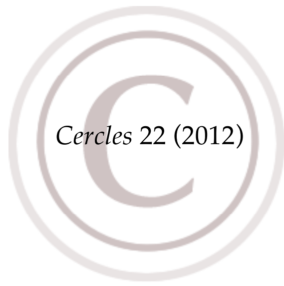

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JOHN SCHLESINGER'S *FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD*: "A MODERN PASTORAL"?[1]

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Since the 1970s and the critical studies of Jean Brooks or Penelope Vigar,[2] literary criticism has been reassessing Hardy as a highly innovative writer who challenged the social and artistic conventions of his time, transgressing the realistic codes through which he had been valued up to that point. As regards the adaptations of his work, though, most critics and scholars dismiss them as "safe", if not reactionary, inasmuch as they present a familiar, conventional vision of Hardy's fiction, highlighting the pastoral elements of a rural, pre-industrial England. Truly enough, films are commercial ventures and therefore often have to be consensual. Filmic adaptations are likely to capitalise on preconceived popular images of Hardy and his Wessex and in this respect they have often been studied as "illustrations of the ways in which the novels' meanings and popular conceptions about Thomas Hardy have been negotiated and contained within a conventional interpretative framework" [WEBSTER 1993 : 143].[3]

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[1] Film references are to the British edition of the DVD (Zone 2) Optimum Home Releasing, 2008; references to the novel to the Norton edition (1986).

[2] See BROOKS 1971 and VIGAR 1974.

[3] Similarly, when analysing the painterly elements in Hardy's work, Roger Webster stresses how daringly innovative the references to impressionistic techniques were at the time Hardy was writing whereas the same references in film adaptations now just look backward and over familiar. He notes about Schlesinger's *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Polanski's *Tess* and Winterbottom's *Jude*: "They tend more towards the picturesque and the production of stereotypical images with a 'Hardyesque' feel to them. These film versions generally present a safe, familiar version of Hardy's fiction accentuating the pastoral or striving for an authenticity which is validated by a sense of the painterly" [WEBSTER 2005 : 21]. To quote another critic, Peter Widdowson: "Where contemporary literary criticism is busy recasting Hardy's work as radically subversive in form and content—finding in a late 19th century writer one whose texts simultaneously deconstruct issues of class and gender in particular… the most prevalent and popular late 20th century modes of reproducing his work, film and television, seem to return us to the older more conventional Hardy of Wessex,

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In particular, John Schlesinger's *Far from the Madding Crowd* has repeatedly been taxed with showcasing the pastoral tradition which, as most critics underline, is used most ambiguously in Hardy's novel.[4] Roger Webster concludes his article:

> Just as the film works to contain the sixties in a pastoral form, so it contains Hardy's fiction within a conventional cultural paradigm. […] The irony is that *Far from the Madding Crowd*, whose title clearly treats the concept of pastoral ironically, is re-pastoralised in the film version. [WEBSTER 1993 : 149-50]

Likewise, Paul Niemeyer comments:

> *Far from the Madding Crowd* [the novel] ultimately rejects the concept of pastoralism as it is conventionally understood: nature is outside human comprehension and no aid to those who aspire to a better place or who wish to find a realm of higher understanding. […] Yet the novel's cultural identity as a simple pastoral—or just as escapist lit—remains largely intact; and this identity was not challenged by John Schlesinger's 1967 film; in fact, it was codified. […] Schlesinger winds up creating both a safe, contained version of Hardy as pastoralist, and a familiar picture of Hardy's world as a place where nature blesses those who live according to its dictates. [NIEMEYER 2003 : 75-76]

What is striking in this recurrent use of the adjective "pastoral" is that it very much amounts to William Empson's definition of pastoral as "putting the complex into the simple" [EMPSON 1986 : 22]. The film adaptation allegedly denies the contradictions, tensions and unresolved complexity of the text. This interpretation might have been encouraged by Schlesinger himself when he explained that he wanted to turn away from contemporary urban life and its modish hedonistic culture, a culture he had

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'Character and Environment', and humanist tragedy" [WIDDOWSON 2004 : 2]. It would be worth questioning this general trend of contemporary criticism which emphasizes Hardy's radicality and deplores film adaptations for their conventionality. First it overlooks Hardy's compromises with his publishers, his work's complex balance between convention and subversion (to echo Isabelle Gadoin's title); second it overlooks that some filmmakers do manage to offer challenging adaptations: Michael Winterbottom's *Jude* (1996) and *The Claim* (2000) are perfect examples of challenging adaptations of Hardy's work. Even on television, a short film like *The Withered Arm* (1973) offers a very bleak, uncompromising view of Hardy's world; most of all, it denotes a failure in being able to read plurality and complexity in the film medium.

