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Sommario

Tim Parks

Semantic Polarities in the Writings of Thomas Hardy and D. H. Lawrence

The novels of Thomas Hardy and D. H. Lawrence aroused fierce controversy, above all for the way they wrote about sexual behaviour. In Hardy's case the controversy has subsided; contemporary critics see nothing offensive in the stories he tells, reserving their censure, if they consider the matter at all, for the prudish Victorian society that attacked him[1]. Lawrence, on the other hand, remains the object of heated debate, though the kind of criticism levelled at his work tends to change with each passing decade[2]. The difference between the critical heritages of the two writers suggests that the nature of the outrage they provoked was not the same,

[1] See L. Shires, "The Radical Aesthetic of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*", in Dale Kramer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*, Cambridge, CUP, 1999, p. 149.

[2] In *Son of Woman* (1931) Middleton Murry saw Lawrence as destroyed by mother love; in *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949) Simone de Beauvoir attacked Lawrence's phallic chauvinism; in *D. H. Lawrence: the Failure and Triumph of Art* (1960) Eliseo Vivas elaborated what he saw as the negative side to Lawrence's apocalyptic vision; in *The Utopian Vision of D. H. Lawrence* (1963) Eugene Goodheart accused Lawrence of confusing the visionary and the ethical; in *Sexual Politics* (1969) Kate Millet launched a scathing feminist attack on Lawrence; in *D. H. Lawrence: History, Ideology and Fiction* (1982) Graham Holderness ridiculed Lawrence's sense of history.

this despite the fact that in both cases initial criticism centred on the presentation of sexual behaviour. The aim of this paper is to analyse these writers' novels and the reaction to them in the light of the dominant semantic polarities that structure their narratives. The intention is not to question recent critical approaches, which have chiefly concentrated on the modernist aspects of Hardy and Lawrence's work, but to provide a fresh framework within which those aspects can be understood.

A word needs to be said about the term 'semantic polarities'. The British anthropologist Gregory Bateson was the first to suggest that personality differentiation occurs around the behavioural polarities dominant in a given cultural ethos[3]. Exhibitionism, for example, invites either competing, hence escalating, exhibitionism, or alternatively a passive response, whether admiring or critical, each behaviour pattern consolidating its opposite in a process Bateson referred to as schismogenesis. Because an individual might feel trapped or limited in one behaviour pattern or social role, personality would be potentially unstable, frequently seeking escape valves that allowed for role reversal and the possibility of exploring different areas of experience.

This crude model has since been enhanced by a number of behavioural psychologists interested in personality development and differentiation within families and larger groups[4]. In particular, the Italian psychologist,

[3] See G. Bateson, *Naven*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1936.

[4] See R. Harrè et al., *The Self and Others: Positioning Individuals and Groups in Personal, Political, and Cultural Contexts*, Westport, CT, Praeger,

Valeria Ugazio, introduced the notion that schismogenetic polarities have semantic content. Comparing themselves with others, people see themselves as fearful or courageous, selfish or altruistic, winners or losers, and so on. She argued that, although in any family various polarities would always be present, one in particular would dominate and all family members would be obliged to construct a personality-determining position within that semantic polarity. Like Bateson, she offers a model to show how this form of schismogenesis can lead to unease and instability. She cites families where one parent is highly independent and enterprising, the other rather fearful, dependent and not unhappy to be so. Children in such families tend to think of themselves and others in terms of fear and courage, dependence and independence, weakness and strength. The problem arises when, over time, a child whose personality has developed at one side of the polarity seeks to shift to the other. For example: a young boy is happy to be attached to an anxious, dependent mother who likes to see him as weak and overprotects him. Eventually, the boy senses that while he has a special relationship with the mother he does not enjoy her admiration as does his enterprising father. At this point he begins to oscillate between attempts to be independent in emulation of the father and panic attacks that oblige him to return to his mother and the security of an already established identity[5].

2003; V. Ugazio, *Storie permesse e storie proibite, polarità semantiche familiari e psicopatologie*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2001; D. Campbell, *Taking Positions in the Organization*, London, Karnac Books, 2006.

[5] See Emilio's story, V. Ugazio, *op. cit.*, pp. 162-166 and in general the chapter entitled, "La semantica fobica: un problema di libertà".

Since Ugazio's understanding of personality is narrative rather than static it is not surprising that she uses literary fiction to exemplify her model of character differentiation around semantic polarities with references to works by Dostoevsky, Fontane, Kundera and Suskind[6], and, in a forthcoming edition, with more strategic analyses of Dickens's *Dombey and Son* and Christina Stead's masterpiece, *The Man who Loved Children*[7]. However, these analyses are limited to a consideration of the relationships between the characters (particularly parents and children); Ugazio does not examine other novels by the same authors to see if the same semantic polarities recur, nor does she look for a relation between these narratives and the authors' lives. Above all, she does not ask the intriguing question that her analyses nevertheless raise: can we suppose that the relationship between author and reader is also being encouraged to form along the same semantic polarity (fear/courage, right/wrong, winner/loser) that we see determining the personality development of the characters in the narrative, the reader being drawn, as though in an extended conversation, into taking a position within that polarity?

With these notions in mind, let us turn to a key moment in Thomas Hardy's early career. There are various accounts of the fate of his first novel *The Poor Man and the Lady*, most describing the book as being rejected for

[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 184-187, 129-132, 97-101, 86.

[7] The second edition of *Storie permesse*, which I have had the privilege to consult, will be published by Bollati Boringhieri in 2010. The analyses of Dickens and Stead are in the opening pages.

publication by an obtuse literary establishment[8]. However in Hardy's version of events Chapman accepted the novel for publication requiring the author to deposit £20 pounds to cover eventual losses. Hardy agreed but was then warned by Chapman's reader, George Meredith, that the novel would provoke controversy and compromise his reputation. After reflection, Hardy withdrew[9].

From what we know of its content *The Poor Man and the Lady* had been as courageous in the writing as its withdrawal was cautious. Hardy spoke of it as his "most original" work, telling "the life of an isolated student cast upon the billows of London with no protection but his brains"[10]; "[...] a sweeping dramatic satire of the squirearchy and nobility, London society, [...] the tendency of the writing being socialistic, not to say revolutionary"[11]. The main character, Will Strong, "was the son of peasants [...] showed remarkable talent at the village school, and was [...] educated as a draughtsman, [...] the lad was sent up to London, where he was taken into the office of an eminent architect and made striking progress"[12].

[8] See G. W. Sherman, *The Pessimism of Thomas Hardy*, Rutherford N.J., Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976, p. 114, and B. Plietzsch, *The novels of Thomas Hardy as a product of nineteenth-century social, economic and cultural change*, Berlin, Tenea, 2004, p. 162; also P. Widdowson, *Hardy in History*, p. 135.

[9] T. & F. Hardy, *Thomas Hardy*, Hertfordshire, Wordsworth, 2007, pp. 61-65.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 62.

[12] E. Gosse quoted in M. Ray, *Thomas Hardy Remembered*, London, Ashgate, 2007, pp. 214-215.

