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## Bitten by an Adder

Tim Parks

*The Return of the Native* by [Thomas Hardy](#), edited by [Simon Avery](#)  
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What a pleasure to return to Thomas Hardy. For about a hundred pages. Then the torment begins, and we're not even halfway through. From now on each turn of the page will expose the reader to greater unhappiness. There's a moment in *The Return of the Native* where the main character, Clym, already deeply troubled by his mother's mysterious death, goes out of his way to find a little boy who may be able to tell him exactly what happened. When he asks the boy's mother for permission to speak to the child, she looks at him 'in a peculiar and criticising manner. To anybody but a half-blind man it would have said, "You want another of the knocks which have already laid you so low."' As the boy then tells his tale, stringing together facts that will destroy Clym's life, the woman 'looked as if she wondered how a man could want more of what had stung him so deeply'. At this point many readers may realise that the same question is on their minds: why am I persevering with a novel that is so painful to me? This will become the central issue in all Hardy's mature fiction, above all *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*: why are these stories so much more painful than anything I have read, painful in the reading that is, the agonising unfolding of events? Why did Hardy insist on making them so? Why do people have an appetite for this?

*The Return of the Native* is set on Egdon Heath. A 'vast tract of unenclosed wild', infertile and intractable, its community left behind by 19th-century progress, without even a church, Egdon is at once overwhelmingly real and a place of the mind, a landscape of ancient burial mounds and prehistoric remains, 'unaltered as the stars', subject to intemperate weather, seething with plant and insect life of the most resilient and unprepossessing varieties. Hardy conveys the atmosphere of such a place better than anyone and shows how remorselessly it belittles human experience, how hard it is for the heath's inhabitants to create any emotion or community that isn't overshadowed by this implacable landscape. Anyone who wants to make anything of him or herself in the modern world must leave Egdon. But as the title tells us, the novel is about someone who has come back.

Against this all-affecting backdrop, complete with its rustic chorus of those happy to live on the heath and accept its limitations, their lives entirely submissive to its seasons and rhythms, the novel presents six characters who in seeking to lift themselves above it will make one another as miserable as people ever could. The bland young orphan Thomasin, 'a pleasing and innocent woman', is timid and sensible in all things except her determination to marry the shifty Mr Wildeve, almost the only eligible bachelor on the heath. Wildeve is a qualified engineer who for reasons never explained now runs the heath's only inn and is looking to bring either security or excitement to his life through marriage. Thomasin would bring security; the more striking, passionate, raven-haired Eustacia, another orphan, is more alluring, but her determination to leave the heath for a fashionable city life would require Wildeve to abandon his economic safety and take a risk in the world.

Clym, Thomasin's cousin, is the native whose return to Egdon seems so inexplicable – above all to his widowed mother, Mrs Yeobright, who is also aunt and guardian to Thomasin. Clym has been working in the diamond business in Paris, at the very heart of modern fashion and culture, but having decided this world is superficial he now wishes to set up a school for the poor of Egdon. So he returns to the heath in order to put others in a position to leave it; or rather, since the peasant folk are one with the landscape, to change the nature of the heath itself, manifestly an impossible task. Already unhappy that her niece wants to marry a man she feels is unworthy, Mrs Yeobright is appalled that her son should renounce his good fortune in Paris for rural philanthropy. Middle-class and struggling to keep her family upwardly mobile, Mrs Yeobright is invariably correct in her assessment of Clym and Thomasin's poor choices but clumsy in her attempts to change their minds: every move she makes is counter-productive. When Clym and Eustacia fall in love, and the energies of the man most determined to stay in Egdon and the woman most determined to leave it collide, Mrs

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Yeobright's dismay knows no bounds. To complete the picture there's the mysterious, quaintly named Diggory Venn. Originally a dairy farmer, Venn once dared to ask for Thomasin's hand in marriage and was rebuffed, because not of the right class. Since then he has become a reddleman, an itinerant tradesman selling red dye to sheep farmers; he himself is permanently stained by it. He is resilient, cunning and still set on Thomasin.

