

**PRIMITIVE MARRIAGE: ANTHROPOLOGY AND  
NINETEENTH-CENTURY FICTION**

**Mary Agnes Noble**

**A DISSERTATION  
PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY  
OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE  
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**RECOMMENDED FOR ACCEPTANCE  
BY THE DEPARTMENT OF  
ENGLISH**

**Advisors: Maria DiBattista and Deborah Nord**

**September 2010**

© Copyright by Mary Agnes Noble, 2010. All rights reserved.

## Abstract

“Primitivism” has come to be seen as a defining trait of Modernism, and it is well-known that major modernist writers turned to anthropology as a source of myth and “primitive” tropes. In *Primitive Marriage*, however, I show that “primitivism” in imaginative literature emerged decades earlier, in the 1870s, when writers such as George Eliot and Thomas Hardy respond to anthropology in their fiction. Anthropology appealed to Eliot and Hardy as a source of myth and other “primitive” literary tropes, and as a framework for understanding modern society and human psychology in terms of “primitive” origins, particularly in relation to sexuality, courtship, and marriage. These novelistic responses reflect the intensive focus of Victorian anthropology on myth and marriage, inaugurated by two influential works: Edward Burnett Tylor’s *Primitive Culture* (1870), which focused primarily on myth, and John McLennan’s *Primitive Marriage* (1865).

Victorian anthropologists were influenced by Walter’s Scott’s folklore recovery projects, since he was the first writer to apply theories of cultural evolution to the detailed study of folk culture. Under Scott’s influence, moreover, novels became a unique medium that could integrate the poetry of primitive cultural forms with the naturalistic interpretive lens of the anthropologist, a productive fusion of romance and scientific social analysis. Because of Scott’s impact on the Victorian writers discussed in subsequent chapters, Chapter One examines precisely how his fiction responds to anthropological themes and concerns raised by own folklore researches and by the proto-anthropological work of late eighteenth-century conjectural historians.

Scott followed Enlightenment thinkers in upholding a dichotomy between the “civilized” inhabitants of England and Lowland Scotland, and his primitive “wild Highlanders.” However, from the 1860s, this dividing line became blurred, as anthropologists promulgated the idea that civilized social institutions are replete with unfortunate primitive “survivals.” Eliot and Hardy draw on this idea in their novels, but they often subvert the cultural hierarchy it implies, by identifying as barbarous the aspects of modern society that anthropologists had valorized as the hallmarks of civilization. For example, Eliot suggests in *Middlemarch* (1872) that modern patriarchal society is “primitive” in its oppression of women, contradicting the anthropological theorists to whom she alludes in the novel, who celebrated modern patriarchy as the most beneficial state of society for women.

Eliot’s interest in the evolution of marriage and sexuality is entirely absent from Scott’s fiction, and only appears fleetingly, and suggestively, in his introduction to *Roy Roy* (1817), as I discuss in Chapter One. However, influential works of mid-Victorian anthropology, including McLennan’s *Primitive Marriage*, lent scientific authority to an emerging popular association between “savage” life and sexual violence. On this topic, Eliot and Hardy invoke the anthropology of marriage only to subvert it. McLennan had

emphasized the absolute separation of (unpleasant) primitive and (beneficent) civilized sexual practices and desires; Eliot and Hardy, however, recuperate certain aspects of “primitive” sexuality within the modern world, and portray primitive forces operating as persistent “instincts” within modern minds and bodies.

In Chapter Two, I explore the implications *Middlemarch*’s allusions to anthropological descriptions of “primitive” male courtship behavior involving ritualistic fights over women. The novel aligns these ritualized expressions of desire with rhetorical forms such as chivalric love literature, and so draws attention to the culturally-constructed nature of a wide range of socially-sanctioned expressions of desire. Eliot thus stresses the commonality between diverse cultures, suggesting not only that desire transcends cultural difference, but also that human societies generally create comparable aesthetic forms—whether ritualized battles or Petrarchan poetry—to structure desire’s public expression. Thus in *Middlemarch*, Eliot is careful to historicize everything except heterosexual relations, which are deliberately dehistoricized and transcendentalized.

Like *Middlemarch*, *Daniel Deronda* (1876) invokes an idea of “prehistoric” human emotion that is a source of ethical and loving relationships with others. However, whereas *Middlemarch* subverts cultural evolutionary readings of sexual behavior, *Daniel Deronda* reintroduces cultural evolution to explain its heroine’s sexual psychology, and rejects universalizing Darwinian claims about women’s biological nature, as I show in Chapter Three. *Daniel Deronda*’s allusions to Darwin’s arguments about motherhood and maternal infanticide are intertwined with allusions to the Medea story, and I argue that the novel makes these rather shocking allusions in order to expose the ways in which nineteenth-century discourse constructed womanhood as a choice between ideal motherhood and monstrosity. The novel instead dramatizes the idea that women’s “primitive” or “natural” propensities are as diverse as men’s, and that primitive emotions like irrational and quasi-religious fear can be harnessed as a form of conscience.

Hardy, too, was interested in the value of the primitive belief, but for its aesthetic rather than for its ethical potential. My fourth chapter shows that Hardy, along with Walter Pater and Andrew Lang, looked to Tylor’s account of myth’s development as a theory of literary evolution, and found in it an implication that contemporary literature might be revitalized by recuperating primitive cultural forms. I show that Hardy’s research and thinking in these areas developed in early novels such as *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), and came to fruition in *The Return of the Native* (1878) in that novel’s invocation of the “primitive” animistic perspective. In Chapter Five, I show that Hardy recuperates other primitive cultural forms, including the folk dance and the ballad, in *The Return* and in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891). These novels present folk dancing in sensualized aesthetic terms as a source of primitive ecstasy and “pagan-self-adoration,” implicitly celebrating folk culture as a source of resistance to Victorian sexual mores.

Hardy more explicitly invokes anthropology in the service of social critique in *Jude the Obscure* (1895), as my concluding chapter shows. In dramatizing contemporary debates over sexual politics, the novel’s heroine, Sue, uses the terms of cultural evolutionism to denounce her society’s sexual mores as “barbarous” or “savage.” In this respect, the

novel reflects on a major trend in 1890s public debates over sexuality and marriage: the prevalence of appeals to anthropological theories to support normative claims. The anthropologist Edward Westermarck contributed to these debates with his *History of Human Marriage* (1891), which suggests that sexual reform will need to accommodate inherited instincts. My chapter shows that *Jude* engages with Westermarck's ideas in its staging of the conflict between Victorian marriage laws and the protagonists' desires for sexual freedom, which the novel codes as Pagan and primitive. Like Hardy's earlier fiction, *Jude* suggests the ambivalent allure and difficulty of reviving primitive freedom within modern social life, and attests to the potential of "primitive" tropes for modern imaginative literature.

## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter One</b>	<b>30</b>
Anthropology, Romance, and the Gendered Primitive in Walter Scott's <i>Waverley</i> Novels	
<b>Chapter Two</b>	<b>50</b>
"An ideal combat...tomahawk in hand": <i>Middlemarch</i> and Mid-Victorian Anthropologies of "Marriage"	
<b>Chapter Three</b>	<b>90</b>
"It's a Medea and Creüsa business": Women, Evolutionary Theory, and Myth in <i>Daniel Deronda</i>	
<b>Chapter Four</b>	<b>127</b>
Thomas Hardy, Walter Pater, and Primitive Literary Aesthetics	
<b>Chapter Five</b>	<b>173</b>
"Pagan...Self-Adoration": Primitivism and English Folk Culture in <i>The Return of the Native</i> and <i>Tess of the D'Urbervilles</i>	

<b>Chapter Six</b>	<b>233</b>
“A Survival from the Custom of Capture and Purchase”: Anthropology and the “Marriage Question” in <i>Jude the Obscure</i>	
<b>Epilogue</b>	<b>289</b>
Victorian Anthropology and Literary Modernism	
<b>Works Cited</b>	<b>296</b>

## Acknowledgements

I am especially grateful to my wonderful advisors, Maria DiBattista and Deborah Nord, for their generous intellectual support at every stage of this project. They have both been unfailing sources of insight, rigor, and calm wisdom. I am particularly grateful to Jeff Nunokawa for providing me with an outstanding first experience of teaching *Daniel Deronda*, and to Oliver Arnold and Bill Gleason for their warm encouragement and advice. My work has benefited from conversations with Diana Fuss, Uli Knoepflmacher, Meredith Martin, Esther Schor, Susan Stewart, and Michael Wood at Princeton and George Levine at Rutgers. Special thanks go to Pat Guglielmi for her inimitable professional help. Sonya Posmentier and Rachel Galvin provided me with an awesome writing workshop for chapter five. During two years spent in Oxford, I enjoyed inspiring discussions with Muireann O’Cinneide and generous help from Carolyn Larrington, Josephine McDonagh, and the members of the Victorian post-graduate seminar. This project is a legacy of the guidance I received as an undergraduate from Caroline Gonda and Alison Hennigan at St. Catharine’s College, Cambridge, who introduced me to the pleasures of studying nineteenth-century fiction.

I am indebted to everyone at the Dickens Universe Winter Conference in 2005 for providing me with a forgiving venue in which to deliver my first scholarly paper, which proved to be the starting point for chapter three of this project. The project has also benefited from the help of Jeremy Coote, Joint Head of Collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum of Anthropology in Oxford, the staff of the Bodleian Library, Lillian Swindell at Thomas Hardy’s Max Gate Library, and Anna Graves, the Special Collections Librarian at Colby College. Ronald Hutton kindly shared with me several chapters from *Blood and Mistletoe* before its publication. My archival research was supported by grants from The Donald and Mary Hyde Fellowship, the Dean’s Fund for Scholarly Travel at Princeton, the Princeton Institute for Regional Studies, as well as Princeton University’s graduate school.

Dan Davison, Briallen Hopper, and Rebecca Rainof have my undying gratitude for their heroic help in the very final stages of this project. Rebecca, Briallen, JK Barret, and Jacky Shin are generous, witty, and generally amazing friends who have made this project and my life indescribably better. I feel very lucky in my fellow graduate students at Princeton, who have given me so much intellectual support, friendship, and fun: Yaron Aronowicz, Roger Bellin, Adrienne Brown, Jonathan Foltz, Abigail Heald, Jules Hurtado, Wendy Lee, Greg Londe, Katie McEwen, Ed Muston, Lindsey Reckson, Erwin Rosinberg, David Russell, Stephen Russell, Nuria Sanjan Pastor, Sonia Velazquez, Dave Urban, Casey Walker, Keri Walsh, Amelia Worsley, and Wes Yu. Beyond Princeton and academia, I’d like to thank my very good friends Hannah Dugdale, Carola Long, Lizzie Freundel, and Sophy King; my parents Jennifer and Bill, and my sisters Kathy and Roberta. Most of all, I’d like to thank Dan Davison for sharing his life with me for the past 12 years.



## Introduction

If you visit the Pitt Rivers Museum of Anthropology in Oxford, you may be surprised by its organization of artifacts. Objects from the heart of rural England are presented next to artifacts from far away destinations and ancient cultures. A talismanic preserved sheep's heart from Dorset lies amongst myriad similar objects from all over the world.<sup>1</sup> The organization of exhibits follows the wishes of Victorian archeologist and ethnographer General Pitt Rivers, who bequeathed his collection to the university in 1884, along with the funds to found the museum and install Edward Burnett Tylor as the university's first Reader in Anthropology—a legacy that established British anthropology for the first time as an academic discipline within a university. The museum's present organization is also a legacy from Pitt Rivers, reflecting his faith in the “comparative method,” the central methodological premise of Victorian anthropology.<sup>2</sup> A sentence written at the time explains why artifacts from Dorset and remote places are comparable:

The superstitions of a remote Asiatic and a Dorset labourer are the same.

[...] The attitude of man [...] at corresponding levels of culture, before like phenomena, is pretty much the same, your Dorset peasants representing the persistence of the barbaric idea which confuses persons and things.”<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The sheep's heart is on permanent display “with some 200 other items in ‘Case 61.A—Sympathetic Magic / Natural Objects and Stone Tools Used as Charms.’” Jeremy Coote, Joint Head of Collections, Pitt Rivers Museum.

<sup>2</sup> The museum now explains its organization by function with no reference to Victorian anthropology.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas and Florence Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928* (Ware: Wordsworth, 2007), 237.

This is not a curator's plaque, but an entry from Thomas Hardy's diary recording his conversation with the folklorist Edward Clodd in 1890, and it encapsulates some important ways in which nineteenth-century fiction and anthropology were related. The entry reflects the main axioms of Victorian anthropology: the stadial theory that all cultures evolve through a unilineal sequence of "levels" from savage to civilized; and the corollary of mankind's "psychic unity." The diary entry also reflects the fascination of anthropology for major nineteenth-century novelists, and illustrates some of the meanings of anthropology for writers of fiction: it offered a framework for generalizing about particular behavior, and making cultural comparisons; and it offered a resource for representing the mental lives of fictional characters by invoking notions of barbarism and stages of mental development. The quotation refers to the "persistence" of "barbaric ideas"—psychological survivals of primitive thought in modern minds—which imaginative writers viewed more positively than did the anthropologists. Hardy adds that the "'barbaric idea which confuses persons and things,' is, by the way, also common to the highest imaginative genius—that of the poet," and his aside instantiates a more widespread sense among nineteenth-century novelists of the literary potential of the "barbaric ideas" excavated by anthropology.

Nineteenth-century anthropology thus provides a key context for understanding the nineteenth-century novel, especially the work of Walter Scott, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy, on whom this study focuses. All three writers left records of their reading that demonstrate their deep interest in and engagement with anthropology, although the ways in which they respond to anthropology in their fiction are at times hostile or revisionary. They share with the anthropologists an interest in understanding society from

a naturalistic historical perspective, and they also share with them an interest in doing so by paying attention to marginal or pre-industrial cultures.

Novelistic responses to anthropology in the nineteenth century can be grouped into three categories. Firstly, Scott, Eliot, and Hardy saw anthropology as a source of folkloric and mythic stories and tropes, and “poetic” ways of viewing the world, and sought to retrieve and revive certain cultural materials that anthropology newly brought to light. Anthropology offered a source of folkloric narratives that partook of romance and the Gothic, and thus fueled elements in fiction that worked against realism. Both Hardy and Scott represent the mythical or folkloric world as one that is about to be lost, and in their fiction they are concerned to recuperate its aesthetic potential. Again, this response to anthropology was shared by literary critics and theorists. Andrew Lang and Walter Pater, for example, were deeply concerned to retrieve and valorize folkloric tropes and primitive ways of seeing for modern literature.

Secondly, all three novelists drew on anthropological theory to understand British society. However, Scott does this rather differently to Eliot and Hardy. Scott followed Enlightenment thinkers in placing Scottish Highlanders at the primitive stage, which he represents in his novels in terms of a stark contrast and clash with civilized Britain. He viewed the stages of society as relatively distinct, and preserves a clear separation between civilized and savage characters and settings, although he does occasionally suggest that civilized institutions, in particular legal ones, can be barbarous or savage.<sup>4</sup> He suggests that for the civilized, barbarism and savagery have attractions—since it is

---

<sup>4</sup> For example, in Fergus McIvor’s pithy comments (prior to his execution at the hands of the British) on the “tender mercies” of the British justice system, which he suggests put the British on a level “with a nation of cannibals” (*Waverley* ch. 64).

precisely the hero's attraction to the wild Highlands that motivates the plots of *Waverley* and *Rob Roy*—but his novels do not suggest that civilization harbors savage vestiges. Thus his novels preserve the anthropological approach of locating the primitive at a distance, among cultural Others, by upholding the dichotomy between the civilized English and Scots Lowlanders and primitive “wild Highlanders.” However, from the 1860s, anthropologists like McLennan and Tylor disseminated the idea that modern social institutions are replete with primitive “survivals.” Both Eliot and Hardy appear to follow the anthropologists by identifying primitive or barbarous aspects of “civilized” society.<sup>5</sup> However, the way in which they do this is subversive because they tended to identify as deplorably barbarous those aspects of modern society that anthropologists had asserted were the hallmarks of civilization. For example, Eliot suggests in *Middlemarch* that modern patriarchal society is “primitive” in its oppression of women, whereas Lubbock, to whom she alludes in *Middlemarch*, celebrated modern patriarchy as the most beneficial state of society for women. And in *Jude the Obscure* Hardy suggests that the social requirement to marry is in itself a barbarous survival, inverting the longstanding anthropological treatment of companionate marriage as the apogee of cultural evolution.

These examples instantiate the third significant way in which Eliot and Hardy respond to anthropology: they turned to it as a source of light on questions concerning sexuality and the courtship and marriage plots. This interest, in the evolution of marriage and sexuality, is entirely absent from Scott's fiction, and only appears fleetingly, and

---

<sup>5</sup> This use of anthropology was not unique to writers of fiction, but was shared by influential cultural critics of the nineteenth century, such as Matthew Arnold, who in *Culture and Anarchy* criticized civilization for its barbarism. See Peter Melville Logan, “Matthew Arnold's Culture,” *Victorian Fetishism: Intellectuals and Primitives* (2009): 47-66.

suggestively, in his 1830 introduction to *Roy Roy* (1817), as I discuss in Chapter One. Influential works of mid-Victorian anthropology—McLennan's *Primitive Marriage* (1865) and Lubbock's *Origin of Civilization* (1870)—lent scientific authority to an emerging popular association between “savage” life and sexual violence. (This turn in anthropology was also accompanied by a deromanticization of the primitive in public discourse more generally, marking a break from Romantic-era representations of “wild Highlanders.”) This is another respect in which Eliot and Hardy invoke the anthropology of marriage only to subvert it. McLennan and Lubbock both emphasize the absolute separation of (unpleasant) primitive and (beneficent) civilized sexual practices and desires. Eliot and Hardy, however, both recuperate certain aspects of “primitive” sexuality within the modern world, and portray primitive forces operating as persistent “instincts” within modern minds and bodies. The notion of “primitive instinct” was surprisingly unpopular with anthropologists of the mid nineteenth century, who tended to explain savage sexual behavior in terms of utilitarian rationality, and Darwin's insistence that “primitive” sexual behavior must be instinct-driven was considered outlandish by anthropologists of marriage like McLennan, and was not incorporated into mainstream anthropology until the publication of Westermarck's *History of Human Marriage* in 1891. Hardy anticipates this 1890s association between evolutionism and the valorization of instinctive sexuality in his earlier novels, especially in *The Return of the Native* (1878).

Eliot's late novels make several explicit references to anthropology of the 1860s and 1870s, using examples from Lubbock, McLennan, and Darwin's anthropological writing in *The Descent of Man* (1871). In Chapter Two, I document the way in which *Middlemarch* (1872) refers to descriptions by Lubbock and Darwin of “primitive” male

courtship behavior involving ritualistic fights over women, and compares these ritualized expressions of desire to the rhetorical forms of chivalric love literature. In this way, Eliot draws attention to the culturally-constructed nature of a wide range of socially-sanctioned expressions of desire, and thus stresses the commonality between diverse cultures, suggesting not only that desire transcends cultural difference but also that human societies generally create comparable aesthetic forms—whether ritualized battles or Petrarchan poetry—to structure desire’s public expression. This move, which universalizes both desire and its aesthetic expression, implicitly undermines assertions of radical differences among the different “stages” of culture in Lubbock’s presentation of the evolution of marriage, while drawing on his data to make the critique.<sup>6</sup> Thus in *Middlemarch*, Eliot is careful to historicize everything except heterosexual relations, which are deliberately dehistoricized and thus transcendentalized.

Like *Middlemarch*, *Daniel Deronda* invokes an idea of “prehistoric” human emotion that is a source of ethical and loving relationships with others, and makes broad, cross-cultural analogies between sexual politics in modern Britain, classical myth, and anthropological ideas about primitive culture. *Middlemarch* alludes to anthropological ideas about courtship only to subvert cultural evolutionary readings of sexual behavior, and instead presents a rather Darwinian view of sexual relations as outside of historical or cultural-evolutionary constraints. However, *Daniel Deronda* reintroduces cultural evolution to explain the heroine’s sexual psychology, and rejects universalizing Darwinian claims about women’s biological nature, as I show in Chapter Three. I show

---

<sup>6</sup> Lubbock, following McLennan, had theorized a history of worldwide cultural evolution as a kind of marriage plot that began in sexual anarchy and culminated in Victorian companionate marriage.

that the novel's allusions to Darwin's arguments about motherhood in "nature" and to maternal infanticide among humans are connected to allusions to the Medea story, and I argue that the novel makes these rather shocking allusions in relation to the mothers it portrays—including fiercely maternal characters as well as Daniel Deronda's unloving mother—to expose the way in which diverse elements of nineteenth-century discourse construct womanhood as a choice between ideal motherhood and monstrosity. The novel instead dramatizes the idea that women's "primitive" or "natural" propensities are as diverse as men's, and that some primitive emotions—especially "primitive" irrational and superstitious fears—can be harnessed as a form of conscience.

Hardy, too, was interested in the value of the central primitive "superstition" identified by Tylor, the belief in an "animated nature" as a literary device. (It is to this belief that Hardy alludes when he speaks of the poetic "barbarous idea that confuses persons and things.") My fourth chapter shows that in the early 1870s Hardy was drawn to anthropology, and in particular to Tylorean accounts of myth's development, as a form of literary theory that he could both learn from and write against. In *Primitive Culture*, Tylor had charted the evolution of culture as a history of literary forms. George Stocking neatly delineates this history:

In Tylorian terms, the 'doctrine of survivals' was the basis for a kind of evolutionary sequence of genres [...] from mythology (the efforts of primitive men to explain the natural phenomena of the world around them)

to the folklore of the modern European peasantry, up to the nursery tales of civilized children.<sup>7</sup>

The chapter demonstrates Hardy's relationship to other writers of the 1870s, including Walter Pater, Andrew Lang, and John Addington Symonds, who viewed anthropology as a theory of literary evolution and a potential source of revitalization for contemporary literary aesthetics. Their reading of anthropology, which valorized primitive cultural forms, reversed the value judgments made by anthropologists such as the influential E.B. Tylor, who viewed myth as obsolete, and predicted the displacement of poetry by science. I demonstrate that Hardy's research and thinking in these areas developed in early novels such as *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), and came to fruition in *The Return of the Native* (1878) in the radical shifts in narratorial mode between an anthropological explanatory voice and a "primitive" perspective that endows the novel's famous Heath with animate life. In Chapter Five, I show that Hardy recuperates other primitive cultural forms, including the folk dance and the ballad in *The Return* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891). In these novels, Hardy explores the losses and gains offered by reviving primitive culture and by analyzing it through an anthropological lens. He represents folk dancing in sensualized aesthetic terms as a source of primitive ecstasy and sexual abandon. The fact that he portrays women experiencing "pagan-self-adoration" in the dance, moreover, implies a social critique of the constraints of women's ordinary lives and a celebration of folk culture as a source of liberating primitive sexuality. My concluding chapter shows that Hardy more explicitly invokes anthropology as social critique in *Jude the Obscure* (1895), to dramatize contemporary debates over sexual

---

<sup>7</sup> George Stocking, *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology, 1888-1951* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995).



politics. *Jude* considers contentious issues of sexual politics in light of recent anthropological theory, and the novel also has Sue critique her culture's sexual mores by denouncing them as "barbarous" or "savage," in other words, by using the terms of cultural evolutionism. Hardy thereby dramatizes the 1890s trend of appealing to anthropological theories to make normative claims about sexual politics, a strategy deployed by sexual reform campaigners such as Grant Allen and Havelock Ellis. Anthropologists themselves began to take more reformist positions in these debates, as Edward Westermarck does in *The History of Human Marriage* (1891). Westermarck's book was innovative in arguing that sexual reform needed to accommodate inherited instincts; Chapter Six shows how Hardy engages with this aspect of Westermarck's book in *Jude*.

Some significant work has recently been published on the ways in which particular nineteenth-century imaginative writers responded to anthropology.<sup>8</sup> In *Culture and Anomie* (1992), Christopher Herbert demonstrates that in the early Victorian era, notions of the primitive and the savage colored Henry Mayhew's portrayal of the London poor, while an anthropological attention to social rituals inflects Anthony Trollope's fiction. In *Disorienting Fiction* (2005), James Buzard argues that nineteenth-century novelists, including Scott and Charlotte Bronte, create narrators that anticipate the procedure of twentieth-century anthropologists. These narrators, he argues, regard British culture as participant-observers, and thus perform "autoethnography" in their novels. Buzard thus reads nineteenth-century fiction as an unwitting anticipation of modernist

---

<sup>8</sup> See also recent studies of individual authors responding to anthropology: for example, Beer, O'Hara, Radford, and Zeitler on Thomas Hardy; O'Hara on George Meredith; and Psomiades on Anthony Trollope.

anthropology. In contrast, my project shows that nineteenth-century novelists engaged with anthropology of their own era, and that they did so self-consciously. And in contrast with Herbert, I focus on writers interested in experimenting with and valorizing the primitive, as well as diagnosing it.

### **The History of Victorian Anthropology**

Eliot and Hardy both looked to anthropology as a source of folklore, myth, and other primitive forms and tropes, and as a source of theoretical structures for rethinking human sexuality and the courtship and marriage plot. Their responses to anthropology reflect the intensive focus of mainstream Victorian anthropology on myth and marriage. (Other major aspects of culture that have interested twentieth-century anthropologists, such as exchange and technology, barely feature in Victorian anthropological works.) The concern with these two topics was activated by two influential works: Edward Burnett Tylor's *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom* (1870), which focused on myth, and John McLennan's *Primitive Marriage: An Inquiry into the Origins of the Form of Capture in Marriage Ceremonies* (1865).<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Both writers are referred to by subsequent anthropologists as “the father of modern anthropology.” See Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, p. 153, and Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, passim. The topics continued to dominate anthropology through the 1890s, with J. G. Frazer's *Golden Bough* (1890) and Edward Westermarck's *History of Human Marriage* (1891).

The present-day discipline of anthropology is usually traced to its origin in the publication of these works,<sup>10</sup> and was institutionalized with the founding of the first readership in anthropology at Oxford University in 1884, initially held by Tylor.<sup>11</sup> Tylor is often called “the father of anthropology,” because he introduced the modern anthropological definition of culture: “Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”<sup>12</sup> However, Tylor did not intend “culture” in the pluralistic sense that defines modern anthropology, since he was the most influential proponent of the comparative method and unilineal cultural evolution.<sup>13</sup>

“Anthropology” was a fairly loose discipline until the founding of the Anthropological Institute in 1871, and indeed, prior to that date, a number of writers now considered “anthropologists,” including Tylor and Lubbock, would probably not have described themselves using this term.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, the field was wider than it now is, so that work on the evolution of humans from apes by Darwin and Huxley made them influential members of the Ethnological Society of London and of its successor the

---

<sup>10</sup> See George Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (1987), and Adam Kuper, *The Reinvention of Primitive Society* (2005).

<sup>11</sup> Kuklick, “Rise and Fall” 57.

<sup>12</sup> Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, Part I, *The Origins of Culture* (1871; Harper & Brothers: New York, 1958), p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> For this reason, Stocking questions the tradition of fathering modern anthropology upon Tylor.

<sup>14</sup> Stocking makes this point (*Victorian Anthropology* 324). In “What’s in a Name?” he shows why Lubbock, among others, was averse to the term “anthropology”—because of the Anthropological Society of London’s controversial associations with racism and impropriety.

Anthropological Institute.<sup>15</sup> This anthropology came out of a fusion of forces: the stadial theory of eighteenth-century conjectural history; anti-slavery and “aborigines’ protection” campaigns; colonial ethnographic surveys and travel narratives; German myth scholarship; British folklore collections in the early nineteenth century; and from 1858, Darwinian evolutionism and archeological discoveries that proved the earth’s long history.<sup>16</sup>

In Britain, organized ethnological research took off in the 1840s with the founding of the Ethnological Society of London (ESL) in 1843. While later Victorian anthropology drew heavily on Enlightenment stage theory, during the 1840s it was in abeyance as a paradigm for the study of cultural Others, since the then leading proponents of ethnology believed in a Biblical time span and that “savages” had “degenerated” from an Edenic stock (Bowler 1989). These principles reflect the origins of the Ethnological Society in Quaker campaigns of the 1830s promoting the rights of colonial subjects: the Society was founded by scientifically-inclined members of The Aborigines Protection Society, which had previously been the main British venue for ethnographic study,<sup>17</sup> and the ESL inherited the Christian-derived belief in “the psychic unity of mankind” from its parent organization. Most research by ESL members was

---

<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Huxley was president of the ethnological institute and presided over its reunion with the ALS as the anthropological institute.

<sup>16</sup> See Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, chapters 2-5, and “What’s in a Name? The Origins of the Royal Anthropological Institute (1837-71)” for an excellent and thorough account of anthropology’s emergence. Adam Kuper offers a somewhat less detailed history in *The Reinvention of Primitive Society*.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Stocking, “What’s in a Name?” 361. The APS was organized in 1837 in the wake of successful campaigns against the slave trade and slavery in the colonies; its aim was to assemble “information concerning the character, habits, and wants of the uncivilised tribes, to prove with ethnological evidence that colonized subjects were susceptible to Christianity and other civilizing influences (see Stocking, “What’s in a Name?” and 1987).

aimed at tying “all men together into a single ethnological family tree,” to disprove arguments that racial differences were hereditary and immutable (Stocking, “What’s in a Name?” ). In doing this, they followed the methods of James Cowles Prichard, whose *Researches into the Physical History of Man* (1813-42) had pioneered the detailed study of alien cultures. He believed in a biblical timescale (with the earth around 6,000 years old), and took a diffusionist approach to cultural difference: all humans can be traced back to Adam, and “savages” are degenerates from the ancient Edenic stock. (The diffusionist approach and degenerationist view of culture persisted into the early 1870s in Max Muller’s works on linguistics and mythography.)

Meanwhile, from the 1840s, writers such as Robert Knox were taking a very different approach to other cultures, arguing that human races were so fundamentally distinct that they were “entitled to the name of species” (quoted in Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* 45). Knox and his followers denied the possibility of either biological or cultural evolution, arguing that “savages” were incapable of civilization. It was a disciple of Knox, James Hunt, who brought the term anthropology into wider use in the 1860s, and who made it for a time anathema to evolutionary “ethnologists” such as Lubbock and Tylor. Hunt had been a member of the ESL, but left in disgust at their insistence on “the psychic unity of mankind” to found the rival Anthropological Society of London in 1863, which placed racial differences at the heart of anthropology (Stocking, “What’s in a Name?” 376-9).

As Stocking remarks in his indispensable study of *Victorian Anthropology*, “the men now remembered as the pioneers of anthropology were on the whole extremely antagonistic to the ASL.” Wallace refers to the ASL as “that bête noire” and Huxley as

“that nest of imposters” (*Victorian Anthropology* 248).<sup>18</sup> This hostility was partly owing to Hunt’s rejection of evolutionism, and partly because Wallace and Huxley, like the other evolutionists, believed in the unity of the human species and rejected Hunt’s approach to race. (Hunt in turn was openly antagonistic to Darwinian and cultural evolutionism, as well as to the liberal politics of the evolutionist camp.)<sup>19</sup> The evolutionists—Darwin, Lubbock, McLennan, and Tylor—were all strongly monogenist, and their insistence that societies independently passed through the same sequence of stages was evidence for the “psychic unity of mankind.” Lubbock and Darwin, however, claimed that different social groups, or “races,” differed in innate moral and intellectual capacities, and so formed an evolutionary “missing link” between modern humans and their pre-human ancestors. Tylor’s notion of the “psychic unity of mankind,” however, was more thoroughgoing—he thought that all humans had the same innate capacities that were molded by environmental conditions.

Tylor and the other evolutionists in anthropology were spurred to investigate cultural evolution over an extended period by the archeological findings in Brixham

---

<sup>18</sup> The ASL also rendered “anthropology” temporarily disreputable by making a point of discussing sexually explicit topics. Members of the ASL, such as Richard Burton, criticized the ESL’s policy of admitting women to meetings since it meant losing the freedom to discuss subjects like circumcision and phallic worship. (For more discussion of the problems posed by sexual topics for Victorian anthropologists, see Stocking (1987), 28-9, and Lyons and Lyons, *Irregular Connections*.)

<sup>19</sup> The first of the ASL’s publications combined these two antagonisms: it was a “memoir” by Hunt entitled “On the Negro’s place in nature” (an evident parody of Huxley’s title, *Man’s Place in Nature*), which argued that humans of African descent were a different species to Europeans. Leaders of the ASL and ESL also took opposing sides in the controversy of Governor Eyre’s massacre of Jamaican protestors at Morant Bay and his extra-judicial execution of a mixed-race Jamaican politician, with Huxley as a leader of the campaign to prosecute Eyre. See Stocking, “What’s in a Name?” .

Cave, Kent, in 1858, of ancient human remains amongst the skeletons of extinct animals. This discovery made the central idea of Darwin's *Origin* (1859)—that humans evolved from apes over an immensely long period—more plausible, and thenceforward, it became a pressing question in anthropology to discover how humankind had evolved over this long period from quasi-apes to civilized Victorian gentlemen. Influential archaeological works<sup>20</sup> offered evidence that prehistoric Europe was comparable to modern savagery, licensing Lubbock, McLennan, and Tylor to study contemporary “savage” societies to learn about European prehistory.<sup>21</sup> In this respect, the evolutionary anthropologists revived the “stage theory” pioneered by eighteenth-century conjectural historians such as Adam Smith, Lord Kames and John Millar, and Dugald Stewart,<sup>22</sup> and drew on the now-extensive literature on contemporary “savages” to place stage theory on a broader empirical footing. As George Stocking notes, “The cultural contrast implicit in the idea of ‘civilization’ is surely as old as civilization itself” (1987: 10), but it was the Enlightenment historians who invented the notion that this contrast represented the poles on a temporal axis of cultural progress, and that contemporary societies which appeared

---

<sup>20</sup> For example, the English translation of Worsaae's *Primeval Antiquities of Denmark* (1849) and Daniel Wilson, *The Archaeology and Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* (1851).

<sup>21</sup> This idea fueled the early works of Tylor and Lubbock: Tylor, *Researches in the Early History of Mankind* (1865) and Lubbock, *Prehistoric Times: as Illustrated by Ancient Remains and the Manners and Customs of Modern Savages* (1865).

<sup>22</sup> McLennan directly signals his inheritance from the Scottish Enlightenment tradition when he closes *Primitive Marriage* with a quote from Dugald Stewart, who taught Scott at Edinburgh University. It is a ringing call for the study of ethnographic data in order to dispel “what Dugald Stewart calls ‘that indolent philosophy which refers to a miracle whatever appearance both in the natural and moral worlds it is unable to explain’” (291).

less advanced than industrializing Britain represented earlier cultural “stages.”<sup>23</sup> In short, they realigned a spatial distribution of social “stages” along a temporal axis. In the eighteenth century, the diagnosis of each stage was largely based on its mode of economic production; thus, roughly speaking, all societies supposedly progressed through four key stages of development: hunting and gathering, tribal nomadic pastoralism, feudal agriculturalism, and industrial modernity.<sup>24</sup> From the 1860s onwards, Victorian anthropology instead gauged levels of culture by the stage of a society’s belief-system (in the work of Tylor and Frazer), or based on courtship and marriage customs and the position of women (in the work of McLennan, Lubbock, and Westermarck).

In *Primitive Marriage*, McLennan influentially hypothesized that the earliest form of social organization was matriarchal, meaning that descent and familial loyalty were traced through the mother because paternity could not be ascertained. He asserted that in the most primitive societies, too, sexual relationships were transient and multiple sexual partners the order of the day—a state he referred to as “primitive promiscuity.” He claimed, however, that in matriarchal societies, far from celebrating women, the practice of killing female children became common, as savages developed rational foresight and realized that women were of less value than men in the struggle for the tribe’s

---

<sup>23</sup> Stocking gives a suggestive etymology of the ancient terms created to describe this cultural contrast: “‘Barbarian’ derives from the Greek contrast between those who spoke intelligibly and those beyond the pale of civil life whose language seemed simply reiterative mumbling [...] A second contrastive term derives not from language but from habitat: ‘savages’ (from the Latin ‘sylva’) were those who lived in the woods, rather than in the city” (1987: 10).

<sup>24</sup> Adam Smith was the first to outline these stages in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence* of 1762-3.



existence.<sup>25</sup> When female infanticide became sufficiently prevalent, according to McLennan's account, women became a scarce resource, meaning that wives could only be obtained by capturing women from other tribes, a strategy for which McLennan coined the phrase "marriage by capture."<sup>26</sup> His arguments for the prevalence of matriarchy, primitive promiscuity, female infanticide, and marriage by capture were widely influential and were disseminated by Lubbock and the American anthropologists Lewis Henry Morgan, among others—although they did not attempt to reproduce McLennan's sequence of causal connections between the various elements.<sup>27</sup>

Darwin engaged at length with McLennan's views in *The Descent of Man*, but failed in his attempts to reconcile "marriage by capture" with his own theories, and relegated the practice to a section entitled "causes that interfere with the action of sexual selection."<sup>28</sup> Subsequently, Westermarck dealt with this problem by suggesting that

---

<sup>25</sup> "Female infanticide—common among savages everywhere—prevails as a system [...] To tribes [...] contending with the difficulties of subsistence, sons were a source of strength [...] daughters a source of weakness. Hence the cruel custom which, leaving the primitive human hordes with very few young women of their own [...] forced them to prey upon one another for wives" (58).

<sup>26</sup> To these circumstances, rather than to "instinct," McLennan traces the origin of exogamy and the incest taboo. "The scarcity of women within the group led to a practice of stealing the women from other groups, and in time it came to be considered improper, because it was unusual, for a man to marry a woman of his own group" (115).

<sup>27</sup> Although he was influential, McLennan's strained logic was apparent to his contemporaries. The implausibility of primitive matriarchy coexisting with male sexual savagery was implied by Lang in his satirical "Double Ballade of Primitive Man": "His communal wives, at his ease, / He would curb with occasional blows; / Or his State had a queen, like the bees [...] / 'Tis the manner of Primitive Man." (Lang, *Ballads in Blue China*, 1881).

<sup>28</sup> McLennan's theories of primitive marriage were rather at odds with the evolutionary idea that humans have descended from animals and would therefore share sexual instincts with animals. McLennan acknowledged such criticisms of his work and responded by implying that human social interactions may be divorced

marriage by capture, along with any other sexual or marital custom not compatible with Darwinism, is not genuinely primitive but must instead have originated in somewhat more developed societies. He theorized that primitive marriage must be monogamous, given that this is the form of “marriage” mostly practiced among our nearest kin, the great apes, and then proves this using ethnological evidence from around the world. Westermarck’s unreserved Darwinism was a novelty in anthropology, and his work registers the way in which the relatively new sense of “instinct” as biologically heritable was becoming increasingly central to understanding sexuality and romantic love. The term “instinct” changed radically over the course of the nineteenth century: it started out as a Burkean conservative term, associated with conservative nostalgia and religious ideas of “human nature,” became associated with scientific evolutionism and primitive moral “license,” and ended the century associated with passionate romantic love in arguments for sexual liberalization and “free unions” made by writers like Havelock Ellis and Grant Allen.

Westermarck thus wrote in a controversial new way about “marriage,” which for various reasons offended both lay and scientific readers. He redefined marriage as any period of monogamous cohabitation, and uses this redefinition to compare human and animal mating. This meant he could describe as ‘marriage’ many arrangements that were regarded as immoral by most of his contemporaries, and decoupled the notion of

---

from biology: “the enquiry, remember, is a *human* one” (quoted in George Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* 176).

marriage from the idea of a moral safeguard, which did not go down well with reviewers.<sup>29</sup>

Westermarck's book has been called "a bridge between the Victorian period and the modernist writings of Malinowski." His proto-modernism declares itself in a greater respect for the specificity of "primitive" cultures studied; a more cautious drawing of inferences; and a rejection of the idea that "civilization" represents the benefits for women claimed by earlier anthropologists. He also argued against the progressivism of earlier anthropology, by rejecting the idea that the "history of human marriage" is always one of progress from worse to better, and offered evidence that instead, the "family institutes of savage tribes" resemble modern monogamous marriage, because they involve monogamous cohabitation that is motivated by sexual desire and parental instincts. The corruptions of polygyny, polyandry, and marriages by capture—which earlier writers like Lubbock and McLennan had claimed were the most "primitive" forms of marriage—had only arisen in partly civilized cultures (which Westermarck alludes to as "barbarism"), or in civilization itself.<sup>30</sup>

The evolutionary narratives created by anthropologists throughout the period I discuss had evident political implications, which shifted in the late nineteenth century. Both Enlightenment writers on the primitive and the mid-Victorian anthropologists tended to valorize the civilized status quo by contrast with "savagery," with all the binaristic value-judgments that entailed, and by implication, offered some endorsement to

---

<sup>29</sup> For example, the anonymous reviewer of the book in *Science* (18.444, p.80), says that "Marriage is a moral institution, and therefore cannot exist except among moral beings; and Mr. Westermarck's failure to duly appreciate the moral aspects of his subject is the principal defect of his work."

<sup>30</sup> At one point, Westermarck notes dryly that "There is thus a certain resemblance between the family institution of savage tribes and that of the most advanced races."

colonialism and empire. In the 1860s and 70s, evolutionists carefully distanced themselves from political radicalism and sexual permissiveness. The anthropologists of marriage, McLennan and Lubbock, reified contemporary sexual norms and the position of women in Victorian society by contrasting them favorably with savage brutality.<sup>31</sup> In the 1880s-1890s, however, anthropological writers like Edward Westermarck and Havelock Ellis explicitly advocated in their works in favor of sexually liberal causes, and anthropology was recruited by non-scientific writers in order to prove or disprove various ideological positions on sex and marriage. Thus the *fin de siècle* saw an increasing overlap between writers on evolution and sexual reform campaigners.

Decades earlier, in 1870, Tylor had called anthropology a “reformer’s science” in a rousing paragraph of *Primitive Culture*, but Tylor did not mean direct political reform, but rather, “to expose the remains of crude old culture which have passed into harmful superstition and to mark these out for destruction.” Tylor was even more specific about the object of reform in the stanzas that he wrote anonymously for Lang’s satire on anthropology, “The Double Ballade of Primitive Man.” The aim was “Theologians all to expose”—to mark out religion itself, perhaps, as a “harmful superstition” (Lang 1880 39). To this end, Tylor frequently implies Christianity’s evolutionary connection to more “barbarous” religions.

As we have seen, the different strands of anthropology had political connotations. Evolutionary anthropology, which became the disciplinary mainstream, emerged from a commitment to proving human monogenism and “psychic unity.” So for Eliot and Hardy to be interested in this particular type of anthropology reflects their relative political

---

<sup>31</sup> See Gowan Dawson, *Darwinism and Victorian Respectability*.

liberalism and agnosticism, as well as their scientific belief in evolutionism. Eliot chose to read Darwin, Lubbock, McLennan, and Tylor on “primitive man,” rather than reading Richard Burton or any of the other members of the Anthropological Society. This reflects the facts that, like Hardy, she is disinclined to denigrate “primitive culture,” and that she, like Tylor and Darwin, believed in the “psychic unity of mankind.” However, both Eliot and Hardy resisted the intense progressivism of much evolutionary anthropology. Instead, they valorize the primitive for its poetic potential (as Scott had done), and viewed it as a repository of knowledge about human nature and society. For the most part, the anthropologists did not advocate cultural relativism, but their work opens up its possibility to imaginative writers by offering a wide array of cultural practices, and the imaginative richness of what Hardy referred to in his notes as “the poetic fancies of savages.”

### **“The Romance of Fact”: Victorian Anthropology’s Literary Affinities**

This study focuses primarily on the ways in which novelists responded to anthropology. However, lines of affinity and influence run in the other direction, too. Victorian anthropology was, for a science, unusually inflected by the ideology and cultural experience of its practitioners (even by Victorian standards).<sup>32</sup> Moreover, major anthropologists viewed their work as addressing literary concerns (in the case of Tylor and Lang), or viewed their subject-matter as having a literary appeal (in the case of McLennan and Frazer), or drew inspiration or data from literary writers.

---

<sup>32</sup> See *Victorian Anthropology*, ch.6.

When Darwin wanted data on facial expressions, when he was developing his theories of human evolution in the 1830s and 40s, it was to Scott's fiction that he turned. Examples from Scott's novels appear as key evidence in Darwin's early notebooks, in which he was already amassing data to support his theory that humans share their moral and intellectual traits with other animals. In his private notebook of 1838, Darwin considers four different incidents in Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering* (1815) and *The Antiquary* (1816) as evidence for hypotheses about the evolution of various instincts.<sup>33</sup> Decades later, in *The Expression of The Emotions* (1872) Darwin cites evidence from novels by authors such as Scott, Eliot, Dickens, and Gaskell, as key evidence supporting his arguments, and he uses the fictional examples in the same way that he cites ethnographic accounts of human behavior.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, scientific reviews of *The Expression* endorsed the book's use of evidence from literary works.<sup>35</sup> The *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* recommends that future anthropologists studying facial expression should seek further literary data (445). This suggests that for Darwin and his conjectured audience, novelists are rather like anthropological observers, whose observations can be cited in the same way as those of Darwin's ethnological correspondents. This belief in the evidential validity of fictional representation also

---

<sup>33</sup> For example, in thinking about the distinction between conscious recall and instinctive memory, he writes, "Miss Cogan's [an acquaintance's] memory of the tune, might be compared to birds singing, or some instinctive sounds. [...] Old Elspeth's in *Antiquary* power of repeating poetry in her dotage is fact of same sort. Aunt B. ditto" (*Notebooks on Mind*). The notebooks contain three more examples from Scott's fiction that confirm Darwin's theories about the evolution of instincts related to memory and the expression of emotions.

<sup>34</sup> The novels he quotes or paraphrases include *Redgauntlet* (1824), *Oliver Twist* (1838), *Adam Bede* (1859), *Mary Barton* (1848), and *Miss Marjoribanks* (1866).  
<sup>35</sup> See also "The Expression of the Emotions," *Popular Science Review* 12.46 (Jan: 1873): 71-3.

reflects a wider sense (present also in Hardy's article on "The Science of Fiction," for example) that fictional realism and science were consilient enterprises with the common goal of expanding human knowledge through careful observation and generalization.

If novels continued to be thought of as quasi-anthropology through the late nineteenth-century, anthropology was also considered to have a poetic or novelistic appeal.<sup>36</sup> Many studies demonstrate that *The Golden Bough* repays attention to its literary qualities, including its irony and romanticism, and Frazer designed the structure of the first, two-volume edition so that it would offer readers the suspense plot of a novel.<sup>37</sup> In a similar vein, in an early essay comparing the marriage laws of England and Scotland, McLennan suggests that the anthropological treatment of marriage laws offers readers attractions analogous to those of novels such as *The Heart of Midlothian* or *Adam Bede*, which "engage all our sympathies" (McLennan 1861: 187).<sup>38</sup> Because marriage laws are within the lived experience of most novel-readers, their novelistic treatment will "never pall upon the reader's attention. They yield, indeed, in attraction only to the romance of fact" (188).<sup>39</sup> By implication, this statement recognizes a novelistic appeal in his myriad narratives of young women kidnapped by groups of unscrupulous men or otherwise

---

<sup>36</sup> This continued sense of the kinship of anthropology and imaginative literature is rather remarkable, given the increasing professionalization within the sciences in the late nineteenth century.

<sup>37</sup> For literary readings of Frazer, see Hyman, *The Tangled Bank* (1962) and Robert Fraser, *The Golden Bough and the Literary Imagination* (1990). In introducing his abridgement of *The Golden Bough* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), Robert Fraser makes a case that the book has a deliberately novelistic design, akin to a "pot-boiler or detective story" (xxi).

<sup>38</sup> Anon. [McLennan], "Marriage and Divorce: the Law of England and Scotland," *The North British Review*, August 1861.

<sup>39</sup> In the rest of the essay, he compares Scots marriage and divorce laws favorably to the English, and defends the former against accusations of barbarism.

forced into marriage, which makes up a large part in his subsequent seminal work of anthropology, *Primitive Marriage* (1865).

Nineteenth-century anthropologists also viewed the object of their study, “primitive man,” as inherently poetic, perpetuating a Romanticist belief popularized in the eighteenth century.<sup>40</sup> Andrew Lang identified this as a cliché of anthropology worthy of parody in his satirical “Ballade of Primitive Man”: “When he spoke, it was never in prose, / But he sang in a strain that would scan / [...] ‘Twas the manner of Primitive Man.”<sup>41</sup> In *Primitive Culture*, Tylor argues at length that the most primitive way of viewing the world, “animism,” is inherently poetic: “the state of men’s minds in the mythologic period” produces a “ceaseless flow of poetic improvisation” and “wild shifting poetry” (I 276). The “poetic sensibility” is itself a “stage” in mental evolution: “The mental condition of the lower races is the key to poetry, nor is it a small portion of the poetic realm which these definitions cover” (II 404). Animistic myths, he rhapsodizes, are “the soul of all poetry,” and the modern poet shares the savage sensibility: “A poet of our own day has still much in common with the minds of uncultured tribes in the mythologic stage of thought” (I 284).

Tylor’s own extensive citation and discussion of diverse forms of poetry, primitive and modern, evinces its enormous value and interest for him. Extended discussions of poetry in theory and in practice appear throughout the two volumes, and Tylor even claims that his have potential for the literary critic, arguing that anyone who

---

<sup>40</sup> Giambattista Vico (1688-1744) was an early proponent of this idea, which was very much popularized by the Ossian poems of the mid eighteenth century.

<sup>41</sup> Lang, *Ballades in Blue China* (1880), 38. Although Lang makes fun of this idea in the “ballade,” in his published anthropological writing he too argues that the primitive perspective was intrinsically poetic.



wishes to understand poetry “analytically” will “do well to study it ethnographically” (*Primitive Culture* II 404). He quotes Milton, Wordsworth, William Barnes, British folk songs, Scott’s *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, alongside ancient myths and folk poems from many other countries and groups, including the Dinka, the Finns, and the Maoris among hundreds of others.

Taylor’s attraction to poetry, which he has defined as primitive, is in tension with Taylor’s other master narrative, that enlightenment and progress necessitate the eradication of primitive modes of thought. He therefore expresses ambivalence in respect to the decline of the primitive “poetic” sensibility when he reflects in an aside that, “fortunately or unfortunately modern education has proved [...] powerful to destroy” it (I: 284). Ancient and savage myths, Tylor writes elegiacally, are “still so full to us of unfading life and beauty,” but they are nonetheless “the masterpieces of an art belonging rather to the past than to the present.” The poetic sensibility is fading, dying; yet, Tylor suggests, it is fortunately not yet completely dead to the civilized: “In those moments of the civilized man’s life when he casts hard dull science and returns to childhood’s fancy the world old book of animated nature is open to him anew” (II: 190). The nineteenth-century Western scientist is lucky, Tylor thinks, because he is at a liminal stage in which it is still possible for him to inhabit the poetic, mythic, animistic animation:

There is a kind of intellectual frontier within which he must be who will sympathise with myth while he must be without who will investigate it and it is our fortune that we live near this frontier line, and can go in and out. European scholars can still in a measure understand the belief of Greeks or Aztecs or Maoris in their native myths, and at the same time can

compare and interpret them without the scruples of men to whom such tales are history and even sacred history (I: 286).

Tylor tracks a history from the “vigour” of savage imagination to the decadence of “affected and even artificial poetry” of civilization:

The state of mind to which such imaginative fictions belong is found in full vigour in the savage condition of mankind; its growth and inheritance continue into the higher culture of barbarous or half civilized nations and at last in the civilized world its effects pass more and more from realized belief into fanciful affected and even artificial poetry (I 331).

The anthropologist himself needs to have a poetic sensibility like that of Wordsworth.<sup>42</sup>

*Primitive Culture* makes apparent Tylor’s thinly-veiled Romanticism in his attitude to poetry, a position that is shared by other ostensibly progressivist Victorian anthropologists of myth, including Frazer and Andrew Lang.

Lang’s career conjoined literature and anthropology in a remarkable way. His publications interspersed studies such as *Custom and Myth* (1884), *Myth, Ritual and Religion* (1887), *The Secret of the Totem* (1905), *The Origins of Terms of Human Relationships* (1908), and *Method in the Study of Totemism* (1911) with literary criticism, folk literature anthologies, and imaginative literary works of his own. He had

---

<sup>42</sup> “Wanting the power of transporting himself into this imaginative atmosphere, the student occupied with the analysis of the mythic world may fail so pitifully in conceiving its depth and intensity of meaning as to convert it into stupid fiction. Those can see more justly who have the poet’s gift of throwing their minds back into the world’s older life like the actor who for a moment can forget himself and become what he pretends to be. Wordsworth [...] could write of Storm and Winter, or of the naked Sun climbing the sky, as though he were some Vedic poet at the head spring of the Aryan race seeing with his mind’s eye a mythic hymn to Agni or Varuna. Fully to understand an old world myth needs not evidence and argument alone but deep poetic feeling” (I: 276).

“considerable influence” on both anthropologists and literary writers, and Stocking has argued that his work was largely “responsible for the great surge in interest in romance in the 1880s and 1890s” (*After Tylor* 52).<sup>43</sup> He was especially influenced by Scott, and produced annotated editions of the Waverley novels (1893) and Scott’s poetry (1900), and an anthropology-infused study of *Sir Walter Scott and the Border Minstrelsy* (1910). In his most influential anthropological work, an early essay which at once succeeded in debunking Muller and foregrounding literature as a field for anthropological investigation, he begins by citing Scott as an anthropological influence:

More than sixty years have passed since Scott, in a note to “The Lady of the Lake,” first called attention in England to the scientific importance of these fictions, and at the same time gave what seems a wrong direction to the enquiry. “A work of great interest,” Scott says, “might be compiled upon the origin of popular fiction, and the transmission of similar tales from age to age, and from country to country. The mythology of one period would then appear to pass into the romance of the next, and that into the nursery tales of subsequent ages.” Much has been done for the study of “popular fiction” since Scott wrote this, when the Grimms were even then at work in Germany [...] But Scott’s view of the genesis of

---

<sup>43</sup> Lang viewed “savage” literature as “cruel, puerile, obscene,” but admired its spirit and energy (53). He “disparaged” the works of Conrad, Dostoevsky, Hardy, James, Tolstoy and Zola, and championed Barrie, Doyle, Kipling and his friends Rider Haggard and Stevenson (*After Tylor* 52).

*Märchen*, supposing Scott by mythology to have meant the higher mythology, appears still to be the accepted one.”<sup>44</sup>

Lang sees Scott as an anthropological precursor, saying that Scott was the first to call attention to the “scientific import” of folk narratives. As Lang recognized, Scott’s writing anticipated nineteenth-century anthropologists in applying stage theory to folk literary forms and myth, and his work exerted a diffuse but pervasive influence on nineteenth-century anthropology via the impact of his folklore collections, as well as through his impact on particular scientists including Darwin, Lang, and Frazer.<sup>45</sup> Scott’s collections of folksongs and poetry inspired works by later Scottish folklore-collectors, for example, Robert Chambers’ *Traditions of Edinburgh* (1824) and Hugh Miller’s *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland* (Dorson 107-59). Some of the leading figures of English folklore in the early nineteenth century were also inspired by Scott (*Victorian Anthropology* 55-6), and his *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* have been recognized as the “first full-length treatise in English on [...] folklore” (Dorson 115). Scott was the first writer to bring together stage theory and folklore in fiction. In both his novels and folklore-recovery projects, Scott looked to “primitive culture” within the British Isles as a source of narrative possibility and poetic energy. The primitive was seen as a source of poetry that could still be appreciated by prosaic moderns, and under Scott’s influence, novels became a unique medium that could fuse the poetry of anthropological subject-matter and primitive cultural forms with the naturalistic interpretive lens of the anthropologist, a productive fusion of romance and scientific social analysis. This sense

---

<sup>44</sup> Lang, “*Kalevala: or the Finnish National Epic.*” *Fraser’s Magazine* (June 1872): 667-77.

<sup>45</sup> In *Devolving English Literature*, Robert Crawford argues that Frazer’s scene-painting is directly influenced by Scott’s (157-169).

of the literary effectiveness of the primitive, evident in Scott's writing, was revived in the late nineteenth century and infused Modernist literature. Because of his impact on the writers discussed in subsequent chapters, Chapter One will examine precisely how Scott's fiction responds to the anthropological themes and concerns raised by own folklore researches and by the proto-anthropological work of eighteenth-century conjectural historians.

## Chapter One

### Anthropology, Romance, and the Gendered Primitive in Walter Scott's *Waverley* Novels

Scott's celebration of the primitive and attachment to the ancient and the folkloric was at odds with the progressive, Whiggish politics of the conjectural historians. Nonetheless, he was attracted to the explanatory power of conjectural history, and especially to the idea that exploring contemporary primitive culture yields knowledge of the past. In his introduction to *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-3), he asserts that studying literature such as that collected in *The Minstrelsy* yields information about the character of earlier stages of culture, the "primitive" and the "barbarous."<sup>46</sup> Cultural evolution was particularly vivid to the Scots because of the evident gulf between the "civilized" Lowlands and "wild" Highlands. A virtuosic digression in *Waverley* (1814) describes a band of Highlanders arriving in the Lowlands, and explains that the contrast between the "stages" within Scotland was such that it could evoke "terror" among the Lowlanders:

The grim, uncombed, and wild appearance of these men [the Highlanders], most of whom gazed with all the admiration of ignorance upon the most ordinary productions of domestic art, created surprise in the Lowlands, but it also created terror. So little was the condition of the Highlands known at that late period that the character and appearance of their population, while thus sallying forth as military adventurers, conveyed to the South-Country

---

<sup>46</sup> "Introductory Remarks on Popular Poetry," preface to the *Minstrelsy, Poetical Works*, vol.1, pp.11-12

Lowlanders as much surprise as if an invasion of African Negroes or Esquimaux Indians had issued forth from the northern mountains of their own native country (214).

The Scots were early witnesses of a phenomenon that later became a more common British experience: the easy conquest or displacement of “savages” by civilized Europeans, which took place in 1800s Scotland with the Highland clearances. (Such erasures of indigenous people appeared to some Victorian writers to be evidence of the inferiority of savage irrationality compared with the European scientific mind.) Stage theory is dramatized in Scott’s early novels in the form of a travelogue recounting a journey into the past undertaken by the novel’s hero: in *Waverley*’s journey from England through the Lowlands to the Highlands, and in *Rob Roy*, in Frank Osbaldistone’s journey from London to Osbaldistone Hall, a quasi-feudal estate in Northumberland, to Glasgow, and thence to the “wild Highlands.” Scott’s 1830 introduction to *Rob Roy* explains the appeal of crossing the Highland line in terms of both cultural contrast and the romantic allure of primitive freedom found in the Highlands:

It is this strong contrast betwixt the civilised and cultivated mode of life on the one side of the Highland line, and the wild and lawless adventures which were habitually undertaken and achieved by one who dwelt on the opposite side of that ideal boundary, which creates the interest attached to his [Rob’s] name (5).

This sense of the Highlands as a site of romance fuels Scott’s interest in Highland culture as an object of antiquarian or ethnographic study. However, Scott’s approach of valuing Highland culture for aesthetic reasons while assessing it through the lens of stage theory

was unusual. In Scott's era, the evolutionist approach to primitive culture was at odds with literary approaches to the British folk tradition. The evolutionist approach in works of conjectural history that influenced Scott, for example, by Smith and Kames, focused on the lawless violence and economic unproductivity of "savage" culture, and virtually ignored folklore and "primitive" aesthetic forms. In contrast, imaginative writers began to valorize and celebrate the primitive as a source of narrative and poetry. Writers like James McPherson, Percy, and Scott himself began to ransack British folk culture for literary purposes and present it for civilized consumption—for example, in MacPherson's spurious folk epics, *The Works of Ossian* (1765), Percy's recovered folksongs in his *Reliques of English Poetry* (1765), and the orally-preserved Lowland ballads of Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-3). Scott was the first writer to successfully import folk materials into fiction, beginning with *Waverley* in 1814.

Scott's novels combined in a single genre two discourses that had been kept separate in his folklore recovery projects such as the *Minstrelsy*: the anthropological approach of his introduction and footnotes, and the folkloric materials of poetic romance. Scott's fusion of these discourses in his fiction anticipated the novelistic use of anthropology alongside pagan and folkloric tropes later in the century, for example by Hardy. The scientific history and folklore traditions on which Scott called correlate with the two main strands of thinking about the Highlanders (and other alien cultures) in the early nineteenth century: the discourses of "Improvement" and "Romance."<sup>47</sup> In Scott's work, both of these discourses have been perceived by recent critics as politically conservative: the discourse of Improvement endorses empire-building, while the

---

<sup>47</sup> See Peter Womack, *Improvement and Romance* (1989).



discourse of Romance evinces a passive nostalgia at the passing of folk culture in the wake of empire-building.<sup>48</sup> However, it seems likely that Scott's invocation of the romance of the primitive was not merely elegiac, and that he did want to enlist his readers' sympathy for Highland culture by valorizing it in his fiction, and thereby ensure its preservation, at least in some vestigial form.<sup>49</sup>

In his representations of distinct aspects of Scottish society—cosmopolitan Edinburgh and Glasgow, Lowland rural life, and Highland tribal culture—Scott draws on the classic paradigm of Enlightenment conjectural history, the idea that all societies progress through a fixed sequence of developmental stages. The stadial model of history, articulated first by Lord Kames and famously by Adam Smith, hypothesized that societies progress through four stages: hunting and gathering food, nomadic pastoralism, feudal agriculture, and commercial civilization. Notably, these classifications determined the stage of a society based on the mode of production and the behavior of its male members. As Scott himself points out in narratorial digressions in several novels (such as that quoted above), all of these stages of society were still visible in Scotland, neatly proving to its Scottish exponents the viability of “stage theory” and the possibility of cultural progress by “improving” primitive groups like the Highlanders.

The stage theory model is especially prominent in *Rob Roy* (1817), and Scott repeatedly draws our attention to the novel's engagement with the stadial model of history. In his introduction, he claims that his historical account of Rob's career can shed light “not on Highland manners alone, but on every stage of society in which the people

---

<sup>48</sup> See e.g. Ian Duncan, “Primitive Inventions” (2002), and Womack (1989).

<sup>49</sup> However, the fact that Scott's novels influenced several generations of readers who invented modern imperialism suggests the relative inefficacy of novels as a means to enlist sympathy for “Others.”

of a primitive and half-civilized tribe are brought into close contact with a nation, in which civilization and polity has attained a complete superiority” (40). The Highlanders of *Rob Roy*, who live either by cattle droving or by relying on “the good things their mountains could offer” (412), fit the earliest two cultural stages, pastoralism and hunting, and are thus classified as “savage” or “primitive.” Rob himself tells Frank that he and his followers are living the way their ancestors did a “thousand years since” (406). The Highland societies represented in *Waverley* and *Rob Roy* are thus represented in ways that place them at slightly different “stages.” In *Waverley*, the Highlands are a mixture of the primitive and the feudal, the latter evidenced in the intricate stratification of hereditary ranks at Fergus’s table. In *Rob Roy*, on the other hand, Highland society fits into the most “primitive” categories within the conjectural history model. Rob’s assertion that he and his followers are living the way their ancestors did “a thousand years since” (406) echoes the famous subtitle of *Waverley*—“‘Tis Sixty Years Since”—but startlingly alters it to emphasize that Rob and his clansmen are emanations from a stage of society quite different from Fergus McIvor’s feudal fiefdom.

In *Rob Roy*, readers are presented with several evaluations of the Highlands in terms of their mode of economic production, according the standards of stage theory, by Lowlanders who view the Highlands as objects for “improvement.” Frank’s guide through the Highlands, a Glaswegian merchant, Bailie Nicol Jarvie, diagnoses the Highlands in precisely this way. The Highlands, he warns Frank, are ““but a wild kind of world by themselves,” and the Highlanders “are an uncivilised people,” because they do not work. ““Now, sir, it’s a sad and awfu’ truth, that there is neither wark, nor the very fashion nor appearance of wark, for the tae half of thae puir creatures; that is to say, that

the agriculture, the pasturage, the fisheries, and every species of honest industry about the country, cannot employ the one moiety of the population” (300). Scott’s endorses this view in his 1830 introduction to the novel, when he approvingly quotes an authority on the causes of “disturbances” in the Highlands, “Mr. Grahame of Gartmore.” Because of Highland lawlessness, Grahame wrote,

‘there is no culture of ground, no improvement of pastures, and from the same reasons, no manufactures, no trade; in short, no industry. [...] Every place is full of idle people, accustomed to arms, and lazy in everything but rapines and depredations. As *buddel* or *aquavitae* houses are to be found everywhere through the country, so in these they saunter away their time, and frequently consume there the returns of their illegal purchases. Here the laws have never been executed, nor the authority of the magistrate ever established. Here the officer of the law neither dare nor can execute his duty [...] In short, here is no order, no authority, no government’ (25-6).