The same description would have fit Hardy himself[13]. But was the writer as strong-willed as Will Strong? Hardy's biography at this point read as follows: born the frail and sickly son of a Dorset stonemason, considered too weak to follow in his father's footsteps (her "rather delicate boy"[14], his ambitious mother always considered him), Hardy had done so well at school that he had been articled to an architect in Dorchester at 16 (he later described himself as "still a child"[15]), receiving his first salary at 20, something that allowed him to live independently from his family, though returning home to mother at the weekends. In 1862, however, aged 22, Hardy had taken the courageous decision to go to London to pursue an architect's career. Living independently from his family, he won two prizes with the firm he worked for and seemed set for a bright future when, in 1867, he abandoned London for home, pleading on the one hand ill health (there was no specific pathology) and on the other the impossibility of "pushing his way into [the] influential sets"[16] that could give him work as an architect. His abrupt departure raises a question as to whether the desire to return home was not stronger than the desire to succeed[17]. In any event, it was from

[13] One subtitle used for the book was "By the Poor Man", indicating Hardy's identification with Will Strong. See T. & F. Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

[14] C. Tomalin, *Thomas Hardy, the Time-Torn Man*, London, Penguin, 2007, p. 288.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 46.

[16] T. & F. Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

[17] Typically, Hardy covered his back, leaving his London employer, Bloomfield, on the understanding that he would soon return. See R. Pite, *Thomas Hardy: the Guarded Life*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2007, p. 135.

the safety of home (hence with rather more protection than just his brains) that Hardy wrote his novel and sent it to London, where its boldness won him both an offer of publication and the warnings of controversy that then led him to withdraw the book.

I bring these apparently disparate facts together to show that within Will Strong's story *and* in the manner in which the author presented it *and* in Hardy's life at the time *and again* in his reaction to the publisher's response, the polarity fear/courage and the related polarities dependence/independence, safety/vulnerability, weakness/strength were all important. It is also clear that Hardy had trouble finding a stable position inside the fear/courage polarity: he admired a strong will, or a Will Strong, he was ambitious, but at the same time was guided in life by a reluctance to run risks and a tendency to return to his family at moments of crisis.

Of course other polarities are in evidence in *The Poor Man and the Lady*. The book's title announces a class conflict tangled with sexual attraction and offering the polarities wealth/poverty and simplicity/sophistication, which prepare us for the polarity justice/injustice when Will is forbidden to court his lady because he is poor. It is out of a consequent "pique"[18] that Will takes up radical politics (something Hardy never did), militancy being thus presented as subordinate or secondary to romantic gratification and possibly rash.

However, Hardy's position on social injustice was stable. He knew where he stood. More problematic was

[18] Hardy in conversation with Gosse, quoted in M. Ray, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

how to respond to it, what risks should be run to redress the balance. In the case of *The Poor Man and the Lady* one might say that Hardy had been braver on paper than he chose to be in reality, only to discover that fiction and the real world were not so separate as he hoped. Alternatively, one might ask whether in portraying the failure of Will Strong's rebellion (from the account Hardy gave Gosse it does not appear that anything was achieved)[19], Hardy was actually justifying his own decision to keep his head down, not to succumb to the promptings of "pique".

Let us turn now to the first moment of serious controversy in Hardy's writing career: the publication of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, variously characterized by adverse critics as coarse, immoral and incompetent[20]. Like *Jude the Obscure* the story starts with a child thrust out into the world early and without proper protection. The question of safety is paramount. Of Tess and her siblings, we hear:

> All these young souls were passengers in the Durbeyfield ship, entirely dependent on the judgement of the two Durbeyfield adults for their pleasures, their necessities, the health, even their existence. If the heads of the Durbeyfield household chose to sail into difficulty, disaster, starvation, disease, degradation, death, thither were these half-dozen little captives under hatches compelled to sail with them – six helpless creatures, who had never been asked if they wished for life on any terms, much less if they wished for it on such hard conditions (p. 24)[21].

[19] Gosse was writing in *The Sunday Times*, 22 January 1928, quoted in M. Ray, pp. 213-216.

[20] See R. Cox (ed.), *Thomas Hardy, the Critical Heritage*, London, Routledge, 1979, reviews by Mrs Oliphant, Mowbray Morris, Andrew Lang and other anonymous reviewers, pp. 183-244.

The passage functions as a warning to the reader that the reading experience is to be one of waiting for catastrophe. We are invited to be anxious. And disaster is not long in coming. Roused at night to drive her drunken father's beehives to market, Tess falls asleep at the reins of the cart and the family's horse is killed, a ruinous loss. As the animal is buried Tess "regarded herself in the light of a murderess" (p. 35) internalizing as guilt along the polarity good/evil what the reader understands to be a consequence of parental carelessness and bad luck. At the end of the novel, when Tess is indeed a murderess, Hardy will still be deploying a rhetoric that suggests she is a victim.

Though "naturally [...] courageous" (p. 53) after this accident Tess becomes "exceedingly timid" (p. 53) about wheeled transport, something Alex d'Urberville spots at once when he picks her up in his dog cart, first accelerating wildly then demanding a kiss as the price of slowing down. Terrified, Tess accepts, then changes her mind when he slows, at which she is accused of breaking her word. Since this is something she knows she must not do (ethical polarity), she now accepts the kiss, protesting "But I thought you would be kind to me, and protect me" (p. 56).

With this ironic back and forth between polarities of

[21] All quotations are taken from T. Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Penguin, London, 2003.

fear / courage and propriety / impropriety does Hardy set up the dynamic that leads to Tess's downfall. On the night she loses her virginity she is first fearful of an attack by a rival girl, sensibly declining to fight, then fatally rash when Alec appears offering to carry her home on his horse. Hardy remarks that "coming as [Alec's] invitation did at the particular juncture when fear and indignation at these adversaries could be transformed by a spring of the foot into a triumph over them, she abandoned herself to her impulse" (p. 68). Such an explanation has the effect of persuading us that the question we must ask of Tess is not, in what way did she sin, but rather, how was it that she made such a bad mistake[22]? Later Tess will learn patience "that blending of moral courage with physical timidity"[23] (p. 285), a positive combination of both sides of the polarity.

Why, after their romantic disappointments, do Hardy's characters always come back for more? And why after being criticized for writing about sex and making it clear how much the criticisms hurt, did Hardy return to the subject? Simply, it was irresistible, it was life itself, and the impulse to go toward it vied constantly with the impulse to self preservation. "She was so *living*"[24] Hardy used to say of his wife Emma in the early days. Tess embodies that irresistibility. On the other hand, contemplation of Tess's beauty always creates an atmosphere of trepida-

[22] Similarly, Ian Gregor remarks of *Jude* that "it seems quite irrelevant to think of the characters in terms of their being 'good' or 'bad'", in M. Mack (ed.), *Imagined Worlds*, London, Methuen, 1968, p. 240.

[23] Hardy had jotted down this formula in his notebook as early as 1865. See T. & F. Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 74.

tion. There is no desire without fear in Hardy and it is around the excitement and danger of sex that the problem of finding a stable position along the line between fear and courage is most tormented. Ambition and class difference are secondary, or are tangled with a potential sexual relationship to increase both attraction and fear and to introduce eventual obstacles to consummation, whether real or imagined[25].

Two remarks in Hardy's notebooks give a sense of the way the polarity operated in his own life. In 1868, aged 28, writing of an attractive woman seen during a boat trip to Lulworth, he remarks: "Saw her for the last time standing on deck as the boat moved of. White feather in hat, brown dress, Dorset dialect, Classic features, short upper lip. A woman I would have married offhand, with probably disastrous results"[26]. Desire immediately triggers the inhibiting notion of the fatal mistake. Three years earlier another note shows how the thrust of these observations is towards a fearful / sensible inaction: "There is not that regular gradation among womankind that there is among men. You may meet with 999 exactly alike, and then the thousandth – not a little better, but far above them. Practically therefore it is useless for a man to seek after this thousandth to

[25] Hardy frequently introduces possible but not absolute obstacles to union, as for example the fact that Sue is Jude's cousin in *Jude the Obscure*, or that Oak is Bathsheba's employee in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. J. Miller comments: "Hardy's work [...] dictates that love will be inflamed by whatever separates the lover from his goal while at the same time providing him indirect access to her". J. Miller, *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1970, p. 175.

