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Unleashed on Thomas Hardy’s Fictional World.“

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1. Introduction

Thomas Hardy is an author who has gained wide critical attention. Already his contemporaries were of the opinion that his oeuvre was worthy of being observed, and even renowned writers like D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf made his works a subject of their attention. In her collection of essays *The Common Reader: Second Series*, published in 1932 a few years after Thomas Hardy's death, Virginia Woolf reveals her high esteem for him: "When we say that the death of Thomas Hardy leaves English fiction without a leader, we mean that there is no other writer whose supremacy would be generally accepted, none to whom it seems so fitting and natural to pay homage." (Woolf 245). However, it still must not be neglected that Thomas Hardy's novels were also hotly debated and were highly contested by his critics. Especially Hardy's allegedly pessimistic attitude, which increased significantly towards the end of his career, caused resentment on the part of his critics. In his tragic novels, which on the whole gained more critical attention than his early pastoral novels, we frequently encounter characters whose aspirations and pursuit of happiness are thwarted by unrelenting forces. Hardy's vivid description of the natural world invited critics to interpret the natural backdrops of his novels as conscious forces committed to the destruction of his heroines and heroes: "The physical elements of climate and countryside, as the most obvious 'things inherent in the universe', are an important plotting device in Hardy's novels, where they so often defeat the individual's efforts." (King 22). Also society has frequently been identified as an institution with inherently destructive powers on whose demands and conventions the protagonists of Hardy's novels frequently founder: "The motif of Convention was the last one to develop in Hardy's works, but it is of much importance, especially in his last novels. He never elaborated the idea to the extent of the others; but that it operated clearly and fatally is unquestionable" (Elliott 99). Marriage, legal technicalities and education often arouse complications in the lives of his characters, which in some cases also entail disastrous consequences. Additionally to the polar forces nature and society, Hardy's intensive readings of contemporary scientists and philosophers like Charles Darwin, August Weismann and Arthur Schopenhauer led to the incorporation of their ideas into his works. Darwin's concept of adaptation and maladaptation respectively, as well as his theories on sexual selection were

eagerly taken up by him, which prompted numerous critics to interpret the failure of Hardy's heroines and heroes in the context of Darwinian discourse. Also Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea* is frequently mentioned in the context of Hardy's novels. Although the exact extent of Schopenhauer's influence on Hardy remains unknown and can merely be speculated upon, many critics allude to the similarities between Schopenhauer's notion of the Will, an unconscious force controlling the universe, and Thomas Hardy's concept of fate and chance. Indeed, Hardy's novels display a large number of coincidences and seemingly fateful events that are intended to advance the plot and not just once turn out to be fatal for his protagonists. Last but not least, Thomas Hardy showed great interest in August Weismann's theory of hereditary transmission. The theme of heredity, which permeates his poetry, is also material to his novels. Especially his later works display a preoccupation with the subject of genealogical compulsion that robs the individual of her or his free will and makes her or him a mere puppet of hereditarily transmitted personality traits.

But although all of the above-mentioned concepts and theories have already been discussed extensively in connection with Thomas Hardy's works, the intention to revisit this topic is certainly not redundant. Up to this point critics tended to focus their attention on only one aspect of the problem at a time. When literary scholars made a point of investigating the tragic fate of Hardy's protagonists they only made one of the afore-mentioned compelling forces the centre of their attention and rather tended to neglect the other ones or at least belittled their importance in favour of the main aspect of their studies. Therefore, a comprehensive study of the forces which are at work in Thomas Hardy's novels and frequently are employed to seal the fates of his characters is not expendable, since his novels contain a myriad of aspects whose artful interplay necessitates a wholesale consideration. Thus, this thesis is going to set itself the task to provide an all-embracing discussion of the forces unleashed on Thomas Hardy's fictional universe, including the totality of plotting devices that are usually mentioned in this regard.

The range of books used in this thesis, namely *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *The Return of the Native* and *Far from the Madding Crowd* was selected with regard

to a number of criteria. Although *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is the one novel of Thomas Hardy's works that has probably gained the most widespread attention on the part of literary critics so far, its integration into the selection of books seems to be essential, since it probably contains the most multifarious allusions to scientific and philosophical concepts that are usually said to play a vital role in the shaping of the fates of Hardy's protagonists:

The heroine in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* has to face the cruelty of Fate on her own, and the vast powers which control the workings of the universe. The scope is too great for petty discussions of morality. Tess has to combat national and universal trends which she can never understand. The novel exposes the heroine to the mystical working of self, religion, society, sex, hereditary gifts and scourges, and universal indifference. The canvas of the novel is broad, however each of the different aspects of the novel exists within its framework only as it relates to Tess's fate - they converge, each sphere of influence outside Tess moving within her as dynamic force. It is this convergence which gives the novel its unique life. (Watt 158-159)

It is virtually impossible to discuss *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* either in the context of scientific concepts like heredity and sexual selection or metaphysical concepts like fate and chance, since such an approach considerably limits the possibility of arriving at a satisfactory and conclusive interpretation, which is why it lends itself to a comprehensive discussion as attempted in this thesis. Also the book's generally pessimistic outlook, which conveys the impression of the immutability of the main protagonist's fate, makes its utilisation indispensable, since it facilitates a comparison with the fates of protagonists of Hardy's early pastoral novels, who display a more optimistic and detached attitude towards life and are able to keep their suffering to comparatively minimal dimensions. The author of an unsigned review in the *Pall Mall Gazette* cuts right to the chase of the matter when voicing his disappointment about the fact that *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* departs from the comparative lightness of pastoral tales like *Far from the Madding Crowd* in favour of a more sombre view of life:

This is a grim Christmas gift that Mr. Hardy makes us, in his last Wessex tale. The reader, intent on the seasonable pleasures of fiction, who carries home *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* for his delectation over the Christmas fire, thinking perhaps to have another *Far from the Madding Crowd*, may well feel a little shaken as the gay pastoral comedy of the opening chapters is shifted by degrees into the sombre trappings of the tragic muse. (Cox 180-181)

Due to this radical departure from the comparatively idyllic pastoral setting and theme of earlier novels and the variety of driving forces displayed in the book, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is going to be the first book discussed in the thesis, since it constitutes a substantial benchmark in Hardy's oeuvre to which the two other works covered in this paper can be related and be easily compared.

The Return of the Native has been chosen on the basis that it, similar to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, also features a powerful female main protagonist whose aspirations eventually are thwarted by the interplay of compelling forces. When the novel was published in 1878 in twelve monthly instalments, it was received with mixed feelings on the side of the critics. Although the novel sometimes is said to be the most intriguing of Hardy's works, also largely eulogistic reviews, like the one by W.E. Henley published in the *Academy*, to some extent qualify their general commendation due to the criticism the book incurs by its way of creating tragedy. Henley, for instance, complains that Hardy's "tragedy is arbitrary and accidental rather than heroic and inevitable" (Cox 48) and passes criticism on the redundant melancholy of the story:

The story is a sad one; but the sadness is unnecessary and uncalled for. A chapter of accidents makes the hero seem to cast off his mother, who thereupon dies; a second chapter of accidents sends the heroine to death by drowning. And the hero, burdened with a double remorse, is left to live on, and to take what is substantially the place in the world that he had desired ere destruction came upon him. It is all very mournful, and very cruel, and very French; and to those who have the weakness of liking to be pleasantly interested in a book it is also very disagreeable. (Cox 49)

The gloominess of the story has also been noticed by other reviewers, one of whom considers it to be a great defect that the tragic potential of the novel is impaired by the gloomy fatalism Hardy supposedly displays:

[T]here is one other great defect peculiar to itself, that the book, which is meant to be tragic in its gloom, and would assuredly be tragic but for a tendency, which we attribute to the sombre fatalism of the author, to lower appreciably below the truth the whole tone and significance of human destiny, treats tragedy itself as hardly more than a deeper tinge of the common leaden-colour of the human lot, and so makes it seem less than tragedy - dreariness, rather than tragedy - by making human passion in general commonplace and poor (Cox 56)

The pessimistic fatalism Hardy is said to display in *The Return of the Native* runs like a common thread through nearly all contemporary reviews of the book, as well as the picturesque and detailed description of the background against

which the story is set. It is the magnificent backdrop of Egdon Heath, which due to its sequestration and rusticity is frequently compared to *Far from the Madding Crowd*, which is set in a very similar context. The fact that a book which obviously contains the same potential for pastoral happiness, nevertheless does not realise it, might be the reason why the critics seem to be torn between the opinion that *The Return of the Native* signifies a regression compared to its highly popular predecessor, and the view that Hardy only now did exploit his full tragic potential, as it is, for instance, put by the author of the survey in the *New Quarterly Magazine*:

It repeats the tragedy of *Far from the Madding Crowd* on a larger scale, with stronger intellectual elements, with a deeper perception of the contrast between human passion and natural repose, with a more subtle sense of their affinity. It has less of the irony of life, and more of its serious sadness. It is, in short, a more serious work than any of its predecessors. We believe it is generally considered to be in every sense 'stronger'. (Cox 67)

Owing to the pessimism Hardy allegedly displays in the novel and the strong focus on environmental determination and providential guidance, which is insinuated both by statements of the characters and the narrator and by the story's powerful backdrop, whose timelessness and persistence make it appear in the light of an agent of fate of mythical dimensions, *The Return of the Native* seems to be an eligible choice. Also in view of the fact that the outcome of Tess and Eustacia's stories closely resemble each other, whereas the focus of tragedy seems to be shifted from social implications, which are strongly felt in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, to the operations of the natural environment in *The Return of the Native*, a comparison of the two seems to be expedient in order to get to the bottom of the question of how tragedy is created and by what means it can be averted in Thomas Hardy's novels.

Due the fact that *The Return of the Native* and *Far from the Madding Crowd* are frequently mentioned in the same breath, although their course of events could not be more diverse, the one tending towards pastoral happiness, while the other results in the ultimate destruction of its heroine and the degradation of its eponymous hero, *Far from the Madding Crowd* is going to be the third book surveyed in this thesis. Additionally, the fact that *Far from the Madding Crowd* has to some extent been disregarded in the vast range of secondary literature on Thomas Hardy's works, because its rather benign ending until very recently

led critics to characterise it as an innocuous pastoral tale that does not contain the same amount of profound thoughts as many of its successors, provides an opportunity for an innovative approach and fresh results. The novel's comparatively enthusiastic reception primarily rests upon the novel's arcadian elements that permeate the book's main storyline. Especially contemporary critics and reviewers tended to focus their attention on the happy-go-lucky aspects of the book, stressing that "Mr. Hardy still lingers in the pleasant byways of pastoral and agricultural life which he made familiar to his readers in his former novels" (Cox 39), a conjecture that procured Hardy a lot of praise. Besides the author of an unsigned review published in the *Saturday Review* in 1875, only few critics seem to recognise the grand tragic potential the novel harbours: "The main stream of the narrative, though sparkling with fun, and sunshine, and green fields, is deeply tragic, culminating in murder, madness, and something like what Jan Coggan (one of the rustics) calls 'committing the seventh'" (Cox 44). Due to the fact that the two main protagonists of *Far from the Madding Crowd* are able to survive all major and minor pastoral and amorous complications and catastrophes and that the book closes with the restoration of pastoral bliss although it does not omit tragic possibilities makes it an indispensable point of reference for *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *The Return of the Native*, in which the protagonists' suffering is pre-eminently represented as the inevitable result of the operation of unrelenting forces that cannot be countered by an individual's efforts.

After an in-depth discussion of the scientific and philosophical influences Thomas Hardy's novels display and an outline of his conception of tragedy and his supposedly fatalistic attitude towards life, this thesis is going to provide a careful analysis of the three novels, which will be divided into subchapters, each of which is going to focus on specific scientific and metaphysical forces interfering with the protagonists' fates, with the ultimate goal of finding out if the three novels under consideration essentially contain the same potential for pastoral happiness and what forces ultimately determine the individual's demise or success in Thomas Hardy's fictional world.

2. Thomas Hardy and the charge of pessimism

Throughout his life Thomas Hardy repeatedly had to ward off charges of pessimism. Already contemporary reviewers did not fail to criticise the dreariness and hopelessness of life he frequently portrayed in his books and to find fault with the pessimistic attitude he allegedly displayed in his depiction of humanity. When after a series of rejections by many well-known publishers he eventually succeeded in finding a publishing house for his last Wessex-novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* in 1891, many critics were appalled by what they called a "clumsy sordid tale of boorish brutality and lust" (Cox 220) and Mowbray Morris, the editor of *Macmillan's Magazine* who already previously had rejected the novel for publication, even remarked in the *Quarterly Review* that "Mr. Hardy has told an extremely disagreeable story in an extremely disagreeable manner" (Cox 219). But also many of Hardy's earlier novels were far from being received favourably by the majority of contemporary critics. When *The Return of the Native* was first published as a serial in 1878 some reviewers, besides commenting on the so-called clumsiness and artificiality of the tale, also noted its gloominess originating in the author's "sombre fatalism" (Cox 56). Still Hardy kept rejecting these persistent allegations of pessimism and frequently resorted to calling himself a meliorist believing in the progress and improvement of the world by human engagement and endeavour:

[M]y pessimism, if pessimism it be, does not involve the assumption that the world is going to the dogs. [...] On the contrary, my practical philosophy is distinctly meliorist. What are my books but one plea against 'man's inhumanity to man' - to woman - and to the lower animals? (qtd. in Gibson, *Literary Life* 147-148)

However, this commitment to meliorism, which he also made in his "Apology" for his *Late Lyrics and Earlier*, published in 1922, namely that "what is to-day [...] alleged to be 'pessimism' is, in truth, only [...] 'questionings' in the exploration of reality, and is the first step towards the soul's betterment, and the body's also" (Hardy, *Poems* 557), in the opinion of many critical voices clearly could not belie earlier statements of his, such as "Pessimism (or rather what is called such) is, in brief, playing the sure game. You cannot lose at it; you may gain. It is the only view of life in which you can never be disappointed" (Hardy, *Life and Work* 333), or "that if way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst" (Hardy, *Poems* 168). Peter A. Dale, for instance, notes that this

“Apology” merely constitutes the attempt of an “ageing public man, weary of the world’s persistent indignation at what he writes and feeling, perhaps, that a prophet of his sort has a certain duty towards reticence in the aftermath of the Great War” (202), and that Hardy’s oeuvre notwithstanding his rectification “is a definite rejection [...] of just that gospel of evolutionary meliorism or, more broadly, scientific humanism he seems here to embrace” (202).

But, as has already been suggested by the above-quoted contemporary reviews of his works, not only Hardy’s personal opinions induced literary critics to declare him to be a pessimist, also the plot structures and opinions expressed by the protagonists and narrators of his novels were suited to contribute to it. After all, his books to a large part are characterised by featuring heroes and heroines who after a series of heavy setbacks seem to have lost their trust in God’s (or fate’s) goodness and consequently resort to a pessimistic mindset instead. Tess, whose dreary living conditions, even before her actual misfortunes, make her voice gloomy thoughts, seems to be an epitome of such a melancholy world view, which is best illustrated by the conversation she has with her little brother Abraham about the stars in the sky:

‘Did you say the stars were worlds, Tess?’

‘Yes.’

‘All like ours?’

‘I don’t know; but I think so. They sometimes seem to be like the apples on our stubborn-tree. Most of them splendid and sound - a few blighted.’

‘Which do we live on - a splendid one or a blighted one?’

‘A blighted one.’ (Hardy, *Tess* 33-34)

But apart from Tess’s negativity concerning the current state of things, the novel also displays a malistic rather than melioristic view towards future events, as exemplified by the proverbial saying “Out of the frying-pan into the fire!” (Hardy, *Tess* 84) uttered by one of Tess’s fellow-workers at Trantridge when she is led away by Alec, which basically, however, sums up the whole course of fateful events eventually leading to Tess’s tragic end.

However, not only Tess but also the main protagonist of another novel which will be given careful consideration to in the course of this thesis, namely Eustacia Vye, the main protagonist of *The Return of the Native*, is not optimistic about the future, but rather anticipates the worst: “[...] I dread to think of anything beyond the present. What is, we know. We are together now, and it is

unknown how long we shall be so: the unknown always fills my mind with terrible possibilities, even when I may reasonably expect it to be cheerful” (Hardy, *Return* 152).

What is more, also the plot structures of Hardy’s novels per se lend themselves to a pessimistic reading, since hardly any of his tales involves a genuinely happy ending and his protagonists commonly “end worse than they begin” (Casagrande 307): Jude’s aspirations for becoming a scholar at Christminster are thwarted by society’s demands; Tess’s quest for real love and a quiet, happy life is opposed by antagonistic forces such as fate and biological determinism; and the hostile environment of Egdon Heath eventually causes Eustacia’s downfall. Although Casagrande argues that Hardy’s people, despite their seemingly tragic ends, still “enjoy hard-won dignity, strength beyond their stations, and, most important, a beauty of situation that (however severe) is absolutely genuine” (307), it still cannot be denied that their strife for betterment of their actual situation is continuously impeded by a plethora of counteracting forces which in most cases give them no chance of success and therefore have often been regarded as narrative constructions intended to induce the worst state possible. This large variety of counterforces which most of the time inhibit the realisation of the protagonists’ dreams rather than enforcing them, despite Hardy’s general attempt as an author at “the exploration of reality, and its frank recognition stage by stage along the survey, with an eye to the best consummation possible” (Hardy, *Poems* 557), however, also gives evidence of the fatalism he seized upon, partly owing to his parents, his conception of tragedy, which repeatedly slips in into his works, and last but not least his extensive reading of contemporary and classical scientific and philosophical treatises which considerably shaped his personal opinions and are also appropriated for his novels to bring about either a change for the better or the worse in the lives of his protagonists.

2.1. Scientific and philosophical influences on Hardy’s writing

It has often been noted that Thomas Hardy’s scope of mind was of a most versatile and extensive nature. Both his artistic career and his personal views can be said to have been shaped by a large variety of influential sources from different fields of knowledge. Pamela Gossin states that “Hardy is as

interdisciplinary a writer as one could ever hope to meet” (3), since his intellectual horizon was comprised of philosophical as well as scientific and literary influences. J.O. Bailey claims that apart from the influence of Schopenhauer and von Hartmann, Hardy’s works are also characterised by “influences of the Bible, Wordsworth, Darwin, J.S. Mill, Leslie Stephen, Newman, Whitman, Shelley, Keats, Shakespeare, Sophocles, Plato, folk-lore and balladry, music, paintings - and just about everything else available to a widely-ranging reader during [his] lifetime” (4).

Although Hardy’s parents Jemima and Thomas Hardy senior, the former working as a cook at the vicar of Stinsford’s house when she met her later husband and the latter being a self-employed stone mason, could not afford a university education for their oldest son, which is why he had to terminate his studies at the age of sixteen, Hardy still “[p]rompted by an acute sense of social and academic inferiority, [...] began a life-long programme of intellectual self-improvement” (Harvey 9). Especially his mother Jemima, who despite her humble station was a rather well-read woman, was responsible for the shaping of his literary tastes and his early fondness of books. According to Geoffrey Harvey, already by the age of ten she had introduced him to such notable works as John Dryden’s *Works of Virgil*, Samuel Johnson’s *Rasselas* and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s *Paul et Virginie* (6). On the whole, however, it must be noted that Hardy’s childhood and adolescent reading, which apart from the above-mentioned works also encompassed writings of Alexandre Dumas, James Grant, G.P.R Scott, W.H. Ainsworth and Walter Scott, was not of a very striking nature, since according to H. C. Webster they all offer “the same specious and paradisiac view of life” (qtd. in Björk, *Reading* 103) without having any immediate noticeable effects on his writing career (Björk, *Reading* 103).

Despite this myriad of impressions from an early age on (or probably just because of them), Hardy frequently disclaimed having a fixed, consistent philosophy of life: “I have no philosophy – merely what I have often explained to be only a confused heap of impressions, like those of a bewildered child at a conjuring show” (Hardy, *Life and Work* 441). It is important to mention at this point that just as his philosophy developed out of diverse influential sources, also his concept of human fate was shaped by many different authorities. Since

it proves to be difficult to order them according to their rank of importance, it seems to be appropriate to start out chronologically, namely with the French utopian socialist and philosopher Charles Fourier, to whom the first entry of Hardy's *Literary Notebooks* is dedicated. Although Fourier is not mentioned in *The Life of Thomas Hardy* and the references Hardy makes to him in his notebook are not copious, Fourier's influence still must not be neglected since Hardy obviously felt some of his ideas to be sufficiently important so as to save them in a chart representing Fourier's "twelve passions" and a few other graphs and diagrams (Mattisson 125). The anti-rationalism Fourier proposed, namely "that it is not reason but passion that is the primary motive power in human life" and "that the greatest obstacle to human happiness is the inability of the modern social order to satisfy the claims of the passions" (Björk, *Reading* 107), is also traceable in Hardy's works. The fact that many of his protagonists are not able to subdue their human passions and consequently are turned into social outcasts, since giving in to one's passions commonly was in contravention to Victorian rules, was quite frequently employed by Hardy as the root of his tragic plot structures. This dichotomy between the head and the heart becomes particularly obvious in the famous and highly suggestive garden-scene at Talbothay's in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, in which Tess becomes irresistibly drawn to Angel Clare's harp playing:

The outskirts of the garden in which Tess found herself had been left uncultivated for some years, and was now damp and rank with juicy grass which sent up mists of pollen at a touch; and with tall blooming weeds emitting offensive smells - weeds whose red and yellow and purple hues formed a polychrome as dazzling as that of cultivated flowers. She went stealthily as a cat through this profusion of growth, gathering cuckoo-spittle on her skirts, cracking snails that were underfoot, staining her hands with thistle-milk and slug-slime, and rubbing off upon her naked arms sticky blights which, though snow-white on the apple-tree trunks, made madder stains on her skin; thus she drew quite near to Clare, still unobserved of him. (Hardy, *Tess* 158)

This scene, which basically describes Tess's sexual awakening by use of natural imagery that still does not fail to convey its proper meaning by means of sexual innuendoes, suggests that Tess being "conscious of neither time nor space" (Hardy, *Tess* 158) has eventually submitted to her sexual cravings by suppressing her rationality. The prudery of Victorian society, which rather expected its members to subdue their passions instead of giving vent to them, however, proves to be an obstacle to her happiness since Tess's sensuality and

fervour, which are frequently insinuated right from the beginning of the novel, are incongruous with society's demands on her and, therefore, only contribute to her tragedy.

Lennart A. Björk claims that besides the references Hardy made to Fourier's theories and the thematic influences which are measurable in his works to some extent, Fourier's ideas primarily fulfilled the function of paving the way for other theories and schools of thought, especially for those of Auguste Comte and the Positivists (*Reading* 108). Comte's positivist theory, which is based on the belief in social evolutionism, proved to be a crucial landmark in Hardy's reading. Apart from chiming in with Fourier's "affective" psychology, since also Comte suggests that "the struggle between the Intellect and the Heart is the principal feature of all great revolutions whether in the individual or in society" (qtd. in Björk, *Reading* 108) and equally maintains that feeling and not reason is "the great motor force of human life" (qtd. in Björk, *Reading* 108), Comte's theory also offered a set of new ideas which Hardy fervently took up. When Comte's *Positive Philosophy* was given to him as a gift by his long-time mentor Henry Moule in 1870, Hardy is said to have read it and thereupon many other positivistic writings so extensively that his own vocabulary eventually reflected positivist overtones, which even led some critics to attribute *Far from the Madding Crowd*, which was published anonymously in 1874, to George Eliot, who was generally known for her veneration for positivist ideas (Björk, *Comte* 64). Indeed, *Far from the Madding Crowd* does not only mirror the positivist lexicon, but additionally also bears resemblance to the positivist doctrine in terms of content. At one point Comte, for instance, remarks on the reliance of the "cerebral functions" on the "nutritive economy" (Mallett, *Philosophy* 25), an assumption which is also taken up in the novel: "Bathsheba was in a very peculiar state of mind, which showed how entirely the soul is the slave of the body, the ethereal spirit dependent for its quality upon the tangible flesh and blood" (Hardy, *Crowd* 329). This concept of "Biological Dependence", namely that "[t]he nobler phenomena are everywhere subordinate to those which are grosser, but also simpler and more regular" (Hardy, *Literary Notes* 76) is also visible in *The Return of the Native*, particularly in the nexus existing between Clym Yeobright and the Heath, since the emotional attachment Clym conceives

for his natural environment even gets to a point where his whole character seems to be determined by it (Björk, *Reading* 109).

Besides Comte's concept of "Biological Dependence", a scientific and static analysis of human nature which had a bearing on many of Hardy's novels, Hardy equally acclaimed Comte's psychological "law of three stages", which rather lays stress on the dynamic and historical side of human psychology (Mattisson 130). Comte claims that in order to reach perfection man has to undergo three different psychological stages, namely the "Theological Stage", the "Metaphysical Stage" and the "Positive Stage":

In the Theological stage, natural phenomena and events are ascribed to the will of a supernatural being, and the political order to divine governance. In the Metaphysical stage, supernatural accounts give way to the notion of abstract "virtues" or "powers" supposed to inhere in the physical world, "God" dissolves into "Nature", and political authority is referred to theories of rights, popular sovereignty, and the social contract. In the Positive stage, the notion of a supra-human deity is rejected as untenable, questions of first and final causes are dismissed as fruitless, and speculation about things-in-themselves is superseded by inquiry into the regularities governing the relation of phenomena to each other. (Mallett, *Philosophy* 22-23)

Although these three stages are undergone successively, still not all institutions of thought are at the same stage at the same time, which can have a negative impact on the individual's life. Björk claims that the tension arising out of the process of development at different rates is one of the major forces in Hardy's novels causing the downfall of his tragic characters: "[M]uch of the suffering of his characters is due to the fact that traditional moral concepts and religious ideas have not kept pace with the general progress of human thought, or with each other" (*Reading* 110). He adduces Angel Clare as an instance, whose progressive religious conceptions contrast sharply with his backward attitude towards morality, which he only revises when he cannot stem the tide anymore: "Having long discredited the old systems of mysticism, he now began to discredit the old appraisements of morality. He thought they wanted readjusting." (Hardy, *Tess* 433). The possible negative implications of this particular view of mankind, however, to a large extent are eclipsed by the optimistic attitude they allow for. Although Comte's theory promoted Hardy's gradual loss of religious faith, its overall effect can still be considered to be an essentially optimistic one, since Comte's idea of human moral progress towards

perfection by means of science and education implies the possibility of a change for the better. Additionally, Comte's "religion of humanity", which can be said to offer an alternative to the moral system of Christianity by assuming "that the social feeling is as strong as selfish aspirations, and that, consequently, social harmony depends on this social instinct and not on any social contract" (Björk, *Reading* 109), although received by Hardy with slight reservations, can be considered as an important influence during his idealistic phase (Harvey 14-15).

The positivist view on this "ethical system", some critics argue, is, however, to some extent undermined by another philosophical influence Hardy is said to have been subjected to, namely the fatalism he adopted from reading Schopenhauer (Harvey 27). Despite Hardy's continual disavowals of his affiliation with Schopenhauer's ideas and although the exact extent of Schopenhauer's authority remains unknown, his influence on Hardy still continues to be undoubted. When Ernest Brennecke's book *Thomas Hardy's Universe: A Study of a Poet's Mind* was published in 1924, Hardy wrote him a letter in which he tries to reduce his contiguity with the German philosopher by arguing that to a greater degree "my pages show harmony of view with Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, Comte, Hume, Mill and others" (Hardy, *Letters* 259). Although Hardy had not read Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea* until 1883, he probably had already been made familiar with his ideas in the periodical press during the 1870s (Mallett, *Philosophy* 30). When *The Return of the Native* was published in 1878, some critics related the novel, which was considered to be much gloomier than any of the preceding ones, to Schopenhauer's fundamentally pessimistic cosmovision. In his in 1819 published *The World as Will and Idea* Schopenhauer basically argues that all natural phenomena are controlled by an imperceptibly operating, indifferent and unconscious force which he termed the "Will":

[...] the whole phenomenal world, even inorganic or seemingly inert matter, exists in [...] two aspects, as both an object of perception and an expression of the blind, ceaseless urging that Schopenhauer denotes the Will. Individual phenomena, including human beings, are merely the form in which the Will reveals itself in space and time. Each empirical event, each separate human desire, can be referred to a sufficient cause or motive, but the totality of event and desire [...] can be explained only in terms of the 'endless striving' of a Will with no other goal than to find its 'objectivity' or 'mirror' in the phenomenal world. (Mallett, *Philosophy* 30)

This rather pessimistic view towards humanity which equally abandons the notion of man's free will and the idea of a divinely ordered world in favour of a superimposed unconscious force, representing the sum of all wills, is also perceptible in many of Hardy's works. Bailey points out that the basic force "men of religion call God, Kant called the *Ding-an-sich*, Schopenhauer called the Will, Bernard Shaw called the Life Force, [...] Hardy called by more than fifty different names" (6). Hardy's conception of an overarching, unchangeable and unconscious force, which basically constitutes a personification of natural law, again demonstrates Hardy's deterministic world view going hand in hand with the pessimism held against him. Although man is equipped with consciousness he still is not anywhere near being in control of his actions: "Far from being guided by our reason, we are often entirely mistaken as to the real motive as to why we do or omit to do something" (Mallett, *Philosophy* 32). Seemingly conscious actions which eventually turn out to be fatal and often appear to be mere coincidences in Hardy's fiction, therefore, can also be interpreted as the secret workings of an Immanent Will. For example, when Tess eventually decides to write Angel a letter, which is supposed to inform him about her past but does not reach the intended recipient, because it is slipped under the carpet, its going astray might be read as a manifestation of the Will urging on Tess's destiny. Besides these apparently chance events which, however, still can be considered to be inherently consistent regarding the Will's final aim of perpetuation and which human intentions and intellect are unable to oppose, the Will's strategy for sustainment according to Schopenhauer also becomes manifest in the sexual drive all beings are subjected to, a motive which equally permeates Hardy's fiction and often times turns out badly for his protagonists. Thus both the sexual desire Jude initially feels for Arabella and Tess's sexual arousal by Angel's harp playing can be regarded as the secret operations of the Will, whose only intention is to perpetuate its existence (Mallett, *Philosophy* 32-33).

Although many of Hardy's novels and poems seize on Schopenhauer's concept of the Will, *The Dynasts* can still be considered the one of Hardy's works which echoes it most distinctly. Already the opening line of this so-called "epic-drama" aims at a definition of the Immanent Will, the force which operates behind the scenes and advances the action. The Spirit of the Years' philosophical question

opening the play, namely “What of the Immanent Will and Its designs?” is answered thus:

It works unconsciously, as heretofore,
Eternal artistries in Circumstance,
Whose patterns, wrought by rapt aesthetic rote,
Seem in themselves Its single listless aim,
And not their consequence. (Hardy, *Dynasts*)

These lines again hint at Hardy’s notion that the absolute force deciding his protagonists’ fate works unconsciously and impartially and therefore can be considered to be immune to the human suffering it frequently causes. The only possibility both Schopenhauer and Hardy see in order to keep the pain humans have to suffer “down to a minimum” (Hardy, *Poems* 558) is a “common act of will annihilation”, namely submitting oneself to the greater Will and choosing the line of least resistance (Asquith 186). Only Hardy’s people of “acquired character”, namely those protagonists who give themselves up to fate and play the part assigned to them, are able to succeed against all odds (Mallett, *Philosophy* 31). Merely characters who are willing to adapt to the circumstances in good time as, for example, Thomasin Yeobright, Elizabeth Jane, Donald Farfrae or Gabriel Oak, are able to reduce their personal suffering to comparatively minimal dimensions, while others like Michael Henchard, the main protagonist of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, who are trying to force their own wills on the world, or Tess, who only when it is already too late stops revolting against her fate and calmly acknowledges that “It is as it should be” (Hardy, *Tess* 505), are destined to meet a tragic ending. However, it must also not be neglected that Hardy, besides complete submission to the Immanent Will, also allows for a more optimistic alternative, which he again voices in *The Dynasts*. At the end the Chorus of the Pities set their hope on the coming to consciousness of the Immanent Will:

Nay;--shall not Its blindness break?
Yea, must not Its heart awake,
Promptly tending
To Its mending
In a genial germinating purpose, and for loving-kindness sake?

And also the closing stanza reads:

But--a stirring thrills the air
Like to sounds of joyance there
That the rages
Of the ages

Shall be cancelled, and deliverance offered from the darts that were,
 Consciousness the Will informing, till It fashion all things fair! (Hardy,
Dynasts 525)

Bailey suggests that Hardy here holds out the prospect that “human suffering and the consequent development of compassion may so enlighten the unconscious Immanent Will that It will feel compassion and alter natural laws to eliminate injustice, cruelty, pain, and all evil” (8), a hope which blends in well with the evolutionary meliorism he said he was committed to, but still remains a singular instance in his fiction.

The last and probably most influential source for shaping Hardy’s conception of fate which will be mentioned in this discussion is the deterministic worldview propagated by Charles Darwin. Although some critics emphasise that Darwin only represents one of a large number of influences on Thomas Hardy, it still must be pointed out that Darwinism takes a special position in Hardy’s works since unlike many other ideologies it “stands out as a consistent resonance in Hardy’s creative writings, poetry, as well as fiction” (Glendening 72). When Darwin’s highly controversial book *The Origin of Species* was published in 1859, Hardy by his own account was “among [its] earliest acclaimers” (Hardy, *Life and Work* 158) and was still to be on his deathbed when dictating the “Epitaph for G.K. Chesterton”. This satirical epitaph, in which Hardy mocks Chesterton, a Roman Catholic novelist who once had attacked Hardy for being a “village-atheist” and had frequently spoken out against Darwin’s evolutionary theory, besides this satirical attack, also serves as a token of his appreciation of Darwinism:

Here lies nipped in this narrow cyst
 The literary contortionist
 Who prove and never turn a hair
 That Darwin’s theories were a snare
 He’d hold as true with tongue in jowl,
 That Nature’s geocentric rule
 ... true and right
 And if one with him could not see
 He’d shout his choice word ‘Blasphemy’. (Hardy, *Poems* 954)

Darwin’s ground-breaking treatise *The Origin of Species*, in which he claims that both fauna and flora throughout the ages have evolved from a lower mode of existence to their present higher developed condition by processes of natural selection and mutation, shattered the orthodox Christian belief in a creator deity.

Although Darwin did not incorporate human evolution into his book, it still could be inferred from the context that the same theory of evolution could be applied to the human world as well and, therefore, occasioned an overarching loss of faith. Also Hardy's personal disbelief in a benevolent and almighty God was confirmed or advanced by Darwin's theory, but as many critics have already suggested, not necessarily originated from it. Man's implicit reduction to animal level, the confutation of long-standing religious views and the concept of living in a world characterised by imperfection, which were all implied in Darwin's theory, contributed to associate him with pessimism. Hardy's life-long appreciation of Darwin's ideas, therefore, has prompted many critics to primarily emphasise "the point of connection between Hardy and Darwin in terms of pessimism, a sense that the laws of life are themselves flawed" (Beer 222). Indeed, Hardy's works and his personal notebooks contain many passages in which the disillusion this new knowledge caused becomes distinct:

The truth seems to be that a long line of disillusioning centuries has permanently displaced the Hellenic idea of life, or whatever it may be called. What the Greeks suspected we know well; what their Æschylus imagined our nursery children feel. That old-fashioned revelling in the general situation grows less and less possible as we uncover the defects of natural laws, and see the quandary that man is in by their operation. (Hardy, *Return* 127)

Roger Robinson argues that the sense of triviality of all human action at the sight of a universe of undreamed-of dimensions regarding both time and space pervades both Hardy's poetry and fiction ("*Darwinism*" 81). Man's insignificance on a physical scale is demonstrated by Tess and Marian working on the field of Flintcomb-Ash, who are, given the vastness of both the brown earth beneath them and the white sky above them, compared to flies. The sound of Gabriel Oak's flute becomes muffled by the landscape's spatial extent. Mrs. Yeobright, watching a community of ants, which serve as a metaphor for humanity, concludes that they offer a similar perspective "like observing a city street from the top of a tower" (Hardy, *Return* 221). And in view of the prehistoric fort Mai Dun, mentioned in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, passers-by appear as insignificant specks (Robinson, "*Darwinism*" 81). But the feeling of human insignificance is also conveyed in terms of history. Padian points out that before *The Origin of Species* was published the human imagination of the earth's age merely stretched back a few thousand years, while the Post-Darwinian world

already ranged in hundreds of millions years, a conception which also shaped Hardy's fictional world (220). Very often in Hardy's novels references are made to prehistoric times by contemplating remnants of those bygone days: Henry Knight discovers a trilobite embedded in a rock while hanging off a cliff; shortly before being arrested Tess decides to rest on a druidic altar; and Michael Henchard and Susan after their long separation have a rendezvous at Maumbury Rings (Robinson, *Hardy and Darwin* 131). The fact that key moments in the lives of Hardy's protagonists are very often overshadowed by the impressive settings among which they take place can certainly not be ascribed to contingency, but rather a purposeful narrative technique which ironically diminishes the fate of individuals in view of the infinite dimensions of time.

