CHAPTER II

HARDY'S TREATMENT OF TRAGEDY IN

THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE (1878)

I

The Return of the Native is the first of the five tragedies that Hardy wrote. According to Arthur MacDowell, "..... It has no superior among his tragic novels as a work of art."\(^1\)

As a work of art it has a classical precision of design which shelters the ardently romantic conception.\(^2\) Here in The Return, Hardy consciously observed the unities throughout.

When the book was first published, no one seems to have recognized its essential truth, the inevitability of the tragedy inherent in it:

"Here for the first time he was fully himself; the mood, the setting and the philosophy implied by that setting,


\(^2\) Ibid, "Indeed this book, where one of the characters is described as a 'Rousseau of Egdon', is the most romantic in spirit." p. 69.
which he interprets, are peculiarly his. Yet he keeps himself in abeyance, his character does not over-intrude: a perfect balance is kept between the parts played by the characters and Fate or Chance, as well as a balance between the creator and the creations. 3

II

It would seem that in The Return, Hardy has given careful consideration to the plotting.

Eustacia Vye, passionate and romantic, pagan and bewitching, is in love with Damon Wildeve, the proprietor of an inn called The Quiet Woman. But soon she passionately longs for Clym Yeobright who has just returned from Paris, the city of her dreams. She leaves no stone unturned to win Clym, but once he has been captured, she finds that there is no temperamental affinity between them, and all her dreams are cruelly shattered. The tragedy is given a further twist by the conflict between Eustacia and Clym's mother, Mrs. Yeobright, a strong-willed possessive woman, whose very life seems to revolve round her son.

No reconciliation seems to be possible between Eustacia and Mrs. Yeobright, and Mrs. Yeobright's final attempt at reconciliation is cruelly shattered by the episode of the "Closed Door", and thinking that it is Eustacia who has kept the door shut, she creeps back through the heath, utterly broken and meets her death. Clym views Eustacia as a murderess, and the breach between the two is complete. Eustacia now makes a final attempt to break loose from the stifling environment of the heath to the world of her ambitions and dreams, in the company of Damon Wildeve, who has now come into money and back into her life. On a rain-laden, stormy night they plan to slope, only to meet their death on the cruel face of the heath. Clym, sobered by this tragedy, finds his true vocation as an itinerant preacher, while Thomasin, his cousin, a passive onlooker most of the time, finds herself in the secure arms of Diggory Venn, the quiet, importune reeve-man, whose sole aim has always been the protection of his beloved.

The central matter of *The Return* is thus a conflict between figures of convention, Clym and Mrs. Yeobright; and figures of rebellion, Eustacia and Wildeve. It is a woman's tragedy, a tragedy of the wrong woman falling in love with the wrong man. Eustacia, the smouldering country Delilah, hovers over Clym, the native, who is not strong enough to shape his destiny or
or prevent his women from mis-shaping it. Like most of Hardy's heroes, Clym is unaggressive and a stream of self-destroying impulse courses through his veins. The thin substance of his manliness gets worn down, and with the loss of sight (brought on by his stupid obstinacy) there is a loss of virility as well, which is too much for a strongly-sexed woman like Eustacia.

But this plot seems to be too weak for the grand subject of tragedy and to fill out the plot, Hardy falls back upon the rustics. Crucial turnings in the plot — for example, the whole painful misunderstanding that cuts off Mrs. Yeobright from the son she hoped to assuage — depend upon the rustics, as a result of which these figures are now transformed into agents of fate and chance.

But even more than the rustics, Egdon Heath seems to play a very important role in the tragedy of the protagonists.

The book opens with the celebrated description of the heath. As Bonamy Dobree has pointed out: "The plot ...... of The Return would not be what it is but for the character called Egdon Heath, which streeks the whole tale."

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4 According to Irving Howe, this "is regarded by Hardy as inseparable from the fevers of Romanticism."


5 Bonamy Dobree: "Thomas Hardy", p.339.
In *The Return*, Hardy has developed Nature as a character more than in any other novel. The Heath, "a Face on which Time makes but Little Impression," (p. 11), is the mute protagonist of this tragedy:

"It was ...... 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....... It had a lonely face, suggesting tragical possibilities" (p. 13).

Almost all the crucial actions of the tragedy take place on the heath. As Evelyn Hardy says: "The characters in *The Return of the Native*, subservient to the Heath's moods seems emanations from it : detached from it they are, like Hardy himself, dominated by it. Thus the Heath partakes of the same nature as the Primal Cause or the Will, for it permits seemingly passive Eustacia, Clym and others to seek fulfilment or destruction, yet ceaselessly coerces them, driven by an urgency, which it does not itself comprehend."7

According to Arthur MacDowall the picture of Egdon provides the base of this tragic novel:

6 Thomas Hardy: *The Return of the Native*, London, Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1965. All page references will be to this book.
"It embodies the scene and the atmosphere, and is besides, the rendering of a mood of a congruous aspect in human life and in the mind of the author. The heath images such meanings and yet remains itself, a microcosm of untamed Nature .... It will be a 'character' among the other characters, while it environs and transcends them. For, while the dark sweep of country evokes an immensity of space, it will shape with precision the destinies of every person in the book."  

The interaction of the characters and the heath seems to be the very basis of this tragic novel — the confrontation between human nature and outer nature.

The heath is fundamentally changeless, yet the growth and the development of the characters, with tragic overtones, take place on its surface:

"The great inviolate place had an ancient permanence which the sea can not claim ....... The sea changed, the fields changed, the rivers, the villages and the people changed, yet Egdon remained"(p.14).

III

The Return of the Native has a fabulous quality all its own.

The central fable9 of the novel rests on a triangle of mother, son, son.

9 I have used the word "fable" here in the sense Irving Howe uses it, that is, as a "dynamic of characters", in his Thomas Hardy, p.61.
wife. The characters of *The Return* are figures of traditional romance or ballad, they are embodiments of a ruling passion. Thus the ruling passion of Eustacia's life is to be loved to madness, that of Clym, is to graft upon his life some significant purpose, while the ruling passion of Mrs. Yeobright's life is her son.

Hardy weaves many a folk motif into the fabric of the novel. The mumming, the gipsying, the maying, the burning of the wax effigy, the lighting of the Beltane fires, above all the dancing whether round the garlanded maypole or the whirling nocturnal flames, all belong to the world of the ballad, the folk magic and the folk dance. They also take us back to the pagan rest for life. It may not be incorrect to say that *The Return* is the most pagan of all Hardy's novels. The reddie-man belongs to this ballad world. Hardy calls him a "Mephistophelian Visitant" (p. 35). "That blood-coloured figure was a sublimation of all the horrid dreams which had afflicted the juvenile spirit since imagination began" (p. 36).

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10 Hardy calls it a "traditional pastime", e.g. Susan Nunsuch burning Eustacia's wax effigy, pp. 362-363.

11 "It was as if these men and boys had suddenly dived into past ages and fetched therefrom an hour and deed which had before been familiar with the spot .... Indeed it is pretty well-known that such blazes as this, the heathmen were enjoying are rather the lineal descendants from jumbled Druidical rites and Saxon ceremonies, than the invention of popular feeling about Gun-powder plot" (p. 23).
The Return of the Native is more Eustacia's tragedy than Clym's, for she seems to have the traditional flaw of a tragic protagonist.

"She is a young goddess of sensuality", as Irving Howe calls her, but she fixes it on the wrong person, for Clym can not cope with her. A rich sensuousness is undoubtedly Eustacia's dominant characteristic:

"She had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman" (p. 73).

"As far as social ethics were concerned, Eustacia approached the savage state though in emotion she was all the while an epicure. She had advanced to the secret recesses of sensuousness, yet had hardly crossed the threshold of conventionality" (p. 103).

