

THE ROLES OF NATURE IN SELECTED
NOVELS OF THOMAS HARDY

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PREFACE

Thomas Hardy ranked as one of the most ardent protestors against the forces of indecision, doubt, and despair prevalent during the Victorian period. Among novelists like George Eliot and George Meredith, Hardy was also keenly aware that man was being plagued by a demon he did not know how to combat. When one reads his novels, then man's ceaseless struggle to fit himself into the scheme of the universe is always apparent.

His melancholy view of man's lot caused him to search for some answer to the problem of man's destiny, because he felt man was always in conflict with the laws of nature. Inevitably, he became aware of the dual power of Nature: a Nature of beauty and grace, and a Nature of ugliness and cruelty.

Thus, Nature became in Thomas Hardy's novels not only the foe against which man battles all his life, but also the real actor in life's drama on the stage, while man was only a passive player. Hardy drew in a group of novels called the "Wessex Novels," the best picture of this two-fold aspect of the natural world that was ever drawn during the Victorian period: first, Nature appeared as a calm, serene parent; secondly, she played the role of a killer. Therefore, in undertaking what I consider to be one of the most important factors in Hardy's novels, his uses of Nature, it is clear that an

explanation of the duality of Nature, as he saw it, is needed. Nature, to Hardy, is the outside world of grass, animals, sunlight, and flowers. It is also the external world of somber majesty - both evil and breathtaking.

Hardy knew and loved the Nature of his youth; for he had become familiar with the heaths and trees which surrounded his homeland. But as he grew and his vision widened, his love of Nature began to deteriorate under the attack of the New Science. My object in this study is to define Hardy's attempt to reconcile the varying ideas concerning Nature in his novels.

There can be found in Hardy's novels a depiction of the external world that is seldom rivaled. The beautiful hillside country, the sound of the wind in the night, the face of a mountain, the patter of rain against the window during a stormy night, are all parts of this external world. Hardy uses these agents of Nature to spur the characters toward some tragic ending. And when he wishes to assume the role of a philosopher it is Nature that becomes the foundation for his philosophy.

It will become clear, through the course of my discussion, that Nature became a definite instrument in Hardy's novels - an instrument chosen to mark the sad progress of man's brief stay on earth. Also, it will be shown that Nature assumes an impassive, scrutinizing face when man acts, and that it is an impartial observer to whom man is almost always subservient.

My principal purpose will be to show the development of Hardy's ambivalent attitude toward Nature. In his early novels Nature was usually calm, serene, and beautiful. But in the later works Nature loses much of its tranquillity and becomes a cruel, sinister force whose role is primarily to destroy.

The novels to be used for this discussion will be, Under the Greenwood Tree (1872), Far From the Madding Crowd (1874), The Return of the Native (1878), The Woodlanders (1887), and Tess of the D'Urbervilles (1891). These have been selected because an ambivalent Nature plays a large role in motivating character, developing plot, and in defining the setting of these novels.

The writer of this thesis wishes to acknowledge the patience and guidance of Dr. Richard K. Barksdale, who made this study an act of pleasure and insight. Without his help, this thesis would not have been successfully accomplished. Appreciation should also be given to the members of the English Department, whose encouragement and assistance were gratefully received. Finally, the writer acknowledges the loyalty and devotion of her family, who were important figures in sustaining her desire to work.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Inevitably, Hardy's concept of Nature, which he incorporated into most of his novels, was influenced by certain tendencies which were current during his lifetime; for not only did Hardy grow up in a period of shifting emphasis in literature and in science, but many social, political and economic changes also occurred during his early youth. Some changes added progress, and some brought anxiety, doubt, and pessimism. As will be demonstrated below, Thomas Hardy was to share in this pessimism, and it was to color his outlook on Nature.¹

Certainly Hardy was fully aware of the dominant forces in his period. No novelist has yet been able to write irrespective of his times. Indeed, Bush noted the following of Hardy in one of his critical works:

The intellectual ideas of the self-educated Hardy - if not his imagination and compassion - started from such emancipators as Mill, Darwin, Spenser, and Essays and Reviews.²

Thus Bush fits Hardy's novels into the scheme of the dominant ideas found in the Victorian period. He goes on to say, in the following quotation, that Hardy's ideas seemed to have a scientific orientation:

¹Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870 (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 63.