[26] M. Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: A Biography*, Oxford, OUP, 1982, p. 112.

make her his"[27]. In the light of these remarks, I would argue that Hardy has constructed Tess's tragic story as both a celebration of female beauty and a stern reminder to himself of the dangers of becoming involved with it. This, as many critics have noted, is the territory of the voyeur, the author as onlooker contemplating the life that both draws and frightens him[28].

If fear is dominant in Tess's relationship with Alec, it is stronger in her courtship with Angel Clare and the more so because less easily focused. The intellectual trainee farmer first becomes aware of the milkmaid as she declares her disinterest in her (beautiful) body: "fixing your mind" on a star in a bright night "you will soon find that you are hundreds and hundreds o'miles away from your body, which you don't seem to want at all"[29] (p. 120). The implied fear of what can happen in one's body is to the fore when the two speak to each other for

[27] T. & F. Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

[28] "Ultimately [...] the pleasure of the text [...] is voyeuristic. Distanced, uninvolved and removed from all possible danger [the reader] can revel in the erotic delights unfolded by the text", in T. R. Wright, *Hardy and the Erotic*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1989, p. 71. See also pp. 20, 37, and N. Page, "Opening Time: Hardy's Poetic Thresholds", in K. Wilson (ed.), *Thomas Hardy Reappraised*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2006, p. 268. J. Mitchell, "Hardy's Female Reader", in M. Higgonet (ed.), *The Sense of Sex, Feminist Perspectives on Thomas Hardy*, Illinois, University of Illinois Press, 1993, pp. 172, 178; finally, though the word 'voyeur' is not used, P. Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, pp. 120-128.

[29] Tess will eventually renounce her body altogether; "Tess has spiritually ceased to recognise the body before him as hers". This is omitted from the Penguin edition. See T. Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Lawrence KS., Digireads, 2007, p. 231.

the first time. It's a June evening and Angel has surprised Tess in the farm garden.

> 'What makes you draw off in that way, Tess?' said he. 'Are you afraid?'
>
> 'Oh no, sir [...] not of outdoor things; especially just now when the apple-blooth is falling, and everything so green.'
>
> 'But you have your indoor fears – eh?'
>
> 'Well – yes, sir.'
>
> 'What of?'
>
> 'I couldn't quite say.'
>
> 'The milk turning sour?'
>
> 'No.'
>
> 'Life in general?'
>
> 'Yes, sir.'
>
> 'Ah – so am I, very often. This hobble of being alive is rather serious, don't you think so?'
>
> She thought that he meant what were the aspects of things to her, and replied shyly –
>
> 'The trees have inquisitive eyes, haven't they? That is, seem as if they had. And the river says, - "Why do you trouble me with your looks?" And you seem to see numbers of tomorrows just all in a line, the first of 'em the biggest and clearest, the others getting smaller and smaller as they stand farther away; but they all seem very fierce and cruel and as if they said, "I'm coming! Beware o' me! Beware o' me!" (p. 123).

After Angel kisses Tess and she responds with "unreflecting inevitableness" (p. 151) to "the necessity of loving him" (p. 170), it becomes clear that each is now a source of fear for the other. Tess is in the milking parlour when Angel enters unseen.

> She was yawning, and he saw the red interior of her mouth as if it had been a snake's. She had stretched one arm so high above her coiled-up cable of hair that he could see its satin delicacy above the sunburn; her face was flushed with sleep, and her eyelids hung heavy over their pupils. The brimfulness of her nature breathed from her. It was a moment when a woman's soul is more incarnate than at any other time; when the most spiritual beauty bespeaks itself flesh, and sex takes the outside place in the presentation.
> Then those eyes flashed brightly through their filmy heaviness, before the remainder of her face was well awake. With an oddly compounded look of gladness, shyness and surprise, she exclaimed –
> 'O Mr Clare! How you frightened me' (p. 169).

Hardy had said that he wished "to demolish the doll of English fiction"[30], but to suppose that he sought to do this as part of a campaign for female emancipation would be to misunderstand. What mattered for Hardy was the freedom to evoke the lure and terror of sexual experience. The more seductive the descriptions of Tess, the greater the danger. Her opening mouth is a snake's. Without this sense of two "tremulous lives" (p. 183) moving towards "terrifying bliss" (p. 182) the couple's failure to consummate their love would be inexplicable.

As Tess begins her confession to Angel on their wedding night, Hardy ominously closes both the chapter and the fourth part – or 'phase' as he calls them – of

[30] T. Hardy to H. Massingham, 31 Dec. 1891, in R. Purdy, M. Millgate (eds.), *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, cit., vol. I, p. 250.

the book. The new 'phase' then opens with the remark that "the essence of things had changed" (p. 227); to the reader's dismay (or perhaps relief) the erotic joy that a hundred lush pages have been leading to is not going to happen.

This division of his characters' lives into a before and after is a recurring device in Hardy's work, suggesting the absolute fatality of certain events. Often the event itself is elided from the narrative. In "Lyonnesse", the poem recalling Hardy's first encounter with Emma Gifford, the poet sets out in his "lonesomeness" with no anticipation that something important is to happen. Returning from Lyonnesse he has "magic in [his] eyes". The transforming event remains unspoken, something "no prophet durst declare"[31]. Issues of motivation and morality are irrelevant beside the life-changing fatality of the event itself.

More often the fatal event is negative. When Tess loses her virginity we hear that "An immeasurable chasm was to divide our heroine's personality thereafter from that previous self" (p. 74). Again, the event itself, and hence the extent of Tess's consent, is elided. In line with this sense of fatality that gathers around sexual experience, Hardy has certain characters seek to postpone it for as long as possible, with Tess in particular wishing for a "perpetual betrothal" (p. 200). Equally, when things go wrong, characters are shown as moving rapidly to a situation where all is lost and painful hope can be put aside. After Angel's rejection, Tess does little to save the situation,

[31] T. Hardy, J. Gibson (ed.), *The Complete Poems*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001, p. 312.

reverting to the notion that she is irremediably guilty and offering to kill herself[32]. All too soon we hear that, having "nothing more to fear", Tess "forgot existence" (p. 234) and fell asleep. As Henry James remarked: "The pretence of sexuality is only equalled by the absence of it"[33]. The couple were perhaps always too fearful to make love and the obstacles that arose to block the consummation (moral proprieties, class difference) were excuses; Angel admits that they "would be viewed in the light of a joke by nine-tenths of the world" (p. 233). We can see here how one problem for the Victorian reader was the insidious implication that the whole edifice of Victorian propriety was based on sexual phobia rather than moral conviction. Since this idea is now a commonplace of our contemporary understanding of Victorian psychology, these scenes present no difficulty for us.

A note here on Alec and Angel. The commonplace that the devil always has the best characters does not apply in Hardy's novels. The devil has no characters at all. If Simon Gatrell remarks that Alec "is little more than a cardboard cut-out, two dimensional rapist and bounder"[34], other critics find him an ambiguous figure who merely behaves impulsively. Either way, it is evident that, like Troy in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Alec is not one of the characters to whom Hardy dedicates much

[32] D. H. Lawrence remarks that "Tess never tries to alter or to change anybody", *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 95.

[33] In a letter to R. L. Stevenson, 17 February 1893, quoted in *Thomas Hardy, The Critical Heritage*, p. xxvi.

[34] From the introduction to the Oxford Classics edition of *Tess*, edited by S. Gatrell and J. Grindle, 2008, p. xxii.

attention since he has no difficulties with the fear/courage polarity. Alec simply does what he wants.