Thus like Sue, Eustacia is an epicure in emotion. But how different are Eustacia's emotional feasts from Sue's experimental savourings. Eustacia's sensuous nature is incapable of thought.

12 Irving Howe: Thomas Hardy, p. 64.
She is built entirely of highly potentialized feeling. Her every act is the instant product of impetuous desire. For example, her manipulating a place in the mumming party just to have a glimpse of Clym. Like Sue, she likes "to hunt up new sensations".

Her soul dissolved in her hot blood, the restraint of reason absent, she has no guide but emotion and animal wants:

"To be loved to madness - such was her great desire. Love was to her the one cordial which could drive away the eating loneliness of her days, and she seemed to long for the abstraction called passionate love more than for any particular lover" (p. 77).

Some people wonder why a woman of such proportions should bestow her love on worthless Wildeve, but Hardy himself explains it thus: "And so we see our Eustacia ..... filling up the spare hours of her existence by idealizing Wildeve for want of a better object" (p. 77).

This thoroughly passionate woman has "predetermined to nourish a passion for Yeobright (p. 150). "The perfervid woman was by this time half in love with a vision. The fantastic nature of her passion, which lowered her as an intellect, raised her as a soul. If she had had little more self-control she would have attenuated the emotion to nothing by sheer reasoning, and so have killed it off" (p. 125).
"She had loved him (Clym) partly because he was exceptional in this scene, partly because she had determined to love him, chiefly because she was in desperate need of loving somebody after wearying of Wildeve ..... Once let a maiden admit the possibility of her being stricken with love for someone at a certain hour and place and the thing is as good as done" (p.149).

Eustacia is as much a pagan as Sue but it is significant that though Sue returns to conventional Christianity after the death of her children, Eustacia ever remains a rebel. John Paterson, in an interesting article on The Return, says : "..... Eustacia belongs to a world that has not yet been touched by the spectral band of Christianity. She reincarnates on the withered parish of Egdon Heath the larger and braver vision of the ancient Greeks."13

She is a rebel in the Prometheus tradition,14 and persistently associated with fire as she is - the colour of her soul is fancied, for example, as "flame-like" (p.74), and the pool in which she dies is defined as a "boiling cauldron" (p.376) - she everywhere evokes the image of a Prometheus heroine.

John Paterson thinks that "in the suffering and death of

14 As Clym says to her: "Now don't you suppose .... that I cannot rebel, in high Prometheus fashion, against the gods and fate as well as you?" (p.261).
Eustacia, *The Return of the Native* dramatizes the tragic humiliation in the diminished world of the modern consciousness, of an heroic, pre-Christian understanding of life.  

To me this seems only partly true, for Eustacia's tragedy is not only a tragedy of pagan ideals vs Christian ideals; her tragedy is primarily a tragedy of love.

It is her "love of being loved" that works such a fascination in her for Clym; but very early in their courtship the temperamental discord raises its ugly head, for while Eustacia symbolizes "Hellenic ideal of life", Clym symbolizes "the Christian ideal of life".  

While Clym has come down from Paris to settle down at Egdon, Eustacia is simply stifled by Egdon and dreams of Paris.

That they are temperamentally antipodal is clear from their attitude towards the Heath. Hardy sums it up very well: "Take all the varying hates felt by Eustacia Vye towards the heath and translate them into loves, and you have the heart of Clym" (pp. 190-91).

During their first meeting Clym finds that she has no love for Egdon, nor does she have any love for her fellow-creatures (p. 193),

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which is quite a contrast to Clym's all-pervading love for Egdon and his fellow creatures. Yet the fascination is strange and deep — Clym dreaming that Eustacia would help him with his school, while Eustacia, the ambitious and the day-dreamer, dreaming of escaping to the sights and sounds of Paris, to Tuileries and the Louvre.

Eustacia seems to have a feminine intuition that their love for each other will not last long: "...... I know that we shall not love like this always. Nothing can ensure the continuance of love. It will evaporate like a spirit and so I feel full of fear" (p.204).

Paris has such a fascination for her that she promises to marry him on condition that he will go back to Paris and when Clym refuses to go back, with a woman's stubbornness she says: "You'll never adhere to your education plan, I am quite sure; and then it will be all right for me" (p.206).

The trouble with Eustacia is that she is not meant to be a housewife and she herself is fully aware of it: "Sometimes I think there is not that in Eustacia Vye which will make a good homespun wife" (p.206).

Even at this period in courtship Clym is aware of the temperamental disparity between them — she, ambitious and luxurious,
he unambitious and plain — There was "a doubt if he were acting fairly towards one whose tastes touched his own only at rare and infrequent points" (p. 207).

Hardy himself is quite explicit about this temperamental disparity and much of the tragedy of The Return derives from this. As Hardy says: "..... he (Clym) could not but perceive at moments that she (Eustacia) loved him rather as a visitant from a gay world to which she rightly belonged than as a man with a purpose opposed to the recent past of his which so interested her" (p. 208).

It has been said that Eustacia is an epicure in emotion, and the following passage gives us an insight into this quality of hers: "Pleasure not known beforehand is half wasted; to anticipate is to double it. I have not thought once today of having you all to myself this afternoon, and the actual moment of a thing is so soon gone" (p. 213).

Even as Clym agrees to get married in a fortnight's time doubts assail him: "Eustacia was now no longer the goddess but the woman to him, a being to fight for and support, help, be maligned for. Now that he had reached a cooler moment he would have preferred a less hasty marriage; but the card was laid, and he determined to abide by the game. Whether Eustacia was to
add one other to the list of those who love too hotly to love long and well, the forthcoming event was certainly a ready way of proving" (p. 216).

After their marriage they live in absolute solitude and, as Hardy points out, "..... it had the disadvantage of consuming their mutual affections at a fearfully prodigal rate. Yeobright did not fear for his own part; but recollection of Eustacia's old speech about the evanescence of love, now apparently forgotten by her, sometimes caused him to ask himself a question; and he recoiled at the thought that the quality of finiteness was not foreign to Eden" (pp. 245–46).

Eustacia on her part is bitterly disappointed at the shattering of her dreams of settling down in Paris, for Clym settles down with his books: "... the sight of books indicating a future which was antagonistic to her dream, struck her with a positively painful jar". (p. 246).

Eustacia's tragedy emanates not only from the flaws of her own character, it is bound up with those of Clym and his mother. For there is a vein of self-destroying impulse that runs through both Clym and his mother.

Reading stubbornly on until he has ruined his eyesight is the act of a man who is subconsciously bent on self-destruction. When
his eyes fail, he deserts Eustacia for sixteen hours of furze cutting a day. He abases himself to the ranks of the meanest, returning home to fall exhausted on his bed, to what Irving Howe calls, "a sexless sleep". Charles Child Walcott says quite rightly: "This is not philosophy; it is — however unconscious — a cruel assault on Eustacia."

It is an extravagant neglect, a virtuoso piece of folly by a man with so luscious and moody a wife.

He is tempting her to quarrel with him so that he can suffer more, and of course she does. And how ironic that while pursuing this course, he should add outrage to injury by being aggressively cheerful:

"Eustacia's manner had become of late almost apathetic. There was a fallen look about her beautiful eyes, which would have excited pity in the breast of anyone who had known her during the full flush of her love for Clym .... Clym the afflicted man, was cheerful ......'Come, brighten up dearest; we shall be all right again. Some day perhaps I shall see as well as ever. And I solemnly promise that I'll leave off cutting furze as soon as

17 Irving Howe: Thomas Hardy, p.63.
I have power to do anything better. You cannot seriously wish me to stay idling at home all day" *(p. 262).