[4] See the chapter called "'The sheep and the dogs': *Far from the Madding Crowd* et la tradition pastorale" [GADOIN 2010 : 51-79].

just been criticizing in *Darling*: "People are tired of the flip side /.../ they're tired of everything mod."[5] Gene Phillips elaborated on this statement in his biography of the film-maker:

> After being confronted day after day, reel after reel with the questionable lives of the jet setters in *Darling*, […] Schlesinger suddenly blurted out one day in the dubbing theatre that it was time they went back to "something more romantic about another age" for their next project. He continued by saying that it would be refreshing to make a film set in the rural England of the previous century about people who enjoyed simple pleasures like sitting around singing songs at a harvest supper and in general were able to cope with whatever life meted out to them. [PHILLIPS 1981 : 79]

Phillips's testimony sounds rather too good to be true and we may well doubt that Schlesinger had so precise a scene in mind at the time. All other official versions relate how the project, commissioned by the American company MGM who wanted to cash in on the winning team of *Darling*, was chosen somehow by chance after editor Jim Clarke suggested Hardy's *Tess of the d'Ubervilles*.[6] What is certain, though, is that the description perfectly fits the definition of pastoral as the antithesis of urban life, an ideal vision of a rural life offering simple pleasures and a harmonious communion with nature.[7]

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[5] Interview in *Times* August 1967.

[6] "I was attracted to Hardy because I was tired of presenting negative solutions to current problems"; "The themes that I've chosen to do are very often about the outsider or compromise. Take *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Thomas Hardy was always writing, or very often writing, about fate or providential attack on an individual who's trying to keep upright in the storm. Fate is constantly striking the individual down, but he has to get up and resist, which in a way is about compromise. That's why the theme of *Far from the Madding Crowd* appealed to me." [quoted in BURUMA 2006 : 70]

[7] In 1967 the pastoral vein of *Far from the Madding Crowd* is very much against the grain in a film production dominated by urban realist settings, either the industrial North of the New Wave or the swinging London. Curiously enough, films set in apparently "pastoral" settings were often horror films: the natural turning primitive turning savage as in *The Plague of the Zombies* (John Gilling, 1966) shot in Cornwall, *Witchfinder General* (Michael Reeves, 1968) in Norfolk and *The Wicker Man* (Robin Hardy, 1973) shot on the isle of Whilthorn (Scotland). As Sue Harper pointed out, "pastoralism runs like a leitmotiv through most British cultural forms—except the cinema" (she argues that because cinema is an art form based on the look and the returned look—within the film's stories as in its apparatus with viewers' identification to characters—landscape is a difficult object as it eludes the gaze

The aim of this paper is to question this view of the film as "a simple pastoral" [NIEMEYER 2003 : 75]. Focusing on how the pastoral elements are treated in the film through the two frameworks of space and time, I would like to argue that Schlesinger's *Far from the Madding Crowd*, far from eschewing the ambiguities of Hardy's text, presents a persistent tension between a realist and a self-conscious mode of representation, as well as between the viewer's involvement and distancing effects. Ultimately I hope to demonstrate that the film, through stylistic incongruities and daring experiments,[8] presents a generic and aesthetic heterogeneity[9] which is very much in keeping with the "polyphonic discordance" of Hardy's style as Thierry Goater has so aptly defined it [GOATER 2010 : 283].

Ever since the film was released, *Far from the Madding Crowd* has been praised for its rendering of "Hardy's Wessex": "Just as the desert was the real subject of the first part of *Lawrence of Arabia*, so the Hardy country is the real subject here," wrote James Price in *Sight & Sound.* Peter Widdowson recalls that even before the film's release, much hype was made about its location filming. He cites the visit that MGM organised for over 200 journalists "in order to experience at first hand the 'natural settings untouched by time in the area of Dorsetshire, known as the "Hardy Country", many of them the actual sites of the novel'" [WIDDOWSON 1989 : 107].

