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THE IDEA OF THE ETERNAL RETURN IN HARDY'S NOVELS

HISTORY AS THE ETERNAL RETURN

Hardy's fiction and Schopenhauer's philosophy exemplify the concept of history expressed through the idea of the eternal return. Mircea Eliade in his perceptive study of the religious mind (*Sacrum. Myth. History*)¹ gives a thorough analysis of the myth of the eternal return. He notices that man in his effort to resist the idea of changeability depriving him of anchorage, immobilizes time giving in the form of repetitive, natural cycles (seasons). He realizes himself as a universal being only when he transcends mere historical experience and indulges his need for experiencing archetypes. Through the simple fact of discovering cosmic rhythms in the centre of his existence (eg. alternate rhythm night-day, summer-winter), he gains a wider perspective on his life and fate. The aim of archetypes, myths and rituals immobilizing time and annihilating history is the elimination of "calamities" and the assimilation of "accident". They express man's defensive attitude towards the facts of everyday reality, his search for safety and for stability.

According to Eliade, the idea of repetitiveness constitutes the process of mythologizing the past which expresses the most common of human yearnings – nostalgia for paradise. The sacred time of the world's beginning, as opposed to the historical time, is by its very nature reversible: it can be endlessly recovered and endlessly repeated. Every perennial ritual gives man an opportunity to experience *illud tempus* – the time created and sanctified by gods through their acts – *gesta deorum*. A religious man does not want to live in historical reality and tries to return to the sacred time which, in some respects, resembles eternity. The wish to reintegrate the original time expresses both the desire to experience the presence of gods and to recover the uncorrupted world, fresh, pure, and strong, as it was

¹ M. Eliade, *Sacrum. Mit. Historia* (Warszawa: PIW, 1970).

in illo tempore. On the existential plane the experience of periodical return to the time of the world's origin consists in the conviction that it is possible to begin one's life anew with all potential opportunities for self-realization. Thus, in its original form, the myth of the eternal return was essentially optimistic. It could not be interpreted as the rejection of reality and escape into dream or imagination. On the contrary, only through the return to the origin of sacrum human existence could evade death and nullity.

The situation changes completely when the meaning of cosmic theology becomes obscure, Gods can no longer be reached through cosmic rhythms. The meaning of the periodical repetition of *gesta deorum* is lost. Repetition deprived of its religious meaning, necessarily leads to the pessimistic vision of life. When cyclical time does not allow man to regain the original condition nor to experience the mysterious presence of gods, it inspires only dread and terror: it turns out to be a wheel perpetually revolving and repeating. This is especially so in Indian philosophy (on which Schopenhauer based his conceptions), in which the pattern of creation-destruction-creation is repeated endlessly. Greek philosophy also knew the myth of the eternal return with its concept of circular time. According to Plato's definition, the time which defines and measures the revolution of heavenly spheres is a moving image of motionless eternity which it imitates while revolving. As a result, the world's creation, existence and destruction develop either circularly or as an endless succession of cycles in the course of which reality passes from one state to another, but the sum of being remains unchanged. Eternally the same individuals appeared, appear, and will appear with every revolution of the wheel.

ANTIEVOLUTIONARY ASPECT OF HISTORY

The pessimistic implications of the idea of the eternal return result unmistakably from the desanctification of the universe and secularization of human experience. If man cannot discover the transcendent, his aspiration for certainty is undermined, his chance of finding out the ultimate truth, which alone could guarantee his mental and moral safety, is lost. The repetitiveness deprived of the original sacrum, which it could imitate or the sacred future which could be its aim becomes purposeless and terrifying. Neither Schopenhauer nor Hardy believes in evolution. Schopenhauer violently attacks so called "optimistic" philosophies professing the idea of progress. According to him they are based on hypostases which spring from the mental effort to subjugate death. Such notions as honour, reputation, fatherland, progress, justice, freedom and God serve not only the purpose

of excusing particular egoistic aspirations but, above all, of embellishing death. Their aim is to make death less terrifying. Philosophies and religions based on these notions condone all evil, especially death, referring to something that will follow it, which is the good so great that it is worth sacrificing life for its sake. Religion simply promises individual immortality after death. The more sophisticated "optimistic" philosophies appeal to supraindividual values, granting them real existence. If it is not to be transcendent being, its presence in the empirical world must be demonstrated. And since at present it is invisible, it has to be moved either into the past or into the future. Placing the ideal in the past attests to a person's sheer ignorance, contempt for knowledge and its replacement by a fantasy – Schopenhauer was particularly critical of the idealizing of the "barbarian" Middle Ages by Romanticism. Placing the ideal in the future is even worse. It gives rise to social demagoguery and "bestiality called by some people humanism".² Philosophers that treat history as a sphere for the realization of supraindividual values forget that eternity has elapsed till the present moment and in eternity everything that could happen must have happened. We owe the distinction between the past and the present to the reflection on the fundamental forms of all perception – space and time. This distinction does not concern the thing-in-itself and the principle of its transformation into the thing-for-us. Anyone who penetrated the world and recognized the will objectified at its foundation realizes that evil permeates the world immanently. It could only disappear with the world itself if the end of the world or its beginning could be conceivable. According to Schopenhauer the world has existed eternally and is eternally corrupted because there is no other world than the world of objects. The Will non-objectified can be imagined only as *noumenon* or the principle of empirical reality but not as the condition anterior to it. The world is evil not only in its present shape but in its essence. In this respect time is powerless against it: it has never been better and never will be. Therefore all aspirations to its perfection are useless, and philosophers professing the ideas of progress lead theoretical thought astray.

