*Et in Arcadia Ego*: Death, Fortitude and the Birth of Wessex in Thomas Hardy’s *Far from the Madding Crowd*

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**Abstract**

As has long been recognized, Thomas Hardy’s *Far from the Madding Crowd* transcends simple pastoral idealization by integrating the harsh realities of labour, economic instability, and mortality into its narrative. The early episodes of the novel, in which the chief characters, Gabriel and Bathsheba, are introduced as potential lovers, culminates in the catastrophic loss of Gabriel’s entire flock of sheep. Other key scenes of the novel also feature untimely early deaths, that of Fanny Robin and of Sergeant Troy, highlighting the persistent shadow of mortality over pastoral life. Written during a period of personal turmoil – Hardy was mourning the suicide of his friend Horace Moule while beginning marriage with Emma Lavinia Gifford – the novel serves as both a pastoral tale and a meditation on death. To keep his promise to the editor of *Cornhill* of ‘a pastoral tale’, such as would fit with the magazine’s usual fare and tenor required careful management of scenes like the death of the sheep and the opening of Fanny’s coffin. Repeatedly we see the narrator deflect away from the abject and toward the beauty of the surrounding natural world in a narrative strategy often enhanced through allusions to the visual arts. This psychological work in the novel during Hardy’s bereavement is put under pressure in the treatment of Troy, whose life (emerging in the wake of Moule’s death) closely corresponded with that of Moule. Troy’s elimination from the narrative to make way for the pastoral conclusion is brought about by clearly differentiating him from Anglo-Saxon natives of Wessex. Troy, as an ‘outsider’ due to his French lineage that is linked with his flaws, contrasts sharply with the local characters’ Englishness that is tested and proven worthy by contrast in times of adversity. The incursion and removal of ‘outsiders’ in Hardy’s Wessex, first conceptualized in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, thus reflects a deeper ideological project – the construction and protection of a distinct notion of Englishness.

**Keywords:** Arcadia, pastoral, death, abjection, Wessex.

Critics have long recognized that Hardy’s depiction of rustic life is far from being in the form of simplistic idealization; a shepherd piping with ‘Arcadian sweetness’ (*Far from the Madding Crowd*, 45) cannot lose sight of the hardships of labour, the vagaries of the natural world, economic precarity or mortality. Indeed, all of these elements that overshadow bucolic life are present or implicit in the climactic scene of a chapter subtitled ‘A Pastoral Tragedy’ in the first installment of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, when Gabriel Oak looks over the precipice of a cliff to see ‘the bodies of two hundred sheep, two hundred mangled carcasses, representing in their condition just now at least two hundred more’ (40-41). In this moment Oak witnesses not only the sudden loss of his livelihood but the loss of his dream of pastoral contentment in which he is established as an independent farmer, married to Bathsheba Everdene. This early scene is echoed in the novel’s later tragic and climactic scenes – the revelation of the death of the pregnant Fanny Robin, whose pulse Gabriel likens to ‘the same quick, hard beat in the femoral artery of his lambs when overdriven’ (54), and the death of Troy, who has reflected that he ‘may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb’ (172). ‘Et in Arcadia Ego’ we are constantly reminded in this novel,[[1]](#endnote-1) in which a long-awaited romantic relationship between Gabriel and Bathsheba begins in a graveyard, beside a tombstone.

 The mixed modality of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, with melodramatic and tragic events of the narrative fitted to a pastoral month-by-month narrative arc concluding with a long-deferred marital union may, in part, be accounted for by the circumstances in which it was written. Hardy began the novel when he was grieving the death by suicide of his close friend and mentor, Horace Moule, and he finished it when beginning married life with Emma Lavinia Gifford after a lengthy long-distance courtship*. Far from the Madding Crowd* is not only ‘a pastoral tale’ (*Life and Work* 97) as promised to his editor, Leslie Stephen, but a meditation on death and a reworking of stoic Christian poetry of the graveyard school like Gray’s ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’ (1751), from which the novel’s title was taken. As with Gray’s ‘Elegy,’ which reaches beyond the present time of its setting and invites reflection on the past of England, the dominant mood arising from Hardy’s meditation on death in *Far from the Madding Crowd* is one that incorporates ‘gentle nostalgia, poignant memories, and resignation’ (Williams, *Prophetic* 108). In what follows I explore the careful, artistic management of death in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, written at a time when Hardy was psychologically reeling from Moule’s suicide. What I argue is not simply that the novel reflects the psychological accommodation of loss Hardy was facing in the year of his marriage, but that the emergence of what was to become his trademark concept of Wessex in the penultimate chapter of this novel is related to his meditations on death and responses to crisis in the novel. What I will ultimately suggest is that the introduction of the concept of ‘Wessex’ is coupled with the construction of a sense of national identity, which is forged in this novel through the pastoral mode. Responses to death in the novel ultimately prove to be a test of Englishness and as such are part of the ideological project that emerges in this novel with the creation of Wessex in Hardy’s fiction.

