her in the landscape, this episode uses environment to empower Tess as the pure, sacrificial heroine of the tragedy. Prostrate on the Stone of Sacrifice she seems to transcend the material world, offering her body up to the Druid Sun god. This religious monument provides the novel with an alternative arena to the Christian Church. Tess also gives herself up to the moment: 'I am not going to think outside of now' (*Tess* 389), because there is only torment for her in the past and the immediate future. For Angel, Stonehenge is a 'monstrous place' (392) but Tess describes it as her 'heathen temple' (393) and says that she likes 'very much to be here' (393). The mood of the place accords with her sense of acceptance and resignation: 'it is so solemn' (393).

This pagan temple seems, paradoxically, to both empower and disable Tess, who 'flung herself upon an oblong slab [the Stone of Sacrifice] that lay close at hand, and was sheltered from the wind by a pillar. Owing to the action of the sun during the preceding day the stone was warm and dry' (*Tess* 393). The impression is that the sun's energy, with which she has been associated throughout the novel, acts as an immanent power that comforts her and finally rises to claim her. At dawn, the solar god puts her to rest and she falls asleep on the stone:

> The band of silver paleness along the east horizon made even the distant parts of the Great Plain appear dark and near; and the whole enormous landscape bore that impress of reserve…The eastern pillars and their architraves stood up blackly against the light, and the great flame shaped Sunstone beyond them, and the Stone of Sacrifice beyond them. (*Tess* 395)

Hardy's description emphasises the religious and sacred significance of the pagan site and inscribes Tess within the wider sacrificial and mythological meaning of place. However, it is also a 'dark' and 'enormous' landscape that dwarfs the characters, a desolate environment, not simply a transcendent or heavenly locus. In diminishing the human in this way, Hardy encodes onto the landscape a sense of mortality and isolation that foreshadows Tess's imminent execution.

After she is arrested in the morning mist she disappears from the gaze of the reader. With the black flag flying over Wintoncester prison, Hardy enacts a more hopeful side of tragedy. The novel subtly plays out its closing, sacred, pagan ritual when Liza-Lu and Angel look at the flag and 'bent themselves down to the earth as if in prayer, and remained thus a long time, absolutely motionless' (*Tess* 398). Their prayer is the final secular scripture that the reader is not allowed to share because their words are not significant. What is important is the vision of hope expressed in their 'joined hands' (398) and the fulfilment of Tess's wish that Angel marry Liza-Lu because 'she is so good and simple and pure' (394). In Hardy's next novel there are also visions of hope, though not to such a degree.

The early landscape descriptions in *Jude the Obscure* are heavily informed by Hardy's admiration of Turner's sublime and dark impressionism that reinforces the tragedy. Jude's first glimpse of the 'city of light' (*Jude* 25) is impressionistic: 'some way within the limits of the stretch of landscape, points of light like the topaz gleamed' (21). The reader is left imagining the difficult experiences that lie ahead for Jude and can surmise that it is going to be an arduous pilgrimage into that unknown territory that lies beyond the horizon. Jude first has to perform a pilgrimage through the now famous brown field. His painful awakening to the cruelty of nature, 'a sort of shuddering' (18), occurs when, as an eleven year-old boy, he is given the job of scaring off crows from farmer Troutham's recently sown corn field. The 'wide and lonely depression... this vast concave' (14) that describes the field introduces the reader to a disturbing and tragic landscape which Hardy constructs in two parts. The first is:

> The brown surface of the field went right up towards the sky all around, where it was lost by degrees in the mist that shut out the actual verge and accentuated the solitude. The only mark on the uniformity of the scene were a rick of last year's produce standing in the midst of the arable, the rooks that rose at his approach, and the path athwart the fallow by which he had come, trodden now by he hardly knew whom, though once by many of his own dead family.

> ‘How ugly it is here!’ he murmured. (*Jude* 14)

‘Brown’, is a prosaic and mundane adjective that has resonances of Hobbema’s stark and barren landscapes, which seem almost devoid of life. Hardy’s visualisation of the field refracts pathos and isolation. The concave geography and the blurred horizon shrouded in the mist have cut Jude off from the outside world, accentuating his isolation and loneliness. The text later makes explicit that, for Jude and the rooks, the field is ‘a lonely place’ (*Jude*, 14). There then follows the second part of this passage:

> The fresh harrow-lines seemed to stretch like the channellings in a piece of new corduroy, lending a meanly utilitarian air to the expanse, taking away its gradations, and depriving it of all history beyond that of the few recent months. (*Jude* 14)

Hardy’s description of the landscape here is infused with a sense of erasure, change and loss. The regular rows of sown corn are lines of intensive utilitarian farming; Jude repeatedly comes into conflict with utilitarian ideology which is more widely conceived throughout the novel. For Jude, the arable land is a territory that stands between him and his dream: ‘the farmer had said he was never to be seen in that field again; yet Christminster lay across it and the path was a public one’ (*Jude* 19). As a member of the community he has a right of access and ‘never swerving an inch from the path’ (19) he walks through this prohibited territory. David Musselwhite has argued that the district surrounding Marygreen ‘is a world that has lost its originally sacred codings and has succumbed instead to meanly utilitarian and wholly desacralized registrations and inscriptions’ (Musselwhite 146). By the end of the novel, the relationship between Jude and his environment has deteriorated to such an extent that it breaks down altogether, becoming insubstantial and spectral.

Hardy’s vision of the earth and landscape in the novel is underpinned by an inspiring dark spirit of place or spectre that must have haunted Hardy as he was writing the novel, because Marygreen is based upon the village of Great Fawley where his grandmother Jemima grew up in a domestic environment of poverty and alcoholism[16]. It is as though this secret real life story is being expressed through the bleaker landscapes of the novel. Also, historically, boys as young as the age of six tended and guarded fields in the early part of the nineteenth century; there were frequent reports in the newspapers of boys staying out all day in the harsh conditions of the fields, falling ill and even dying from exposure. This fictive landscape, then,

[16] See Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 12.

is layered with tragic significance, expressing a wider theme in the novel, the price exacted by agricultural mechanisation and so-called progress.

The eleven year old Jude's quest for enlightenment accidently begins when he goes into the village of Marygreen and asks the school teacher, Phillotson, why he is leaving: 'my scheme, or dream, is to be a university graduate, and then to be ordained' (*Jude* 10). In this way, higher education, religion and place are tragically conflated from the beginning of the novel. The next revelation takes place when Jude asks a local for directions to Christminster; the reply is 'out by there yonder' (19). Jude then finds himself 'climbing up the long and tedious ascent on the other side… all before him was bleak open down... not a soul was visible on the hedgeless highway' (19). The vista before him does not instil him with expectation, but rather reinforces his fear and loneliness.

From the top of a ladder the boy Jude prays for the mist and cloud to lift so that he can get a sight of the utopian city and 'the thinning mist dissolved altogether from the Eastern horizon' (*Jude* 21). The narrator describes Jude's praying as an 'experiment'. One of the workmen repairing the roof of the barn describes the city as 'it looks like – I don't know what' (20); this is clearly a nondescript place for the locals at Marygreen. Even Jude's early glimpse of Christminster carries tragic connotations of place, since the Brown House (a further reference to brown which resonated with Hobbema's figures mentioned earlier) is situated near the spot where his parents separated and near the pool where, apparently, his mother drowned herself. Moreover, his aunt Drusilla tells him of how one of his ancestors was hanged on a gibbet near the crossroads. Hardy devotes nine paragraphs to landscape descriptions in Part One, Chapter Three, which suggests the key role played by landscape in the opening scenes of the novel.

The reader is repeatedly taken through low-lying terrain that then rises up beyond the horizon in a topographical narrative of isolation and infinity. The mirage of Christminster and Jude's celestial perception of it, suggest that the actual experience of the city will be far from enlightening. When he actually reaches that far-off place, the experience is a tragic one and his hopes are dashed. In this sense, these landscapes can be described as tragic since they hide a painful truth – the seat of learning is not for him. The momentum of the plot draws upon the proleptic effect of the early landscapes that rely upon a continual series of seemings and impressions of distant places; such expressive landscapes in the novel are infused with meanings that advance Jude's tragic situation.

In a similar visionary mode, the prose directions of *The Dynasts* offer some of the finest examples of how Hardy infuses a landscape with a sense of death and destruction. This

experimental psycho-drama in verse is not usually read for its prose descriptions, but they do significantly reinforce the work's tragic vision of humanity. Perhaps it is because they are in the form of stage directions that these passages have not received the critical attention that they deserve. Hardy's motivation in writing this 'epic drama' was stimulated by the fact that the English contribution to the Napoleonic Wars had been relatively ignored by those 'continental writers' to which he refers in the preface; here he would have had in mind Stendhal and Tolstoy. As he explains in the preface, he had previously touched upon the 'vast international tragedy' of the Napoleonic Wars in *The Trumpet Major*, but the play is written in a completely different tragic mode from that of the novel. There is perhaps no greater tragic heroic vision in Hardy's fiction than the image of Napoleon, inspecting his troop lines on horseback; this despotic warrior, who killed more French soldiers than anyone else in the history of France, cloaked in a drab trench-coat and riding his famous grey horse across the battle field at Austerlitz.

There is an uncanny historical significance in the fact that Hardy is bringing to life destructive landscapes in 1913, on the eve of another (European) war, reinforcing his tragic depiction of man. In Hardy, war is a point of reference in Greek and Shakespearean tragedy and the horrors of territorial empirical power. The horror of war becomes woven into the fabric of Hardy's landscapes in *The Dynasts*. In 1914, Hardy said that he would have changed the philosophical ending of *The Dynasts* if he could have foreseen the war: 'so mad and brutal a war destroyed all Hardy's belief in the gradual ennoblement of man' that he had previously illustrated in poems such as 'The Sick Battle God' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 398).

The opening stage direction of *The Dynasts* reads like a landscape of destruction:

> The nether sky opens, and Europe is disclosed as a prone and emaciated figure... the point of view then sinks downwards through space, and draws near to the surface of the perturbed countries, where the peoples, distressed by events which they did not cause, are seen writhing, crawling, heaving, and vibrating in their various cities and nationalities. (*The Dynasts* 6)

The descending aerial perspective is an important example of how Hardy's imaginative mode of seeing constructs an epic landscape. On a territorial level, his dark picturing instils the earth with a sense of mortality and the macabre; indeed there are many instances where he uses the gothic and grotesque in the construction of landscape, for instance, 'the light of the flaming beacon, under which the purple rotundities of the heath show like bronze, and the

pits like the eye-sockets of a skull' (*The Dynasts* 53). What comes over is the uncontrollable and unpredictable annihilating power of war itself; once released, the destructive energy of conflict cannot be controlled by man, it escalates and wreaks its own havoc.

Written on the eve of the First World War, Hardy's landscapes in *The Dynasts* have a visionary significance – he was not just congratulating Wellington and the British army's defeat of Napoleon, the monstrous tyrant. In the final scene, Napoleon, defeated at the Battle of Waterloo, is slumped over his horse, wandering through a wooded glade: 'a solitary figure on a jaded horse, the shadows of the boughs travel over his listless form as he moves along' (*The Dynasts* 518). Horrific images of mass human annihilation torment his mind: 'the stench of gunpowder and a muddy stew of crushed corpse and gore' (518). Napoleon, in a soliloquy, acknowledges that England will never be his and that the English army was the 'mangling of me' (520). On the eve of the final day of battle, dark rain clouds gather like menacing wolf packs and, as in Shakespeare's tragedies, nature is thrown into chaos and disorder, omens for a final tragic catastrophe. In this experimental work, Hardy makes the reader 'look through the insistent, and often grotesque, substance at the thing signified' (Preface to *The Dynasts* xi). The overriding emotion expressed through the landscape and the determining tragic mode of *The Dynasts* is its pitiful vision of humanity at war with itself. Such annihilation, for Hardy, leaves its scar upon the landscape and upon the memory, but written on the eve of the outbreak of the First World War, Hardy's psychological drama seems to be saying that man has not learned his lesson from war and this, therefore, is the greater tragic condition of man.

In conclusion, in Hardy's early experiments with environment he found a method of expressing the tragical meanings and feelings beyond that offered by conventional modes of characterisation and plot. The dynamic between mind, memory and environment in *Desperate Remedies* is an early illustration of his proto-modernism. 'Wessex' too, became the agency through which Hardy captured the more disturbing changes that he observed around him. Wessex grew into a literary device through which he expressed the tragic essence of a world that was disappearing as he wrote and his fears and anxieties of the encroaching New Wessex. Hardy's social satire in *The Hand of Ethelberta* examines the dilemmas and crises of self and identity which the modernists would later explore in greater detail. His dark, impressionist landscapes, influenced by Turner's paintings, open up and intensify the tragic situation in his fiction. Such innovative uses of environment pre-empted the modernists' more radical metaphoric use of landscape. Hardy's landscapes often diminished and levelled individual consciousness positing the character within a tense conflictual natural context.

CHAPTER FOUR: 'ABSTRACT IMAGININGS' OF 'THE TRAGICAL MYSTERIES OF LIFE'[17]

By the 1880s, with the success of several serials and novels behind him, Hardy embarked upon another phase of extensive reading and note-taking around tragedy. He had previously conducted a similar project in 1876, prior to the writing of *The Return of the Native*, when he was engaged in the dismantling of Victorian theories on tragedy. Contingent upon and emanating out of that earlier research, is the formulation of his own theories relating to the tragic and the type of fiction he wanted to write. One central direction in which his concepts were taking him can be gauged by the notes he made in 1887: 'Nature is played out as a beauty, but not as a Mystery. I don't want to see the original realities – as optical effects, that is. I want to see the deeper reality underlying the scenic, the expression of what are sometimes called abstract imaginings' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 192)[18].

Using this note by Hardy as a starting point, this chapter will focus primarily upon the middle fiction but also refers to the novels of the 1890's. Beginning with a discussion of such modernist themes as isolation and solitude, the chapter moves to an examination of the 'underlying' tragic realities of marriage and how those are mediated through Hardy's use of the absurd; the absurd being a future preoccupation with writers such as Samuel Beckett and James Joyce amongst others. The final section explores the ways in which Hardy artistically celebrates the primitive in his tragic deployment of the fetich and animism, which is a feature

[17] This heading is a conflation of two of Hardy's remarks dated January 1887. The first is documented above, the second reads: 'the exact truth as to the material fact ceases to be of importance in art – it is the student's style – the style of a period when the mind is serene and unawakened to the tragical mysteries of life' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 192). Hardy's abstract imagining and what he thought of, less helpfully, as his 'abstract realisms' (183) indicates a metaphorical and symbolic mode of expression that Hardy was experimenting with about this time. In art it was also emerging out of the surreal paintings of René Magritte and André Breton on the continent and Walter Sickert in England.

[18] Another example that illustrates the direction in which Hardy's tragical theories were taking him at this time is his conceptualisation that the 'business' of the novelist is to 'show the sorriness underlying the grandest of things, and the grandeur underlying the sorriest of things' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 178). Dated 19th April 1885, this was written just after he completed *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, a novel that relies heavily on relativism and an aesthetic of contrast for its tragic effects. His comment, to a large extent, points towards a way of reading its unfolding dramatic tensions and the ironic undermining of greatness by accident, bad luck, small incidents and random happenings.

of Hardy's fiction that deeply influenced D. H. Lawrence's own reconstruction of the primitive.

Section One: Isolation and Solitude

In his exploration of isolation, Hardy drew upon the Romantics, in particular Wordsworth's democratisation of the tragic in works such as *The Prelude*, in which solitude is presented within a sublime and natural setting: 'And I was taught to feel (perhaps too much) / The self-sufficing power of solitude' (Wordsworth 78). 'Perhaps too much' signals that solitude can turn into something harmful, that is, isolation and it is the interchangeable nature of these states that this section is concerned with. Hardy's aesthetic of abstract imagining becomes a useful way of expressing the inner and deeper realities of lonely and solitary characters. By the mid-nineteenth century, the idea of individual isolation was becoming overlaid by the recognition of the influence of more complex social and psychological forces. Hardy's post-romantic innovative examination of isolation is another proto-modernist feature of his writing. By focusing upon the damaging effects of isolation, Hardy creates tragic visions of the disorientated and lonely self, struggling to find meaning in an agnostic universe. At any given point, the general tragic situation conveys feelings of both cosmic and psychological isolation, which is a vision at the heart of *Two on a Tower* (1882). As Hardy insisted in his defensive response to several negative reviews of the novel, the cosmos operates, not so much as backdrop to the human drama, but as an integral force in the shaping of the romance between Swithin St. Cleeve and Lady Viviette Constantine. This is evident from the episode of their first encounter when Swithin tries to describe to Viviette the horror that he feels when peering through his telescope:

> Impersonal monsters, namely, Immensities. Until a person has thought out the stars and their interspaces, he has hardly learnt that there are things much more terrible than monsters of shape, namely, monsters of magnitude without known shape. Such monsters are the voids and waste places of the sky. (*Tower* 29)

Years of astronomy have not expanded Swithin's consciousness, in fact they seem to have closed it down; he has become spiritually intoxicated by these 'monsters of magnitude' and 'voids' so that they have corrupted his very perception of himself and, by implication, have distorted his sense of reality. He even struggles to acknowledge Viviette's presence; as she, herself, observes, astronomy makes Swithin 'feel human insignificance too plainly' (*Tower*

28). The sense of cosmic horror that possesses Swithin seems to escalate the harder he looks at the sky; his perceptions have a deep resonance with the, now famous, observation attributed to Fredrick Nietzsche that 'he who fights with monsters should be careful lest he thereby become a monster. And if thou gaze long into an abyss, the abyss will also gaze into thee' (Hollingdale (trans.) Aphorism 146). The novel's story implies that the voids in Swithin's life were probably there before he looked down a telescope, because that loneliness and isolation forms part of his way of perceiving the world and the deeper tragical mysteries about his personality, such as that embedded in the damaging effect of the early loss of his parents.

The intensity of his fear is also one of the scope and scale of infinity, as he perceives it; there is a spatial dimension at which 'ghastliness begins' (*Tower,* 30) and from that point of view 'the actual sky is a horror' (29) to him. After several years of astronomical study, he has become fearfully sensitised to the allure of the dark spaces between the stars, those 'deep wells for the human mind to let itself down into' (30). Given the impending emotional entanglement with Viviette, the metaphorical meaning of this cosmically induced angst becomes clear; just as there are dark fearful voids that separate the stars, so too are there disturbing psychological and emotional spaces within their relationship. In their encounter, Viviette is on the verge of falling in love with him and losing herself therein, just as he loses himself when he peers into infinity. By losing oneself in the other, I mean the neglect of a minimal level of personal well-being; the abandonment of one's duty to oneself. This losing is tragically dramatised in the novel through their overall gradual physical and emotional decline.

In 1881, Hardy visited the Greenwich Observatory because he wanted to know if it was possible to position a telescope on a tower like the one described in the novel. He uses astronomical discoveries and speculations, like those of Richard Proctor, whose *Essays in Astronomy* Hardy owned, to mysterious tragic effect in the novel. The overriding tragic vision of the cosmos is a fearful and unstable one, expanding and, therefore, possibly heading towards extinction. For Swithin, the cosmos is marked by 'a quality of decay' (*Tower* 30) because stars are mobile and burning out, as he says, like candles. There is nothing eternal or transcendent about the universe for him. This leads him into fearful apocalyptic imaginings about life in general and, in trying to communicate these nihilistic views to Viviette, he invites her to imagine 'a heaven of total darkness' (30). His abstract imaginings about infinity make him feel 'doomed to isolation' (147), but this fear contaminates their relationship. It is this ongoing dialogue between fearful perceptions of the cosmos, loneliness and the forces

that separate the lovers, which gives shape to the whole story. The tower and its enclosing hinterland is the predominant terrestrial metaphor of human isolation.

The location of the tower at Ring Hill provides an intimate meeting place for them, it is where they can find sanctuary from the eyes of the community: 'there is no road leading near it' (*Tower* 3). The surrounding topography of the column also conveys a sense of isolation and exclusion, standing alone in the centre of an 'insulating field' (240) on a rotund hillock of trees and brambles in the centre of a hundred acres of ploughed land, itself located in the midst of an arable plain. The precise typographical framing of the column evokes sensations of enclosure, inaccessibility and isolation which abstractly reflects and narratively dramatises the unfolding disastrous romance between Swithin and Viviette.

The growing tragic tension of the novel is largely configured by such continual juxtapositions of togetherness and isolation. The underlying tragical reality is that, in their different ways, both Swithin and Viviette are idealists and extremists; each, unconsciously and desperately, is trying to escape a deep, inner loneliness. Associated metonymically with the tower, they are affiliated to a world which is insulated from modernity. In contrast to Swithin's isolation, Viviette's loneliness is more significantly shaped by her initial oppressive marital and social situation. Estranged from her abusive and alcoholic husband, Lord Blount, she has been living a lonely, repressed existence in the manorial Welland House, never having visited the eighteenth-century tower until news of the handsome young astronomer, Swithin St. Cleeve, reaches her. Discovering him, by chance, in the tower, she instantly falls in love with this Adonis, ten years her junior. When he is peering, transfixed, through his telescope, he is absorbed by his speculations, barely aware of her presence, so the sky has a more powerful hold over him than she has. Each is therefore lost and isolated in their distinctive ways: Swithin is psychically lost in the cosmos and Viviette neglects her emotional balance and needs for him.

Hardy casts Swithin as a speculative theoretician and sinister idealist; idealism of the darker mould is something that is both compelling and absent and, therefore, this contains a potentially disturbing force that is vividly realised in the novel. The characters suffer from isolated, extreme and highly self-centred forms of thinking that mean they fail to deal with the practical, social and emotional side of life. Thus, Swithin, a poor student, ignores the possible social implications of becoming entangled with this older Lady of the manor. His perception of the universe is transferred onto the emotional and psychological chasms that exist within himself and in his relationship. She overcompensates in her responses to him, trying in a way to protect and mother him – repairing the damage to the column, lending him

money and buying him a new telescope. Swithin's impractical and idealistic nature comes to the fore through his naive hope of an open, happy marriage with her, but Viviette is only filled with anxiety, guilt and shame over the prospect of the community finding out about them.

