Chapter - Three

Existentialism in Far From The Madding Crowd and The Return of the Native

Hardy’s *Far From the Madding Crowd* is an example of his existential vision which we have in the portraiture of Gabriel Oak and Bathsheba. We see the lamb, revived by the warmth, began to bleat, and the sound entered Gabriel's ears and brain with an instant meaning, as expected sounds will. Passing from the profoundest sleep to the most alert wakefulness with the same ease that had accompanied the reverse operation, he looked at his watch, found that the hour-hand had shifted again, put on his hat, took the lamb in his arms, and carried it into the darkness. After placing the little creature with
its mother, he stood and carefully examined the sky, to ascertain the time of night from the altitudes of the stars.

The Dog-star and Aldebaran, pointing to the restless Pleiades, were half-way up the Southern sky, and between them hung Orion, which gorgeous constellation never burnt more vividly than now, as it soared forth above the rim of the landscape. Castor and Pollux with their quiet shine were almost on the meridian: the barren and gloomy Square of Pegasus was creeping round to the north-west; for a way through the plantation Vega sparkled like a lamp suspended amid the leafless trees, and Cassiopeia’s chair stood daintily poised on the uppermost boughs.

*One O’clock,’ said Gabriel.*

Being a man not without a frequent consciousness that there was some charm in this life he led, he stood still after looking at the sky as a useful instrument, and regarded it in an appreciative spirit, as a work of art superlatively beautiful. For a moment he seemed impressed with the speaking loneliness of the scene, or rather with the complete abstraction from all its compass of the sights and sounds of man. Human shapes, interferences, troubles, and joys were all as it they were not, and there seemed to be on the shaded hemisphere of the globe no sentient being save himself; he could fancy them all gone round to the sunny side.

Occulted thus, with eyes stretched afar, Oak gradually perceived that what he had previously taken to be a star low down behind the outskirts of
the plantation was in reality no such thing. It was an artificial light, almost close at hand. To find themselves utterly alone at night where company is desirable and expected makes some people fearful; but a case more trying by far to the nerves is to discover some mysterious companionship when intuition, sensation, memory, analogy, testimony, probability, induction—every kind of evidence in the logician’s list—have united to persuade consciousness that it is quite in isolation.

Farmer Oak went towards the plantation and pushed through its lower boughs to the windy side. A dim mass under the slope reminded him that a shed occupied a place here, the site being a cutting into the slope of the hill, so that at its back part the roof was almost level with the ground. In front it was formed of boards nailed to posts and covered with tar as a preservative. Through services in the roof and side spread streaks and dots of light, a combination of which made the radiance that had attracted him. Oak stepped up behind, where, leaning down upon the roof and putting his eye close to a hole, he could see into the interior clearly.

The place contained two women and two cows. By the side of the latter a steaming baron-mash stood in a bucket. One of the women was past middle age. Her companion was apparently young and graceful; he could from no decided opinion upon her looks, her position being almost beneath his eye, so that he saw her in a bird’s-eye view, as Milton’s Satan first saw paradise. She
wore no bonnet or hat, but had enveloped herself in a large cloak, which was carelessly flung over her head as a covering.

“There, now we’ll go home,’ said the elder of the two, resting her knuckles upon her hips, and looking at their goings-on as a whole. I do hope Daisy will fetch round again now. I have never been more frightened in my life, but I don’t mind breaking my rest if she recovers.’

The young woman, whose eyelids were apparently inclined to fall together on the smallest provocation of silence, yawned without practicing her lips to any inconvenient extent, whereupon Gabriel caught the infection and slightly yawned in sympathy.

‘I wish we were rich enough to pay a man to do these things,’ she said, ‘As we are not, we must do them ourselves,’ said the other, ‘for you must help me if you stay.’

‘Well, my hat is gone, however,’ continued the younger. ‘It went over the hedge, I think. The idea of such a slight wind catching it.’

The cow standing erect was of the Devon breed, and was encased in a tight warm hide of rich Indian red, as absolutely uniform from eyes to tail as if the animal had been dipped in a dye of that colour, her long back being mathematically level. The other was spotted, gray and white. Beside her Oak now noticed a little calf about a day old, looking idiotically at the two women, which showed that it had not long been accustomed to the phenomenon of eyesight, and often turning to the lantern, which it apparently mistook for the
moon, inherited instinct having as yet had little time for correction by
experience. Between the sheep and the cows, Ducina had been busy on
Noncombat Hill lately.

‘I think we had better send for some oatmeal,’ said the elder
woman; ‘there’s no more bran.’

‘Yes, aunt; and I’ll ride over for it as soon as it is light.’

‘But there’s no side-saddle.’

Oak, upon hearing these remarks, became more curious to observe
her features, but this prospect being denied him by the hooding effect of the
cloak, and by his aerial position, he felt himself drawing upon his fancy for their
details. In making even horizontal and clear inspections we colour and mould
according to the wants within us whatever our eyes bring in Had Gabriel been
able from the first to get a distinct view of her countenance, his estimate of it as
very handsome or slightly so would have been as his souls required a divinity at
the moment or was ready supplied with one. Having for some time known the
want of a satisfactory form to fill an increasing void within him, his position
moreover affording the widest scope for his fancy, he painted her a beauty.

