〔駒沢女子大学　研究紀要　第10号　p.121～207　2003〕

Nature As Character in Thomas Hardy's Wessex Novels

J.B. JONES

ABSTRACT

Some of the most powerful descriptive and poetic passages in Thomas Hardy's novels involve the world of nature. His use of closely observed detail when depicting nature and natural processes is perhaps unrivaled in English fiction. One of his great strengths as a novelist is the way he portrays the interaction of his characters with the natural world, which he often characterizes as sentient; in many instances he even gives the natural world human attributes. His characters can usually be seen in different relationships to the natural world: Nature may be seen as merely decorative; it can be seen as illustrative, ie. in harmony with the character(s) moods or situation, in essence, a projection of the inner state of the character; it is sometimes determinative of action, ie. the weather or natural features influence the moods and behavior of the character(s); it may be a controlling influence, causing characters to take action in some way; and finally, it can itself be a main character, as Egdon Heath is in *Return of the Native*.

This paper will analyze passages taken from the following novels: *Under the Greenwood Tree* (*1872*), *a Pair of Blue Eyes* (*1873*), *Far From the Madding Crowd* (*1874*), *The Return of the Native* (*1878*), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (*1886*), *The Woodlanders* (*1887*), and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (*1891*).

Nature in all its forms becomes a protagonist in his work. Hardy saw nature as a sentient force with a definite personality; by allowing his characters to interact with nature in his fictional countryside of Wessex (the counties of Berkshire, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Dorset, Somerset and Devon), Hardy is able to add to his fiction a great sense of drama and a profound vision of man in harmony with the natural world. It has been noted that "Hardy instinctively unites nature and man, making the external setting a kind of sharer in the human fate" (Howe; 23) and that he writes so that "the landscape takes its place as an actor in the drama of human life" (CH; 413). Perhaps no other writer, living or dead, had such an understanding of nature and at the same time possessed the writing skill and emotional depth to capture and convey this world in print.

Contents

1. Introduction

Most of Hardy's 'Wessex' novels provide a rich source of nature imagery — some more than others, but still each novel set in Wessex has strong naturalistic elements. However, *Jude the Obscure*, and *The Hand of Ethelberta* and *The Well-Beloved* do not really center on life in the countryside and are therefore excluded from treatment in this paper.

Hardy was born in Dorchester, in the southwestern county of Dorset in 1840 into a world that has now long since vanished and was vanishing even as he wrote — one that he tried to capture in his fiction and poetry for the rest of his long life. In his boyhood, he was often solitary and "would wander for hours through the countryside, learning to love — it might be more accurate to say, coming to be one with — birds and small animals" (Howe; 6). This close involvement with the natural world and a certain shyness in the boy seem to have produced unusually sensitive feelings for nature. But there were darker moments. Hardy as a young person also observed the suffering of both animals and men in the Dorset of that time; this seems to have ingrained in him a great deal of empathy for unfortunates — he eventually came to the conclusion that suffering is a democracy uniting all men and animals. But this is only one aspect of Hardy's perspective on Nature; more positively, he celebrated the beauties of the natural world and man's relationship to it. He had deep affinities with "the farmland, animals, rocks, hills and the people who live among them" (ibid.). This 'prolonged celebration' of the English countryside is one of the great attractions of his writing for many people.

The passage in Hardy that inspired this paper comes from *Far From the Madding Crowd*, and it is justly famous. It is a description of a summer thunderstorm:

> Heaven opened then indeed. The flash... sprang from east, west, north, south, and was a perfect dance of death. The forms of skeletons appeared in the air, shaped with blue fire for bones — dancing, leaping, striding, racing around, and mingling altogether in unparalleled confusion. With these were intertwined undulating snakes of green, and behind these was a broad mass of lesser light. Simultaneously came from every part of the tumbling sky what may be called a shout, since, though no shout ever came near it, it was more of the nature of a shout than anything else earthly. In the meantime one of the grisly forms had alighted on the point of Gabriel's rod, to run invisibly down it, down the chain, and into the earth. Gabriel was almost blinded, and he could feel Bathsheba's warm arm tremble in his hand — a sensation novel and thrilling enough: but love, life, everything human, seemed small and trifling in such close juxtaposition with an infuriated universe.
>
> (FMC; 260-61)

This passage from Chapter Thirty-seven (The storm: the two together) is only a segment of Hardy's description of this storm. It is instructive to note the additional expressions that characterize the storm — and give it human qualities: the lightning at one point is seen to be like 'mailed armies' (FMC; 258). A flash leaps out 'with the spring of a serpent and shout of a fiend' (FMC; 259). The verbs used in the quoted passage above all convey motion and even madness: skeletal lightning 'dancing, leaping, striding, racing around, and mingling together' (ibid.) — these are things that humans do and the reference to skeletons is certainly striking. The climax in the above passage comes when the lightning reaches Gabriel's improvised lightning-rod; notice that Hardy says the 'grisly form' of the lightning came down and 'alighted' upon his rod and then traveled down into the ground. Gabriel is almost blinded. Howe has pointed out that in this passage, the storm "seems to be driven by the same energies and torn by the same passions that drive and tear the characters. There is a relationship, extremely hard to fix in language, between the characters and the natural setting, a partial sharing in rhythm and motion, upsurge and rest" (Howe; 54).

This passage is emblematic of much of Hardy's writing about nature — and though it is more violent than most — it still conveys his concern with his characters not as passive victims of nature but as participants in a natural drama. Hardy was an expert observer and was able to render detailed portraits of the environment, and in so doing, he has the environment participate in the moods and feelings of his characters, sometimes reflecting their feelings and condition, sometimes taking on a 'life' of its own; at other times he has the natural environment influence a character's emotional state. Thus he was able to elevate certain scenes to higher levels of intensity and meaning; in the best novels, this heightened level of meaning reaches the intensity of epic tragedy. A critic from his own time, William Watson, puts it in terms of classical drama by commenting that one of his "especially poetic traits is his manner of sometimes using external Nature not simply as a background or setting, but as a sort of superior spectator and chorus, that makes strangely unconcerned comments from the vantage-ground of a sublime aloofness upon the ludicrous tragedy of the human lot" (CH; 201). There will be various examples of this 'presence' cited in this paper.

2. Under the Greenwood Tree

The subtitle for this early novel is "A Rural Painting of the Dutch School" and thereby immediately suggests nature-painting. Southerington, however, feels the subtitle "stands for... the basic unreality of the incidents" (HVM; 46), which is supported by the unusual visual presentation of certain characters: Dick Dewey, for example, appears first in profile against the sky like "the portrait of a gentleman in black cardboard" (UGT; 8). The Mellstock choir, in another example, is seen to advance "against the sky in flat outlines, like some procession in

Assyrian or Egyptian incised work" (ibid.). Another painterly, even impressionistic scene is offered in Book II, Chapter II:

> It was evening of a fine spring day. The descending sun appeared as a nebulous blaze of amber light, its outline being lost in cloudy masses hanging around it, like wild locks of hair. The chief members of the Mellstock parish choir were standing in a group in front of Mr. Penny's workshop in the lower village. They were all brightly illuminated, and each was backed up by a shadow as long as a steeple; the lowness of the source of light rendering the brims of their hats of no use at all as a protection to the eyes.
>
> (UGT; 53)

The novel is divided into four parts: winter, spring, summer and autumn; Hardy's other novels are not so divided — most having single chapter headings. In the first part we are introduced to the Mellstock Quire; Hardy wanted to so title the novel, rather than using the title it finally carried which is, of course, from *As You Like It*.

The first chapter, "Mellstock-lane" is one of the most powerful in the book; in fact, the first paragraph is notable in itself for the 'music' the trees make and the 'precise location of the story in the natural world' (Howe; 49):

> To dwellers in a wood, almost every species of tree has its voice as well as its feature. At the passing of the breeze, the fir-trees sob and moan no less distinctly than they rock; the holly whistles as it battles with itself; the ash hisses among its quiverings; the beech rustles while its flat boughs rise and fall. And winter, which modifies the note of such trees as shed their leaves, does not destroy its individuality. (UGT: 7)

Of course, the 'dwellers in the wood' here referred to are human, but they could just as well be otherwise; it is not too much of an imaginative stretch to see these dwellers as non-human in Hardy's democracy of life. Hardy's use of accurate detail to individualize the different species of tree is typical of his natural realism.

The time is Christmas eve and a lone figure is seen traveling along the dark lane through the trees; as he does so the trees 'whisper...thus distinctively to his intelligence' (ibid.). Like the trees, which have clear and distinct 'voices,' the man sings a rural song. As he looks upward into the branches of the trees, he notices "the silver and black-stemmed birches with their characteristic tufts, the pale gray boughs of oak, the dark-creviced elm, all appeared now as black and flat outlines upon the sky, wherein the white stars twinkled so vehemently that their flickering

seemed like the flapping of wings" (ibid.). The description of the branches, flat black silhouettes against the sky, through which the stars twinkle 'vehemently,' seems a technique from an impressionist painting, or a evocation of Van Gogh's 'Starry Night.' The effects in the passage quoted are clearly visual but the singing of the trees seems to be a reflection or parallel image for the choir; but there is a note of sadness and strife in the woodland that is reflective of the struggle for survival in nature, as the fir trees 'sob,' the holly 'battles with itself' and the ash quivers.

The lone figure, Dick Dewey, is soon joined by the other members of the choir and as they fall in along the road, Hardy introduces each. They are on their way to the Tranter's (a carrier) cottage. There they will assemble before making the Christmas rounds of parishioner's houses.

2. 1 The Quiet of a Winter Scene

> *And then, when the night has turned twelve the air brings from dim distance, a rhythm of voices and strings: 'Tis the quire, just afoot on their long yearly rounds, to rouse by worn carols each house in their bounds....*
>
> (*CP; 734*)

At about ten that night the choir and musicians make ready to begin their Christmas duty to the community of Mellstock. Assembling takes some time but

> Just before the clock struck twelve, they lighted the lanterns and started. The moon, in her third quarter, had risen since the snow-storm; but the dense accumulation of snow-cloud weakened her power to a faint twilight, which was rather pervasive of the landscape than traceable to the sky. The breeze had gone down, and the rustle of their feet, and tones of their speech, echoed with an alert rebound from every post, boundry-stone, and ancient wall they passed, even where the distance of the echo's origin was less than a few yards. Beyond their own slight noises nothing was to be heard, save the occasional howl of foxes in the direction Yalbury Wood, or the brush of a rabbit among the grass now and then, as it scampered out of their way.
>
> (UGT; 21)

The quiet of this scene is relieved only by small sounds (the rustle of feet, their quiet speech, (among the humans) and the far-off howl of foxes and the scampering of rabbits (among the animals).

2. 2 The Pathway of Time

After making part of their rounds on this cold winter night, the men enter the church bell-tower and range themselves on benches to have a meal before continuing. Here Hardy introduces one of his recurrent themes, the nature of time:

> In the pauses of conversation could be heard through the floor overhead a little world of undertones and creaks from the halting clockwork, which never spread further than the tower they were born in, and raised in the more meditative minds a fancy that here lay the direct pathway of Time.
>
> (UGT; 27)

Hardy is concerned in most of his novels with time, especially with human and natural history through time in the countryside of Wessex and the insight that any present generation is but a temporal incarnation of those gone before and those to come. The kitten now playing in the garden is the same kitten that played there 400 years ago and the same kitten that will play there in another 500 years. This perspective gives his writing a depth of meaning that adds weight to events. For example, he explores another perspective of time in *Domicilium*, his earliest poem, where he speaks of an oak "springing from a seed dropped by some bird a hundred years ago" (CP; 5). This perspective on vegetative time in particular, and time in general is unique to Hardy.

One figure in particular, old William, is selected by Hardy for a kind of immortality. In the following passage, he is 'painted' by Hardy so that he assumes giant proportions, thereby associating him with an old oak:

> ... a certain nobility of aspect was also imparted to him by the setting sun, which gave him a Titanic shadow at least thirty feet in length, stretching away to the east in outlines of imposing magnitude, his head finally terminating upon the trunk of a grand old oak tree.
>
> (UGT; 57)

Notice how the sun extends his shadow to thirty feet and causes it to merge with the trunk of the oak; old William shares in the glory of the setting sun; his shadow lengthens to match his years; he becomes one with the old oak; his shadow extends to the east — the point from which each day is reborn. This scene also echoes the portrait (quoted above) that shows the choir gathering in a group in front of Mr. Penny's workshop: both feature long and extended shadows created by the setting sunil; both are 'word-paintings.'

2. 3 Man in Nature — Nature in Man

Hardy's characters in this novel are generally in accord with nature and are seen as an integral part of the natural world. In describing the game-keeper's house, Hardy carefully sets the scene so that the house seems almost an outgrowth of the natural landscape:

> It was a satisfaction to walk into the keeper's house, even as a stranger, on a fine spring morning like the present. A curl of wood-smoke came from the chimney, and drooped over the roof like a blue feather in a lady's hat; and the sun shone obliquely upon the patch of grass in front, which reflected its brightness through the open doorway and up the staircase opposite, lighting up each riser with a shiny green radiance, and leaving the top of each step in shade.
>
> (UGT; 73)

This excerpt is notable for the way Hardy uses a simile comparing the chimney smoke to a feather from a lady's hat: a conflation of nature and fashion into a figure which is present in other novels. Hardy apparently equated the strength of certain female characters (in this case the keeper's daughter), with the forces of nature and at the same time combined this with a view suggesting women's changefulness and enslavement to fashion. For example, in a later scene we find Fancy talking to Dick about fashions. Here Fancy is seen "...looking at a group of hollyhocks in flower, round which a crowd of butterflies had gathered like females round a bonnet-shop" (UGT; 108).

The above passage is also remarkable for the way Hardy uses the sunlight to bring the reader into the house: consider how each riser on the steps has 'a shiny green radiance' which suggests that the green world outside has been invited into the game-keeper's house.

Fancy, as she goes about her chores in her father's house, sings little snatches of tunes that spring to mind 'like mushrooms' (UGT; 74). Her father himself seems an emanation of nature: "the surface of his face was fissured rather than wrinkled" (ibid.) rather like the bark of a tree or even chinks in a rock — it is significant that Hardy should choose the word 'surface' to refer to his skin — which is unusual, as only inanimate objects usually have a surface. Fancy's father has other distinctive physical features that remind one of objects in nature: "over and under his eyes were folds which seemed as a kind of exterior eyelids" (ibid.). This reference to 'exterior eyelids' suggests features one might find in the world of reptiles or other similar creatures; he has suffered an injury to his nose that allows others "when the sun was low and shining in his face...(to) see far into his head" (UGT; 75). This implies that he is like some great tree that has been damaged by storms or lightning, so that its interior is open to view.

In another scene, Fancy Day and her friend Susan Dewy are shown picking apples on a

morning in late summer. Hardy's description of the scene is elegant:

> It was a morning of the latter summer-time; a morning of lingering dews, when the grass is never dry in the shade. Fuchsias and dahlias were laden until eleven o'clock with small drops and dashes of water, changing the color of their sparkle at every movement of the air, or hanging on twigs like small silver fruit. The threads of garden spiders appeared thick and polished. In the dry and sunny places, dozens of long-legged crane-flies whizzed off the grass at every step the passer took.
>
> (UGT; 102)

The quote above is exceptional for the way he creates movement in the scene. The drops of water on the flowers are seen to change color with the movement of the wind — the way they 'change the color of their sparkle at every movement of the air' is truthful to nature and carefully observed. He also brings in spiders and crane-flies to enhance the sense of movement and life. Also of note is his precise use of natural objects or things to give the scene a sense of time and to orient the characters. the dew lingers on the flowers until eleven o'clock. A few pages earlier, trees are used as natural markers to orient two characters in time: "There was a silence between them till they passed about twenty of the equidistant elm-trees that ornamented the road leading up out of the town. 'Though I didn't come for that purpose either, I would have,' said Dick *at the twenty-first tree*" (UGT; 94; emphasis mine). Thus does Hardy heighten the realism of his fiction; and since nature is a major character in his work, the use of naturalistic details like those cited increases even further the authenticity of his landscape.

Hardy often punctuates conversations between characters, especially if they are having a difficult time, with rather less happy natural details. For instance, when Dick is trying to ask her father for Fancy's hand in marriage, Hardy shows Dick "...looking out at the pale mist creeping up from the gloom of the valley" (UGT; 122) and when there is a silence between them, "...the stillness was disturbed only by some small bird that was being killed by an owl in the adjoining copse, whose cry passed into the silence without mingling with it" (ibid.). Note how the bird's death-cry becomes silence, as if this shout of pain is something outside reality. In *Under the Greenwood Tree* nature is in general benevolent, but in some of the other novels the tone is consistently much darker.

In Chapter III of Part IV (Autumn) Hardy has Fancy Day caught in a storm — one of the many storm sequences he uses in his novels to show the blind force of nature and man's lone individuality within it:

> A single vast gray cloud covered all the country, from which the small rain

and mist had just begun to blow down in wavy sheets, alternately thick and thin. The trees of the old brown plantation writhed like miserable men as the air wended its way swiftly among them: the lowest portions of their trunks, that had hardly ever been known to move, were visibly rocked by the fiercer gusts, distressing the mind by its painful unwontedness, as when a strong man is seen to shed tears. Low-hanging boughs went up and down; high and erect boughs went to and fro; the blasts being so irregular, and divided into so many cross-currents, that neighboring branches of the same tree swept the skies with independent motions, crossed each other, passed, or became entangled. Across the open spaces flew flocks of green and yellowish leaves, which, after travelling a long distance from their parent trees, reached the ground, and lay there with their under-sides upward.

(UGT; 124)

This storm is used to drive Fancy to search for shelter, the nearest being the cottage of Elizabeth Endorfield (named for the witch of Endor in the Bible). Regarding the storm itself, the writhing of the trees, as they seem to battle against each other in the wind, suggests the struggle for life in nature; the violence of the storm causes even the lowest portions of the trunks to move — something that Hardy compares in emotional intensity to seeing a strong man cry; an interesting comparison, and unique here in the sense that the wind's physical force is compared to the emotional force of a heart-rending event. The direction of movement of the boughs is also dramatic in that some move upward, while others move side-to-side so that they become entangled, as if each individual tree is at war with itself. Finally, the leaves that have been torn from the trees are seen to fly across the open spaces in 'flocks', suggesting birds rather than leaves; they are seen to rest on the ground finally with their undersides turned upward, suggesting a violent end. Dramatic chapter-openings like this are a favorite device with Hardy; the fact that the storm sends Fancy to the house of a 'witch' is also important.

Elizabeth is one of a series of 'witches' in Hardy's novels. While some critics suggest that Hardy uses such characters to indicate that superstition still has a strong grip on his country folk, it is also possible that, rather than simply focusing on their superstitions, he is interested in showing, as a part of his realism, the inherited wisdom that has been traditional in many rural areas of England since early times — perhaps going back to the Druids. Hardy first offers stereotypes held by the women of the area about Elizabeth: she "was shrewd and penetrating; her house stood in a lonely place; she never went to church; she always retained her bonnet indoors; and she had a pointed chin" (UGT; 125). Then he notes that to those who looked no further than these traditional views of witches she probably appeared as 'Satanic'; but he then comments that to those who really knew her, she was just a 'Deep Body', and by this he means

'wise.'

As Elizabeth and Fancy talk, it crosses Fancy's mind that Elizabeth can divine what she is thinking. Elizabeth sees Fancy is startled by her perceptiveness and then says, "Little birds tell me things that people don't dream of my knowing" (UGT; 126). Elizabeth then gives Fancy some common-sense advice on how to convince her father for permission to marry — no witchery here — just an intelligent old woman giving advice to a younger one. Still, at the conclusion of this interview, Hardy notes that Fancy 'bade the witch good-bye' (ibid.), so it seems the term 'witch' is used here with gentle irony to mean an older woman wise in the ways of man and nature.

2. 4 The Last Day

Since this is a generally happy tale, it also has a happy ending, something which becomes progressively rarer in Hardy's novels. Hardy therefore begins this last short section of the tale with, again, a positive description of a natural scene:

> The last day of the story is dated just subsequent to that point in the development of the seasons when country people go to bed among nearly naked trees, and awake next morning among green ones; when the landscape appears embarrassed by the sudden weight and brilliancy of its leaves; when the night-jar comes and commences for the summer his tune of one note; when the apple-trees have bloomed, and the roads and orchards become spotted with fallen petals; when the faces of the delicate flowers are darkened, and their heads weighed down by the throng of honey-bees, which increase their humming till humming is too mild a term for the all-pervading sound; and when cuckoos, blackbirds, and sparrows, that have hitherto been merry and respectful neighbors, become noisy and persistent intimates.
>
> (UGT; 145)

While the night-jar is considered a bird of ill omen, the imagery of this opening paragraph involves the opening of new life — as is appropriate for the pending marriage of Fancy and Dick. Observe how Hardy's description begins with trees: the green leaves, the petals of the blooming apple trees, the flowers and the bees and their humming, which is almost too loud, and finally the auditory image of birds moving from the sedateness of the colder months to the boisterousness of the warmer.

The final nature-image of the book concerns an ancient beech-tree, which borders Fancy's father's property. Some critics have seen the tree as the prime pastoral symbol of the novel, representing the mutual cooperation in nature, which is reflected by the harmony amongst the

rustic characters of the novel (HC; xxii). In addition, this final image of the one ancient tree and the harmony it suggests contrasts with the opening image of the novel, where a variety of trees are described — all in contention and strife with each other as the wind passes through them.

Hardy recalls the countless generations of animals and birds that have been born in and under its branches. The tree is

> ...horizontally of enormous extent, though having no great pretensions to height. Many hundreds of birds had been born amidst the boughs of this single tree; tribes of rabbits and hares had nibbled at its bark from year to year; quaint tufts of fungi had sprung from the cavities of its forks; and countless families of moles and earthworms had crept among its roots. Beneath its shade spread a carefully-tended grass-plot, its purpose being to supply a healthy exercise-ground for young chicken and pheasants; the hens, their mothers, being enclosed in coops placed upon the same green flooring.
>
> (UGT; 155)

Now rather than a run for chickens, the area under the tree is the preserve of the wedding guests, where music, dancing and singing go on into the evening. Because music is so important to Hardy, the last few pages are spent in a discussion of this; however, the last lines of the novel are given over to Fancy and Dick as they leave in the moonlight on the first night of their marriage — Fancy says,

> 'Hark! What's that?'
> From a neighboring thicket was suddenly heard to issue a loud, musical, and liquid voice,
> 'Tippiwit! Swe-e-et! ki-ki-ki! Come hither, come hither, come hither!'
> 'O, 'tis the nightingale,' murmured she, and thought of a secret she should never tell.
>
> (UGT; 159)

In Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, in Amien's Song, we find:

> Under the greenwood tree
> Who loves to lie with me,
> And turn his merry note
> Unto the sweet bird's throat,

Come hither, come hither, come hither.
Here shall see no enemy
But winter and rough weather.

Fancy and Dick's life is off to an idyllic start — the only note of discord is Fancy's secret, suggesting it is only the human world which contains duplicity.

3. A Pair of Blue Eyes

This novel begins with a careful description of the heroine, Elfride Swancourt, whose eyes were "the sublimation of all of her; it was not necessary to look further; there she lived. These eyes were blue; heavenly blue....blue as autumn distance — blue as the blue we see between the retreating mouldings of hills and woody slopes on a sunny September morning. A misty and shady blue, that had no beginning or surface, and was looked *into* rather than *at*. Of the two, indeed, perhaps this earthly blue is the more beautiful" (PBE; 8). These eyes suggest distance: eyes that should be 'looked into rather than at.' Using nature imagery to describe her eyes seems an obvious device, but with Hardy the quality and delicacy of the description is what counts, and describing her eyes as being like the blue we see between the shapes of hills and wooded slopes on a September morning —'a misty and shady blue'— indicates how sensitive and discriminating he is in his choice of images.