Robinson argues that the scale of time and space against which the individual human existence is measured, apart from conveying a general sense of melancholy, also entails immediate tragic consequences since man has evolved so far as to suffer emotional blows due to this consciousness (*Hardy and Darwin* 132):

A woeful fact - that the human race is too extremely developed for its corporeal conditions, the nerves being evolved to an activity abnormal in such an environment. Even the higher animals are in excess in this respect. It may be questioned if Nature, or what we call Nature, so far back as when she crossed the line from invertebrates to vertebrates, did not exceed her mission. This planet does not supply the material for happiness to higher existences. (Hardy, *Life and Work* 227)

The fact that humans are equipped with a mind too highly developed as to fit into the imperfect environment they move in is also discussed in many of Hardy's major novels and quite frequently is employed as a major source for tragedy. Jude's sensitivity, for example, which is so pronounced that he cannot bear the sight of a pig being killed or is kept awake by the thought of a trapped rabbit, prompts his wife Arabella to call him a "tender-hearted fool" (Hardy, *Jude* 64) and eventually leads to his destruction since he is unable to survive in an environment which favours self-interest over compassion (Robinson, *Hardy and Darwin* 134). But not only Jude also Tess, Clym and many others suffer from this "disease of feeling", as Hardy calls it in his poem "Before Life and After". Tess's too highly evolved sensitivity is also discerned by Alec, which leads him to comment that Tess is "mighty sensitive for a cottage girl" (Hardy, *Tess* 65);

and Clym eventually founders on his newly acquired sensitivity which makes him have high aspirations which, however, simply are incompatible with the environment of Egdon Heath.

Apart from the tragic effects stemming from over-evolved human sensitivity, Hardy's works are also suffused by the deterministic implications of Darwin's theory. Darwin suggests that both the individual and the race are preconditioned by forces beyond their control, namely by their living environment and hereditary traits passed on from generation to generation. His novels show a constant struggle of his protagonist trying to escape their pre-conditioning, whether it is circumstantial, geographic, cultural or genealogical. Robinson points out that the conditioning by the environment Hardy's characters undergo "includes the seasonal shaping of *Under the Greenwood Tree* and *Far from the Madding Crowd*, the colouring of Miller Loveday and Diggory Venn by their trades, the dress of many characters, and the participation of the heath-dwellers, woodlanders, and labourers in the 'great battle for life' (*"Darwinism"* 81-82). The novel which probably best illustrates the Darwinian struggle for existence and the concept of natural selection is *The Woodlanders*. Far from being an idyllic pastoral, the woodlands per se represent the Darwinian struggle for existence: "The trees, which are such a dominant presence in the novel, compete with each other for nourishment and light, are vulnerable to disease and damage, and are frightening in their moaning under the lash of the storm" (Harvey 77). In order to be able to survive in a world made of mechanic natural laws Hardy's protagonists have to adapt to their circumstances, a task they frequently prove not equal to. Most of Hardy's tragic heroes prove to be maladaptive to their environment and therefore fall prey to natural selection, a motive carried to extremes in *Jude the Obscure* when Little Father Time, the personification of natural selection, kills his siblings and afterwards commits suicide because "[they] are too menny" (Hardy, *Jude* 336).

Towards the end of Hardy's novel-writing career the concept of heredity became increasingly important in his fiction and very often constitutes a major source for tragedy: Hardy adopted the science of heredity in part as a new kind of tragic determinism, replacing the 'deus ex machina' or Wheel of Fortune" (Robinson, *"Heredity"* 179). The notion of the importance of genealogical

features in the shaping of an individual already propagated by Darwin was reaffirmed when reading the German neo-Darwinian August Weismann, who in his germ plasm theory claims that immutable germ cells are responsible for the transmittance of genetic information. The fact that Hardy was currently working on *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* when encountering Weismann's theory according to Robinson was the reason behind his radical reshaping of the novel, in whose various stages more and more emphasis was put on Tess's ancestry ("Heredity" 178). Also his last novel *Jude the Obscure* is concerned with the characters' determination by their legacy, on which their ultimate failure, which partly consists in their inability to make their quasi-marital relationship fit for society by formally entering into marriage, is partly blamed. This inability to bring themselves to become married is ascribed by Jude's aunt Drusilla to a hereditary disposition: "The Fawleys were not made for wedlock: it never seemed to sit well upon us. There's sommat in our blood that won't take kindly to the notion of being bound to do what we do readily enough if not bound" (Hardy, *Jude* 70).

Apart from the pessimistic implications of Darwin's theory, which frequently make Hardy's people appear as helpless beings at the mercy of forces beyond their control, some critics argue that Darwin's evolutionary theory also allows for a more optimistic attitude, which equally can be found in Hardy's works. After all, as John B. Bury points out, evolution by itself is a "neutral, scientific notion compatible with both optimism and pessimism" and claims that its interpretation to a large extent depends on "the temperament of the inquirer" (qtd. in Björk, *Reading* 112). Indeed Darwin's evolutionary theory also admits a more cheerful interpretation since according to Darwin "natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection" (qtd. in Dale 202). Also Hardy's works and his personal notebooks seize upon this optimistic loophole in Darwin's theory. In *A Pair of Blue Eyes* Stephen writes that "[b]y applying [the evolutionary] principle to the social organism we have come to the conclusion that the development of society implies the development of certain moral instincts in the individual" (qtd. in Dale 203). Also Hardy himself seems to have gained a sense of moral optimism from Darwin's evolutionary theory, which follows from the following passage of a letter directed to the Secretary of the Humanitarian League:

Few people seem to perceive fully as yet that the most far-reaching consequence of the establishment of the common origin of all species is ethical; that it logically involved a re-adjustment of altruistic morals by enlarging as a *necessity of rightness* the application of what has been called 'The Golden Rule' beyond the area of mere mankind to that of the whole animal kingdom. Possibly Darwin himself did not wholly perceive it, though he alluded to it. (Hardy, *Life and Work* 376-377).

George Levine suggests that earlier approaches to Darwin's influence on Hardy's literary career which merely stressed the pessimistic argument involved in his evolutionary theory take insufficient account of the fact that "[t]hrough all the darkness of a chance-driven, mindless world against which thought-endowed animals like humans have to struggle hopelessly, there glimmers steadily a strong moral vision and even a life-affirming Hardy" (37). Also Gillian Beer points out that Hardy's novels, besides a gloomy sense of pessimism and the mostly tragic plots by which his novels are characterised and which by far exceed those in which his characters reach their aims, also show a sense of fullness or happiness, namely an "'appetite for joy' which Hardy saw as charging life equally with rapture and disaster" (225).

2.2. Hardy's conception of tragedy

Apart from the scientific and philosophical influences which contributed to Hardy's understanding of human fate, it is also crucial to look at Hardy's appropriation of the genre of tragedy since his dependence on the tragic form also has a significant effect on his shaping of human fate. Jeannette King suggests that although Hardy was less familiar with the Greek classics than writers like George Eliot, since he was not taught Greek at school, he still at one point of his life devoted himself to the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles, which not only becomes evident from the direct references he makes in his fiction but also from an annotated edition of the Greek text which was found at Max Gate (41). Although it may not be evidenced when exactly Hardy was first made familiar with the Greek classics, he obviously already had begun his studies in the Greek language when working as an architect in Dorchester since *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* states that his complex daily routine during this phase of his life included that "[h]e would be reading the *Iliad*, the *Aeneid*, or the Greek Testament from six to eight in the morning" (36) and *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy* tells us that he also studied *Agamemnon* and *Oedipus* during his

apprenticeship (King 41). King, however, points out that Hardy's friend and mentor Horace Moule advised him to quit his reading since it was entirely unrelated to his career as an architect, which accounts for the fragmentary character of his later reading of the Greek dramatists (41).

It needs to be pointed out that Hardy did not employ a consistent form of tragedy, which is why the Draper suggests that "it would be more appropriate to speak of the tragic element in his work, rather than to use the term 'tragedy'" (432). Just like his novels do not strictly adhere to the tragic form in the narrow sense and differ in the way and in the extent to which tragic elements are applied, Hardy himself seems to be somewhat uncertain concerning a proper definition. After the completion of *The Return of the Native*, the novel which is said to adhere most strictly to the tragic form, Hardy made the following attempt at a definition:

A Plot, or Tragedy, should arise from the gradual closing in of a situation that comes of ordinary human passions, prejudices, and ambitions, by reason of the characters taking no trouble to ward off the disastrous events produced by the said passions, prejudices, and ambitions (*Life and Work* 123)

Draper points out that this definition, given the contradictory emotions of Clym and Eustacia, corresponds well to *The Return of the Native* (428). However, in 1885 when Hardy's mind was still occupied with *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy revised his definition of tragedy by shifting the main emphasis from passions and emotions as the cause of tragedy to the inexorability of fate: "a tragedy exhibits a state of things in the life of an individual which unavoidably causes some natural aim or desire of his to end in a catastrophe when carried out" (Hardy, *Life and Work* 182). Ten years later, namely in 1895 when *Jude the Obscure* was published, Hardy in view of the occasion again modified his definition by changing the emphasis from the inexorability of fate to social oppression: "Tragedy may be created by an opposing environment either of things inherent in the universe, or of human institutions. If the former be the means exhibited and deplored, the writer is regarded as impious; if the latter, as subversive and dangerous" (*Life and Work* 290). All in all, it may be established that Hardy's works from his first attempt at tragedy with *The Return of the Native* to later works like *The Woodlanders*, *Jude the Obscure* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* show a progression from classical to modern in their conception of

tragedy (Draper 430). While *The Return of the Native* is said to adhere more strictly than any other of Hardy's novels to the Aristotelian concept of tragedy since it conforms to the unities of time and place and was originally intended to be organised into five books, similar to the five acts of traditional tragedy (Draper 428), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* already integrates "the concerns of modern thought" (qtd. in Harvey 147). Michael Henchard, the main protagonist of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, commonly is considered to be the most Aristotelian hero among Hardy's fiction, because he combines the concepts of *hubris* and *hamartia*: "The intense focus on the conflicting moral impulses within a single figure provides Hardy with the means of expressing the tragic action in a form both as unified and as seemingly inevitable as that of Greek tragedy" (King 107). Besides the intertwining of character and fate, the novel also resembles Greek tragedy by its cyclical pattern. Hardy here clearly draws on Aristotle's concept of *peripeteia*, namely the reversal of fortune, which forces the tragic hero to face up to his past:

The inexorability of Henchard's accelerating decline and fall are terrible. All the significant figures of his past, each betrayal, return to haunt him – Susan, Elizabeth-Jane, Lucetta, Newson. Each step of his decline forces him to encounter his past. Each effort at reparation and reconciliation fails. (Harvey 74).

Additionally to the Aristotelian concepts employed in the novel, Hardy here also combines classical tragic elements with zeitgeisty concerns and problems like alcohol abuse and Victorian prudery. The fact that Hardy with increased regularity incorporates "comic" elements, which mainly are the result of the deadly irony attending many of the tragic events, into his tragic structure can already be felt in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (Harvey 149). In 1888, three years after the completion of the book, he argued that "If you look beneath the surface of any farce you see a tragedy; and, on the contrary, if you blind yourself to the deeper issues of a tragedy you see a farce" (*Life and Work* 224). Also the socially based elements of tragedy which he refined in his later novels are already discernible in Michael Henchard's story since Draper points out that "Lucetta's fear of society's ostracism, with the damaging effect upon her of the skimmity-ride, is [...] a complementary, if subordinate, part of the novel's overall tragic effect" (430).

While *The Mayor of Casterbridge* can still be considered to reveal the classic Aristotelian form of tragedy, *The Woodlanders*, which was published two years later, already can be considered to be one further step ahead towards a modern form of tragedy. Although Hardy right at the beginning of the novel claims that the setting of Little Hintock would also be appropriate to “dramas of a grandeur and unity truly Sophoclean” (*Woodlanders* 7) the novel according to many critics also contains elements which enhance the Aristotelian and Sophoclean forms of tragedy to an extent which makes it even questionable if one can speak of tragedy after all. In his introduction to *The Woodlanders* Phillip Mallett points out that the novel actually shows more characteristics of comedy than tragedy, a fact which has also been recognised by Millgate, who considers the novel to be “a tragic-comedy of social and sexual mismatching” (qtd. in Harvey 81). The love-plot which is foregrounded in the novel and into which no less than eight characters are involved according to some critics entails a universalisation of tragedy since the tragic potential of the book is divided between the protagonists: “Our interest as readers is diffused more or less equally over a number of characters, to all of whom the narrator offers a degree of sympathy. No single figure demands the intensity of engagement both narrator and reader give to Henchard and Tess” (Mallett, *Introduction* viii). Since for some reasons it remains questionable if one can speak of tragedy after all, many critics seem to have already accepted that it is impossible to define the genre of *The Woodlanders* since “impressionism, symbolism, and realism co-exist with the melodramatic, the tragic, the comic and the elegiac” (Harvey 80).

Although *The Woodlanders*, compared to its predecessors, already involves increased use of elements of social tragedy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* even go one step further in giving weight to the harmfulness of social opinion. However, the influence of Greek tragic theory can still be felt in both of the novels. Harvey argues that *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* “offers an Aristotelian tragedy of situation, informed by an Aeschylean belief in education through suffering” (150). The attention Hardy draws to the relationship between character and event or situation respectively is evocative of Aristotle's theory of tragedy. Similarly to Aristotle, tragedy in Hardy's works rather arises out of a gap between character and situation, which already becomes obvious in the title (King 99). King argues that Hardy's tragedies are primarily tragedies of situation

rather than character since “[a]ny character defect or vulnerability in the protagonist may seem harmless until a particular situation arises” (99). The fact that Tess is a member of the decayed family of “the D’Urbervilles” or that Jude is an “obscure” character does not per se account for the protagonists’ tragic fate but merely proves to be unfavourable in a particular situation:

Tragedy arises out of the gap between what the character is – his true self – and what he does – the identity he presents to the outside world. In his concern for what happens to the hero, the reader makes contact with an experience related less to character than to forces which override it. In such tragedies, much of the pity and horror turns on the sense of wasted potential, the sense of individuals born in the wrong time or place. (King 99-100)

Apart from the emphasis on plot and events the two novels also bear resemblance to Aristotelian tragedy in terms of their treatment of “peripeteia” and the cyclical patterns they involve. Both Jude and Tess are haunted by their past since past events are not isolated from the present, but rather interfere with it. But although the two novels contain elements resembling Greek tragedy and also make direct or indirect references to ancient tragedians, like the narrator of *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*’ quotation of Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound* or Jude’s quotes from *Antigone* and *Agamemnon*, they also add modern elements. As it has already been pointed out their singular treatment of society as the root of tragedy distinguishes them from Hardy’s earlier attempts at the genre of tragedy. While the tragic situations in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *The Return of the Native* either arise from character flaws or adverse fate, the blame is now shifted on the social system. Although many different factors contribute to Tess’s failure, she holds the opinion that it is especially the Victorian moral values which impede her happiness. Tess herself considers society’s attitude to morality to be purely arbitrary and seems to be convinced that if she had lived in another social context her bitter fate could have been averted:

[A]lone in a desert island would she have been wretched at what had happened to her? Not greatly. If she could have been but just created, to discover herself as a spouseless mother, with no experience of life except as the parent of a nameless child, would the position have caused her to despair? No, she would have taken it calmly, and found pleasures therein. Most of the misery had been generated by her conventional aspect, and not by her innate sensations. (Hardy, *Tess* 115)

Similarly to Tess, also Jude questions the laws of society. Apart from class laws and social boundaries which render Jude’s admission to university impossible

and which compel him to pursue a skilled trade, the novel also challenges unwritten moral laws. When Jude gives in to his sexual desire, his momentary submission proves to be a life-long trap since the laws of society force him to marry the “wronged” woman (King 121). Hardy’s negative attitude towards the cruelty of marriage also becomes obvious in the postscript he added to the original preface in 1912 in which he claims that an unhappy marriage “secured a good foundation for a tragedy” (qtd. in Harvey 92). According to Harvey marriage in the novel “is treated bitterly as a tragic farce” since it is “revealed as a meaningless contract institutionalising sexual inequality” (92). However, it must also be pointed out that it is not Jude’s initial blind acceptance of the Victorian moral laws, but especially their later abandonment and the ensuing social ostracism Jude and Sue have to face that causes their downfall since “in relation to the rest of society their status as free spirits merely exposes them to prejudices that exacerbate their insecure position, lacking as they do the cunning of an Arabella who knows how to cover her more radical amorality with acceptable masks of conformity” (Draper 430-431).

Hardy’s modern approach to the genre of tragedy where the protagonists’ suffering primarily has its origins in contemporary society, however, was not appreciated by some of his critics. According to King many critics have pointed to the fact that since Hardy’s later novels present the cause of tragedy to be rooted in a particular (social) situation, the disastrous outcome could have simply been averted by changing this situation (64-65). The fact that the cause for the protagonists’ suffering in Hardy’s later novels is neither universal nor unchangeable has frequently been criticised since tragedy according to Aristotle is supposed to arise from “hamartia”, namely a tragic mistake committed by the hero or heroine. Also D.H. Lawrence, whose work shows a great deal of Hardy’s influence, in his posthumously published *Study of Thomas Hardy* obviously finds fault with Hardy’s conception of tragedy which primarily springs from the arbitrary rules of society:

[...] Anna, Eustacia, Tess or Sue – what was there in their position that was necessarily tragic? Necessarily painful it was, but they were not at war with God, only with Society. Yet they were all cowed by the mere judgement of man upon them, and all the while by their own souls they were right. And the judgment of men killed them, not the judgment of their own souls or the judgment of Eternal God. (30)

The fact that Hardy's tragedies lack "the fundamental, mythic dimension, the sense of things inherent in the structure of the universe" (Draper 430) has also been recognised by other critics. While D.H. Lawrence especially criticises that Hardy's tragedy is always "the tragedy of those who, more or less pioneers, have died in the wilderness whither they had escaped for free action, after having left the walled security, and the comparative imprisonment, of the established convention" (21) Hardy's contemporary Lionel Johnson in his discussion of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* especially finds fault with his scientific rationalism and his emphasis on biological determinism:

But, winning and appealing as she seems, there remains in the background that haunting and disenchanting thought, that upon the determinist principle, she could not help herself: she fulfilled a mechanical destiny. There is nothing tragic in that, except by an illusion: like any other machine, she 'did her work', and that is all [...] The tragedy of Tess does indeed rouse in us 'pity and fear': it does indeed purge us of 'pity and fear': but with what a parody of Aristotle! (qtd. in Harvey 147-148)

Nevertheless it also needs to be pointed out that the charge of a lack of a superhuman force or deity deciding the fate of the individual in Hardy's tragic novels is not entirely justifiable, since although the scientific and socio-critical ideas which had an effect on Hardy's writings during his career as a novelist increasingly were employed as the ultimate cause of tragedy, Hardy's belief in supernatural powers deciding the fate of the individual was never entirely superseded by these more rationalistic forces but remained a steady part of his fictional world. This is also acknowledged by Lawrence, who argues that the fact that Hardy "set[s] behind the small action of his protagonists the terrific action of unfathomed nature" (29) to some extent compensates for the lack of the mythic and also Draper suggest that although the tragic outcome of Hardy's later novels primarily stems from society's illiberality, the fact that his novels still seem to be permeated by "an irresistible, impersonal Will, a bleak, latter-day version of the Greek immortals" (431) can be considered a modern perpetuation of the ancient, fatalistic model.

2.3. Hardy and fatalism

The central theme of fate in Thomas Hardy's works, which he frequently uses as a narrative instrument which causes his characters' lives to change for the worse or, admittedly less often, to bring about good fortune, is closely related to

his reading of the classic tragedians since the conception of fate employed in his works can to some extent be traced back to his reading of Aeschylus. However, it must not be neglected that Hardy's fatalistic temperament also stems from other sources and impressions he received during his life. Although Hardy repeatedly denied that his philosophy of life possessed a fundamental basis and unity, some critics still assume that his ideas are founded on a common ground. Unlike other critics who consider Hardy's gloomy fatalism to manifest itself only in his later works, Albert Pettigrew Elliott argues that "the fundamental basis of the man's fatalism was embodied in his youthful actions and the very first works he wrote, and that there is evidently a gradual development up to the day of his death" (14). He further claims that although "[t]here were modifications of a sort, [...] the basic consistency [of Hardy's fatalism] cannot be questioned" (14) and he considers Hardy's inherent melancholy as the foundation of his fatalism. The story of his birth, namely that the newborn Hardy had been pronounced dead by the surgeon and had only been saved because the attentive midwife suddenly observed signs of life in him, seems to have contributed to Hardy's fatalistic disposition as well as his early developed sensitivity to human suffering and misery. His pronounced commiseration becomes manifest in a letter he wrote in 1902 in which he remembers the emotional impact a malnourished child from his neighbourhood had on him: "[A]s a child I knew a sheep-keeping boy who to my horror shortly afterwards died of want - the contents of his stomach at the autopsy being raw turnip only" (*Life and Work* 335). This gloomy sense of injustice and universal suffering perfectly chimed in with the fatalism devolved from his parents. While his father's fatalism expressed itself in a rather passive acceptance of circumstances, his mother's fatalistic temperament was accompanied by a propensity for pessimism (Harvey 6). The fact that his mother's spirit, however, proved to be the dominant influence is demonstrated by the following notebook entry: "Mother's notion, & also mine: That a figure stands in our van with arm uplifted, to knock us back from any pleasant prospect we indulge in as probable" (Hardy, *Notebooks* 6-7). But apart from Hardy's allegedly melancholy disposition, which in my opinion already has been overemphasised in literary research, and his sensitivity to hardship, also Hardy's close connection with nature contributed to the shaping of his fatalism. Elliott claims that "Hardy's

tender sympathy with nature and his belief in her as an instrument of Fate, which was to become the propelling theme in all of his works, is to be explained by the fact that his entire childhood was spent close to the soil" (15). The fact that Hardy spent his early life in Dorset, the topography of which he adopted for his fictional county of Wessex, allowed him to gain an insight into the operation of natural laws, which he frequently used as a personification of fate.

Taking into account these early contributing factors it may not be wrong to speak of an early foundation of Hardy's fatalistic temperament which paved the way for its later manifestations. The shaping of his fatalism, which can be considered as having its root in his early childhood continued unchecked during his adolescence. Especially the gradual erosion of his religious belief played an important role regarding his conception of human destiny. Hardy's early orthodox belief and ardent adherence to Evangelicalism, which is well-documented by his correspondence with Henry Bastow, his close friend and fellow student of architecture at Dorchester, who happened to be a Baptist, in the course of which he, however, decided to "stick to his own side" (Hardy, *Life and Work* 33) continued unchecked during his childhood and adolescence. In his theological days Hardy's devoutness even went as far as to aspire to taking orders, which is also recorded in *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy*:

As a child, to be a parson had been his dream; moreover, he had had several clerical relatives who held livings; while his grandfather, father, uncle, brother, wife, cousin, and two sisters had been musicians in various churches over a period covering altogether more than a hundred years. He himself had frequently read the church lessons, and had at one time as a young man begun reading for Cambridge with a view to taking Orders (qtd. in Elliott 18-19)

The decisive reason for Hardy's apostasy, however, is a matter of conjecture since the only statement he makes concerning his change of mind regarding his matriculation at Cambridge is that his intention "fell through less because of its difficulty than from a conscientious feeling, after some theological study, that he could hardly take the step with honour while holding the views which on examination he found himself to hold" (Hardy, *Life and Work* 53). The crisis Hardy's orthodox theism underwent in the mid-1860s and which according to his own words was due to "theological study" was also promoted by the overall rationalistic climate of the late Victorian age and the influential writings of Darwin, Comte, Mill, Huxley, Spencer and Stephen he indulged in. The chief

reason for the gradual erosion of Hardy's faith, however, some critics assume to be the inconsistency of human suffering and the idea of a benevolent deity, which Hardy considers to be a self-contradiction "[f]or omnipotence, omniscience, & moral perfection are irreconcilable' with a radically imperfect world" (qtd. in Dalziel 74). Also Elliott argues that

It was not a fickle doubt of specific dogma, but an honest questioning of the entire conception of a benevolent God, which caused Hardy to forsake Christianity. It came about as a result of his own observation, aided obviously by his inherently gloomy temperament. It was too much for him to reconcile the idea of beneficence in an omnipotent and omniscient deity [sic!] with the fact of omnipresent evil and the persistent tendency of circumstances toward the unhappiness of human beings. (20)

But although Hardy gradually started to reject orthodox theism his attitude towards religion and those who practised it was never hostile and despite his loss of faith he considered himself to be "churchy; not in an intellectual sense, but in so far as instincts and emotions rule" (qtd. in Hands 363). Hardy's mixed feelings regarding Christianity and his internal struggle, which was generated by the rationalistic denial of a benign deity and his emotional craving for the joys a blind acceptance of the religious principles would allow, is also traceable in his works. Elliott points out that it would be wrong to label Hardy as an atheist, as for example G.K. Chesterton had done in *The Victorian Age in Literature* by calling Hardy an "village atheist, brooding and blaspheming over the village idiot" (qtd. in Hands 360), since despite the agnostic tendencies his works show they still evoke connotations of an all moving power he personifies as an Immanent Will (21). This concept of a force which is "neither moral nor immoral, but *unmoral*" (Hardy, *Letters* 54), which he clearly gathered from his readings of Schopenhauer and which must be regarded as a permanent feature of nearly all of his works, clearly shows that Hardy never lost the belief in an "agency of causation" (Gatrell, "*Fate*" 119):

[W]e are accustomed to read, in the narrative voice, of this agency as fate, or destiny, or chance, or circumstance, or fortune, or providence [...] - an impersonal random force for good or evil as occasion and human action allows, the force that allows one crucial letter to arrive just too late to prevent a death (*The Return of the Native*), another to be read at the precise moment when it can do most psychological damage to the reader (*The Mayor of Casterbridge*), and yet another, pushed under a door, to slip under the carpet rather than on top of it, so that it is never read (*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*). (Gatrell, "*Fate*" 119).

Hardy's disbelief in a conscious, omnipotent God on the evidence of human suffering obviously made him substitute the Christian idea of divinity by a more neutral force. This surrogate for a single almighty deity, which in his novels takes the shape of a universal power pulling the strings of human life, has been a matter of debate among critics since the reading of fate in Hardy's novels proposes several conundrums. Although Hardy's personal writings seem to suggest that his conception of fatalism assumes fate and the Immanent Will respectively to be a neutral and unconscious force, its manifestations in the novels, however, tell another story. In many cases fate appears to be a rather antagonistic force which consciously tries to ruin people's lives. Indeed, a sense of justice seems to be missing in the controlling force of the universe, because in many cases the tragedies of Hardy's protagonists seem to arise from the best intentions. Elliott points out that "[a]lmost every step which brings sorrow to Tess has its origin in a lofty motive" (36). Although the tragic outcomes of Hardy's novels frequently appear to be results of chance events, the wantonness of fate is repeatedly emphasised since many of Hardy's characters consider themselves to be ill-used by things beyond their control and also authorial comments seem to suggest malevolent forces operating behind the scenes. Nevertheless it must also not be neglected that fate "in a mood of playfulness" (Elliott 39) in some cases also holds happiness for his protagonists:

Sometimes, especially in his early novels, he felt under compulsion to give his plot 'a predetermined cheerful ending' but even here we sense an obvious reluctance, a compromise upon peace and joys realized so late that much of their sweetness is lost. This is most noticeable in the marriages at the end of *Far From the Madding Crowd* and *The Woodlanders* which seem not the triumphs of the will to human happiness over great obstacles, but rather mere makeshifts for contentment, in which Fate has no less surely its triumph in the destruction of happy illusion. (Elliott 35)

Despite Elliott's reasonable point that the perfunctory happiness achieved in some of Hardy's early novels is not entirely without resignation and a sense of disillusionment, I would still argue that those of Hardy's protagonists who against all odds are able to celebrate a triumph over adverse circumstances can partly attribute their success to themselves. Also Simon Gatrell contends that although it seems that Hardy's people are set against forces over which they have no control and which they cannot interfere with, the importance of free will still is not nullified since the destiny of Hardy's characters often times depends

on how they deal with the fateful setbacks: “How we respond to these senseless acts of cruelty is the ultimate measure of the quality of our humanity” (Gatrell, “*Fate*” 127-128). This becomes especially obvious in the case of Michael Henchard, the main protagonist of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Although it cannot be denied that Henchard’s decline of fortune is promoted by an array of hostile forces, the ultimate factor leading to his destruction can be considered to lie in Henchard’s response to the fateful events which is induced by his character. It is not for nothing that Hardy cites Novalis’ maxim “character is fate”, a quotation behind which one can suspect the idea that apart from external forces also both human actions and character to a great deal influence our destiny, and that it is ultimately the level of capacity of an individual to adjust to the circumstances of life which decides his or her fate (Gatrell, “*Fate*” 127).

Finally it must also be pointed out that the conception of fate displayed in Thomas Hardy’s novels, apart from its varying benevolent, antagonistic or neutral forms of appearance and the different designations Hardy uses for its manifestations, also fluctuates in many other respects. Fate in Hardy’s novels manifests itself in a variety of forms ranging between chance events and cruel determinism. Elliott argues that determinism constitutes the scientific equivalent of fatalism, which acknowledges just as fatalism does “that man’s struggle against the Will behind things, is of no avail, but it does decree that the laws of cause and effect must not suspend operation” (31). Indeed the freedom of choice of Hardy’s protagonists is often limited by certain predetermined qualities of their natures conditioned by heredity and milieu. Especially his later novels show that human destiny is composed of a nexus of forces which in themselves can be considered to be manifestation of a superior power. All in all Elliott invokes five different motifs of fate, namely chance and coincidence, nature, time, woman and convention which all can be said to contribute to the shaping of the destiny of Hardy’s protagonists (57). Therefore, it may be said that apart from accidental occurrences, like the letter slipped under the carpet in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, the workings of the universal power frequently referred to as fate also draw on other instruments, like natural events, time-conditioned change and indirectly also employs particular characters and social laws and conventions as the agents of fate. The subsequent chapters of this thesis thus will make it their business to determine to what extent these forces precipitate

the course of events in the three novels under consideration and to ascertain whether their workings are conducive to a turn for the better or the worse in the lives of Hardy's protagonists.

3. Tess of the D'Urbervilles

3.1. Hereditary traits and character disposition

The deterministic quality of heredity is one of the manifestations of the universal force which both conditions and constrains human life in Thomas Hardy's novels. For discussing this central theme of Hardy's fictional cosmos, especially *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* lends itself as a case in point, since the importance of genealogy as a compelling force is stressed consistently in the course of the book. As has already been pointed out, the emphasis on heredity as an impetus which contributes to the fateful events and ultimately causes Tess's demise has been intensified in the course of the shaping of the novel. According to J.T. Laird, the Ur-plot of the novel, which exists in seven different versions, lacks the opening meeting between Parson Tringham and John Durbeyfield, in which the former reveals the latter's ancient and aristocratic lineage, the consequence being that Tess's encounter with the villain, who in the Ur-plot is a man named Hawferne, who does not bear a (sham) relation to her, is not based on the scheme to "claim kin", but is founded on an accidental meeting (33). However, the accentuation of the d'Urberville motif not only had a bearing on the plot structure of the novel, but also influenced the shaping of the novel's symbolism. Robinson points out that the modification of the first scene and the amended authorial statement at the closing of the novel, namely "And the d'Urberville knights and dames slept on in their tombs unknowing" (Hardy, *Tess* 508), purports that Tess's trouble begins and ends with her ancestry (*Hardy and Darwin* 137). Analogous to the heightening of the motif of biological determinism, there can be noticed a decrease of chance and coincidence during the shaping of the novel. As mentioned previously, it was probably August Weismann's theory, which Hardy indulged in at the time of writing the novel, that caused this shift towards straightforward determinism. The emblematic forces of fate, which manifest themselves in chance events or the workings of malicious deities, which had dominated the earlier versions of the manuscript, were altered into the more literal and scientific operation of these forces (Robinson, *Hardy and Darwin* 135-136). It may be argued that the unavoidability of fate this change of emphasis engenders only enhances the tragic quality of Tess's destiny:

The effect of this calculated emphasis on Tess's place at the exhausted ending of a long family line is to put her in a tragic situation from which there can be no escape, a captivity made the more harrowing because her every response to it may be seen as having been conditioned by that very heredity. (Robinson, *Hardy and Darwin* 138)

Hardy's sudden preoccupation with the theme of heredity, which not only had an impact on the plot but also on the protagonists' characterisation and the guiding themes of the novel, is already revealed in the book's title (Laird 109). The novel's title, which had been *Too Late Beloved* at the earlier stages of the shaping of the book, in its final stage already stresses the importance of Tess's genealogy. Simon Gatrell suggests that it was quite usual practice both in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to name a book after its central character for several reasons (*Study of mankind* 98). The fact that "the novel from its origins was very much concerned with the presentation of character and the author often wished to direct the reader's attention from the beginning to the appropriate personality" (Gatrell, *Study of mankind* 98) could be an explanation for this custom as well as the average reader's craving for rather straightforward biographical fiction, a type of text which usually is easily recognisable by a similarly straightforward title, namely the main protagonist's name, and the authors' popular wish for mainstream success. Since Tess undoubtedly is the main character of the book on whose experiences the plot is centred, the author's choice to name the book after her stands to reason, but also the fact that the reader's attention equally almost immediately is drawn to her descent must not be neglected, since it offers an additional aid for interpretation. After all, Tess's dual status as a poor tradesman's daughter and as a progeny of a noble family has a deep impact on the heroine's tragic failure. Gatrell suggests that Tess's exceptionality mainly derives from the fact that she is "a Durbeyfield by social status, but a d'Urberville of the spirit" (*Study of mankind* 98). Although Tess's nuclear family suffers from dire living conditions, she is of inherently noble blood, which is also reflected in her nature: "She has the strength, pride and fineness of spirit that Hardy associates with the superior gentry, the passion and the violence." (Gatrell, *Study of mankind* 99). The fact that Tess's character shows specific traits, which given her modest position in life cannot be regarded as the result of external influences but rather must be treated as the fruit of internal, inherited qualities, for example, shows itself in Tess's proud nature, which strictly speaking is at odds with her actual economic position. Her pride

and tendency towards violence, two properties Hardy obviously connected with aristocracy, for instance, are revealed when during a quarrel she suddenly strikes Alec d'Urberville with a glove:

One of her leather gloves, which she had taken off to eat her skimmer-cake, lay in her lap, and without the slightest warning she passionately swung the glove by the gauntlet directly in his face. It was heavy and thick as a warrior's, and it struck him flat on the mouth. Fancy might have regarded the act as the recrudescence of a trick in which her armed progenitors were not unpractised. (Hardy 422)

Simon Gatrell claims that it is pre-eminently this tension and polarity distinctive of Tess's character and already suggested in the book's title which causes her ultimate failure. It is the clash between innocence and sensuality, conventionality and free thought, ignorance and education and likewise the discordance between the pride, which can be considered a residue of her powerful ancestors, and the humility accompanying her humble social position which constitutes a partial root of her trouble (Gatrell, *Study of mankind* 99-100). Tess's proud attitude, which sometimes tends to result in violent behaviour, also manifests itself when riding through "The Chase" with Alec, where she reacts sharply to Alec's attempt to embrace her waist: "This immediately put her on the defensive, and with one of those sudden impulses of reprisal to which she was liable she gave him a little push from her" (Hardy, *Tess* 86). Shirely A. Martin considers Tess's resort to both threatened and effectively performed physical violence as the product of the moral decline of her degenerate family (ch. 1). Tess's sudden violent outbursts, however, cannot merely be considered as a result of time-conditioned degeneracy, but can also be seen as a replication of the past deeds of her ancestors. The vicious behaviour of her forebears, which is both evoked by authorial comments and the various legends and myths surrounding her ancestral family, obviously is rekindled in Tess's personality. This attitude towards heredity, namely that it constitutes a force robbing the individual of free will due to genealogical predisposition, is also recorded in Hardy's poem "The Pedigree" in which the lyrical I, who is bent over his pedigree, realises that he is a prisoner of inherited qualities:

And then did I divine
That every heave and coil and move I made
Within my brain, and in my mood and speech,
Was in the glass portrayed

As long forestalled by their so making it;
 The first of them, the primest fuglemen of my line,
 Being fogged in far antiqueness past surmise and reason's reach.

Said I then, sunk in tone,
 "I am the merest mimicker and counterfeit! -
 Though thinking, I AM I
 AND WHAT I DO I DO MYSELF ALONE."