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pattern of communication) [HARPER 2010 : 149]. Until the 1980s and its vogue of *heritage films* which exploited the pictorial value of the landscape as part of a more general commoditisation of the national heritage, rural landscapes are to be found only in the margin of mainstream film production: mainly documentaries or semi-documentaries (two important exceptions are the silent films of British pioneer Cecil Hepworth (*Tansy* in 1921 is the story of a shepherd girl in Devon, *Comin' Thro' the Rye* in 1923 was described as "pastoral melodrama") and Powell and Pressburger's films, for example the celebration of eternal Britain in *A Canterbury Tale* (1944)).

[8] Thomas Wright is one of the very few to acknowledge Schlesinger's *Far from the Madding Crowd's* experimental quality: "John Schlesinger too, I suggest, by being prepared to experiment with the conventions of cinema as Hardy did with the conventions of fiction, achieves similar effects in *Far from the Madding Crowd*"[WRIGHT 2005 : 7].

[9] Interestingly enough, some criticisms made to Schlesinger echo the reproaches made to Hardy when he was praised for his realism yet criticised for his stylistic incongruities. Likewise, many critics find fault with the generic and modal heterogeneity of Schlesinger's work both from film to film and within single films. As the editor's foreword of Gene D. Phillips nicely put it: "Consistency is not superficially the distinctive mark of Schlesinger's work" [PHILLIPS 1991 : foreword].

However, cinematic landscapes are never purely realist records but are subjects, like any other cinematic elements, to aesthetic manipulation, technological enhancement and ideological reading (all the more so as landscape itself is a cultural construct, best defined as a way of seeing, a scopic regime). *Far from the Madding Crowd* was indeed shot in Dorset and Wiltshire. Actually, to evoke Casterbridge, the film crew chose Devizes, an ancient market town across the county boundary in Wiltshire (for the market place, the church where Troy is meant to marry Fanny) with some additional shots from Shaftesbury (the steep cobbled street), the scene in Bath, which becomes Budmouth in the film, was filmed in Weymouth; Troy's sword display was set in the scenic hills of Maiden Castle, an Iron Age hill fort, and the cock fighting at Horton Tower, a 120-foot tower in southeast Dorset [see PENDREIGH 1995 : 95-96]. This shows the film landscape is first and foremost a construct, created out of a selection of actual locations that are reshaped and whose spatial relationships are restructured to create a fictional chronotope, very much like Hardy's "partly real, partly dream-country" [HARDY 1986 : 5].

What is more, as Simon Gatrell has pointed out, Schlesinger's film uses explicit place names very sparingly (a cart with the inscription "B. Everdeen Weatherbury" is visible in the granary when Bathsheba dismisses Oak, posters with the name Casterbridge are stuck on the wall of the Corn market, Casterbridge and Budmouth are mentioned *en passant*) but the film, by including allusions to other novels, conveys the idea that Hardy's Wessex was "a cumulative idea" [GATRELL 2005 : 38]: Troy rides with a reddleman, passing two men carrying bundles of furze (as in *The Return of the Native*); when arriving at Casterbridge, Oak walks past a cart on which a mother is sitting with her children and the family's clock (an image reminiscent of *Tess of the d'Ubervilles*), Boldwood introduces a steam threshing machine and a horse-drawn reaping machine (as in *Tess of the d'Ubervilles*) and Bath is replaced by the fictional Budmouth which figures in a number of Hardy's novels.

The addition of scenic locations such as Maiden Castle and Horton Tower also stresses the presence of history in the land providing a view of England endowed with stable layers of historical accretion. This view of landscapes immune from change certainly highlights the interpretation of *Far from the Madding Crowd* as a pastoral, an interpretation which is further strengthened by pictorial references to scenes depicting rural life such as paintings by Jean-François Millet (*Les Glaneuses*/*The Gleaners* (1857)) and Brueghel (*Harvesters* (1565) or *Summer* (1568)) which are evoked through the lunch break during the harvest [1:17] or the three bonneted women

harvesting [1:27]. James Price must have been the first to comment on this pictorial quality:

> It is an obtrusively painterly film with references from Hogarth (Temperance and Soberness Miller) to Corot and even (the sleeping reapers/ the Land of Cockayne) Breughel: these allusions, together with the images of sowing, sheep-dipping and harvesting, emphasising as they do the Arcadian character of the story, create feelings of both timelessness and of a time from which an urban audience is totally cut off. It is here, it seems to me, that the specific appeal of the film lies. [PRICE 1967 : 39]