Schopenhauer's recognizing particularism and egotism as the source of all evil in the world, is a continuation of a tradition in philosophy begun by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. There, however, the world's depravity was preceded by a period of happiness and harmony, conceived either as the state of nature before civilisation or as a historically defined epoch. Therefore, such an assumption implied the possibility of regaining this initial harmony, for instance through identification with nature. In Schopenhauer's world it is impossible.

² J. Garewicz, *Schopenhauer* (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1965).

Schopenhauer dissociates himself from any empathy with Darwin's theory of evolution. The Will's objectification is an act absolutely spontaneous, never preceded by consciousness, a whim not governed by any plan. Structuralization of the world should not be interpreted teleologically. The capriciousness of the Will simply made it use all possibilities, bring to life all accessible forms. All this occurs beyond time, and therefore any evolution of species is out of the question. The order of nature can be explained by pointing to the Will as its basis but it must not be ascribed any thought, any hidden meaning or the realization of the moral principle within it.

In this pessimistic vision of the world and history there is but one comfort. The world is so bad that it cannot be worse. Thus the degree of intensity of evil becomes the guarantee of the world's stability. Its final catastrophe, whether defined as salvation or as annihilation, is inconceivable. The world will roll on, as bad as it was ages before, and neither Messiah nor Avenger-Angel will appear in it. In the face of evil man is solitary and undefended, he must confront it alone counting neither on God nor on future generations.

All the negative consequences of the adoption of a voluntary philosophy for the concept of history (particularly the anti-evolutionary aspect of history and its repetitiveness deprived of metaphysical sense) are as applicable to Hardy's universe as they are to Schopenhauer's. The latter's polemical debate with Rousseau will find its equivalent in Hardy's polemical argument with Wordsworth in *Tess*.

The idea of the eternal return in Hardy's novels is expressed through the application of the motif of repetitiveness – the duplication of the experiences and fate of other people by the protagonists. On the allegorical plane this motif is implicit in the scenes of universal experience, equalizing individual experience with collective experience, and in the theatre imagery which deprives individual fate of its uniqueness and reduces it to the fate of "thousands and thousands".

The application of the theatre imagery and incorporation of the scenes of universal experience in the course of the narration result in the character's incapacitation and alienation. The necessity of copying the same pattern of experience deprives him of the chance of being master of his own fate and of deciding what direction his life should take. His freedom of choice is limited and the sense of his life – the belief in realizing all his potential talents and making use of his opportunities – undermined. The repetitiveness is closely associated with determinism and predestination. Since the characters only imitate the constant pattern, their life is necessarily preordained and the shape their dreams and aspirations assume fixed immutably from the beginning of time, decided before they are born. The significance of this fact for individual freedom should be self-evident.

The eternal return, with its implicit idea of circular or cyclical time, is important also for Hardy's concept of Nature. Do the cyclical return to Nature and identification with it with the coming of the seasons give the characters a foothold and anchorage, as in the philosophies descending from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, particularly in the Romantic philosophy of nature? Is the seasonal pattern of Hardy's novels the eternal return in its optimistic or pessimistic mode? Is it possible to begin one's life anew (the idea implicit to the concept of the eternal return) with, for instance, the coming of spring, and to forget past misdemeanors and past misfortunes?

The analysis of the image of a circle and the motif of the character's return to the same place will answer these questions in part.

SCENES OF UNIVERSAL EXPERIENCE

Just as time in Plato's definition is a moving image of motionless eternity, the everyday experience of Hardy's characters mirrors the universal experience of humanity. Hardy's novels provide many examples of scenes of universal experience, the most striking ones being farmer Troutham's field and Fourways in *Jude the Obscure* and Carrefour and Mixen Lane in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. These scenes seem to be where the transcendent is penetrated, the sphere in which noumenal reality, in its invariability and static permanence, looks through the flickering, kaleidoscopically changing and speeding phenomenal reality. The scenes are particularly significant on the epistemological level. In few fleeting moments a character gains transitory insight into the essence of being. His perspective of vision is, for a while, that of a sage. He recognizes the human condition in his own experience and the universe in his immediate environment. He identifies the aspirations of other people with his own and realizes his kinship with them. The wide-ranging temporal and spatial context of the scene (eternity and the universe) allows him to look at himself from the right perspective, a perspective that belittles his success and diminishes the importance of his failure, equalizing his fate with the fate of other people. Such a vision, as it were, transcends the fact of the Will's objectification and approaches noumenal, intelligible Will. If the noumenal sphere were the sphere of sacrum, such an experience would be religious – the experience of the presence of God. However, in Hardy's desanctified universe, where the transcendent has not the character of order or harmony, it could only be a reflection on one's fate and the fate of others, reestablishing life's proper proportions and making man aware of his limitations. The scenes of universal experience on the philosophical plane play a similar part to the bird's eye view

