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Primitive Minds

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THE END OF THE NOVEL

Naturalism and Reverie in

Tess of the d'Urbervilles and *The Return of the Native*

In some respects it is odd to think of Arthur Conan Doyle and Thomas Hardy as contemporaries. Hardy's narratives center on the anguished and disoriented subjects of industrial modernity while the Holmes stories uncover and defuse threats to collective order. Moreover, where Doyle's career reflects an increasingly confident belief in the spiritual afterlife, Hardy scrutinizes the "primitive believer in his man-shaped tribal god"¹ and endorses the agnosticism of Spencer and Darwin over the idea of an omnipotent and beneficent deity.² What they do share, however, is a shift in emphasis from Lamarckian evolutionism, with its stress on the purposive striving of the individual to bring about the improvement of the species, to a more Darwinian interest in transformations that are neither predictable nor necessarily progressive. Both also respond to this recognition with a turn to the automatic, or "lower," activity of the mind, although for Hardy this automatism provides, at best, temporary psychic relief from the conscious

suffering of his protagonists, where for Doyle it promises to unlock great human potential. Also, in a very different way from Doyle, these states in Hardy's fiction produce spectral and mystical forms in place of a force for omnipotent goodness in the universe. These forms exert so much pressure on the realist narratives that they perhaps explain why Hardy abandons the novel and turns to poetry, recognizing it as a medium that can better represent the automatic motions of the mind and the faint hope such motions hold out against what he famously described in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* as "the ache of modernism."

Hardy's novels struggle to retrieve forms of spirituality, especially pagan mysticism and animism, from the secular and scientific modernity embedded in the realist novel's very form as well as in its subject matter.³ They do so both formally, through the dreamy and magical perceptions of a narrative voice that paradoxically remains agnostic, evolutionist, and antihumanist and in the novels' content, where ancient and primitive objects and rituals continue to affect the characters, providing some narrative counterweight to the stories of human nature and social disintegration that otherwise promise to dominate and destroy them. The "gift" of the novelist, Hardy proposed in an 1891 essay on realism, is not the naturalist's ability to "count the dishes at a feast" but rather to "see written on the wall" Prospero's vision that "we are such stuff / As dreams are made of."⁴ Although Hardy's narratives, which position their characters at the mercy of circumstance, could not be more different than Shakespeare's story of the magician-duke who tames the elements, both acknowledge that productions of the dreamy mind are consolations as much as curiosities, for they partly mitigate human suffering at the hands of nature and history.

I. THE NOVEL AND THE MODERN ACHE

Darwinian readings of Hardy's novels show that their stories of individual lives are dwarfed by the great plots of geological history, natural and sexual selection, and the accidents, interdependencies, and contingencies of a world that John Glendening has identified with Darwin's entangled bank.⁵ The indifference of these larger stories to the fates of their individual human actors can determine the undue suffering of those, like Tess d'Urberville, who are driven by the pulse of nature yet neither cradled nor redeemed by it. At other times, nature and its rhythms may be a source of refuge from the discomforts of social life, as characters ranging from farm laborers and milkmaids to those who have risen in the metropolitan world, experience something like a

oneness with the natural world as they seek to forget the dislocation, want, or emotional pain inflicted on them by human institutions and systems.⁶ Even as they diminish individual experience in relation to these greater narratives, the novels thus intrude the cruelties and attractions of culture into the stories of humans and nature—whether in the form of the lure of high culture represented by Christminster in *Jude the Obscure*, or the glamour of the commercial world in *The Return of the Native*, or the exploitation of rural laborers at the hands of industrial modernity as in *Tess*. Natural and cultural forces are further entwined by the contradictions and constraints nature and culture exercise on each other,⁷ and within such entanglements, Hardy's characters seem to lose all power of self-determination.

Such themes are quintessentially novelistic. In *The Origins of the English Novel*, Michael McKeon divides the historical analysis of the novel into two mutually informing categories: questions of truth and questions of virtue. Responding at once to the discoveries of empirical science and the upheavals of secularization and social reform in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, he argues, the novel wrestles with how to present the world given by nature and, at the same time, how to navigate its changing moral shape. As a literary form that responds to and records both social uncertainty and epistemological instability, the novel is therefore robustly modern.⁸ Hardy might be said to have formulated a late nineteenth-century response to precisely these questions of “truth” and “virtue” in two essays that express his views on the responsibilities and limits of fictional forms—views that are informed by the findings of evolutionary biology as well as by his attitudes to the literary public sphere and middle-class prudery. Cautioning against the censoring of fiction by magazine editors and publishers, he argues:

in representations of the world, the passions ought to be proportioned as the world itself. This is the interest which was excited in the minds of the Athenians by their immortal tragedies, and in the minds of Londoners at the first performance of the finer plays of three hundred years ago. They reflected life, revealed life, criticized life. Life being a physiological fact, its honest portrayal must be largely concerned with, for one thing, the relations of the sexes and . . . of catastrophes based upon sexual relations as it is.⁹

Hardy emphasizes the biological fact of sexual desire that, like other facts of human instinct, underwrites even as it threatens to destroy the most fundamental units of social organization; he insists that the writer's allegiance must be to those realities that go beyond “social expedients by humanity”

to Nature's essential laws—realities that urge “the triumph of the crowd over the hero, of the commonplace majority over the exceptional few.”¹⁰ This biologism also drives the structure of fiction itself, with human nature determining not only the subject matter of novels but the very form of that subject's delivery. To adopt the “false colouring” of the happy ending in which estranged lovers are reunited and remain happy ever after is to fly romantic-comically in the face of the tragic reality that we are biologically driven by passions that easily outmaneuver the social forms devised to contain them.

Yet even this account does not quite capture the full degree of his characters' entrapment, which is determined by “social expedients” as well as by natural laws. In a much-discussed passage from *Tess*, Angel Clare observes how strange it is that a simple milkmaid should suffer from the melancholy spirit of the age, or what he calls the “ache of modernism” (*Tess*, 124). Some time ago, David de Laura showed how this phrase captures not only the broad themes of modernist aesthetics—rootlessness, isolation, spiritual emptiness—but also Hardy's skepticism toward Matthew Arnold's secular-humanist promise to retrieve a rational, creedless faith from the ruins of Christian mysticism. In the frustrated idealism, neo-Hellenism, and intellectual liberalism of characters like *Tess*'s Angel Clare and Clym Yeobright in *The Return*, de Laura proposed, Hardy projects the failure of these modern forms of faith *either* truly to overcome “custom and conventionality” *or* to relieve human beings from the painful awareness that all experience is the product, not of benevolent design, but of blind natural laws.¹¹ He creates modern, intellectual characters like Angel and Clym, who, while they may be, as J. Hillis Miller has put it, “separated from the universe by the detached clarity of . . . mind” also “participate in the motion of nature through . . . body.”¹² Their active resistance to the cultural traditions or social conditions that limit human potential can find its reference point only in fantasies of a pristine, premodern world untouched by the corrupting influence of modernity. Meanwhile, their female counterparts, Tess d'Urbeyfield and Eustacia Vye, who are at once the desired and desiring figures in the dance of sexual selection and at the same time the outcast victims of moral conventions and laws, are likewise tormented by both the power of social forms and the indifference of natural laws. Whatever longings the characters may have, either for the full, liberating realization of the modern spirit or for a world uncontaminated by its ills, none is able to fully retreat from the social environments that oppress them or to successfully integrate their longings with the natural forces that shape their lives. Indeed, in their very efforts to do so, they usually precipitate their own or others' suffering.

