# Thomas Hardy's Textual Choreography: Tangles, Knots, Braids, Textures and String Games

## Norman Simms

> It is, above all, this mélange, this undetermined hovering between form and image, for which Plato reproached imitative arts. The artist, too, no longer lives immediately in the world of sensuous appearances as if it were the only world that was given—for him, too, it has become a sort of phantasmagoria and silhouette; however, all his strivings are directed to breathing life into this very shadow and to cloaking it with the semblance and allure of being.[1]

**Introduction**

Sometimes a work of modern fiction suddenly opens up possibilities for learned discussion that far exceed what the author may have meant or even known—and may have been impossible to know in his or her lifetime—but which nevertheless continue to shed new light on the implications of the fiction. In such a reading, which is more than just close (an intense drawing out of implications inherent in the details of description, figurative language, and the pattern of allusions to people, places, things, events and ideas) or philological reading (where special attention is given to the forms of discourse, the etymology of words, the spectrum of traditional expressions, and the history of the text's critical reception and further publication after the author's own efforts), small, virtually marginal or trivial details come into focus and open up those special insights that make the study of the history of mentalities, psychohistory and cultural history so exciting. This is so especially when we can fold in unexpected insights from neuroscience, paleobiology and ethnology. Our whole sense of what constitutes reality,

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[1] Ernst Cassirer, 'Eidos and Eidolon: The Problem of Beauty and Art in the Dialogues of Plato (1924)', in *The Warburg Years (1919-1933): Essays on Language, Art, Myth, and Technology*, trans. S.G. Lofts (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 235.

nature and mind begins to shift, if ever just so little, as to make the whole effort worthwhile.

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) opens his short story 'The Son's Veto' (1891) suggesting not just the personality of the main female character but the method in which his own tangled narrative will develop:

> To the eye of a man viewing it from behind, the nut-brown hair was a wonder and a mystery. Under the black beaver hat, surmounted by its tuft of black feathers, the long locks, braided and twisted and coiled like the rushes of a basket, composed a rare, if somewhat barbaric, example of ingenuous art. One could understand such weavings and coilings being wrought to last intact for a year, or even a calendar month, but that they should all be demolished regularly at bedtime, after a single day of permanence, seemed a reckless waste of successful fabrication.[2]

Sophy, the woman in question, is the daughter of a poor man immobilised by an accident, married above her station into a situation where she has becomes increasingly alienated and subject to further incidents of bad luck. She now ironically undertakes these complicated manipulations of her hair,[3] as "it was almost the only accomplishment she could boast of." For this reason, writes the narrator, she suffered "unstinted pains."[4] The ambiguity of these pains implies, on the one hand, physical effort, and on the other, psychological pangs of hurt and humiliation, suggesting that the braiding of her hair is a deep and hidden cry to elicit empathy from someone.[5] Her sense of alienation arises because there is no one who regards her appearance with pity or responds to her inner hurt and shame, leaving her to make what therefore are empty gestures of self-caring by styling her hair. Inadvertently, both in these personal attempts to relieve her distress and in the author's signalling of her inner discomforts, the passage coincides with the discovery at the end of the nineteenth century of *empathy* as an intense and dynamic concept that excedes pity or sympathy. At the same time, scientific studies to identify the

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[2] Thomas Hardy, 'The Son's Veto', in *The Melancholy Hussar and Other Stories* (London: Collector's Library, 2005), p. 7. This story first appeared in Hardy's *Life's Little Ironies* in 1894.

[3] Mary Caroline Richards, 'Thomas Hardy's Ironic Vision (Part One)', *Trollopian*, vol. 3 no. 4 (March 1949), p. 273.

[4] G. D. Schott, 'Pictures of Pain: Their Contribution to the Neuroscience of Empathy', *Brain: A Journal of Neurology*, vol. 138 (2015), pp. 812-820.

[5] Andrea Pinotti and Massimo Salgaro, 'Empathy or Empathies? Uncertainties in the Interdisciplinary Discussion', *Gestalt Theory*, vol. 41, no. 2 (2019), pp. 141-158. While 'empathy' is difficult to define, this article uses the term in the sense of *Einfuhrung* in its association with sympathy, pity and pathos.

causes of alienation led to the development of treatments based on sympathy and an emotional understanding of the patient. Retrospectively in our own reading, through the revelation of a mirror neuron system ancillary to the central nervous system, we are cognisant of the capacity for hormones to trigger emotional responses. This produces a deeply historical explanation of how humans differ from other primates.[6] As Gary Tomlinson explains, "narratives must … attempt to analyse from the start the our biocultural reciprocities in which deep, multiplex cultural histories shaped noncultural dynamics of evolution at the same time as they were shaped by them."[7] In fact, the search for artistic and aesthetic means of communicating and responding to these patterned manifestations of inner experiences—usually originating in shocks, concussions and trauma—the defining contours of culture are found.[8] Through the depiction of pain in drawings, dance, music, story, sculpture and mime, the aesthetic experience is driven by empathy, with the social bonds of family, community, language and civilisation, the result.[9] As the feminist art historian Griselda Pollock points out, "seeing art as one of the cognitive activities, one of the bizarre or revealing aspects of culture,"[10] is one of the ways of binding together the threads of biology, neuroscience, aesthetic theory and scientific logic.

## Dance

> "Dance is a rhythmical movement which can be classified as a form of non-verbal communication."[11]

In Hardy's short story, ephemeral as these complicated stylings of the hair may seem, they nevertheless indicate a reflex of the preparations made for dance in its earliest recorded forms. As Yosef Garfinkel points out, "The dancing is often performed with special decorative elements: coiffure, head coverings, masks, body paintings and dress. In many cases, the dancers use

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[6] Schott, 'Pictures of Pain', p. 813.
[7] Gary Tomlinson, *A Million Years of Music: The Emergence of Human Modernity* (Boston, MA: MIT Prowess/Zone Books, 2015), p. 42.
[8] Schott, 'Pictures of Pain', p. 814.
[9] Schott, 'Pictures of Pain', pp. 815-816.
[10] Griselda Pollock, interviewed by Richard Candida Smith, *The Ambivalence of Pleasure*, Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1997) p. 79, at https://archive.org/details/ambivalenceofple00poll. Accessed 1 July 2019.
[11] Yosef Garfinkel, 'Dance in Prehistoric Europe', *Documenta Praehistorica*, vol. 37 (2010), p. 205.

very elaborate accessories whose preparation begins months before the event itself."[12] Dancing requires a special defined space, rhythmic or musical accompaniment, a group of participants and perhaps onlookers. While there is no single area of the brain that is concerned with music, as there is for speech, writing and hearing words, there are, however, "multiple pathways of music" which can be seen to have emerged at different stages of evolutionary history.[13] It is, Garfinkel tells us, "an ecstatic event, involving an altered state of consciousness (trance) and is considered a deep spiritual experience by the participants."[14]

We find something similar in the development of more permanent decorations in ceramics and weaving based on the motions and emotions created in the dance, considering the patterns made and unmade in ritual performances of dance, storytelling and epic chanting.[15] These different elements of the dance—the place, the occasion, the players, the accompaniments and the ecstatic consequences—are woven together, along with personal and collective memories of the event.[16] Weaving—along with braiding, the twisting of knots, knitting, and the *entrelacement* of formulaic phrases into narratives and declamatory statements—evidences the deliberate nature of speech. Like other cultural spectacles and rituals, such involutions seem to be reflexes of activities at work in the matrixial space of the formative/informing mind,[17] and in the cultural games designed to find ways of soothing the suffering and frustrations that arise when things do not happen as they ought.[18] Stanley J. Tambiah tells us that rituals, as formulaic and conventionalised as they are, "are always linked to status claims and interests

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[12] Garfinkel, 'Dance in Prehistoric Europe', p. 206. See also Kubatzky, 'The Function of Music in Ancient Greek Cults', p. 10.
[13] Tomlinson, *A Million Years of Music*, p. 29.
[14] Garfinkel, 'Dance in Prehistoric Europe', p. 206.
[15] Anton Bierl, 'Introduction. The Choral Dance and Song as Ritual Action: A New Perspective', *Ritual and Performativity: The Chorus in Old Comedy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009). Also see Ivana Turčin, 'The Forgotten Movement—A (Re)construction of Prehistoric Dances', *Exarc.net* (18 January 2018), at https://exarc.net/issue-2018-1/int/forgotten-movement0recionstruction-prehistoric- dances. Accessed 1 July 2019.
[16] Stanley J. Tambiah, 'A Performative Approach to Ritual', in *The Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. 65 (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 113-169.
[17] Bracha L. Ettinger, 'Com-passionate Co-response-ability. Initiation in Jointness and its Link-x of Matrixial Virtuality', in *Gorge(l). Oppression and Relief in Art*, ed. Sofie Van Loo (Antwerp: Royal Museum of Fine Art, 2006), pp. 11-32.
[18] Bierl, 'Introduction. The Choral Dance and Song as Ritual Action', p. 3.