The primitiveness of *Rob Roy*’s Highlanders is underlined not only through their manners and their mode of economic production, but also through, their association with the hallmarks of the most “primitive” known culture, the “wild Indians” of North America, who were discussed by Scots’ conjectural historians as the epitome of the savage. The comparison between the “wild Highlander” and the “wild Indian” is used elsewhere in Scott’s fiction—in *A Legend of the Wars of Montrose*, in which participants in a vendetta collect the severed heads of their enemies instead of scalps, and in *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), in which an actual American Indian tribe features peripherally as the final destination of Effie Deans’ feral son. In *Waverley* even the Lowlanders appear to

Waverley like American Indians: they are “almost in a primitive state of nakedness” beside “a miserable wigwam” (34), and the Highlanders too shelter in rapidly-constructed “wigwams” (117, 178). Later, when the Highlanders are engaged in military subterfuges, they are compared to North American Indians, and referred to as moving “Indian file” (182, 184).

Roger Emerson argues that “the well-known uses to which eighteenth-century Scots put the travel literature on American Indians” in their “reflections on savagery, barbarism, and the rude ages of mankind” were causally connected to the intensely-felt need to “Improve” the Highlands. Within Enlightened Scottish discourse, “the Highlanders [...] differed only in degree of depravity and backwardness from the Indians.”<sup>50</sup> This comparison, as Emerson’s remark suggests, seeks to emphasize the alterity of contemporary Highlanders in the most vivid way possible.<sup>51</sup> Conjectural historians nonetheless tended to imply that both Indians and Highlanders are amenable to improvement or civilization. But Scott’s novels relate ambivalently to this notion of improvement, often implying that the loss is greater than the gain. Unlike conjectural history accounts, which rendered American Indians and Highlanders equally alien to their civilized readership, Scott gives Highlanders such as Rob Roy sympathetic interiority. Scott’s representations of and references to savage life are often sympathetic, and if outright condemnations of the primitive or savage appear in his novels, they emanate from characters who subscribe to an unnuanced advocacy of civilization—such as the

---

<sup>50</sup> Roger Emerson, “American Indians, Frenchmen, and Scots Philosophers,” *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture* 9 (1979): 211-236, pp.211-2.

<sup>51</sup> For example, in Cadwallader Colden’s *The History of the Five Indian Nations of Canada* (Lockyer Davis: London, 1755), of which a copy is present in Scott’s library at Abbotsford.

Bailie in *Rob Roy*, who absurdly suggests the “improvement” of Loch Lomond by draining it so that the land can be used for agriculture: “he undertook to prove the possibility of draining the lake, and ‘giving to plough and harrow many hundred, ay, many a thousand acres, from whilk no man could get earthly gude e’enow, unless it were [...] a dish of perch now and then’” (415).

Recently, Ian Duncan has argued that *Rob Roy* participates in the nation- and empire-building ideological enterprise advocated by the Bailie and by other articulators of the stage theory model, who advocated the “improvement” of the savage and its subsumption into capitalism. He focuses on the novel’s representation of the Scottish Highlanders as “primitive,” pitted in a losing battle against the forces of capitalizing Britain, and argues that Rob’s “wild virtues,” his wiliness, mobility, mutability, and aggressive drive—in other words his primitive traits—all enable not only his survival, but also his outrageous success as a freebooter in a rapidly modernizing Scotland. In other words, the natural competitive aggression of “primitive” man makes for success within modern commercial society, and can be assimilated to it rather than eradicated.<sup>52</sup> The novel, Duncan claims, thereby naturalizes capitalism, while displacing unease about the loss of a more authentic way of life. Andrew Lincoln argues against Duncan that while the narrative ostensibly presents desirable norms of civilization, it undermines this by portraying civilized behavior as necessarily duplicitous and hypocritical. Lincoln reads Rob, Rob’s wife Helen, and the novel’s heroine Diana Vernon, as “voices of protest” exposing the hypocrisy of the civilizing project. Both critics suggest that the primitive in

---

<sup>52</sup> Ian Duncan, “Introduction,” Walter Scott, *Rob Roy* (Oxford, 1998); “Primitive Inventions: *Rob Roy*, Nation and World System,” *Eighteenth Century Fiction* 15.1 (Oct. 2002): 81-102.

*Rob Roy* has the potential to be a repository of authenticity, but is instead an unsuccessful locus of resistance to civilized hypocrisy.

In a wide range of works written during the Romantic era, Highland culture is indeed a repository of sincerity and authenticity, but this is not the case in *Rob Roy*. The virtues of truth or authenticity, and dissimulation or policy, are not stably correlated with either the civilized or the primitive. On the one hand, Scott claims that of the “rude virtues” of savages, honesty is paramount, and allies the “polity” of civilization with subterfuge; but on the other hand, he admiringly tells us that Rob has the “subtle policy [...] of an American Indian,” and recounts the complicated subterfuge carried out by Rob’s “savage” clansman, Dougal. Frank describes Dougal encountering Rob thus: “In my experience I have met nothing so absolutely resembling my idea of a very uncouth, wild, and ugly savage, adoring the idol of his tribe.” He is therefore later surprised at the way Dougal is sustain an elaborate deception that involves feigning various emotions as well as convincingly giving false information, implying that these skills are, in Frank’s eyes, the virtues of the civilized: “I could not help admiring the address with which the ignorant, and apparently half-brutal savage, had veiled his purpose, and the affected reluctance with which he had suffered to be extracted from him the false information which it must have been his purpose from the beginning to communicate” (353).

The primitive in Scott’s fiction, then, is endowed with romance through its association with exotic alterity, outlawry, resourcefulness, and resistance as much as with poetic beauty, and sublime landscapes. Associating such qualities with the primitive was far from being unique to Scott, but was widespread during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. While the Highlanders were marginalized and seen to be in need of

“improvement,” they were also reified as the romantic preservers of heroic resistance and primitive freedom. These romance elements of the Highlands emphasize the traits ascribed by conjectural historians to masculine savagery: bravery, vengefulness, and tribal loyalty. However, Scott’s fiction also pays interesting attention to women and gender.

In his fiction, the notion of the primitive is gendered in particular ways. The masculine primitive is associated with illegitimate violence—extra-judicial vengeance, theft, rape, murder, and “uncivilized” modes of warfare—and with pre-industrial modes of economic production. The feminine primitive is associated with myth, folklore, and the bardic tradition. We see this in *Waverley*, in which the feudal lord Fergus McIvor ultimately meets his end at the hand of English justice as punishment for waging a treasonous civil war, whereas his sister Flora survives as preserver of the Bardic tradition. In *Waverley*, Flora is not in any way threatening; but in later novels, figures of the female primitive become sources of threat to civil society, and are associated with excessive violence or madness.

In the works of conjectural history with which Scott was familiar—Kames’s *Sketches of the History of Man*, Robertson’s *History of Women*, and Millar’s *Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* (which focuses solely on women as a register of stadial progress)—the role of women in civilized, barbarous, and savage life is discussed at some length.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Miriam Burstein usefully discusses the analysis of women by the conjectural historians, but she exaggerates the extent to which “Scottish Enlightenment philosophers were fascinated with women’s role in shaping the progress of civilization” (17). While Millar’s *Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* emphasizes women’s role in progress, it is exceptional. A chapter on “The Progress of Women” takes up only about one twentieth of Kames’ *Sketches*. Burstein also misleadingly claims that Enlightenment writers portray the condition of women in savage life as

Kames and Millar concur in viewing women in civilization as happier because of stronger sexual love than in savage life: they are apparently more highly regarded in general because more passionately loved by their husbands. It was not until the mid nineteenth century that savagery came to connote unbridled sexual license and the violence abuse of women. In Scott's era (1790-1830), anthropological writing did not concern itself much with marriage or sexuality, and the primitive was not especially associated with excessive sexuality. Indeed, a major difference between eighteenth-century conjectural historians like Kames and Millar, and nineteenth-century anthropologists like McLennan, is that for the former, the primitive is not especially associated with sexual license or rapacious sexual desire. The eighteenth-century thinkers considered savage "sexual passions" to be less strong than those of civilized people, and the civilized supposedly have their passions increased by the restraint imposed by civilization.

Not only Kames, but also John Millar, Buffon, and many eighteenth century American contact narratives emphasized that American Indians lacked the sexual passion of the "civilized" nations.<sup>54</sup> And according to Millar, in the first of the "four stages" (the hunter-gatherer, or "savage"), men married not out of "passion," but in order to gain a "comfortable subsistence" through the woman's labor, in contrast to civilized marriage which is based on "passion" (26, 29). Kames too makes passionate sexual love a feature of civilization, and infers its absence from the "savage state" in which sexual desire was

---

"sexual slavery" (17), but for Kames and Millar, any hypothetical enslavement of savage women is not sexual but economic, involving female agricultural labor.

<sup>54</sup> Kames, *Sketches of the History of Man*, Vol. II, 24-5, 75-84. The naturalist Buffon also influentially claimed that all natural phenomena of the New World were smaller and weaker than those of the Old, including the "organs of generation," and that male ardor for women was therefore greater in Europe than in the Americas.



thought to be weak and generic. Scott reflects such ideas in the motivation he imputes to the men who rape women in *Rob Roy*'s introduction: the law-enforcers who rape Helen, and her sons whom Scott describes kidnapping a lowland woman in the "Introduction," are motivated not by desire but by the Enlightenment-defined lusts of primitive or "natural" man: to dominate and to acquire wealth. Robin Oig, Rob's son, is twice said to be "determined" to "make his fortune," "by carrying off and marrying, by force if necessary, some woman of fortune from the Lowlands" (43, 47).

In *Improvement and Romance*, Peter Womack misleadingly claims that the notion of unbridled sexual excess was widespread in representations of the Highlander, but Womack bases this claim entirely on evidence from Scott's Introduction to *Rob Roy*—its allusions to the prevalence of "marriages by capture" such as that committed by Rob's sons, and to ballads about girls being "row'd" in a "plaidy." As we have seen, Scott's contemporaries and precursors did not especially connect primitive society and sexual license. However, on the basis of the introduction to *Rob Roy*, we might infer that Scott contributes to the idea of savage sexual violence towards women that took off during the 1860s with McLennan's *Primitive Marriage*. McLennan does not give any Scottish examples of marriages by capture, but this omission seems deliberate, given the frequency with which he alludes to the practice in Ireland, and since he would certainly have come across accounts of it in Scotland—in the introduction to *Rob Roy*, if nowhere else. It is plausible that his motive in studiously avoiding Scottish examples of marriage by capture was to protect his home country from accusations of barbarism, given that the main thrust of his earlier essay on "The Marriage Laws of England and Scotland" was to defend Scottish marriage laws from this charge.

While according to Kames and Millar, women's status has changed in achieving civilization, women themselves have not changed, as men have, from being "savage" to "civilized." Kames implies that while men can be savage or civilized, women are simply women in both stages of society, and in savage life they are trapped in a nightmare world where their potential "delicacy" and "agreeableness" are not appreciated. In these accounts, there is nothing romantic or mythic about savage women. Any kind of glamour in these histories is associated with masculine qualities like martial prowess. Scott therefore supplies a new element when he endows savage women with mythic attributes, imputes to them the lawlessness of savage men, or makes them the bearers of folkloric tradition.

In *Rob Roy*, the romance and myth but also the savage violence of the primitive are particularly figured as feminine, in the character of Rob's wife, Helen MacGregor. Whereas Rob appears in diverse settings that connote different cultural stages—English posting inns, magistrates' dinner tables, Glasgow streets and the Glasgow jail, Highland crags and hovels—Helen appears only in the setting of the Highland sublime. Her delimitation to the Highlands denotes that Helen, much more than Rob Roy, incarnates the Highland primitive. In this, she shares with many of Scott's female characters the role of representing the past, and with many depictions of Highland women in literature of the early nineteenth century the role of bearer of an oral tradition of poetry.

Helen is not only the novel's scapegoat for the negative values associated with the primitive—excessive passion, violence, vengefulness, irrationality—but she is also immensely powerful. She is constructed in terms of anthropological and sociological

classifications that place her as “savage,” but she is also understood mythologically, as a “pagan goddess,” Judith, Cleopatra, and Amazon.<sup>55</sup> The narrator’s tone is quite different when talking about Helen—she is imagined in mythic terms. As Judith Wilt remarks, Helen “seems a Christian Princess reverted under stress to a pagan deity.”<sup>56</sup> She is thus portrayed through a double lens: on the one hand, standing for everything that enlightened civilization repudiates, and on the other, for a powerful, transgressive life-force that exceeds realistic narration. Helen’s double signification is especially well-illustrated by the passage that describes Frank’s first encounter with her (which is also the reader’s first encounter):

At length we were placed before the heroine of the day, whose appearance, as well as those of the savage, uncouth, yet martial figures who surrounded us, struck me, to own the truth, with considerable apprehension. [...] The specks of blood on her brow, her hands and naked arms, as well as on the blade of her sword which she continued to hold in her hand—her flushed countenance, and the disordered state of the raven locks [...] seemed all to intimate that she had taken an immediate share in the conflict. Her keen black eyes and features expressed an imagination inflamed by the pride of gratified revenge, and the triumph of victory. Yet there was nothing positively sanguinary, or cruel, in her deportment; and she reminded me [...] of some of the paintings I had seen of the inspired heroines in the Catholic churches of France. She was not, indeed, sufficiently beautiful for a Judith, nor had she the inspired expression of

---

<sup>55</sup> Walter Scott, *Rob Roy*, ed. Ian Duncan (Oxford: OUP, 1998).

<sup>56</sup> Judith Wilt, *Secret Leaves*, p. 68.

features which painters have given to Deborah, or to the wife of Heber the Kenite, at whose feet the strong oppressor of Israel, who dwelled in Harosheth of the Gentiles, bowed down, fell, and lay a dead man. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm by which she was agitated gave her countenance and deportment, wildly dignified in themselves, an air which made her approach nearly to the ideas of those wonderful artists who gave to the eye the heroines of Scripture history (357).

Here, Scott anticipates the Victorian practice of using myth to construct female characters whose primal force is dangerous to civilized man because alluring as well as violent, comparable to Judith, who seduces Holofernes in order to kill him. However, Scott's troping of Helen as a savage beauty is not associated with any implication of unbridled sexuality, as such depictions were later in the nineteenth century.

Scott associates poetry with the primitive through the figure of the Gaelic bard, and this power is especially granted to women in his novels. Recent studies have suggested that in the eighteenth century, women were coming to be seen as agents of civilization who might counteract the effects on men of a culture-sapping commercial world.<sup>57</sup> Primitive women were also, in a somewhat different way, coming to be seen as bearers of culture. Towards the end of the eighteenth century primitive women increasingly appear in fiction as figures such as the Highland nurse of the *National Tale*, who are represented repositories of folk tradition and authentic feeling with which to

---

<sup>57</sup> See Robert P. Irvine, *Enlightenment and Romance: Gender and Agency in Smollett and Scott* (2000). His account revises the now commonplace idea that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, women as a class (along with children, the destitute, and the mentally ill) were often viewed as less "developed," more "primitive," than civilized men.

restore civilized heroes and heroines sapped by the modern world.<sup>58</sup> Scott persistently associates the bardic tradition of spontaneous oral poetry with women, reinforcing the idea that women are the keepers of primitive tradition. Helen MacGregor speaks “wild, elevated, and poetical” English (as a result of translating her ideas from her “native Gaelic”) that is effective in dominating her auditors (412), and she is reported to have “made a lament” on the occasion of the MacGregor’s expulsion from their land that was so effective “that our hearts amaist broke as we sate and listened to her” (407).

The “Introduction” to *Rob Roy*, written in 1830, presents a conjectural history version of Helen as a victimized woman and of Rob as a savage male motivated primarily by the desire for vengeance, but in the novel, Scott does something altogether more interesting than this. In his introduction, Scott tells us that the rationale for Rob’s turn to a life of outlawry was a desire for “unbounded vengeance” for the rape of his wife by soldiers repossessing their home after Rob’s bankruptcy (17-18). Scott implies that Rob’s career in banditry was originally motivated by a desire to avenge his wife’s rape by wreaking vengeance on the instigator of this repossession, the Duke of Montrose. This motivation for an endless “private war” fits into the model of the “savage” male: as Scott puts it, Rob Roy inhabits a world in which revenge is considered a duty rather than a crime. This idea echoes many narratives about American Indians and revenge, for example, Peter Williamson’s *French and Indian Cruelty* (1762), which Scott owned: “No people have a greater love of liberty, or affection for their relations; but they are the most implacably vindictive people upon the earth, for they revenge the death of any relation, or any affront, whenever occasion presents, let the distance in time or place be never so

---

<sup>58</sup> See Irvine, *Enlightenment and Romance*, Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*, and Womack, *Improvement and Romance*.

remote” (22).<sup>59</sup> But while Scott’s introduction implies that the motive for Rob’s career in banditry could or perhaps even should have been the “thoughts of unbounded revenge” prompted by his wife’s rape, Scott’s novel rather shows us that Rob’s tactics and motives are in general economic rather than personal. Instead, in the novel, it is Helen who seeks “unbounded vengeance” for her “dishonour,” claiming that this is her sole reason for continuing to live. In this respect, an aspect of savagery supposed to be male (vengefulness) is displaced from Rob onto Helen. In loading all aspects of the primitive, masculine and feminine, onto Helen, the novel can cordon off some of the anxiety these traits might generate, because as a woman, she is already marginalized. Lincoln argues that the novel uses Helen as a way to delimit and contain the “primitive” Highlands by making “heroic resistance indivisible from culpable female excess, an excess which can be neutralized by the restoration of masculine hierarchy with the return of *Rob Roy*” (2002: 56).

In the novel, we do indeed see Helen take revenge in a thoroughly “savage” and excessive manner. Rob has been captured by British officers acting on information from Morris, a government tax official. Helen instigates Morris’s capture, orders his extrajudicial execution by Rob’s clansmen, and he is duly slung off a cliff. Her actions effectively reverse the chivalric logic that should make Rob her avenger, not the other way around. Helen’s menacing speeches carry this inversion of chivalric revenge even further:

‘if they injure a hair of MacGregor’s head, and if they do not set him at liberty within the space of twelve hours, there is not a lady in the Lennox

---

<sup>59</sup> Edinburgh, 1762; Thoemmes Press: Bristol, 1996. In Scott’s personal library.

but shall before Christmas cry the coronach for them she will be loth to lose [...] I will send this Glasgow Bailie, and this Saxon captain, and all the rest of my prisoners, each bundled in a plaid, and chopped into as many pieces as there are checks in the tartan.’

Here, she threatens a barbaric vengeance that she promises will especially afflict those of her own sex, mirroring male homosocial rules for defending female honor.<sup>60</sup> The association of primitive culture with reversals of “civilized” gender norms was to become an increasingly central trope in later nineteenth-century anthropology.

The novel portrays Helen’s rape as a brutal crime, which Helen describes in the passionate language of romance. She tells the British officers that “I am no stranger to your tender mercies. Ye have left me neither name nor fame—my mother’s bones will shrink aside in their grave when mine are laid beside them” (349). However, in the factual, historical discourse of the Introduction, Scott represents Helen’s rape quite differently. Here, he follows his allusion to Helen’s rape with a suggestion that she probably provoked any action taken against her: “She was a woman of fierce and haughty temper, and is not unlikely to have disturbed the officers in the execution of their duty, and thus to have incurred ill-treatment” (18). The Introduction suggests thus seems to imply that Helen provoked her own rape by her unfeminine lack of submissiveness.

Whereas the Introduction to *Rob Roy* represents Helen in purely negative terms, as rather unsympathetic victim of the modern state who is also unfeminine in her aggression. In the novel, however, Helen is not only disempowered and de-feminized, but

---

<sup>60</sup> The eighteenth-century literature on “savagery” contains many accounts of North American “savages” stepping out of proper gender roles—for example, Kames describes North American Indian women working in the fields while men relax at home.

also empowered—in rhetorical terms by the novel’s construction of her as mythical and monstrous, and in terms of the novel’s plot, through her seemingly natural ability to wield power over others, a power shared only by Rob himself. She embodies the primitive or the folkloric in more anxiety-provoking ways than savage male Highlanders like Rob, because the novel suggests that unlike Rob, she cannot be assimilated to civilization. Nonetheless, Helen seems to have been a strong element in the novel’s immediate popularity. An early review suggests that: “There are many striking scenes in this work which are worthy of graphic illustration [...] neither last nor least, the sudden apparition of Helen Campbell [MacGregor] to the military invaders of the Glen.”<sup>61</sup>

However, to later readers, she came to seem slightly ridiculous, a figure of melodrama. Leslie Stephen, reviewing Scott’s *oeuvre* in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1871, facetiously suggests that “Mrs. MacGregor has just stepped off the boards of a minor theatre, devoted to melodrama.” The literary context in which most readers now meet Helen MacGregor is in Dickens’ *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-9), where Mr. Crummle’s testifies to his wife’s indiscriminate dramatic versatility by explaining that “then she played Juliet, and Helen Macgregor, and did the skipping-rope hornpipe between the pieces.”<sup>62</sup> *Rob Roy* itself occasionally seems to invite us to view Helen’s sufferings and her subsequent fixation on them as ludicrous, when Rob himself exclaims impatiently against hearing yet another recital of her wrongs: “‘All may be forgotten,’ said the extraordinary female who addressed me—’all, but the sense of dishonour, and the desire of vengeance.’ ‘*Seid suas!*’ cried the MacGregor, stamping with impatience. The bagpipes sounded” (413). *Seid suas* means “strike up,” and as an instruction given to the

---

<sup>61</sup> Unsigned review, *European Magazine* 73 (Feb. 1818): 137-39.

<sup>62</sup> Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 318.



bagpipers, means that Rob is acting to drown out his wife, since unable to overrule her. That Scott undermines Helen in the final scene of the novel, creating the impression that this dramatic figure is a tiresome, complaining wife in private life, suggests the difficulty of representing a “primitive” woman in mythic terms without either romanticizing or ironizing her.<sup>63</sup>

Later in *Rob Roy*’s Introduction, the abduction and rape of a “civilized” lowland woman, Jean Key, by Rob and Helen’s sons, is treated very differently to Helen’s briefly- implied rape: it narrated at length, and is portrayed as the extremity of uncivilized brutality (40-59). The way in which Scott frames this kidnap narrative alerts readers to the idea that the story has a wider relevance to the study of cultural “stages”: the incident is “an interesting chapter, not on Highland manners alone, but on every stage of society in which the people of a primitive and half-civilised tribe are brought into close contact with a nation, in which civilisation and polity have attained a complete superiority” (40). Scott’s introductions are not only more “scientific” and prosaic and less romantic than the novels; they are also more sympathetic to the discourse of “improvement,” and less sympathetic to their primitive subjects. The Introduction to *Rob Roy* is mainly historical, analyzing Rob’s career and the fortunes of his family, but Scott frames this as a kind of conjectural history case-study, and repeatedly sets particular incidents in the context of much wider cultural comparisons. Moreover, Scott uses the comparative method to suggest that the kidnap and forced marriage of Jean Key reflects a universal practice: he draws comparisons between the kidnap and the rape of Helen and the Sabines in classical

---

<sup>63</sup> This is a difficulty that Hardy, too, experienced, in the mixed critical reception of Eustacia in *The Return of the Native*, who is mythologized and primitivized against a prehistoric backdrop, and yet struck one reader as a trivial “courtly pretender” who undermines the novel (Robert Evans, “The Other Eustacia,” 1968).

myth, and the frequency of such abductions in the Highlands and in Ireland (43). Thus in narrating a barbaric “marriage by capture,” Scott makes precisely the same connections between this recent “savage” practice and classical myths about wife-stealing that were later made by McLennan and Lubbock.

## Chapter Two

### ““An ideal combat...tomahawk in hand”: *Middlemarch* and Mid-Victorian Anthropologies of “Marriage”

In her earliest published review, Eliot championed the study of “barbarous” culture as a vital means of understanding the present:

It would be a very serious mistake to suppose that the study of the past and the labours of criticism have no important practical bearing on the present. Our civilization, and yet more, our religion, are an anomalous blending of lifeless barbarisms, which have descended to us like so many petrifications from distant ages, with living ideas, the offspring of a true process of development. [...] The endeavour to spread enlightened ideas is perpetually counteracted by these *idola theatri*, which have allied themselves, on the one hand with men’s better sentiments, and on the other with institutions in whose defence are arrayed the passions and the interests of the dominant classes.<sup>64</sup>

This review appeared in 1851, the year of the Great Exhibition, which placed the notion of civilization’s emergence from barbarism at the center of popular culture. The exhibition constructed a narrative of progress that allowed visitors to enjoy a sense of national and racial superiority by placing cultural artifacts from the non-European world in a historical sequence representing cultural evolution from the primitive and barbaric to

---

<sup>64</sup> Review of Robert Mackey’s *Progress of the Intellect*, *The Westminster Review* 54 (Jan. 1851), pp. 353-68.

the civilized products of the British nineteenth-century. Eliot's review suggests that the value of studying "barbarism" lay in exposing its vestiges in civilized life so that one might know and avoid them: in other words, contrary to the implicit claims made by the Exhibition, Eliot insists that barbarism is to be found at the heart of civilization. In this claim, she anticipates the emphasis placed on cultural "survivals" in E.B. Tylor's seminal work, *Primitive Culture* (1871). Her 1851 discussion of survivals also seems to anticipate Tylor's heralding of anthropology as "a reformer's science" because it enabled intellectual progress by exposing and undermining primitive beliefs and practices—Eliot's "*idola theatri*" that she asserts impede "the endeavour to spread enlightened ideals." Eliot's statement that barbaric customs are intertwined not only with "better sentiments," but also with the interests of the dominant classes thus anticipates Tylor's reformism, but is more radical in its sentiment and angrier in tone. Yet Eliot's later novels increasingly question the validity of the cultural-evolutionary hierarchy taken for granted in her reference to "the endeavour to spread enlightened ideas." In her last two novels, *Middlemarch* (1871-2) and *Daniel Deronda* (1876), she continues to reflect on the relationship between social evolution, barbarism, and the dominant British culture, paying particular attention to the way in which this conjunction determines female experience and cultural constructions of femininity.

*Middlemarch* engages significantly with Victorian anthropology: the novel covertly refers to major works of 1860-71 that theorize "primitive" sexual organization—Henry Sumner Maine's *Ancient Law* (1861), John McLennan's *Primitive Marriage* (1865), John Lubbock's *The Origin of Civilization and the Primitive Condition of Man* (1870) and Darwin's *Descent of Man* (1871). Eliot's novel places the sexual rituals

described by anthropology in the same category as the artificial devices of the sonneteers and the rhetorical excesses of chivalric love, drawing attention to the culturally determined nature of the forms in which desire is expressed. As an alternative, the novel portrays romantic love and sexual desire as phenomena that transcend the cultural formations specified by anthropology. Whereas the novel draws on contemporary anthropology to historicize conventional expressions of courtship and love, it also represents love and desire as experiences that transcend culture and history.

In the years immediately preceding *Middlemarch*'s publication, 1865-71, anthropology emerged as an institutionalized scientific discipline, accompanied by an increased public interest in its findings. Widely-read periodicals began to feature articles on topics such as "Primitive Marriage" and "The Religion of Savages." The *Fortnightly Review*, edited from 1865-67 by Eliot's partner G.H. Lewes, abounded in articles on anthropological topics, while other magazines such as the *Cornhill* nearly matched its anthropological content.<sup>65</sup> As the titles of such essays suggest, this era of anthropology was characterized by a particularly exclusive focus on two topics—myth and marriage—in primitive society. The centrality of "primitive marriage" to anthropology of this era is articulated by John Lubbock in *The Origin of Civilization* (1870):

Nothing, perhaps, gives a more instructive insight into the true condition of savages than their ideas on the subject of relationship and marriage; nor can the great advantages of civilization be more conclusively proved than

---

<sup>65</sup> During this period, the *Fortnightly Review* included book reviews by anthropologists John Lubbock and E.B. Tylor in many issues; William Adam's review of primitive marriage laws in "consanguinity in Marriage" (1865); Tylor's "On the Origin of Language" and "The Religion of Savages" (1866); McLennan's "Kinship in Ancient Greece" (1866, distilled from *Primitive Marriage*) and "the Worship of Animals and Plants" (1869-70).

by the improvement which it has effected in the relation between the two sexes.<sup>66</sup>

Lubbock's contention that civilization's enlightened patriarchy vastly improved on savage social arrangements in terms of "relations between the sexes" relies not only on an idealization of nineteenth-century companionate marriage, but also on the then widespread idea that in "savage" societies, men were brutal and women brutalized. This logic informs John McLennan's widely disseminated theory that social organization began with "marriage by capture," the supposedly universal, original form of marriage. For McLennan and Lubbock, the timescale for such social evolution had been vastly extended by revelations from archeology, geology, and Darwinian evolutionary theory, and so it was possible to speculate on much more radical social changes in the evolution from savage to civilization.<sup>67</sup> Thus Lubbock and his influential precursor John McLennan could plausibly claim that human societies were originally and universally matrilineal.

Both McLennan and Lubbock imply throughout their work that the status and treatment of women in a society is a measure of its progress, and that contemporary civilization is beneficial for women. In their view, "civilization" is a form of enlightened

---

<sup>66</sup> John Lubbock, *The Origin of Civilization and the Primitive Condition of Man* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1870), 50. Lubbock's assertion of the pivotal importance of "civilized" marriage in shoring up civilization as a whole testifies to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's contention that "the moment when a domestic society is born out of domestic confusion" is often narrated as "the protection of women by men." Nineteenth-century anthropology's emphasis on the suffering of primitive women is probably a form of the discursive imperialism that Spivak encapsulates in the statement, "white women are saving brown women from brown men" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" pp. 296-98).

<sup>67</sup> These theories depend on a belief in the evolutionary timescale and a sense that social and cultural evolution need to be explained in secular, rational terms, but the evolutionary anthropologists' emphasis on cultural forces often seems to undermine the idea that humans share major traits with animals.

patriarchy, the very opposite of the violent and savage matrilinear societies they postulated as the most “primitive” cultures.<sup>68</sup> *Middlemarch* undercuts the idea that civilized patriarchy is a state that is beneficial to women, and the novel’s occasional references to anthropological theories contribute to this subversion. For example, the novel represents the marital power dynamic between Dorothea and Casaubon in terms that evoke the “primitive patriarchy” described in Henry Sumner Maine’s proto-anthropological work, *Ancient Law* (1861), from which Eliot took extensive notes just prior to writing *Middlemarch*.<sup>69</sup> Maine argued in *Ancient Law* that the primitive state of society was an absolute patriarchy in which women were bought as wives, were held as chattels, and could not own property. Maine emphasized the absolute legal power of dead husbands over their wives under “primitive patriarchy,” an idea that Eliot dramatizes at length in representing Casaubon’s “dead hand,” his posthumous control over Dorothea through his will (429-532). Dorothea’s extended period in heavy mourning dress for Casaubon is perceptively, if startlingly, compared by her neighbor Mrs. Cadwallader to the obligatory lifelong celibacy of Hindu widows—which Maine had viewed as an extreme manifestation of primitive patriarchy (*Middlemarch* 549; Maine 113). The effect of these cultural comparisons is to suggest that oppressive male power over women, defined by anthropologists as the hallmark of primitive society, persists as a living barbarism within civilization—or as Eliot puts it, in an aside amongst her notes from

---

<sup>68</sup> “The most ancient system of kinship in which the idea of blood-relationship was embodied was a system of kinship through females only” (McLennan *Primitive Culture* 64).

<sup>69</sup> Henry Sumner Maine, *Ancient Law* (London & Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1931). While Maine’s book was conceived of by its author as a historical rather than an anthropological project, McLennan’s *Primitive Marriage* (1865), a work that historians of anthropology regard as the foundational text of anthropology as a mainstream discipline, was written as a polemical response to Maine’s book.

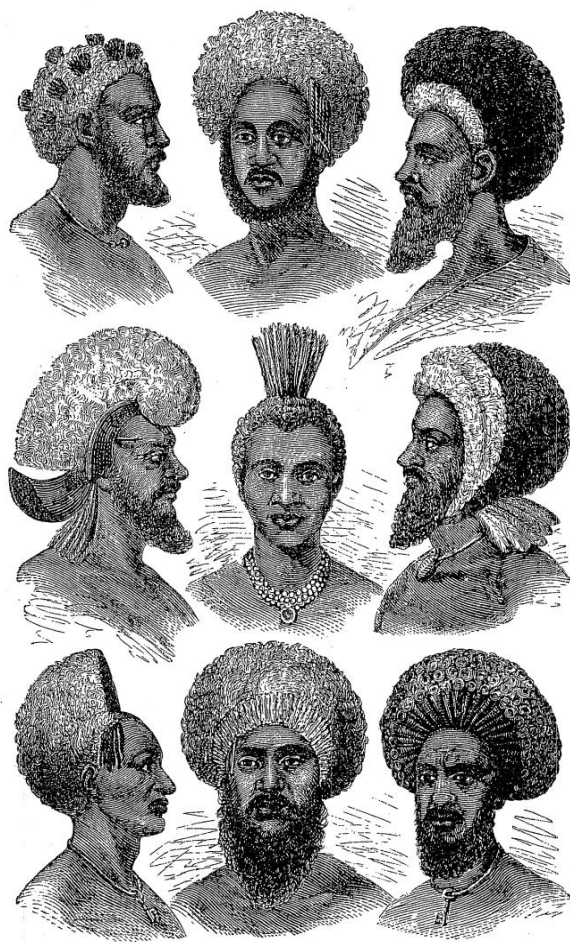
Maine, “the modern position of women is chiefly determined by barbarian elements” (Notebooks 205).<sup>70</sup>

Eliot makes a more direct use of anthropological allusion to signal that the primitive and the civilized have much in common when she refers to Lubbock’s *Origin of Civilization* in chapter three of *Middlemarch*, in a narratorial digression on women’s hairstyles of 1828. At that time, her narrator remarks, “public feeling required the meagerness of nature to be dissimulated by tall barricades of frizzed curls and bows, never surpassed by any great race except the Feejeean” (27). This analogy satirizes both Fijian and early nineteenth-century culture for making baroque hairstyles a requirement for participation in society. The comparison implies that an apparently super-civilized mode of self-adornment is a savage custom that features in civilized as well as supposedly “savage” life. The source of Eliot’s notion of elaborate Fijian hairstyles is likely to have been the memorable plate in Lubbock’s *Origin of Civilization* depicting nine different Fijian coiffures. The Fijian hairstyles remarkably resemble 1820s-30s hairstyles, and their visual presentation seems to be modeled on the layout of nineteenth-century fashion plates (fig. 1).

---

<sup>70</sup> Or as Maine puts it, “Ancient law subordinates a woman to her blood-relations, while a prime phenomenon of modern jurisprudence has been her subordination to her husband [...] The archaic principle of the barbarians has fixed the position of married women, and the husband has drawn to himself in his marital character the privileges which had once belonged to his wife’s male kindred” (91-2).





FEEJEEAN MODES OF DRESSING THE HAIR



Fig 1. Top left: plate II, pp.66-7, John Lubbock, *The Origin of Civilization and the Primitive Condition of Man* (London: 1870); top right: fashion plate, 1836; below: plate from *Townsend's Monthly Magazine*, 1826.



Notably, the subjects of Lubbock's illustration of Fijian hairstyles are men, so in making her comparison, Eliot registers an interest in social forms that reverse Victorian gender norms.<sup>71</sup> In *Victorian Anthropology* (1987), George Stocking argues that anthropological theories frequently seemed to be unconscious reversals of contemporary cultural norms and preoccupations: for instance, in anthropological theory, "savage" men are "made 'redundant' by female infanticide," reversing the nineteenth-century phenomenon of redundant women.<sup>72</sup> However, while Lubbock stresses the polarization of "primitive" and "civilized" societies, making the most primitive societies those least like Britain (matriarchal instead of patriarchal, and so on), Eliot suggests continuity and overlap between the "primitive" Fijians and the denizens of her early-nineteenth-century provincial town. *Middlemarch* thus questions the ethnocentric dialectic of the civilized and the savage assumed by anthropological writers, and implies that in some respects human nature is everywhere pretty much the same.

*Middlemarch*'s references to anthropology are also significantly connected to the novel's patterns of mythical allusion and its focus on Casaubon's mythographic study. In the 1870s, mythography was considered a branch of anthropology; moreover, myth itself had come to be seen as a form of ethnographic evidence about society in the now putatively "primitive" ancient world, and was compared unquestioningly in anthropological studies to non-fictional account of contemporary "savagery."

---

<sup>71</sup> Moreover, Eliot seems to have deliberately chosen an especially harmless example of Fijian cultural behavior; by contrast, the Fijians were frequently cited in the anthropological literature as practitioners of cannibalism. See, for example, McLennan, *Primitive Marriage*, 34.

<sup>72</sup> George Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), pp.202-3.

### **“That semi-savage poem, the Iliad”: Anthropology and Greek Myth**

Eliot’s choice of mythography as the foundational branch of scholarship pursued by Casaubon reflects not only her personal fascination with this topic, but also speaks to the importance of mythography in the wider intellectual culture of the nineteenth century. Eliot’s notebooks of 1868-72 attest to her serious interest in the competing claims of mythography, anthropology and ancient history to describe the most primitive forms of human society, via theories that emphasized the position of women and the social forms that structure sexual and familial relationships.<sup>73</sup> In *Middlemarch*, she draws on her reading on these topics not only to portray Casaubon’s myth scholarship, but also to make indirect comments on changes in myth scholarship since the novel’s 1828-32 setting and on the changed status of myth in anthropological writing. Anthropology of the 1860s-90s demystified and devalued the mythic as a form of knowledge about the world, but also relied on it for access to knowledge about primitive beliefs. Anthropologists from McLennan to Frazer insisted that the underlying meaning of myth for primitive culture was fundamentally concerned with regulating sexuality and reproduction. Yet whereas Frazer was later to write in inadvertently celebratory terms of fertility myths and rites, for McLennan and Lubbock, writing in the 1860s and 70s, primitive myths and

---

<sup>73</sup> Eliot’s notes on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century mythography make up the largest disciplinary component of her notebooks for *Middlemarch*—accounting for more page space than her notes on electoral reform and medicine combined. The notebooks attest that in the three years preceding the publication of *Middlemarch*, Eliot also read influential works of 1860-70 that integrated readings of myth with an anthropological approach, such as Maine’s *Ancient Law* (1861), E.B. Tylor on “the Religion of Savages” (*Fortnightly Review*, 1866), McLennan’s articles on “plant and Animal Worship” (*Fortnightly Review*, 1869-70), and Lubbock’s *Origin of Civilization* (1870). See John Clark Pratt and Victor A. Neufeldt, *George Eliot's Middlemarch Notebooks*, Berkeley: California UP, 1979.

sexual practices were simply unenlightened and barbaric, the myths devoid of aesthetic value, and the desires and familial structures they represent empty of emotional meaning. In *Middlemarch*, Eliot deploys mythical allusion to counteract the denigration of myth by anthropological myth scholarship, and to recuperate the idea of erotic pleasure as an aspect of the mythical, by bringing resonant mythical references into conjunction with arid theory.

Casaubon's twilight zone scholarship in pursuit of a key to all mythologies, in its stated aim of glossing all myth in light of a fixed prior conviction, is suggestively similar not only to all-unifying myth interpretations of the eighteenth century, but also to mid-nineteenth-century developments in mythography, such as Müller's theory that all existing myths derive from an originary "solar myth."<sup>74</sup> *Middlemarch* points insistently towards this analogy. For example, among Casaubon's many scholarly anxieties are numbered "other men's notions about the solar deities," in worrying over which he has "become indifferent to the sunlight" (197). Debarred from enjoying sunlight, Casaubon also fails to take pleasure in literature, and cannot even enjoy his scholarly study of myth. The capacity for aesthetic enjoyment, or, more broadly, imaginative delight, is highly valued in *Middlemarch* and is connected to erotic pleasure: for examples, the novel invites us to share Will Ladislaw's pleasure in half-humorously, half-poetically fantasizing about his relations with Dorothea in terms of heroic myths.

The novel shows Casaubon continuing to reject ways of appreciating myth that might include sensual or aesthetic pleasure, even when he might thereby appeal to

---

<sup>74</sup> Gillian Beer brilliantly and suggestively discusses *Middlemarch*'s relationship to Müller's solar myth theory, in *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter* (Oxford: OUP, 1996), pp. 233-4.

Dorothea. For example, he dismisses the Cupid and Psyche story, which moves Dorothea when she sees it depicted in an art gallery during their honeymoon: he calls it a romantic travesty rather than a “genuine mythical product” (197). This rejection is suggestive of his thorough-going distrust of imaginative or sensual pleasure, which is common to many of the schools of myth scholarship that Eliot summarized in her notebooks.<sup>75</sup> For anthropologists and mythographers, myth might be all about sex, but have nothing to do with pleasure. In using mythical allusion in *Middlemarch*, on the other hand, Eliot emphasizes the representation of the erotic, and the way that myth produces pleasure.

Mythical allusions are a way for Eliot to refer to the carnal impulses and fantasies of sexual empowerment that underlie her novel’s decorous statements about love and desire: its references to myths in which men abduct women provide Will and Dorothea with stories of romantic love that offer the possibility of effective action (for Will) and rescue (for Dorothea). In this respect, *Middlemarch* elaborates on a widely used nineteenth-century literary tradition of deploying myth to express the erotic. For example, *Adam Bede* (1859) encodes the fact of Hetty’s seduction, before we learn of her pregnancy, through allusions to nymphs and river gods when Hetty and Arthur Donnithorne meet in the woods, while *Middlemarch* alludes humorously to Greek literature as a source of sexual knowledge when she tells us that as a boy, Lydgate’s only

---

<sup>75</sup> Eliot categorizes eighteenth-century myth criticism as follows: “euhemerism,” whereby myths are viewed as stories about historical personages who were subsequently deified; “mystical Interpretation: mythology as a veil for religious and scientific ideas”; “derivation of mythology from a primitive religion revealed in the Old Testament (Casaubon’s theory of myth, we infer); “astronomical interpretation”; “development of religion from a rude state of nature;” “mixed Systems;” and the “symbolical school,” which, she notes, “reached its climax in Payne Knight: ‘An inquiry into the symbolical language of ancient art and mythology’”—Richard Payne Knight’s abundantly illustrated treatise that considered all myths to have arisen from phallic symbols (*Notebooks* 50-51).

biological knowledge derived from reading “the indecent passages in the school classics” (144).<sup>76</sup> Eliot’s use of classical myth to encode sexual desire continues a longstanding literary tradition, and is at odds with the way in which anthropologists deromanticized the myths to reveal violent underlying “realities” such as “marriage by capture.” The anthropological interpretation emptied myths of their emotional resonance and made them serve narratives about “savagery” and “semi-savagery” in which primitive people do not have the same standards of morality, familial feeling, or romantic love as the civilized.

As Eliot was aware, during the nineteenth-century, Greek myth might represent rational “sweetness and light” for some writers, but for others had come to epitomize the worldview of a culture at a liminal point on the long road from savagery to civilization. In his voluminous *History of Greece* (1862), George Grote had influentially positioned the Greek primitive and its “mythical” world view back in the pre-historic era, but unlike the anthropologists, Grote viewed ancient Greek society nostalgically, and thought of its “primitive” aspects, including greater freedom about sexuality and the human body, as representative of a society-wide innocence.<sup>77</sup> In contrast, anthropologists of the 1860s and 70s drew upon classical myth and literature for information about forms of “primitive” sexual organization, and characterized Greek sexual mores, like those of other primitive societies, as generally negative, violent, and loveless. This rethinking of myth, which was essentially anti-mythopoeic, made the era of myth and the “mythical” worldview synonymous with the “primitive.”

---

<sup>76</sup> *Adam Bede* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1985), pp.128-9, p.135.

<sup>77</sup> George Grote, *History of Greece*, 10 vols. (1846; London: John Murray, 1888), vol. I, p. 470; pp. 318-19.

Eliot's early grasp of anthropology's rethinking of ancient Greek literature is reflected in her comment to Sarah Hennell in March, 1868: "I am reading about savages and semi-savages [in John Lubbock's *Prehistoric Times*], and I think that our religious oracles could do well to study savage ideas by a method of comparison with their own... I am studying that semi-savage poem, the Iliad. How enviable it is to be a classic."<sup>78</sup> Eliot's ironic reference to Lubbock's recategorization of Homeric literature as "semi-savage" reflects Eliot's suspicion of the "comparative method" and its schematic ranking of culture. She implies here that her religious coevalists had much in common with the fetish-worshipping "savages and semi-savages" of Lubbock's work, and in *Middlemarch*, Eliot again asserts the likeness between savage religion and aspects of Victorian belief: referring to Bulstrode's solipsistic evangelism, the narrator remarks that "the religion of personal fear remains...at the level of the savage" (620).<sup>79</sup> In her ironic reference to Homer's "savage" poem followed by her facetiously-expressed envy of it as a literary classic, Eliot consciously reacts against the anthropological view of Homer as a source of facts from which to make inferences about a society less developed than her own. Eliot's mode of reading Homer (as a literary "classic") is of course part of a longstanding tradition, but was becoming increasingly embattled in nineteenth century debates, for instance, over the value of a classical education. *Middlemarch* asserts a sense of kinship between the realist novel and the Homeric epic, referring to the spirit of "Homeric

---

<sup>78</sup> George Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters*, 9 vols, ed. Gordon Haight (New Haven: Yale UP, 1954-1978). Vol. 4: 424.

<sup>79</sup> This implication is characteristic of Eliot's sense that the superstitious aspects of "the primitive" persist in modern, industrializing society, reflected in earlier novels such as *Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner*.

particularity” (387).<sup>80</sup> Eliot stated that she drew on Greek literature and myth to invoke human universals, the “great primitive emotions” expressed in Greek tragedy.<sup>81</sup>

*Middlemarch* furthermore suggests that the modern sense of the ancient past’s utter alterity and barbarism stems from ignorance: Dorothea’s “toy-box” education leaves her unprepared for the “surprise of a nearer introduction to Stoics and Alexandrians, as people who had ideas not totally unlike her own” (86). At other times, however, Eliot uses myth to suggest the distance between the modern and the epic world, a chasm that she famously theorizes by way of comparisons to Antigone and Saint Theresa in the Prologue to *Middlemarch*.

In her *Middlemarch* notebook, Eliot again refers to the anthropological use of Homer to support inferences about primitive life. She quotes instances in which Maine builds his theory of primitive law on the *Iliad*’s use of terms signifying judgment, and notes his suggestion that “the Cyclops is Homer’s type of an alien and less advanced civilization; for the almost physical loathing which a primitive community feels for men of widely different manners from its own usually expresses itself by describing them as monsters.”<sup>82</sup> Eliot’s awareness of the way that evolutionary anthropologists were using Homer, Herodotus, Plutarch, the tragedians, and many more generic accounts of classical myths means that even where *Middlemarch* makes allusions to myth that are not specifically aligned with anthropological ideas, such allusions may gesture to that myth’s

---

<sup>80</sup> Elsewhere in *Middlemarch*, Homeric allusion testifies to the long-term persistence of basic human traits and behaviors: for instance, Hiram Ford, one of the uneducated “smock-frocks” who attacks the railway surveyors, “turned back and shouted a defiance which he did not know to be Homeric” (558).

<sup>81</sup> Eliot was reported to have said this by the classicist R.C. Jebb, in response to his question as to how the Greek tragedians influenced her. Cited in Gordon Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1985), p.464.

<sup>82</sup> Maine, *Ancient Law*, pp.25 and 74. Quoted in Eliot, *Notebooks*, pp.202-204.



recent use by writers on “primitive society.” It may not be overstating the case to say that by the time she came to write *Middlemarch*, Eliot could have viewed all mythical allusion through the lens of its anthropological reinterpretation. It is, moreover, probably not a coincidence that *Middlemarch* refers to many of the myths that McLennan and Lubbock cite as evidence of the persistence of “marriage by capture” in classical antiquity, including those of Persephone and Hades, Theseus and Ariadne, Cupid and Psyche, Io, and Helen of Troy. *Middlemarch* suggests that these myths are not distillations of historical fact, as the anthropologists claimed, but rather vehicles by which modern societies might continue to find narrative shape and release for anomic desire. The novel thus resists the anthropologists’ positivistic approach to myth.

### ***Primitive Marriage* and “Marriage by Capture”**

The anthropological tropes of “primitive matriarchy” and “marriage by capture,” and their relationship to classical myth, would have been especially present to Eliot as she began to write *Middlemarch*. In September or October of 1870, shortly before beginning to write “Miss Brooke” (which became the first section of the novel), Eliot noted several passages from John Lubbock’s *Origin of Civilization*, from chapters on “Marriage and Relationship” and “The Origin of Marriage.”<sup>83</sup> Lubbock argues that in

---

<sup>83</sup> John Lubbock, *The Origin of Civilization and the Primitive Condition of Man* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1870). Dates of Eliot’s reading are taken from Pratt and Neufeldt, *George Eliot’s Middlemarch Notebooks*, xlv. Dates of composition are taken from Timothy Hands, *George Eliot: A Chronology* (Macmillan: Basingstoke, 1989), p.118. Lubbock’s chapters are dominated by citations and paraphrases of McLennan’s *Primitive Marriage*. McLennan’s ideas were widely disseminated—for instance, in his own essays in periodicals such as the *Fortnightly Review*—and contributed in significant

human groups, prior to any form of social organization, a general promiscuity would have obtained, but the earliest form of society would have been matrilineal because sexual relationships were polyandrous; polyandry was the norm because female infanticide was so common; and so, if a man wanted a female partner or “wife” of his own, she could only be obtained by capturing a woman from another tribe: “exogamy was based on [female] infanticide, and led to the practice of marriage by capture” (Lubbock 102). Lubbock excludes the kinds of “natural emotion” that Darwin asserted were inherited instincts, such as erotic or parental love, as determinants of “primitive marriage,” arguing instead that only the more culturally evolved system of patriarchy reflected “natural” emotions such as paternal affection. Lubbock tells us that “the origin of marriage...had nothing to do with mutual affection or sympathy” (111). For primitive man, a wife was an “especial necessary to their comfortable subsistence [...] who is a slave in the strictest sense of the word” (Lubbock 112). Within this logic, primitive sexual practices are determined by pragmatism rather than desire.

Lubbock nowhere suggests that male desire would be specific to any individual woman, and more strikingly, does not register sexual desire as a factor in primitive sexual relations. Recent cultural critics have, to varying degrees, emphasized the sexually rapacious “savage” male of the Victorian ethnological imagination (Stocking 208), but the expected sense of male desire as the driving force of savage life is absent from

---

ways to some of the major theoretical works of the late nineteenth century. Darwin and Freud drew on his ideas in *The Descent of Man* (1871) and *Totem and Taboo* (1913). Lewis Henry Morgan, who relied heavily on McLennan and supported his hypothesis of “primitive matriarchy,” is a key source for Engels’s *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884). While subsequent writers contested minor points, McLennan’s general premises—that matrilineage and marriages by capture were widespread in primitive societies—were accepted through the 1880s.

Lubbock's writings. Whether or not we infer a subtext of sexual desire in Lubbock's descriptions of primitive marriage, it is clear that desire in the situations of relatively indiscriminate wife-seizure he describes must be generic, and not highly selective and individualized as it was in the ideal of nineteenth-century choice of a marriage partner, as well as in Darwin's notion of sexual selection. Darwin notes that where marriage by capture prevailed, sexual selection could not occur: "as long as men habitually procured their wives through violence and craft, they would have been glad to seize on any woman, and would not have selected the more attractive ones." In *Middlemarch*, Eliot reinstates this unselective "choice" of a spouse from an undifferentiated horde of potential choices as an aspect of modern marriage: for instance, when she represents the generic desire of Sir James Chettam for either of two sisters, who are more or less interchangeable, or Casaubon's "choice" of Dorothea, whom he initially, mistakenly views as one of an undifferentiated set of suitable brides.

Following a series of anecdotes from ethnographic literature evincing the universality of "marriage by capture," Lubbock argues over several pages that "the character of Helen, as portrayed in the Iliad, can only be understood by regarding her marriage with Paris as a case of marriage by capture" (119, 256-9). In Lubbock's source, *Primitive Marriage* (with which Eliot was probably familiar through McLennan's publications in *The Fortnightly Review* under Lewes's editorship<sup>84</sup>), McLennan suggests that we consider myths such as that of Hades and Persephone as testimony that "marriage by capture" pervaded ancient Greece. He cites Herodotus's history to the same effect, referring to the famous opening of his *History*, where he traces the origins of the Trojan

---

<sup>84</sup> McLennan published sections of *Primitive Marriage* in his series of articles, "Kinship in Ancient Greece" (*Fortnightly Review*, 1866-7).

war to a series of attritive marriages by capture that began with the seizure of Io and led to the rape of Helen; and he redefines classical heroes such as Theseus as serial marriers by capture: “to that hero’s charge are laid numerous rapes of women whom he carried off to be his wives—his crimes of this description culminating in the seizure of Helen” (35). It might perhaps seem insignificant, given the range of Eliot’s classical allusion, that she should mention some of the same myths as McLennan, but it is suggestive that all of the myths he claims represent stories of “marriage by capture” appear in *Middlemarch*. Eliot refers to Herodotus’s account of Io’s capture, ironically deflating her own narrative practice by aligning her starting point with that of Herodotus, “who also, in telling what had been, thought it well to take a woman’s lot for his starting point; though Io, as a maiden apparently beguiled by attractive merchandise, was the reverse of Miss Brooke, and in this respect perhaps bore more resemblance to Rosamond Vincy” (96). The story of Theseus, the Minotaur, and Ariadne is a recurrent allusion through the novel, interlocking with references to Dorothea as Persephone carried off by Hades.

Early in the novel, Eliot explicitly yokes conventional literary and mythical tropes relating to pursuit and capture of a love-object with ethnological accounts of marriage by capture. This series of references appears in an analysis of the mental state of a relatively minor character, Sir James Chettam, on his discovery of Casaubon’s engagement to Dorothea, whom Sir James had wanted to marry:

He was not one of those gentlemen who languish after the unattainable Sappho’s apple that laughs from the topmost bough. [...] He had no sonnets to write, and it could not strike him agreeably that he was not an object of preference to the woman whom he had preferred [...] Although

Sir James was a sportsman, he had some other feelings towards women than towards grouse and foxes, and did not regard his future wife in the light of prey, valuable chiefly for the excitements of the chase. Neither was he so well acquainted with the habits of primitive races as to feel that an ideal combat for her, tomahawk in hand, so to speak, was necessary to the historical continuity of the marriage tie (62).

Eliot represents Sir James's mental state by a series of negative comparisons to situations in myth, literature, and anthropology that might seem to denote excessive or unbridled sexual desire, ironizing by contrast Sir James's rather polite and easily-overcome "preference." However, the behavior of the Sapphic lover, the sonneteer, and the primitive races who stage "ideal combats" are not, in fact, acts of unmediated, anomic desire, but are expressions of sexual impulses within highly ritualized social forms. It is noteworthy that Eliot makes no distinction between sonneteering and jousting with tomahawks: both are referred to with the same tolerant irony. The reference to men who value women "chiefly for the excitements of the chase" emphasizes the overlap between "primitive" and chivalric or Petrarchan love conventions: hunting metaphors are a commonplace of love poetry that feature heavily in the sonnet tradition and in classical love poetry, but we are given no explicit indication that the "excitements of the chase" are metaphorical, and the phrase may refer to the literal pursuit of women described in Lubbock's many anecdotes of "marriage by capture," in which women are chased on horseback or on foot through woods and mountains (Lubbock 116-127).

The "ideal combat [...] tomahawk in hand" is evidently an allusion to Lubbock's account of how actual marriage by capture was replaced by ritualized battles for or chases

after women among certain American Indian tribes. He writes, for example, that “it has ever been the custom among [the Hudson Bay Indians] for the men to wrestle for any woman to whom they are attached” (Lubbock 101). Lubbock suggests that fights for or chases after women are not the result of powerful innate instincts, but are either necessary to obtain a wife or they have become a ritualized form, a “survival” of an earlier reality. Eliot’s phrasing, “ideal combat” that is “necessary to the historical continuity of the marriage tie” is suggestive of the idea of a survival or ritualized form. The staged character of the combat with tomahawks, and its conjunction with references to courtly love literature, aligns the supposedly violent behavior of “primitive races” to chivalric tournaments. Eliot’s allusion to primitive courtship divorces such practices from the idea of unbridled desire, and suggests that for them as for the “civilized,” ritualized and potentially disastrous marriage customs might become institutionalized for historically determined rather than pragmatic reasons.

Nonetheless, it is less clear that in Eliot’s emphasis on the cultural construction of expressions of desire she is following Lubbock in eliminating desire from the equation. What, after all, is the difference between Sir James and the men who feel obliged to fight for, pursue, or sonnetize their love-objects? The passage is ambivalent about whether the desire experienced by Sir James’s antitheses is different from that of Sir James, or only differently expressed. The anonymous tomahawk-wielding men described by anthropologists and alluded to by Eliot may not be experiencing a different kind of desire to Sir James, since his feeling that such a combat is unnecessary to the “continuity of the marriage tie” signals the culturally-determined nature of such a belief. Alternatively, at this stage in the novel we might infer that the difference between these men and Sir

James is a general difference between men in different cultures: passionate, potentially violent desire has somehow been written out of the nineteenth-century masculine psyche. This idea becomes untenable, however, with the appearance of Will Ladislaw, whose desire for Dorothea is aligned with that of sonneteers and chivalric combatants. Over the course of *Middlemarch*, Eliot recuperates the erotic element of stories in which women are languished over, fought over, and captured by making these vivid elements of Will's psyche.

While the passage anticipates the novel's recuperation of passionate desire, it also ironizes the anthropologists' habit of pronouncing that culturally-specific practices must be universal "necessary stages" in the evolution of marriage. The absurdity of claiming that "primitive races" know that a combat with tomahawks is "necessary to the historical continuity of the marriage tie" ironizes the anthropologists' practice of subsuming every traveller's tale into a universalizing narrative of cultural evolution, a key to all cultures. The phrase points also to the absurdity of interpreting all evidence in light of a strong prior conviction, as Casaubon does,<sup>85</sup> and of basing sweeping generalizations on limited data, as Lydgate does in constructing his theories about women.<sup>86</sup> Her wording

---

<sup>85</sup> George Eliot, "The Influence of Rationalism," *Fortnightly Review* 1 (May-Aug 1865): 43-55, pp.54-5.

<sup>86</sup> The mistake of generalizing too largely from too little is in *Middlemarch* particularly associated with choices of marriage-partner. Both Dorothea and Lydgate make such errors: "Dorothea's inference about Casaubon may seem large" (22). Her conclusions about Casaubon's mental wealth are based very much on the biographies of famous dead scholars. Dorothea luckily gets to learn from her mistake; Lydgate does not. He views women in strict binaries—"flower" and "divine cow" (159). He initially imagines Rosamond to be the opposite of his husband-murdering first love, Laure (159); then, wonders if she might be exactly the same: "his mind glancing back to Laure while he looked at Rosamond, he said inwardly, "Would *she* kill me because I wearied her?" and then, "It is the way with all women"" (592). Lydgate does learn, too late to avoid marrying Rosamund, that his response to women is inadequate, in part through his

humorously implies that the “ideal combat” takes place because the combatants themselves are aware of its necessity for the historical continuity of marriage, and, unbeknownst to the anthropologists, the “primitive races” act with the foresight that their traditions are part of a cultural evolution that builds towards its zenith in modern matrimony.

The light-heartedness of Eliot’s reference to Lubbock’s “combat,” which in his book is one of a long series of rape and kidnap narratives, further suggests that she didn’t take his notion of a universal stage of marriage by capture very seriously. In her notes from Lubbock’s book, she records his other major theory about primitive marriage—“primitive matriarchy”—but in spite of the interest we might assume such an idea would hold for Eliot, she never alludes to it in any of her fictions. She seems to have found the primitive matriarchy hypothesis less plausible than Maine’s “primitive patriarchy,” since she draws on Maine’s ideas to somberly explore the miseries that a retrograde patriarchal marriage impose on Dorothea.

The “ideal combat with tomahawks” is the first of *Middlemarch*’s many images of combat, pursuit, capture, and enchainment in relation to love and marriage. This language of capture is ambivalent: the desire to “capture” a marriage-partner is incompatible with reciprocal love, and perhaps incompatible even with intense erotic desire. It defines Casaubon’s relation to Dorothea, and Rosamond’s to Lydgate, and it is thus associated with their self-absorbed egotism rather than with the desire for closeness to one unique

---

encounter with a third kind of femininity manifested in Dorothea: “this power of generalizing which gives men so much the superiority in mistake over the dumb animals, was immediately thwarted by Lydgate’s memory of wondering impressions from the behavior of another woman—from Dorothea’s looks and tones of emotion about her husband when Lydgate began to attend him” (*Middlemarch* 592).



individual. Nevertheless, the idea of carrying off a woman is also considered as a course of action by Will Ladislaw, who is regarded by many recent critics as *Middlemarch's* exemplar of healthy desire. He sporadically wishes he could literally fight for Dorothea—as well as worship her from afar like the sonneteers. Critics such as Wiesenfarth have elucidated the parallels made by the novel between Will and Theseus, Dorothea and Ariadne, and Casaubon and the Minotaur. Will himself hints at his own potential role as a Theseus-style capturer or rescuer, when he extravagantly laments that Dorothea has been captured, imprisoned, and devoured by a Minotaur created by her own “notions”:

It is monstrous—as if you had had a vision of Hades in your childhood, like the boy in the legend. You have been brought up in some of those horrible notions that choose the sweetest women to devour—like Minotaurs. And now you will go and be shut up in that stone prison at Lowick: you will be buried alive. It makes me savage to think of it! I would rather never have seen you than think of you with such a prospect (220).

Eliot is perhaps making a joking reference to anthropology with Will's expression of his “savage” feeling, which is inspired by the fact that another man has carried off the woman he desires. Will does not at this point offer himself to Dorothea as a potential slayer of Minotaurs, but the reader may conceive that he has this in mind, since he has only pages earlier meditated on the heroism of releasing Dorothea from the “dragon” Casaubon (209). The references to the “vision of Hades” and the Minotaur, while not referring directly to Casaubon, nevertheless remind us by proximity that he has previously been compared to both of these mythical villains.

Will's fantasies of chivalric rescue or capture are somewhat qualified by narrative irony, as well as by his self-consciousness about the excess of his own rhetoric. During an extended passage representing Will's vacillations of feeling about Dorothea, presented in a free indirect discourse that incorporates not only the narrator's ironic distance from Will, but also Will's ironic distance from what he considers his own folly, Will invokes an image reminiscent of Perseus rescuing Andromeda, to suggest a form of bride capture that is also a release from a prior captivity: "If Mr. Casaubon had been a dragon who had carried her off to his lair with his talons simply and without legal forms, it would have been an unavoidable feat of heroism to release her and fall at her feet" (209). Whereas in classical and chivalric literature, heroism towards a woman might consist in fighting for her or carrying her off, the romantic heroism of the nineteenth century, as Will finds, involves merely enduring a "sacrifice of dignity" or submitting to feeling "a fool" (470). This is the characteristic mode of Romantic heroism represented in *Middlemarch*: Fred also feels himself to be as heroic as Theseus in sacrificing his horse and "learning to write a book-keeping hand" for Mary's sake (834). Each of his impulses to carry off Dorothea is immediately negated, not only because such a course of action is so incompatible with the proprieties of modern life, but also because his actual course of genuine renunciation and self-abasement distances him from everything he perceives to be wrong in Casaubon's socially sanctioned policy of "engrossing" his wife.

For Will, imagining a violent seizure of Dorothea from mythical captivity is enabling: by casting their situation in these dramatic terms, he finds some relief for his "passionate prodigality." Furthermore, Will's allusions to capturing women convince the reader of his psychic compatibility with Dorothea: when he speaks to her of captivity,

Hades, and Minotaurs, he seems to have intuited her own metaphorical conception of her marriage as an underworld, a labyrinth, and a “virtual tomb.” Will’s wish to capture Dorothea convinces us of both his highly self-conscious literary imagination and his compelling, pre-rational erotic desire for Dorothea, and is therefore markedly differentiated for us from Casaubon’s egotistical coldness. Moreover, Will’s desire is privileged by the novel because, unlike Casaubon’s, it is utterly specific to its object, Dorothea.