In this respect, they demonstrate the melancholy underside of what Bruno Latour has identified as the triumphant critical posture of the modern subject, who moves back and forth between the ideas of a transcendent nature, “out there,” beyond the control of human beings, and notions of a human-constructed reality that conditions our understanding of all phenomena. Modernity, Latour argues in *We Have Never Been Modern*, is a historical construction that announces the separation of human-made and nonhuman worlds, or the transcendence of both “a Nature that is not our doing” and Society as something “we create through and through.”¹³ However, at the same time as they declare this separation of the human from the nonhuman, moderns are able to mobilize “critical possibilities” that invert and overlap these realms while appearing to keep them in place:

Nature remains mobilizable, humanizable, socializable. Every day, laboratories, collections, centers of calculation and of profit, research bureaus and scientific institutions blend it with the multiple destinies of social groups. Conversely, even though we construct Society through and through, it lasts, it surpasses us, it dominates us, it has its own laws, it is as transcendent as Nature. . . . The critical power of the moderns lies in this double language: they can mobilize Nature at the heart of social relationships, even as they leave Nature infinitely remote from human beings; they are free to make and unmake their society, even as they render its laws ineluctable, necessary and absolute.¹⁴

Using the examples originally twinned by Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer of Boyle’s air pump and Hobbes’s Leviathan, Latour argues that moderns simultaneously liberate themselves socially through ideology critique, which exposes the fusion of power and knowledge at the origin of society, and acknowledge their natural limits by raising scientific reasoning above the human-made procedural and social world, then appealing to the certainty of nature’s laws to emphasize what is inevitable. Yet they are also able to maneuver within these categories, binding social and natural relations so as to render themselves less impotent as natural beings and less anchorless as social actors. As they assert the absolute separation of natural and social worlds while concealing and repressing the hybrid forms, Latour suggests, the moderns “purify” the categories of Nature and Society. In so doing, they banish to the premodern any pretensions to “science” that combine spiritual knowledge with the investigation of nature, such as alchemy or astrology.

Hardy’s “ache” transforms the self-assurance of Latour’s moderns into helplessness and paralysis. His characters struggle against forces of social

domination only to find that their power of choice is profoundly limited by desire or physical want or both; in answering their raw bodily needs they risk entrapment or disgrace at the hands of those who exercise social power over them. Even as their struggles against social limitations reveal heredity and desire as the determining force in their lives, the unyielding influence of these natural forces joins with persistent tyrannical social forms. Jude's defiant relationship with Sue does not liberate him from the condition of his birth or from the domestic traps woven by sexual desire; Eustacia's modern rebelliousness leaves her in nature's clutches as she pursues her material ambitions in "the secret recesses of sensuousness," while at the same time she has "hardly crossed the threshold of conventionality" (86); Angel's sexual fascination with Tess is what drives his need to identify her with a unspoiled Arcadia, and his subsequent rejection of her once he learns the story of her past exposes the morally conventional heart of the intellectual rebel. All three struggle uselessly against a confluence of natural and cultural forces that confirms the fatalism of the folk expression "It was to be" (*Tess*, 74) but that, as a hybrid, has more tragic power than purely natural oppressiveness like that of the milkmaids' futile passion for Angel or purely cultural oppression like the Evangelist preaching Tess learns to despise.

Angel's treatment of Tess demonstrates how the denial of these hybrid forms contributes to the disempowerment and alienation of those most vulnerable to them. Until her revelation, Tess remains for him "a genuine daughter of nature," embodying both the premodern wholeness that he experiences in rural life and the unburdened joy of his own past. His physical separation from the other dairy hands and his ignorance about the real toil and suffering of rural laborers prevent him from ever immersing himself in the particulars of Tess's world. He can no more perceive the confluence of modern historical forces that have brought Tess to Crick's dairy—the industrialization of agriculture and the ascendancy of a new merchant class represented by the Stoke-d'Urbervilles—than he can recognize "the particulars of an outward scene" over the "general impression" (119). Such romanticism shapes his encounter with nature and "the voices of inanimate things" (118), even as an unyielding Evangelical background drives him to revile Tess after he learns about her seduction. By refusing to recognize that Tess is as much a child of history as of nature, he exposes her to greater punishment from the elements and, as a consequence, to further human exploitation.

On the other hand, as an intellectual who is nonetheless more conventional than he knows, Angel himself is able both to disparage social rules that forbid him to marry a woman of a lower station and to resist the creaturely yearning for joy when it conflicts with his rather traditional moral sympa-

thies. Once he condemns Tess, desire has no hold on him and “propensities, tendencies, habits, are as dead leaves upon the tyrannous wind of [his] imaginative ascendancy” (245). Angel’s combination of determined resistance to the voices of nature and his critical stance on the artificial obstacles to union with the woman he loves suggest his immunity to the ache. His life is shaped by will rather than by necessity, and his position as a younger son of a clergyman allows him the freedom to choose both a profession and a mate. Despite his romanticism about rural life, he never has any illusions about his own relationship to it, determining on a future as a gentleman farmer because it will afford him financial independence while allowing for intellectual liberty and because “something had to be done” (117). He is therefore “wonderfully free from the chronic melancholy . . . taking hold of the civilized races with the decline of belief in a beneficent Power” (118). In these ways, he is very different from Clym Yeobright, who turns his back on Paris and the glamorous life of a diamond merchant in the hope of recovering the organic community that he associates with his childhood on Egdon Heath. Clym finds that he cannot return; and although he works as a furze cutter, he never ceases to be the Rousseau-like modern, looking longingly back from this side of modernity on a lost world.

Angel, however, is no less modern than Clym. His relationship with Tess highlights his modern’s way of thinking even as it positions him within a cluster of natural and cultural forces to which he remains oblivious. This is true even as he analyzes the effect of modernity on others. With the kind of insight that is usually reserved for the narrative voice, Angel attributes Tess’s sadness to an ache arising from the place of human beings in an animate yet cruelly indifferent nature. Tess has described this nature as a place where human and nonhuman exchange looks that seem to communicate only the inevitability of anguish and death. “The trees have inquisitive eyes,” she says, “And the river says ‘why do you trouble me with your looks?’” (124). At first Angel interprets her words in the context of modern alienation. He then reflects that this very act of interpretation is taking place within the human-made context that gives new names to old sensations. In this self-correction, he suggests the need to distinguish between the laws of nature and the social lenses through which they are interpreted and, with true modern flair, exchanges the transcendence of the natural world for that of the social. After he condemns Tess, however, he becomes the object of narrative analysis rather than the analyzer. The narrator shows the hybrid forms that Angel represses: social forces in the form of moral conservatism exert pressure on him outside the sphere of his own awareness, determining the lovers’ separation; but these are compounded by the organic consequences of

that separation, whereby, the narrator tells us, “new growths insensibly bud upward to fill each vacated place [and] unforeseen accidents hinder intentions” (246). Here nature absorbs the effects of social life into the larger story of change under the pressures of growth and circumstance. In Latour’s account of the teleologies and elitisms of modernity, the segregation of science and the social world results in the triumphant demystification of both as curious objects and knowing subjects are both divested of their premodern power. For Hardy, however, such segregation and the recombinations of social oppression and natural cruelty that it permits create mental suffering at all levels of human experience. In his misery, Angel blames first Tess’s peasant woman’s ignorance of social proportions and in the next breath her aristocratic heritage whose “exhausted seedling” points to the inevitable decline of the narrow breed through natural selection. Limited by his modern relationship both to nature and to culture, Angel punishes the characteristically passive Tess, who then becomes doubly victim to the ache.