How on earth, you ask, could an experienced reader find painful the antics of such an unpromising set of characters? Our sympathies are 'never ... strongly enlisted in any of the three [major characters]', one contemporary reviewer complained. Another felt the book's disregard for realism reached levels 'repugnant to our sense of the probable'. Its 'people talk as no people ever talked before', wrote a third, and 'the story strikes us as intensely artificial.' Crucial moments in the novel seem incredibly contrived, not only because the events themselves are so improbable but because Hardy makes his manipulation of them so evident: there are a dozen points where the plot turns on a character's overhearing precisely the part of a conversation that will give the wrong impression and lead to calamity. The tragedy is 'arbitrary and accidental', yet another reviewer wrote, the sadness 'unnecessary and uncalled for', 'mournful and cruel', so that for those 'who have the weakness of liking to be pleasantly interested in a book it is also very disagreeable'.

When critics quote the first reviews of classic novels it is usually to suggest the naivety of the initial reception, the superiority of our own understanding. Yet all these comments address aspects of Hardy's fiction that demand a response, if only because, despite all the mournfulness, cruelty and disagreeableness, *The Return of the Native* is more engaging and more painful than the famously superior tragedies with a great and noble character whose fatal flaws make his or her downfall inevitable. But why?

This new edition of the novel, edited by Simon Avery, has appendices that include those early reviews, as well as Hardy's own prefaces to various editions, maps, extracts from contemporary works of science and philosophy that Hardy read, a small selection of his poetry, pertinent passages from his essays, the complete script of a mummers' play which has a part in the plot and the illustrations that accompanied the novel's first serialisation in the magazine *Belgravia* in 1878. Abundant footnotes elucidate the frequent archaic and dialect terms and wide-ranging references to myth, scripture, ancient history, local customs, 19th-century politics and much else. At the beginning of the book a 'brief chronology' of Hardy's life runs to seven pages while a textual note discusses amendments he made to the book in later years.

So this is an edition for students and Hardy's novel is presented as an object of study. But Avery's introduction says nothing about the peculiar nature of the reading experience it offers. The words 'embody', 'enact', 'foreground', 'configure', 'transcend', 'gender', 'proto-modernist' and other exempla of the lit-crit lexicon abound, while a dozen or so Hardy experts are applauded for 'astute' or 'highly significant' contributions. Avery gives little sense of Hardy's urgent personal investment in the themes of his novels (the chronology contains the sublimely cryptic entry '1895 – The Hardys' marriage becomes increasingly difficult'). We learn that Egdon Heath offered him the possibility of 'unity of place' and was, 'as John Bayley astutely suggests, nothing less than "a microcosm of the dark indifferent universe in which human life has to be carried on".' It thus 'becomes the perfect setting for the social, political and intellectual upheavals of the age that the novel dissects and interrogates'.

But this is hardly how the novel actually appears to the reader. Take the following passage; at this point in the novel the ravishing Eustacia has renounced Wildevle, who marries Thomasin. Clym then marries Eustacia, taking her not to Paris but to a tiny cottage on the heath where his long hours of study, preparatory to opening the school, have a disastrous effect on his eyesight. Reduced to near blindness, he is now fit only to cut furze for fuel, something that has to be done in a suit of protective clothing:

This man from Paris was now so disguised by his leather accoutrements, and by the goggles he was obliged to wear over his eyes, that his closest friend might have passed by without recognising him. He was a brown spot in the midst of an expanse of olive-green gorse, and nothing more. Though frequently depressed in spirit when not actually at work, owing to thoughts of Eustacia's position and his mother's estrangement, when in the full swing of labour he was cheerfully disposed and calm.

His 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. 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 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-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. The monotony of his occupation soothed him, and was in itself a pleasure. A forced limitation of effort offered a justification of homely courses to an unambitious man, whose conscience would hardly have allowed him to remain in such obscurity while his powers were unimpeded.