of the participants, and are therefore always open to contextual meanings."[19] This means we should not be too surprised when a fictional depiction of what seems like a specific and private moment between several characters is at the same time a rendering of a traditional festive occasion. The normative anthropological approach can, in other words, be reversed, starting from the personal and moving out to the sociological, thus taking archaic elements as the structure of a waking dream in which the modern characters perform. By assigning the expression of this powerful organising agent of personality and culture to a female character, Hardy ensures that insight is not limited by sexual differences,[20] but also crosses chronological, geographical and national boundaries. Even further, the key thing within the perspective of Aby Warburg's psychohistorical approach is the dynamic of mental processes: "the elements that relate it to explosive motion and disjunction."[21] Thus Pollock explains:

> Women exceed the models of binary thought. We menstruate and we grow babies in our bodies. How can anything that divides the world between animal and human, between self and "other," comprehend a creature that has another human being inside it?[22]

The braiding of hair, the dancing of reels, the playing of cat's-cradle, a whole range of symbolic forms come into being in order to at once show outwardly and figuratively what happens inside the mind below the levels of consciousness and cultural articulation (in words, images, and architectural forms).

Before we can further examine Hardy's late nineteenth-century prose narratives, we need to clarify some of the key concepts we are working with. Tambiah defines ritual in this now classic formulation:

> Ritual is a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterised in varying degrees by formality (conventionality), stereotypy (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition).[23]

Yet because these formulated and formalised modes of expression are driven by archaic trauma and re-cathected by personal and historical shocks, pain

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[19] Tambiah, 'A Performative Approach to Ritual', p. 115.
[20] Pollock, *The Ambivalence of Pleasure*, p. 84.
[21] Patrick Ffrench, 'Pathology of the Photogram', in *Film Philosophy*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2006), p. 23.
[22] Pollock, *The Ambivalence of Pleasure*, p. 201.
[23] Tambiah, 'A Performative Approach to Ritual', p. 119.

lies at the heart of the empathetic experience.[24] This is one of the reasons why, as Anton Bierl points out, "in traditional societies myth is often re-actualized in ritual and translated into action."[25] The images (taking the term in its widest sense of symptoms, metonymic signals and metaphoric re-/dis-placements) are rarely representational or mimetic, but mnemonic in the way in which ancient memory systems required there to be shocking, grotesquely insulting, fantastically far-fetched emblems created and placed in *topoi* that constantly shattered normative, common sense pictures and logical arguments. The more intricate, that is, the more effort that is required to untangle the knot, the more likely it is to be recollected (stimulated into consciousness and re-organised to make current sense). In many ways, the process resembles Sigmund Freud's approach to dream-work in *Der Traumdeutung*/*The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), as well as *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewußten*/*Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905).

To take a relatively simple example, look at what happens in the playing of string games, an analogue to the dances we shall examine in Hardy's fiction. Speaking of the intricacies of the game of cat's cradle, W. Innis Pocock points out:

> The strings often tangle in making the transformations, but if the play is correct the tangles will unravel of themselves. They are caused by pieces of some loops getting nipped between the fingers and other strings. A mistake if it does not bring the play to an end may result in a tangle, that is a real crossing or intertwisting which can be got rid of.[26]

In real life, the two players may not know they are competing with one another, only that they complement each other's moves, whether or not they consciously plot strategic moves or manipulate situations, with each attempting to create circumstances favourable to themselves. While each specific culture has its own customs and names attached to the various cradles used in string games, the persistence of figures created over vast periods of time and across immense geographic areas suggests something far more deeply essential in the playing of these games which may be associated with a necessary humanising experience comprised of cooperation, empathic

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[24] Pollock, *The Ambivalence of Pleasure*, p. 203.

[25] Bierl, 'Introduction. The Choral Dance and Song as Ritual Action', p. 9.

[26] W. Innes Pocock, 'Cat's Cradle', *Folklore*, vol. 17, no. 1 (1906), p. 91. Note that sources from Hardy's time of writing have been deliberatly chosen in this article, not just to catch the epistemological ambience of the novels, but to stay close to the words, images and range of allusions within which these texts were formulated.

realisation, and the preservation of the foundational moments of symbolic thinking.[27]

As Hardy's fictional dancers seem to show, however, the interweaving patterns of cats-cradles, like weaving, dancing and architectural constructions are also fraught with stress and anxiety, fear of breaking the continuous and dynamic flow of the games and losing touch with the self (private and social) so precariously brought into existence. In the games we play where we are aware of other individuals or groups seeking to play out their own desires or fears alongside of our own, we are alerted to the possibilities of the always-shifting features of the political or moral tableau—as in board games of skill like chess or card games of chance like Twenty-One, where most slips or errors can be considered neither final nor lethal. While a good player can have a range of possibilities in mind when the expected counter-move does not show up, surprising transformations may still be possible through creative inventions. Even when that happens, the opposite player, to keep the game going, may take over the game to present a more conventional configuration for the other to respond to. Poor players, those who are familiar only with basic moves and cannot innovate within the regulations, can easily be outwitted, and turn their disappointment into frustration and rage, forcing an end not just to that particular round or game session, but to the relationship altogether. Sore losers go further in their adverse responses by breaking the strings, throwing the cards to the ground or hitting the other player.

Such games do not necessarily communicate information, although they have often been allegorised in commentary, and sometimes are depicted as part of an educational programme (*paideia*). They can be a simple source of fun for the players and spectators, and at the same time 'teach' depth perception, finger manipulation, eye-coordination and other essential but not intellectual skills. Yet they can also be the occasion for storytelling and thus become a kind of modified dance-through-talk. As in the chorus of classical Greek theatre, both tragedy and comedy employ linguistic shifters or *embreyeurs*, where the points of reference, the tonal and syntactic connections, and narrative roles create variations, simultaneous mimetic levels, alternative signifiers, and interlaced epistemological arguments.[28] That is, the string movements that create new figures and the strategic

[27] E.E. Evans-Pritchard, 'Zande String Figures', *Folklore*, vol. 83, no. 3 (1972), pp. 225-239.
[28] Bierl, 'Introduction. The Choral Dance and Song as Ritual Action', p. 13.

decisions taken to outmanoeuvre the competing card-players express different kinds of participation in the performance that vary transformative relationships and engender dynamic shifts in social function. Ritual actions keep adjusting themselves to the specifics of the occasion, including the nature of audience response, and the circumstances of the game itself. In the dance scenes described by Hardy, his characters come to understand their roles as the music and their own inner feelings urge them on, while they attempt to shape the experience according to their own skills and strategic aims. Ironically, they often move at cross purposes, misconceive the motives of their partners, and overlook essential patterns in the dance as a complex cultural ritual. To understand this better, we need to discuss twisted threads.

## Tangles and Knots

> "Dance is a ritual enacted on the body. At the same time as it is executed a transformation takes place."[29]

Tangles and knots are similar but not the same, especially in regard to threads, ropes and cords, particularly in the tubes, vessels and extended cells of the body and mind. Like mixtures and mélanges, they can be useful or harmful: tangles, in their indeterminacy, are disorderly, stressful and unwanted, while knots, in their patterns and designs, can be useful for fishermen, essential for sailors and definitive for cloth-makers. The tangle may lead to unwanted and dangerous complications, strangulating blockages and unseemly relationships; whereas knots—in fretting and knitting, crocheting and weaving—may be easily untied and retied, as in games of cat's cradle or in hairdressing. Braids were quite fashionable in mid-nineteenth century England and Hardy sees in these decorative knots something emblematic of the persons so adorned, in the partners who gaze at the alluring textures thus displayed, finding analogies to deeper psychological and biological insights. For example, in *The Return of Native* (1878), set some thirty years previous to the writing of the novel, the narrator remarks:

> Aunt and niece stood together in the bedroom where the bride was dressing. The sun, where it could catch it, made a mirror of Thomasin's hair, which she always wore braided. It was braided according to a calendric system: the more important the day the more numerous the strands in the braid. On ordinary working-days she braided it in threes; on ordinary Sundays in

[29] Bierl, 'Introduction. The Choral Dance and Song as Ritual Action', footnote 170.

> fours; at May-pollings, gypsyings,[30] and the like, she braided in it fives. Years ago she had said that when she married she would braid it in sevens. She had braided it in sevens to-day.[31]

The passage seems superficial and merely to point towards an oddity in the young woman's sense of style, by increasing the number of braids she makes in her hair according to the importance of the occasion; although she also may be following a local tradition more than her own private whims. She certainly values the calendrical days on a scale of folkloric significance, with her own wedding day as the climactic event marked by the highest number of braided strands.