By one of those whimsical coincidences in which Nature, like a
busy mother, seems to spare a moment from her unremitting labours to turn and
make her children smile, the girl now dropped the cloak, and forth tumbled
ropes of black hair over a red jacket. Oak knew her instantly as the heroine of
the yellow wagon, myrtles, and looking-glass: prosily, as the woman who owed him two pence.

They placed the calf beside its mother again, took up the lantern, and went out, the light sinking down the hill till it was no more than a nebula. Gabriel Oak returned to his flock.

The sluggish day began to break. Even its position terrestrially is one of the elements of a new interest, and for no particular reason save that the incident of the night had occurred there, Oak went again into the plantation. Lingering and musing here, he heard the steps of a horse at the foot of the hill, and soon there appeared in view an auburn pony with a girl on its back, ascending by the path leading past the cattle-shed. She was the young woman of the night before. Gabriel instantly thought of hat she had mentioned as having lost in the wind; possibly she had come to look for it. He hastily scanned the ditch, and after wailing about ten yards along it, found the hat among the leaves. Gabriel took it in his hand and returned to his hut. Here he ensconced himself, and peeped through the loophole in the direction of the rider’s approach.

It was in the chapters of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, as they appeared month by month in a popular magazine that he first ventured to adopt the word “Wessex” from the pages of early English history, and give it a fictions significance as the existing name of the district once included in that extinct kingdom. The series of novels I projected being mainly of the kind called local, they seemed to require a territorial definition of some sort to lend
unity to their scene. Finding that the area of a single county did not afford a canvas large enough for this purpose, and that there were objections to an invented name, I disinterred the old one.

Since then the appellation which I had thought to reserve to the horizons and landscapes of a partly real, dream-country, has becomes more and more popular as a practical provincial definition; and the dream country has, by degrees, solidified into a utilitarian region which people can go to, take a house in, and write to the papers from. But I ask all good and idealistic readers to forget this, and to refuse steadfastly to believe that there are any inhabitants of a Victorian Wessex outside these volumes in which their lives and conversations are detailed.

Moreover, the village called Weatherbury, wherein the scenes of the present story of the series are for the most part laid, would perhaps be hardly discernible by the explorer, without help, in any existing place nowadays. The church remains, by great good fortune, unrestored and intact, and a few of the old house; but the ancient malt-house, which was formerly so characteristic of the parish, has been pulled down these twenty years; also most of the thatched and dormered cottages that were once life holds. The heroine’s find old Jacobean house would be found in the story to have taken a witch’s ride of a mile or more from its actual position; though with that difference its features are described as they still show themselves to the sun and moon-light. The game of prisoner’s-base, which not so long ago seemed to enjoy a perennial vitality in
front of the worn-out stocks, may, so far as I can say, be entirely unknown to the rising generation of schoolboys there. The practice of divination by Bible and key, the regarding of valentines as things of serious import, the shearing-supper, the long smock-frocks, and the harvest-home, have, too, nearly disappeared in the wake of the old house; and with them has gone, it is said, much of that love of fuddling to which the village at one time was notoriously prone. The change at the root of this has been the recent supplanting of the class of stationary cottagers, who carried on the local traditions and humours, by a population of more or less migratory labourers, 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.

*Far From the Madding Crowd* begins a new chapter in the career of Hardy. His philosophy, his art of characterization and his delineation of the rustic life of Wessex, all impart a unique place to the Novel.

“In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Hardy has come almost to his full stature. The sphere of experiment has been left behind; not only does he know what he wishes to do, he has the technique at command with which to do it. The humour of the Wessex rustic is probably at its best in these pages. The descriptions, the opening chapter, the sheep-shearing, Gabriel Oak thatching the ricks before the storm are worthy to stand beside any that Hardy was to write.
Bathsheba is that very characteristic compound. The character of Gabriel Oak, on the other hand is an achievement. The strong, simple and lovable shepherded is one of the most memorable figures in the Wessex novels. The happy ending is a concession, but even the *Return of the Native* ends with such a concession; if a final sound of wedding bells can be called a ‘happy ending’ when it comes after such a breaking of hearts that the peace of the grave is welcome in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, tragedy stops short of the intensity which the later novels achieve; indeed there is more pathos than real tragedy. The whole Boldwood episode is too artificial to grip the heart; but the episode of Fanny Robin does. It was the development of the manner is which the fortieth chapter is written that was to give us the will of Michael Henchard and the baptism of Tess’s sorrow. But *Far From the Madding Crowd* does not sear as Tess’s sears or the *Mayor of Casterbridge*. Moreover, it still lacks that power so memorably put forth in the ‘*Return of the Native*’ – of enveloping the mere plot in an atmosphere more potent than any single incident. It is in short a work everywhere shows the highest, but not yet, except perhaps occasionally in its comedy, Genius. It made Hardy’s name as a novelist, and so paved the way for greater things to come.”

The plot is laid among the shepherds and small farmers of the village of Weatherbury, “far from the madding crowd’s ignoble strife.” Hardy himself explains the situation of the village in the preface to the novel, “Moreover the village called Weatherbury wherein the scenes of the present
Bathsheba Everdene is a poor girl who comes to the village of Weatherbury—with household goods in a wagon. Gabriel Oak, a bachelor and a farmer notices the beautiful maid at the turn pike gate where the wagon stops for the payment of taxes. There are haggling over two pence. The farmer Oak pays two pence to the Gate keeper and the wagon is allowed to pass. Bathsheba does not speak a word. She looks at farmer Oak with little indifference. Gabriel finds Bathsheba full of vanity. But the farmer is full of romantic love for her. Oak meets Bathsheba again while she is riding a horse and performing some feat of bodily exercise.