II. AUTOMATISM AND ESCAPE FROM THE MODERN

Yet there is some relief from this bleakness. Although there is no return from the modern, Clym’s rejection of metropolitan luxury in favor of helping the folk of his childhood to withstand the destructive effects of a commercially upward-bound civilization immerses him in the folk culture of rural Wessex. Like Angel’s Hellenism, his return to the traditional world of his childhood and his “barbarous satisfaction” in the failure of new farming methods to tame the Heath may ultimately fail to alleviate the pains of modernity, but they earn him the respect of the narrator, who allows him a provisional return, associating him with that very landscape, as “he might be said to be its product” (148). This association in turn ties him to the evidence of premodern human activity that decorates the Heath: the Druidical monument he points out to Eustacia, and the “jumbled Druidical rites and Saxon ceremonies” that Egdon waste hosts. Correspondingly, *Tess* holds out the hope that the miseries inflicted by Darwinian nature might be overcome through pagan spirituality. The narrator tells us that “women whose chief companions are the forms and forces of outdoor Nature retain in their souls far more of the Pagan fantasy of their remote forefathers than of the systematized religion taught their race at a later date” (104). This passage follows closely from one in which we learn that Tess, although burdened by disgrace and grief following Alec’s seduction and the death of her child, is nonetheless led by “the irresistible, universal, automatic tendency to find sweet pleasure

somewhere, which pervades all life from the meanest to the highest” (103). Alone this account links joyful nature with the evolutionary force or “deep time” that has no care for the individual life.¹⁵ Yet the narrator ties the experience of natural release from the prejudices of social convention and “systematized religion” to Tess’s pagan worship of the “Sun and Moon . . . [and] Green Things upon the Earth” (104). This tension between the indifference of Darwinian nature and the comfort or joy of pagan animism is repeated at the end of the novel. Here Angel’s pairing with Tess’s sister, Liza Lu, negates the value of an individual life by positioning it in the greater story of descent. Yet this undramatic ending, in which the couple simply “join hands and [go] on” (398) after Tess is executed, is narratively speaking much less powerful than the preceding scene at the pagan temple of Stonehenge in which Tess tragic-heroically announces her “glad” (396) resignation to her death.

Creatures of the premodern mind—preternatural forms, ancient “ghosts,” and pagan spirits that blend human and nonhuman worlds—do not disturb the daylight realities of industrialization, social injustice, and the struggles of the rural poor as these are depicted in the novels. Instead, they appear in Hardy’s depiction of the peculiar mental states of trance, dream, and reverie. Tess’s “fetishistic utterance” is part of a “half-conscious rhapsody” (104); the days before Tess’s capture belong to the lovers’ dream world in which “all that’s sweet and lovely” defies the “inexorable” (390). In the Flintcombe-Ash swede field, where the conditions of industrialized farming reach their most brutal, she is indifferent to the injustice of her lot so long as “it was possible to exist in a dream” (285). At one level, dreaminess is associated throughout the novel with her self-destructive passivity, most obviously in her feeling of separateness from her surroundings and “dream-like fixity” (151) when she is raped by Alec d’Urberville and in the “drooping eyelids” that express her shame and submissiveness when she tells Angel about her past. Yet dreams and other states of automatic mental activity also free her from creaturely suffering. Having confessed to Angel how she experiences the cold gaze of nature, she adds, “but *you* can raise up dreams with your music, and drive all such horrid fancies away” (124). Angel first notices her when he hears her state to the dairyman how “our souls can be made to go outside our bodies when we are alive” (120). She describes how by self-hypnotically fixing her mind upon a star, she can travel hundreds of miles from an unwanted physical body. She feels relief only when her mind is removed from its natural surroundings to fix upon some creature of its own making and consequently when it does not meet the gaze of nature.¹⁶

Like Tess’s reverie, Angel’s somnambulism briefly offers hope against the inexorable forces that direct the narrative through separation and suffering

toward death. When Angel comes into her room the night before he leaves her, Tess recognizes immediately by his vacant stare that he is sleepwalking, and despite the physical danger to both of them when he carries her across the river and into a graveyard, she experiences this somnambulistic episode as a “beatific interval” (249). Angel’s state is clearly the effect of his mental exhaustion. Yet it endows him with unconscious prevision: As he carries his wife to a graveyard he prefigures the scene in the d’Urberville family tomb when Alec entraps her, and as he weeps over her “dead” body, he anticipates the final scenes of the novel. The narrator faults Angel for not being insightful enough to recognize his wife’s real virtue, because the “shade of his own limitations” blinds him to her goodness. Only in sleep does he know her as “sweet, good, and true” (247).

Such foresight links his somnambulism to the local legends and superstitions that likewise forecast the tragic events to come. Although these are far from beatific, they stress the hybrid human-nature forms of the premodern, and in that respect they echo the episodes of dreamy release from the burdens of modernity. When the newly wed Tess and Angel step into the coach to travel to the former d’Urberville manor house, Tess’s feelings of foreboding express themselves in a strange and sudden recognition of the vehicle itself: She says she “must have seen it in a dream” (213). Angel then partially reveals the legend of the d’Urberville coach, explaining that a crime was committed in it by some sixteenth- or seventeenth-century d’Urberville but refusing to finish telling her the gloomy legend since it presumably forecasts murder. Tess ignores his subsequent naturalistic explanation, for some dim knowledge of the story has come to her mind by association and prophesies that it signifies either crime or death. Her intuition is then reinforced by the call of an afternoon crow, which the dairyman observes bodes an unhappy union, notwithstanding his wife’s anxious, naturalizing assurance that “it only means a change in the weather” (216). Later in the story, the legend of the coach echoes ironically in Tess’s fancy that she hears it again, followed by the appearance of Alec, the sham d’Urberville, who comes as false redeemer to save her family from destitution. Although Tess is delivered from the oppressive voices of Evangelism by Angel’s heterodox rejection of the word of scripture, her modern’s skepticism is only ever for her a temporary keeping at bay of the folkish “gloomy specters” (195) that the plot will reveal to be rightfully foreboding.

Although Tess’s dreamy presentiments are borne out by the plot of her own life, as we have seen, the narrator persists in the story of nature’s indifference to individual beings in its relentless push toward generation. Despite its significance in the lives of Tess and Angel, Dairyman Crick’s household

belongs only to “another year’s installment of flowers, leaves, nightingales, finches, and such ephemeral creatures [who take] up their place where only a year ago others had stood in their place when these were nothing more than germs and inorganic particles” (128). The narrator of *The Return of the Native*, on the other hand, appears torn between evolutionary awareness and a susceptibility to reverie. In his tribute to “the particular glory of the Egdon [heath]”¹⁷ labored personification draws the landscape into the human world, animated by “sympathy” and “fraternization” to merge with the darkening sky at dusk and then “appear[s] slowly to awake and listen” (9). The heath, for him, is a reminder of Lyell’s expanse of geological time, remaining unchanged while all who occupy it continually change and disappear. And yet it is also one and the same with its human inhabitants who, in sped-up evolution, “appear upon the scene” in the title of chapter 2, “Humanity Appears Upon the Scene, Hand in Hand with Trouble.” Their celebration of Guy Fawkes, which evokes Druid and Saxon rites, provokes “muttering articulations of the wind” in the hollows of the surrounding hills (18). He describes these figures in the landscape as indistinct, grotesque bodies, whose exaggerated features in the firelight suggest something “extreme” and “preternatural” belonging again to the peculiar magic of the heath at sundown but also to the Christian prehistory of that landscape, so that “the first instinct of an imaginative stranger might have been to suppose it the person of one of the Celts . . . so far had all of modern date withdrawn from the scene” (15). Similarly, in his first description of Eustacia, he emphasizes the “material minutiae” that create the effect of the heath coming to life as “the united products of infinitesimal vegetable causes” (50). Yet again, as an “imaginative stranger” he hears the sounds announcing the appearance of a woman whom he describes as a reincarnated Sappho and whose ritual nighttime wandering on the heath emphasizes its otherworldly character. Ghostly and pagan visions float across his awareness of actual evolutionary time.¹⁸ Despite his attunement to the gulf between geological and human time as well as of the “intelligible [historical] facts” (10) that belong to the heathland, the narrator experiences its apparently unchanging forms as a “ballast to the mind adrift on change and harassed by the irrepressible New” (11). In this state of reverie, time stands still: These scenes “exhibit the inertness of the desert”; they suggest a cataleptic “condition of healthy life . . . nearly resembling the torpor of death” (14–15).

