



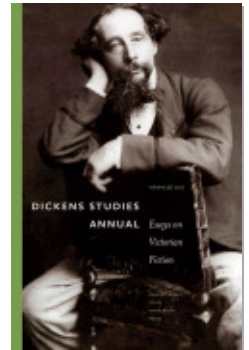
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Paradise Returned: Hardy's *The Return of the Native*

Clay Daniel

Paradise Lost is a primary intertext for The Return of the Native. Though the novel is often faulted for its obtrusive allusions to classics, ancient and modern, Hardy's deft use of Milton stabilizes a notoriously elusive narrative that lacks a clear protagonist and includes comfortable narrative "Aftercourses" that the author repudiated many years later. Specifically, Hardy fuses Miltonic oppositions into a monolithic, "modernist" landscape, from which not only God but also Satan has disappeared. To this Victorian wasteland, all natives who attempt to leave must return because there are no exits, except perhaps suicide. Yet the Miltonic text is so subtly rewritten, that it tends to mask too well the novel's subversive messages, especially in its transformation of the apparently selfish, lazy, and mischievous Eustacia Vye into one of the first modernist heroines.

In *Return of the Native*, Hardy "had striven more deliberately than ever before to make" his "book an unmistakable work of art" (Millgate 184). Classics, ancient and modern, are echoed throughout a novel with "aspirations to classically tragic status" (190). Yet for most readers since its publication, the novel works in spite of this "somewhat obtrusive apparatus" (189).¹ Excessive allusions are often related to an attempt to turn the teenaged provincial Eustacia Vye into a mythic and/or tragic heroine. She accumulates "so many allusive attributes . . . that she resists any reading at all" (Higonnet 125). I will argue that Hardy's allusions are

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more effective than is usually acknowledged, especially in relation to Vye, who is stabilized by an adroit configuration of the Narcissus myth. An even more primary intertext is *Paradise Lost*. Hardy fuses Heaven and Hell and Eden (and several other Miltonic oppositions) into a monolithic, "modernist" landscape, from which not only God but also Satan has disappeared. To this Victorian wasteland, all natives who attempt to leave must return because there are no exits, except perhaps suicide.²

The puzzling (for many readers) opening, entirely a description of the heath, rewrites the epic's beginning to create the novel's essential condition: Heaven and Hell and Earth are one. Milton's "concave" Hell (*PL* 1.63, 542) that is occupied by "no light, but rather darkness visible" is rewritten as a heath that "wore the appearance of an installment of night which had taken up its place before its astronomical hour was come: darkness had to a great extent arrived hereon, while day stood distinct in the sky" that is compared to a "tent" (33).³ Heaven's light and the heath's darkness then merge: "The sombre stretch of rounds and hollows seemed to rise and meet the evening gloom in pure sympathy, the heath exhaling darkness as rapidly as the heavens precipitated it. And so the obscurity in the air and the obscurity in the land closed together in a black fraternization towards which each advanced half-way" (34). This place of "incomplete darkness" and "sinister condition" is composed not of good and evil but of shades of evil that "might have represented a venial beside a mortal sin" (77). Rebellion and exile are not defined in relation to the landscape; they are this monolithic landscape, "the untameable, Ishmaelish thing" of Egdon (35), encouraging rebellion but denying exits. Here only the impotent, simple, old, superstitious, blind, or mindless can be called Christian (Paterson, "*The Return of the Native* as Antichristian Document"). And fired with indignation at the "mockery" and "oppression" of the heavens, the narrator intends, as Milton before him, to record the "true tale" of a "Titanic form" that "appeared slowly to awake and listen" and then await a "final overthrow" (*RN* 33–34; *PL* 1.198, 510). Titanic Satan awakes, rallies his cohorts, escapes Hell, conquers a new world, and returns to announce to his awaiting admirers that he and his image-mate have linked Hell to a second Heaven. The novel begins where Satan's adventures end. Where Hell and Heaven/Eden/earth have merged, where rebellion has become a landscape of the status quo and escape impossible, there's nothing left to do for rebellious spirits, except to await "a final overthrow" (final pointing to a mysterious initial one).

On Guy Fawkes's night, the heath's darkness is soon lit with many a "tall flame" (44). An official celebration of rebellion's defeat is merged with more primitive, authentic (dis)content: the fires express the militant "Promethean rebelliousness" of "the fettered gods of the earth" to protest the "black chaos" of the wintry, ineluctable, and "recurrent season" (45). This recasts the fallen angels' initial fiery response to Satan, standing like a "tower" above his "cherub tall" standard bearer (1.534, 591):

Millions of flaming swords, drawn from the thighs
 Of mighty cherubim; the sudden blaze
 Far round illumined hell; highly they raged
 Against the highest, and fierce with grasped arms
 Clashed on their sounding shields the din of war,
 Hurling defiance toward the vault of heaven.
 There stood a hill not far, whose grisly top
 Belched fire and rolling smoke.

(1.664–71)

The devils want a hero, and they find one:

Who shall tempt with wandering feet
 The dark unbottomed infinite abyss
 And through the palpable obscure find out
 His uncouth way, or spread his airy flight
 Upborne with indefatigable wings
 Over the vast abrupt, ere he arrive
 The happy isle; what strength, what art can then
 Suffice, or what evasion bear him safe
 Through the strict sentries and stations thick
 Of angels watching round?

(2.404–13)

The heathfolk also seem to need a hero to tread their own version of “the palpable obscure,” Hardy’s “obscurity in the air and the obscurity in the land” of mismatched marriages, emasculated Christian(s), and an ill-educated humanity afraid of or impervious to the life and death that they discuss around the bonfire:

It seemed as if the bonfire makers were standing in some radiant upper storey [Milton’s?] of the world, detached from and independent of the dark stretches below. The heath down there was now a vast abyss, and no longer a continuation of what they stood on; for their eyes, adapted to the blaze, could see nothing of the deeps beyond its influence. Occasionally, it is true, a more vigorous flare than usual from their faggots sent darting lights like aides-de-camp down the inclines to some distant bush, pool, or patch of white sand, kindling these to replies of the same colour, till all was lost [*PL* 9. 784] in darkness again. Then the whole black phenomenon beneath represented Limbo as viewed from the brink by the sublime Florentine in his vision.