Idling at home, no, but he could be a companion to her and she could read to him. There is wilful neglect in his sixteen hours of exhausting labour. Yet he does not want her to go to a village dance. The speech, in which he bids her go, is a model of sick martyrdom and self-pity:

"Go and do whatever you like, who can forbid your indulgence in any whim? ..... Yes go alone and shine. As for me, I will stick to my doom. At that kind of meeting people would shun me. My hook and gloves are like the St. Lazarus' rattle of the leper, warning the world to get out of the way of a sight that would sadden them" (p. 263).19

If his mother was shocked at the humble occupation of the son, for whom she had hoped great things, how much graver was the disappointment and distress of the wife, who, in this humiliation, could read the death sentence of all her aspirations for herself.

The garb and occupation were bad enough in themselves, symbolizing the return to the narrow way of life she hated.

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19 C.C. Walcutt says: "This is touching but every word of it is false." *Character and Coincidence in The Return of the Native*, p. 168.
But it was the cheerful mood of Clym that was hardest to bear proving his willing surrender to the captivity of the heath. It was inevitable that harsh words should be spoken and that bitterness and pride should come between them, that she should turn again, however reluctantly, to the thought of Wildeve, when the death of Clym's mother had brought upon her the jealous suspicion of Clym. It was natural that in her pride, she should have withheld the words that might have cleared up the misunderstanding. And from that point to her suicide, she was carried on as a restless current flowing from her disillusionment.

Eustacia is thus a Hardy heroine blown hither and thither by the irrational promptings of love. She has reason but it can not make her lead her life in a rational manner.

Love for Hardy is the supreme end of all things in the sense that any other consideration must be discarded so that its greedy appetite be satisfied. Love rushes through Eustacia, it encounters reason, wrestles with it and in almost a moment has passed on, a cold and callous conqueror.

Hardy makes Eustacia one of those unfortunate people who can not in any way place their ideas in any kind of logical order. They are arranged in a kind of chaotic mass, so that their value is practically nil to its possessor. Hardy describes this
inharmoous assortment of ideas quite vividly:

"Thus it happened that in Eustacia's brain were juxtaposed the strangest assortment of ideas from old time and from new. There was no middle distance in her perspective; romantic recollections of sunny afternoons on an esplanade, with military bands, officers and gallants around, stood like gilded letters upon the dark tablet of surrounding Egdon" (p. 76).

Yet she is perhaps not so much a type as a universal. For Hardy makes it very clear that love to a woman "is her whole existence." But this love-desire nearly always seems to bring with it sorrow and pain. It possibly explains Eustacia's vacillations a little, when Hardy explains that to a limited extent her love is impersonal, or rather, not firmly fixed on a human person. Perhaps love in its most perfect sense is too exquisite to find a haven in so limited a thing as a human being. Yet it is only a human object which can be given that kind of love. It is a perplexing dilemma. And Eustacia, weak that she is, meets her doom in this perplexing dilemma. Here is essentially love's tragedy. Caught between the flaws of her own character, and those of Clym and his mother, and in the meshes of fate, she comes to her ruin. But even after all this has been said, there is a certain grandeur in her character. There is
nothing mean or abject about her. Even in death there is an aura of dignity about her:

"The expression of her firmly carved mouth was pleasant, as if a sense of dignity had just compelled her to leave off speaking. Eternal rigidity had seized upon it in a momentary transition between fervour and resignation ..... The stateliness of look, which had been almost too marked for a dweller in a country domicile, had at last found an artistically happy background" (pp. 382-83).

We may conclude by saying that Eustacia gets caught in a tragic web because life has confused her endowments into a strange mixture of innocence and sophistication.

V

As a tragic protagonist, Clym has a kinship with Giles, Jude and Henchard, for he shows the same self-destroying impulse.

20 Hardy explicitly says that "Eustacia is not a crying animal" (p. 346). Elsewhere he says, vulgarity would be impossible for her: "It would have been as easy for the heath ponies, bats and snakes to be vulgar as for her" (p. 77). Her dignity survives her liaison with Wildeve — and even the indignity of being jilted by him. She can still be imperious in saying, "You may tempt me but I won't give myself to you any more," and thus rekindle his desire.
It is significant that Hardy withholds the description of Clym's character for about one hundred and fifty pages. But this description is intended to be central to the story. After a careful scrutiny of this description, we are faced with one important question: How far is the tragedy of Clym's own making? And the answer: almost all of it.

At the very beginning of this description Hardy writes that Clym is unfortunate in being intellectually advanced beyond the readiness of the rural world to respond to his visions:

"To argue upon the possibility of culture before luxury to the bucolic world may be to argue truly, but it is an attempt to disturb a sequence to which humanity has been long accustomed. Yeobright preaching to the Egdon eremites that they might rise to a serene comprehensiveness without going through the process of enriching themselves, was not unlike arguing to ancient Chaldeans that in ascending from earth to the pure empyrean it was not necessary to pass first into the intervening heaven of ether." (p. 130). 21

21 Commenting on this passage C. C. Malcutt says: "To announce that Clym lives by a high order of idealism and then introduce these considerations in this language would seem to display an ironic attitude towards him, to label the stupid natives 'Egdon eremites' passe the ironic and even broders on the derisive; the notion of preaching 'a serene comprehensiveness' to such yokels is ridiculed in the telling. "Character and Coincidence in The Return" (p. 162).
Hardy then proceeds to explain that Clym's mind is not well-proportioned, that well-proportioned minds do not make heroes and prophets. But he does not say that Clym is the stuff of greatness; here he leaves the reader to look at the facts and judge for himself.

What the facts show is a deep vein of self-destroying impulse, running through Clym. An extraordinary bit of evidence comes to light when we see that although arguments do not prevail with his mother, Clym finds that feelings do — that Mrs Yeobright shares his contempt for mere physical comforts and will, in spite of her ambition to rise through the world of business, intuitively participate in his contempt for the great world: "His theory and his wishes about devoting his future to teaching had made an impression on Mrs Yeobright. He had despaired of reaching her by argument; and it was almost as a discovery to him that he could reach her by a magnetism which was as superior to words as words are to yells.

"Strangely enough he began to feel now that it would not be so hard to persuade her who was his best friend that comparative poverty was essentially the higher course for him, as to reconcile to his feelings the act of persuading her" (p.196).

But after he has persuaded her it seems that Clym wants his mother to disapprove of what he is doing. Could there be a
more expressive demonstration of his rebellious and self-
destroying motives?

His silver cord must vibrate when, finding that he has
given an exhumed urn full of bones to Eustacia, his mother
only comments, "The urn you had meant for me you gave away" (p.198). Her disapproval of Eustacia is so fierce and her
expression of it is so ominous that Clym's growing passion is
almost matched by the emotional force of his neurotic conflict
with his mother. After his evening on the heath with Eustacia's
kisses, mother and son glare at each other over tea. This
doubles his emotional involvement in the wooing.

It might almost be argued that the glowing contest over
Eustacia has allowed Clym to modify the original plan of opening
a simple school for the natives. That is, his destructive
attachment to his mother is satisfied by the new issue, so that
now he can please Eustacia by a much more impressive operation,
which will ultimately put him "at the head of one of the best
schools in the country" (p.200). Thus easily are his ideals
accommodated, while the basic destructive drives are kept strong
and tense. The images of light and dark introduced early in
the book, are fused in a complex of symbolism by Mrs Yeobright's
flashing reply:

"You are blinded Clym", she said wistfully "It was a bad day
for you when you first set eyes on her. And your scheme
is merely a castle in the air built on purpose to justify
this folly which has seized you, and to save your conscience on the irrational situation you are in" (p. 200).

Seldom has reason been so expertly used in the cause of emotion. In the following scene, when Clym becomes engaged to Eustacia, he sets up a second version — like a sub-plot in Lear — of the destructive relation with his mother. Now he will have two women raging, for Eustacia can not remain content on Egdon heath, and Mrs. Yeobright's blazing antipathy for Eustacia is completely without basis in observed fact.