So much for 'the microcosm of the dark indifferent universe'. Freed from ambition by the problems with his eyes, the 'man from Paris' moves downward socially and immerses himself in the natural world, putting himself beyond the recognition even of his closest friends. Hardy conjures the pleasures of flora and fauna, giving us flesh, blood and insect flirtation in a blaze of colour. Freedom, it seems, lies in surrender to the present moment and untamed nature, not in the struggle for realisation through career or love. Hardy's characters often wish to be out of the fray, even to be dead; Tess Durbeyfield, for example, looks forward to the moment when she will be 'grassed down and forgotten'. How much, you then have to ask, do these people truly desire to attain the goals they have set themselves? Are they inhibited in the achievement of those goals by Avery's 'structures of discrimination and oppression'; or are these social limitations, like Clym's partial loss of his sight, excuses for renouncing a path that seems too hard, too strenuous, too frightening?

D.H. Lawrence thought so. Here he is on Eustacia and Clym:

Eustacia, dark, wild, passionate ... loves first the unstable Wildeve, who does not satisfy her, then casts him aside for the newly returned Clym ... What does she want? ... some form of self realisation ... to attain herself. She does not know how ... so romantic imagination says Paris and the beau monde. As if that would stay her dissatisfaction.

Clym has found out the vanity of Paris and the beau monde. What then does he want? ... his imagination tells him he wants to serve the moral system ... to teach little Egdon boys in school. There is as much vanity in this, easily, as in Eustacia's Paris. What is Clym's altruism but a deep very subtle cowardice, that makes him shirk his own being whilst apparently acting nobly? ... Thus both Eustacia and he sidetrack from themselves, and each leaves the other unconvinced, unsatisfied, unrealised.

All this strikes a chord. Even Lawrence's main criticism – that by always allowing his more ambitious characters to be crushed by the forces of convention, Hardy is encouraging the reader to remain within the bounds of those conventions – makes good sense. It certainly fits with Hardy's own extremely cautious behaviour, rather as if the novels were written as warnings to himself of the dangers of overstepping the mark. But this still doesn't tell us why the development of the story is so painful.

As *The Return of the Native* opens, Wildeve and Thomasin have gone to a neighbouring town to marry, but have failed to do so because the certificate Wildeve had procured isn't valid there. Thomasin isn't convinced that the problem is merely the certificate and wonders about his commitment. Feeling compromised and slighted, she now questions her own commitment. We discover that a previous attempt to marry was blocked when Mrs Yeobright intervened during the ceremony, claiming she knew of an impediment to the union and thus humiliating both Wildeve and her niece. A situation has been created where, whatever ultimately happens, there will be bad feeling on all sides. Rather than repeating the old complaint that Hardy's characters are not 'great' enough for 'real' tragedy, it might be more useful to turn the proposition on its head and say that if we did have 'great' characters the Hardy kind of tragedy could not happen. Were Wildeve a more substantial figure he would either sweep Thomasin off her feet or leave her alone altogether. Were Thomasin 'great' she would hardly be thrown into confusion by a bureaucratic hitch. Nor would a more forceful guardian vacillate as Mrs Yeobright does.

Eustacia and Clym are similarly uncertain. Eustacia has grown weary of Wildeve, but renews her interest in him when he turns to Thomasin; she then falls in love with the idea of Clym before seeing him, simply because he has been living in Paris; later she falls in love with the real Clym, but without renouncing the idea that he can be persuaded to return to Paris. Clym falls in love with Eustacia's unconventional character and beauty but immediately and improbably imagines her as a charity-school teacher, then is rather too concerned about his mother's hostile reaction and the effect of this emotional upheaval on his philanthropic projects. First he decides to delay the marriage, then he allows himself to be hurried into it, because he's anxious that Eustacia is anxious that he will allow his anxious mother to change his mind. Even the landscape – with its tiny meandering paths through thick vegetation over low hills under weird light effects – is a terrain of indecision: 'There was that in the condition of the heath itself which resembled protracted and halting dubiousness.'

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Uncertainty and vacillation prepare the way for unhappiness, misunderstanding and bitterness. Eustacia knows of Wildeve's attachment to Thomasin, Thomasin of his interest in Eustacia. Wildeve learns of Eustacia's interest in Clym, Clym of Eustacia's interest in Wildeve, Eustacia imagines Clym's possible interest in Thomasin and hers in him. Each is unsure of the others' affections and hence even more unwilling to commit to his or her own. The opportunities for farce are clear, and much of the novel,

particularly the events surrounding Clym's mother's death, does indeed resemble farce, though the consequences are devastating. 'If you look beneath the surface of any farce you see a tragedy,' Hardy tells us, 'and ... if you blind yourself to the deeper issues of a tragedy you see a farce.'