perspective on technical plane of the novels. They are also the place of concentration and the immobilization of history. History as mutability does not pertain to the noumenal sphere. The concept of the repetitiveness of human experience neutralizes or even annihilates history. It is derived from the idea of the eternal return in terms of which both man and the universe remain eternally invariable.

Fourways in Christminster may serve as an example of the scene of universal experience. The broad, general vision is granted to the character. Jude is grown-up and mature and his insight into the essence of things results directly from his disillusionment caused by a letter from the Master of Biblioll College which shatters his hopes. As always, this wide vision is contrasted with the incomplete perception of ordinary, ignorant people, "struggling men and women" who formed "the reality of Christminster, though they knew little of Christ or Minster":

He only heard in part the policeman's further remarks, having fallen into thought on what struggling people like himself have stood at that Crossway, whom nobody ever thought of now. It made more history than the oldest college in the city. It was literally teeming, stratified, with the shades of human groups, who had met there for tragedy, comedy, farce; real enactments of the intensest kind. At Fourways men had stood and talked of Napoleon, the loss of America, the execution of King Charles, the burning of the Martyrs, the Crusades, the Norman Conquest, possibility of the arrival of Caesar. Here the two sexes had met for loving, hating, coupling, parting; had waited, had suffered, for each other; had triumphed over each other; cursed each other in jealousy, blessed each other in forgiveness. He began to see that the town life a book of humanity infinitely more palpitating, varied, and compendious than the gown life.³

As this excerpt shows, Hardy interrupts the continuity of individual perception (Jude's ordinary vision) with the view of the philosopher. The abstract terms used throughout the passage generalize the particular lives of the inhabitants of Christminster into a "book of humanity, palpitating, varied and compendious", their unique experiences into "loving, hating, parting, and coupling". Historical events, even so distant as the Norman Conquest or the execution of Charles I, enumerated as it were in one breath, merge into one. History shorn of its variability contextualizes the same human experience or, more correctly, human condition. It is conceived as essentially non-progressive and ahistorical. This aspect of history is emphasized through the application of the theatre imagery where life is shown in terms of performance, "real enactment of the intensest kind", and its vicissitudes as "tragedy, comedy or farce". In fact the visualisation of history as theatre underlies the concept of the eternal return with its stress on repetitiveness.

³ Th. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 137. All further page references in the text are to this edition.

THEATRE IMAGERY
HISTORY AS THEATRE, LIFE AS A PERFORMANCE, CHARACTERS AS ACTORS

The application of theatre imagery in other scenes of universal experience is even more persistent. The market place in Casterbridge appears to Elizabeth-Jane as a stage on which a medieval drama is being performed:

The carrefour was like the regulation Open Place in spectacular dramas, where the incidents that occur always happen to bear on the lives of the adjoining residents. Farmers, merchants, dairymen, quacks, hawkers, appeared there from week to week, and disappeared as the afternoon wasted away. It was the node of all orbits.⁴

The similarity in the imagery to medieval drama is further developed in the description of Mixen Lane, whose residents are portrayed not as individuals but as abstract moral notions, personified virtues and vices. This device serves the effect of contraction of individual experience and its equalization with human fate in general. The labels attached to individual fortunes immobilize them, render them static, generalize them into archetypes:

Mixen Lane was the Adullam of all the surrounding villages. It was the hiding-place of those who were in distress, and in debt, and trouble of every kind. Farm labourers and other peasants, who combined a little poaching with their farming, and a little brawling and bibbing with their poaching, found themselves sooner or later in Mixen Lane. Rural mechanics too idle to mechanize, rural servants too rebellious to serve, drifted or were forced into Mixen Lane. The lane and its surrounding thicket of thatched cottages stretched out like a spit into the moist and misty lowland. Much that was sad, much that was low, some things that were baneful, could be seen in Mixen Lane. *Vice* ran freely in and out certain of the doors of the neighbourhood, *recklessness* dwelt under the roof with the crooked chimney; *shame* in some bow-windows; *theft* (in times of privation) in the thatched and mud-walled houses by the shallows. Even *slaughter* had not been altogether unknown here. In a block of cottages up an alley there might have been erected an altar to disease in years gone by. Such was Mixen Lane in the times when Henchard and Farfrae were Mayors. ...