The ensuing quarrel with his mother in which she says words about Eustacia that can never be unsaid guarantees a permanent hostility between her and the girl. This hostility, which is one of the main causes of the tragic action, has grown from deep psychological roots traced by the author.

The harm that this strain of self-destroying impulse does to Eustacia has already been noted: "'Two wasted lives'" — as Hardy himself puts it so succinctly in Eustacia's mouth.

Clym is a masochist through and through. He seems to enjoy inflicting pain on himself, but does not seem to realize that thereby he inflicts pain on his loved ones too. This is most evident after the death of his mother. He views himself in the light of a murderer and presents the picture of utter "wretchedness"
(p. 313); he is terrible in his "self-condemnation" (p. 314).

Eustacia is quick to see through Clym's masochism:
"'You give yourself up too much to this wearying despair', said Eustacia, 'other men's mothers have died' " (p. 314).

In Thomasin he has a better listener for his masochistic outbursts: "'If there is any justice in God let Him kill me now. He has nearly blinded me, but that is not enough. If He would only strike me with more pain I would believe in Him for ever .... I wish I could be punished more heavily than I am" (p. 316).

His tendency to inflict pain on himself goes hand in hand with his tendency to self-pity: "'What's the use of my getting well? It would be better for me if I die and it would certainly be better for Eustacia ...... but unfortunately I am going to live' " (p. 317).

"'I who was going to teach people the higher secrets of happiness, did not know how to keep out of that gross misery which the most untaught are wise enough to avoid' " (p. 318).

When the terrible truth about his mother's death is disclosed, Clym is a changed man; he no longer views himself as a murderer, he believes Eustacia is the murderess. He says: "'May all the murderers get the torment they deserve' " (p. 328).
There is now murder in his eyes and Hardy likens him to Oedipus but points out that though Clym contemplates murder, the imperturbable countenance of the heath is a great deterrent: "The pupils of his eyes, fixed steadfastly on blankness, were vaguely lit with an icy shine, his mouth had passed into the phase more or less imaginatively rendered in studies of Oedipus. The strangest deeds were possible to his situation. Instead of there being before him the pale face of Eustacia, and a masculine shape unknown, there was only the imperturbable countenance of the heath, which having defied the cataclysmal onsets of centuries, reduced to insignificance by its seamed and antique features the wildest turmoil of a single man" (p. 329).

The following encounter between Clym and Eustacia is reminiscent of the encounter between Othello and Desdemona (Act IV, Sc 1): "And while she looked, the carmine flush with which warmth and sound sleep had suffused her cheeks and neck, dissolved from view, and the death-like pallor in his flew across into hers" (p. 330); for Eustacia has held Clym's "happiness in the hollow of (her) hand, and like a devil (she) has dashed it down" (p. 330).

But Clym does not kill his wife for "'that would be making a martyr of you and sending you to where she is; and I would keep you away from her till the universe come to an end, if
I could" (p. 332). No, he will not make a martyr of Eustacia, he will himself be a martyr at the altar of grief and jealousy.

Eustacia’s reading of Clym is apt: "Who of any dignity would take the trouble to clear cobwebs from a wild man’s mind after such language as this? No, let him go on and think his narrow thoughts, and run his head into the mire" (p. 332).

She is right when she says: "I have lost all through you, but I have not complained. Your blunders and misfortunes may have been a sorrow to you but they have been a wrong to me ..... You deceived me — not by words, but by appearances, which are less seen through than words." (p. 335).

The trouble is, though Clym deceives himself, he does not succeed in deceiving his women folk about himself. Though Hardy preferred to see him as the very emanation of the pagan heath,22 and also to see him in the role of a meliorist, as school master to the proletarian Egdon, a Prometheus figure,23 his characteristic note as pointed out by John Paterson,24 is that of Christian self-renunciation.

Mrs Yeobright is quick to see through his disguise of a

22 "He was permeated with its scenes, with its substance and with its odours" (p. 180).
23 "As is usual with bright natures, the deity that lies ignominiously chained within an ephemeral human carcass shone out of him like a ray".
missionary: 'It is right,' she concedes at one point, 'that there should be school masters and missionaries, and all such men ....... ' "(p.185); and Bystacia, not far behind in insight, associates him half-satirically with the Apostle Paul: "...... but the worst of it is that, though Paul was excellent as a man in the Bible, he would hardly have done in real life' "(p.233).

It is significant that Hardy himself interprets Clym as an inverted Christian just as he interprets Wildeve as an inverted Romantic. Clym, according to Hardy, is a "John the Baptist who took an ennoblement rather than repentance for his text" (p.179). In his mission to the unwashed denizens of the heath he is seen "preaching to the Egdon eremites" (p.180). And in defending his mission against the more secular intelligence of his mother, he is moved to invoke the aid of St. Paul himself: "'I get up every morning,' he tells her, 'and see the whole creation groaning and travelling in pain, as St. Paul says, and yet there am I, trafficking in glittering splendours with wealthy women and titled libertines ..... ' "(p.182).

Clym's Christian self-renunciation is contrasted with life-renewing Maypole day and Thomasin's marriage with Venn. Clym is now divorced from the "savage" rites of spring and marriage. This is nowhere more explicit than in the penultimate scene of the novel when Charley describes for the benefit of the hero (significantly still blind) the joyous wedding festivities of which they
have chosen to be the unobserved and pathetic spectators:

"'Do any of them seem to care about my not being there?' Clym asked.

"'No, not a bit in the world. Now they are all holding up their glasses and drinking somebody's health.'"

"'I wonder if it is mine?'".

"'No, 'tis Mr. and Mrs. Venn's, because he is making a hearty sort of speech .......'

"'Well, they haven't concerned themselves about me and it is quite right they should not. It is all as it should be .......'" (p.140).

Self-pity has now turned to self-renunciation, self-destructive impulses (characteristic of a romantic hero) have given way to self-realization and as a tragic protagonist Clym comes close to his salvation.

VI

It would be wrong to say that Mrs. Yeobright is the "villain of the piece". Nevertheless it is true to say that much of the tragedy of her own life, and those of Clym and Eustacia derive from a flaw in her character. As Irving Howe says:....
Without Mrs. Yeobright there would be no astringency and no conflict. 25

Mrs. Yeobright is a striking portrait of a possessive mother, a triumph of psychological portraiture. It is significant that Lawrence's Mrs. Morel is modelled on Mrs. Yeobright.

It is only Mrs. Yeobright who can cope with the passionately destructive Eustacia, she is a force counterposed to both Eustacia and Clym. She is a gritty puritan woman who alternates between passionate outbursts of self-assertion and sudden lapses into country stoicism. At the very outset she is introduced as a "person with weight of character" (p. 40).

She is a grim perceptive woman but in her wilfulness not perceptive enough. She has strong feminine intuition and intuitively knows what is right for her son: "She had a singular insight into life, considering that she had never mixed with it. There are instances of persons who, without clear ideas of the things they criticize, have yet had clear ideas of the relations of those things ....... In the social sphere these gifted ones are mostly women; they can watch a world which they never saw, and estimate forces of which they have only heard. We call it intuition" (pp. 196-97).

25 Irving Howe: *Thomas Hardy*, p. 65.
From the very beginning her actions create "unpleasantness" first for Wildeve, then for Eustacia. She is antagonistic to Eustacia even before she has met her. For example, this is how she introduces Eustacia to Clym: "'A proud girl from Budmouth. One not much to my liking. People say she is a witch...''" (p.172).