This novel is set on the Cornish coast and seems dominated by scenes like the following:

> ...the weather and the scene outside seemed to have stereotyped themselves in unrelieved shades of gray. The long-armed trees and shrubs of juniper, cedar, and pine varieties were grayish-black; those of the broad-leaved sort, together with the herbage, were grayish-green; the eternal hills and tower behind them were grayish-brown; the sky dropping behind all, gray of the purest melancholy.
>
> (PBE; 34)

These fine distinctions in coloring are very painterly, and Hardy notes that "in spite of this somber artistic effect, the morning was not one which tended to lower the spirits" (ibid.) because at least there was no rain. We are told that when staying in an English country house, the inmates are sometimes subject to 'mental conclusions affecting our humours at such times... ' which 'are really but extreme corollaries of one of those atmospheric conditions' (ibid.); in other words, the weather colors mood, which in turn influences thought. In another passage, Elfride is directly affected emotionally by the weather — her mood goes from cheerfulness to complete sadness in a matter of seconds:

> One of the brightest mornings of late summer shone upon her. The heather was at its purplest, the furze at its yellowest, the grasshoppers chirped loud enough for birds, the snakes hissed like little engines, and Elfride at first felt lively. Sitting at ease upon Pansy, in her orthodox riding-habit and non-descript hat, she looked what she felt. But the mercury of those days had a trick of falling unexpectedly. First, only for one minute in ten had she a sense of depression. Then a large cloud, that had been hanging in the north like a black fleece, came and placed itself between her and the sun. It helped on what was already inevitable, and she sank into a uniformity of sadness.
>
> (PBE; 110)

Notice the way Hardy has pictured the black cloud, he sees it as having 'placed itself' between Elfride and the sun, as if the cloud were a sentient being that has decided to spoil her day. This seems a clear use of one of nature's manifestations acting as a human character would. Not only is Hardy employing nature to affect a character in his story but he is being psychologically true-to-life: most of us feel subject to the weather as it influences our moods. He has already mentioned, in the English country house passage noted above, that when our spirits are at a low ebb we often can be pushed into depression by the advent of rain. Elfride's mood here is impelled toward sadness by a cloud.

Elfride, astride her horse, suffers a more significant mood change, one that dictates her next action, or lack of action. She feels indecision about whether to continue on her course to meet Stephen or to turn back and return home. She thinks that if 'she had a mamma' at home, she would turn back. She actually turns the horse around and starts to head home but she thinks of Stephen and turns about again. Hardy notes that this indecisiveness, this 'miserable strife of thought now began to rage in all its wildness' (ibid.) and so in Elfride's refusal to decide for herself she "dropped the rein on Pansy's shoulders, and vowed she would be led whither the horse would take her" (ibid.). She appears to be leaving the decision to fate and chance, but this is too simple an interpretation; Hardy seems rather to be saying that only when we intentionally abandon volition and conscious choice do we then open ourselves to the vagaries of chance or a capricious and unfeeling universe. The horse wanders over to a pool for a drink of water and Elfride looks down into the water:

> ...the repose of the pool, the idle motions of the insects and flies upon it, the placid waving of the flags, the leaf-skeletons, like Genoese filigree, placidly sleeping at the bottom, by their contrast with her own turmoil made her impatience greater.
>
> (PBE; 111)

F.R. Southerington offers an apt interpretation of this passage by saying that the insects upon the pool "are noted for their 'idle motions,' the vegetation waves placidly in the wind — and Elfride, by resigning her powers of choice is equally idle and equally at the mercy of the winds of chance and circumstance and of cause and effect. Elfride does no more than align herself with the lower orders of life, and the leaf-skeletons at the bottom of the pool may be intended to suggest the tragic result of just such a refusal to decide" (HVM; 51). However, Hardy uses the word 'placid' twice here for the vegetation and contrasts this with her 'turmoil,' so it appears that he wishes to simply contrast her emotions with the stillness of nature.

3. 1 Nature in the City

Since most of Hardy's Wessex novels are set in the country, city scenes are somewhat rare; however, a certain number of chapters in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* show Elfride, Stephen and Henry Knight in London. Bede's Inn, where Knight has rooms, is the location of most of these scenes. The Inn itself is interesting in that at the front is a 'bustling thoroughfare' and at the back are a network of crowded alleys frequented by the rather impoverished inhabitants of the area. Hardy says little about the front of the Inn but notes the back alleys are a place where one can see 'a great deal of shirtless humanity's habits and enjoyments' (PBE; 127) — those staying at the Inn may also hear "a harsh voice, an unequal footstep, the echo of a blow or fall, which originates in the person of a drunkard or wife-beater...." (ibid.). This view of the poorer classes in the city is not too positive and contrasts with Hardy's sentimental and humane view of the working-people in the country.

Stephen comes to the inn to see Knight one 'fine October evening' and notices a sycamore tree outside the inn. Hardy as narrator says, "We notice the thick coat of soot upon the branches, hanging underneath them in flakes, as in a chimney. The blackness of these boughs does not at present improve the tree — nearly forsaken by its leaves as it is — but in the spring their green fresh beauty is doubly beautiful by the contrast. Within the railing is a flower-garden of respectable dahlias and chrysanthemums, where a man is sweeping the leaves from the grass" (ibid.). In Hardy's poem 'To a Tree in London' (CP; 869), the subject tree of the poem is seen as 'black and blind' because of the city soot. It may be hard to imagine today soot hanging in flakes from the branches of a tree, but in a coal-fired age like the 19th century, the black stuff must have been everywhere in London.

Once inside Knight's chambers, Stephen notes his many books and other furniture; and he also sees a corner window that allows 'one stream only of evening sunlight ' (PBE; 129) to enter the room; he notices an aquarium that stands in the window. Hardy describes it thus:

> It was a dull parallelepipedon enough for living creatures at most hours of the day; but for a few minutes in the evening, as now, an errant, kindly ray lighted

up and warmed the little world therein, when the many-colored zoophytes opened and put forth their arms, the weeds acquired a rich transparency, the shells gleamed of a more golden yellow, and the timid community expressed gladness more plainly than in words.

(ibid.)

The 'errant, kindly ray' of sunshine that enlivens this little 'natural' world within the room in the city seems almost a life-giving force; the inhabitants of the aquarium 'express their gladness more plainly than in words' through their movements and heightened activity. There is a certain pathos in this passage — a feeling that runs through all Hardy's work, in fact; it is a compassion and understanding for all life and all living things, no matter how 'small' or seemingly insignificant; it is a projection of imagination that goes beyond anthropomorphism because it is an understanding that does not see creatures in the natural world as things to be protected or used by man but as things that have a rightful place in the world, as rightful a place as any human one and even challenges any claims humans can make for dominion over them. Hardy sees this aquatic world as he does the larger world outside — it is the outside world writ small. Hardy may even be suggesting that London is like the imprisoned world the zoophytes live in but buildings replace the glass walls of the aquarium. A few pages later he shows us the aquarium again, this time more towards evening when "the streak of sunlight had crept upward, edged away, and vanished; the zoophytes slept; a dusky gloom pervaded the room" (PBE; 133).

The two men notice another light that 'shone over the window' and this is a gaslight from the street below; they gently open the sash to observe the human scene beneath where 'gaslights glared from butcher's stalls, illuminating the lumps of flesh to splotches of orange and vermillion, like the wild colouring of Turner's later pictures, whilst the purl and babble of tongues of every pitch and mood was to this human wildwood what the ripple of a brook is to the natural forest" (ibid.). So Hardy gracefully takes us from the little world of the aquarium in the window to the little world outside and beneath the window. It is difficult to avoid thinking that Hardy somehow sees all worlds, whether they be inside a glass box, in a London street or in the wildwood as basically alike. His sympathy for all created life allows, almost dictates, this view.

3. 2 The Natural and the Artificial

Many of Hardy's characters live so close to nature that they are able to literally tell time without the use of clocks. In each of his novels, characters like Giles Winterborne are able to estimate the time by looking carefully around and paying attention to the signs of nature. In *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, for example, Mr. Swancourt comments:

'I have known labouring men at Endelstow and other farms who had framed complete systems of observation for that purpose. By means of shadows, winds, clouds, the movements of sheep and oxen, the singing of birds, the crowing of cocks, and a hundred other sights and sounds which people with watches in their pockets never know the existence of, they are able to pronounce within ten minutes of the hour almost at any required instant'.

(PBE; 140)

Mr. Swancourt goes on to tell a story about a man who could tell the weather so accurately from natural signs that most people believed he kept a barometer at home — when in reality he foretold the weather from the braying of his ass and the temper of his wife. Of course, Hardy is being humorous here and this anecdote about the man and his wife and donkey leads into an important and even more interesting observation by Mrs. Swancourt:

'And in just the same way that those learnt the signs of nature, I have learnt the language of her illegitimate sister — artificiality; and the fibbing of eyes, the contempt of nose tips, the indignation of black hair, the laughter of clothes, the cynicism of footsteps, and the various emotions lying in walking -stick twirls, hat-liftings, the elevation of parasols, the carriage of umbrellas, become as ABC to me.'

(ibid.)

Artificiality Hardy equates with society in the town or city, so there is a certain predictability to Mrs. Swancourt's remark; however, the terms chosen by Hardy to illustrate the idea of falseness in society are fascinating and show a level of creative language use that is startling: the 'fibbing of eyes' may be rather predictable but the 'laughter of clothes', the 'indignation of black hair' and the 'contempt of nose tips' certainly are not. Nicely stated too is Hardy's parallelism in asserting that both the natural world and the 'artificial' world of city society can be read by the careful observer.

The exploration of the idea of naturalness and artificiality continues as Mrs. Swancourt responds to Elfride's notice of the pretty artificial flowers the women in carriages wear in their bonnets. Referring to the flowers, Mrs. Swancourt observes that "some of them are even more striking in color than any real ones. Look at that beautiful rose worn by the lady inside the rails. Elegant vine-tendrils introduced upon the stem as an improvement upon prickles, and all growing so naturally just over her ear — I say *growing* advisedly, for the pink of the petals and the pink of her handsome cheeks are equally from Nature's hand to the eyes of the most casual observer" (PBE; 141). Notice 'to the eyes of the most casual observer' not the eyes of a careful

observer, such as Hardy's country sages; to the casual observer the pink of the woman's cheeks and the pink of the false petals seem equally from 'Nature's hand' while in reality both pinks are artificial, at least if the woman under such observation uses rouge. Also of interest is how the lady under discussion has 'improved' upon nature by replacing the thorns of the rose with vines that do not wound but rather 'grow' over her ear.

3. 3 Life and Death

One of the finest sections in the novel, both in richness of description and in drama, are Chapters VIII and IX of Volume II. This is the famous part where Knight and Elfride face death on the Cliff without a Name.

Elfride follows a stream from her house to the coast when she encounters Knight. They in turn follow the stream to the cliffs where the stream 'finds its death.' The first hint that Hardy will be dealing with both the macrocosm and microcosm in nature is to be found in this passage: the stream as it goes over the precipice rains upon the projecting ledges and creates 'minute grassy meadows' on the ledges.

As they turn away from the sea, Elfride notices a pile of rock on the right described as "a vast stratification of blackish-gray slate, unvaried in its whole height by a single change of shade"; Hardy comments that "it is with cliffs and mountains as with persons; they have what is called a presence, which is not proportionate to their actual bulk. A little cliff will impress you powerfully: a great one not all. It depends, as with man, upon the countenance of the cliff" (PBE; 205-206). Elfride cannot bear to look at it because, she says, it "has a horrid personality and makes me shudder" (ibid.). Knight suggests that they follow a path over 'the grim old fellow's brow.' They reach the top and sit down to rest. Knight begins to explain to Elfride how the wind strikes the face of the cliff and pushes upward — a 'Niagara' of air that flows up and over their heads. He leans over and loses his hat in the wind, goes to retrieve it and finds he has difficulty in getting back. There has been a brief shower which has made the shaly surface slick — Knight is now crawling on his hands and knees. He is unable to get back to her. She moves to help him and they both slip lower. They are facing a 650-foot drop to the beach. He instructs her to climb over him and stand on his shoulders to reach safety — which she does — but in doing so Knight loses his foothold and is now hanging on by each hand to some sea pink. He is literally hanging on for his life and feels 'the presence of personalized loneliness' (PBE; 212), which can be understood as the presence of death.

Hardy continues in the next chapter with a comment on how of all 'haggard cliffs' this was 'the ugliest of them all' (ibid.). As he holds on with 'a dogged determination to make the most of every jot of endurance' (ibid.) he slips into a new state of awareness:

> He reclined hand in hand with the world in its infancy. Not a blade, not an

> insect, which spoke of the present, was between him and the past. The inveterate antagonism of these black precipices to all strugglers for life is in no way more forcibly suggested than by the absence of the minutest tufts of grass, lichens, or confervae from their outermost edges.
>
> (PBE; 213)

He feels that this is 'nature's treacherous attempt to put an end to him' (ibid.). He gains an insight into the nature of reality through "one of those familial conjunctions in which the inanimate world baits the mind of man when he pauses in moments of suspense, opposite Knight's eyes was an imbedded fossil, standing forth in low relief from the rock. It was a creature with eyes. The eyes, dead and turned to stone were even now regarding him. It was one of the early crustaceans called Trilobites. Separated by millions of years in their lives, Knight and this underling seemed to have met in their death. It was the single instance in reach of his vision of anything that had ever been alive and had had a body to save, as he himself had now. The creature represented but a low type of animal existence.... The immense lapses of time each formation represented had known nothing of the dignity of man. They were grand times, but they were mean times too, and mean were their relics. He was to be with the small in his death" (PBE; 213-214). This is an amazing perception of the true nature of death; death comes not as a grand event but as an inconsequential anecdote or incidental event.

The irony of this passage is that Knight is a geologist. Rather than his own life passing before his eyes, he sees countless eons of evolution from his small dead companion to himself at this moment, pinned in time against a cliff face. Hardy plays further with time by saying, "Time closed up like a fan before him. He saw himself at one extremity of the years, face to face with the beginning and all the intermediate centuries simultaneously" (ibid.). He sees primitive men and animals long gone from the earth in 'juxtaposition.' His mind races back to the dinosaurs and still backwards till 'the life-time scenes of the fossil confronting him were a present and modern condition of things' (ibid.). All this passes before 'Knight's inner eye in less than half a minute' (ibid.).

Hardy leaves Knight hanging, so to speak, while he digresses to musing on one of the central themes of this paper: his view of nature as a personalized sentient force in the life of man, and this view of nature as a character includes the capricious moods she sometimes displays:

> Nature seems to have moods in other than a poetical sense: moods literally and really — predilections for certain deeds at certain times, without any apparent law to govern or season to account for them. They read her as a person of a curious temper. Thus: she does not scatter kindnesses and cruelties alternately, impartially, or in order — shining on them one day, raining

> on them the next — but heart-less severities or overwhelming kindnesses in lawless caprice. Their case is always that of the prodigal's favorite or the miser's pensioner. In her unfriendly moments there seems a cruel fun in her tricks — a feline playfulness begotten by an anticipated pleasure in swallowing the victim.
>
> (PBE; 215)

As Knight hangs on for dear life, Hardy illustrates this idea by saying that "the rain increased and persecuted him with exceptional persistency" (PBE; 215). Knight feels the rain personally torturing him because 'he was in such a wretched state already' (ibid.). It is as if Nature senses his misery and therefore becomes even crueler, like a chess player moving in for checkmate or a boxer finishing off an opponent. It rained 'upwards instead of down' and it hits him with such force that the drops "stuck into his flesh like cold needles. Each drop was virtually a shaft, and it pierced him to the skin. These water-shafts seemed to lift him on their points; no downward rain ever had such a torturing effect" (ibid.). As if the rain is not malevolent enough, there is also the wind.

The wind 'tugged' at his coat and 'lifted' it: actions usually thought of as strictly human. Here Hardy comments: "we are mostly accustomed to look upon all opposition which is not animate, as that of the stolid, inexorable hand of indifference, which wears out the patience more than the strength. Here, at any rate, hostility did not assume that slow sickening form. It was a cosmic agency, active, lashing, eager for conquest: determination; not an insensate standing in the way" (ibid.). So Nature here is seen as actively and malignantly hostile to man.

Next Hardy uses a pronoun to designate the forces at work against Knight's survival. In personalizing these forces, Hardy says, "It was, as usual, the menacing attitude in which *they* approached him that magnified *their* powers" (PBE; 216 *emphasis* mine). Hardy then comments that "Pitiless Nature had then two voices, and only two. The nearer was the voice of the wind in his ears, rising and falling as it mauled and thrust him hard or softly. The second and distant one was the moan of that fathomless ocean below and afar — rubbing its restless flank against the Cliff without a Name" (ibid.). The pitilessness of Nature is further emphasized by a sun which seems to mock his plight; it shines forth briefly, not with its usual countenance but rather like 'a splotch of vermilion red' which appears as 'a red face looking on with a drunken leer' (PBE; 217). Knight has by this time almost given up and Hardy reminds us that it is often when we have done so that we are saved. Elfride has returned and saves him by an unusual tactic: she has torn up her clothes to make a rope, which she throws to him. He grabs the rope and pulls himself to safety.

The drama on the Cliff without a Name clearly demonstrates Hardy's notion of Nature as a personalized force in the lives of men. Specifically, in this instance, a cosmic agency hostile

to man. Some critics see the Cliffs as a symbol for Circumstance; they see Knight's struggle as the condition of man — only his intelligence can save him — for intelligence can overcome hostile circumstance in Hardy's view (HVM; 57-58). This is true on one level. Knight's experience on the Cliffs, and the way his consciousness alters as he faces death, and Hardy's comments on his situation, reprise a view of Nature often repeated in Hardy's Wessex novels: she can be benign or hostile depending on the dramatic circumstances; Nature can possess a form of consciousness or no awareness at all; when certain of these aspects come together 'in lawless caprice' then man is often the hapless victim — only his intelligence can save him, and woe to the unfortunate Hardy character who ignores Nature or chooses not to think of circumstance.

3. 4 Small Worlds

One of the most interesting observations Hardy makes in this novel involves a natural scene emphasizing the delicacy of sound. Hardy wants to underscore the stillness of the night in this passage. Stephen is waiting to meet Elfride at a church. As he waits, he perceives that:

> The faint sounds heard only accented the silence. The rising and falling of the sea, far away along the coast, was the most important. A minor sound was the scurr of a distant night-hawk. Among the minutest where all were minute were the light settlement of gossamer fragments floating in the air, a toad humbly labouring along through the grass near the entrance, the crackle of a dead leaf which a worm was endeavouring to pull into the earth, a waft of air, getting nearer and nearer, and expiring at his feet under the burden of a winged seed.
>
> (PBE; 235)

The waft of air that carries the winged seed to him unfortunately does not bring Elfride with it, but these minute sounds are quite imaginatively presented. It is unclear whether Stephen hears these sounds or if they are observations made by the narrator; whichever is the case, it would take hearing of a preternatural acuity to detect 'the crackle of a dead leaf' being pulled into the earth by a worm. This small world so closely observed shows one end of the range of Hardy's observation and thought about the natural world.

Almost as finely and minutely observed is the following, which centers on the sense of sight. Stephen secretly observes Knight and Elfride meeting clandestinely in a summer house. His attention is drawn by the scratch of a 'striking light,' which light "was the mother of a thousand new existences. It gave birth to dancing leaf-shadows, stem-shadows, lustrous streaks, dots, sparkles, and threads of silver sheen of all imaginable variety and transcience. It awakened

gnats, which flew towards it, revealed shiny gossamer threads, disturbed earthworms" (PBE; 241). This is a very intense moment in the story because Stephen is the rival of Knight for Elfride's affections, yet at this critical moment, Hardy pauses to observe the matchlit scene described above. By doing so he throws the whole picture into relief and gives it more power through revealing the tiny worlds existing alongside the emotional tableau of the two lovers. Of course, Stephen pays 'little attention' to these small phenomena, but the reader is aware that the three lives so portrayed are not all. The light reveals 'other existences' alongside those of the human characters.

Finally, in a minor scene, where Elfride discovers a lost earring, it is the sun that seems to 'find' it for her. She has lost it in a crevice of rock upon which for "a few minutes during the day did the sun light the alcove to its innermost rifts and slits, but these were the minutes now, and its level rays did Elfride the good or evil turn of revealing the lost ornament" (PBE; 309).

While A *Pair of Blue Eyes* does not offer a wealth of nature description, there are certain passages, like the one on the Cliffs without a Name, that are rich in imagery and meaning; scenes where Hardy uses nature as a protagonist in the action of the novel.

4. Far From the Madding Crowd

This novel was published a year after *A Pair of Blue Eyes* but is far away from it in scope and in quality. It has been seen by many as Hardy's first great novel. Hardy's hero in this novel is Gabriel Oak, a shepherd, and as his last name suggests, he understands the ways of the natural world, is stolid and the center-weight of the novel.

Irving Howe feels the novel was the first to "bring into play Hardy's greatest gift as a writer of fiction — his gift for those compressed incidents or miniature dramas, sometimes spoken and sometimes mere dumb show, which in a page or two illuminate whole stretches of experience," what Hardy himself has called 'moments of vision' (TH; 52). Many of these moments of vision center on natural events, and one of the most thrilling is a thunderstorm which threatens Bathsheba's crop, which Gabriel saves.

The novel opens with a smile. The owner of the smile is Gabriel Oak; it is a smile so broad that the corners of his mouth are 'within an unimportant distance from his ears'; his eyes are reduced to 'chinks' and the wrinkles around them characterized as being like 'the rays in a rudimentary sketch of the rising sun' (MC; 7). After describing his physical appearance, Hardy notes his watch, which is more the size of a clock. It will be remembered that Hardy's rural heroes really don't need clocks or watches, for they are able to tell time by the natural world. Oak's watch does not keep time very well: it either goes too fast or not at all; it tells minutes but not hours. However, he really doesn't need it, (it is a sentimental token from his grandfather), because he knows the time by "constant comparisons with and observations of the sun

and stars" (MC; 8) — and by looking in neighbor's windows.

4.1 Nature's Voice

In almost every Hardy novel there are not a few passages that convey the sounds of the natural world in a way which is both acutely observed and totally convincing. In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, such a passage is to be found in a description of a beech wood:

> To-night, these trees sheltered the southern slope from the keenest blasts, which smote the wood and floundered through it with a sound as of grumbling, or gushed over its crowning boughs in a weakened moan. The dry leaves in the ditch simmered and boiled in the same breezes, a tongue of air occasionally ferreting out a few, and sending them spinning across the grass. A group or two of the latest in date amongst the dead multitude had remained till this very mid-winter time on the twigs which bore them, and in falling rattled against the trunks with smart taps
>
> (FMC; 13)

and this:

> The thin grasses, more or less coating the hill, were touched by the wind in breezes of differing powers, and almost of differing natures — one rubbing the blades heavily, another raking them piercingly, another brushing them like a soft broom.
>
> (FMC; 14)

Hardy's choice of adjectives to describe the sounds made by the trees, bushes and grasses is instructive: the wind 'smote' the trees and 'foundered' through with a sound of *grumbling*; it gushes over the tree tops in a *weakened moan*; the dry leaves are seen to simmer and boil, as if they were being 'cooked' by the wind; as the dead leaves fall they *rattle* against the trunks with *smart taps*, as if seeking entrance. The grasses blown by the wind are even more finely described because small in size: breezes of 'differing powers, and almost of differing natures' *rub* the blades heavily; they *rake* them piercingly, others brush them like a soft broom. Hardy goes on to say that the trees 'wailed and chanted' like a choir; hedges 'caught the note' and lowered it to 'the tenderest sob' before 'plunging' away to the south.

From terrestrial nature Hardy moves to the upper air in the next paragraph, where he talks about how clear the sky looks, so clear that, "the twinkling of all the stars seemed to be but throbs of one body, timed by a common pulse" (ibid.). And this is not all, the stars have clearly

recognizable colors: Sirius with 'a steely glitter'; Capella 'was yellow' and Aldebaran and Betelgueux are a 'fiery red.' Hardy comments on the 'stately progress of the stars' (ibid.) and how one gets the impression, when standing on a dark winter hilltop, of "your stately progress through the stars. After such a nocturnal reconnoitre it is hard to get back to earth, to believe that the consciousness of such majestic speeding is derived from a tiny human frame" (ibid.). The twinkling of all the stars together, as if they have a universal pulse, fairly well represents Hardy's view of nature as an organic whole. Man is a small but important part of the globe as it speeds past and through the void of stars.