The feeling of helplessness Hardy felt when faced with the concept of genealogical predisposition during a certain phase of his life, also found expression in various other poems like "Heredity", "Family Portraits", "Old Furniture" and "Sine Prole", but is also reflected in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Tess's propensity for sudden fierceness and pride can thus be considered as a legacy from her ancestors, who themselves were guilty of acts of violence. Some critics additionally point out that it is, however, not only the violent deeds Tess commits herself, but also the violence she is subjected to which can be regarded as an "obscure strain in the d'Urberville blood" (Hardy, *Tess* 492). According to the narrator Tess's rape perfectly resembles the sexual crimes her forefathers committed: "Doubtless some of Tess d'Urberville's mailed ancestors rollicking home from a fray had dealt the same measure even more ruthlessly towards peasant girls of their time" (Hardy, *Tess* 91). The ironically reversed distribution of roles which makes Tess, a descendent of the aristocratic and powerful d'Urbervilles, in this particular case the victim rather than the perpetrator, can therefore be considered a retribution for the sins her ancestors committed. This ironic reversal of fortune which compels their posterity to repay the past sins of their long-gone ancestors also manifests itself in a quite different situation, namely when the Durbeyfields after the death of the head of the family are forced to leave their house due to the expiration of the lease:

Thus the Durbeyfields, once d'Urbervilles, saw descending upon them the destiny which, no doubt, when they were among the Olympians of the county, they had caused to descend many a time, and severely enough, upon the heads of such landless ones as they themselves were now. So do flux and reflux - the rhythm of change - alternate and persist in everything under the sky. (Hardy, *Tess* 447-448)

Tess's genetic loading, however, does not only manifest itself in the unfortunate positions in which Tess repeatedly finds herself and her violent outbreaks at times she feels her pride to be injured, but also becomes evident from Tess's occasional indulgence. Tess's pride which at some points makes her even go

so far as to resort to actual physical violence also finds expression in passivity and submissiveness. The same feeling which makes Tess slap Alec d'Urberville in the face, makes her refrain from begging Angel to stay with her after he has made up his mind to leave her:

If Tess had been artful, had she made a scene, fainted, wept hysterically, in that lonely lane, notwithstanding the fury of fastidiousness with which he was possessed, he would probably not have withstood her. But her mood of long-suffering made his way easy for him, and she herself was his best advocate. Pride, too, entered into her submission - which perhaps was a symptom of that reckless acquiescence in chance too apparent in the whole d'Urberville family - and the many effective chords which she could have stirred by an appeal were left untouched. (Hardy, *Tess* 324)

This passage suggests that Tess's story easily could have taken another turn if only she had pocketed her pride. The destructive nature of this particular character trait of hers also becomes apparent when Tess's pride inhibits her from appealing to Angel's parents for money in a situation in which she desperately needs it and rather chooses hard, bodily work on a farm to sustain herself and her family. When Tess tries to reject Alec by telling him that she is not dependent on his help since she could easily apply to her parents-in-law for help, he reveals her proud nature by saying: "*If you ask for it. But you won't, Tess; I know you; you'll never ask for it - you'll starve first!*" (Hardy, *Tess* 454), and also Angel, on learning that during his absence Tess had never appealed to his parents, considers this omission as an act of pride rather than timidity: "[I]t occurred to Angel that her pride had stood in her way, and that she had suffered privation" (Hardy 473). According to Gatrell, it is this "clash between her pride and her social and economic position [on which] much of the process of her tragedy depends" (*Study of mankind* 99). It seems that Tess simply cannot escape her true aristocratic nature, which given her actual status, however, rather proves to be fatal instead of helpful.

The destructive nature of Tess's "reckless acquiescence in chance", which becomes manifest in "[h]er fatal supineness under the assaults of Alec and her failure to claim her own rights from Angel, her tendency to 'drift into acquiescence' and her habit of dropping asleep at critical moments" (Robinson, *Hardy and Darwin* 138), however, is not only referred to by the narrator, but is also perceived by the characters. After Tess has revealed her history to Angel, he immediately links Tess's passivity with spent family energies:

I think that parson who unearthed your pedigree would have done better if he had held his tongue. I cannot help associating your decline as a family with this other fact – of your want of firmness. Decrepit families imply decrepit wills, decrepit conduct. Heaven, why did you give me a handle for despising you more by informing me of your descent! Here was I thinking you a new-sprung child of nature; there were you, the belated seedling of an effete aristocracy! (Hardy, *Tess* 297)

Laird claims that Angel's remark, in which he in a way blames Tess for having inherited the misfeatures of her ancestors, an accusation which she has nothing to hold against, also functions as a consciously inserted excuse for her character:

As a consequence of such passages, it becomes apparent that Hardy sees much of the responsibility for Tess's effeteness as circumstantial, rather than personal, and believes that she should not be judged too harshly by the reader for an inherited passivity and submissiveness. (114)

However, it must also be pointed out that Tess's lineage not only has a negative impact, but also has certain favourable effects. Tess's nobility also bestows a certain "flash of dignity which must have graced her grand-dames" (Hardy, *Tess* 436) on her, which according to Laird lends Tess a romantic aura which sets her apart from the other characters and enables the reader to sympathise with her more easily (117). Additionally her genealogy also enables her to take on greater significance in the eyes of some protagonists. Angel Clare, for instance, who, as follows from the above-mentioned passage, is rather known to despise ancient families, at some times also becomes fanciful about Tess's lineage and considers her descent in a romantic light: "Politically I am sceptical as to their virtue of their being old. Some of the wise even among themselves 'exclaim against their own succession,' as Hamlet puts it; but lyrically, dramatically, and even historically, I am tenderly attached to them." (Hardy, *Tess* 213). But apart from the irrational emotional attachment he bears towards old families, Angel also considers Tess's ancestry in a very practical light by deeming it a trump-card among society:

For your own sake I rejoice in your descent. Society is hopelessly snobbish, and this fact of your extraction may make an appreciable difference to its acceptance of you as my wife, after I have made you the well-read woman that I mean to make you. My mother too, poor soul, will think so much better of you on account of it. (Hardy, *Tess* 242).

Apart from certain character traits Tess seems to have inherited from her d'Urberville predecessors, it is explicitly stated in the novel that her appearance

as well reflects features of her ancestors. Dale Kramer points out that the description given of Tess at one point of the novel, which stresses her otherness in comparison to other peasant girls by remarking that “[her] cheeks are paler, [her] teeth more regular, [her] red lips thinner” (Hardy, *Tess* 112) than theirs, suggests a more aristocratic, lady-like appearance which might be considered a gift from her ancestors (39). Also Angel, when contemplating the gloomy d’Urberville portraits at the mansion in which they spend their honeymoon, is able to draw a connection between certain features of Tess’s face and the lineaments presented in the pictures:

He looked up, and perceived two life-size portraits on panels built into the masonry. As all visitors to the mansion are aware, these paintings represent women of middle age, of a date some two hundred years ago, whose lineaments once seen can never be forgotten. The long pointed features, narrow eye, and smirk of the one, so suggestive of merciless treachery; the bill-hook nose, large teeth, and bold eye of the other, suggesting arrogance to the point of ferocity, haunt the beholder afterwards in his dreams. [...] The unpleasantness of the matter was that, in addition to their effect upon Tess, her fine features were unquestionably traceable in these exaggerated forms. (Hardy, *Tess* 277)

As can be deduced from the above-quoted passage the analogies Tess bears to her knightly ancestors are primarily referred to in the novel as having a sinister and uncanny effect on the contemplator, which again serves to remind the reader of the dark side of heredity. However, while these lines merely serve the purpose of contributing to the overall gloomy effect produced by the powerful d’Urberville motif, there are many other passages in the novel which offer a different interpretation restraining the authority of the d’Urberville plot. As has already been pointed out by many critics, Tess’s pretty features and her mature body are important factors contributing to her tragedy, since the reader’s attention is more than once drawn to the fact that it is especially Tess’s “face which had been her undoing” (Hardy, *Tess* 119). The favourable attributes of Tess’s appearance, however, are features exclusively inherited from the maternal side: “[T]he personal charms which Tess could boast of were in main part her mother’s gift, and therefore unknightly, unhistorical” (Hardy, *Tess* 20). Although Tess’s father is convinced that the trump-card to play among Tess’s rich relations is especially her “d’Urberville blood”, her mother soon divines that it is her daughter’s beauty on which hope can be set, an assumption which proves right. When Tess first arrives at the mansion of her rich relatives the

importance of the ancient blood her father frequently boasts of in the eyes of Alec d'Urberville is lost in favour of the advantageous attributes Tess inherited from her peasant mother:

He watched her pretty and unconscious munching through the skeins of smoke that pervaded the tent, and Tess Durbeyfield did not divine, as she innocently looked down at the roses in her bosom, that there behind the blue narcotic haze was potentially the 'tragic mischief' of her drama – one who stood fair to be the blood-red ray in the spectrum of her young life. She had an attribute which amounted to a disadvantage just now; and it was this that caused Alec d'Urberville's eyes to rivet themselves upon her. It was a luxuriance of aspect, a fullness of growth, which made her appear more of a woman than she really was. She had inherited the feature from her mother without the quality it denoted. It had troubled her mind occasionally, till her companions had said that it was a fault which time would cure. (Hardy, *Tess* 47-48)

This passage clearly shows that Tess's appearance plays as much a part in her undoing as does her ancient blood. Though it is the knowledge of her ancestry and her bad conscience about the accident with her family's horse that prompts her to call on her alleged relatives, it is solely her prettiness which makes her an object of sexual desire in the eyes of Alec d'Urberville. After all, Tess's sexual attributes not only arrest Alec's attention at their first meeting, but also cause his dismissal of his newly-gained moral principles: "I was firm as a man could be till I saw those eyes and that mouth again - surely there never was such a maddening mouth since Eve's! [...] You temptress, Tess; you dear damned witch of Babylon - I could not resist you as soon as I met you again!" (Hardy, *Tess* 411). Also Tess herself seems to be convinced that her beauty constitutes the root of her tragedy, which even makes her go so far as to ruin her looks in order to be able to avoid further male advances:

[...] Tess resolved to run no further risks from her appearance. As soon as she got out of the village she entered a thicket and took from her basket one of the oldest field-gowns, which she had never put on even at the dairy - never since she had worked among the stubble at Marlott. She also, by felicitous thought, took a handkerchief from her bundle and tied it round her face under her bonnet, covering her chin and half her cheeks and temples, as if she were suffering from toothache. Then with her little scissors, by the aid of a pocket looking-glass, she mercilessly nipped her eye-brows off, and thus insured against aggressive admiration she went on her uneven way. (Hardy, *Tess* 356)

In summary, it may be said that the conception of heredity as a destructive force is implicitly present throughout the novel. Both the various manifestations of Tess's pride, which she probably inherited from her noble ancestry, and her

natural beauty which is said to be a gift from her mother's side can be considered as being tacitly tagged as contributing factors regarding Tess's tragedy. But despite the "credence in a tragic d'Urberville inheritance" (O'Toole 81), the significance of which is stressed by both the actions and remarks of the protagonists, but is sometimes even evoked by the narrator himself, by, for example, calling Tess "an almost standard woman, but for the slight incautiousness of character inherited from her race" (Hardy, *Tess* 114), the authority of genealogy cannot be called definite (O'Toole 81). Most of the aforementioned passages are somewhat vague when it comes to establishing a direct connection between Tess's character and her descent. Moreover, O'Toole points out that "even when the genealogical explanation is invoked by the narrator, it is often done in a tentative or speculative way" (81). For example, the passage quoted above in which Tess strikes Alec with one of her leather gloves actually merely says that "*Fancy might* have regarded the act as the recrudescence of a trick in which her armed progenitors were not unpractised" [emphasis added] and also Angel only "associates" Tess's so-called "want of firmness" with the decline of her family. Therefore, it can be said that both passages fall short of making definite statements of direct causality (O'Toole 82).

Apart from this suggested reluctance to reduce Tess's individuality to such an extent so as to attribute her actions exclusively to her status as a d'Urberville, there are even some passages in the novel which quite clearly go against a genealogical interpretation of Tess's tragedy. O'Toole suggests that "the idea of a d'Urberville legacy [...] exists in opposition to an alternate level of causality, a socioeconomic one which implicitly challenges the notion of ancestral determination" (77). This reading of the story in socioeconomic terms is particularly promoted by the scene taking place in the d'Urberville family vault, where Alec mocks Tess with the fact that "[t]he little finger of the sham d'Urberville can do more for [her] than the whole dynasty of the real underneath" (Hardy, *Tess* 465). But apart from those socioeconomic compulsions which seem to undermine a genealogical reading of the novel, also other forces seem to be at work, which equally demonstrate that genealogy and heredity are not the ultimate factors of influence to determine the course of events. This, for instance, manifests itself in the May-Dance scene, where

Angel does not choose Tess for his dancing partner, a fatal action which according to the narrator cannot be traced back to Tess's genealogical background, but rather happened by chance, which Tess's descent obviously cannot interfere with: "Pedigree, ancestral skeletons, monumental record, the d'Urberville lineaments, did not help Tess in her life's battle as yet, even to the extent of attracting to her a dancing-partner over the heads of the commonest peasantry. So much for Norman blood unaided by Victorian lucre." (Hardy, *Tess* 16). The importance of this missed chance in the chain of tragic events must not be neglected, since also Tess herself at one point of the story regrets Angel's neglect by exclaiming "Why didn't you stay and love me when I - was sixteen; living with my little sisters and brothers, and you danced on the green? O, why didn't you, why didn't you!" (Hardy, *Tess* 250). The assumption that the tragic course of events does not entirely rest on genealogical predisposition is also revealed in the scene in which Tess has to deliver the bee-hives in her father's stead, which again, like the event at the May-Dance, proves to be fatal, by her mother's comment that the "beehives [...] must be delivered, family or no" (Hardy, *Tess* 22).

Thus it may be said that the novel itself offers two different ways of interpreting the importance of heredity in terms of the consecution of events. Although a genealogical interpretation is promoted both by the novel's title and the "plot's organization around the idea of an ancient family" (81), O'Toole still suggests that "[e]ven as the novel frames Tess as a d'Urberville, it shows that the genealogical interpretation of Tess's character is precisely that, an interpretation, a reading, one which depends on the perception of the observer who frames Tess against the background of d'Urberville history" (82). The novel thus does not put forward Tess's status as a d'Urberville as the ultimate authority of her tragedy, but rather continuously "implicitly raises the question of whether what matters is being a d'Urberville or knowing oneself to be one" (O'Toole 77) and that "narrative transmission ultimately may be more important than [sic!] genetic transmission" (76). According to this reading, Tess's tragedy rather consists in her parents' wish to attain greater distinction than their actual status would suggest and their foolish faith in the benefits of a de facto decayed family background. Hugman suggests that it is primarily the abiding memory of

the noble ancestors which proves to be the main obstacle in the main protagonist's life rather than actual genealogical predisposition:

The naturally indolent John Durbeyfield is betrayed into want and eventually disaster by an absurd faith in his ancestors and the good they will do him. The pursuit of the supposed beneficial effects of their descent leads to Tess's personal disaster, and subsequent suffering. (53)

Indeed, John Durbeyfield's belief that his family can extract advantages from the mere knowledge of their aristocratic lineage proves to be fatuous considering their shattered remnants, the irony of which is frequently shown quite plainly to the reader. The economic futility of the aristocratic ancestry is, for instance, demonstrated when the Durbeyfields at their mother's unfounded desire go to Kingsbere, "the spot of all spots in the world which could be considered the d'Urbervilles' home" (Hardy, *Tess* 461), are forced to camp in the open since their descent not even is so much worth as to offer them a roof over their head:

Tess listlessly lent a hand, and in a quarter of an hour the old four-post bedstead was dissociated from the heap of goods, and erected under the south wall of the church, the part of building known as the d'Urberville Aisle, beneath which the huge vaults lay. Over the tester of the bedstead was a beautifully traceried window, of many lights, its date being the fifteenth century. It was called the d'Urberville Window, and in the upper part could be discerned heraldic emblems like those on Durbeyfield's old seal and spoon. (Hardy, *Tess* 463)

Hugman suggests that the subtle irony of this passage especially consists in the fact that the "ancestral home" of Tess's family fails to save the d'Urbervilles' poor relatives from homelessness, but merely is able to offer useless elegance, a fact which Tess's parents, however, blind themselves to. The interpretation of Tess's tragedy in terms of her parents' fancies is also promoted by other scenes in the novel. Right from the beginning of the book it becomes obvious that Tess's parents both suffer from unfounded delusions of grandeur, which is best exemplified by the family horse Prince, whose violent death can be said to mirror Tess's sad destiny. The fact that the Durbeyfield family calls a horse which is described to be mean and rickety by the pretentious name of "Prince" already reveals their liability to self-conceit and the poor horse's death, which is basically caused by John Durbeyfield's omission to attend to his duty of delivering beehives in favour of celebrating the unearthing of his pedigree since Tess who goes in her father's stead is not apt to manage the horse, already foreshadows Tess's tragic ending. Tess's father's conceitedness, however,

which not only shows itself in his neglect of duty in favour of uncalled-for celebrations, does not pass Tess unnoticed: "Tess began to perceive that a man in indifferent health, who proposed to start on a journey before one in the morning, ought not to be at an inn at this late hour celebrating his ancient blood" (Hardy, *Tess* 25). And also Tess's father's decision not to sustain his family by working anymore since "'tis wrong for a man of such a high family as his to slave and drave at common labouring work" (Hardy, *Tess* 438), a resolution which again gives financial trouble to his family and contributes to Tess's return to Alec, demonstrates that the knowledge of the family's ancient blood after all proves to be more decisive than actual genetic transmission. This assumption also seems to be justifiable in the light of direct statements made by the protagonists, which are aimed at stultifying John Durbeyfield's fancies. Not only Tess is inclined to dismiss her father's ideas about their ancient lineage as stupid fantasies, but also his wife seems to notice that he is carrying things too far and tries to put him in his place again:

'Hush - don't be so silly, Jacky,' said his wife. 'Yours is not the only family that was of 'count in wold days. Look at the Anktells, and Horseys, and the Tringhams themselves - gone to seed a'most as much as you - though you was bigger folks than they, that's true. Thank God, I was never of no family, and have nothing to be ashamed of in that way!' (Hardy, *Tess* 30)

All in all, it may be said that although heredity and genealogy are central themes in the novel, which seemingly play a part in contributing to Tess's bitter fate, it still appears that the d'Urberville inheritance rather operates on an imaginative and narrative level rather than on a genetic one (O'Toole 85). Since the novel is permeated by stories and myths relating to d'Urberville history, such as the legend of the d'Urberville coach, which according to Watt signifies "the involuntary aspect of hereditary traits" (162), the reader soon becomes inclined to see Tess's personal history in the light of her family history: "The novel's persistent alignment of family history with narrative and the emphasis it places on Tess's encounters with the family story suggests that the imagination is vital to the influence wielded by family history" (O'Toole 84). Although also some of the characters themselves assign value to Tess's descent, many of them eventually have to acknowledge their deception and also Angel finally realises

that there is no real, substantial value of Tess's genealogy, but that the significance ascribed to it is merely a product of imagination:

The historic interest of her family - that masterful line of d'Urbervilles - whom he had despised as a spent force, touched his sentiments now. Why had he not known the difference between political value and the imaginative value of these things? In the latter aspect her d'Urberville descent was a fact of great dimensions; worthless to economics, it was a most useful ingredient to the dreamer, to the moralizer on declines and falls. (Hardy, *Tess* 436).

3.2. The inescapability of milieu and the effects of maladaptation

Unlike the concept of heredity, whose authority is not determinate but rather remains questionable, the influence of the milieu the characters are exposed to seems to be more definite. Simon Gatrell, for instance, claims that "Tess is an example of the destructive effect of society's pressures and conventions upon a nature naturally pure and unstained" (*Study of Mankind* 105) and also Michael Millgate points out that the turn of events in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is first and foremost a product of the "inevitable - or at least, credible - outcome of the immediate narrative context of their own personalities conditioned and limited by the forces of heredity and environment" (qtd. in Mattisson 334). Tess's tragedy, therefore, partly can be said to be constructed by the environment she was born into, both in a smaller and a larger context. As has already been pointed out earlier, the social context, namely late-Victorian rural England, Tess belongs to partly engenders her misery, since the current moral values of society and its double standards render the happiness of a spouseless mother plainly impossible. However, it is not sufficient to declare society as being the only factor contributing to Tess's personal tragedy, since the novel also seems to put emphasis on her being a direct product of the dire conditions prevailing in her nuclear family. Especially the neighbours seem to be convinced that Tess's lapse only represents one model instance in a whole series of immoralities on the part of her family:

Ever since the occurrence of the event which had cast such a shadow over Tess's life, the Durbeyfield family (whose descent was not credited) had been tacitly looked on as one which would have to go when their lease ended, if only in the interest of morality. It was, indeed, quite true that the household had not been shining examples either of temperance, soberness, or chastity. The father, and even the mother, had got drunk at times, the younger children seldom had gone to church, and the eldest

daughter had made queer unions. By some means the village had to be kept pure. (Hardy, *Tess* 450)

The fact that Tess's nuclear family exerts significant influence on Tess also becomes obvious in her linguistic usage, since Tess O'Toole points out that Tess, although being capable of mastering proper English, when talking to one of her family members still very often resorts to dialectal language use (79). Moreover, Tess's submissiveness and her liability to let life choose for her instead of being in control of her own destiny, which as previously mentioned proves to be disastrous at times, can also be related to her parents' fatalism and their general laissez faire attitude toward life.

However, it may be said that although Tess's social environment in general and her family's degenerate state figure into her demeanour and therefore also contribute to her tragedy, her mother probably still plays the most decisive role. When the reader first encounters Joan Durbeyfield she is singing a folk ballad called "The Spotted Cow", which according to O'Toole relates the story of a woman losing her virginity (88). The fact that this song is said to be Tess's mother's "favourite ditty" (Hardy, *Tess* 19) suggests a rather easygoing attitude towards 19th century English moral values and according to O'Toole also "determines Joan Durbeyfield's resigned and relatively unperturbed reaction to Tess's experience with Alec" (88). This rather casual attitude also shows itself in the fact that Joan obviously fails to prepare Tess for how to deal with possible threats posed by her cousin, which Tess also reproaches her for:

'How could I be expected to know? I was a child when I left this house four months ago. Why didn't you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why didn't you warn me? Ladies know what to fend hands against, because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance o' learning in that way, and you did not help me!' (Hardy, *Tess* 104)

This passage obviously shows that a lot of Tess's tragedy stems from her family's simpleness and ignorance and also from their quite liberal stance on morals. On the scale of things, Tess appears to be overdependent on her parents and their decisions. Although she is more down-to-earth and more reasonable than both her parents, she cannot stand up to them and continuously submits to their wills. Despite Tess's initial reluctance to call on her rich relatives, she soon sees herself forced to alter her mind, because she cannot bear the guilt they continuously inculcate in her for selfish reasons:

‘It is for you to decide. I killed the old horse, and I suppose I ought to do something to get ye a new one. But-but-I don’t quite like Mr. d’Urberville being there!’ The children, who had made use of this idea of Tess being taken up by their wealthy kinsfolk (which they imagined the other family to be) as a species of dolorifuge after the death of the horse, began to cry at Tess’s reluctance, and teased and reproached her for hesitating. ‘Tess won’t go-o-o and be made a la-a-dy of!-no, she says she wo-o-on’t!’ they wailed, with square mouths. ‘And we shan’t have a nice new horse, and lots o’ golden money to buy fairlings! And Tess won’t look pretty in her best cloze no mo-o-ore!’ (Hardy, *Tess* 54)

According to Watt Tess’s powerless position in her immediate family is also illustrated by the ship metaphor employed by the narrator, which raises the image of Tess and her siblings being passengers on a ship whose control entirely rests with her parents (161):

All these young souls were passengers in the Durbeyfield ship - entirely dependent on the judgment of the two Durbeyfield adults for their pleasures, their necessities, their health, even their existence. If the heads of the Durbeyfield household chose to sail into difficulty, disaster, starvation, disease, degradation, death, thither were these half-dozen little captives under hatches compelled to sail with them - six helpless creatures, who had never been asked if they wished for life on any terms, much less if they wished for it on such hard conditions as were involved in being of the shiftless house of Durbeyfield. (Hardy, *Tess* 24)

However, Tess is not the only character in the novel that seems to be a prisoner of circumstance. Also Angel Clare, despite being a free thinker, “is very much bound by the social power of his own culture” (Watt 152). Although he claims to have rejected the conventions of his father’s church, “he can never fully reject the nostalgia which he feels for the cultural/historical aspects of the institution” (Watt 150) and thereby plays a part in Tess’s destruction. Despite the fact that Angel tries to suppress his conventional side, it surfaces at the very moment when Tess’s future depends on his thinking outside the box:

This night the woman of his belittling deprecations was thinking how great and good her husband was. But over them both there hung a deeper shade than the shade which Angel Clare perceived, namely, the shade of his own limitations. With all his attempted independence of judgment this advanced and well-meaning young man, a sample product of the last five-and-twenty years, was yet the slave to custom and conventionality when surprised back into his early teachings. (Hardy, *Tess* 338)

Although the reader is told that Angel has partly succeeded in breaking out of the course of life his parents had intended for him, his early associations and teachings cannot be entirely suppressed. Despite the fact that Angel’s parents

from an early age on have set their minds on Angel's taking orders and although the religious influence exerted by his father, "[a] spiritual descendant in the direct line from Wycliff, Huss, Luther, Calvin; an Evangelical of the Evangelicals" (Hardy, *Tess* 202), can be called significant, Angel still finds fault with his parents' narrow dogma and eventually thwarts their plans by becoming an apprentice farmer. However, the other side of the coin is that Angel by his own account, despite his displayed heterodoxy, "felt that he was nearer to his father on the human side than was either of his brethren" (Hardy, *Tess* 215), which becomes apparent in his conduct towards Tess after the disclosure of her past. According to Nelson, Angel is "an arm-chair liberal who speaks for emancipation from Old Testament vindictiveness, but when confronted with the need to forgive 'sin' in his own life chooses the hard line" (159). Angel's hovering between liberalism and his family's stance on morals and traditions he unconsciously adopted also shows itself in his reverential attitude towards Tess, whose supposed purity and innocence kindles his romantic paganism (Watt 151). According to Watt, Angel's love for Tess can be considered a replacement for his lost faith, which is also why he at one point of the story addresses her with the names of Greek goddesses, namely "Artemis" and "Demeter" (151). But although Angel on the surface subscribes to an anti-dogmatic, pagan view on morals, he "is unaware that his romantic paganism, as it values Tess, is founded on one of the common norms of the socio-Christian world he rejects" (Watt 151), which is why his worship of Tess immediately ceases after the purity and innocence he ascribed to her turn out to have been an illusion, and is unable to show compassion towards her:

Within the remote depths of his constitution, so gentle and affectionate as he was in general, there lay hidden a hard logical deposit, like a vein of metal in a soft loam, which turned the edge of everything that attempted to traverse it. It had blocked his acceptance of the Church; it blocked his acceptance of Tess. Moreover, his affection itself was less fire than radiance, and, with regard to the other sex, when he ceased to believe he ceased to follow: contrasting in this with many impressionable natures, who remain sensuously infatuated with what they intellectually despise. (Hardy, *Tess* 308)

It is thus the ethereal quality of Angel's love for Tess which proves to be fatal, because once he cannot put Tess on a pedestal of innocence anymore his initial affection and reverence for her immediately abate. Also the narrator

suggests that Angel's empty idolatry of Tess plays a part in contributing to her tragedy:

Some might risk the odd paradox that with more animalism he would have been the nobler man. We do not say it. Yet Clare's love was doubtless ethereal to a fault, imaginative to impracticability. With these natures, corporeal presence is sometimes less appealing than corporeal absence; the latter creating an ideal presence that conveniently drops the defects of the real. She [Tess] found that her personality did not plead her cause so forcibly as she had anticipated. The figurative phrase was true: she was another woman than the one who had excited his desire. (Hardy, *Tess* 312)

Thus it appears that Angel Clare's teachings, although he continuously tries to escape from the norms and dogmas instilled into him by his family background, can be said to surface again and again in the course of the novel, which, for instance, becomes manifest in his quest for a substitute for the faith propagated by his parents in which he, however, frequently resorts to Christian values: "The free thinker is very much bound by the social power of his own culture, as well as being an unconscious part of it. He tries to be part of a new present but is continually drawn into the past." (Watt 152).

Hardy's preoccupation with environment and milieu, which he probably gathered from his readings of Darwin and which he perhaps most clearly displays in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, since the protagonists' social backgrounds not only prove to be decisive factors when it comes to the shaping of their characters, but that the influence of milieu also represents one of the main driving forces behind the progress of events, however, does not constitute the only Darwinistic borrowing in the novel under consideration. Altogether, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is heavily imbued with Darwinistic implications which determine Tess's path through life. John Glendening names as many as twenty four (!) "Darwinisms" employed in the novel, which apart from environmental and hereditary determination, whose influence on the course of events has previously been mentioned, also include survival fitness, adaptation and maladaptation, and natural and sexual selection, which will be dealt with in the following (72-73).

Regarding sexual selection it may be said that especially two passages in the novel mirror this concept. It is documented that Hardy read Darwin's text *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, a work presenting sex as the

chief point in Darwin's theory, since "[n]atural selection cannot contribute to evolution unless those with the greatest survival fitness also possess reproductive fitness" (Glendening 94). Unlike natural selection, sexual selection does not constitute a struggle for existence, but rather represents a competition between males for the attainment of a sexual partner in order to produce offspring (Glendening 94). This conception, which according to Darwin is not limited to the animal world, but which applies to humans as well, also found entrance into *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* since the two male main characters' struggle for Tess can be regarded as a reflection of Darwin's evolutionary ideas (Glendening 94). In *The Origin of Species* Darwin, for example, claims that male birds in order to attract females evolve features which are supposed to distinguish them from their competitors, and in *Selection in Relation to Sex* he adds that also their whistling serves the purpose of enticing females, and not only to compete with other males, a kind of behaviour perfectly mirrored by Angel Clare and Alec d'Urberville (Glendening 94-96). At Trantridge Alec whistles to Tess allegedly to teach her so that she can fulfil her duty of whistling to his mother's birds, but in actual fact merely tries to impress and flatter her by whistling a song called "Take, O take those lips away". However, we are told that "the allusion was lost upon Tess" (Hardy, *Tess* 72) and that Alec's whistling merely adds to her feeling uncomfortable in his presence. While Alec fails to attract Tess with his whistling, Angel, however, is able to deeply impress her with his harp-playing:

Tess had heard those notes in the attic above her head. Dim, flattened, constrained by their confinement, they had never appealed to her as now, when they wandered in the still air with a stark quality like that of nudity. To speak absolutely, both instrument and execution were poor; but the relative is all, and as she listened Tess, like a fascinated bird, could not leave the spot. Far from leaving she drew up towards the performer, keeping behind the hedge that he might not guess her presence. (Hardy, *Tess* 157-158)

Unlike the scene with Alec, in which Tess tries to withdraw when Alec suggests whistling to her, she here is unconsciously drawn to Angel like "a fascinated bird". Although Angel's performance is considered poor by the narrator, he obviously still by some means is able to excel Alec. After all, Alec only depends on his physical abilities by whistling to Tess, while Angel is also able to coax tender timbres from his harp, which represents a leap forward in evolution. The men's different approaches to musical courtship can also be said to represent

their varying attitudes towards love. While Angel's harp-playing represents a more subtle and ethereal suit, Alec's blatantly obvious advances already foreshadow his animalistic wantonness. Angel, therefore, by generally presenting himself to be more evolved than his competitor, is able to put Alec out of contention. Moreover, Glendening suggests that personal preferences and dislikes as well as individual variation are of great importance when it comes to sexual selection:

Angel's personal attractions - his cultivated demeanor and polished manners that make the harp seem appropriate to him even apart from its suitability for a perceived angel - are as important for Tess as are qualities of voice, size, shape, coloration, or movement in a male bird whose selection by a female expresses both species-wide predilections and individual preferences. (98)

By applying Darwin's theory of sexual selection to his human characters Hardy implicitly can be said to challenge the Victorian ideas about the distribution of male and female roles (Glendening 95). Allowing Tess to actively choose her partner represents a reversal of traditional gender roles, since among humans "it is primarily the females who, in contradistinction to many species, develop the means of sexual attraction through the aesthetics of appearance and behavior" (Glendening 94).

The novel, however, also features scenes where Tess is subjected to selection rituals on Angel's and Alec's sides, which prove to have disastrous effects regarding the course of events. In what John Glendening calls the "entangled bank scene" in "Phase the Third" Tess and three other dairymaids, who are on their way to church, suddenly find part of the road leading to the church flooded, which leads them to climb a steep roadside-bank in order to circumvent the said obstacle. When Angel Clare, who is rambling about, suddenly appears on the spot, he immediately offers to carry the girls over the pool of water. The fact that "[t]he rosy-cheeked, bright eyed quartet looked so charming in their light summer attire, clinging to the roadside bank like pigeons on a roof-slope" (Hardy, *Tess* 183) makes him stop and regard them before drawing near, but although he notices the personal charms inherent to all of the girls, it is Tess whom he eventually selects for a mate. Glendening suggests that notwithstanding that Marian, Izz and Retty "desperately long to possess and be possessed by him, [...] aesthetic and other cultural standards determine that they cannot compete with the beautiful and better educated Tess" (70-71).

Indeed the scene again highlights Tess's individuality and exceptionality, which according to Glendening, for instance, becomes obvious in her claiming that she "can clim' better than they" (Hardy, *Tess* 185) and considering herself "to be more impassioned in nature, cleverer, [and] more beautiful than they" (Hardy, *Tess* 189). Besides this particular scene it must be pointed out that Tess's individuality is emphasised throughout the whole novel. Already at the May-Dance right at the beginning of the book Tess stands out from the crowd of other girls by the fact that "[s]he wore a red ribbon in her hair, and was the only one of the white company who could boast of such a pronounced adornment" (Hardy, *Tess* 12). Although Angel failed to choose Tess as a dancing partner at the May-Dance, we still learn that their encounter was sufficient "to lead him to select Tess in preference to the other pretty milkmaids" (Hardy 155) at Talbothays. Her exceptionality, which basically consists in her striking beauty, however, is not only noticed by the men around her but it is also considered to be a priceless asset by her mother and consequently enhanced by all means. On the day appointed for Tess's departure for Trantridge Joan Durbeyfield does her bit in order to underline her daughter's (developing) womanly qualities, the outcome of which probably contributes to the great appeal Tess inadvertently has with Alec:

First she fetched a great basin, and washed Tess's hair with such thoroughness that when dried and brushed it looked twice as much as at other times. She tied it with a broader pink ribbon than usual. Then she put upon her the white frock that Tess had worn at the club-walking, the airy fulness of which, supplementing her enlarged *coiffure*, imparted to her developing figure an amplitude which belied her age, and might cause her to be estimated as a woman when she was not much more than a child. (Hardy, *Tess* 56-57)

Therefore, it must be pointed out that Tess's exceptionality, which leads Angel to choose her over the other girls at the dairy, proves to be counterproductive in other ways, since "the value of individual traits is determined by whether or not they help an individual survive, and reproduce, in a given environment, but [...] environmental change can alter the degree of fitness such traits convey, rendering maladaptive what was once adaptive and vice versa" (Glendening 92). Gillian Beer points out that Darwin's concept of maladaptation i.e. "the FAILURE OF THINGS to be what they are meant to be" (qtd. in Beer 232) also had an impact on Hardy's writings since "[t]he urgency of intended happiness, intended perfection, pervades Hardy's text, but its poignancy derives from the

failures of perfection, the unfulfilled, skewed, and disturbed” (232). Although Tess in some instances can be said to adapt strikingly well to the respective environments she moves in, a level of adaptability which even gets to a point where her feelings and the predominant mood of her environment seem to merge, she proves to be maladaptive in other ways. Despite the fact that Tess is a beautiful, clever, diligent and altruistic girl, these qualities rather turn out badly for her instead of bringing happiness. Glendening lays stress on the fact that especially Tess’s beauty, which in the environment of Talbothays helps her attract a well-bred and refined husband in spite of her poverty, proves to be fatal at Trantridge since there “her beautiful and expressive face, her splendid figure, and her vitality become liabilities because they make her susceptible to sexual predation by men from higher social classes who are unlikely to marry her” (92). Tess, therefore, proves to be ill-adapted to her environment and in Darwinian terms is not fit to survive. But also other characters fail to meet the requirements of their environment. Alec d’Urberville, for example, due to his unrefined manner and his libidinous behaviour does not adapt well to Tess’s needs, which is why she continuously rebuffs him. Despite his considerable financial resources, which make her give in to his temptations and, therefore, can be said to render him well-adapted during Tess’s financial hardships, his former malpractice and churlishness eventually prove to have grave consequences since Tess in a fit of rage kills him.