The root cause of this inability to make decisions and stick to them is fear. Just as it's a terrain of 'dubiousness' the heath can also 'intensify the opacity of a moonless midnight to a cause of shaking and dread'. All Hardy's major novels are steeped in a vocabulary of fear and all his main characters, rash or reckless though they may be, are fearful. Of what exactly? To an extent, they're worried about social criticism should they break with prevailing moral proprieties. But they're mainly anxious about the fatal, irreversible nature of experience itself: they're afraid of making a wrong decision that will change their lives for ever. Sex is the most dangerous of these experiences and whom to marry likely to be the most determining of decisions. In short, Hardy's characters are most afraid of the thing they most desire: a partner. Hardy had the same problem. In 1868, writing of an attractive woman he saw on a boat trip to Lulworth, he remarked: 'Saw her for the last time standing on deck as the boat moved off. White feather in hat, brown dress, Dorset dialect, classic features, short upper lip. A woman I wd have married offhand, with probably disastrous results.'

One natural consequence of this fearful mindset is a growing desire to be spared experience and its tough decisions. 'If there is any way of getting a melancholy satisfaction out of life,' Hardy says in the autobiography he wrote with his second wife, 'it lies in dying, so to speak, before one is out of the flesh ... Hence even when I enter into a room to pay a simple morning call I have unconsciously the habit of regarding the scene as if I were a spectre not solid enough to influence my environment.' In *The Return of the Native* he writes of Clym: 'He had reached the stage in a young man's life when the grimness of the general human situation first becomes clear; and the realisation of this causes ambition to halt awhile. In France it is not uncustomary to commit suicide at this stage; in England we do much better, or much worse, as the case may be.'

Hardy's immediate narrative dramatises the thrilling struggle to achieve love and self-realisation, but at a deeper level so much trepidation surrounds the drama that both characters and reader begin to wish that everything would go wrong sooner rather than later, to get it over with. What makes Hardy modern is his perception that the individual's felt need to become someone is a disturbingly onerous task, a frightening imposition. In this his writing reminds one of the narrator of *Notes from the Underground*, who lamented that he had 'never even managed to become anything: neither wicked nor good, neither a scoundrel nor an honest man, neither a hero nor an insect'. The 'modern consciousness', it seems, is incapable of deciding between one course of action and another, seeing and fearing too clearly the negative consequences of any choice: 'with all his heightened consciousness' the modern person begins to regard himself 'as a mouse and not a man'. In Hardy as in Dostoevsky, a complete loss of self-esteem lies at the core of the characters' miseries. They don't trust their instincts, or their reasoning. 'I ought never to have hunted you out,' Wildeve says to Eustacia, 'or having done it, I ought to have persisted in retaining you.' 'Should have' and 'ought to have' are frequent laments.

With the death of Clym's mother Hardy has the reader squirming, not just because of the way Victorian society, or implacable fate, or bad weather or just bad luck treat the characters, though they all do their worst, but out of a heightened awareness that words and action can be fatal, and that the fear which springs from that awareness actually hastens the outcomes it fears – and because all this anxiety is exhausting. 'I love you to oppressiveness,' Clym tells Eustacia before they marry. 'Nothing can ensure the continuance of love,' she replies. 'It will evaporate like a spirit, and so I feel full of fears.' She elaborates: 'It will I fear end in this way: your mother will find out that you meet me, and she will influence you against me!' 'The unknown,' she says, 'always fills my mind with terrible possibilities.' And again: 'How terrible it would be if a time should come when I could not love you, my Clym!' And he: 'Please don't say such reckless things. When we see such a time at hand we will say, "I have outlived my faith and purpose," and die.' In short, these two have already mapped out their catastrophe before it occurs. 'I have feared my bliss. It has been too intense and consuming,' Eustacia says. Well warned, the reader still foolishly hopes that disaster can be averted.