Equally absent in Hardy's novels are positively saintly figures. While Alec acts unthinkingly when he should not, Angel, for thinking too much, does not act when he should. With Hardy there is never that division of *dramatis personae* into the cruel and kind typical of Dickens, nor do we have a good/evil contrast of the variety Alexei Karamazov/Dimitri Karamazov, or even Laura Fairlie/Sir Percival Glyde (*The Woman in White*). On the other hand we can place all Hardy's characters on a line that runs from cowardliness at one end through fear and caution, common sense and courage, to recklessness at the other. Both *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *The Return of the Native Hardy* include comic, peasant figures who are so fearful that they never engage in life at all[35]. At the other extreme Sergeant Troy and Alec d'Urberville are reckless without many saving graces. Other characters are more complex. Mrs Yeobright is rash in her blind insistence on strict proprieties, something that threatens to destroy her daughter's life. Eustachia is extremely rash, but sympathetic because she starts from a position of vulnerability and is more aware of what is at stake; she thus takes on a certain grandeur in her folly, as when at the opening of the novel she stands absolutely exposed on the skyline of Egdon Heath, a position of maximum self assertion and vulnerability.

[35] Significantly, the fearful Christian Cantle in *The Return of the Native* is "The man no woman will marry", T. Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, New York, Bantam, 1981, p. 21.

In a median position between terrified inaction and reckless carelessness, Gabriel Oak and Diggory Venn combine caution and courage, possessing steadily and over many years the best of both ends of the polarity; all the same neither character is a philanthropist or do-gooder[36]. Hardy's only major character who talks about doing good, Clym Yeobright, is in retreat from the diamond business in Paris to the cottage of his beloved mother on Egdon Heath (the parallels with Hardy's retreat to Dorset from London are evident); D. H. Lawrence comments, "What is Clym's altruism but a deep very subtle cowardice, that makes him shirk his own being whilst apparently acting nobly?"[37]. Clym's relief when poor eyesight frees him from his schemes and reduces him to a furze-cutter suggests an underlying desire to be released from all situations of risk and conflict.

More interesting are the characters who oscillate from one end to the other of the fear/courage, caution/rashness polarities, the chief among these being Henchard and Jude who, in their different ways, are both capable of years of constructive, cautious behaviour followed by moments of recklessness under the influence of wine or women or both. Needless to say, such moments are fatal. When a Hardy character gets drunk or simply falls asleep when he should not, the reader knows to expect the worst. Henchard's rashness in a moment of drunkenness leads to years of fearful secrecy as he attempts to avoid an exposure we know is inevitable. Thus behaviour at

[36] It is interesting that both these men finally get their women simply by waiting patiently, without the need to expose themselves in a game of seduction.

[37] D. H. Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 24.

one end of the polarity sends these characters bouncing back to the other, every act of fearless rashness giving them more to be fearful about.

In *Hardy and the Erotic*, T. R. Wright suggests that Hardy's dealings with literary censorship had the characteristics of an erotic game[38]. Certainly the back and forth between his assurances of authorial propriety and submissions of 'scandalous' material, some of it cut only to be reinstated later, some of it published separately, suggests that mixture of boldness and caution typical of the man who wants to see how far he can go; Mowbray Morris picked up on this in his hostile review of *Tess* when he drew a comparison between the nature of the story itself and the "hole and corner" way it had been published: "It is a queer story and seems to have been published in a queer manner"[39].

But just as in *Tess* there is a drawing back from consummation, so in Hardy's relationship with some of his critics, and, presumably many readers, there comes a moment of disillusionment when each realises that the other was not the partner he hoped for. "For the first half of his story", Morris goes on, "the reader may indeed conceive it to have been Mr Hardy's design to show how a woman essentially honest [...] will through the adverse shocks of fate eventually rise to higher things. But if this were his original purpose he must have forgotten it before his tale was told"[40]. Hardy's narrative strategy, that is, invites the reader to hope for one kind of story, then dashes those hopes and piles on the pain. Doing

[38] T. R. Wright, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-15.

[39] R. Cox (ed.), *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, cit., p. 217.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 218.

so and simultaneously rejecting the notion that this is a moral tale, he draws the reader over to the 'fear/courage' polarity that was so important for him. There are thus moments in *Tess* and above all in *Jude* when it seems like an act of courage to go on reading, so painful are the events described, so unrelieved by poetic justice or catharsis[41]. If we do read on it is for the pleasure Hardy communicates, the pleasure of watching Tess yawn or of immersing ourselves in the landscape and people of Wessex; for the reader too, then, desire and fear go hand in hand. However, since Hardy's vision is irretrievably pessimistic, essentially inviting us to believe that all human striving toward happiness is doomed[42], some readers may arrive at a break point where the vision is unacceptable. Mowbray Morris, Mrs Oliphant and other Victorian critics clearly felt impelled to question the poetic veracity of the story because they sensed that the principles on which they based their lives were under attack. "Has the common feeling of humanity against seduction, adultery and murder no basis in the heart of things?" protests Mowbray Morris. And he insists, "It is the very foundation of human society"[43].

To break down Hardy's narrative construct, both Oliphant and Morris attack his subtitle ("A Pure Woman

[41] "It is very difficult to read", remarked Richard Hutton in the *Spectator*, "because in almost every page the mind rebels against the steady assumptions of the author, and shrinks from the untrue picture of a universe so blank and godless", R. Cox (ed.), *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, cit., p. 194.

[42] "This novel is a shrug of the shoulders and a last taunt to hope", wrote D. H. Lawrence of *The Hand of Ethelberta. Study of Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 23.

[43] R. Cox (ed.), *Thomas Hardy: the Critical Heritage*, cit., p. 233.

Faithfully Presented"); if they can show that Tess is not 'pure', they will have found a way back to a reassuringly moral reading of the story along a polarity good/evil. Commenting on the period when Tess lives as Alec's mistress, accepting the fine clothes he gives her, Oliphant claims: "Here the elaborate and indignant plea for Vice that it is really Virtue breaks down altogether"[44]. The remark (which is fair comment) points out the misunderstandings that arise when people see things with different polarities in mind: Hardy calls Tess a "pure woman" to clear the morality problem out of the way[45]. The critics, disturbed by the book's powerfully negative vision, take his premise as provocation and argue against it. For his part, Hardy registered only these negative criticisms, not the book's many positive reviews, as if such aggressive censure offered him confirmation that the world was indeed the very dangerous place he had described in *Tess*: it was mad to expose oneself in fiction just "to be shot at"[46].

In his most intriguing criticism, Mowbray Morris also attacks the other side of the subtitle, that this is a story "faithfully presented". Hardy, he claims, "is too apt to affect a preciosity of phrase which has a somewhat incongruous effect in a tale of rustic life; he is too fond [...] of writing like a man "who has been at a great feast of languages and stolen the scraps", or in plain English, of making experiments in a form of language which he does not seem clearly to understand"[47]. Recent critics

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 226.

[45] The subtitle was an addition after criticism of the book as it appeared in serial form.