It has already been noted that, though Oak carries a watch, it is not really necessary for he can tell the time by the stars. Oak surveys the night sky, noting the positions of the constellations, and murmurs, "One o'clock" (FMC; 17). He looks on the sky as 'a useful instrument' and regards it 'in an appreciative spirit' as 'a work of art superlatively beautiful'; Oak is impressed with the 'speaking loneliness' (FMC; 17-18) of the scene because it is devoid of all human presence, save his own.

Gabriel not only is able to tell time using the stars and other hints; in the pivotal chapter where the thunderstorm threatens Bathsheba's crops, he knows the foul weather is coming well beforehand, for, as he approaches his home, he accidentally kicks something soft and leathery, 'like a boxing-glove': it is "a large toad humbly travelling across the path" (FMC; 253). Being an 'intensely humane' (FMC; 43) man, he 'placed it among the grass' (FMC; 253). He knows instinctively that "this was a direct message from the Great Mother" and what it meant. He soon gets another 'message.' He strikes a light and sees on the table, 'a thin glistening streak' (ibid.) He sees a 'huge brown garden slug' which had 'come indoors to-night for reasons of its own' but of course this is "Nature's second way of hinting to him that he was to prepare for foul weather" (ibid.). As he watches two black spiders which 'promenaded' on the ceiling and then ultimately dropped to the floor, he thinks that "if there was one class of manifestation on this matter that he thoroughly understood, it was the instincts of sheep" (ibid.). He runs to the field and sees the flock "all grouped in such a way that their tails, without a single exception, were towards that half of the horizon from which the storm threatened" (ibid.). But what the toad knows, what the spiders know, what the slug knows and what the sheep know is clearly explained by Hardy in a tour de force of nature observation:

> Every voice in nature was unanimous in bespeaking change. But two distinct translations attached to these dumb expressions. Apparently there was to be a thunderstorm, and afterwards a cold continuous rain. The creeping things seemed to know all about the later rain, but little of the interpolated thunderstorm; whilst the sheep knew all about the thunderstorm and nothing of the later rain. (FMC; 254)

Nature provides intelligence to careful observers like Oak (and Hardy); and those able to read these messages are favored in all Hardy's novels. The thunderstorm itself has already been described at the opening of this paper, but the brewing of the storm needs to be experienced by the reader to be understood. There was first a 'hot breeze' as if "breathed from the parted lips of some dragon about to swallow the globe" (FMC; 256). This breeze is from the south, while to the north rose "a grim misshapen body of cloud, in the very teeth of the wind. So unnaturally did it rise that one could fancy it to be lifted by machinery from below" (ibid.). This description suggests that the storm is almost like something one sees in a theater, with behind-the-scenes machines moving the scenery. But it probably simply reflects Hardy's sense that the universe is a large machine. "Meanwhile the faint cloudlets had flown back to the southeast corner of the sky, as if in terror of the large cloud, like a young brood gazed in upon by some monster" (ibid.). Here Hardy apparently refers to a brood of fowl, but the same image will do as well for sheep: the way they will huddle in one corner of a pen when frightened. So again, Hardy ties the human world to the animal world which is in turn linked to the heavens above. In the final passage before the opening of the storm in Chapter XXXVII, Hardy tells us that "the moon vanished not to re-appear. It was the farewell of the ambassador previous to war. The night had a haggard look like a sick thing, and there came finally an utter expiration of air from the whole heaven in the form of a slow breeze, which might have been likened to death" (FMC; 257).

4. 2 Commonality

In the chapter in which Gabriel meets Bathsheba, we find the following passage:

> One afternoon it began to freeze, and the frost increased with the evening, which drew on like a stealthy tightening of bonds. It was a time when in cottages the breath of the sleepers freezes to the sheets, when round the drawingroom fire of a thick-walled mansion the sitters' backs are cold even whilst their faces are all aglow. Many a small bird went to bed supperless that night among the bare boughs.
>
> (FMC; 25)

The cold of winter weather closes in. The humans of course feel it in bed and by the fireside but Hardy especially notices the poor hungry birds on their bare boughs; there is a suggestion here too of the kinship of the human and non-human denizens. This cold impels Gabriel to block up places in his hut where the wind comes in, and he therefore passes out because of the fumes from his stove; Bathesheba hears the howling of his dog and investigates, thus saving him.

In Chapter XI, Hardy describes the stages of winter as they come on:

> Winter, in coming to the country hereabout, advanced in well-marked stages, wherein might have been successively observed the retreat of the snakes, the transformation of the ferns, the filling of the pools, a rising of fogs, the embrowning by frost, the collapse of the fungi, and an obliteration by snow.
>
> (FMC; 88)

Notice the verbals in this passage: retreat, transformation, filling, rising, embrowning, collapse, and obliteration. All forceful, especially the last two, which well proclaim the last living thing (the fungi) to go and the final retreat of surface life from the winter landscape. There is almost a time-lapse photography feel to this description of winter drawing on.

In another example linking the human and non-human residents of the area, Gabriel as he approaches Bathsheba's house hears, "the chatter of a knot of sparrows on the eaves: one might fancy scandal and rumour to be no less the staple topic of these little coteries on roofs than of those under them" (FMC; 31). The noisy chatter of these birds is probably familiar to most people so it is easy to imagine them 'gossiping.'

Oak himself is linked to the natural world in many ways — a few have already been cited. On asking for her hand and being refused, he "sighed a deep honest sigh — none the less so in that, being like a sigh of a pine plantation, it was rather noticeable as a disturbance of the atmosphere" (FMC; 35).

Of even further disappointment to Gabriel is Bathsheba's departure for Weatherbury. He still has his sheepdog, George, as a companion though, the dog is described with great care:

> Gabriel had two dogs. George, the elder, exhibited an ebony-tipped nose surrounded by a narrow margin of pink flesh, and a coat marked in random splotches approximating in colour to white and slaty grey; but the grey, after years of sun and rain, had been scorched and washed out of the more prominent locks, leaving them of a reddish brown, as if the blue component of the grey had faded, like the indigo from the same kind of colour from Turner's pictures. In substance it had originally been hair, but long contact with sheep seemed to be turning it by degrees into wool of a poor quality and staple.
>
> This dog had originally belonged to a shepherd of inferior morals and dreadful temper, and the result was that George knew the exact degrees of condemnation signified by cursing and swearing of all descriptions better than the wickedest old man in the neighborhood. Long experience had so precisely taught the animal the difference between such exclamations as, "Come in!" and "D ____ ye, come in!" that he knew to a hair's breadth the rate of trotting

back from the ewes' tails that each call involved, if a staggerer with the sheep-crook was to be escaped. Though old, he was clever and trustworthy still.

(FMC; 38)

George is wise in the ways of field and farm. For example, Oak sees a cat in Bathsheba's garden which, on seeing George, went into 'arched shapes and fiendish convulsions' (FMC; 31) but the dog "took no notice, for he had arrived at an age at which all superfluous barking was cynically avoided as a waste of breath" (ibid.); in fact George is so wise that "he never barked at the sheep except to order, when it was done with absolutely neutral countenance" (ibid.). Oak's younger dog has no name as yet; he is still learning the 'sheep-keeping business' and he is still having difficulty learning the difference between "doing a thing well enough, and doing it too well" (FMC; 39). (The young dog will eventually betray Gabriel by chasing his sheep over a cliff to their deaths.) However, George must be an amazing dog from the above description. The intelligence of sheepdogs is well-known, but George must be an exception even among this elite breed. That he can distinguish between English expressions that are very similar seems amazing. Hardy asserts this is because of long experience, but it must be remembered too that Hardy sees animals much as he does people; this democracy of life seems natural and true to him and he manages to convince most readers of this.

After the tragic death of his flock, nature seems to mirror Gabriel's feelings. For example, he sees the "attenuated skeleton of a chrome-yellow moon" whose light on a nearby pool makes it glitter 'like a dead man's eye' (FMC; 41-42). A breeze ruffles the surface of the pond, "elongating the reflection of the moon without breaking it, and turning the image of the star to a phosphoric streak upon the water. All this Oak saw and remembered" (ibid.). Ironically, the young dog is destroyed because, as Hardy notes, he is 'too good a workman to live' (ibid.).

4. 3 The Great Barn

Chapter Twenty-Two is devoted to a description of the barn in which sheep-shearing is done. The barn itself is like a 'church with transepts' (FMC; 150). While the barn is not strictly a part of nature, it is included for discussion here because it serves as a symbol of the long continuity of life through time in the countryside of Wessex. Hardy observes that, "the old barn embodied practices which had suffered no mutilation at the hands of time" (FMC; 150).

After a description of the architectural features of the barn, (it will be remembered that Hardy was an architect), he notes that the barn had existed for 'four centuries.' Unlike churches and castles that rival the barn in age, this workplace has served the same useful purpose for these four centuries. Hardy notes that "in comparison with cities, Weatherbury was immutable" (FMC; 151). He goes on, "In these Wessex nooks the busy outsider's ancient times are only old, his old times are still new, his present is futurity" (ibid.). After establishing the

age of the place and contrasting it with cities, Hardy ties it to the life of the countryside: "So the barn was natural to the shearers, and the shearers were in harmony with the barn" (ibid.). The phrase 'in harmony with' suggests Hardy sees it within the continuity of life in Weatherbury, and that it is a natural outgrowth of man's harmony with nature. Southerington remarks that it is necessary to see Weatherbury as a 'total organism' (HVM; 62) in order to understand the work, and the barn is a prime element in this totality; he further notes that "the inter-relationship between environmental stability, economic stability, and moral stability is one of Hardy's most subtle and valuable perceptions" (HVM; 63).

One striking passage is almost like a painting in its use of color and light. It pictures the shearers at work and serves again figuratively to unite the people of the farm with the natural world around them and to show the organic relationship of barn, people and landscape:

> To-day the large side doors were thrown open towards the sun to admit a bountiful light to the immediate spot of the shearers' operations, which was the wood threshing-floor in the centre, formed of thick oak, black with age and polished by the beating of flails for many generations till it had grown as slippery and as rich in hue as the state-room floors of an Elizabethan mansion. Here the shearers knelt, the sun slanting in upon their bleached shirts, tanned arms, and the polished shears they flourished, causing these to bristle with a thousand rays, strong enough to blind a weak-eyed man. Beneath them a captive sheep lay panting, quickening the rapidity of its pants as misgiving merged in terror, till it quivered like the hot landscape outside.
>
> (FMC; 151)

Notice how Hardy carries the reader's eye from the outside to the inside of the barn with the sunlight; how he observes the age of the wooden floor, blackened by generations of laborer's flails; how he describes the living shearers, linking them with those who have gone before; how he carries the eye of the reader back outside again by likening the panting quivering sheep to the 'hot landscape outside' (ibid.). The above is one of the finest examples in all of Hardy's writing of his great skill with structure, language and imagery to convince the reader that man and his animals are in true harmony with nature, especially here, but by extension in all such natural work. It is this historical perspective, this notion of the present as the only point which can touch eternity, which makes his people and the landscape in which they move so powerful and moving. His skill rests in the ability to "show us glimpses of the human story stretching forward and back through time...(this is what) makes Hardy's historical vision sublime" (GHT; 161).

4. 4 Sergeant Troy

Hardy introduces this character as a contrast to Gabriel Oak, and notes that "Troy's deformities lay deep down from a woman's vision, whilst his embellishments were upon the very surface: thus contrasting with the homely Oak, whose defects were patent to the blindest, and whose virtues were as metals in a mine" (FMC; 199). In addition, Troy contrasts with Boldwood, the gentleman farmer, who is also smitten with Bathsheba. All three men in some way or other become entangled romantically with her — both Gabriel and Boldwood make their feelings clear but only Troy actively courts her and wins her hand in marriage.

Gabriel discovers something about Troy that immediately casts the soldier's character into doubt. Troy has told Bathsheba that he attends church, which Gabriel doubts; in a discussion of him with Bathsheba she says, "He is as good as anybody in this parish! He is very particular too, about going to church" (FMC; 202). When Gabriel says he has never seen Troy in church, Bathsheba rejoins that "he goes in privately by the old tower door, just when the service commences and sits in the back of the gallery. He told me so" (ibid.). After this brief exchange, Gabriel goes home by way of the church yard and stops to examine the tower door in question. There is just enough light to see by, .

> The pale lustre yet hanging in the north-western heaven was sufficient to show that a sprig of ivy had grown from the wall across the door to a length of more than a foot, delicately tying the panel to the stone jamb. It was a decisive proof that the door had not been opened at least since Troy came back to Weatherbury.
>
> (ibid.)

It is significant that Hardy should use something from nature, in this case a tendril of ivy, as a means of allowing one character to discover the truth about another. As has been mentioned, Gabriel is Hardy's nature-hero in this novel; he reads and understands it as one does a book open for inspection. As has also been mentioned, part of Hardy's strength as a novelist comes from his use of telling detail; that he should have Gabriel notice the small detail of the ivy is quite consonant with his overall artistic approach. It is almost as if the ivy were a character here, informing Gabriel of Troy's lie; the tendril of ivy being almost like an arm barring the door and at the same time pointing to Troy's deceitful nature.

One of the major calamities of the novel occurs because of Troy's bad character: this happens at the harvest-supper and dance, and Hardy notes it was 'the night selected by Sergeant Troy' (FMC; 250). Troy has become Bathsheba's husband and now the master of her farm. All the folk on and near the farm are invited and Troy urges the men, after the supper to stay and drink on into the night. Gabriel knows better and leaves after the supper, but the majority of

farmhands carouse on into the night. This is the night of the thunderstorm that threatens to destroy Bathsheba's crops, and since all the hands have fallen into a drunken stupor, only the sober Gabriel is left to save her corn from being ruined by the rain. As a prelude to this celebration that will go so wrong, Hardy begins this crucial chapter with what seems a warning from nature:

> The night had a sinister aspect. A heated breeze from the south slowly fanned the summits of lofty objects, and in the sky, dashes of buoyant cloud were sailing in courses at right angles to that of another stratum, neither of them in the direction of the breeze below. The moon as seen through these films had a lurid and metallic look. The fields were sallow with the impure light, and all were tinged in monochrome, as if beheld through stained glass. The same evening the sheep had trailed homeward head to tail, the behavior of the rooks had been confused, and the horses had moved with timidity and caution. Thunder was immanent....
>
> (FMC; 251)

This is yet another example of Hardy using a natural scene, or more precisely a natural drama involving the elements and landscape, to metaphorically comment of the characters and intensify the action that follows. As the chapter under discussion develops, the thunderstorm becomes a direct participant in the action of the novel, The animals, the horses, sheep and rooks also divine what is about to happen and their behavior prefigures a similar reaction in their human counterparts.

Early in the novel, well before Troy has married Bathsheba, he has ruined an innocent farm girl named Fanny Robin. He has promised to marry her but has left her destitute because she has no prospect of wealth or the privilege of station. Near the end of the novel, she is seen as a destitute waif wandering along the Casterbridge Road in what is one of the most moving passages in any Hardy novel; a section of the novel that shows clearly Hardy's great sense of compassion and pity for those who are suffering. It is interesting that Hardy does not immediately identify Fanny, he merely refers to her as 'the woman.' As she walks on, her steps 'become feebler' (FMC; 272) until her walk becomes a totter. She is clearly and literally on her last legs. Even the clock in the tower in Casterbridge, which is her destination and where she hopes to find Troy, reflects her enfeebled state: the narrator notes that after "midnight the voice of a clock seems to lose in breadth as much as in length, and to diminish its sonorousness to a thin falsetto" (FMC; 273).

She stops beside a stand of trees and "there was not a rustle, not a breeze, not the faintest clash of twigs to keep her company" (FMC; 274). Her state is pitiable enough, but Hardy

suggests here that not even the natural world can be a balm for this shattered soul. Because she is so broken down, she takes two sticks from a woodcutter's pile and uses them as makeshift crutches, but she finally falls and lays immobile for a time. Still, the morning wind begins to 'move afresh dead leaves which had lain still since yesterday' (FMC; 275), which is a reference to her pitiable state. She rises and goes feebly on. She stops at a milestone and listens, "There was not a sound of life save that acme and sublimation of all dismal sounds — the bark of a fox, its three hollow notes being rendered at intervals with the precision of a funeral bell" (ibid.). Here it seems the fox, like the church bell before, is commenting on this poor wretch's present state and future condition.

She makes it to the bridge over the river near the town and collapses again. As she leans against the guard-stone of the bridge, she thinks of ways she can go on — by crawling or rolling along, if she has to, but as the narrator notes, "Hopelessness had come at last" (FMC; 276). Her savior is not human but animal. We watch as in "the stripe of shadow on the opposite side of the bridge a portion of shade seemed to detach itself, and move into isolation upon the pale white of the road. It glided noiselessly towards the recumbent woman" (FMC; 277). She becomes aware of something touching her hand, "it was softness, and it was warmth. She opened her eyes, and the substance touched her face. A dog was licking her cheek" (ibid.). The dog is a 'huge heavy and quiet creature' and though the breed is not identifiable, the narrator says that "He seemed to be of too strange and mysterious a nature to belong to any variety" (ibid.). He seems to be sent from heaven:

> Being thus assignable to no breed he was the ideal embodiment of canine greatness — a generalization of what was common to all. Night in its sad, solemn, and benevolent aspect, apart from its stealthy and cruel side, was personified in this form. Darkness endows the small and ordinary ones among mankind with poetical power, and even the suffering woman threw her idea into the figure.
>
> (ibid.)

She looks up to her canine friend just as she had in earlier times 'looked up to a man.' The dog is as 'homeless as she' and he 'respectfully' withdraws when she moves and seeing that 'she did not repulse him' he licks her hand again. It dawns on her that she can use him to reach her destination. She points in the direction of Casterbridge and the dog seems not to understand because he trots off in that direction; but upon seeing that she has not followed, he returns and whines. She rises to a stooping posture and wraps her arms around his neck; she 'murmurs stimulating words' and "Whilst she sorrowed in her heart she cheered with her voice, and what was stranger than that the strong should need encouragement from the weak was that cheerful-

ness should be so well stimulated by such utter dejection" (ibid.). She raises herself, wraps her arms around his neck and they move slowly toward Casterbridge. When she sinks down again the dog "who now thoroughly understood her desire and her incapacity, was frantic in his distress on these occasions: he would tug at her dress and run forward" (FMC; 278). They eventually reach Fanny's goal: the Casterbridge workhouse, which is outside the town, and which Hardy calls a "mere case to hold people" (ibid.). It is "so devoid of excrescence, and so closely drawn over the accommodation granted that the grim character of what was beneath showed through it, as the shape of a body is visible under a winding sheet" (ibid.). This simile is apropos because Fanny will never leave the place — at least on her feet. This final reference to her impending death is softened by the succeeding statement, however: "Then nature, as if offended, lent a hand. Masses of ivy grew up, completely covering the walls, till the place looked like an abbey" (ibid.). This image of the workhouse transformed to look like an abbey by the hand of Nature is consistent with Hardy's view of Nature as transformative.

As the attendants help her through the gate, she asks what has become of her dog, her friend and savior, and the caretaker says, "I stoned him away," which suggests the fate of a religious martyr, who, like the dog, has selflessly aided another suffering being and has been rewarded with scorn and hatred.

4. 5 Fanny's Last Journey

As Joseph Poorgrass drives the wagon containing Fanny's coffin back to Bathesheba's farm, we have another instance of Hardy using the natural world to influence the emotions of the characters in the novel and therefore the sensibility of the reader. It is late afternoon and Poorgrass looks to the right toward the sea as he walks beside the horse. There he sees moving toward him "strange clouds and scrolls of mist rolling over the long ridges" (FMC; 292). As the clouds and mist grow thicker, "their dank spongy forms closed in upon the sky" (ibid.). The word 'spongy' here leads to the narrator's comment that "It was a sudden outgrowth of atmospheric fungi which had their roots in the neighboring sea" (ibid.) so that by the time 'horse and corpse' reach Yalbury Wood "these silent workings of an invisible hand" (ibid.) had reached and completely enveloped them. This atmospheric tomb-like weather reinforces the gloomy nature of Joseph's mission and gives the reader a sense of claustrophobia, as any tomb might.

The disorientation is so complete that the "air was as an eye suddenly struck blind" so that the 'waggon and its load' (ibid.) are no longer on the horizontal but seem to float in space; they are "imbedded in an elastic body of monotonous pallor throughout" which intensifies the sense of death and dissolution. Poor Joseph is unnerved at this point, as he is as superstitious as most of Hardy's country folk. The disorientation caused by this enveloping shroud of death-like mist causes all sound to be lost: there "was no perceptible motion in the air" (ibid.) so that the trees

"stood in an attitude of intentness, as if they waited longingly for a wind to come and rock them. A startling quiet overhung all surrounding things — so completely, that the crunching of the waggon-wheels was as a great noise" (ibid.). As Joseph proceeds on his frightful errand, he stops the horse to listen. The 'dead silence' is broken only by a large water drop, like a tear being shed for Fanny, which drops on her coffin with 'a smart rap.' The 'hollow echo' of its fall "reminded the waggoner painfully of the grim Leveller " (FMC; 293). The drop is only the first of many, as the trees are by now saturated, so that soon "there was a continual tapping of these heavy drops upon the dead leaves, the road, and the travellers" (ibid.). We notice the trees where the "nearer boughs were beaded with the mist to the greyness of aged men" (ibid.), strengthening the notion of death. This interlude in the wood serves to further underscore the melancholy nature of Joseph's mission. The direct function of this frightening passage, however, is to serve to unnerve Joseph so that he stops at the next tavern because he is emotionally overwrought by his experience. He gets drunk and gradually forgets his mission completely. Finally, Gabriel Oak finds him drunk in the tavern. Gabriel gives up on Joseph and goes out to the wagon, which he drives along 'through the unwholesome night' (FMC; 299) to Bathsheba's farm.

What follows is a result of Bathsheba's discovery of Fanny's secret and her cruel rejection by Troy at the coffin; Bathesheba opens the coffin and finds mother and child. She then quarrels with Troy because of his treatment of Fanny; Troy declares that the dead woman means more to him than Bathsheba ever will. She declares the marriage over. She flees from the house and goes along the "dark road neither knowing nor caring about the direction or issue of her flight" (FMC; 313).

4. 6 Under a Tree

In her flight, Bathsheba finds herself before a gate leading to a thicket overhung with oak and beech trees. She could now "think of nothing better to do with her palpating self than to go in here and hide" (FMC; 313); soon she "lighted on a spot sheltered from the damp fog by a reclining trunk, where she sank down on a tangled couch of fronds and stems" (ibid.); here she falls into a dream-like state. She soon becomes aware of "some interesting proceedings which were going on above her head and around" (ibid.). The first sound she hears is the 'coarse-throated chatter' of a sparrow; next she hears a finch, then a robin and then a squirrel, and then a ploughboy singing to himself. It is interesting that Hardy seems to move from smaller to larger creatures here: birds to squirrel to boy. The ploughboy is from her own farm and he is leading some horses to drink in a pond across the road.

After they leave she looks around and notices that

> Day was just dawning, and beside its cool air and colours, her heated actions

and resolves of the night stood out in lurid contrast. She perceived that in her lap, and clinging to her hair, were red and yellow leaves which had come down from the tree and settled upon her during her partial sleep. Bathsheba shook her dress to get rid of them, when multitudes of the same family lying around her rose and fluttered away in the breeze thus created — "like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing."

(FMC; 314)

The suggestion here is that she is an intruder; she has brought her worldly cares and 'heated actions' into a place seldom disturbed; her agitation of shaking out the leaves causes their 'flight.'