Yet amid so much that was bad needy *respectability* also found a home. Under some of the roofs abode *pure and virtuous souls* whose presence there was due to the iron hand of necessity, and to that alone.⁵

The allegorical technique of presentation, so obvious in the passage quoted above, is a myth-forming device often employed by Hardy because his interests frequently transcend the dimension of realism. This fact is emphasized by the author of *Thomas Hardy and History*. The critic observes that Hardy's characters

⁴ T. Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1978), p. 164. Hereafter all references to this edition will be in the text.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 250-51.

have ... the epic quality of figures of *Everyman*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Paradise Lost*, and *The Tempest*. The great figures of the world's imaginings transcend the limits of the personal and are clothed in abstraction. Only when we understand this shall we cease to judge them as "real", "true to life", or otherwise. We may even cease to discourse on "the static nature of Hardy's characterization", or "the rigid and diagrammatic structure of his plots", or "his incredible use of coincidence".⁶

Another instance of Hardy's parabolical or allegorical inclination is the arrangement of the contents of *The Return of the Native*. The titles which he gives to the chapters of the novel make individual characters and actions stand for general truths, good and bad qualities. At the same time they reveal the author's attitude towards the protagonists, the judgement he passes on their conduct and the moral lesson which he teaches. Let us consider a few examples from the novel. I have given names of the characters to whom the labels refer in parentheses:

- *Humanity* appears upon the Scene, Hand in Hand with Trouble (Diggory and Thomasin);
- *The Figure* against the sky (Eustacia);
- A Coalition between *Beauty and Oddness* (Eustacia and Diggory);
- Firmness is discovered in a *Gentle Heart* (Thomasin);
- The First Act in a *Timeworn Drama* (Eustacia and Clym's love);
- A Conjuncture and its Result upon the *Pedestrian* (Mrs Yeobright);
- Rain, Darkness and *Anxious Wanderers* (Clym, Thomasin, Diggory, Captain Vye).⁷

To conclude let us return once again to the theatre imagery, the meaning of which has already been discussed. Except for its philosophical importance (visualisation of history as the eternal return and human experience as repetitive) it also serves the purpose of intensifying the fate of the characters, reminding the reader all the time that the author is dealing with real tragedies and foretelling the tragic consequences of the plot. Clym watching the departing Eustacia is filled with misgiving about their future happiness. He is overpowered by "the dead flat of the scenery", "the oppressive horizontality", which remind him of "*the arena of life*"⁸ and give him a sense of equality with other natural creatures. Henchard reconsidering his past life has "no wish to make *an arena* a second time of a world that had become a mere *painted scene* to him".⁹ The clocks striking the hour just before night-time are compared to "*a row actors delivering their final*

⁶ R. J. White, *Thomas Hardy and History* (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 19.

⁷ Emphasis mine.

⁸ T. Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (London: Pan Books, 1978), p. 209.

⁹ T. Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 312.

speeches before the fall of the curtain".¹⁰ Nature at the wife-selling episode in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* constitutes the setting in which a human drama is performed. "To watch it was like looking at some *grand feat of stagery* from a *darkened auditorium*".¹¹ Sue and Phillotson's second marriage ceremony is seen by Sue as a "*re-enactment* of their former selves of the *similar scene* which had taken place at Melchester years before".¹²

Just as Socrates' death in the Greek version of the eternal return is repeated an infinite number of times, with every new revolution of the circle of time, so Tess's life echoes the lives of her predecessors:

Because what's the use of learning that I am one of a long row only – finding out that there is set down in some old book somebody just like me, and to know that I shall only act *her part*; making me sad, that's all. The best is not to remember that your nature and your past doings have been just like thousands' and thousands' and that your coming life and doings'll be like thousands' and thousands!¹³

MAN AS A TRAVELLER, LIFE AS WANDERING

Nearly all of Hardy's novels exploit the motifs of travelling, the pilgrimage of life and man conceived as an eternal wayfarer. It is first revealed in the imagery of word and phrase. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge* Newson is referred to as "a rover and sojourner"¹⁴ and Henchard as "a wayfarer".¹⁵ Tess is described as "the unhappy pilgrim" who "descended into the Valley of Humiliation".¹⁶ Mrs Yeobright, exhausted by the long journey preceding her death, describes herself as a "weary wayfarer".¹⁷ A similar phrase is used by Jude who, repelled by the oppressing atmosphere of the tavern, calls himself "the unfortunate wayfarer (who) finds himself with no other haven of rest".¹⁸

The characters rarely find their anchorage. Always restless, they shift from place to place, change their quarters as regularly as migratory birds, wandering about the world in search of work and happiness. Whenever they come across a suitable place for them to pitch their tent, it soon turns

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

¹² T. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, p. 389.

¹³ T. Hardy, "Tess of the d'Urbervilles", *The Thomas Hardy Omnibus* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1978), p. 954. All further references in the text are to this edition.