[46] T. & F. Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

[47] R. Cox (ed.), *Thomas Hardy: the Critical Heritage*, cit., p. 233.

respond to this remark with the claim that what Morris was reacting to was Hardy's shift towards a modernist style deploying multiple points of view, varying time perspectives, heterogeneous stylemes and an awareness of character as unstable[48]. There is a remarkable consensus among these critics. Such words as "defamiliarize", "subvert" and "explode" abound[49], while the things subverted and exploded are always Victorian pieties and misconceived narrative conventions. On the question of the modernist tendencies in Hardy's work these critics are clearly right. There is a great deal in Hardy that looks forward to modernism. However, some critics go on to imply that there is something *morally* virtuous in what Hardy was doing. So Linda Shires concludes that in *Tess* Hardy was "educating his readers by defamiliarization" something that "is the primary goal of a novelist who would have us treat women differently, alter linguistic conventions, and reform the institutions that misshape women as much as language"[50]. At this point Hardy's work is being judged along the polarity right/wrong just as it was by the Victorians; Shires simply has a different

[48] See for example, A. Cooper, "Voicing the Language of Literature: Jude's Obscured Labor", in *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, 28, 2, pp. 391-410.

[49] See L. Shires in *The Cambridge Companion* to Thomas Hardy, cit., pp. 152, 157 and in her introduction to the OUP edition of *Far from the Madding Crowd* (Oxford 2002) p. xx. Also A. Radford, *Thomas Hardy and the Survivals of Time*, London, Ashgate, 2003, p. 213. Also P. Widdowson, *Hardy in History*, pp. 160-161. Also S. Maier in her introduction to the Broadview Press edition of *Tess*, Calgary, 2007, p. 14. Also S. McEathron's discussion of various critical positions in *Thomas Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, London, Routledge, 2005, p. 54.

[50] L. Shires, *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 159.

sense of what, as Morris put it, is "written into the heart of things"[51].

Modernist strategies can be deployed to different ends and in different spirits. In Hardy, the awareness of different time scales, the fragmented points of view and the presentation of character as unstable, are all used to reinforce feelings of disorientation, bafflement and danger; they are active, that is, along the dominant polarities of fear/courage, vulnerability/security[52]. In Woolf or Lawrence or Joyce the same perceptions could be given a positive value. In *Women in Love*, Birkin, Lawrence's alter ego, is "the changer" "the chameleon"[53]. Here, it is a matter of celebration that a character cannot be pinned down.

Hardy wrote about blocked lives, situations where only a radical act of courage could lead his characters to fulfilment. The typical formula was the unwise romantic engagement that prevented the formation of a more appropriate relationship. The parallels with Hardy's own stalled marriage are clear enough and his many timid but inconclusive extra-marital flirtations are well documented[54]. In the light of what we have said about the possible function of the narratives in Hardy's life, it makes

[51] See footnote 41.

[52] Arguably they also contribute to the enigmatic, guarded stance that Hardy adopts with regard to his own views, something universally noted by critics.

[53] D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*, London, Penguin, 1982, p. 149.

[54] In *Hardy and the Erotic* (p. 20), T. R. Wright speaks of a man "sheltering ... timidity or impotence behind the tragic demands of marriage in a hypocritical society". The flirtations are listed on p. 22. Gittings speaks of "an attraction to the idea of love without the power to fulfil it". R. Gittings, *Young Thomas Hardy*, London, Penguin, 1978, p. 53.

sense to suppose that as the tensions in his marriage grew and the desire for change became stronger, so it required a grimmer and grimmer vision of the consequences of action to prevent the now well-established, secure writer from becoming an adulterer or divorcee. In this scenario, the anger that so many critics found difficult to explain in his work – "What has Providence done to Mr Hardy", protests Edmund Gosse "that he should rise up in the arable land of Wessex and shake his fist at the Creator?"[55] – may have been directed in part against himself for his incapacity to change his own life.

If the most obvious way of dealing with blockage is to push past it, another might be to consider one's problems meaningless in the light of eternity. Rather than rising up from the arable land of Wessex, one could sink back into it, looking forward to the moment when, as Tess puts it, we will all be "grassed down and forgotten" (p. 226). This brings us to the setting, rather than the plots, of Hardy's novels: Wessex, an archaic England where community is still (albeit precariously) in harmony with the seasons and soil, offers a refuge for the defeated modern individual, a place where he or she can annul the ego when all is lost. Hence we have Tess absorbed into community and landscape after moments of defeat[56], or Clem immersed in the vegetation and insect life of Egdon Heath to the point that he loses all identity.

[55] R. Cox (ed.), *Thomas Hardy: the Critical Heritage*, cit., p. 269. See also p. 227 where Mrs Oliphant asks, "Against whom is he so angry?".

[56] "[...] unconscious absorption into the general life" is how one critic puts it. J. Hillis Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 221. See also *Tess*, p. 85: "Her flexuous and stealthy figure became an integral part of the scene".

He was a brown spot in the midst of an expanse of olive-green gorse, and nothing more [...].
His familiars were creeping and winged things, and they seemed to enrol him in their band. Bees hummed around his ears with an intimate air, and tugged at the heath and furze-flowers at his side in such numbers as to weigh them down to the sod. The strange amber-coloured butterflies which Egdon produced, and which were never seen elsewhere, quivered in the breath of his lips, alighted upon his bowed back, and sported with the glittering point of his hook as he flourished it up and down. Tribes of emerald-green grasshoppers leaped over his feet, falling awkwardly on their backs, heads, or hips, like unskilful acrobats, as chance might rule; or engaged themselves in noisy flirtations under the fern-fronds with silent ones of homely hue. Huge flies, ignorant of larders 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-dells snakes glided in their most brilliant blue and yellow guise, it being the season immediately following the shedding of their old skins, when their colours are brightest. Litters of young rabbits came out from their forms to sun themselves upon hillocks, the hot beams blazing through the delicate tissue of each thin-fleshed ear, and firing it to a blood-red transparency in which the veins could be seen. None of them feared him[57].

[57] T. Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, cit., pp. 228-229.

In the sheer extravagance of this passage one can see how the dynamic created by problems relating to fear and courage is influencing Hardy's prose as he seeks, in the richness of language and landscape, a pleasure and refuge analogous to the comfort Clym finds in submitting his body to an immersion in nature that is almost an anticipation of decomposition. A death wish is never far away in Hardy. One of his great pleasures, as he remarked, was to imagine himself already a ghost, "out of the flesh [...] a spectre not solid enough to influence my environment"[58]. The relation of such a wish to the fear/courage polarity is evident, as equally there is a parallel between the desire to be thus beyond engagement and Tess's desire to delay consummation or to forget her body in contemplation of the stars. Hardy appears to yearn for a place beyond fear, desire and the need to muster courage. He gave up novel-writing, one might hazard, to look for that place and that ghostly persona in poetry[59].

The burden of this paper so far has been that while Hardy's anticipations of modernism are fascinating and his critique of Victorian England rich and varied, the key to his achievement lay in his finding forms to express the profound tensions he experienced in relation to issues of fear and courage, critical reception to his work being conditioned by the fact that his contemporaries tended to see issues of morality as paramount. It would

[58] C. Tomalin, *op. cit.*, pp. 224-225.

[59] "Hardy's narrative position in his poems is often a posthumous one", remarks Gillian Beer in "Hardy: the After-Life and the Life Before", in P. Mallet (ed.), *Thomas Hardy, Texts and Contexts*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2002, p. 28. J. Miller speaks of the "characteristic withdrawal of the mind from life" in Hardy's work, quoted in G. Harvey, *The complete Critical Guide to Thomas Hardy*, London, Routledge, 2003, p. 165.

be interesting to pursue this analysis in every area of Hardy's life and work, but given limitations of space it may be more enlightening to compare and contrast Hardy's work with that of D. H. Lawrence, a writer who faced similar hostility, apparently for similar reasons.

Like Hardy, Lawrence was born a sickly child in a family where security depended on manual labour for which he was judged unfit[60]. His mother, like Hardy's, was at once protective, instilling a sense of life's danger, yet ambitious for him, ready to push him out early into the world, a situation bound to generate anxiety. Unlike Hardy, however, Lawrence was not the eldest child, but the fourth of five, and would have to wait until an older second son died to become mother's favourite. He grew up in a situation of competition. His mother died when he was twenty five and with the subsequent break up of the family there was no home to return to.