In November 1872, Leslie Stephen wrote to Hardy as the author of *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), commending his descriptions of country life and inviting him to write a serial for *Cornhill* magazine (Maitland 270-71). Although still writing *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), Hardy proposed a story in which ‘the chief characters would probably be a young woman-farmer, a shepherd, and a sergeant of cavalry’ (*Life and Work* 97). The following year he began to submit the first chapters of the novel for monthly instalments published from January to December 1874. He wrote swiftly to keep apace with publication; the final chapters were, he recalled afterwards, ‘done at a gallop’ (*Life and Work* 103). The phrase ‘far from the madding crowd’ suits as a title because ‘the setting of the novel is an area remote from an urban world, much like the settings of traditional pastoral,’ as Michael Squires notes (304), but Gray’s ‘Elegy,’ from which it was taken has a much deeper resonance with the novel in its entirety and with Hardy’s work as a whole. The ashes-to-flame motif (l. 92) would have appealed to him, as would the attempt to bring about a virtual reversal from death to life via memory, through writing. Like many elegies, Gray’s ‘Elegy’ immortalizes the dead through presenting ideas and images of them as they were in life. Thus, the speaker presents us with the image of the housewife and the children by the blazing hearth, and the image of the labourer in the field at harvest. These images of life are in stark contrast with what lies beneath those rugged elms, suggested in the phrase ‘Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap’ (38). Hardy was drawn to this line from Gray’s poem, using it as a chapter heading in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, in which Stephen Smith unwittingly courts Elfride on the very tomb in which her former lover is laid, bringing the contrast between life and death starkly to our visual imagination.

Hardy seems to have been fascinated by the idea of the proximity of death to a pair of lovers. To accompany ‘Her Dilemma,’ a poem written in 1866 and published in *Wessex Poems and Other Verses* in 1898, he illustrated such a dramatized scene that takes place in the poem.

IMAGE TO BE ADDED

Figure 1 Illustration by Thomas Hardy accompanying ‘Her Dilemma.’ *Wessex Poems and Other Verses* (1st edition) New York; London: Harper & Brothers, 1898, p. 25. OCLC 5959488. Reproduced under Creative Commons.

Hardy’s illustration for the scene from the poem, which takes place in a ‘sunless church’ with ‘mildewed walls’ (1-2), is an architect’s twist on the kind of cross-sectional thinking invited by Gray’s ‘Elegy’ when it invokes the image of a gravebed as a ‘mouldering heap’ – a reminder of the putrefaction underfoot. That phrase from Gray’s ‘Elegy’ brings us momentarily into the realm of the graveyard poets, whose meditations on mortality included reference to ‘skulls and coffins, epitaphs and worms’ (Blair, *The Grave*, 1743, 23). In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva has defined our repulsion to such images as abjection. That which is abject, she writes, is ‘at the border of my condition as a living being’ (3). ‘The corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border,’ Kristeva writes ‘that has encroached upon everything’ (3). ‘It is death infecting life’ (4). Death remains as a presence underfoot in Gray’s ‘Elegy,’ but it is intriguing to find how Gray manages that border that threatens to collapse the distinction between life and death. Anne Williams has observed that ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’ is distinct from poems of the graveyard school as ‘Gray avoids any effort to express or arouse terror, the hallmark of the tradition he evokes’ (108). The voice of Gray’s ‘Elegy,’ as Williams puts it, ‘is that of a psyche persistently defending itself against intense emotions’ (108). In *Far from the Madding Crowd* we see a similar avoidance of ideas related to the physical corruption of death and a need to transform death into art that we see in Gray’s ‘Elegy,’ which Hardy would have read in his prized copy of the *Golden Treasury*, gifted to him by Horace Moule in 1862 (Taylor 165).

On the 21 September 1873, the month in which Hardy supplied his first ten pages of *Far from the Madding Crowd* for January to March installments of *Cornhill*, Horace Moule tragically ended his life with the blade of a razor. Hardy was apprised of the details of his death – the dripping of the blood heard in the adjacent room by his brother and the final words: ‘Love to my mother. Easy to die’ (Deacon 113). Four days after Moule’s death, Hardy went to Fordington churchyard and contemplated the mound of chalk dug from the newly prepared grave. Robert Gittings writes of Hardy’s grave-side visit: ‘It was this day, rather than the day of the death, or that of the funeral, which he attended, that he always remembered’ (180). The account of the death too horrific to contemplate, Hardy elides the details from *The Life and Work* (1928), instead recording his attendance at the funeral. Details from the account of the death, however, make their way into his fiction. In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, when locals speculate that the missing Fanny Robin is burned or drowned, Billy Smallbury, ‘with a vivid sense of detail,’ responds “Or ’tis her father’s razor!” (70). After the sword exercise that Bathsheba fears will kill her, Troy states that his sword could ‘shave like a razor’ (187). In later work, repressed details emerge in the dripping blood on the ceiling viewed by Mrs Brooks in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, even, perhaps, the tortured killing of the pig in *Jude the Obscure* with a blade. In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, the death of Moule was also psychologically bound up with the birth of Sergeant Troy, whose character is developed after Moule’s death. Moule, Hardy believed, had abandoned a pregnant lover (Millgate, *Biography* 142). Elements from Moule’s life and character are transferred into Troy, who abandons his pregnant fiancé and contemplates suicide before dying tragically and suddenly. The complexity of Hardy’s response to Moule is reflected in his treatment of Troy. Moule had identified Hardy to Leslie Stephen as the author of *Under the Greenwood Tree*, thus giving Hardy the opportunity to write for *Cornhill*. As Rosemarie Morgan has discussed, Hardy’s treatment of Troy required revision to make him less sympathetic (*Cancelled* 48). Ultimately, Troy is Hardy’s ‘exceptional being’ (166) – charismatic, prone to excess, capable of the darkest depression (Millgate, *Biography* 141). Hardy’s complex response is also reflected in that of Troy’s betrayed wife Bathsheba, who requests that Troy’s name is etched alongside that of his deceased mistress and child on a grand marble tombstone. It is here, while tending his grave, that Bathsheba decides she will marry Gabriel Oak in a chapter Hardy wrote as a newly-wed, one year on from Moule’s death.