However, along with these painterly allusions which contribute to convey a proper pastoral mood, there are as many pictorial references which provide a much more ironical comment on the pastoral theme. Evoking a Breughel-like figure, an old woman is filmed in profile bent in such a way that it evokes the tea pot's shape she is drinking from [18]. But I would suggest that if Breughel has a determining presence in the film, it is indirectly through his *Fall of Icarus* (circa 1558). In the painting, the tragic event of Icarus' drowning is but a tiny spot in the background while the foreground shows a farmer ploughing his field, and the middle ground a shepherd musing. The film achieves a similar effect when it introduces the fire at Bathsheba's farm [19]: a tiny red spot is hardly visible in the distance while the landscape is framed by tree branches. Likewise, the opening scene stresses the immutable elements while putting at a distance the human activity going on in the background (Oak tending his sheep) but I will come back to this point later. The film also alludes to Hunt's famous painting *Our English Coasts (Strayed Sheep)* (1852) but to recast it in much more sombre tones: the brightly lit, vividly coloured painting of sheep grazing on the edge of a cliff in Kent becomes a dark duplicate ominously foreboding the sheep's tragic fall.

Realism is thus tempered by pictorial and symbolic references which also provide some narrative comment. Likewise, the film, which has been much praised for the air of authenticity given to the scenes of English rural life in the second half of the 19th century[10] oscillates between a minute

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[10] Gene D. Phillips writes: "In other words, by adapting the methods of social realism to the making of a period picture […], Schlesinger managed to depict the past as a living present." [PHILLIPS 1981 : 82]. The *Daily Cinema* praised the film for "the remarkable recreation of country life a hundred years ago, the fine photography … and the extra dimension given to reality by the fascinating faces of the extras hand-picked from the present-day inhabitants of Wiltshire and Dorset" (20 October 1967)

historical reconstitution and its stylised exploitation for the narrative's sake. The focus on country life activities such as lambing, sheep-washing, harvesting, sowing, bee-hiving and the fact the film used non-professional actors (real-life farmers) in minor roles led some critics to speak about "the air of a semi-documentary" [PHILLIPS 1981 : 82]. There is even some focus on specific historical details such as the greasy spot on the back of the chair, framed in close up at the beginning of the scene where Bathsheba and her servants clean up her uncle's belongings [29], which may seem puzzling for any viewer who has no historical knowledge of the hair pomade men used in the second half of the 19th century. Nonetheless, the film does not show a fetishistic attention to historical accuracy for its own sake: the main characters do not wear headgear all the time as propriety would have had it and they do not speak with a west country accent. The historical reconstitution is at the service of the story, not the other way round: the introduction of the reddleman, for example, with whom Troy rides, would be very limited as a socio-historical comment and is used first and foremost for its formal quality in the narrative, providing a very nice graphic match between two scenes (from the red canvas of the reddleman's cart to the red curtain that Bathsheba is putting up in her room). In these cases, the film highlights objects as signs of an absence, in what Isabelle Gadoin defined as a "poetics of traces" [GADOIN 2010 : 111].

All in all, the film includes the visions of the "modified pastoral" as Michael Squires defines Hardy's account, which excludes "the falsification and artificiality of traditional pastoral"[11] and focuses instead on the hard prosaic realities of farm activities while it also simplifies its social implications, toning down the economic dimension of the characters' relationship.[12] In this respect, the presence of 1960s icons among the local

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and Patrick Brion, who otherwise is very critical of the film, concludes: "Reste un documentaire de qualité /…/ sur l'Angleterre du XIXe siècle" [BRION 1968 : 72].

[11] "The falsification and artificiality of traditional pastoral have been rigorously excluded from Hardy's account; In *Far from the Madding Crowd* there is no perpetual summer, no frolicking sheep, no piping shepherds who live without care […] *Far from the Madding Crowd* is not a traditional pastoral, but a modified version of traditional pastoral » [SQUIRES 1970 : 299 & 303].

[12] The two-pence Oak pays for Bathsheba at the turnpike gate (ch .1), her measuring the time Oak takes to shear a sheep (ch .22), Oak's mental calculation of the potential loss if the harvest is not protected from the storm (ch. 36, p. 189) are altogether omitted in the film. What remains are the labour fair, the payday, Pennyways' greed (seen stealing and organising gambling over cockfighting), Troy's gambling and his quarrel with Bathsheba about money (although it is not the real bone of contention). Most specifically, the film foregrounds Boldwood's vision of human relationship in terms of financial contracts: as in the novel, he wants to pay Troy out of the way,

extras playing the "rustics", which most critics have wryly disparaged, partly re-inscribes the film in the genre of traditional pastoral. As Robert Murphy jocosely sums up: "if […] we view the film as a pastoral, then one might expect and excuse the appearance of Swinging London royalty among the peasants" [MURPHY 1992 : 265].