Clym's mother is furious. 'You give up your whole thought – you set your whole soul – to please a woman?' she asks and Clym answers: 'I do. And that woman is you.' This throws the reader completely. How can he say such a thing? Nobody seems able to maintain a steady state of mind. To assure Eustacia he is solid, Clym capriciously offers to marry her at once. His mother refuses to come to the wedding, then relents and decides to hand over the hundred guineas left by her dead husband to be divided equally between Thomasin (now Mrs Wildeve) and Clym. The manner in which this is done beggars belief, but the reader keeps reading because the psychology of what is happening between the family members is more than credible.

Mrs Yeobright gives the money to the dumb, fearful peasant Christian Cantle to carry across the heath in the dark. Christian has a drink too many and meets Wildeve, who

gets wind of the fact that money is being passed to his wife behind his back. He proposes a bit of gambling and wins the money. Unbeknown to either they are being watched by Venn the redleman, who, believing that all the money was meant for Thomasin, challenges Wildeve, wins it back, then goes to hand it over to her. A situation is thus created (with what effort!) where Clym's money has gone to his cousin.

Hearing from Christian that Wildeve has appropriated the money, but hoping he has been gentleman enough to hand over what belonged to her son, Mrs Yeobright goes to see Eustacia. 'Have you received a gift from Thomasin's husband?' she begins. Having no information about the inheritance, Eustacia can only suppose she is being accused of maintaining a relationship with Wildeve despite her marriage. A furious argument ensues. 'You have caused a division which can never be healed!' Eustacia cries. 'You stand on the edge of a precipice,' Mrs Yeobright says. Neither of them is responsible for the original misunderstanding, but both seem all too eager to turn it into a tragedy.

Clym's partial blindness delays his plans to move to Budmouth, where Eustacia might be happy. She is full of pity, but concerned at how happy Clym suddenly is to be working as a furze cutter. 'It was bitterly plain to Eustacia that he did not care much about social failure.' So much for the lady's being oppressed by Victorian discrimination. 'Has your love for me all died, then,' he needlessly says, 'because my appearance is no longer that of a fine gentleman?' Again, neither of them is guilty of the predicament they are in, but everything they say makes it worse.

Bored to death, Eustacia goes to a country dance, where by chance she meets Wildeve and dances with him. The relationship is renewed, though Eustacia is not in any sense unfaithful. Doing everything he can to complicate the questions of intention and responsibility, Hardy has Venn the redleman see the ex-lovers together and report the incident to Thomasin, mindful of his ex-sweetheart's honour. When Wildeve goes to hang around Eustacia's cottage at night, Venn warns him off. So Wildeve goes by day.

Now comes the centre of the farce. Concerned about his mother's estrangement, Clym decides to visit her to make up, but only after finishing his day's work. He sets off to cut furze at 4.30 a.m. Mrs Yeobright in the meantime decides to visit him, choosing the hottest day of the year for a walk of some miles across open heathland. Feeling ill, she gets lost, then follows her son's distant figure as he returns home in the early afternoon, but has to stop and rest a short distance from the house. This gives Clym time to fall asleep and Wildeve time to turn up and knock at the door. Eustacia can admit him because her husband is in the house, though in bed. Now Mrs Yeobright clicks open the garden gate, Eustacia rushes to the window and the two see each other. But the younger woman doesn't want to open the door with Wildeve there, fearing what Clym's mother may imagine. He is taken to the back door. She hears Clym shout the word 'mother!' and believes he has woken up and is going to open the door for her. In fact he is having a nightmare. When Eustacia returns, she finds her husband still asleep and his mother gone. Convinced that her son, who she knows is at home, is refusing to see her, Mrs Yeobright starts off into the blistering heat, where she unburdens her bitterness on a little boy who just happens to be around. Almost home, she is bitten by an adder and collapses.

The accumulation of coincidences here – at least a dozen – is extraordinary. It's not that Hardy is such a poor writer that he needs to use elements of chance to move his stories on: rather, he tosses them in in mad abundance to create a situation where no one is responsible but everyone can blame everyone else – as well as themselves and the weather and destiny and witchcraft and Victorian bigotry and more or less anything you care to mention.