At first the girl is thrilled at the idea of having a piano and the other small comfort which Gabriel can provide but she finally decides that she will be bored with married life.

One night Gabriel loses his flock of sheep because a dog had become excited and had driven them over a cliff. From this loss, he soon loses his entire farm and is forced to travel about seeking employment elsewhere.

Meanwhile, Bathsheba has inherited a farm in the vicinity from her uncle. One night her barn catches fire and the man who rushes from the road to
help put out the flames is Gabriel. He becomes her hired man. Bathsheba’s beauty and prosperity attracted many suitors among whom was the aristocratic William Boldwood. But suddenly, the gay young blade sergeant Troy, comes upon the scene and Bathsheba is swept of her feet. Even at their wedding supper, when sergeant Troy becomes hopelessly drunk, Bathsheba realizes that she has made a poor choice.

Gabriel Oak has watched the suitors come and go, and even after the object of his love has married the worthless soldier, he continues to work patiently for his mistress. Bathsheba gradually learns that sergeant Troy has had other affairs and one girl has just dies, after having given birth to his baby. Finally, Troy leaves Bathsheba and the farm. A report is circulated that he had been drowned.

William Boldwood enters the scene again and Bathsheba promises to marry him at the end of seven years when Troy would be legally declared dead and she would be free to marry. At a Christmas Eve party to deliberate the decision, Troy suddenly appears dead drunk. Boldwood shoots him. He is tried and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Bathsheba is prostrate with grief and gradually comes to realize that she had erred long before in not accepting the faithful Gabriel. When Gabriel decides to leave the vicinity, she comes to his cottage and offers herself to him in marriage. The vain and beautiful Bathsheba at last finds contentment
and peace with the man she had at first considered common place and unattractive.

Gabriel Oak was a modest sheep-farmer. He commanded general respect of his neighbours on account of his honesty and integrity. For his social and courteous manners, he was liked by his friends and farmers. One day, by chance he saw a very beautiful and charming girl who was traveling in a wagon seated on the top of her luggage. At the first glance Oak fell in love with her; as her manner of looking into the glass created a strong sensation of love in his heart. Oak went to her house for proposing to her, but he found that she was not at home. Actually he was wrongly informed by the aunt. The name of the girl whom Oak had begun to love was Bathsheba. When she saw a stranger going back, she ran after him and told Oak that what her aunt had told him was not true. Oak took this opportunity and told Bathsheba that he wanted to marry her. She at once declined the offer of marriage.

Misfortunes never come alone. After the disappointment in love affair Oak had a small watch-dog whose duty was to guard the sheep and to chase them to the fold. One day he chased a sheep to the cliff and other sheep gathered and followed the chased sheep. One by one they fell below the hill and all of them were killed. Now after this tragedy, the only course open to Oak was to sell off his remaining property so that he could pay back all the debts that he had incurred to buy the sheep.
Gabriel Oak had become jobless. One day he happened to be driven to a farm which was on fire. Some people were trying to put out terrible fire at the farm. Oak also helped them to put out the fire and thus saved the farmer’s harvest. To his pleasant surprise, Oak found that the farmer whose farm was on fire was Bathsheba to whom he had already proposed marriage. Bathsheba employed Oak as a shepherded at her farm.

On his way to his new quarters Gabriel met a girl standing in the woods. Next morning he heard that a girl from the farm had disappeared and he rightly guessed that Fanny Robin was the girl that he had met. Fanny had run away to meet a soldier who was his lover. Fanny had gone to Sergeant Troy who was at his new station, for her had promised to marry her if she came to him. Both of them agreed to marry, but the proposal failed, because Fanny went to the wrong church. When she requested Troy to make arrangement for marriage again, Troy refused to do so.

At this stage Boldwood appeared in the affairs of Bathsheba. Farmer Boldwood had his farm in the vicinity of Bathsheba’s farm. He was a serious minded person who had never taken any interest in women. One day Bathsheba sent him an anonymous love letter. It was just for fun. But this letter kindled a deep passion in Boldwood. As soon as he came to know that this letter was from Bathsheba he madly fell in love with her. He offered to marry her. Bathsheba could not accept this proposal. In the meantime, she met Troy accidentally. Troy was greatly attracted by her beauty. Later on Troy developed
his intimacy with Bathsheba. He captured her heart by his hand-some appearance, his dashing manners and charming behaviour. Soon Bathsheba and Troy got married, and Boldwood’s hopes of marriage with Bathsheba were shattered. He became very bitter and gloomy.

Thus Troy became the master of Weatherbury farm, but the farm did not function well under the stewardship of Troy, Gabriel did not like in his heart that Troy should have married Bathsheba. Troy began to buss over Gabriel Oak. Troy began to drink and gamble. One day Troy and Bathsheba riding in a horse cart passed a young girl walking down the road. They stopped the cart and went to talk to her. This woman was Fanny Robin who was feeble and ill. Troy wanted to give her some money, as he had been in love with her.