In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, as Hardy attains control over repressed abjection and grief, what we see, repeatedly, is the psychological and aesthetic management of death in descriptions of setting. In the climactic scene of the opening installment of the novel in *Cornhill*, Gabriel looks away from carcasses of the sheep over the cliff and upwards to take in ‘the skeleton of a chrome-yellow moon which had only a few days to last’ reflected in a pool that ‘glittered like a dead man’s eye’ (41). ‘All this Oak saw and remembered,’ the narrator notes of this artistically sublimated objective correlative (41). But Oak’s vision is often deflected away from the catastrophe in front of him to take in what the narrator can then record as an idealized depiction of nature. In the ‘sheep-rot’ episode that was elided from the novel, (now only extant in eleven manuscript leaves), Troy, temporarily working as a farmer, has infected a field so that sheep will be unnaturally fattened, leading to their untimely death. Witnessing the aftermath of Troy’s actions, Gabriel once again views a dead flock of sheep and looks beyond it, this time to take in the beauty of the natural world:

He looked upon a Valley of the Shadow of Death to any ovine entity under the sky. But it was indeed beautiful to look upon. The air about it, looking thus towards the sun, had a substance and a surface visible to the eye. It was a magnificent aureate mist or veil; fiery, yet semi-opaque – the hedge behind in [sic] being in some measure hidden by its golden brilliancy. (407)

This pivoting away from death and toward the beautiful becomes a characteristic narrative device of the novel, used in key scenes that would be expected to invoke abjection. When Bathsheba prizes open the lid of the coffin containing the bodies of Fanny Robin and her child, mother and baby are depicted as in a state of arrested development, transfixed not on a borderline between vitality and decay but on the ‘threshold of a new state of existence’ and thus they become for the narrator ‘by nature interesting, rather than instances of dissolution, by nature frightful’ (289). Complying with Leslie Stephen’s editorial guidance to diminish focus on the baby, Hardy turns the coffin scene into a beautiful picture of Fanny:

Fanny was framed in by that yellow hair of hers, just as she had slept hundreds of times in this house, with the exception of the fresh colour which had formerly adorned her. There was no longer any room for doubt as to the origin of the curl owned by Troy. She appeared rounder in feature and much younger than she had looked during the latter months of her life. Her hands had acquired a preternatural refinement, and a painter in looking upon them might have fancied that at last he had found the fellows of those marvelous hands and fingers which must have served as originals to Bellini (289).

This scene is skillfully managed, first by deflecting attention away from flesh and towards hair. Sergeant Troy has acquired a lock of hair from Fanny, quite possibly in the same manner in which we have seen him secure a curl from Bathsheba, that is, in the course of a flirtatious, show-boating sword exercise. Earlier in the narrative, when finding that Troy has kept a lock of Fanny’s hair, Bathsheba objects: ‘[Y]ou shouldn’t keep people’s hair. You’ll burn it, won’t you, Frank?’ (267) Apart from showing her understandable feelings about the trophy hair, the fact that Bathsheba asks Troy to burn it points to the fact that hair doesn’t decay. After Fanny’s death, the lock of hair, now belonging to a corpse, is fetishised by Troy, who keeps it in his watch. With a reference to the Renaissance painter Giovanni Bellini, like the lock of hair that won’t decay, Fanny’s corpse is transformed into art that will be untouched by time. Readers mindful of Bellini’s ‘Madonna and child’ paintings (Morgan, Hermeneutics 8) may well even have found in the reference suggestions of the assumption of the Virgin Mary and the attainment of eternal life without the physical corruption of the body.

Although we have earlier been told that life experiences had prematurely aged the young Fanny Robin (258), in death she is given back the freshness of her youth. The narrator takes pains to emphasize that we are not in the realm of the grotesque, noting: ‘The youth and fairness of both the silent ones withdrew from the scene all associations of a repulsive kind’ (289). Rather than being repelled by Fanny’s corpse, Troy gently kisses it ‘as one would kiss an infant asleep to avoid awakening it’ (292). The tenderness of the description of the coffin scene is all the more striking in that it is primarily focalised through the perspective of Fanny’s rival – her lover’s wife, Bathsheba. She sees the cheeks of the baby, and the plump little fists as like ‘the soft convexity of mushrooms on a dewy morning’ (289). We are reminded here of the presence of the baby, who, like Fanny, is associated with freshness and who is also given the dignity of association with timeless art as the narrator describes the baby enclosed in Fanny’s arms as ‘A curious frame of Nature’s work,/ A flow’ret crushéd in the bud,/ A nameless babyhood’ (289), a quotation from Charles Lamb’s ‘On an Infant Dying as Soon as Born.’ This sublimation as a response to a confrontation with death that brings a narrative scene into the realm of the arts was to become characteristic of Hardy’s work; the narrator of *The Return of the Native* (1878) comments that in death Eustacia’s beauty finds an artistically happy background, and Hardy’s elegies for Emma visualise a youthful phantom untouched by the ravages of time or death.

The scene in which Bathsheba opens the coffin to find Fanny and her baby is followed by a curious act that reminds us that pestilence exists as an abstraction in the novel. While the abject is sublimated into art when the bodies are exposed, the context of the scene provokes an abject response in Bathsheba as she is confronted with the reality that Troy rejects her, his living wife, in favour of a corpse. After viewing the bodies of Fanny and her baby, and seeing her husband tenderly kiss the corpse of his former lover, we are told that Bathsheba felt an impulse to flee from him, to run, hide and escape his words, ‘not stopping short of death itself’ (296). At this point, Bathsheba leaves her home and chooses to spend a night buried in rotting ground in a kind of death-like state of unconsciousness.