But her coiffure also serves as a mirror to deeper themes in the novel about nineteenth century culture in its transition from tradition to modernity, revealing far more than Hardy seems able or willing to articulate. When speaking of the village festivity called gypsying in *The Return of the Native*, Hardy, however, does speak of it as one of the occasions—in one of the enclaves where modernity hardly seeps—when "Paganism was revived in their hearts."[32] As with Sir James Frazer, whom Hardy once met,[33] and whose *The Golden Bough* he read with interest, this is an example of cultural survival,[34] where the residue of archaic activity and feelings are brought into the present. A different and more modern explanation of these left-overs or returns of the repressed might be found in a consideration of what happens when we accept that "human cognition (perception, thought memory and more) is fundamentally grounded in the movement of the body contextualized in world" where, on the one hand, the body grows old and its senses become impaired, and on the other, that "the world" is inconsistent, incoherent and easily altered by a range of circumstances.[35]

## Braids, Reels and Textiles

[30] A country dance on the green or *fête champêtre*.
[31] Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1963), pp. 166-167.
[32] Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, p. 266.
[33] Martin Seymour-Smith, *Hardy* (London: Bloomsbury, 1994), p. 740.
[34] Edward Clodd, *Myths and Dreams*, 2nd ed. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1891 [1885]), p. vii. Hardy was a friend and long-time correspondent of Clodd's. See Seymour-Smith, *Hardy*, p. 82 ff.
[35] John Vines, 'Senescence, Enaction and Technology: On the Need for Movement and Questions of Interaction Design', *Technology Research—Reader 2012* (Plymouth, UK: Plymouth University, 2012), p. 2.

> Culturally and personally determined choices of furniture and fittings created the material environment for a mental journey in which the present of the reclining analysand is suspended, and then fractured, by the surfacing of buried memories or mnemic fragments from childhood that are no longer accessible in full to the adult consciousness that they, none the less, overdetermine. Freud's analytical theatre, full of objects and casts, stands for the shattered, incomplete and repressed histories, no longer available in their original unity or vitality. Instead, each item is marked by both oblivion and anamnesis, exemplifying in material form the shards of memory and fantasies that analytical sessions will conjure up in the transferential presence/present of the analyst with whose partnership, some hermeneutic sense of these discontinuous fragments may be rewoven into a tissue of shifting, subjective meaning.[36]

The intricacies of braided hair, like that of weaving and cross-stitching cloths, suggest a deeper anthropological and archeological significance that it is unlikely Hardy was aware of. In 'The Dance of the Phoenix' (1898) he evinces what seems to be a superficial interest in, or knowledge of, the psychological significance of the popular dances of nineteenth-century England. But elsewhere, for instance in *The Return of the Native*, he finds in "the ceaseless glides and whirls" of the country dances something "to disturb the equilibrium of the senses, and to promote dangerously the tender moods."[37] These roused sexual feelings, which fascinate, entrance, cause the reason to go to sleep, and "drive the emotions to rankness,"[38] being nothing less than what Friedrich Nietzsche denominated as Dionysian. Ivana Turčin suggests that spinning or twirling was one of the methods (other than hallucinogenic plants and other substances) used to induce the trance.

> Rhythmic rotational movements, often accompanied by hyperventilation and exhaustion, are also one of the common actions played to transform the mind into trance. They affect the sense of balance and cause dizziness which can eventually alter the state of consciousness…trance is a psychobiological capacity available to all societies…[39]

When the exuberant dancers in Hardy's fiction "threaded their giddy way" in and out of the maze-like dances, something from the deep unconscious of their collective memories emerges, something imbued with a strangeness that is uncanny—both familiar and yet shockingly unrecognisable.

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[36] Pollock, 'The Image in Psychoanalysis and the Archaeological Metaphor', in *Psychoanalysis and the Image: Transdisciplinary Perspectives on Subjectivity, Sexual Difference, and Aesthetics*, ed. Griselda Pollock (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 5.
[37] Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, p. 267.
[38] Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, p. 267.
[39] Turčin, 'The Forgotten Movement', 5. See also Tomlinson, *A Million Years of Music*, p. 33.

The "enchantment"[40] is there, too, in the hair-do of the village girls, for "[f]air ones with long curls, fair ones with short curls, fair ones with love-locks, fair ones with braids, flew round and round…"[41] The more they dance, the more they are excited, the more they blush and the more they lose consciousness of who and where they are. The sexual themes, however, seem played off against the ways of memory and the processes of aging, without bringing to the surface any deeper or more general implications. We can only remember the memorable and that means that before we can process perceptions and back-looped emotional contexts that reshape those sensations into memorable units of speech, imagery, feeling, rhythms and so forth, we will have unconscious patterns of synaptic sensitization already established by intra-uterine experiences, including what is embedded in the maternal body's physiological and psychological somatic mind. These pre-and-verbal, non-iconic and non-conceptually signifying vibrations "transmit[…] nongenetic information from one generation to the next" and form what Tomlinson (following Kim Stereleny) calls "accumulations or cultural archives" and Robert Payson Creed named—in regard to oral formulaic composition—"storage language." [42]

## The Speaking Dance

> "In Plutarch's *Symposium*, Ammonios, one of the guests, suggests 'speaking dance' as a definition of poetry (Plutarch *Questiones conviviales* 9.748a)."[43]

In no. 27 from the *Wessex Poems and Other Verses* (1898), young Jenny, whose "life had hardly been/A life of modesty" yields to the admonitions of "a gentle youth," marries, and has two sons, who grow to be sailors and are lost to her. Her life then passes as a faithful wife and mother. Nearly sixty years old, she sees on the street the regiment of her old lover and, though lying chastely next to her husband in bed, she hears the distant sounds of music and feels the old passions once again, deciding to join them at a soldiers' ball celebrating the victory over Napoleon.

> She knocked, but found her further stride
> Checked by a sergeant tall:
> "Gay Granny, whence come you?" he cried;
> This is a private ball."

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[40] Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, p. 266.
[41] Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, p. 263.
[42] Tomlinson, *A Million Years of Music*, p. 70
[43] Bierl, 'Introduction. The Choral Dance as Ritual Action', footnote 106.

> "No one has more right here than me!
> Ere you were born, man," answered she,
> "I knew the regiment all!"

The local steward intervenes to allow Jenny to enter as there are insufficient partners for the dance. So the now elderly woman joins in their dance, the movement rousing her dormant erotic passions, "the springtime flood," as the poet puts it, or at least the memory of her more lively passions.

> They seized and whirled her 'mid the maze,
> And Jenny felt as in the days
> Of her immodesty.

There is sufficient ambiguity in the pronoun "they" here to suggest that it is not only the young men dancing with her that "whirl" into the "maze,"[44] constructed from spiralling hallucinatory lines or paths, but also her sexual memories, feelings and longings for love, be they maternal, wifely or erotic. For we had earlier learned that as she lay in bed:

> That night the throbbing "Soldier's Joy,"
> The measured tread and sway
> Of "Fancy-Lad" and "Maiden Coy,"
> Reached Jenny as she lay
> Beside her spouse; till springtide blood
> Seemed scouring through her like a flood
> That whisked the years away.

In the ballroom, her vigorous manoeuvres seem a marvel to the assembled young men of the regiment who had at first seen in her nothing but an old woman, someone who could be their grandmother. Her style of dancing

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[44] This is a commonplace description of dance in nineteenth-century novels, but it links up with the myth of the Labyrinth on Minoan Crete, where at the centre waits the Minotaur for young adolescent Greeks sacrificed to him, and who is slain by Theseus, aided by Ariadne's clue; the thread she spins for the young hero. But mazes and labyrinths also allude to the Trojan Games described by Virgil in the *Aeneid*: an intricate war-game played by young survivors of Troy in which Iulius Ascanius, Aeneas' son and heir, leads the mounted youths in a weaving pattern, something like the Canadian Royal Mounted Police musical ride at the annual Calgary Stampede. Another thread in the path from birth-death trauma, as indicated at the entrance to prehistoric caves on Malta, takes us to medieval carols, with dancer-singers holding hands and passing under each others' raised arms; or in the child's version of London Bridge's Falling Down, with the capture, incarceration and symbolic sacrifice of the victims. Where the ambiguous clue leads back through the mystical pentangle of virtues and vices, the interlaced stanzaic patterns, and seasonal patterns of planting and harvest, sowing and reaping, hunting and entrapment, seduction and rape, and so on and so forth. *Carol* is related to *l'escargot*, the snail, the spiral-marking creature. See Norman Simms, *Sir Gawain and the Knight of the Green Chapel* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1992).

moreover shocked them as a return of an age much less staid and controlled than their own Victorian mode.