### **“Plucking tail-feathers from a benefactor”: Darwinian Sexual Rivalry**

In emphasizing desire’s specificity and instinct-like force, *Middlemarch* seems to chime with Darwin’s revival for anthropological purposes of the idea that sexual choice is determined by an instinctive and very specific attraction to a particular individual, elaborated in the second half of *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871). Moreover, *Middlemarch* seems to refer with peculiar emphasis to key terms that Darwin subtly redefined to describe sexual selection: “preference” and “choice.” *Middlemarch* is the first of Eliot’s novels to use the terms “preference” and “choice” in the context of attraction, love, and marriage, and it does so in a way that draws attention to the terms and problematizes their meaning. Eliot had come across Darwin’s theory of sexual selection as early as 1859, in *The Origin of Species*, where he identifies two forms of male competition for females: physical combat (using “special weapons” such as horns and spurs), and “displays” of “gorgeous plumage,” “melodious singing” before “females,

which standing by as spectators, at last choose the most attractive partner.”<sup>87</sup> She was probably re-familiarized with this theory, and introduced to Darwin’s application of it to humans, shortly following the publication of *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* in February 1871 (at which point she had written only the first quarter of *Middlemarch*). While Darwin accepted and included in his own book a good deal of McLennan’s and Lubbock’s evidence for the prevalence of “marriage by capture” in primitive societies, he claimed that these social forms were an aberration, because they do not reflect human nature as it must have been inherited from the great apes. In *The Descent of Man*, he argued that human social and sexual behavior had evolved from the behavior of one or other of the great apes, and were still partly determined by the innate instincts of jealousy and attraction to beauty.

Whereas *Middlemarch* critiques the social expectation that men get to choose women, who passively accept their choice and yet must compete for that choice on aesthetic grounds, Will Ladislaw, as David Trotter has recently noted, is throughout made to seem an exemplar of an aesthetically flamboyant, sexually competitive Darwinian male, embodying the qualities required to be sexually selected by women.<sup>88</sup> The analogies that connect Will with the animal world—comparisons with birds, panthers, and tigers—make him an exemplary Darwinian male animal, beautiful and fiercely aggressive. When he is discovered with Rosamund by Dorothea, “he had a horrible inclination to stay and shatter Rosamond with his anger. It seemed as impossible to bear the fatality she had drawn down on him without venting his fury as it would be to a

---

<sup>87</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), p. 74.

<sup>88</sup> David Trotter, “Space, Movement, and Sexual Feeling in *Middlemarch*,” *Middlemarch in the 21st Century*, ed. Karen Chase (Oxford: OUP, 2005), pp.55-103.

panther to bear the javelin-wound without springing and biting” (778). On the other hand, David Trotter suggests that what some readers have viewed as Will’s effeminate traits—his hair that “shakes out light” (209), his responsive “girl’s complexion” (610)—are also reflective of his conformity to *masculine* attractiveness according to Darwin’s theory of sexual selection. He “makes a figure” as a singer (472), and possesses a beauty that is as lovingly anatomized as that of any of the novel’s women.

Will and Casaubon are self-consciously in competition with one another, deploying their own “special weapons”: even before Will admits to himself his attraction to Dorothea, he has an impulse to outdo Casaubon in her presence, while he and Casaubon are irresistibly drawn to saying and doing things that will damage one another in Dorothea’s eyes: Casaubon criticizes Will directly, bans his visits, and writes his codicil disinheriting Dorothea if she marries Will; and Will reflects openly on the shortcomings of Casaubon’s scholarship. Will’s attack on Casaubon is couched in terms that seem a clear echo of Darwin’s descriptions of sexual selection: the narrator tells us Will feels uneasy about casting aspersions on Casaubon’s scholarship, because it means “plucking the tail-feathers from a benefactor” (208). Will’s behavior, an underhand combative strategy for damaging his rival’s plumage, is in fact a conflation of Darwin’s two modes of male competition for females—display, and combat.

But this gorgeous plumage, melodious singing, and rivalrous behavior, have little to do with Dorothea’s “choice” of Will. When she finally realizes that she loves Will it is because she is jealous after seeing him with Rosamund, and has nothing to do with comparing Will favorably to any other man. Her feelings towards Will are expressed in terms quite other than those of attraction and preference—“happiness” and “delight”

during their interactions, and a sense of having her thoughts understood and appreciated—modes of feeling and behavior that are not addressed by theories of attraction dependent on the inheritance of sexually selective traits. The novel represents love's instinctual aspects as a kind of ineffable, irrational sublime, and ultimately rejects the Darwinian language of sexual preference and choice based on a combination of attractive attributes. In its representation of two fairly successful marriages—those of Mary and Fred, and Dorothea and Will—*Middlemarch* rejects not only Darwin's conception of mate choice as a form of appropriation implied in Farebrother's rejection of the term, but also Darwin's use of the term "choice" as the descriptor for a feeling of eminent preference for one person among many, based on their particular, desirable traits. Instead, the novel implies that these loves are impelled by forces less scrutable, and more primal, that Darwin's descriptions of "preferences" within the animal kingdom, which he implies are based on a more-or-less conscious recognition of particular attributes such as strength or beauty. Specifically, in the case of Fred and Mary, the idea of preference based on particular attributes is repudiated: Mary's charm for Fred is not the sum of her personal attributes, but is described as being rather the result of the interaction between the two individuals, "the one loving and the one loved" (409). Here charm, rather than causing attraction and then love, follows from a preexisting love.

### **“Tied up to be chosen like poultry at market”: the Discontents of Darwinian Choice**

The word “choice” is frequently used in narrating Casaubon’s decision to marry Dorothea, and her decision to accept him, which is by itself enough to invite our suspicion that the term is not being innocently deployed. Farebrother, the *Middlemarch* clergyman who doesn’t get to marry Mary Garth, tells his sister exactly what is wrong with this confusion between theoretically “choosing” and actually acquiring a mate: “you talk as if young women were tied up to be chosen, like poultry at market; as if I had only to ask and everybody would have me” (510). The novel here critiques Darwin’s use of the term “choice” as a one-sided process, a euphemism that masks the appropriation, objectification, or commodification of women by men, as instantly attainable, exchangeable, sexual “choices.”

Casaubon’s thinking about his wife implies that Dorothea is one of a class of educated, lovely young women among whom he can comparison shop for a bride: the narrator comments, in an irony-inflected translation of Casaubon’s thoughts on the subject of choosing a wife, that “a man of good position should expect and carefully choose a blooming young lady—the younger the better, because more educable and submissive—of a rank equal to his own, of religious principles, virtuous disposition, and good understanding” (278). In discussing Casaubon’s choice of and marriage to Dorothea, the language of capture and captivity jostles with oblique references to a kind of unpleasant, “civilized” sexual selection in which socially powerful men can appropriate any “blooming” young woman, regardless of compatibility:

Whether Providence had taken equal care of Miss Brooke in presenting her with Mr. Casaubon was an idea which could hardly occur to him.

Society has never made the preposterous demand that a man should think as much about his own qualifications for making a charming girl happy.

As if a man could choose not only his wife but his wife's husband! Or as if he were bound to provide charms for his posterity in his own person!

When Dorothea accepted him with effusion, that was only natural (279).

Both the language and ideas of this passage invite a Darwinian interpretation. In her implication that men don't "choose" themselves when they choose wives, Eliot seems to be taking a swipe at Darwin's application of sexual selection to humans, where he retreats from his claim that in all animals the female of the species makes the mate choices, and instead claims that men get to do all the choosing. She hints at a kind of auto-sexually-selective eugenics on the part of men that would reverse the actual dynamics of male sexual choice: firstly with the idea that a man might consider his own suitability for his wife, rather than only hers for him, and secondly, with the implication that a man might consider his own capacity as well as his wife's to produce attractive offspring. This latter notion is key to Darwin's theory of "sexual selection," a phrase in which "selection" refers not to the choice of one individual by another, but to "selection" by inheritance. Attractive individuals, he argues, will leave a more numerous progeny than less attractive rivals, so that the attractive traits that led to sexual success will be transmitted preferentially to subsequent generations. In this respect, anthropological theory was very much at odds with Darwin's idea of sexual selection, which he claimed



was based on passionate feelings of attraction or jealousy with regard to one specific, preferred individual.

In *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot uses the phrase “natural selection” to mean “sexual selection,” to connote the appropriation of a particularly attractive woman by an ugly but wealthy man.<sup>89</sup> Implicitly, Eliot here refers to Darwin’s discussion of sexual selection in humans, where he reverses the typical polarities of choice among animals. According to Darwin, in animals, generally, the females choose among the competing males, but in humans, even in primeval times before cultural factors intervened, Darwin argues that men get to do all the choosing, without accounting at all for his reversal of the sex of chooser and chosen (*Descent* 580, 594, 598-600).<sup>90</sup> The novel’s humorous construction of a masculinist discourse—the incredulous exclamation that “a man could choose [...] his wife’s husband,” and the claims as to the “fitness” of male appropriations of beautiful women—register discomfort and suspicion with regard to the cultural dominance of the idea that men “choose,” women are chosen. Within this framework, women must compete to satisfy male standards of feminine “fitness,” registered in Casaubon’s obviously self-interested assertion to Dorothea that, “The great charm of your sex is its

---

<sup>89</sup> This usage of “natural selection” to mean “sexual selection” is also key to Constance Naden’s poem “Natural Selection,” about a woman who chooses an all-singing, all-dancing heartthrob over a reclusive natural scientist. This use of “natural” instead of “sexual” is no doubt partly inspired by a wish to avoid unnecessary censure from reviewers. Most reviews of Darwin’s *Descent of Man* avoided referring by name to the second half of the book’s title, *Selection in Relation to Sex*.

<sup>90</sup> Modern biology endorses Darwin’s default position that non-human females choose males, since mammalian reproductive biology and the defining gametic asymmetry of the sexes imply that females are the limiting factor in the reproductive process. The role-reversal in Darwin’s writing on human sexual selection is therefore in need of more explanation than he offers. Recent work in the history of science has given various explanations for his inconsistency: see Rosemary Jann, “Darwin and the Anthropologists: Sexual Selection and its Discontents” and George Levine, *Darwin Loves You*.

capacity of an ardent, self-sacrificing affection, and herein we see its fitness to round and complete the existence of our own” (*Middlemarch* 46). In other words, whereas in animals, the females choose males for beauty and strength, in humans, male social scientists theorized, women are conveniently made by nature to subject themselves to men and to prefer the material comfort supplied by male-owned wealth to masculine beauty and strength, thereby allowing unattractive men to “choose” to mate with beautiful, loving women.<sup>91</sup>

Eliot thus subverts the reification of women as “choices” for men, but this subversion is complicated by the narrative exigencies of realistic description. When Dorothea and Rosamond meet late in the novel, Eliot prefaces the chapter with a poetic epigraph that compares the two women to works of art on sale side by side. They are thus compared to marketable goods that can be evaluated based on a list of attributes:

This figure hath high price: ‘twas wrought with love

Ages ago in finest ivory;

Nought modish in it, pure and noble lines

Of generous womanhood that fits all time

That too is costly ware; majolica

Of deft design, to please a lordly eye:

---

91 In a more redemptive reading of Darwin’s theory of sexual selection, George Levine points out that in spite of Darwin’s failings when dealing with humans, it is remarkable that he was able to think so inovatively with regard to selection among animals, and to describe female animals choosing males by comparing their appearance and prowess (“Darwin's Theory of Sexual Selection: How Anthropomorphism Helps,” keynote address, “Science in Nineteenth-Century Britain,” University of Chicago, April 7, 2006.)

[...] A table ornament

To suit the richest mounting (431).

The poetic voice resembles that of an auctioneer crying up the two female figures, which bear more than a passing resemblance to Dorothea and Rosamund. The first figure, like Dorothea, is imbued with value by the vision of a lover, and is characterized by simplicity, timelessness, womanliness, and nobility. The second, like Rosamund, is self-evidently costly, pleasing to a generic aristocratic viewer rather than a specific lover, ornamental, and suited to finery. Such qualitative comparisons between the timeless and natural, and the ephemeral and artificial, as properties of women, suggests a narrative endorsement of a version of the eternal, natural woman, majestic and maternal, whose potential is embodied in Dorothea. However, the poetic epigraphs in Eliot's novels are sometimes in a voice that is quite at odds with the narrative discourse, and in some cases vocalize an almost parodic misogyny, which the reader is invited to reject or to contrast with the thematic purposes of the chapter following the epigraph. This epigraph may once again ironize the notion that women's value can be itemized and compared.

Subsequently, Rosamond follows the practice of the epigraphic auctioneer, objectifying and commodifying both herself and Dorothea, as she mentally catalogues and compares their dress, features, and manners. Yet a comparatively evaluative approach is also taken by the chapter's narrator, who provides a careful itemization first of Dorothea's clothes, hair, face, and manners, then of Rosamond's:

The grace and dignity were in [Dorothea's] limbs and neck; and about her simply parted hair and candid eyes the large round poke which was then in the fate of women, seemed no more odd as a headdress than the gold

trencher we call a halo. [...] They were both tall, and their eyes were on a level; but imagine Rosamond's infantine blondness and wondrous crown of hairplaits... (432).

This comparison of the two women's physical attributes includes conjectures as to the effect of these attributes on a beholder. We are thus given rational and empirical reasons for Will's preference for Dorothea, with the narrator performing the function of the Darwinian scientist when he attempts to rationalize a peahen's preference for one peacock over another. The discourses of empiricism and sexually selective preference are rejected as possible "lover's discourses," but they are an important component of *Middlemarch's* realistic narrative: the reader is invited to choose between Dorothea and Rosamond on the basis of their itemized attributes.

**"I never had a *preference* for her"**

With increasing emphasis, Will is distanced from such comparisons between women, and the novel explicitly rejects the language of preference and choice in relation to his attraction to Dorothea. At the same moment that the narrator is carefully evaluating the two women, Will, we are told, is "too much occupied with the presence of the one woman to reflect on the contrast between the two" (432). After Dorothea leaves, Will calmly asserts to Rosamund that "when one sees a perfect woman, one never thinks of her attributes—one is conscious of her presence" (435). This claim, one notes, does not entirely refute the idea that "attributes" are important—after all, as Darwin tells us, the peahen, in preferring a particular peacock, does not necessarily draw up a mental list to

make her choice, but might unconsciously register attributes in order to be “struck by the general effect” (*Descent* 435). But later, when Will passionately expresses to Rosamond his pent-up feeling for Dorothea, the idea that desire is a matter of “conscious” choice or preference based on particular attributes is much more sweepingly rejected. After Dorothea finds Will and Rosamond holding hands and rushes from the room, Rosamond sarcastically suggests that Will go after Dorothea and “explain his preference” for her. At this suggestion, Will exclaims,

Explain my preference! I never had a *preference* for her, any more than I have a preference for breathing. No other woman exists by the side of her. I would rather touch her hand if it were dead, than I would touch any other woman’s living” (778; the emphasis is Eliot’s).<sup>92</sup>

Will asserts that his desire for Dorothea is not rational or comparable to desire for any other woman; it is a biological necessity that transcends thought, like breathing. This makes desire a biological instinct, and as such the passage might look like an endorsement of Darwin’s theory that human desire is a biological instinct. However, the passage is a refutation of Darwin’s somewhat misleading implication, when writing about sexual selection in animals, that desire is a matter of more-or-less conscious preference. The claim that he would rather touch her “dead hand” than that of any living woman’s again reminds us of the contrast between Will and Casaubon: whereas Casaubon had tried to keep possession of his wife beyond the grave through his “Dead Hand,” Will’s claim suggests that his love transcends not only death, but also the satisfaction of normal sensory wants. (His assertion is also quite humorously offensive to Rosamund, whose

---

92 *Preference* is italicized in modern editions of *Middlemarch*, and underlined in Eliot’s manuscript.

hands he was holding when Dorothea entered the room.) The tone at these moments is peculiarly hard to read, even by the standards of *Middlemarch*'s reticent, ironic narrator. We can never be sure how seriously we are to take statements of the transcendence of Will's love: his defiant assertions are both romantic and erotically charged, but his hyperbole makes it possible to simultaneously experience narrative irony and humor around his claims.

*Middlemarch* makes further emphatic claims for the biological nature of Will's attraction to Dorothea, which is to him is a necessity like "breathing." In describing the effect of Dorothea's presence on Will, Eliot has recourse to both physical science and the Romantic sublime:

When Mrs. Casaubon was announced [Will] started up as from an electric shock, and felt a tingling at his finger-ends. Any one observing him would have seen a change in his complexion, in the adjustment of his facial muscles, in the vividness of his glance, which might have made them imagine that every molecule in his body had passed the message of a magic touch. And so it had. Effective magic is transcendent nature; and who shall measure the subtlety of those touches which convey the quality of soul as well as body, and make a man's passion for one woman differ from his passion for another as joy in the morning light over valley and river and white mountaintop differs from joy among Chinese lanterns and glass panels? (*Middlemarch* 384)

The distinction between the "valleys and mountains" women and the "Chinese lantern" women—an antithesis of the natural, eternal, and loved, and the ephemeral, man-made,

and merely admired—prefigures the subsequent comparisons of Dorothea and Rosamund discussed above, and explains Dorothea's electrification of Will as a kind of embodied natural sublime. The climactic statement, "effective magic is transcendent nature," is hard to parse, but suggests that Dorothea's presence and its effect on Will are experienced by him as magical, but that this is an experience in which cause, process, and effect are natural, although none the less powerful.<sup>93</sup> This moment is ostensibly beyond narrative, since the statement has no temporal movement, no story. It is barely even a metaphor, just a statement of equivalence, and to that extent it rejects literary conventions of figurative language, while at the same time also seeming to reject available scientific discourse for describing natural experience.

But Eliot flanks this unscience with the scientific, in talking of molecules transmitting electricity. The scientific language she calls on here to describe desire is not that of Darwinian naturalism, but rather of electro-physics and cell biology. Dorothea produces a reaction in Will like the effect of electricity, which affects him not as an organic whole or integrated, discrete subject, but as a collection of communicating molecules. This image expresses an understanding of pre-socialized desire which arises not in the mind but in bodily programmed reflexes, evoked directly by the sensory apprehension of the desired object. Thus Eliot expresses confidence in one kind of scientific language for erotic love, the physiology and chemistry of desire, even though

---

<sup>93</sup> Immediately before Dorothea's entrance, Will had been "low in the depths of boredom, and, obliged to help Mr. Brooke in arranging "documents" about hanging sheep-stealers," was contemplating "a sheep-stealing epic written with Homeric particularity" (387) This reminds us of the actual Homeric poems, or rather, wife-stealing epics. But such narratives, where the capture of women is analogous to the indiscriminate theft of sheep, is immediately dispelled upon Dorothea's entrance.

she treats anthropological accounts of partner choice with skepticism.<sup>94</sup> One problem with anthropological and Darwinian accounts of mate choice, for Eliot's purposes in *Middlemarch*, is that they account for the social forms and behaviors involved in mate choice without attempting to take account of the experience of desire, an experience she evokes using the language of physiological chemistry.<sup>95</sup> Rather than demystifying the claims of science, Eliot's use of scientific language here has the effect of elevating the physiology of desire, of endowing it with emotive and aesthetic, as well as explanatory, power.

After the intensity and romanticism of the scene in which they declare their love, which is characterized by intense physical responses—vivid blushed, involuntary handclasps and sobs—the novel's "Finale" risks anti-climax. Indeed, it seems deliberately to court it, with Eliot's implication that Dorothea's marriage to Will is not

---

<sup>94</sup> Eliot repudiates the sweeping theories of sexual behavior put forward by anthropologists, but she evidently regards as worthwhile the aim of accounting scientifically for hidden laws of sexual psychology and behavior. In her article on Lecky's *History of Rationalism* (*Fortnightly Review*, 1865), she argues that human psychology has "definite processes" that are no more inscrutable than is Darwin's "development-theory": "Mental attitudes" and "predispositions," however vague in consciousness, have not vague causes, any more than the "blind motions of the spring" in plants and animals." Here Eliot affirms the material basis of mind and suggests mental "predispositions" are analogous to biological instinct—and perhaps the sexual instinct is implied in her suggestive phrase, the "blind motions of the spring."

<sup>95</sup> While the Dorothea-Will relationship is figured in these naturalistic terms, however, Eliot is suspicious of the term "natural" when it is attached to human behavior: those characters in *Middlemarch* who think their feeling or acts are "only natural" are usually in the process of thinking or doing something which the novel suggests is ethically questionable. Frequently characters feel it is "natural" that the world should fall into harmony with their own desires. For example, to Rosamund, it is natural that Lydgate should fall in love with her rather than anyone else (114); Fred "naturally" feels he deserves more pleasure than he can pay for (229); and Casaubon finds it "only natural" that Dorothea should have accepted him with effusion (279). Eliot thus emphasizes how often "nature" is invoked to palliate questionable ideologies beliefs and personal choices, and invites readers to question "the natural" as an ideological category.



“ideally beautiful,” and that Dorothea’s achievements as a wife are relatively insignificant. The Finale combats this anticlimax by invoking a myth that is simultaneously about transcendent sexual love and the origins of society: Dorothea and Will’s move to London is compared to the relocation of Adam and Eve, “who had their honeymoon in Eden but their first little one amid thistles and thorns in the wilderness” (832). This elevates their move as a timeless transition from innocence to knowledge, nostalgic past to difficult present, aligning their journey to London with an archetypal paradigm that universalizes and dehistoricizes them in the very moment at which they descend into the social medium of the world’s largest city, and into history. This universalizing mythical allusion palliates the prospect of their historical insignificance, since it places them as actors in a timeless, eternal re-enactment of love and procreation that the novel implicitly celebrates. In relation to sexual love and marriage, the novel resists its own carefully-realized historicism.

Eliot looked on the whole social and cultural history of humans as a series of experiments from which the human race as a whole has learned, and on this type of species-wide social learning as an outcome of “past revelations and discipline” (*Letters*, IV: 216-17). However, she cordons off “human love” from this notion of cultural or species-wide evolution, asserting that it precedes history: “human love, the mutual subjection of soul between a man and a woman...is also a growth and revelation beginning before all history.” (*Letters*, IV: 468). References to anthropology gesture to this sense of a common humanity, which reaches far beyond *Middlemarch*’s represented social milieu and historical moment. Eliot’s engagement with anthropological theories about sex and marriage contributes signally to her portrayal of the universality of sexual

desire, while also allowing her to register the pressure of the social forms that represent and structure desire.

Eliot's conjunctive allusions to myth and anthropology stage a conflict between competing ways to understand human sexuality: idealism versus realism, universalism versus historicism. Mythical allusion typically invokes human universals while anthropology points to culturally-determined change in fundamental human traits; but Eliot uses both discourses to suggest the universality of the experiences of desire and romantic love, so that her references to anthropology point to aspects of a common and unchanging human nature, which has persisted over an immensely long evolutionary timescale. *Middlemarch* valorizes the idea that sexual love is "natural" to humans of both sexes, in part through references to a Darwinian discourse of natural desire that humans share with animals, one that transcends arbitrary human social arrangements. Unlike Lubbock and McLennan, Darwin emphasizes selective attraction and "instinct" as motives for partner choice in all human societies, questions civilization's suppression of these forces, and offers extensive, affectionate descriptions of female animals choosing males for their beauty or prowess. Eliot is very much a Darwinian in her conception of human sexuality in terms of our descent and inheritance from animals, and in her explicitly evolutionary comparisons of humans to animals in all of her novels. Her portrayal of human sexual relationships, like Darwin's, seems to rest on a belief that human society and psychology ultimately arose from what Huxley called "the physical basis of life." *Middlemarch* implies that some essential core of human desire is biologically "natural" and not culturally constructed, and this idea contributes to the novel's highly romantic portrayal of Will's attraction to Dorothea. However, Eliot found

Darwin's specific arguments about women troubling, and took issue with them in her final novel, *Daniel Deronda*.

### Chapter Three

#### **“It’s a Medea and Creüsa business”: Women, Evolutionary Theory, and Myth in *Daniel Deronda***

After finishing *Middlemarch*, Eliot embarked on a very extensive course of research for her next novel. Within *Daniel Deronda* (1876), the depth of this research is most evident in what early reviewers called “the Jewish part” of the novel. But her anthropological and mythographic read-matter—including Tylor’s *Researches into the Early History of Mankind* (1865) and *Primitive Culture* (1871), John Fiske’s *Myths and Mythmakers*, and Darwin’s *Expression of the Emotions* (1872)—also leaves an imprint on the novel.<sup>96</sup> The novel’s engagement with Darwin has been eloquently demonstrated by Gillian Beer, but in this chapter, I suggest that Darwin’s writing on human behavior is only one of the novel’s anthropological contexts.<sup>97</sup> The novel’s method is itself universalizing and comparativist to a far greater extent than Eliot’s earlier fiction, drawing Tylor-esque connections between societies widely separated in space and time—for example, between young men centuries ago in Palestine or Cairo and Daniel dressing for dinner (509), and between Gwendolen and speakers of Coptic and Etruscan (41).

---

<sup>96</sup> For a full record of Eliot’s reading and note-taking during this period (1873-6), see Jane Irwin, ed. *George Eliot’s Daniel Deronda Notebooks*. Cambridge: CUP, 1996. The complete title of Fiske’s book is John Fiske’s *Myths and Mythmakers: Old Tales and Superstitions Interpreted by Comparative Mythology*, which makes clear its anthropological and scientific affiliations. Eliot wrote to enthusiastically to tell Fiske that she had been unable to put the book down (Irwin 247).

<sup>97</sup> Gillian Beer, in *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth Century Fiction* (Cambridge University Press, 1988, 2000), pp.196-219.

The novel's engagement with the anthropology of McLennan and Tylor is, in fact, a way of writing against both Darwinian and traditional views of female morality. Both Tylor's books, and McLennan's essays on totemism, which Eliot read in 1870-1, represent "primitive" mental lives that are determined by irrational fears and solipsistic beliefs about the natural world. Both writers argue that primitive man believes that natural conditions and objects have a special bearing on him. Tylor calls this form of solipsism "animism;" McLennan calls it "totemism." While for both of these anthropologists, such fears and beliefs are wholly negative influences that they hope will be eradicated by civilization, in *Daniel Deronda*, precisely this kind of "primitive" fear is represented as a moral force akin to conscience. The novel suggests that this fear is a kind moral impulse that is deeply rooted in the human psyche and cuts across gender lines. The novel explores the importance of fear in determining the moral life of its heroine, Gwendolen, and denies her the conventional outlets for a woman's moral feeling—conjugal and maternal love. Indeed, the novel illustrates some of the ways in which these latter aspects of female moral "nature" are in part culturally constructed and enforced. The Darwinian arguments and classical myths to which the novel alludes are revealed to be powerful stories masquerading as truths about women's nature. Interlocking references to the Medea myth and to Darwin shape the novel's discussion of intra-female rivalry and women's "nature," and contribute to the novel's critique of women's restriction to the roles of romantic heroine and mother. The novel denies Gwendolen, the novel's heroine, these satisfactions by denying her the conventional trajectory of the courtship plot, and instead makes her development as a moral being contingent on her

rejection of sexual rivalry and motherhood and on her embrace of fear “as a guide” and a “form of conscience.”<sup>98</sup>

The first quarter of *Daniel Deronda* (1876) dwells on Gwendolen’s individual development, which is figuratively situated within the terms of a “stage theory” model of cultural evolution. The terms and trajectory of this evolution, from “primitive” or savage through to civilized, had been set by conjectural historians of the eighteenth century, but were given new life in scientific discourse in the years preceding *Daniel Deronda* (1876) by works such as John McLennan’s foundational-text of evolutionary anthropology, *Primitive Marriage* (1865), and Darwin’s *Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871). These theories increasingly focused on primitive sexual behavior and the treatment of women by men, and on the role of myth in primitive epistemology. *Daniel Deronda* also brings into focus the conflicts between McLennan’s anthropological theories about “primitive” sexual organization and myth, Darwin’s quite different theories of sexual selection and belief in myth, and Eliot’s vision of British society situated within world history. As in *Middlemarch*, *Daniel Deronda*’s mythical allusions not only invoke a literary heritage, but reaffirm the value of myth to express psychological meanings in the face of its devaluation by anthropological theories of the “primitive” or myth-making frame of mind.

The novel’s use of the Medea myth, which informs the triangulated plot of Gwendolen, her husband Grandcourt, and his former lover Lydia Glasher, speaks to the capacity of myth to represent non-rational psychology. Eliot emphasizes those elements of the Medea myth—female rivalry, metamorphosis, motherhood and maternal

---

<sup>98</sup> George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (Penguin Books: Harmondsworth, 1995), pp. 454 and 676.

infanticide—that are central to Darwin’s *Descent*, and to *Daniel Deronda*’s engagement with Darwin’s theory. The novel’s references to *The Descent* suggest the historical contingency of Darwin’s theories of “natural” mating and reproductive behavior, and question Darwin’s inadvertent reinforcement of cultural traditions that limit female destiny to successful marriage and motherhood, or failure, alienation and tragedy. In addition, Eliot undermines the teleological imperative of both sexual selection and the heroine-centered novel—the appropriate mothering of the race as determined by male choice—by making her central female character, Gwendolen, extraneous to the novel’s resolute marriage plot. By the end of *Daniel Deronda*, Gwendolen has eluded the wire-work of the deterministic, heroine-centered narrative, which renders a model woman’s life as a journey from the blindness of girlhood to the treasure-bearing of motherhood. Her blindness is dispelled by the frightening vision of “a woman’s life” represented by the socially exiled Lydia Glasher (152). Unlike the Darwinian woman whose life revolves around her sexual and reproductive functions, Gwendolen is repelled by the possibility of the sexual rivalry in which other characters expect her to engage with Lydia. The novel invests a lot of space in portraying Gwendolen’s participation in an apparently sexual rivalry with Lydia that is not actually sexual, although other characters in the novel take for granted that it is. Instead, Gwendolen’s sense of horrified guilt towards Lydia and her illegitimate children, and the consequent purgatorial suffering of her marriage, push her towards disgust for the personal “empire” she had once craved, and towards a vague but sincere desire to “make others glad that they were born” (810). Gwendolen’s desire to atone for her crime against Lydia is, paradoxically, expressed in her most monstrous wish—for her husband’s death. This desire represents the apex of

Eliot's inversion of the Darwinian emphasis on sexual competition among women for men. This end result—Gwendolen's exile from the courtship and marriage plot, her relative freedom, and her rather undirected ethical ambitions—is not entirely positive, nor in keeping with Gwendolen's own desires, but it is a fairly radical experiment made by Eliot involving a new trajectory of feminine development, one that implies a longer course of moral and intellectual growth than heroines are generally accorded.

In representing Gwendolen's personal evolution over the course of *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot alludes to a vast range of historical and contemporary notions of the natural and the good in human life, and of human behaviors and societies both ancient and modern. Eliot's interdisciplinary interrogation of notions of the natural and good gives a richly nuanced sense of the complexity of these concepts for women as much as for men, and repudiates the newly-scientized cultural myth that women will ensure themselves natural and ethical lives merely by virtue of having married and mothered a family. Within this paradigm of ethical equality among the sexes, each character or action that Eliot represents is deeply and problematically “composite” (403), in ways that stage a rejection of pervasive cultural assumptions, such as those that associate Englishmen with civilized virtue, Jews with foreignness, women with loving motherhood.<sup>99</sup>

The novel moreover explicitly disavows the evolutionary progressivism championed by anthropological writers who assert that cultural evolution is invariably a progress from worse to better. Such a view is stated baldly, to the point of caricature, by

---

<sup>99</sup> The extent to which, in Gwendolen, Eliot inverts the cultural associations of fairness with Enlightenment, civilization, and normalcy, was suggested to me by Jeff Nunokawa, who called the Mirah plot the “light side” and the Gwendolen plot the “dark side” of engaging with the strange. (Jeff Nunokawa, Lecture on *Daniel Deronda*. Eng 334: Literature of the *Fin de Siècle*. English Department, Princeton University, NJ. September 9, 2004.)



Buchan, the Scottish artisan introduced to Daniel by Mordecai at the Hand and Banner: “‘The laws of development [a contemporary synonym for evolution] are being discovered, and changes taking place according to them are necessarily progressive; that is to say, if we have any notion of progress or improvement opposed to them, the notion is a mistake.’” Daniel bluntly and tellingly repudiates this:

‘I really can’t see how you arrive at that sort of certitude about changes by calling them development... there will still remain the danger of mistaking a tendency which should be resisted for an inevitable law that we must adjust ourselves to—which seems to me as bad a superstition or false god as any that has been set up’ (528).

Daniel’s view here reflects the novel’s wider concern to cast doubt on the ill-founded valorization of the “civilized” status quo by evolutionary anthropologists, and turns their condemnation of primitive belief against them, by aligning their deterministic theories with superstition and idolatry.

### **Gwendolen and Cultural Evolution**

In its portrayal of women in terms of imagery of the monstrous and supernatural, the novel dramatized an element of folk belief, to which Darwin’s theorization of women’s sexually selected difference from men had unintentionally lent authority. The closeness of women to animals implied by the insistent emphasis on women’s maternal function within evolutionary theory speaks to a much older, traditional mythology that placed the female body closer to animal nature. The nineteenth-century ideal of the

domestic angel, with its contradictory connotations of both earthliness and spirituality, has a dark counterpart in that century's fascination with myths of monstrous, supernaturally powerful women—part-human, part-snake—whose biologically functional bodies have been refigured as “lower” animal forms, yet who are also, like Medea, preternaturally powerful.<sup>100</sup> Myths that represent the metamorphosis of women into animals and that figure women as monsters suggest not only anxieties about human kinship with beasts but also fears of the power of the female body over the male psyche.

Eliot thus alludes to both literary and evolutionary myth when she figures Gwendolen, Lydia, and Daniel's mother, the Princess, as metamorphosing women, who combine supernatural and serpentine qualities: in the first chapter, Gwendolen is compared to Lamia, and is also, simultaneously, Eve and the tempting serpent, for whom, claims marginal character Mr. Vandernoodt, it would be worth a fall: ““Woman was tempted by a serpent; why not man?”” (12). Lydia too is snakelike and dangerous, and is associated by a series of allusions with Medea the poisoner. She indulges in “outlashes of venom,” stages a “medusa-apparition,” and compares herself to a viper (347, 605). The Princess has her alterity figured by comparison to Melusina—fairy above the waist, snake below (625). Grandcourt too is figured as a reptile, but his reptilian qualities figure him as a cold-blooded, slow-moving predator, without any of the quasi-supernatural power and mythopoeic resonance evoked by the goddess-snake figuration of female characters.

As some of the foregoing metaphors suggest, Eliot's allusions to mythical monstrous women overlap with her Darwinian understanding of human kinship to animals, both psychologically and physiologically. Gwendolen experiences life in the

---

<sup>100</sup> See Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1984).

way that animals do—she has a bodily joy in hunting as though she herself were the horses and the hounds, she faces physical danger with instinctive courage, and yet experiences irrational, instinctive fears. Darwin’s *Descent* had theorized that most trends in human behavior, including the moral sense, are evolved instincts—a sense that is reflected in *Daniel Deronda*’s recurrent discussion of characters’ mental processes in terms of instinct. However, the novel contests Darwin’s division of virtues according to gender. In the *Descent*, the characteristically male virtues are physical courage, desire for predominance (competitiveness and ambition), self-command, and the “social instincts” that lead to the development of sympathetic identification and conscious morality (*Descent* 115). In his account, female virtue is closely tied to maternal love, which Darwin distinguished from the more social instinct of sympathy. All of his examples of extra-familial altruism feature male protagonists, while all of his examples of female altruism involve women or female animals protecting their young.<sup>101</sup> In *Daniel Deronda*, Gwendolen is initially endowed with male virtues such as physical courage, desire for unspecified “empire,” and power of self-command, and lacks tenderness towards others. Gwendolen’s limitations in the first part of the novel thus connect her “primitive” fears and superstitions with masculine traits as much as with femininity. Gwendolen is satirically identified as a “princess in exile” who “wants the world at her feet,” but already possesses her own “domestic empire” of subservient female relatives (41), like other patriarchs in the novel, including the Reverend Gascoigne, Sir Hugo Mallinger, and

---

<sup>101</sup> “The all-important emotion of sympathy is distinct from that of love. A mother may passionately love her sleeping and passive infant, but she can hardly at such times be said to feel sympathy for it.” “Woman, owing to her maternal instincts, displays these qualities [tenderness and unselfishness] towards her infants in an eminent degree; therefore it is likely that she would often extend them towards her fellow-creatures...and this holds good even with savages.” (*Descent* 109, 583).

Grandcourt. After her family's financial "fall," she is compared, in her egotistical desire for power and aggrieved sense of her own entitlement, to Prometheus, Byron, and Macbeth (44).<sup>102</sup>

Gwendolen thus begins the novel as something other than a conventional proto-heroine trapped by the "wire-work of social forms" (53), although this summarizes one aspect of her limitations as a heroine and as a human being. She is famously represented in terms of contradictions on the first page of the novel—both beautiful and not, both conventional and strikingly unusual. The novel insists that she suffer simultaneously from the malaises of modern civilization—rootlessness, ignorance of tradition, and instead of sympathetic altruism, a mere desire to win while others lose—and from shadowy impulses and instincts that seem like emotional echoes of a dark, barbarous past: her superstitious dreads and aversions, vague inklings of her own supernatural power, and her intense terror of inanimate objects, which she endows with incomprehensible powers over her own destiny. Gwendolen has a "streak of superstition in her which attached itself both to her confidence and her terror—a superstition which lingers in an intense personality even in spite of theory and science" (276). She imagines alternately that she is goddess of all she surveys, or on the other hand, that the universe in its entirety conspires against her; both of these delusions are alike, however, in their solipsism and self-aggrandizement.

Gwendolen's dread of natural phenomena such as "a change in the light" suggests not only immaturity, but also a "primitive" frame of mind: a liability to "fits of spiritual

---

<sup>102</sup> Later, however, she is identified with specifically female figures of suffering and enslavement, and comes to resemble victimized and murdered wives from Dante's *Inferno*, suggesting that the oppression of women may have the positive effect of whipping them into compassionate fellow-feeling with other sufferers.

dread” that are induced by superstitious responses to physical phenomena that have no connection to orthodox religion:

She was ashamed and frightened, as at what might happen again, in remembering her tremor on suddenly feeling herself alone, when, for example, she was walking without companionship and there came some rapid change in the light. [...] The little astronomy taught her at school used sometimes to set her imagination at work in a way that made her tremble (63-4).

Gwendolen’s sensitivity to natural conditions is reminiscent of, but different to that celebrated by the Romantic poets: she experiences it as invasive and terrifying, because it impinges on her sense of agency, and undermines her own sense of an unspecified “empire” (64). Both her dread and her arrogance are facets of her belief “that whatever surrounded her was somehow specially for her” (804). In addition, Gwendolen’s quasi-religious, solipsistic fear at changes in weather conditions also echoes the “primitive” beliefs described by anthropologists such as McLennan and Tylor, as does her fetishistic endowment of material objects with supernatural meaning. She attributes quasi-magical properties to the jewelry sent to her by Lydia Glasher, who sends her Grandcourt’s diamonds with a threatening letter, and by Daniel, who redeems the necklace she had pawned in order to gamble. It is noteworthy that in Gwendolen’s terrified perception the necklace sent her by Lydia becomes a “serpent,” a motif that echoes the trope of serpent-worship with which the novel opens. The way in which Gwendolen responds to these jewels is in keeping with the superstitious dread of fetishistic objects by cultures such as the Celtic, Norse, and Egyptian, which Eliot had studied in the lead up to writing *Daniel*

*Deronda*. In particular, Eliot derived the idea of serpent-worship from McLennan's influential essays on totemism, which she read in 1869-70, in which he describes the worship of feared or evidently powerful natural phenomena such as snakes.<sup>103</sup>

Gwendolen's mental state in *Daniel Deronda* is thus represented through imagery that alludes to the psychological state of "primitive man" described by Tylor, McLennan, and Darwin. The tropes of serpent-worship and the fear of figurative snakes that are attached to Gwendolen invoke McLennan's influential essays on totemism, which focus at length on the prevalence of serpent-worship as a primitive cultural "stage," and discuss its origin in a fear of snakes. Gwendolen's irrational terror in response to events like "a change in the light" reflects Tylor's idea of savage "animism," the belief that natural conditions are animated by forces that might impinge upon one's own life; and Gwendolen manifests the solipsism implied in animistic belief, in her faith that whatever happen is somehow "especially for her." In its representation of Gwendolen's "primitive" fears, the novel also chimes with passages in the opening chapter of Darwin's *Descent of Man*, in which Darwin discusses how the instinctive fears that humans share with animals—the fear of snakes, of the dark, and of thunder and lightning—lead to the development of "primitive," fetishistic religions, based on a solipsistic belief that inanimate objects and animals act in relation to oneself.<sup>104</sup> *Daniel Deronda* thus suggests similarly that primitive belief is alive and flourishing in the modern world—in particular, in the deepest recesses of the mind of an apparently ultra-modern young woman.

---

<sup>103</sup> John McLennan, "The Worship of Plants and Animals: Part II.—Totem-Gods Among the Ancients," *The Fortnightly Review*, 1869. Eliot's notebooks of 1869-71 quote from McLennan's essay. John Clark Pratt and Victor A. Neufeldt, *George Eliot's Middlemarch Notebooks* (Berkeley: California UP, 1979)

<sup>104</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, pp.73, 96-98.

However, the novel in some respects the novel questions the value-judgments implied by these anthropological theories of religious evolution. Tylor in particular, was deeply committed to advancing scientific rationalism at the expense of both primitive belief and modern religion. He and McLennan suggest that modern man is losing the capacity for religious fear and awe that inspired animism and other forms of primitive religion (and by implication, Christianity too). Eliot also sometimes invokes a negative notion of primitive or savage belief, for example, when she suggests in a letter of 1865 that “primitive” beliefs closely resemble undesirable varieties of modern Christianity.<sup>105</sup> However, in *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot implies there is value in irrational or primitive religious feeling, not merely as an object of study to help moderns to understand universal human experiences (the “great primitive emotions” of Greek tragic drama)<sup>106</sup> but as elements in the novel’s program for an ethical life. Gwendolen’s primitive fears make an important contribution to her evolution towards moral awareness later in the novel, as she struggles to let her irrational fear “guide” her, as Daniel suggests: “Take your fear as a safeguard. It is like quickness of hearing. It may make consequences passionately present to you” (454, repeated on 676). Daniel’s advice implies that conscience is rooted in fear, and that conscience itself is no more rational than fear, since its action is passionate and instantaneous, like “quickness of hearing.” Nonetheless, agency and rationalism have a place in this process, since the embrace of one’s fear (a

---

<sup>105</sup> George Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters*, 9 vols, ed. Gordon Haight (New Haven: Yale UP, 1954-1978). Vol. 4: 424.

<sup>106</sup> Eliot’s comment to R.C. Jebb, in answer to his question about how Sophocles had influenced her. Cited by Gordon Haight, in *George Eliot: A Biography* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1985), p. 464.

conscious act of will) can prepare one for those moments when instinctive moral judgment is called into play.

In portraying the anthropologically-defined “primitive” as a significant aspect of Gwendolen’s psyche, *Daniel Deronda* suggests that the primitive persists undiminished within the civilized, contrary to the claims of evolutionary anthropologists. The novel observes “primitive” customs in a variety of “civilized” settings, noting the reconciliation of superstition and rational unscrupulousness often seen in gamblers, and referring to the social practice of charitably feeding a poor relation on the worst of your food as “a ‘survival’ of prehistoric practice, not yet generally admitted to be superstitious” (399). Such wry, mock-anthropological observations of the savagery of civilization from “outside looking in” are in tension with the unsettling evocations of Gwendolen’s terrified, “primitive” interiority. Both of these representative strategies cast a skeptical eye on anthropological generalization, on its use of “primitive” to distance supposed irrationalism from modern life, and its denigration of all forms of irrationality. Eliot’s ambivalent use of the term “superstition” in the novel helps us to understand the novel’s attitude to the primitive, often understood in mid-Victorian discourse to mean the irrational. While the narrator’s rationalistic perception reveals superstitious beliefs held by characters to be inaccurate, their mistaken faith in supernatural logics can point to a moral truth. For example, Gwendolen’s “superstition” that Daniel has some coercive force over her destiny encourages her to trust him and learn from him, leading her to a series of self-revelatory moral epiphanies, while Mordecai’s superstition that Daniel is his destiny compels Daniel’s trust in Mordecai. Gwendolen’s superstitious belief that Lydia’s



letter bodes retribution horrifies her into a passionate sense of remorse.<sup>107</sup> The novel thus suggests that ethical truth can be found in the irrational as well as in conscious rationalism, because apparent irrationality so often means merely that humans don't yet have the power to explain its logic.

Eliot subverts her culture's association of Jews with barbarity and Englishness with civilization, placing the barbarous in the English half of the novel. This reversal of a stereotype of cultural evolutionism is encapsulated in the novel's patterns of naming: the names Gwendolen and Lydia emanate from the barbarous, pagan past. Gwendolen's name, especially, invokes Celtic meanings of which at least some of her readers would be aware. For instance, in Blake's *Jerusalem*, the mythical "Gwendolen" (whose history or legend is recounted by Geoffrey of Monmouth) is part of a Celtic sisterhood, and is a symbolic female figure presiding over prehistoric violence. Eliot's notebooks point us to a more prosaic source of information on this original Gwendolen: Charlotte Yonge's *History of Christian Names*, from which Eliot quotes: "Gwen is also considered as the British Venus [or] ...evening star," and also as the "lady of the bow...an ancient British Goddess, probably the moon."<sup>108</sup> This ancient Gwendolen is thus simultaneously the Diana and Venus of a pre-Christian British pantheon, a dual identity that correlates with an element of Gwendolen's doubleness: she delights in masculine admiration but abjures sexual contact with men.

---

<sup>107</sup> "The vague foreboding of some retributive calamity which hung about her life, had reached a superstitious point" (429).

<sup>108</sup> Charlotte Yonge, *The History of Christian Names* (London: Macmillan, 1884), p.266.

## Rivalry and Revenge

*Daniel Deronda*'s construction of rivalry between women is always inflected by a critical relation to both traditional and scientific narratives of "natural" female behavior. Gwendolen's initial competitiveness with other women has no sexual element, but is impelled by what the novel represents as a desire for preeminence that is conventionally coded as masculine. The possibility of sexual rivalry with Lydia causes her a horror that verges on hysteria.

The majority of Darwin's *Descent of Man* is devoted to his theory of "Selection in Relation to Sex," which gave sexual rivalry a newly central place as a determining force in the natural order, and therefore, as Eliot recognizes, newly problematized the socially constructed defining events of women's lives (love and marriage), as well as their novelistic representation. In the *Descent*, Darwin advanced his theory of sexual selection, which, as he summarizes, "depends, not on a struggle for existence, but on a struggle between the males for possession of the females; the result is not death to the unsuccessful competitor, but few or no offspring."<sup>109</sup> This rule is said to obtain among many animal species, including humans in their most "primitive" state. Males are said to compete for females through display, bodily ornaments, or trials of physical prowess, while the females will mate with males by whom they are thus "excited or allured."<sup>110</sup> However, among humans within both civilized and savage societies, the direction of

---

<sup>109</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, ed. Gillian Beer (Oxford: OUP, 1996), p.73

<sup>110</sup> "This form of selection may have occasionally acted during later times; for in utterly barbarous tribes the women have more power in choosing, rejecting, and tempting their lovers, or of afterwards changing their husbands, than might have been expected" (*Descent* 619-20)

sexual choice described by Darwin is reversed, and women compete to be chosen by men. He accounts only briefly for this reversal: “Man is more powerful in body and mind than woman, and in the savage state he keeps her in a far more abject state than the male of any other animal; therefore it is not surprising that he should have gained the power of selection.”<sup>111</sup> He goes on to suggest that these conditions have created the pattern observable in his own society, in which women compete with one another via displays of beauty for male sexual attention (619). *Daniel Deronda* portrays such female competition for men as a cultural norm within what Darwin would term “civilization,” but also vehemently critiques this status quo.

Darwin’s inversion of the dictum that women have the power of choice (or even of refusal) in marriage is echoed in *Daniel Deronda*, but the novel rejects Darwin’s implication that this is inevitable or morally neutral in its effects. Eliot parodies a patriarchal eulogy of the male power that requires women to pass the “test” of “men’s taste,” in a chapter epigraph composed as a dramatic fragment spoken by an anonymous “1<sup>st</sup> Gent”:

“What woman should be? Sir, consult the taste  
Of marriageable men....Our daughters must be wives,  
And to the wives must be what men will choose;  
Men’s taste is woman’s test” (99).

---

<sup>111</sup> Darwin account of why the control of choice in sexual relations passed to men is unsatisfactory and rather confused, because it requires that some women will be rejected and will therefore produce fewer offspring than their more attractive competitors. This seems unlikely given that men’s reproductive investment is so minimal compared with women’s, and men can engage in reproductive sexual relations with women at so little biological cost.

Appropriately, this epigraph precedes the chapter narrating the Brackenshaw Archery Meeting, at which Gwendolen first meets Grandcourt. This archery contest represents a public staging of Darwinian sexual competition among women within “civilized society:” spectators express less interest in the sport than in the elaborate display of beauty and dress in which all of the unmarried “young ladies” in Gwendolen’s neighborhood compete. Gwendolen delights in her sense that she is considered by the men to be the “finest girl present,” although she loses the contest in archery. The narrator comments with savage irony on the patriarchal power that underpins such admiration and makes Gwendolen’s triumph disturbingly hollow: “Perhaps it was not quite mythical that a slave has been proud to be bought first” (100).<sup>112</sup> The specifically Darwinian reference of the contest is signposted for us by an explicit allusion that ironizes literalistic interpretations of sexual selection theory: Juliet Fenn, who wins the contest of skill but loses that of beauty, is said to be a failed product of a possible attempt at “artificial” sexual selection: her “underhung” and “fish-featured” father has failed to ensure beauty for his offspring by the “natural selection” of a pretty wife, since chance has bestowed his own apparently atavistic facial features—“a receding brow resembling that of the more intelligent fishes”—upon his daughter. Owing to the inheritance of her father’s “natural selection” of her mother, Juliet cannot compete in her own generation’s sexual competition. Eliot

---

<sup>112</sup> This comment adds further irony to Gwendolen’s belief that she can escape the slavery that characterizes the lives of other women: “Other people allowed themselves to be made slaves of, and to have their lives blown hither and thither like empty ships in which no will was present: it was not to be so with her” (39).

makes this reference a Darwinian joke at men's expense, by suggesting that ugly men consider it "natural selection" when they choose "a mate prettier than themselves" (114).<sup>113</sup>

Eliot's portrayal of the archery contest not only echoes Darwin's claim that women have ceded sexual choice to men, but is also sharply critical of the effects of this status quo on women. In addition, she extends this critique to the hypocrisy of novelistic convention that unrealistically elevates the choice of a husband to an act of immense ethical significance, when, Eliot implies in this novel, such "choices" are often nothing of the kind. Through the ironic titles to the second and fourth books of *Daniel Deronda*, "Maidens Choosing" and "Gwendolen Gets Her Choice," Eliot directs attention to a conventional literary language that sentimentalizes young women's "choice" of their husbands. When Gwendolen "chooses" Grandcourt, for example, she is pushed towards her decision by her new sense of powerlessness, and her desire to escape from hopelessness to triumph, and lift her family from poverty into wealth—motives that Grandcourt recognizes and skillfully manipulates:

Grandcourt said, slowly and languidly, as if it were of no importance, other things having been settled—'You will tell me now, I hope, that Mrs. Davilow's loss of fortune will not trouble you further. You will trust me to prevent it from weighing upon her. You will give me the claim to provide against that.' [...] Repugnance, dread, scruples—these were dim as remembered pains, while she was already tasting relief under the immediate pain of hopelessness" (300-302).

---

<sup>113</sup> This joke is similar the Darwinian joke in *Middlemarch*, when the narrator refers to unattractive men reflecting on the "fitness" of being able to marry lovely young women.

Grandcourt's wealth and Gwendolen's lack of it are conditions necessary to the success of his proposal, exemplifying one form of the legalized gender inequality that not only undermined women's power of choice (or even of refusal), but also put them at the mercy of the men they marry. In the novel, the women who get to freely choose their partner are Mirah, who is able to earn her own living as a professional singer, and Catherine Arrowpoint, who is an heiress, and marries the impoverished musician Klesmer in defiance of social expectation.

In representing female rivalry for men in conjunction with female disempowerment, *Daniel Deronda* suggests that these allied phenomena emerge from socially specific, historically contingent conditions, such as the imbalance of power and wealth, and different expectations about sexual behavior and experience among men and women. Moreover, in its detailed representations of the psychological moment, the novel emphasizes the complexity with which these forces act on human psychology, creating much further-reaching "checks to the action of sexual selection" than those suggested by Darwin.

As I mention above, *Daniel Deronda* questions Darwin's claims of the ubiquity and inevitability of female sexual rivalry. The novel does not anywhere suggest, for example, that either Gwendolen or Lydia are jealous of the other's sexual possession of Grandcourt. *Daniel Deronda* emphasizes this absence of conventional rivalry paradoxically, by comparing it with an archetypal story of sexual rivalry taken to an extreme conclusion. The story of Medea's jealousy and revenge is mapped on to the triangulation of Gwendolen, Grandcourt, and Lydia Glasher, who figure respectively as Creüsa, Jason, and Medea. Again, Mr. Vandernoodt is the source of salacious literary

allusion, explaining Grandcourt's "separate establishment" to Daniel with considerable relish for the notion of "Grandcourt between two fiery women": "The fact is, there's another lady with four children at Gadsmere...A fiery dark-eyed woman—a noted beauty...It's a sort of Medea and Creüsa business...Grandcourt is a new kind of Jason" (432).<sup>114</sup> Vandernoodt's *Medea* reference is accurate beyond his knowledge, since when he makes the comparison, Gwendolen has already received Lydia's "poisoned gems" and "poisoned letter" on her wedding night. The imagery of poisoned jewels and emotions haunts the novel with an insistence that alerts us to the significant presence of other Medean tropes: female metamorphosis and maternal infanticide. However, Vandernoodt's rendering of Gwendolen and Lydia's story as a Medea myth, a tale of intense sexual rivalry, is inaccurate. His version of their story implies a widespread belief that such female competition for men is natural, and that sexual jealousy is the only emotion conceivable for two women in such a situation. Although Lydia had loved Grandcourt ten years prior to the novel's temporal setting, when she eloped with him, and Gwendolen was drawn to him before they married as a "subject" she might dominate, by the time of their rivalry, neither woman wants Grandcourt as a husband because of erotic desire for him. Indeed, they both feel a physical aversion to him: the novel describes their "dread" of Grandcourt in gothic terms. For both women, his attraction is the financial support he can offer their (largely female) families, while for Lydia he also represents her children's escape route from social shame to legitimacy. Lydia's "poisoned letter" to

---

<sup>114</sup> Vandernoodt refers to Ristori's famous performance of Legouv  's *Med  e*, which has an obvious relevance to the plot of *Daniel Deronda*, since Legouv  , like Eliot, uses the Medea story to critique the fathers of illegitimate children and evoke sympathy for the mothers. But the novel also includes ideas that are in Euripides's *Medea* but not Legouv  's, such as the sacrifice of children as a revenge.

Gwendolen is not an attempt to knock out her rival and regain her man, but is solely directed at punishing the newlyweds, not only for Grandcourt's defection but for Gwendolen's betrayal, since Gwendolen had earlier promised Lydia not to harm her by marrying Grandcourt. Therefore, although the rivalry between Lydia and Gwendolen superficially resembles a sexual battle, their motives have nothing to do with sexual attraction, the Darwinian explanation for such contests.

Following Gwendolen's marriage, their psychic states converge on the rage, frustration, and sickening helplessness generated by their absolute subjection to Grandcourt. Gwendolen initially attempts to align her thoughts with the self-righteous modern-day Creüsa she imagines in her own situation, and wishes she could emulate:

She had only to collect her memories, which proved to her that 'anybody' regarded the illegitimate children as more rightfully to be looked shy on and deprived of social advantages than illegitimate fathers. The verdict of 'anybody' seemed to be that she had no reason to concern herself greatly on behalf of Mrs. Glasher and her children (298).

Instead, however, she identifies with Lydia, and feels passionate guilt towards this supposed rival and her children. She also realizes the potential parallelism between Lydia's situation and her own: "all the while the dark shadow thus cast on the lot of a woman destitute of acknowledged social dignity, spread itself over her visions of a future that might be her own, and made part of her dread on her own behalf." Gwendolen's moral paralysis is ambivalently portrayed: it is self-interested yet understandable that she should wish to avoid the poverty and social exile in which Lydia has languished, and which she perceives will be her fate as "Mrs. Grandcourt 'run away.'" In portraying the



psychologically crippling effects of Lydia's social exile and dependence on Grandcourt, Eliot suggests how powerfully the patriarchal double standard has conspired to cause Lydia's Medean "savagery."

Although in her portrayal of the women of *Daniel Deronda* Eliot contests Darwin's conjectured patterns of female behavior, in some significant respects, their views coincide: for instance, in their shared belief that female sexual behavior is sadly "deformed" by its repression in "civilized" nineteenth-century society. He expresses some nostalgia for forms of society that encouraged active choice of sexual partners by women, and their unrepressed enjoyment and expression of sexual desire, and he notes sadly that such positive phenomena have been inexplicably suppressed by civilized life. He reserves his most celebratory tone for his descriptions of animal courtship and familial altruism, whereas his representation of civilization's biologically and evolutionarily troubling courtship rites and "oppression" of women are described in a voice that conveys pained weariness—for instance, in his reflection that while in modern societies men may choose women for their moral character, they are even more likely to do so for their social status. Whereas female animals in Darwin's world are "excited," "charmed" or "allured" by the males, these responses are alien to Gwendolen. She is not merely cynical ("the question of love on her own part had occupied her scarcely at all in relation to Grandcourt. The desirability of marriage for her had always seemed due to other feeling than love") and naive ("to be enamored was the part of the man, on whom the advances depended"), but reacts to physical sexual attention with a bodily horror that is inexplicable to her—for instance, when Grandcourt kisses her neck. Eliot emphasizes the lack of such joy and desire not only in Gwendolen's relation with Grandcourt but

with all men, which the novel connects to her unlikeness to other women, and her unhealthy solipsism.

While the novel questions Darwin's implication that sexual competition is a major determinant of women's behavior, it nonetheless represents sexual jealousy as a positive emotion. Jealousy catalyzes the declaration of love between Catherine and Klesmer, and prompts Mirah to realize that she is in love with Daniel. (Mirah's jealousy is figured as another salubrious form of poison, a "little biting snake" that is stirred by imagining Daniel's attraction to Gwendolen.) The sympathetic portrayal of Mirah's jealousy also counters Mordecai's normative claim that good women and sexual jealousy do not mix: "women are specially framed for the love which feels possession in renouncing," to suggest that the female love which seeks possession is both natural and morally healthy (736). The novel implies that sexual jealousy is not inherently selfish, because it is such a frequent corollary to passionate love. Indeed, the novel suggests that the absence of such possessive jealousy signals a much greater self-centeredness and lack of humility, if it is predicated on a sense that everything already belongs to you, as with Gwendolen's conviction "that whatever surrounded her was somehow specially for her, and it was because of this that no personal jealousy had been roused in her relation to Deronda." In her valorization of jealousy, Eliot again revises Darwin's beliefs about the gendered distribution of emotions: he implies that male jealousy (among animals) is a positive emotion, while female jealousy (among humans) is negative and even leads to the killing of daughters.

## **Mothers and Monstrosity**

Motherhood's centrality to women's lives as a cultural and biological norm that pervades nineteenth century discourse, and its particular relevance to human biological and moral evolution was newly and influentially theorized in Darwin's *Descent*, which argues that motherhood was practically the sole form of altruism available to women, especially in their most primitive state, before the intervention of "reason and foresight" interfered with such instincts.<sup>115</sup> Lydia's "savage maternity" makes her closer to Darwin's notional primitive humans and to animals. While Eliot sympathetically portrays Lydia's "passionate motherhood" and valorizes the maternal behavior of minor characters such as Mrs. Meyrick, the novel as a whole resists the limitation of women's ethical lives to their maternal role. Lydia's life, without any social role outside of motherhood, is pernicious to her mental health, while women who define themselves by their motherhood, such as Daniel's stepmother, Lady Mallinger and Gwendolen's mother, Mrs. Davilow, are incapacitated as effective moral agents even in relation to their children.

Aside from the role of maternal altruism in women's ethical development, Darwin considered maternal altruism to be an evolved trait that aids the survival of offspring into adulthood, making it a necessary adjunct to the evolutionary function of sexual desire. However, in human societies this "natural" connection gets disrupted; and for Darwin, its most disturbing rupture is instantiated in maternal infanticide, when the first mechanism

---

<sup>115</sup> "During a very early period, when man had only just attained to the rank of manhood...he would...have been guided more by his instinctive passions, and less by foresight or reason...He would not have practised infanticide." (*Descent* 628)

of selection, the competition for a partner, impedes the second, the survival of children: he expresses dismay at ethnological reports of the “fearfully common” killing of female children by their mothers,<sup>116</sup> not only as a form of population control, but as a means for mothers to reduce wear and tear on their looks while also reducing the number of younger female competitors in circulation:

The trouble experienced by the women in rearing children, their consequent loss of beauty, the higher estimation set on them when few, and their happier fate, are assigned by the women themselves, and by various observers, as additional motives for infanticide (*Descent* 614.)

*Daniel Deronda* not only repudiates this kind of simplistic generalization about the motives of women as a group, but more specifically questions Darwin’s ascription of female infanticide to the reluctance of mothers to lose out in a sexually selective battle to their daughters. Lydia, aware of her own aging and lack of charm for Grandcourt, instead views her three daughters’ beauty as a weapon in her battle against him: “To Lydia it was some slight relief for her stifled fury to have the children present: she felt a savage glory in their loveliness, as if it would taunt Grandcourt with his indifference to her and them—a secret dart of venom that was strongly imaginative.”<sup>117</sup> The beauty of her children is optimistically viewed by their mother as a potential revenge against their father.

---

<sup>116</sup> The *Descent* refers repeatedly to the disturbing prevalence of maternal infanticide in “savage” societies: “Malthus...does not lay stress enough on what is probably the most important [factor limiting population increase] of all, namely infanticide, especially of female infants.” (Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, ed. James Birx (Prometheus Books: New York, 1997), p. 47.)

<sup>117</sup> Eliot, furthermore, emphasizes the extent to which these girls are surplus to requirements in the eyes of society. In this way Eliot registers the problem of “odd women,” and laments the disabilities suffered by such superabundant girls in a patriarchal context.

Eliot has thus seemingly eliminated the second, counter-Darwinian thread of Medea's revenge from Lydia's story. Even at her most poisonous, Lydia is as fierce in her maternity as in her vengefulness—her “two dominant passions”—and is, rather, “capable of a repression harder than shrieking and struggle” for her children's sake: “If she had not been a mother she would willingly have sacrificed herself to her revenge.” Eliot's rewriting of Medean revenge here suggests the insuperable power of the “instinctive” love of a mother for children, but also the possibility of consciously repressing one “passion” or instinct by means of another—an idea that is discussed by Darwin when he suggests that self-sacrifice arises when the “social instinct” predominates over the “instinct for self-preservation.” However, his discussion of this topic suggests that the “social instinct,” or altruism beyond one's offspring, only encompasses men; his example of a woman overcoming the “instinct of self-preservation” is a mother rescuing her drowning child.<sup>118</sup> Eliot's representation of Lydia's maternal love seems to conform to the terms of the Darwinian woman, except that her instinct for revenge might top her instinct for self-preservation.