This tension in the narrative voice between modern knowing and the reverie brought on by the strange visual effects of the heath at dusk introduces a broader pattern in the novel whereby the mind’s painful awareness of circumstances is suspended and the intellectual gap between the separate,

observing modern and the unreflecting “native” driven by forces outside his control collapses. Eustacia’s longing to escape from the stifling rural environment and her painful sense of being isolated and out of place in relation to the villagers is relieved at several key moments. The first is on the Heath when her voice mingles with the sounds of the scene in a “spasmodic abandonment . . . as if, in allowing herself to utter the sound, the woman’s brain had authorized what it could not regulate” (51). The second is in the illicit dance with Wildeve when her “reason become[s] sleepy” and “her face rapt” as “her soul . . . passed away from and forgot her features, which were left empty and quiescent” (219–20). Her trance state, like Clym’s blindness and resulting social regression, temporarily relieves her feelings of separateness from the people and countryside around her, but again, like him, she suspends her suffering at the cost of nervous and mental superiority to all that surrounds her. “The fantastic nature of her Passion,” the narrator observes, “which lowered her as an intellect, raised her as a soul” (104). Such passion withdraws her attention from her surroundings as she becomes so absorbed in daydream that she mentally erases both her own history and that of the countryside she lives in. She longs for the cosmopolitan pleasures of a Paris that exists only in her imagination, but that she feels is much more native to her than rural England, a longing so powerful that it sometimes overwhelms awareness of her surroundings and she sees “nothing of human life now” (63). When Clym draws her attention to an ancient Druidical landmark, she replies “I was not even aware that there existed any such curious Druidical stone. I am aware that there are Boulevards in Paris” (160). Although it is the urban heart of modernity that she longs for and the pagan landmarks that she ignores, the dreamy non sequitur removes her mentally from both the scene of sexual desire and the constraints of convention that cluster in a changing social landscape, thereby offering release from her own, very modern pain.

While Eustacia attempts to escape the constricting life of Edgon in reverie, Clym tries to find some alternative to “the grimness of the human situation” (161) in his return. Abandoning not only his commercial position in the world but eventually even his aspirations to pass along high knowledge to those who have been denied it, he endeavors to discover “a bare equality with, and no superiority to, a single living thing under the sun” (177). To his mother, watching him cut furze on the Heath, he becomes one with the landscape and, like an insect, so primitive as to have “no knowledge of anything in the world but fern, lichens and moss” (231). Yet such absorption in nature brings him not comfort but the pain of jealousy and loss. Following Eustacia’s death, Clym is able to forget his grief only when he

walks on the heath alone and his imagination fills the landscape with ancient figures.¹⁹ Neither character can overcome social and intellectual separateness from those around them except by retreating from the world delivered by the senses. This propensity to dreaminess is thrown into relief by the contrasting example of Thomasin, who is able to renounce the snobbish ambition that kept her from loving Diggory when she begins to “[lay] her heart open to external influences of every kind” (316).

As in *Tess*, dreamy states of mind often intersect with folklore and magical thinking in *The Return of the Native*. The revelation that the haunted Christian Cantle is “the man that no woman will marry” (26), partly, it is thought, because he was born on a moonless night, is followed by Fairway’s warning that ghosts show themselves to unmarried sleepers. Susan Nunsuch accuses Eustacia of practicing witchcraft, and although the more educated Mrs. Yeobright declares such superstition absurd, Eustacia’s mysterious rituals on the heath initially suggest sinister magic. At the very least she has a powerful mesmeric influence over her male “subjects”: Susan’s son, Johnny Nunsuch “seem[s] a mere automaton, galvanized into moving and speaking by the wayward Eustacia’s will” (55) as he helps her to light the fire; Wildev, who next appears on the scene, comes “in obedience to [her] call” (58). Although the informed reader knows that it is the power of sexual selection, not witchcraft, operating here, the narrative does not entirely reject the possibility of psychic and malevolent influence at a distance. Coincidences between Susan’s burning of the wax effigy, Clym’s prescient sense, while he waits in hope that his wife will come back, that “invisible shapes of the dead were passing in on their way to meet him” (297), and Eustacia’s death are never explained away. Moreover, the half-mesmerized narrator, who becomes so lost in his description of her queenly carriage and “Pagan eyes” (61) that he cannot deliver any precise information about her history or parentage until well after he first introduces her, describes Wildev’s unrequited passion as the product of a “spell” (305).

If there is something witchlike about Eustacia, there is plenty ghostlike in the character of Diggory Venn, the reddleman. Christian, whose fear of ghosts gives him a horror of the reddleman’s coloring, encounters the latter in “strange places, particularly dreams” (262). Diggory himself is a figure of the old rural world destined for extinction, the narrator muses, like the dodo in the world of animals. His career is the inverse of Clym’s, since he begins life beneath his potential but sheds his red skin at the end of the novel to revive his courtship of Thomasin and advance himself as a farmer and husband. Despite the narrator’s pointed identification of his fortunes with the natural and commercial forces of transformation in the novel,

however, we experience him at least as much through the haunted minds of other characters as through the descriptions of his own suffering and cynicism. Our first introduction to him is as the specter of Christian's terrified imagination, and he preserves this ghostlike quality throughout most of the novel, materializing as if out of nowhere at key moments in the emotional lives of the other characters or as if he were the embodiment of Eustacia's conscience, appearing suddenly on the heath to remind her of the illegitimacy of her relations with Wildeve. A sort of spirit of the heath, he belongs to the dreamscapes of the other characters even as he gives voice to the rural culture of Mosaic censorship that seeks to quiet Eustacia's rebellious passions. Diggory is thus at once a key figure in the realist description of how human potential is liberated or constrained by circumstance, and in another the creature of primitive superstition conjured up by the superstitious or guilty fears of other characters. It is not surprising then, that it is to Diggory that Clym expresses his spiritualist longings following Eustacia's death, lamenting that "we, who remain alive, [are not] allowed to hold conversation with the dead" (265).

While reverie and dreamy clairvoyance temporarily liberate the characters from the painful conditions of their lives, Hardy's later fiction recognizes the cruelties of nature and history as being themselves the creations of automatic or unconscious mind on a cosmic scale. According to an evolutionary principle called the "Immanent Will," which he assembled from his reading of Schopenhauer and Von Hartmann in the late 1880s and 1890s, life is animated evolutionarily by an unconscious force that has no awareness of and hence no compassion for its actors. The blind indifference of this Will is the primitive root from whose reflex acts branch ever ascending creations, culminating in the powerful intellect and complex sensibilities of modern human beings. This means humans are afflicted with a painful awareness of natural and social constraints on any attempt at self-determination, an awareness that itself represents an evolutionary achievement unforeseen by the purposeless energy of the original creative force. Although Hardy would later soften this philosophical pessimism with the idea of "evolutionary meliorism" or the gradual coming to consciousness of this automatic creative force, his novels show little anticipatory evidence of this concept.²⁰ Instead they propose that refuge from the pain of conscious reflection on the indifference of the Will is to be found in a more primitive mental state, which mimics the Will's automatism, reversing the exquisite mental talents that human beings have acquired to their own detriment.