She is so possessive that she just can't bear to see Clym bestowing favours on any other woman and when that woman happens to be Eustacia, the clash, tragic in its consequences, is inevitable. Small things, but to Mrs. Yeobright they matter so much. One such instance occurs when Clym gives an exhumed urn full of bones to Eustacia. Comes the cool comment of Mrs. Yeobright: "'The urn you had meant for me you gave away'" (p.198). The tone of this sentence, says the novelist, is "curious" (p.198), so much of unspoken reproach is packed in it.

The self-destructive impulses of Clym have been inherited from his mother; for repeatedly we see Mrs. Yeobright making things hard for herself. It begins with the forbidding of banna, thus inflicting a mortal insult on Wildeve. She adds insult to the injury by carrying Thomasin away by the back door while Wildeve is serving mead to the singing natives in the front room. Again, in attempting to fan the dying embers of Wildeve's passion for Thomasin, she sends him straight back to Eustacia. There is complex irony in the sequence that shows Mrs Yeobright proudly
rejecting Liggyorry Venn's renewed suit for Thomasin's hand, "thinking God for the weapon which the redelman had put into her hands" (p.106), straightway lying to Wildeve in order to provoke his jealousy—and, moreover, turning the subsequent events in a direction, utterly counter to her intentions. As the author says, "By far the greatest effect of her simple strategy on that day was, as often happens, in a quarter quite outside her view when arranging it. In the first place her visit sent Wildeve, the same evening, after dark to Eustacia's house at Mistover" (p.103).

Hedstrong pride and miscalculation achieve for Mrs Yeobright results she does not want. One such example is her distrust of Wildeve and handing over Clym and Thomasin's money to the yokel Christian. The later misunderstanding between Mrs Yeobright and Eustacia hinges on this particular action; for the money is first won by Wildeve and later won by Liggyory, who passes the whole amount to Thomasin, while Mrs Yeobright is informed only of the former.

"The Encounter by the Pool" (bk IV, Ch. 1, pp. 243-251) achieves nothing; it only feeds fat the "ancient grudge" that Mrs Yeobright bears Eustacia. It shows Mrs Yeobright's ungovernable temper and animus. She makes the trouble, prevents the accident from being explained away, is determined to quarrel with all her young kinfolk and does. The guineas are only a pretext for

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26 C.C. Salcutt says: "In this interview (bk IV, Ch.1), a boiling masterpiece of charges and countercharges, the two women pour out their accumulated grievances".

searching out Eustacia but towards the end of that chapter there is a certain pathetic grandeur about her prophecy:

"'I have fallen on an evil time; God has been unjust to me in letting you insult me! Probably my son's happiness does not lie on this side of the grave, for he is a foolish man who neglects the advice of his parent. You, Eustacia, stand on the edge of a precipice without knowing it'" (p. 251).

Mrs. Yeobright's disapproval of Eustacia is so fierce and her expression of it so ominous that there does not seem to be any hope of reconciliation between the two. It is, therefore, much to the credit of Mrs. Yeobright that she takes the first step towards reconciliation. Though late, wisdom has dawned on her and with it the hope of reconciliation. As she says to Diggory: "'The marriage is unalterable, my life may be cut short, and I should wish to die in peace. He is my only son, and since sons are made of such stuff, I am not sorry I have no other .... I forgive him now'" (pp. 279-80).

But, by a tragic irony, even when the long journey across the heath in the blazing September sun brings her to the door of her son, it remains closed and she sees a "woman's face looking at her through a window pane". She puts the blame entirely on Eustacia for not letting her in (though the facts of the case would show that Eustacia was under the impression that Clym had woken up and opened the door to his mother) and dies
broken hearted thinking that she had been cast off by her only son.

Her influence on Clym and Eustacia does not come to an end with her death, it rather helps to make the relation between Clym and Eustacia more complicated. We may say that the seeds of dissension that she has sown between Clym and Eustacia take root and sprout after her death, spelling tragedy both for Eustacia and Clym.

About Mrs Yeobright it could be said (inverting what Arthur Mizener says about Arabella27) : "She is the mighty opposite of tragedy, not the parody villainess of melodrama."

VII

Damon Wildeve, on the other hand, is not made of the stuff of greatness. But even he is not odious enough to be termed a villain.

He keeps "the quiet woman" but the peasant chorus observes that he is made for "better things" (p.28).

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27 Arthur Mizener : "Jude the Obscure as a Tragedy", Southern Review, Summer, VI, Reprinted in Modern British Fiction ed. by Mark Schorer, p.60.
"An engineer that's what the man was, as we know; but he threw away his chance, and so 'a took a public house to live. His learning was of no use to him at all" (p. 29).

Hardy presents Damon Wildeve as the type of the decrepit and disreputable romantic, and as a perfect foil to Eustacia. He is frequently seen and satirized as "the Rousseau of Egdon".

"To be yearning for the difficult, to be weary of that offered, to care for the remote, to dislike the near; it was Wildeve's nature always. This is the true mark of the man of sentiment. Though Wildeve's fevered feeling had not been elaborated to real poetical compass, it was of the standard sort. He might have been called the Rousseau of Egdon." (p. 223).

Hardy's description of Wildeve brings out the romantic traits - traits with potentiality for evil:

"The grace of his movement was singular: it was the pantomimic expression of a lady - killing career ..... Altogether he was one in whom no man would have seen anything to admire, and in whom no woman would have seen anything to dislike." (p. 50).

He is a "man unlucky enough to be cursed with sensitiveness...." (p. 52). Wildeve is "passion's slave": ..... "'the curse of inflammability is upon me ..... I that brought me down from engineering to innkeeping: what lower stage it has in store for
me I have yet to learn" (pp. 70-71).

Even to Eustacia who hankers for "the abstraction called passionate love, Wildeve sometimes appears to be not worth the bother: " 'Do I embrace a cloud of common fog after all? You are a chameleon....' " (p. 73). Nevertheless there is much in common between Eustacia and Wildeve: both are passionately romantic and they both hate the heath.

Like a true romantic he ever hankers for the unattainable: "The old longing for Eustacia had reappeared in his soul: and it was mainly because he had discovered that it was another man's intention to possess her." (p. 223).

He may have his faults but he gets a bad deal both from Eustacia and Mrs Yeobright. Eustacia's rejection leads him to a hasty marriage with Thomasin with its tragic consequences for, after her marriage and consequent shattering of her dreams, Wildeve comes into Eustacia's life once again.

Even the loss of money (the money that he had won from Christian) is not enough to extinguish the flame of passion that Eustacia has rekindled in him: "Wildeve forgot the loss of money at the sight of his lost love, whose preciousness in his eyes was increasing in geometrical progression with each new incident that reminded him of their hopeless division" (p. 242).
That dance with Eustacia on the village green is a turning point in Wildeve's career: "Obstacles were a ripening sun to his love, and he was at this moment in a delirium of exquisite misery. To clasp as his for five minutes what was another man's through all the rest of the year was a kind of thing he of all men could appreciate. He had long since begun to sigh again for Eustacia; indeed, it may be asserted that signing the marriage register with Thomasin was the natural signal to his heart to return to its first quarters, and that the extra complication of Eustacia's marriage was the one addition required to make that return compulsory" (p. 289).

Wildeve envies Clym for getting what he has always hankered for and also the sweet sleep "which is the result of physical labour carried on in circumstances that make no nervous fear" (p. 290).