²Douglas Bush, Science and English Poetry (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 135.

Both Hardy's matter and his manner proved welcome to the early decades of our country, and his philosophy appeared to have a special scientific sanction.³

Victorian England was the period that saw the culmination of the Industrial Revolution, which generated problems that challenged the ingenuity of theoreticians like Bentham and Mill. Bentham was the originator of the famous utilitarian policy, "the greatest happiness for the greatest number." He was mainly interested in an England that could produce more food for the hungry mouths in England, and an England that could lift its commercial trade so that the import of material could be greater than the export. Later John Stuart Mill carried on Bentham's fight for an economically sound England, free from the degradation of imminent starvation for its citizens. Mill was convinced that a "utilitarian function" could be found for all things. Thus, he believed that England had only to perfect a doctrine of utility to insure happiness for the greatest number of people.⁴

While these principles were in theory sound, they did not solve all of the problems engendered in the Industrial Revolution. Rapid economic changes had brought disruptive class change, and the rise of the greedy industrialists. Admittedly, the Industrial Revolution had begun with the purpose of bringing England greater wealth. Yet it brought to one portion of the English people, the working class, greater evils. The employers became hard and ruthless, interested only in making money at any expense, even at the expense of the lives and welfare of their workers.

³Ibid.

⁴David Thomson, England in the Nineteenth Century, Penguin Books (Baltimore: Penguin Books Ltd., 1961), pp. 30, 31, et passim.

Decency in employer-employee relations was non-existent, and the Englishman with decent moral standards found it necessary to do something about the existing conditions.⁵ And so political and economic reform became urgently necessary if England was to avoid revolution.

The first Reform Bill was finally passed in 1832. Though it was a step in the direction of reform, it did not alleviate the conditions of the working class. It was followed by the Factory Act in 1833, which improved the lot of children employed in factories, because it limited their working hours and also set a standard age at which they could work.⁶ The New Poor Law enacted in the same year was another important step in economic reform in England. The need for reform inevitably had an impact on the literature of the period; for the writers felt the rising tide of criticism, and acknowledged this criticism with their pens. Listed among the writers who commented on the need for certain reform measures are Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, Charles Dickens, John Stuart Mill, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and George Eliot, writers who found it necessary to make their own social protest and to find their own way to prick the conscience of the English nation. Later in the century Thomas Hardy took his place among these protestors; for he lamented the plight of the poor and their gradual corruption in one of his best novels, Tess of the D'Urbervilles.

Cottagers who were not directly employed on the land were looked upon with disfavor, and the banishment of some starved the trade of others, who were not thus obliged to follow. These families, who had formed

⁵Ibid., p. 32.

⁶Ibid.

the backbone of the village life in the past, who were the depositaries of the village traditions, had to seek refuge in the large centers.⁷

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries many new inventions were making their impact on the English nation. The invention of the spinning jenny (1784), the steam engine (1765), and the building of railroads helped make England a land dominated by steampower. The machine was able to produce in greater numbers; thus came the reliance in England on machine power instead of man power. England, in effect, became a mechanized England, with the smoke from the great steam inventions rising and settling across the English countryside.⁸

At a time when England had become a mechanized England, Hardy wrote of a mechanistic universe. For in Nature he found the same tendency toward mechanism; it ran its endless course, regardless of the plight of man on earth. Nature remained undisturbed, and nothing altered its daily procedure. In the novel, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Hardy comments on the indifferent, unalterable quality of the universe. When Tess is seduced the activities of Nature never cease. When she has to take a job involving grueling, menial labor, Nature appears to conspire against her.

It was so high a situation, this field, 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.⁹

⁷Thomas Hardy, Tess of the D'Urbervilles (New York: Washington Square Press ed., 1961), p. 381.