Hardy's lengthy, three-part play, *The Dynasts* (1904–8) gives the Will dramatic realization as it is repeatedly described and apostrophized by an

allegorical cast of spirit intelligences. Driven only by the patterns of “rapt aesthetic rote,”²¹ Will is “like a knitter drowsed / Whose fingers play in skilled unmindfulness.”²² The historical events of the play, which center on the Napoleonic wars, reveal the deterministic forces in the universe against which human beings vainly assert purpose and deliberate change. The Spirit of the Years insists on the futility of such endeavor when “Thus does the Great Foresightless mechanize / In blank entrancement now as evermore / Its ceaseless artistries in Circumstance.”²³ Although the play concludes with the hope that the Will may eventually become self-aware, this possibility of “kindly eyed benevolence”²⁴ is both faint and remote. However, the unwieldy form of the play to some extent offsets its modern subject matter: the failure of human ambition to overcome the power of an indifferent creative universe. In his Preface, Hardy emphasizes that while the play’s material stagery, wherein the Spirits look down upon and discuss events in human history, did not suit it to the traditional theatre, it might be performed with

A monotonic delivery of speeches with dreamy conventional gestures, something in the manner traditionally maintained by the Christian mummers, the curiously hypnotizing impressiveness of whose automatic style—that of persons who spoke by no will of their own—may be remembered by all who ever experienced it.²⁵

In place of a naturalistic “closely-webbed development of character and motive,” this automatism would bring dramatic life to the motiveless, dreamy forces that dwarf human intentions. In thus linking mental automatism with premodern dramatic form, the play promises to forge an imaginative reconciliation between the Will and the historical world that *The Dynasts* portrays.

In the novels, on the other hand, the pressure of the realist form to respect history and nature separates the alert minds of the characters from the undesigned natural world in which events play out with cruel indifference to their desires and ideals. In an early scene from *The Return*, Eustacia disguises her gender and acts in a Mummer play in order to spy on Clym, the object of her romantic fantasies and the key, she believes, to escape from the dreary rural life from which she, as a woman, has no possibility of delivery other than through marriage. Yet as dutifully as she learns the part, Eustacia remains agonizingly self-conscious throughout the performance, terrified of exposure, and so inhibited that she makes a “preternaturally inadequate thrust” (117) of her sword and delivers her lines too faintly to appear convincingly absorbed in the part. Her awkwardness derives at once from a discomfort at her too-bold transgression of social convention, which however

exhilarating also brings her uneasiness and shame and from the shuttle of seductions to which her performance is linked: It requires that she give the original player her bare hand to kiss in return for taking his part, and conceal her passionate interest in a man she has never met as the motive for her actions. Within the novel, then, Hardy embeds the Mummer play in a web of social and libidinal forces that transform it from an automatic to a highly self-conscious event.

III. HALLUCINATION AND INSIGHT

Physiologically speaking, sleepwalking and reverie represent the escape from circumstance that Hardy's characters pursue. Macnish had argued that reverie was similar to dreaming in that it represented a want of balance in the faculties arising from excessive application and solitude (*PS* 249). Although in reverie there is no disturbance of the external senses and the dreamer can see and hear everything in the external environment, he or she is attached to ideas that bear no relationship to this environment (248). Later accounts of the nervous origins of dreamy states (on both sides of the Atlantic) recast Macnish's phrenology in a cerebral map according to which the higher faculties that help navigate environment—volition, judgment, and moral sense—are suspended during dreamy episodes and the mind abandons the moderating guidance of the senses and the will. Henry Lyman's *Insomnia and Other Disorders of Sleep* (1885) argues that, in somnambulism, the active faculties are coordinated on an even lower plane than that of ordinary dreaming, so that the ideas and actions they produce are less capable of rising into consciousness and thus into relation with external circumstance.²⁶ Similarly, Hack Tuke links reverie and somnambulism to hypnosis as states in which reflex cerebral acts, liberated from the higher work of consciousness, enable ideation to take place independently of the external conditions that ordinarily moderate that ideational activity.²⁷ Such unrestrained movement, he argues, may produce hallucinations. At the same time, the exaltation of certain faculties in combination with the depression of others may enable the kind of extraordinary physical coordination demonstrated in sleepwalking, as the mind limits awareness to only those impressions that relate to its preoccupations.²⁸ In either case, the mental events that take place bear little or no relation to the circumstances of the dreamer, for they are "entirely outside the individual's conscious personal existence."²⁹

Tess confidently identifies the nervous origin of her husband's somnambulism in "continued mental distress" (246). Following Tuke, she recognizes

somnambulism as the exhaustion of the will by prolonged attention to ideas that then continue to flow automatically.³⁰ In Lyman's account, clairvoyance is one possible product of the dreamy withdrawal from the external world and acute focus of the mind on particular ideations:

The wonderful exaltation of certain faculties during the unequal sleep of the different organs of the mind is usually to be considered as something relative rather than absolute. But there is little reason to doubt that sometimes the excitement of the waking portions of the brain does really transcend the ordinary functional capacity of the structure. The undivided concentration of attention upon the comparatively limited circle of ideas which are thus produced, greatly increases the intensity of the resulting impressions upon the mind in consciousness—. Hence the grandeur of the visions which may arise; hence also, the possibility of their construction in accordance with fact rather than with fancy. As the darkness of the night, by shutting out the earth from sight, opens our eyes to the glory of the starry sky, so in like manner sleep, by closing the senses against the distractions of the external world, may sometimes afford the conditions enabling a richly gifted intellect to comprehend the course and the destination of those deep and silent streams of thought which move on unnoticed during the hours of wakeful life.³¹

These are the “obscure recesses” of the mind that in the mid-century William Hamilton argued were recognized by consciousness in “extraordinary exaltations of mental power”³² and that Carpenter described as “unconscious cerebration” or the process by which hidden ideas or reservoirs of knowledge are delivered to consciousness, appearing miraculous (*Principles*, 515–43). Such “mental latency”³³ explains, for example, the remarkable cases in which someone suddenly acquires a whole language or a talent in some art in which the person has had no training. In Lyman's account the latent knowledge is that of sequenced events, whose minute gradations offer a pattern that is too subtle for the conscious mind to detect. In this way the dreamy withdrawal from circumstance may entail episodes of clairvoyance whose origin in the attention makes it akin to the astral voyaging that Tess describes as a release from the sorrows of waking life.

Mental science pathologized visions and previsions as “hallucination” and evidence of madness. Esquirol identified the “visionary” as “one who is said to labor under a hallucination” and who gives substance to images reproduced by memory without the senses intervening.³⁴ At the end of the century, such symptoms pointed not only to the insanity of the individual

subject but generally to a pervasive pathological condition of modern life: Maudsley attributed telepathic phenomena and clairvoyance resulting from the alleged communication of spirits to the nervous disorganization that caused hallucination and identified these as morbid evidence of degenerative nervous stock.³⁵ Yet the “hallucinatory” visionary was not universally recognized as insane or even as the victim of inherited nervous weakness or overextension. In mid-century France, in particular, debate about the compatibility of hallucinations with reason was energetic, taking up no less than eight meetings of the *Société medico psychologique* in 1855 and 1856. The leading figure in this debate, a respected alienist and secretary of the Society, was Alexandre Brière de Boismont, whose *Hallucinations, or the Rational History of Apparitions* (1852), the first full published study of hallucinations, had precipitated the society’s discussions.³⁶ *Hallucinations* maintains that medical observations of the mind should not intrude upon sacred knowledge and that divine inspiration and “the ecstatic character which the struggles of the soul impart to ideas” cannot be reduced to hallucinatory madness.³⁷

De Boismont’s etiology of hallucinations is compatible with Tuke’s and Carpenter’s claims that clairvoyant phenomena can be explained as the sudden gift of cerebral activity to sensations stored in the memory that have previously been dormant (*Hallucinations*, 257). He argued that certain kinds of epileptic seizure, apoplexy, and hysterical fit, somnambulism, magnetism, and ecstatic states involve hallucinations, including prevision, whereby “the mind, as in dreams, is fixed upon certain impressions which it takes for so many real and actual external sensations” (245). Hallucinatory previsions, he cautions, must be “subjected to severe examination . . . [and] their occurrence guaranteed by men of intelligence and integrity” (243). However, he stresses that these ideations may coincide with the full rational activity of the mind. Having proposed that they are not necessarily the product of a diseased mind, he then asks why the rational species of hallucination recognized as vision or prophecy has disappeared from modern culture. He then traces the loss of visionaries to the spiritual impoverishment of modern culture:

No serious comparison can be made between the hallucinations of those famous men [of past ages] and those of the visionaries of our day. There, enterprises conceived, carried out, consummated with all the powers of reason, the train of facts, the force of genius, and with whom the hallucination was but an auxiliary; here, projects without connection, without aim, without fact, and always stamped with insanity.