"'God how I envy him that sweet sleep!' said Wildeve.
'I have not slept like that since I was a boy—years and years ago'" (p. 290).28

It is much to the credit of Wildeve that when he comes into fortune he does not show off though it increases his worth in

28 John Paterson says: "... Wildeve beholding innocence, and wounded by a remorse for which there is no cure, evokes the pathos of Satan at the gates of Eden." "The Return as Anti-Christian Document" (p. 115).
Eustacia's eyes. 29 Hardy explains thus:

"Wildeve's silence that day on what happened to him was just the kind of behaviour calculated to make an impression on such a woman. These delicate touches of good taste were, in fact, one of the strong points in his demeanour towards the other sex. The peculiarity of Wildeve was that, while at one time passionate, upbraiding and resentful towards a woman, at another he would treat her with such unparalleled grace as to make previous neglect appear as no discourtesy, injury as no insult, interference as a delicate attention, and the ruin of her honour as excess of chivalry." (p. 306).

This is evident in the speech that he makes to Eustacia — a master-stroke of a lady-killing career:

"The sight of a man lying wearied out with hard work as your husband lay, made me feel that to brag of my own fortune to you would be greatly out of place. Yet, as you stood there beside him, I could not help feeling too that in many respects he was a richer man than I." (p. 307).

After the death of Mrs Yeobright, the truth of the "closed door" still withheld, Wildeve's heart goes out in pity for Eustacia who has sunk deep into the mire of her own making, though

29 "Though she was no lover of money she loved what money could bring; and the new accessories she imagined around him clothed Wildeve with a great deal of interest" (p. 306).
Wildeve rightly takes on part of the blame himself. He resolves to save Eustacia from the vicious web in which she has got herself entangled. After the terrible truth has been told and Eustacia has left Clym for her grandfather's house, a fire is lighted again (without her knowledge), which calls up Wildeve and in his determination to save Eustacia from her desperate predicament, Wildeve agrees to her plan to take her to Audmouth in his carriage. Accordingly, a signal is given by Eustacia on the night of the sixth November, there is rain and darkness and the uncongenial heath, Eustacia falls into the pool of the Shadwater weir and Wildeve loses his life in a brave attempt to save her life.

Thus by the end of the novel Wildeve appears in a far better light. This is evident in the picture after his death:

".....the same luminous youthfulness overspread it, and the least sympathetic observer would have felt at sight of him now that he was born for a higher destiny than this" (p.363).

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30 "..... There flashed upon her imagination some other form which that fire might call up" (p.344).
In contrast to Eustacia and Wildeve, Diggory Venn and Thomasin Yeobright are very much at home in the heath: they strike us as perfect creatures of the soil, natural and unsophisticated. They play their part, however small, in the unfolding of the tragedy that overtakes Eustacia and Clym. What strikes us most about these two characters is their goodness of heart. This is Hardy's comment on the character of Diggory Venn:

"...after looking at him one would have hazarded the guess that good nature, and an acuteness as extreme as it could be without verging on craft, formed the framework of his character" (p. 87).

Though rejected by Thomasin with whom he has always been passionately in love, he deems it his duty to protect Thomasin's interests. This unaggressive masculinity reminds us of Gabriel Oak and takes us forward to Giles Winterborne. 31 Since Thomasin's

31 Cf. Major Dobbin in *Vanity Fair*. 
hope is apparently centred on Wildeve. "Venn determined to aid her to be happy in her own chosen way" (p. 183). Accordingly, he is aroused to strategy in a moment. He first eavesdrops at almost a lovers' quarrel between Eustacia and Wildeve, and his next step is to persuade Eustacia to give up Wildeve so that he may be free to marry Thomasin.

Eustacia, however, instantly rejects Venn's suggestion to go to Budmouth with an employment that would demean her. With this rejection — carefully placed before the return of the native — she has freely chosen to stay in the lonely country that she detests. 32

After this move has failed, Diggory next renew his suit for Thomasin's hand but here again rejection stares him in the face for Mrs. Yeobright proudly believes that "she (Thomasin) ought to be Wildeve's wife, if she means to appear before the world without a slur upon her name" (p. 105).

But he takes this rejection in his stride and continues to remain on the heath and posts himself every night by Rainbarrow to assist at any meeting between Eustacia and Wildeve. Now that Eustacia's love for Wildeve has cooled off, she writes a letter

32 In Hardy there is always this struggle between Free Will and Predestination but the majority of the Hardy critics have failed to notice that more often than not Free Will emerges victorious. In this particular example Eustacia decides to stay on on the heath of her own sweet will.
of rejection, and Venn is ready to take both the letter
and the parcel of presents he is to return for her. Eustacia
is surprised to see Venn ever anxious to help on Thomasin's
marriage with someone else, knowing well how deeply he loves
her. The reply that Venn gives speaks volumes of his generous
heart; his innate goodness, his unselfishness: "I would
sooner have married her myself", he said in a low voice.
"But what I feel is that she cannot be happy without him.
I will do my duty in helping her to get him, as a man ought" (p. 159).

Hardy comments: "Eustacia looked anxiously at the singular
man who spoke thus. What a strange sort of love, to be entirely
free from that quality of selfishness which is frequently the
chief constituent of the passion and sometimes its only one!" (p. 160).

Though Wildeve's reaction to Venn is slightly different —
he thinks Diggory is in league with the Devil33 — he also sees
the oddness in the fact that the reddleman "should so run counter
to his own interest as to bring this (Eustacia's letter and the
parcel of presents) to him" (p. 161).

33 He appears and disappears throughout the novel, as Wildeve
for one has good reason to know, with an uncanny rapidity
that suggests the possession of magical powers: "On
(wildeve's) reaching the top a shape grew up from the earth
immediately behind him" (p. 160).
On hearing from Wildeve that Thomasin has accepted him, he makes a last attempt to win Thomasin, but here Wildeve defeats his purpose; he has gone and claimed and got Thomasin before the reedleman could reach her.

But Venn is not one to smart with rancour—to keep ill-will festering like a wound. "Since Wildeve's resumption of his right to Thomasin, Venn with the thoroughness which was part of his character, had determined to see the end of the episode" (p. 171).

Thomasin is married to Wildeve, as Venn himself puts it: "....... her history as Tamsin Yeobright is over" (p. 172). His mission to see Thomasin secured to Wildeve ended, "he vanished entirely" (p. 173).

But he has a knack of turning up at the right moment mainly to thwart the devil that is in Wildeve. One such episode occurs just after Wildeve has won all the money that the yokel Christian was carrying to Clym and Thomasin. The reedleman approaches Wildeve, "without a word being spoken he deliberately sat himself down where Christian had been seated, thrust his hand into his pocket, drew out a sovereign and laid it on the stone" (p. 236).

Gambling by the lantern light and later by the glow of the
glow-worms, these two men are a study in contrast: "Wildeve was a nervous and excitable man; .....he writhed, fumed, shifted his seat; and the beating of his heart was almost audible. Venn sat with his lips impassively closed and eyes reduced to a pair of unimportant twinkles; he scarcely appeared to breathe. He might have been an Arab or an automaton; he would have been like a red sand-stone statue but for the motion of his arm with a dice-box" (p. 237).

Venn wins back all the money but in his enthusiasm hands over the entire sum to Thomasin and thus, without being aware of it, sows further seeds of dissension between Eustacia and Mrs Yeobright and adds to the tragedy of their lives. As Hardy puts it: "Thus Venn, in his anxiety to rectify matters, had placed in Thomasin's hands not only the fifty guineas which rightly belonged to her but also the fifty intended for cousin Clym ..... it was an error which afterwards helped to cause more misfortune than treble the loss in money value could have done" (p. 243).

Venn's self-appointed task of protecting Thomasin's interests is not done yet. Now that Wildeve has moved into Eustacia's life again, Venn must needs keep a close watch over his movements and hatches "a secret plan to keep him (Wildeve) .....
home at my (Thomasin's) will in the evenings" (p.273).

Venn uses craft to circumvent Wildeve's errant tastes, and when he sees Wildeve outside Clym's house, he is prepared to go to any lengths "short of absolutely shooting him, to terrify the young innkeeper out of his recalcitrant impulses" (p.277).