(44)

Dante sees Limbo after passing through the Gates of Hell. The Sublime Puritan’s chaos and version of limbo (3.495) divide Heaven and Earth from Hell. Hardy

merges all five regions into a single bleak entity. “Radiant” suggests a flicker of Milton’s hopeful story at the beginning of book 3, as Satan emerges out of chaos. There the Son agrees to descend to earth to regain paradise. Yet in/on Hardy’s story/storey, no hero-savior appears, there is no paradise to regain, and whatever is authentic about the heathfolk’s light, soon extinguished, is linked to dim “past ages” of “jumbled Druidical rites and Saxon ceremonies” (44–45).

The hero-savior who fails to respond to the heathfolk’s fiery appeals is Eustacia Vye. The rebellious girl is identified with Satan’s defiant escape from Hell, and encoded by her culture with Byronic notions of rebellion, but she rebelliously rejects these links. The “Queen of Night” (89) is of “smouldering rebelliousness” and “Tartarean dignity sat upon her brow” (90): “. . . and care / Sat on his faded cheek, but under brows / Of dauntless courage, and considerate pride” (*PL* 1.601–03).⁴ Satan had plummeted to Hell through a “nethermost abyss” (2.956, 969). Eustacia is “thrown away on netherward Egdon”—at night especially a “vast abyss” (44)—and “there she had imbibed much of what was dark in its tone, though inwardly and eternally unreconciled thereto” (90). She is “banished” to this “Hades” by “Destiny” (90, 92). Satan similarly attributes his “sad”—but not final—“overthrow” to “chance, or fate” (*PL* 1.133). Eustacia’s “triumph,” like Satan’s (*PL* 1. 94–111), is her “realms . . . lost” (92). She also here is compared, unwisely for many, to pagan divinities. But this connection, a common conflation of the divine and human, enhances her diabolism in light of Milton’s epic, which insists that the Olympians are disguised devils (e.g., 1.507–22): “her general figure might have stood for that of either of the higher female deities. The new moon behind her head, an old helmet upon it, a diadem of accidental dewdrops round her brow, would have been adjuncts sufficient to strike the note of Artemis, Athena, or Hera respectively” (90).

“General,” “helmet,” “strike,” and Artemis are soon joined by this observation: “She seldom schemed, but when she did scheme, her plans showed rather the comprehensive strategy of a general” (94). The militant Queen’s primary target is the “depression” of life (94)—“She Goes Out to Battle Against Depression” (266), embodied in an environment that even Caesar avoided (77). A desperate, claustrophobic struggle indeed, since Eustacia (as well as Clym and Venn), like Satan (“myself am hell” 4.75), is “at one with the symbolic proportions of the landscape” (Meisel 79) that is her own hated “prison” (RN 34; *PL* 1.71; 2.59, 434, 824, 906).⁵

Armed with a telescope (79–80, 84, 94; *PL* 3.590) and “deep as the North Star” and with “an utter absence of fear” (75, 77), “as a spike from a helmet” (41) she first appears above a “hill,” high atop Rainbarrow, the ancient Celtic grave, “pole and axis of this heathery world,” with nothing above her but what “could be mapped . . . on a celestial globe” (41). But when the bonfire folk arrive, she vanishes, apparently “dropping into eternal night with the rest of” her “race” and not “likely to return” (41–42). She does return but only after the heathfolk have departed and their fire is “decaying embers” (79). She then ends her silence.

Satan breaks the “horrid silence” (1.83) of Hell, with fiery words of defiance; he responds to the appeals of devilish fires with plots that will “seduce” Adam and Eve and enable the devils to escape from Hell (1.33, 219; 2.368).⁶ Having rejected her fiery compatriots, Eustacia sighs for a window behind which is an inhabitant who, if she can seduce him, might help her to endure the “jail” that she hates (79; 114; 34). She then returns to her house at Mistover Knap, with its hedges “like impaled heads above a city wall” and “white mast, fitted up with spars and other nautical tackle” (81). The Captain’s place, on Gunpowder night, “had much the appearance of a fortification upon which had been kindled a beacon fire.” The martial imagery will soon fade, as Eustacia is in fact rather unmilitary. But this imagery again (and this partially explains its use) links the reputed witch and exotic Queen of Night (traditionally, the moon) to Satan, here his navigation off the fiery lake. His shield

like the moon, whose orb
 Through optic glass the Tuscan artist views
 At evening from the top of Fesole,
 Or in Valdarno to descry new lands,
 Rivers or mountains in her spotty globe.
 His spear, to equal which the tallest pine
 Hewn on Norwegian hills, to be the mast
 Of some great admiral, were but a wand.

(1.287–94)

Despite her resistance to the role, Eustacia, in Venn’s words “a beauty, with a white face and a mane as black as night” (275), often (and inevitably) acts, especially in relation to Thomasin (whom she gives as wife to her former lover Wildeve), like the fallen angel that Gabriel reduces to “a proud steed reined” who “went haughty on, / Champing his iron curb” after he inspires uneasy dreaming in Eve (4.858). Thomasin’s stealthy protector owes much to Hardy’s merger of Heaven and Hell. The vigilant and often unseen guardian of community morality, he’s also an outcast bogeyman who bedevils others, “the Wicked one” (57; 58), “Mephistophelian” (100), something of “a devil or the red ghost” even according to the rational Fairway (53, 98). Hardy had paired him with Moloch in an earlier version (Paterson, *Making* 103). His ambiguity is embodied in his spectacular color. On the one hand, Venn’s “sinister redness” (166) marks his devilish fall. On the other, “celestial rosy red, Love’s proper hue” is the color that Raphael assumes to explain angelic sex to Adam (8.218–229). Raphael is praised as he dines with the naked Eve and Adam: “in those hearts / Love unlibidinous reigned, nor jealousy / Was understood, the injured lover’s hell” (5.449–50). Gabriel is another of those hearts, defending the sleeping, naked Eve from Satan (4.776–1015). Venn chastely protects a temporarily “lost woman,” as Thomasin later refers to herself while gathering apples (132): “I did not think when I went away this morning that