A similar tension governs the film's depiction of nature. Notwithstanding Rita Costabile's statement that "Schlesinger's difficulties derive directly from his failure to grasp complex relationship between men and nature that is the principal theme of the novel" [CONSTABILE 1981 : 156], nature in the film, far from being consigned to the picturesque, offering an overall benign and idealistic environment (which will become a recurrent criticism against *heritage films*), oscillates between pathetic fallacy, as a means of characterization, to express emotional states or heighten dramatic events,[13] and its complete indifference to men, its deceptive, sinister and sometimes destructive aspect commenting upon the insignificance of human life and its "ignoble strife."[14] What then prevails is the use of conspicuous shots that foreground the camera and other cinematographic techniques as narrative instance creating a mental distance for the viewer, mainly through dramatic irony. The opening scene is a superb illustration of foregrounding the natural forces over human presence. As Keith Selby aptly writes: "The sea and sky in the opening shot establish the overriding impression and role of nature in the novel: it is huge, pure existence" [SELBY 2000 : 100]. The movement of the camera reinforces the sense of the insignificance of human

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wants to strike a "contract" with Bathsheba, buys her numerous presents in secret, but he is also introduced haggling over money and he is the one who introduces the threshing machine (which "will do the work of ten men and do it better" [32]). Besides, Boldwood appears in the film as a wealthy farmer behaving as if he owned the place he lived in while in the novel he is a tenant like Bathsheba [HARDY 94 & 249]. Here historical accuracy about rural life and social differences has been disregarded in favour of simplification.

[13] Among examples of pathetic fallacy: the ominous cloud over Gabriel's flock of sheep filmed in vertical high angle shot [7]; the blooming nature that parallels Bathsheba's arousal to desire [1:03] and conversely her mourning process through her walking among dead leaves [2:09]; the drop of water dripping from the leaf onto Fanny's coffin (cf. ch. 42) which in the film is isolated from the context of the misty fog and therefore given more prominence, a symbolic image of nature crying over the baneful fate of the innocent girl but also an ironic forerunner of the water gushing out of the gargoyle spout onto her grave; the rain in the scene after Troy has left with the melancholy gloom of the atmospheric condition compounded by the song in voice-over (the only instance in the film); in an echo, the rain in the final scene (epilogue) obviously undermines the cheerfulness of the happy ending.

[14] In reference to Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard".

life just like the many inclusions of long or extreme long shots with people either absent from the land or barely visible. Whenever the horizon is prominent (the opening scene, the long shot of Boldwood's tiny silhouette wandering forlornly at night after a slow tilt down through the cloudy sky, the tilt up from the beach and Troy's piles of clothes to the open sea where the horizon remains empty), the film stresses the cosmic perspective of the narrative, dwarfing man's existence.[15]

This conspicuous use of extreme long shots, by stretching the visual capacity of the viewer to its limit, highlights a visual defamiliarisation that is unusual in mainstream cinema. Likewise, the recurring zooms in and zooms out convey the rapid shifts of narrative focus that have often been analysed in Hardy's prose.[16] Oak's flock of sheep is thus filmed in a vertical aerial shot [7] followed by a zoom out that reduces the animals to tiny beige spots on a beige background, highlighting their fusion in their environment but also the tenuousness of their existence, foreboding their imminent fate (suggested by the cloud casting an ominous shadow over them). Another example of such ironic detachment with tragic overtones occurs at the end of the film, when Boldwood is first framed face to camera in a close shot, then a zoom out reveals his environment is a prison, stressing the man's insane isolation and estrangement from the outer world.

The film thus multiplies unusual perspectives, each time drawing attention to themselves. After Troy has planted bulbs on Fanny's grave [2:04], the scene ends with a high angle shot of the tomb being ruined by pouring water in what proves to be the gargoyle's perspective (the next shot shows a close up of the gargoyle as its origin, as in a classical retrospective Point Of View shot). Like the gargoyle's grin in the novel, the inclusion of its perspective turns it into an agent of fate, emphasizing the cruel dramatic irony of Troy's last homage to Fanny. This perspective is later echoed at the end of the film when Oak meets Bathsheba in the churchyard; as Oak leaves, the couple is filmed in a high angle shot from the church roof, followed by a close shot of one gargoyle and a zoom out; here the inclusion of the gargoyle's perspective acts as a reminder of the past tragedy as well as the fundamental irony of human fate. Another unusual perspective occurs when

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[15] As with the vastness of the landscape, the sense of history, conveyed by historical settings such as Maiden Castle or Horton Tower, belittles human activities, desires and feelings (the long tracking down of the tower that introduces the cock-fighting scene thus suggests a discrepancy between the lofty building and its mean and cruel use).