The most striking difference, however, between the two families was the level of parental conflict in the Lawrence household of which *Sons and Lovers* gives a vivid account. It was a situation in which moral censure was used as a weapon, the polarity of winning and losing being more important than that of right and wrong.

> There began a battle between the husband and wife, a fearful bloody battle that ended only with the death of one. She fought to make him

[60] Of Lawrence's alter ego Paul Morel in the autobiographical *Sons and Lovers*, we hear that "He was not strong enough for heavy manual work": D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*, London, Penguin, 2006, p. 113. All further quotes from this edition will be indicated in parentheses in the main text.

> undertake his own responsibilities, to make him fulfil his obligations. But he was too different from her. His nature was purely sensuous, and she strove to make him moral, religious (p. 22).

Similarly, towards the end of the book, Miriam reflects that "Paul was arguing God onto his own side, because he wanted his own way, and his own pleasure. There was a long battle between him and her" (p. 291).

The language of conflict (winning losing, victory defeat, triumph humiliation) is so pervasive throughout *Sons and Lovers* that one might suppose that it establishes the dominant polarity, that what matters above all is to be a winner. Not only do we have chapter headings such as "The Birth of Paul, and another Battle", "Strife in Love", and "The Defeat of Miriam", but every incident and every relationship is described in terms of conflict and competition. The Morel children are most loved when they win prizes in competition with others. Mrs Morel "bullies" (p. 46) the clergyman over his sermons, fights with "her enemy the pot man" (p. 99); the eldest son William fights with the neighbours' children, fights his mother over his girlfriends (whom he considers so many conquests) and later his fiancée, Louisa Western. Paul will fight with Miriam, his mother, Clara and, brutally, Baxter Dawes. Watching the shadows a fire casts on the walls, it seems to him his room is "full of men who battled silently" (p. 291). Even in the smallest exchanges the language of struggle is evident: arriving after his son at the pub where his wages are to be shared out, Morel asks Paul, "Have you bested me?" Offering his son a drink he is met with the boy's "fierce morality"

(p. 96). When he is older Paul's playfulness (with Clara's mother, with Beatrice Wyld) invariably takes the form of mock fighting. He is often described as engaged in a fight with his own feelings. At the end of the book after his mother has lost her battle with cancer Paul is presented as fighting despair. Taken together the words 'fight', 'battle' and 'struggle' occur 78 times in the novel.

However, if conflict is to the fore in a way it never is in Hardy (in *Tess* the same words occur only 15 times), attitudes toward conflict are governed by fear, each character being quickly placed by the way in which fear or caution, courage or rashness, predisposes them to conflict. Morel is a "heedless man, careless of danger" (p. 108); he has "not a grain of physical fear" (p. 36) but is "afraid to seem too jubilant" (p. 29) in his wife's presence and "always ran away from the battle with himself" (p. 56). When he tries to leave home he has "not even the courage to carry his bundle beyond the yard end" (p. 60). Physically weaker, Mrs Morel is impelled to fight out of fear of being left without financial support – "My only fear was that he'd pawn something" (p. 59), she says when her husband runs away – or out of fear of losing her sons to other women. Miriam fears any engagement that could be painful, as shown when she is afraid of offering corn to a hen for fear of being pecked. Overall, the word 'fear' occurs 51 times in *Sons and Lovers*, "afraid" 85 times, "frightened" 34 times, "shrink" 33 times, "dread" 23 times, "horror" 27 times, "terror" 11 times, "timid" 12 times. In *Tess* "fear" occurs 63 times.

The most subtle nuancing of the relation between fear and conflict comes in the presentation of Paul. He is afraid of the battle between his parents, "the children lay

silent in suspense, waiting for a lull in the wind to hear what their father was doing. He might hit their mother again. There was a feeling of horror, a kind of bristling in the darkness and a sense of blood" (p. 85). As a result of such experiences the boy recoils from every form of engagement with the adult world. Sent to get his father's wages he is too terrified to speak in front of the miners. This is the first occasion on which fear is put in relation to self consciousness: "Paul was suffering convulsions of self consciousness" (p. 95). However, to withdraw from the fray is to risk exclusion from life. When Paul and Arthur cannot find friends to play and fight with, they look "anxiously" about and feel "genuine desolation" (p. 101). To find their companions is a pleasure, even though "The six would fight, hate with a fury of hatred, and flee home in terror" (p. 101).

Paul begins to see the need to overcome fear in order to engage in life's struggle when his mother takes him for a job interview at Jordan's. Paul, like Hardy's Jude, has no desire to grow up. His ambition is for a quiet life beside his mother. On the other hand the family spirit of competition has given him the habit of "measuring people against himself" (p. 114). The verb "shrink" becomes important here to establish a connection between fear and problems of engagement. Both Paul and his mother "shrank" (p. 123) from life, but she had nevertheless learned to fight for her rights.

The interview is presented, hilariously, as a battle in which Paul is too fearfully self conscious to assert himself until Mr Jordan corrects his translation of "doigts" as "fingers", explaining that the word means "toes", at which Paul becomes "defiant" – "'Well, it does mean

fingers', the boy persisted" (p. 121). Fighting back from timidity, he is given the job.

So much of the critical comment on *Sons and Lovers* has concentrated on Paul's morbid attachment to his mother and sexual difficulties with Miriam but it seems useful to remember that from the beginning he is fearful of engaging in life at any level. The closeness to his mother and the snobbery he develops in regard to men like Jordan ("wasn't Mr Jordan common, mother?", p. 121) give him excuses for withdrawing from life. Lawrence's complaint that his sexuality was blocked by mother love can thus be seen as partly an alibi for, or at least integrated with, a generally fearful disposition that he struggled to overcome.

Once engaged in life's conflict, fears multiply and the most curious fear of all, the one that determines that the dominant polarity will be fear/courage rather than winning/losing, is the fear of victory. In situations of crisis fear arouses hatred, then cruelty and one is tempted to crush one's antagonist[61]. Yet to do so can have disastrous consequences. After the apparent victory involved in locking his wife out of the house, Morel experiences a "shrinking, a diminishing in his assurance" (p. 37). After he throws a drawer that cuts Mrs Morel's head we hear that "his manhood broke [...] he had hurt himself most" (p. 55). Eventually Mrs Morel, weaker physically but stronger psychologically, draws all the children into an alliance against Morel who is now "shut out from all family affairs" (p. 87). But the completeness of her

[61] In *Women in Love* Lawrence conflates this sequence of emotions in the collocation "shrank cruelly": "Gudrun [...] shrank cruelly from this amorphous ugliness". D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*, cit., p. 57.

victory is her ruin; she is "hurt" (p. 111) by her inability to love her husband and forced to turn for fulfilment to unsatisfactory relationships with her children.

The dangers of victory are evoked on numerous occasions. When Paul fights Dawes and is on the brink of strangling him, he appreciates that such a final victory would be fatal. Relaxing his grip, he allows Dawes to get the upper hand and beat him senseless, but this then gives Paul a psychological power over the other man when next they meet[62]. This pattern is repeated throughout Lawrence's work: to achieve self realization, it is essential to overcome fear and engage in life's battle; those too fearful to do so will be isolated and overwhelmed[63]. However, complete elimination of an antagonist (Gudrun's victory over Gerald in *Women in Love*, for example) will leave a sense of desolation.