In his romance with Viviette, Swithin's isolation and loneliness are not cured, only magnified. As he admits, 'the fear that something may snatch you from me keeps me in a state of perpetual apprehension' (*Tower* 95). Now that someone has shown a passionate interest in him, the fear of losing her and the possible consequent loneliness, is potentially more dangerous than if he had remained single. As his uncle's will warns him, if he wants to succeed in his research he should stay away from women. With the news that her husband has died in Africa, they make plans to marry and conduct their lives in secret.

The catastrophic effect of the ending is produced by a complex textual oscillation of themes, in particular those of hope, melodrama, pathos and resignation. As befits the metaphorical schemata of the novel, the final scene is enacted in the tower where Viviette and Swithin first met. The years of longing and loneliness have aged and weakened Viviette and ironically, the ecstatic shock of their reunion proves to be the final tragic blow to her now frail constitution; thus, she collapses and dies in his arms. The inexorable processes of alienation and isolation have, therefore, claimed their victims which now includes their illegitimate son. The pathos of the spectacle of a motherless boy is magnified by the boy's sad euphemism: 'mother has gone to sleep' (*Tower* 243). The fearful and unknown world before him, rather like the empty cosmic and inner voids his parents had to face, reflects Hardy's agnostic, tragic vision of the universe. Here the implication is that, like his parents, the boy will also inevitably seek somebody, or something, greater than himself through which he will try to appease his own loneliness.

Hardy's experiments with the tragic effects of isolation takes on a greater dramatic intensity and a dark theatricality in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Hardy wrote *The Mayor* after having settled into Max Gate, the house that he built on the outskirts of Dorchester in 1885. This is a significant point of detail because living there evoked in him difficult feelings about his relationship with his home town. A few years later, in a letter empathetic towards John Addington Symonds's own feelings of isolation, he reflects on his ambivalent sentiments about the town: 'I, too, am exiled ... the spot on which I live here is very lonely... one does get a little rusty in living in remote places' (Purdy and Millgate (eds.) i, 190). Throughout the novel, Henchard is preoccupied with feelings of alienation and loneliness that grow in magnitude until he finds himself cut off from the community that once allowed him to rise to

success. In the text, Hardy rigorously explores the type of psychological isolation that can be caused by intense social and public alienation. Even the full title of the novel synoptically points towards such concerns: *The Life and Death of the Mayor of Casterbridge: A Story of a Man of Character*. This posits the fate of the central figure firmly within its social and humanist context, but also, by omission, suggests questions about the private man and the antagonistic relationship between the two. In the second movement of the novel, signs of the mayor's social and emotional fallibility come to the fore as soon as he has the chance to engage with Farfrae. Henchard walks with Farfrae up the high street of Casterbridge, he desperately tries to persuade him to stay and work for him and, with tragic irony, Farfrae finally agrees to be his man. A little later, Henchard realises that there is something deeper to his thoughts about the young Scotsman than those of a purely business concern: 'how that fellow does draw me…I suppose 'tis because I'm so lonely' (*The Mayor* 56). This solitary muttering signals where the tragic catalyst in their relationship lies – in Henchard's emotional loneliness that still lurks within him.

From the early to mid-nineteenth century, abusive and excessive alcohol consumption was generally considered a religious and moral matter, a view promoted by the growing Temperance movement of the period. However, in Hardy's novel, Henchard's disposition to drink is framed in socio-psychological ways, that alienate and isolate him. In this formulation, Hardy's depiction of Henchard anticipates certain Freudian ideas of suppression and the unconscious and, as such, Henchard's drinking is inextricably linked to his feelings of fear and shame, which neither the narrator nor Henchard address. Therefore, when he relapses after twenty-one years, releasing himself from the oath that is keeping him alive at least, his 'era of recklessness began anew' (*The Mayor* 229). Hardy goes on to describe the duplicitous nature of Henchard's syndrome, now reactivated: 'his feelings under a cover of stolidity, fortifying his heart by drinking more freely at the King of Prussia every evening' (235). Such observations about his drinking pattern demonstrate a proto-modernist medical view of Henchard's tragic condition, reflecting a profound visionary understanding of what would later be defined as the disease of alcoholism. This underlying reality and, to him, mystery about his drinking underpins his denial and ignorance about his motivations and experiences. So, rather than suggesting a religious or moral explanation for Henchard's drinking, the text installs a pathogenic aetiology for it. The tragic effect is mediated through a series of metaphoric episodes in which Henchard's drinking is framed by the convergence of social, psychic and emotional circumstances. This continual interaction between internal and external forces gives direction, momentum and shape to his tragically isolated mind and soul.

For example, Henchard's desperate engagement with the weather prophet, Mr. Fall, is symbolically conducted in the conjuror's remote cottage, which forms part of 'a lonely hamlet ... so lonely, that what are called lonely villages were teeming by comparison' (184). In this episode, Henchard takes an ever diminishing and narrowing path to the cottage, which is a topographical declination that gradually intensifies the sense of doom and fatality about the encounter. Significantly, unlike Henchard, Fall himself does not suffer from shame and its subliminal isolating effects, but rather lives out his life in quiet solitude. He never tells the mayor that he can cheat nature or predict the weather, because secretly he knows he cannot, that is only a con and feint that he uses to his advantage over the community. It is Henchard's own desperate and isolated thinking that induces him to believe that Fall can influence the course of nature. In this way, the text sets up another tragic ironic paradigm, the outcome of which is Henchard's death. Towards the end of the novel Elizabeth-Jane comments on the extent of Henchard's loneliness and he replies 'ay, child – to a degree that you know nothing of. It is my own fault' (291). Here, Henchard mistakenly feels solely responsible for his isolation whereas the text makes clear that there is a range of mitigating circumstances that also shape his fate.

For Henchard, the narrator tells us, 'the end of his life would be friendless solitude' (*The Mayor* 301). However, moments of hope frequently emerge in Hardy's tragic shaping of a story. Towards the end of the novel, this comes in the form of Elizabeth-Jane and Henchard's late affectionate feelings for her. This moral and emotional period of regeneration is, of course, short lived. When Farfrae marries Elizabeth-Jane, Henchard's hopes of a renewed friendship with her are dashed and, after losing her, he dramatically withdraws from society as a whole. In psychological terms Henchard can be seen as co-dependent because he seems so emotionally shaped by his human relationships. The narrator pronounces on this point: Henchard 'has lost all that can make life interesting or even tolerable… all had gone from him' (291). After losing Elizabeth-Jane the thought of living out his life under the spectre of such loneliness is too overwhelming and it is at this point that he decides to commit suicide.

One of the most striking psycho-dramatic and modernist passages in the story is the moment of epiphany when Henchard decides to drown himself by the rotting and neglected weir, on the lower east side of the town. Hardy depicts this as a symbolic place, because on this part of the river there are two bridges, one is new, built of brick and can be seen from the town, and the other is older, heavier and bigger, made of stone and out of sight of the town. The latter has a tragic spiritus loci and history of depressive experiences and suicides and it is

this one that Henchard chooses. Thus, he is cast as one of many who have felt as low as he does at this moment. It is almost as if the bridge itself is bearing witness to his fate. Having taken his hat and coat off, he is on the brink of jumping when, by chance, he sees a double of himself floating in the pool:

> In the circular current imparted by the central flow the form was brought forward, till it passed under his eyes; and then he perceived with a sense of horror that it was himself. Not a man somewhat resembling him, but one in all respects his counterpart, his actual double, was floating as if dead in Ten-Hatches Hole. (*The Mayor* 292, 293)

In the crisis point on the stone bridge, Hardy draws upon nineteenth-century ideas and representations of doubles and doppelgangers[19] and creates his own proto-modernist pre-Freudian model of a suppressed psyche. Henchard, having before recklessly uttered that 'I care nothing for what becomes of me' (*The Mayor* 271), is ironically saved from death, because in the effigy he becomes conscious of the horror suppressed within him. In this way, Hardy's imaging technique reveals the deeper, tragical reality of Henchard's character. The doubling effect therapeutically creates a catharsis that stops him from complete self-annihilation. This temporary recovery continues when he returns home to the sympathetic Elizabeth-Jane, who, to a degree, empathises with his isolation.

In a last attempt to make amends to Elizabeth-Jane, he nervously decides to make an appearance at her wedding. However, once having been mayor and now living in isolation with Jopp as a poor hay-trusser, he is painfully class-conscious of his degenerate appearance: 'having no clothes but the working suit that he stood in' (*The Mayor* 373). By this stage, the accumulative oppressive effect of isolation has so mentally weakened Henchard that he becomes anxious about situations that would not have previously bothered him. As the narrator puts it 'solitude and sadness had so emolliated Henchard that he now feared circumstances he would formerly have scorned' (375). One of the most powerful closing visions of isolation in the novel is the image of Henchard on the road to Casterbridge after he

[19] There are also strong points of reference between Henchard and Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) that have received relatively little critical attention. This line of investigation could open new aspects of investigation relating to Henchard and frames of identity and perception in the novel. In a letter of 1886, Hardy praises Stevenson's 'immense imaginative power' (Purdy and Millgate (eds.) i, 147). In his tribute to Stevenson, Hardy recorded that the elder novelist praised Henchard as being ''a great fellow'' (Orel (ed.) 150).

has just alighted the carrier: 'he was soon left as a lonely figure on the broad white highway' (374). This scene geometrically frames the opening silent vision of him and his family trudging along the dusty road that will lead them into Casterbridge. Although he is not physically on his own at the beginning, Hardy vividly casts him as an isolated soul, unable to interact meaningfully with his fellow beings.

Henchard's loneliness and the general tragic effect is only intensified by moments of hope, as when a seemingly possible reconciliation with Elizabeth-Jane is immediately dashed by the sudden reappearance of her real father, Newson. Henchard lies to her about his reappearance, telling her that he must be dead, which is a lie that only rebounds upon him. In the final movement of the novel Elizabeth-Jane expresses her anger and resentment to him for having so cruelly deceived her and Henchard's sense of self-worth is so low at this point that he does not now even try to defend himself (which he arguably might have done). Thus, he abandons Casterbridge and its society to wander off, like a wounded animal, to die alone. His final hours are spent in an isolated and remote hut on the edges of Egdon Heath, where he dies in a state of resignation, denouncing all the codes and values that composed his social, but not his spiritual, identity.

Hardy's method of abstract imagining and metaphorical imaging must have suggested to the modernists ways in which a novelist can express the tragical mysteries and realities of life, something that clearly preoccupied them. Hardy goes on to even more subliminally and abstractly hone his technique in *The Woodlanders*, where his attention to the small and seemingly insignificant details of life continues to perform an tragic effect and, once again, isolation and solitude are at the heart of his enactment: 'the slow meditative lives of people who live in habitual solitude... renders every trivial act of a solitary full of interest, as showing thoughts that cannot be expressed for want of an interlocutor' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 158). Hardy deploys a combination of close, detailed observations of Giles's face, clothes, overall form and his slightest gestures and movements, all of which are shaped by his surroundings, social circumstances and situation. There is, therefore, a gradual gathering of subliminal and never fully explained internal and external forces that converge upon and isolate Hardy's partly classical, partly proto-modernist tragic hero.

In the enclosed, woodland environment of *The Woodlanders* isolation is shaped more by enclosure and entrapment than by the spatial expansion and infinity on display in *Two on a Tower*. In the opening scene of the novel, isolation seems to creep up out of the landscape, enveloping a human figure, whom we later discover is Edred Fitzpiers. First, Hardy deploys one of his familiar tropes when the narrative voice asks the reader to imagine a 'rambler', in

winter, walking along the ‘foresaken coach road’ (*The Woodlanders* 5) from Bristol and coming to a ‘lonely’ spot where the road meets Rebdon Hill ridge overlooking ‘a deep and silent vale’ (5). Then, Hardy’s abstract imagining goes towards creating a vision of solitude:

> The physiognomy of a deserted highway expresses solitude to a degree that is not reached by mere dales and downs, and bespeaks a tomb like stillness more emphatic than glades and pools. The contrast of what is with what might be, probably accounts for this. (*The Woodlanders* 5)

Solitude is conveyed by the displacement and abandonment of the human, which inscribes the scene with a morbid emptiness. The text creates this feeling of mortality by contrasting the ‘tomb like stillness’ of the highway and the romantic notion of movement in ‘glades and pools’ and, as such, creates a morbid sense of stasis for the reader. Thus, the road is not just empty or devoid of man but ‘deserted’, which itself is configured by the ‘contrast’ between ‘what is’ and ‘what might be’.

Isolation is a far more tragic form of being than solitude, which has connotations of integration, ease and comfort. However, in the novel solitude and isolation are frequently juxtaposed and often merge into one another. That benign mode of aloneness is quickly dispelled by Hardy when the rambler steps from a field onto the ‘pale thoroughfare’ of the ancient coach road. Now he finds himself ‘suddenly more alone than before’ (*The Woodlanders* 5). In moving through a hedge from a field to an empty road, the whole atmosphere changes from one of ‘solitude’ to an altogether more disturbing aloneness in which the road is described as ‘an incubus of the forlorn’ (5). Hardy’s choice of this gothic term conjures up mysterious images from the occult; solitude has now metamorphosed into something far darker, with metaphysical connotations.

The opening passages of the novel illustrate how Hardy deploys a physiological and visual technique to uncover a menacing sense of isolation and abandonment. This extract, and indeed much of the novel, seems to be concerned with isolation, entrapment and abandonment, which are made all the more intense precisely because they occur within a tightly-knit community. Informing Hardy’s dramatisation of isolation is the rationale that there is a strong spatial and temporal component to isolation; that it does not simply emanate from the inner thoughts and feelings of the characters but can be mysteriously brought into being by spatial movement and changes in one’s surroundings. Isolation, solitude and loneliness are represented by Hardy as fluid and transitory conditions that emanate from a dynamic interaction between character and environment.

The vision of Marty South at work is essentially one of solitude, but also the type of isolation that arises out of economic and commercial exploitation. Hers, in this wider sense, is a tragic situation that Hardy encodes through a detailed observation of her body and an impressionist portrait of her beautiful hair – hair that is about to be taken from her. First, the narrator focuses on her face that 'had the usual fullness of expression which is developed by a life of isolation' (*The Woodlanders* 11). The one last vestige of her beautiful womanhood is her hair that is imbued with 'intensity and distinctness' and, unlike her hands, her body is 'composed' by Hardy in an impressionist way, 'a blurred mass of unimportant detail, lost in haze and obscurity' (11). Hardy repeatedly deploys a telescopic visual technique in the novel that oscillates from close, detailed portraits that express their isolation, to wider, visionary views of the characters that point towards a type of Sophoclean perspective, but a proto-modernist variant of it. Marty's face radiates meaning precisely because she has not acquired all the sophisticated traits of a society woman; there is no one to impress or guard herself against. Traced upon her right hand are the long years of spar cutting: 'the palm was red and blistering' (10). According to the narrator there is no other determining factor for her arduous isolation than the 'cast of the die of Destiny' (10). However, as the human drama unfolds in the novel it becomes apparent that chance, bad luck and the blindness of others around her, shape her life and continue to isolate her.

The text's restrained tragic mode is its proto-modernist achievement and its representations of isolation actually dismantle the great interconnected web of humanity. This is not a narrative about an organic homogeneous community, but one which, both in reality and metaphorically, is shaped by treacherous woodland paths, gates, fences, turnpikes, impasses and even man-traps. Isolation and entrapment are also properties of a web that is designed to fix its victims, allowing the spider to feed off them, as Percombe feeds off Marty when she has savagely cut off her own hair in exchange for money. When the web falls apart, the threads that normally bind human beings together, those social, economic and emotional ties, also disintegrate. Then, the characters descend into the abstraction of self-consciousness, becoming increasingly alienated from society and those around them. In the novel's fluid oscillation between solitude, entrapment and isolation, a figure emerges that embodies the most tragic expression of isolation in the text – Mrs. Felice Charmond.

The misanthropic Mrs. Charmond has withdrawn from society and its formulations of progress and 'perfection' (*The Woodlanders* 197). But fearful of 'society's correctives and regulations' (197) she is unable to find a sustainable alternative to it; she lacks that capacity to experience solitude that Giles Winterborne and the locals possess and repeatedly falls into

depression and isolation. Her past, estranged marriage has only compounded her low self-worth. In a highly metaphorically-framed passage, Fitzpiers pays her a visit and finds her sitting in her little boudoir with the curtains drawn whilst, outside, old oaks and elms emit 'slimy streams of fresh moisture' from 'decayed holes caused by old amputations' (196). These old trees have aged, endured and continue to survive, in contrast to the misanthropic Mrs. Charmond, who hides her face from Fitzpiers in the gloomy bedroom light. She murmurs to him that 'the world is so dreary outside' (197), explaining that the night before she could not sleep because of the sound of snails scraping up the window pane. After her 'emotions have been exhausted', fear and paranoia, rather like the action of the snails, creep in on her:

> I become full of fears, till I think I shall die for very fear. The terrible inconsistencies of society – how severe they are, and cold, and inexorable – ghastly towards those made of wax and not stone. Oh I am afraid of them; a stab for this error and a stab for that. (*The Woodlanders* 197)

There is fate of an undefinable and mysterious nature in her words, for she will, indeed, die of the effects of fear and isolation. She blames the coercive forces of society for destroying everything that she has cared for, feeling herself to be 'stunted and starved' (*The Woodlanders* 197), thus the arrival of Fitzpiers into her life lifts her emotions, giving her hope of companionship, despite his marital status. As Percombe informs us, she has a history of failed marriages and relationships, so marriage itself, for her, now represents those mores and values she so adamantly rejects. The problem is that she cannot cope with the inner emotional conflict that arises from her entanglement with him.

For Fitzpiers, the other outsider of the novel, solitude becomes intensified through physical contiguity and propinquity. As he recognises, 'the most irksome of solitudes is not the solitude of remoteness, but that which is just outside desirable company' **(***The Woodlanders* 126). His type of loneliness, then, is that which is produced by a migration from an urban and professional milieu; his motivation for moving to Little Hintock being to pursue his anatomical and medical research. However, after about a year, 'the loneliness of Hintock life' (125) takes the form of a domestic restlessness in which he walks around the cottage peering out of the windows, hoping to get a glimpse of Grace Melbury. The 'insidious stratagem of loneliness' (126) creates a subliminal tragic situation. In his loneliness, Fitzpiers begins to fall prey to his primary weakness, which is his sexual desire, and he enters into the disastrous relationship that the novel focuses upon. The ending of the novel is mediated

through tragic modes of stasis and irresolution as opposed to the more conventional catastrophic finale. Through the example of Fitzpiers, sexual promiscuity contributes to a damaging state of mind. As the narrator satirically says, Fitzpiers is 'a man of too many hobbies' (124), which implies that he treats women in a similarly flippant vain. However, the text also suggests that there is a deeper tragic reality lying behind his promiscuity, that Fitzpiers is also just another fallible man and, as such, a victim of his own sexual drives that have an effect of isolating him emotionally.

The tragic effect draws upon the presentation of such outsiders who consciously choose to withdraw from society, but, after a while, are infected by a dark mode of isolation. This creeps in, in mysterious abstract ways that transforms well intended solitude into something far more emotionally and spiritually damaging. Rural isolation has a progressive and insidious effect upon Fitzpiers and Mrs. Charmond who cannot come to terms with it in the way that the locals seem to do more naturally. Mrs Charmond illustrates the dangers of 'shutting up of one's self' (*The Woodlanders* 198) and how it can induce a state of 'idle indulgence' (198), which in turn leads to her disastrous involvement with Fitzpiers, a relationship which, instead of relieving the loneliness, only magnifies it.

Hardy's psychological and dramatic expression of isolation in a modern agnostic world pre-empts the modernists' more radical and linguistically sophisticated analysis of the state of loneliness. For example, Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* (1928) is a vehicle for the expression of deep levels of solitude and consciousness that, paradoxically, she experiences in her precious moments alone: 'she took a look at life… something real, something private, which she shared neither with her children nor her husband' (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 50). This is what she becomes, for Woolf, when the children have gone to bed. It is precisely because her husband, family and friends cannot communicate with her on any nourishing or meaningful level, that she so desperately craves such a dangerous mode of solitude. Her isolation is that of a mother at the centre of a family whose individuals are preoccupied with their own lives.

Hardy's method, then, of imagining the abstract invisible loneliness of existence points towards the modernists' more sophisticated examination of isolation. His preliminary pioneering experiments of exploring the condition of solitude and isolation is another way in which his tragic perception of life led him into formulating proto-modernist visions of being alone that uncover some of the tragical mysteries about human existence.

Section Two: Marriage and the Absurd

Hardy's proto-modernism comes to the fore of the texts when the tragic effect becomes shaped by farcical and absurd modes of writing. For Hardy there was something tragically absurd about the oppressive forces of modern society and the ways in which it forced individuals to act unnaturally or against their better instincts, often forcing them into desperate situations, which happens frequently in the case of marriage, although it is far more extensive than this in Hardy. This tragic absurd mode of perception and expression becomes most prominent throughout the 1880's and 1890's. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, for instance, there is a continual textual oscillation between modes of irony and the absurd that dramatise the tragic effect. If the absurd reflects the impossibility of self-empowerment, orderly direction and making sense of the world, as it did for Samuel Beckett, then Hardy's casting of Michael Henchard fits that definition. In the opening episode at Weydon hill fair he seems to have little control over the unfolding of events, despite his initial good intentions.

The novel starts from an *a priori* position that the social apparatus of marriage tries to contain passions that are unstable and transient. Thus, arises an ironic situation that is performed through modulations the absurd that only intensifies the underlining tragic menaing. In the so-called 'wife sale' episode, for example, it is clear that Susan and Michael Henchard's marital problems are long standing. For Henchard's part, he believes that he 'married at eighteen like a fool' (*The Mayor* 9); for Susan, living with his anger and emotional volatility has clearly been a miserable business – as she says, 'I've lived with thee a couple of years and had nothing but temper!' (13). But what has he had from her? There is an absent centre in Hardy's representation of their history together. Henchard is not simply cast as a bad man or villain but he has a complex set of motivations that become even more distorted as they evolve into 'deeds'.