[16] See BULLEN 1986.

Bathsheba is filmed entering the room where Fanny's coffin has been laid and the camera adopts as it were the coffin's perspective, endowing the coffin with some uncanny visual powers that highlight the Gothic tone of the scene.

Last, camera movements sometimes intrude upon the narrative, stressing disruption and dislocation in isolated scenes that stand apart through the cinematographic techniques they display. The handheld camera that follows a man walking up to Mrs Hurst's door [9] stresses its instability, the camera embodying as it were, through the anonymous man, a *deus ex machina*. Just after the tragic death of Oak's sheep, a medium shot shows his mobile hut with the horizon in diagonal [12] and then a swift pan to the right reveals Gabriel who walks away with his dog; here again the camera draws attention to itself, as if mimicking an exterior observer watching through a telescope while conveying some distancing effect which plays down the previous tragic event.

Surely enough, nature in Schlesinger's film and the relationships between men and their environment prove highly ambiguous, all the more so as many instances of distancing effects are provided by the filmic narrative instance. If *Far from the Madding Crowd* does display pastoral elements, the film departs significantly from being a "simple pastoral". I would argue that, if the film has to be qualified, then it corresponds to a modern pastoral[17] inasmuch as it reintroduces dramatic irony[18] and a sense of the absurd as a modern form of tragic.

This sense of tragedy is also what disrupts the cyclical time of the pastoral. Indeed, as in the novel,[19] the film follows an overall slow rhythm punctuated by a pattern of seasonal and country activities (lambing, sheep-washing, harvesting, sowing, bee-hiving etc.). As in the novel, in which the seasonal pattern provides a contrasting background for the dramatic scenes, the film narrative itself is structured through two apparently contradictory temporalities: a structure in echoes that parallels a cyclical vision of time and the gathering of a dramatic momentum that makes the characters converge

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[17] As James Price has observed, "But *Far from the Madding Crowd* is a modern pastoral and the notions of time and timelessness which loom in it are typically contradictory" [PRICE 1967 : 39].

[18] Dramatic irony is also often conveyed through the use of montage and of cross cutting in particular as in the parallel editing between Boldwood walking forlorn in the horizon and Bathsheba in her bedroom on her wedding night which stresses the irony of Boldwood's predicament.

[19] "The story moves by the shepherd's calendar" [PURDY 1986 : 413].

and leads to a crescendo towards the climactic scene of Boldwood shooting Troy.

However, while the film stresses echoes[20] it also adds ironical codas: one occurrence is the inclusion of the gargoyle's perspective echoed at the end of the film (see above). The most obvious example, though, concerns the beginning and ending**:** Gabriel's proposal to Bathsheba in the first scene of dialogue[21] is repeated *verbatim* in the last but one scene and effectively constitutes the last words of the film. While the repetition perfectly conveys Oak's constancy, there is irony in the inversed echo in the couple's proxemics: in both scenes Bathsheba peeps through the window but her situation has been reversed from inside to outside, from fleeing Oak's presence to looking for him; ironically Oak is standing at the back of the house, where Bathsheba herself was hiding. But most importantly, this apparent looping the loop is further qualified by the addition of the epilogue. This bitter-sweet coda brilliantly concludes the film's obsession with time symbolized by the overabundance of clocks and the insistent sounds of ticking and chiming**.**

While in the novel clocks and watches are mainly associated with the intrusion of modernity and its capitalist quantitative logic, in the film, time imagery partakes of a more philosophical stance highlighting the implacable passage of time itself and the relentless irony of time thwarting human destinies. Most of all, as Paul Niemeyer has aptly observed [NIEMEYER 2003 : 91], clocks are systematically associated to scenes where marriage is at stake (with the two exceptions of Oak's proposals), which gives marriage a rather sinister connotation.