I should come back like this" (66; "O much deceived, much failing, hapless Eve, / Of thy presumed return!" [*PL* 9.404–05]). Asleep within Venn's van, Thomasin is disturbed by the "uneasy . . . dreaming" (39) caused by her experience with a "saint" (133) who is later explicitly compared to Satan in creating a troubling dream in the sleeping Eve. Immediately after Eustacia seeks refuge in Venn's van, Wildevé starts "like Satan at the touch of Ithuriel's [Gabriel's assistant] spear" as Venn apparently thwarts, like Gabriel without actual violence and without his charge's knowledge, his designs on Thomasin's happiness (169). This degradation is intimately connected with Venn's love for Thomasin, who spurns him in favor of a more devilish Wildevé, but whom he still protects, romantic-sentimentally or perhaps neurotic-obsessively, almost violently, and certainly slyly.

Hardy continues to conflate Miltonic oppositions by characterizing Eustacia as Satan's first victim, Eve, another role that Eustacia radically reconfigures if not rejects. When she returns to her house, with its "dimly visible" garden (81), she stands by its pool. Milton's Eve, immediately after her creation, sees her reflection in "a liquid plain . . . pure as the expanse of heaven" that to her "seemed another sky" (4.455–59). She "there had fixed" her "eyes with vain desire, / Had not a voice [God's] thus warned" her (4.465–67). God then takes her to Adam, whose "manly grace / And wisdom" (4.490–91) compels her submission. So Milton supposedly warns against pride, of the flesh and spirit, especially women's flesh and spirit. Egdon however has no benevolent warning voice. Created out of the darkness of Rainbarrow, Eustacia lingers by her pool, apparently unable to second Eve's initial escape from her image. But narcissism, more simply related to Eve as vanity, becomes extremely complex in this intensely self-dissatisfied woman. Eustacia does not look into the pool, much less become infatuated with her reflection. The only described image precedes Eustacia's appearance at the pool, when "nobody was visible": "in the smooth water of the pool the fire appeared upside down" (81). Fire is an apt metaphor, if not reflection, for the often devilish, often bedeviled Eustacia, whose soul's "colour" is "flame-like" (89). And the floating fire, and darkened heath-fires, comment on what seems to be her predetermined death.

Her fire is a signal to one below rather than one above, and the woman's image seems to leap off the fiery pool of Milton's hell. Damon Wildevé/Dam(o)n Wildevé[I], or Toogood the "white witch" in an earlier draft, appears as "some wondrous thing she [Eustacia] had created out of chaos" (84), even out of the chaos of herself. Subverting the notion of Adam's rib, this scene suggests not only Eve's but Satan's narcissism, when Sin sprang out of his head and into his bed when he first conceived his rebellion (2.758–63). The heath-hating, Yeobright-loving, Wildevé reflects the fiery Eustacia, even in her drawings out, rejections, delays, professions-accusations of unworthiness, dog-in-the-manger responses to love, and ultimate sense of self-failure. Clearly, he's as bedeviled/devilish as Eustacia. He too is beset with "blue-demons [and red, Venn], and Heaven knows what" (70), including "the curse of inflammability" that in Wildevé's own words

“has brought me down . . . what lower stage it has in store for me I have yet to learn” (86; “And, in the lowest deep, a lower deep / Still threatening to devour me opens wide” [*PL* 4.76–77]). He lives in a place, initially described, “down, downward,” a steep descent for those in a “Tartarean situation” (Olly Dowden and Mrs. Yeobright approaching his inn) (61). He often plays Satan to Eustacia’s Eve (as she plays Satan to his Eve and Adam). He ignites, as someone under her skin, a “subterranean heat” and thus “may tempt” her (87). She later hides from the “serpentining” (167) Wildeve in Venn’s van, again evoking the scene in which Gabriel defends Eve from Satan.

If Wildeve is a reflection of Eustacia, it is one with which she is intensely dissatisfied. But an opportunity for a more satisfying experience soon arises, and it arises in deceptively Miltonic terms. The next day, Eustacia overhears voices that, in another merging, “instinctively coupled her and this man [Clym Yeobright] in their minds together as a pair born for each other” (130). As Satan-Eve she had awaited Wildeve, but as simply Eve she leaves her pool on her own initiative to seek this idea of a mate. Unable to see him in the dark, she experiences his “masculine voice” (135), which elicits a dream, compared to those of Nebuchadnezzar and Bunyan. But the primary context is *Paradise Lost*. Dreaming Eve, inspired by Satan’s voice, hears a “gentle voice” that she believed to be Adam’s call her “forth to walk” in the “pleasant” night (5.36–38). Instead she finds the forbidden tree and “one shaped and winged like one of those from heaven” (5.55). She then is exhorted to “see” herself as a “goddess” (5.78) among the heavens that she had seen as the setting for her image in the pool: “Ascend to Heaven, by merit thine, and see / What life the gods live there, and such live thou” (5.80–81). Satan puts the fruit to her lips, she flies upward, he vanishes, and she falls and wakes: “Oh how glad I waked / To find this but a dream!” (5.92–93).