¹⁴ T. Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 309.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

¹⁶ T. Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, p. 400.

¹⁷ T. Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, p. 283.

¹⁸ T. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, p. 66.

out to be of a provisional and temporary character. They are quickly compelled to set out on another journey, to keep going. Always on the move, they are seen in different places during a short period of time, ascending and descending hills, traversing vast plains, the valleys and uplands of Wessex, treading their way in a direction known only to themselves. This hag-hazard way of life is closely connected to their jobs. Hardy's protagonists are often tramps, pedlars, and unemployed rural workers.

Michael Henchard starts his career as an itinerant haytrusser plodding the country roads with his young wife and child, Clym Yeobright during the period of his convalescence works as a furze-cutter roaming about the heath, Tess repeatedly hires herself out as a seasonal labourer to milk cows in spring and summer, gather crops in harvest time, and hack and cut turnips in autumn. John Durbeyfield, Dr Vilbet, Diggory Venn, and young Jude are all travelling salesmen and the latter also an itinerant stonemason.

The time of wandering in Hardy's novels is counted not by minutes and hours but by weeks, months and years. The periodical nature of their work makes the characters travel in spring and summer and rest in autumn and "in the depth of winter". Their routes and camping sites do not vary much from year to year. On the way they always meet the same people. Their lives have seasonal pattern and are synchronised to the course of nature. This parallel is developed in the description of Shaston from *Jude the Obscure* where human fate is reduced to the behaviour of birds of passage.

There was another peculiarity ... which Shaston appeared to owe to its site. It was the resting place and headquarters of the proprietors of wandering vans, shows, shooting-galleries, and other itinerant concerns, whose business lay largely at fairs and markets. As strange wild birds are seen assembled on some lofty promontory, meditatively pausing for longer flights, or to return by the course they followed thither, so here, in this cliff-town, stood in stultified silence the yellow and green caravans bearing names not local, as if surprised by a change in the landscape so violent as to hinder their further progress; and here they usually remained all the winter till they turned to seek again their old tracks in the following spring.¹⁹

The wayfarer of Hardy's novels is either a pedestrian with a bundle on his back, or a carter driving a waggon which carries all his wordly possessions and drawn by a horse.

All the novels being analysed here open with the image of a wanderer. Before we learn his name and destination, we see him as a pilgrim, a traveller in general, who could be just any man walking. The critics have often remarked the striking regularity of the beginnings of these novels:

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

1. Along the road walked an old man. He was white-headed as a mountain, bowed in the shoulders, and faded in general aspect. (*The Return of the Native*)²⁰
2. On an evening in the latter part of May a middle-aged man was walking homeward from Shaston to the village of Marlott, in the adjoining Vale of Blakemore or Blackmoor. (*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*)²¹
3. One evening of late summer, before the 19th century had reached one-third of its span, a young man and woman, the latter carrying a child, were approaching the large village of Weydon-Priors, in Upper Wessex, on foot. (*The Mayor of Casterbridge*)²²
4. The school-master was leaving the village, and everybody seemed sorry. The miller at Cresscombe lent him the small white tilted cart and horse to carry his goods to the city of his destination, about twenty miles off, such a vehicle proving of quite sufficient size for the departing teacher's effects. (*Jude the Obscure*)²³

None of the above-quoted excerpt mentions the names of the travellers, only later do we learn that they are Captain Vye, John Durbeyfield, the Henchards, and Phillotson respectively.

The endings of the novels also exploit the same motif of the traveller. Since some of the characters are no longer alive by then, their places on the road are taken by other people who follow their tracks. This substitution is not significant, and passes almost unperceived. When the motionless figure of Clym, standing on the top of the tumulus by the end of the novel, replaces the solitary figure of Eustacia, who stood there two years before, nothing changes in the general aspect of the scene. Similarly nothing changes if somebody else continues the journey started by his predecessor. The traveller of the beginning and the traveller of the end of the novel merge into one person, a traveller in the abstract, a pilgrim on the pilgrimage of life. The traveller is thus a figurative expression for man. The device of repeating the same motif closes the novels compositionally, explicitly defining the character's fate as universal human fate, the fate of an eternal pilgrim.

THE ROAD AS LIFE

The wanderer frequently appears on the long, laborious road, dry, empty, white and winding. The road bisects a vast surface of level or hilly upland, diminishing and bending away on the furthest horizon. Thus the road traversing the dark expanse of Egdon Heath is viewed from above

²⁰ T. Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, p. 16.

²¹ T. Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, p. 851.

²² T. Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 1.