All subsequent references or quotations from Tess of the D'Urbervilles will be taken from this edition.

⁸Thomson, op. cit., pp. 99-101.

⁹Hardy, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 308.

But if the Industrial Revolution came to play a large part on the literature of the period, the advent of the "New Science" had even greater influence. It was hailed as a step toward even greater progress in

George Henry Lewes's History of Philosophy (1845-46):

Philosophy had been ever in movement, but the movement has been circular; and this fact is thrown into stronger relief by contrast with the linear progress of Science. Instead of perpetually finding itself, after years of gigantic endeavor, returned to the precise point from which it started, Science finds itself year by year, and almost day by day, advancing step by step, each accumulation of power adding to the momentum of its progress....and the 'thoughts of men are widened by the process of the suns.'¹⁰

In other words, the "New Science" came in on a note of enthusiasm, a note that was gradually to change with the publication of certain works.

Lyell published his Principles of Geology in 1833, almost eleven years before Richard Chambers' Vestiges of Creation (1844). The publication of the Principles of Geology helped to formulate the geologists' new view of the world as an object hundreds and thousands of years old. Lyell formulated a 'Uniformitarian' principle of geology and explained the past in terms of the present geologic processes taking place in England.¹¹

In 1859 Darwin published his famous work, Origin of the Species. He had done extensive reading of Lyell's Principles while on a voyage in which he was employed as a naturalist. Then, he chanced in

¹⁰The Biographical History of Philosophy (2 vols. in 1. New York, 1885), Introduction, p. xi. The quotation which also stands on the title page is taken from Tennyson's "Locksley Hall."

¹¹Garret Hardin, Nature and Man's Fate, Mentor Book (New York: The New American Library, 1961), pp. 18-20.

1845 to read Malthus' Principles of Population (1796).¹² From this work Darwin derived his idea of the 'survival of the fittest.' Darwin explored the world of nature to find that the animal and plant world operated on a principle of natural selection. On this basis he surmised that man fell into the same pattern of natural selection. He stated in a letter to the American botanist, Asa Gray:

I think it can be shown to be probable that man gets his most distinct varieties by preserving such as arise best worth keeping and destroying the others, but I should fill a quire if I were to go on. To be brief, I 'assume' that species arise like our domestic varieties, with 'much' extinction.¹³

Another aspect of Darwin's Origin of the Species was his idea that man had evolved from a lower form of life - that man represented a higher stage in this development, but through the course of the years another state would develop that would almost reach perfectibility. The disturbing fact about Darwin's theory is that God was left totally out of the framework of man's creation. Darwin's Origin of the Species was naturalistic in concept. It contained the idea that man was controlled by his physical environment - that the forces of Nature were indifferent and often controlled man's destiny. Man was puny against the forces of Nature. With this idea in his work, Darwin became one of the originators of the naturalistic philosophy which was to come into literature.

¹²Malthus published his Principles of Population in 1845. He noted that there were four checks to population increase - wars, famine, accidents, and disease. Only those who were strongest could survive. Darwin, while reading this work, began to apply this idea to the natural world and defined these population checks in his Origin of the Species as the 'survival of the fittest.' Finally, Darwin used this theory to formulate his idea of a competitive natural selection.

¹³Robert A. Rosenbaum, Earnest Victorians (New York: Hawthorne Books Inc., 1961), p. 271.

Darwin's idea caused a furor in Victorian England. His thesis that man had descended from lower forms of animals led to anxiety, despair, and doubt as far as the continuation of man's existence on earth was concerned. It threw into question the biblical explanation of the Creation of man. Nature was shown to be in perpetual warfare, utterly indifferent to man's fate. Darwin's Origin of the Species stressed the conflict factor in Nature and brought out the idea of biological determinism. Tennyson's famous passage in "In Memoriam," reflects the personal dilemma this theory of Nature engendered.