3.3. The significance of chance events and Divine Providence

Besides the deterministic qualities of heredity, which, despite their being mainly a product of the characters’ imagination, prove to be a powerful factor interfering with Tess’s fate, and the adverse effects of the protagonists’ social backgrounds and their inability to adapt to their environment, Thomas Hardy employs other fundamental forces holding sway over Tess’s fortunes. Although the variant forms of scientific determinism make a substantial contribution to the tragic course of events, one cannot help the feeling that there is yet another overarching force operating behind the scenes which ultimately seals the heroine’s fate and renders futile every single attempt at escape. Despite her obvious maladaptiveness and her pretty face, Tess is also described by the narrator as “a fine and picturesque country girl, and no more” (Hardy, *Tess* 14)

and “an almost standard woman” (Hardy, *Tess* 114), two statements which give reason to believe that Tess’s tragedy does not only stem from her exceptionality, which as pointed out above is alluded to in other passages of the book, but was already predestined by an unconscious force which regardless of human motives or character qualities indiscriminately determines the course of life of every human being whether it be a guileless country girl or a wise and mighty ruler. This supernatural power is subtly hinted at from the very beginning by the use of vocabulary implying the hopelessness and immutability of the course of events. In many instances of the book suggestive expressions like “doomed” and “destined” are used to refer to the protagonists’ predetermined future. Also the fact that fateful incidents are frequently used to move the plot into seemingly predetermined directions seems to confirm that Tess’s fate has already been decided long ago and does not admit any changes. The abundance in which Hardy employs fateful coincidences gives them weight. Although Bruce Hugman points out that “[b]y average standards of probability, realism, objective coherence and narrative practice the novel is imperfect” (52-53), one must not neglect the fact that when an author like Thomas Hardy strains the limits of probability to such an extent only few novelists could venture without losing their credibility, the significance of such incidents should not be rejected as entirely irrelevant. Indeed, the tragic course Tess’s story takes is promoted by many minor and major fateful events which urge forward the plot. The first of this series of unhappy coincidences comes to pass already very early in the novel, namely when Angel unfortunately misses the chance to ask Tess for a dance in the Club Walking scene. The fact that Angel “took almost the first [girl] that came to hand” (Hardy, *Tess* 15) without further discrimination proves to have disastrous consequences and is later bitterly regretted by both Angel and Tess. In leaving the dance we are told that Angel’s “eyes lighted on Tess Durbeyfield, whose own large orbs wore [...] the faintest aspect of reproach that he had not chosen her” (Hardy, *Tess* 16) and according to the narrator also Angel himself “was sorry then that, owing to her backwardness, he had not observed her” (Hardy, *Tess* 16). The fatality of this event is also stressed later in the novel when Tess in her desperation reprimands Angel for his negligence: ““Why didn’t you stay and love me when I - was sixteen; living with my little sisters and brothers, and you danced on the green? O, why didn’t

you, why didn't you!" (Hardy, *Tess* 250). And also Angel regrets his neglect, although he does not ascribe as much importance to it as Tess: "Ah - why didn't I stay!" he said. 'That is just what I feel. If I had only known! But you must not be so bitter in your regret - why should you be?' (Hardy, *Tess* 250).

This initial fateful incident is followed by many others which equally induce the readers (and the narrator as well) to lament that they did not come to pass in a slightly different manner or at a different time:

There are many Fateful Incidents – Durbeyfield's learning of his lineage, the killing of the old horse, the child resulting from the seduction, the series of events which frustrates Tess's attempt to confess to Angel, culminating in the letter under the carpet, the death of her father, which plays her into Alec's hands again, and the return of Angel just too late [...]. (Elliott 68)

These incidents, which all contribute to Tess's destiny, tend to be considered as the workings of malevolent forces, since all of them unrelentingly expedite the sad ending of her story:

As we search his [Thomas Hardy's] plots for Coincidence, we are impressed by the fact that he uses this force not so much to interpret the unrelenting trend of his action, but to further it. In novels of his late life, coincidences are allied with a unity of purpose which persuades us that they are not only part of a determined system, but parts of a system determined for evil. (Elliott 59)

Due to the fact that incidents like Tess's accident with the family horse, which happens just soon after her family has learned about the existence of rich relatives and which provokes them to send Tess there in order to ask for financial assistance, as well as her second meeting with Alec, who is preaching in a barn in the one village of all villages he could have chosen as an itinerant preacher Tess has to pass through on her way home from the futile journey to Angel's family, where she was headed to ask for their support, usually pass at such inconvenient times, that the reader is inclined to assume a preconceived malicious purpose behind their interlinking. Equally the episode on the way home from Chaiseborough, where Tess and her fellow-workers pass their time off work, and which eventually leads to Tess's rape (or seduction), seems to be a series of predetermined coinciding events, which added together collude so well as to play into the hands of Alec d'Urberville, who is only waiting for a convenient opportunity to be alone with her. On the whole three different and unrelated events prove to be conducive to the tragic closing of this particular

day. First, we are implicitly told that Alec's presence in the town is due to a mere contingency itself, namely because a fair and a market happen to coincide on this particular day, which probably induced Alec to visit this place, which on other occasions would be unlikely to engage his interest. Secondly, the breaking of the vessel filled with treacle, which is carried by one of Tess's co-workers, and which provokes Tess's laughter and the carrier's subsequent anger, contributes to Tess's resolution to continue on her way home alone: "Tess was indignant and ashamed. She no longer minded the loneliness of the way and the lateness of the hour; her one object was to get away from the whole crew as soon as possible." (Hardy, *Tess* 83). And thirdly, Alec's coming by this scene by chance and his offer to carry Tess home, which perfectly coincides with the trouble with her company:

At almost any other moment of her life she would have refused such proffered aid and company, as she had refused them several times before; and now the loneliness would not of itself have forced her to do otherwise. But coming as the invitation did at the particular juncture when fear and indignation at these adversaries could be transformed by a spring of the foot into a triumph over them, she abandoned herself to her impulse, climbed the gate, put her toe upon his instep, and scrambled into the saddle behind him. (Hardy, *Tess* 84)

Although Tess's rape (or seduction) by Alec, which follows the above listed fortuitous events, proves to be one of the crucial landmarks in her eventual destruction, one cannot help the feeling that Tess after all could have achieved happiness. In my opinion it is in fact quite another occurrence which ultimately turns the scale of her fortune. When Tess can no longer bear the hardships on Flintcomb-Ash and finally decides to appeal to her parents-in-law for help, her journey to Angel's family is again accompanied by many misfortunes. It is one particular variety of coincidence which in this scene can be considered to be responsible for the most dramatic turning point in the whole novel, namely the motif of the overheard conversation. After Tess has entered Emminster, the town Angel's parents and siblings reside, and finds that the whole household has gone to church, she decides to go for a stroll until their return, where she encounters Angel's brothers, who are talking about her in the following disparaging manner:

'Ah! poor Angel, poor Angel! I never see that nice girl without more and more regretting his precipitancy in throwing himself away upon a dairymaid, or whatever she may be. It is a queer business, apparently.

Whether she has joined him yet or not I don't know; but she had not done so some months ago when I heard from him.'

'I can't say. He never tells me anything nowadays. His ill-considered marriage seems to have completed that estrangement from me which was begun by his extraordinary opinions.' (Hardy, *Tess* 382)

The fact that her brothers-in-law in addition to their slighting remarks also, to top it all, take away her walking boots, which she earlier has hidden in a hedge in order to look pretty and decent for Angel's family, with the observation that it must have been done by "[s]ome impostor who wished to come into the town barefoot, perhaps, and so excite [their] sympathies" (Hardy, *Tess* 383), eventually induces Tess to flee the town without carrying out her original plan. Also the narrator acknowledges that Tess's meeting with Angel's brothers has been of an unfortunate nature, since after overhearing their conversation she wrongfully is led to conclude that also Angel's parents are hostile to her: "Innocently as the slight had been inflicted, it was somewhat unfortunate that she had encountered the sons and not the father, who, despite his narrowness, was far less starched and ironed than they, and had to the full the gift of charity." (Hardy, *Tess* 383). Not knowing that it is this wrong inference and her subsequent demoralisation which permanently reverses her fortunes, she eventually leaves: "[A]nd she went her way without knowing that the greatest misfortune of her life was this feminine loss of courage at the last and critical moment through her estimating her father-in-law by his sons." (Hardy, *Tess* 384).

Besides the frequent use Hardy makes of allegedly chance events and fateful incidents which are intended to entrap Tess in a web of inevitable determinism ultimately resulting in her destruction, Hardy also employs foreshadowings and ill-omens "to indicate the presence of a supernatural power behind the scenes" (Waldoff 135). The accident with the horse Prince, in the course of which it is pierced by the shaft of the cart and Tess becomes "splashed from face to skirt" (Hardy, *Tess* 35) with blood which is why she afterwards cannot help "regard[ing] herself in the light of a murderess" (Hardy, *Tess* 38), for example, both foreshadows Tess's rape and Alec's murder. The blood imagery also plays a role in the scene when Tess first meets her seducer Alec and pricks herself with a rose's thorn: "[...] [I]n looking downwards a thorn of the rose remaining in her breast accidentally pricked her chin. Like all the cottagers of Blackmoor

Vale, Tess was steeped in fancies and prefigurative superstitions; she thought this an ill omen - the first she had noticed that day." (Hardy, *Tess* 50). The fact that Tess pricks herself with a rose, which the man who turns out to be her undoer has presented her with earlier, again can be considered a very powerful image adumbrating Tess's later ravishment. Also on Talbothays Tess is not spared from forebodings and ill-omens. Especially Dairyman Crick and his workfolk prove to be a source for pessimistic bodings and apprehensions. Just like the cows' not milking well is interpreted as the consequence of a new hand having arrived, a cock crowing in the afternoon and the late publication of the banns are considered ill omens for Tess and Angel's marriage.

Also the d'Urberville lineage and the myth of the d'Urberville coach prove to be sources of superstition and peasant fatalism. When Angel, for instance, urges Tess to adopt the name of her ancestors, because he thinks it will help her gain the acceptance of his parents, Tess struggles against it, because she is afraid that nothing good will come of it:

'Tess, you must spell your name correctly – d'Urberville – from this very day.'
 'I like the other way rather best.'
 'But you *must*, dearest! Good heavens, why dozens of mushroom millionaires would jump at such a possession! [...]
 'Angel, I think I would rather not take the name! It is unlucky, perhaps!' (Hardy, *Tess* 242-243)

Besides the fact that Tess in the course of the novel grows more and more uneasy about everything connected with her knightly ancestors, also the legend of the d'Urberville coach is prone to unsettle her. On the day she is married to Angel Tess fancies to have seen the coach Angel has hired before:

'I fancy you seem oppressed, Tessy,' said Clare.
 'Yes,' she answered, putting her hand to her brow. 'I tremble at many things. It is all so serious, Angel. Among other things I seem to have seen this carriage before, to be very well acquainted with it. It is very odd – I must have seen it in a dream.'
 'Oh – you have heard the legend of the d'Urberville coach – that well-known superstition of this county about your family when they were very popular here; and this lumbering old thing reminds you of it.'
 'I have never heard of it to my knowledge,' said she. 'What is the legend – may I know it?'
 'Well – I would rather not tell it in detail just now. A certain d'Urberville of the sixteenth or seventeenth century committed a dreadful crime in his family coach; and since that time members of the family see or hear the old coach whenever – But I'll tell you another day – it is rather gloomy.'

Evidently some dim knowledge of it has been brought back to your mind by the sight of this venerable caravan.' (Hardy, *Tess* 272)

Although Angel attributes Tess's hypersensitivity to her probably having heard about the legend before, the reader rather tends to interpret this instance supernaturally since the gloomy ties Tess shares with her ancestry have been overemphasised up to that point. Thus, when the reader later in the novel learns by the words of Alec d'Urberville the part of the story Angel has withheld so as not to upset his fiancé he/she, like the characters themselves, is probably inclined to regard the fact that Tess at times seems to see or hear the legendary coach as a sinister omen for the future course of events, since the former appearances of the coach equally did not bring Tess good luck but rather were a presage of evil:

'It is that this sound of a non-existent coach can only be heard by one of d'Urberville blood, and it is held to be of ill-omen to the one who hears it. It has to do with a murder, committed by one of the family, centuries ago. [...] One of the family is said to have abducted some beautiful woman, who tried to escape from the coach in which he was carrying her off, and in the struggle he killed her - or she killed him - I forget which. Such is one version of the tale [...]' (Hardy, *Tess* 452)

All in all, it may be noticed that horse-drawn vehicles play an important role in the course of the whole novel, since they can be considered as symbols of Tess's limited free will as contrasted with the (alleged) superiority of fate, which is beyond her control. There are many instances of horse-drawn carriages in the book, for example, the one which carries home John Durbeyfield after he has been informed about his aristocratic lineage, Alec's trap which more than once leads Tess into disaster, the carriage Tess drives in the fatal night of the accident with the horse Prince and also the vehicle with which Angel leaves her. I partly agree with George Watt, who is of the opinion that "horse-drawn vehicles seem to symbolise the involuntary aspect of hereditary traits" (162), but I think that this "involuntary aspect" can be regarded in a larger context as well. The fact that "Tess never drives [...] [but] is always driven" (Watt 162) can also be interpreted as an emblem of providential determinism or Tess's passivity.

Apart from the odd coincidences happening to Tess, which seem to be part of a determined scheme, and the abundance of omens which are indicative of certain future events, also the characters themselves are susceptible to fatalism. Particularly Joan Durbeyfield seems to retain an unshakeable belief in

providence. Her fatalistic nature already manifests itself when the reader first encounters her, namely when Joan asks her daughter to “take the *Compleat Fortune-Teller* to the outhouse” (Hardy, *Tess* 23) after her consultation of it. Joan’s serene reliance on fortune is also revealed when after bidding farewell to Tess, who has decided to go into service with their rich relatives, she quickly swallows her tears and instead “passively trust[s] to the favour of accident” (Hardy, *Tess* 60) or when she tries to spirit up Tess by sayings like “We must take the ups wi’ the downs, Tess” (Hardy, *Tess* 39) and “Well, we must make the best of it, I suppose. ‘Tis nater, after all, and what do please God!” (Hardy, *Tess* 104). Although Tess, unlike her mother, does not always seem to be so convinced of fate’s justice, she still shows a belief in providential governance, even though it can be called an utterly pessimistic one: “‘I don’t quite feel easy,’ she said to herself. ‘All this good fortune may be scourged out of me afterwards by a lot of ill. That’s how Heaven mostly does. [...]’” (Hardy, *Tess* 262). Tess apparently is convinced that it is futile to oppose one’s fate, since nothing she does has any significant effect on the course of events, which makes her even refuse Alec’s entreaty to pray for him: “‘How can I pray for you,’ she said, ‘when I am forbidden to believe that the great Power who moves the world would alter His plans on my account [...] I have been cured of the presumption of thinking otherwise.’” (Hardy, *Tess* 408). But Tess is not the only pessimistic character when it comes to fate’s (and society’s) sense of justice, also Angel in the course of the book feels compelled to alter his belief in a just fate in favour of disillusionment: “He was incensed against his fate, bitterly disposed towards social ordinances; for they had cooped him up in a corner, out of which there was no legitimate pathway.” (Hardy, *Tess* 343). However, not only the novel’s protagonists, but its narrator as well seems to feel gloomy about the conception of poetic justice. When Tess is raped by Alec, an event which as we know has grave consequences, he actually deplores the fact that a pure and kind-hearted person like Tess is doomed to such a tragic fate as hers:

But, might some say, where was Tess’s guardian angel? where was the providence of her simple faith? Perhaps, like that other god of whom the ironical Tishbite spoke, he was talking, or he was pursuing, or he was in a journey, or he was sleeping and not to be awaked. Why it was that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive; why so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus, the wrong man the woman, the wrong woman

the man, many thousand years of analytical philosophy have failed to explain to our sense of order. (Hardy, *Tess* 91)

The narrator's view that chance (or fate) only on rare occasions coincides with the individual's will is also displayed in the scene when Tess first meets Alec, a fateful incident which again gives rise to pessimistic laments:

Thus the thing began. Had she perceived this meeting's import she might have asked why she was doomed to be seen and coveted that day by the wrong man, and not by some other man, the right and desired one in all respects – as nearly as humanity can supply the right and desired; yet to him who amongst her acquaintance might have approximated to this kind, she was but a transient impression, half forgotten. In the ill-judged execution of the well-judged plan of things the call seldom produces the comer, the man to love rarely coincides with the hour for loving. Nature does not often say 'Here!' to a body's cry of 'Where?' till the hide-and-seek has become an irksome, outworn game. [...] [I]n the present case, as in millions, it was not the two halves of a perfect whole that confronted each other at the perfect moment; a missing counterpart wandered independently about the earth waiting in crass obtuseness till the late time came. Out of which maladroitness sprang anxieties, disappointments, shocks, catastrophes, and passing-strange destinies. (Hardy, *Tess* 48-49)

This pessimistic estimation of fate's benevolence can be said to culminate in one particular scene. The harvest scene at Marlott can be regarded as a synopsis of the protagonists' and the narrator's conception of Divine Providence. The symbolic value of the reaping machine, which forms the centre of the proceedings, soon becomes explicit when the narrator refers to it as the "unerring reaper":

The narrow lane of stubble encompassing the field grew wider with each circuit, and the standing corn was reduced to smaller area as the morning wore on. Rabbits, hares, snakes, rats, mice, retreated inwards as into a fastness, unaware of the ephemeral nature of their refuge, and of the doom that awaited them later in the day when, their covert shrinking to a more and more horrible narrowness, they were huddled together, friends and foes, till the last few yards of upright wheat fell also under the teeth of the unerring reaper, and they were every one put to death by the sticks and stones of the harvesters. (Hardy, *Tess* 110)

According to Ewald Mengel the reaping machine's circular movement through the wheat field and the subsequent diminishment of places where the animals can still take refuge, can be interpreted as a reversal of the motive of the Wheel of Fortune, whose centre usually allegorises the Absolute while its periphery stands for death: "Das Bild betont die Unausweichlichkeit und Unbarmherzigkeit des Schicksals, dem alle gleichermaßen ausgeliefert sind.

Die Hoffnung, sich durch eine Flucht in das Zentrum dem immer näher rückenden Tod entziehen zu können, erweist sich als Illusion.” (Mengel 183)
 The image of the unerring reaper thus not only prefigures Tess’s personal destiny, but it can also be considered in a larger context, namely as the general inexorability of fate, a conception that dovetails with Tess’s pessimistic viewpoint.

However, despite the fact that fate seems to play a central role in the novel, which besides the frequent use of fatal coincidences causing decisive turns in the course of events also becomes evident from the weight which is seemingly given to evil forebodings by their actually coming to pass as well as the significance attached to the concept of providential guidance by the book’s narrator and its characters, some critics have argued that it is not the manipulation of supernatural forces or beings which ultimately causes Tess’s misfortunes. Bruce Hugman, for instance, points out that despite the fact that Thomas Hardy lends substance to this interpretation by remarking that “‘Justice’ was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Æschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess” (Hardy, *Tess* 508) in the last paragraph of the book, a position which in itself gives this comment considerable weight, a supernatural explanation of Tess’s calamities is not wholly satisfying since “[n]owhere else in the book is reference made to malevolent deities, and there are not hints of divine intervention for which this sentence would be the final summary” (13). According to Hugman the “President of the Immortals” as well as the concept of fate is pre-eminently of symbolic value:

Tess feels herself to be the toy of a malevolent power which hurries her irresistibly from one misfortune to another. She is weighed down to the point of despair by what seems to be an inescapable fate. But Hardy does not suggest that it is anything more than the result of the coincidence of miscellaneous factors. These are symbolically represented by the ‘President of the Immortals’ and by the occasional reference to ‘doom’ and ‘fate’. (15)

Moreover, he points out that although Tess is ruined by a plethora of forces she does not really understand, which consequently makes them appear as the workings of a supernatural authority, the novel’s admittedly pessimistic pattern still cannot be considered to originate in a fatalistic philosophy since “[i]t is not fatalistic to say that if one cuts oneself one will bleed, nor that if one steps in front of a moving bus one will be knocked down” (Hugman 14). According to

Bruce Hugman, it is therefore the principle of cause and effect which must be considered responsible for Tess's misfortunes rather than the doings of a malevolent power working behind the scenes. Many critics have pointed out that it is primarily the heroine's character which proves to be the source of her destruction, since Tess's personal limitations on any number of occasions prove to counter her pursuit of happiness:

[I]t is not necessarily an indication of a predetermined scheme when people act in accord with their normal behaviour patterns. Most of us are likely to live and act in a more or less predictable way - not because we are divinely imposed upon - but because we remain single persons with certain limits of capability. (Hugman 14)

Also Pinion suggests that "[c]haracter often plays a critical part in determining circumstance" (77) in Hardy's books. Also *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* makes no secret of Tess's defects and the reader sometimes almost tends to reproach the heroine for not acting differently, since her personal judgement and her character flaws frequently seem to stand in her way. Especially Tess's pride, which has already been mentioned in the context of heredity, proves to be a stumbling block to her peace of mind. Not only does she for a long time refuse to apply to Angel's parents for help, but her proud nature also plays an important role on the evening of the rape. As has been pointed out earlier, it is the concurrence of many fortuitous events which eventually lead up to Tess's ravishment, but nonetheless Tess's specific character traits have a share in the proceedings, since her anger with her fellow-workers and the sense of triumph she anticipates when mounting Alec's horse induce her to ride off with a man who on every previous occasion has failed to enjoy her trust. Additionally to her pride, which often has been interpreted as a hereditary trait, Tess seems to have inherited another weakness symptomatic of her whole nuclear family: "Tess is born into a world which thrives on illusions: the Durbeyfield family live on romantic visions of a return to their former glory. And while criticising their castles in the air, and their dreams of her marriage to the young squire, Tess inherits the same weakness." (King 113). King suggests that it is this inborn proneness to romantic illusions which is behind the fatal accident with the family horse. Indeed, the reader learns that Tess, after the conversation with her little brother Abraham which also gets onto the subject of their "great relation" and Tess being married to a gentleman, "fell more deeply into reverie than ever" (Hardy, *Tess* 34) in which "she seemed to see the vanity of her father's pride;

the gentlemanly suitor awaiting herself in her mother's fancy; to see him laughing at her poverty, and her shrouded knightly ancestry" (Hardy, *Tess* 35). The fact that her fancies "grew more and more extravagant, and she no longer knew how time passed" (Hardy, *Tess* 35) thus can be blamed for her getting on the wrong side of the road which makes her primarily responsible for the accident, even though her father's excessive drinking paved the way for its eventuation. Apart from Tess's pride and her propensity for daydreaming also her passivity and her forbearing nature prove to be fatal characteristics. When Angel reproaches her for her sexual encounters with Alec, we are told that despite his hard words "[t]here was [...] underneath, a back current of sympathy through which a woman of the world might have conquered him" (Hardy, *Tess* 308), which Tess, however, fails to take advantage of:

But Tess did not think of this; she took everything as her deserts, and hardly opened her mouth. The firmness of her devotion to him was indeed almost pitiful; quick-tempered as she naturally was, nothing that he could say made her unseemly; she sought not her own; was not provoked; thought no evil of his treatment of her. She might just now have been Apostolic Charity herself returned to a self-seeking modern world. (Hardy, *Tess* 308-309)

What is more, Jeannette King points out that Tess "is also prone to a melodramatic view of herself which increases her sense of guilt" (113). This assumption definitely proves to be correct as far as the horse accident is concerned. The fact that Tess cannot subdue her sense of guilt after this fatal incident plays a central part in her assent to her parents' scheme of claiming kinship with their aristocratic relatives: "The oppressive sense of the harm she had done led Tess to be more deferential than she might otherwise have been to the maternal wish" (Hardy, *Tess* 39).

But it is especially Tess's fatalistic nature which contributes to her ultimate destruction. Although the reader is told that "[b]etween the mother, with her fast-perishing lumber of superstitions, folk-lore, dialect, and orally transmitted ballads, and the daughter, with her trained National teachings and Standard knowledge under and infinitely Revised Code, there was a gap of two hundred years as ordinarily understood" (Hardy, *Tess* 23-24) and that "[w]hen they were together the Jacobean and the Victorian ages were juxtaposed" (Hardy, *Tess* 24), one is compelled to challenge these statements in the further course of the book, since Tess actually resembles her mother in her reliance on fate. Despite

her formal education Tess is as deeply caught up in superstitions as the rest of the country folk we encounter in the novel. Her belief in ill-omens, which frequently motivates her to alter her course, on the one hand and her “reckless acquiescence in chance” (Hardy, *Tess* 324) on the other hand both play an immediate role in her misfortunes. Her liability to pessimism, which already manifests itself in the book’s first pages, causes her to consider incidents as unfortunate which would not have struck the reader as being so in the first place. Angel’s neglect at the May-Dance, the belated banns, the ballad of the mystic robe her mother used to sing to her when she was a child as well as the prick of the rose on her first meeting with Alec d’Urberville all alarm her and thus can be said to have an impact on her future doings. The ill Tess usually anticipates to come from those omens, however, does not necessarily have to be interpreted as an indication of an overarching supernatural power being in control of the overall course of events:

The country people are ‘essentially naturalistic’ in their outlook. With this view goes an instinctive superstitiousness. This results from the perception that there seem to be inherent correspondences between some separated events, and between action and result, which conform to a pattern which is more or less predictable. This arises from the occurrence of genuine coincidences and from the obvious fact that certain actions will almost inevitably provoke certain reactions. Furthermore it is often possible, in retrospect, to elicit what appears to be a predetermined pattern, from what was a random succession of events. Incidents to which no importance was attached at the time take an ominous significance when seen from the present; when similar incidents recur they are thought to herald similar results. This belief may contribute to the repetition of the pattern, and so reinforce the belief further. (Hugman 16)

Quite similar to Hugman also Jeannette King suggests that the coming true of ill-omens and evil forebodings is rather a matter of self-fulfilling prophecy than the result of a predetermined, predictable scheme:

Chance is particularly likely to fall into such nightmarish patterns for those who are prone to superstition. Belief in omens tips the scales in favour of their being fulfilled: it diminishes the ability to choose freely. The relationship between the omen and later events begins to look more than coincidental, if not yet causal. For the omen is often archetypal, representing probability, because it (the archetype) portrays ordinary instinctive events as types. (25-26)

The omens’ compatibility with a number of possible denouements, which is, for instance, illustrated by Tess’s interpretation of the cock crowing in the afternoon as a predictor for the evil that is going to spring from the concealment of her

history, while the other workers on Talbothays retroactively attribute it to Retty's death, shows that they are not concomitant phenomena of a preordained outcome of Tess's story. What to Tess appear to be interpositions of fate are actually only the manifestations of her subconscious fears and wishes. This becomes especially obvious in the scene of her first meeting with Alec and the prick of the rose. Hugman suggests that

[h]er interpretation of the event as an 'ill-omen' is an expression of her instinctive recognition of the strangeness and danger of Alec d'Urberville's behaviour. The stubbing of her toe, or any other such minor accident would have provoked a similarly instinctive and 'superstitious' interpretation (16-17)

This tendency can on the one hand be traced back to Tess's overall pessimistic view of the world, and on the other hand attributed to the fact that "her individual experience is susceptible to a universalization that ignores the specifics attendant upon her particular enactment of it" (O'Toole 85). The scene with the text painter she encounters on her way home from Trantridge is a good example for this, since Tess, who has just left the place of her undoing and understandably is still absorbed in reflections concerning the "sins" she has committed there, cannot help interpreting the accusatory bible quotations like "THY, DAMNATION, SLUMBERETH, NOT." (Hardy, *Tess* 101) as a reproach for her personal deviations from society's demands. Additionally, also the scene in which Tess determines to seek financial help from her parents-in-law but unfortunately comes across Angel's brothers before the actual meeting, who just at that particular moment are voicing their unfavourable opinion about her, can be considered a slight overreaction on Tess's side. Although it has been shown that it is the culmination of a number of coincidences which are partly responsible for the fruitlessness of Tess's journey, it still must be pointed out that the story still could have taken another turn if Tess had stayed the course against all odds:

She knew that it was all sentiment, all baseless impressibility, which had caused her to read the scene as her own condemnation; nevertheless she could not get over it; she could not contravene in her own defenceless person all these untoward omens. It was impossible to think of returning to the Vicarage. (Hardy, *Tess* 383)

The fact that Tess is overly inclined to alter her plans whenever she feels insecure and to ascribe the necessity of these alterations to interpositions of fate, can be regarded as a defence mechanism with which Tess not just once

avoids unpleasant affairs and duties. When she, for instance, has decided to tell Angel about her history with Alec d'Urberville, she time and again finds reason to delay her plans for fear of losing his esteem: "She had not told. At the last moment her courage had failed her, she feared his blame for not telling him sooner; and her instinct of self-preservation was stronger than her candour." (Hardy, *Tess* 242). She constantly remains torn between the possibility of telling and losing him and of keeping her shady past a secret:

Every see-saw of her breath, every wave of her blood, every pulse singing in her ears, was a voice that joined with nature in revolt against her scrupulousness. Reckless, inconsiderate acceptance of him; to close with him at the altar, revealing nothing, and chancing discovery; to snatch ripe pleasure before the iron teeth of pain could have time to shut upon her: that was what love counselled; and in almost a terror of ecstasy Tess divined that, despite her many months of lonely self-chastisement, wrestlings, communings, schemes to lead a future of austere isolation, love's counsel would prevail. (Hardy, *Tess* 228)

Tess's inner disunity, which also manifests itself in the fact that she asks her mother for counsel, however, apparently seems to have come to an end after she is insulted by a man who knows about her past in Angel's presence, which according to the narrator "was the last drachm required to turn the scale of her indecision" (Hardy, *Tess* 266), and she eventually decides to confess to him. When Tess, however, discovers that the letter in which she intended to inform Angel about her past has accidentally been slipped under the doormat and remained undiscovered there till their wedding day, she again backs down with the argument that "[s]he could not let him read it now, the house being in full bustle of preparation" (Hardy, *Tess* 269) and subsequently destroys her letter. The fact that Tess uses any excuse she can for not informing Angel about her personal history, however, must not necessarily be considered as the play of malevolent forces promoting her hard lot, although Tess frequently is inclined to consider the postponement of her confession necessary as soon as events take an unexpected turn due to what she herself calls "Providential interposition[s]" (Hardy, *Tess* 285). Tess's tardiness, which originates in her wish for emotional security, however, ultimately proves to be fatal since Angel claims that if she had told him sooner he might still have been able to forgive her: "'O Tess! If you had only told me sooner, I would have forgiven you!' he mourned." (Hardy, *Tess* 341).

All in all, it may be said that despite the plethora of seemingly fateful incidents the main protagonist is confronted with, it is not the workings of a malevolent fate which dooms her to unhappiness. On the contrary, it is "Tess's innate predisposition to passive fatalism that contributes to her destiny and implicates her in her own tragedy" (Harvey 83), since Hardy's characters theoretically all have the potential for eluding their adverse fortune. Tess's remark that "[her] life looks as if it had been wasted for want of chances!" (Hardy, *Tess* 161), however, must not be discounted entirely since Tess's free will is certainly to some extent limited by converging influencing factors. Jeannette King points out that, although "[e]ven the most improbable coincidences are merely accelerating factors" (26), the outcome of Hardy's works still frequently seems inevitable due to such deterministic forces as heredity, character and environment, which have been shown to play an active part in the shaping of Tess's fortunes: "Heredity and environment, character and society, are each conceived as modern Fates. Primitive superstition and scientific theory reinforce each other. Whether we call this vision 'fatalistic' or 'deterministic' is of relatively minor importance." (King 26)

4. The Return of the Native

4.1. Fatal and favourable qualities

According to some critics, already the opening chapter of *The Return of the Native* reveals that the story which is going to be enacted is entirely different from anything Thomas Hardy had written up to that point. John R. Nelson suggests that “although like ‘Far from the Madding Crowd’ in being set upon the heath, presenting a chorus of rustics, and treating the human drama brought about by strivings for control and love, it is quite a different book, dealing with essentially different issues.” (75). The fact that the opening chapter is entirely dedicated to the heath, the sublime scenery amidst which the story takes place, already suggests the central role assigned to it. In view of the fact that the first chapter of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, the novel which is most frequently compared and contrasted to *The Return of the Native*, is entirely dedicated to its main protagonist Gabriel Oak, many critics have pointed out that the heath is “one of the *dramatis personae*” (qtd. in Hornback 16) of *The Return of the Native*, a notion already insinuated by the chapter heading “A Face on which Time makes but little Impression”, which gives a detailed description of the heath’s physical appearance. The anthropomorphisation of the heath is continued throughout the first chapter, leaving a deep impression on the reader, which is additionally enhanced by its timelessness and permanence. The reader soon learns that Egdon Heath is not a passive background which merely watches the proceedings transpiring on it, but an active agent controlling time and space and thus eventually also the life forms dependent on it:

The face of the heath by its mere complexion added half an hour to evening; it could in like manner retard the dawn, sadden noon, anticipate the frowning of storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of a moonless midnight to a cause of shaking and dread. (Hardy, *Return* 1)

Although the book’s narrator tells us that the heath “was at present a place perfectly accordant with man’s nature - neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly: neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame; but, like man, slighted and enduring; and withal singularity colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony” (Hardy, *Return* 3), he also concedes that the heath’s lonely face “suggest[s] tragical possibilities” (Hardy, *Return* 3). After this weighty introduction the reader understandably cannot help the feeling that the tragic potential, which is

adumbrated right from the beginning, must be considered in the context of the heath, which more and more frequently seems to take the form of an antagonistic force causing the protagonists' downfall:

The untameable, Ishmaelitish thing that Egdon now was it always had been. Civilization was its enemy; and ever since the beginning of vegetation its soil had worn the same antique brown dress, the natural and invariable garment of the particular formation. In its venerable one coat lay a certain vein of satire on human vanity in clothes. A person on a heath in raiment of modern cut and colours has more or less an anomalous look. We seem to want the oldest and simplest human clothing where the clothing of the earth is so primitive. (Hardy, *Return* 3).

The fact that the will of the heath is superimposed on those of its dwellers, since every attempt at cultivation is rendered futile by the opposing and barren environment, also becomes obvious when the reader is told that “[n]ot a plough had ever disturbed a grain of that stubborn soil” (Hardy, *Return* 10) and that various efforts to bend the heath to the human will had even claimed a few lives. The reader learns that the tillage of the heath-ground Wildeve possesses proved to be a fatal endeavour for two men: “The man who had discovered that it could be tilled died of the labour: the man who succeeded him in possession ruined himself in fertilizing it. Wildeve came like Amerigo Vespucci, and received the honours due to those who had gone before.” (Hardy, *Return* 26). Despite human attempts at progress and improvement, Egdon Heath largely remains inviolate, because it is a well-adapted and austere place: “The sea changed, the fields changed, the rivers, the villages, and the people changed, yet Egdon remained. Those surfaces were neither so steep as to be destructible by weather, nor so flat as to be the victims of floods and deposits.” (Hardy, *Return* 4).

The Darwinistic concept of adaptation and its implied opposite maladaptation, however, not only apply to the fauna and flora, but also prove to be essential to the continued existence of the human denizens. It seems that both the failure and the continuance of some of the novel's protagonists are entirely dependent on their degree of accordance with their environment. The importance of this concept for the interpretation of the book's tragic potential is outlined in a metaphoric passage right at the beginning of the book, namely when the narrator discusses the continuance and intensity of the various bonfires lighted all over Egdon Heath in celebration of the 5th of November:

The bonfire was by this time beginning to sink low, for the fuel had not been of that substantial sort which can support a blaze long. Most of the other fires within the wide horizon were also dwindling weak. Attentive observation of their brightness, colour, and length of existence would have revealed the quality of the material burnt; and through that, to some extent the natural produce of the district in which each bonfire was situate. The clear, kingly effulgence that had characterized the majority expressed a heath and furze country like their own, which in one direction extended an unlimited number of miles: the rapid flares and extinctions at other points of the compass showed the lightest of fuel - straw, beanstalks, and the usual waste from arable land. The most enduring of all - steady unfaltering eyes like planets - signified wood, such as hazel-branches, thorn-faggots, and stout billets. Fires of the last-mentioned materials were rare, and, though comparatively small in magnitude beside the transient blazes, now began to get the best of them by mere long-continuance. The great ones had perished, but these remained. (Hardy, *Return* 19-20)

This highly allusive excerpt, when applied to human existence, contains many points already mentioned in the context of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, since both (social) environment and intrinsic properties are obviously considered decisive for human destiny. This notion, which I would claim affects the whole of Thomas Hardy's novels, is also present in *The Return of the Native*. To begin with the characters' environment, it may be said that the highly constrained space of action obviously has an effect on the protagonists' lives. While some of them feel oppressed by the heath's consistency and immutability, others consider the same qualities as soothing. Especially the two main protagonists' attitudes towards their environment are utterly at variance with each other. While Eustacia regards Egdon Heath as a place of banishment and is unable to perceive its beauties, Clym is in perfect accordance with his obsolete surroundings although he spent a few years in Paris, "the centre and vortex of the fashionable world" (Hardy, *Return* 82). Although he admits incipient prejudices against the heath soon after his entrance into a more sophisticated mode of living by saying "When I first got away from home I thought this place was not worth troubling about. I thought our life here was contemptible. To oil your boots instead of blacking them, to dust your coat with a switch instead of a brush: was there ever anything more ridiculous? I said." (Hardy, *Return* 130), after his experiences he still concludes that he "would rather live on these hills than anywhere else in the world." (Hardy, *Return* 142). The reader learns that "Clym had been so inwoven with the heath in his boyhood that hardly anybody could look upon it without thinking of him" (Hardy, *Return* 128) and that "[h]e

was permeated with its scenes, with its substance, and with its odours” and that “[h]e might be said to be its product” (Hardy, *Return* 132). Although we are told that the heath has formed Eustacia’s character as well to some extent, her early experiences at Budmouth prove to be an obstacle to the acceptance of her new vicinity. Despite the fact that Eustacia’s voice “modulated so naturally into the rest [of the heath’s sounds] that its beginning and ending were hardly to be distinguished” (Hardy, *Return* 40), that “her articulation was but as another phrase of the same discourse” (Hardy, *Return* 40) and that for a regular night-rambler as she is, “a difference between impact on maiden herbage, and on the crippled stalks of a slight footway, is perceptible through the thickest boot or shoe” (Hardy, *Return* 42), which enables her to perfectly find her way at night time, Eustacia proves to be resistant against the heath’s charms, because they are not in accord with her character:

[...] [C]elestial imperiousness, love, wrath, and fervour had proved to be somewhat thrown away on netherward Egdon. Her power was limited, and the consciousness of this limitation had biased her development. Egdon was her Hades, and since coming there she had imbibed much of what was dark in its tone, though inwardly and eternally unreconciled thereto. (Hardy, *Return* 50)

The fact that the clash between Eustacia’s temperament and her surroundings plays a central part in her eventual undoing has been an issue in many literary interpretations. The narrator’s remark that “[a]n environment which would have made a contented woman a poet, a suffering woman a devotee, a pious woman a psalmist, even a giddy woman thoughtful, made a rebellious woman saturnine” (Hardy, *Return* 53) indicates that Eustacia’s rebellion against her environment partly originates in the fact that her nature and her surroundings are irreconcilable. Although Simon Gatrell suggests that “it is accurate to say that Eustacia too is what she is at the beginning of the novel in large part because of the heath”, which leads to “a conflict between the inhaled vapours, the darkness of the heath absorbed into her unconscious and bloodstream, and her conscious determination never to be reconciled to the heath” (*Study of Mankind* 47), the part of Eustacia which actually is in harmony with the heath due to her longstanding sojourn there, which for instance manifests itself in her frequent wanderings through the heath, during which Eustacia seems to be in perfect harmony with her environment, only plays a minor part compared with the remembrance of her early years spent in Budmouth and the romantic ideas

she gathered from her extensive readings. Although the environment of Egdon Heath naturally contributed to the shaping of her character, one cannot help the impression that some of the character qualities which seem to have an effect on Eustacia's fate are either inborn or acquired from very different sources. Although the concept of heredity on the whole does not play such a significant role as it does in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, some of Eustacia's fatal character traits might be products of hereditary transmission. Eustacia herself, for instance, suggests in a conversation with Wildeve that the gloominess which repeatedly seems to be an obstacle to the acceptance of her circumstances might be the corollary of heredity:

‘But perhaps it is not wholly because of you that I get gloomy,’ she archly added. ‘It is in my nature to feel like that. It was born in my blood, I suppose.’