The tragic tension gradually builds in an ironically orchestrated sequence of events. Tragic irony and the absurd diminish the ego and together function as a leveller uncovering the futility of the individual will and intention as it comes up against circumstance and wider forces of nature. Thus, Henchard is aware of his weakness for alcohol, chooses what he thinks is the right tent, the one selling furmity, rather than the other one advertising strong liquor.

Hardy uses the extraordinary situation where Henchard and Susan are in the tent to explore the ways in which the characters react to each other and how the mood can change, both in the novel and within the characters. Despite the narrator's comments upon 'the jovial

frivolity of the scene' (*The Mayor* 12), Susan warns Henchard that 'a joke is a joke, but you may make it once too often, mind' (11) causing the mood between them to deteriorate. The tragic tension climaxes when a sailor, who has been silently observing the proceedings, comes forward and places cash on the table; an absurd situation is instantly transformed into one that has a threatening tragic potential. Hardy uses the sound and presence of the coins and the appearance of the five pound note to symbolise how money reduces marriage to the absurd in the text by portraying marriage in a satirical and darkly farcical way. The act turns Henchard's bluff and bravado into a tragical reality and into a question of circumstance and commerce. Henchard never intended this, but, now intoxicated and goaded by all around him, he commits the impulsive error of deciding to take the money. There is a hard rationale here too; the family is poor and destitute and the 'sale' at least solves that immediate problem.

Money has a tragic power in a novel whose realist plot depends so much on commercial market forces, in particular the 'home Corn Trade' as Hardy writes in his General Preface to the novel. Thus, the sight of real money, in full amount in answer to a challenge for the same, has a marked effect upon the spectators: 'Their eyes become riveted upon the faces of the chief actors and then upon the notes as they lay weighted by the shillings on the table... A lurid colour seemed to fill the tent, and change the aspect of all therein' (*The Mayor* 12). Money has a destructive power in this novel, constantly reducing the human to a market commodity. Henchard's rise and fall can be viewed in terms of his obsession with the power of money but, even at this stage, the deal could still be aborted. It is only when Henchard actually picks up the five pound note and the offending five shillings that the deal is struck. As Susan warns him, 'if you touch that money, I and this girl go with the man' (13) but, by now, his pride and anger are running too high and once they all agree terms he pockets the money 'with an air of finality' (12). His acceptance of the coins and note, those symbols of a capitalist economy, is the tragic outcome of the events.

The narrator now pronounces that what appeared to be a ridiculous 'transaction' is, in fact, a 'tragical crisis' (*The Mayor* 24) in the lives of those it directly and indirectly involves, since, intriguingly, the tragic contagion will spread and infect those not present, nor even born. Insidiously implicit in the absurd spectacle of a wife sale is the idea that the woman is the property of the husband; the fact that such a bogus transaction has no standing in law only reinforces further the absurdity of the whole situation. This has a significant long term tragic effect because this non-binding agreement is taken seriously by Susan, as Newson, to his own surprise, explains later to Henchard. The drunken Henchard refers to Susan as an article and 'my goods' (11) and in one of his rants, he utters a selfish, utilitarian rejection of her: 'the

woman is no good to me' (10), so reducing their once sacred bond to a failed, financial arrangement. The crowd judges the completed transaction to be 'a piece of mirthful irony carried to the extremes' (12). There is tragic pathos in the mocking attitude of the crowd because the sale takes place 'amid the sneers and laughter of the mob' (51). For the rustics, it might be a farce that begins in an atmosphere of harmless frivolity but, for Susan, it develops into an absurd and perplexing experience. This 'nonsense' (12) situation spins out of control and a complex series of small incidents ends in a traumatic separation, the consequences of which resonate throughout the whole of the novel.

The 'Facts' Notebook is a major material source for the novel; there are three reported wife sales recorded in Hardy's notebook, which be began compiling about the time of writing the novel[20]. William Greenslade observes that 'the central phase of the notebook entries are from the *Dorset County Chronicle* for the years 1826-29' (Greenslade (ed.) Introduction, *'Facts' Notebook* xxii) and the accounts of wife selling form part of that pitiful economic depression of the 1840's. Greenslade points out the report to which Hardy refers comes from the *Dorset County Chronicle*, which explicitly condemns the practice: 'to sell a wife is a disgraceful exhibition' (51). The second entry that Hardy records from the *Dorset County Chronicle* describes the happy celebration of a wife sale, after which the three parties involved go to the local pub to toast the event and, with a touch of religious satire, the church bells are also rung (113). In this report, all the participants appear to have benefitted from the amicable arrangement and there must have been many instances when wives were only too happy to leave a poor or useless husband and benefit from such a seemingly absurd set of circumstances, which had largely come about because of the intransigent and binding letter of the marriage law. The third wife sale entry describes 'a most disgraceful scene' which 'took place at Stanford on Friday' (173).

A comparison between the notebook entries and the misleadingly identified 'wife sale' in the novel demonstrates how Hardy's tragic vision transformed the facts into fiction. For instance, in the novel there is no mention of such a sinister degrading artefact as a horse's halter that was placed on the women in the newspaper articles. This absence is a reminder that there were limitations to the level of absurdity that serial magazines and the nineteenth-century novel might depict. In each of the wife sale items recorded in the notebook, a halter is used to deliver the wife to the purchaser; to reproduce such a detail would have been such an affront to decency in 1886 as to prevent it from being published by the editors of the *Graphic*

[20] Greenslade has listed these items as: 32 g, p. 51; 74 b, p. 113, 116 c, p. 172-173.

and *Harpers Weekly*, who would certainly have found it impossible to print. There is also a further significance to the omission of the halter in that it adds to the ambivalence of Henchard's intention here; he could hardly put a harness on Susan by accident, chance, or even in play.

The equestrian element in the episode is further significant, because it acts as a catalyst for the shaping of the absurd and tragic situation. The initial idea of Henchard's disposal of his wife originates from the cries of the gypsy horse-trader who is trying to auction off old horses outside the tent. His voice infiltrates the canvas of the tent and provokes Henchard into saying to himself, 'for my part I don't know why men who have got wives, and don't want 'em, shouldn't get rid of 'em as these gypsy fellows do their old horses' (*The Mayor* 10). Hardy may have believed that as soon as a marriage deteriorated into cruelty it should be dissolved, but there were no easy, viable alternatives to marriage for a single woman in the late 1820's, when this phase of the novel is set and there is an obvious, shocking absurdity to Henchard's degrading pronouncement. However, the idea implants in his mind a seed that grows and that, in some way, determines his acceptance of Newson's money. The absurd drama that surrounds marriage continues to unfold through a sequence of tense episodes that provides the novel with its tragic momentum.

There are strong echoes of the absurd running through out Hardy's dramatisation of the relationship between Henchard and Abel Whittle that has correspondences with the fraught friendship between Estragon and Vladimir in Beckett's *Waiting For Godot*. In both cases deference, servitude and the power of authority are ridiculed. Thus 'poor Able Whittle' (*The Mayor* 95) is presented as 'a round-shouldered; blinking young man of nineteen of twenty' and addresses Henchard as 'your worship', (96) and Vladimir calls Estragon 'His Highness' (Act ii, scene i). Underpinning this mockery is a serious dismantling of class division that suggests the humane absurdity of such social segregation.

When Susan tracks down Henchard after nineteen years, he tries to make amends to her by sending her five guineas. This may appear to be a noble gesture on his part, but it is also one quite devoid of sensitivity and reflects his deeper problems of empathy; he still cannot connect emotionally with those closest to him. Despite Henchard's period of abstinence (sobriety is too grand a term for his dry condition), money still exerts a prime hold over his life, perhaps more so now that he has become successful. In the novel, the relationship between Henchard and Susan is often reduced to monetary considerations and the material commercial world, rather than being based on love and commitment. This is not a deliberate choice, but an expression of the nature of the world they are caught up in, rather

like caged birds and is one of the dominant motifs of the novel. The later episode, in which Henchard leaves Elizabeth-Jane a wedding present of a caged goldfinch, was deleted from some magazine versions of the novel, an omission that detracts from the tragic, metaphoric power of the episode at this moment of pathos. Henchard secretly leaves the little bird behind in its 'wire prison' (*The Mayor* 299)[21]. The next day, the 'little ball of feathers' (305) at the bottom of the cage serves as a metaphor for the death of love inside Henchard, 'the self-alienated man' (305). The dead goldfinch also symbolises the oppressive power of marriage that can destroy passion and love.

In the episode of the skimmity ride and the one that follows it, Henchard's pain and suffering become figured as the direct result of the laughter of the mob as his relationship with Lucetta is publically and painfully mocked. As Hardy describes it, it is 'a spectacle of the uncanny revel' (*The Mayor* 275) that is reflected in Lucetta's eyes in the 'lurid' light. The consequence of this social exposure is that she is traumatised, becoming mortally ill as a result. This sequence in the novel constitutes an absurd spectacle which gradually reveals the tragic suffering that lurks beneath, just as the farcical complicity of the 'spectators' in the wife-selling episode is fundamental to the tragic outcome. The initial catastrophe would never have come into being if the audience had not been themselves so degenerate and cruel. Therefore, Henchard is not solely responsible for what takes place; even the wife's compliance and lack of protest are mitigating factors in their break-up because, at a critical point, 'she bowed her head with absolute indifference' (12). Lucetta's traumatic reaction to the effigy of herself can also be viewed as containing an element of the absurd; in most cases of such public humiliation, the victim does not have a fit, fall ill and die. Hardy's shaping of the whole episode draws upon irony, contingency, circumstance, chance and sheer bad luck. The tragic component in this novel is not then simply a question of individual will versus deterministic forces, but rather a convergence of essentially mysterious and unidentifiable factors that Hardy orchestrates through his aesthetic of abstract imagining.

Another novel that illustrates the absurd in Hardy and the direction in which his sense of the tragic was taking him is *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved* (1892). This novel, as opposed to the later version of the story, focuses more intently upon the marital ambiguities and absurd tragic situations that arise out of it. Whereas the later revised text is far more

[21] This extract is taken from the Oxford Edition of the text. As Kramer and Dalziel explain in the note on the text, 'this critical text is based primarily on a study of the principal versions of the novel'. Dalziel. Introduction. *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Oxford: Oxford U. P., 2004: xxxv.

deeply underpinned by problems of the psyche and aesthetic issues. The strange destructive phenomenon of the Well-Beloved that possesses Jocelyn Pearston is a good example of how Hardy deploys an absurd fantasy to uncover a tragic reality lying behind a man's quest for love and marriage. In this novel, Hardy takes marriage and the absurd to a fantastical and bizarre level, but always with the intent of revealing proto-modernist ideas about the self in crisis, separation and solitude. An underlining tragic discourse that runs throughout the novel is the inability of the self to connect with the illusive other. As the narrator describes it, the phenomenon of the well-beloved is a 'germ' and 'essentially she was of no tangible substance; a spirit, a dream' (*The Pursuit* 17).

Pearston, himself, does not know the nature of his infliction; the condition is so abstract and indefinable and the text leaves open this possibility: 'she was a mood of himself' (*The Pursuit* 17). The supernatural functions in the story as an agency for the disturbing turmoil that romantic, idealised forms of love, in themselves possessing fantastical elements, can create. Therefore, there is an underlying absurdity and unreality in this male fantasising about the perfect beautiful woman of Pearston's 'dream' (17). Like the spectre itself, the image of this women in the abstract is transient, migrating from one bodily form to the other. Pearston has, in fact, fallen in love with many women before, but is never able to commit himself to marriage.

The opening theatrical scene of Pearston burning the love letters vividly signals his intense tragical personality[22]. As Pearston feeds the letters into the fire, he catches glimpses of the beloved schoolgirl's hand writing and his growing 'sentimental feeling' (*The Pursuit* 9) stops him from burning the whole bundle. When a fragment of her hair flares up in the fire, he feels 'I am burning her – part of her' (10). He cannot destroy the letters, 'the lumps of undying affection' (10), and so takes them with him to the Isle. This opening scene metaphorically dramatises a man's inability to gain closure on past relationships; taking the letters with him symbolises the problem of fixity or immutability; he is unable to learn the lesson that each distinct relationship tries to teach him. The absurdity that the rest of the novel enacts is that of pursuing and hanging on to a fixed abstract idea of feminine beauty, which haunts Pearston in the form of the well-beloved. He makes another attempt to burn all the letters in a garden, but again fails to do so. Avice Caro the First points towards the true nature of his psychic malady: 'I am – only one – in a long, long row!' (15). Therefore, the

[22] As Hardy must have done himself, secretly, when he lit those fires in his garden at Max Gate.

absurd treatment in this novel is not so much about marriage than man's fixed idea of love that marriage tries to contain.

The familiar, real conflict between love and 'the curse of matrimony' (*The Pursuit* 39) is still present and articulated by Pearston: 'to me healthy natural instinct is true law, and not an Act of Parliament' (159). The oppressive situation that marriage can bring about is further reinforced by Pearston's letter to his artist friend Somers: 'a law which causes physical cruelty to the innocent deserves to be evaded' (161). However, the story is not just about natural desire and passion, but also dismantles the destructive effects of obsession; it is 'a germ with which he had become impregnated' (28) and that eventually drives Pearston to an attempted suicide in the turbulent waters of the Race only to fall into a coma.

In the climactic episode, he recovers consciousness and recognises 'that voice' of the migratory phantom that he knows 'absurdly well' (*The Pursuit* 166). The final form it takes is the aged Marcia, whose beauty has suffered the 'raspings, chisellings, and stewings' (167) of time. She has now been reduced to a 'wrinkled crone' (167). Her true appearance and the inexorable ageing process is the omnipotent power that shocks Pearston into tragic recognition, filling him with a deep sense of 'the grotesqueness of things' (167). In this way, the novel continually oscillates between fantasy and reality, dismantling the absurd tragedy, not of the supernatural agency, but of the destructive force of male fantasy. Avice the Third manages to legally nullify her marriage with Pearston and escapes the marital cage, further extending Hardy's apparent belief that 'we are all caged birds; the only difference lies in the size of the cage. This too is part of the tragedy' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 178). The metaphorical cage of the absurd in this novel is the one that is common to many men who pursue their idea of the perfect woman – that perfection is an absurd, but a powerfully compelling, obsession. Pearston finally manages to accept Marcia Bencombe the way she is and devotes himself to her, realising, through marrying her, the difference between Hellenistic art and the reality of womanhood.

Hardy's exposition of the absurdities surrounding marriage is another aspect of his proto-modernist mode of the tragic for his vision of the absurdity of modern life unmistakeably anticipates the work of Samuel Beckett. In *Waiting for Godot* (1949) Beckett strips his characters of the trappings of capitalism and so, too, are Hardy's characters at the end of his narratives; they too are destitute and often find themselves in a barren environment. Therefore, ostensibly, Beckett begins when Hardy ends, intensifying the absurd to a more radical degree. In a more preliminary mode, Hardy does this by marriage, but by extension Hardy sees absurdity in the way man organises himself, which includes class and

the Church. Hardy's examination of marriage reveals how ridiculous a spectacle socialised man has become and how distorted his natural passions and desires are under forms of social oppression. Hardy uncovers the tragic absurdity of modern existence; similarly Beckett starts from the idea that man is a ridiculous creature and that life is fundamentally nonsensical.

Section Three: Fetichism and the Tragic

In the 1870's, Hardy's friend and mentor, Horace Moule, gave him his own English edition of Auguste Comte's *A General View of Positivism*. Hardy had sufficiently good French to tackle Comte's ideas competently and in Hardy's notebook entries from Comte, Hardy shows particular interest in his ideas on fetichism (the nineteenth-century spelling of the word, which Hardy repeatedly uses in his Literary Notes). Comte's hypothesis introduces fetichism as the most powerful form of religion based upon a spiritual and superstitious engagement with nature. Comte makes this point in his seminal work, *The Positive Philosophy*:

> The theological period of humanity could begin no otherwise than by a complete and usually durable state of pure Fetichism, which allowed free exercise of the tendency of our nature by which Man conceives of all external bodies as animated by a life analogous to his own, with differences of mere intensity... Man having everywhere begun by being a fetich-worshipper... Man conceives of all external bodies as animated by a life analogous to his own. (Comte ii, 156)

Hardy takes Comte's idea of the fetich and transforms it into a destructive and tragic force in the fiction. Comte hypothesised that primitive man projected his own thoughts, emotions and meanings onto the natural world and worshipped the sun, moon and stars. This basic perception of the world was, for Comte, the beginning of theological thought. There is nothing particularly tragic or destructive about this formulation that is framed by Comte's philosophical account of human progress, which divided the history of civilisation into three ages: the theological, metaphysical, and scientific. However, it was the concept of fetichism that resonated most deeply with Hardy's primitive and pagan sensibilities. It could be easily aligned with his own vision of an indifferent and hostile natural world that had the power to psychologically subjugate individuals. Hardy's emerging vision of nature draws upon the fetich idea and turns it into a tragic aesthetic and patterning device. The natural and inanimate

world take on a significance for his characters which can be both fearful and threatening; the ways in which the texts perform this will be the focus of this section.

In *Desperate Remedies*, for example, Hardy deployed fetichistic states of consciousness to intensify the tragic situation between Cytherea Graye and Aeneas Manston. Hardy casts Cytherea as being particularly sensitive to her surroundings and material objects that continually seem to have a disturbing effect upon her mind. As she stands like a sombre statue in her wedding dress, by the side of Aeneas Manston, the narrator informs us that she looked like 'a saddening, perplexing contradiction' (*Desperate Remedies* 248) and that she 'possesses an instinct that with which her heart had nothing to do' (248). Whereas 'there is no fetichism in his idea' of clothes, for her 'those sorry trifles, her robe, her flowers, her veil, and her gloves' (248) all feel as though they are detestable objects which all have a depressive effect upon her psyche. Hardy goes on to explore the tragic implications of the fetichism in increasingly proto-modernist ways that recuperate the instinctive energies that flow through modern man. For example, D. H. Lawrence's mythic and psychological revival of the primitive was heavily influenced by Hardy's expression of fetichism, but in Lawrence the primitive instinct is not fundamentally destructive or fearful, it is rather at the source of a life energy that modernity seeks to oppress.

Fetichistic and fearful perceptions of reality disturb Hardy's characters, magnifying their own feelings of guilt, shame and loss. The necessary division between thoughts, ideas and the outer world becomes eroded and the hard facts about reality become perversely distorted by the characters. Material objects and things take on a surreal and threatening significance, which is also the underlining basis of Hardy's method of animism, which he uses for a sophisticated and proto-modernist effect in the middle and later fiction.

During this analytical and abstract period of expression, Hardy wrote that 'In spite of myself I cannot help noticing countenances & tempers in objects of scenery: e.g., trees, hills, houses' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 302), which reflect the coercive and compelling power of animism that Hardy deploys to uncover the tragical mysteries and deeper realities in *The Woodlanders*. Trees, in particular, take on a wide range of meanings and have tragical effects. When old John Smith becomes ill and is confined to bed, he becomes paranoid about the elm tree outside his bedroom window which he perceives as bent on killing him. That fetichistic threat is magnified every time it sighs and blows in the wind and especially at night. He is convinced that it is 'the tree 'tis that's killing me' (*The Woodlanders* 91) and not his medical condition, so he instructs it to be cut down. The tragic irony is that in 'shrouding' the lower branches and felling it, South's anxieties no longer have an object to focus upon and he dies

sooner than he would have and that, having been cut down, the tree indirectly induces greater chaos and misery than it did when standing. In this episode of the novel, a fetichistic fear about a tree leads to further tragic consequences.

When the world seems to turn against Hardy's characters, the material, objective world becomes threatening and hostile. Here the tree creates 'terrifying illusions' (*The Woodlanders* 91) in the woodman's mind. Because he is confined to his bed, South is trapped both physically and psychologically; when he is not in his bed, he sits up all day obsessing about the elm tree that has been a part of his whole life. South's antagonistic relationship with the tree is a depiction of how a natural object is transformed, by the text, into an agency for a disturbing state of mind. Having grown up with him, it has become an integral part of his life, but now he regrets not chopping it down for a clothes line when he was young. As he rather ominously states: 'tis my enemy and will be the death of me' (92). The action only partially proves him right, for the tree is only an agency in the dissemination and magnification of his fear. South's anxieties have a detrimental effect upon those around him and having the tree cut down leads to an even more catastrophic situation. If the tree had not been touched, the storyline would have to have taken a completely different direction.

When Giles sets about shrouding the tree, he gradually works his way up it, disappearing into the enveloping twilight fog. Whilst he is up the tree, Grace Melbury passes by and shouts out that their relationship is terminated – thus begins a new tragic phase in their lives. It is as though all those that are involved in cutting down the tree have become cursed by it, suggesting a metaphysical element within the animistic conceit that the novel deploys. Once the tree has been cut down it has a knock-on effect which contributes to the collision between Mrs Charmond's carriage and the timber wagon; it is also as a direct result of this confrontation that Giles Winterborne loses his life-hold agreement on the cottage, which proves to be a decisive blow to his relationship with Grace.

Another novel that displays Hardy's interest in fetichism is *The Mayor of Casterbridge* in which the narrator casually comments that 'there was something fetichistic in this man's beliefs' (*The Mayor* 17). The novel then proceeds to dramatise and explore this statement through a series of metaphorical events and situations. 'Something' is a vague and indeterminate term, by necessity, because Hardy is dealing with a very abstract state of mind when exposing Henchard's fears, given the self-destructive nature of his own beliefs; for it is the self-annihilating force of these beliefs that causes him so much damage. The novel would appear to endorse the idea that within belief systems there lies a dangerous component.

Henchard is the embodiment of how beliefs, thoughts and ideas can consume a life given the right antagonistic circumstances.