But the meddler is only partly successful in keeping Wildeve from visiting Eustacia, for Wildeve decides to visit Eustacia by day; "Since it is unsafe to go in the evenings' he said, 'I'll go by day' "(p.279).

Venn's next move is to approach Mrs Yeobright and persuade her to visit her son. And it is from the journey that she makes across the heath to pay her visit, and the journey back after having seen a woman's face through a window pane and a closed door that part of the tragedy of these three lives — Clym, Eustacia and Mrs. Yeobright — derives.

After the death of Mrs Yeobright, it is Venn who informs Clym that his mother had forgiven him and, that she had made the journey across the heath with the sole purpose of making up (p.324). This bit of information sends Clym to the little boy, Johnny Nunsuch, who had accompanied Mrs Yeobright some distance on her return journey and "a lurid light breaks upon Clym's darkened understanding" (p.319). Thus without being aware
of it Digory Venn, the roddleman plays quite an important role in the movement of the action of the tragedy.

After the death of Bystacia and Wildeve, he is rehabilitated by marrying Thomasin, the pagan garb is off and he appears in the role of an ordinary Christian; the roddleman has now become a farmer.

IX

Hardy has used the rustics — Grandfer Cantle and company — in the manner of the chorus of the Greek tragedies. They witness the action of the protagonists and make comments. We first make their acquaintance as they whirl round the bonfire they have lighted. Their first comment is about the marriage of Thomasin and Wildeve (p. 25), and their decision to go and wish them joy. It is through them that we get to know that once Mrs. Yeobright had forbidden the banns and one of the speakers, Humphrey, comments on the oddity of the situation: "'After keeping up such a mummy-watch and forbidding the banns 'twould have made Miss'ess Yeobright seem foolish-like to have a hanging wedding in the same parish all as if she'd never gainsaid
Susan Nunsuch then voices her doubts about Wildeve:

"'Well, I can't understand a quiet lady-like little body like Tamsin Yeobright caring to be married in such a mean way. 'Tis worse than the poorest do. And I shouldn't have cared about the man, though some say he is good-looking' " (p. 29).

We next see Wildeve through their eyes: "To give him his due he is a clever learned fellow in his way — almost as clever as Clym Yeobright used to be. He was brought up to better things than keeping the Quiet Woman. An engineer, that's what the man was, as we know; but threw away his chance and so 't a took a public house to live. His learning was no use to him at all" (p. 29).

As they speak of Wildeve and Thomasin, we have premonition that this marriage can not last long. They throw out scraps of information on almost all the principal characters of the novel. Their insight into these characters is at once shrewd and humorous.

The scrap of information that they throw on Eustacia makes the reader anxious to know more about her: "'She is very strange in her ways, living up there by herself, and such things please her ..... she's a well-favoured maid enough, especially

35 * 'Wildeve is older than Tamsin Yeobright by a few good summers. A pretty maid too she is, A young woman with a home must be a fool to tear her smock for a man like that.' " (p. 30).
when she's got one of her dandy gowns on.' " (p.36).

Of these rustics, Christian Cantle, Grandfather Cantle's youngest son, has a hand in the movement of the tragic action. His presentation is steeped in Shakespearean humour. He is a carry-over from Joseph Poorygrass of Far from the Madding Crowd. Whereas Joseph was essentially shy and would blush scarlet in the presence of women, Christian is a coward. He is bathed in typical Hardyque humour: "...... a faltering man, with reedy hair no shoulders, and a great quantity of wrist and ankle" (p.31). He "is the man no woman will marry" for he was born when "there was no moon". And as Timothy Fairway says: "......" 'No moon, no man'. 'Tis one of the truest sayings ever spit out. The boy never comes to anything that's born at new moon. A bad job for thee Christian, that you should have showed your nose than of all days in the month!' " (p.33).

Christian's language has kinship with Mrs Malaprop's. This is how in his own words he is rejected by his latest love:
" 'Get out of my sight, you slack twisted, slim-looking maphrotight fool!' " (p.32).

He is a born coward and the redlagsman gives him the creeps:
" 'If he had a handkerchief over his head he'd look for all the world like the Devil in the picture of the Temptation.' " (p.39).
He admits that he is "'a man of the most fullest make'" (p. 40) ..... "'Oftentimes if you could see how terrible down I get in my mind, 'twould make 'ee quite nervous for fear I should die by my hand' " (p. 40).

And it is to this coward yokel that Mrs Yeobright entrusts the guineas that she would not trust Wildeve with. He is not only a coward but a fool, as well, and at the raffle at the Quiet Woman, where Christian has been drawn, it does not take Wildeve long to realize that he is carrying the money that Mrs Yeobright would not trust him with.

"It was money for his wife that Mrs. Yeobright could not trust him with. 'Yet she could trust this fellow,' he said to himself. 'Why doesn't that which belong to the wife belong to the husband too?' " (p. 230).

As they proceed together towards Mistover, Wildeve, by telling stories of men born to good luck induces Christian to gamble with the money that he is carrying and soon the boy has lost all.

"It was nearly eleven o'clock, when, with almost a shriek, Christian placed Yeobright's last gleaming guinea upon the stone. In thirty seconds it had gone the way of its companions." (p. 235).
It would be wrong to put the blame on Wildeve for divesting Christian of the money that he is carrying. As C.C. Walcutt has pointed out, the blame lies entirely at Mrs Yeobright's door:

"Mrs Yeobright first offends Wildeve by not entrusting Thomasin's inheritance of guineas to him and then makes the error of choosing a dolt like Christian Castle to deliver them. Thus she has incited Wildeve and played into his hand. Why should he not take revenge by winning the money from Christian?" 36

To some extent the conversation between the rustics, Sam and Humphrey and Eustacia's grandfather about Clym Yeobright (pp. 114-15-16) makes Eustacia "half in love with" a vision. As Hardy puts it:

"The subject of their discourse had been keenly interesting to her. A young and clever man was coming into that lonely heath, from of all contrasting places in the world, Paris. It was like a man coming from heaven. More singular still, the heathmen had instinctively coupled her and this man together in their minds as a pair born for each other.

"That five minutes of overhearing furnished Eustacia with visions enough to fill the whole blank afternoon ..... The words of Sam and Humphrey on the harmony between the unknown and herself had on her mind the effect of the invading Bard's Prelude in the Castle of Indolence at which myriads of imprisoned shapes arose where had previously appeared the stillness of a void." (pp. 116-17).

Later it is to Fairway and Humphrey that Clym speaks in earnest about his projected mission at Egdon: "..... my business (in Paris) was the idlest, vainest, most effeminate business that ever a man could be put to. That decided me: I would give it up and try to follow some rational occupation among the people I knew best and to whom I could be of some use. I have come home and this is how I mean to carry out my plan. I shall keep a school as near as Egdon as possible, so as to be able to work over here and have a night-school in my mother's house" (p. 178).

But the heathmen are not convinced: "'He'll never carry it out in the world,' said Fairway. 'In a few weeks he'll learn to see things otherwise'" (p. 178).

These rustics seem to have had a shrewd insight into human nature and Sam's summing up of Eustacia's character is fairly apt:

"'I would rather say her thoughts were far away from here, with lords and ladies she'll never know and mansions she'll see again'" (p. 185).

These cheerful rustics gather again, for the last time in the novel, in preparation for the marriage of Thomasin and Diggory. As they prepare a bed for the couple they say: "'Not that this couple be in want of one, but it was well to show them
a bit of friendliness at this great racketing vagary of their lives." *(p.403).