²³ T. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, p. 1.

as "the parting-line on a head of black hair".²⁴ Elsewhere in the novel it is compared to a thread. "The white flints of footpath lay like a thread over the slopes".²⁵ In *Tess* its surface is depicted as "tape-like".²⁶ It is a road in the abstract, unbroken in its course, going out of sight on the horizon. Its emptiness and apparent boundlessness, the fact that the wanderer's destination is not visible, are repeatedly emphasized by Hardy's narrator. The road where Lucetta waits for Farfrae "stretched onward straight as a surveyor's line till lost to sight on a most distant ridge. There was neither hedge nor tree in the prospect now, the road clinging to the stubbly expanse of corn-land like a stripe on an undulating garment".²⁷ Similarly Angel taking a backward glance at the road sees it "diminishing in his rear as far as he could see".²⁸ In the same novel Tess pausing to rest sees "before her the road ascending whitely to the upland along whose margin the remainder of her journey lay. Its dry pale surface stretched severely onward, unbroken by a single figure vehicle, or mark, save some occasional brown horse-droppings which dotted its cold aridity here and there".²⁹ The words "dry" and "aridity" in the last excerpt imply the hardship and toil connected with the wanderer's progress on the dusty road. His chance of rest and the prospect of reaching his destination are distant. We learn that the road "stretches severely onward". Hardy is more explicit about the wanderer's condition elsewhere in the novel when he shows Tess taking a glance at "the long white road" which she "had just laboured up"³⁰ and later when she sees in front of her "a long and stony highway which she had to tread without aid, and with little sympathy".³¹ Especially in this last description does the allegorical content become fully discernible and the road can be perceived unequivocally as life. The vastness of the landscape around the wanderer additionally promotes the idea of loneliness and alienation. Hardy defines it as "absolute solitude – the most apparent of all solitudes, that of empty surrounding space".³² Man in his passage through life is metaphorically conceived of as "a lonely figure on the broad white highway".³³

²⁴ T. Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, p. 16.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

²⁶ T. Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, p. 1107.

²⁷ T. Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 201.

²⁸ T. Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, p. 1107.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1054.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 899.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 905.

³² T. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, p. 72.

³³ T. Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 315.

CROSSROADS AS AN APPARENT CHOICE

Seemingly, the character's itinerary is not fixed when he sets out on his journey. He is given choices as to the course of his life. If he were able to decide upon the right route, he could shape this course. The recurrent image of crossroads expresses figuratively the choice of route offered to the protagonist. Whenever he reaches a turning point in his life he comes back to the crossroads to make another start. The opening passage of "The Rally" in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* depicts the heroine leaving home for the second time. After the painful experiences in Trantridge she hopes to begin her life afresh. Midway between Marlott to Talbothays she passes a junction of highways near Stourcastle. Several months later she travels in the opposite direction and parts from Angel at almost the same spot. "At a midway point when Nuttlebury had been passed, and where there were crossroads, Clare stopped the conveyance and said to Tess that if she meant to return to her mother's house it was here that he would leave her".³⁴ In a like manner Angel parts from Izz "where her lane branches off".³⁵

Cross-in-Hand, the place appearing in the novel, repeatedly lies at the point of intersection of several roads, namely: Flintcomb-Ash – Emminster, Casterbridge – Sherton-Abbas, and the desert Roman tract called Long-Ash – Lane. Tess, driven to despair with loneliness and poverty, passes through this place on her way to Emminster, intent on asking Angel's parents for help.

Left without any assistance, she finds herself there again on her way back. At this spot "the most forlorn of all on this bleached and desolate upland" she meets Alec d'Urberville, the meeting decisive her future life. She approaches this place with hope and leaves it with ruined purpose. At length the converted Angel Clare, keen on reunion with Tess, visits Cross-in-Hand after his return from Brazil. However he has come back too late.

The Brown House from *Jude the Obscure* is the place of similar significance to that of Cross-in-Hand in *Tess*. In its immediate vicinity the Christminster highway is crossed at right angles by a green "ridge-way" – the Icknield Street and original Roman road through the district. Jude visits this place at crucial or critical moments of his life, first as a child keen on seeing Christminster – the city of his dreams and expectations. He finds himself to be passing that way several years later when he is sixteen years old and works as a bakery deliverer. Then he resolves to take up the handicraft of a stone-mason to accumulate resources for education in Christminster. His plans are thwarted by an inappropriate marriage. For

³⁴ T. Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, p. 1018.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1030.

the third time the Brown House is mentioned by Arabella on the occasion of her taking leave of her husband. She means it as an allusion to their situation since it is also the spot at which the parting of Jude's parents was said to have occurred. Deserted by Arabella, Jude comes back to the Brown House again.

... when his day's work was done, he came out of doors after supper, and strolled in the starlight along the too familiar road towards the upland whereon had been experienced the chief emotions of his life. It seemed to be his own again.