Henchard's superstitious temperament is tormented by visions of a fetichistic kind. After discovering that Elizabeth-Jane is not his natural daughter, his alienation reaches a new level of intensity while his unstable mind begins to lose its grip on reality. The narrator is quite clear about the fetichistic channels into which Henchard's temperament moves at this point in the novel: 'Henchard, like all his kind, was superstitious, and he could not help thinking that the concatenation of events this evening had produced was the scheme of some sinister intelligence bent on punishing him. Yet they had developed naturally' (*The Mayor* 124). This mode of fetichism is false and unreal and creates an antagonism between what Henchard imagines and the reality of his situation. His delusions of persecution and paranoia alienate him from the natural conditions of his existence. Intensified through his drinking, his mind becomes baffled and confused and he projects those self-centred anxieties upon an object, his rival Farfrae. Continually, throughout the novel, an evolutionary realist view of the world is expressed, which conflicts with Henchard's fetichism. His superstitions evoke the idea of a threatening metaphysical power, bent on isolating him from the community and his natural environment. This is illustrated by the episode in which Henchard calls upon the help of Mr. Fall, the strange 'weather prophet'. Mr. Fall is a strange servant of 'the god of weather' (183) and the man Henchard turns to in his desperate attempt to outwit his friend, turned rival, Farfrae. In Hardy's rendering of Henchard's disastrous collaboration with the old conjuror, he shows how superstition and fear-based psychic states can alienate an individual from reality and the natural environment. The unpredictable power of the weather crushes man's feeble superstitious attempts to outwit it. Deluded thoughts intensify to finally isolate Henchard from his family, friends and the community – the communal environment that once was a source of his wealth and power.

One of Hardy's notes from Comte comprised the following: 'Pantheism – relapse into a vague & abstract form of Fetichism' (Björk (ed.), *Literary Notebooks* i, n. 669). Whereas 'relapse' here has negative connotations of regression, by contrast, in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Hardy deploys a positive vision of paganism that acts as a regenerative force. Several times Tess is allowed to recover from traumatic and painful experiences by unconsciously becoming infused by an abstract fetichistic power of the earth and nature. This physical, emotional and spiritual undulation gives the tragic narrative a pronounced pattern of rise and fall. While Tess is not shown to be fully conscious of that sustaining energy flow, the narrator stresses it throughout the novel. In nature, she finds sanctuary and refuge from the

invidious gaze of men and the oppressive patriarchal society that tacitly excuses it. Her fetichistic pagan relationship with the soil provides her with shelter from the lustful male gaze, but the price is a loss of individualism: 'Tess walked on; a figure which is part of the landscape; a field woman pure and simple, in winter guise' (*Tess* 280). That loss of her feminine identity is not simply a negative aspect of Hardy's casting of her, because it is that part of her, her womanly form, which has attracted so much negative masculine attention. This pantheistic metamorphosis is only a brief experience, but it provides her with a strength to endure life's struggles. Frequently she perceives the world as a threatening place, afflicted as she is by a 'fetichistic fear' (67) of nature, which she seems to have inherited from her superstitious mother. The narrator is not critical or dismissive about such a rustic turn of mind; if anything folkloric pagan beliefs hold greater spiritual value for Hardy than Christianity does.

Juxtaposed against this tragic mode of the fetich is Hardy's naturalist and life-affirming use of animism that emanates from 'the appetite for joy which pervades all creation' (*Tess* 190). Thus, Tess has times when she can hear 'a pleasant voice in every breeze, and in every bird's note seemed to lurk a joy' (103). In a notorious scene she begins to descend a hill above the 'Vale of the Great Dairies', when she is regenerated by the vertiginous view and fertile landscape below. In her joy, Tess breaks out in a ballad that she knows from her Book of Common Prayer, which was one of Hardy's favourite Christian and also pagan texts – pagan because it became inscribed with folkloric and pre-Christian sentiments. In the typology of the novel, Hardy interjects and punctuates lines from the prayer book with omissions, spaces and pauses on the paper; the textual appearance of this passage seems to actually reflect the ideological dualism of the words. Her song, therefore, expresses a fusion of paganism and Christian sentiment:

> And thus her spirits and her thankfulness and her hopes rose higher and higher, she bursts into song trying several ballads. Fetichistic utterance in a Monotheistic falsetto; women whose chief companions are the forms and forces of outdoor Nature retain in their souls far more of the pagan fantasy of their remote forefathers than of the systematised religion taught their race at later date. (*Tess* 103)

In a novel that has already been shaped by topographical and emotional highs and lows, Tess's joy is overshadowed by an impending doom that reaches realisation in her ensuing romance with Angel Clare. Throughout the novel, Hardy juxtaposes her pagan beauty and strength with modern civilisation, a patriarchal society and its oppressive modes of seeing,

particularly the lustful male gaze. Her fetichistic spirit is thus figured by Hardy as alternately regenerative and destructive. Overall, her fetichistic perceptions of the natural world are tragical, not simply because they are manifestations of her inner fear, but, more significantly, because they distort reality. As the narrator comments: 'it is a sorry and mistaken creation of Tess's fancy' to think that 'the world is only a psychological phenomenon' (*Tess* 85). The indifferent material world, governed by natural laws which take no heed of man's intellect or emotions, is set against Hardy's mode of fetichism and disturbing animism that encodes the substantive world with tragic meanings and values.

Hardy does not recoil from the 'horror and disgust of such a state of things' (Comte ii, 545) that he uncovered in fetichism, but rather uses it in creating his own fictions of tragic mystery and beauty. The famous scene of Tess in the garden at Talbothays is a good example of how his fetichistic imagination shapes a very proto-modernist form of writing. Through the deployment of animistic and fetichistic modes of perception, the passage juxtaposes the heroine's purity against a degenerative spiritus loci. When, unobserved, Tess overhears the melodious sound of the Angel's harp, all her senses unconsciously draw her towards him as 'the floating pollen seemed to be his notes made visible' (Tess 123). His music is sweet and alluring, but, like the player, hides an insidious corruption:

> The outskirts of the garden in which Tess found herself had been left uncultivated for some years, and was now damp and rank with juicy grass which sent up mists of pollen at a touch; and the tall blooming weeds emitting offensive smells – weeds whose red and yellow and purple hues formed polychrome as dazzling as that of cultivated flowers. (*Tess* 122).

This fetichistic description celebrates a primitive, uncultivated nature: its organic degeneration carries strong echoes of Baudelaire's use of the grotesque in *Les Fleurs du Mal.* Indeed Hardy quotes from a review of the poem in his '1867 Notebook': 'a vegetation fantastic and hideous, with bizarre leafage, with disquieting colourations, corrupt perfumes… flora of vice and putridity' (Björk (ed.), *Literary Notebooks* ii, 8). In Hardy's garden, the heroine advances in stealthy and feline movements through the decayed flora which seem to sensually violate and desecrate her clothes and body. The disturbing experience eventually 'brings tears into her eyes', but why insert such a strange and disturbing scene within this regenerative phase of Tess's life? This fetichistic and tragic narrative reflects back to the setting of her violation by Alec d'Urberville; the reader is reminded of the 'blackness' of that moonless night, the ghostly 'primeval yews and oaks' and the 'dead leaves'. Thus, the garden

scene can be read as a synoptic metaphor for her tragic relationships with Alec and Clare and can also be viewed as contaminations of her purity.

In keeping with the novel's repeated use of tragic irony, it is at Talbothay's Dairy, the location of the garden, that Tess and Clare fatefully fall in love. In a neglected, uncultivated spot, in this seemingly benevolent, pastoral setting, lurks the seed of corruption and moral duplicity. Hardy's disturbing mode of naturalism intensifies the unfolding tragic situation between Tess and Clare, in which her innocence and purity are, once again, violated and stained. But Angel's abandonment of her reflects his moral weakness and hypocrisy and amounts to a far deeper wound than her previous sexual violation by Alec. Angel's violation of her takes the form of an infiltrating form of seeing and is intensified by the narrator's commentaries, as for example when Angel encounters her after she has just awoken from sleep at Talbothay's:

> He saw the red interior of her mouth as if it had been a snake's… It was a moment when a woman's soul is more incarnate than at any other time; when the most spiritual beauty bespeaks itself flesh. (*Tess* 169)

Angel's idealisation of Tess, his abstract and unreal notions about her innocence and beauty, are not as powerful as her physical presence and beauty. This corresponds to a fetichistic mode that embellishes the physiological with mysterious powers. Alec treats Tess as an object and as flesh, but Angel transforms her flesh and body into an idea, a tragical abstract imagining of a milkmaid. Hardy's mode of animism in the novel compounds this unreal, fetichistic vision of Tess in the instance when she and Angel take the milk to the local railway station, depicted as a remote outpost of 'their secluded world' (*Tess* 186). The appearance of steam on the horizon becomes a metaphor for the approach of modern life. After they have unloaded the milk at the platform, the train appears to critically examine Tess, reconfiguring her into an alien object; she is already part of the past and not the future:

> No object could have looked more foreign to the gleaming cranks and wheels than this unsophisticated girl, with the round, bare arms, the rainy face and hair, the suspended attitude of a friendly leopard at pause, the print gown of no date or fashion, and the cotton bonnet drooping on her brow. (*Tess* 186, 187)

The train functions as an agency for the dehumanisation of Tess. This type of animism is another means by which Hardy's abstract expressionism anticipates the blurring of the boundaries between the real and the imaginary, the human and the material world, the real

and the unreal of the modernists. In Hardy's next novel, this disturbing phantasmagoria reaches an even more radical degree of distortion.

Jude the Obscure further illustrates Hardy's increasing preoccupation with the expression of a dark power that resides physiologically within material objects. Jude frequently attributes objects with threatening and fearful properties and is also prone to treating Sue Bridehead in a similar way. At the beginning of his emotional entanglement with her, he catches up with Sue in Melchester and it is the idea of her, that is the abstraction of her real person, that so powerfully draws him towards her and so he develops an 'excessive human interest' (*Jude* 130) in wherever she goes. Whilst pursuing her, he walks through the Close adjoining Melchester Cathedral and, looking up at the spire that seems to disappear in the fog, he undergoes a fetichistic experience. As the west front of the Cathedral is lit up in the dusk, this 'most graceful architectural pile' (131) seems to him to be a good omen concerning the presence of Sue. His perception of the building is thus encoded with 'the superstitions of his beliefs, that this was an exercise of forethought on the part of a ruling power' (131). This may be an early, benign example of how Jude's obsession with Sue affects him, but it illustrates the mysterious, almost metaphysical power, that his abstract imaginings about her will exert over his life.

Fetichistic modes of perception exercise an increasingly distorting influence in the novel, thus revealing the tragic force which underlines the appearance of things. So, even before they meet, Jude's unstable temperament signals that he is prone to such fantastical and dangerous disproportioning of the substantive world; he has already become 'extremely, morbidly, curious about her life' (*Jude* 151) Jude has a meaningful connection with the artefacts associated with her, as opposed to the real, fallible woman that she is. Even her letters have a greater impact upon him than does her actual person: 'you are never so nice in your real presence as you are in your letters' (165). This may be a common emotional delusion experienced by many a letter reader, but with Jude it reaches obsessive proportions. He transfers his emotional needs onto her and so reveals one of his major weaknesses. As he confesses to Sue: 'I am fearful about life, spectre-seeing always' (151). Not only is he one of those spectre-seers, but, in Hardy's characterisation of him, he is presented as ghost-like and only half conscious of his surroundings.

Sue hates Christminster since to her it is 'a place full of fetichists and ghost-seers' (*Jude* 307). Nervously avoiding Jude's opening allusion to Phillotson, she voices this phrase, obliquely. Within their dialogue it is almost a throwaway, insignificant utterance, however, given the fact that Jude himself proves to be one of those seers of ghosts, her derogatory

remarks about the town have an unintended tragic significance. Up to this point, she has constituted an idea, a fantasy materialised only as a photographic image and, as such, has exerted a potent hold over him. Even just prior to this first encounter in Melchester, he has had to restrain himself from kissing the photograph that he possesses of her as a child. He has, then, already shown signs of a fetichistic attachment to her, which has displaced his obsession with the academic world of Christminster.

In 1887, Hardy wrote that 'people are somnambulists… we are in a somnambulistic hallucination… we think the real to be what we see as real' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 192); this is a mode of abstract expressionism that he employs to powerful tragic effect in *Jude*. When Jude fails to enter university, he wanders about the streets of Christminster, drunk like a ghost or sleep-walker. Jude has abstracted himself from his surroundings, becoming a somnambulist in a nightmarish world. Like those venerable ghosts of academia he used to worship, he now feels himself dehumanised, unreal and even dead. Towards the end of the novel Jude develops an inflammation of the lungs and sets off on an arduous journey to find Sue. As he weakens, Hardy describes him as a 'pale as a monumental figure in alabaster' (*Jude* 387) and Sue's last perception of him is the sound of his cough mingling with the patter of the rain on the windows of Marygreen church. Jude is presented as fading away and losing his grip on life and Hardy's spectralisation of him is a process that reaches a climax when he and Arabella walk for the last time through the empty streets of Christminster where he sees 'those spirits of the dead again' (392) and even talks to 'the phantoms all about me' (392). The stone figures now seem to mock him as he becomes weaker and reduced to a spectre of a man, essentially invisible and, like Tess earlier, alienated. As the life force in Jude ebbs away, that which makes Jude human is obscured and he seems to dissolve into a dystopia where, according to him, there is nothing living or dead around him.

To conclude, this chapter has examined how, in the middle and later novels, Hardy deployed a technique of abstract imagining to uncover what he saw as the tragical realities and mysteries of life. His preoccupation with such proto-modernist subjects as solitude and isolation, the absurdity of modern existence and fearful perceptions of an imposing material world, all point towards the similar concerns of the modernists. This chapter has explored how his metaphoric style mediates a wide range of tragic techniques in the fiction. Hardy's 'abstract realisms', was a form of tragic expression that anticipated similar modernist techniques. For example, the 'rising and falling' of the elm trees in *Mrs Dalloway* has the potential to send the nervous and fragile Septimus 'mad' (Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* 17) so he has

to shut his eyes. Hardy deploys the fetich as a means of expressing such oppressive effects that objects can have on the psyche and is another agent of his tragic imaginings.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE FRAGMENTATION OF EXPERIENCE

Following on from the discussion of Hardy's abstract imaginings of the tragic, this chapter considers how he extends his expression of disturbing ideas and feelings to the performance of the fragmented self, so central to modernist literary experiment. As I will illustrate, unconscious, subliminal feelings and motivations conflict with conscious efforts to control the self, so creating a fracturing of experience that is formally played out in the texts. In a range of ways, sexual instincts, desire and passion are repressed and lead to a breakdown of the self. Sexual compulsion and conscious suppression are, therefore, primary tragic forces in Hardy. In this way, Hardy anticipates Freud's theory of the repressed unconscious. For D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf, the unconscious also proved to be a rich source of impulses, sensations and mysterious meanings. For Lawrence, however, Freud's analysis was 'no more than our repressed incest impulses' (Lawrence, *The Fantasia of the Unconscious* 206); Lawrence did not see the unconscious as an expression of repression but as a source of pure, human energy: 'the true unconscious is pristine...the well-head, the fountain of real motivity' (207). Hardy's realm of the unconscious, however, is a storehouse of detrimental energy, a topic which is explored in section one. Hardy's writing allows unconscious forces to play against the consciousness of the characters and this tension is expressed in the performance of sudden interruptions within the narratives, often expressed as shocks to the mind and body. This is a particular feature of the short stories, therefore, the second section mainly focuses upon the foreshortening of the tragic in the short story, a form extensively developed by later modernist practitioners. In the shorter fiction, Hardy depicted human life as frail and vulnerable, capable of being disrupted and even obliterated at any one moment. An index of that frailty is the volatility of human nature, the presentation of which informs the final section of this chapter which is devoted to an analysis of Hardy's experiments in character in the later novels.

Section One: The Unconscious

As Jenny Bourne Taylor has recently argued Hardy demonstrated his fascination with the dysfunctional and darker side of the mind in his early reading of medical disorders and mental pathology:

> He noted… medical writers, such as A. L. Wigan whose *A New View of Insanity: The Duality of the Mind* of 1884 played an influential part in debates on 'double consciousness' and… Maudsley's *Body and Mind: An Inquiry into Their Mutual Influence, Specially in Relation to Mental Disorder*… 1870. (Bourne Taylor 339)

Tragedy and the tragic focus upon the dynamic between disorder, chaos and disruption against the forces of harmony and order. These elements are all played out within the performance of the unconscious in Hardy's fiction. In his first novel, *Desperate Remedies* (1871), Aeneas Manston is portrayed as a beautiful but sinister being, desperately trying to suppress his desire for Cytherea Graye: 'he was palpably making the strongest efforts to subdue, or at least to hide, the weakness (loving her), and as it sometimes seemed, rather from his own conscience than from surrounding eyes' (*Desperate Remedies* 147). It is this type of internal division and disassociation that does so much damage to Hardy's tormented characters. That Manston is a disturbed character is made clear in the episode in which he overwhelms her through his organ playing. He alludes to her possible fears and talks of 'the monstrous fireplace' (139) that no longer exists, almost touching her ear with his mouth, unknown to her. The violent changes of mood which his playing produces give rise to a sense of his unstable personality. Towards the end of the novel, Manston is sitting in a cafe in the Strand, trying to find a way of preventing a letter from Edward Springrove, incriminating him (Manston), reaching Cytherea. Whilst worrying about the letter, he gazes out at the people passing by. At this point, the narrator comments:

> There exists as it were an outer chamber to the mind, in which, when a man is occupied centrally with the most momentous question of his life, casual and trifling thoughts are just allowed to wander softly for an interval before being banished altogether. (*Desperate Remedies* 319)

In this scene, anxious thoughts lie at the centre of the mind, whilst peripheral thoughts drift in and out of his consciousness, shaping his perception; the irony is that while he can perceive the anonymous, conglomerate spirit of the crowd, he struggles with his own true moral

dilemma. This structural and organic model of the mind suggests parallels with the evolutionary psychology of the time as it was expounded by Henri Bergson, G. H. Lewes and William Clifford[23]. Henri Bergson's theories of consciousness suggested to Hardy ways in which he could use the recursive nature of memory to intensify tragic situations. Hardy noted from Bergson's *Creative Evolution*: 'all consciousness is memory, preservation and accumulation of the past in the present... consciousness is above all a hyphen, a tie between past and present' (Björk (ed.), *Literary Notebooks* ii, 216). However, in Hardy, memory proves to be a defective 'hyphen' because the passage of time distorts the original feelings and recall becomes confusing, producing a fractious effect upon the individual. Significantly, in his 1911 lectures in Paris, Bergson agreed that consciousness was fragmentary and in a constant state of flux – a very proto-modernist view of the mind.

The host of people passing are each 'unconscious of the significant whole' that they collectively form (*Desperate Remedies* 320). The unconscious is peripheral and the mind is seen from a structural point of view as a physical organ which houses consciousness at its centre; this is the more vivid, cognitive area of the brain. The interplay between conscious and unconscious life suggests a dynamic view of mental processes which exist on a physical and mental level. Hardy's interest in concepts of the relationship between mind and body is made clear from his note-taking: one such note that refers to the subjective self is a quote from Clifford in the *Edinburgh Review* about perception:

> The subjective character of the world of phenomena; that this world I perceive <u>is</u> my perceptions, & nothing more. But besides these perceptions there is also a spirit, a <u>me</u> that perceives them. And to get rid of this imaginary soul or substance was the work of Hume. (Björk (ed.), *Literary Notebooks* i, 135, n. 1215)

The article explains how Clifford arrived at his concept of 'mind stuff', a psychological and neurological understanding of consciousness that fascinated Hardy. Mind and the unconscious are, therefore, viewed in biological terms as being inseparable from the body and the physical world. This biological concept of the mind underpins Manston's distorted modes of perception in *Desperate Remedies*. The influence of Francis Galton's work on the

[23] 'For a conscious being to exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly. Should the same be said of existence in general?' (Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, quoted in Björk (ed.), *Literary Notebooks* ii, 221)

genetics of criminality as being a personality disorder that could be inherited and caused by background environmental conditions, can certainly be felt in Hardy's formulation of Manston's character. Hardy quotes from 'Mr. Galton's Inquiries into Human Faculty, and its Development' (1883) in which 'we find out of any group of a thousand men… some who are crippled, insane, idiotic, & otherwise incurably imperfect in body or mind' (Björk (ed.), *Literary Notebooks* 154, 155). Evolutionary psychology developed into more subjective views of consciousness as the nineteenth century progressed. For Hardy, the mind was only ever partially autonomous from the body and environment, because of the nervous system and the sensory processes. By the 1890s, Hardy's treatment of the unconscious had become more sophisticated and analytical.

The disruptive effects of the unconscious are not always framed by overtly sinister and tragic patterning, but can be played through a seemingly joyous, benign situation, as is the case in 'On the Western Circuit' (1891). At the time of writing the story Hardy wanted to depict 'nature's unconsciousness not of essential laws, but of those laws framed merely as social expedients by humanity' (Orel (ed.) 127). The antithesis between the unconscious forces of nature that flow through individuals and their social and cultural conditioning underpins the tragic irony of the story. In its boldly innovative opening scene, the object of the roundabout functions as an erotic machine that disorientates the sensations and perceptions of the protagonists; the trainee servant girl, Anna, becomes 'unconscious of everything save the act of riding: her features were wrapped in an ecstatic dreaminess' ('On the Western Circuit' 95). The rhythm of the horse makes her oblivious to the presence of onlookers; thus, she is not aware of being observed by the barrister, Charles Bradford Raye, who only snatches glimpses of her as she passes his line of view on the ground. The undulating and cyclical movement of the ride arouses sexual sensations and feelings in the individuals that have an unconscious and disturbing effect upon them.

The characters become symbolically fused with this machine: 'their motions were so rhythmical that they seemed to be moved by machinery' ('On the Western Circuit' 93, 94). Swept along by an ecstatic sensation, the protagonists unconsciously lose their human identity, becoming a part of 'the pleasure-machine' (97). This highly sensual, symbolic, opening scene affiliates the human with a type of automaton, an extension and product of the mechanised world which both disorientates their consciousness and exerts a dehumanising influence on them. The characters are ignorant of the direct influence of the roundabout and external forces, which conjoin to create a tragic ironic situation where Raye is inexorably drawn towards an idealised, yet false, vision of Anna that shapes the rest of the story. Thus,

they form false, romantic perceptions of each other from the start. The text presents this as ironic because we, the readers and the narrator, are aware of the antithesis between the conscious and unconscious realm whereas the characters are clearly not. For example, in respect of Raye's nature, the narrator informs us that beneath 'the self-indulgent vices of artificial society, there was a sub-stratum of honesty and fairness' (110). The subtext, here, is that the pleasure-seeking self conflicts with the individual's honesty and conscience, an inconsistency of which Raye is quite oblivious.