There is a striking contrast between this emotionally chaotic, grotesque scene, and the serene and tenderly-drawn revelation of the coffin in which lie Fanny and her baby, whose cheeks and hands are ‘fresh little mushrooms on a dewy morning,’ a description that is visually evocative without being offensive to the mind’s eye (289). The deflection away from the grotesque, which is so strikingly absent from the coffin scene, removes any taint of judgment of Fanny through pathetic fallacy. Instead, when Joseph Poorgrass returns with the coffin, the atmosphere is repellent, the surrounding fog described as ‘an atmospheric fungi with roots in the neighbouring sea,’ that reaches out an ‘invisible hand’ to envelop him (275). The abject is also later displaced from Fanny’s coffin into Bathsheba’s grave-like bed. The ‘atmospheric fungi’ from the scene in which the coffin was transported to Weatherbury lingers and Bathsheba spends a troubled, sleepless night amid rot and decay. The description of Fanny’s strikingly *fresh* deathbed is in contrast with the rotting leaves and fungi with ‘clammy tops’ and ‘oozing gills’ where Bathsheba lays her head in a kind of putrid grave. The earth exhaling a ‘poisonous essence’ suggests miasma (296). While the baby’s hands were like rounded, fresh little mushrooms, here the mushrooms are not only clammy but described in terms that suggest bodily fluids, some with ‘oozing gills,’ others with the redness of arterial blood. Again, we have the glossing over of the grotesque with the pastoral, with the morning mist from the light of the sun lighting up the ‘beautiful yellowing ferns’ (296), but the swamp is grotesque in the sense of being grotto-esque – rank with fungus and decay. The narrator layers the description of the scene with images of rot to emphasize the death-in-life decay that surrounds Bathsheba in her grave-like bed. ‘Beautiful yellowing ferns’ give way to a vision of ‘a species of swamp, dotted with fungi’; some fungi are clammy, some marked with ‘great splotches, red as arterial blood’ and others are ‘leathery’, a reminder of hardened, dead skin (296). As Anna West has noted, Hardy even restored phrasing from the excised sheep-rot scene to the description of this ‘nursery of pestilences’ (80). After spending a night taking refuge from the ‘damp fog’ (295) in a grave-like ‘hollow’ that ‘seemed a nursery of pestilences small and great,’ Bathsheba arose with a tremor at the thought of having passed the night on the brink of so dismal a place (296).

 Bathsheba has indeed been on the brink of a dismal place. We have pathetic fallacy in the description of the setting – it is described as a depression – but furthermore we see Bathsheba find a setting that is an objective correlative to her morally rotten situation. Seeking out the abject in the swamp has been a consideration of suicide; she suggests to Liddy that she might have been found dead from ill-usage (299). As Howard Babb has observed, the symbolic scene featuring Bathsheba’s burial shows the situation to be pestilent (160), but the setting for this scene is a borderland in both literal and metaphorical senses. Bathsheba has reached the brink, that borderland of life and death, but this ‘nursery of pestilences’ is in ‘the immediate neighbourhood of comfort and health’ and her retreat from the abject restores her to the pastoral mode (311). The red and yellow leaves from which she emerges are ‘like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,’ the line from Shelley’s ‘Ode to the West Wind’ (1820) highlighting the transition in this scene from decay to renewal (296). Bathsheba can retreat from this place of death, from this rotting place associated with moral perfidy, to be restored to the church, the community and to the natural, agricultural world. Bathsheba is not only awoken by birdsong, but by a young boy reciting prayer, and by the arrival of her maid, Liddy. Thus, again, the grotesque is subsumed into the overarching narrative arc of the pastoral.

As the novel’s dramatic action makes way for the pastoral ending, Hardy writes a scene that focuses on Troy and prepares for his elimination from the novel’s conclusion. Fanny has been buried in what is described as ‘the reprobates’ quarter of the graveyard of Weatherbury Churchyard, called in the parish “behind church”’ (311). In a sudden fit of remorse, Troy has erected a grand marble tombstone and carefully planted flowers all over the grave that lies beneath the only functional gargoyle of the eight that feature on the four faces of the parapet of the church. Exhausted after his efforts, Troy spends the night asleep in the Church and awakens to find that the rain that has fallen steadily all night has been concentrated through the mouth of the gargoyle onto Fanny’s grave. The scene that greets him is described thus:

The persistent torrent from the gargoyle’s jaws directed all its vengeance into the grave. The rich tawny mould was stirred into motion, and boiled like chocolate. […] The flowers so carefully planted by Fanny’s repentant lover began to move and writhe in their bed. The winter-violets turned slowly upside down, and became a mere mat of mud. Soon the snowdrop and other bulbs danced in the boiling mass like ingredients in a cauldron. (307)

While the description of the hands and cheeks of the baby’s corpse as mushrooms is an original metaphor at once perfectly fitting and strangely tender, here in the ‘tawny mould,’ we have the abject metaphor of chocolate mud. The image is reminiscent of Hardy’s poem ‘The Levelled Churchyard,’ in which the exhumation of bodies to make way for a railway reveals the bodies all mixed up, like ‘human jam’ (190-91). In the depiction of Fanny’s despoiled grave, the ‘writhing’ of the anthropomorphized flowers that dance ‘like ingredients in a cauldron’ almost suggests the opening of the grave and offers a reminder of the proximity of the corpses. Nonetheless, the grotesquerie of the scene does not undermine the earlier tenderness of the description of Fanny and her baby in the coffin. The grotesque points outwards from scene to context – toward the reason for the desecration of the grave that bursts out with the writhing mud unearthed by the gargoyle. It is the fact that Fanny and her baby are buried in a pauper’s grave in a disused part of the churchyard that has led to the introduction in this scene of the element of the grotesque. And yet Hardy again offers a pastoral revision. Sentences after the passage featuring chocolate mud, Hardy writes the following painterly version of the scene:

The rain had quite ceased, and the sun was shining through the green, brown, and yellow leaves, now sparkling and varnished by the raindrops to the brightness of similar effects in the landscapes of Ruysdael and Hobbema, and full of all those infinite beauties that arise from the union of water and colour with high lights. The air was rendered so transparent by the heavy fall of rain that the autumn hues of the middle distance were as rich as those near at hand, and the remote fields intercepted by the angle of the tower appeared in the same plane as the tower itself. (308)

Sun shines through decaying leaves in this painterly depiction of the ‘infinite beauties’ surrounding the scene in which the gargoyle has desecrated Fanny’s grave; then Hardy turns his attention to Troy’s reaction.

Through Troy, his fictional rendering of Moule, Hardy comes to reflect on resilience in the face of vicissitude. The narrative treatment of Troy comes to serve the overarching concerns of the novel which, by this point, must clearly end with the rewarding of Oak’s fortitude, but Hardy cannot go so far as to have Troy end his life (as Troy seems to consider) by suicide in the sea. Hardy thus makes an important distinction in relation to his origins that help with his removal from the novel’s pastoral ending. Bonnie Gerard notes that ‘[i]f pastoral harmony can be thrown off-key, then certainly someone is to blame. For Hardy, the scapegoat betokens the “outside” world – he is Sergeant Troy’ (345).This ‘outsider’ status has been observed by Gerard in the episode when Oak and Bathsheba rescue the ricks because Troy’s influence has rendered the labourers of Weatherbury incapacitated by alcohol, the sound of their collective breathing sounding ‘like London from a distance’ (344). But Troy is not merely an outsider in Weatherbury; he is alienated on account of his ancestry. As Merryn Williams notes, it must be remembered that Oak and Bathsheba are themselves intruders in Weatherbury (135), and that Troy is from Casterbridge (131). However, Troy’s French lineage is emphasized at key points of the narrative in contrast to their pure Englishness. When Troy asks Bathsheba if she reads French, she replies, ‘No; I began, but when I got to the verbs, father died,’ her practical response underscoring the difference that will ultimately separate them, as does the content of the books she reads (172). She is familiar with her uncle’s book collection that she has inherited, which includes Shakespearean tragedy, comedies by Beaumont and Fletcher and Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts* a graveyard poem in which she could read that

The Man who consecrates his Hours

By vigorous Effort, and an honest Aim,

At once he draws the sting of Life and Death:

He walks with Nature; and her Paths are Peace.

(Night II, ll. 185-88)

This is a philosophy she shares with Oak, who also has a distinctly English book collection. Alongside the Bible and instruction manuals for the practice of tending animals, Oak’s collection includes *Paradise Lost*, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and *Robinson Crusoe* (72).

In naming his ‘wicked soldier-hero’ (Maitland 273) Troy, Hardy aligns him with the Trojan horse of *The Aeneid*, and thus with deception, hollowness, and destruction. After Fanny’s death, in the episode with the gargoyle Hardy connects Troy with another animal machine-hybrid, in the shape of the gargoyle. Troy, like the monstrous water-spout, is an agent of destruction that is out of place in its setting. Like the gargoyle that Hardy singles out as the one that concerns the story, which is ‘of the boldest cut that the hand could shape, and of the most original design that a human brain could conceive’ (306), Troy is introduced to the story as an ‘exceptional being’ (166). The illegitimate son of the English aristocracy and a French governess, Troy, like the gargoyle, is a ‘Continental grotesque’ (306). The gargoyle’s desecration of Fanny’s grave corresponds with Troy’s treatment of her in life, but, lacking insight and resilience, he chooses to view the despoiling as the working of a malign fate and the narrator relates this response to his origins.

Troy, in his prostration at this time, had no perception that in the futility of these romantic doings, dictated by a remorseful reaction from previous indifference, there was any element of absurdity. Deriving his idiosyncrasies from both sides of the Channel, he showed at such junctures as the present the inelasticity of the Englishman, together with that blindness to the line where sentiment verges on mawkishness, characteristic of the French. (305)

Troy’s ‘mawkishness’ (*OED*: ‘feeble or sickly sentimental character; excessive sentimentality’) is curiously linked with his French lineage. As in Tennyson’s *In Memoriam A. H. H.,* which references the ‘blind hysterics of the Celt’ (CX, 16), Troy’s ‘foreign’ reaction to death is contrasted with English fortitude. Troy is perfectly consistent in his inconstancy – his abandonment of Fanny’s grave is of a piece with his jilting her after intending to marry her and his later desertion of his wife, Bathsheba. Seeing the destruction wrought by the gargoyle, Troy flees indefinitely, not to return home, as Bathsheba does, the following day.

While Troy, like the gargoyle, represents careless destruction, *Far from the Madding Crowd* upholds the virtues of prudence and self-governance in response to death. Troy planting bulbs on Fanny’s grave is the most pastoral thing we see him do in the entire novel, and it is also the one act of his that shows long-term thinking; he chooses flower roots of several varieties, some to bloom in early spring and others for the later seasons of the year. But when he sees the damage wrought by the gargoyle, we are told: ‘He did not attempt to fill up the hole, replace the flowers, or do anything at all. He simply threw up his cards and forswore his game for that time and always’ (309). It is the joint work of Bathsheba and Oak that restores the grave, as they replant the bulbs and Bathsheba orders that the churchwardens turn the leadwork at the mouth of the gargoyle so that the stream will be directed sideways, and the repetition of the accident prevented. Such a practical response to destruction will lead to their graveside reunion and marriage.