The full dawn has not yet come. From her resting place with its 'beautiful yellowing ferns' she notices that the ground slopes downward to 'a hollow' in which she sees 'a species of swamp, dotted with fungi' (ibid.). Swamps and fungi in Hardy usually mean death, disease, illness or decay, and he notes that a "morning mist hung over it now — a noisome yet magnificent silvery veil, full of light from the sun, yet semi-opaque" (ibid.). The hollow is described in some detail:

Up the sides of this depression grew sheaves of the common rush, and here and there a peculiar species of flag, the blades of which glistened in the emerging sun like scythes. But the general aspect of the swamp was malignant. From its moist and poisonous coat seemed to be exhaled the essences of evil things in the earth and in the waters under the earth. The fungi grew in all manner of positions from rotting leaves and tree stumps, some exhibiting to her listless gaze their clammy tops, others their oozing gills. Some were marked with great splotches, red as arterial blood — others were saffron yellow, and others tall and attenuated with stems like macaroni. Some leathery and of richest browns. The hollow seemed a nursery of pestilences small and great, in the immediate neighborhood of comfort and health, and Bathsheba arose with a tremor at the thought of having passed the night on the brink of so dismal a place. (ibid.)

The hollow is a clear metaphor for death. This whole passage has a magical feel to it: Bathsheba is seen as an enchantress who has fallen into a trance-like sleep next to an evil place — be it a figurative castle, hollow or entrance to the underworld. The profusion of mushrooms adds a further fairy-like aspect. Hardy has very effectively created an enchanted refuge here and managed to remove Bathsheba from the pain and anguish that her discoveries about Fanny and Troy have just occasioned. This retreat into the unconscious with its dreamlike imagery

allows Bathsheba to reemerge into the day world that has been so cruel to her with renewed strength.

She next hears footsteps along the road and crouches down. It is a schoolboy with his bag over his shoulder. He appears to be addle-brained because he repeats "Oh, Lord O Lord O Lord" again and again as a way of learning his psalms. Hardy notes that in "the worst attacks of trouble there appears to be always a superficial film of consciousness which is left disengaged and open to the notice of trifles, and Bathsheba was faintly amused at the boy's method, till he too passed on" (FMC; 315). This interlude functions as a transition to bring her back into the daylight world of common life. The next figure to appear on the horizon of the road is her servant, Liddy, who manages to persuade Bathsheba to return home.

4. 7 Gabriel and Bathsheba

After Bathsheba returns home with Liddy, Troy mourns Fanny's death and erects a tombstone at her grave as a penance; he leaves the area, goes for a swim in the ocean and almost drowns — is thought dead for a time and then returns; Boldwood murders him and is taken to prison and this allows Gabriel and Bathsheba to express their love for each other now that Troy and Boldwood are gone. Hardy ends the novel with this observation on their love:

> Theirs was the substantial affection which arises (if any arises at all) when the two who are thrown together begin first by knowing the rougher sides of each other's character, and not the best till further on, the romance growing up in the interstices of a mass of hard prosaic reality. This good-fellowship — *camaraderie*, usually occurring through similarity of pursuits, is unfortunately seldom superadded to love between the sexes, because men and women associate not in their labours but in their pleasures merely. Where however happy circumstance permits its development the compounded feeling proves itself to be the only love which is strong as death — that love which many waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown, beside which the passion usually called by the name is evanescent as steam.
>
> (FMC; 409)

5. The Return of the Native

First scenes in any Hardy novel are always impressive and important, no matter how minor the work may be thought to be; *The Return of the Native* is considered to be Hardy's representative early novel (RN; 11 [intro.]) and the opening is impressive because it deals with Egdon Heath, the 'character' or 'actor' representative of the natural world in this novel. In fact,

the presence of the heath is a continual background to all that takes place in the novel and at times it assumes a leading role in influencing and even interacting with the main characters.

It is twilight on a Saturday in November when Hardy first shows us Egdon Heath, which 'embrowned itself moment by moment' (RN; 53), suggesting that the moorland itself has the power to change its own appearance. Above, "the hollow stretch of whitish cloud shutting out the sky was as a tent which had the whole heath as its floor" (ibid.). This introductory paragraph is followed by a long description of the heath and the surrounding countryside.

He continues:

> The heaven being spread with this pallid screen and the earth with the darkest vegetation, their meeting-line at the horizon was clearly marked. In such contrast the heath wore the appearance of an installment of night which had taken up its place before its astronomical hour had come: darkness had to a great extent arrived hereon, while day stood distinct in the sky. Looking upwards, a furze-cutter would have been inclined to continue work; looking down, he would have decided to finish his faggot and go home. The distant rims of the world and of the firmament seemed to be a division in time no less than a division in matter. The face of the heath by its mere complexion added half an hour to the evening; it could in like manner retard the dawn, sadden noon, anticipate the frowning of storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of a moonless midnight to a cause of shaking dread.
>
> (ibid.)

Notice the use again of human terms to refer to the heath: it has 'a face' and 'a complexion' which add an element of darkness to all surroundings; it changes time — it 'adds a half an hour to evening'; it 'retard(s) the dawn'; further, it causes emotional changes: it can 'sadden noon'; it seems to be in accord with the weather by anticipating storms; and it becomes so dark on moonless midnight nights that it is a cause of fear in the breasts of mortals unlucky enough to be caught out on such a night. Hardy is not anthropomorphizing the heath; he is exploring its personality in terms the reader can understand. Then

> ...precisely at this transitional point of its nightly roll into darkness the great and particular glory of the Egdon waste began, and nobody could be said to understand the heath who had not been there at such a time. It could best be felt when it could not clearly be seen, its complete effect and explanation lying in this and succeeding hours before the next dawn: then, and only then, did it tell its true tale. The spot was, indeed, a near relation of night, and when

night showed itself an apparent tendency to gravitate together could be perceived in its shades and the scene. The somber stretch of rounds and hollows seemed to rise and meet the evening gloom in pure sympathy, the heath exhaling darkness as rapidly as the heavens precipitated it. And so the obscurity in the air and the obscurity in the land closed together in a black fraternization towards which each advanced half-way.

The place became full of a watchful intentness now; for when other things sank brooding to sleep the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen. Every night its Titanic form seemed to await something; but it had waited thus, unmoved, during so many centuries, through the crises of so many things, that it could only be imagined to await one last crisis — the final overthrow.

(RN; 54)

This is downright spooky and Hardy probably meant it to be. Hardy has given us again the sense of a place in Wessex being old beyond memory, and in this particular area Egdon Heath seems older than time itself; it 'had waited so many centuries' and now waits only for the 'final overthrow'— the end of time.

The heath itself seems to have a consciousness. It has a 'watchful intentness' and it appears to be a thing of the night; it is an abiding presence. Hardy then calls it 'haggard Egdon' because its beauty is not of the type usually labeled 'charming and fair' (ibid.). Its beauty appeals to a different type of human aesthetic; it is 'majestic without showiness, emphatic in its admonitions, grand in its simplicity' (ibid.). Hardy is perhaps suggesting that the heath is a symbol of the beauty of sadness, winter and age. He hints that only in a world that has aged, just as the heath has, can its beauty be appreciated: "human souls may find themselves in closer and closer harmony with external things wearing a somberness distasteful to our race when it was young" (RN; 54-55); the 'chastened sublimity' of the heath appeals to those who are 'the more thinking among mankind' (ibid.). The gaudy tourist spots of Europe, like the Alps, Hardy opines, coming generations will forsake for more austere places like Iceland and the 'sand-dunes of Scheveningen' (ibid.). Ascetics will choose a spot like Egdon for their meditations — in fact, those who renounce the world have 'a natural right to wander on Egdon' (ibid.) according to Hardy. The only season where Egdon can be seen to display any type of natural show is high summer, when the mood approaches 'the level of gaiety' (ibid.). Hardy suggests that the true 'intensity' of the heath arrives with winter and "during darkness, tempests and mists. Then Egdon was aroused to reciprocity; for the storm was its lover, the wind its friend" (ibid.). It is at this time of the year that the heath 'became a home to strange phantoms' (ibid.). For the heath is in reality "the hitherto unrecognized original of those wild regions of obscurity which are vaguely felt to be compassing us about in midnight dreams of flight and disaster, and are never thought of after

the dream till revived by scenes like this" (ibid.). So Hardy presents us here with the heath as a symbol for the unconscious mind; this, combined with the immemorialness of the place serve to establish this symbol as central to the novel. D. H. Lawrence would later sense much the same thing and actually go beyond Hardy in talking about the unknown which threatens mankind, which is:

> ...the outer darkness....the glimmer of dark movement just out of range, ...the vast darkness that wheeled round about, with half-revealed shapes lurking at the edge....the darkness wheeled round about, with grey shadow-shapes of wild beasts, and also with dark shadow-shapes of the angels, whom the light fenced out, as it fenced out the more familiar beasts of darkness. And some, having for a moment seen the darkness, saw it bristling with the tufts of the hyena and wolf; and some, having given up their vanity of the light, having died in their own conceit, saw the gleam in the eyes of the wolf and the hyena, that it was the flash of the sword of angels, flashing at the door to come in, that the angels in the darkness were lordly and terrible and not to be denied, like the flash of fangs.
>
> (The Rainbow; 405-406)

The mystery that Lawrence senses in what is beyond man's daylight consciousness Hardy sees in the heath. However, he goes on to say that the heath was 'at present perfectly in accord with man's nature' (ibid.). In other words, it is "neither gastly, hateful, nor ugly; neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame; but, like man, slighted and enduring; and withal singularly colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony. As with some persons who have long lived apart, solitude seemed to look out of its countenance. It had a lonely face, suggesting tragical possibilities" (ibid.). This passage is typical of Hardy in that he virtually equates man and nature — this has been suggested before in his works but never in such a direct way. This perspective undelies all Hardy's thought: man and nature exist together in a symbiosis so finely woven and interconnected as to be two parts of the same greater being. That it 'had a lonely face' and that, like a person who has long lived apart, 'solitude' seems to 'look out of its countenance' (ibid.).

In further describing the heath, Hardy says it is 'obscure, obsolete, superceded country' (ibid.) that has been characterized in the Domesday Book as a 'heathy, furzy, briary wilderness' (ibid.) again suggesting its wildness and great age. Significantly, the "area of Egdon down to the present day has but little diminished" (ibid.). Here is a place that, unlike many other areas of England, has been impervious to the changes caused by modernization. In fact, Hardy notes that "Civilization was its enemy; and ever since the beginning its soil had worn the same antique

brown dress..." and notes the incongruity of seeing a "person on a heath in raiment of modern cut" because we "seem to want the oldest and simplest human clothing where the clothing of the earth is so primitive" (RN; 56).

Hardy imagines a visitor to Egdon at this time of day, between 'afternoon and night'—a person who realizes that "everything around and underneath had always been from prehistoric times as unaltered as the stars overhead, gave ballast to the mind adrift on change, and harassed by the irrepressible New. The great inviolate place had an ancient permanence which the sea cannot claim" (ibid.). The sea changes constantly because it is 'distilled' by the sun and 'kneaded' by the moon. In fact, "the sea changed, the fields changed, the rivers, the villages, and the people changed, yet Egdon remained" (ibid.).

This chapter ends with Hardy noting 'an aged highway' (ibid.) traversing the heath; and on the evening under discussion, "though the gloom had increased sufficiently to confuse the minor features of the heath, the white surface of the road remained almost as clear as ever" (RN; 56-57); it is as if the man-made road represents the one solitary and transitory human mark on Egdon Heath.

5.1 The Red Man

On the lonely heath we see a solitary figure, 'white-headed as a mountain' (RN; 58). He appears to be a retired naval officer; he carries a silver-headed walking stick. The scene confronting this lonely traveler consists of "the long, laborious road, dry, empty, and white. It was quite open to the heath on each side, and bisected that vast dark surface like the parting-line on a head of black hair..." (ibid.). Here again Hardy offers a simile relating the natural landscape to a physical human feature.

The old man sees a red van ahead, the only other thing in sight. He notices the driver walking beside the van—he is completely red, too. This is one of the main characters, Diggory Venn, the reddleman, "a person whose vocation it was to supply farmers with redding for their sheep" (RN; 59). Reddle is a red ochre used for marking sheep. In an aside, Hardy tells us that the vocation is fast disappearing from Wessex; as an aspect of the past, he occupies a place between tradition and the rapidly modernizing world and for Hardy represents the loss of traditional life.

The 'decayed' officer draws abreast of the reddleman and wishes him a good evening. He sees that the reddleman is young and handsome. His eye is "keen as that of a bird of prey, and blue as autumn mist" (ibid.). Hardy notes that this red man has 'a certain well-to-do air' that suggests he may have been someone of consequence once. He returns the old man's greeting but is disinclined to talk, so they walk along quietly where there "were no sounds but that of the booming wind upon the stretch of tawny herbage around them, the crackling wheels, the tread of men, and the footsteps of the two shaggy ponies which drew the van" (ibid.). This auditory

image serves to accentuate the isolation of the humans and animals amid the lonely waste. Their silence Hardy accounts for by saying "in these lonely places wayfarers...frequently plod on for miles without speech; contiguity amounts to a tacit conversation where, otherwise than in cities, such contiguity can be put an end to on the merest inclination, and where not to put an end to it is intercourse in itself" (RN; 60).

It transpires that Diggory Venn is carrying a young woman in the back of his van. The old man begins to ask too many questions and the reddleman decides they should part company. The old man says goodbye and goes on.

Diggory makes camp and begins to 'do things musingly, and by small degrees' which seemed to be "a duty in the Egdon valleys at this transitional hour, for there was that in the condition of the heath itself which resembled protracted and halting dubiousness. It was the quality of the repose appertaining to the scene. This was not the repose of actual stagnation, but the apparent repose of incredible slowness. A condition of healthy life so nearly resembling the torpor of death is a noticeable thing of its sort" (RN; 62). Hardy's acute perception and understanding of the heath is apparent here, for Egdon exhibits 'the inertness of the desert' but at the same time exercises powers 'akin to those of the meadow' and 'even of the forest' to the careful observer who is sensitive to "the attentiveness usually engendered by understatement and reserve" (ibid.). Hardy's suggestion of the glacial slowness of the heath represents an almost religious perception of Egdon. What Margaret Drabble has said about Hardy applies here: for Hardy, "the whole of the natural world has a strong organic unity, which he apprehends at times with a mystic clarity" (GTH; 164).

The scene before Venn's eyes consists of "a gradual series of ascents from the level of the road itself backward into the heart of the heath. It embraced hillocks, pits, ridges, acclivities, one behind the other, till all was finished by a high hill cutting against the still light sky" (ibid.). One 'noteworthy object' attracts the eye: a barrow, which occupies "the loftiest ground of the loneliest height that the heath contained" (ibid.). We realize how important this landmark is in the world of Egdon with the comment that "It formed the pole and axis of this heathery world" (ibid.). Above the barrow itself rises 'a form' so that a gradual series is described: "Above the plain rose the hill, above the hill rose the barrow, and above the barrow rose the figure. Above the figure was nothing that could be mapped elsewhere than on a celestial globe" (RN; 62-63). Hardy thus links the earth and sky through this hierarchy; further, the hill suggests Golgotha and the figure of Christ. Later in the novel this suggestion will become clearer but this anticipatory glimpse is the first example of this leitmotif in the novel. Noteworthy too is how Hardy has managed to connect earth, man and sky in the organic unity mentioned by Drabble.

Hardy marries these elements so that "the vale, the upland, the barrow, and the figure above it amounted only to unity. Looking at this or that member of the group was not observing a

fraction of a thing" (RN; 63). Once this unmoving unity is described, the 'form' on the barrow moves: "the figure perceptibly gave up its fixity, shifted a step or two, and turned round. As if alarmed, it descended on the right side of the barrow, with the glide of a water-drop down a bud, and then vanished" (ibid.).

Its movement discloses it is a woman. Other figures begin to appear, all carrying bundles, which contain fuel for fires to be built that evening. Hardy implies that the solitary woman, this 'queen of the solitude', has been displaced by the less interesting newcomers. These people Hardy compares to sheep, by saying that the "party had marched in trail, like a travelling flock of sheep; that is to say, the strongest first, the young and weak behind" (RN; 65). They are carrying furze to be made into a bonfire in a ritual harking back to Celtic days and marking the beginning of winter; Hardy reinforces the connection to nature and ancient custom by observing that every "individual was so involved in furze by his method of carrying the faggots that he appeared like a bush on legs till he had thrown them down" (ibid.). This simile is the first of a series that incorporate the human characters into the landscape, thus reinforcing Hardy's effort to integrate his human and non-human characters.

At this point Hardy notes the name of the place: Rainbarrow. The 'bonfire-makers' stand in 'some radiant upper storey of the world' which is 'detached from and independent of' the heath below, which is like 'a vast abyss' (RN; 66). Their fire is one of many in the surrounding vastness. Hardy then alludes to Dante: "the whole black phenomenon beneath represented Limbo as viewed from the brink by the sublime Florentine in his vision, and the muttered articulations of the wind in the hollows were as complaints and petitions from the 'souls of mighty worth' suspended therein" (RN; 67). Hardy then again connects this fire ceremony with the Celts and Druids to emphasize the age of this rite. This is an act of 'Promethean rebelliousness' against the winter with its "foul times, cold darkness, misery and death" when "black chaos comes, and the fettered gods of the earth say, Let there be light" (RN; 67). These celebrants Hardy then introduces as they stand round the fire. Since a discussion of Hardy's rustics is not properly within the scope of this paper, the succeeding scenes will be passed over until we come to the advent of Eustacia Vye.

5. 2 The Figure Against the Sky

We first see her when Hardy mentions that she was the "the woman who had first stood there (on Rainbarrow) so singularly, and vanished at the approach of strangers" (RN; 104). Figures against the sky on Rainbarrow are a feature of this novel; just as we first see Eustacia, various other characters are presented in this manner. In one notable example, Hardy shows us Eustacia and Wildeve who "were as two horns which the sluggish heath had put forth from its crown, like a mollusc, and had again drawn in" (RN; 140). This virtual identification of some characters with the heath itself, links them strongly to the place; three characters are initially

so represented: Wildeve, Eustacia and Clym, but Mrs. Yeobright might also be considered among this group.

Eustacia ascends to the top, where she had stood before, "where the red coals of the perishing fire greeted her like living eyes in the corpse of day" (ibid). While this image is rather melodramatic, it seems almost perfect when associated with Eustacia. But even more sensational is the following:

> There she stood still, around her stretching the vast night atmosphere, whose incomplete darkness in comparison with the total darkness of the heath below it might have represented a venial sin beside a mortal sin.
>
> (ibid.)

All that can be known about her at this point in the novel is that she was 'tall and straight in build' and 'ladylike in her movements' (ibid.). Though we can learn little about her through sight, her behavior reveals her "extraordinary fixity, her conspicuous loneliness, her heedlessness of night, (these) betokened among other things an utter absence of fear" (ibid.). What follows is a lengthy exploration of the sound of the wind over the heath — the voice of Egdon; it is also an exploration of the heath in microcosm and in macrocosm as seen first through her eyes and then the narrator's:

> It might reasonably have been supposed that she was listening to the wind, which rose somewhat as the night advanced, and laid hold of the attention. The wind, indeed, seemed made for the scene, as the scene seemed made for the hour. Part of its tone was quite special; what was heard there could be heard nowhere else. Gusts in innumerable series followed each other from the north-west, and when each one of them raced past the sound of its progress resolved into three. Treble, tenor, and bass notes were to be found therein. The general ricochet of the whole over pits and prominences had the gravest pitch of the chime. Next there could be heard the baritone buzz of a holly tree. Below these in force, above them in pitch, a dwindled voice strove hard at a husky tune, which was the peculiar local sound alluded to. Thinner and less immediately traceable than the other two, it was far more impressive than either. In it lay what may be called the linguistic peculiarity of the heath; and being audible nowhere on earth off a heath, it afforded a shadow of reason for the woman's tenseness, which continued as unbroken as ever.
>
> Throughout the blowing of these plaintive November winds that note bore a great resemblance to the ruins of human song which remain to the throat of fourscore and ten. It was a worn whisper, dry and papery, and it brushed

so distinctly across the ear that, by the accustomed, the material minutiae in which it originated could be realized as by touch. It was the united products of infinitesimal vegetable causes, and these neither stems, leaves, fruit, blades, prickles, lichen, nor moss.

They were the *mummied heath bells* of the past summer, originally tender and purple, now washed colourless by Michaelmas rains, and dried to dead skins by October suns. So low was an individual sound from these that a combination of hundreds only just emerged from silence, and the myriads of the whole declivity reached the woman's ear as a shrivelled and intermittent recititive. Yet scarcely a single accent among the many afloat tonight could have such power to impress a listener with thoughts of its origin. One inwardly saw the infinity of those combined multitudes; and perceived that each of the tiny trumpets was seized on, entered, scoured and emerged from by the wind as thoroughly as if it were as vast as a crater.

'The spirit moved them.' A meaning of the phrase forced itself upon the attention; and an emotional listener's fetichistic mood might have ended in one of more advanced quality. It was not, after all, that the left-hand expanse of old blooms spoke, or the right-hand, or those of the slope in front; but it was the single person of *something else* speaking through each at once.

Suddenly, on the barrow, there mingled with all this wild rhetoric of night a sound which modulated so naturally into the rest that its beginning and ending were hardly to be distinguished. The bluffs, and the bushes, and the heather-bells had broken silence; at last, so did the woman; and her articulation was but another phrase of the same discourse as theirs. Thrown out on the winds it became twined in with them, and with them it flew away.

What she uttered was a lengthy sighing...

(RN; 105-106; *italics* mine)

Margaret Drabble feels that "his description of the sound of the wind on Egdon is one of the finest passages in his work" and this is because 'among his many gifts as a writer,' was his "ability to describe and reproduce almost unnoticeable variations of sound and melody" (GTH; 167-168) gained from his musical background. "Her sighing seems a part of the heath, and the reader feels she is more deeply connected to it, probably for ill because Hardy describes her sighing as having a "spasmodic abandonment about it as if, in allowing herself to utter the sound, the woman's brain had authorized what it could not regulate" (RN; 106). Hardy's description of the heath-bells is more like poetry than prose in theme and treatment. His imagination is so powerful in this passage that he carries the reader with him; and in a sense

his imagination is like the wind it describes, able to range over the large and the small in nature, traveling in, around and through whatever it touches. Hardy nods to those emotional listeners in 'fetichistic' mood, who perhaps may perceive something else — a god speaking through each small flower at once. Not only does Hardy note the pervasiveness of the wind on the heath, but he also describes the different 'voices' of the wind: one could hear "where the tracts of heather began and ended; where the furze was growing stalky and tall; where it had been recently cut; in what direction the fir-clump lay, and how near was the pit in which the hollies grew; for these differing features had their voices no less than their shapes and colours" (RN; 139).

Eustacia does two things next: she looks at the inn through a telescope and she bends down to find a small hourglass in the sod; Hardy makes no comment on the first, but on the second, he says, 'she wore a watch' so obviously the fact the hourglass is broken and all the sand has run out implies that time may be running out for Eustacia, though there is a traditional association between witches and hourglasses. Next, "She threw away the stick, took the glass in her hand, the telescope under her arm, and moved on" (RN; 107).

We learn that Eustacia hates her life on the heath, for she comments to Wildeve, her lover, "I get gloomy" and that the cause originates in "coming into this wild heath. I was happy enough in Budmouth" (RN; 115). In a later chapter, Wildeve says, "You hate the heath as much as ever," to which she replies, "I do...'Tis my cross, my shame, and will be my death!" (RN; 139).

In the space of two pages, Hardy tells us much more about her; he starts with a minor example, showing us Eustacia's 'little slave'— a local child who tends a signal fire for her. The boy "went on feeding the fire as before. He seemed a mere automaton, galvanized into moving and speaking by the wayward Eustacia's will. He might have been the brass statue which Albertus Magnus is said to have animated just so far as to make it chatter, and move and be his servant" (RN; 111). (Magnus was a 13th- century German Dominican who was reputed to have magical powers.) A few pages later Wildeve says, "I have come in obedience to your call" ((RN; 116); to which she replies, "I merely lit the fire because I was dull, and thought I would get a little excitement *by calling you up* and triumphing over you as the Witch of Endor called up Samuel. I determined you should come; and you have come! I have shown my power" (ibid.; *italics* mine); note the verb phrase she uses to describe Wildeve's summoning.