Fanny went on to Casterbridge but she was so weak and ill, that she died after sometime. When the news came to Weatherbury farm, Bathsheba sent a cart to bring her body to the farm. When her dead body is brought to the farm, it is kept at the house of Bathsheba. It is at that time that Bathsheba comes to know that Troy had been in love with Fanny and that Fanny died during child birth. The same night Troy, on seeing the dead body of Fanny experienced a strong feeling of remorse and repentance at having deserted Fanny. He decided not to live with Bathsheba and left the Weatherbury farm.

After leaving the farm he went away. But before leaving the far, he showed great consideration for Fanny and decorated the grave of Fanny with lilies and roses. That was the expression of his great love for Fanny. After some
time, news came that he had been caught in a dangerous current while swimming in the sea and had been drowned. But actually he was not drowned. Bathsheba was living in an erroneous idea that Troy was drowned.

Bathsheba did not believe that Troy had died. But farmer Boldwood was sure that Troy had been dead. Therefore he tried his level best to marry Bathsheba. Bathsheba was to move that she promised to marry him after seven years. But one night Troy appeared and entered the hall where a party was being held. Finding that Troy was still alive Bathsheba was most surprised, and she fell down on the floor in faint. Boldwood was so outraged that he took a gun from the wall and shot Troy in the chest. Troy died immediately. Boldwood was trialed by the court and sentenced to death. But as a result of mercy petition submitted by the people of Weatherbury, the punishment of death was changed into life imprisonment.

Gabriel who had made every effort to save Boldwood from hanging, had emerged as a respected leader in the neighbourhood. He looked after both the farms, those of Bathsheba and Boldwood. Of the three lovers of Bathsheba, the only survivor was Gabriel Oak. One day Gabriel went to Bathsheba and told her that he was planning to leave her service. Bathsheba listened very calmly to him. The same day Oak convinced Bathsheba that he was the only lover left whom she was prepared to marry. Both of them were married happily. The farmers of the district were all delighted when Bathsheba became Mrs. Oak and Gabriel the master of Wetherbury farm. The story ends
with the long delayed union of these two. Gabriel Oak is at last rewarded for his loyal service and devotion to Bathsheba.

Hardy presents Clym Yeobright as the young man of the future. He is not physically impressive or handsome. His face expresses ‘the view of life as a thing to be put up with.’ His experience is writ large on his face. The people of his countryside had always expected something unique of him, something out of the ordinary because he was not one ‘to stand still in the circumstances amid which he was born.’ ‘The rural world was not ripe for him’. He is ahead of his time. He has the zeal of a fanatic in abandoning his business and in hoping to help the natives on Egdon. It is strange that someone who knows the health so well, that someone who is its own product, should not understand its inhabitants.

Clym belongs to the Health physically, instinctively and emotionally. He is remote from Egdon intellectually only. Clym’s belief is that men are born to misery and he wants to teach them how to endure it. The irony of the situation is that Clym is creating his own misery by believing that he can educate and enlighten the people of the Heath. What happens to him is not something imposed by the gods or Fate. Without realizing it, he creates his own tragic situation. Hardy makes the point clear that Clym was born at a wrong time-too soon for his ideas to be successful. In his first lengthy conversation, Clym asks Eustacia if she will teach too. The idea has no appeal for her. Hardy tells us that he had reached the stage in a young man’s life when the grimness of
the general human situation first becomes clean and the realization of this causes ambition to halt awhile. So Hardy says: “Clym’s mind was not well proportioned. A well-proportioned mind is one which shows no particular bias; one of which we may safely say that it will never cause its owner to be confined as a madman, tortured as a heretic, or crucified as a blasphemer. Also, on the other hand, it will never cause him to be applauded as a prophet, revered as a priest, or exalted as a king. Its usual blessings are misery and mediocrity.”

Clyms is the tragic hero of the novel. Hardy considers him to be the “nicest among his characters”. The home-coming of Clym and the tragedy it brought about are the main theme of the novel. Though Clym appears after one-third of the novel is over he is the central figure in it. We hear about him from the beginning. We find that all are anxiously waiting for his arrival, heath-people Mrs. Yeobright and even Eustacia. At the end of the novel when the main characters are either dead or gone, we find Clym preaching from the Rain barrow in the Egdon heath which he dearly loves.

Like his author, Clym is the typical product of heath. He loves the heath and its people. His early life was spent in the heath and this influenced his view of life. He likes the simple and austere life of the heath. When he is happy, the heath gives him only a “sense of bare equality” with every-thing living under the sun. In his misfortune the heath swallows him up and absorbs him into its furze and various creatures.
Clyms was a promising boy. Even at his early age it was thought that he would succeed or fail in an original way. When he appears in the novel he has already become an idealist. Eustacia calls him St. Paul. He hates the vanity of the city life. He does not want to go back to his trade of diamonds in Paris. For him city life is not better than rural life. It is only different. His scheme is to educate the people of the heath.

Like all idealists he is firm and courageous. He is self-sacrificing. He finds that most people are suffering in the world. Therefore, he does not think it right to waste away his time in Paris. His scheme of education is opposed by his mother and by his wife. But nothing can shake his firm purpose.

In fact, he is a man of ideas. He represents what Hardy calls “the ache of modernism”. We can already see the disease of thought in him. His face reflects “the view of life as a thing to be put up with.” His highest ambition was to teach the people how to face the miseries of life. Towards the end of the novel we see that he has found his vocation.