In her dream, Eustacia, feeling “like a woman in Paradise” (137), dances ecstatically with a visored knight. There is no Heaven for her to ascend as a goddess. She leaps downward with this romantic image into a pool, emerging in a cavern of rainbows. But a noise from the opening of a window-shutter awakens the dreamer as he was about to put his lips to hers. Eustacia exclaims, twice, “O that I had seen his face” (137, 138), a pointed contrast to Milton’s penitent Eve. Yet Eustacia will see his face, with disastrous consequences that are foreshadowed in her dream. Largely because Clym sleeps as she appears in a window before the rapping Mrs. Yeobright, Hardy’s wild Eve (with Wildeve) will end her life by flouncing into a rainy pool that leads not to a cave of rainbows but to a rain-barrow. This results in part because she had engaged in a variation of the trap that Satan creates for Eve in her dream, feigning the voice of a man (Adam) before appearing to her as an angel. Clym is an “original” who returns to where “any man could imagine himself to be Adam without the least difficulty” and ““what there is for him to do here the Lord in heaven knows”” (185, 127, 187). Eustacia however insists on seeing Clym, whom she has never seen, as “a vision” of “a man coming from heaven” with a “golden”—and “blinding”—“halo” (138, 130, 266, 216). She even

identifies him with what Satan had tempted Eve: a ticket to a version of “heaven,” the “dream” of Paris, ““that rookery of pomp and vanity”” where she “rightly belonged” (214–15, 260, 124).

Hardy eliminates distance between Heaven and Hell, Eve and Satan, Gabriel and Satan, even Adam and Eve, clearing a mythic space in which Eustacia can emerge (or submerge). This erasure is deftly continued in at least one instance of Hardy’s often slighted use of classical myth: his reworking of Echo and Narcissus. Eustacia at the pool had raised shades of Eve’s narcissism, which readily relates to a self-centered woman pursuing “Paris” as one of those who energized by the pagan “pride of life . . . adored none other than themselves” (269). For Milton, and many of his Victorian readers, this was evil. But Hardy suggests otherwise, turning Milton’s myth inside out. Eve as Narcissus becomes Eustacia/Eve-Narcissus as Echo, fatally seeking a quasi-blind Miltonic Narcissus. This reinscription of the myth, if it fails to cohere into a lucid explanation for Eustacia’s death, yet discredits facile constructions of her “vanity” that his Miltonic readers might too easily have made.

Determined to encounter her vision of a mate, she disguises herself as a mummer to enter the Yeobright “Paradise” (155; 137) after the dance-tune “Devil’s Dream” (“without any particular beginning, middle, or end”) and a reel that concludes when “the serpent emitted a last note that nearly lifted the roof” (of the heath? 150, 152). An opening description of Eustacia had subtly characterized her as Echo: “The mouth seemed formed less to speak than to quiver, less to quiver than to kiss” (90). Here she is explicitly identified with Echo: “the fascinations of her coquetry denied existence, nothing but a voice left to her; she had a sense of the doom of Echo” (161). According to Ovid, Echo was Hera’s loquacious confidante, whose zest for romantic intrigue results in her being reduced (by Hera) only to responding to those who had spoken first (a quiet nymph if not woman), usually in the countryside. There her fortunes turn dismal indeed, and the parallels with the initial misadventures of Hardy’s heroine are striking:

Now when she saw Narcissus wandering through the fields, she was inflamed with love and followed him by stealth; and the more she followed, the more she burned by a nearer flame; as when quick-burning sulphur, smeared round the tops of torches, catches fire from another fire brought near. Oh, how often did she long to approach him with alluring words and make soft prayers to him! But her nature forbids this.

(*Metamorphoses* 3.370–77)

Hardy’s adaptation, climaxing in Eustacia’s drowning, ripples not only through Clym and Eustacia’s first face-to-face meeting but their last. Clym learns that his mother had died because she has seen “what’s worse [than a devil-ghost]—a woman’s face [Eustacia’s] looking at me through a window-pane” (often identified with mirrors in narcissism narrative) and refusing to admit her (293). Eustacia-Echo

has become Narcissus, fatally rejecting the unflattering self-image embodied in the other Mrs. Yeobright (no other name provided for Clym's mother). Clym then enters Eustacia's room, with "blinds . . . still closely drawn" (329). She (standing, as at the pool) and at "the noise of his arrival . . . aroused" (again, as at the pool) at last looks directly at her image in a mirror and sees not her face but Clym's:

when he opened the door she was standing before the looking glass in her nightdress, the ends of her hair gathered into one hand, with which she was coiling [like Eve? Satan? Medusa? "the coil of things" ("The Two Stand Face to Face" [156]) the whole mass round her head, previous to beginning toilette operations. She was not [like Echo?] a woman given to speaking first at a meeting, and she allowed Clym to walk across in silence, without turning [like Orpheus?] her head. He came behind her, and she [like Perseus?] saw his face in the glass.⁷

Whatever she sees (and the indeterminacy seems intentional)—as Eve-Narcissus, or as Clym-Narcissus, or as Echo, or as all of them—it means separation from one whose absence leaves her, like Narcissus and/or his image, stifling "under stagnant water" (211): "the deathlike pallor in his face flew across into hers. He was close enough to see this, and the sight instigated his tongue [like Echo's?]. 'You know what is the matter,' he said huskily. 'I see it in your [his?] face.'" (329–30).

Eustacia then flees her "Eden" (251) and returns to Mistover Knap. No longer the perverse Narcissus, she is again the tragic Echo, reduced to a voice. Her "face was not visible" as she addresses one (Charley) to whom she was "scarcely incarnate" (336). After Charley finds her "hidden by the bank" where she has "disappeared" (336), she echoes the fallen Eve and the distraught Thomasin: "You [Charley] did not think when I left home in the summer that I should come back like this!" (337). On the next November 5th, he creates by the pool a bonfire for her. Through a window, she sees the fire itself "facing her," extinguishing her candles (342–43). Then two splashes—soon to be tragically echoed—in the pool announce the arrival of a devilish Damon: "the fire now shone into each of their faces from the bank stretching breast-high between them" (344). Eustacia, with something like an echo, protests, "Don't, don't come over to me!" With what is Damon tempting the Narcissus-Echo-Eve-Satan? The traditional wares of Vanity—wealth, love, Paris, the world? The wished-for all-consuming mad love? Even, as her self-image, to accept herself? Whatever the specifics, the newly enriched lover would seem to be offering her a life of worldly, if not pagan, happiness of which she had dreamed, with or without him: ". . . what is called life—music, poetry, passion, war, and all the beating and pulsing that is going on in the great arteries of the world" (290).