But it may be said, how does it happen that this species of hallucination has disappeared in our day? Here is a reply to the query: to be hallu-

cinated in this manner needs profound conviction, intense belief, extreme love of humanity; to live in the midst of a society partaking of the same belief and willing, in case of necessity, to die for it. Then, they walked with the age. Where are the new creeds? Where are the martyrs? What voice governs the world? Everyone lives for himself and in himself. Skepticism has gained all classes. Generous devotedness excites a smile. Material happiness is the motto. It will be allowed that such a disposition of mind is little favourable to enthusiasm and great enterprises. (xi)

Despite the distancing voice of the alienist who classifies hallucinatory episodes as “enthusiastic” in his closing remarks, he also reclaims them as genuine spiritual phenomena of a precommercial and presecular culture. In this respect he inverts Maudsley’s identification of hallucinations as stigmata of degeneracy. He then suggests that there *is* a contemporary analogue for the rational hallucination of past ages in the form of a certain kind of reverie, where the prolonged mediation on an object or an idea can generate impressions of things we have never seen, “phantoms that our imagination, by its sole power, gathers around us . . . beneath the charm of its sorcery” (42). While reverie is “a state of mind that everyone has experienced and which shows with what facility hallucination can be produced,” and while it may delude us with “waking dreams” or “castles in the air” that release us from “the sad realities of life” (43), it may also be the prelude to extraordinary productions of mind like those of prophets, poets, and philosophers, for whom “reverie is force, power, health, and often even longevity” (42). The creative power of reverie can be distinguished from that which is slavishly obedient to the image it produces and is thus a symptom of, at best, mental weakness and, at worst, madness (42). Likewise, the hallucinations produced by religious ecstasy may still be categorized as visionary where they “spring from an enlarged faculty of perception [or] a supernatural intuition” (259). For this reason, he asserts, although we cannot admit theology into a book of medical science, we must remain respectful of “the creeds which have thrown so bright a refulgence on the world, to which humanity owes its greatest conquests, and which can alone save it from the abyss, [and] we cannot keep silence when we hear them loudly proclaimed as the lucubrations of diseased brains” (ix).

Among members of the SPR, the question of whether hallucination constituted a pathological symptom or evidence of a spirit personality also turned on the relationship of modern minds to ancient creeds. In *Modern Spiritualism* (1902), Frank Podmore argued that the presence of psychic phenomena in premodern societies is precisely what should alert us to the

way in which the mind itself produces these phenomena. The susceptibility of spiritual mediums and séance audiences to hallucinatory encounters with the dead, he proposed, represents “a striking recrudescence in civilised countries of the old-time belief in agencies working outside and beyond physical nature.”³⁸ Indeed, spiritualist activation of the primitive, automatic regions of the mind revives in modern lives the group automata seen in traditional societies where, for instance, “spontaneous outbreaks of bell-ringing and stone-throwing . . . from time to time perplex a country village.”³⁹ For Podmore, the spirit contact does suggest madness as it occurs in

a person of unstable mental equilibrium in whom the control normally exercised by the higher brain centres is liable, in slight provocation, to be abrogated, leaving the organism, as in dream or somnambulism, to the guidance of impulses which, in a state of unimpaired consciousness would have been suppressed before they could have resulted in action.⁴⁰

More spiritualist Society members, however, insisted that evolutionary and mental science needed to be sensitive to possibilities categorically dismissed as the products of cerebral malfunction and the primitive superstition that can provoke it. Darwin’s one-time rival and fellow-discoverer of natural selection, Alfred Russell Wallace, advocated that spiritual phenomena be incorporated into evolutionary conjecture, meaning that “the existence of sentient beings unrecognizable by our senses would no more contravene [natural laws] than did the discovery of . . . those structureless, gelatinous organisms which exhibit so many of the higher phenomena of animal life without any of that differentiation of parts or specialization of organs.”⁴¹ Myers proposed that beyond our modern, scientific fetishizing of reason and consciousness in which we encounter only “shrunken and shadowed souls,” we might explore deeper levels of awareness that recapture our power of “higher vision” (*HP* 1: 67). In *Science and a Future Life*, he argued that the empirical study of the phenomena that we still perceive to be contradicting the laws of nature in fact opens evolutionary science to our spiritual future where it has hitherto been limited to our animal origin. Clairvoyance, telepathy, or communication from a departed personality all work beneath the threshold of awareness to point to a self much greater than that represented by the superficial consciousness with which we habitually associate our intellectual existence. This greater Self is recognized in the Gospels and by Plato and Socrates; the continuity between the deep past and the greater future of the mind discovered in the Self is, however, beyond the grasp of current scientific observation.⁴²

In another essay, Myers suggests that this recognition of the greater Self is available to poetry, and, like de Boismont, he distinguishes between true prophets and the more superficial “self-inspired mystic.”⁴³ In Tennyson’s poems, he argued, the radically secularizing discoveries of evolutionary science are allowed to provoke “the worldly discovery” that the soul has no “immutable destiny” (“Science and the Future Life,” 148–49). Yet by powerfully expressing “flashes of a strange delight” or ecstatic episodes in which the self dissolves into the cosmic whole, Tennyson respiritualizes the universe and exalts the human presence within it (163). The great mind that suffers from “nerve storms” may reveal “a deep lying capacity in us that otherwise would not come to light” (159) and its genius therefore may “have as much to teach us of the mind’s evolution as the study of insanity has to teach us of its decay.” The greatest truths of evolution may thus “rise into consciousness” before they are confirmed by empirical science (160).

Hardy had no affiliation with the SPR. He did, however, summarize several passages from Myers’s essays on poetry in his notebooks. One from “Essays Classical” described the task of the poet to combine “reality and sense” with “magical and suggestive power.”⁴⁴ Another, from “Modern Poets and the Meaning of Life,” published in the January 1893 issue of *The Nineteenth Century*, asked whether the law of conservation condemned mind to extinction with the death of the body, or whether consciousness might itself constitute a form of transformable energy, and whether evolution might apply to the moral as well as the material world.⁴⁵ Such speculations in the context of Hardy’s aesthetics certainly do not testify to any shared sympathies with Myers concerning the existence of a greater Self or an afterlife. However, they do suggest that spiritualist belief provides a point of access to the premodern social and spiritual psyche that Hardy invokes in his characters to relieve their otherwise unmitigated sorrow. Defending himself against the accusation of inflexible rationalism, he declared that he “believe[d] (in the modern sense of the word) in specters, mysterious voices, intuitions, omens, dreams, haunted places, etc.”⁴⁶ This rather ironic “spiritualism” recognizes the shaping power of the human mind in place of divine agency. Yet his remark also seems to imply that, through suspension of disbelief, something other than alienation and despair might greet the subjective negotiation of modern experience.