But the mind of Clym is not balanced. He is not rational in his approach to the problems of life. He is too sensitive and sentimental. He loves ideas but he is careless about outward form of things. His scheme of education is too idealistic. It is neither practical nor practicable. He wants to make the rustics educated without giving them any social status or prosperity. Mrs. Yeobright and heath-people know the impractical character of his scheme of education but he himself sees no defect in it.
Thus Clym is a prig hero. He cannot see himself as others see him. Though he rises to greatness because of his nobility, lofty ideas, self-effacing nature and stoicism, it cannot be denied that he is somewhat priggish. His priggishness comes from his egotism which is also the source of some great qualities in him.

Clym is an emotional man. His love for his mother is deep and sincere. After her death, he becomes almost mad. He also loves Eustacia. In his glow of love he fails to see that a man of his nature and temperament cannot live with a fashionable and ambitious woman like Eustacia. In this sense his love was a folly, or a freak of fate. His feelings do not come to the surface. He tries to be cheerful in misfortunes. He feels as much pleasure in the task of furze-cutting as in teaching. He shows great courage in the face of suffering. However there comes a stage when his stoicism fails. The death of his mother and Eustacia are the two great blows of fate which push him to the verge of madness. Through this process Clym rises to the level of the greatest tragic characters known in literature.

The title introduces to us the return of Clym Yeobright to his native place Egdon Heath. Egdon Heath was a gloomy wasteland in Southern England. Against this majestic but solemn, brooding background a small group of people were to work out their tragic drama in the impersonal presence of fate and nature.
On the fifth of November, bonfires were glowing in the twilight as Diggory Venn, the red leman, drove his van across the Heath. Tired and ill, Thomasin’s Yeobright lay in the rear of his van. She was a young girl whom Diggory loved, but she had rejected his proposal in order to marry Damon Wildeve, proprietor of the Quiet Woman Inn. Now Diggory was carrying the girl to her home at Blooms End. The girl had gone to marry Wildeve in a nearby town, but the ceremony could not take place because of an irregularity in the license. Shocked and shamed, Thomasin had asked her old sweet-heart Diggory to take her home.

Mrs. Yeobright, Thomasin's aunt and guardian, heard the story from the red leman. Concerned for the girl’s welfare she decided that the wedding should take place as early as possible. Mrs. Yeobright had good cause to worry for Wildeve’s intentions were not wholly honourable. Wildeve was a gay philanderer and was not serious about marrying Thomasin. Later in the evening, after Wildeve had assured the Yeobrights, rather casually, that he intended to go through with his promise, his attention was turned to a bonfire blazing on Mistover Knap. There old captain Vye lived with his beautiful grand-daughter, Eustacia. At dusk the girl had started a fire on the Heath as a signal to her lover, Wildeve, to come to her. Though he had intended to break with Eustacia, he decided to obey her summons to continue as it were his romantic hobnobbing.
Eustacia, meanwhile, was waiting for Wildeve in the company of Young Johnny Nunsuch. When Wildeve threw a pebble in the pond to announce his arrival, Eustacia told Johnny to go home. The meeting between Wildeve and Eustacia was unsatisfactory for both. He complained that she gave him no peace. She, in turn, resented his desertion. Meanwhile Johnny Nunsuch, frightened by strange lights he saw on the Heath, went back to Mistover-Knap to ask Eustacia to let her servant accompany him home, but he kept silent when he came upon Eustacia and Wildeve. Retracting his steps, he stumbled into a sand-pit where stood the reddleman’s van. From the boy Diggory learned of the meeting between Eustacia and Wildeve. Later, he over-heard Eustacia declare her hatred of the Heath to Wildeve who asked her to run away with him to America. Her reply was vague but the reddleman decided to see Eustacia without delay to beg her to let Thomassin have Wildeve.

Diggory’s visit to Eustacia was fruitless. He then approached Mrs. Yeobright, declared again his love for her niece and offered to marry Thomain. Mrs. Yeobright refused the reddleman’s offer because she felt that the girl should marry Wildeve. She confronted the innkeeper with vague references to another suitor with the result that Wildeve’s interest in Thomassin awakened once more.

Shortly afterward Mrs. yeobright’s son, Clym returned from Paris and a welcome-home-party gave Eustacia the chance to view this stranger about whom she had heard so much. Uninvited, she went to the party disguised as one
of the mummers. Clym was fascinated by this interesting and mysterious Young woman disguised as a man. Eustacia dreamed of marrying Clym and going with him to Paris. She even broke off with Wildeve who, stung by her rejection promptly married Thomasin to spite Eustacia. Indeed Eustacia went out of her way to facilitate the circumstances prompting Thomasion’s marriage with Wildeve. Clym Yeobright decided not to go back to France. Instead he planned to open a school. Mrs. Yeobright strongly opposed her son’s decision. When Clym heard that Eustacia was bewitching her children, his decision to educate these ignorant people was strengthened. Much against his mother’s wishes Clym visited Eustacia’s home to ask her to teach in his school. Eustacia refused because she hated the Heath and the country-peasants, but at the result of his visit, Clym fell completely in love with the enchanting yet ambivalent Eustacia.