The social backgrounds and cultures of the two protagonists strongly conflict; Raye becomes enraged upon learning that Anna had deceived him through the letters, whereas Anna allows her mistress, Edith Harnham, to write to Raye on her behalf, because of her feelings of shame and low self-worth. Not for one moment does he question the authenticity of the letters since they correspond to his unrecognised expectations of Anna; Anna, on the other hand, is driven to deceive Raye, prompted by her unconscious feelings of shame centred on her lack of literacy and her humble background. For her part, Edith's feelings for Raye are 'insensibly developed' ('On the Western Circuit' 107) as she becomes drawn into his presented persona through her own loneliness; the letters were 'her own impassioned and pent up ideas' (107). In the process of transcription the true original source of the passion has been ironically corrupted by the interlocutor's own desire. The role of the go-between, the narrator and interlocutor, is also a primary narrative means of uncovering the sinister forces of the unconscious in 'A Changed Man'.

In 'A Changed Man', the narrator informs that the bored 'invalid' is the other person who knows about the 'actors' ('A Changed Man' 1) and the events that take place. The supernatural is first deployed to expediently introduce and create a tragic situation. Although the Hussars are honourably received by Casterbridge, they are nonetheless the tragic reminder of the regiments bloody past. This 'crack' regiment is welcomed as a heroic war machine, but we learn from Captain Maumbry that 'some crime' has been committed by 'certain of our regiment in past years' (3). This dark past of the regiment and, by implication, of Maumbry, is made manifest in Hardy's representation of the ghost that follows the regiment around. This spectral monster is 'about twelve feet high; its teeth chattered with a dry, naked sound, as if they were those of a skeleton; and its hip-bones could be heard grating in their sockets' (3). This ghost anticipates the death and destruction that will be wrought upon the community by the cholera outbreak. Maumbry's obsession with the phantom functions as a channel for his troubled conscience centred on the bloody past of his regiment. In this light, his sudden conversion can be seen as connected with the Hussars' past crimes

against humanity that are made manifest in the description of the ghost. The text highlights the ironic and antithetical dynamic between experience and the undercurrent of a hidden reality that may be lurking behind it, when the idle and nosy invalid attends, uninvited, the wedding between Laura and Maumbry; he sits at the back of the church, moved by:

> A subconsciousness that though the couple might be happy in their experiences, there was sufficient possibility of their being otherwise to colour the musings of an onlooker with a pleasing pathos of conjecture. ('A Changed Man' 5)[24]

There was a 'pathos' and 'solace' in the whole spirit of the occasion and, as the action of the story proves, his tragic musings turn out to anticipate what is to follow.

With Maumbry's religious conversion, sightings of the skeletal ghost in the streets of Casterbridge come to an end. It is as though Maumbry has confessed the past sins he and his regiment may have committed on the battlefield, or even on civilians. The cholera epidemic operates as a foreshortening device that further tests Laura's feelings for him; it is only when she sees Maumbry's heroic attempts to contain the cholera that she realises how much she still loves him. The suppressed guilt and shame that result from her intended infidelity with Vannicock prevent her from enjoying any marital happiness. She becomes haunted by the striking vision of Maumbry's figure passing in front of the purifying, decontaminating fires: 'the insistent shadow of the unconscious one; the thin figure of him, moving to and fro in front of the ghastly furnace in the gloom' ('A Changed Man' 18). Thus Hardy uses the supernatural as a device to uncover the unconscious anxieties and complexities of the characters. In death, Maumbry's spirit prevents her from marrying anyone else – an example of how Hardy deploys a Gothic device to show Laura's troubled conscience and the subsequent deterioration of her mind.

Another instance of Hardy's tragic use of the unconscious for supernatural effect is his story 'The Withered Arm', in which the occult acts as an agency for the drama of the underlying unconscious. The appearance of the incubus, at the turning point in the story, intensifies the escalating tension between the two women. From this point on, they are thrown against each other in opposition to their conscious wills and desires. The dark power of the occult exposes the mental and emotional volatility of the two women; this tension between opposites runs throughout the story giving it its tragic momentum and shape. The antithesis between what is real and what appears to be, between the cognitive and the

[24] The term 'subconsciousness' is used for the first time in the short stories here.

unconscious, between social prejudice and individual truth, all contribute towards the strong shape of the story. So this seemingly fantastic, folkloric tale is actually one of Hardy's most striking proto-modernist examinations of the darker and unconscious workings of the mind, an internal drama that is ignited by Rhoda's Brook's jealous curiosity.

Although she is in denial of the fact, Rhoda is plagued by jealousy and obsessed with the woman that has usurped her comfortable place by the side of the wealthy Farmer Lodge. She is in denial of her resentments toward Gertrude Lodge and the perverse ideas that are growing within her unconscious. Preoccupied with visions of Gertrude, Rhoda goes to bed, falls into a nightmare state and is visited by an incubus that takes the form of Gertrude. But the spectre is not that of a pretty woman, it is rather a grotesque, 'shockingly distorted, and wrinkled' creature ('The Withered Arm' 335) that represents all those evolving ugly and perverse urges. The dream is an artistic device through which Hardy explores the suppressed sensations of the protagonist. Through the spectre of Gertrude, which physically assumes a domineering and oppressive position by sitting on Rhoda's chest, Hardy deploys the supernatural to dramatise the unconscious fears and jealousies that Rhoda has been suppressing. Thus, in the nightmare she is most intensely disturbed by the sight of the incubus's mocking, glittering, wedding ring that leaves a profound impression upon her psyche.

These uncanny impulses are, therefore, played out in this gothic, folkloric tale. Yet accompanying the supernatural elements is a social realism aimed at presenting Rhoda as a figure alienated from a recognisable community. For example, the villagers condemn Rhoda for possessing malignant powers and stigmatise her as a witch. The gossips of the community believe that Rhoda is a harbinger of evil powers, but this judgement is only based on her appearance and isolated way of life since her matrimonial displacement. Rhoda declares that she is not in control of any destructive power that the community have accused her of possessing: 'can it be that I exercise a malignant power over people against my own will?' ('The Withered Arm' 338). Rhoda bears no ill thoughts towards Gertrude, whose blighted arm is, therefore, not 'the work of an enemy' (343) as Conjuror Trendle suggests. Rhoda's powerlessness lies in her unconscious impulses and anxieties: she is, therefore, figured more as a socially-determined and sexually responsive woman than as a victim of supernatural powers. In this light, Rhoda's suppressed jealousy and unprocessed resentments become manifest through the supernatural.

The unconscious desires and weaknesses of the women reach a climax when they go to see the white witch in a desperate attempt to cure Gertrude's 'blasted flesh' ('The

Withered Arm' 339); their desires and fears are enacted through their acceptance and involvement in rituals of the occult. Gertrude desires to be healed, principally because she fears losing her looks in a world in which men objectify woman as things of beauty. Gertrude's unconscious feminine desire, something that is innate and essential, is expressed by the narrator, who informs us that 'her woman's nature, craving for the returned love, through the medium of renewed beauty was ever stimulating her' towards this superstitious cure (347). The principal tragic emotion of fear, spreads and grows in intensity, as does the blight. Gertrude is in fear of her 'husband's anger' (347) and the possible consequences of his rejection of her. Her unconscious prayer was 'O Lord, hang some guilty or innocent person soon' (348).

Fear is presented in the text as an uncontainable contagion that infects all those that come into contact with it, both physically and psychologically. After having had her strength sapped by the blight, Gertrude performs the ritual of the cure and succumbs to the intense process of 'the turn o' the blood' ('The Withered Arm' 356). The 'double shock' (357) of having touched the bruise on the dead boy's neck and seeing Rhoda are metaphorical dramatisations of the women's unconscious feelings of rivalry. The final catastrophes come in the realisation that the dead boy is, in fact, Rhoda's son and the traumatic death of Gertrude, an outcome that suggests there, tragically, may be no ultimate cure for suppressed fears and anxieties. Rhoda returns to Farmer Lodge's dairy and lives out her 'monotonous' life with 'sombre thoughts beating inside that wrinkled brow' (357). The narrative of a fallen dairy maid can also be seen in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

Tess frequently explores these tensions between the cognitive rational self and unconscious, instinctive forces. Throughout the story there is free-flowing interaction between the conscious and the unconscious realms of existence and this dynamic acts as a catalyst that intensifies the tragic tension. At critical points in *Tess*, the heroine falls into states of unconsciousness or semi-consciousness that reinforce the lack of control she has over her life and the impotency of her will. The most notorious instances of this are when Tess is violated in The Chase and when she becomes unconscious of time and place in the garden at Talbothays Dairy. However, there are other instances of the subtle presentation of unconsciousness within the novel, for example, when Tess's magnetism draws Angel Clare to her whilst they are milking the cows. Angel observes Tess as she milks, 'her eyes fixed on the far end of the meadow with her gaze as one lost in a trance' (*Tess* 150), and approaches her whilst she is in this semi-conscious state, The text stresses that their emotional entanglement is not solely of their own making: the absolute stillness of the summer heat and

the fertile energy of the verdant land help to generate these powerful feelings of sexual attraction. The critical moment arises when, thus distracted, Angel kisses Tess on the cheek. As soon as he does so, the narrator informs us that he emits a 'curious sigh of desperation, signifying, unconsciously, that heart had outrun his judgement' (150). Here Tess's unconscious impulses and her deep-seated need for love in a world that she experiences as indifferent to her and, at times, as fearful, are juxtaposed against Angel's idealisation of her.

About the time of writing the novel, Hardy was contemplating 'Nature's Unconsciousness' and 'catastrophes based on sexual relations' (Orel, (ed.) 127, 128) and the novel repeatedly emphasises the unconscious ways in which Tess and Angel are drawn towards one another. Even after Angel becomes aware of what is happening and he is 'no longer passion's slave' (*Tess* 135) he is still unconsciously under the influence of a natural compulsion towards her. After Tess eventually confesses her past to him, Angel takes on a 'terribly sterile expression' of self-control (235) that eventually becomes eroded by the unconscious power that binds them together. At the end of the novel, whilst Tess is lying asleep on the sacrificial stone at Stonehenge, her 'unconscious form' (395) is brought into being when the early morning sunlight touches her eyelids. The suggestion here is that, whilst asleep in a state of unconsciousness, her soul and spirit have regenerated so that when she awakens she is full of inner peace and resignation. For Tess, 'experience is as to intensity, and not as to duration' (124); she 'had just that touch of rarity about her… she was expressing in her own native phrases… feelings which might almost have been called those of the age – the ache of modernism' (124) and so Hardy posits Tess as a transitional figure, both rooted in a rural past, yet also within the age of modernity, fragmented by the coercive forces of both the old and new.

In *Jude the Obscure*, the unconscious is depicted as a form of protection from the painful truth of existence. Whilst at the Melchester training college, the narrator informs us that, in the dormitory, the girls 'formed a pretty, suggestive, pathetic sight, of whose pathos and beauty they were themselves unconscious' (*Jude* 104). Sue Bridehead, herself, is under the influence of this 'lurid' (140) atmosphere of the dormitory and is unaware of her womanly vulnerability. She breaks free from the oppressive regime of the school and, in so doing, becomes part of a tragic story connected to the college. The novel assimilates Sue's experiences into a wider historical scheme; the text produces, for the reader, a sense of tragic irony because it makes clear that, in escaping from the college, she is still under a natural unconscious force; the girls of the college:

> Formed a pretty, suggestive, pathetic sight, of whose pathos and beauty they were themselves unconscious, and would not discover till, amid the storms and strains of after-years… their minds would revert to this experience. (*Jude* 141)

'At Melchester', there are a series of encounters in which the unconscious becomes increasingly conscious; as the narrator informs us: 'she seemed to get further and further away from him with her strange ways and curious consciousness of gender' (*Jude* 149). Through their tense discourse about their underlying feeling for each other, the subliminal urges they harbour become explicit and articulated. It is only by addressing his own impulses towards Sue that Jude, in fact, sustains an intimate relationship with her. After his painful experiences with Arabella, Jude has become sceptical about female motivations, but Sue 'was his comrade, friend, unconscious sweetheart no longer' (166).

Jude calls her 'Sue unconsciously' (*Jude* 399) towards the end of their relationship, but this is only after having become disillusioned about any possible loving relationship with her. This simple utterance suggests that he has finally accepted that they can no longer be together; on an unconscious level, he has already let go of her. This is a moment of tragic recognition in the novel because she has now become, for him, nothing more and nothing less than Sue his cousin; with this, he can let go of her. Their ideals now seem to have dissolved into a deeper, unconscious knowledge of each other. The final encounter with Sue recalls Jude's earlier unfulfilled desire to become a Christminster scholar: the 'hell of conscious failure' (119) he experienced then is now greatly magnified.

In Hardy's last major novel, *The Well-Beloved*, the unconscious is the domain in which Joclyn Pierston's spiritual malady regenerates itself 'by imperceptible and slow degrees' (*The Well-Beloved* 221): his incipient feelings and sensations about the well-beloved rise to the surface of his psyche when he is in the physical presence of the Avices, although they themselves are usually unconscious of his desperate condition. Whilst in the Hope churchyard, he falls asleep against the wall and 'loses count of time and consciousness of incident' (235). Under the transfiguring effects of the moonlight, he awakens into a far more powerful 'dream-fancy' (235) when he is confronted by the corporeal substance of the young, angelic, Avice Caro. From this moment on he can think of nothing else other than her perfect, womanly form.

Hardy deploys perception as the intermediate zone between the conscious and the unconscious in the London episode. Pierston and Avice's relationship reaches a climatic intensity when they find themselves sharing a flat in London; it is whilst living this estranged

existence together that he discovers the reality of her marital status; as she discloses her position the realisation that she can never be his induces his increasingly depressed state of mind. Avice, by contrast, is 'unconscious of their isolated position' (*The Well-Beloved* 267) and unaware of his feelings towards her until he actually articulates them – by which time it is too late.

This fragmentation of experience is played out through the disturbing restlessness of both Pierston's mind and Hardy's atmospheric description of the street from his high vantage point. As Avice's self-appointed guardian, Pierston goes onto the balcony to look out for her and peers out into the kaleidoscopic array of street lights and lamps; the 'shadowy blank figures' and 'the whole noise impressed him with the sense that no one in its normal mass ever required rest' (*The Well-Beloved* 268). A tragic effect is produced by the interaction between the unconscious and conscious levels of existence which share an intermediary sphere of fearful perception. The closing episode involving the mouse trap, metaphorically entitled, 'A Grille descends between' (270), dramatises such tensions between consciousness, sensation and subliminal levels of experience. Like the mouse caught in the cage, Pierston and Avice seem trapped together in his London flat, but she is completely oblivious to his feelings for her: 'her lack of all consciousness for him, the aspect of the deserted kitchen, the cold grate, impressed him with a deeper sense of loneliness than he had ever felt before' (272). Avice eventually appears out of this 'illimitable ocean of humanity' (269), quite unconscious of his anxieties for her. Living so close to her, in such a confined space, proves too painful for him and his emotions erupt leading to his discovery that she is already married. By making use of the mouse trap, the text subliminally dramatises their tragic situation and their inability to escape from it. At the end of the novel, what was once a mysterious infliction for Pierston becomes a conscious torment; the shock of the real and aged condition of Marcia makes him painfully aware of his deluded idealisation of the three women.

Section Two: Shocks and Interruptions: Hardy's Foreshortening of the Tragic

This section argues that Hardy's proto-modernist experiments in fiction are further advanced through his foreshortening of the tragic in the short stories. The narratives are punctuated with shocks and interruptions, paroxysms and traumatic experiences, horror and sickness and disease; these are not unique to his short stories since Hardy was well experienced in episodic writing for serial publication, but it is in the mode of the short story

that these devices become highlighted and foregrounded. Kristin Brady has argued that, away from the critical limelight that surrounded the realist novel, the short story allowed Hardy a medium in which to explore 'new ideas and narrative techniques: since no single story would receive the extended attention from reviewers that was given to a novel' (*Withered Arm and Other Tales* xviii). Shock, and what Hardy described as 'the strange fate of interruption' ('Enter A Dragoon' 255), operates as a prominent and powerful narrative device in these stories. Through that disruption the texts mediate a vision of the fragility and impermanence of human existence which can be disrupted and terminated in a moment.

The idea of interruption as a tragic narrative device is a feature of 'Destiny and a Blue Cloak'; Hardy's first short story has been generally undervalued by critics[25]. Surprisingly, Kristin Brady considers it as primarily a product of Hardy's commercial concerns, a 'relatively minor' work, which 'does not inspire' (*Withered Arm and Other Tales* xviii, xix). However, I suggest that this story is an early example of how Hardy uses the short form to present destiny as a dramatic sequence of flawed, human deeds, in contrast to its conception as an immanent, metaphysical power.

At the start of the story, Hardy throws the reader straight into an unfolding social situation on Weymouth esplanade in which a conversation is about to take place between Oswald Winwood and Agatha Pollin. It opens: ''good morning Miss Lovill', said the young man, in the free manner usual to him toward pretty and inexperienced country girls' ('Destiny' 3). The narrator notes Oswald's patronising view of country women and subtly draws attention to one of the story's tropes (which Hardy will develop throughout his fiction) – the oppressive, male gaze that, for the men, transposes women into sexual objects. The tragic irony emerging from this opening scene is that Oswald mistakes the cloaked Agatha for another woman.

As soon as Agatha's placid mind has been disturbed by him she instantly recognises Oswald's initial 'mistake' ('Destiny' 3), but his second interjection is all the more significant because it delays Agatha's intention to correct his error. She remains silent, 'her contradiction hung back' (3) and in that moment's hesitation, undone by his flattery, a tragic situation begins to develop. She impulsively seizes her chance for romance and a more exciting existence than the one she has to endure with her uncle, Miller Pollin. But in appropriating Frances's persona, 'whose name she had stolen for a day' (9), she only compounds Oswald's

[25] An exception is Pamela Dalziel's appreciation of Hardy's narrative technique in the story as she outlines it in her *An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress and Other Stories*. Oxford U. P., 1999: xxix-xxx.

error, committing a form of identity theft. However, this moment of hesitation and deception is presented as an aspect of her 'young and impulsive' (4) character and not as extraordinary. Agatha is not cast as malicious, but rather as nervous and insecure.

Her initial act of 'envy' is portrayed as a betrayal of her rural simplicity; no longer is she 'a mere child in nater' ('Destiny' 19). Thus, partly by will and partly by accident 'poor Agatha Pollin' (5), as she describes herself, briefly adopts the persona of Frances Lovill, the 'fully-developed' twenty-five year old beauty and lady of Clotton village. The situation rapidly escalates into something more complex because, as a 'contingency of no great matter but for one curious emotional circumstance – Agatha had already lost her heart to him' (4). The moment of falling is depicted as a precipitous shock. Tragically, what the characters fall in love with is their own romantically deluded perceptions of each other which cloak their true motivations and identities. Agatha has purchased the cloak 'in the spirit of emulation' (3); Hardy quickly transforms this seemingly harmless act of copying into a tragic scenario of deception because it leads to Agatha being mistaken for the woman she seeks to emulate. From this mistake, the drama proceeds through a series of contingent events.

Hardy deploys the fairy-tale trope of the hooded cloak as an expedient means of shaping of a crisis of identity, but uses it as a slight feint in the plot, since the main action is determined by the dubious motivations and actions of the characters. The cloak can be read metaphorically, as fog – an agent of deception and disguise. The narrator tells us that 'the blue coat ruled her destiny' ('Destiny' 25), yet the two cloaks actually feature very little in the story, only appearing at the beginning and end of the text, suggesting a weakness in the story's structure, given the expectations generated by the title. However, the cloaks can be viewed in gothic and folkloric terms as inanimate agents of a tragic energy; contaminated objects that transmit a destructive power: 'a malign influence seemed to be at work without any visible human agency' (21). Nevertheless, the overwhelming, psychological realism of the story effectively overrides such a possibility, serving the more authentic function of concealing identity and thus playing a central role in its tragedy.

In the story's final scene, Frances discloses to Agatha what she has been doing behind the scenes and the truth about Oswald's sickness in London which prevented him from returning to India; how the parson, Mr Davids, abetted by her uncle, betrayed Agatha's trust and her secret plan for her and Oswald; how Frances spied upon the lovers from the corner of the van on that fateful day and what she did afterwards; the way she observed Agatha's pact with the miller's lad and how she finally turned Oswald away the morning of the wedding.

The combined effect of all these deeds, performed without Agatha's knowledge, has brought about her downfall.

'Destiny', here, is not some metaphysical power, but is fragmented to perform the workings of human revenge and the contingent nature of experience and reality. Agatha Pollin is not a simple victim of fate or some external power, but a victim of her own vanity and jealousy and who, in a moment of interruption, makes the wrong decision. In this way, Hardy unravels and secularises the classical motif of destiny, displacing it with a proto-modernist vision of the contingent nature of urban existence. In such a world, identity is precariously influenced by appearance and by how others perceive us or ignore us.

Hardy's examination of the erratic and disruptive nature of desire and power is dramatically realised in the relationship between Baron Von Xanten and Margery Tucker, in 'The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid'. Although the tale was written in 1883, it was finally collected by Hardy in *A Changed Man and Other Tales* in 1913. Since it underwent a series of revisions during the intervening years, it is appropriate to consider this story in conjunction with the later fiction. The story begins with Margery's intrusion upon the Baron's attempt to shoot himself; 'the tragical event she had interrupted on the foggy morning' ('Romantic Adventures' 207). Her devotion to the Baron can be read in psychological terms as a transference or displacement of feeling. Once again in the short stories, a young person is depicted trying to come to terms with the lack of parental affection in her life; her father is described as 'odd tempered... reproach and rage in a human mask' (169, 207). When the Baron comes into her life, her suppressed feelings and low self-worth find an objective outlet in him; in her need for emotional and spiritual comfort she turns towards him. She is figured as so blind and unforgiving of Jim Hayward that she is simply unable to empathise with him or sympathise with his shortcomings.