‘Hypochondriasis.’

‘Or else it was coming into this wild heath. I was happy enough at Budmouth. O the times, O the days at Budmouth! [...]’ (Hardy, *Return* 47)

But not only Eustacia's gloominess, also her propensity for romantic ideas, which block her approval of the real world, might be considered to be a hereditary trait, since we learn from Mrs. Yeobright that “her father was a romantic wanderer - a sort of Greek Ulysses” (Hardy, *Return* 163). Therefore, it may be said that the conjuncture of her innate qualities, her early teachings at Budmouth and her immediately ensuing seclusion from fashionable society, combined with her grandfather's indulgence and permissiveness, probably added to the development of escapist fancies:

Thus it happened that in Eustacia's brain were juxtaposed the strangest assortment of ideas, from old time and from new. There was no middle distance in her perspective: romantic recollections of sunny afternoons on an esplanade, with military bands, officers, and gallants around, stood like gilded letters upon the dark tablet of surrounding Egdon. (Hardy, *Return* 51)

The early experiences at Budmouth, a fashionable seaside resort, she imbibed make Eustacia ill-adapted to a sequestered place like Egdon and prove to be fatal. While the narrator remarks that “[a] narrow life in Budmouth might have completely demeaned her” (Hardy, *Return* 52), her nature distinguishes her from most of the other dwellers of the heath and makes her vulnerable. The fact that Eustacia stands out among the other inhabitants of the heath is also noticed by her fellow-creatures. Susan Nunsuch remarks that “[s]he is very strange in her ways, living up there by herself” (Hardy, *Return* 21), Timothy

Fairway says that some of his neighbours claim that “the lonesome dark-eyed creature up there that some say is a witch [...] is always up to some odd conceit or other” (Hardy, *Return* 37) and also Diggory Venn nourishes a feeling that there is “something more interesting, more important, more likely to have a history worth knowing” (Hardy, *Return* 9) about Eustacia as compared to the other heath dwellers. It is the combination of her particular character with the specific surroundings of Egdon Heath which makes her a singular being:

Had Eustacia remained in Budmouth, she might, or even would have been quite unremarkable, one of dozens of pretty flirting girls milling around the soldiers and the gallants. The heath drives her inward, forces her to damp down the surface of her passionateness while intensifying her sexual energy within; it gives her a sense of her own dignity and makes her potentially a tragic heroine. The isolation and insulation of Egdon allows her to be superior as well as to imagine her superiority. (Gatrell, *Study of Mankind* 48).

Although Eustacia claims that the heath is “my cross, my shame, and will be my death” (Hardy, *Return* 64), it is probably her nonconformity and her imperiousness which prove to be disastrous. Also Hornback holds the opinion that Eustacia’s character is more likely to be the source of her tragedy than the supposedly adverse environment of Egdon Heath:

It is character, of course, and not setting, that Hardy is interested in. He is concerned with man, and committed to finding and demonstrating his potential. In order to test his heroes, to measure their character, he intensifies the world in which they live and act. His problem, in part, is that he has no way of expressing this intensification except through exaggeration. Rather than exaggerate his characters directly, in their description or action, he exaggerates the world in which they live, in space and more importantly in time, and then subtly suggests their relationship to this larger world. (24-25)

Eustacia’s tragedy is particularly a tragedy of circumstance. The character qualities which probably would have been of no effect in a different environment obviously limit her in the specific environment of the heath and it soon becomes obvious that all the qualities which make her great also make her violable:

Eustacia Vye was the raw material of a divinity. On Olympus she would have done well with a little preparation. She had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman. Had it been possible for the earth and mankind to be entirely in her grasp for a while, had she handled the distaff, the spindle, and the shears at her own free will, few in the world would have noticed the change of government. (Hardy, *Return* 49)

According to Nelson this god-like quality must be considered as “an unpropitious and unfortunate condition” (77) since it significantly limits Eustacia’s scope of action. The fact that Eustacia proves to be a very unpliant and inflexible character eventually turns out to be catastrophic. Her proud nature and her inclination to force her will unto her surroundings without being willing to bend to the will of others manifests itself right from the beginning. When Eustacia, for instance, needs to keep the small bonfire alive, which is intended to be a signal for Wildeve to meet her, she compels Johnny Nunsuch, a little boy from the neighbourhood, to look after it under the pretext that she wants to give him a special treat and tries to intimidate and at the same time to appease him by saying “Never shall you have a bonfire again unless you keep it up now. Come, tell me you like to do things for me, and don’t deny it.” (Hardy, *Return* 44) upon which we learn that “The little slave went on feeding the fire as before. He seemed a mere automaton, galvanized into moving and speaking by the wayward Eustacia’s will.” (Hardy, *Return* 44). Also when her grandfather complains about her wasting fuel by keeping up the fire so long, the reader is told that Eustacia answers him “in a way which told at once that she was absolute queen here” (Hardy, *Return* 43) and which immediately silences the objector. Moreover, when she eventually meets Wildeve, for which purpose she actually has lit the fire, she tells him that she merely beckoned him to come in order to demonstrate and confirm her power over him:

‘I merely lit that fire because I was dull, and thought I would get a little excitement by calling you up and triumphing over you as the Witch of Endor called up Samuel. I determined you should come; and you have come! I have shown my power. A mile and half hither, and a mile and half back again to your home - three miles in the dark for me. Have I not shown my power?’ (Hardy, *Return* 48)

The fact that her pride plays an active part in contributing to her misfortunes especially becomes apparent during a discussion between Eustacia and Diggory Venn, who in order to prevent Eustacia from further interferences with Thomasin and Wildeve’s relationship offers her a situation as company-keeper for an elderly lady in Budmouth, in which Eustacia denies herself the chance to fulfil her dream of living there due to her superciliousness and lack of contact with reality:

‘I should have to work, perhaps?’
 ‘No, not real work: you’d have a little to do, such as reading and that. [...]’
 ‘I knew it meant work,’ she said, drooping to languor again.

'I confess there would be a trifle to do in the way of amusing her; but though idle people might call it work, working people would call it play. Think of the company and the life you'd lead, miss; the gaiety you'd see and the gentleman you'd marry. [...]

'It is to wear myself out to please her! and I won't go. O, if I could live in a gay town as a lady should, and go my own ways, and do my own doings, I'd give the wrinkled half of my life! [...]

'Help me get Thomasin happy, miss, and the chance shall be yours,' urged her companion.

'Chance - 'tis no chance,' she said proudly. 'What can a poor man like you offer me, indeed? [...]' (Hardy, *Return* 70-71)

This scene clearly demonstrates how far Eustacia's obstinacy actually goes and also reveals its destructive nature, since she does not take the chance of leaving Egdon Heath, the place which according to herself is a "jail" (Hardy, *Return* 70) and a "cruel taskmaster" (Hardy, *Return* 142) to her. Her pride, however, not only turns out to be a stumbling block to Eustacia's happiness when it comes to her leaving behind the life she professedly despises, but also appears to be fatal in other cases. After Eustacia has learned of the arrival of Clym Yeobright and heard his voice while rambling about the heath at night, she dreams about him, which altogether suffices to make her fall in love with this figment:

The perfervid woman was by this time half in love with a vision. The fantastic nature of her passion, which lowered her as an intellect, raised her as a soul. If she had had a little more self-control she would have attenuated the emotion to nothing by sheer reasoning, and so have killed it off. If she had had a little less pride she might have gone and circumambulated the Yeobrights' premises at Blooms-End at any maidenly sacrifice until she had seen him. But Eustacia did neither of these things. (Hardy, *Return* 89)

But apart from Eustacia's concept of love, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, her ill-fated nature also influences other events as well, since her relationship to her mother-in-law suffers from her effervescence. When Mrs. Yeobright inquires if she has received the money she intended to send to Clym from Wildeve, Eustacia replies in her usual quick-tempered manner, which is even more pronounced than usual due to her bad conscience: "Eustacia fired up all too quickly, for her own consciousness of the old attachment between herself and Wildeve led her to jump to the conclusion that Mrs. Yeobright also knew of it, and might have come to accuse her of receiving dishonourable presents from him now." (Hardy, *Return* 186). The fact that Eustacia's rude address is most uncalled-for, which is why it eventually

contributes to the two women's fatal estrangement, is also perceived by Mrs. Yeobright, who subsequently warns her daughter-in-law to control herself when speaking with Clym: "Only show my son one-half the temper you have shown me to-day - and you may before long - and you will find that though he is as gentle as a child with you now, he can be as hard as steel!" (Hardy, *Return* 188). Since the two women prove to be of a very similar disposition, their encounters hardly ever turn out well. When Thomasin tries to soothe Clym by remarking that the two still might be good friends some day, he replies "Not two people with inflammable natures like theirs." (Hardy, *Return* 190). The fact that Eustacia's obstinacy and hot temper to a vast extent contribute to her misfortunes becomes all the more distinct since the same character qualities prove to be fatal for Mrs. Yeobright, who according to Nelson belongs to the group of fixed characters like Eustacia and Wildeve (76). Although Mrs. Yeobright's death can be read in the context of nature's and accordingly also the heath's mercilessness, since the reader learns that towards the end of her journey across the heath "[t]he sun had now got so far to the west of south and stood directly in her face, like some merciless incendiary, brand in hand, waiting to consume her" (Hardy, *Return* 221) and that the sun's "present torrid attack made the journey a heavy undertaking for a woman past middle age" (Hardy, *Return* 211), it is first and foremost her fixed character disposition which causes her tragedy, which is also confirmed by the fact that Mrs. Yeobright is generally in tune with her natural surroundings. Nevertheless she still shows a propensity for imposing her own will on the people of her social environment:

Mrs. Yeobright shares many qualities with her more youthful counterparts. While not disliking the heath or dreaming unreasonably of the future, she invests considerable of her total energy in wish fulfillment, schemes, and coercion. Like many other meddling older women types in literature [...] she wishes to manipulate the fortunes of the young according to her views of success and fulfilment. Overburdened by reflections, unable to structure her own life by personal and viable ideas of form, she seeks to shape the destinies of others. The signal problem is that she oversimplifies complex issues, yet is uncompromising in asserting her opinions and value judgements. [...] A woman with fixed and definite ideas of what she expects, she is, like Eustacia, far too sweeping and reductive in her soundings of a complex existence, and suffers accordingly. (Nelson 90)

The notion that it is primarily the protagonists' character dispositions and not the plotting of an adverse environment that proves to be decisive for their failure is

also validated by the fact that the heath can obviously be lived at peace with quite well. This becomes particularly obvious regarding the unfixed characters Clym and Thomasin Yeobright and Diggory Venn, whose laissez-faire attitude and general acquiescence in circumstances make them more adaptable and thus less vulnerable. To begin with Clym Yeobright, it may be said that the accordance he displays with his environment in general, which also finds expression in his attitude towards the heath, proves to be favourable to his eventual peace of mind. Although the reader's last encounter with him is somewhat ambivalent, since it shows the book's hero in a very prosaic state of mind and with prematurely aged looks, we are left with the impression that he finally has found his true vocation. Clym's acquiescence in chance is clearly recognisable when after a series of blows of fate he is for a time forced to suspend his dream of becoming a teacher and to become a furze cutter instead in order to sustain himself and his newlywed wife Eustacia. His ability to lose himself in his new work with perfect ease again manifests itself through his merging with the scene both in colour, since we are told that "[h]e appeared of a russet hue, not more distinguishable from the scene around him than the green caterpillar from the leaf it feeds on" (Hardy, *Return* 212), and in action:

The silent being who thus occupied himself seemed to be of no more account in life than an insect. He appeared as a mere parasite of the heath, fretting its surface in his daily labour as a moth frets a garment, entirely engrossed with its products, having no knowledge of anything in the world but fern, furze, heath, lichens, and moss. (Hardy, *Return* 212)

Clym's fusion with his new trade, however, is not only demonstrated by his melting into the plant world, but is also accompanied with an affiliation with the heath's insect fauna:

His familiars were creeping and winged things, and they seemed to enrol him in their band. Bees hummed around his ears with an intimate air, and tugged at the heath and furze-flowers at his side in such numbers as to weigh them down to the sod. The strange amber-coloured butterflies which Egdon produced, and which were never seen elsewhere, quivered in the breath of his lips, alighted upon his bowed back, and sported with the glittering point of his hook as he flourished it up and down. (Hardy, *Return* 193)

His stoic nature, which enables him to quickly adapt to new circumstances and which he himself acknowledges by saying "[...] [M]y body does not require much of me, I cannot enjoy delicacies; good things are wasted upon me." (Hardy, *Return* 134), however, instead of cheering Eustacia up only alienates her. Their

different world views prove to be an ordeal to their marriage and in the end again drive her into Wildeve's arms, whose ambitions dovetail with hers. The fact that Clym "is an enthusiast about ideas, and careless about outward things" (Hardy, *Return* 216) like social status and money, eventually turns out to have disastrous consequences, which although already anticipated by Clym right at the beginning of his relationship with Eustacia still do not restrain him from persevering in his courtship: "You are ambitious, Eustacia - no, not exactly ambitious, luxurious. I ought to be of the same vein, to make you happy, I suppose. And yet, far from that, I could live and die in a hermitage here, with proper work to do." (Hardy, *Return* 152).

But although Clym in general does not "rebel, in high Promethean fashion, against the gods and fate [...]" due to his notion that "there is nothing particularly great in its [the world's] greatest walks, and therefore nothing particularly small in [...] furze-cutting" (Hardy, *Return* 196), he is not entirely spared trials and hardships. His high-flying ideas about social equity and education make him to some degree ill-adapted to a remote place like Egdon Heath and thus vulnerable. In this regard he is not unlike Eustacia, a property which is also recognised by his fellow heath-dwellers: "Both of one mind about niceties for certain, and learned in print, and always thinking about high doctrine - there couldn't be a better couple if they were made o' purpose." (Hardy, *Return* 81). Although the speaker is not right about Clym's attitude towards "niceties", he certainly has a point concerning his education and his advanced ideas. On the whole, education is not valued among the denizens of Edgon Heath, since it proves to be a threat to the old social order and longstanding values:

'Ah, there's too much of that sending to school in these days! It only does harm. Every gatepost and barn's door you come to is sure to have some bad word or other chalked upon it by the young rascals: a woman can hardly pass for shame sometimes. If they'd never been taught how to write they wouldn't have been able to scribble such villainy. Their fathers couldn't do it, and the country was all the better for it.' (Hardy, *Return* 80-81)

When Clym returns from Paris and unveils his plan of founding a school, the people of the heath are unenthusiastic about his scheme, which becomes obvious from negative predictions like "He'll never carry it out in the world, [...] [i]n a few weeks he'll learn to see things otherwise." and their desire that "he had better mind his business" (Hardy, *Return* 131). The fact that Clym is more

advanced in his thinking than most of his fellow-creatures, due to his encounter of new ethical systems during his stay abroad, rather seems to be a curse than a blessing: "In consequence of this relatively advanced position, Yeobright might have been called unfortunate. The rural world was not ripe for him. A man should be only partially before his time: to be completely to the vanward in aspirations is fatal to fame." (Hardy, *Return* 131). Also Jeannette King remarks that "Clym's education is ultimately a burden, because although he is a product of his education, he is equally a product of the heath, and longs for a simple life in communion with his natural world." (24). Therefore, it may be said that although Clym has a deep connection with his birthplace and in general proves to be well-adapted to the heath, his progressive way of thinking proves to be an obstacle to his fortune. However, since unlike Eustacia he is able to adapt his goals and ideas after they have proven to be impractical or futile to the demands of his environment, he is spared the disastrous consequences his rebellious fellow-creatures have to suffer, but on the other hand deny him the possibility of becoming a genuine tragic hero.

Similar to Clym, also his cousin Thomasin Yeobright, who accords equally well with her environment, does not have to undergo the same extent of suffering as the more fixed protagonists are subjected to. Unlike Wildeve, who has adopted Eustacia's view of the wild surroundings of the heath, Thomasin has nothing but love and respect for it:

'[...] You go about so gloomily, and look at the heath as if it were somebody's gaol instead of a nice wild place to walk in.'

He looked towards her with pitying surprise. 'What, do you like Egdon Heath?' he said.

'I like what I was born near to; I admire its grim old face.'

'Pooh, my dear. You don't know what you like.'

'I am sure I do. There's only one thing unpleasant about Egdon.'

'What's that?'

'You never take me with you when you walk there. [...]' (Hardy, *Return* 267)

Thomasin's naivety, her practicality and her modesty make her well-adjusted to a place like Egdon since "the heath cannot be dominated, it can only be co-operated with" (Gatrell, *Study of Mankind* 45). According to Nelson this quality makes Thomasin an inversion of the novel's main heroine:

Both loving the lowly heath and reflecting its life, Thomasin is of another order than the Olympian Eustacia Vye. Thomasin's contentment with the heath is further established by the singular lack of data on wish fulfillment

and dreams which would apply to her. She lives in the present, disdaining the past or future, never dreaming of biblical heroes, Napoleonic splendor, or Parisian grandeur. (93)

The only thing which seems to be opposed to a life without sorrow is her character, which may not exactly make her susceptible to a tragedy like Eustacia's or Wildeve's but still puts obstacles in her way which require her to put some effort into their removal before she can face the truly happy ending which is due to her. Her concern with propriety and her overarching wish to content her aunt and her cousin and not to expose them to gossip are responsible for her unhappy marriage with Wildeve, which right from the beginning seems to be doomed to failure. The fact that she rudimentarily shares a character quality which is usually reserved for the fixed characters, namely pride, induces her to consent to a union with a man whose defects she has already discovered, which becomes obvious from remarks like "I belong to one man; nothing can alter that. And that man I must marry, for my pride's sake." (Hardy, *Return* 84) and "I am a practical woman now. I don't believe in hearts at all. I would marry him under any circumstances since – since Clym's letter." (Hardy, *Return* 118-119).

The only character that preserves his integrity from the beginning to the end and maintains a stoic mind which enables him to evade the hardships others have to suffer is Diggory Venn. His persevering nature, which still never induces him to impose his will on his environment in order to achieve his aims, combined with his flexibility would make him well-adapted to any place in the world, not only Egdon Heath. The reddleman's adaptability is insinuated right from the beginning. Like Clym, who in his occupation as a furze-cutter seems to enter a symbiotic relationship with his surroundings, Diggory Venn merges with his trade: "[...] [L]ike his van, he was completely red. One dye of that tincture covered his clothes, the cap upon his head, his boots, his face, and his hands. He was not temporarily overlaid with the colour: it permeated him." (Hardy, *Return* 5). Due to his colouring Diggory frequently needs to defend himself against prejudices and generalisations on the part of the more unreceptive heath-dwellers and time and again is able to prove his versatility in doing so. He, for instance, replies to Johnny Nunsuch's question if he was born a reddleman: "No, I took to it. I should be as white as you if I were to give up the trade - that is, I should be white in time - perhaps six months: not at first,

because 'tis grow'd into my skin and won't wash out." (Hardy, *Return* 57). All in all, Diggory Venn is a character who like Clym does not assign value to outer appearances, but still does not get lost in a dream world. While Clym, although he "sees through the glitter of social shams to the human condition beneath" remains "a victim of a youthful fantasy that prevents him from understanding the connection between social progress and intellectual advancement" (Schweik 766), the reddleman throughout the whole book stays on top of things. Moreover, also his seeming conditioning by his trade, which becomes obvious from his red colouring ensuing from his dealing in reddle and which promotes a deterministic interpretation of the book in which the characters are unable to escape the influence of their environment, is rendered vain by the way he reacts to preconceived opinions on his outward appearance:

Mrs. Yeobright was not demonstrative, but her eyes involuntarily glanced towards his singular though shapely figure.

'Looks are not everything,' said the reddleman, noticing the glance. 'There's many a calling that don't bring in so much as mine, if it comes to money; and perhaps I am not so much worse off than Wildeve. There is nobody so poor as these professional fellows who have failed; and if you shouldn't like my redness - well, I am not red by birth, you know; I only took this business for a freak; and I might turn my hand to something else in good time.' (Hardy, *Return* 73)

The assumption that it is not solely the protagonists' environment - which besides their natural surroundings also involves their social background and their trade - that seals their fate, is not only confirmed by Diggory's attitude towards this notion which is displayed by his fellow creatures, but also by the incontrovertible fact that in the end "of all the circle, he himself was the only one whose situation had not materially changed" (Hardy, *Return* 288) in terms of great and tragic shifts and that he manages to quit his occupation as a reddleman and takes up a more respectable trade. Since Diggory Venn only stands out in his perseverance, his longanimity and his forbearance, and does not offer points of resistance to his environment or rave against his fortune, he eventually is rewarded with the woman and the life he always wished for:

Venn's lowness and unpretentiousness are exactly the kinds of impediments upon which characters like Eustacia and Wildeve stub their toes. [...] To be such in Hardy's cosmos is to have a very great chance for whatever shard of happiness is left at the end of the action, and we observe that he finishes with considerable savings from his profession, his dairy farm, Thomasin, the baby [...], and Wildeve's money and house:

all this is solemnized and celebrated in a rousing heath wedding. (Nelson 98)

All in all, it may be said that although Egdon Heath seems to be a force which, based on the characters' adaptability, actively chooses between the ones that merit being elevated and those that need to be crushed, it is first and foremost the protagonists' character disposition that decides their fate. This notion of a hostile and active environment has long been retained due to the fact that nearly all the protagonists who nurse a grudge against their environment perish, while harmony with the heath seems to be a high road to happiness. This interpretation, however, proves to be somewhat deficient at a closer look, since on the one hand Mrs. Yeobright, who looks upon the heath as a friend, is led into disaster anyhow and on the other hand the reddleman, who is the only character who never voices a distinct opinion on his natural surroundings but rather takes a neutral stance, is the most successful character of the whole novel. Although Eustacia is convinced that the heath represents the malevolent power which lurks behind her destruction, the reader soon realises that it is not objective reasons and actual conditions which cause her accusations, but that is rather her injured pride which, after she has realised that her dreams of fashionable life are just shadows, tries to compensate for her own limitations:

Here ambition to live in Budmouth, where her beauty and talents will be more appreciated, her passion for the ladykiller, Wildeve, and her rapid boredom with her husband Clym, the man of ideas, suggest the limitations of her intellect and imagination. She desires greatness, but does not know what greatness is. She burns with love while painfully aware of the inadequacies of her lover. This transcendent emotion drives her to distraction for lack of a reality on which to focus it [...]. Her world offers no opportunity for the grand life-style and noble, super-human actions she associates with tragic heroines. It is this gap between the world of high tragedy and reality which is the source of her tragedy. For she creates a make-believe tragic world, a world in which the Turkish Knight she acts in the Mummers' play might really find a place. She creates a world in conspiracy against her, in order to provide sufficient excuse for her failure to achieve her ambition. In her imagination, she turns the indifferent Egdon Heath into an antagonist. (King 103)

The validity of this interpretation may be proved by the fact, that Eustacia, although her dream of living in Budmouth is within her grasp after Diggory Venn's offer to become a lady's companion, refrains from going due to her haughtiness, but is also corroborated by the descriptions the various characters render of their environment in the night of Eustacia's and Wildeve's violent

death. After Eustacia has set out to meet Wildeve in order to elope with him, the narratorial comments already presage an imminent tragedy. The awful storm that racks the heath is experienced by Thomasin, who as yet is sitting by the fire, "The fire soon flared up the chimney, giving the room an appearance of comfort that was doubled by contrast with the drumming of the storm without, which snapped at the window-panes and breathed into the chimney strange low utterances that seemed to be the prologue to some tragedy" (Hardy, *Return* 278), as well as Eustacia, who cuts across the storm-tossed heath:

The gloom of the night was funereal; all nature seemed clothed in crape. The spiky points of the fir trees behind the house rose into the sky like the turrets and pinnacles of an abbey. Nothing below the horizon was visible save a light which was still burning in the cottage of Susan Nunsuch. (Hardy, *Return* 271)

But although the violent storm is a reality that cannot be denied, the two women's perception of it varies tremendously according to their state of mind and their overall disposition. The following depiction of the heath, in which it appears to be an equally frightful and dangerous place, can thus not be classed as an impartial comment by the narrator, but rather seems to have originated in Eustacia's troubled mind:

The moon and the stars were closed up by cloud and rain to the degree of extinction. It was a night which led the traveller's thoughts instinctively to dwell on nocturnal scenes of disaster in the chronicles of the world, on all that is terrible and dark in history and legend - the last plague of Egypt, the destruction of Sennacherib's host, the agony in Gethsemane. (Hardy, *Return* 271-272)

The fact that the Egdon Heath that strikes the reader as an antagonistic force committed to the heroine's destruction is merely a symptom of Eustacia's lost grasp on reality also manifests itself in the narrator's comment that "Never was harmony more perfect than that between the chaos of her mind and the chaos of the world without." (Hardy, *Return* 272). What is more, Eustacia's confused mental state also becomes obvious from the fact that she, of whom we have been told that on other occasions she is easily able to orientate herself on the nocturnal heath and when caught by brambles calmly puts them off without being thrown off balance, suddenly is not capable of finding her way and also tumbles over the slightest obstacles: "Skirting the pool, she followed the path towards Rainbarrow, occasionally stumbling over twisted furze-roots, tufts of rushes, or oozing lumps of fleshy fungi, which at this season lay scattered about

the heath like the rotten liver and lungs of some colossal animal.” (Hardy, *Return* 271). Her desperate rebellion against her circumstances and her resolve to pursue her plan without drawing back, since she is determined that “having committed herself to this line of action there was no retreating for bad weather” (Hardy, *Return* 271), are the last and at the same time the most fatal points of resistance she offers to her situation. Unlike a well-adapted character like Thomasin, or even like the timeless heath itself, who brave the fearful storm with patient endurance, Eustacia remains a rebel until the end:

In the end Eustacia refuses to learn one lesson of the heath well understood by Clym, Thomasin and Diggory: patient endurance. The heath is in harmony with the storm and wind because its profile is low – heather, fern, furze – offering no points of resistance. Eustacia is full of points of resistance, and when the tempest at the end of the novel arouses Egdon, the heath, in harmony with it, becomes in Eustacia’s mind most intensely her enemy. [...] And so, resisting, despairing, we see Eustacia driven by her vision of the heath to her death, whether we hold it to be accident or suicide. (Gatrell, *Study of Mankind* 48)

It is thus the interplay between her pride and her ambition, which fuel her rebellion against the limited circumstances of her present living condition and her romantic enthusiasm, which turns the indifferent environment of Egdon Heath into a fiend and Budmouth into an unreachable make-believe world, rather than the pressures of society or a conspiracy of natural forces which cause her to drown in the weir. When she finally realises the futility of her resistance and her dreams’ elusiveness due to their impracticability, there is no other exit to her situation than death. That it is not external forces, like the weather, which clouds her sight and thus makes her lose her bearings, but rather internal factors that condition her death becomes evident from the fact that Thomasin’s sentiment towards her situation, although she likewise is exposed to the inhospitable circumstances of the nocturnal heath, varies significantly from Eustacia’s:

Yet in spite of all this Thomasin was not sorry that she had started. To her there were not, as to Eustacia, demons in the air, and malice in every bush and bough. The drops which lashed her face were not scorpions, but prosy rain; Egdon in the mass was no monster whatever, but impersonal open ground. Her fears of the place were rational, her dislikes of its worst moods reasonable. At this time it was in her view a windy, wet place, in which a person might experience much discomfort, lost the path without care, and possibly catch cold. (Hardy, *Return* 279)

Since Eustacia considers herself as a tragic heroine, who has been ill-used by forces beyond her control, a delusion which also manifests itself in the bitter last words the reader hears from her before the narrator's focus is shifted away, the only way out of her (partly self-created) misery is a heroic death, because her dignity does not allow her to abase herself by being entirely dependent on an average man like Wildeve, but on the other hand she does not see an alternative which would enable her the easy and fashionable life she has always dreamed of. In view of Eustacia's inner disunity which is supervened by her sudden insight that "even had she seen herself in a promising way of getting to Budmouth, entering a steamer, and sailing to some opposite port, she would have been but little more buoyant, so fearfully malignant were other things" (Hardy, *Return* 272), a more or less conscious decision to end her own life does not seem implausible. The hate and fears Eustacia used to project on the immediate surroundings of the heath at this moment of black despair are conferred upon the whole world and she suddenly realises "the cruel obstructiveness of all about her" (Hardy, *Return* 272), an altogether very bleak world view which is not unlikely to have occasioned suicide and well-nigh rules out the possibility of an extrinsic, heath-related interference with her fortune. However, the fact remains that Eustacia, notwithstanding that she has to die owing to the contradictoriness of her limited circumstances and her grand ideas, in dying is able to celebrate a triumph since she thereby is able to preserve her integrity as a genuine tragic heroine, whose unusual life is followed by an exceptional death:

Yet for all this data establishing Eustacia's brittle, proud, fixed nature, one grants her an undeniable measure of integrity. She not only makes her own rules, but attempts to live by them. She is never vulgar. She refuses to succumb to Wildeve's plea to become his mistress when a simple 'yes' would grant her an easy claim on his money. Her death stirs our sympathy only because she as a heroine has a stratum of qualities which we both respect and admire. (Nelson 87)

4.2. Concepts of love and the importance of sexual selection

The fact that Eustacia's sense of reality is distorted by the escapist fantasies she harbours, which necessarily collide with her actual state of affairs, also becomes obvious in her partner choice (Schweik 761). We soon learn that Eustacia is not to be satisfied with mediocrity, but instead is looking for a man

who fits into the make-believe world she has created for herself, and possibly also enables her to escape from the drab monotony of her everyday life:

To be loved to madness - such was her great desire. Love was to her the one cordial which could drive away the eating loneliness of her days. And she seemed to long for the abstraction called passionate love more than for any particular lover. (Hardy, *Return* 52)

Her selection criteria therefore are first and foremost guided by degrees of power, material factors and outward appearances, which immediately manifests itself when the reader learns about the heroes she venerates:

Her high gods were William the Conqueror, Strafford, and Napoleon Buonaparte, as they had appeared in the Lady's History used at the establishment in which she was educated. Had she been a mother she would have christened her boys such names as Saul or Sisera in preference to Jacob or David, neither of whom she admired. At school she had used to side with the Philistines in several battles, and had wondered if Pontius Pilate were as handsome as he was frank and fair. (Hardy, *Return* 52-53)

Her attachment to Wildeve, a man considerably inferior to her regarding intellect and cultivation, only becomes explicable when considering him in the light of a diversion or a potential deliverer from her current situation. Besides the fact that Wildeve is financially independent, since, to quote Olly Dowden, "he've several acres of heth-ground broke up here, besides the public-house, and the heth-croppers" (Hardy, *Return* 26), we are also told that he is graceful in movement and all in all has a prepossessing appearance:

He was quite a young man, and of the two properties, form and motion, the latter first attracted the eye in him. The grace of his movement was singular: it was the pantomimic expression of a lady-killing career. Next came into notice the more material qualities, among which was a profuse crop of hair impending over the top of his face, lending to his forehead the high-cornered outline of an early Gothic shield; and a neck which was smooth and round as a cylinder. The lower half of his figure was of light build. Altogether he was one in whom no man would have seen anything to admire, and in whom no woman would have seen anything to dislike. (Hardy, *Return* 31)

But despite the above listed personal qualities Wildeve displays, which are further enhanced by the fact that he is said to be "a clever, learned fellow in his way" (Hardy, *Return* 15), Eustacia soon tires of him. Nevertheless she continues to idealise him "for want of a better object" (Hardy, *Return* 53) and her passion is rekindled to a considerable degree when she learns that Wildeve, who is equally weary of Eustacia's caprices, has turned his attention to Thomasin Yeobright. The major importance of rivalry in Eustacia's concept of

love soon becomes obvious during one of Eustacia's conversations with Diggory Venn in which he asks her to relinquish Wildeve for Thomasin's sake, which reveals that her revived interest in Wildeve merely is the result of her pride and her marked sense of competition:

'No - I won't, I won't!' she said impetuously, quite forgetful of her previous manner towards the reddleman as an underling. 'Nobody has ever been served so! It was going on well - I will not be beaten down - by an inferior woman like her. It is very well for you to come and plead for her, but is she not herself the cause of all her own trouble? Am I not to show favour to any person I may choose without asking permission of a parcel of cottagers? She has come between me and my inclination, and now that she finds herself rightly punished she gets you to plead for her!' (Hardy, *Return* 69)

But besides the fact that Wildeve becomes attractive to Eustacia due to his infatuation with another woman, he also meets another of Eustacia's standards for potential lovers, in particular on account of his capriciousness, which again and again enables him to keep her in line by stimulating her pride and ambition, since Eustacia at one point claims that love ideally should consist of both ups and downs: "I should hate it to be all smooth. Indeed, I think I like you to desert me a little once now and then. Love is the dimmest thing where the lover is quite honest" (Hardy, *Return* 63). It is thus Wildeve's ability to walk out on her and return penitently at the right moment which makes him worth Eustacia's while:

The man who had begun by being merely her amusement, and would never have been more than her hobby but for his skill in deserting her at the right moments, was now again her desire. Cessation in his love-making had revived her love. Such feeling as Eustacia had idly given to Wildeve was dammed into a flood by Thomasin. She had used to tease Wildeve, but that was before another had favoured him. (Hardy, *Return* 71-72)

The transient nature of Eustacia's rekindled passion, however, manifests itself after she has been told that another suitor has evinced interest in Thomasin Yeobright and that she merely has won Wildeve by default:

What curious feeling was this coming over her? Was it really possible that her interest in Wildeve had been so entirely the result of antagonism that the glory and the dream departed from the man with the first sound that he was no longer coveted by her rival? She was, then, secure of him at last. Thomasin no longer required him. What a humiliating victory! He loved her best, she thought; and yet - dared she to murmur such treacherous criticism ever so softly? - what was the man worth whom a woman inferior to herself did not value? The sentiment which lurks more or less in all animate nature - that of not desiring the undesired of others -

was lively as a passion in the supersubtle, epicurean heart of Eustacia. Her social superiority over him, which hitherto had scarcely ever impressed her, became unpleasantly insistent, and for the first time she felt that she had stooped in loving him. (Hardy, *Return* 76)

Nelson suggests that this passage again is indicative of Eustacia's pride and her egoistic approach towards love, since "her response to Wildeve has been largely structured upon his social possibilities and her winning in a prestigious competition for his hand" (85). However, the lack of profundity of Eustacia's devotion not only shows itself in her attachment for Wildeve, but also becomes explicit in her second love relationship with Clym Yeobright, who at least initially is able to supplant his rival. Since Eustacia herself acknowledges that "there was only one circumstance which could dislodge him [Wildeve], and that was the advent of a greater man" (Hardy, *Return* 54), the question forces itself upon the reader: what makes Eustacia think that Clym is actually a worthier object of love than Wildeve? Needless to say, Clym obviously surpasses Wildeve in terms of brainpower and depth of intellect, but he has also external qualities to boast of:

The face was well-shaped, even excellently. But the mind within was beginning to use it as a mere waste tablet whereon to trace its idiosyncrasies as they developed themselves. The beauty here visible would in no long time be ruthlessly overrun by its parasite, thought, which might just as well have fed upon a plainer exterior where there was nothing it could harm. Had Heaven preserved Yeobright from a wearing habit of meditation, people would have said, 'A handsome man.' Had his brain unfolded under sharper contours they would have said, 'A thoughtful man.' But an inner strenuousness was preying upon an outer symmetry, and they rated his look as singular. (Hardy, *Return* 103)

Despite the fact that Clym's features lack equilibrium, his appearance is able to make a deep impression on Eustacia due to its singularity and the high expectations she has built up by then. Eustacia's high-wrought expectations eventually, however, prove to be fatal for the simple reason that Clym is incapable of meeting them. Already at the first mention of Clym Yeobright's design to return to his native place, he seems "like a man coming from heaven" (Hardy, *Return* 82) since his former whereabouts, Paris, sharply contrast with the lonesome heath, and he therefore appears to be the man who is able to answer her prayer "O deliver my heart from this fearful gloom and loneliness: send me great love from somewhere, else I shall die." (Hardy, *Return* 52). The fact that Eustacia "want[s] to get away from here at almost every cost" (Hardy,

Return 77) also influences her relationship with Clym, whom she perceives to be her deliverer owing to a combination of actual reports and girlish daydreams. Although Eustacia has never met Clym in person, she soon has a preconceived opinion on his personality. His seeming financial independence, which is insinuated by accounts that he belonged to “a blazing great business” in which one “may make away with a deal of money” (Hardy, *Return* 80), and which is additionally enhanced by his refined manners and his equal social status and alleged like-mindedness, proves to be sufficient to give rise to delusional love on Eustacia’s part, since she concludes from what she merely knows from hearsay that “[a] man in the full swing of his activities in a gay city could not afford to linger long on Egdon Heath” (Hardy, *Return* 90). The distorted picture Eustacia has formed of Clym also manifests itself in the extravagant dream she has in the night after her first encounter with Clym on the nocturnal heath, in which he appears as a knightly figure in silver armour in the fashion of her aforementioned schoolbook heroes (Schweik 761). Although Clym and Eustacia have never met in person up to this point, the reader is told that “[t]he perfervid woman [Eustacia] was by this time half in love with a vision” (Hardy, *Return* 89), and it soon becomes obvious that her love for him is not entirely disinterested, but rather originates in selfish reasons and her general capacity for enthusiasm:

She had loved him partly because he was exceptional in this scene, partly because she had determined to love him, chiefly because she was in desperate need of loving somebody after wearying of Wildeve. Believing that she must love him in spite of herself, she had been influenced after the fashion of the second Lord Lyttleton and other persons, who have dreamed that they were to die on a certain day, and by stress of a morbid imagination have actually brought about the event. Once let a maiden admit the possibility of her being stricken with love for some one at a certain hour and place, and the thing is as good as done. (Hardy, *Return* 107).