But despite his sympathy with the possibilities of such a life, Hardy indicates that it was impossible to achieve it, for many reasons, some of them directly related to Milton. By the 1870s, Milton's Heaven was vanishing, but his Christian

heroism, based on his configuration of Hebrew and Hellene, remained vital and compelling.⁸ *Paradise Lost* had destroyed traditional epic, whose great subjects were “what is called life—music, poetry, passion, war, and all the beating and pulsing that is going on in the great arteries of the world.” The poet had located evil in “man’s effeminate slackness” (*PL* 11.634) that is linked with courtly Renaissance romance and had countered it with the middle-class heroism of work, perseverance, faith, and the low wisdom of surviving in a world of paradises lost, compromised, and/or patched up:

. . . with good
Still overcoming evil, and by small
Accomplishing great things, by things deemed weak
Subverting worldly strong, and worldly wise
By simply meek.

(*PL* 12.565–69)

Eustacia, from the beginning, has provided an antithesis to this heroism. Her heroes are the founder of the Norman yoke, Strafford, a recent emperor, and biblical victims of God. Her ideal of being “loved to madness” (92) embodies Milton’s ideal vice of “man’s effeminate slackness.” She scorns Clym’s beloved heath (as close as anything to the presence of God in the novel) as a “cruel taskmaster” (203), an echo of Milton’s “great task-master’s eye” (line 14) in his oft-quoted Sonnet VII on finding a vocation. Mrs. Yeobright, on the following page, resorts to Milton’s other great sonnet on vocation, “On His Blindness,” when advising against marriage to Eustacia: “But when I consider the usual nature of the drag which causes men of promise to disappoint the world I feel uneasy” (204); “When I consider how my light is spent, / Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide . . . / I fondly ask” (“Sonnet XVI 1–2, 8). The novel’s only instance of “when I consider” is quickly joined by the narrator’s puzzling citations of “a poet blind” (not Milton, but a Miltonic construction) as he commends Mrs. Yeobright’s intuitive insight (205–06).

Despite (or perhaps because of) her rejection of her role(s) as Satanic Eve-Byronic rebel, Eustacia falls victim to the Sublime Puritan’s cultural legacy—or his “bogey.”⁹ Ironically, her tragedy results from her admitting what she had only sensed with her opening sigh: Milton was right. Traditional notions of “greatness” are, as Milton had argued, worthless, though not because of Milton’s Heaven and Hell but because of an absence of them, which similarly invalidates the poet’s Christian heroism:

And so we see our Eustacia—for at times she was not altogether unlovable—arriving at that stage of enlightenment which feels that nothing is worth while, and filling up the spare hours of her existence by idealizing Wildeva for want of a better object. This was the sole reason of his ascendancy: she

knew it herself. At moments her pride rebelled against her passion for him, and she even had longed to be free. But there was only one circumstance which could dislodge him, and that was the advent of a greater man.

(94)¹⁰

This recognition generates Eustacia's (self-)destruction, not the thwarting of her yearnings for Paris, for which she often has been castigated as a culturally encoded schoolgirl (Garson 71). And the "arriving" at—or returning to?—this recognition neatly summarizes her tragic action in the novel and tends to justify her mythic apparatus. Her *hubris* causes her to believe that her magical presence can create something worthwhile, or summon it from afar, or discover it if she can escape Egdon. As this Romantic "Life" is ready to be enabled, the "model goddess" within (89) instinctively recognizes her hope as self-deception. She cannot escape "the heath." What she has found there she will find in Paris: Wildevé, or another version of Wildevé or of Clym or of herself, in another time-worn story of sin, one more beautiful adulteress, an extra defiant devil, in Byronic exile, getting wrinkles. Resistance and rebellion are useless where Byron and Milton form the cultural landscape. This inspired recognition results in a kind of modern/Goethe-Faustian consciousness that rejects existence. Goethe's Faust, also on the point of suicide, wagers his soul against an experience that justifies creation, committing himself to spectacular experience. Eve, despite the horror elicited by her dream, eats the apple, attempts to ascend into Heaven, and is exiled from Eden. Satan, despite his being Hell, relocates to a paradisaal earth. Eustacia, despite her delight in her dream of the Knight, refuses the aid of the gallantly romantic Wildevé (who will die for her) because "nothing is worth while." Spurning the City of Light, and light itself, she seeks her rebellious image in a watery blackness of imageless negation.

Not surprisingly, as storm clouds gather, the Victorian girl perceives the triumph of the "model goddess" within as a defeat. Soon she is again atop Rainbarrow, "her effigy melting to nothing" (Echo) and "her soul in an abyss of desolation" (Satan) (360). When "Eustacia hears of Good Fortune and beholds Evil," we are told that "instead of blaming herself for the issue she laid the fault upon the shoulders of some indistinct, colossal Prince of the World, who had framed her situation and ruled her lot" (304). Now her opening sigh that has been swelling throughout the novel is verbalized in desperate soliloquy to this dark power, here called "destiny," despite the fact that circumstances miraculously have provided her with a newly-rich lover who can take her to Paris and anywhere else:

"And if I could [escape the heath with Wildevé's aid], what comfort to me? I must drag on next year, as I have dragged on this year, and the year after that as before. How I have tried and tried to be a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me! . . . I do not deserve my lot!" she cried in a frenzy of bitter revolt. "O, the cruelty of putting me into this ill-conceived world! I was capable of much; but I have been injured and blighted and crushed by

things beyond my control! O, how hard it is of Heaven to devise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to Heaven at all!"

(357)

The schoolgirl's notions that muddle her illumination are derived largely from Milton. Addressing light rather than darkness, a hopeless, sighing Satan also bitterly laments the "powerful destiny" whose misplacement of him in the universal scheme has resulted in Hell (4.29–31, 58–60):

. . . for within him Hell

He brings, and round about him, nor from Hell
One step, no more than from himself, can fly
By change of place: Now conscience wakes despair,
That slumbered, wakes the bitter memory
Of what he was, what is, and what must be
Worse . . . thus in sighs began . . .
Me miserable! which way shall I fly
Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?
Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell;
And, in the lowest deep, a lower deep
Still threatening to devour me opens wide,
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heaven.