Ironically it is another promise, her betrothal to Jim, which stands in the way of freedom and adventure. She tells Jim, 'you don't know the world, and what a woman's wants can be' ('Romantic Adventures' 192). The irony that the story dramatises is that he proves to understand her better than she knows herself, however, in her eyes, he lacks experience and knowledge of the world beyond the dairy that she yearns for. It is not until she returns home that she fully experiences 'the full shock of the convulsion' (207) that her abandonment of Jim has caused. The still atmosphere of the house in which she was due to marry him 'had been checked at its climacteric like a clock stopped on the strike' (207). Her thoughts and feelings about Jim are continually disrupted by the possibility of escape from her oppressive

life at home; this is symbolised by the Baron's yacht tantalisingly moored in the bay, a vessel representing the possibility of a new life and adventure.

There is always tragedy lurking below the passions in this story; one layer of passion constantly impinges upon another, half hidden; pain and suffering is thus embedded within the romance. At the yeomanry ball the soldier says to her that 'you dance too well – you dance all over your person – that's too thorough a way for the present way' ('Romantic Adventures' 173). In an act of psychic seduction, 'the bewildered Margery was led by the Baron up the steps to the interior of the house whence the sounds of music and dancing were already proceeding. The tones were strange' (183). Hardy gives fuller expression to destructive sexual desire in this story than he would have been allowed to do in a more heavily censored novel. Yet this is not a simple tragedy of a pure and innocent farming girl falling victim to a lustful, older man. In the story Margery is depicted as a deceitful woman, but this is not clear cut. Marjory and the Baron are caught up in their own deceptions and entangled in the web of passion that they themselves weave.

A Group of Noble Dames (1890) is the most unified of the Hardy's four collected volumes, composed as it was as a cycle of tales about eighteenth-century aristocratic women. Hardy's subversive use of the 'Wessex Field and Antiquarian Club', whose 'inclusive and inter-social character' (*A Group* 96) provides the source of a group of middle-class, eccentric narrators. Whilst at the club, they are trapped inside by a storm and decide to pass the time by telling stories. A fire is lit that then shines light upon 'the varnished skulls… the fossilised ichthyosaurus and iguanodon… the dead eyes of the stuffed birds' (96). It is in this ghoulish atmosphere that Hardy establishes the tone of stories that deal with an extinct and corrupt aristocracy. This museum of extinct, natural forms is, therefore, symbolic of the decline and corruption of an aristocratic feudal system. Overall, the collection of stories in *A Group of Noble Dames* satirically explores the complexities of the role that women played within an unjust social order. They are figured as entangled in a tragic drama of power and heritage, caught up in his ironising of a defunct, privileged regime. The principal narrators are also satirised as a group of odd, idiosyncratic personalities who project their own very subjective perspectives onto the characters and deeds that they describe.

One such story that uses a pathology of the tragic in its criticism of class and privilege is the 'The First Countess of Wessex'; the tale of a twelve year old 'child-wife' ('The First Countess' 60) who is driven to inflicting smallpox upon herself in a shocking attempt to get out of an arranged marriage. Hardy's depiction of Betty Reynard's father, the feeble and sick Squire Dornel, foregrounds the tragic, pathological mode of the tale. The old Squire, of the

befittingly named ‘Falls-Park’, suddenly becomes ill under the emotional stress of opposing his wife’s choice of suitor for their daughter. He collapses in an apoplectic fit ‘like a log’ and lies unconscious ‘puffing and panting like a blacksmith’s bellows’ (56). The remedy suggested by the doctor is to control his ‘perturbed emotions’. Because he is in competition with his wife over the suitors, out of shame he tries to hide all knowledge of his ‘seizure’ from his wife. One day, the Squire takes a treble dose of his ‘gout specific’ which gives him a burst of energy making him ‘hot-tempered… impulsive… reckless’ (73). After a long ride to confront Reynard, his bodily health gives way and he subsequently dies, isolated and alone.

In this pathological mode, the rivalry of the two parents unfolds; their daughter being the principal victim of this struggle. By chance, taking on a journey home with her mother, Betty sees Nanny Priddle sitting in a chair covered with ‘scales which glistened in the sun’ (‘The First Countess’ 70). She impulsively chooses to make use of this inadvertent opportunity and desperately attempts to control events, but, young Phelipson, Betty’s preferred choice of suitor, is overwhelmingly horrified by her smallpox that she has deliberately brought upon herself in an attempt to repel Stephen Reynard. Once again, Hardy’s psychopathological aesthetic comes into play at a critical moment in a story’s narrative structure. Betty’s deeper psychological damage occurs when the young Phelipson refuses to kiss her and she ‘received a poignant wound’ (89). Thus, her scheme and the ‘terror of smallpox’ have an ironic and unintended intended effect: ‘Bring a distemper upon yourself and usurp the sacred prerogative of God, because you can’t placate the man you’ve wedded’ (71). In fact, it was in the eighteenth century that a cure for smallpox was first invented by inoculating young healthy people with the virus. In that way they were able to form anti-bodies and so the disease was often prevented from becoming an epidemic. Hardy would have known this and, therefore, it is no surprise that Betty recovers.

‘Worn out in body and mind’ (‘The First Countess’ 90), Betty bursts into tears in her bedroom, not just because she is ill, but rather because her lover has rejected her. Her breakdown is thus described in emotional, psychological and medical terms and draws upon the popular nineteenth-century motif of sick mind, sick body and sick soul. This episode in the tale dramatises the psycho-pathological effects of a corrupt aristocratic regime. Betty is torn between two scheming parents, whose values and codes have very little to do with her personal welfare. In this context, she is cast as a victim of patriarchal desire and sexuality, producing an overall vision of the aristocracy as one of ignobility.

The shock element of horror is a major concern of the modernists, for example, the madness, horror and trauma of Joseph Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* (1907). It has all the drama

and excitement of a ‘shilling shocker’, but the most disruptive event in Mr Verloc’s life is the emotional and moral betrayal of his wife, who goes on to murder him: ‘it was his marital affection that had received the greatest shock’ (Conrad 188). It is a violent novel, but the meaning of shock is far greater and an integral part of Conrad’s narrative technique of suspense and irony. Thus, we only learn, towards the end of the story, about the truth and gruesome details of Stevie’s death.

Another tale of a corrupt nobility is ‘Barbara of the House of Grebe’; T. S. Eliot was fascinated by this story, but was offended by the malignant horror of the tale: ‘In ‘Barbara of the House of Grebe’ we are introduced into a world of pure Evil. The tale would seem to have been written solely to provide a satisfaction for some morbid emotion’ (Eliot 58). The story is shaped by the text’s oscillation between historical, psychological and sensual literary modes. This modal vacillation subverts the popular Victorian narratives of *Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast* and *Little Red Riding Hood*. Kristin Brady argues that the story can be seen as a ‘fairy-tale gone wrong’ (Brady 53), however, that reading is too generically simplistic and belies the story’s complex pervasive oscillations of tragic modes that move in and out of romance, fantasy, horror and psychological realism. Emanating from, and contingent upon, the disfigurement of the hero, the tale enacts a killing of the god of beauty, ‘Adonis’ (‘Barbara’ 155), as it is embodied in the figure of the young, handsome Edmond Willowes. ‘Willow’ also suggests a beautiful and fertile nature.

In the Greek myth, Aphrodite is captivated by Adonis’s beauty and tries to dissuade him from a chase but he goes and is killed by a wild boar. In popular nineteenth-century culture, Adonis symbolised agricultural and seasonal rebirth and death, however, in Hardy’s story, the hero-god, Willowes, is badly burnt in his brave attempt to rescue people from a theatre fire at his Hotel in Venice. The tragic consequence is that his beautiful ‘flesh’ (‘Barbara’ 114) and body are desecrated by the flames. However, the real psychological and spiritual blow comes when he returns to England and discloses his disfigurement to Barbara: ‘she shut her eyes at the hideous spectacle... a quick spasm of horror had passed through her... this human remnant, this écorché... the sight was too much’ (115). Barbara’s hysterical reaction, the deformation of Edmond’s beauty and the desecrated garden statue, all form part of the story’s dark critique of conventional and classical masculine beauty. The story seems to dramatise the killing of the god. Edmond, in distress, articulates this secular demythologising: ‘your Adonis, your matchless man, has come to this’ (115), but, Hardy takes the tragic a step further, to the level of psychological horror.

Confronted with his deformity, Barbara is stunned and flees from her lover into the arms of the jealous villain, Lord Uplandtowers. In the eyes of the old surgeon, the first narrator in *A Group of Noble Dames*, the degenerate feudal system has obviously produced a wicked being. The climactic episode is the malign Uplandtower's 'fiendish disfigurement' of the statue ('Barbara' 125). After Uplandtowers makes Barbara confront the statue that he has hidden in the bedroom cupboard, she faints to the ground in a nervous heap, then her now husband carries her back to the bed chamber chuckling a sound in her ear that was 'oddly compounded of causticity, predilection, and brutality' (126). This night scene, then, performs a morbid pseudo-sexual mode of the tragic. Set against Edmond's beauty, nobility and his divine aura, is the malign spirit of the absurdly named Lord Uplandtowers. His cruel, lustful spirit is personified in the excavated remains of the statue of Willowes: 'a mutilated Roman satyr; or… figure of Death' (130). Images of that grotesque sight haunt Barbara for years afterwards.

In mind, body and spirit Barbara is reduced to a mere spectre of a woman. Her only recourse and means of survival is to exorcise the memory of Willowes from her mind. But this emotional cauterisation comes at the cost of her psychosomatic attachment to her oppressive Lord and the dehumanisation of her femininity. In a psychopathological diagnosis the surgeon remarks that, for Barbara, this 'cure became so permanent as to be itself a new disease' ('Barbara' 130). For J. A. Symonds, Hellenism was a vehicle for idealising male heroism, transposing it into a homoerotic Victorian recasting of the gentleman. However, for Hardy, as can be seen in his tale, that romantic, almost effeminate, depiction of the male becomes radically undermined.

Another story that deconstructs tragedy through a dramatic interaction between the supernatural and real human passions is 'The Fiddler of the Reels'. Hardy's sharp focus here is upon the malign lasciviousness of Wat Ollamoor's lusty and unique destructive powers. Hardy uses the shock effect of Wat's fiddling to powerful tragic effect: 'he could make any child in the parish, who was at all sensitive to music, burst into tears in a few minutes' ('The Fiddler' 192). Yet Ollamoor never speaks throughout the whole of the story, so further reinforcing his uncivilised power. Ollamoor's cruelty is all the more disturbing because he laughs at the suffering of the children. Once again, the tragic interest involves the suffering of innocent children which provides an eerie, often silent, accompaniment to the main action.

Hardy also expresses a subversive anti-modern view of the world through Ollamoor's misanthropy: the wild, antisocial nature of this 'woman's man' ('The Fiddler' 192) who lives on Egdon Heath, 'those outlying shades of the world' (191) is stressed from the start. His

predatory personality is presented as alien to modernity, as symbolised by the Great Exhibition of 1851 which features prominently in the story. Civilisation and progress, like the power of Egdon Heath itself, are his enemies: what better way to exact his revenge on society than to seduce its children. Thus, the 'weird and wizardly', satyr-like, figure of Ollamoor produces songs that are not of the establishment: 'seditious hybrid creations of his own, taken from 'old dance-tunes... country jigs… the mutilated remains of… nameless phantoms' (192). The narrator hints at his malign spirit by informing the reader that Ollamoor probably never played a note of music in a church, 'all were devil's tunes in repertory' (193).

The villain is once again characterised as the agent and not the source of a destructive energy. Thus, Ollamoor is not in full control of this malign power: it seems to exist outside of him, in the fiddle itself, 'allowing the violin to wander on at will... the ancient fiddle as if it were dying of the emotion which had been bent up within it' ('The Fiddler' 192, 206). Hardy emphasises the physiological power of the fiddle by blurring the boundaries between the material and the spirit world. Thus, Ollamoor's fiddling could have 'drawn an ache from the heart of a gate post... could have drawn your soul out from your body like a spider's thread' (192, 195). The condensed form of the short story enables the boundaries between the supernatural and the real to become blurred, so that these normally distinct spheres in a realist novel combine to create a tragic situation of childhood trauma and angst. In this mode of tragic farce, Hardy increases the destructive effect of the contagion that Ollamoor transmits. However, it is in Ollamoor's seduction of Car'line Aspent that the pathological element comes to the fore, because it traumatises her and drives her into states of paroxysm. 'Car'line's spasmodic little frame' (202) is highly susceptible to the seductive power of the fiddle and she experiences 'moments of paralyzed reverie' (203). Illness and death, so ubiquitous in the stories, are deployed by Hardy as potent, foreshortening devices. On their first encounter, Car'line is on a bridge outside of Ollamoor's isolated cottage, gazing idly into the swirling water of the stream, when she physically succumbs to the weird power of his music: 'the aching of her heart seized her simultaneously... her tread convulsed itself more and more' (194).

Frighteningly, she seems to lose control of her body, however, this time, she manages to shake off her 'strange infatuation' ('The Fiddler' 194) for him after a few hours. Later, however, whilst sitting quietly at home with her family, she hears the faint notes of Ollamoor's fiddle coming down the chimney several times. Although he is playing some distance down the road, her acute hearing even allows her to pick up the sound of his tapping foot. On several occasions she finds herself leaping up from her seat in the chimney corner

‘as if she had received a galvanic shock, and spring convulsively towards the ceiling; then she would burst into tears’ (194).

The narrator further intensifies the tragic tension of the episode by introducing a psychologically naturalistic element: ‘it would take a neurologist to fully explain’ this ‘species of epileptic fit’ (‘The Fiddler’ 194, 195), but her symptoms and the metaphysical influence of the music take the story beyond the realms of ordinary realism; a Conjuror Trendle, or even an exorcist (as opposed to a man of science) might be better placed to help Car’line. Car’line and Ollamoor go their separate ways until the narrative picks up the story four years later, when we find Car’line with Carry, Ollamoor’s illegitimate daughter, married to the simple mechanic, Ned Hipcroft, and living in London.

This foreshortening procedure enables Hardy both to distil and intensify the potentially tragic situation. On their return to Stickleford, they come across Ollamoor playing in a roadside hostel. At the sound of the first notes ‘matters changed for Car’line’ (‘The Fiddler’ 203); against her will, under ‘his acoustic magnetism... projecting through her nerves excruciating spasms’ (205), she falls into a ‘paroxysm of desperation’ (206); paroxysm being ‘an episode of increased acuteness or severity of a disease’ (O.E.D.). When Car’line collapses, exhausted, reeling on the floor in ‘convulsions’, Ollamoor grabs Carry and ‘disappears’ with her (‘The Fiddler’ 206, 207). As Ollamoor lives by natural laws and not the laws of civilisation, he claims the right to his illegitimate daughter. The reader is left wondering whether under the power of his ‘unholy musical charm’ (208) Carry is doomed to an existence of servitude.

Shocks and interruptions also shape the narrative structure of Hardy’s critique of progress and ambition in ‘A Changed Man’. Underlying the vision of change are the positive ideals of progress, expansion and the popular nineteenth-century view of human advancement. However, the story presents change as problematic – with disastrous repercussions for others. From one point of view, Captain Jack Maumbry’s transformation from heroic soldier to benign, self-sacrificing vicar is an honourable development, even an act of Providence, but such an act of resignation creates another set of problems for the question that his conversion raises is one of marital responsibility. As Laura, his neglected and, arguably, abandoned wife puts it, ‘by what “right” does a woman’s husband have to do such a thing?’ (‘A Changed Man’ 246). Indeed, the central episode rapidly revolves around Laura Maumbry’s inability to come to terms with her dilemma of choice. In Hardy’s story, the distance that results from Laura’s rejection of Maumbry has to be related to her fears of condemning herself to a lifetime of celibacy.

Destructive pathological effects of music and dance also feature prominently in ‘Enter a Dragoon’. In the opening description of the derelict cottage the narrator informs us that a ‘number of abrupt family incidents ... took place’ in the house (‘Enter a Dragoon’ 255). In this narrative about and configured by ‘the strange fate of interruption’ (268), the most significant abrupt incident is the ‘sudden collapse’ of the returning Sergeant John Clark. It is in this episode that Hardy deploys a pathogen to condense the tragic situation. After believing Clark has been killed at the battle of Alma, Selina Paddock becomes engaged to Bartholomew Miller, but as preparations for the wedding are being made she receives news that Clark is still alive and due to return home. On his arrival Clark declares his love for her and their little boy and the Paddocks decide to celebrate by throwing an impromptu party; soon a fiddle strikes up and a dance comes into life.

Once again, Hardy draws upon the disturbing Dionysiac effect of music and dance to induce a disruptive, shock effect. As they dance, Selina whispers to Clark that she had arranged to marry the sensible wheelwright, Bartholomew Miller. He appears to accept her confession, but after twenty minutes of strenuous country dancing Clark begins to stagger and he becomes exhausted. He recovers briefly and continues dancing, but then falls ‘ill’ again (‘Enter a Dragoon’ 268). He explains to Selina that he now suffers from a weak constitution ever since his ‘long illness’ (268) and stay in hospital following the battle of Alma. He eventually falls unconscious and dies. The coroner’s report is that the cause of death was ‘heart failure’ (270), but Selina is convinced that it was ‘the shock of her statement that felled a constitution so undermined’ (270). In Hardy, it is not the loud, clearly articulated, voice that has the most damaging tragic effect, but rather the muttered or mumbled words of the characters. The effect of her whispered words dramatises just how shattering a lover’s softly spoken words can be and this moment illustrates that.

The final shock comes in the form of a tragic recognition of Clark’s dishonest and duplicitous behaviour as he lies buried in the churchyard. The surprise appearance of Clark’s legitimate widow with his legal son and heir is the blow that obliterates any vestiges of Selina’s love for Clark. Once again, in Hardy, the eerie and silent presence of children intensifies a tragic situation, with the two boys cast as innocent victims of the romantic follies of the parents. In this powerfully metaphoric scene, Selina interrupts the woman ‘spudding up with the point of her umbrella some ivy roots that she [Selina] had reverently planted’ (‘Enter a Dragoon’ 274) over Clark’s grave. As the woman explains, ivy ‘is considered a weed in my part of the country’ (276). In this way, the story performs a symbolic dramatisation of the

tragic consequences of Clark's infidelities and his double standards; Selina has similarly been uprooted.

Another shock effect of love at first sight gives shape to 'Alicia's Diary'. In the story, Hardy depicts the uncontrollable force of 'the wild passion of love' ('Alicia's Diary' 82) as a contagion that makes all those that it touches first unsettled, then ill and eventually drives Charles de la Feste, her sister's fiancé, to suicide. This story is narrated in the form of a diary (a narrative strategy that Hardy never reuses in fiction) which, in itself, fragments and punctuates the time frame, yet also allows the reader an insight into Alicia's innermost thoughts and feelings. This first person narrative strategy provides a rare glimpse into the turbulent passions of a Victorian lady's romantic life, a normally closely-guarded domain of Victorian experience. So that when Charles de la Feste declares his feelings for Alicia, telling her that he admires her 'more than you imagine' (82), he is only reciprocating the impulses that she has secretly been harbouring and of which the reader is apprised, ever since she first caught sight of him with her sister Caroline in Venice. She records it in her 'desultory chronicle' (101) as 'a morning of adventures and emotions that leave me sick and weary' (92): 'I have seen him!... he looked up, and stood staring at me – engrossed in a dream-like fixity. Thereupon, I too... stood moonstruck... and before I could gather my weak senses... they went out' (79). The power of love at first sight is, of course, a common idea in Hardy, but this text's emphasis upon the disturbing, shock effect of this form of seeing suggests that there is something disturbing and unnatural about the force between them. Her articulate diary shows that she has a sound insight into what took place. This all-consuming energy, of course, pays no heed to the third party, Caroline, her sister who is already engaged to him.

Once the spark of passion has been ignited, its energy soon wreaks havoc on the lives of the three protagonists. The stress created by the concoction of their forbidden desire, sisterly love and the duty to oneself as an individual, begins to exact a toll on the wellbeing of all those involved. The storyline and shape of the tale remains faithful to its Shakespearean dictum: 'What a tangled web we weave / When we first practise to deceive!' ('Alicia's Diary' 89). Through Alicia's 'struggle between duty and selfishness' (86), she finds what she thinks is a compromise and manages to persuade de la Feste to appease the distressed Caroline by conducting a mock marriage that would also leave him free to later return to her. De la Feste and Caroline appear to be so incompatible that a later separation seems inevitable, but that plan of deception, intended to be a 'balm to Caroline's wounded soul' (88), does not even come into operation because her sister, feeling rejected by de la Feste, becomes ill. As the diary puts it: 'my dear Caroline has lost appetite, spirits, health. Hope deferred maketh the

heart sick' (86). The only possible 'remedy' (97) and antidote to this unruly passion is for Caroline to marry Charles back in England. Any continuation of the relationship between them would 'be a grievous sin' (96) for Alicia who cannot bear to see her sister suffer the torment of longing for him. Charles realises that he will not be able to live without Alicia and vaguely tries to warn her of the possible consequences of living out such a lie.

As soon as Charles weds Caroline, he, knowing that he has betrayed himself and his true love for Alicia, cannot go through with the deception. Torn between the two women he becomes depressed, goes missing and his body is later discovered at the bottom of a weir. The coroner reports that 'his death had been caused by misadventure' ('Alicia's Diary' 101), but Alicia knows that his personal, moral code, that 'honour shall be my word not love' (101) drove him to stepping 'out of life' through suicide. Caroline, Alicia assumes in her diary, goes through a period of grief and gets on with her life. The final chapter of the story breaks with the pattern of a continuous diary and reads like a post-script to the main text, being added some years after the events. Alicia now reflects that ever since that moment of 'passion' at first sight and the ensuing suffering that it engendered, life now never shines 'warmly in my eye' (101). Such a loveless existence is the atonement that she has had to pay for trying to deceive her sister. But it is clear, from that ecstatic moment onwards, that whatever she would have done was doomed to end in failure. So the whole story can be read as shaped by the interruption and shock of two people wildly falling in love, since that love, in turn, generates a series of painful experiences that ends catastrophically for the deceivers.