The counter-Darwinian, infanticidal strand of Medea's story is touched on obliquely, at the margins of Eliot's novel, in the abandonment of children by Lydia and the Princess, and in Gwendolen's wish for Grandcourt's death as a way to avoid bearing his child. The Princess is especially emphatic in her hostility to motherhood. While I do

---

<sup>118</sup> It is evident in the first place, that with mankind the instinctive impulses have different degrees of strength; a savage will risk his own life to save that of a member of the same community, but will be wholly indifferent about a stranger; a young and timid mother urged by the maternal instinct will, without a moment's hesitation, run the greatest danger for her own infant, but not for a mere fellow-creature. Nevertheless many a civilised man, or even boy, who never before risked his life for another, but full of courage and sympathy, has disregarded the instinct of self-preservation, and plunged at once into a torrent to save a drowning man, though a stranger” (*Descent* 113-4).

not wish to elide the major distinction between not wanting children and killing them, I suggest that the trope of the “monstrous” mother who does not want her children is on a continuum in the popular nineteenth century imagination with infanticidal “savage” mothers who preoccupied Darwin and other anthropologists in the decade prior to *Deronda*’s publication. While according to one cultural logic, the bodily aspects of motherhood imply women’s common ground with animals, non-maternal women are equally considered monstrous according to normative constructions of a “natural” or biological femaleness. Daniel Deronda’s mother, the Princess Halm-Eberstein, compellingly articulates the ideological construction of the unnatural or monstrous woman as one who lacks maternal feeling when she complains that “Every woman is supposed to have the same set of motives, or else to be a monster. I am not a monster, but I have not felt exactly what other women feel—or say they feel, for fear of being thought unlike others” (628). The Princess not only rejects the idea that all women are natural mothers, but also draws attention to women’s complicity in this proscriptive fantasy. She feels it to be natural to *her* that she does not wish for a child, and, conversely, experiences the guilt that drives her to seek out her son, Daniel, as unnatural, an “evil enchantment” (631). The novel is not entirely sympathetic to the Princess’s rejection of motherhood, because it invites us to strongly identify with Daniel’s deep pain at the absence of a loving mother. However, the Princess’s statements are rhetorically powerful, and their critique of the discourse of natural motherhood is reinforced by the fact that the novel elsewhere questions such generalizations about women’s nature.

For example, the all-consuming “maternal instinct” that determines Lydia’s actions within the novel was not always part of her character. A significant component of

her passionate motherhood is her guilt over the death of her first child, whom she had abandoned on leaving her husband for Grandcourt, after which the child died: “The one spot which spoiled her vision ... was the sense that she left her three-year-old boy, who died two years afterward, and whose first tones saying “mamma” retained a difference from those of the children that came after” (341). Lydia abandons her son to a man that she herself flees, because, it is implied, she prefers a passionate love affair with Grandcourt to an unhappy marriage and care of her child. The self-sacrificing maternal feeling that Darwin suggests is women’s defining moral instinct therefore seems not to be innate, but is acquired by Lydia through suffering and privation. On the other hand, one might also read Lydia’s past in light of Darwin’s main example of “one instinct getting the better of another”—“the migratory instinct conquering the maternal instinct” among birds (*Descent* 111). Motherhood as portrayed in *Daniel Deronda* does seem to be an inescapable psychological bond, since Lydia’s first experience of thwarted motherhood has remained entrenched in her psyche, resurfacing in her relationship with subsequent children. The Princess’s experience reinforces the idea that even if one wishes one’s child out of existence, procreation has a psychological legacy: even as she asserts the rights of women who do not want children, she reveals a history of sublimated guilt entailed by her rejection of Daniel, which she explains as an “evil enchantment” forcing her to seek out her son against her conscious will.

The privileging of maternal love by evolutionary theory is further complicated by Eliot’s sympathetic portrayal of Gwendolen’s vehement desire to avoid conception. Gwendolen’s aversion to procreation allows her to be classed with fin de siècle representations of women vitiated by civilization and devoid of maternal instinct, whose

irresponsible self-interest might lead to the extinction of civilized man. Gwendolen's aversion to maternity, however, alters over the course of the novel. Before meeting Grandcourt, she manifests a purely egotistical aversion to motherhood, considering it to be an irrevocable "immersion in humdrum" (39). She intuits that motherhood entails both social and literary marginalization, since as a mother, one is no longer the heroine of one's own life. After months of marriage, however, Gwendolen's aversion to motherhood has increased to a feverish concentration of negative energy:

Some unhappy wives are soothed by the possibility that they may become mothers; but Gwendolen felt that to desire a child for herself would have been a consenting to the completion of the injury she had been guilty of. She was reduced to dread lest she should become a mother. It was not the image of a new sweetly-budding life that came as a vision of deliverance from the monotony of distaste: it was an image of another sort. In the irritable, fluctuating stages of despair, gleams of hope came in the form of some possible accident. To dwell on the benignity of accident was a refuge from worse temptation (672-3).

Grandcourt's death is here couched as Gwendolen's preferred alternative to motherhood. (The accident on which she dwells is, of course, one that ends her husband's life.) Her "dread lest she should become a mother" is represented as a moral reflex, a desire to do no more harm to another woman's children, however sweet a deliverance motherhood might seem from her life of monotonous distaste. Her aversion to motherhood has become altruistic rather than selfish.



The novel implies that Gwendolen's chief crime is her treachery to Lydia, and not her conveniently-fulfilled wish for Grandcourt's death. Gwendolen's homicidal impulse is not vengeful, nor even merely self-interested, but is the reflex of her wish to reverse the harm she has done Lydia and her children. According to Grandcourt's will, his illegitimate family will regain legitimacy, and inherit his title and lands, only in the event of his death without children by Gwendolen, and her dread of conception is equivalent to a dread of further wronging Lydia's family. Soon after she receives the poisonous jewels and letter from Lydia, Gwendolen begins to carry about a small dagger in her dressing-case, and to fantasize about using it against her husband, as she later confesses to Daniel:

'I wished him to be dead...I wanted to kill...It had all been in my mind when I first spoke to you...I did one act—and I never undid it—it is there still...There it was—something my fingers longed for among the beautiful toys in the cabinet in my boudoir—small and sharp like a long willow leaf in a silver sheath. I locked it in the drawer of my dressing-case. I was continually haunted with it and how I should use it. I fancied myself putting it under my pillow' (691).

Her fantasy of stabbing Grandcourt is a simultaneous inversion and rejection of the sexual act: if she stabs him, she will of course negate the risk of reproduction: his death is thus symbolically figured as contraceptive measure. Gwendolen's maritidal fantasy thus reverses the Medean plot, transforming the notion of an anti-maternal murder from horrifying crime to act of inter-female altruism.

Gwendolen's awakening to the possibility of her own wrongdoing is first triggered by Lydia's quasi-supernatural apparition at the Whispering Stones, rather than

by Daniel's intervention in her necklace-pawning adventure in Leubronn, although the latter appears first in the novel.<sup>119</sup> It is therefore Gwendolen's interaction with Lydia that first awakens her ethical sense, although this is developed through her relationship with Daniel. According to Eliot's moral logic, Gwendolen requires the pain of Lydia's poisoned gift, and she is not only punished but also helped by it, since it awakens her sleeping conscience to a necessary sense of self-dread. Lydia's letter and its unleashing of furies echo the gothic, admonitory tone and personification of guilt in the novel's prefatory epigraph, which has puzzled many readers: it begins, "Let thy chief terror be in thine own soul." If we take this as a lens through which to read the entire novel, it becomes apparent that a special role is being accorded to remorse and to the fear of wrongdoing. In her role as Medea, Lydia represents a force of vengeful female justice, sending Oresteian "furies" across the threshold of Gwendolen's marital home. Her words trigger the intense remorse that Gwendolen experiences, like Medea's gifts, as poisonous and burning:<sup>120</sup>

'All the things I used to wish for...had been made red-hot. The very daylight became a punishment to me. Because—you know—I ought not to have married. I wronged someone else. I broke my promise [...] I wanted

---

<sup>120</sup> The "poison" of the letter derives in part from its incantatory syntax and powerful imagery: "I am the grave in which your chance of happiness is buried as well as mine. You had your warning. You have chosen to injure me and my children...The willing wrong you have done me will be your curse" (358-9). It insists on the inexorability of Gwendolen's misery and defeat so effectively that Gwendolen takes its pronouncements as prophetic: Gwendolen burns the letter, but she finds lines involuntarily repeating themselves in her mind months later. In Eliot's rationalistic world, such Medean magic is not supernatural, but is rather the powerful, seemingly inexplicable force that one personality can wield over another, as Grandcourt does in establishing his "empire of fear" over Gwendolen.

to make my gain out of another's loss [...] it was like roulette—and the money burnt into me' (692).

The Medea myth structures the novel's representation of Lydia's just revenge and Gwendolen's repentance, constructing a triangulated relationship between two women that lies quite beyond the scope of Darwin's theories of female rivalry. Lydia's letter has served for Gwendolen like the opening injunction of the novel's sibylline epigraph, echoing its admonitory, prophetic mode. Lydia's "poisonous words" effectively put Gwendolen "in terror of her own soul," and function as her pharmakon, her poison that cures.

While *Daniel Deronda* works against the idea that particular kinds of virtue are distributed according to race or sex, the novel nonetheless emphasizes the ramifications of being born a woman, especially the peculiar sufferings and limitations that oppress "a woman's life" (152). Gwendolen's eventual treachery to Lydia is represented as a betrayal of her sex, to some extent. At their first encounter, Lydia draws attention to the contrast between the young and attractive Gwendolen and her own looks, prematurely aged by suffering at the hands of men. Her appearance conveys a kind of essential truth to Gwendolen about the common lot of women: "Gwendolen, watching Mrs. Glasher's face while she spoke, felt a sort of terror: it was as if some ghastly vision had come to her in a dream and said, 'I am a woman's life'" (152).

In its representation of "woman's life," the novel sharply critiques the ways that civilized societies endorse men's oppression of women, as Grandcourt is condoned according to the sexual double standard that deems it "only natural and desirable" that he should abandon Lydia along with their illegitimate children:

That he should have disentangled himself from that connection seemed only natural and desirable. As to her [Lydia], it was thought that a woman who was understood to have forsaken her child along with her husband had probably sunk lower. Grandcourt had of course got weary of her. He was much given to the pursuit of women: but a man in his position would by this time desire to make a suitable marriage with the fair young daughter of a noble house. No one talked of Mrs. Glasher now, any more than they talked of the victim in a trial for manslaughter ten years before: she was a lost vessel after whom nobody would send out an expedition of search; but Grandcourt was seen in harbor with his colors flying, registered as seaworthy as ever (342).

Lydia's abandonment of her child is deemed by her society to place her in the moral gutter: she will have "sunk lower" into depravity, an image that also implies drowning and chimes with the metaphor for her social exile, a loss at sea. The collective social voice complacently ignores the precise conditions of her marriage and elopement, and views her choice between lover and child in sensationalistic, binary terms. The depiction of Lydia and Grandcourt as matrimonial or rather sexual "vessels" casts an ironic backwards glance at the novel's description of young girls such as Gwendolen as the "delicate vessels" bearing the cargo of human inheritance into the future (126). This idealistic image seems a parody of the sentimental view of young marriageable girls, if in their capacity as "vessels" they are at the mercy of sexually experienced men, and are to be judged by such a harshly different standard to the men who abandon them to pursue other women.

By hinging Gwendolen's initial ethical awakening on her sense that she has robbed another woman and that woman's children, Eliot contests Darwin's implication that women's ethical sense hinges on an instinct arising from their own reproductive lives. However, Gwendolen's moral "evolution" is notably not determined by the expulsion of the "primitive" instincts that anthropologists viewed as antithetical to civilization. Rather, her evolution is caused by instincts: Gwendolen's sense of guilt towards Lydia is, from their first encounter, instinctive rather than rational:

On that day and after it, she had not reasoned and balanced; she had acted with a force of impulse against which all questioning was no more than a voice against a torrent. The impulse had come...from her dread of wrongdoing, which was vague, it was true, and aloof from the daily details of her life, but not the less strong. [...] From the dim region of what was called disgraceful, wrong, guilty, she shrunk with mingled pride and terror; and even apart from shame, her feeling would have made her place any deliberate injury of another in the region of guilt (293).

Here, the kinds of "social instincts" which Darwin discussed as male preserves create Gwendolen's shame, but "even apart from shame," she would shrink from knowingly injuring another person, implying a sense of altruism that, unlike shame, has no ulterior social motive. Even late in the novel, Gwendolen continues to feel, like the "savages" described by Darwin and McLennan, that the universe is more affected by her thoughts and actions than it really is. The narrator does not make it clear whether or not she let Grandcourt drown, and indeed, it is implied that Gwendolen believed that she somehow willed him to die: she tells Daniel, "I saw my wish outside of me" (692). Yet the novel

implies that while her suffering after Grandcourt's death is perhaps disproportionate, it is not insalubrious. Her "primitive" sense of her own importance entails an intensity of guilt that shocks her into the wish to "be better," emblemized in her care for and gratitude towards her mother as she exits the text (807).

Gwendolen's realization of moral responsibility is generated in large part by her identification with Lydia as a woman, but this is notably not expressed as a biological affinity but rather as a fellowship in suffering. Gwendolen's "troubles in love and marriage" have changed her to the extent that she would give up the personal comfort of her £2,000 inheritance to atone to Lydia for the usurpation of her rights. She has more love for and understanding of the failures of her mother and sisters, and develops a sense of domestic rootedness, represented in her desire to resettle with her family at Offendene (774). She has, in other words, developed a sense of altruism that the nineteenth century constructs as good enough for women. But the novel finally implies the inadequacy of the model of local, inter-female altruism that Gwendolen has so far achieved, by painfully initiating her into the masculine world of "the larger destinies of mankind" (803). When Daniel tells her of his decision to embrace his Jewish heritage and travel East, Gwendolen experiences a personal Copernican revolution:

[a] sort of crisis...was at this moment beginning in Gwendolen's small life: she was for the first time feeling the pressure of a vast mysterious movement, for the first time being dislodged from her supremacy in her own world, and getting a sense that her horizon was but a dipping onward of an existence with which her own was revolving (804).

As on the night when she received Lydia's diamonds and letter, this revelation generates hysterical abjection, a night of continual "fits of shrieking" interspersed by weeping (807). What she gains, though, at this epiphanic moment, is a sense of a world that has claims on her beyond those of "a woman's life": "There comes a terrible moment to many souls when the great movements of the world, the larger destinies of mankind, which have lain aloof in newspapers and other neglected reading, enter like an earthquake into their own lives" (803). She has, the novel suggests, had forced on her the "larger destinies of mankind," of which she is so utterly oblivious at the novel's outset:

Could there be a slenderer, more insignificant thread in human history than this consciousness of a girl, busy with her small inferences of the way in which she could make her life pleasant?—in a time, too, when...universal kinship was declaring itself fiercely; when women on the other side of the world would not mourn for the husbands and sons who died bravely in a common cause (126).

The gulf between Gwendolen's "small inferences," and the courageous, tragic political engagement of women refusing to mourn husbands and sons who died in the American Civil War, evokes disgust for the slender, conventional concerns and activities of young ladies by contrast with their potential involvement in world history and the declaration of "universal kinship." This passage's veiled allusion to the U.S. campaigns against slavery organized by women invites us to speculate on the kind of social action possible for "girls" who have the courage and vision to break free of the wire-work of social forms. The novel leaves indeterminate whether and how Gwendolen acts on her expressed desire to "live for others," but it also leaves readers convinced that it is possible and desirable.

The novel uses Darwinian ideas about women and sex only to refute them, and to suggest they are ideology rather than scientific truth about women's nature. The "wire-work of social forms" produces situations like the archery contest, which look startlingly Darwinian, and therefore natural—a situation of straightforward female sexual rivalry. The novel suggests that claims about "natural" behavior, such as men's "natural selection" of beautiful women, function as ideology: they mask both the oppressive social forces that produce such scenes of sexual rivalry among women, and they obscure the diverse desires and thoughts of the participants. Darwin's theory urged that women's moral sense is closely tied to biological reproduction, and *Daniel Deronda* experiments with breaching that association. The novel suggests that an alternative source of moral instinct, for both sexes, is found in the terror and dread advocated in the novel's opening epigraph: "Let thy chief terror be of thine own soul." This emphasis on irrational "terror" as a moral stimulant seems a surprising turn away from the rationalism of Eliot's previous fictions, but it is a reading of human behavior derived from a branch of science—from contemporary anthropological readings of the "primitive" human psyche as a locus of terror and dread.

Gwendolen's primitive fetishism—her solipsistic fear of sudden meteorological changes and of objects which she invests with preternatural power—is represented by Eliot as a primitive form of instinct-led conscience, a stimulus to moral development. Around the time of *Daniel Deronda*'s publication, other writers, including Thomas Hardy and Walter Pater, were also valorizing primitive animism—not for its moral implications, but for its aesthetic potential as a literary trope, as we will see in the next chapter.



## Chapter Four

### Hardy, Pater, and Primitive Literary Aesthetics

Thomas Hardy's fiction is intent on representing, preserving, and aestheticizing traditional rural culture in complex and unusual ways. All of the Wessex novels focus on cultural change and represent societies in which traditional, folk, or primitive culture still endures but is threatened or impinged upon by modernity. His fiction is famous for its vivid evocation of the residues of the past within the present, in landscapes striated with the traces of cultural and biological prehistory in burial urns, barrows, ancient footpaths, ruins, fossils. His social worlds often center on "Pagan" folk-cultural practices; Christianity is a recent presence, only superficially grassing over an enduring substratum of pagan instincts, beliefs, and practices that have persisted unchanged from prehistory into the nineteenth century. These include the ritual bonfires, mummer's play, maypole festivities, and seasonal dances in *The Return of the Native* (1878), the "skimmity ride" in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), the Midsummer's eve rite in *The Woodlanders* (1887), and the May-day club-walking in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891). These traces of prehistory in his works have enormous resonance, and are charged with great symbolic and affective weight. As we shall see, many of these folk customs are associated with

partner choice, courtship, or marriage, or fertility rites, and Hardy anticipates modernist writers in making aesthetic capital out of the sensualism of the primitive.<sup>121</sup>

This celebration of folk culture is somewhat ambivalent, since folk culture is often explained to the reader in narratorial tones suggestive of a detached, culturally-superior ethnologist. Yet Hardy complicates this ethnologist-narrator with an alternative voice that seeks to revive for his readers a “primitive” sensory and aesthetic experience of being. Anthropological theories of culture were tremendously useful to him in this project, but he responded to these theories with a good deal of resistance, by celebrating aspects of folk culture that they denigrated, and making folk cultural elements exciting and aesthetically powerful in his novels. These elements include notions of poetic irrationality, primitive sexual abandon, and the loss of self within the landscape or in primitive rituals. Thus paradoxically, Hardy’s incorporation of anthropology, a modern science, catalyzed his successful development of an aesthetic of the primitive. The following chapters will trace Hardy’s development of these distinctive formal strategies over his entire career. This involved the reworking of “primitive” tropes such as animism and “primitive” narrative forms such as the folk-tale and the ballad into novelistic narrative. These innovations were shaped by Hardy’s fascinated engagement with and resistance to several phenomena: Tylolean anthropology, popular perceptions and literary conventions for representing rural life, and aspects of modern life including its homogeneity, conventionality, and its neglect and suppression of sensory and sensual pleasure. Hardy’s development of a self-consciously “primitive” aesthetic is related to

---

<sup>121</sup> Frazer’s *Golden Bough* (1891) is often referred to by critics as though it inaugurated the sexualization of the primitive, and is said to have influenced Hardy in this regard (see e.g. Gallagher). However in the first edition there are almost no references to sexuality, which were only added gradually to later editions, from 1900 onwards.

aestheticism as well as to anthropology, as we will see, and to Pater's theorizations of the value of "primitive forms" in literature. The valorization by late nineteenth-century writers of primitive form seems to have been a way of managing various anxieties arising from rapid industrial modernization, its depletion of sensory and aesthetic experience, and the consequent loss of contact with the natural environment and the past. Hardy and Pater, along with Lang and Symonds, were reading Tylorean anthropology as a kind of literary theory that not only provided insights into primitive myth, but also offered guidance for the modern imaginative writer interested in recouping the "poetic" primitive perspective.

Two book-length studies of Hardy and anthropology have been published in recent years, one by Andrew Radford and another by Michael Zeitler, that thoroughly document the extensive references in Hardy's novels to "the new sciences of humankind."<sup>122</sup> Radford's monograph offers a particularly detailed exploration of Hardy's engagement with Tylorean anthropology's new perspectives on deep history, cultural evolution, and "survivals." He reads *Tess* as "the crowning imaginative assimilation and recreation of the 'proceedings' of the new sciences of humankind that evolved in the Victorian age" (7). Both Radford and Zeitler emphasize Hardy's assimilation of anthropological science, and so underplay his resistance to it. Hardy's

---

<sup>122</sup> Andrew Radford, *Thomas Hardy and the Survivals of Time* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2006), p. 7; and Michael Zeitler, *Representations of Culture: Thomas Hardy's Wessex and Victorian Anthropology* (New York, NY: Peter Lang 2007). Gillian Beer and Patricia O'Hara have published compelling essays focusing on Hardy's engagement with Victorian anthropology in *The Return of the Native*, addressing the way in which this contributed to his complex narrative voice and to his negotiation of ideas of cultural and psychological evolution and origin. (Gillian Beer, "Can the Native Return?" in *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter* (Oxford and New York: OUP, 1996), pp. 31-54; Patricia O'Hara, "Narrating the Native: Victorian Anthropology and Hardy's *Return of the Native*," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, Vol 20 (1997), 147-163).

allegiance to “primitive modes” is manifest in his Romantic sense of the “genius” of the primitive imagination, and his celebration of “Pagan” self-abandonment to sensory experience. Radford’s study aligns Hardy closely with the scientists, often suggesting that in his fiction “Hardy investigates,” or “asks whether...”. As Ralph Pite points out, “Radford downplays [...] Hardy’s sense of allegiance with primitive modes of thought and feeling” (“Recent Hardy Criticism” 293). This causes Radford to misread Hardy’s novels in an important respect, seeing in them an unequivocal moral condemnation for characters who indulge in “Pagan self-adoration,” and failing to see Hardy’s aesthetic investment in this trope.

Radford does emphasize Hardy’s allegiance to one aspect of “primitive modes of thought and feeling”: its positive function in ensuring group cohesion and communality, through seasonal feasts and other community-affirming rituals. In a sense, then, Radford’s is a functionalist reading of Hardy’s use of anthropology. He argues that traditional customs are a source of communal reinforcement, and sees characters that use primitive rites for private pleasure as interlopers, misappropriators of essentially communitarian rites for private hedonistic ends. But Hardy makes that pleasure-seeking hedonism, “Pagan self-adoration,” a vital aspect of the experience and value of primitive ritual, not an aberration. Pagan hedonism, furthermore, is an important source of narrative energy and aesthetic excitement, for example in Eustacia’s wild dance with Wildeve on the Heath in *The Return of the Native*, or Fitzpiers’s wild chase with Suke Damson after the midsummer’s eve rite in *The Woodlanders*. The momentum and the compelling imagery of these scenes resist Radford’s view that they express moral condemnation of characters who pursue sexual pleasure through folk ritual. Instead, such scenes dramatize

two irresolvable tensions: an ethical tension between fundamental human obligations—to care for others, and to enjoy life as intensely as possible—and a tension experienced by the reader between the aesthetic power of these scenes and their violence or cruelty. For example, the midsummer's-eve rite in *The Woodlanders* (1888) is a folkloric custom relating to marriage that entails a sexual betrayal. The scene is one of the most vivid, energetic and compelling in the novel, and thus foregrounds the tension between amorality and pleasure, making the reader self-consciously complicit in an enjoyment of amoral acts. The ritual involves the village's unmarried girls walking into the woods after dark, with the idea that their future husbands will appear to each of them as a vision, while the village's young men encourage the visionary process by standing hidden in the woods, waiting to appear in front of, and embrace, their lovers in the flesh. Several years after the publication of *The Woodlanders* in 1888, *The Golden Bough* (1891) implied that ancient, seasonal rites involved indiscriminate human copulation.<sup>123</sup> Hardy suggests, too, that this midsummer ritual has a Saturnalian undercurrent, providing cover for Fitzpiers' transgressive promiscuity and sexual betrayals. Under cover of the rite, he kisses the novel's heroine Grace Melbury, then chases and copulates in a hay rick with Suke Damson, an act that transgresses class boundaries and ethical mores, because Suke is another man's fiancée and a laborer's daughter, and he is a doctor from London. *Tess* (1891) also associates pagan celebration with both hedonistic pleasure and sexual violence.

---

<sup>123</sup> Frazer's only explicit description of a quasi-saturnalian orgy in the first edition of *The Golden Bough* appears in the second volume, and Hardy is only known to have read volume I, in 1891. However, Hardy may well have come across the idea of seasonal saturnalia elsewhere, since many of Frazer's ideas and data were derived from other sources.

In representing Wessex traditions and folklore, Hardy draws on intimate local knowledge, relying on personal experience, oral traditions, and locally published sources like the *Dorset County Chronicle* and the compendious *History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset*.<sup>124</sup> He also places local traditions within the systematic theories of culture put forward by Comte, Spencer, and Tylor. It would, indeed, be hard to overstate Hardy's interest in and knowledge of "the human sciences"—anthropology, archaeology, mythography, natural history, and geology. On two occasions he lists Comte and Spencer, together with Darwin and Mill, as the thinkers who had most influenced him.<sup>125</sup> His novels, notebooks, letters, and journal publications offer copious evidence of his engaged reading in these fields. Hardy participated in local folklore recovery projects and societies such as the Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club, and he was friendly or acquainted with folklorists and anthropologists including William Barnes, Edward Clodd, General Pitt Rivers, and Johns Symonds Udal, author of *Dorset Folklore*

---

<sup>124</sup> Hardy's Max Gate library holds his copy of John Hutchins's *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset* (4 vols, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1861-73), a compendious, multi-volume record of local parish and family history, topography, buildings, ruins and archaeological finds, which Hardy has annotated and interleaved with notes and cuttings from other sources. Hardy records that the *History* was one of his favorite books (*Survivals of Time* 6), and he made copious notes on its descriptions of folkloric customs that he later reworked in his fiction, such as the May club-walking that appears in *Tess* (Zeitler, ). His *Facts Notebooks* (ed. William Greenslade) contain many vignettes and incidents copied from the *Dorset County Chronicle*, including several news stories about wife sales. William Barnes's poetry collections in Dorset dialect, and *A Grammar and Glossary of the Dorset Dialect: With the History ... of South-Western English* are in Hardy's Max Gate library. Barnes's works on ancient history, for example *Notes on Ancient Britain and the Britons* (1858) are not in the Max Gate catalogue, but Hardy is likely to have known these works because he was friends with Barnes, familiar with his poetry, and wrote his obituary.

<sup>125</sup> In 1911 and again in 1924, Hardy lists the authors who most influenced him as 'Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, Comte, Hume, Mill and others.'

(1922).<sup>126</sup> His knowledge in these fields meant that he was able to comment in an informed way, in an article for *The Times*, on the archeological discoveries at Maumbury Rings, and on the current archeological dating of the building of Stonehenge for the *Daily Record*.<sup>127</sup> He published on the Roman remains found on the grounds of his house, and he privately supplied examples of folk customs and superstitions to folklorists such as Clodd and Udal. In the last weeks of his life, he started a controversy on the origin of “country dances” in the pages on the Folk Dance Society’s journal.<sup>128</sup> It is therefore not an exaggeration to say that in a minor way Hardy was a direct contributor to nineteenth-century anthropology.

The kinship of Hardy’s fiction to anthropology was apparent to contemporary readers. Lionel Johnson’s 1894 book-length study argued at length that Hardy’s fiction, in its “close and long attention to the characteristics, very various, but all noted, of one locality,” embodies “a spirit and energy parallel in our day to the students of anthropology.”<sup>129</sup> Hardy himself wrote to Edward Clodd in 1894 advising him that his novels could be depended upon as anthropological sources: “every superstition, custom &c described in my novels may be depended on as true records of the same.”<sup>130</sup> Clodd’s work of popular anthropology, *The Story of Primitive Man* (1897), seems to take Hardy at

---

<sup>126</sup> See Zeitler, 15. Hardy became close friends with Edward Clodd in 1890 (Millgate, *Life* 462). They read and commented on one another’s works, and Clodd’s letters to Hardy reveal that he understood Hardy’s novels, to take an anthropological approach to contemporary life. It was perhaps on Clodd’s recommendation that Hardy read *The Golden Bough* in 1891; Clodd is also known to have recommended it to Yeats.

<sup>127</sup> “Stonehenge,: 1899 (*Hardy’s Public Voice*).

<sup>128</sup> *The English Folk Dance Society News* (Sept. 1926, pp. 384-5), reprinted in *Hardy’s Public Voice*.

<sup>129</sup> Lionel Johnson, *The Art of Thomas Hardy* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1928), pp. 387-88.

<sup>130</sup> *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Richard L. Purdy and Michael Millgate, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978-88), II, p. 54.

his word and to allude to the initiating incident of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) as a matter of fact: “wives were obtained first by seizure; afterwards by purchase; a survival of which latter custom is seen in the occasional sale of a wife among the lower orders, under the delusion that the transaction is valid” (*The Story of Primitive Man* 155).<sup>131</sup> Clodd went on to read *Jude* as a dramatization of the anthropological view of “modern marriage as a survival of the custom of capture and purchase.”<sup>132</sup> While Clodd accurately perceived that Hardy’s fiction adopts anthropological theories of cultural evolution as an explanatory device, he missed the counterweight to this, the celebratory use of “primitive” modes of thought and feeling as aesthetic categories. This dialectic of primitive and modern voices and motifs strikes me as what is most original in Hardy’s fiction, and, I will suggest, it was the outcome of an intense search throughout his novelistic career for new ways to represent traditional rural life that would do justice to its variety, its alienness, and its Promethean resistance to the homogenizing thrust of modernity.

*The Return of the Native* is the first of Hardy’s novels to set cultural differences and transformations in an anthropological frame, and the first in which rural folk customs are characterized as Pagan, wild, ancient, and potentially violent or cruel. Earlier novels, such as *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872) and *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874),

---

<sup>131</sup> Hardy had based his account of Henchard’s wife-sale on two news stories in 1820s editions of the Dorset County Chronicle; Clodd may also have known through Hardy of these factual accounts. *Thomas Hardy’s Facts Notebooks: A Critical Edition*, ed. William Greenslade (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2004), pp. 51, 113, 173.

<sup>132</sup> Hardy is perhaps the only nineteenth-century writer to portray a marriage by purchase in his fiction, in the opening chapter of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. This ‘primitive’ marriage is not merely local color but is a highly consequential narrative event. However, it is not specifically linked to the anthropological theory of the evolution of marriage; instead it is related to cultural evolution in a more general way, as an instance of the “survival” of a superseded custom.



view rural community without the interpretive lens of comparative anthropology, and in pastoral terms that are often nostalgic.<sup>133</sup> Folk-cultural customs and superstitions, such as the shearing supper and the divination by Bible and key in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, or the harvest home in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, are represented as traditions persisting into the unrecorded past, but these customs are not compared with other forms of the “primitive” in prehistory or elsewhere in the world.<sup>134</sup> From *The Return* onwards, however, the narrator places local customs within a sequence of stages of cultural development derived from Tylor and Comte. In novels before *The Return*, moreover, folk culture is celebrated for promoting social cohesion and connection to the natural environment, as well as conformity to sometimes damaging superstitions and traditions. In novels from *The Return* onwards, folk customs like seasonal bonfires and May dances can still promote connectedness to one’s local community and the landscape, but they are also sources of decidedly un-pastoral aesthetic energies and social disruptions.

Hardy’s essay on rural life, “The Dorsetshire Labourer” (1873), is primarily an account of recent changes in rural employment conditions and their erosion of traditional rural culture in Britain. However, the essay also offers insight into Hardy’s early views on the literary representation of traditional rural life, and on “progress” versus tradition.

The essay mounts a defense of traditional culture against idealizing stereotypes. It

---

<sup>133</sup> This approach was not entirely of Hardy’s own choosing: his first successful novel, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, was pushed towards the pastoral and away from unsettling social and sexual politics by George Meredith and Leslie Stephen. The success of the early novels gave him more time and income for more research and a more experimental approach in *The Return*, and this shaped his portrayal of folk culture and cultural evolution on all subsequent novels.

<sup>134</sup> Hardy revisited *Far From the Madding Crowd* in 1895 and attached a preface in which he reflects on cultural evolution in the novel in anthropological terms, but this kind of analysis does not appear in the novel itself.

critiques the common mode of packaging folk culture for civilized consumption, the humorous and picturesque representation of rural types and pastoral scenes. By 1873, Hardy had made his name as a novelist of rural life, and Leslie Stephen suggested as late as 1880 that Hardy reproduce the early success of *Under the Greenwood Tree* by eschewing formal experiment and offering a series of “sketches of Hodge & his ways.” (One can easily imagine Hardy’s irritation.) Hardy opens “The Dorsetshire Labourer” with a forceful dismantling of the notion of “Hodge” as a homogenous rural type, and thus contradicts readers like Stephen who viewed both rural life and Hardy’s portrayal of it as an undifferentiated, picturesque folk culture. To undermine such views, the essay invites readers to take an imaginative sojourn that sounds rather like that of a “participant observer,” who learns about the richness of a culture by living within it. The essay describes for us the mental journey taken by a hypothetical “city gentleman” who accidentally stays some months with a family of “Hodges,” and finds his hosts resolve themselves dramatically into individuality:

[S]uppose that, by some accident, the visitor were obliged to go home with this man [the rural laborer], take pot-luck with him and his, as one of the family. [...] At first, the ideas, the modes, and the surroundings generally, would be puzzling—even impenetrable. [...] But living on there for a few days the sojourner would become conscious of a new aspect in the life around him [...] that the man who had brought him home—the typical Hodge, as he conjectured—was somehow not typical of anyone but himself. His host’s brothers, uncles, and neighbours, as they became personally known, would appear as different from his host himself as one

member of a club, or inhabitant of a city street, from another. [...] The great change in his perception is that Hodge [...] has become disintegrated into a number of dissimilar fellow-creatures, men of many minds, infinite in difference.<sup>135</sup>

The heterogeneity of rural laborers is part of their picturesqueness, Hardy implies, and argues that the modernization of rural dwellers is a march towards homogeneity, “uniformity and mental equality.” If heterogeneity creates the picturesque, and progress produces uniformity, then “progress and picturesqueness do not harmonise.” Hardy rejects, however, any notion of preserving picturesqueness at the expense of progress among the rural population. Later in the essay, he dryly points out that rural-dwellers cannot be expected to remain static and “picturesque” for the benefit of the cosmopolitan observer. It might seem a contradiction that Hardy’s fiction itself capitalizes on representing the “picturesque” aspects of traditional rural life for a cosmopolitan audience, but I do not think so. His point in the essay is not to downplay the aesthetic power of rural culture, but rather, to overturn the stereotype of its homogeneity, and to draw attention to the diverse concerns, desires, and attributes of the human individuals who partake in it; and these projects are clearly also aspects of his fiction, which is intent on representing the diversity of rural culture.

The loss of diversity and picturesqueness, the essay suggests, are less significant than the loss of a culture that, unlike civilized modernity, produces happiness. Traditional rural communities, he claims, are where “happiness will find her last refuge on earth, since it is among them that a perfect insight into the conditions of existence will be

---

<sup>135</sup> Hardy’s *Public Voice*, p. 40.

longest postponed.”<sup>136</sup> In 1873, when Hardy wrote this essay, cultural progress—the “march towards uniformity and mental equality”—was defined by anthropologists as a society-wide decline in superstition and misery, and gain in knowledge and enlightened happiness. Hardy’s remark on happiness and knowledge might suggest that he is simply inverting these binaries, and that symbiotic relationships exist instead between ignorance and happiness in primitive culture, and between knowledge and unhappiness in modernity. But Hardy’s point is more subtle than this, since he correlates happiness only with ignorance of a specifically *modern* kind of knowledge: “knowledge of the conditions of existence,” a phrase that suggests an awareness of the randomness, loss of individual agency, and diminution of the human within the scale of the temporal and spatial universe entailed by nineteenth-century science. In contrast to this, in his fiction Hardy portrays an entirely different, traditional kind of knowledge—a knowledge that does confer happiness. In *The Woodlanders*, for example, the narrator powerfully asserts that “old association,” a profound intimacy with a local landscape that is dependent on memory and oral history, is a sufficient condition for pleasure and delight during a rural winter:

Winter in a solitary house in the country, without society, is tolerable, nay, even enjoyable and delightful, given certain conditions [...]. They are old association—an almost exhaustive biographical or historical acquaintance

---

<sup>136</sup> There is of course an inherent irony in celebrating the happiness granted by ignorance in a journal article. Hardy’s remark laments the loss of happiness entailed by “insight into the conditions of existence,” but it is only through such insight that the remark itself is possible; and this suggests that you can only truly appreciate the happiness of traditional culture once you have lost it. Hardy’s fiction surrounds that “insight into the conditions of existence” with further ambiguity by portraying major characters whose access to this insight renders them moral or personal failures.

with every object, animate and inanimate, within the observer's horizon. He must know all about those invisible ones of the days gone by, whose feet have traversed the fields which look so gray from his windows; [...] what domestic dramas of love, jealousy, revenge, or disappointment have been enacted in the cottages, the mansion, the street, or on the green.<sup>137</sup>

This happiness, based on intimate local knowledge, is only possible for those who live for many years in one rural setting and are integrated into its community. It is a happiness entirely dependent on what anthropologists had identified as the stasis of primitive life, but this idea does not feature in the anthropological literature, because happiness is not a concern of anthropological investigation. In his fiction, however, Hardy makes powerful use of precisely this sort of knowledge of his native district: effectively, he reproduces his own pleasure in intimate local knowledge for his readers.

In "The Dorsetshire Laborer," Hardy attributes the loss of traditional knowledge and increased "uniformity and mental equality" not to formal education but to nomadism enforced by changed employment practices, as a relatively stationary rural population is displaced by nomadic laborers. Over the nineteenth century, more and more rural laborers had been forced into yearly migrations: landowners gradually eliminated life-tenants (like the Durbeyfields in *Tess*), and workers were hired annually for jobs and concomitant accommodation, which might be a day's journey from their previous job. In 1873, Hardy was prepared to consider that the change from rootedness to nomadism might benefit the workers in some respects, but he notes that it entailed a loss more serious than that of picturesqueness, the loss of an "intimate and kindly relation to the land":

---

<sup>137</sup> *The Woodlanders* (Oxford: OUP, 1996), p. 112.

They are losing their individuality, but they are widening the range of their ideas, and gaining in freedom. It is too much to expect them to remain stagnant and old-fashioned for the pleasure of romantic spectators. But, picturesqueness apart, a result of this increasing nomadic habit of the labourer is naturally a less intimate and kindly relation with the land he tills than existed before Enlightenment enabled him to rise above the condition of a serf, who lived and died on a particular plot, like a tree (*Hardy's Public Voice*, 50).

The sharp disjuncture between the reference to the laborer's "intimate and kindly relation to the land" and his condition as a tree-like serf evidently reflects a longstanding contradiction in Hardy's thinking, between his faith in the gains in knowledge afforded by progress, his resistance to the loss of old kinds of knowledge and experience. The "varied experience" of annual migration that makes rural workers "shrewder and sharper men of the world" is evidently a mixed blessing; and paradoxically, the tree-like "serf" possesses a more distinct individuality than the nomadic laborer who is moving towards "mental equality" with the worldly observer. Here, Hardy emphasizes the loss to the laborer in terms of his experience, and suggests that the aesthetic loss is relatively unimportant, caricaturing the "romantic spectator" in search of the "picturesque." However, subsequently Hardy came to see the loss of traditional cultural forms as a significant aesthetic loss. Much later, in his retrospective preface to *Far From the Madding Crowd* in 1895, he echoes "The Dorsetshire Laborer" in describing the source of rural "progress," but he describes it more unequivocally as a loss, and adds literary elements of folk culture to the list of significant losses:

The change at the root of this has been the supplanting of the class of stationary who carried on the local traditions and humors, by a population of more or less migratory labourers, which has led to a break of continuity in local history, more fatal than any other thing to the preservation of legend, folklore, close inter-social relations, and eccentric individualities.<sup>138</sup>

Here, two of Hardy's categories of traditional culture—legend and folklore—are categories of narrative. As we shall see, ideas about the origin of literary forms were central to Hardy's literary projects and to discussions of the origin of culture among anthropologists and other theorists of culture in the late nineteenth-century.

Several years later, in *The Return of the Native*, Hardy began to bring anthropological theories of cultural change to bear on the range of different perspectives conjured in "The Dorsetshire Labourer"—the worldly outsider, the modern nomadic native, and the tree-like serf who lives in intimate relation to the land. The differences between these perspectives are, of course, partly questions of social class, but they are also, according to Hardy, manifestations of the kind of cultural evolution described by anthropologists. The idea that genuinely primitive culture endured, in "seclusion and immutability," within the British isles, had been asserted by stage theorists of the eighteenth century, and had been restored to prominence in 1870 with the publication of Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871), but Hardy's novels offer a view of this domestically-based "primitive culture" from within.

---

<sup>138</sup> *Far From the Madding Crowd* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), p. 393.

It seems clear that Hardy had read *Primitive Culture* by the time he wrote *The Return*, since in that novel he provides an explanation for the distinction between “survivals” and “revivals” that verbally echoes Tylor’s book.<sup>139</sup> In *Tess*, Hardy has Tess use one of *Primitive Culture*’s central, original arguments to question Alec’s claim that his new-found religiosity will keep him from sexual immorality: “She tried to argue, and tell him that he had mixed in his dull brain two matters, theology and morals, which in the primitive days of mankind had been quite distinct” (363).<sup>140</sup> In fiction written before *The Return*—for example, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873)—Hardy refers to concepts Tylor made central to the development of culture, such as primitive animism, but he need not have derived these ideas from Tylor.<sup>141</sup> Indeed, Hardy evidently derived the idea of a

---

<sup>139</sup> In *The Return*, Hardy writes that “a traditional pastime is to be distinguished from a mere revival in no more striking feature than in this, that while in the revival all is excitement and fervour, the survival is carried on with a stolidity and absence of stir which sets one wondering why a thing that is done so perfunctorily should be kept up at all. Like Balaam and other unwilling prophets, the agents seem moved by an inner compulsion to say and do their allotted parts whether they will or no. This unweeeting manner of performance is the true ring by which, in this refurbishing age, a fossilized survival may be known from a spurious reproduction” (107). According to Tylor, the difference between survivals and revivals are that the survival is “passive,” the revival “active” and vigorous (137). Patricia O’Hara was the first critic to note this verbal echo. She makes a compelling case that Hardy knew Tylor’s work well, based on the internal evidence of *The Return of the Native*. As she points out, most of Hardy’s notebooks were destroyed so that only a very incomplete record of his reading notes now exists. (‘Narrating the Native: Victorian Anthropology and Hardy’s *The Return of the Native*.’) Moreover, relatively few of the books in Hardy’s personal library catalogued at his death in 1928 dates from earlier than 1890.

<sup>140</sup> In *Primitive Culture*, Tylor “insisted on an absolute separation between morality and religion” in primitive life (*Victorian Anthropology* 193). Primitive animism, Tylor argued, was “almost devoid” of moral content, but “the lower races” and even “the rudest tribe” necessarily possessed “a code of morals” that was independent of their religion (*Primitive Culture* II: 107 and 360-1. Quoted in *Victorian Anthropology* 194).

<sup>141</sup> Andrew Radford argues that, “Tylor’s concept of the untutored rural masses as a limitless archive of cultural antiquities, introduced in his articles of the mid-1860s and scrupulously extended in his masterwork, *Primitive Culture*, may have had a profound effect on Hardy’s imaginative reconstruction of Wessex village life” (9).



primitive belief in animated nature from various sources, including Pater and Comte, whose analogous term for animism—fetishism—is used by Hardy in a number of novels, including *The Return* and *Tess*.<sup>142</sup>

In one respect Hardy seems specifically influenced by Tylor. The Wessex novels, including very early novels such as *Under the Greenwood Tree* and *Far From the Madding Crowd*, represent a local culture as a “complex whole” in a way that seems to reflect Tylor’s pioneering anthropological definition: “Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”<sup>143</sup> Tylor’s definition quite significantly altered the concept of culture in public discourse. His most influential work, *Primitive Culture*, pioneers the idea that “primitive” societies, as well as civilized, had complex cultural systems, and that “primitive culture” was worthy of sustained, detailed study. However, Tylor’s description of culture as a “complex whole” may give the misleading impression that, like twentieth-century anthropologists, he focuses on the “complex whole” of one particular society. Tylor did not, in fact, do this, and it only became the paradigmatic approach of anthropology with the work of Boas and Malinowski in the early twentieth century. The cultural environments of the Wessex novels, on the other hand, represent precisely the kind of “complex wholes” that Tylor briefly describes at the outset of *Primitive Culture*, but then effaces through his use of the comparative method. Thus Hardy in fact departs

---

<sup>142</sup> Around 1875-6, Hardy made notes from Comte’s *Social Dynamics* on “Fetishism – universal adoration of matter,” but it likely he had come across the idea of animism in reading previous works by Comte, if not elsewhere.

<sup>143</sup> Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, Part I, *The Origins of Culture* (1871; Harper & Brothers: New York, 1958), p. 1.

from Tylor in this important respect, and appears to anticipate the approach to folk culture adopted by early twentieth-century anthropologists.

Tylor's *Primitive Culture*, like Frazer's *Golden Bough*, was polemically "committed to totalizing explanation, to the discovery of a single system of reference and meaning, such had already been developed by Darwin in evolutionary terms" (Beer, *Open Fields* 43). This totalizing explanation was the "comparative method," which charted the path of evolutionary development followed by all cultures, and involved comparing data from a wide range of known societies, and aligning similar-looking elements of entirely separate societies. Even British groups—from non-privileged social classes such as the urban poor or rural laborers—could be placed at the level of "savage" or "primitive" on the cultural-evolutionary scale. Thus Tylor emphasizes the cultural affinity of primitive rural life in Europe and "savage" communities in other parts of the world:

Look at the modern European peasant using his hatchet and his hoe, see his food boiling or roasting over the log-fire, observe the exact place which beer holds in his calculation of happiness, hear his tale of the ghost in the nearest haunted house, and of the farmer's niece who was bewitched with knots in her inside till she fell into fits and died. If we choose out in this way things which have altered little in a long course of centuries, we may draw a picture where there shall be scarce a hand's breadth difference between an English ploughman and a negro of Central Africa (*Primitive Culture* 6).

For Tylor, not all of the “primitive” customs of European countryside-dwellers were outcomes of a genuinely primitive mindset; some were instead “survivals.” He emphasizes the widespread “survival” of primitive cultural forms within Western European civilization. Tylor influentially defines survivals in the introduction to *Primitive Culture*:

Among evidence aiding us to trace the course which the civilization of the world has actually followed, is that great class of facts to denote which I have found it convenient to introduce the term ‘survivals.’ These are processes, customs, opinions, and so forth, which have been carried on by force of habit into a new state of society different from that in which they had their original home, and they thus remain as proofs of an older condition of culture out of which a newer has been evolved. [...] Such examples often lead us back to the habits of hundreds and even thousands of years ago. The ordeal of the Key and Bible, still in use, is a survival; the Midsummer bonfire is a survival [...] Most of what we call superstition is included within survival, and in this way lies open to the attack of its deadliest enemy, a reasonable explanation (*Primitive Culture* 16-17).

Survivals have a curious status in Tylor’s work—they are not lifeless, like fossils, but merely rites that have had new myths invented to explain them, their originals having been lost. As he says, “superseded habits of old-world life may be modified into new-world forms still powerful for good and evil.”

Hardy makes explanatory use of the comparative method, for example, in discussing “stages” of culture in *The Return*. He creates a powerful metaphor for the

comparative method's elision of spatial and temporal axes in his evocative image of the "precipice in time," a description of the first Dorset-London railway line that makes an analogy between traveling in space from "primitive culture" to modern London, and voyaging backwards in time.<sup>144</sup> But, while this analogy seems to echo the anthropologists' alignment of exotic tribes and rural laborers, Hardy's formal strategies as a novelist complicate this by giving voice to the "primitive culture" as well as to anthropological interpretations from the privileged position of knowing outsider.

Recent critics have drawn attention to Hardy's fascination with the Tylolean idea of "survivals" as cultural forces that are both anachronistic and powerful.<sup>145</sup> Hardy was also, like Tylor, drawn to the idea of surviving cultural practices leading back to the social habits of past millennia. At the opening of *The Return*, he describes the bonfire-lighting men and boys as having "dived into past ages." He also follows Tylor in portraying cultural "survivals" as practices for which the original explanation has been lost, and when he accounts for traditional magical practices (such as the snake oil applied to Mrs. Yeobright's snake-bite in *The Return*) as rational but mistaken interventions. Tylor had championed "intellectualism" in anthropology, the idea that cultural forms and behaviors were produced by rational thinking (for example, seasonal rituals were interventions to ensure good weather), and became irrational superstitions only as they dwindled into survivals. He basically ignored the contemporary Darwinian notion that cultural behaviors might be motivated by non-rational, innate human instincts (a set of views Tylor shared with Frazer).<sup>146</sup> In contrast, for certain categories of folk custom or

---

<sup>144</sup> Hardy, 'The Fiddler of the Reels,' *Wessex Tales* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 2000).

<sup>145</sup> See especially Radford, *Thomas Hardy and the Survivals of Time*.

<sup>146</sup> Lubbock also promulgated the intellectualist view. See e.g. Lubbock 1870: 3.

belief, Hardy offers both inherited traditions and instincts as motives. The fire-festivals and dances in *The Return*, and Tess's impulse towards "heliolatry," are prompted by deeply-felt instincts, primal impulses and desires that are shared by all humans.

Moreover, whereas Tylor rejoiced at the victory of "reasonable explanation," Hardy regarded the displacement of myth by science with ambivalence. Irrationalism is not always treated with the short shrift we might expect given Hardy's well-documented enthusiasm for science, and that is because irrationalism is central to important categories of folk tradition and imaginative narrative. In the 1892 preface to *Far From the Madding Crowd*, we find Hardy writing elegiacally about the decline of superstition: "the practice of divination by Bible and key, the regarding of valentines as things of serious import [...] have, too, nearly disappeared." (It is probably coincidence rather than influence that "the practice of divination by Bible and key," which Hardy makes pivotal to the plot of *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1873), is one of the first examples of a survival in Tylor's *Primitive Culture*.)<sup>147</sup> Some of Hardy's fictions, notably the short story, "The Withered Arm" (1888), create the impression that narrated events may have supernatural causes. Of course, there is a difference between valorizing superstition in life, and privileging supernatural explanation in fiction. But both of these phenomena are manifestations of a desire for mythical etiology, and Hardy's choice to include supernatural or quasi-supernatural elements in his fiction indicates that he did not think this desire could entirely be met by "reasonable explanations."

Hardy was thus both attracted and resistant to anthropological explanations of cultural forms, and both the attraction and resistance can be explained in relation to his

---

<sup>147</sup> *Primitive Culture*, Part I, p. 16.

literary aims. Tylorean anthropology offered a history of cultural forms, and was therefore highly relevant to the study of literary history. It legitimized primitive cultural forms as the focus of profound and detailed attention, of the kind bestowed by Hardy on traditional Dorsetshire culture; and it offered a way of situating local detail within a much larger systematic enquiry. On the other hand, Tylor's cultural scale denigrated all elements of primitive culture by definition, whereas Hardy regarded primitive culture as the source of irreplaceable literary aesthetic potential. This divided response is well-illustrated by a conversation that Hardy recorded in his diary:

December 18 [1890] - Mr. E. Clodd this morning gives an excellently neat answer to my question why the superstitions of a remote Asiatic and a Dorset labourer are the same: "The attitude of man," he says, "at corresponding levels of culture, before like phenomena, is pretty much the same, your Dorset peasants representing the persistence of the barbaric idea which confuses persons and things, and founds wide generalizations on the slenderest analogies."

(This "barbaric idea which confuses persons and things," is, by the way, also common to the highest imaginative genius—that of the poet.)<sup>148</sup>

The notion Clodd expresses would have been familiar to Hardy at least by the time he wrote *The Return of the Native*, which represents confusions between persons and things and makes statements about levels of culture. His notebook entries of the early 1870s refer to the comparative method, expressed here in Clodd's explanation that Dorset peasants and non-Europeans shared superstitions because they were at the same cultural

---

<sup>148</sup> Thomas and Florence Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928* (Ware: Wordsworth, 2007) p. 237.

“stage.” The conversation gives a sense of what Hardy enjoyed about anthropological explanation: the “neatness” of scientific classification and generalization, of explaining large groups of humans by reference to other large groups. But that sentiment is undercut by the final, parenthetical aside: ‘This “barbaric idea [...]” is, by the way, also common to the highest imaginative genius – that of the poet.’ The idea of the poetic imagination as animistic had become almost a commonplace in writings on the evolution of culture. As Hardy records in his notebook, Comte describes “fetishism” as poetic, “useful even now, giving animation to language.” (132). Tylor also makes the point: “a poet of our own day has still much in common with the minds of uncultured tribes in the mythological stage of thought” (133). *Primitive Culture* is suffused with the sense that animism and personification are poetic:

First and foremost among the causes which transfigure into myth the facts of daily experience, is the belief in the animation of all nature, rising at its highest pitch to personification. This, no occasional or hypothetical action of the mind, is inextricably bound in with that primitive mental state where man recognizes in every detail of his world the operation of personal life and will. [...] To the lower tribes of man, sun and stars, trees and rivers, winds and clouds, become personal animate creatures, leading lives conformed to human or animal analogies, and performing their special functions in the universe with the aid of limbs like beasts, or of artificial instruments like men; or what men’s eyes behold is but the instrument to be used or the material to be shaped, while behind it there

stands some prodigious but yet half-human creature, who grasps it with his hands or blows it with his breath. (*Primitive Culture* 258).

The difference between Hardy's sentiment and Tylor's thinking, however, is that Hardy considered the poetry of animistic myth to be its chief interest. He heads a list of examples from Tylor, "Poetical Fancies of Primitive People" (*Literary Notebooks* 160). Hardy also considered animistic myth to be of continuing value and significance for modern readers, and celebrates poetic animism in Romantic terms, as "the highest imaginative genius." Tylor, however, foresaw the decline of poetry in modern society, and regarded the displacement of myth by science with something like equanimity:

The growth of myth has been checked by science; it is dying of weights and measures, of proportions and specimens; it is not only dying but half dead, and students are anatomising it. In this world one must do what one can, and if the moderns cannot feel myth as their forefathers did, at least they can analyse it (*Primitive Culture* I 286).<sup>149</sup>

While Tylor often alludes to the beauty of "primitive" and modern poetry, for him its chief interest was as an object of ethnological analysis.

Tylor considered poetry a "survival" of animistic myth, a remnant of an earlier culture that no longer functions as it originally did. He preserves a distinction between the genuine "primitive" belief in animism, and its poetic use as a trope: "The basis on which such ideas as these are built is not to be narrowed down to poetic fancy and transformed metaphor. They rest upon a broad philosophy of nature, early and crude

---

<sup>149</sup> Given Tylor's statements about the place of poetry in cultural evolution, it is also ironic that Frazer's work played such a central role in the upsurge of interest in primitive myth among Modernist poets.



indeed, but thoughtful, consistent, and quite really and seriously meant” (258). In contrast to Tylor, Hardy suggests that modern poets themselves elide the distinction between genuine animism and “transformed metaphor.” He said of himself in 1877 that “I sometimes look upon all things in inanimate nature as pensive mutes,” and in 1897 that “in spite of myself I cannot help noticing countenances and tempers in objects of scenery.”<sup>150</sup>

The difference between Hardy’s thinking and Tylor’s on this topic, therefore, is significant. For both Hardy and Tylor, animism, myth, and poetry overlap, but Hardy viewed this phenomenon positively, and sought to make use of the recognition of their kinship in his writing. He makes frequent use of tropes that classified by Tylor as “primitive”: personification, plot devices resembling myth or folk-tale, and quasi-supernatural events that lack a rational explanation. *The Return of the Native*, for example, is pervaded by peculiarly impressive personifications of inanimate objects and landscapes such as Egdon Heath, “opens with several stunning personifications of a primitive way of knowing” (149), and invites readers to “intermittently...enter the sensory state of being a native,” “brought about by invoking sound, touch, smell, body weight” (*Open Fields* 49). The novel’s narrator frames such personification as a form of primitive animism.

Thus from anthropology Hardy drew ideas about what is permanent or enduring in human cultural forms and aesthetic perceptions to contribute to his own fictional art, and he hit upon animism, a supposedly vital aspect of the “primitive,” as a fundamental human propensity that might yield peculiar aesthetic riches. In conceiving of animism as

---

<sup>150</sup> Florence Emily Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1928* (London, 1962), pp. 114, 285.

a brilliant formal strategy available to contemporary writers, Hardy was among a small group of writers interested in thinking about literary history in anthropological terms. During the mid 1870s, Walter Pater, Andrew Lang, and John Addington Symonds were finding primitive animism at the heart of privileged forms of culture, for example in Greek epic and tragedy and in Romantic poetry. Hardy's notebooks show that he read their work on this subject with close attention, and in *The Return of the Native*, he seems to capitalize on their insights by deliberately making animism such a prominent feature of the novel's narrative voice.<sup>151</sup> However, Hardy in fact pre-empts Pater, Lang, et al in seeing the formal, aesthetic possibilities of primitive animism, since he had evidently arrived at this realization while writing *A Pair of Blue Eyes* in 1872, before he could have read their essays of 1873-6.

Animism features in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* in what is probably now that novel's most famous scene, Knight's near-death experience on the cliff-face. This scene is the earliest occasion I have found in which Hardy brings a sense of the violence and strangeness of human prehistory into juxtaposition with contemporary Wessex inhabitants. In other words, the scene draws on anthropology's "comparative method" to place inhabitants of modern Britain. It is also the first occasion on which he discusses the animistic imagination in an anthropological way, as well as recreating it in his prose. By the time he wrote the cliff-face scene, then, Hardy seems familiar with the idea of animism or fetishism as a primitive way of seeing, and with the idea of cultural evolutionary stages. If he had not already read Tylor, he may have found these ideas on Comte's work.

---

<sup>151</sup> The works of these writers would be yet another way in which Hardy became familiar with the new anthropological theories and methods pioneered by Tylor.

The scene alludes to anthropology's comparative method, making literal Hardy's metaphor of the "precipice in time." While out walking with the novel's heroine, Elfride, Henry Knight falls and spends several moments hanging precariously on the face of a cliff, and is forced to contemplate his kinship with an extinct, fossilized trilobite imbedded in the cliff-face in front of him: "Separated by millions of years in their lives, Knight and this underling seemed to have met in their death. It was the single instance within reach of his vision of anything that had ever been alive and had had a body to save, as he himself had now." This leads to Knight's mental panorama of prehistoric evolution as a sequence of vividly realized images that are lined up one after the other like the sections of a fan. As in comparative anthropology, prehistory is represented spatially rather than temporally:

Knight was a geologist; and such is the supremacy of habit over occasion, as a pioneer of the thoughts of men, that at this dreadful juncture his mind found time to take in, by a momentary sweep, the varied scenes that had had their day between this creature's epoch and his own. [...] Time closed up like a fan before him. He saw himself at one extremity of the years, face to face with the beginning and all the intermediate centuries simultaneously. Fierce men, clothed in the hides of beasts, and carrying, for defense and attack, huge clubs and pointed spears, rose from the rock, like the phantoms before the doomed Macbeth. They lived in hollows, woods, and mud huts—perhaps in caves of the neighbouring rocks. Behind them stood an earlier band. No man was there. Huge elephantine forms, the mastodon, the hippopotamus, the tapir, antelopes of monstrous

size, the megatherium, and the myledon--all, for the moment, in juxtaposition. [...] Folded behind were dragon forms and clouds of flying reptiles: still underneath were fishy beings of lower development; and so on, till the lifetime scenes of the fossil confronting him were a present and modern condition of things (272).

Several critics have demonstrated how closely parts of this scene echo the conclusion to Gideon Mantell's *The Wonders of Geology* (1838), which Hardy read in 1858.<sup>152</sup> Mantell describes "groups of elephants, mastodons, and other herbivorous animals of colossal magnitude" and human beings "clad in the skins of animals" ("Retrospect," I).<sup>153</sup> Hardy's departures from and additions to the material he adopted from Mantell are, nonetheless, significant, and reflect Hardy's interest in the Gothic possibilities of prehistory and evolutionary timescales. Whereas Mantell's narrative moves reassuringly forwards in time towards the safety of the present day, Hardy unnervingly journeys rapidly backwards from a Gothic encounter with prehistoric "fierce men" to arrive at a vision of the earth without life. Mantell simply names the mammals and then humans "armed with clubs and spears," whereas Hardy's prehistoric men "rose from the rock like phantoms before the doomed Macbeth," with threateningly large clubs and sharp spears carried for

---

<sup>152</sup> Hardy was lent the book by his friend Horace Moule, who was apparently anxious to it out of the sight of his clergyman father, who disliked its evolutionism. The echoes of Mantell's work were first noted by Patricia Ingham in 1980; Andrew Radford and Adeline Buckland both discuss the scene as a response to Mantell. Gillian Beer discusses the passage as a response to Darwinian theory (Beer, "Finding a Scale for the Human," *Darwin's Plots* (CUP: Cambridge, 1983); Adeline Buckland, "Thomas Hardy, Provincial Geology and the Material Imagination," *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 6 (2008); Andrew Radford, "Opening the Fan of Time," *Thomas Hardy and the Survivals of Time* pp. 50-65.)

<sup>153</sup> *The Wonders of Geology; or, A Familiar Exposition of Geological Phenomena* (6th edn, London: Henry G. Bohn, 1848, II, p. 448.

“attack and defense.” Patricia Ingham, who discovered the parallels between Hardy’s scene and Mantell’s, asserts that Hardy’s comparison of the “fierce men” to the phantoms in *Macbeth* makes them seem less brutish than Mantell’s, but the I find that the analogy makes them more frightening. In any case, Hardy emphasizes the men’s aggression and dangerous weapons in a way that Mantell does not (“fierce men,” “huge clubs,” “pointed spears”), while Mantell instead endows his men with propensities for home-making and agriculture, which Hardy does not mention: “they constructed huts for shelter, inclosed pastures for cattle, and were endeavouring to cultivate the soil” (*The Wonders of Geology*). In fact, these activities were by 1873 considered inconsistent with cave-dwelling, as Hardy may have been aware. John Lubbock’s famous *Pre-Historic Times* (1865), for example, makes clear that huge temporal gaps divided the earliest evidence of human life in Britain from the later evidence of settlement and farming. Hardy’s men are thus less anachronistic than Mantell’s, as well as more alien and frightening.

Hardy’s next supplement to Mantell’s narrative is yet more striking and sinister: “Behind them stood an earlier band. No man was there.” In these portentous sentences, Hardy draws his readers attention to a major problem within evolutionary science—the difficulty of convincingly describing the “missing link,” Darwin’s “ape-like progenitor” from whom all humans had evolved and for whom no evidence then existed. In Knight’s moment of trauma and abjection, when he realizes his kinship with the trilobite, he experiences a gothic vision of humankind’s unknown progenitors from which the novel’s readers are excluded.

The entire scene is characteristically Hardyan, in that a moment of great psychological stress precipitates a suddenly vivid awakening to prehistory’s daunting

timescales and to the frightening otherness of an era without humans, and emphasizes that knowledge of these things may offer a sense of the insignificance of human individuals, rather than conferring power through knowledge.<sup>154</sup> Knight experiences this as a gradual realization:

The creature represented but a low type of animal existence, for never in their vernal years had the plains indicated by those numberless slaty layers been traversed by an intelligence worthy of the name [...] The immense lapses of time each formation represented had known nothing of the dignity of man. They were grand times, but they were mean times too, and mean were their relics. He was to be with the small in his death.

Knight thus classifies himself in Victorian evolutionary terms as an example of the highest stage of evolutionary development and civilization: “he thought—he could not help thinking—that his death would be a deliberate loss to earth of good material; that such an experiment in killing might have been practised upon some less developed life.” His idea of the “low type of animal existence” is a reference to the commonplace notion of an evolutionary hierarchy crowned by humans. Knight is able to correctly read the fossil record (and write about it for a London periodical, ironically entitled *The Present*), but the novel generally encourages us to question Knight’s assumptions of his own superiority. And elsewhere, Hardy registers objections to such evolutionary scales of merit; for example, he records in a notebook kept during the 1870s that “in the eyes of

---

<sup>154</sup> In later novels, moments of great stress or trauma, such as Tess’s arrest at Stonehenge and Jude’s rejection by Sue at fourways in Oxford, give protagonists access to a stunningly vivid sense of the evolutionary past and human prehistory.

science, man is not ‘higher’ than the other animals.”<sup>155</sup> At the beginning of Knight’s cliff-face ordeal, then, Hardy creates a harsh irony around Knight’s realization of his kinship with the trilobite. He has Knight pursue an evolutionary line of thought that at once confirms his own superiority and places a reassuringly immense distance between himself and the trilobite, yet it does not protect him from repeated, traumatized realizations of his affinity with a “low,” extinct form of animal life, that like him “had been alive and had had a body to save.” (This is especially painful for Knight since, throughout the novel, he tries to keep his body from impinging on his life—for example, in his reluctance to kiss women with whom he is in love.) Knight thus experiences Hardy’s “precipice in time”—the juxtaposition of the primitive and the modern, the evolutionary “low “ and “high”—with unpleasant vividness, in part because he has been rudely and shockingly thrust into an unmediated perceptual relationship to natural formations, the elements, and the realities of his own biology and material existence.