For Hardy, infatuated though he was with his dashing soldier, such is the weight of the mode of the pastoral that Troy had to be sacrificed to serve the ideological purpose of the novel. Troy’s deficiencies are manifold: he fails Fanny and Bathsheba as a lover, the community as a farmer, and his country as a soldier. Unconcerned with self-sacrificing national service, Troy uses his role as a soldier for performance – in the ‘new-born gallantry’ (162) he practices on Bathsheba, in his sword display carried out in military dress, and in the role of Dick Turpin (162), a role he acquires on account of his skill as a dragoon-guardsman (331). Troy’s sudden adoption of the role of farmer means he abandons the army; he purchases his discharge, most likely with Bathsheba’s money (237). ‘Nothing has prospered in Weatherbury since he came here,’ a representative rural labourer remarks (360), almost suggesting Troy’s very presence unleashes a curse on his environs. Indeed, in the sheep-rot episode, Troy creates ‘a Valley of the Shadow of Death’ (394), putting the lives of the flock (both ovine and human) in jeopardy, requiring the intervention of Oak to save the ‘blasted’ sheep (136). While Troy’s name suggests the deception associated with the Trojan horse and the fall of a great city, Gabriel Oak’s name suggests angelic intervention, strength and continuity.

As a faithless, reckless dilettante in all aspects of his life, Troy serves as a perfect foil for Oak. After the crisis of losing his uninsured sheep Gabriel reflects that he almost wished that he himself joined the cavalry, inviting comparison with Troy. While Troy is associated with the devil and with destruction, Gabriel is the novel’s ‘Good Shepherd’ (Williams 134) and ‘pastoral king’ (43). For Foucault, the pastoral power of the Church diffused outward in a secular age and became incorporated into the management of society; salvation is now for the living rather than the dead (334). In a lengthy passage on the value of the barn to the community the narrator notes that ‘unlike the Church,’ ‘the old barn embodied practices which had suffered no mutilation at the hands of time’ because ‘[t]he defence and salvation of the body by daily bread is still a study, a religion, and a desire’ (143). While the Church is of no real spiritual significance to the lives of the residents of Weatherbury, who wonder what to say to ‘a great gaffer like the Lord’ (279) and talk nonchalantly of the dead going up or down (63), their interests concern ‘health, well-being, (that is, sufficient wealth, standard of living), security, protection against accidents’ (Foucault 334). Secular ‘salvation’ is secured for the Weatherbury community under Oak’s governance. In the ‘great barn,’ Weatherbury’s secular ‘Church,’ Oak shears sheep, dispenses food and drink and acts as ‘general supervisor’ (142). In Church, Gabriel yawns and plans his dinner through the Nicene Creed, as his bodily needs outweigh the spiritual (9). It fits with the novel’s design that Oak discovers the untrustworthiness of Troy from seeing evidence that shows he has lied about attending Church (192), but more importantly for the community of Weatherbury (as spirituality is always a private matter), Oak cures the blasted sheep (originally conceived of as infected by Troy) and then saves the ricks on Bathsheba’s farm while Troy indulges in a drunken, harvest-time wedding celebration.

The novel’s other foil for Gabriel Oak is William Boldwood, the sombre, austere farmer who is jolted out of his state of celibate reclusion into a passionate obsession with Bathsheba on account of her sending him a Valentine card in an impulsive joke. Boldwood, too, fails the community as a farmer and employer, his neglect of his ricks meaning that ‘not a tenth of [his] corn will come to measure’ (251). Like the intemperate weather that destroys the corn, Boldwood, himself, is a ‘hotbed of tropic intensity’ (122). Boldwood’s character is not given in the original outline offered to Leslie Stephen for the story and Gittings suggests that Hardy was prompted to include him after Moule’s death, as he sought to plumb the depths of a disturbed consciousness (183). As another rejected suitor of Bathsheba, he serves as an emotional foil for Gabriel. While after Bathsheba’s marriage to Troy, Gabriel seeks to comfort Boldwood with ‘the repose of a man whom misfortune had inured rather than subdued’ (252), Boldwood responds with an outpouring of Biblical allusion, recovering mastery of his emotions by speaking again ‘with a carelessness which was like the smile on the countenance of a skull’ (253). Without Bathsheba, he admits, ‘it is better to die than to live’ (252). In a fraught scene of emotional blackmail, Boldwood had morbidly offered Bathsheba a feeling ‘strong as death’ (199), and this phrase is echoed and reworked in the final chapter of the novel, when Gabriel and Bathsheba’s love is described as ‘strong as death – that love which many waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown’ (384). That last clause also offers a subtle reminder of the Lulworth cove episode, contrasting Troy’s weakness with the resilience of Oak and Bathsheba. Joseph Poorgrass’s closing commentary, which opens with ‘Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone’ also serves, ironically, through a mangled Biblical allusion, to reminds us of Troy’s debauchery (389). Unlike reckless Troy and Boldwood, whose grievances jeopardize the crops, Oak and Bathsheba put the needs of others first. In a muted happy ending, they plan a secret wedding mindful of ‘certain things that would make a gay wedding seem hardly the thing’ (385-6). Rather than marrying in an ideal bucolic setting on a sunny Spring morning (suggesting the possibility of new life), Gabriel and Bathsheba meet on ‘a damp disagreeable morning’ to tie the knot in a chapter entitled ‘A Foggy Night and Morning,’ the atmosphere offering a reminder of the return of Fanny’s coffin. It is a reminder of the stoicism that they share with Hardy, who in 1881, after a lengthy illness, took a walk on Wandsworth Common where he recited lines from Gray’s ‘Ode on the Pleasure arising from Vicissitude’ (*Life and Work* 153).