Since it seems legitimate to identify Lawrence's concerns with Paul's in this avowedly autobiographical novel, we can say that the author is confronting two problems: how to overcome fear as a prerequisite of self realisation and how to behave in such a way that once involved one neither destroys nor is destroyed. Love is insistently presented as a battle to possess or be possessed, with each party fearful of being possessed without possessing; yet for either party to get complete control is disastrous for both. In the later essay, "Morality and the Novel", Lawrence remarks that to strike the right

[62] This fight without complete victory creates a positive sense of connection: "There was a feeling of connection between the rival men, more than ever since they had fought" (p. 423).

[63] Jill Banford in *The Fox* is an example. Lawrence treats her violent death with complete indifference.

balance in such relationships requires "courage above all things"[64].

Like *Tess*, *Sons and Lovers* has at its core a frustratingly long courtship. In *Tess* consummation is denied when, hearing of Tess's past, Angel declares that "You were one person; now you are another" (p. 228). As Tess acquires a history and an individuality, she ceases to be an idealized object of desire and Angel is unable to love her. In *Sons and Lovers*, in a reverse process, Paul, finds that to make love to Miriam he has to stop seeing her as an individual and discover the impersonal in both her and himself. We hear that "he shrank from the physical contact"[65] (p. 322) because, Miriam always called him back from "a swoon of passion" to "the littleness, the personal relationship" (p. 328). Given Miriam's vocation for spirituality this is also a disembodied relationship. "I am quite ghostish, disembodied" (p. 232), Paul protests. Again we recall Tess's attraction to a disembodied state and Hardy's pleasure at the thought that a ghostly self would not be "solid enough to influence [his] environment". In his determination to live, however, Paul cannot see his feelings of disembodiment positively and speaks instead of shedding self-conscious individuality which he has

[64] The full statement reads: "There is, however, the third thing, which is neither sacrifice nor fight to the death: when each seeks only the true relatedness to the other. Each must be true to himself herself, his own manhood, her own womanhood, and let the relationship work out of itself. This means courage above all things". D. H. Lawrence, "Morality and the Novel", in *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*, cit., pp. 174-5.

[65] It's interesting that Hardy also spoke of avoiding physical contact, though in his case he does not see this as something to be overcome. See T. & F. Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

now identified as the source of fear and inhibition: "She lost all her self-control, was exposed in fear. And he knew, before he could kiss her, he must drive something out of himself" (p. 247). After finally making love Paul enjoys an experience of being "smeared away into the beyond", "melt[ing] out into darkness"; it is a "reaching-out to death" (p. 331) and a loss of selfhood comparable to the experiences of Tess and Clym when they work in the fields. But while in Hardy such experiences are consolatory, following defeat, in Lawrence they are enabling. A discovery of the "impersonal fire of desire" (p. 328) makes engagement with the world possible. Later, his whole sexual relationship with Clara is shown to have been "impersonal" (p. 399).

Having understood the liberating consequences of shedding conscious selfhood and its fears, Lawrence carries out a transformation that would become one of the hallmarks of his mature work. Previously, Paul had persuaded himself he must not make love to Miriam for fear of damaging someone who is "good", ethical considerations bolstering his fear: "Something in me shrinks from her like hell – she's so good, when I'm not good" (p. 321). Now he decides that fear itself is morally wrong: "Don't you think", he asks Miriam "we have been too fierce in what they call purity? Don't you think that to be so much afraid and averse is a sort of dirtiness?" (p. 325). And again "Some sort of perversity in our souls [...] makes us not want, get away from, the very thing we want. We have to fight against that" (p. 326).

At this point it is not, as Victorian society saw it, the (premarital) sex that is immoral but the lovers' fear of it and Lawrence can henceforward transform the struggle

to overcome fear into a moral crusade[66]. Hence the developments in his later work, his exploration, of different levels of consciousness, his constant comparison between modern and 'primitive' psyches, his habit of fashioning a personal morality complete with a religious aura in contrast to conventional morality, can all be seen as the fruit of his need to confront fear and push beyond it. While Hardy's narratives, we might say, confirm that it is appropriate to be fearful, Lawrence's dramatize the necessity of fighting fear; reading Hardy, we wait for catastrophe, reading Lawrence we watch the developments of a struggle, and in the novels of the mature period are invited to engage in that struggle ourselves.

It is at the point that fear is identified as the enemy and attacked, that Lawrence's problems with the critics begin. "To our grief and our amazement", writes one reviewer of the second half of *Sons and Lovers*, "the book suffers a sea change [...] We revolt in weariness from incessant scenes of sexual passion"[67]. As Lawrence focuses fearlessly on sexual experience in *The Rainbow* and then *Women in Love*, he necessarily arouses the ire of the critics. James Douglas in his notorious Star review of *The Rainbow* claimed that "No novel in the English language [is] so utterly lacking in verbal reticence"; its characters, he complained, were "creatures [...] immeasurably lower than the lowest animal in the zoo"[68].

[66] Noting the same transformation in *Women in Love*, Murry condemned Lawrence for "painting his devil as an angel". J. Middleton Murry, *Son of Woman*, London, Cape, 1931, p. 135.

[67] R. P. Draper (ed.), *D. H. Lawrence: The Critical Heritage*, London, Routledge, 1997, p. 71.

[68] *Ibid.*, p. 93.

Together with the content of the books it was understood that Lawrence's style had also changed. "The thud thud thud of the hectic phrases is intolerably wearisome", Douglas remarked establishing a "dull monotonous tune of spiritless sensuality"[69]. In a concluding passage, extraordinary for its adoption of Lawrence's own vocabulary and vehemence, Douglas insisted that "The artist is not his own lawgiver. He must bow before the will of the generations of man"[70]. Like a Lawrence character whom fear has prompted to seek the annihilation of his opponent, Douglas went on to invoke the banning of *The Rainbow*, speaking of a moral 'battle' in which, as a matter of urgent "self-preservation" "every man and woman must take sides"[71]. Lawrence's new style had thus created, outside his fiction, exactly the sort of relationship he discusses in it[72]. Middleton Murry was reacting to this development when he spoke of Lawrence as having given up "deliberately, the pretence of being an artist [...]. His aim was to discover authority, not to create art"[73]. The implication is that the reader's response to Lawrence, in what Bateson would have recognised as a schismogenetic process, must be to accept, or more likely struggle against, Lawrence's credo.

In 1914 Lawrence accepted a commission to write

[69] *Loc. cit.*
[70] *Ibid.*, p. 94.
[71] *Loc. cit.*
[72] Benjamin Kunkel makes the same point in an article in the *New Yorker*, December 19, 2005: "People talking about Lawrence sound like his own quarrelsome couples: they hate him, they say, or they love him, or both".
[73] J. Middleton Murry, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

a study of Thomas Hardy, then typically asserted his independence/authority by using the commission to develop his own views, leaving Hardy out of the picture for pages at a time. Early on, Lawrence claims that "The final aim of every living thing, creature or being is the full achievement of itself"[74], but that people nevertheless assume that "life is the great struggle for self preservation"[75], this out of "a cowardice that will not let us be"[76]. He then analyses Hardy's fiction showing how Hardy depicts exceptional characters struggling towards full achievement, but always contrives to have them destroyed, indeed "cowed"[77] by the spirit of self preservation in the community. Hardy, Lawrence concludes, in obedience to the notion that "the spirit of Love must always succumb before the blind, stupid, but overwhelming power of the Law", goes "against himself" to "stand with the average against the exception"[78], and all this "in order to explain his own sense of failure"[79]. Lawrence does not tell us what Hardy's "failure" might be, but it is clear that, having understood how the scales are tipped towards fear in Hardy's work, Lawrence is defining himself in contrast. It is as if Hardy were the kind of novelist he might have been had he not overcome his fears.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to examine the stylistic innovations of *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*.