In contemplating the trilobite and the visions of prehistory it inspires, then, Knight retains his “modern” scientific epistemology. In subsequent paragraphs, however—as he is lashed by rain and sea spray and afraid of his own imminent death—his frame of reference also regresses to a more “primitive” stage, as terror engenders a kind of psychological atavism. In the language of Victorian anthropology, he becomes an “animist” or “fetishist” who ascribes anthropomorphic intentions and preferences to elements of the natural world in order to explain apparent favors or punishments received at nature’s hands. The narrator explains that this way of thinking, alien to Knight, is the norm for most inhabitants of Wessex:

---

<sup>155</sup> *Literary Notebooks* 225. Noted from Guenther’s *Darwinism*, trans. McCabe.

To those hardy weather-beaten individuals who pass the greater part of their days and nights out-of-doors, Nature seems to have moods in other than a poetical sense: moods literally and really – predilections for certain deeds at certain times, without any apparent law to govern or season to account for them. They read her as a person with a curious temper [...] scattering heartless severities or overwhelming kindnesses in lawless caprice [...] This way of thinking had been absurd to Knight, but he began to adopt it now. [...] The rain increased, and persecuted him with an exceptional persistency which he was moved to believe owed its cause to the fact that he was in such a wretched state already. [...] We are mostly accustomed to look upon all opposition which is not animate, as that of the stolid, inexorable hand of indifference, which wears out the patience more than the strength. Here, at any rate, hostility did not assume that slow and sickening form. It was a cosmic agency, active, lashing, eager for conquest. [...]

Nobody would have expected the sun to shine on such an evening as this. Yet it appeared [...] as a splotch of vermilion red upon a leaden ground—a red face looking on with a drunken leer (215).

In this passage, the narrative perspective slips between Knight's free indirect discourse, as he starts to believe in a hostile, animated nature, and a narrative perspective that is also animistic. Hardy's reference to the West Country view of nature, which Knight had considered "absurd," refers to a gulf between Knight and the "weather-beaten individuals" that is not only a difference in education and culture between Knight's



cosmopolitanism and a provincial or working-class perspective, but is also a “precipice in time” between the primitive and the modern. It would be a mistake to elide Knight’s “fierce men, clothed in the skins of beasts” with the “hardy, weather-beaten individuals” of present-day Wessex; yet both of these groups are represented as “primitive” compared to Knight, according to the classificatory systems of nineteenth-century anthropology. But now, in this moment of hyper-awareness of his natural surroundings, Knight begins to view “nature” like the West Country natives who “read her as a person with a curious temper,” a capricious female agent. Hardy’s detailed, vivid description of Knight’s personification of nature seems to reconstruct the motives and experience of “animism,” the epistemology considered by Comte, Spencer, and Tylor to be characteristic of “primitive man.”

Hardy is far from dismissing the “West Country” animistic perspective he refers to here. He not only makes frequent and powerful use of personification in his writing, but also positively represents the animistic impulse in characters like Tess and Jude. Resisting the “fetishism” of imputing animate life to inanimate natural phenomena, Hardy’s novels imply, is an aspect of the repression characteristic of privileged, educated males such as Knight and Angel Clare, to whom his fiction accords little sympathy. Yet the “animism” his fiction endorses can never be the same as the purported “primitive” belief that sun, moon, rain, and wind are personified agents, because his characters and narrators only intermittently enter into this frame of mind.

It is, nonetheless, perhaps surprising to find Hardy privileging animism, which implies the universe is anything but indifferent, since he is also known for his embrace of a Darwinian sense of the universe’s indifference to human concerns. Perhaps in Knight’s

embrace of animism at a moment of intense physical and mental stress, he suggests that primitive animism is a source of pleasure or consolation. Tess, we might note, begins to perceive animate life in a water jug at the moment when Angel rejects her. However, Hardy makes animism an aspect of his narrative voice as well as of the perception of his characters, suggesting its value as a source of pleasure for his readers, too. It permeates the narrative voice itself in some of his most famous, intensely vivid descriptive passages, including the personifications of Egdon Heath in *The Return*. This perspective connotes a profound, imaginative apprehension of nature, which is in some ways suggestive of Wordsworth. Although Hardy's valorization of animism as a literary device may sound idiosyncratic, this notion had other influential advocates in the early 1870s, notably Walter Pater, whose 1873 essay on Wordsworth celebrated him as a poetic animist.

Pater's approach to literary aesthetics is important to the notes Hardy made in 1874-7 in preparation for writing *The Return*. His notes from Pater, as well as Symonds, Comte, and Spencer, are focused on "the primitive" in relation to literary aesthetics. From Comte, Hardy several times notes that fetishism is highly poetic.<sup>156</sup> From Spencer he quarries examples of the "poetic fancies of savages," from Pater, the idea that animism (the personification of nature) is central to literary aesthetics; from Symonds, ideas about the importance of myth in cultural evolution and in the modern world, and from Schlegel, the idea of an enduring human need for myth: "The deepest want & deficiency of all

---

<sup>156</sup> Hardy notes from Comte that for example, "the doctrine of Polytheism (Greeks) is less poetic than that of Fetichism" (*Literary Notebooks* 67). "In Art particularly. – The primitive belief that all objects are alive, and concern themselves with Man is eminently adapted to stimulate ideality" (76). "Fetishism—looks on all objects in nature as animate....is the most spontaneous mode of philosophizing, & useful even now, giving animation to language &c..." (77).

modern Art lies in the fact that the Artists have no mythology” (quoted from Lewes, *Literary Notebooks* 15).

Pater went furthest of these writers in arguing for the poetic value of primitive perception. In his essays on “Demeter and Persephone” and Wordsworth, “anthropology and aestheticism merge.”<sup>157</sup> (Hardy’s notes in preparation for *The Return* show that he read the former and probably also the latter. *Literary Notebooks* 305).<sup>158</sup> Pater opens “Demeter and Persephone” by celebrating animism as the spirit of poetry:

That older unmechanical, spiritual, or Platonic, philosophy envisages nature rather as the unity of a living spirit or person... Such a philosophy is a systematised form of that sort of poetry (we may study it, for instance, either in Shelley or in Wordsworth), which also has its fancies of a spirit of the earth, or of the sky,—a personal intelligence abiding in them, the existence of which is assumed in every suggestion such poetry makes to us of a sympathy between the ways and aspects of outward nature and the moods of men (96-7)

In this essay, Pater suggests that myth, and therefore literature, arises from “instincts” of animism, personifications of the seasons, that themselves arise from an intensely sensory appreciation of the natural world. He suggests, too, that this sensibility can still be active even within modern, educated minds:

some such feeling as most of us have on the first warmer days in spring,  
when we seem to feel the genial processes of nature actually at work; as if

---

<sup>157</sup> Robert Crawford, “Pater’s *Renaissance* and Anthropological Romanticism.”

<sup>158</sup> Hardy was taking the *Fortnightly* when the essay was published, so it is likely that he came across it. See Natarajan for further evidence.

just below the mould, and in the hard wood of the trees, there were really circulating some spirit of life, akin to that which makes its energies felt within ourselves.

Pater thought of animism as an aspect of Romanticism, a view he developed in his essay on Wordsworth (1874). This essay is perhaps his most thorough exploration of an anthropological approach to literature.<sup>159</sup> For Pater, the aim of literature was to maximize the aesthetic pleasure of sensory experience, and a very powerful way to achieve that was to inhabit the perspective of those who knew how best to do this—the primitive, animistic mythmakers described by anthropology. Like Hardy, he asserts that contemporary poets, too, are able to (almost) genuinely revisit the animistic frame of mind: “this sense of a life in natural objects, which in most poetry is but a rhetorical artifice, is with Wordsworth the assertion of what for him is almost literal fact.” Pater is evidently drawing on Tylorean anthropology here, but he revalues its categories to make poetic animism high praise. Pater begins the passage reserving his belief in Wordsworth’s “literal” animism with the cavil, “almost,” but the cumulative effect of the subsequent extended evocation of Wordsworth’s passionate animism has the effect of effacing doubt

---

<sup>159</sup> Walter Pater, “On Wordsworth,” *Fortnightly Review* 15.88 (Apr. 1874): 455-65. It seems significant both that Pater had intended to make the Wordsworth essay the concluding chapter of his *History of the Renaissance* (in place of the now-famous conclusion exhorting readers to “burn always with this hard gem-like flame”), and also that he cancelled this plan. Robert Crawford speculates that Pater changed endings because it would have been more controversial to have forcefully argued in a book intended for a general readership that literary art was an evolved product of savagery—more controversial even than the aestheticist conclusion that caused him such trouble. Crawford’s suggestion is not implausible, but we have no way of ascertaining either Pater’s intentions or the probable reception of the Wordsworth essay had it received a much wider circulation.

that Wordsworth shared in a primitive sensibility that produced his best poetry. Pater celebrates the fact that for Wordsworth,

every natural object seemed to possess more or less of a moral or spiritual life, to be capable of a companionship with man, full of expression, of inexplicable affinities and delicacies of intercourse. An emanation, a particular spirit, belonged, not to the moving leaves or water only, but to the distant peak of the hills arising suddenly, by some change of perspective, above the nearer horizon, to the passing space of light across the plain, to the lichened Druidic stone even, for a certain weird fellowship in it with the moods of men. It was like a “survival,” in the peculiar intellectual temperament of a man of letters at the end of the eighteenth century, of that primitive condition, which some philosophers have traced in the general history of human culture, wherein all outward objects alike, including even the works of men’s hands, were believed to be endowed with animation, and the world was—“full of souls”—that mood in which the old Greek gods were first begotten, and which had many strange aftergrowths. In [...] Wordsworth, such power of seeing life, such perception of a soul, in inanimate things, came of an exceptional susceptibility to the impressions of eye and ear, and was, in its essence, a kind of sensuousness. At least, it is only in a temperament exceptionally susceptible on the sensuous side, that this sense of the expressiveness of outward things comes to be so large a part of life (46-47).

Pater describes Wordsworth's sensibility in Tylolean terms, as a "survival" from the "primitive condition" of mankind. We might wonder what benefit Pater sees in Wordsworth's poetic belief in the *anima mundi*. He remarks that while the "first aim" of Wordsworth's poetry is "to give a particular kind of pleasure," this pleasure itself communicates knowledge to readers—knowledge of how to be in the world, the importance of process and of sensory and intuitive as well as intellectual apprehension of the world, of pursuing good and beautiful means as well as ends. "Contemplation—impassioned contemplation—that, is with Wordsworth the end-in-itself, the perfect end" ("On Wordsworth"). Pater anthropologizes this power of contemplation by naming it a "survival," and makes it a means of valuing specifically primitive or natural objects—the Druid's stone and the change in the light.

According to Pater, at "moments of intense susceptibility [Wordsworth] was attracted by the thought of a spirit of life in outward things, a single, all-pervading mind in them [...] that old dream of the *anima mundi* [...] the network of man and nature was pervaded by a common universal life" ("On Wordsworth" 462). In a recent essay illuminating Hardy's response to Pater, Uttara Natarajan reads this passages alongside *The Return's* famous heath-bells passage, in which the hypothetical listener's initial "fetishistic" idea, that the heath itself is animated by a spirit, "forces" the listener to return to a more "advanced" quality of thought and to recognize and place his own mood as "fetishistic."<sup>160</sup> She argues that for Hardy and Pater to identify fetishism is to refute it, and to distance themselves from both primitive and Wordsworthian animists: "Both passages recognize, and so resist, the mind's susceptibility to the pathetic fallacy"

---

<sup>160</sup> Uttara Natarajan, "Pater and the Genealogy of Hardy's Modernity," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 46.4 (Aug. 2006): 849-61.

(Natarajan). But Pater appears to celebrate and identify strongly with animistic perception, not to refute it. And while here Hardy's description of fetishism, with its anthropologist-like commentary, is self-cancelling, in many other passages he "animates" the heath without "placing" this maneuver on a developmental scale. For example, "the place became full of a watchful intentness now. When other things sank brooding to sleep the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen." This is what Beer describes as *The Return's* intermittent embodiment of "the sensory state of being a native," endowing the Heath with animate life in precisely the terms used by Pater of Wordsworth, and by Tylor, Lang, and Symonds of the primitive animists. While the passage says the Heath only "appeared" to listen, the cumulative effect of Hardy's extended evocation of the Heath as the only agent in *The Return's* opening chapter creates an unusually literal sense of it as an animate force in the novel.

Pater's notion of Tyloorean animism as a force in literature was strongly influenced by his friendship with Andrew Lang. Lang burst onto the anthropological scene in 1873 as an ardent Tyloorean, with his essay on "Myth and Fairy-tales" in which he influentially debunked Müller's theory of myth as a "disease of language."<sup>161</sup> In this and many other essays and books, he publicized Tylor's notions of cultural development and applied Tylor's theory more explicitly to literary evolution. Lang made a case that Tylor's developmental sequence of the stages of myth and belief could be extensively deployed as a scientific theory of the history of literary forms, which evolved from simple animistic myths to art forms of great complexity and refinement. For example, Lang's

---

<sup>161</sup> Robert Crawford gives an excellent analysis of the mutual influence of Lang and Pater and their intellectual debts to Tylor and Swinburne in "Pater's *Renaissance* and Anthropological Romanticism."

essay on the *Kalevala* traces the development from the ballad to epic poetry in Scandinavia. Lang was interested in the way that literature preserved primitive forms: “As the *Kalevala*, and as all relics of folk-lore...and ballads prove, the lower mythology—the elemental beliefs of the people—do survive beneath a thin covering of Christian conformity.”<sup>162</sup> Moreover, according to Lang the literature of any era can be studied and found to contain the traces of earlier forms. For example, the Märchen (a German traditional of orally-preserved fairy-tales) “are the remains of an earlier formation [...] they preserve an earlier and more savage form of the same myth.” Lang wrote of the evolution of literature from “savage” myths based on animistic beliefs, through ballads and folk-tales to epic and tragedy. Lang’s evolution of literature only took place in the upper classes and only in some societies, while primitive literature persisted unchanged among the lower orders:

We must remember [...] the quite unbroken nature of peasant-life, and of peasant-faith. The progressive classes had advanced comparatively but a little way in the evolution of creeds and customs when they left the rural people behind... The superstitions instinct has permitted the masses to forget and omit nothing of the old cults and old rites.<sup>163</sup>

---

<sup>162</sup> Lang, “*Kalevala*: or the Finnish National Epic,” *Fraser’s Magazine*, June 1872.

<sup>163</sup> Andrew Lang, “Mythology and Fairy Tales,” *Fortnightly Review*, 13:77 (1873: May) p.618. Lang was hostile to Hardy’s later work, especially *Tess* and *Jude*, because of its pessimism, sexual immorality, and irreligiosity. In lieu of a review of *Tess* he announced his refusal to review it, but then later wrote scathingly about the novel’s nihilism and sensualism in response to Hardy’s preface to the second edition of *Tess*, in which many readers perceived a veiled attack on Lang. Lang’s review of *Far From the Madding Crowd* is more mixed—he complains that the rustic dialogue is too much a mixture of “rural euphemism, misapplications of scripture, and fragments of modern mechanical wit.” (Andrew Lang, “*Far from the Madding Crowd*,” *Academy* 7:139 (1875: Jan 2), p. 9.) This suggests that, ironically, he disliked a fictional rural idiom that corresponded to



Lang's assertion that "the people" retain "the remains of immemorial cults," and persist in a "primitive form of human life" that has been unaffected by progress, echoes Tylor's claims about "the European peasant." It is also reminiscent of Hardy's statement, also published in 1873, of the "seclusion and immutability" of the rural laborer's life before the social changes of the nineteenth century ("The Dorsetshire Laborer"). Hardy's thinking on the evolution of literary forms may have been influenced directly by Lang, since Hardy seems to have been reading the *Fortnightly Review* regularly in the 1870s, but in any case he would have been made aware of Lang's Tylorian, anti-Müllerian notions of literary evolution indirectly through his reading of Pater and Symonds. In 1876 he read Symonds second series of *Studies of the Greek Poets*, which also debunks Müller's theories of myth and advances a Tylorian reading of Greek myths.<sup>164</sup> Moreover, Lang's derogatory attitude to the sensualism of the most primitive literary forms—which he called "savage, puerile, obscene"—set him at odds with Hardy as well as Pater.

Pater nonetheless responded enthusiastically to Lang's work by "arranging his own materials into an evolutionary scheme showing the transmission of pagan elements under the surface of "Christian" art." But in an important regard he differed from Lang, who argued that "primitive forms" could be detected in "the higher mythologies," but

---

his own principles of linguistic and literary evolution: that survivals persist in language, they persist the longest in the language of the peasantry, and they may often be grotesque or incongruous.

<sup>164</sup> In summer 1876, apparently in response to reading Symonds, Hardy wrote contemptuously of Muller's central theory: "Mythology, according to the comparative mythologers, is, forsooth, only a disease in language—literal understanding of primitive metaphors" (59). Earlier in the year (in January), he had made a less skeptical note of Muller's theory: "Everything subject to disease – 'The disease of language, called 'phonetic decay' by philologists'" (17, 265n, emphasis Hardy's). So we can infer that in 1876, Hardy became familiar with the overthrow of Muller's degenerationist myth theory and its usurpation by the evolutionary view of myth advanced by Tylor and Lang.

considered the “primitive forms” to be “puerile” if not “disgusting superstitions.” Pater, on the contrary, privileged “primitive forms” such as animism, and celebrated their presence in transitional poetic forms like *Aucassin and Nicolette* and in Romantic poetry: “It is in the tension between the primitive and the refined...that Pater locates the central fascination” (Crawford 869), in the development of a “new artistic sense” that is “bound up with a renascent spirit of rebellion and revolt against the moral and religious ideas of the age” (Pater, *Studies* 6-7). In other words, Pater celebrated primitive, Pagan elements in literature as a source of sensory excitement, formal innovation, and resistance to social conventions. This seems to precisely characterize the effect of primitive and Pagan elements in *The Return of the Native*. However, unlike Hardy, the writers Pater discusses incorporated these elements into their work intuitively, or unconsciously, as an inheritance embedded in the literary forms in which they write. Hardy, on the contrary, deploys these elements deliberately and self-consciously to achieve the effects Pater describes.

In 1876, Hardy also made notes on Symonds’s evolutionary theory of literature, with animism as its origin, from the second series of *Studies of the Greek Poets*. It is worth noting Hardy’s response to Symonds both because he continued to read Symonds’s books with interest and corresponded with him on literary topics, and also because while Symonds and Hardy roughly shared significant views (on evolution, agnosticism, and sexual liberalism), their differences illustrate some of the nuances of Hardy’s thinking. Early in the second series of *Greek Studies*, Symonds quotes Vico’s *Della Metafisica Poetica* to “make the conditions under which we must imagine myths to have arisen more intelligible”:

‘Poetry, which was the first form of wisdom, began with a system of thought, not reasoned or abstract, as ours is now, but felt and imagined, as was natural in the case of those primitive human beings who had developed no reasoning faculties, but were all made up of senses in the highest physical perfection, and of the most vigorous imaginations. [...] The whole of nature [...] they imagined to be a vast animated body, capable of feeling and passion.’ Vico then proceeds to point out how difficult it is for us who, through long centuries, have removed ourselves as far as possible from the life of the instincts, senses, and imagination, whose language has become full of abstract terms, whose conception of the universe has been formed by science [...] to comprehend the attitude of primitive humanity in its personifying stage of thought.’

Symonds emphasizes both animism’s universality as the primitive frame of reference, and its alterity from contemporary modes of thought. Animism is associated with “the life of the instincts, senses, and imagination,” from which the modern “us” have become alienated. Like Pater, Symonds believes that modern poets can channel primitive animism: poets “prolong the youth...of the race, retaining the faculty...of looking on the universe as living” (43).<sup>165</sup>

---

<sup>165</sup> Symonds goes further than Pater, and is more definite, in specifying why Wordsworthian poetic animism is of use in the modern world. He suggests that nature personified is not only a source of poetic pleasure, but humanity’s religious future. In his thinking, the ethical “laws” of human nature that future science will uncover can form the basis of a kind of post-Christian pantheism: “What St. Paul conceived but dimly, the physicist declares to us: we are all parts and members of the divine whole. It is the business of Science not to make God nowhere in the universe, but everywhere, and to prove [...] that the happiness and the freedom of man consists in his self-subordination to the laws of the world, whereof he is an essential, though an insignificant part.” As Hardy

Like Pater and Symonds, then, one important facet of Hardy's interest in anthropology was as a kind of literary-historical theory, which shaped his writing and his view of literary history. Hardy and these other writers were interested in what "primitive" myth did better than modern literature. Pater and Symonds advocated a synthesis of elements of primitive and modern as the future of literature; Hardy actually set about creating this in his novels. Hardy's often-noted dual perspective, which David Lodge has described as a narrative voice split between pedant and creator, is thus related to his response to anthropology. In his fiction, he not only represents primitive and modern phenomena, but embodies the two sensibilities in two dichotomous narrative voices, which could be described as the anthropologist and the mythmaker, or perhaps the novelist and the poet. The poetic voice seeks to give readers an experience of the "primitive" through animism, myth, and the irrational, while the pedantic narrator "places" such narrative phenomena within cultural evolution. This kind of meta-literary commentary was considered by nineteenth-century writers to be a key aspect of the "modern" perspective. It is a self-conscious way of integrating "primitive" material into that quintessentially self-aware and modern form, the novel. And the primitive material,

---

notes, according to Symonds, "Humanity is part of the universal whole" (388), and "God" is "the name of a hitherto unapprehended energy, the symbol of that which is the life & motion of the universe" (392). This sounds close to Hardy's later conception of the "immanent will" of the universe as a "personification of natural selection" (Morton 38) dramatized in *The Dynasts* (1904-08). But whereas Hardy portrays the immanent will or natural universe as indifferent if not hostile to human life, Symonds attempts to view this universal energy as benign, because it ensures its own well-being, even if it disregards the welfare of individuals. As Hardy notes from Symonds, "If disease & affliction fall upon us we must remember that we are the limbs & organs of the whole, & that our suffering is necessary for its well-being." The natural universe must simply "be accepted as the best possible, as that which was intended so to be."

the animistic perspective, is there in the first place as a way of tapping into what were assumed to be prehistoric human aesthetic instincts.

This alliance of ideas among Hardy, Pater, and Symonds, reflects not only a shared aesthetic sensibility—a realization of the literary possibilities of “primitive” forms and devices—but also a shared form of sexual dissidence. A powerful vein of sensualism runs through their descriptions of the virtues of animism. For Symonds, the primitive animist (and by implication, the modern poet) is embedded in “the life of the instincts, senses, and imagination.” In the essay on Wordsworth, Pater emphasizes that Wordsworth’s “power of seeing life...in inanimate things...came of...a temperament exceptionally susceptible to the sensuous side,” and that the goal of literature is amoral pleasure; the “office of the poet is not that of the moralist.” The essay associates the poetic virtues of sensual pleasure (even only that of “eyes and ears”) with ideals of Pagan myth, Platonic philosophy, and poetic amorality, suggesting that literary focus on sensory experience, instincts, and self-abandonment to the natural world, might be dangerously elided with a more sexually-charged form of sensualism.<sup>166</sup> Such elisions appear in interesting forms in *The Return of the Native*, as we will see in the following chapter.

It is worth noting an important difference between Pater and Hardy. Pater was only interested in the animistic point of view as a rich source of aesthetic pleasure for cultivated readers, and was uninterested in animism as the perspective of cultural others, whereas Hardy’s fiction was committed to inviting readers to inhabit the point of view of cultural others, rural laborers and other inhabitants of Wessex. And it is very important

---

<sup>166</sup> All of these interconnected issues are probably related to Swinburne’s importance as an influence on both Pater and Hardy. I will discuss some of the links between Hardy’s and Swinburne’s handling of Pagan sensualism in the subsequent chapter on *Jude the Obscure*.

that Hardy understood the ritual year, traditional dances and ceremonies, as an erstwhile participant—unlike the other writers I discuss, who knew of these phenomena only through observation or second-hand. This probably contributes to some of Hardy's differences from folklorists like Tylor, Frazer, and Lang, as well as from literary writers on these topics, including Pater.

## Chapter Five

### **“Pagan...Self-Adoration”: Primitivism and English Folk Culture in *The Return of the Native* and *Tess of the D’Urbervilles***

Recent criticism identifies two strands of *fin de siècle* sexual dissidence—progressive and decadent—allied with two strands of subversive *fin de siècle* literary aesthetics—decadent aestheticism, and more overtly political New Woman, utopian, and protest literature.<sup>167</sup> Roughly speaking, aestheticist decadence was associated with the advocacy of sexual and artistic pleasure for its own sake, while progressivists aimed at political reform on ethical and biological grounds. Recent criticism tends to ally Hardy with the progressivist movement, because of Hardy’s gestures towards the protest or New Woman novel (most notably, in *Jude the Obscure* and *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*) and because his fictions investigate sexuality from both an ethical and biological point of view. This chapter, however, will trace Hardy’s affinity with the aesthetic-decadent movement, and will demonstrate that in *The Return of the Native* (1878), Hardy developed a particular kind of aestheticism that valorized “the primitive.” While Hardy almost never uses the term “primitive,” he frequently refers to cognate terms, “barbarous” and “savage” (which play a similar role to “primitive” in the anthropological literature), and Pagan, a term that Hardy uses very loosely to refer to everything he likes about the non-modern world.

As I argued in my previous chapter, the ways in which Walter Pater and John Addington Symonds conjoined neo-classicism and aestheticism with the recent

---

<sup>167</sup> See Richard Dellamora, *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*.

anthropological theories of E.B. Tylor fed Hardy's aesthetic experiments in *The Return*. Hardy diverged from all of these writers, however, by paying sustained, close attention to *English* folk culture in these terms.<sup>168</sup> He did so in order to create a new fictional aesthetic and to create characters who are at once alien and sympathetic to the implied cosmopolitan, metropolitan readership of his novels. This balancing-act between "othering" his characters and attracting readers relies on his assertion that the Pagan affinities he locates within rural England of the 1840s are a persistent legacy pervading all of human nature, to which he would appeal in his readers. This assertion of the persistent Pagan strand of human nature had been made many times by anthropologists (for example Tylor) but Hardy is unique in representing it within nineteenth-century England, and in positive terms.

As this chapter will show, in *The Return of the Native*, Hardy represents "Paganism" in this sense via several interlocking antitheses, which he complicates by subverting their normal hierarchy—between Pagan sensualism and modern ethics; between sensual experience and aesthetic spectacle; and between two different narrative voices: an anthropological voice, and a voice associated with the primitive. These voices are brought together in the novel's representations of folk customs, dances, ballads, myths, Pagan impulses and beliefs, superstitions, magic, and ancient or prehistoric cultural forms. The anthropological voice is a subcategory of realist narration, while the folk-Pagan mode of narration disrupts causal narrative progression in favor of a modernist poetics comprised of fragmented images, lyrical prose, and intense evocations of sensory or sensual pleasure. This dialectic of narrative voices in Hardy's fiction shows

---

<sup>168</sup> Pater and Symonds focus on Classical Greece; Tylor writes on virtually every geographic and cultural group *except* the English.



us what anthropology made available to him. In many of the moments I discuss below, Hardy prefaces a shift into the “primitivist” voice with an ethnological generalization. Such ethnological generalizations are, for Hardy, a way of authorizing the introduction of Paganism, magic, and the supernatural into realistic fictions without rationalizing them away.

The primitivist voice is also a way of representing and commenting on female desire and sexuality outside of dominant ethical paradigms. As this chapter will show, in Hardy’s fiction, folk dancing is an especially important cultural form in which women can experience sexual desire. Scenes of folk dancing, I will show, promote not only a primitivist aesthetic that anticipates strands of Modernism, but also a primitivist ethics, which asserts the value of female self-delight, desire, and pleasure, and subordinates the dominant Victorian ethical imperative of altruism to a hedonistic virtue that Hardy describes in *The Return of the Native* as Pagan “self-adoration” (318). Hardy’s values in this respect, however, are complicated. In addition to promoting a sense of female sexual subjectivity as an inward aesthetic experience, he also represents Paganized women, and other primitivized characters, as objects that can be visually aestheticized like the landscape; and suggests that the primitive aesthetic they embody, which Hardy is celebrating, can be best appreciated not by these characters themselves, but by a modern spectator.

*The Return* and subsequent fictions pre-empt both Modernist literary primitivism, and later concerns and approaches in anthropological and ethnographic studies: for example, the folklore movement, and the turn towards studying particular cultures in depth in the early twentieth century. Hardy achieved this, I will show, not only by

drawing on but also by building on various theories of “primitive” or Pagan culture (including works by Pater and Tylor) and by adding to these his own sensibility and his experience of rural “folk culture.” However, in order to illuminate the prescience and inventiveness of Hardy’s aesthetic vision and cultural analysis, the chapter will also shed light on the relationship between *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* and *The Golden Bough*, and show that Hardy’s attunedness to the cultural Zeitgeist enabled him to anticipate the concerns and tropes of a work of anthropology that fuelled literary Modernism.

### **“A Strange Country of Pagan Survivals”: *The Return of the Native***

Pagan fires, wild outdoor dances, sexual abandon, heroic myths, a prehistoric landscape, loss of self within a wilderness: *The Return* dramatizes the experience of these “primitive” sources of pleasure, which the novel’s setting, Egdon Heath, especially promotes. The novel categorizes the Heath as “primitive” using the terms of Comtean or Tylorean stage theory;<sup>169</sup> however, it undermines their theories because it is skeptical of progress as either an ideal or a possibility, and the novel’s conclusion intimates that the pleasures and energies of the Heath’s native Paganism are unaffected by either civilizing influences or Christianity. The novel asserts that this resistance to progress is a positive

---

<sup>169</sup>*The Return*’s narrative discourse refers explicitly to stage theory as an interpretive frame, asserting that “In passing from the bucolic to the intellectual life the intermediate stages are usually two at least, frequently many more; and one of those stages is almost sure to be worldly advance. We can hardly imagine bucolic placidity quickening to intellectual aims without imagining social aims as the transitional phase” (147). This statement endorses the anthropological principle that societies get from one stage to the next through a roughly similar succession of stages, but it undermines Clym’s idealistic hope of accelerating this process. Clym, like later Hardy characters such as Angel and Sue, makes references that identify him as a reader of stage theory and as a devotee of Comte in particular, views that are ironized or undermined by the novels’ events.

quality, Promethean and subversive, and that this resistance to “chance and change” among the Heath-dwellers<sup>170</sup> is promoted by the special qualities of the Heath, on which time and human culture leave “but little impression.” Folk culture therefore can’t be revived for the modern world, but it can be salvaged, the novel implies, in the aesthetic representations of modern literature.

Egdon Heath is *The Return*’s most striking aesthetic invention. It is virtually a character in the novel, introduced in the opening chapter as “A Face on Which Time Makes but Little Impression.”<sup>171</sup> Description of the Heath takes up the entire first chapter, which refers to no human characters whatsoever—it appears as an experiment in writing fiction without anthropoid characters, although Hardy’s second chapter title—“Humanity enters the scene, hand in hand with trouble”—acknowledges that some form of anthropogenic “trouble” is needed to drive a narrative. But in fact, the Heath itself contributes some of the “trouble” of the novel’s narrative arc, determining aspects of the experience and behavior of characters: its spirit infects and influences immigrants to the Heath, such as Eustacia and Wildeve, and Clym, the returning native. Hardy introduces the Heath not only as the ultimate prehistoric or primitive survival into the modern world, but as an active force battling civilization:

The untameable, Ishmaelitish thing that Egdon was it always had been.

Civilization was its enemy [...] everything around and underneath had

been from prehistoric times as unaltered as the stars overhead [...] even the

---

<sup>170</sup> I am using the rather clumsy locution “the Heath-dwellers” throughout this chapter, because this is how they are referred to in the novel. The phrase also suggests, accurately, that their experiences and characteristics are in some important ways determined by living on the Heath.

<sup>171</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (Norton, 2006).

trifling irregularities were not caused by pickaxe, plough, or spade, but remained as the very finger-touches of the last geological change (10-11).

The Heath is an enclave that escapes the pressures of history, neither pastoral nor Edenic, but celebrated for the very primitive qualities that make it hostile to civilization. This ancient landscape manifests a dark, barren visual aesthetic that, paradoxically, modern humans are only just now able to value:

Haggard Egdon appealed to a subtler and scarcer instinct, to a more recently learnt emotion, than that which responds to the sort of beauty called charming and fair. Indeed, it is a question if the exclusive reign of this orthodox beauty is now approaching its last quarter. The new Vale of Tempe may be a gaunt waste in Thule (9).

Hardy thus places aesthetic concerns at the center of his consideration of the ancient and the modern. The wildness and “Promethean resistance” to civilizing change embodied by the Heath since the last glacial maximum represent a kind of aesthetic that perhaps only the most modern humans can appreciate. The only character who loves the Heath’s visual appearance is Clym, who is also the novel’s only fully modern character, an up-to-date cosmopolitan who has lived in Paris and is a devotee of Comtean philosophy, and therefore seemingly the only character who sees the Heath from a distance and from a scientific perspective.<sup>172</sup> However, his enjoyment of the Heath is troped not as modernity

---

<sup>172</sup> Incidentally, none of the novel’s characters shares the knowledge and perspective of the narrator. His range of personal knowledge appears to extend infinitely into the past: he can say with confidence that the Heath is “as it had always been” and knows precisely what caused the irregularities of its surface. Later, he knows that “a cream-coloured courser had used to visit this hill [...] but a barbarian rested neither night nor day till he had shot the African truant, and after that cream-coloured coursers had thought fit to visit Egdon no more” (79-80). Here, the narrator knows the fate of the last courser to visit

but as “barbarous,” and he is represented especially reveling in its beauty once he has literally lost his distance vision. Other characters like Eustacia and the Heath-dwellers are allied with the Heath, but they don’t appreciate its visual beauty. Rather, they are themselves aspects of its beauty, and thus of the novel’s representation of the primitive for the aesthetic enjoyment of Hardy’s modern readers. However, as I will show in later sections, these primitivized characters instead value an inward-focused form of sensual experience that is roughly speaking aesthetic (according to Pater’s terms), and is described by the novel as Pagan “self-adoration” (318).

The Heath is an apt setting for the ancient traditions represented in the novel, including the fire festival, the mummer’s play, the outdoor dances, the use of voodoo dolls and snake oil. These traditions would have seemed much more alien to Hardy’s cosmopolitan readers than the picturesque rituals, the sheep-shearing and harvest home, portrayed in his most commercially successful early novels, *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872) and *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1873). The cultural world of *The Return* thus seems a subversion or rejection of the pastoral world of the early novels. In creating the traditional rural world for these earlier works, Hardy had drawn on his own experience; *The Return*’s innovatively darker social and natural landscape also drew on Hardy’s early experiences, but also, as we know from Hardy’s notebooks, on the unprecedented, eighteen-month course of reading and note-taking with which Hardy prepared to write the

---

Egdon, and the motives of the (presumably nineteenth-century) barbarian who shot him. This would seem to align the narrator’s knowledge with that of the Heath, but it extends even further than that: he can tell us the places visited by the wild mallard passed by Diggory Venn, who recently had “Polaris in the Zenith, Franklin underfoot” (80). Thus the narrator knows the flight path of an individual mallard, and the whereabouts of Franklin’s corpse (a great unsolved mystery to Hardy’s contemporaries, in spite of extended searches for the missing arctic explorer).

novel. A significant number of these notes relate to theories of cultural evolution in the works of Arnold, Comte, Muller, Pater, and Symonds, and the novel itself indicates a much more extensive use of his reading notes than any of his other works.<sup>173</sup> As I argued in the previous chapter, *The Return* also shows the influence of Hardy's reading of Tylor's *Primitive Culture*. That *The Return*'s construction of a "primitive" social world differed markedly from more conventional rural novels was noted and criticized by several early reviewers. W.P. Trent laments that all the characters are "pagans," and declares that Wessex is a "strange country of pagan survivals."<sup>174</sup> *The Monthly Magazine*'s review states with qualified approval that "Mr. Hardy's genius [...] tends always to a primitive conception of human life. Man seems to impress him as a natural, rather than [...] a socialized being" (*Critical Heritage* 62). The *Saturday Review* was directly hostile to the novel's combined breach of realist convention and social class: "We are in England all the time, but in a world of which we seem to be absolutely ignorant [...] The people seem to know nothing of high-roads or stage-coaches... So that naturally we have the unadorned simplicity of nature in every shape... we hear nothing of a squire; while there is only incidental notice of a parson."<sup>175</sup> The reviewer's discomfort with the

---

<sup>173</sup> Lennart Bjork, ed., *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy* (1974), "Introduction," xxi

<sup>174</sup> R.G. Cox, ed., *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage* (1996), p. 237

<sup>175</sup> Anon, *Saturday Review*, *Critical Heritage*, p. 410. Contemporary reviewers of Hardy's fiction often either call Hardy himself a pagan, or criticize the "primitive" nature of his characters and settings, and this escalated on the publication of *The Return* (1878). However, in an essay of 1883, Havelock Ellis inaugurated a tradition of celebrating the "primitive" aspects of Hardy's work, especially his female characters: "It would appear, then, that those qualities which we have found to be distinctive of his heroines, the absence of moral feeling, the instinctiveness, had a direct relation to the wild and solitary character of their environment. This primitive social phase is accompanied by an even more primitive phase of worship. We have spoken of this, with its constant and loving reference to the shifting aspects of earth and air, as a kind of Nature-worship."

novel's social setting is partly a result of the novel's dearth of middle- and upper-class characters, but it seems also to be caused by the novel's focus on an uncivilized culture—"unadorned...nature"—that is not picturesque. Of course, the novel does not create this sense of an alien world by accident, but is at deliberate pains to heighten the antithesis between civilization and life on the Heath, and to portray traditional rural life as a survival of prehistory using the lens of comparative anthropology, rather than within the pastoral tradition.

### **"The Savage under the Civilized": Primitivizing Classical Myth**

The novel's antithesis between cultural paradigms—between a pagan spirit embodied in Eustacia and the Heath-dwellers and Clym as spirit "of the future" (171)—has been read by influential critics as a dramatization of Arnold's vision of Western society as a perpetual conflict between the values of Hebraism and Hellenism. Bjork, the editor of Hardy's notebooks, argues that Hardy had studied writers like Arnold, Pater, and Symonds in order to write a new kind of novel, the first of his novels in which "Hellenism" is "a criterion against which modern life is assessed" (Bjork, xxv). However, as I will show, the novel invokes a revised sense of ancient Greek culture as primitive, rather than the Arnoldian sense of Hellenism.<sup>176</sup> According to Arnold, "The uppermost idea with Hellenism is to see things as they really are; [...] with Hebraism [it] is conduct and obedience." This Hellenism represents the "sweetness of light" of seeing "things as

---

<sup>176</sup> We know that Hardy made notes from Arnold's "Hebraism and Hellenism" in preparing to write *The Return*. Hardy's response to Arnold in *The Return*, *Tess*, and *Jude*, is powerfully elucidated in David DeLaura's "The Ache of Modernism in Hardy's Later Novels," *ELH*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Sep. 1967), pp. 380-399.

they are.” Hebraism is not so much a religious ideal as a code of conduct governed by “strictness of conscience.” Other critics have read the novel as a dramatization of the triumph of Christianity, or Hebraism, over Pagan Hellenism, viewing Clym as the avatar of Hebraism.<sup>177</sup> However, it is hard to see how the progress of Hebraism on Egdon Heath is not a success story. The auditor’s of Clym’s “secular sermon” at the novel’s end disregard its content and listen out of kindness to Clym, and the church remains a marginal presence throughout the novel. The Egdon parson, who never appears in the novel, is unable to prevent primitive magic in his church when Susan Nunsuch pricks Eustacia with a needle to counter her supposed witchcraft. Instead, the Heath-dwellers end as they began: the final section, “Aftercourses,” shows them continuing to pursue the “frantic gaieties” of Paganism (318). In thus insisting on the hardihood of pagan tradition in the face of civilizing influences, and representing a social world within 1840s Britain in which prehistoric elements persist, Hardy illustrates a widespread claim of anthropology (made by Tylor among many others) that Christianity was superficial and that “primitive culture” persisted among the European peasantry, whose paganism more closely reflected “natural” inclinations.<sup>178</sup>

Moreover, the novel emphasizes the connections between English “primitive culture” and the new sense of Greek Paganism as a form of “primitive culture.” This fusions of anthropology and classicism emerged partly through Hardy’s engagement with the neo-classicism of Walter Pater and John Addington Symonds. Pater too had

---

<sup>177</sup> For example, see David J. DeLaura, “‘The Ache of Modernism’ in Hardy’s Later Novels,” *ELH* 34 (1967): 380-99.

<sup>178</sup> In his Preface to the 1895 edition, Hardy states that he set the novel in the 1840s, although Carl Weber argued from internal evidence that it is set in the 1830s. Weber, “Chronology in Hardy’s Novels,” *PMLA* 53.1 (Mar. 1938): 314-320.



emphasized the persistence of a pre-Hellenic, primitive Paganism, which endured because it was motivated by universal human nature:

The broad foundation, in mere human nature, of all religions as they exist for the greatest number, is a universal pagan sentiment, a paganism which existed before the Greek religion, and has lingered far onward into the Christian world, ineradicable, like some persistent vegetable growth, because its seed is an element of the very soil out of which it springs.<sup>179</sup>

Here, Pater implies that “paganism” is not a quality specific to Greek religion, but that Greek religion merely continued an eternal, ubiquitous paganism that comes from human nature.

Pater also emphasizes the continuity of this primitive Paganism with classical Greek myth. In his two articles on “Demeter and Persephone,” he argues that “primitive culture” inhered within Greek religion and art, finding elements of savagery in the archaeological ruins of ancient Greece, and thus rejects Arnold’s view of Greek culture as the pure “sweetness of light” of “seeing things as they are.” (Frazer made much more extensive arguments for “the savage under the civilised Demeter” (*The Golden Bough* 357), but he was anticipated by Pater.) Pater’s essays analyze archaeological discoveries in the shrine to Demeter at Cnidos, and find that they reveal that the classical statues of Demeter and Persephone are surrounded by relics of fetishism and superstition:

The *dirae* or spells,—*katadesmoi*—binding or devoting certain persons to the infernal gods [...] still lay, just as they were left, anywhere within the sacred precinct, illustrating at once the gloomier side of the Greek religion

---

<sup>179</sup> Pater, “Winckelmann,” *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1873), 201-2.

in general, and of Demeter and Persephone especially, in their character of avenging deities, and as relics of ancient magic, reproduced so strangely at other times and places, reminding us of the permanence of certain odd ways of human thought.<sup>180</sup>

Pater draws on anthropological theory to argue that at the Demeter and Persephone shrine we see two distinct cultural stages pressing against one another: “We see [the shrine] with its provincial superstitions, and its curious magic rites, but also with its means of really solemn impressions, in the culminating forms of Greek art; the two faces of the Greek religion confronting each other here.” He argues that the relics of magical belief reflect “that phase of religious temper which a cynical mind might think a truer link of its unity and permanence than any higher aesthetic instincts.” In other words, Greek culture always retained elements of the grotesque, savage, and violent cultural forms from which it originated. Hardy’s use of allusions to Greek Paganism in *The Return* reflects this new sense that the ancient Greeks have much in common with more “savage” forms of Paganism.

The Greek Paganism referred to in *The Return* is much closer to Pater than to Arnold’s view of the joyful Greeks of “sweetness and light,” and the novel echoes Pater in connecting and comparing ancient Greek culture and “primitive” cultural forms by aligning the Heath-dwellers’ traditions with Greek Paganism. For example, the history of the ritual fires lit on the Heath in chapter three is explained with reference to Prometheus,

---

<sup>180</sup>Pater, “The Myth of Demeter and Persephone,” *The Fortnightly Review*. The findings at the shrine include a prayer fragment that asks Demeter to punish a neighbor believed to be bewitching a child, a use of magic that suggestively resembles a plot element in *The Return*—Susan Nunsuch’s use of magic to punish Eustacia for bewitching her son, a plot incident that reflects the primitive, pre-Christian stage of culture on the Heath.

Thor and Woden, Celtic prehistory, and Guy Fawkes, brought together in a Tylor- or Frazer-esque cultural-evolutionary alignment. The novel describes both the furze-cutters and Eustacia as pagans, and they are closely associated with the “primitive” Heath itself. Eustacia is the novel’s most overtly “Hellenic” character, compared to various Greek goddesses and to Prometheus within the same chapter that she is described as a “savage.”

### **Pagan Sensualism and Savage Ethics**

Another way in which Greek culture was being redefined as imbued with or connected to the primitive was in the recuperation of the erotic as a “primitive” element of ancient Greek literature, art, and artifacts. This was a radical break from major mid-nineteenth-century writers on ancient Greek myth, who downplayed its sensualism: it was ignored by mid-century classicists like Grote, Müller reassuringly explained the indecent stories as solar myths, while Andrew Lang deplored, even as he emphasized, that the origins of Greek myth were “obscene, like the fancies of the savage myth-makers” who created them.<sup>181</sup> In the 1870s, however, writers like Symonds and Pater not only restored but also covertly affirmed the sexual content of Greek myth. (Swinburne had of course been doing this far more overtly and scandalously from the publication of *Poems and Ballads* in 1865.) Symonds remarks approvingly that Greek comedy, which emerged from the “phallic pageants” of Dionysus, was at liberty to portray Greek society with “the utmost license” (197), emphasizing that this aesthetic liberalism was the continuation of a primitive tradition. Pater, Symonds, and Hardy all elide paganism with a form of

---

<sup>181</sup> Lang, “The Method of Folklore,” *Custom and Myth* (1884).

sensualism, and elide the appreciation of the personal beauty of humans and the aesthetic beauty of phenomena such as landscape or art. Symonds was somewhat reticent about positively emphasizing the sexuality of Greek culture, probably at least in part because he was homosexual. In his conclusion to the second series, he defends himself against criticism of the first series, which included the charge that his advocacy of a revival of the pagan spirit constituted an affirmation of demoralizing materialism and “sensual excess.”<sup>182</sup> No doubt for this reason, in the second series Symonds is careful to distinguish the Greek acceptance of “natural” sexual desires—which he praises—as “moderation” rather than “license” (199). In the conclusion, however, he expresses “hopes, in the nature of dreams” that “comparative history and anthropology” will found a science of ethics that will “multiply and fortify [human] faculties,” and have no concern to “repress appetites” (398). In other words, Symonds hopes that comparing human behavior across all cultures and eras will yield more realistic social norms that accept rather than seeking to repress human sexuality. Hardy made a note of this (*Notebooks* 65), and it sounds a distinctly Hardyian sentiment, although perhaps Hardy would be less keen than Symonds to make such a confident leap from scientific study to its ethical implications. Thinking about this in relation to *The Return*, we might notice that the novel draws on “comparative history and anthropology” to make a number of claims about human nature in scenes that celebrate “Pagan impulses,” and that Paganism enables certain kinds of sexual freedom. And, the novel not only uses tropes of Paganism to connote sensualism and sexuality, but also makes sensualism an aesthetic virtue rather than a moral vice.

---

<sup>182</sup> Symonds, *Studies in the Greek Poets*, Second Series, volume 2 (1876; London, 1902), p. 415.

Eustacia in particular is presented to the reader as a kind of aestheticized spectacle of both Hellenic and savage sensuality, described in imagery that juxtaposes Paganism and the exotic. She calls to mind “tropical midnights” and “lotus-eaters” (62). When dancing her sensations are “tropical” (220); she has “pagan eyes, full of nocturnal mysteries” with “oppressive lids and lashes; and of these the under lid was much fuller than it usually is with English women” (61). Her mouth is compared to an architectural curve, the ogee, introduced to European Gothic architecture from the Middle East. The curve of Eustacia’s mouth is thus associated with a history in the exotic orient, an association that Hardy intensifies:

The sight of such a flexible bend as that on grim Egdon was quite an apparition. It was felt at once that the mouth did not come over from Sleswig with a band of Saxon pirates whose lips met like the two halves of a muffin. One had fancied that such lip-curves were mostly lurking underground in the South as fragments of forgotten marbles (61-2).

Eustacia herself, then, is a Romantic survival of a lost, underground ancient Greece, like the recently discovered underground shrine and marble statues of Demeter and Persephone that Pater eulogizes. She embodies an ancient, exotic beauty that the novel suggests is still more powerfully effective than any more recent aesthetic, and that the novel itself seeks to recuperate and revive for its readers.

However, the novel surrounds Eustacia with so many different classical allusions that the effect is partly parodic. The chapter that introduces her to the reader, “Queen of the Night” (60-66) begins with a series of rather backhanded Hellenic compliments:

She had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman [...] In a dim light, and with a slight rearrangement of her hair, her general figure might have stood for that of either of the higher female deities. The new moon behind her head, an old helmet upon it, a diadem of accidental dewdrops round her brow, would have been adjuncts sufficient to strike the note of Artemis, Athena, or Hera respectively, with as close an approximation to the antique as that which passes muster on many respected canvases (60-62).<sup>183</sup>

Each analogy is slightly undermined: she can “strike the note of” or “approximate” or “pass muster” for a goddess “in a dim light.” While Eustacia’s alignment with “the three higher deities” has therefore struck many critics as a satire, marking her distance from the goddesses, another way to read this analogy is to consider the satire to be directed towards the goddesses themselves as well, with their “passions and instincts” that would undermine a “model woman” marking them as “savage” rather than Hellenic in the conventional sense. Hardy was evidently thinking along these lines when, in his pre-*Return* notebook he wrote that in pagan religions, divinities have qualities that place them at “the lowest stage of animality” (69-70). Here, he seems to be alluding to the new sense of savagery within the Greek pantheon, and also when he writes that Eustacia was as unconcerned about Diggory publishing rumors of her affair with Wildeve “as a goddess at a lack of linen” (86). He implies that her “emotional Epicureanism” and her “savage state” of “social ethics” are both aspects of her pagan-goddess-like sensualism and

---

<sup>183</sup> Hardy frequently linked his heroines to pagan goddesses, although never so hyperbolically as with Eustacia: his first heroine, Cytheria of *Desperate Remedies*, is given an alternate name for Venus; Tess is hailed by Angel as Artemis and Demeter; Sue compares herself to Persephone.

indifference to civilized social decorum. Eustacia's association with Hellenic goddesses is an aspect of her "savage" sexual ethics, her sexual hedonism, "the passions and instincts which make a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman" (60).

Eustacia is Hardy's most explicit portrayal of a heroine as a desiring subject, and this quality of her personality is constructed partly through the ways in which she is exoticized and primitivized. Using terms like "savagery" and "passions" when describing your heroine is obviously a risky strategy, given publishing conditions and the reviewing climate in 1878. Hardy was aware that Eustacia might be a difficult proposition for readerly sympathy, and he pursued various strategies to resist negative judgments of her. Throughout the novel's serialization he struggled with his illustrator, Hopkins, in an attempt to ensure that Eustacia looked sufficiently feminine and attractive, and he also engaged in what Pamela Dalziel terms "anticipatory boulderization," toning down references in the novel's first draft to Eustacia's "night-side of passion" (revised to "night-side of sentiment," 353). On the other hand, as T.R. Wright argues, "Hardy's sympathetic portrait of Eustacia [seems ...] designed to offend contemporary morality,"<sup>184</sup> and it is hard not to agree with Wright, given that Hardy says of Eustacia, for example, that "fidelity for fidelity's sake had less attraction for her than most women," or that "As far as social ethics were concerned Eustacia approached the savage state," or has her tell Wildeve, after they have both married other people, that "we have been hot lovers in our time." Her portrayal drew criticism from the novel's early reviewers, who were puzzled by a female character who seemed to be a heroine, yet whose defining trait is sexual amorality. Havelock Ellis, in his 1883 essay on Hardy, was being deliberately subversive

---

<sup>184</sup> T.R. Wright, *Thomas Hardy and His Readers* (2003), p. 114.

and advancing his own sexually libertarian politics when he celebrated Eustacia as the first of Hardy's "instinct-led" primitive women.<sup>185</sup>

The description of Eustacia's appearance is remarkably close, in tone and imagery, to Pater's Persephone—in particular, Pater's description of her incarnation as Kore, the goddess of the dead, the primitive version of Persephone—and the novel alludes to Eustacia as a Persephone figure by describing Egdon as "her Hades" and telling us that "A true Tartarean dignity sat upon her brow." Pater describes the Persephone statue in the shrine at Cnidos as "compact of sleep, and death, and flowers, but of narcotic flowers especially," while Eustacia's "presence brought memories of such things as Bourbon roses, rubies, and tropical midnights; her moods recalled lotus-eaters." The Praxiteles Persephone described by Pater has "shadowy eyes" and a "fullness or heaviness in the brow," and "the fainter colouring of the underworld, and the tranquillity, born of it, has "passed into her face." Eustacia's hair "closed over her forehead like nightfall extinguishing the western glow" while her "pagan eyes" with their "oppressive lids and lashes" are "full of nocturnal mysteries." In style, then, the descriptions of Eustacia out-Pater Pater—the language is more baroque, and the description more intensely sensual. Hardy's Paterian writing about Eustacia invites us to enjoy her aesthetically, which perhaps helps to deflect the reader's judgment of her in conventional moral terms. Many of these images also work to heighten Eustacia's physical affinity with the Heath, reinforcing the sense that, like the landscape, she is an object of aesthetic appreciation, and beyond ethical judgment. She is often represented as physically

---

<sup>185</sup>Kristen Brady, "Thomas Hardy and Matters of Gender," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Dale Kramer (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), pp. 93-111.



continuous with the Heath, appearing like an “organic part” of it, as the “spike” on Rainbarrow’s “helmet” (15), with her hair blending into the furze-bushes (61), and as having “imbibed what was dark in [the Heath’s] tone” (62; the Heath infects its inhabitants). However, she sees the Heath as entirely alien to her, and her affinity with the Celts, the barrow, the Heath, and the other Pagan imagery is symbolic, available to the reader but not, consciously, to her. She is represented to the novel’s modern readers in aesthetic terms that are binary opposites of the modern: the ancient, the primitive, and the exotic, whereas she likes to think of herself as a worldly cosmopolite stuck in a backwater that doesn’t suit her. Nonetheless, her interior consciousness is far from exclusively modern, but rather, mixes “the strangest assortment of ideas, from old time and from new” (63). In fact, she is a central participant in the “Pagan” or primitive sensibility that the novel celebrates, although she does not consciously perceive her experience in these terms.

Moreover, the novel does provide Eustacia with something like an aesthetic philosophy (although again, it does not suggest she would think of it in these terms): her “emotional Epicureanism” and her philosophy of *carpe diem*, which echoes Pater’s famous “Conclusion” to *The History of the Renaissance*:

[Eustacia] dimly fancied [...] 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. [...] A blaze of love, and extinction, was better than a lantern glimmer of the same which should last long years (64).

Her feeling that time is her enemy in this quest for passionate experience echoes the philosophy of life Pater advocates in his final sentences: “to get as many pulsations as possible into [one’s] given time,” which may be achieved through “the passion and sorrow of love” but most of all through “poetic passions...the love of art for art’s sake.”<sup>186</sup> Pater’s injunction to pleasure and passion is rather different to Eustacia’s in that its highest aim is aesthetic experience (although he expresses it in terms of physical sensation, “pulsations”), while Eustacia’s is “love” or “passion.” However, Pater’s conclusion nonetheless provoked an outcry for seeming to advocate amoral sensualism and hedonism, which indeed he does. He insists that erotic and aesthetic pleasure are analogous, and valorizes “the passion and sorrow of love” as an experience for its own sake rather than for any social aims, such as marriage, or the “wider altruism” that George Eliot (and others) had claimed romantic love promotes. In representing Eustacia—in particular in the dance scene, to which I return below—Hardy follows Pater in that he also privileges the erotic for its own sake and as a quasi-aesthetic experience, but he adds to this two elements: the subversive advocacy of *female* erotic hedonism along Paterian lines, and his use of “primitive” or Pagan cultural forms as the structure in which such pleasure can be realized. This means that we can understand Eustacia as an

---

<sup>186</sup> Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London, 1873), p. 213.

aestheticizing subject, as well as an aestheticized object, although there is plenty of the latter too.<sup>187</sup>

### **Clym's Barbarous Satisfaction**

The novel, then, draws on contemporary scholarship to create a complicated, savage Paganism that is particularly associated with Eustacia, and appears to set this in contrast to Clym's spirit "of the future." Clym is said to embody the aesthetic of the future in his own person: in the set piece chapter that introduces him, his face is described (in contrast to the Heath, the "face on which time leaves but little impression") as

the typical countenance of the future. The view of life as a thing to be put up with, replacing that zest for existence which was so intense in early civilizations, must ultimately enter so thoroughly into the constitution of the advanced races that its facial expression will become accepted as a new artistic departure (143).

The imagery and logic of this chapter, however, convey that the aesthetic sensibility able to appreciate this "new artistic departure" is not yet possessed by the novel's readers.

Instead, the chapter denotes the aesthetic of the future by constant allusions to Ancient Greek art, implying that this is the aesthetic sensibility most readily understood by the novel's readers: for example, faces like Clym's will be sculpted by a "modern Pheidias."

The ancient is thus still the aesthetic standard of reference, as it was when discussing the

---

<sup>187</sup> The portrayal of Eustacia's hedonism as an absolute overthrow of civilized social restraints also implies a critique of the oppressive constriction of her ordinary social existence.

Heath as an aesthetic landscape via a comparison to Tempe and Thule.<sup>188</sup> The novel suggests that both Clym's ultra-modern and the Heath's primitive beauty clash with the Apollonian aesthetic still operative among Hardy's readership, and that both can only be appreciated in the future or by the cultural *avant-garde*—and, in fact, the character who most values the Heath's beauty is the ultra-modern Clym. However, his keen appreciation of the Heath, which the novel privileges, is constructed by the novel not as an aspect of his modernism, but as a manifestation of the cultural regression that he undergoes through his “return to the native.”

The novel's title carries a dual meaning: it describes Clym's return to his birthplace, but the term “native” was culturally freighted, most often used in this period to denote “primitive” others, characterized as exotic, sensual, superstitious, violent, or amoral. The idea that progress was not necessarily inexorable, that regression was an ever-present possibility and could be brought on by exposure to the primitive environment—in other words, by “going native”—was a widespread anxiety in mid- to late-Victorian discourse.<sup>189</sup> *The Return* embraces and celebrates this source of anxiety by making the return of a super-civilized Paris jeweler, Clym, to the Heath, and his regression to a state of “primitive” sensory apprehension, a center of the novel's aesthetic pleasure. While the early description of Clym asserts that he has lost the Hellenic “zest for existence,” he is shown revived by precisely such a “zest” in moments of ecstatic

---

<sup>188</sup> Tempe was a Valley known as the home of Apollo and the Muses, and thus suggests an Arnoldian Hellenism of “sweetness and light,” whereas Thule is an ancient Greek name for an unknown island in the far north, perhaps the Shetlands or Iceland, in other words connotative of the furthest reaches of barbarism. The Heath is of course like Thule, rather than Tempe.

<sup>189</sup> See Beer, “Can the Native Return?” *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter* (1996)

communion with the Heath, which only take place because he partially loses his sight and therefore his ability to teach and work towards advancing the Heath-dwellers through the cultural stages as he had planned. As for Eustacia, for Clym, the primitive Heath becomes an extension of embodied self: “He was permeated with its scenes, with its substance, and with its odours.” But whereas she has “imbibed” the heath’s darkness, his affinity is for a sunlit version of the Heath. In a famously beautiful passage, Hardy describes Clym cutting furze on a summer afternoon:

[Clym’s] daily life was of a curious microscopic sort, his whole world being limited to a circuit of a few feet from his person. His familiars were creeping and winged things, and they seemed to enroll him in their band [...] The strange amber-coloured butterflies which Egdon produced [...] 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. Tribes of emerald-green grasshoppers leaped over his feet, falling awkwardly on their backs, heads, or hips, like unskillful acrobats [...]. Huge flies, ignorant of ladders and wire-netting, and quite in a savage state, buzzed about him without knowing that he was a man. In and out of the fern-brakes snakes glided in their most brilliant blue and yellow guise.

(211)

In this passage, natural beauty is tinged with violence or danger, the flies “savage” and “huge,” and the snakes dazzlingly “brilliant.” Clym can both perceive this microscopic beauty, and is himself part of it—“enroll[ed ...] in their band.” His affinity with the “huge flies, ignorant of ladders and wire-netting,” is a wry comment on the impact of human

culture—"ladders and wire-netting"—on organisms that humans typically see as existing quite independently of human cultural activity. The flies are implicitly anthropomorphized through the reference to their "savage state," a phrase that appears frequently in nineteenth-century periodicals, to refer moralistically to a supposed state of poor morals or mental cultivation among exotic "primitive" groups, or to suggest a state of living close to nature. The claim that flies, like humans, can be in a savage state asserts that they can also be civilized, and this implies that "civilization" is not an inherent property of the civilized, but merely their constraint within the superficial trappings of civilized domesticity. The "savage state" is thus figured as freedom, a freedom that Clym here implicitly shares. This move sounds somewhat essentialist, but through its lyricism, the passage nonetheless draws the reader into Clym's blissful affinity with the natural and the savage. This suggests that his experience of living in the sensory moment is of more value than his improving aspirations, which are undercut by the novel. The scene thus appears to valorize a turn away from modern, ethical activism to an aestheticist appreciation that is constructed as a kind of primitive or natural impulse.

Significantly, the novel portrays this affinity with the savage partly as a consequence of Clym's increasing myopia. In effect, he has both literally and figuratively lost the distanced perspective of the modern, scientific observer. The "primitive" aesthetic experience Clym enjoys here is primarily visual; unlike Eustacia's dance, which is focuses more on bodily pleasure than any particular sense. Perhaps her experience can scarcely be described as aesthetic, but it fits with Pater's advocacy of seizing both aesthetic and erotic pleasure, as analogous aspects of human experience (in the "Conclusion" to the *Renaissance*). Clym's perspective focalizes an aesthetic experience

that is translated for the reader via Hardy's prose—he and the reader both have an aesthetic experience; whereas Eustacia has a sensory experience of desire, which is translated into an aesthetic experience for the reader. Once again, the “primitive” is available to the modern reader or observer in a visual aesthetic form, but to the “primitive” participant only as an experience of bodily pleasure, which is “aesthetic” only in Pater's somewhat idiosyncratic terms.

Clym's affinity with the Heath's savagery affects not only his sensory experience but also his conscious thought. He enters the novel an activist seeking progress, with a detailed plan for “advancing” the Heath-dwellers rapidly through the Comtean stages by educating them, and his belief in this aim caused him to “do such a ridiculous thing as throw up his business to benefit his fellow-creatures.” But the novel indicates that contradictions exist in Clym's thinking well before his literal loss of vision: at the same time that he cherishes plans to advance the Heath-dwellers, he takes pleasure in the failure of the very first “stage” of cultural development on the Heath:

He could not help indulging in a barbarous satisfaction at observing that, in some of the attempts at reclamation from the waste, tillage, after holding on for a year or two, had receded again in despair, the ferns and furze-tufts stubbornly reasserting themselves. (148)

Clym himself feels “barbarous,” aligning him with pre-civilized values, and the word here evokes its use in anthropology. “Barbarism” had been defined by Lubbock, for example, as the pastoral and nomadic “stage,” preceding agricultural settlements. Perhaps Clym's sense of affinity with the primitive, uncultivable landscape is an instance of the ultra-modern aesthetic sensibility referred to on the novel's opening page: in Clym's eyes,

this “gaunt waste” is a Vale of Tempe. Clym’s attraction to the Heath, however, is not only aesthetic but also suggests his resistance to civilization in a wider sense, in spite of his ostensible aim in returning to Egdon. This resistance is suggested at other points: for example, as he waits for Eustacia by moonlight, he imagines himself escaping social necessities to an idealized lunar wilderness (166).