5. 3 Queen of Night

Hardy begins the next chapter with this: "Eustacia Vye was the raw material of divinity" because she "had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess" (RN; 118). Part of her physical appearance is then described:

> She was in person full-limbed and somewhat heavy; without ruddiness, as without pallor; and soft to touch as a cloud. To see her hair was to fancy that

a whole winter did not contain darkness enough to form its shadow; it closed over her forehead like nightfall extinguishing the western glow.

(ibid.)

Like an animal, her "nerves extended into those tresses, and her temper could always be softened by stroking them down" (ibid.). She even behaves like an animal: "passing under one of Egdon's banks, (if) any of its thick skeins were caught...by a prickly tuft of the large *Ulex Europaeus* — which will act as a sort of hairbrush — she would go back a few steps, and pass against it a second time" (RN; 118). There are various ways to interpret this particular passage, but what seems obvious is that Eustacia actually makes a physical connection with the heath — she uses the gorse bush as a brush — and the old notion of hair as a sexual attribute may indicate that, no matter how much she dislikes Egdon because of the social deprivation that it represents for her, she's basically a sensual creature (Howe has called her a 'smouldering country Delilah' [TH; 63]), who seeks physical contact wherever she may find it; one wonders what Hardy would do with her in London. This appears to be another example of Hardy having one of his human characters fall under the influence of the landscape and the natural environment.

Hardy observes that she has 'Pagan eyes' which are full of 'nocturnal mysteries'; her eyes have 'oppressive lids and lashes' and "of these the under lid was much fuller..." which "enabled her to indulge in reverie without seeming to do so" (RN; 119). Hardy remarks that Eustacia's soul is 'flame-like' as indicated by her eyes; this harmonizes with the theme introduced in the bonfire scenes. He notes her mouth, which was "formed less to speak than to quiver, less to quiver than to kiss. Some might have added, less to kiss than to curl" (ibid.). These lips form a perfect S-shaped curve, or 'ogee' in the English of the period; this perfection, the "sight of such a flexible bend as that on grim Egdon was quite an apparition" (ibid.). When she laughs, Hardy sees that "the sun shone into her mouth as into a tulip, and lent it a similar scarlet fire" (RN; 144). It might be noted that Hardy's physical descriptions of women often center on the mouth.

Hardy then comments on her moods, which 'recalled lotus-eaters and the march in *Athalie*' (a tragic drama by Racine), and her emotions, which 'ebb and flow' like the sea, and her voice, which sounds like 'the viola' (ibid.). However, her emotions seem futile in this place, for "celestial imperiousness, love, wrath, and fervour had proved to be somewhat thrown away on netherward Egdon" (ibid.). These strictly human emotions are a weakness here; if fact, they only cause torment because "Egdon was her Hades and since coming here she had imbibed much of what was dark in its tone" (ibid.).

"Why did a woman of this sort live on Egdon Heath?" Hardy asks. We learn that she had come here with her grandfather after the death of her parents. Her earlier experiences in the

town of Budmouth were "like guilded letters upon the dark tablet of surrounding Egdon" (RN; 121). The heath itself has created and is the cause of the dignity she projects:

> Perhaps it was the gift of Heaven — a happy convergence of natural laws. Among other things opportunity had of late years been denied her of learning to be undignified, for she lived lonely. Isolation on a heath renders vulgarity well-nigh impossible. It would have been as easy for heath-ponies, bats and snakes to be vulgar as for her. A narrow life in Budmouth might have completely demeaned her. The only way to look queenly without realms or hearts to queen it over is to look as if you had lost them...she could suggest mansions she had never seen. Perhaps that was because she frequented a vaster mansion than any of them, the open hills.
>
> (ibid.)

The natural dignity that nature lends to those of mankind who dwell close to her wild places appears to be what creates in Eustacia a higher nobility than she would have otherwise attained had she stayed in town. By removing to the heath, though involuntarily, she has become the queen of the place and the hearts of men around her. In addition, she exists in a 'populous solitude' because though she appears to be 'listless, void, and quiet,' she is really 'busy and full' inside (ibid.).

Hardy has the heath directly act on Eustacia, as it would on any human; we have already seen how she interacts with the heath in physical ways and now it becomes apparent that the heath, though she resents its influence, acts to form in her a strange spirit. As long as she stays on the heath, she will retain her dignity and power; a remove to Paris, where she so desperately longs to go, would bring her down to the mundane and she would probably become just another tourist. The heath's influence is explicit for Hardy:

> To dwell on a heath without studying its meanings was like wedding a foreigner without learning his tongue. The subtle beauties of the heath were lost to Eustacia; she only caught its vapours. An environment which would have made a conventional woman a poet, a suffering woman a devotee, a pious woman a psalmist, even a giddy woman thoughtful, made a rebellious woman saturnine.
>
> (RN; 123)

Her gloom and her isolation feed each other in a tragic way; Hardy observes her strength of character, pride and dignity and her 'strange state of isolation'; like any strong character, she

is one of those who, though they "have lost the godlike conceit that we may do what we will, have still not "acquired a homely zest for doing what we can," which "shows a grandeur of temper which cannot be objected to in the abstract, for it denotes a mind that, though disappointed, forswears compromise" (ibid.). This appears to be a tragic flaw for she is at 'that stage of enlightenment' where she feels 'nothing is worthwhile'— she idealizes Wildeve 'for want of a better object' (ibid.). The only thing that could replace Wildeve would be the 'advent of a greater man' (ibid.) and this man will be the 'native' of the title, Clym Yeobright.

5. 4 The Return

Clym's return from Paris, where he has been successful in business, is eagerly awaited by his mother, of course, and his cousin Thomasin, but there is another interested party —- Eustacia, who, though she has never met him hopes she will 'see a sufficient hero' as she sets out one moonlit night with a band of mummers to the Yeobright home.

When she sees him, Hardy remarks on his well-shaped youthful face, but "the mind within was beginning to use it as a mere waste tablet whereon to trace its idiosyncrasies as they developed themselves. The beauty here visible would in no long time be ruthlessly overrun by its parasite, thought" (RN; 194). This notion of thought being a scourge on the human organism is repeatedly found in Hardy, however, it is especially strong in this novel, with Clym being the direct evidence of its destructive effects, for he 'already showed that thought is a disease of the flesh' (ibid.). In the poem *Before Life and After*, Hardy expresses the idea that consciousness is a burden and a curse:

> A time there was — as one may guess
> And as, indeed, earth's testimonies tell —
> Before the birth of consciousness
> When all went well.
>
> (CP; 277)

Clym's perhaps intemperate ambition is to start a school; in his intensive preparatory reading his sight is damaged, which drives him to become a furze-cutter, as in his almost blind state it is the one thing he can do. Hardy's irony is hard to miss — he has 'returned' to the heath in an intimate way. Like Eustacia, his days on the heath are marked by physical contact with Egdon. But he has a basically happy nature; for with Clym, "as is usual with bright natures, the diety that lies ignominiously chained within an ephemeral human carcase shone out of him like a ray" (RN; 195).

Though Clym has become a furze-cutter after his misfortune, this is not as unusual a choice as might first appear; growing up on the heath, "he had been so interwoven with the heath in

his boyhood that hardly anybody could look upon it without thinking of him" (RN; 226). Hardy here virtually identifies him with the heath, perhaps to prepare the reader for the coming tragedy and thereby soften the blow. To describe a boy's connection to the heath as 'interwoven' demonstrates the deep connection Hardy establishes between this character and the landscape. In another passage, he has Clym walk forth on Rainbarrow one night when the moon is full. As he stands at the top, he sees the sky is clear from 'verge to verge' (RN; 253), "after standing awhile he stopped and felt the heather. It was dry, and he flung himself down upon the barrow, his face towards the moon, which depicted a small image of herself in each of his eyes" (ibid.). Hardy reinforces this concept of Clym by explaining that

> If any one knew the heath well it was Clym. He was permeated with its scenes, with its substance, and with its odours. He might be said to be its product. His eyes had first opened thereon; with its appearance all the first images of his memory were mingled; his estimate of life had been coloured by it; his toys had been the flint knives and arrow-heads which he found there, wondering why stones should 'grow' to such odd shapes; his flowers, the purple bells and yellow furze; his animal kingdom, the snakes and croppers; his society, its human haunters. Take all the varying hates felt by Eustacia Vye towards the heath, and translate them into loves, and you have the heart of Clym. He gazed upon the wide prospect as he walked, and was glad.
>
> (RN; 232)

Hardy makes it clear here that these two characters are opposite natures; therefore, their forthcoming marriage, though we are not aware of it yet at this point in the novel, will fail because of this basic disharmony. The polarity of these two is further defined when Hardy has Eustacia say that she does not have much love for her fellow-creatures; Clym rejoins by suggesting she should hate what produced them, perhaps meaning society, and she then asks "Do you mean nature? I hate her already" (RN; 244). It seems apparent that Hardy identifies Eustacia with town life (society) and Clym with the heath (nature). She dreams of Paris and all it promises; ironically, he is a refugee from the very life she desires. When he tells her that he finds the heath 'exhilirating, and strengthening, and soothing' (RN; 245), and asks her if she is aware there is a Druidical stone nearby, she answers, "I am aware that there are Boulevards in Paris" (ibid.).

The month of March arrives, and the heath shows "its first faint signs of awakening from winter trance. The awakening was almost feline in its stealthiness" (RN; 249). Also awakening is Clym's passion for Eustacia. They meet by moonlight, in fact using the moon as a timepiece. Eustacia is late and Clym complains, to which she replies, "You said ten minutes after the first

mark of shade on the edge of the moon..." (RN; 254). After a time, she mourns the loss of time, not only on this night, but we sense, in her existence and in their love. She wails, "'See how out time is slipping, slipping, slipping!' She pointed toward the half-eclipsed moon" (RN; 258).

5. 5 Summer On the Heath

Hardy next shows us the heath at the beginning of summer. The brownness of winter and early spring has given way to a 'green stage' (RN; 263). Clym, after an argument with his mother over Eustacia, walks forth to calm himself and as he does Hardy has the serenity of the heath reflect Clym's mood:

> In the minor valleys, between the hillocks which diversified the contour of the vale, the fresh young ferns were luxuriantly growing up, ultimately to reach a height of five or six feet. He descended a little way, flung himself down in a spot where a path emerged from one of the small hollows...he was in a nest of vivid green. The ferny vegetation round him, though so abundant, was quite uniform: it was a grove of machine-made foliage, a world of green triangles with saw-edges, and not a single flower. The air was warm with a vaporous warmth, and the stillness was unbroken. Lizards, grasshoppers, and ants were the only living things to be beheld. The scene seemed to belong to the ancient world of the carboniferrous period, when the forms of plants were few, and of the fern kind; when there was neither bud nor blossom, nothing but a monotonous extent of leafage, amid which no bird sang.
>
> (RN; 264)

One flower does appear however, for he sees Eustacia's white bonnet above the ferns; she vanishes into a hollow for a moment but then "her whole form unfolded itself from the brake" (ibid). After they part, he watches her walking away toward the setting sun, whose "luminious rays wrapped her up with increasing distance" (RN; 267), and though the "dead flat of the scenery overpowered him" (ibid.), he was alive to the green beauty all around him; still, there was "something in its oppressive horizontality which too much reminded him of the arena of life; it gave him a sense of bare equality with, and no superiority to, a single living thing under the sun" (ibid.). Clym's intuition about the 'arena of life'— the leveling feeling he has, is at once a glimpse of the future with Eustacia and the struggle it will involve and a humble, saving feeling of his part in the natural scheme of things.

Clym leaves his mother's house to 'secure a dwelling to which he might take Eustacia' (RN; 268). As he sets out across the heath, the "cold clouds hastened on in a body, as if painted on a moving slide. Vapours from other continents arrived upon the wind, which curled and parted

around him as he walked on" (RN; 268). Significantly, he comes to a fir and beech plantation which had been "enclosed from the heath land in the year of his birth" (ibid.); this fact further identifies him with the place before Hardy presents us with this descriptive passage:

> Here the trees, laden heavily with their new and humid leaves, were now suffering more damage than during the highest winds of winter, when the boughs are specially disencumbered to do battle with the storm. The wet round beeches were undergoing amputations, bruises, cripplings, and harsh lacerations, from which the wasting sap would bleed for many a day to come, and which leaves scars visible till the day of their burning. Each stem was wrenched at the root, where it moved like a bone in its socket, and at every onset of the gale convulsive sounds came from the branches, as if pain were felt. In a neighboring brake a finch was trying to sing; but the wind blew under his feathers till they stood on end, twisted round his little tail, and made him give up his song.
>
> (RN; 268-269)

While in Hardy the natural world can be destructive or healing, trees seem to take most of the punishment and the burden of meaning, as in the passage above. Amputation, bruises, lacerations — all are possible human injuries for Hardy often uses trees as a symbol to signify human suffering and conflict.

But the heath is impervious to the insults inflicted on the trees; the gusts which "tore the trees merely waved the furze and heather in a light caress. Egdon was made for such times as these" (ibid.). One wonders if Clym will be able to weather the coming storm, too. The 'gusts' can also be interpreted as change and 'progress'— where the trees fall victim, but the heath resists all inroads. This is confirmed in another part of the novel when Clym cannot help 'indulging in a barbarous satisfaction' (RN; 232) by observing that though the local farmers have tried to till the soil of Egdon it is a place that intrudes as an 'uncouth object into this' (century); Hardy explains that "tillage, after holding on for a year or two, had receded again in despair, the ferns and furze-tufts stubbornly reasserting themselves" (ibid.).

It is now July and the heath is at its most beautiful. The sun fires the crimson heather to scarlet. "It was the one season of the year, and the one weather of the season, in which the heath was gorgeous" (ibid.) and in comparing the seasons to the hours, Hardy suggests the cyclic harmony of the place within the progress of time:

> This flowering period represented the second or noontide division in the cycle of those superficial changes which alone were possible here; it followed the

> green or young-fern period, representing the morn, and preceded the brown period, when the heath-bells and ferns would wear the russet tinges of evening; to be in turn displaced by the dark hue of the winter period, representing night.
>
> (RN; 299)

It is during this summer too that Clym will take up the labor of furze-cutting, where he can get 'half-a-crown a hundred' (RN; 310) for cutting this fuel. His new life is "of a curious microscopic sort, his whole world being limited to a circuit of a few feet from his person" (ibid.); this is reminiscent of the scene in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* where Knight is seen clinging to the face of the Cliff without a Name, face to face with the trilobite. Here this close perspective brings him even deeper into to the world of the heath for his

> familiars were creeping and winged things, and they seemed to enroll him in their band. Bees hummed around his ears with an intimate air, and tugged at the heath and furze flowers at his side in such numbers as to weigh them down to the sod. The strange amber-coloured butterflies which Egdon produced, and which were never seen elsewhere, quivered in the breath of his lips, alighted on his bowed back, and sported with the glittering point of his hook as he flourished it up and down. Tribes of emerald-green grasshoppers leaped over his feet, falling awkwardly on their backs, heads, or hips, like unskilled acrobats, as chance might rule; or engaged themselves in noisy flirtations under the fern-fronds with silent ones of homely hue. Huge flies, ignorant of larders and wire-netting, and quite in a savage state, buzzed about him *without knowing he was a man.* In and out of the fern-dells snakes glided in their most brilliant blue and yellow guise, it being the season immediately following the shedding of their old skins, when their colours are brightest. Litters of young rabbits came out from their forms to sun themselves upon hillocks, the hot beams blazing through the delicate tissue of each thin-fleshed ear, and firing to a blood-red transparency in which the veins could be seen. *None of them feared him.*
>
> (RN; 312; *italics* mine)

Here we see Clym fully integrated with the heath and its world. Drabble notes that "we see nature as a background to character: or is it the other way round? Which came first in the conception of the novel, Clym or Egdon? The two are inextricably connected" (GTH; 166). Hardy was perhaps one of the few writers who could so fully and convincingly describe

intimately man's harmony with Nature, though Thoreau, in a different way, was able to observe and record just as keenly and perceptively. This passage is so pleasing and, because it is not typical of Hardy's observations of nature, can stand as the prime emblem of harmony in the catalog of his nature writing. Delightful are the grasshoppers tumbling like green acrobats; the huge savage flies that are unaware he is a man; the butterflies that are found nowhere else; the brilliant snakes slithering through the grass; and finally, the young rabbits with the blazing red ears in the sun — their transparency linked to the lack of fear they have for the man.

In another place, Hardy sees Clym as "a silent being who...seemed to be of no more account in life than an insect. He appeared as a mere parasite of the heath, fretting its surface in his daily labour as a moth frets a garment, entirely engrossed with its products, having no knowledge of anything in the world save fern, furze, heath, lichens, and moss" (RN; 339). This comment follows directly on a passage in which Mrs. Yeobright, his mother, observes 'ephemerons' (small insects) "passing their time in mad carousal"— some of which can be seen in the mud "heaving and wallowing with enjoyment" (RN; 338). The passages taken together seem to suggest that Clym's labor on the heath is a form of enjoyment for him because his mind is freed from the 'ravages of thought' noted earlier, when we first see him in the novel. His withdrawal from the social world (in the form of his teaching plans) to the natural world of the heath has healed his mind somewhat, if not his eyes. If this is so understood, then the heath for Hardy is a source of life and restoration for humanity amid the 19th-century onslaught of industrialization.

We next see the heath in the withering August heat, where the "sun had branded the whole heath with his mark, even the purple heath-flowers having put on a brownness under the dry blazes of the few preceding days. Every valley was filled with air like that of a kiln, and the clean quartz sand of the winter water-courses, which formed summer paths, had undergone a species of incineration since the drought had set in" (RN; 337). Mrs. Yeobright looks at the 'metallic violet' sky, so different from the 'sapphirine hue' of early summer (ibid.). She makes her way to her son's house to try and reconcile some differences with Eustacia — her new daughter-in-law. As she approaches the house she sees that at "one side of Clym's house was a knoll, and on top of the knoll a clump of fir trees so highly thrust up into the sky that their foliage from a distance appeared as a black spot in the air above the crown of the hill" (RN; 339). This black spot mirrors, or perhaps even helps generate her feelings. For, "on reaching this place Mrs Yeobright felt distressingly agitated, weary, and unwell" (ibid.). She makes her way to the top and sits under their shade to think about what to say to Eustacia. Hardy now gives us a careful description of Mrs. Yeobright's inner state as reflected in the physical profile of the trees:

> The trees beneath which she sat were singularly battered, rude and wild, and

for a few minutes Mrs Yeobright dismissed thoughts of her own storm-broken and exhausted state to contemplate theirs. Not a bough in the nine trees which composed the group but was splintered, looped, and distorted by the fierce weather that there held them at its mercy whenever it prevailed. Some were blasted and split as if by lightning, black stains as from fire marking their sides, while the ground at their feet was strewn with dead fir-needles and heaps of cones blown down in the gales of past years. The place was called the Devil's Bellows, and it was only necessary to come there on a March or November night to discover the forcible reasons for that name. On the present heated afternoon, when no perceptible wind was blowing, the trees kept up a perpetual moan which one could hardly believe to be caused by the air.

(RN; 339-340)

The 'perpetual moan' that the trees keep up is the auditory counterpart of Mrs. Yeobright's spiritual state. She has had her own March and November gales to weather and while she may not be twisted, distorted or splintered, psychic suffering has left its mark on her; though the gales have passed for the moment in her life, she still suffers their effects, Hardy seems to be saying. Mrs. Yeobright will later die of an adder bite, which she may have received at the Devil's Bellows, it is not detailed in the novel. In fact, one of the minor characters says, as they look at another adder they've caught, "Look at his eye — for all the world like a villainous sort of black current" and "Look at that, Neighbors, how do we know but that something of the old serpent in God's garden...lives on in snakes and adders still" (RN; 359). The impact of her death on Clym is so great that Hardy says Clym "longed for death as a field laborer longs for the shade" (RN; 372). When he further learns that his mother had been trying to visit him to reconcile matters, and that her knocking had been ignored by Eustacia, he experiences true spiritual suffering. He faced,

only the imperturbable countenance of the heath, which, having defied the cataclysmal onsets of centuries, reduced to insignificance by its seamed and antique features the wildest turmoil of a single man.

(RN; 388)

Yeobright at this point has a "consciousness of a vast impassivity in all which lay around him..." which he has experienced once before on parting from Eustacia, and is interpreted as an "overpowering of the fervid by the inanimate" (RN; 389); his experience before with Eustacia had been sweet; this time it is far on the other side of that. But both times his power of decision

has been altered by this vast impassivity.

Though he has parted from her, he waits and hopes for Eustacia's return. As he busies himself with chores, he thinks he hears her outside. Natural sounds cause him to think of her, for when, "a leaf floated to the earth he turned his head, thinking it might be her footfall. A bird searching for worms in the mould of the flower-beds sounded like her hand on the latch of the gate; and at dusk, when soft, strange ventriloquisms came from holes in the ground, hollow stalks, curled dead leaves, and other crannies wherein breezes, worms, and insects can work their will, he fancied that they were Eustacia, standing without and breathing wishes of reconciliation" (RN; 409). Sounds that come from holes in the ground, hollow stalks, dead leaves and places where worms do their work, strange murmurs and ventriloquisms (which comes from the Latin and means 'speaking from the belly'), suggest that her imagined voice originates from a place other than her self; that she is perhaps already a ghost.

5.6 Night Flight

Eustacia does, in fact, take flight from Clym on a rainy night in November. Hard as she tries to ignore the weather, the "gloom of the night was funereal; all nature seemed clothed in crape" (RN; 420). She heads for Rainbarrow, "occasionally stumbling over twisted furze-roots, tufts of rushes, or oozing lumps of fleshy fungi, which in this season lay scattered about the heath like the rotten liver and lungs of some colossal animal" (RN; 420). Because Eustacia hates Egdon Heath, what she experiences is hateful. We can imagine her tripping and stumbling, a physical action highly irritating to normal individuals, and one profoundly angering to a person of her strong nature; the fungi seem to be projections of her unhappy and fevered mind. Typical of Hardy, 'the reflection of landscape in mind and mind in landscape' is a technique used to create unity within the novel; the movement seems to be primarily from 'internal emotion to external equivalent' (PN; 135); however, there are examples in Hardy's novels of the reverse happening: examples where the external natural world interferes or influences the internal states of the characters.

Eustacia finally reaches Rainbarrow and she stands still to think; and here Hardy admits that never "was harmony more perfect than that between the chaos of her mind and the chaos of the world outside" (RN; 420). This almost heroic relation between her inner state and the outer world is not like her seeing the fungi earlier; here we have a situation where the external and internal are united through synchronicity alone: the unity thus achieved increases the authority of Hardy's observation of this character. She hunches under her umbrella in the rain and it is "as if she were drawn into the Barrow by a hand from beneath" (ibid.); now, barrows traditionally contain the dead, so this image becomes another powerful suggestion of what will come for her. She is in "isolation from all of humanity except the mouldered remains inside the tumulus" (ibid.). This downward movement from life to death is also reflected in Hardy's description of

the rain:

> Extreme unhappiness weighed visibly upon her. Between the drippings of the rain from her umbrella to her mantle, from her mantle to the heather, from the heather to the earth, very similar sounds could be heard coming from her lips; and the tearfulness of the outer scene was repeated upon her face. The wings of her soul were broken by the cruel obstructiveness of all about her...;
>
> (RN; 421)

The movement of the rain, which in Hardy usually accompanies unhappy change, is from heaven above to the barrow below and it carries along Eustacia's spirit, away from the 'obstructions' above to the darkness and peace below. She now utters a cry to heaven at the injustice of her lot and with this Hardy places her within a long tradition in tragic literature:

> 'How I have tried and tried to be a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me!...I do not deserve my lot!' she cried in a frenzy of bitter revolt. 'O, the cruelty of putting me into this ill-conceived world! I was capable of much; but I have been injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond my control! O, how hard it is of Heaven to devise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to Heaven at all!'
>
> (ibid.)