[74] D. H. Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 12.
[75] *Ibid.*, p. 13.
[76] *Ibid.*, p. 17.
[77] *Ibid.*, p. 30.
[78] *Ibid.*, p. 49.
[79] *Ibid.*, p. 92.

Suffice it to say that having decided that fearful self consciousness was essentially constructed in language, it was inevitable that Lawrence would launch an attack on standard English and celebrate liberating mental states beyond rational thinking; hence such syntactically transgressive (and courageous) phrases as "she was destroyed into perfect consciousness"[80], or "they were glad and could forget perfectly"[81], The techniques he developed and their many implications have been meticulously explored[82], but the tendency to present Lawrence as carrying out some sort of dispassionate linguistic research can be misleading. Without wishing to be reductive, Lawrence's innovations make more sense when one appreciates the experience on which they were predicated.

Accused of clumsy repetition in the prose of *Women in Love*, Lawrence responded that: "every natural crisis in emotion or passion or understanding comes from this pulsing, frictional to-and-fro which works up to a culmination"[83]. However this appeal to the artist's mimetic vocation was preceded by a simpler explanation: "The only answer is that it is natural to the author"[84]. This was the bottom line for Lawrence and the end of

[80] D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*, cit., p. 430.

[81] *Ibid.*, p. 397.

[82] See in particular M. Ragussis, *The Subterfuge of Art: Language and the Romantic Tradition*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1978, and M. Bell, *D. H. Lawrence, Language and Being*, Cambridge, CUP, 1992.

[83] In Lawrence's 1919 forward to the American edition of *Women in Love*, quoted in M. Squires and K. Cushman (eds.), *The Challenge of D. H. Lawrence*, Madison, Wis., Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1990, p. 121.

[84] *Loc. cit.*

any discussion of aesthetics: to surrender, for fear of criticism, what was "natural" would mean a loss of manhood and exclude him from a proper relatedness with the world, including the reader, who must be fought like anyone else (hence the remark, "Whoever reads me will be in the thick of the scrimmage"[85]). However, to avoid the desolation of being left without antagonists, the battle for authority must remain a battle without a victory. Hence Lawrence's enthusiasm for the novel form, where plot and story constantly undercut any narrow didactic position taken by the author an enthusiasm that prompts his other famous injunction: "Never trust the artist. Trust the tale"[86]. Perhaps the closest analogy to Lawrence's desired relationship with the reader is his notion of Blutbrudershaft, or rather the brief taste of it that Birkin and Gerald enjoy in *Women in Love*. The idea, we remember, was of a sworn friendship so loyal and permanent that it could allow both partners to say whatever they thought of each other and even to fight, physically, without seeking to destroy each other; in short, a context in which the self-realising qualities of conflict could be exercised in conditions of safety. Gerald and Birkin fight naked until both men are so exhausted they fall into a trance, "quite unconscious"[87], but with Birkin, Lawrence's alter ego, lying on top.

Even allowing for the half a century between them, the social and cultural changes and the impact of the

[85] J. Boulton and L. Vasey (eds.), *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, Volume V*, Cambridge, CUP, 1989, p. 201.

[86] D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, ed. E. Greenspan, L. Vasey, J. Worthen, Cambridge, CUP, 2003, p. 14.

[87] D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*, cit., p. 349.

Great War, it is remarkable how Hardy and Lawrence follow opposite but related trajectories according to the way they dealt with the tension between fearfulness and self assertion that their families bequeathed them. Hardy's marriage is a cautious adventure, Lawrence's a determined breach of conventions. Hardy keeps marital strife strictly private; the Lawrences yell at each other in public. Hardy builds himself a house not far from his village home; Lawrence leaves England to measure himself against a succession of alien cultures. Hardy negotiates with censorship and trembles at criticism; Lawrence flouts the censors and thrives on upsetting the critics. Unbelieving, Hardy becomes a regular churchgoer and observes all conventional proprieties; Lawrence fashions a morality of his own which pronounces a hymn like *Lead Kindly Light* profoundly evil[88]. Hardy writes an autobiography to be published after his death in his wife's name, its purpose being as much to conceal as to reveal; Lawrence writes a confessional autobiographical novel in his mid twenties and never fails to be brutally candid. Hardy is seriously ill twice, but without any known pathology or long term consequences; Lawrence is frequently at death's door but denies that he has tuberculosis. Hardy lived to a ripe and celebrated old age; Lawrence died at 44, worn out with his fighting and travelling. Neither man suffered from feelings of guilt. To the end and for all the many intellectual and stylistic sophistications, the tension between fear and courage is present in their work, toned down and implicit in

[88] Cfr. "Morality and the Novel", in *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*, cit., p. 176.

Hardy's late poetry, always to the fore in Lawrence.

A poem like *Afterwards* rehearses all Hardy's anxieties so quietly we hardly notice. The poet's has been a "tremulous"[89] life, death is already behind him, aestheticized in the tolling bell; his anxiety about his reputation is presented modestly as he wonders whether people will remember how he observed the natural world that the poem then immerses itself in. A rapacious bird of prey becomes the beautiful 'dewfall hawk'; the fact that this bird could be responsible for the death of the "furtive hedgehog" of the next stanza is discretely left unmentioned. Hardy "strove that such innocent creatures should come to no harm. But he could do little for them; and now he is gone" – so much for the possibility of positive action in the world. In the fourth stanza the starry heavens remain the 'mystery' they always were. There is no God. Finally the bell of "quittance" suggests "discharge from a debt or obligation"[90]. Hardy is relieved to be gone[91]. All life's passions have been elided. The pessimism is so elegantly and safely put. No one could object.

Lawrence on the other hand continued to seek confrontation with otherness, whether in people, animals or foreign cultures. In "Snake"[92] the poet is "afraid", "most afraid", but resists "the voices of education" that

[89] D. H. Lawrence, *The Complete Poems*, cit., p. 553.

[90] Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

[91] "What most appeals to Hardy about the dead is their liberty [...] It is as if a great weight had been lifted from their shoulders". J. Hillis Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

[92] D. H. Lawrence, V. De Sola Pinto and W. Roberts (eds.), *Complete Poems*, London, Penguin, 1964, pp. 349-350.

would have him transform fear into the impulse to kill. In contrast to Hardy's "Afterwards", "Ship of Death"[93] confronts the poet's decease and recognizes fear: "in the bruised body, the frightened soul / finds itself shrinking [...] cowers naked in the dark rain over the flood". Even so Lawrence will not succumb to fear but launches "the fragile soul in the fragile ship of courage", ready to face the final loss of self. Despite all the differences, the polarity fear/courage and Lawrence's position with regard to it, at once anxious but determined, remain as they were decades before in *Sons and Lovers*.

In conclusion, analysis of the hierarchy of semantic polarities in the works of these authors gives us a clearer understanding of what is at stake in their fiction and why they provoked hostile criticism. Understandably, most negative responses to Hardy's novels dissolve as Victorian propriety gives way to contemporary mores; what remains is the need to position oneself in response to his immense pessimism. Responding aggressively to fear, Lawrence continues to provoke controversy since he does not even wish for people to agree with him, only to engage in fierce debate. Finally, consideration of how the tendency to privilege the polarity fear/courage came about in the lives of these authors offers a rather different way of putting their lives in relation to their work, the novels becoming parts of an extended conversation each writer has with himself and his readers, elements in a lifelong attempt to find a sustainable position within the force field of that polarity.

[93] *Ibid.*, pp. 716-720.