Clym’s affinity with the Heath’s “barbarism” only intensifies in the novel’s last quarter, after Eustacia’s death, when he walks the Heath alone and feels himself at home in its prehistory:

Forgotten Celtic tribes trod their tracks about him, and he could almost live amongst them, look in their faces, and see them stand beside the barrows which swelled around, untouched and perfect as at the time of their erection. Those of the dyed barbarians who chose the cultivable tracts were, in comparison with those who had left their marks here, as writers on paper beside writers on parchment. Their records had perished long ago by the plough, while the works of these remained (316).

This passage again celebrates the ephemerality of cultivated fields compared to the permanence of the barbaric barrows. Clym reflects on this persistence as an example of “unforeseen factors,” rather than cultural fitness, conferring immortality. Yet in addition to this reflection, available to him as an educated modern who is familiar with the long span of history and prehistory, Clym directly “gazes” into the faces of hallucinated Celts. His knowing historical perspective is complicated by a different kind of gaze, one that puts him on a level with the Celts themselves, who like him could not predict their future.



The novel's emphasis on the persistence of the Heath's barrows suggests the resilience of Celtic cultural artifacts, but in the novel, the trope of the Celt also connotes extinction. At Eustacia's first appearance she is compared to a Celt who is the "last of her race," suggesting imminent extinction: she is pictured in the distance appearing on Rainbarrow, rising "from the semiglobular mound like a spike from a helmet [...or] one of the Celts who built the barrow [...]. It seemed a sort of last man among them, musing for a moment before dropping into eternal night with the rest of his race." (15-16). The last time we see Eustacia she is again on the Celtic barrow, reinforcing her association with the extinct tribe who built it. Instead of rising from the barrow, she "ceased to stand erect, gradually crouching down under the umbrella as if she were drawn into the Barrow by a hand from beneath" (316). Eustacia's death thus seems to be a reunion with the Heath of which she is already symbolically a part. And while her demise might suggest a failure of Paganism, the Heath-dwellers' continued vitality at the novel's end suggests otherwise.

### **The Origins of Culture on Egdon Heath**

In addition to drawing on the primitivizing of classicism by Pater and Symonds to create an aesthetic of sexualized Pagan sensation associated particularly with Eustacia, *The Return* also draws on this aesthetic in representations of "primitive culture" that respond to, anticipate, or transform nineteenth-century anthropology. If anthropology was offering attractively dark myths of savage origin to nineteenth-century readers and writers (as I argue in earlier chapters), in *The Return* Hardy suggests that aesthetically powerful

analogues persist in the still-recoverable folk traditions of England. The third chapter represents several different ancient folk-cultural forms—a fire festival, a ballad, and an outdoor dance—and these appear in the novel before the introduction of its central characters, privileging communal traditions and aesthetic spectacle over the novelistic individuation of characters. One of the first utterances in the novel, and the first by any of the Heath-dwellers, is not a line of dialogue but the traditional ballad, “Earl Marshal,” an assertion of collective oral tradition.<sup>190</sup>

The narrator’s explanation of the bonfire-lighting ceremony draws on contemporary anthropological theory and turns it inwards, to explain English folk-customs, making particularly vivid the claims Tylor and Pater make for the resilience of prehistoric Paganism in a very lightly Christianized European peasantry. The fire-lighting is the first scene portraying Egdon Heath’s social world, and it dramatically emphasizes the connectedness of the Heath’s current inhabitants to prehistory:

It was as if these men and boys had suddenly dived into past ages, and fetched therefrom an hour and deed which had before been familiar with this spot. The ashes of the original British pyre which blazed from that summit lay fresh and undisturbed in the barrow beneath their tread. [...] Festival fires to Thor and Woden had followed on the same ground and duly had their day. Indeed, it is pretty well known that such blazes as this the Heathmen were now enjoying are rather the lineal descendants from

---

<sup>190</sup> Hardy’s version of the ballad comes from Percy’s *Reliques of English Poetry* (1765. London: Bickers and Son, 1876, 164-68). Several printed versions exist dating back to 1685, but the ballad “was no doubt circulating orally some time before that,” according to Francis James Child, *The English and Scottish Ballads*, vol. 3 (Houghton Mifflin: Boston and New York, 1890), p. 257.

jumbled Druidical rites and Saxon ceremonies than the invention of popular feeling about the Gunpowder Plot.

Moreover to light a fire is the instinctive and resistant act of man when, at the winter ingress, the curfew is sounded throughout Nature. It indicates a spontaneous, Promethean rebelliousness against that fiat that this recurrent season shall bring foul times, cold darkness, misery and death. Black chaos comes, and the fettered gods of the earth say, Let there be light (18).

The passage asserts that the Heath-dwellers have preserved the social or religious rites of prehistory in their contemporary customs. The men and boys “reach into past ages,” a metaphor that suggests they are making direct contact with the past in a way that is inaccessible to the modern observer-narrator who traces the fire-festival through different stages of its history. The image of reaching suggests this ritual fire-lighting extends as an unbroken tradition back through time, through Saxons and Druids to the originary impulses of “Nature” giving rise to human culture, the fundamental human struggle against the “cold darkness, misery, and death” wrought by the seasons. Their impulse is “Promethean,” aligning them with the mythical figure who founded human society by bringing fire to humans in defiance of the gods; the allusion to this myth suggests that their fire-lighting is a tradition inherited from the very origins of human cultural activity.<sup>191</sup> The “Promethean” spirit is presented here not as a specifically Hellenic feeling but as a kind of universal instinct of resistance to suffering (a resistance that Hardy affirms as a virtue in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*). Other allusions in the passage relate the fire-lighting impulse to alternate stories of cultural origins, such as the first act of biblical

---

<sup>191</sup>According to Aeschylus and in subsequent versions of the myth, Prometheus endowed humans not only with fire but also with the arts and sciences of civilization.

Genesis (“Let there be light”), and to myths of primitive “gods of the earth,” an allusion that might refer to the Titans, predecessors of the Hellenic pantheon, or to the worship of chthonic gods, theorized by Bachofen, for example, as the most ancient form of religion.

The description of them as Promethean fire-lighters made unrecognizably grotesque by the flames, and their unbroken connection to the ashes of prehistoric fires in the barrow underfoot, makes the Heath-dwellers seem magnificent and strange, exoticizing them as an aesthetic spectacle for his readers. The subsequent conversation around the fire, however, undercuts this evocation of the sublime, since the Heath-dwellers reveal themselves to believe absurd ghost stories and rumors of the supernatural as literally true. But this is handled so that the Heath-dwellers don’t seem foolish, and their magical beliefs add to the sense that the Heath-dwellers are preservers of a genuinely ancient folk culture. Both Tylor (1870) and Comte argue that serious belief in “magic belongs to the lowest known stages of civilization,” whereas among rural people in Western Europe, primitive customs and superstitions dwindle into “the sport of later generations, and its serious belief to linger on in nursery folklore.” Egdon Heath harbors a social group which, like Tylor’s most primitive societies, still believes in magic, witches, and ghosts, and although Hardy was personally a rationalist, here and in many short stories his narratives entertain magical beliefs without rationalizing them away. *The Return* also complicates Tylor’s distinction between “survivals” of the primitive in a more advanced culture, and cultural elements that are embedded parts of a genuinely traditional culture: the predominant culture on Egdon is basically traditional, so it is impossible to identify particular elements as “survivals”; however its situation within 1840s industrializing England, albeit in relative isolation, means that the entire social group is a

survival, as is the Heath itself—“a place which had slipped out of its century generations ago, to intrude as an uncouth object into this” (149).

The fire-lighting scene seems also to allude to the motive suggested by Tylor and Frazer (1890) for the most “primitive” kinds of magical ritual: they argued that such rituals are attempts to control or appease the natural environment. Both anthropologists insist that this motive is conscious and rational, and follows the misguided scientific principle that Frazer called “sympathetic magic.” For example, Frazer claims that “primitive” groups light fires in imitation of the sun, to produce the desired result of a warm summer and a good harvest. However, while Hardy portrays the fire-lighting as an act of resistance to winter, he in fact presents a very different view to Tylor and Frazer, suggesting that the Heath-dweller’s fire-lighting is not rational or utilitarian, since his Heath-dwellers are motivated by an “impulse” of resistance to encroaching cold and darkness but not by the belief that the fires will ensure warmer weather. So, whereas Frazer and Tylor think all “primitive” belief is *rational* but wrong, Hardy implies that fire-lighting is a non-rational but productive (because pleasurable) response to natural conditions, an idea that anticipates functionalist explanations of myth and ritual: they persist because they promote general social welfare rather than the specific magical purpose they claim to advance.

Hardy does in fact portray a detailed representation of “sympathetic magic” in *The Return*: the wax doll that Susan Nunsuch carefully makes to represent Eustacia, into which she then sticks pins and finally melts, right before Eustacia drowns. To my knowledge, Frazer is the first British anthropologist to discuss the use of a person’s image to cause them harm: “One of the principles of sympathetic magic is that any effect may

be produced by imitating it. [...] If it is wished to kill a person, an image of him is made and then destroyed, and it is believed that [...] the man feels the injuries done to the image as if they were done to his own body” (*The Golden Bough* 9). In *The Return* (1878), Hardy therefore anticipates Frazer’s 1890 description by 12 years. *The Return* clearly delineates Susan’s motives and expectations in making and destroying the doll, and the same clarity of intention is represented motivating other magical practices in the novel, for example, the application of snake oil to Mrs. Yeobright’s snake-bite and Susan’s attempt to prove Eustacia a witch by sticking a pin into her. We can see from these instances that Hardy makes a clear distinction between magical practices that have definite causal intentions (and so resemble Tylor’s and Frazer’s idea of magic as misplaced science), and rituals that aim more generally at pleasure for their participants (and for his readers).

But unlike Frazer, Hardy does not present this “sympathetic magic” through an entirely skeptical, rationalistic lens, instead making the magic seem ambiguously effective. The last time we see Eustacia alive is the scene right before Susan Nunsuch makes and destroys her wax image, and when the novel subsequently returns to Eustacia she has drowned in the weir in mysterious circumstances that the novel never explains. In this way, Hardy gives “primitive” epistemology explanatory weight, as I discuss in the previous chapter,<sup>192</sup> and makes myth and magic active forces and engines of plot within a novel that in most respects follows the realist tradition. This tension—between Hardy’s attraction to magic and the supernatural within fiction and his strong belief in rationalist

---

<sup>192</sup>Gillian Beer focuses on this incident as an instance of Hardy giving voice to the “primitive” epistemology in her essay, “Can the Native Return?” *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter* (1996).

epistemology—animates a number of his short stories, including “A Tragedy of Two Ambitions” and “The Withered Arm.” In the latter story, the supernatural agency of a dream and the deadly effect of touching a hanged corpse are not rationalized away.

Hardy also complicates Tylor’s and Frazer’s claims that myths often arise to explain ritual survivals of which the original meaning has been forgotten. Frazer asserted that “It is to be observed that the explanations which I give of many of the following customs are not the explanations given by the people who practice these customs. Sometimes people give no explanation of their customs, sometimes (much oftener than not) a wrong one” (131). Frazer’s confidence that he can explain the history of ritual better from his armchair than can the participants themselves is, of course, tremendously conceited, and it is surprising to find it is apparently anticipated in Hardy’s portrayal of the Heath-dwellers lighting their fire. Hardy seems to echo this by suggesting that the Heath-dwellers do not know themselves to be “lineal descendants” of the worship of Thor and Woden. The tone of patronage is only increased by Hardy’s casual introductory clause, “it is pretty well-known”—to his middle-class readers, perhaps, but not to the Heath-dwellers themselves. However, while the passage refers to an unspecified observer who may mistake their fires for “popular feeling about the Gunpowder Plot,” Hardy doesn’t have the Heath-dwellers themselves give *any* rationale for the fire-lighting, but while they stand around the fire, they discuss the reason for other traditional customs. Timothy Fairway sums up: “‘You be bound to dance at Christmas because ‘tis the time o’ year; you must dance at weddings because ‘tis the time o’ life’” (23). Timothy suggests customs are followed because the participants are “bound to” do so, reflecting both his intellectual limitations and the new sense in anthropology that far from being illimitably

free to pursue their desires, primitive society is much more dominated than modern life by taboos and constricting customs.<sup>193</sup> If the fire-lighting is comparable to the dances Timothy describes, then it survives not because it produced pleasure, but merely because of cultural stasis and perhaps by virtue of its correspondence to aspects of the seasons or human life cycle. However, the novel suggests subsequently that traditional celebrations, especially dances, offer intense forms of pleasure to their participants, and presents this pleasure in positive terms as a form of aesthetic experience that escapes or transcends ethical judgment—or perhaps poses an alternative to it.

### **English Folk Dancing and Pagan “Self-Adoration”**

Herbert Spencer had publicized the idea that dancing preceded all other aesthetic forms and thus stood at the “origins of culture,” an idea that persisted through the Modernist era: Havelock Ellis writes in 1923 that, “the art of dancing stands at the source of all the arts that express themselves first in the human person,” while Ezra Pound also claimed dance is the oldest of all the arts, rooted in bodily rhythms, and suggested that modern poets should aim to channel this type of archaic and primal rhythm and make it available to modern society.<sup>194</sup>

Several of the memorable set piece representations of Egdon Heath’s culture are of outdoor dances that are troped as primitive, exotic, and prehistoric. The preparations for the maypole dance in the novel’s final section, “Aftercourses,” illustrate the novel’s

---

<sup>193</sup> Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie*.

<sup>194</sup> Michael Golston, *Rhythm and Race in Modernist Poetry and Science* (2008).



double perspective on dancing, viewing it through the lens of anthropology while also drawing on its potential for poetic representation:

The [May]pole lay with one end supported on a trestle, and women were engaged in wreathing it from the top downwards with wild flowers. The instincts of merry England lingered on here with exceptional vitality, and the symbolic customs which tradition has attached to each season of the year were yet a reality on Egdon. Indeed, the impulses of all such outlandish hamlets are pagan still: in these spots homage to nature, self-adoration, frantic gaieties, fragments of Teutonic rites to divinities whose names are forgotten, have in some way or other survived mediaeval doctrine (318).

The most striking phrase in the passage is, I think, “self-adoration,” which suggests hedonistic, self-absorbed, and possibly sexual pleasure, and subverts the reassuring familiarity of Maypole dances and “merry England.” Hardy makes the Maypole dance seem wild and Bacchic: it is an instance of “homage to nature” and of “frantic gaieties.” Moreover Hardy uses prose style in the passage to undercut the familiarity of the Maypole for his English readers, first of all using the language of an ethnological observer to make universalizing claims about the custom, and then using rhythm to evoke the pagan energy of the rite. The first sentence describes a specific, local practice (“women were engaged in wreathing it”); the second sentence makes the practice represent an instance of the general level of local culture (“the instincts of merry England lingered on here”); and the final sentence extends the generalization from this local example to “all such outlandish hamlets,” and then lists other Pagan impulses of such

outlandish hamlets, which are implicitly imputed to the women wreathing the Egdon Maypole. This passage is one of many in the novel that affirms that Paganism is a human “impulse” as much as an inherited tradition, and that it has persisted unchanged among the peasantry through the Christian epoch, as Tylor and Lang had argued. The style and approach throughout much of this paragraph is thus characteristic of nineteenth-century anthropology.<sup>195</sup> The assertion that outlandish hamlets are suffused with Pagan energies, however, heralds a change in pace, rhythm, and tone, with the listing of the vivid persistence of “homage[s] to nature, self-adoration, frantic gaieties, fragments of Teutonic rites to divinities whose names are forgotten.” The rapid succession of paratactic phrases replicates the frantic energy of the rites, and the idea that the names of the gods have been forgotten heightens their mysterious portentousness.

The formal shift in this passage is a characteristic move in *The Return*, and instantiates the collision of voices discussed in the previous chapter. The shift in narrative perspective from the general to the particular is of course a standard move in fictional realism, familiar to novel-readers at least since Fielding’s fictions of the 1750s. But here, the first “voice” is unusually ethnological, with its focus on recording “symbolic customs,” and this scientific perspective is restored in the paragraph’s final claim, that the rites have “survived medieval doctrine,” which echoes the anthropological terminology of “survivals” and “stages.” The paratactic phrases that intervene disrupt causal narrative

---

<sup>195</sup> Simon Gattrell says of this passage that “the point of this account and others like it is that Hardy wrote of these rituals as part of his own day-to-day experience as a young man. Their anthropological significance interests him less than their endurance, revealing long human roots in the soil even of haggard Egdon, so indifferent to man.” (*Cambridge Companion*, 23). In a sense Gattrell is right, in that Hardy is more interested in the fact of the persistence of Pagan homages to nature than in the anthropological method that enables him to place them.

progression in favor of fragmentary images and associative and rhythmic effects—in other words, in favor of a modernist poetics, a poetics that the paragraph associates with the “primitive” or Pagan aesthetic instantiated in the rites. This poetics recurs at important moments in *The Return* as a means to represent moments of sexual anarchy and hedonic pleasure, moments at which the ethical judgment of the narrator (and by implication, the reader) is suspended. It is important to note, however, that access to this poetic is achieved via the mediation of the anthropological voice, as though Hardy wishes to thereby legitimate the introduction of the Pagan energies and folk culture and their displacement or marginalization of Christian ethics, and frame these phenomena in a language that is familiar to the modern reader.

Pagan energies are also represented directly at the start of the novel, when the furze-cutters begin to dance in the sparks of the dying bonfire:

“Susy, dear, you and I will have a jig—hey, my honey?”

[...] She was lifted bodily by Mr. Fairway’s arm, which had been flung round her waist [...]. Once within the circle he whirled her round and round in a dance. [...] The vagary of Timothy Fairway was infectious. [...] The young men were not slow to imitate the example of their elders, and seized the maids; Grandfer Cattle and his stick jigged in the form of a three-legged object among the rest; and in half a minute all that could be seen on Rainbarrow was a whirling of dark shapes amid a boiling confusion of sparks, which leapt around the dancers as high as their waists. The chief noises were women’s shrill cries, men’s laughter, Susan’s stays and pattens, Olly Dowden’s “heu-heu-heu!” and the strumming of

the wind upon the furze-bushes, which formed a kind of tune to the  
demoniac measure they trod.” (30-31)

The dance and dancers are in some respects grotesque—Granfer Cantle is a “three-legged object,” and the “tune” accompanying their dance is made up of inarticulate cries and laughter, and the sounds made by Susan’s attire. There is no suggestion that the dance gives access to any sort of transcendence, ecstasy, or sexual abandon, in contrast to the dance among younger people that appears later in the novel. While the dance gives pleasure to the participants, they are not taking it perfectly seriously (the men are laughing, and in early drafts of the novel the women are cursing). On the other hand, the dance is dignified by its “demoniac” nature and by its setting, amid the boiling sparks on Rainbarrow.

This spontaneous outdoor dance with little or no musical accompaniment corresponds to Victorian conceptions of the origins of dance, which was thought by Herbert Spencer to have been the earliest of all aesthetic forms, preceding narrative, poetry, and visual art.<sup>196</sup> Indeed he suggests that originally, dancing, music, and rhythmic speech (poetry) were originally all aspects of dance, and only later became distinct arts: “Rhythm in speech, rhythm in sound, and rhythm in motion, were in the beginning, parts

---

<sup>196</sup> Darwin thought that at a lower stage of cultural evolution, courtship is carried out through aesthetic activities, and that the aesthetic activities of humans (including dancing) are analogous to the physical beauty and display behavior by which animals attract one another. Aesthetic activities, in this view, are instinctive behaviors for acquiring a sexual partner. This explanation held true for 19th-century formal dancing among middle- and upper-class Europeans, so Darwin’s own cultural background seems to have conditioned his theory. Spencer, like Darwin, thought aesthetic forms were originally produced because of biological instincts, but unlike Darwin he differentiated between dance and other aesthetics forms, Spencer sees dancing as the outlet for strong physical impulses; Havelock Ellis (1923) later argued that dancing involved the satisfaction of sexual feeling (Williams 57).

of the same thing; and have only in process of time become separate things.” Spencer claimed that the most “primitive” dances would not have been accompanied by tonal music but by rhythmic sounds made by the participants: “The dances of savages are accompanied by some kind of monotonous chant, the clapping of hands, the striking of rude instruments.”<sup>197</sup> “As implied by the customs of still extant barbarous races, the first musical instruments were, without doubt, percussive [...] and were used simply to mark the time of the dance” (Spencer 171). He suggests that all three aspects of rhythmic art—the origins of poetry, music, and dance—arose initially through instinctive behaviors, and are an extension or elaboration of spontaneous embodied rhythms, similar to the rhythms of muscular spasm when in pain or the rhythmic patterns of speech (327-8). Spencer thought dancing arose as an outlet for physical impulses, while another influential Victorian theorist of the origin of dancing, Darwin, saw it as a form of courtship ritual or mating display (as indeed it was within Darwin’s own social world). Frazer viewed “primitive” dancing as a form of sympathetic magic, adducing the “rain-dance” among other examples supporting his theory that sympathetic magic was a “universal” cultural stage, so that dancing was yet another form of misguided rationalism-based intervention in the natural world. It was only in the early twentieth century that anthropological writing about dance (for example, Ellis in 1923) argued that dancing involved the erotic pleasure, which is central to Hardy’s representation of “Pagan” dancing in *The Return*. Scattered mid- to late- nineteenth-century travelers’ accounts of “primitive dancing” claimed that it expressed or gratified sexual desire, and condemned it on both moral and

---

<sup>197</sup> Spencer, *First Principles* (New York, 1865), p. 169.

aesthetic grounds,<sup>198</sup> but the trope of exotically sexualized dancing only became widespread in the 1890s, when it also became associated with aesthetic “decadence” in literature, for example, in *Salome* and in Arthur Symonds poem “Javanese dancers.” Conversely, ethnographic and anthropological writers of the late nineteenth century remained rather dismissive of what they called “primitive” dance as an art form, whatever explanation they gave of its motive.

Hardy was interested throughout his life in traditional dances and in their history and origins, but his position on the subject is quite different from those of the major evolutionary theorists on the subject (of whom Darwin, Spencer, Tylor, and Frazer were the most influential). He knew about folk dancing in practice because in his childhood and teens he played the violin at local rural dances, and he recorded in his autobiography that certain of these dance tunes would move him to tears.<sup>199</sup> In the last year of his life, he contributed information about Dorset folk dances to the English Folk Dance Society (EFDS), supporting their attempts to recover, revive, and maintain British folk dancing traditions. The Society, founded by Cecil Sharp in 1898, approached traditional culture from an entirely different perspective to that of evolutionary anthropology, and in important respects has more in common with contemporary anthropological methods. Sharp’s approach was to treat fairly small local areas as sites of distinctive cultural traditions, a conceptual framework that was the reverse of the nineteenth-century anthropologists’ method of squashing varying local traditions into a theory of universal cultural evolution. And unlike purely “armchair” anthropologists, Sharp’s method was to

---

<sup>198</sup> Andrew Lyons and Harriet Lyons, *Irregular Connections: A History of Anthropology and Sexuality* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004)

<sup>199</sup> Florence and Thomas Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy* (Wordsworth, 2007), p.15.

investigate and record these traditions at first hand, by spending time with people who still knew traditional songs and dances. The dances in Hardy's fiction are likewise specified by name, contextualized, and described based on first-hand knowledge. The description of dances in *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872) prompted the editor of the EFDS journal to write to Hardy in 1926 for more information, which elicited Hardy's contribution of the steps of a "country dance," the College Hornpipe, to the journal in a published letter. In the same letter, he also disputed Sharp's genealogy of "country dances," which Sharp thought were indigenous traditions of the rural areas in which he found them. Hardy argued that these dances had been imported to the South-West of England from urban areas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, superseding a prior tradition of "folk dances" that were more energetic and less "genteel":

These country dances were not the same as the folk dances, though often considered to be. They superseded and extinguished the latter [...] though sometimes the folk dances were done within my memory, the motions being more boisterous than in the Country dance."<sup>200</sup>

It is not always made clear which of the dances represented Hardy's fiction are "country dances," and which the traditional "folk-dances," but his autobiography gives some guidance on this by making a clear distinction between "hornpipes and jigs, and other old dances," and the "more genteel country-dances," and by referring to "the endless jigs, hornpipes, reels, waltzes and country-dances that his father played" (*Life* 15). This suggests that the Heath-dwellers' "jig" in the fire-embers and a six-handed reel called the "Devil's Dream" in *The Return* would both have been considered by Hardy traditional

---

<sup>200</sup> *Thomas Hardy's Public Voice*, ed. Michael Millgate (2001), 453.

folk dances. Some other of the dances described in Hardy's work would have been termed "country dances," including The College Hornpipe, The Triumph, and Bonnets So Blue (portrayed in *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872) and in the poem, "The Dance at the Phoenix." In another letter to the EFDS journal, Hardy offers slightly more description of the older folk-dances: "The work-folk had their own dances, which were reels of all sorts, jigs, a long dance called the 'horse-race,' another called 'thread-the-needle.' These were danced with hops, leg-crossings, and rather boisterous movements" (*Hardy's Public Voice* 465). The epithet "boisterous" makes the dances sound rather unpoetic, and perhaps slightly ridiculous, but the representation of jigs and reels in Hardy's fiction makes them seem wild, abandoned, and passionate, and so ungenteel in a quite different sense to that implied by "boisterous." In *The Return*, for example, the "celebrated 'Devil's Dream'" involves a "fury of personal movement that was kindled by the fury of the notes." Nonetheless, all of the dances Hardy describes, whether primitive "folk" dances or the more "genteel" country dances, necessarily follow formal patterns. Dance is in this sense like poetry, offering freedom and motion within the constraints of a particular form.

Hardy's perspective on folk dance, then, is quite markedly different to the anthropological writers, who considered folk dance negligible as an aesthetic form, "primitive" and uncomplicated. In this sense Hardy's view is close to that of Cecil Sharp, in the value they both saw in recovering and preserving the genuinely ancient folk dances of England. Unlike Sharp, however, Hardy anticipates the ideas of writers like Ellis (1923) who argued that folk dancing was a source of sexual or sensual pleasure.

In *The Return*, *Tess*, and several of his short stories, Hardy portrays physical abandonment during a dance that is implicitly somewhat analogous to a sexual act. The



narrator of *The Return* asserts that to dance with a man is “to pass to courtship without acquaintance, to marriage without courtship” within the space of an hour (115).

Sublimating sex scenes into dance scenes of the kind Hardy constructs, however, seems to have been only barely tolerable within the late-Victorian serial-fiction marketplace: Hardy had to publish the dance scene from *Tess* separately from the rest of the novel, in a more liberal periodical than *The Graphic*, the “family magazine” in which the novel was initially serialized.

In *The Return*, Eustacia’s orgiastic dance with Wildeve is represented as an experience of dream-like, sensual self-delight. The dance episode starts in a fairly orthodox realist mode, with an empirical generalization about the effect of weather conditions on the senses, but subsequently undermines any sense that the effects of this dance are rationally explicable, with a series of clauses that describe the mysteriously potent, even dangerous, effect of mixing certain sensory input, movement, and emotion:

There is a certain degree and tone of light which tends to disturb the equilibrium of the senses, and to promote dangerously the tenderer moods; added to movement, it drives the emotions to rankness, the reason becoming sleepy and unperceiving in inverse proportion; and this light fell now upon these two from the disc of the moon. All the dancing girls felt the symptoms, but Eustacia most of all (219).

The root cause of this, the “degree and tone of the light,” is made to seem magical as much as natural, and the precise qualities of the light’s “degree and tone” apparently elude realistic description. The effects of this light together with the dance are to create “rankness” of emotions and “unperceiving” reason. These effects might be expected to

have negative connotations, but are instead described in a way that makes them contribute the mysteriously rapture of the atmosphere. Eustacia's experience is described as a kind of soul-absence (a condition that Frazer later emphasized was central to primitive beliefs and rites):

Eustacia floated round and round on Wildeve's arm, her face rapt and statuesque; her soul had passed away from and forgotten her features, which were left empty and quiescent, as they always are when feeling goes beyond their register.

How near she was to Wildeve! It was terrible to think of. She could feel his breathing, and he, of course, could feel hers. [...] The enchantment of the dance surprised her. A clear line of difference divided like a tangible fence her experience within this maze of motion from her experience without it. Her beginning to dance had been like a change of atmosphere; outside, she had been steeped in arctic frigidity by comparison with the tropical sensations here. [...] The dance had come like an irresistible attack upon whatever sense of social order there was in their minds (220).

This passage draws on various tropes of "the primitive": the sleep of reason, tropical sensations, a dissolving sense of the social order and the self. In terms of the novel's plot, the dance is genuinely threatening to the social order. The narrator reminds us that the dance takes place when both Eustacia and Wildeve are newly married to other people: Eustacia to Clym, and Wildeve to Thomasin. Thus the dance's celebration of sensual and sexual energies, which is portrayed so seductively, is at the same time cruel to Eustacia's husband and Wildeve's wife. The dance is thus a moment of profound tension in the

novel's ethical schema, because Hardy makes a great aesthetic investment in recreating for his readers the elemental, orgiastic experience of the dancers, but keeps us aware that other characters about whom the reader cares are being damaged by the dancers' pleasure. The representation of their highly-charged, physical pleasure is disturbing precisely because of the disjuncture between the pleasure of reading Hardy's ecstatic prose, and our sense of the betrayal of suffering others that this pleasure constitutes. Pagan ecstasy is, in this situation, the antithesis of the Comtean loving-kindness that the novel appears to celebrate as Clym's heroic virtue, but unsettlingly, the novel makes considerable aesthetic investment in this kind of amoral or immoral joy.

Recently, Andrew Radford has read this dance as a reflection of Hardy's interest in anthropology, and argues that the novel obliges readers to condemn this dance as the misuse of a communal rite by two sybaritic modern interlopers, Wildeve and Eustacia, for morally deplorable ends.<sup>201</sup> He moralistically reads Eustacia's participation in folk culture as a crime for which she ultimately pays: "When Eustacia exploits for her own private ends the traditional fertility rituals of the Heath [...] she trivializes them by divesting them of whatever communal resonance they have left. She has no conception of feasting as [...] a sincere articulation of the search for belongingness to a clan."<sup>202</sup> He claims that the "illicit nature" of Eustacia's dance, its selfishness, "pollutes the spirit of yearning for imaginative and interpersonal connection upon which the village festivity rests. Any multiplied consciousness of her surroundings or experience of erotic and expressive

---

<sup>201</sup>He takes Eustacia's dance together with her infertile sexuality as evidence that the novel casts as a Cybele, the goddess who performs a castrating "ghastly dance." However, given that the novel directly links Eustacia to Persephone, Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite, it seems unnecessary to hypothesize connections to other Greek goddesses based on slender evidence.

<sup>202</sup> Andrew Radford, *Thomas Hardy and the Survivals of Time* (2003), p. 26.

enthusiasm is therefore of a menacing, delimited kind” (Radford 89). Radford’s reading considers Eustacia an outsider to the Heath’s culture, who enjoys the dance in an illicit way that is out of keeping with the other dancers, but this reading disregards the fact that the other dancers have a similar experience: “All the dancing girls felt the symptoms.” Eustacia’s kinship to the other dancers is emphasized: they are all sensuous Pagans together. “A whole village-full of sensuous emotion, scattered abroad all the year long, surged here in a focus for an hour. [...] For the time paganism was revived in their hearts, the pride of life was all in all, and they adored none other than themselves.” The novel emphasizes that Eustacia’s desires are the same as those of the Heath-born girls (who, like Eustacia, had earlier viewed the mummer’s play as a vehicle for furthering their love affairs); they, like Eustacia, lose themselves in dancing to sensory pleasure that the novel indicates is sexual and self-oriented. In that sense, all of the dancers are “exploiting it for their own private ends.” Radford’s mistake here is to view the folk-dance as an affirmation of community analogous to traditional feasts. The folk-dance, as Hardy portrays it, is the obverse of the feast. In Hardy’s fiction the feast celebrates community; the dance is about self-adoration and self-focused pleasure. The entire scene is therefore scarcely a condemnation of Eustacia’s heedlessness of her unhappy marriage and embrace of sensual hedonism, as Radford claims.

In any case, Radford seems mistaken to view the pursuit of private sexual pleasure as a subversion of folk culture’s communality. Folk dances in Hardy’s fiction incite sexual ties, and sexual ties are an important means by which social norms are enforced, as Hardy’s fiction so often reveals. The apparent freedom of dancing with a lover is one means, as Hardy makes clear, of ensuring the ultimate social glue, marriage

and children, whatever the dancers might wish. Hardy sometimes suggests that these two goals are mutually reinforcing: for example, the scene discussed above suggests that dancing can lead to marriage and therefore does in fact play a role in establishing community ties. In the scene from *The Return* discussed above, the narrator offers wry commentary on the comparatively disappointing nature of those ties: “how many of those impassioned but temporary embraces were destined to become perpetual was possibly the wonder of some of those who indulged in them.”<sup>203</sup> The lasting social tie of marriage, it is suggested, is an unwelcome and long-lasting outcome of a brief hedonistic pleasure. In the short story, “The History of the Hardcomes,” two engaged couples who exchange partners during a long evening’s dancing end up married unsuitably to the person with whom they danced rather than to their original fiancé, “all having been done under the hot excitement of that evening’s dancing.”<sup>204</sup>

The novel’s aesthetic investment and its suspension of moral judgment in regard to Eustacia’s dance reflects a broader aesthetic and ethical tension in respect to ancient and modern in *The Return*. In this scene, beauty and pleasure are associated with marital infidelity, Paganism, the tropical, the irrational, and self-adoration—in other words, with antitheses of all the Comtean virtues which the novel elsewhere encourages us admire in Clym. Conversely, Clym’s modern, ethical philosophy does not create beauty, and he himself does not embody it—or rather, the novel suggests that even modern readers are

---

<sup>203</sup> Hardy’s friend Edmund Gosse suggestively refers to dancing in Hardy’s fiction in a similar way, as a sexual pleasure with a high cost to the participants. He describes Hardy’s fiction itself as a dance generated by Hardy as the “fiddler.” He wrote in 1918 that Hardy is at times “pleased to act as the fiddler at a dance, surveying the hot-blooded couples, and urging them on by the lilt of his instrument, but he is always perfectly aware that they will have to “pay high for their prancing” at the end of all” (*Edinburgh Review*).

<sup>204</sup> Hardy, *Life’s Little Ironies* (1894)

not yet able to see his beauty, and his futuristic appearance can only be evoked through reference to the ancient as the standard of aesthetics (“In Clym Yeobright’s face could be dimly seen the typical countenance of the future. Should there be a classic period to art hereafter, its Pheidias may produce such faces”). Eustacia’s Pagan beauty and morals, on the other hand, capture readers’ attention, and this is reflected in the early reviews and multitude of critical essays that focus on her. In other words, *The Return* successfully makes use of a self-consciously “primitive” aesthetic to appeal to a modern readership.

However, the scene does not merely aestheticize Eustacia as an object of the reader’s attention, but also involves us in Eustacia’s perspective on the dance as an experience. The passage I quote above shows how the narrator begins by describing her (“rapt and statuesque”), but moving inwards to focalize the dance through her perspective, giving us access to her experience of sensations (“tropical”) and motions (“a maze,” “riding a whirlwind”). In other words, the scene suggests that Eustacia’s experience is itself aesthetic; it celebrates her experience as an expression of female sexuality and Paganism, and offers this to the reader as an alternative to the ethical.<sup>205</sup>

### **“A Precipice in Time”**

In 1893, Hardy published a short story, “The Fiddler of the Reels,” which prominently figures a folk tradition of wild music and dance that, as in *The Return*, is

---

<sup>205</sup> In reference of this final contention, that the scene celebrates female pleasure rather than male, it’s notable that the scene is much less sympathetic to Wildeve’s sexual motives: the novel tells us that Wildeve consciously thinks of his and Eustacia’s marital betrayal by dancing in this way (whereas Eustacia does not), and that he positively enjoys the dance more because of that knowledge.

associated with the primitive, magical, and sexual. The cultural contrast in the story between an aesthetically and sexually potent primitive sphere and a barren modernity is set in the context of the cultural evolutionism the Great Exhibition of 1851:

For South Wessex, the year formed in many ways an extraordinary chronological frontier or transit-line, at which there occurred what one might call a precipice in Time. As in a geological “fault,” we had presented to us a sudden bringing of ancient and modern into absolute contact.<sup>206</sup>

The concept of a “precipice in time” aptly describes the sharp juxtaposition of ancient and modern artifacts within the Exhibition itself, as well as the sudden proximity of “ancient” Wessex to “modern” London created by the excursion trains set up to enable West country inhabitants to visit London.<sup>207</sup> The Exhibition itself deliberately brought together the ancient and modern by arranging in developmental sequence the arts and technology of all countries, and thus “annihilated time which separates one stage of a nation’s progress from another,” according to William Whewell (Stocking 6). Hardy’s phrase “precipice in time” thus dramatically captures the effect of the exhibition on visitors.<sup>208</sup> The story’s elaborate comment on the Exhibition year prepares readers to regard the Wessex-

---

<sup>206</sup> Hardy, *Life’s Little Ironies* ed. Alan Manford and Norman Page (Oxford: OUP, 1996), p. 137. Hardy wrote the story on request for a *Scribner’s Magazine* number marking the Chicago World Fair (*The Fiddler of the Reels and Other Stories, 1888-1900*, ed. Keith Wilson and Kristin Brady, p. 306).

<sup>207</sup> George Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (1991), p. 5.

<sup>208</sup> Hardy’s phrase is so apt in both of these respects, in fact, that George Stocking begins his authoritative study by using Hardy’s phrase to encapsulate the major trope of Victorian anthropology (*Victorian Anthropology* 5).

based events of the story as “ancient,” and the story itself as a view granted to modern readers over the “precipice in time” into a past stage of development.

The ensuing story centers on the quasi-magical sexual effects of folk music and dance on a young woman, Car’line. When she hears the fiddler, Mop Ollamoor, “the aching of the heart seized her simultaneously with a wild desire to glide airily in the mazes of an infinite dance. (140),” she starts from her seat “convulsively,” as if moved by a “galvanic shock,” weeps, and generally exhibits physical distress (140). Mop is exoticized, described in a way that suggests Mediterranean or gypsy ethnic origins, with copious black curls and a “rich olive” (138). He plays old dance tunes—“country jigs” and “reels,” (139), the energetic traditional dances Hardy later attributes to the “work-folk,” rather than the more “genteel” country dances, associating him with authentic folk tradition. The combination of his mysterious, exotic appearance and the English folk music he plays is effectively magical in its effects on Car’line, and she is unable to stop dancing while he is playing (151-2). He represents a nexus of primitive magic, sexuality, and artistic power that is contrasted with Car’line’s husband Ned, a kind, uninteresting mechanic who moves her to London and to a strikingly banal vision of modern life. There is no overlap between them: Ned represents the ethical and modern, Mop aesthetic power and the primitive.<sup>209</sup>

---

<sup>209</sup>Brady and Wilson, introduction, *The Fiddler of the Reels and Other Stories*. As in *The Return of the Native* the short story’s narrator rationalizes plot events that nonetheless retain their mystery for the reader and their power to unsettle. The narrator says that Car’line’s galvanic response to the music “could be explained by a neurologist” (140), yet the narrator does not do so; nor does he explain Mop’s mysterious apparition in a mirror at the Exhibition, how and where he ultimately vanishes, nor his power over his



The story, published over a decade after *The Return*, revisits the novel's antitheses between the ancient or primitive rural world and the modern, and makes the distinction sharper and more obvious. As others have noted, the primitive and the modern in "The Fiddler" are "mutually exclusive" and closely associated with setting. The tropes of passion, beauty, and ancient tradition, represented by Ollamoor and available in rural Wessex, have vanished by the story's end, leaving Ned, the figure of modernity, in a London that offers limited personal, sexual, and aesthetic satisfaction. In other Hardy novels about the clash between tradition and modernity (in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1888) and *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), for example), tradition is vanquished. This makes *The Return*'s mooring of an unvanquishable folk culture in a realistic geography exceptional. But the novel itself tells us that this is only possible because the resilient, Promethean wildness of the Heath, which allows this cultural stasis, is itself exceptional. The Heath is unusual, but not a refuge from the real.

Hardy's portrayal of rural English folk dances makes them radically different to the world of Victorian ballroom dancing, most notably in the extent to which his dances represent sexual freedom. Eustacia's dance is particularly remarkable because it emphasizes her experience of erotic pleasure as a form of exhilarating liberation, like "riding a whirlwind." *The Return* thus anticipates the way in which primitivized dancing is used in *fin de siècle* works: in Mona Caird's *The Daughters of Danaus*, George Egerton's "A Cross Line," and in Wilde's

---

and Car'line's daughter that allows him to take her unprotesting from her mother, even though she has never previously met him (147, 153-5).

*Salome*, dance is the vehicle for expressions of an aestheticized female sexuality. (Caird begins *The Daughters of Danaus* with a description of a dance that is evidently influenced by *The Return*.)<sup>210</sup>

In an important respect, however, dances in Hardy's fiction (in *The Return*, "Fiddler of the Reels," and "The History of the Hardcomes") suggest that dances allow women a temporary sexual freedom at the cost of reinforcing nineteenth-century social and sexual norms. Equating dancing to sexual intimacy, Hardy emphasizes that an hour's pleasure dancing can lead to a lifetime of regret, either because of an illegitimate child or an unhappy marriage. In the poem, "The Dance at the Phoenix" (written in 1878, the year *The Return* was published), Hardy literalizes this relationship between female dancing and retribution, with the heart attack and death of the poem's aging female protagonist after an unusual night of intensely pleasurable dancing. And in *Tess*, sexually uninhibited dancing leads indirectly to Tess's rape.

### ***Tess of the D'Urbervilles*: "a Pagan fantasy"**

*Tess* (1891) reprises the contrast set up between primitive and modern in *The Return*, and both novels figure this contrast by joining together tropes of

---

<sup>210</sup> "Into the half light stole presently the sound of some lively instrument: a reel tune played, as it were, beneath one's breath, but with all the revel and rollicking emphasis of that intoxicating primitive music. A new and wilder spirit began to possess the whole party. [...] Hadria's reels were celebrated, not without reason. Some mad spirit seemed to possess her. It would appear almost as if she had passed into a different phase of character. She lost caution and care and the sense of external events. When the dance was ended, Hubert led her from the hall. She went as if in a dream."

classical myth and the primitive in the female protagonist (Tess/Eustacia), and joining notions of modernity and nineteenth-century evolutionism in a male protagonist (Angel/Clym). However, Hardy complicates this by endowing Tess with some of Clym's ethical virtues, for example, her sense of obligation and generosity towards others, and his "primitivist" perspective on nature. In *Tess*, however, Hardy suggests that this affinity for the primitive is associated with being female: he describes how the field-women are one with the field, whereas the men are apart from it. Tess herself is inspired by an impulse to worship nature that is part of the universal human impulse to enjoy, and that finds its form in a "Pagan fantasy" that is said to be peculiar to women who work outdoors:

The irresistible, universal, automatic tendency to find sweet pleasure somewhere, which pervades all life, from the meanest to the highest, had at length mastered Tess. [...] She tried several ballads, but found them inadequate; till, recollecting the Psalter that her eyes had so often wandered over of a Sunday morning before she had eaten of the tree of knowledge, she chanted: 'O ye Sun and Moon ... O ye Stars ... ye Green Things upon the Earth ... ye Fowls of the Air ... Beasts and Cattle ... Children of Men ... bless ye the Lord, praise Him and magnify Him forever!' [...]

And probably the half-unconscious rhapsody was a Fetishistic utterance in a Monotheistic setting; women whose chief companions are the forms and forces of outdoor Nature retain in their souls far more of the

Pagan fantasy of their remote forefathers than of the systematized religion taught their race at later date.

Tylor prints similar fetishistic “hymns” to Tess’s “O ye Sun and Moon” in *Primitive Culture*.<sup>211</sup> According to Tylor, “To the minds of the lower races it seems that all nature is possessed, pervaded, crowded with spiritual beings” (185). He argues that the purpose of animism is “to explain nature on the primitive childlike theory that it is truly and throughout ‘Animated Nature.’” (184-5). Unlike Tylor’s savage man, Tess is not attempting a causal explanation of natural phenomena, but Hardy is evidently placing her utterance within the “primitive” Tylolean stage, and implicitly celebrating it. Tess’s “fetishism,” the narrator implies, is an appropriate response to the beauty of the rural world, a beauty of which the novel makes Tess herself a part, and which the novel’s readers are likewise invited to value.

### **The Chaseborough Dance and the Dionysian**

In its treatment of sexualized dancing, *Tess* also differs significantly from *The Return*. The orgiastic Chaseborough dance, which directly precedes Tess’s rape, reprises the dance in *The Return* in that the narrative makes an aesthetic investment in seductively representing energetic movement, but this scene is much more morally ambiguous because it precedes and indirectly contributes to the rape.<sup>212</sup> As in Eustacia’s twilight

---

<sup>211</sup> For example, “O Creator, and Sun, and Thunder,” attributed to the Incas, vol. 2, p. 263; “O though river,” *Primitive Culture* (1871), vol. 2, p.435.

<sup>212</sup> The scene was removed by Hardy from the first, serial edition of the novel in *The Graphic*, and published separately. It was only restored to the novel in the edition of

dance in *The Return*, the scene yokes English folk tradition to a savage Greek Paganism, but the dance in *Tess* is closer to Nietzsche's concept of the Dionysian, which involved not only a sensual, ecstatic experience of music and dance, but sex joined to violence, a "horrible mixture of lust and cruelty."<sup>213</sup> While the allusions to Ovidian rape evoke a sense of violence and threat, and the dancers are lost in a state of physical abandonment, the passage creates a sense of mysterious semi-visibility and delightful whirling movement that makes it exhilarating to read:

Of the rushing couples there could barely be discerned more than the high lights—the indistinctness shaping them to satyrs clasping nymphs—a multiplicity of Pans whirling a multiplicity of Syrinxes; Lotis attempting to elude Priapus, and always failing.

At intervals a couple would approach the doorway for air, and the haze no longer veiling their features, the demigods resolved themselves into the homely personalities of her own next-door neighbours. Could

---

1912, by which time the scene was no longer especially shocking. (See Simon Gattrell's introduction to the manuscript of *Tess*).

<sup>213</sup>"Jener scheussliche Hexentrunk aus Wollust und Grausamkeit," *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Nietzsche, *Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari (Berlin, 1972), III.1, p. 29. Nietzsche argued that Western classical tragedy originated in the rite of Dionysus, centering on dancing and singing, and in doing so invented the concept of the "Dionysian impulse." He describes the sublime power of "the Dionysian" to produce both and embodying sensual abandon and self-transcendence in participants. Hardy's earliest direct reference to Nietzsche appears in a notebook entry of 1894, and many subsequent references indicate his interest in Nietzsche's thought. His only public utterance on Nietzsche was antagonistic: in October 1914, in the wake of the outbreak of World War I, he wrote to *The Manchester Guardian*, repudiating claims of his discipleship of Nietzsche, and harshly criticizing Nietzsche's philosophy, in particular for its incoherence and its celebration of militarism and social Darwinism. However, many readers have seen common ground between Hardy and Nietzsche—for example, see Eugene Williamson. "Thomas Hardy and Friedrich Nietzsche: The Reasons," *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Dec. 1978), pp. 403-41.

Trantridge in two or three short hours have metamorphosed itself thus  
madly!<sup>214</sup>

The dances here are “reels” and “jigs” that Hardy argued elsewhere were the authentic folk-dances of immemorial tradition. Unlike Eustacia, however, Tess knows by instinct to avoid the sexual danger posed by the dance, and the exhilaration of the scene is undercut by her anxiety about her presence in this licentious environment and about how she will get home. Within the description of the dance itself, the central allusions to rape narratives from Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* imply a relationship between its pleasurable sexual abandon and sexual violence against women, suggesting that Tess is right to be worried for herself, and foreshadow her rape later that night in the Chase. Yet the allusions to the rapes of Lotis and Syrinx take place in a comic register, undermining Tess’s anxiety. The novel seems to give further endorsement to the hedonism of the dancers in its aesthetically powerful evocation of their ecstatic self-delight during their walk home, which forms the linking scene between the dance and the rape.

The Chaseborough Dance is implicitly Bacchanalian, with its motifs of mortal girls clasped by demi-gods and the inspiration of alcohol, and during the walk home through the dark countryside, “the spirit of wine” is invoked in a way that seems to echo Nietzsche’s notion of the Dionysian. In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Nietzsche characterizes the Dionysian experience as one of non-rationality, savagery, intoxication, and a frenzied or ecstatic self-immersion in nature:

The ecstatic rapture, which rises up out of the...collapse of the *principium individuationis* [... offers] a glimpse into the essence of the *Dionysian*,

---

<sup>214</sup> Hardy, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (Norton), p. 48.

which is presented to us most closely through the analogy to *intoxication*.

[...] Under the magic of the Dionysian, not only does the bond between man and man lock itself in place once more, but also nature itself, no matter how alienated, hostile, or subjugated, rejoices again in her festival of reconciliation with her prodigal son, man. [...] He feels himself a god; he himself now moves in as lofty and ecstatic a way as he saw the gods move in his dream. (*The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Johnson).

Hardy appears to illustrate this notion of the Dionysian in the description of the walk, during which the drunk laborers experience a profound sense of self-transcendence:

However terrestrial and lumpy their appearance just now to the mean unglamoured eye, to themselves the case was different. They followed the road with a sensation that they were soaring along in a supporting medium, possessed of original and profound thoughts, themselves and surrounding nature forming an organism of which all the parts harmoniously and joyously interpenetrated each other. They were as sublime as the moon and stars above them, and the moon and stars were as ardent as they (*Tess* 50).

The passage gives a vivid impression of an alcohol-heightened sense of imaginative connection to nature and oneness with the universe. The lyricism of Hardy's language implicitly celebrates the experience. The "terrestrial" and "lumpy" laborers have become, as Nietzsche put it, "a work of art: the artistic power of all of nature, to the highest rhapsodic satisfaction of the primordial unity, reveals itself here in the transports of intoxication." Immediately after this, however, Hardy once again undermines our sense

of the beauty of their self-abandon, by telling us that Tess does not share in this rapture because of her experiences of the practical consequences of drunkenness at home: she “had undergone such painful experiences of this kind in her father’s house that the discovery of their condition spoilt the pleasure she was beginning to feel in the moonlight journey. Yet she stuck to the party, for reasons above given” (53). Tess’s unhappy response to her companions’ drunkenness is understandable to the novel’s readers, since we have seen that all her troubles began with her father’s drinking and consequent incapacity to drive the family’s horse to market. Yet the quality of the language describing Tess’s feelings here, its clunkiness and banality in contrast to the poetic cadences and lyricism of the previous description of the laborers’ drunken pantheism, means that our sympathies may remain with the ecstatically intoxicated laborers rather than shifting to Tess. There are thus two voices at work in the passage. One voice dispassionately analyzes the drunken laborers and Tess’s response, and describes them in language that is as “terrestrial and lumpy” as the laborers appear to the detached observer. The other voice inhabits the lyrical, ecstatic sensory experience of the laborers. As in the descriptions of dancing in *The Return*, the aesthetic momentum of this scene comes from the “primitive” voice.

This juxtaposition of narrative beauty and amorality persists into the description of Tess’s rape, which is in a dreamlike sylvan landscape: “Darkness and silence ruled everywhere around. Above them rose the primeval yews and oaks of The Chase, in which there poised gentle roosting birds in their last nap; and about them stole the hopping rabbits and hares.” This peace and beauty is undercut not only by the rape itself but by the narrator’s biting irony:



But, might some say, where was Tess's guardian angel? where was the providence of her simple faith?

The narrator then digresses into seemingly gratuitous references to idolatrous worship in the Old Testament and to druidical rites, in the mode of comparative anthropology: "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." As Catherine Gallagher demonstrates, these references connect Tess's rape to ritual sacrifice.<sup>215</sup> "That other god" is Baal, with whom Hardy conflates the Christian god of Tess's "simple faith." The reference here is to Kings 1, to the competing sacrifices to Baal and Jehovah, intended to bring rain during a drought and fertilize the ground. (The sacrifice to Baal failed.) The previous sentences refer to "primeval oaks," which are referred to elsewhere in the novel as "druidical oaks," and are therefore also a site

---

<sup>215</sup> Catherine Gallagher, "Tess of the D'Urbervilles: Hardy's Anthropology of the Novel," in Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, ed. John Paul Riquelme (Boston & New York: Bedford Books, 1998). Many recent critical works on Tess of the D'Urbervilles allude to or assess the novel's response to J.G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890), focusing on this scene in particular. (See, for example, Gallagher's essay, and the monographs by Laird, Radford, and Zeitler). But while Hardy's notebooks show that he read Frazer while revising Tess for publication in 1891, the manuscripts of Tess reveal that most of the supposedly Frazerian motifs and allusions were already in place in Hardy's first draft of the novel—written in 1889, a year before the publication of Frazer's book (see Simon Gattrell, ed., *Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Facsimile of the Manuscript, with Related Materials*. New York: Garland Pub, 1986) and *Hardy the Creator: a Textual Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); and Laird, *The Shaping of Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.) The recent criticism examining Hardy's Frazerian motifs is useful, however, because it demonstrates the great extent to which the two works share motifs and thematic concerns. This overlap of themes and tropes is so striking that it would be inadequate to explain it by acknowledging that the two writers share a cultural milieu. Rather, I suggest, the places in which the two works converge seem to emerge from each writer bringing together the study of "primitive" myths and mental processes from Tyloorean anthropology with their own interests in rural folklore and in the aesthetic potential of the dark and violent side of myth. Establishing this is important because it allows us to fully appreciate Hardy's originality as a writer and his attunedness to contemporary theories of culture.

of primitive sacrifice. The novel's dramatic climax at Stonehenge, where Tess wakes from a sleep on the Stone of Sacrifice only to encounter the police, who take her to be tried and ultimately hung, makes explicit the analogy between Tess's experiences and primitive human sacrifice, inviting the reader to view her social punishment for deviation from sexual norms and her legal punishment for murder as analogous to Stone Age human sacrifice.

While the sexualized folk rituals and rural dancing in *The Return* and *Tess* implicitly celebrates the savage sexual underpinning of English folk culture, *Tess* implies a far harsher, more brutal and violent version of the primitive than had featured in *The Return*, of which women are the victims. In *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy revisits the motif of women as sacrificial victims of the social norms concerning sex and marriage, when Sue compares brides standing at the altar to sacrificial heifers. As the next chapter will show, *Jude* explores the ways in which "barbarous" ideas concerning marriage and sex survive in modernity and contribute to social oppression and suffering for both women and men.

## Chapter Six

### **“A Survival from the Custom of Capture and Purchase”: Anthropology and the “Marriage Question” in *Jude the Obscure***

Hardy’s friend, the folklorist Edward Clodd, apparently read *Jude the Obscure* (1895) as a fictional expression of anthropological theories of the evolution of marriage. Shortly after the publication of *Jude*, Hardy wrote the following in a letter to him:

What you say is pertinent and true of the modern views of marriage as a survival from the custom of capture and purchase, propped up by a theological superstition. The story of *Jude*, however, makes only an objective use of marriage and its superstitions as one, and only one, of the antagonistic forces in the tragedy.<sup>216</sup>

Hardy acknowledges the accuracy of Clodd’s dissection of modern marriage as barbarism’s legacy, and acknowledges its role in the novel’s “tragedy.”<sup>217</sup> Moreover, novel bears out Clodd’s reading of it as an investigation of marriage in anthropological

---

<sup>216</sup> 10 Nov 1895. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978-88), vol. II, pp. 92-3. The letter from Clodd that elicited this response is not available.

<sup>217</sup> The letter’s attempt to downplay “marriage and its superstitions” as “only one” factor in *Jude*’s tragedy was probably motivated by Hardy’s sense of embattlement and wish to distance the novel from criticisms of its subversive political stance on sex and marriage. As other critics have noted, Hardy wrote this letter at an especially defensive moment, on a day when he had been under attack both by reviewers and friends such as Edmund Gosse. On the same day, November 10, 1895 Hardy wrote two other long letters (to Gosse and Florence Henniker) arguing that *Jude* was not primarily about the marriage question, nor subversive of current mores regarding sex and marriage, nor in any way comparable to New Woman fiction. Earlier in 1895, before the publication of *Jude* and consequent critical storm, Hardy had been happy to align his novel with a notorious “purpose-novel,” Grant Allen’s *The Woman Who Did* (1894; *Letters*, Vol ii, pp.68-9).

language, since its protagonists discuss marriage in these very terms, as a “barbarous [...] superstition.”

The novel’s use of anthropological language to comment on marriage emerges from and contributes to a pervasive use of such language in 1880-90s debates over sexual reform that was conducted in the periodical press. The central voices in these debates—including Grant Allen, Mona Caird, Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis, Edmund Gosse, Karl Pearson, and John Addington Symonds—made arguments that relied heavily on anthropological, cultural-evolutionary ways of thinking about human sexuality. These social reformers marshaled value-laden anthropological interpretations of the history of marriage and sexuality in the service of whatever political ideal they were championing. The importance of anthropology to the discussion of sexual reform is indicated by the British popularity of *The History of Human Marriage* (1891), a scholarly work by the Finnish anthropologist Edward Westermarck, which itself made normative arguments about the future of civilized sexual relations. Hardy owned this book, and seems to have been responding to it in *Jude the Obscure*.

My recovery of *Jude*’s engagement with contemporary anthropological treatments of sex and marriage adds to our understanding of why the novel was received as such an alarming breach of the social fabric. Situating *Jude* in relation to the political use of anthropology by Hardy’s contemporaries, including Havelock Ellis and Mona Caird, reveals that the novel is even more radical in its sexual politics than generally believed. Moreover, the novel’s anthropological subtexts provide new evidence of Sue as a subversive figure, a female desiring subject, rather than a dramatization of female repression or a reinscription of domestic femininity, as some influential critics have

recently argued.<sup>218</sup> Hardy goes further than most of his contemporaries in critiquing not only Christian sexual morality but also writers critical of traditional sexual norms, including the optimistic appropriations of anthropology by late nineteenth-century writers for feminist ends. The novel offers a powerful critique of anthropology-based arguments put forward variously by Westermarck, feminist reformers, and the social purity movement, all of whom claimed that a newly-evolving male sexual altruism would resolve various contemporary problems concerning sex and marriage. The novel is all the more overtly connected to these anthropology-based sexual debates because the central characters Jude and Sue, as well as the narrator, are aware of themselves in anthropological terms, whereas in Hardy's previous novels, only the narrator has access to the anthropological perspective, never the characters. The earlier novels create a narrative aesthetic that calls on a nexus of sexuality and the primitive, but in *Jude* we see Sue aware of this aesthetic herself; in early novels, the narrative discourse celebrates "Pagan" sexuality, but in *Jude* Sue does this herself. In *Jude*, therefore, there is a layer of mediation overlaying the primitive aesthetic of Hardy's earlier fiction, unavoidably ironizing it and pointing to its limitations.

Hardy's use of anthropology in *Jude* is thus quite different than in his earlier novels, and perhaps this is why recent critics who provide compelling readings of anthropology in Hardy's Wessex fiction treat the last novel rather perfunctorily.<sup>219</sup> Compared to *Under the Greenwood Tree*, or *Return of the Native*, or *Tess*, *Jude* does not represent traditional "pagan" rural life at all. The social world of *Jude* is the obverse of

---

<sup>218</sup> See Penny Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), pp.140-50.

<sup>219</sup> See Andrew Radford, *Thomas Hardy and the Survivals of Time* and Zeitler, *Representations of Culture*.

the rural culture portrayed in Hardy's earlier novels, which knit characters into a community united by "legend, folklore, close inter-social relations."<sup>220</sup> The educated protagonists in *Jude*—Jude, Sue, Phillotson—are not merely cut off from the rural communities into which they were born, but also seem extraordinarily isolated by any standards, cut adrift from natural affinities of family, village, religious affiliation, and social class, with their partner or spouse as their only social support. In many of Hardy's early novels, characters participate in group rituals that are perpetuated through oral tradition—the remnants of England's primitive culture. Sue and Jude, on the other hand, participate only vicariously in primitive culture, through their reading. Nowhere in the novel do we see a thriving rural community; Marygreen, the village in which Jude grows up, is as depleted of folklore and barren of close inter-social ties as conurbations such as Aldbrickham.<sup>221</sup> The novel's implication that England is now an aggregation of rootless individuals—alienated from myth, custom, and community—is emphasized by the novel's allusions to a more communitarian life in the not-very-distant past. This counterpointing throws into greater prominence the tragic rupture between modern

---

<sup>220</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, "Preface," p. 5.

<sup>221</sup> The difference is also starkly evident in the representation of the dance in *Jude* in comparison to rural dances in Hardy's earlier fiction. In *Jude*, the sexual ecstasy of the rural dance has been downgraded to the dilapidated and diminished sensualism of a dance-hall that Jude visits: "He came to a public hall, where a promenade concert was in progress. Jude entered, and found the room full of shop youths and girls, soldiers, apprentices, boys of eleven smoking cigarettes, and light women of the more respectable and amateur class. He had tapped the real Christminster life. A band was playing, and the crowd walked about and jostled each other, and every now and then a man got upon a platform and sang a comic song. [...] The spirit of Sue seemed to hover round him and prevent his flirting and drinking with the frolicsome girls who made advances—wistful to gain a little joy." Christminster's urban dance is at once diminished in wildness and sensuous joy, and more dependent on the stimulation of cigarettes and alcohol. The final aside is sympathetic to the aspirations of the sexually adventurous girls, but their prospective joy is "little," a sharp contrast to the "enchantment" and "delirium" of the dance on Egdon Heath in *The Return*.

individualism and primitive community—the distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* theorized in late-Victorian anthropological literature.<sup>222</sup> But isolating the couples portrayed in *Jude* also suits Hardy's purposes remarkably well by allowing him to focus his investigation on the history of love and marriage.

Moreover, *Jude* forsakes the anthropological field sites of rural Wessex for what many readers have viewed as the depleted, semi-urbanized landscapes of Berkshire and Oxfordshire, from which Wessex's characteristic "prehistoric monuments, [...] ancient buildings, [...] mossed and immemorial woodlands" have been effaced.<sup>223</sup> This is, of course, a conscious move on Hardy's part. In a famous passage in the novel's opening pages, his narrator is at pains to tell us that in the landscape that surrounds Jude, the ploughed fields have had all visible traces of ancient tradition effaced from them. Like corduroy, they give the impression of recent manufacture in the industrial era: "The fresh harrow-lines seemed to stretch like the channellings in a piece of new corduroy [...] depriving it of all history beyond that of the few recent months" (*Jude* 13). Here, it appears that the visible aesthetic beauty given to the landscape by history and tradition, celebrated in Hardy's earlier fiction, has been lost. The novel asserts, however, that the

---

222 These terms originated in Ferdinand Tönnies' 1887 work *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, but the dichotomy between the primitive communality of village life and the modern individualism of industrialized societies had been foregrounded in a number of British anthropological texts, such as Henry Sumner Maine's *Village Communities in the East and West* (1871).

223 Edmund Gosse, review of *Jude the Obscure*, *Cosmopolis* (January, 1896). Reprinted in *Jude the Obscure*, ed. Norman Page (Norton: New York and London, 1999), pp. 383-88. More recently, Andrew Radford argues that unlike Hardy's previous Wessex novels, *Jude* does not have a mythic structure, nor a foundation of "primitive" survivals, but instead features Christianity itself as a "survival" (*Thomas Hardy and the Survivals of Time*).

landscape retains invisible echoes of the past, intangible traces of past love and desire available only to the novel's omniscient narrator:

to every clod and stone there really attached associations enough and to spare—[...] Love-matches that had populated the adjoining hamlet had been made up there between reaping and carrying. Under the hedge which divided the field from a distant plantation girls had given themselves to lovers who would not turn their heads to look at them by the next harvest; and in that ancient cornfield many a man had made love-promises to a woman at whose voice he had trembled by the next seed-time after fulfilling them in the church adjoining (13-14).

While the bleak ploughed fields seem to Jude to lack a past and to lack aesthetic merit, Hardy's narrator tells us otherwise: as in his previous novels, every bit of ground is imbued with past associations. And, as in earlier novels, in this passage Hardy associates a kind of timeless past, a history comprised of cyclical seasons rather than evolutionary progress, with sexual love and reproduction. He draws attention to the timeless nature of sexual betrayal and marital unhappiness as well as love. The visual beauty of the landscape has been lost, but the primitive force of human sexuality remains within the modern world as a source of pleasure and pain. The passage is a self-conscious declaration that while the novel lacks Gosse's "mossed and immemorial woodlands," it inscribes prehistory invisibly, in the inheritance of human sexual desire. This signals something important about how *Jude* will operate: it will not be a Hardy novel about rural Paganism or folk community, but it is, rather, a novel about excavating the long history of human sexuality and its legacy in modern bodies and minds.