Southerington has noted the artistic success Hardy achieved by "setting his figures against a cosmic background which would enoble them despite their weaknesses" (HVM; 85). Eustacia is certainly one of these. The 'ill-conceived world' in which she finds herself has injured, blighted and crushed her, just as any natural thing (any tree) would be in the storms of circumstance and fate. As Clym waits in vain for Eustacia's return, the theme of death is additionally reinforced beyond Eustacia's experience on the barrow. The rain begins to increase in intensity as the wind rises. Clym walks restlessly about the house:

> It was one of those nights when cracks in the walls of old churches widen, when ancient stains on the ceilings of decayed manor-houses are renewed and enlarged from the size of a man's hand to an area of many feet. The little gate in the palings before his dwelling continually opened and clicked together again, but when he looked out eagerly nobody was there; it was as if invisible shapes of the dead were passing in on their way to visit him.
>
> (RN; 424)

His cousin, Thomasin, however, goes out into this same weather but to "her there were not, as to Eustacia, demons in the air, and malice in every bush or bough. The drops which lashed her face were not scorpions, but prosy rain; Egdon in the mass was no monster whatever, but impersonal open ground. Her fears of the place were rational, her dislikes of its worst moods reasonable" (RN; 430) —unlike Eustacia and even Clym.

The drowning of Eustacia and Wildeve and the death of Mrs. Yeobright leaves Clym, Thomasin and Diggory Venn alone in the novel as it closes. Clym, perhaps closest to the heath, is often seen walking the heath alone. His meditations cast his mind back to the ancient past. So that his "imagination would then people the spot with its ancient inhabitants: forgotten Celtic tribes trod their tracks about him, and he could almost live among them, look in their faces, and see them standing beside the barrows which swelled around, untouched and perfect as at their erection. Those of the dyed barbarians who had chosen the cultivable tracts were, in comparison with those who had left their marks here, as writers on paper beside writers on parchment. Their records had perished long ago by the plough, while the works of these remained" (RN; 449). This meditation on immortality places Clym on safe ground; Diggory Venn appears again, no longer a reddleman but of 'an ordinary Christian countenance' and the owner of a 'fifty-cow dairy' (RN; 450). Venn and Thomasin marry, as might be expected.

The novel closes with a final image of Clym standing atop Rainbarrow; the resemblance to Christ on the Mount is hard to miss:

> On the Sunday after the wedding an unusual sight was to be seen on Rainbarrow. From a distance there simply appeared to be a motionless figure standing on top of the tumulus, just as Eustacia had stood on that lonely summit some two years and a half before. But now it was fine warm weather, with only a summer breeze blowing, and early afternoon instead of dull twilight. Those who ascended to the immediate neighborhood of the Barrow perceived that the erect form in the center, piercing the sky, was not really alone. Round him on the slopes of the barrow a number of heathmen and women were reclining or sitting at their ease. They listened to the words of the man in their midst, who was preaching, while they abstractedly pulled heather, stripped ferns, or tossed pebbles down the slope. This was the first of a series of moral lectures or Sermons on the Mount, which were to be delivered from the same place every Sunday afternoon as long as the fine weather lasted.
>
> The commanding elevation of Rainbarrow had been chosen for two reasons: first, that it occupied a central position among the remote cottages around; secondly, that the preacher thereon could be seen from all adjacent points as soon as he arrived at his post, the view of him being thus a

convenient signal to those stragglers who wished to draw near. The speaker was bareheaded, and the breeze at each waft gently lifted and lowered his hair, somewhat too thin for a man of his years, these still numbering less than thirty-three. He wore a shade over his eyes, and his face was pensive and lined; but, though these bodily features were marked with decay there was no defect in the tones of his voice, which were rich, musical and stirring.... Yeobright had, in fact, found his vocation in the career of an itinerant open-air preacher and lecturer on morally unimpeachable subjects....

(RN; 473-474)

The mention of the fact that the speaker is 'less than thirty-three' further identifies Clym with Christ. In the above passage, consciousness is still a burden to be borne, as evidenced by his bodily features 'marked by decay,' but his spirit has triumphed and his voice shows this. This is perhaps the final moral claim of the novel: that this particular suffering man, struggling to find meaning in a neutral uncaring, or even hostile universe, has taken a stand for human meaning and purpose upon the land. His close identification with the heath, his integration into it, is not at odds with this stance. The heath in a sense has produced Clym, and he has claimed it for his own in return; his final choice of Rainbarrow is logical and sane — being the highest point roundabouts — but it is also a symbol of man's need to see clearly into the distance, perhaps the only successful tactic in the face of the arbitrariness of destiny.

6. The Mayor of Casterbridge

This novel is set in the third decade of the nineteenth century. Henchard, a skilled laborer, and his young wife and babe-in-arms approach the town of Weydon on Fair-Day. They stop to have some 'furmity'— a kind of porridge. Henchard notices 'with the instinct of a perverse character' (MC; 8) that the furmity-woman will add rum to the gruel for a price, so he winks to her and she measures out some liquor and pours it into his bowl. He thereby, after a few bowls, becomes drunk. He then sells his wife for five pounds to a sailor. She leaves with the sailor and the child. This horrible sale of a human being Hardy contrasts with a scene immediately outside the furmity-woman's tent, where the "difference between the peacefulness of inferior nature and the willful hostilities of mankind was very apparent at this place. In contrast with the harshness of the act just ended within the tent was the sight of several horses crossing their necks and rubbing each other lovingly as they waited in patience to be harnessed for the homeward journey" (MC; 14). This comment is followed by a description of the 'valleys and woods' beyond the Fair; of the sunset and the peace at that time of day, but Hardy cautions us that when considering "this scene, after the other, there was a natural instinct to abjure man

as the blot on an otherwise kindly universe; till it was remembered that mankind might some night be innocently sleeping when these quiet objects were raging loud" (ibid.). Hardy believed that man was an integral part of nature and the universe so, figuratively, Henchard has created an ugly storm through his drunkeness, which has resulted in a personal disaster while the natural world at this time is at peace; however, this can easily be reversed: storms and disaster can occur in the natural world while man is 'innocently sleeping.'

Besides suggesting that he sees the natural and human worlds as parts of a whole, Hardy here elevates Henchard as a character to a force of nature through his violent actions and passionate character, even though his actions at this point are vile. Howe comments that Henchard is 'scaled as somewhat larger than life' (TH; 96). This critic sees the creation of Henchard as "that rarity in modern fiction: an integral characterization, a figure shown not through a dimension of psychology or an aspect of conduct, but at a single stroke, in his full range of being...a man exemplifying the futility and heroism of the human will" (TH; 101). Henchard is an archetypical character in isolation in his own time and for all time. The critic Southerington is of the opinion that Henchard is much like the universe itself, again stressing the identity of this character with natural forces: "...the universe is itself blind, instinctive, unpurposive, and each of these terms, except just possibly the last, may be applied to Henchard himself" (HVM; 104).

The next morning, Henchard enters a church, puts his head on the Bible and swears an oath not to touch liquor for twenty years, until he is forty. He begins a search for his wife and child that takes him to a seaport where he learns that they have emigrated. He then decides to settle in the town of Casterbridge.

Eighteen years later the mother and her daughter, by name Elizabeth-Jane, appear in Weydon; the wife is searching for Michael Henchard; her sailor-husband has drowned. She explains to her daughter that he is a relative. She learns from the same old furmity-woman that Henchard has left word that, if anyone might come looking for him, that he is in Casterbridge. Upon arrival and after making some inquiries, they learn that he is the mayor, a corn-merchant, and the most powerful man in the town.

6. 1 Casterbridge and the Countryside

They journey to the town, which they see is 'untouched by the faintest sprinkle of modernism'; Hardy says that there were no suburbs, that the town and the country 'met at a mathematical line' (MC; 27). The town is as 'compact as a box of dominoes' (ibid.). Hardy mentions in another place that Casterbridge was 'the complement of the rural life around, not its urban opposite' (MC; 56); he thus establishes that the countryside and the town are parts of the same unified rural world. To further reinforce this idea, he says that "Bees and butterflies in the corn-fields at the top of the town, who desired to get to the meads at the bottom, took no circuitous

course, but flew straight down High Street without any apparent consciousness that they were traversing strange latitudes. And in the autumn airy spheres of thistledown floated into the same street, lodged upon the shop-fronts, blew into drains; and innumerable tawny and yellow leaves skimmed along the pavement, and stole through people's doorways into their passages with a hesitating scratch on the floor, like the skirts of timid visitors" (MC; 56-57). The interpenetration here of the two worlds seems thorough, though perhaps fleeting....soon to pass away as modernization advances. In the eleventh chapter, Hardy expands this pastoral perspective to include a further dimension of the place: he sees the town as a symbol for the continuity of human endeavor through time:

> Casterbridge announced old Rome in every street, alley and precinct. It looked Roman, bespoke the art of Rome, concealed dead men of Rome. It was impossible to dig more than a foot or two deep about the town fields and gardens without coming upon some tall soldier or other of the Empire, who had lain there in his silent unobtrusive rest for a space of fifteen hundred years. He was mostly found lying on his side, in an oval scoop in the chalk, like a chicken in its shell; his knees drawn up to his chest; sometimes with the remains of his spear against his arm; a fibula or broach of bronze on his breast or forehead; an urn at his knees, a jar at his breast, a bottle at his mouth....
>
> (MC; 68)

This perspective is somewhat reminiscent of George Eliot's descriptions in novels like *The Mill On the Floss*, where she was concerned with demonstrating the age of the place and the continuity of its inhabitants through the years — or in *Adam Bede*, for example. In this novel, perhaps more than any other that Hardy wrote, a town and its environs assumes the importance of a naturally-occurring feature like Egdon Heath; where before Hardy put his descriptive genius into places like the Heath, the Cliffs without a Name in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, or the haunted wood Bathesheba sleeps and dreams in in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, in this novel Casterbridge becomes an organic feature of the landscape and the locus of meaning. Hardy repeatedly states that Casterbridge is a part of the country; for example, it 'had no suburb in the modern sense' (MC; 88); the town seems to have been plunked down in the middle of fields: it was like 'a chess-board on a green table-cloth' (MC; 89). In an evocative passage describing the integration of town and countryside, Hardy says,

> The farmer's boy could sit under his barley-mow and pitch a stone into the office-window of the town clerk; reapers at work among the sheaves nodded

to acquaintances standing on the pavement corner; the red-robed judge, when he condemned a sheep-stealer, pronounced sentence to the tune of Baa, that floated in at the window from the remainder of the flock browsing hard-by; ....wheat ricks overhung the old Roman street, and thrust their eaves against the church tower; green-thatched barns, with doorways as high as Solomon's Temple, opened directly upon the main thoroughfare....

(ibid.)

This harmony extends to the cottage Henchard rents for his former wife:

The evening sun seemed to shine more yellowly there than anywhere else this autumn — stretching its rays, as the hours grew later, under the lowest sycamore boughs, and steeping the ground floor of the dwelling, with its green shutters, in a substratum of radiance which the foliage screened from the upper parts. Beneath these sycamores on the town walls could be seen from the sitting-room the tumuli and earth forts of the distant uplands; making it altogether a pleasant spot, with the usual touch of melancholy that a western prospect lends.

(MC; 79)

Because Henchard is doing a morally upright thing by installing the mother and daughter in their own home, Hardy invests approving emotion into the place by bathing it in the beauty of the setting sun, though with a touch of melancholy. Henchard becomes a regular visitor.

However, other areas of Casterbridge are less inviting. On the northeastern edge of the town is an area with "precincts (that) embodied the mournful phases of Casterbridge life, as the south avenues embodied its cheerful moods" (MC; 124). The area is 'sunless' even in the summer; the spring did not melt the frosts that seemed to linger there longer than anywhere else; in winter it was 'the seed-field of all aches, rheumatism, and torturing cramps'; if it were not for the 'configuration of the landscape' on the northeastern side of town, the doctors of Casterbridge 'might have pined for the lack of nourishment' (MC; 124-125). After a series of domestic setbacks have soured him, Henchard walks in this area one evening; the place seems to fit his situation and mood, another example of Hardy drawing emotional correspondences between a character and the landscape. As he walks along the slow, dark, noiseless river he sees a pile of buildings — a place used for hangings; the area seems almost a Dantean feature.

6. 2 Two Bridges

Hardy locates two bridges near the lower part of Casterbridge town; one bridge, the closest

to town, is made of brick; the other, further out amid green meadows, is made of stone; the stone bridge is still within the limits of the town. Both bridges are well-worn — Hardy says the bridges had 'speaking countenances'— and they are in this worn state because of the weather, of course, but also because of the 'friction of generations of loungers' (MC; 220) on each bridge. This statement is consonant with Hardy's view of Casterbridge as an organic part of the countryside; just as nature and man form an organic whole, so the weathering of the bridges is a result of the joint forces of man and nature. These bridges form the 'merging point of respectability and indigence' (ibid.) because of the two groups of very different and distinct people who 'haunt' each bridge.

Consciously or unconsciously, Hardy seems to be adding further Dantean elements here by making the bridges so distinct in location and by telling us that those who frequented the first, brick bridge, were of the 'lowest character' while those who frequent the second, stone bridge, were of a 'politer stamp' (MC; 221). While the first bridge attracts those who had been 'of comparatively no account during their successes' (ibid.), the second bridge boasts "bankrupts, hypochondriacs, persons who were what is called 'out of situation' from fault or lucklessness, the inefficient of the professional class — shabby-genteel men" (ibid.) who have little or nothing to do during the day. Those on the first bridge 'had no particular sense of shame in their ruin' (ibid.) while those on the second bridge do; the loungers on the first face the road and do not 'mind the glare of the public eye' (MC; 220); those on the second face the water and never look at those who pass by. The second bridge is a bridge of suicides; men gaze down into the river so long that sometimes they 'allow their poor carcases to follow that gaze' (ibid.). To the second bridge comes Henchard in all his self-created troubles and woe; this bridge becomes a frequent destination for him. In fact, when Henchard decides to commit suicide, he uses this bridge on his way to Ten Hatches, the deepest part of the river. The care with which Hardy treats these two locations, the fact that they are geographically distinct and that they are frequented by 'lost souls' suggests again that Hardy may have been thinking of Dante.

But an even more distinct area of human degradation is Mixen Lane — the 'mildewed leaf in the sturdy and flourishing Casterbridge plant' (MC; 252); here we find another metaphor relating the town to the natural world. Mixen Lane was "the hiding-place of those who were in distress, and in debt and trouble of every kind" (ibid.). The lane "stretched out like a spit into the moist and misty lowland...Vice ran freely in and out of certain of the doors of the neighborhood; recklessness dwelt under the roof with the crooked chimney; shame in some bow-windows; theft (in times of privation) in the thatched and mud-walled houses by the swallows. Even slaughter had not been altogether unknown here" (MC; 252). But this human blot on the landscape is located "not a hundred yards from a row of noble elms, and commanding a view across the moor of airy uplands and corn-fields, and mansions of the great" (ibid.). So Hardy seems to be saying that just as nature has its ugly sides, so also does the human construct of

the town itself, and this is because it is a part of nature.

Anyone who has read the novel will know that Henchard's fate is not a happy one. His nature, for so long so violent and stubborn, causes him to leave the town in self-exile, to die alone in a hovel where he is finally discovered by his Elizabeth-Jane and her husband Donald. In a crude will he has left he asks that no mourners be at his funeral, no bells be tolled, no 'flours' be put on his grave and that no man remember him. A man of such extremes, a man who was almost a natural force in himself, is perhaps Hardy's most successful creation in terms of character-drawing and psychological depth.

7. The Woodlanders

Open any Hardy novel at the first page of the first chapter and you will find a stunning nature-description; *The Woodlanders* is no exception. As is also usual with Hardy, the opening scene is not in a town or village, but on the open road, and like most openings, he uses trees as a central image. On this coach-road there are

> extensive woodlands, interspersed with apple-orchards. Here the trees, timber or fruit-bearing as the case may be, make the wayside hedges ragged by their drip and shade, their lower limbs stretching in level repose over the road, as though reclining in insubstantial air....
>
> (W; 5)

The trees dominate and seem to 'recline in insubstantial air,' as if they were humans at rest, stretching out on a lazy summer day. This image elides into evocations of all the generations of people who have passed this way:

> ...when the days are darkening the many gay ones now perished who have rolled over the hill, the blistered soles that have trodden it, and the tears that have wetted it, return on the mind of the loiterers.
>
> (ibid.)

As in the Roman ruins of Casterbridge, Hardy quickly evokes a sense of the past and the long continuity of human life within the setting he establishes. Hardy then reflects on all such lonely routes — suggesting also that highways, because they involve beginnings and endings symbolize man's lonely passage through this life:

> The physiognomy of a deserted highway expresses solitude to a degree that

is not reached by dales or downs, and bespeaks a tomb-like stillness more emphatic than that of glades and pools. The contrast of what is with what might be, probably accounts for this. To step, for instance, at the place under notice, from the edge of the plantation into the adjoining pale thoroughfare, and pause amid its emptiness for a moment, was to exchange by the act of a single stride the simple absence of human companionship for an incubus of the forlorn.

(ibid.)

The man who steps from the trees onto the highway feels suddenly "more alone than before he had emerged upon the highway" (ibid.). This man is the master-barber, Mr. Percomb, who has come seeking Marty South, one of the woodlanders, to cut her hair — he is a wig-maker. Her hair is her one pride, her 'one pretension to beauty' (W; 11). Its color is brown in the evening firelight but on "observation by day, would have revealed that its true shade was a rare and beautiful approximation to chestnut" (ibid.)— a tree as well as a color. Hardy also notes that "its abundance made it almost unmanageable" (ibid.), thus suggesting it is akin to vegetation in its plenitude and strength. Her work is to make spars used in thatching — a job she dislikes but must do to survive.

Marty's father is also connected to trees, or more accurately, to one tree, in a very interesting way: in his final illness, he believes that the tree outside his house will be the death of him; in other words, when the tree falls, so will he; he even fears it will fall on him and his daughter. The tree is "a tall elm...Whenever the wind blew...the tree rocked, naturally enough; and the sight of its motion, and the sound of its sighs, had gradually bred the terrifying illusion in the woodman's mind. Thus he would sit all day, in spite of persuasion, watching its every sway, and listening to the melancholy Gregorian melodies which the air wrung out of it. This fear it apparently was, rather than any organic disease, which was eating away the health of John South....As the tree waved South waved his head" (W; 91). Marty explains to the doctor that "the shape of it seems to haunt him like an evil spirit. He says that it is exactly his own age, that it has got human sense, and sprouted up when he was born on purpose to rule him, and keep him as its slave" (W; 101).

Less fantastic that South's imaginary struggle with the beech are the numerous descriptions suggesting the struggle that goes on in nature. One evening, Marty South steps outside to deliver some finished spars to a neighbor and listens, "A lingering wind brought to her ear the creaking sound of two overcrowded branches in the neighboring wood, which were rubbing each other into wounds, and other vocalized sorrows of the trees, together with the screech of owls, and the fluttering tumble of some awkward woodpigeon ill-balanced on its roosting bough" (W; 16). Marty is seen as a woodland creature herself in her ability to read nature and live within

and according to its rhythms. Her hearing seems especially acute — it must be to hear the tumble of a woodpigeon. In another passage, when she is planting pine trees with Giles Winterborne, she says, "How they sigh directly we put 'em upright, though while they are lying down they don't sigh at all" (W; 64). Giles replies that he'd never noticed it. She "erected one of the young pines into its hole, and held up her finger; the soft musical breathing instantly set in which was not to cease night or day till the grown tree should be felled — probably long after the two planters should be felled themselves" (ibid.). Drawing yet another link between trees and the two main characters, Marty is made to say, "It seems to me," the girl continued, "as if they sigh because they are very sorry to begin life in earnest — just as we be" (ibid.).

When she finally decides to sell her hair, she cuts it herself and as she lays her severed tresses across a white table, Hardy tells us that "they stretched like waving and ropy weeds over the washed white bed of a stream" (W; 20) again providing us with an image linking her hair and plant life. Later, Marty reveals that she is "the original owner of Mrs. Charmond's supplementary locks, and inclosed a sample from the native stock, which had grown considerably by this time" (W; 249).

Even indoors she is alert to nature; she awakens when she hears "the sparrows walking down their long holes in the thatch above her sloping ceiling to their exits in the eves; whereupon she also rose..." (W; 21).

Like any Hardy nature-priestess, she knows the animals and can forecast the weather. Hardy here combines nature lore with a beautiful word-painting that shows his skills as a poet:

> She looked towards the western sky, which was now aglow like some vast foundry wherein new worlds were being cast. Across it the bare bough of a tree stretched horizontally, revealing every twig against the evening fire, and showing in dark profile every beck and movement of three pheasants that were settling themselves down on it in a row to roost.
>
> "It will be fine to-morrow," said Marty, observing them with the vermilion light of the sun in the pupils of her eyes, "for they are a-croupied down nearly at the end of the bough. If it were going to be stormy they'd squeeze close to the trunk."
>
> (W; 68)

Marty is a character so immersed in the natural world that she gains a kind of immortality and becomes a natural force in the novel; an emanation of the spirit of the story itself, she therefore transcends the tale to become an unconscious archetype, in the words of Irving Howe, she becomes a 'permanent citizen of the imagination' (TH; 129), like Tess.