The strongest association with clocks concerns Boldwood. At least five clocks can be numbered only in his dining room (four on the mantelpiece,

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[20] Echoes and contrasts abound in the film. To give a few examples, the two scenes of the pay day are introduced by the same shot [24] and [2:09] whose framing is unusual enough to stand out (a close up of the feet on the muddy lane followed by a tilt up revealing the lane leading to Weatherbury farm): the echo here highlights the contrast between the optimistic cheerfulness of Bathsheba in the first and her mourning and resigned sadness in the second (stressed by the dead leaves). In merging the first two visits to the Corn Market, the two remaining scenes stand in sharp contrast, the first focusing on Bathsheba's defiant entrance, the second, by contrast, focusing on the men's haggling over business before showing Bathsheba reduced to the "womanly" action of fainting.

[21] Gabriel's line in the film is very similar to the novel: "And at home by the fire whenever I look up there you will be and whenever you look up there I shall I be". The novel reads: "And at home by the fire, whenever you look up, there I shall be—and whenever I look up, there will be you" [HARDY 1986 : 28].

one behind him), their loud obsessive ticking enhanced by the otherwise silent soundtrack. As he is pressing Bathsheba again and again to give him a date by which she should give him an answer,[22] the loud ticking of clocks dominates the soundtrack during his third proposal at Bathsheba's and most specifically during his fourth and last proposal at his home in front of the same mantelpiece where the valentine was placed. In this scene, the use of different focus to film the two characters' background emphasises their relation to time: while the clocks behind Bathsheba are filmed in soft focus, those behind Boldwood are all in sharp focus, thus foregrounding Boldwood's obsession with time, his illusion of his control over time as opposed to Bathsheba's possible denial of time.

Bells chiming also qualify Fanny's doomed wedding, stressing Troy's impatient waiting, then the fateful irony of Fanny's misunderstanding, her being out of time as the military band playing off the beat indicates. This dark irony is echoed when Troy chooses the same ominous hour (11 o'clock) to meet her at the Corn Exchange, which foreshadows the second missed encounter; grim irony is added with the juxtaposition in the same frame of Troy looking at his watch in the foreground while in the background Fanny's coffin is carried away in Joseph's cart.

If the film does not retain Troy's father's watch with its cynical motto "Cedit amor rebus", it offers in its guise the musical clock that Troy gives Bathsheba just after their wedding night and that comes to represent their marital relationship. First forming the background against which their hands are joined, its sound soon becomes bitterly mocking when Bathsheba confronts Troy over his gambling debts and he declares that he repents of marrying. Lastly the musical clock dominates the melancholy coda. The scene ends up with the camera zooming in onto Troy's musical clock until it freeze frames the red-clad soldier in close-up. This is an obvious intrusion in the couple's intimacy and an ominous comment on their future marital bliss. Significantly enough, when the clock starts striking, Oak takes out his watch to check its time and it is the first time Oak is looking at a watch.

Through the metonymy of the musical clock, Troy is given the last word as it were. Interestingly, while the film seems to follow the metaphor of the puppet and the automaton that is regularly applied to Troy in the novel, the film actually subverts its implications. As in the novel, Troy is the intruder, the *deus*—or the *satanas*—*ex machina,* that entails the collapse of the

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[22] The use of overlapping dialogue introducing Boldwood's third proposal [2:10] (the soundtrack of the forthcoming scene intruding at the end of the previous scene) may also be interpreted as a mark of his impatience, disrupting time as it were.

pastoral paradigms: as an agent of disruption, Troy is indeed associated with breaks in narrative and narrative twists, just as his appearances are marked by some disquieting jarring chords, in contrast to the fairly romantic tune of the main leitmotiv or the flute associated with Oak.[23] Throughout the film, Troy is consistently defined as a performer, associated with the visual effects and artifices of the spectacles that he stages. What is more, he often appears as a conniving agent of narrative suspense, as when his identity is postponed, when he first arrives at Weatherbury as a mysterious rider or when he comes back before breaking into Boldwood's party. He is thus endowed with a rather ambivalent power in the narrative drive that regularly disrupts the film's prevailing pastoral aesthetics, accounting for some of the variety of styles it adopts: from the quasi-psychedelic garden of romance where flowers are filmed out of focus like impressionistic blurbs of colours to the vampire-like Gothic shadow cast on Boldwood's farmhouse, from the magnified heroic display of his swordsmanship to the slapstick comedy of the circus numbers to the melodramatic climax of his shooting.