In this respect, then, the novel continues to use anthropology in the same way as many of Hardy's other novels from *The Return* onwards: to suggest that modern, educated humans retain aspects of "primitive" psychology (for example, Grace Melbury in *The Woodlanders* is a mix of "modern nerves and primitive emotions") or pass through earlier cultural stages in their personal development (for example, Tess's schooling means that she is 200 years ahead of her mother in cultural-evolutionary terms). *Jude*, too, considers the *Bildung* of its central characters as analogous to cultural evolution. It addresses the formation of modern selfhood, understood as an "arena for cultural conflict between civilization and the primitive past."<sup>224</sup>

In addition to Clodd, other contemporary readers registered that *Jude* considers sex and marriage in evolutionary and anthropological terms. It is of course well known that many of Hardy's reviewers were scandalized by the novel; as I will show, they were particularly dismayed by the novel's use of anthropological ideas in relation to marriage and sex. Recovering this context for the novel makes clear that Sue was received by contemporary readers as an avatar of a particular kind of 1890s feminism, one that drew on evolutionary thinking to espouse sexually and socially radical ideas.

Hardy's attribution of an evolutionary view of marriage to protagonists with a lower class origin particularly antagonized R.Y. Tyrrell, who referred dismissively to both Hardy and *Jude* as undereducated would-be Herbert Spencers, and to Sue as a vulgarized George Eliot "after she came under the blighting influence of science."<sup>225</sup> The

---

224 Daniel Bivona, describing "Jude's self-division" in *Desire and Contradiction: Imperial Visions and Domestic Debates in Victorian Literature* (Manchester University Press, 1990), pp. 108-9.

225 R.Y. Tyrrell, review of *Jude the Obscure*, *The Fortnightly Review*. Reprinted in R.G. Cox, *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 297. Tyrrell,

comparison of Hardy and Jude with Herbert Spencer associates them with evolutionism in sociology and anthropology, as well as with a scandalous religious agnosticism, while comparing Sue to a George Eliot alludes at a stroke to evolutionism, freethinking, and female sexual impropriety. Moreover, a number of the novel's reviewers drew hostile attention to the ways in which *Jude* appears to entertain some of the more disquieting conjectures of evolutionary anthropology about "primitive life," such as "communism in women" and "matriarchy." In refuting what he saw as Hardy's primitivist utopianism, Tyrrell portentously asserts that,

The [very ancient Greeks] thoroughly investigated the whole theory of communism in woman as well as in property. They faced the abolition of the family as a factor in society, and the most practical of them saw that such a revolution would undermine two of the most potent forces of civilization, the sense of proprietorship and the feeling of natural affection.

Tyrrell suggests that "communism in women" is an ancient idea, repudiated by the first supposedly genuine civilization, the Greeks. It seems evident that a version of stage theory underlies Tyrrell's claims here, since he implies that "the sense of proprietorship" afforded by living in nuclear families is an improvement over "communism in women." The priority Tyrrell accords the "sense of proprietorship" as a foundation for civilization reflects an axiom deeply embedded in Victorian anthropology: the supposed dependency of the development of domestic affection upon an earlier stage in which men owned

---

then Regius Professor of Greek at Trinity College, Dublin, ascribed Jude's class-transgressing *hubris* to Hardy as well, taking Hardy to task over ignorance of classical languages and English diction (Cox, 297). Hardy's reviewers would often collapse distinctions between his semi-educated rural characters and his narrative voice by describing his writing style and aesthetic achievement as "primitive."

women. Tyrrell thinks to dismiss Hardy's advocacy of sexual freedom by implying his classical ignorance, but instead Tyrrell reproduces a truism of anthropological thinking—that the natural “sense of proprietorship” is a beneficial force of civilization that is accommodated by marriage—that Hardy much more knowingly writes against in *Jude*. For example, he has Sue refer to the fact that the marriage ceremony reflects a transfer of ownership when the bride is given away “like a she-ass or she-goat.”

Hardy was not unique in projecting forms of putatively “primitive” social organization, such as “communism in women,” into a better future rather than leaving them moribund in the primitive past or among distant and potentially civilizable “savages.” Such ideas were put forward by a vocal radical minority, and created much anxiety among politically mainstream and conservative writers. Anthropological discourse was useful to various kinds of sexual and social reformers in the 1890s because it offered both data and a historical trajectory upon which to base normative arguments about sexual behavior. Beginning in the 1860s, anthropology had newly historicized sexuality, charting the immense distance traveled by the civilized from primitive sexual man. Such arguments tended to reinscribe the values of Victorian domestic ideology at the expense of the supposed primitive. The 1880s and 90s, however, saw anthropological evidence being explicitly recruited to feminist and radical causes in debates over sexual mores and marriage. By the 1890s, ethnographic data concerning life in “primitive” societies was being used by progressive sexual reformers like Havelock Ellis and feminists like Mona Caird to argue that civilized sexual mores were not necessarily natural or good. The interest in connecting anthropology to current debates over sexual mores crystallized in Westermarck's *History of Human Marriage* (1890), an influential

work of anthropology that explicitly argued that “primitive” sexuality might be more persistent, more resistant to deliberate reform, and a more positive moral force than mid-Victorian sexual ideology had claimed. Subversively, Westermarck argued that the primitive or natural form of sexual relationship was monogamous, and that “vices” such as prostitution were the result of “civilization.” The “savage” sensuality that had earlier been attributed only to socio-cultural Others might now be championed as a part of universal human nature, while bourgeois sexual mores were increasingly seen as an unwholesome suppression of a more “natural” human relationship to sexuality.<sup>226</sup> The primitive came to be valued as a version of the natural—in opposition to the Lubbock-McLennan construction of the primitive as negative, violent, and oppressive to women—and in this guise, the primitive also started to serve as a source of positive data for feminist arguments. In her essay “Marriage,” for example, Mona Caird argues that “An increasing body of evidence points to the original organization of the family through the mother, and not through the father [...] showing that something other than mere force was the director of the earliest human relations” (694).<sup>227</sup> In 1880s London, at the Men’s and Women’s club, founded by Karl Pearson to discuss “all matters...connected with the mutual position and relation of men and women,” Kate Mills presented a paper that asserted that like the “lower” animals, the “easy parturition”...of “savage” women was due to their living by the “natural law” of sexual abstinence

---

<sup>226</sup> In *Culture and Anomie*, Christopher Herbert argues that McLennan’s anthropology inaugurated this hypothesis, in viewing primitive life not as an arena in which desires are to have free reign (“primitive promiscuity”), but as fettered and hampered by superstitious custom, in contrast with civilization, which is all the time moving towards greater sexual freedom. It is, however, a little anachronistic to date this kind of thinking back to McLennan and Lubbock in the 1860s since both writers emphasize that savagery is often promiscuous, and that civilization regulates sexuality.

<sup>227</sup> Mona Caird, “Marriage,” *Westminster Review* 130 (August 1888).

during pregnancy. The “civilized” man, in breaking this law, had brought painful childbirth and menstruation upon their women... The pain, combined with the social responsibilities of motherhood and the cultural denial of female sexuality, led to a reduction in women’s sexual desire.<sup>228</sup>

According to Mills, both the excesses of male desire, and the repression of female sexuality, were contrary to “natural laws” which could be inferred from observing “primitive” societies. In this view, the primitive allows both a more egalitarian and more natural expression of human sexuality; whereas in civilization, men have become *more* beastly at the expense of women.

Complicating matters, some writers, including Westermarck, began to urge that civilization was moving towards greater, and more “natural” sexual freedom.

Westermarck used anthropological data to show that human marriage was originally monogamous, that monogamy was more reflective of human “nature,” and that marriage only later became unhealthily fettered and cluttered with superstitions during an intermediate state to which Westermarck refers as “barbarism.” Havelock Ellis seems to have a similar idea in mind in writing his review of *Jude*, in which he argues that civilization is capable of releasing humans’ “naturally” refined sexual feeling from the “overlay” of “bucolic” life. *Jude the Obscure*’s consideration of modern marriage as a “barbarous” institution engages with Westermarck’s thinking, as I will discuss below.

---

<sup>228</sup> Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, p. 86. The minutes of the club offer a rare nineteenth-century example of the views of highly educated, fairly radical women discussing sexual topics with men. The club’s female members included Annie Besant, Elizabeth Blackwell, Mona Caird and Olive Schreiner. Bland documents the anger and frustration expressed privately by women attendees when their opinions were only sought on the basis of their personal experience as women, rather than their general knowledge, and their contributions were so often dismissed by the male club members on “scientific” grounds (Bland, “Marriage Laid Bare”).

At least two other ways of using anthropology to think about marriage were championed by women from roughly feminist perspectives. Women involved in social purity campaigns, such as Ellice Hopkins, argued for women's centrality to cultural evolutionary progress because of their ability to control and restrain the primitive forces of male sexuality.<sup>229</sup> This view was also propounded by Westermarck, whose *History of Human Marriage* concludes with the rousing sentence, "The history of human marriage is the history of a relation in which women have been gradually triumphing over the passions, the prejudices, and the selfish interests of men" (549-50). This assertion, of course, echoes traditional views of women's role as society's moral arbiters. The converse of this position was taken by Havelock Ellis in his review of *Jude*, in which he asserts that women are the more primitive sex, and implicitly celebrates women's "primitive" traits: according to Ellis, every woman "contains...the wild beast element. She is a tamed animal that sometimes returns to her natural instinct" (Cox 310). Both Hopkins's position and Ellis's reflect reevaluations of mid-century views of male and female "primitive" sexuality—male sexuality was becoming more negatively viewed, female sexuality less so.

Anthropological theory also fuelled Mona Caird's powerful deconstruction of the self-serving use of the terms "nature" and "instinct" in debates over marriage.<sup>230</sup> Drawing on a wide range of material from influential anthropologists, including Lubbock, McLennan, Tylor, and Maine, she argued that

---

<sup>229</sup> Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*, p. 91.

<sup>230</sup> Caird collected her essays on the history and anthropology of marriage into a book, *The Morality of Marriage* (1897).

all history proves that society is in a state of perpetual motion, and that there is, perhaps, no set of ideas so fundamental and sacred that humans beings have not somewhere, at some period of the world, lived in direct contradiction to them. We dare not trust even what we call instinct as a fixed quantity. There is, apparently, not one which the conditions of existence, the force of superstition, cannot overwhelm ("Marriage," 692).

Caird's essay makes manifest that the vast diversity of cultural behaviors concerning such fundamentals as religion, marriage, and the family, indicates the power of culture to override sexual "nature," and to create beliefs and feelings so strong that they appear to *be* nature (693). But while Caird rejects the category of the natural to describe human social behavior, she concedes the power of other anthropological interpretive categories, for instance, when she asserts that many of "our own ideas" that seem to be natural are in fact "merely [...] very barbarous survivals." Thus when Hardy frames modern marriage as a failure of "civilization" in his contribution to a forum on sexual education published in *The New Review* in 1894, he was consciously making use of a widespread strategy among periodical contributors of referring to the historical anthropology of sex and marriage in order to make political arguments.<sup>231</sup>

Such arguments make a significant contribution to the impassioned reviews of *Jude*. The novel's reviewers recognized it as a counter in a larger debate over sexual mores, which pitted the recently-coined authority of evolutionary science against the traditional authority of conservative Anglican belief. As John Goode remarks, the novel's

---

<sup>231</sup> Thomas Hardy, "The Tree of Knowledge," *The New Review*, Vol. 10 (June 1894), p. 681. The selection of antagonistic contributors, including Sarah Grand on the side of sexual reform and Eliza Lynn Linton as a voice of social conservatism, was clearly intended to be provocative.

“reviewers—Gosse, Ellis, Wells, Hannigan, Le Gallienne—wrote about it with a passionate commitment which effectively embraces the text more as a cause than as an object of professional judgment.”<sup>232</sup> The critics who leapt to Hardy’s defense represented a specific, radical subset of the reviewing community, including scientific naturalists such Ellis, who wished at once to advocate for greater sexual freedom based on a scientifically described human nature, while distancing this cause from charges of immorality. Both sides in this debate focused on the distinction between humans and animals: in general, conservatives attempted to maintain the separation, while evolutionists wanted to close the gap in order to make claims that certain aspects of human desire and behavior were “natural.” When making these claims, both sides found anthropological data to provide crucial evidence of how humans behaved in their “primitive” or natural state.

Again, the reviews of *Jude* offer evidence of the pervasive, even casual, use of anthropology-derived ideas about “primitive” humans in staking out moral or political turf in debates about sexual norms. For example, Margaret Oliphant’s famously

---

<sup>232</sup> Goode adds, “Nor can Hardy have had any other intention (despite the disingenuous protests of aesthetic disinterestedness) than to make an intervention in the highly controversial issues of the day, most notably that of marriage.” (“Hardy’s Fist,” in *Jude the Obscure*, ed. Penny Boumelha, New Casebooks Series, St. Martin’s Press: New York, NY 2000.) A significant aspect both of the novel’s offensiveness, and of its political capital for scientific progressives such as Ellis, was the fact that it came from the pen of an author whom even the novel’s detractors were accustomed to hail as the “greatest living novelist.” The publication of the novel was therefore either a highly damaging knife-thrust at the fabric of society, or a valuable asset in the campaign for social and sexual reform, depending on your point of view. The high ideological stakes of these debates also reflect “a deep belief that the roots of social stability lay in individual and public morality...Sexual behavior had in the course of the [nineteenth] century become a symbol of much wider social features” (Weeks, 92-3). The 1880s saw an increasing number of laws passed that represented state attempts to control both public and private sexual morality—for example, making homosexuality a crime, even in private, with the Criminal Law Amendment, 1887 (Weeks 90-91).



aggressive review of *Jude*, which attacks Hardy as a leading light in the “anti-marriage league,” argues that *Jude* promotes an “animal,” rather than a human, openness about sex. Oliphant labels the sexually forward Arabella a “human pig,”<sup>233</sup> and thus asserts that Hardy’s novel transgresses an absolute distinction between human and animal nature in the arena of sexuality. In making this argument, Oliphant asserts that even among “savages,” sexuality is handled with modesty and circumspection, and that such sexual reticence is a “natural instinct” among all humans, and that Hardy unnaturally subverts this instinct in *Jude*. She deplores the fact that *Jude* selects “as the most important thing in existence, one small [...] fact of life, which natural instinct has agreed, even among savages, to keep in the background, and which among all peoples who have ceased to be savage is veiled over.” She suggests that in dwelling on sexuality Hardy’s novels and characters fail to qualify even for the savage level of humanness.

The novel’s defenders, too, had recourse to terminology from both anthropological and Darwinian evolutionary discourses.<sup>234</sup> According to Havelock Ellis, the “sexual sensibility” portrayed in the novel is an “instinct of nature” that can be better expressed in “civilization,” and that is hidden or repressed when “overlaid by rough and

---

<sup>233</sup> She also contrasts Sue’s “indecent” reticence, which, by denying Jude’s gratification keeps the notion of sex constantly in play, with the kind of heroine who subdues “the Savage” with a smile (“The Anti-Marriage League,” 142). Her choice of modifiers for a novel that she acknowledges is the work of a great writer is extraordinary: “unsavory,” “sickening,” “unclean,” “disgusting,” “filth,” “garbage,” “infamy,” “unutterable foulness,” a “perfection of filthiness.” She damns it as the most “coarsely indecent” work of serious fiction she has read.

<sup>234</sup> For D.F. Hannigan in the *Westminster Review*, sexual liberalism was only impure if you looked at it in the wrong way—and that wrong way was to view it with the eyes of a “Caliban”:

The relations between Sue and her cousin will necessarily appear impure to those who see nothing but uncleanness in the relations of a married man and a woman who is not his wife. But Mr. Hardy is not to blame for the brutishness of his readers’ minds any more than Miranda...is to blame for Caliban’s beastly thoughts about her (Cox 273).

bucolic conditions of life.” In other words, for Ellis, human instincts are best accommodated by the sexual liberalism of civilization. He implies, contra Oliphant, that sexual reticence in primitive society is simply a masking of natural instinct, rather than an expression of it.<sup>235</sup> Indeed, throughout his review, Ellis stages an ardent defense of *Jude*’s representation of liberated sexual passion as a benefit offered by civilized marriage that had hitherto been suppressed by “primitive” or traditional life, apparently ignoring the novel’s pointed suggestions that civilized marriage in fact consists of “barbarous” superstitions that fetter sexual desire.

### **Sue’s Evolutionism**

When Sue calls civilization “barbarous” with respect to marriage, therefore, she becomes a participant in the *fin de siècle* trend of critiquing marriage in anthropological terms. This is a departure from Hardy’s previous novels, in that *Jude* represents autoethnography: the novel’s main characters interpret themselves through an anthropological lens. It is also the first of Hardy’s novels in which scientific ideas are propounded by a female protagonist. In the extensive dialogues between Sue and Jude over marriage and other social questions, Sue draws on terms from theories of cultural

---

<sup>235</sup> Ellis appears to address Oliphant’s review directly, without naming her, by turning her comparisons of the novel’s humans to pigs against her and claiming that the novel’s supposed indecency was perceived only by those who brought to their reading “a farm-yard view of marriage,” which sees marriage as analogous to putting together a cock and hen to breed, without reference to sexual or intellectual compatibility. He notes ironically that for such readers, “your wholesome-minded novelist knows that the life of a pure-natured English-woman after marriage is, as Taine said, mainly that of a very broody hen, a series of merely physiological processes with which he, as a novelist, has no further concern.” (*Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, ed. R.G. Cox (London: Routledge, 1995), xxxiii, pp. 311, 315.)

evolution and other anthropological concepts. The novel thus closes the gap between anthropological observer and object, making Sue and Jude autoethnographic theorists of their own situation. For example, Sue echoes stage theorists like Comte and anthropologists like Tylor when she relegates theology to an earlier stage as an outdated “superstition,” and echoes anthropological theorists of marriage when she reasons that marriage originated not in sacred belief but in practical considerations, so that underlying the “theological superstition” of marriage as a sacrament, marriage is in fact “a material convenience in householding, rating, and taxing, and the inheritance of land and money by children, making it necessary that the male parent should be known” (166). In the quotation with which this chapter began, Sue laments the social restrictions on her freedom to move from marriage with Phillotson to cohabitation with Jude, and casts the problem in terms of nature and culture, civilization and barbarism, in which contemporary society plays the role of barbarian counterpart to a more civilized, liberal future:

‘It is none of the natural tragedies of love that’s love’s usual tragedy in civilized life, but a tragedy artificially manufactured [...] When people of a later age look back upon the barbarous customs and superstitions of the times that we have the unhappiness to live in, what *will* they say!’ (*Jude* 170).

Sue’s use of the cultural-evolutionary term “barbarous” to refer to phenomena firmly embedded within “civilization” disrupts the hierarchical arrangement of the primitive-modern, savagery-civilization scale on which the “civilized” or modern self-image of Hardy’s readers reposed. Sue’s diagnosis of modern society as “barbarous” in regard to

marriage is in several respects vindicated by the novel as a whole, as is Sue's sense that her "tragedy" with Jude takes place because they have developed in advance of their environment. For example, she articulates the idea that their choice to reject marriage is merely the advance guard in a society-wide evolution: "Everybody is getting to feel as we do. We are a little beforehand, that's all. In fifty, a hundred, years the descendants of these two [their children] will act and feel worse than we." The novel ironizes Sue's implication, here and elsewhere, that she and Jude can entirely evolve beyond "barbarism" or "savagery," when she reverts to "savage superstition" after her children die. However, this reversion does not undermine Sue's overall view of the sexual self as trapped within social and biological evolution—for instance, she is "possessed with the thought" that her sexual union with Jude might produce a "terrible intensification of unfitness—two bitters in one dish," an explicitly Darwinian way of thinking about one's sexual life and heredity—although at times both she and the narrator indulge in a fantasy of regaining a kind of primitive freedom.<sup>236</sup>

Furthermore, in various ways, Hardy seems to make Sue a mouthpiece for his own views concerning the evolution of culture and of marriage, views that he himself articulated in virtually identical language at various points during his life from the 1870s through the 1900s.<sup>237</sup> While many scholars have noted aspects of the histories of Hardy's male protagonists that are based on his own early life, it is rarely noted how much he drew on his own history in portraying Sue. When Sue outs civilized marriage as a

---

<sup>236</sup> The reviewer who called Sue a George Eliot to Jude's Herbert Spencer perhaps intended to register the evolutionary-scientific aspects of Sue's beliefs.

<sup>237</sup> My argument that Hardy invests Sue with his own views complicates the claim made by some recent critics that while the novel endorses Jude's point of view by aligning it closely with the narrator's, Sue is objectified and her views undermined.

barbarous custom, her statement represents a view Hardy himself expressed elsewhere, that present-day “civilization” is barbarous, implying that it is at an interim, imperfect and in many ways cruel and violent stage of cultural development. For example, in 1895 Hardy wrote on the pig-killing scene in *Jude*, which had been so much decried in reviews: “I expected...it might serve a humane end in showing people the cruelty that goes on unheeded under the barbarous *régime* we call civilization.”<sup>238</sup> Later in the novel, Hardy has Sue articulate a bleak evolutionary position that echoes statements of his own made during the 1870s, when she reflects that “there seemed never to have been contemplated such a development of emotional perceptiveness among creatures subject to those conditions as that reached by thinking and educated humanity.” In other words, Sue suggests that human emotions have evolved so that they are out of step with the environment in which humans live. Her use of the term “development,” a synonym for evolution (as in the widely-used phrase, “the development hypothesis”) signals that hers is a specifically evolutionary way of thinking. The passage above is often mistakenly attributed to *Jude*’s narrator (for example by Zeitler 133), perhaps because it seems to align closely with both the spirit of the novel and with Hardy’s expressed belief. Indeed, Sue’s statement echoes Hardy’s own more extravagant claim that humans are “too extremely developed,” made in a diary entry during his illness in 1878:

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 [...] It may be questioned if Nature, or what we call Nature, so far back as when she crossed the line from invertebrates to

---

<sup>238</sup> Letter to Gosse, 10 Nov, 1895.

vertebrates, did not exceed her mission. This planet does not supply the materials for happiness to higher existences.

In this extraordinary statement, Hardy suggests that the capacity for happiness was lost not with “those conditions [...] reached by thinking and educated humanity,” but with the development of the more sophisticated nervous system of vertebrates.<sup>239</sup>

Sue’s rationalist intellectual views are also implicitly endorsed by *Jude*’s narrator, for instance, on the several occasions when her words are quite strikingly echoed by the narrator—they both, for example, quote in passing Gibbon’s ironic reflections on the failures of sexual asceticism among the early Christians from chapter 15 of *The Decline and Fall*.<sup>240</sup> Hardy treats Sue’s intellectual aspirations with far more sympathy than those of his educated male protagonists, such as Angel Clare. The novel’s narrator encourages readers to respect Sue’s intellectual attainments, for example stating unironically that “her intellect scintillated like a star.” Whereas *Tess*’s narrator makes derogatory allusions to the fact that Angel’s views are commonplace and derivative of Huxley or Voltaire, Sue’s expressions of Comtean or Huxleyan sentiments are not invalidated in this way. It is additionally remarkable that, whereas in Hardy’s previous fiction, the “advanced,”

---

239 Sue’s implication that thought and education undermine the possibility of human happiness also echo the sentiment of Hardy’s assertion about cultural evolution, published in “The Dorsetshire Laborer” (1873), that traditional rural life will harbor the last vestiges of human happiness, made possible by the absence of that knowledge of “the conditions of existence” enforced by civilized life.

240 The narrator invokes chapter 15 of *Decline and Fall* to ironize Jude’s naïve belief that living near Sue might help strengthen his resolve not to love her: “in the laconic words of the historian, ‘insulted nature sometimes vindicates her rights’ in such circumstances.” (*Jude* 154). Sue later writes to Phillotson, quoting the same chapter, that “no poor woman has ever wished more than I that Eve had not fallen, so that (as the primitive Christians believed) some harmless mode of vegetation might have peopled Paradise. But I won’t trifle!” (178). The same chapter from Gibbon also appears in the novel when Sue reads to herself from it in her bedroom in front of her newly-purchased statues of Venus and Apollo.

positivist characters (Clym Yeobright, Henry Knight, and Angel Clare) were all male, in *Jude* Hardy makes his avatar of modern scientific rationalism a woman, who educates her male lover, Jude, in the ways of free-thinking.

While Hardy endows Sue with a presciently 1890s mode of viewing civilized sexual mores as “barbarous,” in other respects he fixes Sue in a specifically 1860s intellectual context (the decade during which the novel seems to be set), and in doing so, he draws on his own intellectual experiences of the 1860s.<sup>241</sup> Sue alludes to Mill, Humboldt, and, less directly, to Comte, all of whom Hardy was himself reading in the 1860s.<sup>242</sup> She refers to Jude’s religious development in terms of “stages” and uses a key term of Comte’s theory of the stages of religious development—“fetishism.” According to Comte’s three-stage theory, the most primitive was the “theological” stage (encompassing fetishism, polytheism, monotheism), and the most advanced was the “positive” or scientific stage.<sup>243</sup> Sue thus relegates civilized religion, like civilized

---

<sup>241</sup> The books to which Sue and Jude allude are all published before 1868.

<sup>242</sup> See Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: A Biography* (Oxford: OUP, 1982), p. 98. Hardy claimed that by 1865, he knew *On Liberty* “almost by heart” (*Life*, p.153), a knowledge that he confers upon Sue, who confutes Phillotson with a perfectly-remembered quotation that Hardy emphatically underlined in his own copy of *On Liberty*: “She or he, ‘who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation.’ J.S. Mill’s words, those are” (*Jude* 177. See also Hardy’s annotated copy of *On Liberty* (1867), Dorset County Museum). Sue’s relationship with an Oxford undergraduate who lent her books and educated her in free thought echoes important aspects of Hardy’s friendship with Horace Moule, who introduced Hardy to evolutionary science and Comtean positivism and in 1865 gave Hardy Comte’s *A General View of Positivism*.

<sup>243</sup> Into the 1890s, the anthropology of religion continued to make explanatory use of a Comte-esque sequence of stages, for example Tylor’s notion that all religion arises from animism and will be superseded by science, and Frazer’s trilogy of magic succeeded by religion and then science. (Comte, *A General View of Positivism*; E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 2; Frazer, *The Golden Bough*.) Hardy himself continued to use Comte’s terms in *The Return of the Native* (1878), in which Comte’s terms feature significantly—alongside echoes of later concepts such as Tylor’s “survivals”—in the narrative

marriage, to an unenlightened state of culture when she likens Christminster's Tractarian Christianity to "fetishism": "'[Christminster] is an ignorant place [...] full of fetishists and ghost-seers!'" (120).<sup>244</sup> She also appears to use stage theory to make light of Jude's religious beliefs when she remarks to Jude, "'You are in the Tractarian stage just now, are you not? [...] Let me see—when was I there? In the year eighteen hundred and—'" (*Jude* 120-121). Her application of "stage theory" to Jude invokes the Comtean and Spencerian idea that in her or his psychological development, the individual recapitulates the intellectual evolution of the human race.

*Jude's* narrative discourse appears to endorse this kind of social-evolutionary view of individual development by endowing Jude with a sequence of beliefs that correspond to Comte's stages. As a young child, Jude is primitively superstitious, running home through the dark in terror of folkloric monsters such as Herne the Hunter (*Jude* 19). As a teenager, he finds himself "under the sway of a polytheistic fancy that he would never have thought of humouring in broad daylight," when he falls to his knees and salutes the moon as a goddess in the words of Horace's "Carmen Saeculare" (29). Jude himself decides that this "curious superstition" is "acquired" rather than "innate," and has "come of reading heathen works," but the narrative suggests it is rather Jude's pagan susceptibilities that are "innate" and more healthy than his assiduously-developed Christianity. Much later in the novel, Jude has reached what Comte might have described

---

discourse. Hardy also refers explicitly to Comte's terms much later in his life, in the preface to *Late Poems and Earlier*. See Hillary Tiefer, "Clym Yeobright: Hardy's Comtean Hero," *Thomas Hardy Journal* 16, no. 2 (2000 May): p. 43-53.

<sup>244</sup> Sue's description of Oxford Tractarianism as a form of savage religion, "fetishism," is comparable to George Eliot's argument that Evangelicalism is analogous to barbarous religions (in her essay, "Evangelical Teaching: Dr. Cumming," *Westminster Review*, 1855).



as the “positive” stage: “hardly a shred of the beliefs with which he had first gone up to Christminster now remain[ed] with him. He was mentally approaching the position Sue had occupied when he first met her” (244). Comte’s “positive” or scientific stage is the stage at which one comes to recognize science, including Comte’s cultural evolutionism, as the truth. This is the position Sue initially occupies, but the novel also shows such mental “progress” in reverse, when Sue becomes, in her own words, “as superstitious as a savage.” Sue’s suffering makes her a fetishist who imputes a vindictive agency to the universe, renouncing her previous evolutionist position.

Sue’s rejection of Christminster’s “fetishism” is further complicated by the fact that “fetishism” and polytheism are represented in the novel as sources of aesthetic pleasure. For example, Hardy creates a scene of great beauty and power when Jude salutes Diana as the moon-goddess.<sup>245</sup> “Fetishism” has positive connotations elsewhere in Hardy’s writing,<sup>246</sup> since he records in a notebook Comte’s assertion that the “fetishistic spirit” was superior to both the theological and scientific in “spontaneity” and poetic “truth,” a doctrine with which striking examples in Hardy’s fiction suggest that he concurred—for example, the celebration of the “fetishistic spirit” in *The Return*.<sup>247</sup> In rejecting fetishism, therefore, Sue is not only rejecting superstition in favor of rationalism

---

<sup>245</sup> Barbara Hardy offers a wonderful explication of this moment. She calls the reference to Horace, “allusion at its best, a modern novelist’s engagement with a classical poet, a dialogue crossing cultures and centuries, a participation in ritual” (*Thomas Hardy Reappraised* 76). “In this scene...Hardy opens his imagination, and ours, to ritual and its path to ecstasy” (72).

<sup>246</sup> The opening scene of *The Return* celebrates the “fetishistic spirit,” as does this passage in *Tess*: “The sun, on account of the mist, had a curious sentient, personal look, demanding the masculine pronoun for its adequate expression. His present aspect [...] explained the old-time heliolatries in a moment. One could feel that a saner religion had never prevailed under the sky.”

<sup>247</sup> Comte, *Social Dynamics* (London, 1876), 68. Hardy records this passage in his *Literary Notebooks*, ed. Bjork, vol. 1, p.324.

but also rejecting the aesthetic “spontaneity” and “truth” of fetishism. However, Sue at one point seems to embrace a form of “fetishism” precisely because of its aesthetic potential, when she makes a self-consciously aesthetic use of pagan statues in her “worship” of clay models of a naked Venus and Apollo.

If Hardy endows Sue with his narrator’s (and his own) evolutionary viewpoint and understanding of stage theory, to what extent does he also give Sue his own sense of the aesthetic richness of the primitive? The novel makes clear that Sue is in some respects a neo-Pagan. She refers to “Greek joyousness” and buys “large and naked” statues of Venus and Apollo to decorate her lodgings. Some readers, such as Andrew Radford, have argued that the novel portrays this tendency of Sue’s as “shallow diletantism,” an aspect of her being an “urban miss” (as Jude calls her), who as has lost touch with the primitive but plays at connecting to it. However, in the scene in which Sue subversively “worships” her statues, Hardy suggests that Sue’s actions are not shallow, but rather, an ambivalent mixture of modern, neo-Pagan aestheticism and a genuine awe that is akin to Jude’s religious awe at the beauty of the moon whom he worships as Diana.

Sue buys the statues impulsively from a roadside seller, is initially uncertain what she will do with them, and chooses a means to enjoy them after some thought. She arranges them in her room in a way that seems to deliberately mock Christian ritual, between two candles, on either side of “a Calvary print” (placed there by her landlady, Miss Fontover), and begins to read to herself in front of them from a selection of deliberately iconoclastic reading matter: first Gibbon’s chapter on emperor Julian’s conversion to Paganism, then a poem that is familiar to her, Swinburne’s “Hymn to

Proserpine,” which is about the overthrow of Paganism by Christianity. The lines quoted in *Jude* refer to the triumphs of Christianity as a loss of visual beauty:

Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean:

The world has grown grey from thy breath!

Sue’s actions here are less impulsive than Jude’s moon-worship, and are not in any conventional sense religious. But the novel suggests that her acts of irreverent reverence disquiet her, since she has difficulty sleeping afterwards, which the novel tells us is unusual:

She was of an age which usually sleeps soundly, yet to-night she kept waking up, and every time she opened her eyes there was enough diffused light from the street to show her the white plaster figures, standing on the chest of drawers in odd contrast to their environment of text and martyr, and the Gothic-framed Crucifix-picture that was only discernible now as a Latin cross, the figure thereon being obscured by the shades.

In this scene, as in many others, the narrator describes Sue from the outside, and we have no access to her thoughts, but the scene offers us some clues as to her motives for creating this quasi-religious tableau. We can infer that Sue’s “ritual” is not sincere heathen worship, since it involves reading Gibbon’s dismissive commentary describing Pagan worship as a “superstition.” However, the scene does not at all suggest that Sue’s ambiguous behavior is merely insincere “dilettantism.” Her actions are subversive of the Christian iconography that she produces to make her living in Miss Fontover’s shop, but the tableau also functions as an insightful symbolic representation of the cultural change described by both Gibbon and Swinburne. By placing her pagan statues in front of Miss

Fontover's Christian cross, Sue creates an aesthetic representation of the clash of values between Paganism and Christianity.

Sue's simultaneous adherence to both evolutionary meliorism and a backward-looking neo-Pagan aestheticism is distilled in her symbolic choice of Gibbon's Enlightenment history of progress, then Swinburne's nihilistic poem "Hymn to Proserpine," to hail her pagan statuary. Sue's switch in reading material (from Gibbon to Swinburne) is a turn away from her usual evolutionary rationalism towards neo-Paganism and primitivism. Gibbon's view is progressive, and anticipates Comte and nineteenth-century anthropologists because it posits an evolution in Western culture from superstition through theology to agnostic rationalism. Swinburne's poem instead suggests that evolution is cyclical rather than progressive, expresses pessimism about the evolution of human knowledge and belief, and celebrates the beauty of death, decline, and Proserpine as the goddess of death. Thus even early in the novel, where she makes explicit statements endorsing an evolutionary view of the history of religion, Sue values a poetic work that rejects and subverts evolutionary meliorism.

Sue subsequently finds herself frightened by her own actions, and stays wakeful all night, unable in the darkness to make out anything of her ornamental arrangement but the image of the crucifixion, which symbolically implies that her iconoclasm has led her to suffer from Christian guilt. Her wakefulness undercuts her confidently subversive actions, and suggests that she, like Jude, cannot entirely escape Comte's "theological" stage of religious thinking. This idea that religious feeling does not die out but continually reinvents itself in new forms is reinforced by the allusion to Swinburne's poem. Thus both the turn to Swinburne and Sue's wakefulness, neither of which are

explained by the narrator, are suggestive of Sue's inconsistent evolutionism, her attraction to Paganism, and the unconscious impulses that seem to arise from vestiges of an earlier, religious stage of belief. Thus, even before her religious conversion towards the novel's end, Sue is troubled by mental vestiges of religious belief. By the end of the novel, Sue has been savagely punished for her naive confidence that she has transcended earlier cultural stages of belief.

### **"The Ishmaelite"**

However, there is one area in which, early in the novel, Sue wants to embrace primitive human nature: that area is sexuality. My claim here may seem outrageous, given that so many readers of the novel have regarded Sue as pathologically sexless. Her sexuality was regarded by the novel's first reviewers as "morbid" because she does not desire marriage or motherhood, and was stigmatized as aberrant in the early and mid twentieth century because she does not desire sex. Critics in the last few decades, led by Penny Boumelha, have read Sue in a more complex way, noting how her sexuality is expressed intermittently through a matrix of other forces including her apparent internalization in nineteenth-century gender norms, which manifests itself on the occasions when she refers to sexuality as "grossness."<sup>248</sup>

---

<sup>248</sup> When Jude expresses dissatisfaction that their elopement is to be celibate, Sue asks Jude, "Why do you have to be so gross?" More poignantly, the last time we see her, she admits to the Widow Edlin that when she kissed Jude she realized that "I still love him—O, grossly!" Other readers have argued that Sue's sexuality is much more complex than mere reticence or coldness, but recent criticism still occasionally laments that in *Jude*, Hardy does not adequately dispense with his society's binaristic view of male and female sexuality. See, for example, Joseph Allen Boone, *Tradition Counter Tradition*, (Chicago:

Throughout the novel, even after her violent religious conversion, Sue is eager to reject Jude's charge that she is sexually cold, and she is equally eager to reject his labeling of her as modern or civilized. These two areas are implicitly correlated in mid- to late-nineteenth-century discourse, and Sue's derogatory phrase for the unbridled lustful male, "sensual savage," attests the commonplace association of the primitive with sexual license. Paganism, the ancient, and classical myth had, moreover, been newly associated with sensualism via both evolutionary writing and aestheticism.<sup>249</sup> Sue's interest in Paganism is implicitly sexual, since Sue's reading of Swinburne's poem in front of her newly-purchased "very large and very naked" statues of Venus and Apollo, is suggestive of a private, Pagan eroticism.<sup>250</sup> Swinburne's poetry itself strongly connoted neo-Pagan sensualism and sexual scandal, and the volume from which Sue reads the poem is presumably Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads*, a key text in the emergence of a supposedly amoral pursuit of aesthetic appreciation.<sup>251</sup> Moreover, conservative writers and anti-Darwinian scientists of the 1860s and 70s connected evolutionary thinking with Paganism and aestheticism, in order to diminish the cultural authority of the Darwinian

---

University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 110-11 and 130-31. The fact that it is still possible to argue over the extent of Sue's desire or prudishness, Hardy's complicity in or subversion of in normative constructions of gender, reflects the evasiveness of the novel in this respect.

249 See Gowan Dawson, *Darwin, Literature and Victorian Respectability*, pp. 2-12.

250 In Swinburne's poem, Venus is a sensual and embodied presence, while Proserpine is merely eyes and a glowing face, as Sue sometimes seems to Jude. Venus embodies not only sexuality but motherhood (she is "mother" of Rome); Proserpine is her antithesis, a goddess of disembodiment and death. The poem thus enacts a classic Victorian splitting of woman into two women, one of the body and senses, the other pure spirit. Taking this splitting further, Swinburne's Proserpine is associated not so much with spirit as with pure negation, in antithetical relation to Venus's creativity. The poem's ending suggests that embracing negation and death is liberating.

251 "Writing to Swinburne in 1897, [Hardy] spoke of "the buoyant time thirty years ago [1867] when I used to read your early works [*Poems and Ballads*] walking along the crowded London streets, to my imminent risk of being knocked down." (Rutland 19).

sciences by associating them with sensualism and the overthrow of traditional morality.<sup>252</sup> In the person of Sue, therefore, Hardy seems to be alluding to this cultural conjunction of evolutionary thinking, social radicalism, and interest in Paganism and aestheticism, and speculations about sexual experimentation, as a way of constructing Sue's conflicted, intellectualized sexuality.

Thus Sue's claims to be "ancient," Pagan, Greek, and uncivilized have a sexual charge, which the novel amplifies. Conversely, Sue's references to sexuality are often made via the languages of neo-classicism or anthropology, and thereby associate sexuality with the ancient or primitive. Moreover, in her dialogues with Jude, Sue is very eager to reject his idea that she is "civilized," "modern," or an "urban miss," and to assert that she is "ancient," a rebel against social conventions, wild, and free. In one of their part-flirtatious, part-argumentative dialogues, when Jude comments that Sue is "modern," she ripostes,

"I am not modern, either. I am more ancient than medievalism, if only you knew." Jude looked distressed.

"There—I won't say any more than that!" she cried. "Only you don't know how bad I am, from your point of view." (107)

Sue elides "ancient" and "bad" in describing herself: she announces herself to be prior to and therefore uninfluenced by "medievalism," which is most often used in the novel as a euphemism for Christminster Christianity. Here, the ancient connotes Pagan classicism, agnosticism, and freedom from the moral constraints of civilization, presumably including socially-imposed constraints upon sexuality. In describing herself as "ancient"

---

252 Gowan Dawson, *Darwin, Literature and Victorian Respectability* (2006), p. 3.

and “bad,” it is unclear whether Sue refers to her atheism, or to her previous cohabitation with a man without marriage, or to both. Sue reiterates her sense of herself as ancient to Jude. When she and Jude miss the train back to Melchester and are forced to spend the night together in the same room of a rural cottage, she starts a conversation with Jude by declaring her pleasure at freedom from the social constraints governing biological and physical imperatives:

“I rather like this...Outside all laws except gravitation and germination.”

“You only think you like it; you don’t: you are quite a product of civilization,” said Jude [...]

“Indeed I am not, Jude. I like reading and all that, but I crave to get back to the life of my infancy and its freedom.”

“Do you remember it so well? You seem to me to have nothing unconventional at all about you.”

“O, haven’t I! You don’t know what’s inside me.”

“What?”

“The Ishmaelite.”

“An urban miss is what you are.” (111)

The conversation associates civilization with conventionality, and pits them against the wildness of the Ishmaelite and the “freedom” of childhood—both states that were analogous to primitive life in the late-nineteenth-century imagination. Sue attempts to position herself as a primitivist and a refugee from civilized convention, an “Ishmaelite” on the inside. “The Ishmaelite” is an outcast or one “at war with society” (*OED*). Ishmael is the wild man of the Old Testament, the illegitimate son of Abram and Hagar, who lived



in the wilderness (Genesis 16.11-12). In *The Return*, the heath is “Ishmaelitish,” which the narrator glosses as an “enemy” of “civilization,” resistant to cultural “progress,” making it an appropriate setting for the enjoyment of sexual freedom. In Sue’s assertion, too, there is an association between the “Ishmaelite” and primitive sexuality, signaled by Sue’s claim that she and Jude have escaped all laws but “gravitation and germination.” Of course, there is an irony here: Sue’s awareness of these laws in itself signals that she is “a product of civilization” who cannot escape such laws because she has internalized them. If Sue has internalized civilized knowledge of the primitive Other, she cannot authentically position herself as a primitive. Rather, like readers of Hardy’s fiction, she is a primitivist, although in this instance she is seeking to recover primitive freedom herself, rather than enjoy it as an aesthetic spectacle.

Here, then, Sue implicitly lays claim to primitive desire that is masked or suppressed by the “laws” of civilization. She makes a similar implication when she aligns herself with “passionately erotic poets” in order to rebut the notion that she is “sexless” (118). The literary works to which Sue refers are associated with sensualism, atheism, and classicism—Swinburne’s “Hymn to Proserpina,” which she also quotes to Jude to ridicule Christminster “fetichism” (120), and the catalogue of scandalous reading with which she signals to Jude her knowledge of literary sex: “I know most of the Greek and Latin classics through translations [...] Catullus, Martial, Juvenal, Lucian [...] Sterne, De Foe, Smollett, Fielding” (117). Sue goes on to claim that her interest in their “indecent passages” ended with her knowledge of them, but this seems to be merely a way of baiting Jude with her nonchalant sexual worldliness: if she is no longer interested in the indecency of these works, why list famously indecent writers from the classical and

eighteenth-century canon? This catalogue appears in the same conversation in which she rejects Jude's charge that she is "a creature of civilization," because she is "a sort of negation of it," and asserts that no man other than a "sensual savage" would force himself on a woman (118).

All of these conversations take place in the first third of the novel, in which Sue is rebuffing Jude as a sexual partner while also asserting that she is a sexual agent. In this part of the novel, she values sexual wildness in imaginative and aesthetic representations, but abjures it in practice. Her self-construction as a closeted "Ishmaelite" may seem to be undermined by her subsequent revulsion from actual sexual experience with Phillotson. However, her discovery of her sexual distaste for Phillotson in fact awakens in her a greater desire to act on her "aberrant passions" and to assert to Jude that her passions are in revolt against the constraints of civilization:

'The social moulds civilization fits us into have no more relation to our actual shapes than the conventional shapes of the constellations have to real star-patterns. I am called Mrs. Richard Phillotson, living a calm wedded life with my counterpart of that name. But I am not really Mrs. Richard Phillotson, but a woman tossed about, all alone, with aberrant passions, and unaccountable antipathies' (161-3).

Shortly after this she and Jude kiss, which the narrator calls "the turning point in Jude's career" (171).<sup>253</sup> The kiss has a comparably strong effect on Sue: whereas hitherto she has been what she calls a "coward," after the kiss she puts her theories into practice. On

---

<sup>253</sup> After this, Jude doesn't merely give up his ambition to become ordained, which would be the logical consequence of his realization that his extramarital desires unfit him for the "apostolic life," but actually renounces his Christian belief.

her return home, she is unable to sleep in the same room with Phillotson: she sleeps the first night in the linen-closet, and the next day arranges to leave him. This series of actions couples sexual desire and agency, and the novel suggests that Sue's assertion of sexual agency stems from her analysis of the clash between desire and "the social moulds [of] civilization"

Sue and Jude subsequently embark on a nomadic life (in the section "At Aldbrickham and Elsewhere") that she describes as "Pagan" and "Greek joyousness"—in other words, an enactment of her former wish for ancient or primitive freedom. However, they continually return to the question of whether to marry and make themselves socially acceptable. After they both divorce their former spouses Jude is in favor of marrying, but Sue can't bring herself to do so, and her declared reason is that marriage itself is barbarous. Earlier in the novel, while married to Phillotson but attracted to Jude, Sue had called it "barbarous" that society required couples to marry to sanction and delimit their sexual relationships (in the dialogue discussed at the start of this chapter). When contemplating marriage to Jude, she describes the marriage ceremony as a ritual surviving from "ancient times" in which the bride figures as the sacrificial victim, and makes direct analogies between the marriage ceremony and ritual sacrifice of animals:

'I have been looking at the marriage service in the prayer book, and it seems to be very humiliating [...] According to the ceremony as there printed, my bridegroom chooses me of his own will and pleasure; but I don't choose him. Somebody *gives* me to him, like a she-ass or she-goat, or any other domestic animal' (136).

Sue views the ceremony from the perspective of an ethnological analyst but identifies with the sacrificial victim. Later, Hardy has Sue and Jude make a comparative study of marriage when they witness and comment on several registry office weddings and a church ceremony while waiting to get married themselves. (After watching the other weddings, they decide to go home without getting married.) At the church wedding, Sue pities the bride's sexual ignorance, and registers the symbolic trappings of virgin sacrifice that surround her: "The flowers in the bride's hand are sadly like the garland which decked the heifers of sacrifice in old times!" Jude responds, "it is no worse for the woman than for the man [...] the other victim."

The novel's figuring of marriage as a form of bodily sacrifice and Christminster religion as "fetishism" are dramatically brought together in Sue's reversion to Christianity and re-marriage to Phillotson, which is figured as a form of religious "hysteria" that compels her to sacrifice her body precisely like "the heifers of sacrifice in ancient time." "We ought to be continually sacrificing ourselves on the altar of duty," she tells Jude, and for her, the greatest such sacrifice is to consummate her re-marriage to Phillotson. This event is represented in ritualistic terms: Phillotson asks her three times, in the same words, if she is sure she wants to consummate their marriage. Once she has assented a third time, he picks her up and carries her over the threshold of their bedroom, a move that invokes the modern "survival" of marriage by capture most frequently cited in nineteenth-century anthropology.<sup>254</sup> In portraying Sue's self-sacrifice to Phillotson as a

---

<sup>254</sup> The idea of the groom carrying the bride over the threshold as a symbolic survival of marriage by capture was a commonplace of late nineteenth-century anthropological literature. It is discussed by McLennan, Lubbock, Tylor, Westermarck, and others.

ritual sacrifice of the bride, the novel reinforces Sue's claims that marriage is a "barbarous" ritual from "ancient" times that enjoins a literal, physical sacrifice from the bride.

The novel gives us access to another source of information about marriage that suggests the institution had a more positive role in traditional, pre-industrial cultures: the Widow Edlin, who tells anecdotes about her own marriage in a Wessex village during the Napoleonic wars. The novel portrays the Widow as a source of pithy social insight and folk wisdom. Responding to Sue and Jude's fear of marriage, she exclaims, "if this is what the new notions be leading us to! Nobody thought o' being afeard of matrimony in my time, nor of much else but a cannon-ball or empty cupboard! Why when I and my poor old man were married we thought no more o't than a game of dibs!" (226). The widow's reminiscences portray marriage as a far less onerous commitment during a period in which so much else was uncertain and the struggle for life was more intense. But later in the novel, the Widow's comments point to other reasons why marriage could be taken more "easily" in her time: "Matrimony have growed that serious in these days that one really do feel afeared to move in it at all. In my time we took it more careless; and I don't know that we was any the worse for it! When I and my poor man were jined in it we kept up the junketing all the week, and drunk the parish dry, and had to borrow half-a-crown to begin housekeeping!" (289). This anecdote makes marriage seem less restrictive in the era of Widow Edlin's youth, the early 1800s in a rural village, and less emotionally intense than Sue's and Jude's marriages. The Widow's words also suggest that marriage was made less onerous by the support offered in a small rural community—the "parish" who join in the post-wedding partying. Late in the novel, the Widow

expresses distress at Sue's lack of social support, since Sue "has nobody on her side" to help her resist Phillotson. The widow's experience contrasts strongly with the situation of Jude and Sue (or Jude and Arabella, or Sue and Phillotson), who are depicted as isolated dyads without any kind of social network. As the Widow points out, under these changed circumstances, marriage might be inappropriate or unnecessary: "if you didn't like to commit yourselves to the binding vow again, at first, 'twas all the more credit to your consciences [...]. After all, it concerned nobody but your own two selves" (278). This comment echoes earlier statements by Sue to the effect that in modern society, sexual relationships can be left as a "private matter."

Sue constructs sexual freedom as primitive or savage, and marriage as a "barbarous" form of constraint. This distinction between primitive sensualism and barbarous restrictive marriage is not unique to Sue, but was central to Edward Westermarck's anthropology of marriage, *The History of Human Marriage*, and Hardy's use of "barbarism" is illuminated by Westermarck's discussion of the term. In 1894, the year in which he wrote most of *Jude*, Hardy's interest in the anthropology of marriage led him to buy the second edition of Edward Westermarck's *History of Human Marriage* (1891).<sup>255</sup> It is to "barbarism," the intermediate stage between "primitive" (or "savage")

---

<sup>255</sup> Anna Graves, Special Collections Librarian, Colby College, Email to the author, 26 Feb. 2008. Norman Page, the editor of the Norton *Jude*, speculates that Westermarck's "widely-read" book was a "source" for *Jude*. His suggestion is based on the internal evidence of the novel, since he does not mention that Hardy owned the book. Page cites Westermarck's statement on cousin-marriage as an encapsulation of one plot-strand of *Jude*: "Several writers [...] believe that there are no injurious results at all from those marriages, unless the parents are afflicted with the same hereditary morbid tendencies." (Norman Page, *Thomas Hardy* (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London, 1977), pp.62-3.) Hardy left no written record of reading Westermarck's book, but many of Hardy's notebooks were destroyed at his death. The pages of Westermarck's book had been cut by the time it was sold at auction shortly after Hardy's death, so it seems a reasonable

and “civilized” society, that Westermarck ascribes the marital customs and behaviors that he considers most hostile to women, including polygyny, wife-beating, frequent abandonment of wives, and “marriage by purchase.”<sup>256</sup> Barbarism is also Hardy’s term for what he considers the unevolved, negative aspects of civilized life, and in his correspondence and fiction he brands his own culture “barbarous” in its attitudes to women and marriage. In outing modern marriage as “barbarous,” Hardy therefore revises Westermarck’s revision of stage theory. Marriage in *Jude* calls itself civilized but turns out to involve many of the bad things that Westermarck imputes to barbarous marriage.

Westermarck was an influential anthropologist, and his book made lasting contributions to science.<sup>257</sup> But while his book is original, it is also a product of its cultural moment, in that it is part of the wider *fin de siècle* trend of drawing on ethnography to address sexual-political questions. It distilled and reshaped contemporary arguments about culture, evolution, sex, and marriage from a rather feminist angle. Throughout the book, Westermarck deplores sexual and marital practices that he sees as harmful to women, including polygamy, prostitution, marriage by purchase, dowries, and

---

inference that Hardy read at least some of it, although unfortunately there is no direct evidence as to when he may have done so.

<sup>256</sup> Arabella articulates views of civilized marriage that endow it with the features of barbarous marriage described by Westermarck. Arabella recommends marriage to Sue because it allows women legal recompense when inevitably beaten or abandoned by their husbands: “Life with a man is more business-like after it, and money matters work better. [...] If you have rows, and he turns you out of doors, you can get the law to protect you, which you can’t otherwise, unless he half runs you through with a knife, or cracks your noddle with a poker. And if he bolts away from you—I say it friendly, as woman to woman, for there’s never any knowing what a man med do—you’ll have the sticks o’ furniture, and won’t be looked upon as a thief” (212).

<sup>257</sup> For example, his observation that children reared together in the first few years of life are unlikely to feel sexual attraction towards one another later is still known as the “Westermarck effect.” This observation was of pressing interest for anthropologists because it offered an explanation for why incest taboos are universal.

indeed anything that is not egalitarian companionate marriage. Moreover, he directly asserts that women's equality with men is a desirable social outcome and that women themselves are the most important agents of reform—most notably, in the resounding final sentences of his book:

A wife is no longer the husband's property; and according to modern ideas marriage is, or should be, a contract on the footing of perfect equality between the sexes. The history of human marriage is the history of a relation in which women have been gradually triumphing over the passions, the prejudices, and the selfish interests of men (549-50).

George Stocking remarks that this last line made Westermarck “a minor hero of the feminist movement” (*After Tylor* 155). It instantiates the idea championed by Tylor, that anthropology during this period was, or should be, a “reformer's science.”<sup>258</sup> However, in some respects, Westermarck is not at all radical, since the book is strongly pro-marriage.

In some ways Hardy's views are consonant with Westermarck's, but in important ways *Jude* appears to directly engage and resist Westermarck. There is a good deal of overlap between the concerns of Westermarck's *History* and the focus on marriage in *Jude*. Westermarck's book deals at length with cousin-marriage and the evolutionary reasons against it, as well as discussing “civilized,” “barbarous,” and “primitive” marriage in ways that seem to be echoed in *Jude*. Both Hardy and Westermarck departed from the main stream of thinking among anthropologists who took an evolutionary approach to culture: both had internalized the belief that the human world evolved from the animal, and that this created sexual drives that it would be unwise to ignore, even in

---

<sup>258</sup> *Primitive Culture*, vol. ii (1871), p.410.



civilization. Both Westermarck and Hardy subscribed to Weismann's theory of human instincts that were embedded in the germ plasm, which "could not be changed from generation to generation by environmental manipulation."<sup>259</sup> Westermarck also shares with Hardy an interest in distinguishing between social custom and biologically inherited human behavioral traits, a distinction on which Hardy had already focused in *Tess*. Thus Westermarck argues, "Human marriage [i.e. monogamous cohabitation] seems to be an inheritance from some ape-like progenitor."<sup>260</sup> Westermarck was new in arguing that primitive marriage is "naturally" monogamous and that the rules governing sexuality, for example those prohibiting adultery or promiscuity, arose not from rational foresight but from an inherited instinct for monogamy.<sup>261</sup>

As Westermarck's final sentence implies, his book argues that male "passions" have been gradually diminishing throughout human existence in response to female influence, and implies that this reduction of male passion is a good thing. Westermarck

---

<sup>259</sup> John C. Burnham, "Instinct Theory and the German Reaction to Weismannism," *Journal of the History of Biology* 5 (1972): 321-26, p. 322. Hardy records that in 1890 he "dipped into" Weismann's *Essays upon Heredity* (*Life* 230). His engagement with Weismann's thinking in *Tess* is explored by Peter Morton in *The Vital Science* (1984).

<sup>260</sup> Westermarck redefines marriage as any form of monogamy, however brief in duration, and also uses it as a euphemism, so that the reader can take him to mean something more like a conventional marriage than Westermarck intends. He discussed the book with E.B. Tylor and A.R. Wallace, who advised him to desexualize its language, and to refer to sexual intercourse as "marriage." (Gowan Dawson, *Darwin, Literature and Victorian Respectability*, p.12). Hardy, on the other hand, does not allow readers this kind of loophole: he makes it as clear as possible that marriage is quite distinct from the identity of "the father of a woman's children," making it impossible for his readers not to contemplate the extra-marital sexuality of Jude and Sue throughout the second half of the novel.

<sup>261</sup> Earlier anthropologists of marriage, such as McLennan and Lubbock, had portrayed the primal horde as an arena of unrepressed sexual instinct, which gradually came under the control of patriarchal rules developed through foresight and reason. Westermarck, however, was not romanticizing "primitive marriage," since he argued that the force keeping monogamy in place is not conjugal love—through he describes this as virtually universal—but sexual jealousy.

made these claims in an explicitly Darwinian way, arguing that male sexual “altruism” towards women was an evolved trait. *Jude* directly engages this idea but powerfully argues with it, suggesting that, firstly, the reduction of male sexual desire as a force in society, either through the practice of sexual “altruism” by men, or through the beneficial effects of interaction with a morally-superior womankind, is unrealistic within society as it stands. I will discuss this topic below in the section “Chivalry as a Darwinian Instinct.”

Moreover, for Westermarck, the happy result of male altruism would be life-long marriage, which he presents as an enlightened ideal and as an arrangement that is helpful in achieving better rights for women. This is one respect in which Hardy argues with Westermarck. Whereas Westermarck idealizes lifelong marriage, Hardy’s novel scathingly undermines it. Westermarck does not question the beneficial aspects of marriage as a civil contract, and contrasts it to primitive marriage, which is “generally considered a private matter, with which the authorities or the community have nothing to do” (429). *Jude* in fact echoes Westermarck’s language here, but Hardy has Sue advocate the modern adoption of this feature of “primitive marriage.” She asserts that “in a proper state of society, the father of a woman’s child will be as much a private matter of hers as the cut of her under-linen, on whom nobody will have any right to question her” (*Jude* 189-90). This echo reverses the ideological value of Westermarck’s words: Sue implies that a “proper state of society” would make sexual relationships a private matter (as they were in primitive life, according to Westermarck), and not require the public marriage ceremony and contract.

Hardy thus takes issue with Westermarck’s argument that a future utopia will be built around life-long marriage, and suggests that this is not a socially-utopian aim. But

without it, society is faced with the problem of illegitimate children or children of prior marriages. One solution alluded to in *Jude* is a wider parental altruism, which allows adults to act with greater sexual freedom on the understanding that ensuing children will be cared for collectively. I'll discuss this suggestion below in the section "By the Lord Harry! Matriarchy!"

### **Chivalry as a Darwinian Instinct**

*Jude*'s dramatization of Westermarck's putative male "instinct" of sexual altruism spoke to the late nineteenth-century's increasing focus on male sexuality in both evolutionary science and moral discourse. When Sue asserts that her freedom around men is derived from her assumption that the men she meets are not "sensual savages" (117-8), her phrase is an unintentional parody of anthropological constructions of "primitive" men who enjoy complete sexual license at the expense of women. It invokes the 1860s anthropology of Lubbock and McLennan, as well as a more general nineteenth-century racial discourse about the overheated sexuality of male "savages" and their supposed mistreatment of women. Sue constructs male sexuality as a "savage" problem, but her own sexuality as pagan or primitive freedom.

For many feminist campaigners and other social reformers, male sexuality was increasingly regarded as inimical to human morals, as well as to women's rights, happiness, and even to female sexuality itself.<sup>262</sup> Darwin's sexual selection theory,

---

<sup>262</sup> In a recent volume of essays, Elizabeth Langland evaluates *Jude*'s response to Arabella in relation to these two constructions of masculinity. *Jude* instantiates a conflict between the two: while he calls the idea of the natural to defend his sex drive to Sue,

however, recuperated male sexual aggression as a heritable instinct that was bound up in the evolution of sexually-selected traits. Up to the 1880s, thinking on sexual morality was founded on the axiom that male sexual desire was much greater than female, and must be accommodated by law and custom. This thinking about male desire both lent weight to and was explained by sexual selection theory. The notion that a high male sex drive was inevitable, however, coexisted uneasily with an equally widespread idea that male desire could be reduced by “good” habits.<sup>263</sup> This aligned nicely with traditional ideas of male chivalry towards women, and was taken up by campaigners for social purity from the 1860s through the 1890s, who argued that the sexual double standard could be eliminated by leveling up men’s sexual behavior to match the natural chastity of middle-class women, who would themselves serve as a good influence on men.<sup>264</sup> But by the 1890s, some writers had found a way to give the chivalric or social purity ideal for men a

---

Arabella can exploit his affinity with something like a chivalric code in order to get him to marry her—twice. Langland argues that Jude’s split masculinity reflects his divided social class, since the chivalric code he largely adheres to is more of a middle- and upper-class notion, and thus signals his social aspirations.

<sup>263</sup> Much nineteenth-century thinking on sexuality was shaped by environmentalism: the notion that human “nature” at the most fundamental level could be shaped by environmental conditions, including better housing, and that male sexual drives might be effectively reduced by the influence of the right kind of women. Even at the beginning of the Victorian era, as Michael Mason demonstrates in *The Marking of Victorian Sexuality*, environmental views of sexuality were prevalent among both secular progressive and evangelical perspectives.

<sup>264</sup> Jeffrey Weeks notes the strength of social purity movements throughout the 1880s to 1900 at a popular level, with the Salvation army and local vigilance associations “bringing closure orders against brothels, hunting out displays of vice, prosecuting obscene books, and promoting wholesome literature.” (91) “But...social purity never succeeded in silencing its opponents. Indeed, there is a strong case to be made that the moralistic campaigns around sexuality encouraged, as a response, a more radical position on sexuality. [...] Radicals like Grant Allen, [Havelock] Ellis, Edward Carpenter, the “new women” in fiction, the mannered libertarians of Wilde and his circle, discovered sexuality as a positive value or as a subversive force which challenged the tyranny of respectability. All this was to feed into the stream of sexual radicalism in the early twentieth century.” (91-2)

Darwinian basis, by labeling the repression of male desire a form of heritable “altruism.”<sup>265</sup> This idea was based on a hybrid of Lamarckian and Darwinian thinking, which allowed that “acquired” moral improvements—including increases in men’s capacity for sexual restraint—might be heritable. For example, the potential evolution and heritability of male sexual continence was discussed by women members of the Women’s and Men’s Club in the 1880s.<sup>266</sup> Darwin himself had not posited male sexual self-control as such a form of altruism, and it is hard to see how he could have made a selectionist argument in favor of male sexual self-control, given his ardent advocacy of sexual selection, which basically depends on males striving to copulate as much as possible.<sup>267</sup>

Nonetheless, feminists of the subsequent decades drew on evolutionary terminology, and specifically appropriated Darwin, in order to make a case that social purity was a realistic *evolutionary* goal: “They pressed for a particular rereading of

---

<sup>265</sup> By the late 1880s Hardy was certainly aware of the widespread attempts in the 1880s and 1890s to revise Darwinism in order to make altruism “natural”: in his *Life*, he records a conversation with Sir James Crichton Browne, the psychiatric specialist, who had attempted to persuade him that “the doctrines of Darwin require readjusting largely; for instance, the survival of the fittest in the struggle for life. There is an altruism and coalescence between cells as well as an antagonism.” Hardy’s retrospective comment on Crichton-Browne’s argument is an almost dismissive, “well, I can’t say.” (*Life* 259).

<sup>266</sup> See Lucy Bland, “Marriage Laid Bare,” p. 127.

<sup>267</sup> Darwin’s thinking on the issue of altruism was two-sided: competitiveness, especially between males for females, drove both natural and sexual selection; but in the earlier portion of the *Descent* he makes an extended argument that human social virtues, including altruism, are evolved traits present in rudimentary forms in animals, and have evolved because they conduce to the good of the species (a “group selectionist” argument). Darwin’s examples of altruism do not involve sexual relationships, and indeed, sex in *The Descent of Man* seems to be all about competition and possession, and nothing to do with altruism. Sexual selection contributes to selection at the level of the individual, whereas altruism contributes to group selection, in Darwin’s view. Heritable social traits—and extreme cases of individual “altruism,” for example sterile worker bees—are now largely explained by kin selection. See Helena Cronin, *The Ant and the Peacock: Altruism and Sexual Selection from Darwin to Today*, (Cambridge, 1991).