While Hardy’s *Far from the Madding Crowd* may be a meditation on death and vicissitude, it is not to be forgotten that in being invited to write for *Cornhill* Hardy was given an opportunity, early in his career, to write for a prestigious magazine at a time when he wished to be a ‘good hand at a serial’ (*Life and Work* 102). The novel he wrote was, in many respects, perfectly tailored for the magazine. Established in London in 1860 for a primarily urban readership, its first issue promised to offer the ‘harvest perennial’ from the ‘kindly fruits of the earth,’ consolidating readers into a united readership as consumers of wholesome agricultural fare (Thackeray). Building on the conflation of agricultural and literary fare, ‘Father Prout’s Inaugurative Ode’ for the first issue punned that *Cornhill* offered ‘genuine cereal’ and promised that it would separate the wheat from the chaff, much as we imagine Bathsheba weighing up cereal in the Corn Exchange (75). By 1873, a story of ‘a woman-farmer, a shepherd, and a sergeant of cavalry’ was well suited to *Cornhill* and a pastoral story, Hardy thought, was the ‘safest venture’ (*Letters* 12).

As a pastoral story, *Far from the Madding Crowd* was well suited to *Cornhill* on ideological grounds too. Pastoral (and its English offspring, the georgic) is ‘overlaid with Christian images drawn from a long Edenic tradition’ (Gerard 332). The cover of *Cornhill* featured four figures representing the labour of each season – ploughman, sower, reaper, and thresher – conflating Biblical and pastoral images. With its twelve installments corresponding not only with the month of the year but the agricultural working calendar, the narrative of *Far from the Madding Crowd* reflects in its structure the georgic images of *Cornhill*’s cover. By turning to conventional pastoral tropes, Hardy was adopting a Western form that had its roots in Greece but which by the nineteenth century had developed through a pure literary line of succession to become a distinctly English form. As Indy Clark notes, the pastoral is the ideal form for the representation of Englishness as the ‘ideology of England and Englishness is to a remarkable degree rural’ (142). Caley Ehnes notes that the georgic images of rural labour on the cover of *Cornhill* introduced a sense of British national identity to the periodical. Such imagery reached back to England’s past suggesting contentment, self-sufficiency and continuity (76). With the incursion of modernity affecting England visibly for *Cornhill*’s urban readership, Hardy depicted his real, local environs around Bockhampton, recast as the fictional rural enclave of Weatherbury. In addition to drawing on the imagery of the magazine’s distinctive cover for his story, Hardy may even have referred to *Cornhill*’s first issue for inspiration. ‘Father Prout’s Inaugurative Ode’ in *Cornhill*, which offers ‘genuine cereal’ as an antidote for modernity, opens with the line ‘Ours is a faster, quicker age’ (l. 1), an idea echoed in Hardy’s serial, in the oft-quoted lines:

In comparison with cities, Weatherbury was immutable. The citizen’s *Then* is the rustic’s *Now*. In London, twenty or thirty-years ago are old times; in Paris ten years, or five; in Weatherbury three or four score years were included in the mere present, and nothing less than a century set a mark on its face or tone. (75)

While the passage primarily works toward fetishizing Weatherbury as an untouched English pastoral idyll, it also incorporates the otherness of Troy; he is associated with both London and France (his mother is, specifically, ‘a Parisienne’) and he wishes to modernize Bathsheba’s farm (172). In this passage, Hardy is building toward a conception of his local environment that was to take the shape of ‘Wessex,’ which was invented as ‘a contrast for something else’ (Gatrell 31). When Troy returns after his lengthy desertion of Bathsheba, Hardy first uses the term ‘Wessex’ in a chapter that serves to reinforce Troy’s outsider status. Having grown tired of making a precarious living by working his way around American towns as ‘Professor of Gymnastics, Sword Exercise, Fencing, and Pugilism’ (330), Troy has returned to England and now emerges in Greenhill Fair as ‘Mr. Francis, the Great Cosmopolitan Equestrian and Roughrider’ (331) in the guise of Dick Turpin, the legendary highwayman. At the outset of the chapter in which he returns, the narrator refers to the local Greenhill Fair of ‘South Wessex’ (327) where there are ‘Wessex’ breeds of sheep (328), to the alien-sounding Russian fair city, ‘Nijnii Novgorod’ (327), thus juxtaposing the alien with the familiar. Through Hardy’s reference to a region of the Heptarchy for the locale of the action, Troy becomes an outsider not only to Weatherbury but to Wessex (and implicitly to England). This late development in Hardy’s conception of place in *Far from the Madding Crowd* in *Cornhill* subsequently influenced revisions to the novel for the volume edition, notably in the depiction of his pastoral setting – the ‘Great Barn.’ In the ‘Weatherbury is immutable’ passage, in which he first conceived of his timeless English pastoral landscape, the ‘nooks’ (520) where ‘the busy outsider’s ancient times are only old’ in *Cornhill* in the volume edition become ‘Wessex nooks’ (144) as the word ‘Wessex’ comes to stand for a pure, pastoral England.