Although Eustacia in a conversation with Wildeve claims “I married him because I loved him” (Hardy, *Return* 217), she also does not make a secret of her other motives, namely that “she love[s] him rather as a visitant from a gay world to which she rightly belong[s] than as a man with a purpose opposed to that recent past of his which so interest[s] her” (Hardy, *Return* 153). The fact that Eustacia is primarily interested in Clym’s past rather than in his present state of affairs manifests itself already during Clym’s wedding proposal:

'But you must answer me. Shall I claim you some day - I don't mean at once?'

'I must think,' Eustacia murmured. 'At present speak of Paris to me. Is there any place like it on earth?'

'It is very beautiful. But will you be mine?'

'I will be nobody else's in the world - does that satisfy you?'

'Yes, for the present.'

'Now tell me of the Tuileries, and the Louvre,' she continued evasively.

'I hate talking of Paris! Well, I remember one sunny room in the Louvre which would make a fitting place for you to live in - the Galerie d'Apollon. [...] But now, about our marriage - '

'And Versailles - the King's Gallery is some such gorgeous room, is it not?' (Hardy, *Return* 151)

Since Eustacia again and again tries to avoid Clym's pressing questions, and eventually only consents on the condition that he gives her his word that someday the two of them are going to return to Clym's previous mode of living, but does not accept his proposal for its own sake, the disastrous consequences of their marriage already become ominous. The evanescence of this perfunctory kind of love is also divined by Eustacia herself: "Nothing can ensure the continuance of love. It will evaporate like a spirit, and so I feel full of fears." (Hardy, *Return* 150). The fact that the affection she conceived for Clym is merely founded on visionary projects and is too intense as to have a lasting effect, also grows apparent in Eustacia's portrayal of her sneaking inclination for an officer at Budmouth:

I see your face in every scene of my dreams, and hear your voice in every sound. I wish I did not. It is too much what I feel. They say such love never lasts. But it must! And yet once, I remember, I saw an officer of the Hussars ride down the street at Budmouth, and though he was a total stranger and never spoke to me, I loved him till I thought I should really die of love - but I didn't die, and at last I left off caring for him. How terrible it would be if a time should come when I could not love you, my Clym! (Hardy, *Return* 153)

The above-quoted excerpt, which basically demonstrates that Eustacia is perfectly capable of nourishing passionate feelings for a person solely based on outward appearances and consequent inferences on that person's lifestyle, may be regarded as a synopsis of the irrefutable fact that Eustacia "mak[es] completely honest or significant human relationships impossible, for she responds to others primarily as stepping stones, the implementers of dreams, pawns in her power struggles, and almost never reacts to another character as a whole emotional, psychological, economic, organic human being" (Nelson 85).

It is therefore hardly surprising that a character like Eustacia is unable to appreciate or even comprehend a concept of love as displayed by Diggory Venn. Venn, who does not concern himself with external appearances or materialistic things, which is already illustrated by his curious choice of career, unlike Eustacia, represents an utterly altruistic kind of love. Although he has already been rejected by Thomasin once before owing to her aunt, who according to Thomasin certainly would want her “to look a little higher than a small dairy-farmer, and marry a professional man” (Hardy, *Return* 60), the reader is told that Diggory is still actively devoted to her happiness. In spite of Thomasin’s sympathy for Wildeve Venn is determined “to aid her to be happy in her own chosen way” although “this way was, of all others, the most distressing to himself” (Hardy, *Return* 61). His persistent, but still non-constricting, love presents itself to the reader when we are told that during his peregrinations he again and again is attracted to the environs of Egdon Heath so that he can be close to his beloved:

Rejected suitors take to roaming as naturally as unhived bees; and the business to which he had cynically devoted himself was in many ways congenial to Venn. But his wanderings, by mere stress of old emotions, had frequently taken an Egdon direction, though he never intruded upon her who attracted him thither. To be in Thomasin’s heath, and near her, yet unseen, was the one ewe-lamb of pleasure left to him. (Hardy, *Return* 61)

Diggory’s continuing interest in Thomasin’s well-being, which does not even abate after her marriage to Wildeve, which renders his own suit well-nigh impossible, and his general altruism and selflessness towards the woman he loves is completely lost on Eustacia, whose approach towards love could not be more different. When Diggory tells her that he is still unequivocal in his support of Thomasin’s affairs and claims that “if she cannot be happy without him [Wildeve] I will do my duty in helping her to get him, as a man ought” (Hardy, *Return* 115), Eustacia cannot help being astonished at his altruistic motives:

Eustacia looked curiously at the singular man who spoke thus. What a strange sort of love, to be entirely free from that quality of selfishness which is frequently the chief constituent of the passion, and sometimes its only one! The reddleman’s disinterestedness was so well deserving of respect that it overshot respect by being barely comprehended; and she almost thought it absurd. (Hardy, *Return* 115)

But although Diggory Venn’s way of loving can be considered an exception to the norm practised on Egdon Heath, his method can be regarded as the only

truly successful one, since he is able to outpace his rival eventually and gains both the love and respect of the woman of his dreams. Unlike Eustacia, whose love for Clym subsides simultaneously with the decline of his fortune, the reddleman displays a pertinaciousness which in the end pays off. The fact that he, as distinguished from Wildeve and Clym, is not driven by his passions and is not obsessed with appearances proves to be additionally helpful to his cause. Since we are told that he is not aware of Eustacia's dashing beauty, which proves to be fateful to at least two other men, but remains constant in his affection towards Thomasin, who indeed has "[a] fair, sweet and honest country face" (Hardy, *Return* 27), but in no way measures up to Eustacia, the "beauty on the hill" (Hardy, *Return* 136), he is better able to control his passions and make informed decisions. Although the reader is told that Clym Yeobright generally is not alive to semblances, his decision to marry Eustacia is indisputably influenced by his sexual drive. The concept of sexual selection, which, as indicated above, proves disastrous to Tess, is also at work in *The Return of the Native*, albeit in attenuated form. Eustacia's striking beauty and exceptionality compared with the other heath-dwellers, which as we know is accentuated right from the beginning, can be said to have a significant influence on the two men's actions. The fact that Wildeve "is a man who notices the looks of women" (Hardy, *Return* 69) accounts for Eustacia's deep-rooted influence on him, which is also noted by Diggory Venn, who tries to coax her into taking advantage of it: "Your comeliness is law with Mr. Wildeve. It is law with all men who see 'ee." (Hardy, *Return* 68). Indeed, we are told that Eustacia "ha[s] so much sway over [...] men-folk" (Hardy, *Return* 68) that Charley cannot help blushing whenever he sees her, since he "like many, had felt the power of this girl's face and form" (Hardy, *Return* 93). We are also told that her appearance in the moonlit night of the village festivity again is able to throw a spell over her old lover Wildeve, which "made it impossible for a man having no puritanic force within him to keep away altogether" (Hardy, *Return* 214). However, it is not solely Eustacia's extraordinary beauty which is able to re-attract him, but it is principally his pronounced sense of rivalry that determines his actions: "The old longing for Eustacia had reappeared in his soul: and it was mainly because he had discovered that it was another man's intention to possess her. To be yearning for the difficult, to be weary of that offered; to care for the remote, to

dislike the near; it was Wildeve's nature always." (Hardy, *Return* 165). In this respect he and Eustacia can be considered two of a kind, since competitiveness and a penchant for self-imposed troubles does not only inform his female counterpart, but also proves to be the driving force behind his own activities:

Obstacles were a ripening sun to his love, and he was at this moment in a delirium of exquisite misery. To clasp as his for five minutes what was another man's through all the rest of the year was a kind of thing he of all men could appreciate. He had long since begun to sigh again for Eustacia; indeed, it may be asserted that signing the marriage register with Thomasin was the natural signal to his heart to return to its first quarters, and that the extra complication of Eustacia's marriage was the one addition required to make that turn compulsory. (Hardy, *Return* 201)

In contrast to Wildeve, Clym Yeobright's spirit of contest keeps within reasonable limits, but it cannot be denied that he "is a passionate man, and that his desire and sexuality tend to obliterate reason" (Nelson 102). More than once the reader finds Clym making rash decisions on the basis of erroneous judgements, which can be blamed on his ardent sexual desire. According to Mrs. Yeobright, who immediately notices her son's unnatural fervour when talking about his sweetheart, "[i]t was a bad day for [him] when [he] first set eyes on her" (Hardy, *Return* 147) and she concludes that he must have been "blinded", two statements clearly attracting attention to the visual sense, which obviously constitutes the main inducement for his passion. His mother's premonitions like "I have never heard that Miss Vye is of any use to herself or to other people. Good girls don't get treated as witches even on Egdon" (Hardy, *Return* 136) and "No lady would rove about the heath at all hours of the day and night as she does. But that's not all of it. There was something queer between her and Thomasin's husband at one time - I am sure of it as that I stand here" (Hardy, *Return* 155), which are always aimed at casting a poor light on Eustacia and originate in her desire to keep her son from a union with her by all available means, are of no avail. Clym persists in his courtship and shuts his eyes to the fact that Eustacia does not represent a suitable mate for him. Although he is told from different quarters that Eustacia does not fit into his scheme of establishing a village school on the heath, he adheres to his vision of the future in which the two of them are going to keep the school side by side. Despite the fact that Sam, the furze cutter, replies to Clym's question if Eustacia was likely to feel like teaching children by saying "Quite a different sort of body from that, I reckon" (Hardy, *Return* 137), Clym after their first personal meeting still has the

feeling that “his scheme had somehow become glorified” since “[a] beautiful woman had been intertwined with it” (Hardy, *Return* 143) and maintains the opinion that she “would make a good matron in a boarding-school” (Hardy, *Return* 147), disregarding the fact that their first conversation almost entirely consisted in Eustacia’s various declarations of hate for her fellow human beings and nature as a whole. Similarly, Eustacia’s remark that “there is not that in Eustacia Vye which will make a good homespun wife” (Hardy, *Return* 152) and his own intuition that Eustacia is a woman “whose tastes touch[] his own only at rare and infrequent points” (Hardy, *Return* 152) do not deter him from pursuing his original plan. His passion and his ardent wish to possess her, both of which frequently make him disregard Eustacia’s weaknesses and limitations, bribe him into marrying a woman who is totally out of harmony with his beliefs and sentiments. Clym’s ultimate determination to make her his wife, therefore, does not originate in profound arguments, but rather comes to pass in the heat of the moment: “His feelings were high, the moment was passionate, and he cut the knot.” (Hardy, *Return* 158). The destructive nature of Clym’s wild passion and his youthful indiscretion already shortly afterwards grows apparent and also Clym himself, after the heat of the moment has passed and he has realised that the woman he has put on a pedestal as a lover probably will not be a model wife, has a sense of foreboding: “Eustacia was now no longer the goddess but the woman to him, a being to fight for, support, help, be maligned for. Now that he had reached a cooler moment he would have preferred a less hasty marriage; but the card was laid, and he determined to abide by the game.” (Hardy, *Return* 159).

All in all, it may be said that Eustacia’s dazzling beauty, similar to Tess’s, veritably influences the actions, and therefore also the fates, of the two men she is torn between. The fact that woman can serve as an agent of fate has already been recognised by Albert Pettigrew Elliott, who points out that “[s]ince woman’s chief business is to find Man to support her she becomes an agent in destiny” (92). Since Eustacia is chiefly interested in finding a man who can sustain herself and enable her a life of ease in some of the fashionable spots of the world, her subsequent manipulations and power games to reach her goals play a significant role in the two men’s misery. Unlike Tess, whose modesty and diffidence forbid her to use her beauty as her trump card, Eustacia consciously

deploys her feminine charms to attain her ends, which amongst other things also manifests itself at Mrs. Yeobright's Christmas party, where Eustacia appears under the disguise of a character in the mummers play in order to get a glimpse of Clym. When Eustacia secretly beholds Clym together with his cousin Thomasin, she immediately experiences feelings of jealousy and regrets that her disguise does not allow her to render herself conspicuous:

Eustacia was nettled by her own contrivances. What a sheer waste of herself to be dressed thus while another was shining to advantage! Had she known the full effect of the encounter she would have moved heaven and earth to get here in a natural manner. The power of her face all lost, the charm of her emotions all disguised, the fascinations of her coquetry denied existence, nothing but a voice left to her: she had a sense of the doom of Echo. (Hardy, *Return* 108)

The power of Eustacia's appearance is also perceived by her husband, who during one of their quarrels even considers it necessary to avert his face from her countenance, because he fears that her beauty might disarm him: "For once at least in her life she was totally oblivious of the charm of her attitude. But he was not, and he turned his eyes aside, that he might not be tempted to softness." (Hardy, *Return* 254). But although passion and sexual desire frequently seal the fates of Thomas Hardy's protagonists by leading them into disaster, Elliott still suggests that "[l]ove itself is not a tragedy; but it is the quality which Woman possesses which makes it so" (92). Despite the fact that this statement can also be read in a sexist way, Elliott certainly has a point since Hardy's novels quite often feature highly sensual women, whose only chance to meet the challenges they are faced with consists in a man who is able to counterbalance and if necessary also to extenuate their carnality. Since neither Wildeve nor Clym Yeobright is adequate to this task, Eustacia necessarily is doomed to perish. Her voluptuous beauty coupled with her selfish motives for love, which originate in her calculating and self-seeking character disposition, are ultimately responsible for her bitter fate, since her manipulative nature also encroaches on her love-making:

[H]er plans showed rather the comprehensive strategy of a general than the small arts called womanish, though she could utter oracles of Delphian ambiguity when she did not choose to be direct. In heaven she will probably sit between the Héloïses and the Cleopatras. (Hardy, *Return* 54)

Although Hardy in general seems to be sympathetic to Theodore Watts' view that "in the struggle for life, the surviving organism is not necessarily that which

is absolutely the best in an ideal sense" (qtd. in Hardy, *Literary Notes* 40), it is not surprising that Diggory Venn is able to triumph over his rivals, since his constancy and his entirely altruistic love for Thomasin Yeobright is singular. Despite the fact that Thomasin feels more attracted to the virile Wildeve, his temerity and inconsiderateness make him unfit to survive. Diggory Venn's flexible character disposition on the other hand, which, unlike Eustacia or Wildeve, allows him to adapt well to disappointments instead of desperately fighting them, as well as his immunity against materialistic things and superficialities, which even characters like Clym and Thomasin are unable to disregard entirely, enables him to succeed eventually, because his "actions [...] have their *raison d'être* not only in his own thwarted love for Thomasin, but also in an idea of equity and justice" (Nelson 96) and do not only answer selfish purposes.

4.3. Fate and chance

As has been shown earlier, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* insinuates the importance of chance events and providential guidance regarding the chain of events, but only infrequently makes direct allusions to forces actively governing the protagonists' fortunes, except for the famous hint at the "President of the Immortals" at the closing of the book. In contrast, *The Return of the Native* contains a vast number of direct references to malevolent deities and other forces beyond the characters' control, who seemingly sport with the lives and fortunes of the defenceless denizens of Egdon Heath. Penny Boumelha suggests that "*The Return of the Native* presents its readers with a distinctive fictional universe of an unusual and [...] an unsettling kind", because "[i]t is a world in which the presence of witches or Mephistophelian visitants seems as plausible as the presence of retired sea captains or innkeepers" (256). Thus it is hardly surprising that the people of Egdon Heath largely display a superstitious and fatalistic attitude to describe occurrences they cannot comprehend otherwise. Also the narrator himself adds to the shaping of a preternatural setting of the story by associating commonplace events with the workings of supernatural forces. When he, for instance, describes the movements of heath-bells in a windy night he quasi forces the reader to connect the sounds produced by their motions with preternatural proceedings:

'The spirit moved them.' A meaning of the phrase forced itself upon the attention; and an emotional listener's fetichistic mood might have ended in one of more advanced quality. It was not, after all, that the left-hand expanse of old blooms spoke, or the right-hand, or those of the slope in front; but it was the single person of something else speaking through each at once. (Hardy, *Return* 40)

In the same manner Christian Cantle's timidity is attributed by his neighbours to the concurrence of his birth with a night of new moon: "No moon, no man.' 'Tis one of the truest sayings ever spit out. The boy never comes to anything that's born at new moon. A bad job for thee, Christian, that you should have showed your nose then of all days in the month." (Hardy, *Return* 18). Similarly, Christian Cantle himself thinks that the exuberant dancing around the bonfire on the fifth of November courts disaster: "Christian alone stood aloof, uneasily rocking himself as he murmured, 'They ought not to do it - how the vlankers do fly! 'tis tempting the Wicked one, 'tis.'" (Hardy, *Return* 22). But the heath dwellers not only respond passively to their superstitious beliefs and fears, they also take more drastic action on their account. Due to Eustacia's nonconformist behaviour the superstitiousness of her neighbours is stimulated to a considerable degree and Susan Nunsuch, whose children have a rather weak constitution, suspects her of bewitching them, which ultimately makes her prick Eustacia with a stocking-needle "so as to draw her blood and put an end to the bewitching of [her] children that has been carried on so long" (Hardy, *Return* 135). Also in the fatal night of Eustacia and Wildeve's deaths Susan attempts to free one of her children from an evil spell supposedly cast on him by Eustacia in passing by her habitation:

Susan's sight of her passing figure earlier in the evening, not five minutes after the sick boy's exclamation, 'Mother, I do feel so bad!' persuaded the matron that an evil influence was certainly exercised by Eustacia's propinquity. On this account Susan did not go to bed as soon as the evening's work was over, as she would have done at ordinary times. To counteract the malign spell which she imagined poor Eustacia to be working, the boy's mother busied herself with a ghastly invention of superstition, calculated to bring powerlessness, atrophy, and annihilation on any human being against whom it was directed. It was a practice well known on Egdon at that date, and one that is not quite extinct at the present day. (Hardy, *Return* 273)

The "ghastly invention" the narrator alludes to is moulding a kind of Voodoo doll out of wax and afterwards piercing it with needles, a practice supposed to have adverse effects on the human being on which the doll is modelled:

From her work-basket in the window-seat the woman took a paper of pins, of the old long and yellow sort, whose heads were disposed to come off at their first usage. These she began to thrust into the image in all directions, with apparently excruciating energy. Probably as many as fifty were thus inserted, some into the head of the wax model, some into the shoulders, some into the trunk, some upwards through the soles of the feet, till the figure was completely permeated with pins. (Hardy, *Return* 274)

The eeriness of Susan's proceedings is further enhanced by her subsequent burning of the doll and her trancelike backward repetition of the Lord's Prayer, "the incantation usual in proceedings for obtaining unhallowed assistance against an enemy" (Hardy, *Return* 274), and of course by the fact that Eustacia indeed suffers a violent death. The fact that Susan's superstitious actions are actually ensued by her antagonist's demise, like the narrator's comment on the "President of the Immortals" near the end of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, gives it considerable weight and renders a fatalistic or at least supernatural explanation of Eustacia's tragedy plausible in the reader's eyes.

Also Eustacia herself seems to hold evil powers liable for her bitter fate. She regularly curses her fortunes and blames fate for her adversities, an approach that perfectly befits her character: "Given Eustacia's values and characteristics it is consistent that she does not blame herself for failures, but rather envisions an abstract efficient cause for all shortcomings of her world view and ambitions: this scapegoat is *Fate*." (Nelson 86). In the "Queen of Night" chapter, which introduces the heroine of the book to the reader, we learn that it is her awareness of the evanescence of love that inter alia occasions her grudge against destiny:

She could show a most reproachful look at times, but it was directed less against human beings than against certain creatures of her mind, the chief of these being Destiny, through whose interferences she dimly fancied it arose that love alighted only on gliding youth - that any love she might win would sink simultaneously with the sand in the glass. She thought of it with an ever-growing consciousness of cruelty, which tended to breed actions of reckless unconventionality, framed to snatch a year's, a week's, even an hour's passion from anywhere while it could be won. Through want of it she had sung without being merry, possessed without enjoying, outshone without triumphing. Her loneliness deepened her desire. (Hardy, *Return* 52)

Also Wildeve concludes that Eustacia has been placed at a disadvantage by the workings of providence, which becomes obvious from remarks like "I sincerely sympathize with you in your trouble. Fate has treated you cruelly." (Hardy,

Return 202) and “The fates have not been kind to you, Eustacia Yeobright.” (Hardy, *Return* 215). The fact that Eustacia considers herself to be “a sport for Heaven” (Hardy, *Return* 261) and, therefore, usually blames fate for the misfortunes that befall her, explains her unwillingness to learn from them and evolve into a more humble and compliant character. Since “instead of blaming herself [...] she laid the fault upon the shoulders of some indistinct, colossal Prince of the World, who had framed her situation and ruled her lot” (Hardy, *Return* 228) her reaction to her bad luck mainly consists in overt pessimism. Her gloomy thoughts about the future are given vent to by, for instance, “sighing that tragic sigh of hers which was so much like a shudder” (Hardy, *Return* 111), pitying herself that she ever was born, her anxiety about the future and her carpe diem attitude, which manifests itself in remarks like “I have heard of people, who, upon coming suddenly into happiness, have died from anxiety lest they should not live to enjoy it. I felt myself in that whimsical state of uneasiness lately” (Hardy, *Return* 157) and blatantly accusatory and self-pitying words like

‘How I have tried and tried to be a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me! ... I do not deserve my lot! [...] 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!’ (Hardy, *Return* 272-273)

However, Eustacia does not constitute the only character that is resentful against fate. Also the narrator himself as well as her husband Clym quite frequently are shown to nurse a grievance against their own and the general human situation. The narrator at one point of the story, for instance, vents his displeasure with the natural laws, which frequently prove to be obstacles to human happiness, by the following remark:

The truth seems to be that a long line of disillusioned centuries has permanently displaced the Hellenic idea of life, or whatever it may be called. What the Greeks only suspected we know well; what their Æschylus imagined our nursery children feel. That old-fashioned revelling in the general situation grows less and less possible as we uncover the defects of natural laws, and see the quandary that man is in by their operation. (Hardy, *Return* 127)

We are also told that Clym has realised “the grimness of the general human situation” (Hardy, *Return* 144), since every day he gets up he “see[s] the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain” (Hardy, *Return* 134). He, therefore, usually does not mince matters when vociferating his grievances and at one

point even tempts God to kill him, because his suffering caused by his mother's death could hardly be any worse: "If there is any justice in God let Him kill me now. He has nearly blinded me, but that is not enough. If He would only strike me with more pain I would believe in Him for ever!" (Hardy, *Return* 238). Despite Thomasin's well-intentioned reprimands Clym does not alter his pessimistic view and when the reader for the last time encounters him he still considers himself to be ill-used: "He did sometimes think he had been ill-used by fortune, so far as to say that to be born is a palpable dilemma, and that instead of men aiming to advance in life with glory they should calculate how to retreat out of it without shame." (Hardy, *Return* 292). However, unlike Eustacia, whose rebelliousness forbids her to accept her fate without resistance, Clym confines himself to plaintive laments and never revolts against his lot but instead passively puts up with it and eventually adapts himself to the new conditions. His general acquiescence in circumstance, for instance, manifests itself in sayings like "Well, what must be will be" (Hardy, *Return* 190) or "I will stick to my doom" (Hardy, *Return* 197). The fact that Clym does not rebel against his fortune, however, proves to be a thorn in Eustacia's flesh and she is deeply offended by his fatalistic attitude. When Eustacia catches him singing at his daily work of cutting furze on the heath she, blinded by pride, cannot comprehend why a mean occupation as his can produce merriment on his part: "To see him there, a poor afflicted man, earning money by the sweat of his brow, had at first moved her to tears; but to hear him sing and not at all rebel against an occupation which, however satisfactory to himself, was degrading to her, as an educated lady-wife, wounded her through." (Hardy, *Return* 194). Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that Clym's inability to "rebel, in high Promethean fashion, against the gods and fate" (Hardy, *Return* 196), which indeed considerably lowers his wife's respect for him and turns out to be a crucial test for their marriage, eventually proves advantageous to him, since he is spared a tragic end owing to his passive endurance and the wise, albeit late, modification of his aims. Although he intermittently indulges in reminiscences and when doing so assumes a hostile attitude towards his fate, we nevertheless learn that for the most part he has become reconciled to it:

But that he and his had been sarcastically and pitilessly handled in having such irons thrust into their souls he did not maintain long. It is usually so, except with the sternest of men. Human beings, in their

generous endeavour to construct a hypothesis that shall not degrade a First Cause, have always hesitated to conceive a dominant power of lower moral quality than their own; and, even while they sit down and weep by the waters of Babylon, invent excuses for the oppression which prompts their tears. (Hardy, *Return* 292)

Apart from the characters' responses to fate and Divine Providence, *The Return of the Native* does not employ many fateful events which seem to be part of a preconceived malevolent plan. Although Albert Pettigrew Elliott claims that "Chance and Coincidence play a subordinate part in *The Return of the Native*" and that "Determinism has taken its place" (66), I have to disagree with him on this point. Quite the reverse is true. It is my opinion that Hardy's protagonists are not irrevocably determined for good or for evil, but that they in fact have sufficient means to act according to their free will, which is merely slightly vitiated by chance occurrences and coincidences. Although Thomasin and Wildeve's troubles with the marriage licences, which contribute to the rather quick cooling-off of their marriage, as well as Wildeve's, Mrs. Yeobright's and Clym's virtually simultaneous arrival at Eustacia's house, which prompts the latter not to admit her mother-in-law into her house, an act entailing grave consequences, can be interpreted as malign operations of fate, I would rather consider them in the light of circumstance. The fact that it is not an evil and unimpeachable force that leads Hardy's protagonists in *The Return of the Native* into disaster becomes obvious when looking at the motives behind the characters' actions. If Eustacia had swallowed her pride and condoned the fact that Mrs. Yeobright in their preceding conversation "had spoken of her so bitterly" (Hardy, *Return* 219), her mother-in-law would not have been obliged to traverse the heath broken-heartedly during the heat of the midday sun without having a chance to rest between her outward and her homeward journey. On the other hand, also Mrs. Yeobright's piqued pride and her subsequent rash action of scurrying off, caused by her immediate jump to the conclusion that her son's not answering the door is connected with their previous dissensions, and which of course originates in her own bad conscience as well as her pronounced self-pity and her unnecessarily strong grudge against her daughter-in-law, contributes to her untimely death. Instead of calmly reflecting on the proceedings and seeking shelter somewhere near her son's house, she acts

thoughtlessly in trying to escape the scene of her alleged humiliation as soon as possible.

The only scene of the novel which admittedly bristles with allusions to fate and providential guidance, and also favours a fatalistic interpretation in terms of the large number of highly fateful events which all seem to push the characters' affairs in predetermined directions, is the one concerned with the game of dice between Wildeve and Christian Cantle and later, after Christian has lost all the money, also between Wildeve and Diggory Venn. The fact that the game of dice is a game of pure chance the outcome of which the players cannot manipulate soon becomes obvious. Since the chances of winning a dice game are considered to depend exclusively on the players' luck or good fortune, Christian Cantle is fooled into believing that good fortune is with him after an accidental lucky throw: "Well, to be sure!" said Christian, half to himself. 'To think I should have been born so lucky as this, and not have found it out until now! What curious creatures these dice be - powerful rulers of us all, and yet at my command! I am sure I never need be afraid of anything after this.'" (Hardy, *Return* 170). But the dice, which Christian after a few instances of beginner's luck also fondly calls the "wonderful little things that carry my luck inside 'em" (Hardy, *Return* 171), are already soon afterwards referred to as "the devil's playthings" (Hardy, *Return* 172) by him, since his initial streak of good luck soon comes to an end and the game between him and Wildeve ends with Wildeve being the winner of the one hundred guineas Mrs. Yeobright had entrusted him with to deliver to Clym and Thomasin, both of whom should get an equal portion of them. The fact that the game between Wildeve and Christian is well balanced up to a certain point, both of them alternately winning and losing without an obvious advantage of either of them, until the odds are eventually in Wildeve's favour, does not strike the reader as highly unlikely, since an eventual success on the part of one of the players is simply inevitable. When Diggory Venn, however, enters the scene, the situation is quite different, because the reddleman wins "with a consistency unknown to the cleverest dice thrower" (Elliott 66). The originally well-balanced game soon runs in another direction, which clearly favours Diggory Venn and apparently gives his opponent no chance of emerging victorious, and also the narrator remarks that: "Fortune had unmistakably fallen in love with the reddleman to-night" (Hardy, *Return* 177).

Due to the fact that Diggory Venn's success at the game of dice has grave consequences since he "in his anxiety to rectify matters, place[s] in Thomasin's hands not only the fifty guineas which rightly belonged to her, but also the fifty intended for her cousin Clym" (Hardy, *Return* 180), a misunderstanding which eventually causes Mrs. Yeobright's and Eustacia's fatal breach and later induces Mrs. Yeobright to undertake the fateful journey across the heath, his unnatural streak of luck can easily be interpreted to indicate a systematic design of a supernatural force trying to force the events into a predetermined direction. This notion is also supported by the narrator's remark that this night's proceedings "helped to cause more misfortune than treble the loss in money value could have done" (Hardy, *Return* 181). However, one must not neglect the fact that although Diggory Venn's luck is characterised by a seemingly artificial consistency, after all it is his overeagerness to serve a friend which leads him to present his beloved with all the money without going further into the matter.

Apart from the game of dice, which is characterised by an unprecedented rigid systematicity regarding the game's outcome and appears to be designed for the sole purpose of promoting a predefined course of events, the novel also features other events and motifs which are repeated again and again in the course of the novel and thus strike the reader as systematic methods intended to advance the plot instead of being entirely random occurrences. The most important motif that should be mentioned in this context can also be found in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, namely the motif of the overheard conversation. Until now only few critics addressed the fact that many events in *The Return of the Native* that are intended to further the plot are of an essentially similar nature, since they all involve unintended information transfer. The novel can be said to abound in instances that feature eavesdropping on the part of one of the characters, which quite frequently proves to have far-reaching consequences. The first instance of eavesdropping occurs already very early in the novel, namely when Johnny Nunsuch secretly listens to Eustacia and Wildeve's conversation after the latter has arrived at Eustacia's signal fire. Although Johnny is too young to comprehend the essence of their talk, his unwanted presence has an impact on the further course of the book, because he later tells Diggory Venn about the things he has heard:

‘What did the gentleman say to her, my sonny?’

‘He only said he did like her best, and how he was coming to see her again under Rainbarrow o’ nights.’

‘Ha!’ cried the reddleman, slapping his hand against the side of his van so that the whole fabric shook under the blow. ‘That’s the secret o’t!’ (Hardy, *Return* 58)

If Johnny Nunsuch had not eavesdropped on Wildeve and Eustacia, Diggory Venn probably never would have found out about Wildeve’s former attachment to her and would not have intervened. After it has come to Diggory’s knowledge that Eustacia might prove an obstacle to Thomasin’s happiness, he decides to spy on her, hiding in a bush near her house. Since he holds Thomasin’s happiness near and dear, he immediately determines to interfere in her problems and act on her behalf: “The reddleman, stung with suspicion of wrong to Thomasin, was aroused to strategy in a moment.” (Hardy, *Return* 62). The next day he calls upon Eustacia in order to plead for Thomasin and encourage Eustacia to abandon her interest in the man who rightly belongs to another woman, an action which as we know merely serves to rekindle her passion and stimulates her competitiveness. Also Diggory’s backup plan, namely to ask Mrs. Yeobright for Thomasin’s hand himself, which he executes after he has realised that his attempts at persuading Eustacia are in vain, turns out to have unforeseen consequences. Although Mrs. Yeobright does not agree to Diggory’s wedding proposal and still adheres to her scheme of marrying Thomasin off to Wildeve, we still learn that Diggory’s proposal gives her a supposed edge over her niece’s future husband: “But though this conversation did not divert Thomasin’s aunt from her purposed interview with Wildeve, it made a considerable difference in her mode of conducting that interview. She thanked God for the weapon which the reddleman had put into her hands.” (Hardy, *Return* 73). Her subsequent proud and dismissive attitude towards Wildeve during their conversation on the one hand results in his return to Eustacia, who admittedly rejects him when she learns about Thomasin’s loss of interest in him but whose denial induces him to abide by the decision to marry Thomasin, and on the other hand conditions his cold behaviour towards his wife and his continued affection for his first love. But these are not the only instances in which eavesdropping plays a central part in the novel’s plot development. Eustacia’s secret listening to a conversation between her grandfather and two furze-cutters is crucial for her falling in love with Clym in the first place, and also

Johnny's unnoticed presence at the closed-door incidence turns out to be the decisive factor for Clym and Eustacia's final discord, since Johnny artlessly tells Clym that while Mrs. Yeobright was knocking at the door Eustacia was looking out of a window and did not open the door on purpose:

'The poor lady went and knocked at your door, and the lady with black hair looked out of the side-window at her. [...] And when she saw the young lady look out of the window the old lady knocked again; and when nobody came she took up the furze-hook and looked at it, and put it down again, and walked across to me, and blowed her breath very hard, like this. We walked on together, she and I, and I talked to her and she talked to me a bit, but not much, because she couldn't blow her breath. [...] She couldn't talk much, and she couldn't walk; and her face was, O so queer!' (Hardy, *Return* 247)

All in all, it may be said that although the novel features a few scenes that would render a fatalistic interpretation of the course of events plausible, I would still argue that fate and chance compared with other determining forces play a relatively minor role in the shaping of the protagonists' destiny. Despite the fact that certain coincidences and fortuitous events indeed have an influence on the course of action and sometimes also shift its direction, environmental conditioning and character disposition are clearly intended to play more central parts in determining the characters' fates. As already indicated above, it is first and foremost the protagonists' actions that are responsible for their eventual downfall or success. Although many protagonists of *The Return of the Native* are considerably prone to fatalism and frequently lay the blame for their misfortunes on a higher power, it is conspicuous that particularly inflexible characters are inclined to shift blame on things outside themselves and eventually come to grief. As already pointed out, Eustacia, Wildeve and Mrs. Yeobright quite frequently curse their fates and indulge in self-pity. Also Clym, although he eventually yields up to his fate, initially displays a rather pessimistic attitude towards his lot and not just once laments the cruelty of human destiny. The inflexible characters' subsequent misfortunes, however, cannot be blamed on retributions of fate, but the root cause of their adverse fates should rather be sought in their general attitude towards their circumstances. The book gives a lot of evidence for the fact that it is primarily human actions that determine the final outcome of the story. Already its title hints at the major importance of human deeds. Similar to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, which already in the title

acknowledges the importance of the concept of heredity, albeit ironically, the title *The Return of the Native* attaches importance to Clym's decision to abandon the fashionable life he leads in Paris and remigrate to his native place. Also the characters themselves apparently realise the far-reaching ramifications of Clym's coming back to the heath. The allegedly adverse effects of Clym's return to the place of his birth are the subject of a conversation between him and Eustacia, in the course of which Eustacia expresses the wish, purportedly for Clym's sake, that Clym had never taken this step:

'If you had never returned to your native place, Clym, what a blessing it would have been for you! ... It has altered the destinies of -'

'Three people.'