Section Three: Experiments in Character

Hardy's proto-modernism can be most clearly detected in his experimental treatment of character in the later fiction in which characters are cast as conglomerates or amalgamations of antagonistic forces. Hardy's intention in *Jude the Obscure* was 'to give shape and coherence to a series of seemings or personal impressions' (Preface, *Jude* 3, 4). Such an aesthetic could equally apply more generally to Hardy's characterisation of the tragic in the later fiction. In 'The Profitable Reading of Fiction' Hardy suggested that 'good fiction' could be defined as a kind of imaginative writing that is based less upon 'the transcript than the similitude of material fact' (Orel (ed.) 114, 116). 'Similitude' points towards the symbolic shaping of character suggesting a proto-modernist, increasingly non-realist way of conceiving character; in this context, character claims a distinct autonomy; it is something beyond the human, existing in a virtual reality, only partly human.

Hardy's characterisation of Grace Melbury in *The Woodlanders* marks his transition from the realist mode to a more modernist way of shaping character. In the casting of Grace, Hardy, through the narrator, expresses a move towards a more displaced, indistinct formulation of character, one that draws attention to the inadequacies of a realist mode that posits the empirical self at the centre of a vision of the world: 'it will have been very difficult to describe Grace Melbury with precision, either then or at any time. Nay, from the highest point of view, to precisely describe a human being, the focus of a Universe, how impossible' (*The Woodlanders* 38). The use of a character with ambiguous personality traits points towards the modernist, more extensive, fragmentation of experience.

Grace's sexual instinct and desire are distorted by a modern, fashionable materialism and social codes of society. Early on in the novel she ignites feelings of rejection and abandonment in Giles because she has changed so much from the girl he once knew and to whom he was promised. The romance between Grace and Giles begins with a return, that of Grace to Sherton Abbas, where Giles goes to pick her up. She is looking 'glorified and refined to much above her former level' (*The Woodlanders* 37), whilst he, by comparison, looks 'rough beside her' (37). On the journey home, it is painfully obvious to him that she has changed; she is no longer interested in his observations about the orchards and farms where they once placed, but is, instead, thinking of 'the fashionable suburb of a fast city' (42) where girls and women parade. As the narrator puts it, 'cultivation had so far advanced in the soil of Miss Melbury's mind as to lead her to talk of anything save of that she knew well… herself' (44). To herself, she is now the centre of the universe; it is as though her sense of herself has been transformed through her education and exposure to fashionable suburban life as it is in places such as Bath or Cheltenham. By the time he drops her off at home he is feeling rejected and shocked at her utter transformation of character and indifference. It is in this radical change of personality that Hardy's antirealist shaping of her is first registered. This experimental mode is hinted at in the text when the reader is told that she has now become 'an alien' (46). However, despite her estrangement and the fact that her mind has been 'tilled into foreignness of view' (108), she assertively announces to her father that 'I should like my engagement to Giles to continue' (108). Through her range of life experiences, Grace exhibits a bundle of contradictions, fragmented and totally unconscious of the breakdown of self. These anomalies in her mean that she is not fit material for a tragic heroine of the realistic kind, despite her central role in the novel. Her inconsistency, purposely constructed by Hardy, comes to the fore in her schoolgirl crush on Edred Fitzpiers; her naïve infatuation with him is determined by her blind and culturally-shaped, juvenile

desire. This marks a major advance in Hardy's proto-modernist exploration of destructive sexuality.

She first becomes intoxicated by Fitzpiers's otherness: his exotic status as an unknown outsider 'impressed Grace as a man who hardly appertained to her existence at all. Cleverer, greater than herself, one outside her mental orbit' (*The Woodlanders* 166). The selfish nature of Grace's desire and relationship with Fitzpiers becomes apparent as soon as she agrees to marry him. Paradoxically, it is because Fitzpiers does not see Grace as the centre of the universe that she is so intrigued by him. Fitzpiers's otherness has a power over her that ignites her desire and, in turn, leads to her rejection of Giles, Marty's misery and Felice Charmond's suicide.

Although she cannot aspire to the role of a tragic heroine, at the centre of Hintock life, Grace, nonetheless, functions as the primary destructive force in Giles's life; she is a significant agent of chaos and discord. Grace's struggle for fulfilment is hemmed-in by her sense of shame which derives from her abandonment of Giles and her desire for Fitzpiers. Hardy's depiction of Grace may lack the tragic power of a Clytemnestra, Artemis or Hera, but she embodies, subtly, a more modern version of the monstrous. As Grace herself points out, 'I am what I feel, father' (*The Woodlanders* 220). The problem is that what she feels for Fitzpiers is based on a deluded perception of him and alters so radically. She even abandons her one chance of happiness, her 'plan of flight' (316) at the end for him. She marks a move towards Hardy's application of the struggle between flesh and spirit. A blind and culturally constructed sexuality is played out against Grace's real emotional needs, feelings that might have been nourished and fulfilled by a relationship with Giles. Grace is one of Hardy's conglomerate characters whose disparate parts fail to add up to one homogeneous whole. In this sense she is a precursor of Hardy's more ephemeral characterisation of Tess.

Hardy's shaping of Giles Winterborne is also influenced by tensions of gender and his innovative ways of expressing character. In stark contrast to Grace, the negation of self and the sacrificing of one's life for another, raises issues of nobility, the value of individualism and self-preservation. Giles is a good example of Hardy's experimental subversion of conventional masculinity and male desire. From the start he is represented as possessing special, pure qualities: he is an honest, hard-working woodsman who enjoys a special relationship with nature and the trees he plants and manages, with a 'marvellous power of making trees grow' (*The Woodlanders* 63). However, his relationships with Grace and Marty stand in stark contrast to the one he enjoys with the natural environment. Hardy casts Giles as a loner, both isolated within the community and a victim of a destructive romance with

Grace. His relationship with the community and society, at large, is more volatile than that of Oak or Venn and, in comparison, is more tragically conceived.

Hardy explores his mental and emotional vulnerability, with tragic effect, as a victim of unrequited love and his own misplaced love for Grace. There is much pathos in the fact that he cannot even consciously access his emotional resources that lie just beyond his reach: 'had he regarded his inner self spectacularly... he might have felt pride in the discernment of a somewhat rare power in him – that of keeping not only judgement but emotion suspended in difficult cases' (*The Woodlanders* 34). This lack of emotional and psychological insight is a feature of Hardy's characters that calls for other ways of expressing their inner selves. Thus, through symbolic gestures, Giles's immediate environment, and the dark, animate descriptions of his surroundings, Hardy conveys a sense of his pitiful self-negation.

During the final act of sacrifice, even nature and Giles's beloved trees seem to turn against him:

> The devilry of a gusty night in a wood... Sometimes a bow from an adjoining tree was swayed so low as to smite the roof in the manner of a gigantic hand. Smiting the mouth of an adversary, to be followed by a trickle of rain, as blood from the wound. (*The Woodlanders* 308)

At the end of the novel, the text finally says 'she [Grace] was not worth such self-sacrifice' (*The Woodlanders* 308, 309). The narrator, who sees what Giles denies to himself, makes clear that Giles has only succeeded in driving Grace back into the hands of Fitzpiers. Thus, the diametric juxtaposition between Giles and Fitzpiers, spirit and flesh, victim and survivor, illustrates how Hardy anticipates the more modernist, character dynamic that D. H. Lawrence will go on to develop in *The Rainbow* and in *Women in Love* in which Ursula Brangwen's sexual potency is juxtaposed with Rupert Birkin's pessimistic intellectualising. In both Hardy and Lawrence, spirit can partly be understood as 'mind' rather than in a religious way.

Giles does not survive – he is a victim of his own insensibility, suppressed emotions and lack of expression. Survival at the cost of others is not the noblest of achievements, but nor, too, is ignorance of one's true beloved. This means, in turn, that he is unaware of Grace's needs as a woman, becoming unresponsive when it comes to her feelings. Giles enjoys 'intelligent intercourse with Nature' (*The Woodlanders* 330) and the trees, but not with the woman that he loves, Grace, nor the woman who loves him and works beside him and of whom he is completely insensible – Marty South; such ignorance is the source of much of his suffering. Giles's misplaced devotion to Grace is figured as a futile self-annulment of

masculinity. Ultimately, his final act of self-sacrifice is described in redemptive terms, but Grace's awakening to his devotion comes, tragically, too late: 'the purity of his nature, his freedom from the grosser passions, his scrupulous delicacy, had never been fully understood by Grace till this strange self-sacrifice in lonely juxtaposition to her own person was revealed' (314). She lives on and is able to process her own guilt about his death. In this respect, she stands for the flesh, rather like Alec d'Urberville and Arabella Donn who follow her. As flesh, she will accept Fitzpiers, but there is a tragic logic in their reunion, since he, too, stands for flesh and so, together, they form a dubious synthesis. Giles's lack of perception and denial about what Grace and Marty really are refracts a negative image of masculine desire. In this context, giving up one's life for another can be construed as an act of disempowerment and turning away from the truth rather than a heroic act.

The novel's final movement is one of return and stasis. Its ending is not a tragic one, but it annuls any sense of a conventional catastrophe, foreshadowing the modernist uncovering of the destructive nature of stasis and immutability. This stasis is in close alignment with the central motifs of enclosure and entrapment of the novel. The tragic vision, then, links to the modernist concerns which draw upon unfulfillment, isolation, fragmentation of self, interrupted flows, disintegration and separation. As the novel signals early on, 'here as elsewhere the Unfulfilled Intention, which makes life what it is, was as obvious as it could be among the depraved crowds of a city slum' (*The Woodlanders* 52). This equating of rural degeneracy to that of the urban, links the novel to the modernist concerns of decay and the failure of relationships – even the impossibility of fulfilling and loving interactions. Negation and impasse are the new shapes of the tragic endings of Hardy's fiction. The patterns of unrequited love, or rather selfish, requited sex and passion, do not lead to grand, catastrophic endings but to those composed of resignation, pathos and stasis.

In Hardy's anti-heroic framing of Giles's death, grotesque and dystopic images of nature reinforce the sense of waste and decay: 'Their roots were stemless yellow fungi… branches disfigured with wounds… rotting stumps' (*The Woodlanders* 311). But the mythical significance of the dying god is still present in Hardy's ambiguous portrayal of Giles: 'The whole wood seemed to be a house of death, pervaded by loss to its most uttermost length and breadth' (326). Nature itself is presented as in mourning for this victim of self-annulment. Hardy's animism allows him to experimentally reveal their beauty in ugliness and even death.

This fusion of pastoral hero and the futility of sacrifice can be felt in the graveyard scenes:

> Weeks and months of mourning for Winterborne had been passed by Grace in the soothing monotony of the memorial act to which she and Marty had devoted themselves. Twice a week the pair went in the dusk to Great Hintock, and, like the two mourners in *Cymbeline*, sweetened his sad grave with their flowers and their tears. (*The Woodlanders* 334)

The death of Giles leaves Marty alone; only time soothes her grief. Thus, Giles is a creation that blends, rather than displaces, the Adonis myth with a modern, ambiguous depiction of masculine self-annulment and sacrifice. Such a resignation of the will to live anticipates Hardy's more nebulous realisation of Tess, in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

Hardy's characterisation of Tess is multi-dimensional and fluid; she evolves through 'phases' and is highly symbolic of what Hardy understood as pure femininity. After Tess has been violated in The Chase, the narrator poses the question: 'why it was that upon this beautiful famine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive' (*Tess* 74). Tess, then, becomes more than the sum of her parts and symbolises a wide range of disparate ideas and values; her large and tender eyes are 'neither black nor blue nor grey nor violet; rather all those shades together, and a hundred others, which could be seen if one looked into their irises...round depths that had no bottom' (90). By expanding the possibilities of identification of the feminine, through such attention to the colour of Tess's eyes, Hardy subverts realist expectations of character to show femininity and identity as an amalgamation, showing that character is not one, fixed phenomenon. This mysterious and indeterminate description of Tess's eyes is further blurred by Angel Clare's perception of her generally.

Angel's spiritualisation of Tess emanates from his deep-rooted stereotypical and naïve view of country girls. In this regard, he functions as a tragic agency and catalyst for Tess's phases of suffering, despite the fact that he embodies the 'spirit' force that is juxtaposed with Alec d'Urberville's power of the 'flesh'. Hardy describes Angel in a suggestive, abstract mode in the third phase of the novel:

> Angel Clare rises out of the past not altogether as a distinct figure, but as an appreciative voice, a long regard of fixed, abstracted eyes, and a mobility of mouth somewhat too small and delicately lined for a man's, though with an unexpectedly firm close of the lower lip... something nebulous, preoccupied, vague, his bearing and regard, marked him as one who probably had no very definite aim or concern about his material future. (*Tess* 113)

This description implies ways of perceiving the world that are peculiar to him; within the domain of that vision lies his idealisation of Tess. In Hardy, there is usually something threatening and sinisterly disturbing about a character who is so immaterial and insubstantial. High-minded characters prove to be victims of their own unrealistic view of life and of others. However, Angel survives at the end because, in a sense, Tess sacrifices herself for him and for Liza-Lu.

Hardy describes in his preface to *Jude the Obscure* the 'deadly war waged between flesh and spirit' (Orel (ed.) 32) which he first initiated in his tragic narrative shaping of Tess. This war provides her with a diametric symmetry that shapes the tragic patterning of the whole narrative. The flesh is mobilised through the predominant power of sex which is figured as an instinctive, natural force. At Talbothays Dairy this flesh even diminishes and obliterates individuality, almost beyond the sphere of the human, as if it was somehow allegorically out there, existing in the environment, waiting to be ignited by the right circumstances. Thus, Hardy applies the tension between flesh and spirit to give shape and a symmetrical pattern to his later novels. In the case of the dairymaids at Talbothays, the power of sex strikes on a summer's night when the maids are in their dormitory. The lush and fertile environment of the 'Valley of the Great Dairies' provides the context for this sensual, even erotic, depiction of frustrated feminine sexuality:

> The air of the sleeping-chamber seemed to palpitate with the hopeless passion of the girls. They writhed feverishly under the oppressiveness of an emotion thrust on them by cruel Nature's law – an emotion that they neither expected nor desired. The incident of the day had fanned the flame that was burning the inside of their hearts out, and the torture was almost more than they could endure. The differences that distinguished them as individuals were abstracted by this passion, and each was but portion of one organism called sex. (*Tess* 147)

As the girls 'palpitate' and writhe 'feverishly', the dormitory frames a space for a pseudo-erotic expression of sexuality. This scene anticipates the whole of the novel in which Hardy repeatedly reinforces how sexual power pulsates through the human. Nature and sex have mischievously determined that Tess is to become Angel's beloved. The girls' individuality is eroded by their common passion for Angel that burns inside of them – this seems to disempower sexuality as disruptive and beyond the control of the individual. The narrative voice speaks oxymoronically, about how sex is 'ecstasizing them to a killing joy' (*Tess* 147). Tess has already felt the heavy hand of the 'one organism called sex' in The Chase and knows the extent to which the sexual instinct has the capacity to destroy. That Tess is Angel's

chosen one was made clear by the day's 'incident' at the flooded lane when he carried her so lovingly through the water. For the dairymaids, frustrated sexual longing is now superfluous, which further emphasises the mischievousness of sexual desire. Thus, 'the deeper passioned Tess' (138), who has 'all the more passion to love' (146), becomes the one most deeply wounded in the novel – and it is her second betrayal by Angel that reopens her wound.

In the third phase of the novel, Hardy builds up the tragic tension in which the power of the flesh creates chaos. Tess regenerates and grows into a woman; she is not simply depicted as a victim of male desire, but is shown to exert a power over men and in particular over Clare's mind. The narrator comments, 'Tess and Clare unconsciously studied each other, ever balanced on the edge of a passion, yet apparently keeping out of it. All the while they were converging, under an irresistible law, as surely as two streams in one vale' (*Tess* 128, 129). Teetering on the edge of a passion they are unmindful of their precarious situation. Angel, to a degree, recognises his own weaknesses, but, as always in Hardy's tragic schema, too late.

As Tess recovers during this phase, her own desire is growing inside her, to a large extent, unconsciously, until the day comes when she has to kill Alec d'Urberville. Hardy thought that his heroine remained essentially pure throughout the novel fulfilling the dictum 'once victim always victim' (*Tess* 332). Indeed, in the opening episodes of the novel, Tess is featured, alongside her family and the horse, Prince, as a victim of poverty and of modern, social and economic forces. In conjunction with these wider forces is the evidence of familial weaknesses and defects. The accident on the road, the first violent incident, is framed as the consequence of her father's alcoholism. Her mother's sacrificing of Tess to their false cousins, the house of fowls, the d'Urbervilles, completes the first sacrificial sequence of the novel. In classical tragedy the scapegoat should be a representative surrogate for the diseased; the sacrificial victim purges it of its excess corruption. However, after Tess has been symbolically sexually infected by Alec, she herself becomes impure, no longer a maiden, but infected and wounded by his violence.

Tess is a violent revenge tragedy, an aspect of the novel which has received relatively little critical attention. Acts of human aggression take place hors de texte, or are deliberately obfuscated, but do occur throughout the novel. Sacrifice in classical tragedy presents the scapegoat as killed by sacred violence, but this code does not apply to Hardy's tragic vision of the world in which acts of aggression are condemned but are uncontainable. As René Girard has argued: 'the sacred embraces all those forces that threaten to harm man or trouble his peace' (*Violence and the Sacred*, 58). For Hardy, the flesh can be corrupted and sinful,

but, at the same time, the body is also sacred. In *Tess*, the secular violence is contagious and so the final act of sacrifice is nullified:

> The sacrificial crisis, that is, the disappearance of the sacrificial rites, coincides with the disappearance of the difference between impure violence and purifying violence. When this difference has been effaced, purification is no longer possible and impure, contagious, reciprocal violence spreads throughout the community. (*Violence and the Sacred*, 287)

Tess is cast as both a victim of violence and a perpetrator of it. Her traumatic (a word derived from Greek word meaning 'wound') experience at the hands of Alec leaves an emotional scar that never fully heals; she is tough and enduring but the experience in The Chase marks her socially and psychologically for life. The violence that Tess absorbs is stored up inside, only to be projected back upon one of the monsters from which it came – Alec d'Urberville. Reading Tess as a victim raises questions about the nature of violence and sacrifice in a secular tragedy. These aspects of the scapegoat seem to be detached from any special ritual, yet are also embedded in Tess's struggle against Alec. After she has killed him she explains to Angel that she feared 'long ago, when I struck him on the mouth with my glove, that I might do it someday for the wrong he did to me' (*Tess* 384). Revenge is almost legitimised here, for Alec would not have been punished by the state for his sexual violation of her, so forcing her to perpetrate her own act of justice. What exactly takes place behind closed doors in the guest house at Sandbourne is obscured from the reader. However, it is highly probable that Tess is forced to kill him in self-defence against the onslaught of his lust (for the text shows repeatedly that Alec has not essentially changed).

By the time Hardy began writing *Tess*, the fallen woman was a well-established subject of Victorian literature. Hardy's treatment of it in the figure of Tess aims to reconstruct the idea of an independent, autonomous woman. The subtitle 'A Pure Woman, faithfully presented by Thomas Hardy' was added by Hardy at the last moment, after reading the final proofs. He expressed his surprise at the controversy his designation caused, but it is probable that he knew what the critical reaction was likely to be, along with the problems it was likely to pose for his readers and critics. For Hardy, her purity was of another nature, a virtue that he conceded had been stained. In an interview with Raymond Blathwayt he admitted that 'I frankly own that a certain outward purity left her on her last fall. I regarded her then as being in the hands of circumstances, not morally responsible, a mere corpse drifting with the current to her end' (Gibson (ed.), *Interviews and Recollections* 40). Hardy, therefore,

qualifies her purity with his overall characterisation of her as a complex amalgam of contradictory sensations and psychic states.

Tess's sensuality and her stained purity are inextricably connected to the life of the community and the landscapes through which she moves. Hardy potently deploys her impurity in his deconstruction of received ideas and modes of tragedy. One reason she attracts so many contrasting interpretations is because she is figured as both pure and impure, both as a heroine and as victim of circumstance, a complex amalgamation of opposing forces. Her moods and emotions are fluid, ever changing according to the immediate situation: 'one day she was pink and flawless; another pale and tragical' (*Tess* 103). There are points throughout the novel where she seems to transcend a normal designation of her, such as 'field-woman', and is elevated above and beyond the realm of human suffering. Angel Clare's idealisation of her has this effect: 'she was no longer the milkmaid, but a visionary essence of woman – a whole sex condensed into one typical form. He called her Artemis, Demeter, and other fanciful names half teasingly which she did not like because she did not understand them' (130). And there is a tragic irony, dramatised in the novel's denouement, in the allusion to Artemis; she is, after all, the virgin goddess that hunts those who attempt to rape her.

Tess wants to be treated purely as a woman: 'call me Tess she would say askance; and he did' (*Tess* 130). However, Angel's early idealisation of her womanhood only makes, in his eyes, her later fall from grace all the more devastating. His betrayal of her love for him and his abandonment of her only proves that he is also only a fallible human being. In the episode of his rejection of her, Hardy casts him as morally weak and, despite his high modern ideals, he just proves to be another victim of a form of social conditioning, as it is mediated through his background and family pressure.

When Tess becomes a criminal, Hardy further complicates her purity. However, as a murderess, she has not completely lost her purity of spirit and her killing Alec can be read as a self-sacrificial act. Through Tess's execution, society has asserted its absolute power over one of its members; her hanging is merely another profane act of violence, only this time it is sanctioned by the power of the state, community and the church. Once a character has been condemned in such a way, unlike, say in Dickens, Hardy distances the reader from the protagonist, not allowing him or her insight into the inner workings of the character. This shifting of perspective reinforces a tragic mode of obscurity and alienation as the character is permitted to withdraw, not just from the world of the novel, but also from the reader.

The concept of character as a conglomerate of parts is vividly illustrated in *Jude the Obscure*. One of Hardy's visions of a darkly symbolic character is Little Father Time, who is described as 'Age masquerading as juvenility, and doing it so badly that his real self showed through crevasses' (*Jude* 276). Hardy's symbolic and visionary characterisation of this incongruous destructive spirit in the form of a child reflects a proto-modernist dismantling of the human. This solitary boy, deposited on the lonely platform at Aldbrickham, intrudes upon the lives of Jude and Sue to catastrophic effect: as the narrator describes him on the outskirts of the town: 'the child fell into a steady mechanical creep which had in it an impersonal quality – the movement of the wave, or of the breeze, or of the cloud' (277, 278). As with most of Hardy's characters, the way in which they move is highly significant because they are not conscious of what it tells others about them. In the description, Father Time is dehumanised, mechanised and abstracted through the use of natural imagery.