Darwin, to add weight to the older evangelical claim that women had a rightful place in regulating sex. For [Ellice] Hopkins, as for Blackwell, women's moral power lay in their capacity to harness and control male sexual energy by drawing out the spiritual impulses in human nature" (Mort 91). Even in the 1890s, only a small minority of polemical writers (including Caird, Ellis, Edward Carpenter, and Grant Allen) celebrated desire *per se*, contested the idea that men's desire was stronger than women's, and argued for the value of sexual desire itself and for the autonomy of women's desire.<sup>268</sup> The notion of male sexual "altruism" made Darwinism seem amenable to feminist aims, and was embraced by Westermarck, who argued that "the evolution of altruism is one of the chief elements in human progress, and consideration for the weaker sex is one of the chief elements in the evolution of altruism" (403). Since proponents of male sexual altruism relied on a Lamarckian notion of the heritability of acquired characteristics, it is one of the weaknesses of Westermarck's Darwinism that he never explains how instinctive altruism can be transmitted via either sexual or natural selection. Hardy's novel is thus in a way more scientifically consistent than Westermarck's science, since it illustrates the logical outcome that sexual altruism is destined to Darwinian reproductive failure (for Jude and Phillotson). Yet the novel does not allow this logic to stand, because it makes this Darwinian failure a result of un-Darwinian social forces as much as of the inherited "unfitness" of its protagonists.

---

<sup>268</sup> Lucy Bland, "Marriage Laid Bare: Middle-Class Women and Marital Sex 1880s-1914," in Jane Lewis, ed., *Labour and Love*, Blackwell: Oxford, 1986. Positions on these issues do not tend to fall into clear groupings correlating with feminist and anti-feminist, progressive or conservative: among feminist writers, for example, Sarah Grand championed social purity as a route to female emancipation, while George Egerton celebrated female desire.

*Jude* reflects on the new ideas that male desire is something that might evolve away through female influence, or be controlled by an evolved altruism. The first idea is present in Jude's claim that Sue's influence can "save" him from his weakness for women; the second is present in the novel's references to humane "instincts" that counter male sexual possessiveness. More generally, Jude frames his aim towards sexual self-control in implicitly evolutionary terms, yoking the notion of progress to that of transcending one's animal origins: he conceives of his desire for Arabella as a sub-human impulse, whose influence he must transcend in order to "[show] himself superior to the lower animals, and contribut[e] his units of work to the general progress of his generation" (52). The novel suggests, however, that this idea of sublimating desire is a fantasy: Jude's reflection is immediately ironized because it is followed in short order by his failure as a pig-butcher, and Jude himself comes to revise the view over the course of the book, later integrating desire into his working life through his partnership with Sue. However, the novel does represent a counter-instinct that ensures that Jude and Phillotson do not selfishly act on desire, even when society allows them to. This instinct is not the result of female influence, but seems to be innate to them.

The novel represents the moral dilemmas of Jude and Phillotson between sexual desire and kindness as a clash of instincts. It is unendurable to Phillotson or Jude to think of one another with Sue, and this jealousy is referred to as an "animal instinct."<sup>269</sup>

Jude for a moment felt an unprincipled and fiendish wish to annihilate his rival [Phillotson] at all cost. [...] he could send Phillotson off in agony and

---

<sup>269</sup> Hardy's references to "instinct" in *Jude* sometimes imply the traditional sense of an instinct as an intuition or transitory impulse, and at other times connote the new biological notion of inherited instincts.

defeat by saying that the scandal was true, and that Sue had irretrievably committed herself with him. But his action did not for a moment respond to his animal instinct” (*Jude* 130).

Elsewhere, the novel names the form of altruism that Jude displays here, which counteracts sexual possessiveness, as another heritable instinct. Phillotson’s altruism towards Sue in allowing her to leave him unhindered is repeatedly said to be a “humane instinct” (290) quite at odds with conventional principles that endorse an ostensibly Darwinian sexual possessiveness:

I, like other men, profess to hold that if a husband gets such a so-called preposterous request from his wife, the only course that can possibly be regarded as right and proper and honourable in him is to refuse it, and put her virtuously under lock and key, and murder her lover perhaps. But ... I simply am going to act by instinct, and let principles take care of themselves. If a person who has blindly walked into a quagmire cries for help, I am inclined to give it, if possible” (*Jude* 182).

Phillotson invokes hypothetical wife-abuse and inter-male rivalrous violence as counterfactuals to his own actual behavior, and he compares the impulse that made him release his wife to the instinct that would prompt one to save a person from drowning.<sup>270</sup> In this sense Phillotson, like Jude, is highly evolved. Indeed, *Jude* is an unusual Hardy

---

<sup>270</sup> In terms of natural and sexual selection, one would expect this behavior to be maladaptive, but it is Darwin’s archetypal instance of “evolved” altruism in the *Descent of Man* (1871). It is interesting that Phillotson’s analogy implicitly masculinizes his behavior, by reformulating his act of passive abstinence as an active, heroic rescue (saving someone from drowning).



novel because it is without an unscrupulous male protagonist who seduces, sexually betrays, or abandons the heroine.<sup>271</sup>

The novel draws attention to the ways in which “civilization” manipulates male behavior towards women in the name of honor. Both Jude and Phillotson have epiphanies to the effect that their culture enforces male sexual selfishness and calls it honor, overriding their own “humane instincts.” Phillotson reflects on this distinction in the language of cultural evolution, when he justifies to himself, and Sue, his decision to remarry her when he knows she can’t be happy if he does. His version of cultural evolution posits the degenerative effect of an “old civilization” on “instinctive...justice” and “crude loving-kindness”:

To indulge one’s instinctive and uncontrolled sense of justice and right, was not, he had found, permitted with impunity in an old civilization like ours. It was necessary to act under an acquired and cultivated sense of the same, if you wished to enjoy an average share of comfort and honour; and to let crude loving-kindness take care of itself (282).

The “justice and right” that one must cultivate to meet the demands of civilization are, the novel insists, at odds with the instinctive “loving-kindness” practiced by Phillotson and

---

<sup>271</sup> Only four of Hardy’s fourteen novels are without this type of character as a central figure. Hardy’s unscrupulous male protagonists are (1) Alec D’Urberville in *Tess* (1891), (2) Fitzpiers in *The Woodlanders* (1887), (3) Michael Henchard, who sells his wife in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), (4) William Dare in *A Laodicean* (1881), (5) Bob Loveday in *The Trumpet Major* (1880), (6) Wildeve in *The Return of the Native* (1878), (7) Lord Mountclere in *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876), (8) Sergeant Troy in *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874), and (9) Aeneas Manton in *Desperate Remedies* (1871). Hardy’s only novels to lack such a figure are *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), *Jude* (1895), and *The Well-Beloved* (1897). *Two on a Tower* (1882) is an ambiguous case, since the hero, Swithin St. Cleve, abandons the heroine when she is pregnant with his child to pursue his scientific career, but does so at her urging.

Jude towards Sue. Civilized “justice and honour” are here made equivalent to the male oppression of wives. The earlier expression of his “instinctive sense of loving-kindness,” to which Phillotson refers here, was his surrender of Sue to Jude, which had cost him his teaching job. Phillotson’s construction of a kind of “natural” or instinctive sense of male altruism towards women echoes feminist, evolutionary-anthropological argument made by Elizabeth Blackwell, Annie Besant, and Kate Mills, who contended that in “primitive” societies, under natural conditions, men acted with greater sexual restraint than in civilized life, and that this kind of “crude loving-kindness” was closer to human nature.<sup>272</sup> In *Jude*, then, men are already altruists by instinct—as feminists argued all men might be in a more natural state of society, or given appropriate female influence.

Throughout the novel, Hardy makes clear that Jude is an altruist in the new, Darwinian sense. His altruism towards “the Weaker” (as the novel describes the girls en masse at the Melchester Training School) follows the same logic as his earlier reluctance to kill the pig he has raised for its meat, and his refusal to scare the birds away from eating the crops: “Nature’s logic was too horrid for him to care for. That mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another sickened his sense of harmony” (17). The novel makes clear that Jude is by nature a Darwinian altruist of this kind:

He was a boy who could not himself bear to hurt anything. He had never brought home a nest of young birds without lying awake in misery half the night after, and often reinstating them and the nest in their original place the next morning. He could scarcely bear to see trees cut down or lopped, from a fancy that it hurt them; and late pruning, when the sap was up and

---

<sup>272</sup> Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, pp. 85-8.

the tree bled profusely, had been a positive grief to him in his infancy.

This weakness of character, as it may be called, suggested that he was the sort of man who was born to ache a good deal before the fall of the curtain upon his unnecessary life should signify that all was well with him again.

He carefully picked his way on tiptoe among the earthworms, without killing a single one (15-16).

Jude therefore clearly does not acquire his altruism through female influence, but is already a Darwinian altruist by nature, brimming with humane instincts that run counter to his own survival and reproductive fitness.

At the same time, Hardy emphasizes that given an understanding of the social codes of “old civilization” and sufficient unscrupulousness, women can manipulate the conflict within the male psyche between sexual desire and “consideration for the weaker sex” (Westermarck 403), as Arabella does both times she persuades Jude to marry her. Following a carefully concerted plan, Arabella catches Jude on the rebound from Sue, keeps him intoxicated for several days, acquires a marriage license, declares that Jude has promised to marry her, and when he balks, has her father on hand to impugn his treatment of women. Jude responds as she predicts:

‘Don’t say anything against my honour!’ enjoined Jude hotly, standing up.

‘I’d marry the damn Whore of Babylon rather than do anything

dishonourable! No reflection on you, my dear. It is a mere rhetorical

figure—what they call in the books, hyperbole [...] I have never behaved

dishonourably towards a woman or to any living thing. I am not a man  
who wants to save himself at the expense of the weaker among us!’ (300-

1)

This is an accurate claim, for all its drunken grandiosity. It suggests that Jude’s altruism towards women is a particularly salient aspect of his unfitness in the struggle to survive. His altruism is partly expressed in terms of traditional chivalry and honour, but the last sentence echoes earlier statements about Jude that bear strong Darwinian inflections.

*Jude* counters Westermarck’s optimistic prognosis that men are evolving greater altruism towards women: under current social conditions, this can scarcely survive for a generation. But this does not mean that the novel is unsympathetic towards the courage and kindness of Jude’s actions towards women, nor towards his inability to fully control his desires: rather, *Jude* represents a social world in which the protagonist’s average sexuality and altruistic heroism are in conflict, and in conflict with social norms, and this produces his tragic failure in both personal and evolutionary terms.<sup>273</sup> The novel thus recognizes that male sexual altruism cannot create group fitness under current social norms, but such altruism persists as an insuperable instinct that overrides the sexual imperative that in so many other Hardy novels prompts men to triumph, unscrupulously, at the expense of women. The intense sympathy the novel evokes for Jude, and the impressively tragic scene of his death—which was particularly lauded by contemporary readers, even by reviewers who condemned the novel—work to create a model of heroism that is emphatically portrayed as being in conflict with evolutionary advantage.

---

<sup>273</sup> The cultural significance of Jude’s combination of sexual “weakness” and altruism towards the women he perceives as victims of his sexuality is suggested by the existence of similar characters in other roughly contemporary works of fiction, for example, Ernest Pontifex in Samuel Butler’s then unpublished novel *The Way of All Flesh*.

The novel implies that society needs to change to accommodate behavior like Jude's and Phillotson's, and its characters allude to several remarkably radical proposals for such a change that seem to be drawn from contemporary notions of sexual and familial arrangements in "primitive" society.

### **"By the Lord Harry! Matriarchy!"**

A number of reviewers criticized Hardy not only for usurping the territory of social scientists such as Spencer, but for his failure to provide "a practical suggestion for reform" (Oliphant). A particularly vexed problem that the novel was accused of sidestepping was the "population question" (a euphemism for the question of caring for illegitimate children). Contemporary fiction and journalistic debates over the marriage question focused a lot of attention on the problem of child rearing and support if marriages were replaced by "loose and transient connections" (Oliphant). Hardy's plot expedient in *Jude* for "solving" the problem of illegitimate children—a murder-suicide carried out by one of the children—was especially troubling to reviewers, and seems deliberately to exceed and even to parody all the horrifying possibilities that conservative social commentators foresaw in a society of "free unions." In her review, Oliphant channels contemporary anxieties in this regard, but also registers the latent Swiftian satirical dimension of the murder-suicide, when she facetiously asks, "Does Mr. Hardy really think this is a good way of disposing of the unfortunate progeny of such connections? Does he recommend it for general adoption? [...] Mr. Hardy knows [...] that the children are a most serious part of the question of the abolition of marriage. Is

this the way in which he considers it would be resolved best?" (383). The problem was not so much that Hardy's novel did not suggest solutions, but that his supposed solutions were wildly, offensively impracticable, since he "resolves" the problems of unhappy marriages and illegitimate children by dramatizing "communism in women" and parodying a Malthusian approach to population control.

Phillotson, meditating after Sue's departure on how to avoid unhappy marriages like his own, proposes a solution that equally accommodates the desire for sexual freedom, maternal love, the economic imperatives of child-care, and newly-evolved male altruism: "I don't see why the woman and children should not be the unit without the man" (184).<sup>274</sup> Phillotson's reactionary friend Gillingham responds with the ejaculation, "By the Lord Harry! Matriarchy!" The novel thus alludes to the "Matriarchal theory," which emerged triumphant from 1860s anthropology as the putative "primitive" social form. (It also perhaps hints that Phillotson derived this knowledge from reading ancient history: he is studying "Romano-Britannic antiquities...a subject that...[was] seen to compel inferences in startling contrast to the accepted views on the civilization of that time" (128).) The term "matriarchy" might also have appealed to Hardy's contemporary readers aware of the recent feminist appropriations of anthropology, some of which celebrated a conjectured primitive matriarchy.<sup>275</sup>

---

<sup>274</sup> In the first edition of the novel serialized in *Harpers Magazine*, Hardy makes his novel's endorsement of the idea of "matriarchy" and collective childcare even stronger by having Phillotson articulate the idea more explicitly: "I don't see why society shouldn't be reorganized on a basis of Matriarchy—the women and children being the unit without the man, and the men to support the women and children collectively—not individually, as we do now." (*Hearts Insurgent*, *Harpers Magazine*, vol. 91 (1895), p.126.)

<sup>275</sup> According to contemporary feminist arguments, the civilized development of patriarchy was a debasement of earlier societies in which women had much greater

Although Phillotson's "matriarchy" is not a particularly convincing proposition within the social world portrayed in *Jude*, it seems in theory to resolve the major problems of family and sexual life as the novel construes them. Here, again, Hardy gives characters in *Jude* some of the most radical of his own privately-expressed views. Remarkably, Hardy partly echoes Phillotson's idea in a letter to Millicent Garrett Fawcett in 1905, in which he suggests that social reforms ensuing from female suffrage will include the overthrow of "the stereotyped household" as the "unit of society":

The women's vote...will break up the present pernicious conventions in respect of manners, customs, religion, illegitimacy, the stereotyped household (that it must be the unit of society), the father of a woman's child (that it is anybody's business but the woman's own).<sup>276</sup>

The last phrase, of course, also echoes dialogue that Hardy had written for Sue, that the "the father of a woman's child [should] be as much a private matter of hers as the cut of her under-linen" (189-90). Hardy thus suggests divorcing sexual relationships not only from state and religious control, but also from the two-parent family as the structure for providing child-care, although how this socialization of male child-support can be effected in practical terms is not indicated.

Hardy has Jude and Sue go even further than Phillotson in dislocating sexual relations from child-rearing, to suggest that mothers as much as fathers might be happy to forego reproduction, or make childcare a collective matter. The novel expresses profound ambivalence about the ethical implications of procreation. Sue agonizes that "it seems

---

sexual self-determination. See Mona Caird, "Marriage" and Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1995), p. 79.

<sup>276</sup> *Letters*, vol. III, p. 238.

such a terribly tragic thing to bring beings into the world—so presumptuous—that I question my right to do it sometimes!” (246). She tells Jude that “In fifty, a hundred, years the descendants of these two [children] will [...] see weltering humanity still more vividly than we do now [...] and will be afraid to reproduce them” (301). Such a perspective is radically at odds with even the most radical sexual reformist thought of the era: only a very few writers (among them Mona Caird) were questioning women’s role as mothers.<sup>277</sup> Evolutionary science instead reinforced the widespread sense that for the greater good, women’s nature and destiny must be maternal, whether or not this made for women’s happiness. In “Some Plain Words on the Woman Question,” Grant Allen argued that British women needed to have an average of four children per woman or the population would go into freefall with dire economic and eugenic consequences.<sup>278</sup> Therefore *Jude* again takes a radical position for its era, in that it questions the desirability of reproduction *per se*. Moreover, Hardy has Jude suggest that instead of mothers raising children independently of fathers (as implied by Phillotson’s “matriarchy”), all children might be raised collectively:

‘The beggarly question of parentage—what is it, after all? What does it matter, when you come to think of it, whether a child is yours by blood or not? All the little ones of our time are collectively the children of us adults of the time, and entitled to our general care. That excessive regard of parents for their own children, and their dislike of other people’s is, like

---

<sup>277</sup> See e.g. Tracey S. Rosenberg, “A Challenge to Victorian motherhood: Mona Caird and Gertrude Atherton.”

<sup>278</sup> “Some Plain Words on the Woman Question.” *Fortnightly Review* 46 (Oct. 1889): 448-458.



class-feeling, patriotism, save-your-own-soulism, and other virtues, a mean exclusiveness at bottom' (215-6).

Jude's words are not merely speculative, since he has just learnt that Father Time is not his biological son but resolves to care for him just the same.<sup>279</sup>

Hardy is thus dramatizing a collectivization of childcare, and his earlier linkage of Phillotson's similar proposal to the concept of "Matriarchy" emphasizes the connection between "primitive culture" and potential solutions to modern sexual and reproductive dilemmas. The reviews of *Jude*, both hostile and friendly, indicate that contemporary readers recognized this turn to the primitive as a source of solutions to society-wide sexual and marital problems. The most hostile reviews, by Oliphant and Tyrrell, suggest that this aspect of the novel was its greatest offense, provoking their animadversions on Hardy's advocacy of "communism in women" and a sub-savage "animal" sexual freedom. The novel's connection to contemporary anthropology-based arguments about sex and marriage seems to have been all the more provoking because positions in these debates were voiced by the *declassé* protagonists. The novel's suggested communalization of childcare on a society-wide scale is never more than Jude's fantasy, but the novel is nonetheless seriously interested in unsettling readers' settled assumptions and perhaps evoking anger at the status quo—as Hardy's prescient note to himself,

---

<sup>279</sup> Jude's speculative proposal for collectivized childhood draws attention to the actual social isolation of couples in *Jude*, which is presented as an increasing phenomenon of modern life. Over the nineteenth century, both social trends and the marriage plot had increasingly valorized a romantic view of the companionate marriage as an isolated dyad, and *Jude* heightens this dyadic isolation in order to point up its limitations.

written as he finished the novel, attests: “Never retract. Never explain. Get it done, and let them howl.”<sup>280</sup>

The novel sympathetically portrays Sue’s sense that the “primitive” offers a refuge from the repressive constraints of “barbarous” patriarchal marriage. However, it also suggests Sue’s position is naive, though idealist. It demonstrates in bleak terms that within current social conditions, pursuing sexual freedom is not conducive to happiness, especially for women. But the novel also implies that sexual freedom is a contradiction in terms, because sexual choice can never be as absolutely free as Sue wishes, as it is constrained by social and biological pressures working in tandem. Like Hardy’s earlier fiction, then, *Jude* suggests the ambivalent allure and difficulty of reviving primitive freedom within modern social life, but also attests to the potential of “primitive” tropes for modern imaginative literature.

---

<sup>280</sup> *Later years*, p. 38.

## Epilogue

### Victorian Anthropology and Literary Modernism

“Primitivism” has come to be seen as a defining trait of Modernism, and it is well-known that major modernist writers turned to anthropology as a source of “primitive” tropes and theories of myth. My argument, however, is that “primitivism” in literary prose emerged decades earlier, in the 1860s, from the ramifications of a new science, “anthropology,” and from the ways in which George Eliot and Thomas Hardy responded to this science in their novels.

The valorization of the primitive, or “primitivism,” has come to be seen as a hallmark of Modernism. It took place in anthropology, with the work of Boas and Malinowski asserting that “savage” cultures should be studied individually and in depth, rather than glossed over and subordinated to master-narratives of cultural evolution. And it took place in literature and the visual arts, with the “discovery” and appropriation of primitive cultural forms by literary writers—for example, in T.S. Eliot’s use of myths collected by Frazer and Jessie Weston, and in Picasso’s invocation of the idiom of African sculpture in his painted faces in *Les Femmes d’Alger*.<sup>281</sup> Bush and Barkan suggest that this type of primitivism became a major force with the 1897 European discovery and looting of art from the Benin empire (in what is now Nigeria), which inaugurated primitivism as “a new idiom for Western art” (primitivism), that came to

---

<sup>281</sup> There has been some debate over the extent to which *The Waste Land* drew on Frazer. For an account of this debate and thorough assessment of the evidence, see Jewel Spears Brooker *Mastery and Escape: T. S. Eliot and the Dialectic of Modernism* (Amherst: Massachusetts UP, 1995).

“signify modernity.”<sup>282</sup> The story of the Benin sculptures reflects the fact that Modernist primitivism is at least as much a response to material objects as to anthropology.

Modernist writers interested in anthropology were much more concerned than Victorians with actual incarnations of primitive culture from elsewhere, including primitive visual art and other objects, or had traveled into foreign spaces designated primitive, as Conrad had done. This was no doubt in part because of historical forces—globalization, expansion of empire, and ease of travel. In canonical modernist novels, there are scenes of cultural encounter that you don’t see the like of in canonical Victorian fiction—for example, the encounter with the native islanders in *The Voyage Out*, and Marlowe’s encounters in *Heart of Darkness*. So whereas, for Victorian novelists, “barbarism begins at home,” modernists were more interested in cultural materials from away.

However, to a significant degree, Modernist fiction and poetry responded to anthropological texts, too—and especially to late Victorian anthropology. Recent studies have demonstrated that Modernist writers—including Conrad, Eliot, Fitzgerald, Joyce, Lawrence, Pound, and Yeats—were extensively engaging with Victorian anthropology, especially with J.G. Frazer.<sup>283</sup> *The Golden Bough* transmitted “a relatively pristine Tyloorean viewpoint well into the twentieth century” (Stocking, *After Tylor*).<sup>284</sup> The Victorian-anthropological mode of authoritative cultural synthesis, evident in Tylor as

---

<sup>282</sup> Barkan and Bush, *Prehistories of the Future*, 1-3.

<sup>283</sup> See e.g. Jewel Spears Brooker, *Mastery and Escape*, Gregory Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival*. Cambridge: CUP, 2008, Robert Fraser, ed. *Sir James Frazer and the Literary Imagination*, Marc Manganaro, “The Tangled Bank Revisited: Anthropological Authority in Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 3.1 (1989): 107, and John Vickery, *The Literary Impact of the Golden Bough*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973.

<sup>284</sup> Marc Manganaro argues that “the anthropological authority operating in Frazer’s text” was “an alluring brand of literary comparativism” that “had significant repercussions in Modernist writing broadly conceived” (Manganaro 108).

well as Frazer, appealed especially to T.S. Eliot, and Eliot also found this cultural synthesis in Joyce's *Ulysses*.<sup>285</sup> In his 1923 essay on *Ulysses*, Eliot theorized the dual role of anthropology and myth in *Ulysses* and *The Golden Bough*. Earlier, he had discussed *The Golden Bough* as though it were a successful work of art, achieving the "interpenetration and metamorphosis" of primitive and modern elements. It "can be read in two ways: as a collection of entertaining myths, or as a revelation of that vanished mind of which our mind is a continuation."<sup>286</sup> These claims suggest that Eliot saw in *The Golden Bough* something analogous to his own operations in *The Waste Land*, unifying "fragments" of culture so that they can be shored against one's ruin. And it is the "unification" of these fragments, Eliot implies, that produces the "revelation" of the "vanished mind" that, paradoxically, his own mind perpetuates. This preoccupation in seeking the unity of the human mind by aggregating cultural fragments is, as I have argued, a very Victorian activity, evident not only in Frazer but in Tylor and others from the 1870s and onwards.

Indeed, some of the Modernist responses to Victorian anthropology were very similar to those I have identified in George Eliot and Thomas Hardy's writing. For example, T.S. Eliot drew on Lévy-Bruhl's notion of "the primitive mind" as prelogical, but whereas Lévy-Bruhl believed in an absolute separation of the primitive and modern mind, T.S. Eliot wrote against this by stressing the legacy of the primitive mind in the

---

<sup>285</sup> As A. Walton Litz argues, "Eliot found in Frazer and in Joyce the same "point of view," the same "vision"—the terms are his—which brought past and present into juxtaposition through myth and ritual." A. Walton Litz, "The Waste Land Fifty Years After," *Journal of Modern Literature*, 2.4 (Nov. 1972): 455-471. 470.

<sup>286</sup> "London Letter," *The Dial* LXX (Sep. 1921).

modern.<sup>287</sup> Joyce's use of anthropology, as described by David Spurr, is similar to George Eliot's strategy of appropriation and irony. "Joyce [...] was acutely conscious that anthropology was a discursive and mythic construct rooted in the colonizing enterprises of European institutions and thought. He satirized the pretensions of anthropology while exploiting its findings for his artistic ends."<sup>288</sup>

In addition, modernist writers were unwittingly drawing on some of the major ideas of Victorian anthropology, which had persisted into twentieth-century science. Tylor's notion that the modern poet is himself at the primitive stage of thought persisted into the 1930s in both anthropology and the work of imaginative literary writers. For example, in Eliot's 1933 essay, "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism," he draws on recent anthropology to argue that "the prelogical mentality persists in civilized man, but becomes available only to or through the poet" (quoted in Bush and Barkan, 34).<sup>289</sup>

Ostensibly, Victorian anthropology was bent on distancing "civilization" from the primitive by designating it as Other, by subjecting it to scientific analysis, and by assigning it a lowly place in the social evolutionary scale. The Victorian era has therefore been viewed as an interruption of the primitivist tradition linking Romanticism and Modernism, since Victorian anthropology denigrated the primitive aspects of myth that were celebrated during the Romantic and Modern eras.<sup>290</sup> This idea is supported by Tylor's famous assertion that anthropology is "a reformer's science," with a duty to

---

<sup>287</sup> David Spurr, "Myths of Anthropology: Eliot, Joyce, Lévy-Bruhl," *PMLA* 109.2 (Mar. 1994): 266-280

<sup>288</sup> Spurr, "Myths of Anthropology: Eliot, Joyce, Lévy-Bruhl," p. 267.

<sup>289</sup> Eliot had in fact read Tylor by 1913, so would have come across this idea in his work. See Barkan and Bush.

<sup>290</sup> Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson, eds., *The Rise of Modern Mythology, 1680-1860* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1972), p. 301.

expose “the remains of crude old culture which have passed into harmful superstition, and to mark these out for destruction” (*Primitive Culture* 410). Yet, even in Tylor’s work we see an attraction to the primitive objects of anthropological study as sources of beauty and pleasure. Tylor’s attraction to the poetry of primitive myth was shared by his fellow progressivist, Frazer. Moreover, as I have shown, Victorian imaginative writers championed the use of the “primitive” aspects of myth for literary purposes. In addition, Eliot and Hardy were interested, like some Modernist writers, in valorizing the instinctive sexuality associated with the primitive, and in emphasizing the legacy of the primitive in the modern mind in the form of “instincts” and irrational states of mind. In their response to anthropology, therefore, Victorian writers participate in some of the characteristic activities of literary Modernism.

There are of course important differences between Victorian and Modernist primitivisms and uses of anthropology. My catalogue of the Modernist writers who respond to Frazer, above, is made up of male authors only, and this reflects a more general phenomenon, that Modernist primitivism appears more often in works by male writers. According to Torgovnick, Modernist narratives tended to provide a “paradigm for primitivism as a white, Western and predominantly male quest for an elusive object whose very condition of desirability resides in some form of distance and difference, whether temporal or geographical.”<sup>291</sup> In accordance with this paradigm, women and primitives were often aligned and distanced from civilized men in late Victorian and early modernist fiction. This occurs, for example, in Rider Haggard’s *She* and in

---

<sup>291</sup> Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “Going Native: Paul Gauguin and the Invention of Primitivist Modernism,” *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*. Ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garard. Westview Press, 1992. 313-330, 314.

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, in which the impenetrable otherness of the Congo is epitomized in Kurtz's African mistress. In these works, the conflation of women and the primitive suggests that "women (like primitives) exist outside the circle of rational thought" (*Going Primitive* 154). However, for earlier writers, including Hardy and Havelock Ellis in the 1870s and 80s, women's "primitive" qualities represented possibilities for pre-modern forms of pleasure, and for desirable social reform; Tess and Eustacia, for example, are connected to the primitive in this way. In Eliot's fiction, too, positive versions of femininity are coded as primitive: in Maggie Tulliver, and in Gwendolen and Lydia in *Daniel Deronda*.<sup>292</sup>

Modernist women writers, including Virginia Woolf, tended to be more wary of primitivism. This was in part because they seem to have regarded embracing the primitive as risking a reversal of the gains of women's rights, a reversion to barbarism.<sup>293</sup> Towards the end of the Modernist era, in *Between the Acts* (1941), Woolf associates the primitive with violent men, and dramatizes a fear of reversion to violent barbarism. Nonetheless, the novel ends with an ambivalently celebratory figuration of heterosexual desire as primitive. As the novel ends, the "curtain rose" on a wordless "embrace" between husband and wife, Giles and Isa.

Left alone together for the first time that day, they were silent. Alone, enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be

---

<sup>292</sup> See Deborah Nord, "Marks of Race," for an insightful reading of how Maggie's figuration in terms of racial alterity is a way for *The Mill on the Floss* to critique women's subordinate social status.

<sup>293</sup> See Alex Zwerdling, *Virginia Woolf and the Real World*, especially the chapter on *Between the Acts*.



born. But first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night [...] Then the curtain rose. They spoke.<sup>294</sup>

Their reconciliation is a heightening and parody of primitivism and of romantic novelistic endings. Woolf's allusion to the "heart of darkness" and her short, repetitive, "primitive" phrases, which insist on the universality of human sexual animality, signal that this scene is a satire of primitivism. Readers perhaps hope for and enjoy this reconciliation because of their emotional investment in these two characters, and Woolf is thus both gratifying and satirizing this readerly desire. And yet the sympathy that the novel has generated for these characters makes it impossible for readers to experience the scene as pure parody, as Woolf would have realized; the scene thus compels an ambivalent reading that recognizes its primitivism as partly sincere. From this point of view, the closing paragraph manifests a qualified, self-aware nostalgia for a perhaps non-existent primitive emotional landscape that is untainted by culture, and perhaps also a nostalgia for primitivism itself.

---

<sup>294</sup> *Between the Acts* (Harcourt, 2008), p.148.

## Works Cited

- Ackerman, Robert. *J. G. Frazer: His Life and Work*. Cambridge: CUP, 1987.
- William Adam. "Consanguinity in Marriage." *The Fortnightly Review* 3 (1865): 74-88.
- Allen, Grant. *Falling in Love with Other Essays on More Exact Branches of Science*. London: Smith Elder & Co, 1889.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Some Plain Words on the Woman Question." *Fortnightly Review* 46 (Oct. 1889): 448-458.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Woman Who Did*. London: John Lane, 1895.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The British Barbarians : A Hill-Top Novel*. London: John Lane, 1895.
- Anon. "The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals. by Charles Darwin." *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 2 (1873): 444-446.
- Anon. Review of "The Expression of the Emotions," *Popular Science Review* 12.46 (Jan: 1873): 71-3.
- Anon. Review of *Jude the Obscure*. *Saturday Review*. 1896. Reprinted in R.G. Cox. *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*. 410.
- Armstrong, Nancy. *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*. New York: OUP, 1987.
- Arnold, Matthew. *Culture and Anarchy*. Ed. Jane Garnett. Oxford: OUP, 2006.
- Auerbach, Nina. *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1984.
- Barkan, Elazar and Ronald Bush, eds. *Prehistories of the Future*. Stanford UP, 1995.
- Barnes, William. *Notes on Ancient Britain and the Britons*. 1858.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Grammar and Glossary of the Dorset Dialect: With the History, Outspreading, and Bearings of South-Western English*. Berlin: Published for the Philological Society by A. Asher, 1863.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Poems of Rural Life in Common English*. London: Macmillan, 1868.
- Beard, Mary. "Frazer, Leach, and Virgil: The Popularity (and Unpopularity) of *The Golden Bough*." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34 (1992): 203-24.

- Beatty, Jerome. *Middlemarch from Notebook to Novel: A Study of George Eliot's Creative Method*. Champaign, Illinois: Illinois UP, 1960.
- Beer, Gillian. *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1983.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Darwin's Reading and the Fictions of Development." *The Darwinian Heritage*. Ed. David Kohn. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985. 543-588.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Origins and Oblivion in Victorian Narrative." *Sex, Politics and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*. Ed. Ruth Bernard Yeazell. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986. 63-87.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter*, Oxford: OUP, 1996.
- Bender, Bert. *The Descent of Love: Darwin and the Theory of Sexual Selection in American Fiction, 1871-1926*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania UP, 1996.
- Benvenuto, Richard. "Another Look at the Other Eustacia." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 4.1 (Fall 1970): 77-79
- Björk, Lennart, ed. *Thomas Hardy's Literary Notebooks*. Göteborg : Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Thomas Hardy's 'Hellenism.'" *Papers on Language and Literature: Presented to Alvar Ellegård and Erik Frykman*. Ed. Sven Bäckman and Göran Kjellmer. Göteborg: Acta Univ. Gothoburgensis, 1985.
- Bivona, Daniel. *Desire and Contradiction: Imperial Visions and Domestic Debates in Victorian Literature*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990.
- Bland, Lucy. "Marriage Laid Bare: Middle-Class Women and Marital Sex 1880s-1914." *Labour and Love*. Ed. Jane Lewis. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Banishing the Beast*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995.
- Bodenheimer, Rosemarie. *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot, Her Letters and Fiction*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994.
- Boone, Joseph Allen. *Tradition Counter Tradition: Love and the Form of Fiction*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1987.
- Boumelha, Penny. *Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form*. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982.
- Brady, Kristen. "Thomas Hardy and Matters of Gender." *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*. Ed. Dale Kramer. Cambridge: CUP, 1999. 93-111.
- Buckland, Adelene. "Thomas Hardy, Provincial Geology and the Material Imagination." *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 6 (2008): 1-22.

- Burstein, Janet. "The Journey Beyond Myth in *Jude the Obscure*." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language: A Journal of the Humanities* 15 (1973): 499-515.
- Burstein, Miriam. *Narrating Women's History in Britain, 1770-1902*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004.
- Burnham, John C. "Instinct Theory and the German Reaction to Weismannism." *Journal of the History of Biology* 5 (1972): 321-26.
- Burrow, J.W. "Evolution and Anthropology in the 1860s: The Anthropological Society of London." *Victorian Studies* 7 (1963): 137-54.
- Butler, Samuel. *The Way of All Flesh*. 1903.
- Buzard, James. *Disorienting Fiction: The Autoethnographic Work of Nineteenth-Century British Novels*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005.
- Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. 1812-1818. *Lord Byron: The Major Works*. Oxford: OUP, 2000.
- Caird, Mona. "Marriage." *Westminster Review* 130 (Aug. 1888).  
 \_\_\_\_\_. *The Daughters of Danaus*. 1894.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. *The Morality of Marriage*. 1897.
- Carroll, David, ed. *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971.
- Castle, Gregory. *Modernism and the Celtic Revival*. Cambridge: CUP, 2008.
- Child, Francis James. *The English and Scottish Ballads*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1890.
- Clodd, Edward. *The Story of Primitive Man*. London: Newnes, 1895.  
 \_\_\_\_\_, *Pioneers of Evolution from Thales to Huxley*. London, 1897.
- Colden, Cadwallader. *The History of the Five Indian Nations of Canada*. London: Lockyer Davis, 1755.
- Comte, Auguste. *A General View of Positivism*. Trans. J. H. Bridges. London: Trubner, 1865.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. *Social Dynamics*. London, 1876.
- Cosslett, Tess. *The "Scientific Movement" and Victorian Literature*. Brighton: Harvester, 1982.
- Cox, R.G., ed. *Thomas Hardy: the Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Crawford, Robert. "Pater's Renaissance, Andrew Lang, and Anthropological Romanticism." *ELH* 53.4 (Winter 1986): 849-879.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Devolving English Literature*. New York: OUP, 1992.
- Cronin, Helena. *The Ant and the Peacock: Altruism and Sexual Selection from Darwin to Today*. Cambridge: CUP, 1991.
- Darwin, Charles. *The Origin of Species*. 1859. ed. Gillian Beer. Oxford: OUP, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*. 1871. Ed. James Moore and Adrian Desmond. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and the Animals*. 1872. Ed. Paul Ekman. Oxford: OUP, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Early Writings of Charles Darwin." Ed. Paul H. Barrett. *Darwin on Man*. Ed. and introd. H.E. Gruber. London: Wildwood House, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Metaphysics, Materialism, and the Evolution of Mind: Early Writings of Charles Darwin*. Ed. Paul Barrett. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin*. Ed. Frederick Burkhardt and Sydney Smith. 15 vols. Cambridge: CUP, 1985-
- Darwin, Francis. *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*. 3 vols. London: John Murray, 1887.
- Davis, Michael. *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Psychology: Exploring the Unmapped Country*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006.
- Dawson, Gowan. *Darwin, Literature and Victorian Respectability*. Cambridge: CUP, 2006.
- DeLaura, David J. "'The Ache of Modernism' in Hardy's Later Novels." *ELH* 34.3 (Sep. 1967): 380-99.
- Dellamora, Richard, ed. *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1999.
- Desmond, Adrian, and James Moore. *Darwin: the Life of a Tormented Naturalist*. New York: Warner Books, 1991.
- DiBattista, Maria A. "Jude the Obscure and the Taboo of Virginity." *First Love: The Affections of Modern Fiction*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1991.
- Dickens, Charles. *Nicholas Nickleby*. 1838-9. Oxford: OUP, 2009.
- Doheny, John R. "Characterization in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*: The Function of Arabella." *Reading Thomas Hardy*. Ed. Charles P.C. Pettit. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.
- Dorson, Richard. *The British Folklorists, A History*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968.
- Dowden, Edward. "The Scientific Movement and Literature." *Contemporary Review* 30 (1877): 558-78

- Duncan, Ian. "Introduction." Walter Scott. *Rob Roy*. Oxford: OUP, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Primitive Inventions: *Rob Roy*, Nation and World System." *Eighteenth Century Fiction* 15.1 (Oct 2002): 81-102.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007.
- Eggenschwiler, David. "Eustacia Vye, Queen of Night and Courtly Pretender." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 25 (1971).
- Eliot, George. Review of Robert Mackey's *Progress of the Intellect*, *The Westminster Review* 54 (Jan. 1851): 353-68.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Evangelical Teaching: Dr. Cumming." *Westminster Review* 64 (Oct. 1855): 436-62.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Natural History of German Life." *Westminster Review* 66 (July 1856): 51-79.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Adam Bede*. 1859. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Mill on the Floss*. 1862. New York and London: Norton, 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Influence of Rationalism." *Fortnightly Review* 1 (May-Aug 1865): 43-55.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Middlemarch*. 1871-2. Ed. Rosemary Ashton. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Daniel Deronda*. 1876. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The George Eliot Letters*. 9 vols. Ed. Gordon Haight. New Haven: Yale UP, 1954-1978.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *George Eliot's Middlemarch Notebooks*. Ed. John Clark Pratt and Victor A. Neufeldt. Berkeley: California UP, 1979.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *George Eliot's Daniel Deronda Notebooks*. Ed. Jane Irwin. Cambridge: CUP, 1996.
- Eliot, T.S. "London Letter," *The Dial* LXX (Sep. 1921).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Ulysses, Order and Myth." *The Dial* 75 (Nov. 1923): 480-83.
- Ellis, Havelock. "Thomas Hardy's Novels." *Westminster Review* 119 (Apr. 1883): 334-64.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Man and Woman: A Study of Human Secondary Sexual Characters*. London: Walter Scott, 1894.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Concerning *Jude the Obscure*." *Savoy* 4 (Oct. 1896): 34-49.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Dance of Life*. London: Constable, 1923.
- Emerson, Roger. "American Indians, Frenchmen, and Scots Philosophers." *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture* 9 (1979): 211-236.
- Engels, Friedrich. *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. 1884.
- Evans, Robert. "The Other Eustacia." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 1.3 (Spring 1968): 251-59.

- Feldman, Burton, and Robert D. Richardson. *The Rise of Modern Mythology, 1680-1860*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1972.
- Ferguson, Adam. *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*. 1769.
- Ferris, Ina. *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991.
- Feuerbach, Ludwig. *The Essence of Christianity*. Trans. George Eliot. 1841. New York: Harper and Row, 1957.
- Firor, Ruth. *Folkways in Thomas Hardy*. Philadelphia: Philadelphia UP, 1931.
- Fiske, John. *Myths and Mythmakers: Old Tales and Superstitions Interpreted by Comparative Mythology*. London: James R. Osgood & Co., 1872.
- Fleishman, Avrom. *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. 1976. Trans. Robert Hurley. London: Allen Lane, 1979.
- Franke, Damon. "Hardy's *Ur-Priestess* and the Phases of a Novel." *Studies in the Novel* 39.2 (2007): 160-76.
- Fraser, Robert. *The Making of the Golden Bough: The Origins and Growth of an Argument*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. *Sir James Frazer and the Literary Imagination: Essays in Affinity and Influence*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990.
- Frazer, Sir J.G. *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion*. 1890. New York: Random House, 1993.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*. Trans. James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1952.
- Gallagher, Catherine. "Tess of the D'Urbervilles: Hardy's Anthropology of the Novel." *Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Complete, Authoritative Text with Biographical and Historical Contexts*. Ed. John Paul Riquielme. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998. 422-443.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Body Economic: Life, Death and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005.
- Garver, Joseph. *Thomas Hardy: The Return of the Native*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988.

- Gatrell, Simon, ed. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Facsimile of the Manuscript, with Related Materials*. New York: Garland Pub, 1986.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Hardy the Creator: a Textual Biography*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.
- Gibbon, Edward. *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. 1776-89. Ed. David Womersley. 1 vol. New York: Penguin Books, 2000.
- Gittings, Robert. *The Young Thomas Hardy*. London: Heinemann, 1975.
- Goetz, William R. "The Felicity and Infelicity of Marriage in *Jude the Obscure*." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 38.2 (Sep. 1983): 189-213
- Golston, Michael. *Rhythm and Race in Modernist Poetry and Science*. New York: Columbia UP, 2008.
- Goode, John. "Hardy's Fist." *Jude the Obscure*. Ed. Penny Boumelha. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.
- Gosse, Edmund. Review of *Jude the Obscure*. *Cosmopolis* 1 (Jan. 1896): 60-69.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Mr. Hardy's Lyrical Poems." *Edinburgh Review* 227 (1918): 272-9.
- Gossin, Pamela. *Thomas Hardy's Novel Universe: Astronomy, Cosmology, and Gender in the Post-Darwinian World*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing 2007.
- Gribble, Jennifer. "The Quiet Women of Egdon Heath." *Essays in Criticism* 46.3 (1996): 234-57.
- Grote, George. *History of Greece*. 10 vols. 1846. London: John Murray, 1888.
- Gordon Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985.
- Hands, Timothy. *George Eliot: A Chronology*. Macmillan: Basingstoke, 1989.
- Hannigan, D.F. Review of *Jude the Obscure*. *Westminster Review* 114 (Jan. 1896): 136-9.
- Hardy, Barbara. "Literary Allusion: Hardy and Other Poets." *Thomas Hardy Reappraised*. Ed. Keith Wilson (editor). Toronto: Toronto UP, 2006. 55-77.
- Hardy, Florence and Thomas Hardy. *The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928*. 1928-30. Ware: Wordsworth, 2007.
- Hardy, Thomas. *Desperate Remedies*. 1871. Oxford: OUP, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Under the Greenwood Tree*. 1872. Oxford: OUP, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. 1873. Oxford: OUP, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Dorsetshire Laborer." *Longman's Magazine* (July 1874): 252-269.



- \_\_\_\_\_. *Far From the Madding Crowd*. 1874. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Return of the Native*. 1878. New York and London: Norton, 2006.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Laodicean*. 1881. Oxford: OUP, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Two on a Tower*. 1882. Oxford: OUP, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. 1886. Oxford: OUP, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Woodlanders*. 1887. Oxford: OUP, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Profitable Reading of Fiction." *Forum* (Mar. 1888): 57-70.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Candour in English Fiction." *The New Review* (Jan. 1890): 15-21.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. 1891. New York and London: Norton, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Science of Fiction." *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art* 53 (June 1891): 854-6.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Tree of Knowledge." *The New Review* 10 (June 1894): 680-81.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Life's Little Ironies* ed. Alan Manford and Norman Page. 1894. Oxford: OUP, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Hardy. *Hearts Insurgent*, *Harpers Magazine*, 1895.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Jude the Obscure* 1895. Ed. Norman Page. New York and London: Norton, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Well-Beloved*. 1897. Oxford: OUP, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Stonehenge." 1899. Reprinted in *Thomas Hardy's Public Voice*. Ed. Michael Millgate.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Hardy, *The Dynasts*. 1904-08. Reprinted in *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hardy*, Vols. 4-5.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Hardy, "Maumbury Ring." *The Times* (9 Oct. 1908): 11.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Preface." *Late Lyrics and Earlier*. 1922. Reprinted in *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. 2.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Letter on "Country dances." *The English Folk Dance Society News* (Sep. 1926): 384-5. Reprinted in *Thomas Hardy's Public Voice*.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*. Ed. Richard L. Purdy and Michael Millgate. 7 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978-88.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hardy*. 5 vols. Ed. Samuel Hynes. Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: OUP, 1982-1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*. Ed. Lennart Bjork. 2 vols. London: Macmillan, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Wessex Tales*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Thomas Hardy's Public Voice: The Essays, Speeches, and Miscellaneous Prose*. Ed. Michael Millgate. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Fiddler of the Reels and Other Stories, 1888-1900*. Ed. Keith Wilson and Kristin Brady. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Thomas Hardy's Facts Notebooks: A Critical Edition*. Ed. William Greenslade. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004.

Havird, David. "'The Commonwealth of Hearts and Hands': Dancing in *The Return of the Native*." *Hardy Review* 5 (Winter 2002): 135-44

Henrichs, Albert. "Loss of Self, Suffering, Violence: The Modern View of Dionysus from Nietzsche to Girard." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 88 (1984): 205-240

- Henry, Nancy. *George Eliot and the British Empire*. Cambridge: CUP, 2002.
- Herbert, Christopher. *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1991.
- Herman, Arthur. *The Scottish Enlightenment*. 4<sup>th</sup> Estate, 2003.
- Home, Henry, Lord Kames. *Sketches of the History of Man*. Edinburgh: W. Strahan & T. Caddell, 1778.
- Hutchins, John. *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset*. 3rd edn. Ed. William Shipp and James Whitworth Hodson. 4 vols. Westminster: John Bowyer Nichols and Sons, 1861-73.
- Hutton, Ronald. *Blood and Mistletoe: The History of the Druid in Britain*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2009.
- Ingham, Patricia. "The Evolution of *Jude the Obscure*." *Review of English Studies: A Quarterly Journal of English Literature and the English Language* 27 (May 1976): 159-69
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Hardy and *The Wonders of Geology*." *Review of English Studies* 31 (1980): 59-64.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Thomas Hardy in Context*. Oxford: OUP, 2003.
- Irvine, Robert P. *Enlightenment and Romance: Gender and Agency in Smollett and Scott*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2000.
- Irwin, Jane, ed. *George Eliot's Daniel Deronda Notebooks*. Cambridge: CUP, 1996.
- Jann, Rosemary. "Darwin and the Anthropologists: Sexual Selection and its Discontents." *Victorian Studies* 37 (1994): 287-306.
- Jenkyns, Richard. *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980.
- Johnson, Bruce. "Pastoralism and Modernity." *Thomas Hardy's Return of the Native*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1987. 111-36.
- Johnson, Lionel. *The Art of Thomas Hardy*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1928.
- Jurta, Roxanne. "'Not-So-New' Sue: The Myth of *Jude the Obscure* as a New Woman Novel." *Journal of the Eighteen Nineties Society* 26 (1999): 13-21
- Kames. *Sketches of the History of Man*. See Henry Home.
- Katz, Alison. "*Jude the Obscure*: The (En)Graven Image." *Thomas Hardy Journal* 22 (Autumn 2006): 85-104.

- Kaye, Richard A. *The Flirt's Tragedy: Desire Without End in Victorian and Edwardian Fiction*. Charlottesville and London: Virginia UP, 2002.
- Kuklick, Henrika. *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885–1945*. Cambridge: CUP, 1991.
- . "The Rise and Fall—and Potential Resurgence—of the Comparative Method, with Special Reference to Anthropology." *Humanities Research* 24.1 (2007): 51-66.
- Kramer, Dale, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*. Cambridge: CUP, 1999.
- Kuper, Adam. *The Reinvention of Primitive Society: Transformations of a Myth*. Oxford: Routledge, 2005.
- Laird, J.T. *The Shaping of Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.
- . "New Light on the Evolution of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*." *Review of English Studies* 31/4 (Nov. 1980): 414-35.
- Lang, Andrew. "Kalevala: or the Finnish National Epic." *Fraser's Magazine* (June 1872): 667-77.
- . "Mythology and Fairy Tales." *Fortnightly Review*, 13.77 (May 1873): 622.
- . "Far from the Madding Crowd." *Academy* 7.139 (Jan. 2, 1875): 9.
- . "The Method of Folklore." *Custom and Myth*. 1884.
- . Review of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. *New Review* 6 (Feb. 1892): 247-9.
- Langland, Elizabeth. *Telling Tales: Gender and Narrative Form in Victorian Literature and Culture*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2002.
- Lawrence, D.H. *Women in Love*. 1920. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2007.
- . *The Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*. 1970. Ed. Bruce Steele. Cambridge: CUP, 1985.
- Leopold, Joan. *Culture in Comparative and Evolutionary Perspective: E. B. Tylor and the Making of Primitive Culture*. Berlin: Verlag, 1980.
- Levine, George. *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1981.
- . *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1988.
- . "Darwin's Theory of Sexual Selection: How Anthropomorphism Helps." Keynote address. "Science in Nineteenth-Century Britain." University of Chicago, April 7, 2006.
- . *Darwin Loves You*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006.
- Lightman, Bernard. *Victorian Science in Context*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1997.

- Lincoln, Andrew. *Walter Scott and Modernity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007.
- Litz, A. Walton. "The Waste Land Fifty Years After." *Journal of Modern Literature*. 2.4 (Nov. 1972): 455-471.
- Logan, Peter Melville. *Victorian Fetishism: Intellectuals and Primitives*. Albany: SUNY UP, 2009.
- Lorimer, Douglas. "Theoretical Racism in Late-Victorian Anthropology, 1870-1900." *Victorian Studies* 31.3 (Spring 1988): 405-430.
- Lubbock, John. *The Origin of Civilization and the Primitive Condition of Man*. London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1870.
- Lyons, Andrew P. and Harriet D. Lyons. *Irregular Connections: A History of Anthropology and Sexuality*. Lincoln, NE and London: Nebraska UP, 2004.
- Maine, Henry Sumner. *Ancient Law*. 1861. London & Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1931.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. *Village Communities in the East and West*. 1871.
- Malton, Sara. "'The Woman Shall Bear Her Iniquity': Death as Social Discipline in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*." *Studies in the Novel* 32.2 (Summer 2000): 147-64
- Manganaro, Marc. "The Tangled Bank Revisited: Anthropological Authority in Frazer's *The Golden Bough*." *Yale Journal of Criticism* 3.1 (1989): 107.
- Mantell, Gideon. *The Wonders of Geology; or, A Familiar Exposition of Geological Phenomena*. 6th edn. London: Henry G. Bohn, 1848.
- Mason, Michael. *The Making of Victorian Sexuality*. Oxford: OUP, 1994.
- Mattar, Sinéad Garrigan. *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004.
- McLennan, John Ferguson. *Primitive Marriage: An Inquiry into the Origins of the Form of Capture in Marriage Ceremonies*. Edinburgh: Adam and Charles, 1865.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. "Kinship in Ancient Greece." Part I. *Fortnightly Review* 4 (Apr. 1866): 582-99.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. "The Worship of Animals and Plants: Part I.—Totems and Totem-ism." *Fortnightly Review* 6 (Oct. 1869): 407-427.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. "The Worship of Plants and Animals: Part II.—Totem-Gods Among the Ancients." *The Fortnightly Review* 6 (Nov. 1869): 562-582.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. "The worship of animals and plants: Part II cont." *The Fortnightly Review* 7 (Feb. 1870): 194-216.

- McMaster, Graham. *Scott and Society*. Cambridge: CUP, 1982.
- Mill, John Stewart. *On Liberty*. 1858. London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1867.
- Millar, John. *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*. 1771.
- Millgate, Michael. *Thomas Hardy: A Biography*. Oxford: OUP, 1982.
- Morgan, Lewis Henry. *Ancient Society*. 1877.
- Mort, *Dangerous sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England Since 1830*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987.
- Morton, Peter. *The Vital Science: Biology and the Literary Imagination, 1860-1900*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1984.
- Murphy, Patricia. *In Science's Shadow: Literary Constructions of Late Victorian Women*. London: Missouri UP, 2006.
- Müller, Max. *Chips from a German Workshop*. 4 vols. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1867-75.
- Natarajan, Uttara. "Pater and the Genealogy of Hardy's Modernity." *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 46.4 (Aug. 2006): 849-61.
- Edward Neill. *The Secret Life of Thomas Hardy: "Retaliatory Fiction."* Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Die Geburt der Tragödie, Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. Ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari. Berlin, 1972.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Trans. Ian Johnston. 1872
- Nord, Deborah Epstein. *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation, and the City*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. "'Marks of Race': Gypsy Figures and Eccentric Femininity in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing." *Victorian Studies* 41 (1997): 189-210.
- Nunokawa, Jeff. Lecture on *Daniel Deronda*. Eng 334: Literature of the *Fin de Siècle*. English Department, Princeton University, NJ. Sep. 9, 2004.
- O'Hara, Patricia. "Narrating the Native: Victorian Anthropology and Hardy's *Return of the Native*." *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 20.2 (1997): 147-63.
- Oliphant, Margaret. "The Anti-Marriage League." *Blackwoods Magazine* (Jan. 1895).
- Ovid. *The Fasti, Epistles, etc.* Trans. H. T. Riley. London: George Bell & Sons, 1876.
- Page, Norman. *Thomas Hardy*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977.

- Pater, Walter. "Winckelmann." *Westminster Review* (Jan. 1867): 89-104.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*. London: Macmillan, 1873.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. "On Wordsworth." *Fortnightly Review* 88/15 (Apr. 1874): 455-65.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. "The Myth of Demeter and Persephone." 2 parts. *The Fortnightly Review* 25 (Jan. 1876): 82-95 and 26 (Feb. 1876): 260-276.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. "A Study of Dionysus: the Spiritual Form of Fire and Dew." *Greek Studies: A Series of Essays*. 1895. London: Macmillan, 1908.
- Paterson, John. "The Genesis of *Jude the Obscure*." *Studies in Philology* 57 (1960): 87-88.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. *The Making of "The Return of the Native"*. Berkeley: California UP, 1963.
- Paxton, Nancy. *George Eliot and Herbert Spencer: Feminism, Evolutionism, and the Reconstruction of Gender*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991.
- Thomas Percy. *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*. 1765. Ed. H.B. Wheatley. 3 vols. London: Bickers and Son, 1876.
- Poovey, Mary. *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1988.
- Psomiades, Kathy. "Heterosexual Exchange and Other Victorian Fictions: *The Eustace Diamonds* and Victorian Anthropology." *Novel* 33:1 (Fall 1999): 93-118.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. "The Marriage Plot in Theory." *Novel* 43:1 (Spring 2010): 51-59.
- Radford, Andrew. *Thomas Hardy and the Survivals of Time*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. *The Lost Girls: Demeter-Persephone and the Literary Imagination, 1850-1930*. Rodopi, 2007.
- Ragussis, Michael. *Figures of Conversion: "The Jewish Question" and English National Identity*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1995.
- Rainger, Ronald. "Race, Politics and Science: The Anthropological Society of London in the 1860s." *Victorian Studies* 22 (1978): 51-70.
- Rutland, William R. *Thomas Hardy: A Study of His Writings and Their Background*. Russell & Russell. 1962.
- Richardson, Angelique. "'Some Science Underlies All Art: The Dramatization of Sexual Selection and Racial Biology in Thomas Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and *The Well-Beloved*.'" *Journal of Victorian Culture* 3 (1998): 302-28.
- Russett, Cynthia Eagle. *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP, 1989.

- Scott, Sir Walter. *Waverley*. 1814. Oxford: OUP, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Guy Mannering*. 1815. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Rob Roy*, 1817. Ed. Ian Duncan. Oxford: OUP, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Heart of Midlothian*. 1818. Oxford: OUP, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Bride of Lammermoor*. 1819. Oxford: OUP, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Legend of Montrose*. 1819. *The Black Dwarf and A Legend of Montrose*. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1924.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Pirate*. 1822. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1910.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*. 1830. Forgotten Books, 2008.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Poetical Works*. 12 vols. Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1833.
- Segal, *Landscape in Ovid's Metamorphoses: A Study in the Transformations of a Literary Symbol*. Wiesbaden: Verlag, 1969.
- Semmel, Bernard. *George Eliot and the Politics of National Inheritance*. New York: OUP, 1994.
- Shaw, Harry E. *The Forms of Historical Fiction*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1983.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Eliot*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999.
- Shuttleworth, Sally. *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: The Make-Believe of a Beginning*. Cambridge: CUP, 1984.
- Simpson, Anne B. "Sue Bridehead Revisited." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 19 (1991): 55-66.
- Small, Helen. *Love's Madness: Medicine, the Novel, and Female Insanity, 1800-1865*. Oxford: OUP, 1996.
- Smith, Adam. *Lectures on Jurisprudence*. 1762-3. Ed. R. Meek, D. Raphael, and P. Stein. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 1776. Ed. Kathryn Sutherland. Oxford: OUP, 2008.
- Smith, William Robertson. *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia*. Cambridge: CUP, 1885.
- Solomon-Godeau, Abigail. "Going Native: Paul Gauguin and the Invention of Primitivist Modernism." *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*. Ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garard. Westview Press, 1992. 313-330.
- Southerington, F. R. "The Return of the Native: Thomas Hardy and the Evolution of Consciousness." *Thomas Hardy and the Modern World*. Ed. F.B. Pinion. Dorchester: Thomas Hardy Soc., 1974.
- Spears Brooker, Jewel. *Mastery and Escape: T. S. Eliot and the Dialectic of Modernism*. Amherst: Massachusetts UP, 1994.

- Spencer, Herbert. *First Principles*. New York and London, 1865.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorti. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. London: Macmillan, 1988. 271-313.
- Spurr, David. "Myths of Anthropology: Eliot, Joyce, Lévy-Bruhl." *PMLA* 109.2 (Mar. 1994): 266-280.
- Squillace, Robert. "Hardy's Mummies." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 41.2 (Sep. 1986): 172-89.
- Stepan, Nancy. *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800-1960*. London: Macmillan, 1982.
- Stocking, George. "What's in a Name? The Origins of the Royal Anthropological Institute (1837-71)." *Man* 6.3 (Sep. 1971): 369-390  
 \_\_\_\_\_. *Victorian Anthropology*. New York: The Free Press, 1987.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology, 1888-1951*. Madison: Wisconsin UP, 1995.
- Sully, James. "George Eliot's Art." *Mind* 6.23 (July 1881): 378-394.
- Swinburne, Algernon Charles. *Poems and Ballads*. 1866. London: John Camden Hotten, 1873.
- Symonds, John Addington. *Studies in the Greek Poets, Second Series*. 1876. London, 1902.
- Thomas, Jane. "Jude the Obscure and Comradely Love." *Literature and History*, 2001.
- Tiefer, Hillary. "Clym Yeobright: Hardy's Comtean Hero." *Thomas Hardy Journal* 16.2 (2000 May): 43-53.
- Thomas, Brian. *The Return of the Native: Saint George Defeated*. New York: Twayne, 1995.
- Tönnies, Ferdinand. *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*. 1887.
- Torgovnick, Marianna. *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1990.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. *Primitive Passions: Men, Women, and the Quest for Ecstasy*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1996.
- Trotter, David. "Space, Movement, and Sexual Feeling in *Middlemarch*." *Middlemarch in the 21st Century*. Ed. Karen Chase. Oxford: OUP, 2005. 55-103.



- Trumpener, Katie. *Bardic Nationalism: the Romantic Novel and the British Empire*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997.
- Turner, Frank. *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1981.
- Tylor, Edward Burnett. *Anahuac: Or Mexico and the Mexicans, Ancient and Modern*. London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization*. London: John Murray, 1865.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "On the Origin of Language." *Fortnightly Review* 4 (1866): 544-559.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Religion of Savages." *Fortnightly Review* 6 (1866): 71-86.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*. 2 vols. London: John Murray, 1871.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Primitive Culture*. Part I, *The Origins of Culture*. 1871. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Anthropology: An Introduction to the Study of Man and Civilization*. London: Macmillan, 1881.
- Tyrrell, R.Y. "Jude the Obscure." *The Fortnightly Review* 65 (1896): 857-64.
- Vickery, John B. *The Literary Impact of the Golden Bough*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973.
- Vigderman, Patricia. "The Traffic in Men: Female Kinship in Three Novels by George Eliot." *Style* 32.1 (Spring 1998): 18-35.
- Vrettos, Athena. "Victorian Psychology." *A Companion to Victorian Novel*. Ed. Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002. 67-83.
- Walkowitz, Judith R. *City of Dreadful Night: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1992.
- Watson, Tim. "Jamaica, Genealogy, George Eliot: Inheriting the Empire after Morant Bay." *Jouvert* 1.1 (1997): 1-31.
- Watts, Cedric. "Hardy's Sue Bridehead and the 'New Woman.'" *Critical Survey* 5.2 (1993): 152-56.
- Weber, Carl. "Chronology in Hardy's Novels." *PMLA* 53.1 (Mar. 1938): 314-320.
- Weeks, Jeffrey. *Sex, Politics and Society. The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800*. London: Longman, 1981.
- Weismann, August. *Essays upon Heredity*. Ed. and trans. Edward B. Poulton, Selmar Schönland, and Arthur E. Shipley. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889.

- Westermarck, Edward. *The History of Human Marriage*. 1891. London: Macmillan, 1894.
- Widdowson, Peter. *On Thomas Hardy. Late Essays and Earlier*. London: Macmillan, 1998.
- Wiesenfarth, Joseph. *George Eliot's Mythmaking*. Heidelberg, 1977.
- Williams, Drid. *Anthropology and the Dance: Ten Lectures*. Champaign, IL: Illinois UP, 2004.
- Williamson, Peter. *French and Indian Cruelty*. Edinburgh, 1762. Thoemmes Press: Bristol, 1996.
- Wilson, Cheryl. "Politicizing Dance in Late-Victorian Women's Poetry." *Victorian Poetry* 46.2 (Summer 2008): 191-205
- Wilt, Judith. *Secret Leaves: The Novels of Sir Walter Scott*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985.
- Womack, Peter. *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands*. London: Macmillan, 1989.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Between the Acts*. 1941. Ed. Melba Cuddy-Keane. Harcourt, 2008.
- Wright, T.R. *Hardy and his Readers*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Yeazell, Ruth Bernard. *Fictions of Modesty: Women and Courtship in the English Novel*. Chicago and London: Chicago UP, 1991.
- Yonge, Charlotte. *The History of Christian Names*. London: Macmillan, 1884.
- Zeitler, Michael. *Representations of Culture: Thomas Hardy's Wessex and Victorian Anthropology*. New York: Peter Lang, 2007.
- Alex Zwerdling, *Virginia Woolf and the Real World*. Berkeley: California UP, 1986