'Five,' Eustacia thought; but she kept that in. (Hardy, *Return* 210)

Therefore, it may be said that although the novel features a few events which strain the limits of plausibility, for instance, Diggory Venn's lucky streak at the game of dice or the sequence of fortuitous events adding up Mrs. Yeobright's death on the heath, the protagonists mostly founder on their conscious decisions rather than on what Eustacia calls "the cruel satires that Fate loves to indulge in" (Hardy, *Return* 157). Despite the fact that Clym's sudden illness, which might appear as a blow of fate at first glance, causes his and Eustacia's estrangement, their intemperate mutual desire was doomed to cool off anyway owing to Eustacia's flightiness and her proneness to coquetry. Equally Clym's conciliatory letter, which due to a series of coincidences does not arrive in time to prevent Eustacia from venturing out onto the storm-beaten heath, cannot seriously be considered to turn the scales against Eustacia's fortune, since the reader is told that "[e]ven the receipt of Clym's letter would not have stopped her now" (Hardy, *Return* 271). After all, the novel's tragic ending is not based on an inexorable fate, but fundamentally stems from the characters' rigidity and inflexibility. It is ultimately Eustacia's pride and her imperiousness, Mrs. Yeobright's pronounced sense of propriety and her destructive love for her son, Wildeve's rashness and Clym's far too advanced ideas that simply are incongruous with a stolid place like Egdon heath that prove to be impediments to their happiness. However, one must not neglect the fact that the protagonists' character disposition alone does not determine their ultimate failure or success, but still gives ample scope for amendment and adjustment, which to some extent is already exemplified by Clym, who just in time averts further damage by

modifying his aims, but becomes even more obvious in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, which almost fully realises its potential for pastoral happiness.

5. Far from the Madding Crowd

5.1. The benefits of mediocrity

Similar to *The Return of the Native*, also Hardy's early pastoral novel *Far from the Madding Crowd* opens with a description of one of its main characters, namely Gabriel Oak. While the opening chapter of *The Return of the Native*, which can be said to introduce the story's backdrop as one of the *dramatis personae* of the book due to its anthropomorphic description, presents the Egdon Heath to the reader as a "vast tract of unenclosed wild" (Hardy, *Return* 1), an untameable and rugged spot, the description rendered of Farmer Oak constitutes a more ordinary outset and all in all creates a more meek and commonplace impression in the reader's mind. We learn that "he was a young man of sound judgment, easy motions, proper dress, and general good character" (Hardy, *Crowd* 13). Far from conveying a sense of crypticism and obscurity, like many of Hardy's male heroes, Gabriel strikes the reader as a straightforward and not very complex man, a notion which is also reinforced by the block characterisation given of him, which encompasses a lot of details concerning his character disposition and leaves the reader with the impression that he can be totally described (Nelson 24). Also his telling name is intended to give information on his nature. Page points out that already his first name suggests his goodness and integrity, since "Gabriel, with its angelic associations, suggests the hero's innate goodness and sweetness of temper" (42). It soon becomes obvious that Gabriel is not a very edgy character. His moral qualities, his character traits as well as his outward appearance are well-balanced and avoid extremes. The reader is told that he "occup[ies] morally that vast middle space of Laodicean neutrality" (Hardy, *Crowd* 13) and that on the whole "he was a man whose moral colour was a kind of pepper-and-salt mixture" (Hardy, *Crowd* 14). Unlike a character like Eustacia Vye, who is characterised by her deviance and nonconformity, Gabriel generally seems to comply with the moral and social demands of his neighbours. Also his looks are described as mediocre: "Gabriel's features adhered throughout their form so exactly to the middle line between the beauty of St. John and the ugliness of Judas Iscariot [...] that not a single lineament could be selected and called worthy either of distinction or notoriety." (Hardy, *Crowd* 17). He does not

possess the singular looks of Clym, which tend to attract superficial characters like Eustacia, and he equally cannot boast of Wildeve's grace in movement, "the pantomimic expression of a lady-killing career" (Hardy, *Return* 31), which is able to mask some of his outward insufficiencies:

His height and breadth would have been sufficient to make his presence imposing, had they been exhibited with due consideration. But there is a way some men have, rural and urban alike, for which the mind is more responsible than flesh and sinew: it is a way of curtailing their dimensions by their manner of showing them. And from a quiet modesty that would have become a vestal, which seemed continually to impress upon him that he had no great claim on the world's room, Oak walked unassumingly, and with a faintly perceptible bend, yet distinct from a bowing of the shoulders. This may be said to be a defect in an individual if he depends for his valuation more upon his appearance than upon his capacity to wear well, which Oak did not. (Hardy, *Crowd* 15)

Already the first chapter of the book reveals that Gabriel Oak represents a striking contrast to most of Hardy's most popular protagonists, who impress the reader by their unconventionality and idiosyncrasy, which frequently finds expression in the fact that they are maladapted to their immediate surroundings and in their penchant for forcing their will on their environment rather than humbly yielding to their fates. Gabriel Oak, however, does not possess those defects and peculiarities that make characters like Tess or Eustacia singular though vulnerable. For instance, the fact that Eustacia is in possession of an hour glass, an instrument with which she tries to escape the immutability and monotony of Egdon Heath and retain a sense of order in its timelessness, demonstrates her rebellion against her surroundings. Gabriel on the other hand does not desperately try to bring order to his environment, but subjects himself to the natural order:

Mr. Oak carried about him, by way of watch, what may be called a small silver clock; in other words, it was a watch as to shape and intention, and a small clock as to size. This instrument being several years older than Oak's grandfather, had the peculiarity of going either too fast or not at all. The smaller of its hands, too, occasionally slipped round on the pivot, and thus, though the minutes were told with precision, nobody could be quite certain of the hour they belonged to. The stopping peculiarity of his watch Oak remedied by thumps and shakes, and he escaped any evil consequences from the other two defects by constant comparison with and observations of the sun and stars, and by pressing his face close to the glass of his neighbours' windows, till he could discern the hour marked by the green-faced timekeepers within. (Hardy, *Crowd* 14)

Due to the fact that Gabriel Oak does not blindly rely on technology, as represented by his watch, but rather double-checks the provided information by careful contemplation of the sun and stars, it may be asserted that he generally is in harmony with his surroundings and does not try to dominate them. That he is well-adapted to his environment and very considerate in his actions is also revealed by his attire:

He wore a low-crowned felt hat, spread out at the base by tight jamming upon the head for security in high winds, and a coat like Dr. Johnson's; his lower extremities being encased in ordinary leather leggings and boots emphatically large, affording to each foot a roomy apartment so constructed that any wearer might stand in a river all day long and know nothing of damp - their maker being a conscientious man who endeavoured to compensate for any weakness in his cut by unstinted dimension and solidity. (Hardy, *Crowd* 14)

The remark on Gabriel's boots allowing him to stand in a river all day without ever feeling damp is of particular interest regarding the bank scene in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. While Tess's light summer attire renders it plain impossible for her to cross the streamlet on her way to church with the other dairymaids and therefore depends on Angel to carry her over this minor obstacle, which, as has been shown above, has far reaching consequences, Gabriel's outfit makes him well-adapted to all conditions and weather situations. Another issue that sets him apart from Tess and Eustacia is the fact that he is neither passionate nor impulsive: "He was at the brightest period of masculine growth, for his intellect and his emotions were clearly separated: he had passed the time during which the influence of youth indiscriminately mingles them in the character of impulse" (Hardy, *Crowd* 15). While Tess's sudden outbursts of anger and passion continuously serve to put her into perilous situations, Gabriel's apparent lack of violent emotions protects him from both emotional acts which have serious consequences and profound disappointments causing disillusionment on his part.

Besides Gabriel's well-balanced character disposition, he is clearly also a character who is in harmony with his environment. Just like his first name, Gabriel, tells the reader about the inborn goodness of the novel's main protagonist, also his last name, Oak, is telling, since it "implies the soundness and durability of a wood traditionally regarded as essentially English" (Page 42), but it also hints at his close affiliation with the natural world. Already his choice

of dress indicates that Gabriel is well-adapted to his natural surroundings, but there are also other clues that show that he is an exponent of the environment he moves and lives in. The fact that Gabriel fits in well with his pastoral surroundings is both indicated by his occupation, namely sheep farming, which he carries out skilfully and wisely, and the musical instrument he carries with him, namely a flute, the prototypical instrument of the pastoral world (Squires 304). But not only his garments and his equipment indicate his nexus with his environment, also his actions shed light on it. Owing to his “objective, observant attitude to Nature” (Cosslett 153), he is able to tell the time by the observation of stellar movements and is more than just once able to avert impending pastoral catastrophes. In the night of the harvest supper and dance, in the course of which Sergeant Troy’s carelessness and recklessness make him encourage his labourers to engage in heavy drinking and leave the ricks unprotected, Gabriel manages to interpret the signs of nature correctly, which announce a violent storm, and act correspondingly. His general heedfulness makes him regard the toad crossing his path on his way home from the harvest supper as a “direct message from the Great Mother” (Hardy, *Crowd* 229), signifying an impending storm, and also the fact that a garden-slug has crept into his house during his absence he considers to be “Nature’s second way of hinting to him that he was to prepare for foul weather” (Hardy, *Crowd* 229).

However, Gabriel’s deep understanding of nature and his unobtrusive conformity with nature’s and society’s ways at first do not prove advantageous when it comes to attracting a mate. The woman he falls in love with, Bathsheba Everdene, does not seem to be favourably impressed by Gabriel’s qualities, which basically consist in the avoidance of extremes. His sober-mindedness and the fact that he “is too prosaic, too honest, too frontal, too easy a touch” (Nelson 36), culminating in a candid, but rather factual, marriage proposal, in which he amongst other things urges his beloved to marry him for the reason that he “love[s] [her] far more than common” (Hardy, *Crowd* 37), clearly fail to attract her. Although Bathsheba seemingly takes pleasure in the thought of gaining decorative objects, like a piano, through a marriage with Gabriel, and being the centre of attention on her wedding day, she cannot reconcile herself to the idea of being bound to a man for a lifetime:

'I've tried hard all the time I've been thinking; for a marriage would be very nice in one sense. People would talk about me and think I had won my battle, and I should feel triumphant, and all that. But a husband - '

'Well!'

'Why, he'd always be there, as you say; whenever I looked up, there he'd be.'

'Of course he would - I, that is.'

'Well, what I mean is that I shouldn't mind being a bride at a wedding, if I could be one without having a husband. But since a woman can't show off in that way by herself, I shan't marry - at least yet.' (Hardy, *Crowd* 38).

Obviously, Bathsheba's craving for public attention, which indeed would make a marriage very desirable for her, is not able to subdue her wish for independence completely. Only when the pretentious and hedonistic Sergeant Troy walks into her life is she willing to abandon her autonomy for the sake of a man. According to Norbert Lennartz, Sergeant Troy can be conceived as an antithetical figure to Gabriel Oak, since while Gabriel represents "the epitome of Christian humility and self-sacrificing dedication", Sergeant Troy on the other hand "cunningly lures her into the tangles of Mephistophelean conversation" (10). Already Bathsheba's first meeting with Troy hints at the different position he is going to occupy in Bathsheba's life in comparison with her other suitors Gabriel and Boldwood. The incidental hitching together of their garments when passing each other in Bathsheba's fir plantation at night can be regarded as "a cogent visualization of the erotically transgressive violence with which destiny flings the soldier into Bathsheba's pseudo-pastoral existence" (Lennartz 9). Sergeant Troy's highly-sexualised demeanour soon bears fruit and the strong appeal he has with women almost instantaneously becomes obvious, since one is able to notice that the otherwise very composed Bathsheba brims with tension and embarrassment during the whole length of their encounter. By appealing to Bathsheba's sense of pride and her craving for admiration by statements like "I've seen a good many women in my time [...] but I've never seen a woman so beautiful as you. Take it or leave it - be offended or like it - I don't care." (Hardy, *Crowd* 158), he is clearly ahead of the competition, since neither Gabriel nor Boldwood have been able to flatter her vanity properly. Also the narrator concedes that "[i]t was a fatal omission of Boldwood's that he had never once told her she was beautiful" (Hardy, *Crowd* 159). Although Boldwood has been able to arrest her attention for some time due to his distant behaviour, he cannot sustain her interest for long. Only his obscure lack of interest in

womankind, of which we learn from Liddy's prattle, is initially able to stimulate Bathsheba's ambition and sense of competition:

'Never was such a hopeless man for a woman! He's been courted by sixes and sevens - all the girls, gentle and simple, for miles round, have tried him. Jane Perkins worked at him for two months like a slave, and the two Miss Taylors spent a year upon him, and he cost Farmer Ives's daughter nights of tears and twenty pounds' worth of new clothes; but Lord - the money might as well have been thrown out of the window.' (Hardy, *Crowd* 78)

Moreover, the fact that Boldwood does not seem to take any notice of her and "passe[s] [her] as unconsciously and abstractedly as if Bathsheba and her charms were thin air" (Hardy, *Crowd* 94) suffices to make him conspicuous, since it puts him into clear distinction to the other men at the cornmarket:

It perplexed her first. If there had been a respectable minority on either side, the case would have been most natural. If nobody had regarded her, she would have taken the matter indifferently - such cases had occurred. If everybody, this man included, she would have taken it as a matter of course - people had done so before. But the smallness of the exception made the mystery. (Hardy, *Crowd* 92-93)

Bathsheba's piqued narcissism, which induces her to pursue a man she probably would not have noticed or considered attractive in another context, also becomes obvious in the following passage:

Boldwood's had begun to be a troublesome image - a species of Daniel in her kingdom who persisted in kneeling eastward when reason and common sense said that he might just as well follow suit with the rest, and afford her the official glance of admiration which cost nothing at all. She was far from being seriously concerned about his nonconformity. Still, it was faintly depressing that the most dignified and valuable man in the parish should withhold his eyes, and that a girl like Liddy should talk about it. (Hardy, *Crowd* 97)

However, after Bathsheba has finally succeeded in winning his heart by sending him the bold valentine card saying "Marry Me", his former aloofness soon changes into a kind of deference which rather repels her. In this respect Bathsheba is akin to Eustacia Vye, since as soon the much longed for triumph over a man's heart has been achieved, they both quickly tire of their former object of desire. Boldwood, whose seeming unavailability makes him appear to be worth her while, loses much of his allure after he has poured out his heart to Bathsheba: "Bathsheba knew more of him now; he had entirely bared his heart before her, even until he had almost worn in her eyes the sorry look of a grand bird without the feathers that make it grand." (Hardy, *Crowd* 153).

Sergeant Troy on the other hand, who already at their first meeting shows a singular carelessness for her opinion coupled with a purposefully dauntless admiration for her looks, accomplishes to keep her in line for a very long time. Indeed, Bathsheba and Troy's approach to courtship is very similar, since both of them rather aggressively display their sexuality in order to ensnare the other sex. Both of them are frequently surrounded with colour symbolism and fire imagery, which both hint at their sensuous natures, but also at the emotional risk they present to others. Since Bathsheba is a rather narcissistic character, it is hardly surprising that she should fall in love with Sergeant Troy, a man resembling her in so many ways:

Her complement is Troy, who carries all before him because of his intense masculinity. Bathsheba, young and vain, wants a proficient lover above all. Boldwood has been too long reticent to inflame her, and Oak is too balanced, too uncommitted to sexual *savoir faire* to win her at first. (Nelson 37)

Troy's dashing looks as well as the continual performance of his masculinity turn out to be the premises for attracting an incipiently superficial character like Bathsheba Everdene. Especially the skilful handling of his sword, "with all the overtones of phallic ostentation" (Lennartz 10) he displays during his sword-exercise, and in which he demonstrates his alleged superiority, makes a deep impression on her. Her former self-reliance and independence prove to be fatal, since once she has found her counterpart, who instils a feeling of inferiority into her, she turns into a puppet begging for appreciation:

Bathsheba loved Troy in the way that only self-reliant women love when they abandon their self-reliance. When a strong woman recklessly throws away her strength she is worse than a weak woman who has never had any strength to throw away. One source of her inadequacy is the novelty of the occasion. She has never had practice in making the best of such a condition. Weakness is doubly weak by being new. (Hardy, *Crowd* 179-180)

All in all, it may be discerned that Bathsheba's rather naive and superficial attitude towards love, coupled with her flippancy and her reluctance to control her passions, a flaw probably stemming from her fairly young age, prove to have grave consequences. We learn that "[h]er love was entire as a child's" and that "[h]er culpability lay in her making no attempt to control feeling by subtle and careful inquiry into consequences" (Hardy, *Crowd* 180). Although she is partly able to uncover Troy's moral deformities and after a while "she had

penetrated Troy's nature so far as to estimate his tendencies pretty accurately", she nevertheless "loved him no less in thinking that he might soon cease to love her - indeed, considerably more" (Hardy, *Crowd* 204). The fact that Bathsheba harbours a most unrealistic notion of Troy's capability of being a romantic hero and a tower of strength at the same time, after her toying with Gabriel and Boldwood suddenly places her in the awkward situation of having to strive for a man's affection. Her hovering between vanity and insecurity makes her an easy prey for the audacious and smooth-tongued sergeant, of whom we learn that although "[h]e was moderately truthful towards men, [...] to women lied like a Cretan - a system of ethics above all others calculated to win popularity at the first flush of admission into lively society" (Hardy, *Crowd* 161). Especially Bathsheba's conceitedness and her arrogance, which are both revealed very early in the course of the book, prove to be obstructive character flaws that initially inhibit her pursuit of happiness. When Gabriel Oak and the reader first encounter her, it already becomes obvious that the novel's heroine is still a long way from possessing the moral qualities necessary for survival in Thomas Hardy's fictional universe:

Bathsheba's appearance in Wessex is clearly related to an iconography of intrusion which highlights her incompatibility with or even her incipient violation of nature's unpretentious rhythms. The fact that she sits on an 'ornamental spring waggon' is ample evidence of her provocative manner of ostentation; the additional fact that it is painted yellow, i.e. in a colour originally reserved to indicate traitors and outsiders [...], is another strong iconographical hint that she is doomed to have antagonistic relationships with her fellow creatures and that she epitomizes the imminent wreck of paradisiacal bliss. Surrounded by 'pots of geraniums, myrtles and cactuses,' she furthermore demonstrates her conspicuous otherness and artificiality both by a caged canary she has with her and by a 'small swing lookingglass' [...] in which she surreptitiously surveys herself. (Lennartz 5-6)

The fact that Bathsheba, as soon as she feels herself to be unobserved after the waggoner has run some way back to retrieve the tailboard, which has fallen off, produces a looking-glass to scrutinise herself, leads to incomprehension on both the part of the narrator and Gabriel Oak. Since her action merely appears to serve the purpose of "observ[ing] herself as a fair product of Nature in the feminine kind" and not to "adjust her hat, or pat her hair, or press a dimple into shape, or do one thing to signify that any such intention had been her motive in taking up the glass" (Hardy, *Crowd* 16-17), Bathsheba's self-scrutiny is

considered to be redundant by them. While the narrator professes to be at an utter loss to understand the motivation for her action, Gabriel immediately interprets it as a manifestation of complacency, which follows from the following conversation with the gatekeeper:

The gatekeeper surveyed the retreating vehicle. 'That's a handsome maid,' he said to Oak.

'But she has her faults,' said Gabriel.

'True, farmer.'

'And the greatest of them is - well, what it is always.'

'Beating people down? ay, 'tis so.'

'O no.'

'What, then?'

Gabriel, perhaps a little piqued by the comely traveller's indifference, glanced back to where he had witnessed her performance over the hedge, and said, 'Vanity.' (Hardy, *Crowd* 18)

Bathsheba's concern for outward appearances and her self-importance are also unveiled in many other instances. On her second incidental meeting with Gabriel, we are told that "[t]here was a bright air and manner about her [...], by which she seemed to imply that the desirability of her existence could not be questioned" (Hardy, *Crowd* 26) and when Boldwood unexpectedly comes around to inquire after the missing Fanny Robin, she simply denies him access to her house owing to her disorderly looks: "A woman's dress being a part of her countenance, and any disorder in the one being of the same nature with a malformation or wound in the other, Bathsheba said at once - 'I can't see him in this state. Whatever shall I do?'" (Hardy, *Crowd* 77). Her deep-rooted anxiety to look her best on every occasion even prevents her from forcefully freeing herself from the rather intimate and according to Victorian moral values highly indecent position she is brought into by her skirt having been caught in Sergeant Troy's spur, who at that point of the story is a total stranger to her, in the fir plantation:

Bathsheba was revolving in her mind whether by a bold and desperate rush she could free herself at the risk of leaving her skirt bodily behind her. The thought was too dreadful. The dress - which she had put on to appear stately at the supper - was the head and front of her wardrobe; not another in her stock became her so well. What woman in Bathsheba's position, not naturally timid, and within call of her retainers, would have bought escape from a dashing soldier at so dear a price? (Hardy, *Crowd* 158)

Bathsheba's preoccupation with physical appearance, however, not only manifests itself in a very pronounced craving for recognition, but also

determines her reactions to other people. It is rather curious that during her first meeting with Gabriel, in which he comes to her assistance when Bathsheba is arguing with the gatekeeper over the exact amount of money she needs to pay in order to be allowed to pass by paying the demanded sum for her, Bathsheba primarily seems to assess Gabriel's worthiness on the basis of his looks rather than his suave manners:

Female response is sensitive here not to economics or etiquette, but to sexuality; the series of references to Gabriel's looks is an unexpected *non sequitur*, for we expect a response to the act, not to the face. The narrator's elaborate and allusive treatment of Gabriel's features is necessary because it corresponds to the value judgment of Oak's worth made by the young woman, and her glance is no more than 'careless'. A value system which begins with little more than superficialities of facial lines finds the whole man unworthy of 'distinction or notoriety'. Her inability to impose herself upon the world in a puerile haggling over a few pence colors her responses to Gabriel: the whole is almost an incident of beauty and the beast, and makes clear a fictional world where it will be helpful for a man to show stylish features and presumably the sexuality which goes with them. (Nelson 23)

Apart from Bathsheba's priggishness also her pride and her obstinacy are characteristics that she needs to discard before pastoral happiness can be fully realised. Already before her social advancement first stirrings of her haughtiness are clearly discernible, but they become even more manifest after she has inherited her uncle's farm and fortune. When Gabriel after a streak of bad luck takes service with her, he is "staggered by the remarkable coolness of her manner" (Hardy, *Crowd* 83) towards him, given their common history:

Certainly nobody without previous information would have dreamt that Oak and the handsome woman before whom he stood had ever been other than strangers. But perhaps her air was the inevitable result of her social rise which had advanced her from a cottage to a large house and fields. The case is not unexampled in high places. When, in the writings of the later poets, Jove and his family are found to have moved from their cramped quarters on the peak of Olympus into the wide sky above it, their words show a proportionate increase of arrogance and reserve. (Hardy, *Crowd* 83-84)

The destructive nature of this particular character trait, which is also realised by one of Bathsheba's workmen, who laments her waywardness by saying "A headstrong maid that's what she is - and won't listen to no advice at all. Pride and vanity have ruined many a cobbler's dog. Dear, dear, when I think o' it, I sorrows like a man in travel!" (Hardy, *Crowd* 104), soon becomes obvious. After a quarrel with Gabriel, in the course of which he amongst other things calls her

conduct towards men “unworthy of any thoughtful, and meek, and comely woman” (Hardy, *Crowd* 130), her pride is wounded to such an extent that she almost even jeopardises the lives of her sheep flock rather than stooping to ask Gabriel for assistance, an action which in the worst case could amount to her financial ruin.

Nevertheless, it still needs to be pointed out that despite the initial character flaws Bathsheba displays she eventually turns out to be a flexible character, who just in time learns to adapt herself to the demands of her environment:

She is the only character who changes and matures. In the course of the novel, Bathsheba develops the same strength that Oak possesses at the outset. Early, she spends much time lamenting the position into which her vanity and folly have plunged her; but as her pride stumbles on misfortune, she matures, grows silent, and learns to bear her sorrows alone. (Squires 312)

Her adaptive side, however, is not a narrative device Hardy pulls out of his hat just before the end to ensure a happy ending intended to satisfy his readership, but is already insinuated from the very beginning of the novel. Bathsheba’s adaptability, for instance, already becomes conspicuous soon after her rise to a higher social position, since Gabriel admits to be “perplexed at the rapidity with which the unpractised girl of Norcombe had developed into the supervising and cool woman here” (Hardy, *Crowd* 55). The fact that “some women only require an emergency to make them fit for one” (Hardy, *Crowd* 55) is clearly mirrored in the book’s heroine, since once she finds herself in an awkward predicament she inflicted on herself, she slowly but surely changes tack and makes the necessary adjustments to her situation. This not only manifests itself in the scene in which her sheep’s lives are in danger owing to their feeding on young clover and in which she in the nick of time swallows her pride and entreats Gabriel to help her despite his former harsh words, but also after she discovers that she has committed a fatal mistake in marrying Troy: “Her pride was indeed brought low by despairing discoveries of her spoliation by marriage with a less pure nature than her own” (Hardy, *Crowd* 257). Soon after she has found out about Troy’s former attachment with Fanny Robin and Troy has left her, we learn that Bathsheba’s opinion of herself has been somewhat deflated and that her vanity and pride have cleared the way for a more profound and realistic assessment of herself and others:

Taking no further interest in herself as a splendid woman, she acquired the indifferent feelings of an outsider in contemplating her probable fate as a singular wretch; for Bathsheba drew herself and her future in colours that no reality could exceed for darkness. Her original vigorous pride of youth had sickened, and with it had declined all her anxieties about coming years, since anxiety recognizes a better and a worse alternative, and Bathsheba had made up her mind that alternatives on any noteworthy scale had ceased for her. (Hardy, *Crowd* 303)

What is more, we also learn that “the severe schooling she had been subjected to had made Bathsheba much more considerate than she had formerly been of the feelings of others” (Hardy, *Crowd* 310) and also her confidante Liddy acknowledges her mistress’s radical change by replying to Jan Coggan’s question if Bathsheba was much altered: “If you haven’t seen poor mistress since Christmas, you wouldn’t know her” (Hardy, *Crowd* 359).

All in all, it may be said that the heavy setbacks Bathsheba has incurred turn out to be necessary for the achievement of pastoral happiness, since her pride needs to be humbled before she can fully perceive Gabriel’s virtues:

[T]he novel can be classified as a *Bildungsroman* in which Bathsheba is painfully taught the lesson of how to conquer the malicious intruder’s temptations and, consequently, to come to a re-evaluation of the shepherd’s oaken stability. According to the principle of *felix culpa*, Bathsheba’s descent into hell, induced by her overweening vanity and predilection for superficial splendour, eventually leads her to a new form of bliss [...] (Lennartz 13)

Owing to Bathsheba’s flexibility, she is eventually able to come out of the crisis strengthened and to realise the superiority of the constant and thoroughly sympathetic man “who had believed in her and argued on her side when all the rest of the world was against her” (Hardy, *Crowd* 364), who although he cannot boast of a commanding presence and suave appearance can be depended on for better or for worse. Although Bathsheba’s humbling process has sometimes been interpreted as a mere breaking of her will and Gabriel’s patronage has been likened to a patriarchal subjugation of her spirit, it cannot be doubted that theirs is “a centrally successful relationship, [...] in which both man and woman can allow for the substantiality of the other’s identity” (Lucas 136), a notion which is also propagated by the novel itself:

Theirs was that substantial affection which arises (if any arises at all) when the two who are thrown together begin first by knowing the rougher sides of each other’s character, and not the best till further on, the romance growing up in the interstices of a mass of hard prosaic reality. This good-fellowship - *camaraderie* - usually occurring through similarity

of pursuits, is unfortunately seldom superadded to love between the sexes, because men and women associate, not in their labours, but in their pleasures merely. Where, however, happy circumstance permits its development, the compounded feeling proves itself to be the only love which is strong as death - that love which many waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown, beside which the passion usually called by the name is evanescent as steam. (Hardy, *Crowd* 368)

5.2. Indifference to fate as a favourable character trait

Besides specific character traits, also the characters' stance on providential guidance determines their prospect of success and survival in Hardy's fictional universe. As has been shown by the examples of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *The Return of the Native*, a tendency to accept one's fate and to humbly subject oneself to the conditions one is brought into by natural forces and chance events proves to be favourable compared to rebelling against circumstance, a notion which becomes even more distinct in the context of Hardy's early pastoral novel *Far from the Madding Crowd*. This already becomes obvious when contemplating the rural community of the novels. While the denizens of Egdon Heath display a natural propensity for superstitious beliefs, which frequently find expression in anxiety and a sense of insecurity given the incomprehensibility of natural phenomena, the people of *Far from the Madding Crowd* show a firm belief in the essential goodness of providence. This already becomes conspicuous during Gabriel Oak's first encounter with the people of the vicinity of Weatherbury in the malthouse. During Gabriel's stop there, the bashfulness of Joseph Poorgrass, a character who in many ways can be said to resemble the timid Christian Cantle of *The Return of the Native*, is the general subject of conversation. Although we learn from the men's thorough discussion of the matter that Joseph suffers from his "curious nature" since "his shyness [...] was so painful as a defect" and that his "mother was concerned to her heart about it" (Hardy, *Crowd* 62), Joseph nevertheless tries to make the best of his condition and even points out "'tis a happy providence that I be no worse" (Hardy, *Crowd* 63). Equally, when at another point of the story Joseph's forgetfulness is the subject of the men's talk, in the course of which one of his fellows remarks "'tis a bad affliction for ye, being such a man of calamities in other ways", a statement which downright invites lamentations about his hard lot on Joseph's part, he makes the following meek reply: "Well, 'tis; but a happy

Providence ordered that it should be no worse, and I feel my thanks.” (Hardy, *Crowd* 108). His firm belief in Divine Providence and the importance of humbleness and blind deference in the light of God’s omnipotence is also revealed when he advises one of his neighbours to ask for the Almighty’s permission and assistance in everything he does: “For my poor self, I always say ‘please God’ afore I do anything,” said Joseph in an unboastful voice; ‘and so should you, Cain Ball. ‘Tis a great safeguard, and might perhaps save you from being choked to death some day.” (Hardy, *Crowd* 208). But not only Joseph Poorgrass believes in the ultimate justice and power of divine or providential guidance, also the majority of his neighbours and friends share his faith. When Henery Fray, for instance, complains about the fact that Bathsheba did not appoint him as the new bailiff and blasphemously adds “There, ‘twas to be, I suppose. Your lot is your lot, and Scripture is nothing; for if you do good you don’t get rewarded according to your works, but be cheated in some mean way out of your recompense”, Mark Clark immediately objects by saying “No, no; I don’t agree with’ee there [...]. God’s a perfect gentleman in that respect” (Hardy, *Crowd* 105) and also Joseph Poorgrass argues that good deeds are generally rewarded.

Similar to the simple country folk, also the main male protagonist of the novel, Gabriel Oak, is not a man who in general rebels against his lot, but instead calmly accepts the things he cannot change. His general blind acceptance of circumstance does also not remain unnoticed by his friends and neighbours, and at one point of the story even Bathsheba professes her deep respect for his endurance and his unassuming nature, which forbids him to consider himself as the centre of the universe:

What a way Oak had, she thought, of enduring things. Boldwood, who seemed so much deeper and higher and stronger in feeling than Gabriel, had not yet learnt, any more than she herself, the simple lesson which Oak showed a mastery of by every turn and look he gave - that among the multitude of interests by which he was surrounded, those which affected his personal well-being were not the most absorbing and important in his eyes. Oak meditatively looked upon the horizon of circumstances without any special regard to his own standpoint in the midst. That was how she would wish to be. (Hardy, *Crowd* 275-276)

Gabriel’s inborn strength, which allows him to accept all blows of fate without yielding to despair, is already revealed right at the beginning of the novel, namely when one of his dogs in his overeagerness has chased the whole of his

sheep flock into a precipice. But despite the fact that this “pastoral tragedy”, as it is termed in the respective chapter heading, basically amounts to Gabriel’s financial ruin, he does not give in, but rather grows on the experience:

Gabriel was paler now. His eyes were more meditative, and his expression was more sad. He had passed through an ordeal of wretchedness which had given him more than it had taken away. He had sunk from his modest elevation as pastoral king into the very slime-pits of Siddim; but there was left to him a dignified calm he had never before known, and that indifference to fate which, though it often makes a villain of a man, is the basis of his sublimity when it does not. And thus the abasement had been exaltation, and the loss gain. (Hardy, *Crowd* 46)

After this already very expressive instance of Gabriel Oak’s resignation to the will of providence, a plenitude of other model incidents can be found in the novel, which equally show his acquiescence in chance. Indeed, he is the only character of the book who possesses the strength of braving and enduring all minor and major calamities and catastrophes fate throws in his way with a stoic mind. This also becomes conspicuous in the way he copes with Bathsheba’s rebuff. While other men, like Boldwood, are eventually destroyed by Bathsheba, who proves to be a powerful agent of fate for the men surrounding her by continuously interrupting the steady flows of their lives, Gabriel does not despair but instead remains a loyal friend to her, which eventually pays off. Although the narrator at one point of the story implies that despite what the reader might think given his outward serenity, Gabriel deep down inside is lugubrious, he is still able to control his subdued spirits since he has come to realise that “wisdom lies in moderating mere impressions” (Hardy, *Crowd* 57), an attitude which eventually turns out favourable for him. Unlike Boldwood, he never importunes Bathsheba after his proposal has been refused by her and he also never attempts to flatter her vanity, but instead shows her her faults quite plainly and unceremoniously.

However, not only woman, but in the special case of *Far from the Madding Crowd* also man, is an agent of fate. According to Elliott, the consistency with which fate throws Sergeant Troy in Boldwood’s path is striking and constitutes the root of the frustration and eventual insanity on the part of the latter (65). The fact that Boldwood obviously regards the intrusion of Sergeant Troy as the source of his misfortunes becomes distinct in a conversation between the two, which on the whole is characterised by the excessive use of the subjunctive

mood. Troy's statement "If I had not turned up she might have become engaged to you" as well as Boldwood's remark "If you had not come I should certainly - yes, *certainly* - have been accepted by this time. If you had not seen her you might have been married to Fanny" (Hardy, *Crowd* 216) clearly indicate that Troy's intrusion on the pastoral world is considered to have changed the fortunes of all the main protagonists. The fact that Troy's untoward appearance is in general regarded as the result of the operations of malignant forces is not only implied by the other characters' reactions to him, but also follows from a number of narratorial comments. For instance, the narrator does not rule out the possibility that the impression the rakish sergeant is able to make on Bathsheba during their mysterious encounter in the fir plantation is the work of the devil: "[B]y chance or by devilry, the ministrant was antecedently made interesting by being a handsome stranger who had evidently seen better days" (Hardy, *Crowd* 159). Also when a few weeks later Sergeant Troy decides to pay Bathsheba a courtesy visit and rather aggressively flatters Bathsheba's vanity, by which he achieves her eventual capitulation to his love-making, the narrator evidently considers this scene to be a turning point for evil:

The careless sergeant smiled within himself, and probably too the devil smiled from a loop-hole in Tophet, for the moment was the turning-point of a career. Her tone and mien signified beyond mistake that the seed which was to lift the foundation had taken root in the chink: the remainder was a mere question of time and natural changes. (Hardy, *Crowd* 166)

But although Sergeant Troy seems to be the agent of adverse fortune, who impedes the main characters' pursuit of happiness, it nevertheless needs to be pointed out that his destructive power does not have an effect on all the main protagonists. Despite the fact that he successfully tampers with the lives and fortunes of no less than three people, two of which face a genuinely tragic end, Gabriel Oak is able to defy him and remain unscathed by his doings. His capability of avoiding the pernicious influence of Troy is, for instance, revealed in the night of the harvest supper when Gabriel turns out to be the only man who is able to resist Sergeant Troy's invitation to engage in excessive drinking, a fortitude all the other men clearly cannot boast of:

To be just, the men were not greatly to blame for this painful and demoralizing termination of the evening's entertainment. Sergeant Troy had so strenuously insisted, glass in hand, that drinking should be the bond of their union, that those who wished to refuse hardly liked to be so unmannerly under the circumstances. (Hardy, *Crowd* 232)

Apart from Sergeant Troy and Bathsheba Everdene, whose manipulations and imprudent actions frequently also have an impact on the lives of other people, Hardy also employs other instruments of fate that once more enable Gabriel to prove his worth. Some critics have argued that the natural world in *Far from the Madding Crowd* is not merely a passive backdrop that serves to illustrate the characters' general adaptiveness or maladaptiveness respectively, but also constitutes a very powerful agent of fate, which not just once alters the course of the lives of humans. Elliott, for instance, suggests that nature plays a dominant part in shaping the lives of the protagonists (87). As has already been pointed out in the previous chapter, Gabriel Oak is a character whose nexus with his environmental surroundings renders him well-adapted to certain conditions arising from the play of natural forces. The fact that Hardy employs nature as a plot-making device already becomes evident in the scene of the straw rick fire, in which Gabriel apparently only re-enters Bathsheba's life owing to a freak of nature. The notion of nature as a force actively governing the lives of the characters also can be considered to find confirmation in the scene in which Gabriel and Bathsheba desperately try to protect the ricks from an impending storm. The violence of the storm which goes hand in hand with an anthropomorphisation of nature frequently led critics to interpret the scene in the light of a wilful intervention of the natural world. Bathsheba and Gabriel are said to deal with "an infuriated universe" (Hardy, *Crowd* 237), threatening the two of them with "diabolical sound[s]" (Hardy, *Crowd* 236) and lightning flashes, whose gloomy forms and colours obviously prefigure evil:

Heaven opened then, indeed. The flash was almost too novel for its inexpressibly dangerous nature to be at once realized, and they could only comprehend the magnificence of its beauty. It sprang from east, west, north, south, and was a perfect dance of death. The forms of skeletons appeared in the air, shaped with blue fire for bones - dancing, leaping, striding, racing around, and mingling altogether in unparalleled confusion. With these were intertwined undulating snakes of green, and behind these was a broad mass of lesser light. Simultaneously came from every part of the tumbling sky what may be called a shout; since, though no shout ever came near it, it was more of the nature of a shout than of anything else earthly. (Hardy, *Crowd* 236)

The extremely severe weather, which in its violence resembles the thunderstorm which is usually said to seal the fates of Eustacia and Wildeve in *The Return of the Native*, is indeed ominous. But although Gabriel seemingly acts recklessly by exposing himself to the ghastly weather, a notion which is

supported by musings like “Was his life so valuable to him after all? What were his prospects that he should be so chary of running risk, when important and urgent labour could not be carried on without such risk?” (Hardy, *Crowd* 235), his initial rashness is mitigated to a considerable degree by the fact that he eventually takes the necessary precautions to keep himself safe:

Under the staddles was a long tethering chain, used to prevent the escape of errant horses. This he carried up the ladder, and sticking his rod through the clog at one end, allowed the other end of the chain to trail upon the ground. The spike attached to it he drove in. Under the shadow of this extemporized lightning-conductor he felt himself comparatively safe. (Hardy, *Crowd* 235)

Although Gabriel’s actions might seem like an attempt at rebellion against nature, which in Hardy’s fictional universe hardly ever goes unpunished, his wise precautionary measures and the fact that his intervention practically constitutes a defiance of human error represented by Troy’s misjudgement of the weather situation rather than an insurgency against nature’s unchangeable laws, enable him to remain unharmed. But although the said passage cannot be regarded as a providential interposition that irrevocably changes the fates of the people involved, it nonetheless also sheds light on man’s personal responsibility when it comes to the shaping of his fortune. Indeed, the scene can be said to be indicative of the fact that an individual’s capability of surviving ultimately rests on his or her character instead of being linked to blind fate. Although we cannot tell what would have happened if Gabriel had not prudently crafted a lightning rod, his considerate and precautionous nature seems to be advantageous in the light of nature’s unpredictability. Similar to Clym Yeobright, who escapes death by drowning by “[b]ethinking himself of a wiser plan” (Hardy, *Return* 285) than Wildeve, who unthinkingly has plunged himself into the weir Eustacia has fallen into, also Gabriel’s foresight puts him at an advantage compared with characters who heedlessly pursue their objectives.