The bizarre Little Father Time is what Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet describe as an 'individuation without a subject… packets of sensations in the raw… collections or combinations' (Deleuze and Parnet 40); he is ghostlike, rather than figuring an attempt at human verisimilitude. The grotesque infanticide that ensues encourages the reader to see this strange child as the fulfilment of the curse of the Fawleys. By this reading he is sent by Arabella to destroy Sue's children, so that the scene can be read as a violent act of revenge. Arabella's lack of sympathy is an unsettling absence, but it is her very self-centred preservation and lack of empathy for others that defines her as a survivor. Hardy's symbolic characterisation of Little Father Time mediates a sinister and dark vision of mankind. Behind the symbolism is the absurd senselessness of man's cruel inhumanity, condensed in the Malthusian logic that it was 'done because we are too meny' (*Jude* 336). At the horrific sight of the dead children, 'Sue's nerves utterly gave way… throwing her into a convulsive agony' (336). This traumatic experience destroys her emotionally and it is with the death of the children that she really, spiritually, dies.

The episode of the infanticide scene distorts the flow of fear and pity in the reader normally associated with conventional tragedy: 'half paralyzed by the grotesque and hideous horror of the scene he let Sue lie, cut the cords with his pocket-knife and threw the three children on the bed' (*Jude* 336). The emotions of fear and pity are frozen; this is significant because this episode overwhelms many readers who, even today, can abandon the novel at this point. Jude tries to appease Sue's self-loathing and guilt and quotes from the chorus of another of Hardy's favourite tragedies, the Agamemnon: 'Things are as they are, and will be

brought to their destined issue' (339). However, Sue is also powerless in the face of her fate and, understandably, has to abandon Jude.

Sue is cast as a nervous, unstable 'creature' and is the catalyst for Jude's disintegration. She is a woman torn apart by her own conflict between her instinctual sexuality and her personal moral code. This tension has tragic consequences; through her ambivalence and her nervousness, she ignites Jude's own self-destructiveness. Sensing his inability to cope with life on his own, Jude admits to her, too late, that 'my two Arch Enemies you know – my weakness for women, and my impulse to strong liquor. Don't abandon me to them' (*Jude* 353). Once again, Jude's judgement of Sue offers an insight into her perverse spirit: 'what I can't understand in you is your extraordinary blindness now to your logic' (353). Jude tries to understand her, but this proves his own lack of 'emotional reason' (Orel (ed.) 115) because she is not understandable and she cannot be read through the application of reasoned analysis.

Jude thinks he perceives her true self, but Sue's own cruel logic acts as a catalyst for revealing Jude's own potential to self-destruct. Weaknesses, fears and ignorance are contagious and, as such, have an imperceptible, tragic effect upon their lives. Under the pressure of Jude's emotional and moral blackmail she consents to sleep with him and thus they fulfil their sexual union, but immediately she feels the oppression of a 'meanly sexual emotion' (*Jude* 268). Growing within her is her guilt about her sexuality, her body; her most self-defeating trait is this corrosive guilt, which pulls her apart. This process of disintegration reaches its most intense level after the infanticide when she castigates herself as a 'vile creature – too worthless to mix with ordinary human beings' (350). Physically she survives the death of the children but psychologically and spiritually she fragments and recoils from Jude.

Her nervousness is not just a question of fear, but directly related to Hardy's proto-modernist understanding of character. Sue's nervous instability and collapse into guilt and shame subverts any straightforward designation of her as an independent, New Woman figure. At first, Sue is cast as a cigarette-smoking, rebellious young woman, struggling for independence and autonomy in an oppressive patriarchal society: 'I am called Mrs Phillotson, living a calm wedded life with my counterpart of that name. But I am not really Mrs. Richard Phillotson, but a woman tossed about, all alone, with aberrant passions, and unaccountable antipathies' (*Jude* 205). But the novel goes on to undermine any affinity she may have with Victorian ideal of the New Woman. Her initial defiance of 'the social moulds civilisation fits

us into' (205) is a noble gesture but it is ineffectual and self-defeating. Her emotional suffering teaches her that to pursue that would only 'crush' her.

The character of Sue offers a strikingly proto-modernist depiction of woman because Hardy deliberately characterises her as a complex conglomerate of conflicting forces, sensations and impulses that distorts any conventional, realist reading of her. She does not develop or grow through experience; there is little stable, vivid, sense of self at the centre of her personality. When one does begin to formulate itself, in her early days at the training college in Melchester, it is soon displaced by her conflicted feelings for Phillotson and Jude with the disparity between her feminist ideals of independence and her nervous and apprehensive instincts and impulses. Several years later, Hardy praised a German reviewer's description of her as 'the first delineation in fiction of the woman who was coming into notice in her thousands every year – the woman of the feminist movement – the slight, pale 'bachelor' girl – the intellectualised, emancipated bundle of nerves that modern conditions were producing' (Orel (ed.) 35). However, this view of her as a social construct is excessively reductive since she does not achieve a state of emancipation or autonomy. Instead, as an experimental character, she tragically collapses and fragments. Without enough willpower and direction, she fails to create a life for herself and can find no alternative to loveless sex and a marriage with Phillotson. Her sexlessness and the force of the spirit that she epitomises in juxtaposition to Arabella's fleshy, sexual power, eventually destroys Jude. The answer, for Sue, to the dilemmas posed by sexual impulses is to destroy them: 'we should mortify the flesh – the horrible flesh – the curse of Adam' (*Jude* 344). Her final solution is to seek purification through her old faith.

After the traumatic loss of her children, she quite believably reverts back to a child-like faith, predicated upon the idea of original sin and the fear of damnation. There can now be no possibility of a new way of life outside of marriage. She is not cast as a tragic heroine of grand, dramatic deeds; instead, another more insidious secular tragedy awaits her, the marital cage of a loveless, and presumably sexless, marriage with Phillotson. As many feminist critics have noted, this degrading narrative of female sexuality is something that the novel struggles against, but in Sue it is not fully overcome; guilt has turned her intellect against herself. For his part, Jude's feelings of guilt are prompted by his realisation that his uncontainable desire for her has marked her; as he says mournfully, 'I seduced you...you were a distinct type, a refined creature intended by nature to be left intact. But I couldn't

leave you alone' (*Jude* 343)[26]. Such a rationalisation begs the question as to why Hardy's characters cannot 'leave' each other 'alone'; why, in the presence of dangerous forces, can they not simply turn away? One reason is that they cannot foresee the possible outcome.

In stark contrast to Sue's nervous make-up and frigidity is the will and sexuality which energise Arabella. As a woman of the flesh, Hardy opposes her, of course, to the androgynous Sue. Arabella's self-centred, eroticism distinguishes her both from Jude's idealism and Sue's sensitivity. Hardy's dramatisation of the tempestuous relationship between Jude and Arabella suggests that the flesh endures and finally triumphs over the spirit, particularly when Sue leaves Jude in the care of Arabella. Tragic characterisation in Hardy entails the clash of negative and positive forces, a gradual falling apart and, in Jude's case, as he recognises at the end, the destructive influence that women have over him. Arabella is the character in the story that honours the needs of the body and one of the novel's central underpinning discourses, 'the mean bread-and-cheese question' (*Jude* 83) of the human corporeal condition. In contrast to Sue's sexlessness, Arabella's womanly instinct for self-preservation only highlights the weaknesses of the spirit and the triumph of the flesh. The supremacy of the flesh is captured in the closing image of her preening herself in front of the bedroom mirror whilst Jude lies dying in his bed, 'curling her hair... When she had finished this, she practised a dimple, and put on her things, she cast her eyes round upon Jude' (402). Her gaze and demeanour expresses a cold indifference for Jude's suffering; he is now expended and no longer of any use. There is, therefore, a set of opposing forces that flows between the characters, continually modulating and intensifying the tragic tension. The tragic effect lies in this interaction, rather than in any intrinsic flaw or character defect.

These images of her ruthless preservation have deep echoes in the novel of Electra, in particular the goddess Electra's ruthlessness in the face of any obstacles that obstruct her will. At the end of Sophocles's play, Electra utters words that resonate with Arabella's attitude to Jude's death which is represented as an inconvenience for Arabella: 'no long speech for him! No not a single word! / He's face to face with death; there is nothing gained / In gaining time' (Sophocles 152). It is clear that Arabella exits the flat with the intention of finding another man as soon as possible, which casts a satirical shadow over the ending. Jude's abandoned and neglected body is testament to the triumph of the flesh (Arabella) over the spirit (Sue); a testament to Hardy's anti-heroic characterisation of him. However, when having to confront

[26] Added to the 1895 proofs of the novel, this sentence is not used in the first edition, on which the Penguin edition is based. The effect is to place greater emphasis on Jude's feelings of remorse.

the power of women, Jude sees something 'monstrous and unnatural' (*Jude* 350). Women, to him, including his mother and aunt, have always been 'other', – strange and alien entities. The ongoing dialectic between the flesh and the spirit, or the body and the soul, is never resolved by the text, which suggests that, for Hardy, flesh means something more than the sins of the body; it is rather, as it will be for Lawrence, the material reality of human sexuality.

This novel can be an emotionally alienating experience for the reader, because the text's continual oscillation of modes, moving in and out of realism, the surreal and tragic symbolism, challenges conventional Victorian representations of suffering. Hardy's modernist anti-hero deconstructs the idealisation of the heroic and negates any Aristotelian form of catharsis or purgation of fear and pity in the reader, reflecting back, as it were, those powerful emotions into the face of the reader; Arabella, with farcical and tragic irony, throws the pig's penis into Jude's face during his high-minded monologue about all those venerable tragedians. However, the text satirises Jude's study of the classics, describing them as 'those dusty volumes' of 'dead languages' (*Jude* 31), suggesting he is heading in the wrong direction. Once Jude and Arabella's paths converge, the narrator points out that there is 'something in her quite antipathetic to that side of him which had been occupied with literary study and the magnificent Christminster dream' (41).

Reading Hardy's characters in the later fiction as conglomerates, or amalgamations of parts, illustrates just how his experiments in the tragic anticipated the modernists' expression of character as being in continual transition, almost provisional. The tragic meaning of Hardy's characters is displaced and abstracted as symbols; his narrators do have privileged access to the inner thoughts and feelings of the characters, but they are by no means omniscient and harbingers of truths.

In summary, Hardy's experiments in character anticipate the modernists' formulation of it. Hardy's concept of a series of seemings and impressions has strong resonances with Lawrence's ideas of 'allotropic states': 'You mustn't look in my novel for the old stable *ego* of the character. There is another *ego*, according to whose action the individual is unrecognisable, and passes through, as it were, allotropic states'[27]. This corresponds with Tess's phases of transition in which the self passes through a continual process of metamorphosis. There is also a strong correspondence between Jude's flawed relationship with Sue's multiple alter-egos and Birkin's with Ursula in *Women in Love*:

[27] *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*. Ed. Aldous Huxley. London: Heinemann, 1932: 198.

> She was strictly hostile to him, but she [Ursula] was held to him by some bond, some deep principle… violent little shudders would come over her… It was a fight to the death between them – or to a new life. (Lawrence, *Women in Love* 205)

Lawrence's more dramatic language amplifies the destructive tension within the romance, however, the ironic dynamic of bondage and hostility, of connection and alienation, is common to both sets of relationships.

In conclusion, this chapter has argued that the fragmentation of experience is a central element in Hardy's tragic vision which anticipates the modernists' examination of the complexities and problems of existence. Drawing upon nineteenth century psychology, Hardy explores the deceptive and dismantling effects of the dynamic between the unconscious and the conscious. Hardy's conscious and narrative use of shocks and interruptions in the short stories further extends his fragmentary treatment of life. Hardy's foreshortening of the tragic in the short stories highlights the impermanent and frail nature of human life that can be obliterated at any given moment. In the later novels, a diametric opposition between the characters provides the works with coherent and unified structure. In particular, the complex playing-out of the war between the flesh and the spirit was a subject and technique that Lawrence goes on to expand upon in even more dramatic ways.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The primary aim of the thesis has been to illustrate how Hardy's tragic vision of a changing world led him towards the writing of proto-modern forms of fiction. It examines how the tragic mode is shaped by textual oscillations and modulations, revealing the fluidity and flexibility of Hardy's narrative technique. The four major concerns of the thesis: the shaping of Hardy's tragic vision, his experiments with environment, the imagining of the tragical mysteries and realities of life and the fragmentation of experience in the later fiction, have covered a range of Hardy's proto-modernistic practices and methods. For example, the intensification of environment, the writing of symbolic and metaphoric landscapes, representations of the isolated and divided self in a secular universe and the dramatisation of the destructive effects of the unconscious.

Chapter two examined some of the significant experiences, ideas and attitudes that were likely to have shaped Hardy's tragic vision of a changing world and how that vision led him into writing proto-modernist forms of the tragic. Hardy's tragic instinct for expression developed early on and was heavily shaped by his experience and interpretation of Shakespearean tragedy in the 1860's. From his attendance at Shakespeare's plays, Hardy learned about the primary tragic function of human passion, a destructive force that is vividly reflected throughout Hardy's early experimental novels.

The third section concentrated on the legacy of the tragic that Hardy inherited from George Eliot and Henrik Ibsen and Hardy's adaptation and reconfiguration of it. By paying close attention to the clash of irreconcilable forces in George Eliot's moral realism and Ibsen's anti-idealism, Hardy's more radical proto-modernist vision of life is thrown into sharp relief. A major aspect of that vision is Hardy's agnosticism and how it opened up the unknown and mysterious side of life. So the narrative of a self, struggling and divided in an indifferent world becomes the abiding diegesis that runs throughout all of Hardy's fiction.

A primary influence in the shaping of Hardy's imagination was Darwin's theory of evolution which had, perhaps, the deepest and most pervasive impact upon his sense of the tragic that compelled him to write the sort of proto-modernist fiction that he did. A secular and physiological view of life would now underpin Hardy's narratives. The chapter also discussed the impact of the contemporary, aesthetic and philosophical ideas that were in the air, such as Arnold's theories on art and Schopenhauer's concepts of suffering, the will and resignation. In Hardy's scheme of things, will and desire compel his characters towards a state of annulment and resignation, rather than a point of reconciliation. It is only in letting go

of the will that the characters find any sense of peace, but that usually occurs too late. This section also considered the possible impact that Pater's critique of the personality and the problems of egocentricity had upon Hardy's tragic vision of the individual. The paradoxes and ironies of subjectivity, consciousness and perception of the other, is repeatedly played out as a tragic paradigm in Hardy. Pater's ideas about the conflicts of the self had a significant effect upon Hardy's shaping of divided and fragmented individuals.

Within this intellectual and cultural climate, Hardy developed a fascination for the tense dynamic between mind, body and environment that now shaped the human condition. As soon as he began writing fiction, Hardy was both deeply absorbed by the ideas and beliefs of his milieu and also engaged in the dismantling of those received ideas and forms of tragedy. His experimental and pioneering expression of the tragic is vividly realised in *Desperate Remedies*.

Chapter three focused upon Hardy's earlier experiments in environment and was concerned with the ways in which Hardy turned towards the environment for tragic meaning. Hardy's pioneering mnemonic use of environment in the earlier fiction was the central topic of the opening section. The complex psychological dynamic between the mind and the environment in the early novels illustrates the presence of an early proto-modern strain in his writing that he goes on to explore throughout the whole of his fiction. 'Wessex' was the name that Hardy gave to his imaginary and realistic vision of a changing world in turmoil and this chapter considered how the continual dialectic between the real and the dream of Wessex shapes the tragic in the texts. Through the evolution of Wessex, Hardy mapped out the loss, suffering and disturbing changes of a world in transition.

From the dream of the old way of life to the anxieties about the encroaching New Wessex, Hardy's environmental creation encapsulates his journey towards a modernist view of a world in crisis. My analysis of Wessex traced the growing 'ache of modernism' (*Tess* 124) that culminates in an apprehensive and conscious view beyond the horizon to a busy and restless future existence. The social environment and the dilemmas of identity became the concerns of the section on satire in *The Hand of Ethelberta*. Hardy's satire is directed at the coercive forces of society but the novel goes on to explore the modernists' concern of a self in crisis.

The closing section of the chapter was an extensive examination of Hardy's expressive landscapes and the wide range of modes through which they convey their tragic meanings and ideas. Inspired by Turner's dark, impressionistic landscapes, Hardy's atmospheric and metaphorical technique conveys a sense of foreboding and transmits an

apprehensive view of infinity that frequently diminishes and displaces the human. These landscapes view the non-human, inanimate universe of stars and natural objects and Hardy's symbolic style anticipates Virginia Woolf and D. H. Lawrence's abstract, expressionistic treatment of landscape in their novels. In this light, reference was made to Lawrence's *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Stories*, especially Lawrence's remark about the destructive power of Egdon Heath's dark, primal, impulsive energy that Hardy's tragic characters throw themselves up against.

A textual analysis of the fiction of the 1880's was the focus of chapter four; this was a particularly analytical and theoretical period in Hardy's experiments in the tragic. Through 'abstract imaginings' (Millgate (ed.), *Life and Work* 192) and 'realisms' (183), he uncovered the deeper 'tragical mysteries of life' (192) that he believed lay hidden behind the ordinary appearance of things. In making ideas and feelings about life vividly visible, this period in Hardy's career marks a major landmark in his journey towards modernist representations of suffering.

The ways in which the texts suppress the inner and mysterious realities of isolation in an indifferent and hostile world was the main concern of the first section here. Through Hardy's tragic representations of isolation, he creates images of disorientated and alienated individuals, unable to form meaningful and loving relationships – this is a tragic phenomenon of modernism that so preoccupied Woolf and Lawrence. Michael Henchard is the epitome of a self-alienated man, incapable of sustaining meaningful human connections; the moment in which he peers down into the pool at Ten-Hatches weir marks a major point in Hardy's journey towards modernism and the representation of a divided and fractured psyche.

For Hardy, isolation is also intensified by the coercive forces of marriage and forms part of the tragic and absurd drama of marriage in the fiction. As a social institution and binding legal and religious contract, marriage imposes an artificial and, above all, unnatural set of conditions upon human relationships; this forces Hardy's characters into committing desperate and foolish deeds, leading to catastrophic outcomes. This general view of marriage lies partly behind Hardy's aesthetic of the absurd, a narrative technique that points towards Beckett's work, most notably, *Waiting for Godot*. The tragedy of the absurd in Hardy was, therefore, another significant proto-modernist element of his writing that arises from his wider experiments with the tragic. In Hardy, if you look closely beneath the absurd, you will see more of modern life's tragical mysteries. At times, life's ironies and paradoxes make human existence seem insignificant, almost nonsensical, beyond sense or reasoned meaning and this is reflected in Hardy's tragic vision of man.

Surrounded by the beauty and power of nature, Hardy's imagination was predisposed to the influence of Comte's concept of fetichism, as it was outlined in his *Social Dynamics* (1876). Hardy's sensibility to the primitive forces flowing through the mind, body and environment become transformed into an aesthetic of the tragic in his fiction, for the fetichistic spirit has a destabilising and destructive influence upon the minds of his characters. That such a primitive energy courses through modern man is essentially an idea and belief that Hardy's 'abstract imaginings' of the tragic brings to life in the fiction.

The fragmentation of experience is one of the deepest and pervasive effects of the growing 'ache of modernism' that runs throughout the whole of Hardy's fiction, but reaches a pronounced intensity in his later novels; this was the central concern of the last chapter of the thesis. Both as a theme and a narrative strategy, such a breaking down of existence clearly points towards the modernist treatment of reality.

Section one dealt with the dynamic framing of the unconscious and conscious in Hardy. The repressed, darker motivations and desires of Hardy's characters are played out against their cognitive and rational consciousness. Drawing upon nineteenth-century psychology, the later fiction illustrates that the unconscious in Hardy remains shaped by a continual and unresolved interaction between environment and the mind. The tragic situation is, therefore, significantly configured by forces outside of and beyond the characters. The texts create their tragic effects through a continual vacillation between the antagonistic forces of the unconscious and conscious realms of experience and the self. This section, therefore, argued that Hardy's dramatisation of unconscious urges and desires demonstrates that, in a sense, he was a Freudian before Freud himself formulated his concept of subconscious repression.

Another way in which Hardy represents the fragmentation of experience is through his deployment of shocks and interruptions, which become vividly realised in his short stories. This section illustrated that the shorter fiction distils and expresses a vision of individual existence as being finite, impermanent and volatile, that can, at any moment, be thrown into turmoil and even destroyed. Hardy's foreshortening of the tragic disseminates a breaking down of experience which points towards the narrative strategies of the modernists and was the main argument of this section. Emerging from this critical discourse on shocks in Hardy's narrative strategies, was an exploration of his experiments in the characterisation of tragic figures.

For Hardy, a 'character' is something in a state of constant change and flux, almost provisional. These packages, amalgamations and loosely unified figures, under the oppressive

forces of certain circumstances and tragic situations, are gradually pulled apart by the magnetic pull of the other and simultaneously unravel internally. There is, therefore, an antagonistic diametric quality to them that gives form to the novels. The central diametric of the war between flesh and spirit is a proto-modernist patterning that Lawrence developed with even more dramatic intensity than Hardy. The amalgamations and packages of sensations, nerves and impulses can be read as simulacra, rather than conventional realist forms. They seem to convey messages and meanings about suffering and fear that goes far beyond their humanist personalities and yet, at the same time, the reader is still able to identify with their particular anxieties and diverse forms of pain. These disparate, varied and fluid compositions powerfully anticipate Lawrence's formulation of 'allotropic states' (Huxley (ed.) 198).

By illustrating how Hardy was simultaneously deeply embedded in his milieu and yet also a visionary proto-modernist, the thesis has uncovered some of the complexities of his narrative procedures. Both in term of ideas and artistic technique, Hardy's proto-modern recasting of the tragic demonstrates his experimental endeavour and his fiction still speaks powerfully to today's reader. A year before Hardy died in 1928, he organised a performance by the Balliol Players of *Iphigenia in Aulis* on the lawn at Max Gate – a fitting finale to his lifelong instinct for tragic expression.

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