7. 1 Giles Winterborne

The other woodlander is Giles Winterborne; along with Marty South, he represents for Hardy the "novel's moral vision, its ethic of man and nature fusing harmoniously, each dependent on the other and linked together by an unwritten language" (PN; 155). Hardy emphasizes this towards the end of the novel, after the death of Winterborne. Giles and Marty share a spiritual bond because "Marty South alone, of all the women in Hintock and the world, had approximated to Winterborne's level of intelligent intercourse with Nature. In that respect she had formed his true complement in the other sex, had lived as his counterpart, and had subjoined her thought to his as a corollary" (W; 330). These two characters are at the core of the novel in that they are both spiritual manifestations of Hardy's emotional and imaginative ideal of Nature and because, in a sense, they are married to the landscape and all it holds. Though Grace loves him, it is Marty who is grafted to his image in this novel. He and Marty are a part of the Hintock woods and their 'wonderful world of sap and leaves' (ibid.). That both Marty and Giles work in the woods, with Nature, elevates them in Hardy's estimation; their woodland consciousness is central to Hardy's concept of man and Nature in harmony:

> They had been possessed of its finer mysteries as of commonplace knowledge; had been able to read its hieroglyphs as ordinary writing; to them the sights and sounds of night, winter, wind, storm, amid those dense boughs, which had to Grace a touch of the uncanny, and even of the supernatural, were simple occurrences whose origin, continuance, and laws they foreknew. They had planted together, and together they had felled; together they had, with the run of the years, mentally collected those remoter signs and symbols which seen in few were of runic obscurity, but all together made an alphabet. From the light lashing of the twigs upon their faces when brushing through them in the dark, they could pronounce upon the species of the tree whence they stretched; from the quality of the wind's murmur through a bough they could in like manner name its sort afar off. They knew by a glance at a trunk if its heart were sound, or tainted with incipient decay; and by the state of its upper twigs the stratum that had been reached by its roots. The artifices of the seasons were seen by them from the conjurer's own point of view, and not from that of the spectator.
>
> (W; 330-331)

Grace even says to Marty at one point that she (Marty) and Giles "could speak in a tongue that nobody else knew...the tongue of trees and fruits and flowers themselves" (W; 331). Giles has been called 'a minister of nature' (PN; 157) because of his nurturing role toward living things,

(especially trees) in this novel. He is uncanny in his husbandry:

> He had a marvellous power of making trees grow. Although he would seem to shovel in the earth quite carelessly there was a sort of sympathy between himself and the fir, oak, or beech that he was operating on; so that the roots took hold of the soil in a few days. When, on the other hand, any of the journeymen planted, although they seemed to go through an identical process, one quarter of the trees would die away during the ensuing August.
>
> (W; 63)

The care and attention he gives to his work makes it seem a religious act:

> Winterbrone's fingers were endowed with a gentle conjuror's touch in spreading the roots of each little tree, resulting in a sort of caress under which the delicate fibres all laid themselves out in their proper directions for growth. He put most of these roots towards the south-west; for, he said, in forty years' time, when some great gale is blowing from that quarter, the trees will require the strongest holdfast on that side to stand against it and not fall.
>
> (W; 64)

Of course, Winterborne's responsibility extends to all types of trees, but perhaps his identity is most closely connected with apple trees. He has his own apple mill; at one encounter with Mrs. Fitzpiers, he is in the process of using the mill, and she sees him looking and smelling like "Autumn's very brother, his face being sunburnt to wheat-colour, his eyes blue as corn-flowers, his sleeves and leggings dyed with fruit-stains, his hands clammy with the sweet juice of apples, his hat sprinkled with pips, and everywhere about him the atmosphere of cider...." (W; 205-206). To Grace Melbury he seems a romantic figure, for he "rose upon her memory as the fruit-god and the wood-god in alternation: sometimes leafy and smeared with green lichen, as she had seen him amongst the sappy boughs of the plantations: sometimes cider-stained and starred with apple-pips...." (W; 278). When Grace later has to make a dangerous journey, "the spirit of Winterborne seemed to keep her company and to banish all sense of darkness from her mind" (W; 315). After the death of Winterborne, Grace realizes how much she loved him and he her; she feels the usual rage at Heaven found in Hardy, but this is followed by a most pathetic scene where Grace is seen "laying her hand on the dead man's eyelids, where she kept it a long time, pressing down their lashes with gentle touches, as if she were stroking a little bird" (W; 321). Winterborne's death is mourned by Grace and the others who loved him; all of nature seems to

weep at his passing:

> For a time Grace and her father walked side by side without speaking. It was just in the blue of the dawn, and the chilling tone of the sky was reflected in her cold, wet face. The whole wood seemed to be a house of death, pervaded by loss to its uttermost length and breadth. Winterborne was gone, and the copses seemed to show the want of him; those young trees, so many of which he had planted, and of which he had spoken so truly when he said that he should fall before they fell, were at that very moment sending out their roots in the direction that he had given them with his subtle hand.
>
> (W; 326)

The trees, then, are his legacy and his immortality at once; on another level, as a nature-god he lives on within the trees themselves. Hardy's last thought in the novel is for Giles and he gives a most beautiful speech to Marty South — perhaps one of the most moving speeches in all 19th-century literature; Marty is at his graveside eight months after his death (Grace no longer visits the grave) when she says:

> "Now, my own own love," she whispered, "you are mine, and on'y mine; for she has forgot 'ee at last, although for her you died. But I — whenever I get up I'll think of 'ee, and whenever I lie down I'll think of 'ee. Whenever I plant the young larches I'll think that none can plant as you planted; and whenever I split a gad, and whenever I turn the cider wring, I'll say none could do it like you. If ever I forget your name let me forget home and heaven!...But no, no, my love, I never can forget 'ee; for you was a good man, and did good things!"
>
> (W; 367)

Hardy's use of anaphora and his simple and direct language here make this final elegy one of his most painfully moving.

7. 2 Marty and Giles

Many have found fault with Hardy's plot and characterization in this novel, but few fault his nature descriptions. They are so beautufully drawn that this novel may be seen as a poetic masterpiece in prose, if that term signifies. The language is 'intimate, unpretentious, concrete' (TH; 105) and because the Nature theme also calls for an intimate, humble and real treatment, there is artistic harmony between language and theme. Because of this, Hardy reaches a sublimity of feeling never equaled in the more prominent novels.

The woods themselves, the creatures of the wood, the weather or atmosphere, the sounds, smells, even the feel of the Hintock Woods becomes an important part of the novel, and artistically perhaps the most important part. The unity of Hardy's vision of man and Nature has already been stressed and it would be well to also keep in mind the author's emotional involvement with this side of his art; this is not to say that he was careless of other parts of the novel, rather that his grounding in nature in his youth and his sentiments about living things are most apparent in this novel and overpower the other factors.

The novel opens in winter and one of the first images that greets the reader in relation to this time of year is a quite unsettling one: "the bleared white visage of a sunless winter day emerged like a dead-born child" (W; 23). A look at the human inhabitants as they rise in the morning is followed by a glance at those of a humbler sort, "Owls that had been catching mice in the outhouses, rabbits that had been eating the winter-greens in the gardens, and stoats that had been sucking the blood of the rabbits, discerning that their human neighbors were on the move, discreetly withdrew from publicity, and were seen and heard no more till nightfall" (ibid.).

When Grace, her father and Winterborne first enter the wood together, Hardy observes, through the eyes of Grace:

> Although the time of bare boughs had now set in, there were sheltered hollows amid the Hintock plantations and copses in which a more tardy leave-taking than on windy summits was the rule with the foliage. This caused here and there an apparent mixture of the seasons; so that in some of the dells they passed by holly-berries in full red growing beside oak and hazel whose leaves were as yet not far removed from green, and brambles whose verdure was rich and deep as in the month of August. To Grace these well-known peculiarities were as an old painting restored.
>
> Now could be beheld that change from the handsome to the curious which features of a wood undergo at the ingress of the winter months. Angles were taking the place of curves, and reticulations of surfaces — a change constituting a sudden lapse from the ornate to the primitive on Nature's canvas, and comparable to a retrogressive step from the art of an advanced school of painting to that of the Pacific Islander.
>
> (W; 51)

This apparent mingling of the seasons suggests that, unlike the windy summits, the shelter of the hollows preserves life, and by extension the wood can be understood to be life-preserving. This combining of seasons also allows Hardy to paint the wood with a more interesting brush and leads into the reflection about primitive and ornate versions of Nature's canvas. As they

go deeper into the woods, Hardy makes us feel that their little group is a usual sight to the creatures of the wood. The squirrels and birds 'know' Mr. Melbury; one of the squirrels is playfully seen to "occasionally run from the path to hide behind the arm of some tree, which the little animal carefully edged around pari passu with Melbury and his daughter's movement onward, assuming a mock manner, as though he were saying, 'Ho, ho; you are only a timber-merchant, and carry no gun!" (W; 52). They walk over 'mats of starry moss' and 'tracts of leaves' and skirt "trunks with spreading roots, whose mossed rinds made them like hands wearing green gloves; elbowed old elms and ashes with great forks, in which stood pools of water that overflowed on rainy days, and ran down their stems in green cascades" (ibid.); however, there are also less attractive sights: on older trees, 'huge lobes of fungi grew like lungs' and where the trees are crowded together, they are likened to 'the depraved crowds of a city slum' so that the "leaf was deformed, the curve was crippled, the taper was interrupted; the lichen ate the vigour of the stalk, and the ivy slowly strangled to death the promising sapling"; the harshness of winter is suggested as they pass "amid beeches under which nothing grew, the younger boughs still retaining their hectic leaves, that rustled in the breeze with a sound almost metallic" (W; ibid.). With this descent to the interior processes of the vegetable world, Hardy reminds us that while the surface world of the wood may appear either attractive or ugly, something from a painting or a bad dream, the processes of Nature are based on the struggle for survival. His realism combined with his poetic intuitions and descriptions constitutes perhaps one of his greatest artistic strengths.

As the leaves return in spring, Hardy shows us Dr. Fitzpiers and Grace Melbury; she appears to him as 'a slyph-like greenish-white creature, as toned by the sunlight and leafage' (W; 169); and as he approaches, his infatuation with her increases, because "she looked so lovely in the green world about her; her pink cheeks, her simple light dress, and the delicate flexibility of her movements acquired such rarity from their wild-wood setting"; he declares that there is no rival to her 'except vegetable nature' (ibid.). It has been noted that landscape in Hardy 'both reflects and projects a character's emotions' (PN; 168) and here Hardy seems to make the natural world influence a character's perception; in the majority of Hardy's descriptive passages of nature, landscape is an emotional projection of a character's mood; here we can see the opposite. Hardy's view of man and nature in harmony represents a more genuine version of life than man outside or alienated from the natural world.

After they marry, she has doubts about his fidelity, and to add to the bitterness, this happens amid the bounty of nature:

> ...the gorgeous autumn landscape of White-Hart vale, surrounded by orchards, lustrous with the reds of the apple-crops, berries, and foliage, the whole intensified by the gilding of the declining sun. The earth this year had

been prodigally bountiful, and now was the supreme moment of her bounty. In the poorest spots the hedges were bowed with haws and blackberries; acorns cracked underfoot, and the burst husks of chestnuts lay exposing their auburn contents as if arranged by anxious sellers in a fruit-market. In all this proud show some kernels were unsound as her own situation, and she wondered if there were one world in the universe where the fruit had no worm, and marriage no sorrow.

(W; 204)

That there should be such apparent plenty and health in the natural world at this time of suffering for her is a cruel irony; her troubled marriage is like the burst husks depicted. The reference to a 'universe where the fruit had no worm' would be later echoed in Tess, where she talks with her little brother Abraham about blighted worlds,

"Did you say the stars were worlds, Tess?"
"Yes."
"All like ours?"
"I don't know; but I think so. They sometimes seem to be like the apples on our stubbard-tree. Most of them splendid and sound — a few blighted."
"Which do we live on — a splendid one or a blighted one?"
"A blighted one."
"'Tis very unlucky that we didn't pitch on a sound one, when there are so many more of 'em!"
"Yes."

(T; 35)

A short time later, Prince, the d'Urberville family horse (and their only means of support) is killed in an accident, at which point Abraham says, "'Tis because we be on a blighted star, and not a sound one, isn't it, Tess?" (T; 37).

When Grace and her father fear that her husband, Fitzpiers, has suffered some misadventure, the go out to search; as they proceed along the turnpike and up a hill, the natural surroundings seem to echo their anxious and foreboding mood. They "halted beneath a half-dead oak, hollow, and disfigured with white tumours, its roots spreading out like claws grasping the ground. A chilly wind circled round them, upon whose currents the seeds of a neighboring lime-tree, supported parachute-like by the wing attached, flew out of the boughs downward like fledglings from their nest. The vale was wrapped in a dim atmosphere of unnaturalness, and the east was like a livid curtain edged with pink. There was no sign or sound of Fitzpiers" (W; 211).

At the end of winter, Mr. Melbury, the timber merchant, sets out to look for Giles; Hardy remarks that it was a 'rimy' evening; he describes the trees in human terms — the woods "seemed to be in a cold sweat; beads of perspiration hung from every bare twig; the sky had no colour, and the trees rose before him as haggard, grey phantoms, whose days of substantiality were passed" (W; 223). Hardy's imagination did not stop with seeing trees and men as a basis for metaphor; for him they call to mind other forms. As Mr. Melbury stands in the wood listening, he hears the breeze "oozing through the net-work of boughs as through a strainer; the trunks and larger branches stood against the light of the sky in the forms of writhing men, gigantic candelabra, pikes, halberds, lances, and whatever else the fancy chose to make of them" (W; 257).

In late summer the shapes of the trees appear somewhat threatening; for "the plantation was always weird at this hour of eve — more spectral (by) far than in the leafless season, when there were fewer masses and more linearality. The smooth surfaces of glossy plants came out like weak, lidless eyes: there were strange faces and figures from expiring lights that had somehow wandered into the canopied obscurity; while now and then low peeps of the sky between the trunks were like sheeted shapes, and on the tips of boughs sat faint cloven tongues" (W; 299). When Grace is alone in Winterborne's hut, and Giles is outside, exposed to the weather, her guilt over putting him out seems manifested in the wind, which Hardy describes with images of great violence; as she retires for the night

> the wind began to rise, and after a few prefatory blasts to be accompanied by rain. The wind grew more violent, and as the storm went on it was difficult to believe that no opaque body, but only an invisible colourless thing, was trampling and climbing over the roof, making branches creak, springing out of the trees upon the chimney, popping its head into the flue, and shrieking and blaspheming at every corner of the walls. As in the grisly story, the assailant was a spectre that could be felt but not seen. She had never before been so struck by the devilry of a gusty night in a wood, because she had never been so entirely alone in spirit as she was now. She seemed to be almost from herself — a vacuous duplicate only....Sometimes a bough from an adjoining tree was swayed so low as to smite the roof in the manner of a gigantic hand smiting the mouth of an adversary, to be followed by a trickle of rain, as blood from the wound. To all this weather Giles must be more or less exposed; how much, she did not know.
>
> (W; 308)

This same violent wind is crushing the life out of Giles as he tries to shelter from its blasts; he

will finally die of exposure and illness. When her feelings of solicitude for Winterborne begin to overcome her allegiance to social conventions (because she is married to Fitzpiers, it would be 'improper' for her to shelter with Giles, though it is his home she uses as a refuge from Fitzpiers), she still hesitates to go outside and ask him in; but when she hears a "tattoo on the window, caused by the tree-droppings blowing against it, (this) brought her indecision to a close" (W; 309), and she goes outside to look for him. She spends one more night in his house, but when he does not appear the next morning for breakfast, she begins to worry. In the afternoon, as she looks outside, the imagery Hardy uses suggests death, and we feel that Giles is being referred to:

> In front lay the brown leaves of last year, and upon them some yellowish-green ones of this season that had been prematurely blown down by the gale. Above stretched an old beech, with vast arm-pits, and great pocket-holes in its sides where branches had been removed in past times; a black slug was trying to climb it. Dead boughs were scattered about like ichthyosauri in a museum, and beyond them were perishing woodbine stems resembling old ropes.
>
> From the other window all she could see were more trees, in jackets of lichen and stockings of moss. At their roots were stemless yellow fungi like lemons and apricots, and tall fungi with more stem than stool. Next were more trees close together, wrestling for existence, their branches disfigured with wounds resulting from their mutual rubbings and blows. It was the struggle between these neighbors that she had heard in the night. Beneath them were the rotting stumps of those of the group that had been vanquished long ago, rising from their mossy setting like black teeth from green gums. Further on were other tufts of moss in islands divided by the shed leaves — variety upon variety, dark green and pale green; moss like little fir trees, like plush, like malachite stars; like nothing on earth except moss.
>
> (W; 311)

The leaves that have been prematurely blown down are like Giles, cut off before his time. The dismembered beech, the black slug, the dead boughs that look like dinosaur bones and the dying woodbine all suggest death. The fungi are a common symbol in Hardy for death and the unclean; the trees that struggle against each other for life are also a recurrent image; the rotting stumps and the simile of rotting teeth are obvious.

The characteristics of man and nature can be either internalized or externalized in Hardy: it is interesting to note that when man's features are projected on the natural world, the result

is negative imagery, stumps like rotting teeth, sap like blood, roots like claws; however, when nature's attributes are given to men, the result is positive: Giles is like the god of autumn, Marty is like a nature goddess. This polarization of imagery is not necessarily divisive when considered within the correspondence between Hardy's realism and imaginative vision, for in this novel, unity rather than division is the overall movement.

8. Tess of the D'Urbervilles

This novel is divided into seven 'phases' through which Tess passes, which are: 'The Maiden,' 'Maiden No More,' 'The Rally,' 'The Consequence,' 'The Woman Pays,' 'The Convert,' and 'Fulfillment'; in this last, Tess is run to ground like a hunted animal and finally martyred. The structure is in the form of a journey in which "each place of rest becomes a test for the soul" (TH; 113), in the odyssey of her onward movement.

Tess is a 'fine handsome girl' with a 'mobile pretty mouth' and 'large innocent eyes' (T; 20). Hardy underscores her innocence by remarking that "for all her bouncing handsome womanliness, you could sometimes see her twelfth year in her cheeks, or her ninth sparkling from her eyes; and even her fifth would flit over the curves of her mouth now and then" (T; 21). Her childhood still lingers and seems to last longest around the curves of her mouth. When Angel Clare later looks at Tess, he is most enamored of her mouth for this is where all her vitality and warmth 'culminated':

> Eyes almost as deep and speaking he had seen before, and cheeks perhaps as fair; brows as arched, a chin and throat almost as shapely; her mouth he had seen nothing to equal on the face of the earth. To a young man with the least fire in him that little upward life in the middle of her red top lip was distracting, infuriating, maddening. He had never before seen a woman's lips and teeth which forced upon his mind, with such persistent iteration, the old Elizabethan simile of roses filled with snow. Perfect, he, as a lover, might have called them off-hand. But no, they were not perfect. And it was the touch of the imperfect upon the would-be perfect that gave the sweetness, because it was that which gave the humanity.
>
> (T; 152)

Tess is a pure country girl. Hardy sees her as the embodiment of natural rural womanhood. Even after Alec takes advantage of her, she remains untouched, but not in her own mind, which is ruled by guilt. Hardy sees her as a part of nature, even though she loses sight of this perspective, for "on these lonely hills and dales her quiescient glide was a piece with the element

she moved in. Her flexious and stealthy figure became an integral part of the scene. At times her whimsical fancy would intensify natural processes around her till they seemed a part of her own story. Rather they became a part of it; for the world is only a psychological phenomenon, and what they seemed they were" (T; 91). This phenomenon of projection onto the landscape is exemplified by passages such as the following: "The midnight airs and gusts, moaning amongst the tightly-wrapped buds and the bark of the winter twigs, were formulae of bitter reproach. A wet day was the expression of irremediable grief at her weakness...." (ibid.). However, her weakness is a product of her own mind; it is a 'sorry and mistaken creation of Tess's fancy' (ibid.) for in reality, Hardy tells us, 'she had been made to break an accepted social law' (ibid.) only, not any 'law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly' (ibid.). Among the animals in their innocence — the "sleeping birds in the hedges, watching the skipping rabbits on a moonlight warren, or standing under a pheasant-laden bough..." (ibid.) she feels like a guilty intruder. But she is not out of harmony with nature at all, she is rather 'in accord' with it.

Tess faces her first crisis when she must take charge of bringing the family beehives to retailers in Casterbridge; her father of course is too drunk to drive the horse and wagon, so she and her little brother Abraham must do it in the dark of the early morning. They go to the stable to harness Prince, the family horse. Poor Prince will subsequently be harpooned by the pointed shaft of a mail cart, and as they hitch the rickety horse to the rickety wagon, he "looked wonderingly round at the night, at the lantern, at their two figures, as if he could not believe that at that hour, when every living thing was intended to be in shelter and at rest, he was called upon to go out and labour" (T; 34).

As little Abraham leans back against the hives, he looks up at the stars "whose cold pulses were beating amid the black hollows above, in serene dissociation from these two wisps of human life. He asked how far away those twinklers were, and whether God was on the other side of them" (T; 35); here we find the passage mentioned earlier in this paper, where Abraham asks if the stars are worlds, to which Tess replies in the affirmative; she compares these worlds to apples, most of which are sound — however, a few are 'blighted,' like ours. Little Aby asks, "How would it have been if we had pitched on a sound one?" and Tess replies, "Well, father wouldn't have coughed and creeped about as he does, and wouldn't have got too tipsy to go this journey; and mother wouldn't have been always washing, and never get finished" (T; 36).

Tess falls into a reverie and Hardy observes the scene: "The mute procession past her shoulders of trees and hedges became attached to fantastic scenes outside reality, and the occasional heave of the wind became the sigh of some immense sad soul, coterminous with the universe in space, and with history in time" (ibid.), and it is at this exact point that Prince is speared by the mail cart — it is his groan of pain that brings her back to consciousness. As the sun rises, Prince's blood on the road reflects 'a hundred prismatic hues' (T; 37). The shock of

the accident causes Aby to look like a man of fifty and Tess to exclaim, "Why, I danced and laughed only yesterday. To think that I was such a fool!" and Abraham says, "Tis because we be on a blighted star, and not a sound one, isn't it, Tess?" (ibid.). Hardy nicely balances the segments of this progression: the horse at the opening; Aby's questions about worlds beyond this one; the reverie she falls into and the sigh of the universal soul; the accident itself and her reflection on the bitterness of her fate.

The Chase, a part of the property where Alec d'Urberville lives, is an important locus of action. Hardy first describes it as "a soft azure landscape...a truly venerable tract of forest land; one of the few remaining woodlands in England of undoubted primeval date, wherein Druidical mistletoe was still found on aged oaks, and where enormous yew-trees, not planted by the hand of man, grew as they had grown when they were pollarded for bows" (T; 41); but this 'sylvan antiquity' is outside the immediate boundaries of the estate (The Slopes) on which Alec lives. She is of course a resident there, employed to care for his mother's chickens. The people of the area 'have an abiding defect' — they 'drank hard' (T; 65). One fine September evening Tess is in town to meet her fellow workers, a time "just before sunset, when yellow lights struggle with blue shades in hair-like lines, and the atmosphere itself forms a prospect, without aid from more solid objects, except the innumerable winged insects that dance in it" (T; 65-66) The insects shown dancing in this evening atmosphere is directly followed by a scene where Tess sees her fellows dancing in a farm storage building; the dancing and the dust of the place create a similar thick atmosphere. Hardy here closely connects nature and man by an interesting image, we see in the air:

> powdery residum from the storage of peat and other products, the stirring of which by their turbulent feet created the nebulosity that involved the scene. Through this floating fusty *debris of* peat and hay, mixed with the perspirations and warmth of the dancers, and forming together a sort of vegeto-human pollen....
>
> (T; 66)

This 'vegeto-human pollen' produced by the dancers links them further to the dancing insects mentioned and strengthens the connection between the human and non-human worlds. These small touches have a cumulative effect in Hardy's novels, so that by the end of each, the sense of expanded realities, beyond those of strictly human social concerns, becomes an underlying platform of belief. Hardy then likens the dancers to Greek demigods, and asks, "Could Tantridge in two or three short hours have metamorphosed itself thus madly!' (T; 67). Those dancers who have found the right partner know it was "then that the ecstasy and the dream began, in which emotion was the matter of the universe, and matter but an adventitious

intrusion likely to hinder you from spinning where you wanted to spin" (ibid.). The use of the terms 'ecstasy, dream, universe' and especially 'spin' cause the reader to feel that these dancers are doing a cosmic two-step, that they are small spinning worlds themselves.

These ecstatic dancers, Tess among them, are next seen on their way home, 'along a dry white road' (T; 68). The narrator tells us that though they appeared 'terrestrial and lumpy' to the 'unglamored eye' they themselves felt they were "soaring along in a supporting medium, possessed of original and profound thoughts; themselves and surrounding nature forming an organism of which all parts harmoniously and joyously interpenetrated each other. They were as sublime as the moon and stars above them; and the moon and stars were as ardent as they" (ibid.). There can be no more direct statement of Hardy's artistic belief in the *rightness* of the connection between the human and natural worlds and their natural unity; his vision as an artist is clearest here because of his belief. Of course, on the surface Hardy is describing their perceptions while drunk, but the unity thus perceived remains a genuine experience and is consonant with Hardy's belief in the interpenetration of the two worlds.

Tess, however, does not share their drunken dream — it reminds her too much of her father; eventually a quarrel takes place and Alec takes her on his horse to escape the group. This leads to the seduction. However, before that, Hardy observes these 'children of the open air' once more. They leave the road and go along a field-path and

> as they went there moved onward with them, around the shadow of each one's head, a circle of opalized light, formed by the moon's rays upon the glistening sheet of dew. Each pedestrian could see no halo but his or her own, which never deserted the head-shadow whatever its vulgar unsteadiness might be; but adhered to it, and persistently beautified it; till the erratic motions seemed *an inherent part of the irridiation* and the *fumes of their breathing a component of the night's mist*; and the spirit of the scene, and of the moonlight, and of Nature, seemed *harmoniously* to mingle with the spirit of the wine.
>
> (T; 72; *italics* mine)

The moon-halo Hardy gives to each is almost a saintly light; the fumes of their breath mingle with the night mist; the spirit of the wine makes this seem a scene from a Greek play. Of course, these characters are vulgar in their indulgence but Hardy does not morally censure them; he does quite the opposite — he elevates them. They are workers of the land and as such are an object of affection.