> Hour chased hour, and night advanced;
> She sped as shod with wings;
> Each time and every time she danced—
> Reels, jogs, poussettes,[45] and flings:
> They cheered her as she soared and swooped
> (She'd learnt ere art in dancing drooped
> From hops to slothful swings).

She goes through the whole repertoire with totally unexpected energy and verve to the wonder of all that observed.

> The favorite quick-step "Speed the Plough"—
> (Cross hands, cast off, and wheel)—
> "The Triumph, "Sylph," "The Row-dow-dow,"
> Famed "Major Malley's Reel,"
> "The Duke of York's" "The Fairy Dance,"
> "The Bridge of Lodi" (brought from France),
> She beat out, toe and heel.

At last, the clock strikes four in the morning and the time comes for her to cease this display and return home, with an entourage escorting her home, helping her sneak in without awakening her husband.

> The "Fall of Paris" clanged its close,
> And Peter's chime told four,
> When Jenny, bosom-beating, rose
> To seek her silent door.
> They tiptoed in escorting her,
> Lest stroke of heel or chink of spur
> Should break her goodman's snore.

Home safely, she nevertheless feels her advanced age, with an ominous sharp pain in her heart: "Death menaced now" as she lies down next to her sleeping husband. Her only wish is "that she were the wife/That she had been erstwhile."

When he finally awakens at six o'clock the old man notices something different about Jenny and realises that she is dead and that "her soul had flown." But why and how "her soul had flown" he cannot fathom. In one sense, her death remains a mystery. In another, she had experienced release from her ordinary, dull and lonely life and a reprise of youthful joy, where all her repressed sexuality and *joi de vivre* was expressed in the dance steps she performed. The secret of her midnight spree remains with the

[45] Complex cross-over step by two or more couples.

King's Own Cavalry, who ride off the next morning harbouring their own sad memories, leaving the husband unaware of what had happened.

> When told that some too mighty strain
> For one so many-yeared
> Had burst her bosom's master-vein,
> His doubts remained unstirred.
> His Jenny had not left his side
> Betwixt the eve and morning-tide:
> —The King's said not a word.

This close reading of Hardy's poem articulates what Richards refers to as "life's little ironies"; "the incongruities, the disparities, the contrasts, the contradictions" that occur in life.[46] Following a consideration of this conventional woman's less-than-ordinary youth and its clandestine reprise (expressed in dance) we might now look to see what is not explicitly said in these verses. Two things about this return of the repressed that are pertinent here: one, that what has been buried alive and lying dormant for a whole lifetime (of the individual and of the culture) has been encrypted, that is, secreted in an unrecognisable form; two, that what is excavated is exhumed, its body both fetishized already in the crypt and re-traumatized upon emergence from its dark night of unconsciousness.[47]

The title of the poem is taken from the inn where the soldiers gather to celebrate the memory of their regiment's victories in the Napoleonic Wars and even of the time before that when their predecessors were billeted in the town: 'The Dance at the Phoenix'. The allusion is, of course, to the mythical bird that lives in a singular form and who at the end of its days casts itself into a blazing pyre, from whence it re-emerges in all its primal vigour, to go through another life cycle. This kind of symbolic form is "convulsive,"[48] rather than static or abstract, as the logical systems of Ernst Cassirer and Warburg attest.[49] Juxtapositions can be as shocking and painful as comparisons, where topics seem to insult one another, and instead of moving progressively through modes of development, they recoil and knock each other about in the space between, a liminality that leaks from one side to another. From regression towards the point of origin, in trauma and the urge towards a future that is marked by an endless series of re-cathected stimuli in

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[46] Richards, 'Thomas Hardy's Ironic Vision (Part One)', p. 265.
[47] Pollock, 'The Image in Psychoanalysis and the Archeological Metaphor', pp. 10-11.
[48] Ffrench, 'Pathology of the Photogram', p. 25.
[49] Mario Wimmer, 'The Afterlives of Scholarship: Warburg and Cassirer', *History of Humanities*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2017), pp. 245-270.

an afterlife of pathos-filled images. Gary Tomlinson examines the origins of music, language, dance and other sapient mental processes, reflecting:

> At heart of this taskscape was a social entrainment more focused and more intense than ever before in the homin line. The attunement of oscillatory neural processes in this entrainment laid the basis for the far more pronounced and precise rhythmic synchronies that would emerge later.[50]

All this is too smooth, however, and does not take into account the hostile, retrograde and injurious events that run counter to any neat progression in the evolution of the mind within the dimensions of cultural space. History—and fictional representations of its momentous encounters—causes blockages (spots, stains, splotches, as well as knots and tangles), the bunching up of threads in the in-between areas where borders are crossed (and celebrated or protected by ritual actions). Culture is created because the path is not smooth and constant.

As Cassirer puts it, "every energy of spirit by which the content of spiritual signification is linked to a concrete and intrinsically appropriate sensuous sign."[51] What is appropriate in such a sign in times of crisis and trauma does not emerge, however, as an abstract or easily deciphered symbol. Mario Wimmer explains that:

> the spirit of *Geisteswissenschaften* was not a free-floating universe of ideas but was bound to a concrete expression, a medium, and form. Symbols came into existence in a space between human perception and the material world [we would add: clashed or collided]. They were embodied in *Geist*, not pure reason.[52]

Cassirer speaks of this in-between space (Warburg's *Zwischenraum*) in terms of Jacob Uexküll's *Umwelt*,[53] a biological environment made up of what a sentient being can perceive and feel in its consciousness, but that (for the earliest humans) can take in inner as well as outer experiences and perceptions,[54] and so is more like a rhetorical *topos* (or *locus*), with its shape, volume, tangible depth and specifics of who, what, and when it can be filled with defensive and protective activities and ambiguous and confused values. Above all, these sensations and reflections become symbolic forms.[55] This new "mentalized" environment where the ego consciousness of self and other

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[50] Tomlinson, *One Million Years of Music*, p. 91.
[51] Cited by Wimmer, 'The Afterlives of Scholarship', p. 264.
[52] Wimmer, 'The Afterlives of Scholarship', p. 264.
[53] Jui-Pi Chen, 'Of Animals and Men: A Study of Umwelt in Uexküll, Cassirer, and Heidegger', *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*, vol. 32, no. 1 (2008), pp. 57-79.
[54] Chen, 'Of Animals and Men', p. 59.
[55] Chen, 'Of Animals and Men', p. 62.

is formed arises because the inchoate gives way to a series of almost spontaneous meetings where individuals perform tasks together, their actions mirroring each other, the rhythm of their actions, bonding them in memorable rituals.[56] Thus, on the one hand, the sense of *Umwelt* is made to refer to the biological-psychological world of pre- and non-verbal, especially 'not-yet' symbolic expressions, while the *Zwischenraum* opens up[57] the necessary and uncomfortable space between that leads to a collision of sensations, phantasies, fantasies and proto-symbolic emotional forms. This is what Warburg calls the *Denkenraum*, the place of thinking and conceptualising through figurative language, signifying images, and conventionalised ritual acts. In anthropological terms, as Tomlinson explains, episodic evolutionary and cultural developments[58] generate a specifically human dimension: the *taskscape*, the space bounded by horizons of activity and work,[59] the time and place where groups of individuals ritually coordinate their creative efforts, memorialise, recollect and archive thoughts, creating a socially-bonded sense of achievement.[60]

Thus a *taskscape* is created that is (re)cognisable so long as the rites of mutual activity continue. Tomlinson defines his neologism *taskscape* in the following way:

> The taskscape creates, from the rhythms of action sequences that form it, its own temporality, one based on moments of mutual attention commanded among its participants by movements and gesture. It describes hominin movement through time connecting the material and the social.[61]

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[56] In autumn 1974, while living in the Romanian village of Ţiganeşti (midway between Bucureşti and Ploieşti), I observed a group of women weaving shawls and tablecloths together. They seemed to pay no attention to the intricate traditional multi-coloured designs they were making, but gossiped and sang together, with much laughter. I observed how their hands and feet were coordinated by the rhythms of the speech and songs, and how laughter and exclamations marked new configurations in the weaving.

[57] In Laurianic *kabbalah*, the opening up is accomplished by *tsimtsum* צמצום, a condensation of chaotic material and confused psychologic materials, leaving a nearly complete vacuum in space for an orderly creation. As the Godhead withdraws into Itself, a small vital element of the divine remains, the *Sheikina.*

[58] Tomlinson, *A Million Years of Music*, p. 35.