Mrs. Yeobright blamed Eustacia for Clym’s wishes to stay on the Heath. When bitter feeling grew between mother and son, he decided to leave home. His marriage to Eustacia made the break complete. Later Mrs. Yeobright felt loneliness: she relented somewhat and gave a neighbour, Christian Cantle, a sum of money to be delivered in equal portions to Clym and Thomasin. Christian foolishly lost the money to Wildeve in a gamble of dice. Fortunately, Diggory won the money from Wildeve, but thinking that all of it belonged to Thomasin he gave it to her as a faithful though unrequited love Mrs. Yeobright knew that Wildeve had duped Christian. She did not know that the reddleman had won the money away from the innkeeper and she mistakenly supposed that
Wildeve had given the money to Eustacia. Meeting Eustacia she asked the girl if she had revived any money from Wildeve. Gabriel Marcel, involved a recognition both of faith in God and of direct communication with other finite selves as necessary elements in personal existence itself. The only permutation I have not seen stated is an existential philosophy affirming direct communication while denying God. This is, I think, historical accident rather than logical necessity; for it appears to be the result of coincidence rather than of logic that both Marcel and Jaspers insist on Jasper’s both communication and transcendence. That faith in God does not imply direct communication we know from Kierkegaard, for whom indirect communication is a necessary consequence of the kind of subjectivity that alone leads to true faith. That the acknowledgement of communication, conversely, does not imply a transcendent faith, one can only guess—for example, from the weakness of the attempted union of the two in Jaspers or Marcel. But, lacking such as philosophy, we may fill out historically, if not logically, the outlines of actual, rather than possible, existential theories by examining some aspects of the Protestant and Catholic varieties, respectively, in Jaspers and Marcel.

I do not mean to suggest, however, that existentialism may develop a concept of community or historical tradition to counterbalance the narrowness of its peculiar individualism and thereby conveniently furnish, as an additional dimension in its analysis of man, a broader basis for morality to supplement the depth of its limited insights. Such easy polarity of balancing one factor against
another would only dull the edge of those insights, would substitute a Jaspers or Marcel, for instance, for a Sartre or Heidegger. Genuine philosophic syntheses are not so easily achieved.

Eustacia was enraged by the question and in the course of her reply to Mrs. Yeobright’s charge she said that she would never have condescended to marry Clym had she known that she would have to remain on the Heath. The two woman parted angrily. Eustacia’s unhappiness was increased by Clym’s near-blindness, a condition brought on by too much reading for she feared that this meant she would never go to Paris. When Clym became a wood cutter, Eustacia’s feeling of degradation was complete. Bored with her life, she went by herself one evening to a gipsying. There she accidently met Wildeve and again felt an attachment for him. Seeing Eustacia and Wildeve together the reddleman told Mrs. Yeobright of the unfortunate condition of her son and the unpleasant development of circumstances. He begged her to make peace with Eustacia for Clym’s sake. She agreed to try. Mrs. Yeobright’s walk at noon across the hot and dry Heath to see her son and daughter-in-law proved fatal. When she arrived in sight of Clym’s house, she saw her son from a distance as she entered the front door. Then as she was thinking how to enter into the house such as to cause least annoyance to Eustace she saw another man getting into the house. She was too far away, however, to recognize Wildeve. After resting for twenty minutes, Mrs. Yeobright went on to Clym’s cottage and knocked. No one came to the door. Heart broken by what she considered a rebuff from her
own son, Mrs. Yeobright started back home-wards across the heath. Overcome by exhaustion and grief, she sat down to rest and a poisonous adder bit her. She died without knowing that in side her son’s house Clym had been asleep worn out by his morning’s work. Eustacia did not go to the door because as she later explained to her husband, she had thought he would answer the knock. The real reason for Eustacia’s failure to go the door was fear of the consequences should Mrs. Yeobright find Eustacia and Wildeve together.

Clym awoke with the decision to visit his mother. Starting out across the Heath toward her house he stumbled over the body. His grief was tempered by bewilderment over the reason for her being on the Heath at that time. When Clym discovered that Eustacia had failed to let his mother to and that Wildeve had been in the cottage, he ordered Eustacia out of his house. She went quietly because she felt in part responsible for Mrs. Yeobright’s death.

Eustacia took refuge in her grandfather’s house where a faithful servant thwarted her in an attempt to commit suicide. In utter despair over her own wretched life and over the misery she had caused to others. Buatacia turned to Wildever, who had unexpectedly inherited eleven thousand pounds and who still wanted her to run away with him. One night she left her grandfather's house in order to keep a pre-arranged meeting with the inn keeper, but in her departure she failed to receive a letter of reconciliation which Thomasin had persuaded Clym to sent to her. On her way to keep her rendezvous with Wildeve she lost her way in the inky blackness of the Heath and either fell accidentally or
jumped into a small lake, and was drowned. Wildeve who happened to be near the lake when she fell in, jumped in to save her and was drowned also.

Originally, *The Return of the Native* ended with the death of Eustacia and of Wildeve but in order to satisfy his romantic readers in a later addition, Hardy made additions to the story. The faithful Diggory married Thomasin. Clym unable to abolish ignorance and superstition on the Heath by teaching, became in the end, in itinerant preacher.

The story makes it clear that Hardy feels an obscure volition in the depth of things that curbs our individual destinies under a law greater than ourselves, the tragic fatality immanent in the concatenation of events heightens the dramatic unity of impression of this classical novel. Indeed Hardy tends to shift the construction of his novel to the inner world: he writes a moral drama and shows us a conflict of contradictory wills, guided themselves by feelings. The story shows a penetrating search-light into the methods and methodology of plot-construction typically characteristic of the genius of Thomas Hardy.