Tess and Alec 'canter along' for a time and the horse slows to a walk. As they amble "a faint luminous fog, which had hung in the hollows all the evening, became general and enveloped them. It seemed to hold the moonlight in suspension, rendering it more pervasive than in clear

air" (T; 73). Tess asks Alec where they are. He replies, "Passing by a wood" (T;74), and when she asks what wood, he tells her it is part of the Chase. She calls him treacherous for taking her so far away, and not directly home. She asks him to set her down but he tells her, "in this growing fog you might wander for hours among the trees" (T; 75). In this moonlit dreamworld, Hardy is moving Tess into a different state of consciousness. The fog also works with Alec's seduction because he tells her he is lost himself. As Tess sleeps under a tree, wrapped in Alec's cloak he stoops and "in a moment his cheek was in contact with hers. She was sleeping soundly, and upon her eyelashes there lingered tears" (T; 77). Hardy does not describe the act further, but wonders why "it was that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as goassmer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive; why so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus, the wrong man the woman, the wrong woman the man, many thousand years of analytical philosophy have failed to explain to our sense of order. One may, indeed, admit the possibility of retribution lurking in the present catastrophe. Doubtless some of Tess d'Urbervilles mailed ancestors rollicking home from a fray had dealt the same measure even more ruthlessly towards peasant girls of their time" (ibid.). It is almost as if Hardy is sanctioning the seduction but he says that visiting the sins of the fathers upon the sons does not 'mend the matter' (ibid.). It is still a wrong done to an innocent and a violation of her rights as a free human being.

Hardy tells us that Tess had learnt 'the serpent hisses where the sweet birds sing' (T; 82). Later, when Alec asks to kiss her cheek again, she turns "her head in a passive way, as one might turn at the request of a sketcher or hairdresser" now he finds "his lips touching cheeks that were damp and smoothly chill as the skin of the mushrooms in the fields around" (T; 84). Her mood is united with the weather, "Sad October and her sadder self seemed the only two existences haunting the lane" (ibid.). Southerington has noticed that Tess is treated 'closely and humanely' at times, but at others she becomes "a feature of the landscape or a product of nature, and her experience is paralleled by theirs" [ie. the natural world] (HVM; 129).

In describing a morning in the month of August, Hardy manages to create a series of images that make up a small word-painting of the night-mists fleeing to hollows, like sheep in a storm:

> It was a hazy sunrise in August. The denser noctural vapours, attacked by the warm beams, were dividing and shrinking into isolated fleeces within hollows and coverts, where they waited till they should be dried away to nothing.
>
> (T; 92)

His attention then turns to the sun:

> The sun, on account of the mist, had a curious, sentient, personal look,

demanding the masculine pronoun for its adequate expression. His present aspect, coupled with the lack of all human forms in the scene, explained the old-time heliolatries in a moment. One could feel that a saner religion had never prevailed under the sky. The luminary was a golden-haired, beaming, mild-eyed, god-like creature, gazing down in the vigour and intentness of youth upon an earth that was brimming with interest for him.

(ibid.)

The sun also lights the red arms of the reaping machine in the field and makes them look like they have been 'dipped in liquid fire' (T; 92). The sound it makes is like 'the love-making of the grasshopper' (ibid.). This image associates again the human and natural world in that the grasshopper is a reaper, too. After the machine came the binders, both men and women, who gather the wheat and tie the sheaves. The women are most noteworthy because of the "charm which is acquired by woman when she becomes part and parcel of outdoor nature" and while the field-man is a 'personality afield' he is only that; however, "a field-woman is a portion of the field; she has somehow lost her own margin, imbibed the essence of her surrounding, and assimilated herself with it" (T; 93). Of course, one of these women is Tess.

8.1 "The Invincible Instinct Towards Self-Delight"

When Tess goes to work at Talbothays, a dairy, she has a brief time of happiness and rest in her journey. It is here that she meets Angel Clare and falls in love. She leaves home on a 'thyme-scented, bird-hatching morning' (T; 107) in May.

As she nears Talbothays, her spirit lifts from the sadness it was grounded in before. Now her "hopes mingled with the sunshine in an ideal photosphere which surrounded her as she bounded along against the soft south wind. She heard a pleasant voice in every breeze, and in every bird's note seemed to lurk a joy" (T; 109). Tess sends a prayer to the universe:

"O ye Sun and Moon...O ye Stars...ye Green Things upon the Earth...
ye Fowls of the Air...Beasts and Cattle...Children of men...bless ye....

(ibid.)

Hardy comments that women, whose 'chief companions are the forms and forces of outdoor Nature" (ibid.), retain the pagan spirit.

As the relationship between Tess and Angel grows in intensity, Hardy begins to give us some very beautiful scenes to illustrate their feelings for each other. For example, in order to emphasize their growing emotional closeness, he shows us Tess on a June evening, when there "was no distinction between near and far, and an auditor felt so close to everything" and in the

silence, she hears Angel's harp; she has listened to him before, but only indoors; outdoors, as she hears him now, his notes 'wandered in the still air with a stark quality like that of nudity' (T; 127). Tess listens like 'a fascinated bird' (ibid.).

Tess finds the garden she is in

> had been left uncultivated for some years, and was now damp and rank with juicy grass which sent up mists of pollen at a touch, and with tall blooming weeds emitting offensive smells — weeds whose red and yellow and purple hues formed a polychrome as dazzling as that of cultivated flowers. She went stealthily as a cat through this profusion of growth, gathering cuckoo-spittle on her skirts, cracking snails that were underfoot, staining her hands with thistle-milk and slug-slime, and rubbing off upon her naked arms sticky blights which, though snow-white on the appletree-trunks, made madder stains on her skin....
>
> (ibid.)

She thus draws closer to Angel, unseen. As she does so, she falls into yet another state of consciousness:

> Tess was conscious of neither time nor space. The exaltation which she had described as being producible at will by gazing at a star, came now without any determination of hers; she undulated upon the thin notes of the second-hand harp, and their harmonies passed like breezes through her, bringing tears to her eyes. The floating pollen seemed to be his notes made visible, and the dampness of the garden the weeping of the garden's sensibility. Though near nightfall, the rank-smelling weed-flowers glowed as if they would not close, for intentness, and the waves of colour mixed with the waves of sound.
>
> (T; 127-128)

This dream she is in is almost a religious-Nature ecstasy; the blending of sound and color and the 'breezes' of music that pass through her make this one of the most touching of Hardy's nature fugues (in the Latin sense of flight). Tess tells Angel his music 'can raise up dreams' (ibid.).

The gray light of morning 'half-tones,' which Hardy describes as different from those of evening because in the morning, the light seems 'active,' while darkness is 'passive.' In the evening, it is the darkness that is active and the light which is passive — in the 'drowsy reverse' (T; 134). The light is such that Tess and Angel, who get up earlier than the others, feel a sense

of 'isolation, as if they were Adam and Eve' (ibid.). They walk along in 'a singular, luminous gloom'; to him she looks 'ghostly, as if she were merely a soul at large' (ibid.). Angel's state of consciousness begins to change, so that to him she was no longer a milkmaid but "a visionary essence of woman — a whole sex condensed into one typical form" (T: 134-135). This perception is clearly of one who is in love and the perception is a profound one.

As Tess and Angel wander they notice, in these 'non-human hours' (ibid.), how close they can get to waterfowl; Herons come out of the trees 'with a great bold noise of opening doors and shutters'; or, "if already on the spot, hardily maintained their standing in the water as the pair walked by, watching them by moving their heads round in a slow, horizontal, passionless wheel, like the turn of puppets by clockwork" (T; 135). In their idyllic walk together towards the cows, they see where their charges have lain:

> faint summer fogs in layers, wooly, level, and apparently no thicker than counterpanes, spread about the meadows in detached remnants of small extent. On the grey moisture of the grass were the marks where the cows had lain through the night — dark-green islands of dry herbage the size of their carcases in the general sea of dew. From each island proceeded a serpentine trail, by which the cow had rambled away to feed after getting up, at the end of which trail they found her; the snorting puff from her nostrils when she recognized them making an intenser little fog of her own among the prevailing one. (ibid.)

As the morning changes to day, Hardy shows us the change by showing us Tess. The minute drops of moisture from the mist look like 'seed pearls' on her eyelashes and hair. As morning vanishes and "the day grew quite strong and commonplace these dried off her; moreover Tess then lost her strange and ethereal beauty; her teeth, lips, and eyes scintillated in the sunbeams, and she was again the dazzlingly fair dairymaid only...." (ibid.).

In the heat of summer, Hardy describes the 'oozing fatness' and the 'warm ferments' of nature; for it is the "season when the rush of juices could almost be heard below the hiss of fertilization, it was impossible that the most fanciful love should not grow passionate. The ready bosoms existing there were impregnated by their surroundings" (T; 151). As mentioned before, the movement of emotional vectors in Hardy's nature-writing is usually from the character's inner feelings to the external landscape; a projection of a character's inner state. Tess is a fine example of this because things only exist as she perceives them; here however we have an example of nature directly coloring the internal state of the characters. And just as nature directly influences the inner states of characters in all Hardy novels, so one character can be of such power that another character's perceptions of the landscape and even inanimate

man-made objects are changed. For example, Clare, because he is so infatuated with Tess, sees the dairy house differently; where it once appeared insignificant, now the "aged and lichened brick gables breathed forth 'Stay!' The windows smiled, the door coaxed and beckoned, the creeper blushed confederacy. A personality within it was so far-reaching in her influence as to spread into and make the bricks, mortar, and whole overhanging sky throb with a burning sensibility. Whose was this mighty personality? A milkmaid's" (T; 158).

This peace and joy lasts but a short time for poor Tess; interludes of misery cause her to see the natural world in another way. From her eyes, after hearing something that stirs bad memories, the "evening sun was now ugly...like a great inflamed wound in the sky. Only a solitary cracked-voiced reed-sparrow greeted her from the bushes by the river, in a sad, machine-made tone, resembling that of a past friend whose friendship she had outworn" (T; 139).

Later, after she separates from Clare, we see her on a lonely road, 'a lonely woman with a basket and a bundle' (T; 266). On a darkening October evening, she meets a man whom Angel had once struck; when he recognizes her, she can only flee, into the woods:

> Under foot the leaves were dry, and the foliage of some holly bushes which grew among the deciduous trees was dense enough to keep off draughts. She scraped together the dead leaves till she had formed them into a large heap, making a sort of nest in the middle. Into this Tess crept.
>
> (T; 270)

Tess thinks to herself as she falls asleep, "All is vanity" and since this is 'a most inadequate thought for modern days' she amends the thought to "All was, alas, worse than vanity—injustice, punishment, exaction, death" (ibid.). As the day dawns, she creeps out of her nest; the sounds she has heard in the night were wounded and dying pheasants, which she now sees lying about bleeding. (Tess will soon be hunted like these poor creatures.) The hunters who did this Hardy has contempt for; so Tess, with "the impulse of a soul who could feel for kindred sufferers as much as for herself...(her) first thought was to put the still living birds out of their torture" (T; 271), so she breaks their necks "tears running down as she killed the birds tenderly" (ibid.). It will be remembered that she cared for Mrs. d'Urberville's birds before. She reflects that she, unlike the birds, is not mangled or bleeding and that she has two good hands to work with. Further, she "was ashamed of herself for her gloom of the night, based on nothing more tangible than a sense of condemnation under an arbitrary law of society which had no foundation in Nature" (ibid.). Again, Hardy sees Nature as the pole star by which to steer; social laws may grind down the human spirit, but those who are close to Nature and keep its laws in mind, can partially escape the hurt society inflicts.

She thinks of the birds suffering through the night and of the 'relativity of sorrows' (T; 272) and again decides she is not so badly off after all. She is on her way to Flintcomb-Ash, and as the name suggests, the soil there will bring forth very little — it is almost barren. Her time as a field-worker, Hardy is preparing us for because he notes that as she walks on she is "a figure which is part of the landscape; a fieldwoman pure and simple, in winter guise" (ibid.); her clothes have become weathered — she has become part of outdoor Nature, has undergone a weathering: every "thread of that old attire has become faded and thin under the stroke of rain-drops, the burn of sunbeams, and the stress of winds" (T; 272-273). Weathering has gone on inside of Tess, too; she no longer exhibits any sign of 'young passion'; her exterior "over which the eye might have roved as over a thing scarcely percipient, almost inorganic" (T; 273) seems like a protective shell but inside she has learned in Hardy's pessimistic phrasing, of "the dust and ashes of things, of the cruelty of lust and the fragility of love" (ibid.). Even though the weather is bad, she trudges on — "the honesty, directness, and impartiality of elemental enmity disconcerting her but little" (ibid.).

The landscape of Flintcomb-Ash is stark and forbidding. Her friend Marian calls it a 'starve-acre place' (T; 277). Hardy humorously says, "The single fat thing on the soil was Marian herself; and she was an importation" (T; 277). Hardy's selective seeing so frequently marries his human figures to the landscape that this becomes almost an emblem of his work. But these are desolate conditions into which Tess has fallen; she and Marian have hired on to dig 'swedes' (rutabagas) for animal feed. They work on the highest ground on the bleak farm:

> the whole field was in colour a desolate drab; it was a complexion without features, as if a face from chin to brow should be only an expanse of skin. The sky wore, in another colour, the same likeness; a white vacuilty of countenance with the lineaments gone. So these two upper and nether visages confronted each other, all day long the white face looking down on the brown face, and the brown face looking up at the white face, without anything standing between them but the two girls crawling over the former like flies.
>
> (T; 277)

The balance between the two featureless 'faces' so close together and the two small women crawling over the one face like insects surely has to be one of the bleakest images in all literature. There is no movement or change in the weather; the sky remains the same all day. The sky becomes an oppressive force, the earth a ground for suffering. The girls are not conscious of 'the forlorn aspect they bore in the landscape' (T; 278) for even "in such a position as theirs it was possible to exist in a dream" (ibid.). They work through the rain because otherwise they will not be paid; but the rain does not fall really, for the field is in "so high a

situation...that the rain had no occasion to fall, but raced along horizontally upon the yelling wind, sticking into them like glass splinters, till they were wet through" (ibid.).

To heighten the sense of bleakness and desolation Hardy describes the winter as the worst in a long time:

> There had not been such a winter for years. It came on in stealthy and measured glides like the moves of a chess-player. One morning the few lonely trees and the thorns of the hedgerows appeared as if they had put off a vegetable for an animal integument. Every twig was covered with a white nap as of fur grown from the rind during the night, giving it four times its usual stoutness; the whole bush or tree forming a staring sketch in white lines on the mournful grey of the sky and horizon. Cobwebs revealed their presence on sheds and walls where none had ever been observed till brought out into visibility by this crystallizing atmosphere, hanging like loops of white worsted from salient points of the outhouses, posts and gates.
>
> (T; 279)

Winter appears as a magician here, able to change from within and without; the image of thickened, frost-covered branches against the gray sky is painterly; the cobwebs emerging into sight because of the frost is carefully observed and the webs hanging like worsted shows the sensibility of a poet. But worse weather is yet to come, for 'strange birds' from 'behind the north pole' (ibid.) began to arrive at Flintcomb-Ash; these are 'gaunt spectral creatures with tragical eyes' (ibid.), so we know that these are a visitation. These birds have "witnessed scenes of cataclysmal horror in inaccessible polar regions, of a magnitude such as no human being had ever conceived, in curdling temperatures that no man could endure; which had beheld the crash of ice bergs and the slide of snow-hills by the shooting light of the Aurora; been half blinded by the whirl of colossal storms..." (T; 280). These nameless birds bring no report of what they have seen — they care only for the possible food they may get from the digging of the women. The winter is so cold that 'it made their brows ache' and 'penetrated to their skeletons, affecting the surface of the body less than its core' (ibid). The birds seem to bring a type of winter unknown before, a 'cataclysmal' one. Snow had 'followed the birds from the polar basin as a white pillar of a cloud...the blast smelt of icebergs, arctic seas, whales, and white bears..." (ibid.).

This same winter, Tess goes to Angel's parent's house (a vicarage) to seek their help, but events work so that, 'nothing favored her' (T;288); as usual, Hardy uses nature to comment on this, the "shrubs on the vicarage lawn rustled uncomfortably in the frosty breeze" (ibid.). He then adds:

> The wind was so nipping that the ivy-leaves had become wizened and grey, each tapping incessantly upon its neighbor with a disquieting stir of her nerves. A piece of blood-stained paper, caught up from some meat-buyers dust-heap, beat up and down the road without the gate, too flimsy to rest, too heavy to fly away, and a few straws kept it company.
>
> (T; 289)

It is very difficult not to see this blood-stained paper as a symbol for Tess; also the image of the bloodied pheasants is echoed here; and the paper itself becomes like her spirit, being unable to rest, like Tess in front of the gate, yet being unable to leave because of its weight, which suggests the physical form and the spirit within. The image of the staws in the wind is further suggestive of the ephemeral state of man.

8. 2 Two Wretched Souls

As Tess and Clare approach the end of their flight from the law, they still take no thought for the future, which is a sign in Hardy of grief to come; their "every idea was temporary and unforefending, like the plans of two children" (T; 347). And though "the season was an English May, the weather was serenely bright, and during the afternoon it was quite warm" (T; 374) as they enter the New Forest. This provides a refuge, but they emerge eventually upon the plain of Stonehenge, where they are finally captured. The night is 'as dark as a cave' as they grope their way forward toward the stones, which hum in the wind like 'some gigantic one-stringed harp' (T; 379). Clare calls it 'a very Temple of the Winds' (ibid.). Tess, too tired to go on, "flung herself upon an oblong slab that lay close at hand, and was sheltered from the wind by a pillar" (ibid). The slab is still warm from the departed sun; it is a sacrificial stone dedicated to the sun.

While Tess is asleep the police arrive. Clare asks them to wait until she wakes, to which they agree. He goes to Tess and bends over her "holding one poor little hand; her breathing now was quick and small, like that of a lesser creature than a woman" (T; 381). As the sun rises, "a ray shone upon her unconscious form, peering under her eyelids and waking her" (ibid.).

The final scene of the book shows Angel Clare and Liza-Lu, Tess' sister, 'a spiritualized image of Tess' walking along a road in the 'brightness and warmth of a July morning'; but these two walk 'with the gait of grief' while 'the sun's rays smiled on pitilessly' (T; 383). The bitter irony is quite appropriate and apparent. They reach the summit of a hill where the view is 'unlimited'; they turn and wait "impelled by a force that seemed to overrule their will" (ibid.); they watch as the black flag on the distant tower is raised meaning Tess has been executed. At this, the "two speechless gazers bent themselves down to the earth, as if in prayer, and remained thus a long time, absolutely motionless: the flag continued to wave silently. As soon as they had strength they arose, joined hands again, and went on" (T; 384).

9. Conclusion

This study of Hardy's use of nature as a distinct personality in his novels has sought to show, first of all, that he saw nature, and by extension the universe, as neither good nor evil, but that moral interpretations are still necessary. He supplied these throughout his work. If any generalization can be made about the moral force inherent in nature, it might be that Hardy sees the natural world as good and man and his works as less so; perhaps this is because he trusts his intuition more than his reason. Much has been written about his pessimism; but perhaps it might be best to think of his philosophy as a 'general temperamental approach to the universe' (GTH; 139), rather than a formal system of thought. For Hardy emotion and not reason is the overriding force in his interpretation of reality. He has been called a 'pessimistic pantheist' (GTH; 144), which is probably a fair evaluation, if any label is appropriate. That Hardy saw nature in mainly religious terms is probably also a safe assumption.

Every student of Hardy has a favorite novel. Many choose Tess because it is his masterwork and for others *Far From the Madding Crowd* is a favorite; *Return of the Native*, with the importance of Egdon Heath, is an outstanding foray into the natural world, but perhaps only in *The Woodlanders* does Hardy consistently display his deep feeling for nature, especially vegetative nature. But it seems clear that Hardy saw the whole of the universe as one interrelated organism; that man, as a thinking part of this larger organism, is uniquely gifted with the blessing and curse of reason and foresight, and this can be used at times to ameliorate his lot on earth and the suffering that comes with it. In his fiction, Hardy used nature as a character or as a function of character because its forces and manifestations are co-equal with man: some may be greater and some much smaller than man himself, but all parts interact. Drabble is of the opinion that he "was perfectly equipped to write of the natural world. By nature, by birth, by training, he was endowed with every gift, and in his best work he writes with a sensitivity and power that none can imitate. Whole landscapes or minuscule details of leaf and root and insect are in his range; he can achieve large effects and small..." (GTH; 168). In his creative imagination he may have formed a hierarchy in the community of life and being, but it appears that he felt that "the universal whole was an organism in which we are 'limbs and organs', on the grounds that organisms are not static but must evolve" while stressing the "similarities of predicament at different levels of the natural world" (HVM; 222). Squires notes that *The Woodlanders* has "a moral vision, its ethic of man and nature fusing harmoniously, each dependent on the other and linked together by an unwritten language" (PN; 155).

Ian Gregor has perceived that in *The Woodlanders* inner and outer realities merge: the woods themselves have a 'presence which is both outside man and within him too' (GW; 164) and this view can been understood by extension to apply to most of Hardy's Wessex novels. Man and nature not only exist in a web of being as parts of a unified whole, but they are mirrors of each

other in the sense that what happens with one happens with the other in a direct way, rather than merely tangentially. One critic has perceived this by saying, "In Hardy, man's unconscious life is anchored immediately and constantly in physical nature... in the whole external world of organic life" for Hardy has shown "... the way toward a new novelistic language to express the unconscious life of man" (NN; 14-15).

If nature provides Hardy with a ground from which to survey the condition of man, it also provides a grounding in sanity. Hardy saw nature as a personality and a force in his writing because his impulse was toward integration of man with nature; the modern impulse is toward disintegration or separation of man from nature; the movement in his novels is toward unity while still seeing the universe as made up of diverse and unique parts; after him, the movement in fiction and in thought would be toward disunity and fragmentation — while at the same time there is a perception of blending or blurring of what is unique or individual in nature and in man into a mass of similar attributes — a standardized and stereotypical sense of otherness and alienation. Hardy was perhaps the last English pastoral novelist, though D. H. Lawrence kept to the tradition in his early novels, to see nature as essential to a sane understanding of man and the world. Hardy's Wessex novels have maintained a place in the conscious and in the unconscious life of their readers because they continue to be relevant to man's experience of the natural world; they continue to help readers interpret not only the natural world that Hardy saw over a century ago, but the contemporary natural world that is fast disappearing — perhaps they offer us a window into a sensibility toward nature that is no longer in existence.

References

Blunden, Edmund. 1954. Thomas Hardy. MacMillan and Co. Ltd. London.

Cox, R. G. Ed. 1970. Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage. Routledge & Kegan Paul. London.

Drabble, Margaret. Ed. 1976. The Genius of Thomas Hardy. Alfred A. Knopf. New York.

Gatrell, Simon. 1988. Hardy the Creator: A Textural Biography. Clarendon Press. Oxford.

Gibson, James. 2001. Thomas Hardy: The Complete Poems. Palgrave Press. London.

Hands, Timothy. 1995. Thomas Hardy. MacMillan. London.

Hardy, Barbara. 2000. Thomas Hardy: Imagining Imagination in Hardy's Poetry and Fiction. The Athlone Press. London.

Hardy, Florence Emily. 1962. The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928. Macmillan & Co. London.

Howe, Irving. 1968. Thomas Hardy. Weidenfield and Nicolson. London.

Millgate, Michael. Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist. The Bodley Head. London.

Southerington, F.R. 1971. Hardy's Vision of Man. Chatto & Windus. London.

Squires, Michael. 1974. The Pastoral Novel: Studies in George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and D.H. Lawrence. University Press of Virginia. Charlottesville.

Stewart, J.I.M. 1974. Thomas Hardy. Allen Lane. London.

Turner, Paul. 1998. The Life of Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography. Blackwell Publishers. London.

Williams, Merryn. 1976. A Preface to Hardy. Longman. London.