The destructive nature of improvidence and the essentiality of a willingness to compromise is already revealed very early in the novel, namely when Gabriel’s dog’s exuberance proves to be the root of the pastoral tragedy that afflicts his owner:

The young dog, George’s son, might possibly have been the image of his mother, for there was not much resemblance between him and George. He was learning the sheep-keeping business, so as to follow on at the flock when the other should die, but had got no further than the rudiments

as yet - still finding an insuperable difficulty in distinguishing between doing a thing well enough and doing it too well. So earnest and yet so wrong-headed was this young dog [...] that if sent behind the flock to help them on he did it so thoroughly that he would have chased them across the whole country with the greatest pleasure if not called off, or reminded when to stop by the example of old George. (Hardy, *Crowd* 42)

The allegoric potential of this passage is heightened to a considerable degree when the reader learns that the young dog's overzealous nature has disastrous consequences for Gabriel and eventually also himself:

George's son had done his work so thoroughly that he was considered too good a workman to live, and was, in fact, taken and tragically shot at twelve o'clock that same day - another instance of the untoward fate which so often attends dogs and other philosophers who follow out a train of reasoning to its logical conclusion, and attempt perfectly consistent conduct in a world made up so largely of compromise. (Hardy, *Crowd* 45)

The two above-quoted passages can be understood in terms of a user manual for life, which advocates the overarching importance of a readiness to compromise and the ability to yield to circumstance and basically condemns stolidity and inflexibility. By applying these directions to the novel's characters, one soon is able to perceive that Gabriel thoroughly possess the properties deemed to be crucial for survival and success, since the narrator's comment that "It is safer to accept any chance that offers itself, and extemporize a procedure to fit in, than to get a good plan matured, and wait for a chance of using it" (Hardy, *Crowd* 47) can be regarded as the verbalisation of Gabriel's constructive attitude towards life, to which he sticks from first to last and which ultimately preserves him from serious harm and heavy losses.

Gabriel's antithetical figure, Sergeant Troy, who can be regarded as an epitome of the depravity attributed to the urban space, since his intrusion on the pastoral world marks the beginning of "his ruthless efforts to revolutionize the traditional customs and thereby to subvert the conventions of order in the rural community" (Lennartz 12) and his attempts to "exploit the rural world for the income it can provide" (Squires 315), however, not only represents the ultimate inferiority of materialistic values and modernity to traditionality and solidity, but also confirms the pre-eminence of equanimity and indifference to fate. Throughout the whole novel Sergeant Troy's actions can be said to be characterised by rashness and indiscretion, they are "erratic and wild" (Squires 308). In the chapter which introduces Troy to the reader we learn that he is a very inconstant character

and that he is “a man to whom memories were an incumbrance, and anticipation a superfluity” (Hardy, *Crowd* 160). The fact that Troy entirely lives in the present and is an “erratic child of impulse” (Hardy, *Crowd* 169) also accounts for his attitude towards fate. Unlike Bathsheba, who eventually perceives that she bears part of the blame for her misfortunes, Troy wallows in self-pity and firmly sticks to the conviction that “Fate had dealt grimly with him” (Hardy, *Crowd* 289). What is more, he also denies his responsibility for Fanny Robin’s tragic end and instead chooses to shift the blame on his ill-fortune, which caused Bathsheba to cross his path: “If Satan had not tempted me with that face of yours, and those cursed coquetries, I should have married her. I never had another thought till you came in my way. Would to God that I had; but it is all too late!” (Hardy, *Crowd* 281). Troy’s unwillingness to accept responsibility for his actions eventually turns out to be fatal, since it inhibits a maturation indispensable for his survival: “There is always an inertia to be overcome in striking out a new line of conduct - not more in ourselves, it seems, than in circumscribing events, which appear as if leagued together to allow no novelties in the way of amelioration.” (Hardy, *Crowd* 289). The fact that Troy considers himself to be ill-used by fate and that continuous providential interposition renders it plain impossible for him to alter his demeanour becomes particularly conspicuous in the scene on the graveyard, in which his attempts at reparation towards Fanny, which basically consist in the planting of flowers on her grave, are thwarted by an unrelenting gargoyle, which floods his beloved’s grave and renders his efforts futile. He considers this trifling incident to be “the sharpest sting of all”, because he thinks it to be an intentional frustration of his moral amendment:

The sight, coming as it did, superimposed upon the other dark scenery of the previous days, formed a sort of climax to the whole panorama, and it was more than he could endure. Sanguine by nature, Troy had a power of eluding grief by simply adjourning it. He could put off the consideration of any particular spectre till the matter had become old and softened by time. The planting of flowers on Fanny’s grave had been perhaps but a species of elusion of the primary grief, and now it was as if his intention had been known and circumvented. (Hardy, *Crowd* 298)

The tiniest opposition to his resolve to atone for his wrongs eventually leads to utter disillusionment on his part and ultimately inhibits his moral progress:

He had not minded the peculiarities of his birth, the vicissitudes of his life, the meteor-like uncertainty of all that related to him, because these

appertained to the hero of his story, without whom there would have been no story at all for him; and it seemed to be only in the nature of things matters would right themselves at some proper date and wind up well. This very morning the illusion completed its disappearance, and, as it were, all of a sudden, Troy hated himself. (Hardy, *Crowd* 298)

Unlike Gabriel Oak, who possesses the necessary strength to cope with all kinds of strokes of fate without being broken in spirit, or Bathsheba, who eventually learns from her mistakes, amends her approach to life and reconsiders her values, Troy's nature forbids him to evolve and leads to his ultimate destruction:

'He that is accursed, let him be accursed still,' was the pitiless anathema written in this spoliated effort of his new-born solicitousness. A man who has spent his primal strength in journeying in one direction has not much spirit left for reversing his course. Troy had, since yesterday, faintly reversed his; but the merest opposition had disheartened him. To turn about would have been hard enough under the greatest providential encouragement; but to find that Providence, far from helping him into a new course, or showing any wish that he might adopt one, actually jeered his first trembling and critical attempt in that kind, was more than nature could bear. (Hardy, *Crowd* 297)

As has been shown by the example of Sergeant Troy, the ability to yield to one's fate without despairing of it is a necessary asset for meeting the challenges of life the characters in Thomas Hardy's novels are frequently presented with. Besides Gabriel Oak practically no other character possesses the same indifference to fate and resignation he displays. Most of them are yet at the learning stage and eventually only one character is able to roughly approximate the ideal that is represented by him, namely Bathsheba. Bathsheba, whose character on the outset of the book strikingly resembles the ill-advised nature of Gabriel's dog, is eventually able to ripen and mature owing the trials and hardships she is faced with. Although she "never achieves the inner peace that true resignation brings Oak in Hardy's world, she nonetheless progresses from despair to a kind of stasis" (Nelson 53). Her learning process already sets in after she has realised the destructive nature of her injudicious letter to Boldwood. We learn that "[i]t troubled her much to see what a great flame a little wildfire was likely to kindle" and that she consequently resolves to "never again, by look or by sign, interrupt the steady flow of this man's life" (Hardy, *Crowd* 121). This learning process, which has been set in motion by her twinge of regret, however, is only fully realised when she herself is confronted

with tribulation. Analogous to the discarding of her pride and vanity, also her attitude towards fate undergoes a radical change. While Bathsheba's outlook was characterised by a kind of pessimism that becomes a genuinely tragic heroine like Tess or Eustacia, which follows from statements like "What shall I come to! I suppose I shall get further and further into troubles. I wonder sometimes if I am doomed to die in the Union. I am friendless enough, God knows!" (Hardy, *Crowd* 189), she eventually is able to adopt a more passive and stoic stance on her future. Her resignation to fate, which enables her to stop apprehending the things that are to come and bear her misfortunes phlegmatically, is initiated soon after her fierce quarrel with Troy. After a brief contemplation of running away from home, she ultimately decides to stand her ground and subject herself to the miserable circumstances she inflicted on herself:

'[...]I've altered my mind. It is only women with no pride in them who run away from their husbands. There is one position worse than that of being found dead in your husband's house from his ill-usage, and that is, to be found alive through having gone away to the house of somebody else. I've thought of it all the morning, and I've chosen my course. A runaway wife is an encumbrance to everybody, a burden to herself and a byword - all of which make up a heap of misery greater than any that comes by staying at home - though this may include the trifling items of insult, beating, and starvation. Liddy, if ever you marry - God forbid that you ever should! - you'll find yourself in a fearful situation; but mind this, don't you flinch. Stand your ground, and be cut to pieces. That's what I'm going to do.' (Hardy, *Crowd* 286)

Since she holds herself at fault for the predicaments she finds herself in she is even able to quench touches of self-pity that stem from her hurt pride and vanity. Her initial desire to pass the time with readings that mirror her disconsolate situation, like *The Maid's Tragedy* and *The Mourning Bride*, soon subsides and she orders Liddy to fetch some books that strikingly contrast with her present mood: "I won't read dismal books. Why should I read dismal books, indeed? Bring me *Love in a Village*, and the *Maid of the Mill*, and *Doctor Syntax*, and some volumes of the *Spectator*." (Hardy, *Crowd* 287). For quite an amount of time Bathsheba lives in a kind of stasis and despite the fact that she considers her future prospects to be dismal, she neither rebels against what she considers to be her fate nor does she dread it:

Hence Bathsheba lived in a perception that her purposes were broken off. She was not a woman who could hope on without good materials for the process, differing thus from the less far-sighted and energetic, though

more petted ones of the sex, with whom hope goes on as a sort of clockwork which the merest food and shelter are sufficient to wind up; and perceiving clearly that her mistake had been a fatal one, she accepted her position, and waited coldly for the end. (Hardy, *Crowd* 304)

All in all, it may be said that although Bathsheba's radical change of heart might seem like utter disillusionment on her part at first sight, it cannot be denied that her alteration proves to be a *sine qua non* for her survival. Since "Oak functions as a standard of value at the center of the novel" against which the other characters are measured "according to how closely they approach him in character" (Squires 311), Bathsheba's trials eventually prove to have a beneficial effect. Her misfortunes ultimately allow her to grow in spirit and enable her to approximate Gabriel's sturdiness and persistence, two character traits that can be said to constitute necessary means of survival, since "[t]hose who approach [Gabriel's] character [...] are rewarded in terms of the world created by the novel; those who do not are purged." (Squires 311).

5.3. The shift of tragedy: Fanny Robin and Farmer Boldwood

Despite the fact that the main storyline of *Far from the Madding Crowd* closely resembles the pastoral by its rural setting and the depiction of amorous complications which are eventually dissolved, it nonetheless needs to be pointed out that this "version of pastoral is one that functions in dark and unsettling ways" (Regan 246). Although the novel constitutes a nostalgic celebration of the rural way of life with a strong focus on its idyllic rather than its coarse sides on the surface, it also displays certain elements that clearly mark a departure from the genre:

In *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) there is no perpetual summer, no frolicking sheep, no piping shepherds who live without care. Instead, there are many realistic details of actual rural life: sheep die, storms threaten, shepherds have misfortunes both 'amorous and pastoral,' peasants work, and unhappiness and despair are spattered over the second half of the novel. (Squires 299)

Regan claims that also other popular forms, like satire, melodrama and sensationalism, found their way into the novel, which becomes especially obvious regarding Fanny Robin and Boldwood's stories (246). Although the novel's main characters, Gabriel and Bathsheba, according to Hornback are "comic romance characters" (51), who after a series of hardships both possess the necessary moral strength to defy adversities and are eventually united in

happiness, the book does not omit the stories of characters whose deficiencies bring disaster on them: “Hardy manages the balance and mixture of comedy and pathos well in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. In Fanny Robin and Boldwood he has the characters of a pathetic, near-tragic story, and in Oak and his chorus of supporters he has the cast for a comedy.” (Hornback 56). It may be said that the book’s tragic characters serve a dual purpose: first, the moral imperfections of characters like Fanny, Boldwood and Sergeant Troy and the complications arising from them enable characters like Gabriel and Bathsheba to prove themselves, and secondly they provide a powerful image of the destructive nature of particular character traits that the more comic characters need to avoid or discard in order to survive. Although a character like Sergeant Troy fails to arouse sympathy on the part of the reader due to his thoroughly immoral and thoughtless conduct and his ultimate unwillingness to make the necessary amends, it cannot be denied that his intrusion on the pastoral scene plays an important role in demonstrating the superiority of Gabriel’s enduring and altruistic country nature over the vanity and selfishness he embodies. While Troy’s entirely antithetical status to the novel’s hero fails to make his end a genuinely tragic one, but rather creates the impression that he got what he deserved, the case is clearly more complicated with Fanny and Boldwood, since the events leading up to their destruction are of a far more complex and diverse nature and, therefore, need further explication.

Regarding Fanny Robin, it may be said that her story is intended to function as a contrast to Bathsheba’s fate (Harvey 64). While Bathsheba “provides a model in the novel for how modification increases an organism’s capacity for survival”, Fanny and other characters have to “suffer because they cannot successfully adapt to change” (Mistichelli 57). However, not only the denouements of their stories contrast sharply with each other, but already the way they are introduced can be said to be strikingly different. Although the reader’s first encounter with the novel’s female main protagonist already shows her character flaws quite plainly, it is nevertheless also indicative of her self-assertion and her reluctance to bend to the authority of men, which is demonstrated by her argument with the gatekeeper. Fanny’s first appearance in the novel, however, is of an entirely different nature. While Bathsheba’s arrival on the scene is characterised by the use of bright colour imagery, the first references to Fanny are made with the

rather indistinct words “form” and “shape”, which according to Nelson serve to dehumanise her (27). After a series of unsuccessful attempts to hit Troy’s window of the army barracks with a snowball, she finally succeeds and a conversation ensues between the two. Their whole conversation is characterised by the “use of plaintive and petitionary terms” (Nelson 28) on Fanny’s part and a rather dismissive and cool attitude by Troy. Troy’s depreciatory question “What girl are you?” (Hardy, *Crowd* 88), his pretence not to remember the promise of marriage he has given her, and his conceited answer “Well - you have to get proper clothes” (Hardy, *Crowd* 89) to Fanny’s question when their wedding is going to be, already bespeaks his irresponsibility and perfunctoriness. However, the dialogue also reveals some of Fanny’s fundamental character flaws. Although her active pursuit of Troy seems like assertiveness on the surface, her actions are actually triggered by fear and desperation (Mistichelli 58). Her reverential attitude and subdued spirit clearly become distinct in her responses to Troy’s negligent statements. When confronted with Troy’s obvious displeasure at seeing her, she not only asks for his forgiveness for coming to the barracks, but eventually also concedes that her conduct was improper: “It was wrong of me to worry you. I’ll go away now.” (Hardy, *Crowd* 90). Unlike Bathsheba, who hardly ever confesses a fault towards men, Fanny is too ready to accept blame and is on the defensive. Her regard for Troy’s feelings and her facile optimism are further revealed in her letter to Gabriel Oak, which is intended to thank him for his benevolence on a previous meeting between them and return the shilling to him he kindly has given her: “I write to thank you for your kindness to me the night I left Weatherbury in a reckless way. I also return the money I owe you, which you will excuse my not keeping as a gift.” (Hardy, *Crowd* 109-110). The fact that Fanny feels compelled to apologise for not accepting so trifling a gift, clearly shows that she “places [Troy’s] feelings, as she sees them, above her own and Oak’s” (Mistichelli 58), since she holds the opinion that Troy would clearly not approve of his fiancé’s taking gifts from strangers: “He would, I know, object to my having received anything except as a loan, being a man of great respectability and high honour - indeed, a nobleman by blood” (Hardy, *Crowd* 110). However, the letter not only demonstrates Fanny’s highly deferential nature and her complete misjudgement of Troy’s person, but also quite

obviously reveals her striking naivety, which eventually proves to be fatal. Since she states that "All has ended well" in view of the mere prospect of marrying her lover, it becomes quite plain that she has lost her grasp on reality. Instead of arousing enthusiasm on Boldwood's part, to whom Gabriel also shows the letter, knowing him to be Fanny's benefactor, it produces the opposite effect: "Fanny - poor Fanny! the end she is so confident of has not yet come, she should remember - and may never come" (Hardy, *Crowd* 110). Contrary to Fanny, Boldwood is of the opinion that Troy is "not one to build much hope upon in such a case as this" and remains doubtful of a happy ending: "I have much doubt if ever little Fanny will surprise us in the way she mentions - very much doubt. A silly girl - silly girl!" (Hardy, *Crowd* 110). Despite the fact that Fanny is surely at a disadvantage compared to Bathsheba, since she is not financially independent, and that coincidence also plays a role to seal her fate, because she goes to the wrong church at the day appointed for their wedding, her blind faith still may be said to be to her detriment and makes her vulnerable and eventually leads to her destruction. The dominant role of this particular character flaw also becomes manifest when she, using the last of her strength, desperately tries to drag herself to the workhouse in Casterbridge and tries to find the necessary inner strength for the seemingly endless walk by continuously persuading herself that her destination is merely five posts away: "I'll believe that the end lies five posts forward, and no further, and so get the strength to pass them." (Hardy, *Crowd* 250). As with Troy, Fanny here again adheres to her "principle that a half-feigned and fictitious faith is better than no faith at all" (Hardy, *Crowd* 250). But although this "paradoxical truth that blindness may operate more vigorously than prescience, and that the short-sighted effect more than the far-seeing; that limitation, and not comprehensiveness, is needed for striking a blow" affords her the necessary strength of travelling a few miles in that fashion, she eventually collapses eight hundred yards before her designation:

Every conceivable aid, method, stratagem, mechanism, by which these last desperate eight hundred yards could be overpassed by a human being unperceived, was revolved in her busy brain, and dismissed as impracticable. She thought of sticks, wheels, crawling - she even thought of rolling. But the exertion demanded by either of these latter two was greater than to walk erect. The faculty of contrivance was worn out. Hopelessness had come at last. 'No further!' she whispered, and closed her eyes. (Hardy, *Crowd* 250-251)

In summary, it may be said that although Fanny's blind faith enables her to come a long way, both on the Casterbridge highway and with Sergeant Troy, it is the same character flaw that prevents her from reaching her goals. Despite the fact that she successfully appeals to Troy's conscience by bursting into tears in front of him and gets him to consent to marry her, she ultimately is unable to tie the knot. But although the appointed wedding does not take place owing to a mere coincidence, namely because Fanny confuses the town's two churches, one cannot avoid the impression that a marital bond with Troy would have been just as fatal as its coincidental prevention, owing to Fanny's "mistaken notions of what will bring her fulfillment" (Mistichelli 58) and her insistence on the essential goodness of a villainous character like Troy, a conception which is certainly foredoomed to cause disillusionment and sorrow on her part.

Similar to Fanny, also Boldwood founders on his mistaken ideas and the high ideals he has of the woman he has fallen in love with. Although he is able to discern Fanny's foolishness in putting her trust in Troy's words, he is unable to take the same detached perspective when it comes to his own love life. This particular weakness already becomes obvious when he receives Bathsheba's ill-advised letter and allows his world to be thrown out of joint by it. Due to the fact that Boldwood is a very sober and dignified man, he is unable to conceive the valentine's original cause to tease him, and "the letter and its dictum changed their tenor from the thoughtlessness of their origin to deep solemnity" (Hardy, *Crowd* 99). His general austerity leads him to assign a more serious motive to it than it can actually boast of:

It is foreign to a mystified condition of mind to realize of the mystifier that the processes of approving a course suggested by circumstance, and of striking out a course from inner impulse, would look like the same in the result. The vast difference between starting a train of events, and directing in a particular groove a series already started, is rarely apparent to the person confounded by the issue. (Hardy, *Crowd* 99-100)

His "blindness to the difference between approving of what circumstances suggest, and originating what they do not suggest" (Hardy, *Crowd* 116) eventually turns out to be destructive. Once his passion for Bathsheba is kindled, he loses himself in it completely:

The phases of Boldwood's life were ordinary enough, but his was not an ordinary nature. That stillness, which struck casual observers more than

anything else in his character and habit, and seemed so precisely like the rest of inanition, may have been the perfect balance of enormous antagonistic forces - positives and negatives in fine adjustment. His equilibrium disturbed, he was in extremity at once. If an emotion possessed him at all, it ruled him; a feeling not mastering him was entirely latent. Stagnant or rapid, it was never slow. He was always hit mortally, or he was missed. (Hardy, *Crowd* 118)

Unlike Gabriel, whose actions and feelings in general tend to avoid extremes and of whom we are told that Bathsheba's presence is sufficient to render him content, Boldwood does not rest until he possesses her heart and soul and does not take into account Bathsheba's wishes and needs. Mistichelli points out that although "Boldwood's feelings are heartfelt, they show how much he is dominated by presuppositions about his role in courtship and marriage and too little about what Bathsheba would need and want" (59). His inability to adapt to Bathsheba's needs likens him to "an organism that has grown narrow in its capability to adapt to circumstances and, therefore, has become vulnerable to extinction" (Mistichelli 60). Additionally, his incapacity to moderate his passionate feelings for Bathsheba makes "his behavior [appear] to be unnatural and perverse [...] given the qualities attributed to nature and its norm - Gabriel Oak - in *Far from the Madding Crowd*" (Babb, 154). While Oak remains steady in his course throughout the whole novel, Boldwood's desperation prompts him to assimilate his ways with Troy's once he has noticed Bathsheba's predilection for him. In order to please his beloved he acknowledges "that [his] present way of living is bad in every respect" (Hardy, *Crowd* 124) and in the course of the book "becomes more and more pointedly linked with a civilized world" (Babb 155) as represented by the villainous Troy. The contrast between Boldwood at the outset of the novel and its closing is indeed striking:

To image his career oversimply, but not untruthfully: shortly after Boldwood enters the story, we learn how he meditates in the barn, drawing comfort from the nearness of the horses [...]; towards the end of the novel, we are shown him absorbed with his tailor in the fitting of a coat he will wear to his Christmas party for Bathsheba. (Babb 155)

But although Boldwood considers Bathsheba's letter to be the spring of his misery and misfortunes, which becomes obvious from statements like "Would to God you had never taken me up, since it was only to throw me down!" (Hardy, *Crowd* 194), it is first and foremost his inability to deal adequately and composedly with setbacks that accounts for his infelicity. Unlike Gabriel, who equally is not immune to amorous and pastoral misfortunes, but still tries to

make the best of it and wins through all difficulties, Boldwood eventually breaks under the strain of unrequited love. When Bathsheba asks him to forgive her and look cheerfully at the complications having arisen from her valentine, Boldwood answers in the following way: "Cheerfully! Can a man fooled to utter heartburning find a reason for being merry? If I have lost, how can I be as if I had won?" (Hardy, *Crowd* 194). The fact that the trials he underwent owing to Bathsheba's continuous rebuffs rather served to break than make him also becomes obvious in the scene of the storm. While Gabriel and Bathsheba feverishly try to protect their ricks from the rather severe weather, Boldwood's utterly distracted mind makes him neglect his duty and his harvest is subsequently spoiled:

It is difficult to describe the intensely dramatic effect that announcement had upon Oak at such a moment. All the night he had been feeling that the neglect he was labouring to repair was abnormal and isolated - the only instance of the kind within the circuit of the country. Yet at this very time, within the same parish, a greater waste had been going on, uncomplained of and disregarded. A few months earlier Boldwood's forgetting his husbandry would have been as preposterous an idea as a sailor forgetting he was in a ship. Oak was just thinking that whatever he himself might have suffered from Bathsheba's marriage, here was a man who had suffered more [...]. (Hardy, *Crowd* 242)

Unlike Gabriel, who clearly possesses "the repose of a man whom misfortune had inured rather than subdued" (Hardy, *Crowd* 243), Boldwood indulges in self-pity and is unable to grow on his misfortunes:

I am weak and foolish, and I don't know what, and I can't fend off my miserable grief! ... I had some faint belief in the mercy of God till I lost that woman. Yes, He prepared a gourd to shade me, and like the prophet I thanked Him and was glad. But the next day He prepared a worm to smite the gourd and wither it; and I feel it is better to die than to live! (Hardy, *Crowd* 243).

All in all, it may be said that both Fanny and Boldwood's stories provide a striking contrast to Gabriel and Bathsheba. Although *Far from the Madding Crowd* is primarily a pastoral novel focusing on the depiction of a rural idyll, Hardy does not omit tragic possibilities. While Gabriel and Bathsheba eventually find happiness due to their solid and enduring character dispositions, the novel also shows quite plainly that characters who do not possess the same strengths and favourable character traits, are likely to perish, even in such a rural and idyllic context as the setting of *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Although both Fanny and Boldwood are inherently good characters, who possess an

essentially altruistic nature, they nevertheless turn out to be maladapted to the pastoral environment, which after the intrusion of Sergeant Troy has become a considerably rougher place demanding self-assertion and perseverance of those who wish to persist.

6. Conclusion

In summary, it may be said that although Hardy's protagonists are confronted with a plethora of forces beyond their control, like fate, chance and hereditary and environmental determination, their capacity for survival is ultimately determined by their character disposition. Although all the novels discussed in this thesis make numerous references to these compelling forces, their dissimilar treatments and the variety of effects they have on Thomas Hardy's characters imply that their authority is not definite. The lack of conclusive statements alluding to the consequences of these phenomena and the overall vagueness surrounding them, quite clearly becomes obvious regarding hereditary determination, a concept which is probably most extensively elaborated on in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* due to Hardy's preoccupation with the theme while working on the novel. The fact that already the book's title lays emphasis on the heroine's status as a member of the d'Urberville lineage as well as the general thematic preoccupation with the motif of genetic determinism, subsequently serve to associate the totality of Tess's actions with her ancestry. Both narratorial comments and statements made by the protagonists are intended to stress the importance of genealogy. Moreover, the discrepancy between Tess's humble social station and certain character traits she displays prompted critics to interpret these qualities in the context of her d'Urberville inheritance. Especially Tess's pride and her sudden violent outbursts have frequently been associated with her knightly ancestors. But despite the fact that the destructive side of the heroine's pride, her "reckless acquiescence in chance" and her physical appearance, all of which are considered to be gifts from her forefathers, is shown quite plainly throughout the whole book, it cannot be denied that the novel falls short of making statements of direct causality. Whenever Tess's character flaws are attributed to her legacy, the narrator's tone becomes tentative and speculative, which ultimately renders the agency of heredity dubious. What is more, although the novel continuously alludes to the deterministic potential of genealogy, it also contains a number of passages that clearly argue against an interpretation of Tess's tragedy as a product of hereditary determination and rather lay stress on its imaginary instead of its actual value.

Similar to biological determination, also the significance of chance events and providential guidance remains rather doubtful. Although all three novels under consideration contain numerous references to malevolent deities and the operations of other malignant supernatural forces, the actual extent of their authority over the protagonists' fortunes remains ambiguous: "Though Hardy quite often appears to use fate or destiny with the implication that the pattern of the lives of his characters [...] is already laid out ahead of them, that they have no control over their future, that implication is more apparent than real." (Gatrell, "Fate" 127). The overabundance of fortuitous events and ill-omens and evil forebodings in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* frequently led critics to interpret Tess's demise in the context of predestination. Additionally, the use of vocabulary stressing the immutability of the course of events, as well as a number of statements made by the main protagonist referring to the limitations of human free will and the hopelessness of her situation promote such a reading. Also *The Return of the Native* is permeated by a superstitious undertone. Both the statements and actions of the denizens of Egdon Heath suggest their fatalistic attitude and their proneness to superstitious beliefs. Also the main protagonist's pessimistic outlook and the fact that she blames fate for her adversities hints at the operation of malevolent forces behind the scenes holding sway over the characters' fortunes. But despite the fact that Tess and Eustacia's ultimate destruction appears to confirm their pessimistic forebodings, it is first and foremost their attitude towards fate that determines their tragic ends. This assumption is confirmed when contemplating the characters that survive the operations of fate and chance. The fact that not only gloomy characters like Tess and Eustacia are brought into quandaries, but that also more sanguine characters like Gabriel Oak and Diggory Venn are faced with adversities and grow by the experience instead of perishing by it, strongly indicates that Thomas Hardy's characters retain a certain degree of agency in the shaping of their destinies. Although it cannot be denied that the lives of characters like Clym Yeobright, Diggory Venn, Gabriel Oak and Bathsheba Everdene are somewhat complicated by unfortunate accidents and that they equally are not spared from calamities, they manage to keep their suffering to comparatively minimal dimensions owing to their resigned attitude. Based on this assumption it can be argued that it is primarily the tragic characters' tendency to lay the

blame for their misfortunes on external forces instead of realising their own faults and making the necessary adjustments to their situations that accounts for their misfortunes. The fact that characters like Eustacia Vye desperately rebel against their condition and try to force their wills on their environment instead of yielding up to circumstance, insinuates that their misfortunes largely stem from their rigidity and inflexibility instead of the inexorability of fate.

While a causal relationship between the misfortunes of Thomas Hardy's tragic heroines and heroes and hereditary determination and/or providential predestination respectively clearly cannot be established, the effect of environmental determination is more obvious. The notion that the characters' surroundings in Hardy's novels both condition and constrain them is a widespread notion among critics. Not only does the protagonists' milieu have a bearing on their nature, as has been demonstrated with regard to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, but the stance they take on their environments also determines their ultimate failure or success. Although it seems that Thomas Hardy takes great pains to present the protagonists' natural surroundings as conscious agents rather than passive backdrops, it is ultimately the characters' reaction to their environment that seals their fates. Darwin's concept of adaptation and maladaptation respectively proves to be a powerful source of the characters' capacity to survive. While Tess and Eustacia's failure to adapt to the demands of their environments makes them vulnerable, the consonance between characters like Diggory Venn, Gabriel Oak and Clym Yeobright and their environment proves to be favourable. Unlike Eustacia, who considers the environment of Egdon Heath as an antagonistic force committed to her destruction and eventually founders on her misguided notions, characters who display patient endurance when faced with the destructive side of natural forces are generally rewarded.

All in all, it may be said that "[w]ithin every one of Hardy's novels, major and minor, the *possibility* of pastoral happiness - a harmonic relationship with the natural world, earthly and heavenly - exists" (Gossin 201) and that the realisation of it merely depends on the protagonist's character. Although it cannot be denied that the operations of external forces like fate and chance and internal forces like hereditary compulsion are powerful narratorial devices

intended to move the plot into predetermined directions, the actual effects of these concepts on the protagonists' lives is minimal compared with the impetus of their character disposition. It is ultimately Tess's pride and passivity, whether they are inherited or not, Eustacia's impetuosity and arrogance, Mrs. Yeobright's overbearing love for her son, Wildeve's inconsiderateness, Fanny Robin's naivety and blind faith and Boldwood's inability to retain a stoic mind when faced with Bathsheba's unrequited love that proves to be fatal and inhibits their pursuit of happiness. The binary opposition existing between Thomas Hardy's protagonists which emerges from the juxtaposition of rigid characters who try to impose their will on the world, and flexible characters, who humbly meet the challenges they are presented with and yield to circumstance instead of making desperate efforts to avert the changes resulting from it, eventually allows the author to "pinpoint the essential combination of characteristics" (Nelson 168) a genuinely successful hero or heroine should possess. A character's survival and success is based on "a complex combination of traits" and Hardy allows the reader to perceive "through considerable contrast and comparison, the precise alignments which make success possible" (Nelson 169). Only characters who are well-adapted to their environment, whose character disposition avoids extremes and who show a certain indifference to fate, which ultimately allows them to come out of a crisis strengthened rather than being deflated by it, are able to persist in the harsh environment of Thomas Hardy's fictional universe. In deference of Gabriel Oak, who probably constitutes the only character of Hardy's novels who has been able to internalise the premises for pastoral happiness and is able to meet the high standards of his creator without being flat, I intend to conclude this thesis with a quote from Joseph Poorgress, one of the minor characters of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, which constitutes an apt synopsis of Gabriel Oak's formula for success: "But since 'tis as 'tis, why, it might have been worse, and I feel my thanks accordingly." (Hardy, *Crowd* 374).

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Abstract

Obwohl es sich bei Thomas Hardy um einen Autor handelt, der zeit seines Lebens und auch nach seinem Tod auf breites wissenschaftliches Interesse gestoßen ist, gab es bislang kaum literaturwissenschaftliche Abhandlungen, die es sich zur Aufgabe gemacht haben eine umfassende Darstellung und Analyse seiner Werke bezüglich der Konzepte Schicksal, Zufall und Determinismus anzustreben. Da es sich bei diesen Konzepten um poetologische Konstrukte handelt, die das Leben seiner Charaktere und deren Erfolg beziehungsweise Niedergang nachhaltig beeinflussen, hat es sich die vorliegende Diplomarbeit zum Ziel gesetzt, die tatsächlichen Auswirkungen dieser Konzepte anhand von drei ausgewählten Romanen zu untersuchen. Das erste Großkapitel bietet einen einleitenden Überblick über die wissenschaftlichen und philosophischen Theorien, die Thomas Hardys Werdegang als Autor geprägt haben und deren Einfluss sich auch in den in dieser Diplomarbeit behandelten Romanen nachweisen lässt. Es ließ sich feststellen, dass Thomas Hardys Weltansicht nicht einer konsistenten Lebensphilosophie entspricht, sondern sich vielmehr aus einem breiten Spektrum korrelierender, teilweise jedoch auch einander widersprechender, Theorien zusammensetzt. Auch in den drei besprochenen Werken *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *The Return of the Native* und *Far from the Madding Crowd* wird ein Zusammenwirken von verschiedenen Kräften fassbar, deren kunstvolles Wechselspiel einen glücklichen oder tragischen Ausgang der Geschichte zu bedingen scheint. Alle drei Romane weisen eine Vielzahl an Anspielungen auf die oben genannten Konzepte auf. Doch obwohl alle Protagonisten der besprochenen Werke mit den Kräften Zufall und Schicksal und genetischem bzw. umweltbedingtem Determinismus in mehr oder minder gleichem Ausmaß konfrontiert werden, sind nicht alle Charaktere gleichermaßen zum Scheitern verurteilt. Anhand von Vergleichen ließ sich feststellen, dass der freie Wille von Hardys Protagonisten, obgleich dieser vom Wirken universaler Kräfte eingeschränkt zu sein scheint, keineswegs annulliert ist. Obwohl schicksalsträchtige Ereignisse, unglückliche Zufälle und soziale und umweltbedingte Einflussfaktoren das Leben von Hardys Protagonisten oftmals aus den Fugen geraten lassen und weitreichende Komplikationen nach sich ziehen, konnte aufgezeigt werden, dass individuelle Persönlichkeitsmerkmale schlussendlich das Schicksal von Hardys Protagonisten entscheiden.

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