(4.20–78; see also Moloch's speech, 2.60–70)

Satan has harmed Heaven and will again as he despoils the new Paradise, creating defiance and despair, escape and otherness, a Romantic hero. Eustacia has never harmed Heaven. Indeed, this is the darkened source of her instinctive despair: despite her culture's insistence, there's no Heaven or Hell or "Destiny" to harm or help, escape or exit, defy or obey. Rejecting escape, she, even more than a Satan who is Hell, creates her fatal destiny. This creation, for Hardy more authentic than Satan's, is her tragic triumph.

On this *walpurgisnacht*, "night"—of which she is Queen—is "funereal; all nature seemed clothed in crape" (356). There are "demons in the air, and malice in every bush and bough" (365) of Eustacia's interior and exterior landscapes generated by the "boiling caldron" (371) that is a woman "in an abyss of desolation" (360): "Never was harmony more perfect than that between the chaos of her mind and the chaos of the world without" (356). "Vanity" has exploded into creations of the world-as-mind. Eve's "liquid plain . . . pure as the expanse of heaven . . . another sky" (4.455–56, 459), in which she first sees herself, has become Hardy's "mud-coloured clouds" (353). The narrator, again conflating opposites, compares the night to ones when violence delivers or destroys God's chosen, such as at Gethsemane (356). "The whole expanse of heath"—"Tis my cross, my shame, and will be my death!" (Eustacia, 107)—is in blackness and "emitting a subdued

hiss” (361). The divine man triumphs over his mortal nature and accepts the death that, as God, he had ordered for himself. Hardy’s fusion of the divine and humane is murkier, the divine triumph more instinctive, and a kind of crucifixion is a kind of suicide.

As “Sights and Sounds [Narcissus and Echo] Draw the Wanderers Together” in the storm (369), Eustacia embraces her death in the turbulent mirror-pool. As at the novel’s opening, she refuses Satanic action or indeed any action, except falling into a stream that, though she is “slowly borne [born?]” (371), she will make no effort to escape. Her death would seem to echo the fatal splash of Narcissus: “To plunge into that medium [the stormy air] was to plunge into water slightly diluted with air” (364).¹¹ But only Wildevle plunges into the turbulent pool, madly seeking the beloved image that eludes him (371). Eustacia, however, fall[s] into the water (371), unlike her action in an earlier draft. This suggests not “only the passivity of accident” (Gatrell 47), but also the gravity of Milton’s tale of the fatal falls of a pool-gazing woman and rebellious spirits who escape from an “oblivious pool” (1.266; 221, 411). This myth and that of and Narcissus obscure her triumph over the temptation to believe vainly in Heavens and Hells and escapes and other errant beliefs with which she has been encoded by her culture. Moreover, its invalidity has left her defenseless, as her rejection of the cultural roles offered by these structures has left her a tumultuous blank. She disappears into a rainy dark mirror-pool that reflects no image, resistlessly carried to it by the resistless stream. She alerts the wanderers not through narcissistic image but through a “dull sound” that seems to echo “the storm and wind” (371): “Across [a pun?] this gashed and puckered mirror a dark body was slowly borne by one of the backward currents.”¹² Backward, forward, darkness, mirrors, born/e, drowned, Eustacia’s matchless lips are puckered for the kiss that she had missed in her dream. Against this blank backdrop, classicism provides a glimmer of consolation in a scene where “see her” (her corpse) appears five times in the space of 135 words. The nymph silenced by Hera has regained some of her *gravitas*: “The expression of her finely carved mouth was pleasant, as if a sense of dignity had just compelled her to leave off speaking” (376).

And what of Clym? Here myth and Milton tend to yield to Milton and English cultural history. To take his place in “a Timeworn Drama” (198), Clym returns not so much as Milton’s Adam but as Hardy’s Milton, a “bogey” for Hardy, too. Though Hardy called Clym “the nicest of all my heroes, and *not a bit* like me” (F. Hardy 151), the character is often described as “deeply autobiographical” (Seymour-Smith 201). Clym’s engagements with Milton are at least partially Hardy’s. Millgate connects a privately recorded statement with “Hardy’s anxiety over the novel’s reception” (Nov. 28, 1878): “Woke before it was light. Felt that I had not enough staying power to hold my own in the world” (199). This comment is made after he had written the novel, as is the statement by W. E. Henley in his overall positive review of the novel: “rare artist that he is, there is something wanting in his [and Clym’s?] personality, and he is not quite a great

man [protagonist?]" (48). This sweeping statement could not have been based on simply one novel. Hardy the man, it had been decided, simply was not great enough to fill the shoes of the preeminent "great man" who was a "great author": John Milton, an excellent candidate for the missing father of *Return of the Native*.