[59] In rabbinical Hebrew, there is no specific term for cult activity or ritual, except *avodah* (work) which includes the sense of service. Compare with Tambiah, 'A Performative Approach to Ritual', p. 117.

[60] Tomlinson, *A Million Years of Music*.

[61] Tomlinson, *A Million Years of Music*, p. 65.

Further to this, Tomlinson explains that The Baldwin Effect causes an important "blurring" in the path of evolution wherein "learned strategies for coping with selective pressures allow species to survive long enough for inherited characteristics to appear that answer the same pressures."[62] Also to be considered is the notion, put forward by Stephen J. Gould and Niles Eldridge, of punctuated equilibria:

> Punctuated equilibrium is a theory in evolutionary biology which proposes that once a species appears in the fossil record the population will become stable, showing little evolutionary change for most of its geological history. This state of little or no morphological change is called stasis.[63]

One other process needs to be added here to indicate the kind of evolution we see as appropriate to psycho history: the way short-term triggers for gene expression allow for minor adjustments within the parameters of the so-called *taskscape* that *humanises* or *mentalises* the *Umwelt* of our species. However, a full explanation for these concepts lies beyond the scope of this article.

Extending the concept to a series of "microbursts of innovation"[64] in the cultural and historical environment, these "crystallizing moments"[65] that can be recollected in a discontinuous consciousness require the constant re-generating of symbolic forms containing myth, language, art and knowledge, as well as the archive of private, personal and intimate memories, desires, fears and repulsions.[66] This conventionalisation of individual and private feelings into ritual creates a special distance[67]—partly felt as an uncomfortable discrepancy, partly as a breathing space into which the ontological pains and humiliations of the individual can be eased by a collective experience, and partly as a moment of aesthetic imagination, intellectual speculation and social creativity—recalls what Warburg calls the *Zwischenraum* or liminal space between seemingly distinct, even mutually exclusive cultural periods.

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[62] Tomlinson, *A Million Years of Music*, p. 35. Also see Thomas J.H. Morgan and Thomas L. Griffiths, 'What the Baldwin Effect Affects', *Cognition* (17 Jan 2020), doi: 10.1016/j.cognition.2019.104165.
[63] Stephen J. Gould and Niles Eldridge, 'Punctuated Equilibria: The Tempo and Mode of Evolution Reconsidered', *Paleobiology*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Spring, 1977), pp. 115-151.
[64] Tomlinson, *One Million Years of Music*, p. 95.
[65] Tomlinson, *One Million Years of Music*, p. 239.
[66] Wimmer, 'The Afterlives of Scholarship', p. 265.
[67] Tambiah, 'A Performative Approach to Ritual', p. 123.

## Dancing at Christmas

> "Meanwhile the taskscape grounds our abstract notions of social order in its featuring of action sequences that join the social to the material—creating the social, we might say, though its material correlates."[68]

In Hardy's poem, the *topos* of ritual activity is set at Christmas, or Yuletide (a Saturnalian holiday of time-out-of-time—the twelve days at the end of one year before the new year settles in) embodying the archaic carnival suspension of normal social and moral rules rather than either the religious celebration of Christ's nativity or the more modern secular period of family gatherings and gift-giving.[69] These hints at the very opening of the poem alert us to the basic themes of life and death, return to youth and release into eternity, loneliness and longing for renewal. But these abstract binomial patterns do not quite match with the poem's interweaving of frustrated desires and guilt, the misunderstanding of appearances and the painful expense of energy in dreams of restoration. In this form, "the symbolic contains the surviving trace of the ritual or dance whereby humanity represents its own negotiation with these [dynamic historical, physiological and psychological] forces."[70] Instead of exact repetitions or neat resolutions, the ritualised dance has what Warburg describes as *Ausgleich*: "a process of compensation…a perpetual to and fro between the opposite extremes—a continual palindromic movement as in a pendulum or a seesaw."[71] In Hardy's text, the compensation for loss of identity and death comes in the form of a joy-filled night in the company of men like those she knew in her youth. The teeter-totter,[72] like the oldtime country dances, has both an erotic and a trance-inducing component to it.

## Patterns of Dance and Energy

> "For the Shipibo can 'listen' to a song or chant by looking at the designs, and inversely paint a pattern by listening to a song or music."[73]

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[68] Tomlinson, *A Million Years of Music*, p. 70.
[69] Richards, 'Thomas Hardy's Ironic Vision (Part One)', p. 268.
[70] Ffrench, 'Pathology of the Photogram', p. 27.
[71] Spyros Papapetros, 'The Eternal Seesaw: Oscillations in Warburg's Revival: review of Georges Didi-Huberman, 'L'image survivante: histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 26, no. 2 (2003), p. 170.
[72] Also known in German as *die Ewige Wippe* and in French as *la balençoire eternelle*, the eternal seesaw. Papapetros, 'The Eternal Seesaw', p. 170.
[73] Howard G. Charing, 'Communion with the Infinite—The Visual Music of the Shipibo Tribe of the Amazon', *Ayahuasca.com,* 5 January 2017, at

In order to understand this negotiation and its resultant pathos-laden symbolic form, let us look at the way anthropologists have approached cultures where designs for weaving, architecture and dancing are themselves interconnected, and constantly re-cathected in the historical trauma of political, military, social and economic intrusions, and where the people at the same time keep sliding back into traditional modes of expression in order to relive these tensions. Form, in other words, is "convulsed, deformed or informed…in its very contours, under the pressure of the repression of the base."[74] If this happens here and not there, at this time but not again for many centuries, it is because what psychohistorians call 'crystalizing moments' do not transform all (or any) of the contingent groups of people who are affected by the precipitating crisis. Tomlinson puts it this way: "Sometimes human gestures and families of gestures live themselves out in a single locale" and moreover, he adds, "this does not mean that similar developments cannot arise elsewhere"[75]—that is, if and when analogous forms of trauma occur. Because evolution lacks an apparent continuous and consistent trajectory, a species-wide transformation of DNA is not required, allowing different expressions of gene alteration. Likewise, the biological and historical pressures on individuals and groups do not run smoothly on parallel tracks and only intersect from time to time. They dance through the ages in so-called epicycles, sometimes operating "independently of the niche-constructive feedback cycles that sedimented them in the first place," and sometimes generating "cultural dynamics" that flash out across the boundary zones of emotional and intellectual growth.[76]

The processes of repression and regression come through in symptoms, where the sign at the originating point of contact refers away from itself to a place where the painful distortion is occurring or where the hurt or humiliation, "in Freudian terms, [comes] from a structural relation between instinctual impulse and repression."[77] Pollock expands on the notion of deeply encrypted processes of primitive repression and what they drive out into consciousness, whether in dreams, myths or rituals:

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https://www.ayahuasca.com/psyche/shamanism/communion-wth-the-infintie-the-visual-music-of-the-shipibo-tribe-of-the-amazon. Accessed 1 July 2019.

[74] Ffrench, 'Pathology of the Photogram', p. 27.

[75] Tomlinson, *One Million Years of Music*, p. 246.

[76] Tomlinson, *One Million Years of Music*, p. 260.

[77] Ffrench, 'Pathology of the Photogram', p. 28.

> They fall not into historical time but into archaeological, hence, coeval space. They are representations or inscriptions in visual mnemonics of what is perpetual, if always distorted by repression. In the human subject, its constitutive foundations and overdeterminations…[78]

Bierl points out that "[b]efore Plato, in a traditional society that relied solely on orality, *mimesis* had the meaning of continually reincorporating and re-enacting a given model," with the later sense of copying, reflecting if in a mirror, and recollecting to preserve in memory, taking in negative connotations in the process.

But in times of crisis there are anxieties of forgetting, a deep fear that all important knowledge will disappear, and that the loss will be irreparable. Not just in oral societies where it is feared that a break in the generations caused by contagious disease, overwhelming disaster or acts of genocide by rival groups will eradicate knowledge, but also where writing codes become unintelligible, where documents are torn or destroyed, and where new generations become wilfully ignorant. Those entering the dance of culture trip over their own feet, demand the right to invent wholly new steps, or refuse to participate. There are times, too, when, as Tomlinson laments, ambitions outreach themselves and lapse into silence, confusion and despair.[79] The words of old songs make no sense, the resolution to traditional narratives frays and fades, and the bonds of love and friendship fall apart.