Hardy’s conception of a ‘foreign’ element in his disruption to rural English life, which first took shape in *Far from the Madding Crowd* through Troy, becomes characteristic of his subsequent pastoral novels. Once he had conceived of his ‘Wessex nooks’ (almost as an afterthought in the November issue of *Cornhill*), Wessex became central to the depiction of rural life in Hardy’s fiction, and it often signified England as a nation. Building the ‘Wessex-as-England’ trope in *The Return of the Native* (1878) by linking Egdon heath with ‘the heath of that traditionary King of Wessex – Lear,’ the word ‘Wessex’ is then used (pre-empting *The Trumpet-Major* and *The Dynasts*) when characters refer to the threatened invasion of Bonaparte (137). The concluding lines of *The Return of the Native* focus on the environs of ‘Wessex’ following the death of the novel’s overly sentimental Francophile Eustacia and her lover Wildeve. This conclusion offers merely a more emphatic expulsion of those associated with France than we see in the ending of *Far from the Madding Crowd* when the marriage of Oak and Bathsheba is subtly associated with English victory over a French enemy; their wedding is celebrated with music from ‘the true and original Weatherbury’ band, who play ‘venerable worm-eaten instruments, which had celebrated in their own persons the victories of Marlborough, under the fingers of the forefathers of those who played them now’ (389). As in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, marital complications in *The Woodlanders* (1887) (that begin with the acquisition of a woman’s hair) are resolved with the death of the novel’s outsiders – Felice Charmond is shot dead in Germany by her Continental lover. In each of these ‘pastoral’ novels, the narrative arc moves toward the elimination of foreigners and those they have destroyed, and the preservation of a pure English Wessex.

While noting that by 1914 ‘Hardy’s Wessex had become a synecdoche for England itself’ (156), Clark also acknowledges that Hardy’s war poetry cannot sustain a vision of Wessex that aligns neatly with the pastoral mode. For Benedict Anderson, no more arresting emblem of nationalism exists than ‘cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers’ (9) and it is notable that in Hardy’s ‘The Dead Drummer,’ the unnamed casualty of the Boer War is referred to not as of England, but of ‘Wessex’ (l. 8). But in ‘A Christmas Ghost-Story’ (1899), the slain soldier is not a citizen of Wessex or indeed anywhere, as was emphasized in the original opening lines for the poem: ‘There lies — be he or not your countryman — /A fellow-mortal’ (2-3). The sequence entitled ‘Poems of War and Patriotism,’ published in *Moments of Vision* (1917), opens with ‘His Country,’ a poem that rejects the nationalism of an English speaker who condemns ‘foreigners’ as ‘not like us’. In the same sequence, ‘The Pity of It’ was prompted by a recognition that the dialect heard in ‘Wessex lanes’ reveals that English and German people are ‘kin folk kin tongued’. Hardy’s troubled response to war involved a shift away from the pastoral mode. Our vision is gently guided upward from the mound marking the site of the uncoffined body to the beauty of the stars in ‘The Dead Drummer’ (1899), (‘Drummer Hodge’) (1899) a ‘pastoral poem’ according to Alpers (301), but in ‘A Christmas Ghost-Story’ (1899), the speaker is ‘a mouldering soldier’ (l. 2) lying uncomfortably (seemingly conscious) in a grave where ‘Awry and doubled up are his gray bones’, he laments that time has not brought about ‘the All-Earth-gladdening Law / Of Peace’. By the time of the First World War, Hardy was reflecting on the pastoral as not only mythic but anachronistic. In ‘The Cornhill’s Jubilee,’ (1912), collected in *Satires of Circumstance* (1914) under the title’ ‘The Jubilee of a Magazine,’ the speaker notes that *Cornhill* still depicts the ‘sower, reaper, thresher’ (8) working in ‘ancient style’ on the ‘updated modern page’. Machinery has since modernized agricultural labour but, the speaker asks: ‘what has been done/ To unify the mortal lot/ Since your bright leaves first saw the sun’?

Looking back at his creation of Wessex in *Far from the Madding Crowd* in his 1895 Preface for the novel, Hardy notably emphasizes its fictionality and consigns its recent origins to the past; many of the buildings that had inspired the setting having been pulled down except for the church and in his 1912 Preface he notes that that is gone too (Orel 10). Consistently in his Prefaces to the Wessex novels, Hardy sought to distance himself from the ‘Wessex worshippers’ who had ‘shaped their own version of Wessex and made it into a mythic image for England itself’ (Clark 147). But Hardy’s pastoral vision of Wessex was to endure because of, not in spite of, its construction of a pastoral idyll that stood for England. Peter Widdowson notes that Hardy’s turning from fiction and toward poetry happened at a time when there was ‘an attempt in England to establish a cohesive national consciousness in a period deeply riven by domestic and international tensions’ (61). Thus the ‘real heroes’ for a readership of this era ‘are all on the model of Gabriel Oak’ (61) and Hardy was to remain ‘the novelist of England, Home and Beauty’ (58).

**Notes**

1. The phrase ‘Et in Arcadia Ego’ (‘Even in Arcadia, I am’) is closely associated with a painting entitled *The Arcadian Shepherds*, by the French Baroque painter Nicolas Poussin (1594-1655), who is referenced by Hardy in *Far from the Madding Crowd* (149). *The Arcadian Shepherds* depicts the figures of three shepherds and a shepherdess framing a tombstone that they view which bears the words ’Et in Arcadia Ego.’ The painting is often interpreted as a memento mori, with the ‘Ego’ (‘I am’) of the phrase representing the presence of Death in an Arcadian setting.

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