Christian is clumsy as usual, a fact which causes his father Grandfer Cantle much sorrow, but all in a humorous vein: "I never saw such a clumsy chap as you, Christian," said Grandfer Cantle severely. 'You might have been the son of a man that's never been outside Blooms-End in his life for all the wit you have. Really all the soldiering and smartness in the world in the father seems to count for nothing in forming the nater of the son. As far as that chiel Christian is concerned I might as well have stayed at home and seed nothing, like all the most of ye here.' *(p.404)

Thomasin and Diggory are married and Grandfer Cantle says "......how quick marrying can be done when you are in the mind for it." *(p.406)

This is the last piece of philosophy that emerges from these denizens of Egdon Heath, these rustics about whom Albert Guerard writes: "The true Hardy rustic is of personality all compact : of gestures, turns of phrase, humors and deformity. He has a past history, which he delights to relate, but no present history and conflict. For he is immune to suffering and change : he is part of the landscape and his stability is a fixed screen for the rebellious and changeful protagonists."37

Much has been made of the coincidences in *The Return* and Hardy has been taken to task for piling accident on accident to thicken the plot. But as has already been shown, the so-called coincidences really emanate from human failings.

Coincidences in this tragic novel are not the result of pitiless meddling of cruel Fate in human affairs, but the quite probable outcome of human pride (embodied chiefly in Mrs. Yeobright) mixed with folly and ignorance, attempting after the most superficial analysis to control a complicated pattern of people, situations and motives. 36

In part II of this novel what seems, in the accumulation, like coincidence appears in the detail to be something else — personal frustration or the reversal of expectations. The movements of Hardy's character among circumstance, ignorance, folly, weave a tragic pattern to which pity and terror, rather than blind

36 "It is not an indifferent or incompetent God who is responsible but human qualities that are almost as old as Egdon Heath".

C. C. Walcutt: "Character and Coincidence in *The Return* (p. 159)."
indignation against fatal coincidence are the proper aesthetic reactions.

Pity is due to the recognition of the fact that something fine has been broken or bruised. Terror, on the other hand, is due to the recognition of the fact that man is caught up in a vast scheme of things beyond his comprehension and control. We may say that we have elements of pity and terror due to the interaction of Character and Destiny. *The Return* has these elements of pity and terror. Our pity goes to Eustacia rather than to Clym. The picture of Eustacia, after Clym takes to furze-cutting following his loss of sight and his attempt at cheerfulness, is a picture of a fine specimen of woman, bruised and broken. Eustacia herself realizes this when she says: "'I deserve pity as much as you......... Even had you felt careless about your own affliction, you might have refrained from singing out of sheer pity for mine. God! If I were a man in such a position I would curse rather than sing.' (p.261)

While Clym wallows in self-pity, Eustacia, even when all her dreams have been cruelly shattered by Clym's obstinacy and a few strokes of fate, can rebel in high Promethean fashion. But after Mrs Yeobright's death, she presents the picture of utter

wretchedness. She thinks she is responsible for the death and conceals the truth from Clym and 'lets concealment feed on her like a worm in the bud' (p. 318).

Finally, after learning the truth from Johnny Nunsuch, Clym cruelly charges Eustacia with the murder of his mother and breaks down all her defences. Eustacia who prided herself on the fact that she was not a 'crying animal,' breaks down at last: "'I have held out long — but you crush me down. I beg for mercy — I cannot bear this any longer — it is inhuman to go further with this! If I had — killed your — mother with my own hand — I should not deserve such a scourging to the bone as this.... You have beaten me in this game — I beg you to stay your hand in pity!" (p. 335).

Eustacia looks completely broken and arouses our emotion of pity on the stormy, rain-laden night when she goes out to keep her rendezvous with Wildeve, who has promised to take her away to Budmouth. As Hardy points out, she is in a pitiable condition indeed: "Never was harmony more perfect than that between the chaos of her mind and the chaos of the world without" (p. 359).

But still she has the last vestige of dignity left and our heart goes

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40 "It was a night which led the traveller's thoughts instinctively to dwell on nocturnal scenes of disaster in the chronicles of the world, on all that is terrible and dark in history and legend—the last plague of Egypt, the destruction of Sennacherib's host, the agony in Gethsemane." (p. 359).
out in admiration for her, "Even to efface herself from the country means were required. To ask Wildeve for pecuniary aid without allowing him to accompany her was impossible to a woman with a shadow of pride left in her; to fly as his mistress — and she knew that he loved her — was of the nature of humiliation." (p. 360)

The passage that follows has elements of both pity and terror. We have a feeling that not only is Eustacia completely broken but she is caught in a vast scheme of things — that she has been injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond (her) control" (p. 361): "Any one who had stood by now would have pitted her, not so much on account of her exposure to weather, and isolation from all of humanity except the moulderd remains inside the tumulus; ...... The wings of her soul were broken by the cruel obstructiveness of all about her; and even had she seen herself in a promising way of getting to Budmouth, entering a steamer, and sailing to some opposite port, she would have been but little more buoyant, so fearfully malignant were other things." (p. 360)\(^41\)

One such malignant thing is the burning of Eustacia's wax effigy by Susan Nunsuch: "To counteract the malign spell which

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\(^41\) Hardy does not specifically mention what these "other things" are, but as in Tess so in The Return he puts the blame — rather wrongly, I suppose — on the "President of the Immortals". Cf. Melville: *Moby Dick*, where Ahab identifies the whale with "all his bodily woes, ...... all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations ...... an incarnation of malicious agencies......".

*Melville: Moby Dick, Eurasia Publishing House, New Delhi, p. 133.*
she imagined poor Eustacia to be working, the boy's mother busied herself with a ghastly invention of superstition, calculated to bring powerlessness, atrophy, and annihilation on any human being against whom it was directed.  (p. 361)

Thus Eustacia's condition arouses both the elements of pity and terror, pity, because being entangled in the web of her own weaknesses, she is finally broken; terror, because she arouses the feeling that she is caught in a web that fate has woven around her. With every stroke of chance in The Return we are face to face with this web of fate.

XI

The Return of the Native appears to be more Shakespearean than Sophoclean in its tragic tone. But for the rustic chorus and the elements of pity and terror, it has few other elements of the Greek tragedy. Both Eustacia and Clym's tragedy hinge on fatal flaws in their characters. Eustacia's over-romantic disposition, her pride, her ambition match Clym's stoic simplicity, high ideals and his masochism. Above all there are the self-destroying impulses of both Clym and Eustacia.42

An earlier Hardy critic, Lascelles Abercrombie, calls the tragedy of *The Return* "the fundamental tragedy of the human state—the inevitable answer to personality's self-assertion against the impersonal power of the world."\(^{43}\)

I would only modify this statement a little and say that it is true that in *The Return*, Hardy has delineated the fundamental tragedy of the human state but the tragedy is not only a confrontation between "personality's self-assertion" and "impersonal power"—it is the result of flaws in character and the forces of fate, the latter being less obtrusive than they are in *Far from the Madding Crowd*.

As M.A. Goldberg\(^ {44}\) has pointed out: "Indeed, if Heaven and God appear at all in *The Return*, they are not forces emanating from or controlling the natural universe; they are rather within the aspirations and ideals of character. To see Fate or God or Destiny as the dominant force in Eustacia Vye's life, except as a natural causal factor, is to deny ontological reality, the operation of permanent, mechanical natural laws within Hardy's Scene; and to insist that the operation of those natural laws are the primal cause for Eustacia's downfall is to deny the ethical.

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the operation of human aspiration and of human responsibilities within that scene."

Coming late into the tragic arena, Hardy has penetrated further into the subconscious than Shakespeare, for example, generally had to do. Hamlet moves on a great stage. The Yeobrights move, really, among their psychological complexities, which Hardy fully accepts as inseparable from the nature and plight of man. Revealing so many destructive flaws among the nobilities of his characters, he makes their contest against terror and mischance seem more inevitably doomed to failure than those, say, of Othello or Macbeth.