Indeed, what is striking is that the film displays a variety of tones and styles that often stand apart in isolated self-contained episodes: from the pastoral to a more naturalistic and socially-conscious depiction of the labour market when Oak looks for a position in Casterbridge, from romance to the Gothic with Bathsheba's discovery of Fanny in the coffin, from slapstick comedy to drama and melodrama, what prevails is the extreme heterogeneity of generic conventions and the dissonance brought about by their juxtaposition. Likewise, incongruities are scattered throughout the film, from the comic rendition of Poorgrass's "multiplying eye" through highly slanted shots of cows – recalling the distortions of fairground mirrors – to the poetic disjunction of sound and image after Boldwood has thrown the Valentine into the fire [39], and the editing succeeds in uniting contraries with the overlapping sound of water on an image of fire, creating what could be called a filmic oxymoron. Each time, the intrusion of the filmic narrative instance proves highly disjunctive, verging on breaking fictional illusion. Not only does the camera convey the multiple shifts in perspective which maintain the viewer "simultaneously both close and distant throughout" to borrow J. Hillis Miller's phrase,[24] adopting the

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[23] For more information about the tension between romantic and experimental musical soundtrack, see COSTA DE BEAUREGARD 2011.

[24] Constant shifts in temporal and spatial perspective have the effect of "maintain[ing] the reader simultaneously both close and distant throughout" [MILLER 1986 : 393].

characters' subjective points of view or unusual perspectives, it also foregrounds its own technical virtuosity in a self-reflexive way.[25]

In two scenes in particular, the film draws attention to its own processes of representation, its filmic texture through the *mise en abyme* of spectacles within the spectacle of the film. The first is the scene at Budmouth on the beach: the scene starts following Bathsheba's perspective as she walks on the promenade until she eventually spots Troy on the beach among a group of spectators who are listening to a sailor's exotic tale while he comments upon drawings hung on an easel. Although a very crude form of show, the sailor evokes the in-house interpreter whose job was to comment upon the pictures of the magic lantern or of the early silent films. This reference sheds significant light on the rest of the scene as the couple is filmed talking while their dialogue is drowned by the sound of waves. What remains is a silent pantomime which the viewer can easily interpret from the context and the actors' body language. Still, the distancing effect which is emphasised by a long shot concluding the scene highlights the film's metatextual reference to "primitive" spectacles and ultimately draws attention to its own filmic nature, the fact that what we are experiencing is cinematic storytelling. The second is the scene of the circus which is much expanded from the novel[26] and puts as much emphasis on the show itself as on its backstage artifice (the blackening of the grey mare, Troy's make-up and outrageous moustache, the crude painting backcloth rolling down for Troy's homage to his "Bonny Black Bess", the sound effects produced backstage as we see a woman clapping pieces of wood together to evoke the fall of performers on stage) and on the audience engrossed in the spectacle, booing the police officers, shouting in surprise, laughing heartily, clapping hands in enjoyment and shedding a tear at the mare's staged death. While paying tribute to pre-cinematographic forms of spectacles, what these two scenes ultimately highlight is a celebration of the artifice of spectacle which, for all its artificiality, secures the audience's emotional involvement.[27]

This *mise en abyme* of spectatorship may well be a hint for viewing Schlesinger's film itself: in combining a realistic setting and the immediacy of fictional illusion with moments when it displays its own devices, "the

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[25] About the film's self-reflexivity, see CLOAREC 2011.

[26] The show is described in just half a page p.264.

[27] This recalls Schlesinger's statement: "I was never interested in being arty. I wanted to give my audience an experience that moved them, made them think, made them cry or laugh or scream out loud. I was most interested in telling a good story" [quoted in MANN 2004 : 16].

cogs and wheels of representation", *Far from the Madding Crowd* alternates between empathic involvement and distancing effects, between a realistic and a self-reflexive mode of representation (just as it merges the use of natural diegetic sounds and source music with extradiegetic or background music). In so doing, it may be said to be "faithful" to Hardy's novel, achieving similar ambivalent effects and taking into account its artifice as well as "the sheep and the dogs" that Henry James so admired.[28]

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[28] "Mr Hardy describes nature with a great deal of felicity, and is evidently very much at home among rural phenomena. The most genuine thing in the book, to our sense, is a certain aroma of the meadows and lanes—a natural relish for harvesting and sheep-washings. He has laid his scene in an agricultural country and his characters are children of the soil – unsophisticated country folk. /…/ Everything human in the book strikes us as artificial and insubstantial; the only things we believe in are the sheep and the dogs" [JAMES 1970 : 27].

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