The trance states into which Hardy’s characters fall temporarily belie the novels’ naturalism. While other aspects of the stories invoke Émile Zola’s detached narrative “experiments,” abandoning individual lives to the natural forces that shape them, these episodes replicate the kind of altered consciousness represented in neo-Gothic and later in spiritualist literature, where

mystical experience offers a refuge from oppressive social conventions and institutions as well as from nature.⁴⁷ Tess's self-hypnotic contemplation of the stars and a mental journey Clym takes across the surface of the moon remind us of how, in her desolate and outcast state, Jane Eyre looks up from her hovel on the heath into the milky way and feels "the might and strength of God" (*JE*, 364). Lucy Snowe too escapes to "the sky . . . amidst circling stars" (*Villette*, 215). In Marie Corelli's popular *A Romance of Two Worlds* (1886) the narrator is initiated into full union with Christ when, by drinking an electrical liquid, she is able to travel not only out of her body but also out of the world to "gaze upon countless solar systems."⁴⁸ The stresses and burdens of the physical life are relieved when her terrestrial bonds are broken and she is released into outer space.⁴⁹ Similarly, the Geneva psychologist Theodore Flourney's biography of the medium Mlle. Hélène Smith, *From India to the Planet Mars* (1900), includes a lengthy section on the descriptions of Mars and the Martians provided by her "spirit guide" and encountered, whether by clairvoyant perception or truly by means of an astral body, when the soul is permitted to "leave momentarily its terrestrial prison."⁵⁰ Flourney's Hélène, like Hardy's Eustacia, has an "instinctive revolt against the modest environment in which it was her lot to be born, [and] a profound feeling of dread and opposition, of inexplicable *malaise*, of bitter antagonism against the whole of her material and intellectual environment."⁵¹

Although they have little to say about the nervous and even less about the spiritual origins of such episodes, Hardy's stories do position somnambulist experiences, including "astral travel" at key moments in the romantic plot. Tess describes her escape to the stars at an early moment during hers and Angel's courtship; as Clym waits for the newly won Eustacia, he stares at the ancient landscape of the moon and "feels himself to be voyaging bodily through its wild scenes" (166). These dreamy events thus mark the point at which each set of histories disastrously merges with the other, yet they momentarily resist the inevitable tragedy of that confluence. Rather than trampling individual stories under the march of events, they entertain, however briefly, a counternarrative in which human stories unfold in a universe animated by human needs and values—one in which the individual history then has some meaning and significance. It is when Tess speaks of traveling out to the stars that Angel notices her voice and distinguishes its tones from those of the other milkmaids. Clym declares that Eustacia's "moonlit face" and sees the "hairbreadth . . . [that makes] the difference between everything and nothing at all" (167).

However, neither reverie nor the transcendent or otherworldly experience it hosts gains much narrative traction in these novels. If ghosts, witches, and

mediums are allowed to roam across Egdon heath and ghostly presentiments to forecast tragic events in *Tess*, the stories nonetheless deliver their characters into the fates powerfully determined for them not by spirits or pagan deities, but by the conditions of their modern lives. *Tess* concludes with the anticipation of a union between Angel and Tess's sister, suggesting that individual suffering will be swallowed up in the larger story of reproductive life and its unquenchable energies. *The Return of the Native* ends with Clym's moderately content life as an itinerant, open-air preacher, in which role he can appear either as native or as cosmopolitan, using simple language in Rainbarrow and the neighboring hamlets or more cultivated speech in larger towns. Reconciled to the inevitable fissures of identity that inflict him and to his permanent homelessness, Clym is clearly resigned to the modern, and his vocation seems more like a trade, for "it was well enough for a man to take to preaching who could not see to do anything else" (336). The narrator's closing words tell us that "everywhere he was well received, for the story of his life had become generally known." At the end then, his modern's story of desire and loss, passion and suffering is more compelling and truer than any tale he has to tell of return.

IV. VISION IN POETRY

In 1898, Hardy announced in a letter to William Archer that he no longer intended to write novels, complaining that "by printing a novel which attempts to deal honestly and artistically with the facts of life one stands up to be abused by any scamp who thinks he can advance the sale of his paper by lying about one."⁵² However, his shift to poetry suggested more than his irritation at prudish reviewers and censoring publishers; it reflected the hope that "the checked tendency in prose may . . . be resumed in verse."⁵³ The novel was, he observed "gradually losing artistic form . . . and becoming a spasmodic inventory of items."⁵⁴ Although such dreary naturalism might currently be ascendant, he observed, poetry would again see its day, and "in divine poesy there is no such thing as old fashion or new. What made poetry 2000 years ago makes poetry now."⁵⁵ This claim that poetry outlasts fashion (perhaps somewhat revised in his later baffled responses to Pound's modernism⁵⁶) and resists the ravages of the modern raises the possibility that his fiction writing had become unbearably strained by its responsibilities to the material truths of modern life, on the one hand, and its pursuit of the ghostly creations of the intuitive mind, on the other.

In lyric poetry, on the other hand, spectral voices can take over from the exhausted living speaker and its weary recognition of circumstance. Such ghostly voices are a feature of what Susan Miller has called Hardy's "impersonal lyric," as they help separate awareness of an *idea* about the inevitably painful nature of human experience from the lived experience itself.⁵⁷ In "The Self-Unseeing," from *Poems of the Past and the Present* (1902), for example, the speaker describes a time before the unanticipated death of the beloved when the floor on which she walked and the door through which she entered carried no painful associations: "Here was the former door / [w]here the dead feet walked in" (11.3–4), while "[e]verything glowed with a gleam / [y]et we were looking away" (11.11–12).⁵⁸ This "gleam" was no more available to living consciousness than the "dead feet" that walked through the door belong to the lost past, since they were then, of course, part of a living body. The poem thus dramatizes a structurally impossible form of human awareness.⁵⁹ Sensation and experience are here separated from thought and meaning.⁶⁰ The latter are therefore liberated in hallucinatory fashion in the form of pure ideation.

At times this liberation takes the form of an astral journey. In an early poem from the *Wessex* (1898) collection, "In Vision I Roamed," the speaker describes a mental voyage to a stellar region so remote that it cannot be spotted from earth. His surrendering of mind to vision as he is freed from the restraining influence of sense perception initially seems to restore him to terrestrial longing; he is reminded that although separated from him, his beloved is nonetheless within his sensible grasp:

And the sick grief that you were far away
 Grew pleasant thankfulness that you were near,
 Who might have been, set on some outstep sphere,
 Less than a want to me, as day by day
 I lived unaware, uncaring all that lay
 Locked in that Universe taciturn and drear. (11.9–14)

Yet the last four lines change the meaning dramatically. The journey has reminded him that in space too vast to be navigated by the senses, the beloved might become "less than a want." The vision raises the possibility of escape from yearning, of "unawareness." At the same time, it becomes unclear what or who is "uncaring" in line 13. This may be the Universe which, like the "mother nature" of "The Sleep Worker," from *Poems of Past and Present* is entranced and indifferent, to its own creations. Or it may

describe the speaker, who is no longer tormented by longing and separation. In this ambiguity then, the latter becomes united with an indifferent universe or, in Hardy's terms, "immanent will." In that Universe, oblivious to the suffering of its creatures, living beings experience release from their sense-inflicted pain, as the speaker does, through hallucination.