Hardy responds to this criticism by quietly creating a landscape bedeviled by not only Milton's legend but by the legend of Milton.¹³ Not even Milton could cope with the complexities of the nineteenth century, whatever reviewers and readers might believe; and his song was as inadequate to Hardy's world as Homer's was to Milton's. Intense, inevitable engagements with this literary father generate personal and professional shortcomings, certainly for Clym, implicitly for Hardy. Hardy's innovative, arduously preparing schoolmaster, of whom great things had been expected, mimics the great student Milton's epic preparation for the establishment of a private school (as ridiculed by Dr. Johnson). Milton eventually does leave his school, to become the revolutionary government's internationally famous Latin Secretary. He defends the English people, even at the cost of his eyesight, the act that crowned him as *the* great man-author, a prophet of parliamentary government.¹⁴ Even in political defeat and blindness, he resumes his educational goals as poet, and the rest is national legend if not history. But Clym cannot even manage a humble school, a plan thwarted not by blindness but by the threat of blindness, brought on, as avowedly Milton's blindness, by reading "far into the small hours during many nights" (259). As a result, Eustacia, like one of Milton's daughters, is forced to read to the invalid when she is not weeping "despairing tears" (260) in the garden while "he is set upon by adversities" and "sings a song" (257). This song disastrously echoes Milton when "in darkness, and with dangers compassed round" he sang "with mortal voice, unchanged / To hoarse or mute" (*PL* 7.23–28).¹⁵ Clym scoffs as "effeminate" the flashy high-life of those who are associated with a place where they "cut the king's head off . . . and what 'twill be next God knows" (188, 193, 128). He also expresses skepticism of class distinctions that empower the glamorous and great. Responding to Eustacia's vehement, tearful protest to his song and his refusal to return to Paris, Clym explains, "But the more I see of life the more do I perceive that there is nothing particularly great in its greatest walks, and therefore nothing particularly small in mine of furze-cutting. If I feel that the greatest blessings vouchsafed to us are not very valuable, how can I feel it to be any great hardship when they are taken away?" (264).

Eustacia is deeply resistant to these Miltonic values; and she soon leaves Clym, the would-be educator. Milton's wife had parted from her husband, too, but her absence in no way impaired his professional success (scant evidence suggests that Milton invited her, as Clym does Eustacia, to serve as schoolmistress). On the contrary, Milton capitalizes on his domestic misfortune by again entering into public controversy, writing divorce pamphlets (later highlighted in *Jude the Obscure*) that astonish hapless civic authorities, earn him the reputation of a bold libertine, and cease only with his wife's supposedly humiliating return (Hardy,

in the public wake of *Jude*, will not be quite so undaunted). For many Victorian patriarchs, Mary Powell Milton's marital misadventures still provided an excellent case of moral instruction from the life of one who, on the wings of his celebrated song, had ascended into the British cultural pantheon. But Clym, narrowly avoiding becoming a totally blind Narcissus, only manages to survive his wife's desertion. At her death scene, he, preferring a lowlier heroism, cautiously avoids the fate of Narcissus. Seeing Eustacia in the weir, Clym wades rather than plunges (373). This "wiser plan" ensures a mundane survival that renders him secondary to the two tragic lovers: "Misfortune had struck them gracefully, cutting off their erratic histories with a catastrophic dash, instead of, as with many, attenuating each life to an uninteresting meagreness, through long years of wrinkles, neglect, and decay" (381). Eustacia had declared, "O, if I could live in a gay town as a lady should, [or die as a sad tragic heroine might?] and go my own ways, and do my own doings, I'd give the wrinkled half of my life!" (115).

Clym opts for a "wrinkled mind" (382), a mind wrinkled with Milton (perhaps an Arnoldian Milton). As the novel concludes, he discovers his "vocation" (from the title of the last chapter), still a favorite word with Miltonists. The returned native has shunned the escape sought by Eustacia and ascends the mount where Eustacia had refused to act in Milton's timeworn drama. There he escapes into Christian platitudes, exhausted echoes of Milton and the Bible, benignly tolerated by those who knew his (and Milton's) time-worn story.

Even the misreadings of Hardy's story are uncannily Miltonic:

The story of the deaths of Eustacia and Wildeva was told throughout Egdon, and far beyond, for many weeks and months. All the known incidents of their love were enlarged, distorted, touched up, and modified, till the original reality bore but a slight resemblance to the counterfeit presentation by surrounding tongues. Yet, upon the whole, neither the man nor the woman lost dignity by sudden death.

(381)

The narrator is not specific about how the story was distorted by the heathfolk, an ambiguity that anticipates (mis)readings of Hardy's (re)telling of the lovers' story. This would suggest that the narrative's fragmented layering is indeed the result of an authorial integrity that was challenged by editorial demands (Gatrell 29–51; Paterson, "Introduction" xv–xx).¹⁶ Though the novel was finally accepted without any demands by the editor of the not entirely reputable *Belgravia*, Hardy had sent the first 15 chapters to the prestigious *Blackwood's Magazine* and offered to accept any bowdlerization. An anxious Hardy "was determined to try to please; he was equally determined to have his own way." Specifically, "besieged as he was by the false values of his society," Hardy strove to effect his belief that "'Literature is the written expression of revolt against accepted things'" (Seymour-Smith 226, 233). This was risky. Yet the cultural aerialist-architect succeeds by appropriating

a silver lining in Milton's cloud. Milton, according to persuasive modern readings of *Paradise Lost*, entangles readers into responding positively to evil in order to correct their own hidden depravity (Fish). This rhetoric, without the corrective narrator, surfaces in a novel that consistently "presents ambiguity and invites complicated responses" (Berger 201n).

Milton's story is so subtly rewritten that it masks the subversive messages in a novel that can readily appear to represent "the triumph of Christianity over paganism" and its Hellenic ideals (*Oxford Reader's Companion* 373; Paterson, "The Return of the Native as Antichristian Document" 119), in a kind of morality play (Wild-Eve, Fairway, Toogood, Yeobright, Eustacia/You-stay-cia, Thomas/in novel, and in draft A-vice). The flashes of the Miltonic narrative, supported with an adaptation of the Narcissus myth, appear to justify the destruction of Eustacia Vye, even while Hardy configures the mischievous woman as a modern, godless heroine whose actions (such as her climactic and fatal rejection of the role of glamorous adulteress) discredit the reader's invalid (and frequently Miltonic) moral responses. Though the narrator makes some of the most negative comments about deity in British literature, the primary framework for this deity is pagan. And this version of paganism, however subtly informed by myth and folklore, seems to endorse Milton's epic constructions of classical myth as brutal and chaotic. Christian providence, on the other hand, appears to have been spectacularly validated. Indeed, the destruction of two would-be adulterers and the marriage of a wronged, rich wife (Thomasin) to a vigilant enforcer of public morality (Venn) would not have disturbed the slumbers of those who believed themselves familiar with Milton's epic.