The catastrophe of Hardy’s novels often depends on a number of trivial accidents. Chance exhibits planned divergences of Hardy’s tragic pattern. Mrs. Yeobright’s first visit to the house of her son is purely accidental and misconceived. She talks to Eustacia and her question is misunderstood by her in another context. This is dramatic irony. The incidents and accidents, so simple and innocuous in themselves, spell disaster. Clym’s near blindedness is also accidental and it mars the happy consequences of his newly-wedded life.
Eustacia’s sudden meeting with Wildeve, when she goes to amuse herself one evening, rekindles the never completely extinguished desire surging in her bosom, to leave Egdon Heath. Similarly, the second coming of Mrs. Yeobright to the house of her son with attitude of complete forgiveness and reconciliation, an incident with great future prospects, turns out to be the inevitable premonition of bleak despair. At last another apparently insignificant event which comes to occur because of sheer inadvertence or chance causing Eustacia to fail to receive the letter of reconciliation sent to her by Clym confirms the inevitable tragic predicament.

Eustacia is abnormal. She is the raw-material for divinity but not good as a woman or as a housewife. She is moon-struck and is propelled by fathomless mysteries of libidinal impulse of which she is not always conscious. The nocturnal impulse of carnal magnetism individuates her being and is the main cause of her social and psychic mal-adjustment. She mistakenly calls this impulse as love but it is love which transcends human limits and is symptomatic of a kind of madness.

Clym is an abnormal visionary and Wildeve is an abnormal philanderer who is not able to understand the motivations of his ambivalent instincts. Thus tragedy results from the conjunctions of abnormal traits in the leading characters who act and react upon one another with peculiar frequencies in the novel at particular instants of space and time.
In this novel, Thomas Hardy created two strong and opposing forces: Egdon Heath, a somber tract of wasteland symbolic of an impersonal fate and Eustacia Vye, a beautiful young woman representing the opposing human element. Throughout the book Eustacia struggles against the Heath, but in vain. Of course, her failure to overcome her environment would seem to prove Hardy’s view that man is not the master of his fate. But in attempting to minimize the importance of the individual in this life, Hardy has created in the character of Eustacia Vye, a person of great strength and marked individuality. Indeed, the reader, contemplating her, feels that Eustacia herself, to a greater extent and not fate alone, is responsible for her tragic end.

_The Return of the Native_ is remarkably representative of Hardy’s achievement in the literary form of novel. The rich descriptions of Nature in _The Return of the Native_ bring out the characteristic poetic qualities of Hardy. His descriptions show his powers of keen perception both of fine shades and of vast golem harmonies. Hardy describes in language of unparalleled poetic beauty all the gloomy vastness of the moor in which every living-being vanishes as if swallowed up in the depth of centuries. This appeals to Hardy most and his expression of the “vast tract of unenclosed wild known as Egdon Heath” haunts his genius and is frequently given an unforgettable expression in his novels and poems alike. Hardy impersonates Heath and expresses nature as not merely a background for human life but grants it a unique personality. Nature assumes in
Hardy a more active control of human nature with which it is brought face to face.

Hardy has given a new dimension to his novels. His novels have attained the grandeur of epic and the somber yet scintillating spectacle of a true tragedy. His tragic novels remind us of the Greek tragedies and the masterpieces of Shakespeare. Although we find detailed passages of narrative prose in Hardy’s *The Return of the Native* yet the ornate style of Hardy’s prose intermittently charged with lyrical effusiveness and expressive of psychological subtleties of character, renders his literary art more akin to the literary species of poetic drama. His existentialism or fatalism becomes a poetic necessity and gives the dramatic unity of impression to his novels.

His plots are not simple. They are complicated, rounded and even creaky. They are impregnated with a pattern and reveal the depth of the meaning in their devised formulation. They grow out of elementary passions: ambition, greed, love, jealousy and the thirst for knowledge. The springs which move them are psychological. More and more as he progresses in his career, Hardy intends to shift the construction of his novels to the inner world. He writes a moral drama, shows us a conflict of contradictory wills guided themselves by feelings. Hardy heroes succeed but rarely in escaping.” Amongst his male characters, Clym Yeobright, Henchard and Jude are three different aspects of that rustic robustness, struggling against the experience of pain or disease of thought. The deliberate design of Hardy puts the leading women of
his novels too in baffling situations. The result is an inevitable tragedy and the
disaster of what is good, emotionally enchanting and beautiful.

The shifting penumbras of human sensibility and emotion are
highlighted as they are revealed against the background of the elementary,
grand and said aspects of nature. Hardy loves the sea but does not describe it not
finding himself familiar with its moods. He loves more to paint the woods
where the seasons go through the infinitely varied circle of their changes far
from all profane onlookers, the vales, the rich pastures, the sober hills of his
native district, the bare uplands where the furrow of a Roman road runs straight
and empty to the horizon, and the gloomy vastness of the moon in which every
living-being vanishes as if swallowed up in the depth of the centuries whose
image is called up by its immobility. The impassioned poetry evoked from the
background gives us the idea of simultaneity and succession which heightens
the vast dramatic necessity immanent in the time-less pattern of his time-
determined shape. Description when it reaches the degree of symbolic breadth is
loaded with philosophy. Hardy existentialism is not only a way of thinking, it
imbues all his visions, it is the very essence of his admirable poetry of nature.
The drama of *The Return of the Native* adumbrates the eternal process of
conflict between the objective nature as Hardy conceives it and the inner nature
of man, as exemplified in the tendencies, appetencies and feelings. These are
anthropologically and psycho-physiologically determined by the racial
characteristics viewed according to heredity and environment historically conceived.