While the nineteenth-century rural society described in Hardy's novels and stories is one in transition between archaic traditions and the secular individuality of modernism, it also is made to bear two extra burdens: one is the late nineteenth-century notion of remains or residue, where there are pockets or enclaves of pre- or non-literate society and the constitutive communities are often composed of individuals who are themselves caught between the two epistemological models; and the other is the emerging discovery of depth psychology, the notion that within the mind there exists places of dark, deep unconscious memories of pre-human experience and the repressed feelings of fear and shock at the breakthrough of consciousness and civilisation. Hardy attempts to make visible both of these phenomena—the social group seen as a tangle of mixed threads and the individual whose thoughts and feelings are knotted together. Incremental repetitions, rhythmic parallelism and other returns to the opening patterns of dance allow for a dynamic interplay of renewal and re-attachment to the group itself. "Thus

[78] Pollock, 'The Image in Psychoanalysis and the Archeological Metaphor', p. 13.
[79] Tomlinson, *One Million Years of Music*, p. 197.

humanly created and unleashed movements become the manifestation of forces outside and beyond the performers," Tambiah explains, "and beget the illusion of emotions and wills in conflict."

In anthropological terms, what we have are complex symbolic forms set in designs, patterns and rhythmic performative circles, reels and interlaced narratives. The dancers weave in and out of the group performance, losing individuality for a moment, regaining it at the point of entry, then exhausting the tensions, and relaxing into the resolution of the performance.[80] Yet at the same time, all around the play-ground of the ritual, in the normal, profane space of the quotidian, and within the conscious mind, in its somnolent relief from excruciating memories of the unpleasant ordinariness of growth and decay, the pressure of reality waits to reassert itself. For Hardy and many of his characters—since not all are able to realise the different intensities and vibrations of these various threads—this is the irony of life. Again to grasp the anthropological and psychological dimensions of the phenomenon, we cite Tambiah, who in turn cites Clifford Leach:

> Thus all varieties of ritual may be seen as involving multiple condensations, and since different sensory channels are used simultaneously, the participants 'pick up all these messages at the same time and condense them into a single experience…'[81]

The return of the King's Own Calvary to the town where Jenny had lived as an honest and faithful wife and mother has suddenly made her aware that she had become "faded now, and hoar," and, at the same time, awakened memories of her youthful adventures. The rhythmic throbbing sounds of the music later that night disturb her equilibrium: they awaken the passion in her blood she believed she had repressed and had forgotten since she was sixteen years old. Though she does not indulge in any amorous escapades, it is in the act of sneaking from the marital bed and the exposure of her lively dance steps that causes "the inner mischief" to be released. When she sees him "toil-weary" asleep upon her return, "She kissed him long, as when, just wooed, She chose his domicile." In a sense, then, the circle is closed, from age sixteen to fifty-nine, she lived a proper matronly existence, and when she breaks loose for a single night at the Phoenix, she cannot go back to being what was, much as guilt and love may require it, no more than she could become the immodest, naughty girl she was before she married. She had exhausted herself, her body unable to sustain the return of repressed longings and

[80] Kubatzky, 'The Function of Music in Ancient Greek Cults', p. 3.
[81] Tambiah, 'A Performative Approach to Ritual', p. 163.

repressed desires. Ironically, after a night of inexpressible pleasure, she dies, leaving at most a sense of something important having happened among the young men with whom she danced.

More than that, what Hardy's poem implies is that Jenny represents in her somatic memories and the vigorous steps of the dances she performs, the life blood that has seemingly drained out of English culture during the nineteenth century. The power of the imagination, when excited by memories recreated in the dance, provides her with momentary relief from the burden of boredom in her normal life, and gives the artist describing the occasion an opportunity to reveal what might have been (or what may become) in the image of a society that is less knotted up, limited and closed in its thinking.

Above the pleasure and the regret, there is a further ironic shift. Gaining entry into the dance, what had "drooped/from hops to slothful swings" comes to life again, giving the dancers a momentary experience of pre-modern life.

> Well! Times are not as times were then,
> Nor fair ones half so free;
> And truly they were martial men,
> The King's-Own-Cavalry.
> And when they went from Casterbridge
> And vanished over Mellstock Ridge,
> 'Twas saddest morn to see.

It is hard to think that the poet meant for this to be more than nostalgia for bygone days, both in sentimental longing for his own youth, and for those pre-modern times when country folk were free to express their passions. Times change, people grow old, and memories fade, occasionally to reappear for a brief spell but with not enough strength to change reality, bring back childish energies, or form a coherent alternative to current aches and pains.

A more illuminating and extensive example of ironically expended energy[82] from Hardy may be cited from another short story, 'The Fiddler of the Reels' (1893).[83] The reels referred to are old-fashioned country dances where the participants form themselves into a variety of shapes and weave themselves in and out as though they were embodying a game of cat's cradle, individually and collectively responding to tunes that are so different from the modern couple dancing of the nineteenth century (such as waltzes, and polkas) that they seem the "mutilated remains" of jigs, quick steps, and other

[82] Richards, 'Thomas Hardy's Ironic Vision (Part One)', p. 278.
[83] Hardy, 'The Fiddler of the Reels', in *The Melancholy Hussar*, pp. 85-108. This story also was first published in *Life's Little Ironies.*

square dances or the "nameless phantoms in new quadrilles or gallops."[84] Yet it is not the tunes or melodies that most "influence" the listeners, especially the impressionable female character at the heart of the story, Car'line Aspent. The fiddler of the title, known as Mop Ollamoor (really Wat but given this nickname because of his hair) is officially an itinerant veterinarian, but also a wandering gypsy entertainer,[85] who has an uncanny ability to communicate powerful musical energies and engage the sensibilities of listeners, especially the naïve and sexually frustrated Car'line. This powerful capacity to seduce women through music is sometimes called *fascination* when it is accompanied by eye motions directed at the object of his charms, and thus seems a form of hypnotic influence which Mop has over those who hear his fiddling. However, the narrator suggests that there is something further, something "singular enough," in his musical productions. And, readers are told, "it would require a neurologist to fully explain them."[86] In the closing years of the nineteenth century when this story was written, a neurologist was not quite what we call a 'nerve specialist and much more', or, in the case of Freud's early work, a 'psychiatrist'. As seen in Freud's early work, the nerves rather than hormones were thought to be the source and carrier of emotive fluids—and imagined as charged currents of galvanic or electrical energy—through the body. Mental illnesses were nervous disorders. This is how the story describes its effects on Car'line, even when the music is heard from outside and at a great distance, no one else around her being aware of Mop's playing:

> She would be sitting quietly, any evening after dark, in the house of her father, the parish clerk… Here, without a moment's warning, and in the midst of a general conversation between her father, sister, and the young man [she was stepping out with]….she would start from her seat in the chimney-corner as if she had received a galvanic shock, and spring convulsively towards the ceiling; then she would burst into tears, and it was not till some half-hour had passed that she grew calm as usual.[87]

[84] Hardy, 'The Fiddler of the Reels', p. 87.
[85] Gypsies of the travelling kind (there were others who settled in Romania and a few other countries) were notorious for two skills, one in being able to break, train and care for horses and other animals; and as musicians who performed improvisationally at village celebrations, funerals, and other festive gatherings. They were also mistrusted as thieves, seducers of local women, and snatchers of babies and young children.
[86] Hardy, 'The Fiddler of the Reels', p. 89.
[87] Hardy, 'The Fiddler of the Reels', p. 90.

Car'line's father had noticed these "hysterical tendencies" before and thought they might be "a species of epileptic fit," which was a near enough guess considering that epileptics were classified with hysterics and other sufferers of nervous disorders in hospitals such as the Salpêtrière in Paris run by Jean-Martin Charcot where Freud came to study.[88] However, these scientific diagnoses remain inadequate to capturing the essence of the events enacted in Hardy's short story, where the sexual Eros of the implied connection between Car'line and Mop is indicated by her emotional responses. The words, figurative expressions and allusions available to the narrator and the characters in the story suggest something more mystical and powerful than fascination, mesmerism or hysteria. For Mop has the unique genius "to draw your soul out of your body like a spider's thread…till you felt as limp as a withywind and yearned for something to cling to."

A *withywind* is a regional dialect term based on Old English *withthrow* or *witless,* a flowering plant *convulvus arvensis* also known as bindweed which contains several alkaloids, including pseudotropine, and lesser amounts of tropine,[89] and meso-cuscohygrine. It is a term also used to describe a *convolvulus*, a harmful weed that twines itself around other plants, thus giving to the word *withywind* the sense of "flexibly strong, [and] entangle[ment]," the very opposite of what we are told about how Car'line feels when she succumbs to Mop's fiddle music. Yet all key words, traced back into their archaic roots, tend to have opposing meanings and to hold these contradictions are held in check like the ins-and-outs of danced knots and tangles. They are effects stretched along the vibrating strings of sensation, drawn to the very limits before they crack apart.[90] If these pulsating strings are likened to a spider's web of gossamer which entraps its prey, alerts the predator, and provides an access to the point of agony, they hint at the phantasmal processes in matrixial space during the trauma of birth, the birth of tragedy, and the origins of other cultural inventions.