In his letter to the editor of the *Daily Chronicle* concerning the poem "A Christmas Ghost Story" (1899), Hardy invokes the figure of the interterrestrial voyager to account for the poem's unheroic portrait of war. The point of view of the Boer War soldier's ghost is he says,

no longer local; nations are all one to him; his country is not bounded by seas, but is co-extensive with the globe itself, if it does not even include all the inhabited planets of the sky. He has put off the substance, and has put on, in part at any rate, the essence of the Universal.⁶¹

This ghost's combined worldliness and otherworldliness make it the most articulate critic of national prejudice and the unnecessary suffering that it produces in the form of war. In this respect, it concurs with the speaker of "The Sick Battle God" (*Poems of Past and Present*), who announces the absence of both the war-mongering, Old Testament "Battle-god" and of a benevolent creator who might oversee the lives of his creatures and who suggests there remains only the comfort of human "souls [who] have grown seers" (1.29) with an evolved a capacity for sympathy in the face of the overwhelming suffering to which they have become attuned. This evolutionary divide between creator and creatures, putting the most highly sensitized organisms at the mercy of an indifferent primitive force, revives the merciless determinism of the novels. Yet the Christmas ghost in Hardy's account of the poem is not simply a stand-in for the exquisitely sensitive consciousness that can perceive the uselessness of its own strivings; it is also a specter or hallucination, a "creature[] of the imagination . . . uncertain, fleeting and quivering, like winds, mists, gossamer-webs, and fallen autumn leaves."⁶² In the poem itself, the ghost of the fallen soldier is less a supernatural character than a heavy-handed literary device to present the cruelties of war and the continued deafness of its actors to Christ's teachings. Yet it is summoned up by a speaker who himself travels mentally "South of the line inland from far Durban" (1.1), where "A mouldering soldier lies—your countryman" (1.2) and who, having found that corpse, then acts as ventriloquist to the soldier's phantom.

In many of the later poems, reverie and vision are provisionally depicted as the condition of a troubled mind that cannot quite manage the mate-

rial and emotional realities with which it is presented. In “The Ghost of the Past,” from *Satires of Circumstance* (1914), the allegorical figure of the past—a “spectral housekeep[er]”—defends the order and comfort of the speaker’s mind against the turmoil of “gaunt griefs.” In “Self-Unconscious,” from the same collection, the speaker is so absorbed in “specious plans” that he is incapable of recognizing the transient details of “earth’s artistry” until it is too late to do so. “The Phantom Horsewoman” (*Poems of 1912–1913*) describes a man who compulsively hallucinates the figure of a perpetually young woman on horseback while he himself continues to “wither daily” (1.29). Yet in each case the dreamy structure of the poem distracts us from its ostensible attention to the fraught emotional circumstances it presents. “The Ghost of the Past” describes the fading echo and shape of the speaker’s spectral companion, yet because the formal arrangement of the poem is so strict—each stanza carefully repeats the final word or phrase from the first line in the second and the fifth line in the seventh—it produces a mesmerizing chant that itself appears undaunted by the message of change. “Self-Unconscious” has a similarly hypnotic structure as the rhyme and meter remain consistent within each stanza, a form that must be seen as deliberate and pointed for a poet who emphasized the “enormous worth” of the Gothic principle of “cunning irregularity.”⁶³ The *regular* form reminds us that the “focused distance” (1.39) on nature that the speaker sacrificed to self-preoccupation is, in the present tense of the poem, elevated to a higher level of reverie in which “he is aware / a thing was there / that loomed with an immortal mien” (11.46–48). The past fluttering of yellowhammers and “metal shine” (1.20) of the sea are not “moments that encompass him” (1.6) but rather ideas whose immortal shapes transcend the sensible natural origins that have “passed away” (1.33).

In the same way, the dreamer of “The Phantom Horsewoman” is released from the diagnosis of mental strain when his perception merges with that of the speaker. The “thing” that, in the second stanza, he is said to conjure up out of his grief is

Warm, real, and keen,
 What his back years bring—
 A phantom of his own figuring. (11.16–18)

Yet the hallucination that the speaker describes here, and which in the third stanza is still located “everywhere / In his brain,” (11.24–25), steps out from the space of his distressed imagination to assume a three-dimensional presence in the poem, as she whose form has hitherto been withheld because she

was a mere figment of the disordered brain takes firm shape and becomes the subject rather than the object of feelings and actions:

But she still rides gaily
 In his rapt thought
 On that shagged and shaly
 Atlantic spot,
 And as when first eyed
 Draws rein and swings to the tide. (11.31–36)

Not only the lover’s “rapt thought” but also the now-entranced speaker experiences the girl as a palpable presence. This joining of dreamy minds is in striking contrast to the opening of the poem, when the speaker begins with a distancing “Queer are the ways of a man I know” (1.1) and asks, “And what does he see when he gazes so?” (1.9). Where he sees only “sands” (1.5) and “seaward haze” (1.6) in the first stanza, he watches the specter herself in the final lines, as she emerges in the present tense of the poem itself. That utterance now expresses not the thoughts of an observing, kindly speaker, but the mind of the mourner and the specter it has created.

Like “The Phantom Horsewoman,” “The Voice” also explores the possible natural origin of the phantom in romantic longing, describing both the loss of passion in the past relationship between the lovers and its restoration in the spectral form conjured up through the force of the speaker’s grief:

Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me,
 Saying that now you are not as you were
 When you had changed from the one who was all to me,
 But as at first, when our day was fair.

In the second half of the poem, the speaker acknowledges that what he hears as the woman calling is created by his longing and explains the natural origin of the sounds he has hallucinated as voice:

Or is it only the breeze, in its listlessness
 Travelling across the wet mead to me here,
 You being ever dissolved to wan wistlessness,
 Heard no more again far or near?

The last stanza then describes the autumn landscape whose sounds are so sympathetic to the speaker’s loss:

Thus I; faltering forward,
 Leaves around me falling,
 Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward,
 And the woman calling.

Yet there is more happening here. Unlike “Self-Unconscious” or “The Phantom Horsewoman,” the structure of this poem is irregular. Not only is the final stanza metrically different from the preceding three, but where the latter consists of grammatically complete, complex sentences, the last lines take the form of an elaborate sentence fragment or a series of abandoned subordinate clauses. This stanza is clearly distinguished from the others, as we move out of the speaker’s mind and away from the internal dialogue he is conducting with the ghost to the external scene in which he appears in a cold, wooded landscape. Yet the formal boundary between internal reverie and external reality is undermined by the final line, which reintroduces the figure of the ghost, only this time directly into the sensible, natural world where she earlier existed merely as the fantasized addressee of the speaker’s distraught questioning. Although she has been naturalized as the sound of the breeze and the falling leaves, she achieves substance in defiance of her disappearance even from yearning in the previous stanza: the “wan wistlessness” that has apparently silenced her in the speaker’s thoughts. Her non-human voice becomes audible at the end of the poem even as the speaker’s carefully articulated study of his own mind becomes less so.

Such apparitions are harder to find in Hardy’s fiction. In his novels, he explained, plot arises “from the gradual closing in of a situation that comes of ordinary human passions, prejudices and ambitions.”⁶⁴ The novel recognizes that “this planet does not supply the materials for happiness to higher existences,”⁶⁵ and those spiritual visions and moments of dreamy relief from circumstance that his characters sometimes experience are in great part naturalized as the productions of a mind driven by the modern ache into hallucinatory escape. Tess’s dreamy fascination with the other worlds she imagines in the stars is a response to the miseries that convince her that she lives in “a blighted one” (*TD*, 31); Eustacia’s daydreams of cosmopolitan glamour are the phantoms of modern want; while Clym’s pagan ghosts people a landscape in which he hopes to retreat from commercial corruption and romantic loss. Yet even as latter-day visions, they preserve an enclave for the spiritualization of nature and the melioration of human relationships that are otherwise shaped by suffering and skepticism. Despite her knowing caution about the way the world has treated and will treat her, and despite the novel’s larger anticipation that her life will be shaped and finally destroyed

by the twin forces of desire and descent, Tess can allow her wonder at Angel to dissolve all other aspects of her life into a “luminous mist,” showing, the narrator suggests, that “she was a sort of celestial person, who owed her being to poetry” (212). The surrender to poetry, in this way, offers a little primitive hope against the gloom of fiction’s modern facts.