The effluent narrations of Hardy acquire symbolical significance. They become pseudo-statements and delicate shades of feeling. The whole style is nearer than that of a poetic drama rich with allegorical significance. Rarely do we meet with an inevitable rhythm with pieces whose music is inseparable from their suggestion. Beauty springs from the powerful concentration, the economy of words and the severe choice of epithets and images.

The dialogue of the novel is pointed and reveals character. This is specially true in the case of Eustacia. Her dialogue expresses her vivacious personality and expresses her frustration at the irony of her situation. Sometimes she indulges in self-communing in the nature of Shakespearean soliloquies. The dialogues is revealing and conditions action internally as well as externally. It has attained the organic unity of tragedy. In the sparkling and unsophisticated scenes of rustic life of Wessex, we have, as it were the immediate physical representation on the stage. The description of the background incarnates the living reality of Edgon. Health and provides the detailed stage-direction and scenario-arrangements which are nevertheless an intrinsic and organic part of the story.

*The Return of the Native* was the first novel in which he achieved the existential level and it could be argued that it is his fines. In no other novel does the setting of the natural world so dominate the characters. Perhaps the
The dichotomy between the human-being and nature in which he lives, which heightens the dramatic interest of this novel, is too acute in this novel.

The Heath is an extended image of the nature of which man is part, in which he is caught, which conditions his very being, and which cares for him. Egdon Heath is the real of the novel. This dynamic use of scene to determine the lives of characters makes the novel assume a peculiar dramatic significance.

The existential novel of Hardy exists on two planes—the plane of design and the plane of plot. In both these planes Hardy is nearer the achievement of a poetic drama. His plots are sometimes vitiated by the thematic unity of his design. His view of a causality, in a variation of the conception of Aristotle, regarding the idea of plot in a tragedy which has a beginning, middle and end, made the evolution of his story stalemate, checkmating, less free and preordained. He is intent to show that stars in their courses fight against the aspiring man or woman who would rise above the common lot through greatness of spirit, of ambition, of passion. In *The Return of the Native*, it is part of the conspiracy of things against the exceptional man that Clym’s mother should visit Eustacia in order to make peace between them at the very time when Dustacia is entertaining Wildeve. Again, it is a part of nature’s enmity that she should be bitten by snake on her way home. Hardy, in frenzy to maintain the causal necessity, which is more dramatic than description, as in a novel, vitiates his realism by over-statement. When we learn later that
Eustacia’s letter to Clym has not been delivered because of the messenger forgot to post it.

Eustacia Vya is the heroine of Hardy’s *The Return of the Native*. Although the title of the novel is connected with the return of Clym to his native land and the novel ends with the sophisticated calm, born of Clym’s self-immolation and great psycho-physiological suffering, the real tragedy of the novel is Eustacia’s. Without Eustacia, the novel of Hardy would be a Hamlet, without the prince of Denmark. The clue to the tragedy of Hamlet is found in the solitary musings of the prince.

The existential pattern of the novel is connected with the general philosophy of the writer, his mode of a characterization and the methodology of plot-construction and, we must study them one by one to have a thorough grasp of the tragedy.

Hardy’s greatest novels are graphs of suffering and of the pity that suffering inspires in a generous mind. Everything is bent to uncover and irradiate these moments when human pride and stubborn hope break under the strain of what hardy called “the plight of being alive.”

The responsibility for this suffering is laid on the imperfections of the First Cause or the supreme creating and organizing principle at the back of things. Hardy never believed in the omnipotent, benevolent and anthropomorphic God of orthodox theology. Nor could he reconcile the existence of a cosmic mind. Hardy’s First Cause or the “creative principle is
blind, indifferent and unconscious. It works unwittingly. Hardy designates this impersonal determination of the universe as Chance, Time Happening, Circumstance, Providence, God or finally as “Immanent Will.”

Thus the creative force, the impersonal exterminator of the universe is not a personalized supreme power exterior to the universe. It is an inhering force which is Immanent in the universe.

This energy takes the form of an urge to grow and live. It pervades all nature. Hardy’s existentialist approach is one and indivisible, but it objectifies itself in infinite ground forms. It is the spiritual indestructible essence of all objects, the reality behind all phenomena. Since the spiritual essence of all is one, there is no essential difference between one form and another.

The burden of significance which the great protagonists of the later novels carry, which Michael Henchard and Tess Durbeyfield have to carry, disbalances the peculiar naturalness of this harmony. Tess and the Mayor of Casterbridge are seen and presented too consciously as monolithic, as chosen stereotypes, for our sympathy to be engaged in so spontaneous a way: we are wholly at home with Gabriel Oak and Bathsheba Everdene, whereas we contemplate, with a proper degree of literary analogy and social portentousness, the displayed fates of Henchard and Tess.
References

1. Far From The Madding crowd, p. 58
2. Ibid, p. 60
3. Ibid, p. 65
4. Preface to Far From the Madding Crowd
5. Preface