Hardy's masterful use of Milton's and Narcissus's myths enables him to retain his artistic integrity and to sell his book in the bargain. A troubled English girl becomes his new mythic anti-heroine in a landscape that signals the inescapable return of and to the native. Heaven and Hell have disappeared into the heath—and the heath has become them. Eerily, the frequent observation that the novel demonstrates that "you can't go home again" remains intact. Without an "other" to define it, there is no home to which to return. At least this is what the allusions suggest, as Hardy neither justifies nor explains, but carefully records "impressions," often allusively, allowing a bleak and dim light through the novel's maze of sights, seeings, gazes, flickerings, stares, shudders, windows, pools, lights, blinds, darkness, reflection, dream, and myth.¹⁷ Yet it is a powerful recording; and Hardy's invocation of an English classic, far from obtrusive, subtly illuminates his text. If similarly effective classic(al) allusive patterns can be detected, a revaluation of the novel's "classicism" (including the impact of modern classics, like *Faust*) would seem to be in order, especially in relation to tragedy. Finally, Hardy's novel is one of the first literary representations of the disappearing of the Romantic Satan. In the later 1800s, Satan as a theological character was already waning. Sir Walter Raleigh in 1900, examining Milton's epic monument to dead ideas, could announce, "Satan himself is not what he used to be" (83). But Milton's Satan, in connection with the Byronic hero, was in full force at this time, especially

among women novelists and female protagonists.¹⁸ Hardy's "Byronic" heroine rejects Byronic rebellion to become one of English literature's first modern(ist) protagonists, indicating that "Milton's bogey" was restricted to neither women nor Victorians. It points toward Pound and Eliot and many other modernists who will repudiate Milton's legacy. Hardy would seem to have been not only the most elderly, but, in some way, the first of British modernists.

NOTES

- 1 "Too studied and self-conscious an imitation of classical tragedy," according to John Paterson, who concedes "the novel is better than its defects" (Introduction ix, x). Dale Kramer writes, "*The Return of the Native* is Hardy's most imitative, most self-conscious, and generally least successful effort at high tragedy" (Kramer 48).
- 2 "Egdon was a lost Eden," according to Bullen (33), examining the heath as an embodiment of the novel's modernism, another vexed topic.
- 3 Citations, included in the text, will refer to the New Wessex Edition.
- 4 In a draft of the novel, Eustacia was a witch, "that immemorial antagonist of the Christian faith" (Paterson, Introduction xxvi; *Making* 18).
- 5 Gatrell calls this "one of the central paradoxes" in the novel (33). In a draft of the novel, Eustacia (as Avice) was a native of the heath.
- 6 Milton here provides Hardy with a model for destabilizing a text, comparing Satan to Moses (1.339).
- 7 Ironically in relation to Orpheus, Clym's not turning around to see his trailing mother causes her death.
- 8 DeLaura examines an idealistic Clym's tragic failures in relation to Hardy's rejection of Arnold's compromise reconstructions of Victorian religion (retaining Christian ethics and replacing its dogma with Hellenic intelligence). For Arnold, Milton was the only British artist who had achieved the Hellenic ideal, in his Puritan epic particularly. Gray, examining "Milton as Classic, Milton as Bible" in Victorian culture (title of chapter 2), cites an observation from Masson's *Poetical Works of John Milton* (1866): "'now it is Milton's story of the origin and first events of the universe, rather than the biblical outline which suggested it to him, that has taken possession of the British mind'" (Gray 42). By the later nineteenth century, *Paradise Lost* was a common school text (33).
- 9 For "Milton's bogey," see Gilbert and Gubar.
- 10 Hardy was reading G. R. Lewes's *Life of Goethe* in June 1875 (Pinion 142). He was keenly interested in "how the Hellenic ideal, which Goethe had reflected in the second part of *Faust*, could be regained" (160).
- 11 According to Callistratus (in his *Descriptions*) and Plotinus (*The Enneads* 1.6.8), he drowns, presumably while attempting to embrace and/or kiss his watery image (Zimmerman 9).
- 12 Coombs connects this sentence with Narcissus (960).
- 13 Walter Raleigh in 1900 made his famous comment in defense of Milton: "*The Paradise Lost* is none the less an eternal monument because it is a monument to dead ideas" (85).

- 14 W. P. Trench, for example, writes of “the moral grandeur displayed by Milton in preferring to lose his sight rather than his beloved and then to him glorious England should go undefended” (173). Masson writes: “Night and day, but chiefly in early morning hours, by sunlight or by candlelight, the work [the *Defensio*] had been going on. But O! at what a cost it was to be! His left eye already useless . . . there were warnings that the other eye likewise might fail before long. Reasoning with him on this and on the general state of his health, his physicians . . . had distinctly told him the probable consequences if he persisted in his task. But he had taken his resolution. Not the voice of Æsculapius himself from his Epidaurian temple, he says, would have prevailed. Knowing the fatal alternative before him to be blindness or desertion of duty, he had deliberately chosen blindness” (251).
- 15 Milton, according to first-hand accounts, also used to sing during attacks of the gout that eventually killed him.
- 16 According to Gatrell, Hardy’s careful revisions were a response to editorial pressures (29–51). Paterson, however, sees the work as escaping Hardy’s control (*Making* 133, 135).
- 17 Hardy maintained that his works were structured by “impressions of the moment, and not convictions or arguments” (“General Preface to the Wessex Edition of 1912,” *Return of the Native* 426). “In this novel of criss-crossing gazes, there are six references to the pupil of an eye, and more than 100 to the eye or eyes generally” (Dillion and Mallett 105n). Instances of see/seeing exceed 200. The face itself is similarly important in Hardy’s fusions of “subject and object, person and landscape, interior and exterior” (Cohen 449). Irwin discusses “seeing” generally in Hardy.
- 18 Chapter 6 in Elfenbein. Elfenbein (as readers often do) sees Eustacia as exemplifying “the vogue for female characters who revived Byronic romanticism by appropriating its clichés” (65).

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