He could not realize himself. On the old track he seemed to be a boy still, hardly a day older than when he had stood dreaming at the top of that hill, inwardly fired for the first time with ardours for Christminster and scholarship. "Yet I am a man", he said "I have a wife. More, I have arrived at the still riper stage of having disagreed with her, disliked her, had a scuffle with her, and parted from her".³⁶

Once again Jude tries to pursue his original intention. He will go to Christminster as soon as the term of his apprenticeship expires. However, he is not successful this time either. He never puts his plans into practice. Already in Christminster he breaks down at the news that he will not be accepted into the students' society. He finds himself at the crossway in the centre of the city called Fourways, pondering over his fate.

The Brown House reappears in the novel for the fifth and sixth time towards the end. Mrs Edlin tells the story of its grim history when Sue and Jude again fail to formalize their marriage. Having parted from Sue, Jude visits the Brown House for the last time in his life. Like Henchard he looks widely at his past course and comprehends his situation:

He was by this time at the corner of the green, from which the path ran across the fields in which he had scared rooks as a boy. He turned and looked back, once, at the building which still contained Sue; and went on, knowing that his eyes would light on that scene no more.³⁷

It follows from these examples that the character's choice of his own mode of life is conceived as apparent. It is so because, in his ignorance, he can never predict the consequences of his decisions. Notwithstanding his age and the experience gained during his life, each time he finds himself at the crossroads in the face of choice, he is equally blind as to its possible results. Although Jude is in every aspect a grown-up person when he visits the Brown House for the third time, it seems to him he is still a boy and his decision is taken as spontaneously and unpremeditatedly as if he were a child.

³⁶ T. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, pp. 93-4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 410.

A MILESTONE AND A CIRCLE AS APPARENT PROGRESS

The subsequent stages of a wanderer's journey are indicated in the novels with a milestone which, marking the mileage between places, at the same time informs the wanderer of both the distance covered by him and the distance still to be covered.

In Hardy's novels one and the same milestone appears on the character's way. Angel and Liza-Lu standing beside it watch the prison in Wintonchester where Tess's execution takes place.

... they reached the first milestone, standing whitely on the green margin of the grass, and backed by the down, which here was open to the road. They entered upon the turf, and impelled by a force that seemed to overrule their will, suddenly stood still, turned, and waited in paralyzed suspense beside the stone.³⁸

Henchard, leaving Casterbridge for good, reaches the milestone and, while sitting on it, reflects on his past life.

He went on till he came to the first milestone, which stood in the bank, half way up a steep hill. He rested his basket on the top of the stone, placed his elbows on it, and gave way to a convulsive twitch, which was worse than a sob, because it was so hard and so dry.³⁹

Jude finds himself near the milestone several times. Once when he was still a boy dreaming of university studies in Christminster, he had proudly cut with his keen new chisel an inscription on the back of this milestone, embodying his aspirations. It had been done in the first week of his apprenticeship, before he was diverted from his purposes by the unsuitable marriage. Later, during a few consecutive years, he has visited the milestone repeatedly to make sure the inscription is still legible. In spite of a long lapse of time, Jude's initials, although slightly overgrown with nettles and obliterated by moss, are still to be discerned. Ironically enough, the inscription immortalizing unaccomplished dreams exists unimpaired although Jude has not taken even a step forward on the way to his purpose. A few days before his death he stops near the milestone again and takes a backward look at his past course. The scene recalls in its context one from *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. The characters' situations are almost identical; they visit the place shortly before their deaths, their journeys have nearly come to a close.

³⁸ T. Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, p. 1115.

³⁹ T. Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 306.

Here in the teeth of the north-east wind and rain Jude now pursued his way, wet through, the necessary slowness of his walk from lack of his former strength being insufficient to maintain his heat. He came to the milestone, and, raining as it was, spread his blanket and lay down there to rest. Before moving on he went and felt at the back of the stone for his own carving. It was still there ...⁴⁰

The fact that the protagonists are depicted beside one and the same milestone limits the progress of their travel. Immovable stone fixed at the side of the road reduces their journey to naught. Their progress is conceived of as illusory for they are permanently stuck in one place – a single stage of their wandering. Since the milestone in its figurative meaning signifies the most important events in the history of human life, the application of this metaphor here undermines the sense of the characters' actions. Whatever they did in their lives, it would not be noticed. Whether they set out on a journey or remained in one place all the time, would be equally unimportant. The milestone in *Jude* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* marks not only the end of the character's wandering but also its beginning because it is often situated near the crossroads. Thus it brings the beginning and the end together. It is connected with the recurrent motif of coming back to the same place which appears throughout the novels, even those where the pattern of wandering is not so explicit. Those places are: The Brown House in *Jude*, the Rainbarrow in *Return*, Weydon-Priors in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, and Cross-in-Hand in *Tess*. Especially here, at those spots, time is viewed as apparent and essentially static. Although it does not spare the character's physical condition, leaving wrinkles on his face, imparting to his shoulders a perceptible bend, lessening the spring of his stride, at the same time it does not allow the changes in his life to be the real changes in the man. Having lived his life through, he comes to exactly the same spot where he set out. How does it happen that the characters return to the same place?