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[88] Simms, 'Charcot's Narcotic Dream: Part I', *New English Review* (November 2018); Simms, 'Charcot's Narcotic Dream: Part 2', *New English Review* (December 2018).

[89] Hardy, 'The Fiddler of the Reels', p. 89.

[90] "The taskscape as a whole was not merely a matrix of action sequences…but something more: a complex system of interlinked oscillators from which emerged social bonding, cultural traditions, and—not least—tools." Tomlinson, *One Million Years of Music*, p. 82. Our argument recasts this notion of vibrating threads and neuronal paths so as to match Bracha Ettiger's paradigm of matricial space as the playground of mental feelings and thoughts. Or, as in this article, a dancing ground of social interactions and intellectual codes.

Those phantasms, in turn, may be understood in the analogy of weaving, knitting and intertwining of all sorts of materials, images and ideas, that is, in making the fleeting, ghostly sensations of the pre- or non-verbal unconsciousness graspable to recognition, memory and reproduction as fantasies, as images, gestures, words and tones in what we call, following Warburg, *Pathosformel*: emotionally-laden and passionately-triggering forms.[91] This is not something Hardy is likely to have formulated into his own intellectual concepts, although the seeds of such a breakthrough were evident all around him and already had started to enter philosophical, scientific, aesthetic and literary discourses in the *fin-de-siècle*. Warburg and Freud were Hardy's contemporaries, and were both keenly interested in how the brain processes sensations into perceptions, feelings and thoughts. They were not merely interested in brain lesions brought on by injury and disease, recognising operations in the mind related to psychological trauma that create and are created by the individual personality.

After this shock (trauma) to her system which leads to Car'line to become even more susceptible to Mop's music, her intended departs for the metropolis to work on the Great London Exhibition of 1851. After rejecting Ned's offers of marriage and losing touch, Car'line writes to him four years later, telling him she has reconsidered his proposal and is now willing to be his wife. She does not explain her situation fully and when she arrives by train to make her plea more forcefully, Ned discovers that she has a daughter who was fathered by the gypsy fiddler. Car'line confesses apologetically to the transgression due to her naiveté and sexual frustrations, but assures her faithful lover the affair was brief and ended completely when the musician departed soon after their fleeting sexual encounter. The two marry and establish a warm but not very passionate relationship, Ned centring his paternal emotions on the young girl. With the Exhibition coming to a close, the couple decide to return to their country village, confident that the intrusive stranger Mop Ollamoor has long since departed. With typical Hardian irony, when the family arrive back in their home village, Ned goes off in search of a job and Car'line and her daughter go to warm up in an inn. At the inn, they hear dance music, which is recognisable as Mop's, and Car'line begins to succumb to its power: "It was not the dance nor the

[91] Kerstin Schansweiter and Philipp Wüschner, '*Pathosformel* (pathos formula)', in *Affective Societies: Key Concepts*, eds J. Slaby and C. von Scheve (New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 1-8 (forthcoming).

dancers, but the notes of that old violin which thrilled the London wife, these having still all the witchery that she had so well known of yore, and under which she had used to lose her power of independent will."[92]

Bewitched again, as she listens Car'line falls into "paralysed reverie" and is then drawn into the reel[93] in which "she convulsively danced and grew weak" and was overpowered with "hysteric emotion."[94] Meanwhile, one by one the other dancers become exhausted and withdraw, and with each diminution of participants, the reels change their format. In his description of these choreographies (that are elsewhere known as "knots") one finds an analogy to the figures in string games, where the narrator inadvertently also recapitulates the paradigms of matrixial relations during the stresses of childbirth. Reels were resorted to at this time, to expell superfluous energy which the ordinary figure-dances were not powerful enough to exhaust. As the dancers position themselves in the form of a cross, the reel is performed by each of the three alternately, with the people who successively reach the middle place dancing in both directions. Car'line feels herself to be like a fly trapped in the middle of a cobweb, fascinated by the shock (trauma) and waiting for the spider to slither down the threads to devour her.

> Car'line found herself in this place, the axis[95] of this place, and could not get out of it, the tune turning into the first part without giving her opportunity. And now she began to suspect that Mop did know her, and was doing this on purpose, though whenever she stole a glance at him his closed eyes betokened obliviousness to everything outside his own brain.[96]

She continued to wend her way through the figure of 8 that was formed by her course, the fiddler introducing into his notes the wild and agonizing

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[92] Hardy, 'The Fiddler of the Reels', p. 101.

[93] A reel is an object like a spool or axis around which string, thread or yarn is coiled. In terms of the verb to reel, *Wiktionary* offers a list of usages that suggest many significations for the paradigm we are discussing including: "To wind on a reel," "To spin or revolve repeatedly," "To unwind, to bring or acquire something by spinning or winding something else," "To walk shakily or unsteadily; to stagger; move as if drunk or not in control of oneself," "(reel back) To back off or step away unsteadily and quickly," "To make or cause to reel," "To have a whirling sensation; to be giddy," "To be in shock," "(obsolete) To roll." 'Reel', *Wikionary*, at https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/reel. Accessed 1 July 2019.

[94] Hardy, 'The Fiddler of the Reels', p. 102.

[95] Eliade speaks about the *axis mundi*, *omphalos* or centre of the world as the point which also connects earth to the heavens. Mircea Eliade, *La nostalgie des origines: méthodologie et histoire des religions* (Paris: nrf/ Gallimard, 1971); Eliade, *Traité d'histoire des religions* (Paris: Payot, 1959).

[96] Hardy, 'The Fiddler of the Reels', p. 103.

sweetness of a living voice in one too highly wrought; its pathos running high and low in endless variation, projecting through her nerves excruciating spasms, a sort of blissful torture.[97]

Mary Caroline Richards observes that Hardy's characters tend not only to "live and die … harassed dupes of an 'Unfulfilled Intention'," but that their nerves have "evolved to an activity abnormal in such an environment"[98] as he sets them, in the still wild Wessex of his imagination. The moment here in the text is at once that of physical orgasm and of aesthetic ecstasy, of entrapment and escape from the mundane and ordinary, the fœtus detaching itself the uterine wall and passing out of the birth canal into the real world of independent sensory experiences. These shared memories—due to analogous primal experiences, neuronal mirroring in foundational socialization and repeated performance of cultural rituals—are not inherent archetypes (as Carl Jung or Mircea Eliade would have them) but rather (following Tomlinson) "embodied … in the accumulated archives of operational sequences themselves,"[99] that is, they are created during the dialectical and dynamic processes of ontological and cultural development.

At the same time, on the dance floor, one by one the others depart exhausted by the overly vigorous exercise, finally leaving Car'line the only female dancer in the group. As the group grows smaller, the figures danced change into new patterns. Thus the narrator seems to give autonomous life to the process of dancing itself: "The reel instantly resolved itself into a four-handed one."[100] More than anyone else, Car'line has no will-power to resist the force of the music as it translates into the danced patterns as they relentless follow the unseen directions of the fiddler Mop and his "acoustic magnetism."

> Then another dancer fell out—one of the men—and went into the passage in a frantic search for liquor. To turn the figure into a three-handed reel was the work of a second. Mop modulating at the same time into 'The Fairy Dance,' as better suited to the contracted movement and no less one of those

[97] Hardy, 'The Fiddler of the Reels', p. 103.
[98] Richards, 'Thomas Hardy's Ironic Vision (Part One)', p. 266.
[99] Tomlinson, *A Million Years of Music*, p. 74.
[100] Hardy, 'Fiddler of the Reels', p. 103.