Clym wakes up, sets off on the planned visit of reconciliation and finds his mother unconscious. He has her carried to a deserted house, where, just before she dies, the little boy turns up to announce what she had told him: 'She said ... she was a broken-hearted woman and cast off by her son.' Clym spends a month wishing he was dead and lamenting 'an error which could never be rectified' before going to talk to the little boy again only to discover that his mother had actually been to his house where another man had been admitted shortly before her. So now Clym believes Eustacia deliberately kept his mother out because she was with a lover. The irate husband heads home for a showdown, 'his eyes, fixed steadfastly on blankness' and 'vaguely lit by an icy shine': 'Instead of there being before him the pale face of Eustacia, and a masculine shape unknown, there was only the imperturbable countenance of the heath, which, having defied the cataclysmal onsets of centuries, reduced to insignificance by its seamed and antique features the wildest turmoil of a single man.' This is the essence of Hardy's vision: an intensely unhappy melodrama for which everybody and nobody is to blame is seen against the backdrop of a vast but rather beautiful indifference which now offers the promise – to characters, author and readers – of quietude, closure, silence. Passionate yearning fizzes beside seraphic detachment, the latter ultimately preferable because the former brings every kind of distress.

The final pages offer more of the same. 'Having resolved on flight Eustacia at times seemed anxious that something should happen to thwart her own intention' is a typical chapter opening. The only curiosity is that having at last killed off Eustacia and Wildeve,

again in circumstances as contrived as they are unclear, and having reduced Clym to a ghost of his former self, a man who feels that past torments now exempt him from any further engagement with women, Hardy tags on a happy ending – Thomasin marries her old flame Venn the reddleman – though in later editions he added a note in which he said this was merely a concession to the requirements of serialisation in a popular magazine. 'Readers can therefore choose between the endings,' he writes. Simon Avery approves, enthusiastically declaring the move 'almost proto-modernist'. In fact it aligns Hardy with his characters' unhappy habit of drawing back from their original intentions, of compromising, of not quite knowing their own minds.

The one person who does know his mind throughout the novel remains the reddleman. Despite Thomasin's marrying Wildeve, Venn continues to spend a great deal of energy looking after her from a respectful distance, and never thinking of other women. His old-fashioned steadfastness sets off everyone else's modern inconsistency: as Hardy says in a note, he is an 'isolated and weird character'. The novel itself frequently warns us that reddlemen are a dying breed.

Of Wildeve and Eustacia's corpses, laid out for burial, we are told: 'Misfortune had struck them gracefully, cutting off their erratic histories with a catastrophic dash, instead of, as with many, attenuating each life to an uninteresting meagreness, through long years of wrinkles, neglect and decay.' Was Hardy thinking of himself as one of those condemned to an 'uninteresting meagreness'? In his biography, it is all too evident how far he shares the mindset that leads his characters to misery. Fearing the critics, he wrote precisely the kind of novel that would provoke them, then suffered atrociously when they attacked him. 'Woke before it was light,' he wrote in his diary shortly after a negative review of *The Return of the Native*. 'Felt that I had not enough staying power to hold my own in the world.' A 'pale gentle frightened little man', as Robert Louis Stevenson remembered him, Hardy had abandoned an exciting London career in architecture to return to his country home and his mother, then proceeded to marry against her wishes. His wife wanted to live in London, he in a village near home. Worrying that he hadn't made the right choice, he regularly used his novels to send his wife precisely the sorts of message guaranteed to make matters worse, but without ever acting decisively to bring an end to their mutual unhappiness, anxious as he always was in the face of possible censure. Given Emma Hardy's growing resentment at the way her husband's novels portrayed married life, it's fascinating to think of *The Return of the Native* itself contributing to a domestic drama that eventually became as unhappy as the one the novel recounts, and to a certain degree unhappy because of this recounting. Like his characters, Hardy anticipates the misery marriage will bring, and precisely in the anticipating brings it on. It's a dangerous dynamic to be drawn into and readers do well to resist. Rather than reflections on proto-modernism, this wonderfully elaborate invitation to despair might be better accompanied by a health warning.

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