Hardy explains this at length in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* when discussing Henchard's fate:

He intended to go on from this place – visited as an act of penance – into another part of the country altogether. But he could not help thinking of Elizabeth, and the quarter of the horizon in which she lived. Out of this it happened that the CENTRIFUGAL TENDENCY imparted by weariness of the world was counteracted by the CENTRIPETAL influence of this love for his stepdaughter. As a consequence, instead of following a straight course yet further away from Casterbridge. Henchard gradually, almost unconsciously, deflected from that right line of his first intention; till, by degrees, his wandering, like that of the Canadian woodsman, became part of a circle of which Casterbridge formed the centre. In ascending any particular hill he

⁴⁰ T. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, p. 410.

ascertained the bearings as nearly as he could by means of the sun, moon, or stars, and settled in his mind the exact direction in which Casterbridge and Elizabeth-Jane lay. ...

And thus Henchard found himself again on the precise standing which he had occupied a quarter of a century before. Externally there was nothing to hinder his making another start on the upward slope, and by his new lights achieving higher things than his soul in its half-formed state had been able to accomplish. But the ingenious machinery contrived by the Gods for reducing human possibilities of amelioration to a minimum – which arranges that wisdom to do shall come *pari passu* with the departure of zest for doing – stood in the way of all that. He had no wish to make an arena a second time of a world that had become a mere painted scene to him.⁴¹

Thus there are two opposing tendencies in human life: one of them keeps man alive, the other one carries him away from life. Their equilibrium makes human life describe a circle, like a planet does in its orbit when subjected to the influence of similar two forces. The indirect comparison of human fate to a single revolution of a planet serves the purpose of generalization, introducing a broader, more universal perspective. At the same time the image of the circle is a direct reference to the concept of the Wheel of Fortune. The Wheel of Fortune having come full circle makes the hero end his journey at the starting point. Henchard suddenly finds himself in exactly the same place he had occupied twenty-five years before. He is given the opportunity to start his life afresh, provided with the experience which he has acquired during his whole life. However, together with its achievement he has exhausted his will to live, and his zeal for the struggle against fate. Never again will he try to fight with his evil star, to ascend the hill once more. The last paragraph of the quoted passage expresses in slightly different words the main idea of the sentence from the first chapter which said: "But a fellow never knows these things till all chance of acting upon 'em is past".⁴²

The repetition of the same reflection recapitulates Henchard's life and fate, symmetrically closes the circle. What Henchard only unconsciously suspected at the very beginning, he can now give full expression to. However, his love for Elizabeth-Jane still almost imperceptibly dominates over his weariness with life and he continues to go on. The succeeding chapters of the novel describe the gradual turn of the scales, their balancing and the final prevalence of death.

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⁴¹ T. Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, pp. 311–12.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

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IDEA WIECZNEGO POWROTU W POWIEŚCIACH HARDY'EGO

Przedmiotem artykułu jest prześledzenie implikacji przyjęcia przez Hardy'ego i Schopenhauera idei wiecznego powrotu. Oryginalnie optymistyczny sens tej idei, której pierwotnym celem było unieruchomienie czasu i unicestwienie historii w celu eliminacji katastrof i asymilacji przypadku, ulega zasadniczej zmianie w filozofii indyjskiej, na której Schopenhauer oparł swoje poglądy. Kiedy cykliczny czas nie pozwala na reaktualizację czasu, w którym dopełniły się dzieła boże, powtarzanie odarte ze swojego znaczenia religijnego inspiruje jedynie strach, czas staje się kołem wiecznie obracającym się i wiecznie odtwarzającym porządek: tworzenie–niszczenie–tworzenie.

Konsekwencją przyjęcia idei wiecznego powrotu jest antyewolucyjna koncepcja historii. Chociaż Hardy uważa się za twórcę „ewolucyjnego melioryzmu”, idea ta (argument w polemice z Schopenhauerem) nie znajduje egzemplifikacji w jego powieściach tragicznych.

Na planie alegorycznym powieści motyw powtarzalności znajduje swój wyraz w scenach „doświadczenia zbiorowego”, które identyfikują indywidualne losy jednostki z doświadczeniem ludzkości, i w metaforze teatru, która pozbawia los jednostkowy jego wyjątkowości, utożsamiając go z losem „tysięcy”, z kondycją ludzką.

Motywy tematyczne powtarzające się we wszystkich powieściach tragicznych: człowiek jako pielgrzym, ludzki los jako wędrówka, życie jako droga, rozstaje dróg jako pozorny wybór, kamień milowy – pozorny ruch naprzód i koło jako powrót do tego samego miejsca, są ilustracją różnych aspektów idei wiecznego powrotu.

Analiza uwzględnia cztery powieści tragiczne Hardy'ego (*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *The Return of the Native* i *Jude the Obscure*), w których jego światopogląd filozoficzny znajduje swój najpełniejszy wyraz.