> foods of love[101] which, as manufactured by his bow, had always intoxicated her.[102]

It is a shock to see how close Hardy's description of the dances modulating into one another fits with a modern neuro-scientific account of how the brain develops as humans evolve into cultures of their own invention: "Multiple, interlinked networks oscillating at different frequencies … create multileveled perceptions of complex events (for example, the hierarchies of quicker and slower pulses or cycles entailed in musical meters)."[103]

## Reels, Realities and Fantasies

> Ritualized practices may have offered a model for the emergence of geometrical thought … we might consider that ideological or religious thought lies behind the use of early geometric art and stimulated innovations in craft production.[104]

Since memory is not a storage of fixed images, or even of permanently distorted pictures of the past, but rather a process by which once sensitised synapses in the neuronal complex of the brain are re-cathected, igniting energy to flow from place to place, to attract and repel other related patterns of alertness. Pollock reminds us, following Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, that "memory traces do not form a single unity, but rather 'are deposited in different systems,' work in chains and relays, and 'are only reactivated once they have been cathected."[105] What we see in Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) is a kind of digital-electronic performance as different parts of the brain light-up and pass-and-select energy.[106] For Hardy,

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[101] Duke Orsino: play on / Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting / The appetite may sicken, and so die." William Shakespeare, Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, Act 1, Scene 1.
[102] Hardy, 'The Fiddler of the Reels', p. 104.
[103] Tomlinsion, *A Million Years of Music*, p. 79.
[104] Catherine Breniquet, 'Weaving and Potting During the Late Neolithic Period: Are there textile Patterns on the early Painted Pottery of Mesopotamia?' in *Painting Pots—Painting People: Late Neolithic Ceramics in Ancient Mesopotamia*, eds Walter Cruells, Inna Meteiciucovà and Olivier Nieuwenhuyse (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2017), p. 216.
[105] Pollock, 'The Image in Psychoanalysis and the Archaeological Metaphor', p. 27. She here cites J. Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac Books, 1988), p. 247.
[106] "MRIs employ powerful magnets which produce a strong magnetic field that forces protons in the body to align with that field. ... When the radiofrequency field is turned off, the MRI sensors are able to detect the energy released as the protons realign with the magnetic field." 'Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)', *National Institute of Biochemical Imagery and Bioengineering*, at https://www.nibib.nih.gov/science-education/science-topics/magnetic-resonance-imaging-mri. Accessed 1 July 2019.

writing more than a century ago, the processes are figured as music, dance and human emotional interactions.

When finally, Car'line is left alone on the dancing ground, and everyone else gone but Mop playing his violin, and her young daughter impatiently waiting to be put to bed.

> She thus continued to dance alone, defiantly as she thought, but in truth slavishly and abjectly, subject to every wave of the melody, and probed by the gimlet-like gaze of her fascinator's open eye; keeping up at the same time a feeble smile in his face, as a feint to signify it was still her own pleasure which held her on. A terrified embarrassment as to what she could say to him if she were to leave off had its unrecognized share in keeping her going.[107]

This very dense passage from the story needs careful unpacking. Otherwise, on the face of it, it is just what Mieke Bal calls "preposterous history."[108] Plausible at first glance, but the more we look at it, the less it makes sense. The transitions and connections are awkward and eventually we realise that it is several stories all together, and is more than a single yarn or thread, demanding to be read on many levels.[109] The heteroglossia is marked by the interwoven discourses of the surface or literal event on the dance floor, the inner workings of Car'line and Mop's minds as they seek to control the power of music and dance projected into her mind ("as she thought") and emanating from his conscious manipulation of the event ("probed by the gimlet-like gaze"), as well as the narrator's interpretive comments ("A terrified embarrassment"). What stands out, though, is the figurative expression "gimlet-like gaze" which appears in E. Cobham Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (current throughout the period from 1810-1897): "Gimlet Eye (g hard) A squinting eye; strictly speaking, 'an eye that wanders obliquely,' jocosely called a 'piercer.' (Welsh, *cwim*, a movement round; *cwimlaw*, to twist or move in a serpentine direction."[110]

The woodworker's penetrating or boring tool, a gimlet, gives the basis for metaphoric usages of the term in regard to sight. Car'line is subject to Mop's penetrating gaze, her mind is invaded by his mesmeric will, her erotic desires are aroused by the stimulation of his will-to-dominate as well

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[107] Hardy, 'The Fiddler of the Reels', p. 105.

[108] Mieke Bal, 'Dreaming Art', in *Psychoanalysis and the Image*, p. 55.

[109] Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous Art* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[110] Cited by *Word Smith* at http://wordsworthonline.blogspot.co.nz/2007/08/gimlet-eyed. Accessed 1 July 2019.

as by the music's power to arouse her sexual feelings. She cannot resist, though she is aware enough of what is happening to feel embarrassed and to wish she could leave the magic circle of the dance. Her helplessness pleases Mop, much more than any desire on his part to seduce her again. His "feeble smile" is a "feint," not an archaic or ambiguous smile, but a trick or ruse to confuse her feelings further, making her think he has a continuing love interest in her. According to Bracha L. Ettiger, revising Jacques Lacan's concept, "The concept of the *fascinum* is the unconscious element in the image that stops and freezes life."[111]

At the end of the performance, which Mop concluded with the violin emitting "an elfin shriek of finality," the musician goes, not to the woman stranded in the centre of the cobweb, but to the child which he assumes is his own. Car'line is bereft and ashamed of her weakness and susceptibility to the music, embarrassed to have her daughter witness it, and profoundly fearful of how her husband will react—and rightly so, as Ned does see her in a new light and also notes the attentions of the fiddler on the four-year-old Carry, so that he takes away the child, and disappears from Car'line's life altogether, probably sailing to America. Instead of a gradual or soft transition from one stage of life to another, there is here a sudden gap, and the possibility of a vast ocean between the parties. Across this gap, nothing can be shared—or known. The Gordian Knot has been cut.

Insofar as she can grasp this web of conflicting wills and weaknesses, and draw any implications as to the delayed and deferred consequences to this powerful event, Car'line falls into "convulsions, weeping violently, and for a long time nothing could be done with her."[112] She has become what her father always feared she would be: a hysteric, like those afflicted women locked up in Charcot's hospital and, thanks to their suggestibility and will to please the great man, put on display in his afternoon public sessions to perform their erotic dances and acrobatic tricks. Ned, for his part, after an initial outburst of rage against the fiddler—whose skull he vows to smash in with a hammer—is restrained by the others in the dancehall, as well as by Car'line who, in her crushed state of abjection and embarrassment, nevertheless holds on to the illusion that Mop will never harm his own daughter, whatever else he does. The married couple lapse into a dull,

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[111] Bracha L. Ettinger, 'Fascinance and the Girl-to-m/Other Matrixial Feminine Difference', in *Psychoanalysis and the Image*, p. 60.
[112] Hardy, 'The Fiddler of the Reels,' p. 105.

passionless routine of domesticity, both of them lacking any spark of real interest in anything, the energy drained out of them by the dangerous few moments when they were caught in the web of something more powerful than anything they could ever understand.

**Conclusion**

Rather than tying up neatly into a well-made tale, Hardy's narratives sometime spin out of control or collapse in on themselves, producing a special kind of irony often hinted at throughout the text. Irony at one extreme is sarcasm, a cutting, hurtful figuring of a victim by speaking of them as an exaggerated distortion of who they really are; whereas at the other end of the scale, the discrepancy between what is spoken or depicted is only slightly awry and in this subtle comment there may be more humour than wit or more cynicism than tragedy. Hardy's ironic spirit, according to Richards, tends to "reside[…] in an exquisitely tenuous region between earnest and jest."[113] It is not so much that the person seen through the lens of irony is an outright fool, a gullible and naïve outsider to the occasion dominated by those who wish to take advantage of him or her—or that he or she misapprehends what those others imply or actually say or do because the *eiron* assumes that others perceive, feel and think what they do—but that the world lacks such easy representations and transparent motives. Richards adds that, "Society is no more responsible, actually, than man individually is" and "This...is ultimately the strongest impression Hardy held."[114] In a more subtle statement, deriving from art history and psychoanalysis, Young-Paik Chun tells us:

> The art or process of representation may surpass an artist's limited personality, emerging from pictorial structures in which unexpected outcomes can result, moving beyond the artist's original plan for the composition of form and color in painting.[115]

It is something like Matthew Arnold's *Dover Beach* (1867) where:

> …you hear the grating roar
> Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
> At their return, up the high strand,
> Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
> With tremulous cadence slow, and bring

[113] Richards, 'Thomas Hardy's Ironic Vision (Part Two)', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1949), p. 21.
[114] Richards, 'Thomas Hardy's Ironic Vision (Part Two)', p. 24.
[115] Young-Paik Chun, 'Melancholia and Cézanne's Portraits: Faces Beyond the Mirror', in *Psychoanalysis and the Image*, p. 100.

> The eternal note of sadness in.

Arnold's poem concludes with sadness giving way to an empty feeling of pure dread, epitomising modern life itself:

> And we are here as on a darkling plain
> Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
> Where ignorant armies clash by night.

When the country dance is over the participants separate, some to disappear into the night, never to be heard from again. Rather than some resurgent life force drawing people together again, cultures enriching themselves by the union of souls, we begin to experience what Hardy sets forth as the ironic conclusion, putting it in the anachronistic words of Hans Sedlmeyer: "when things are mere phenomena that have no meaning inherent in them, then they begin to be experienced as things without stability, things fleeting, wavering, bodiless and indetermined."[116]

[116] Chun, 'Melancholia and Cézanne's Portraits: Faces Beyond the Mirror', p. 123.