Are God and Nature then at strife,
That Nature lends such evil dreams?
So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life,

That I, considering everywhere
Her secret meaning in her deeds,
And finding that of fifty seeds
She often brings but one to bear,

I falter where I firmly trod,
And falling with my weight of cares
Upon the great world's altar-stairs
That slope thro' darkness up to God,

....

Who trusted God was love indeed
And love Creation's final law--
Tho' Nature, red in tooth and claw
With ravine, shriek'd against his creed--

This same tone of pessimism and despair, this same recognition of the control of man by Nature can be found in the novels of Thomas Hardy. His cry of despair was as poignant as Tennyson's. Hardy bemoaned the strange twist of fate that condemned man to wandering on a darkling plain.¹⁴ Hardy used Nature as a symbol of the implacable law of the universe, a

¹⁴Harvey Curtis Webster, On a Darkling Plain (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1947), p. 24.

law which fixed man as a minute creature of no greater importance than a bird or a tree.

Although Hardy often wrote of the beauties of Nature, he could also see its cruelty. In the novel, Return of the Native, for instance, Mrs. Yeobright is destroyed by an adder amid the sunshine of a beautiful day. Similarly, in the Mayor of Casterbridge Henchard's crops are destroyed by the forces of Nature:

All these transformations, lovely to the outsider, to the wrong-headed corn-dealer were terrible. He was reminded of what he had well known before, that a man might gamble upon the square green areas of fields as readily as upon those of a card room.

Henchard had backed bad weather and apparently lost
.....¹⁵

Thomas Hardy, in some instances, employed a naturalistic view of man in his novels. Eustacia Vye is controlled, in the Return of the Native, by the implacable ugliness of Egdon Heath and is finally killed by the forces of Nature. In The Woodlanders, Giles Winterborne is killed by the weather he has so often gauged in planting his lovely trees.

Through Oak, Winterborne, Henchard, and Tess, Hardy seeks to establish his theory of the potential value of agricultural life, and to celebrate the naturalness of men and women engaged in the skills and necessities of agriculture. The experiences of Oak before the storm breaks, or the field labourers probing their way over Egdon in the darkness are inventions that connect men so intimately with their native environment that the differences in their nature are hardly discernible. Hardy

¹⁵Thomas Hardy, The Mayor of Casterbridge, A Signet Classic (New York: American Library of World Literature, 1962), p. 186.

All subsequent quotations will be taken from this edition.

constructs these characters on a note that is at once urgent, elegiac, and yet full of substantial and accurate perceptions.

The displacement of agriculture which took place in the wake of industrialization became another important point of comment in novels such as Under the Greenwood Tree and Tess of the D'Urbervilles. In the nineteenth century almost half of England's people moved to the town. Hardy comments in Tess of the, "process, humorously designated by statisticians as 'the tendency of the rural population towards the large towns,' being really the tendency of water to flow uphill when forced by machinery." The agricultural way of life had become a precarious way of life, and the small farmers were slowly being forced out of their homes. The exodus of the labourers to the town came as a response to the lure of flourishing industry, higher wages, and the diversions and attractions of the towns.

Darwin's Origin of the Species had its effect primarily on Hardy's later novels. In his earlier novels another major influence contributed to Hardy's concept of Nature as a benign, smiling parent. This influence was the lovely Dorsetshire countryside where he was born. Hardy's novels, called the Wessex novels, are titled so because of the country "Wessex," an imaginary name which Hardy coined for his novels. However, the land he was writing about was not imaginary, but had its background in the country of Dorchester where he was born.¹⁶ Thomas Hardy was born a hundred miles or so from London in "a small brick house with a thatched roof in a secluded spot in Dorchester."¹⁷ Hardy described

¹⁶Charles George Harper, The Hardy Country (London: A&C Black, 1904), p. 76.

¹⁷Carl J. Weber, Hardy of Wessex (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), p. 3.

it in The Return of the Native as,

...A spot which returned upon the memory of those who loved it with an aspect of peculiar and kindly incongruity. The vast track of unenclosed wild known as Egdon Heath wore the appearance of a thing majestic without severity, impressive without showiness, emphatic in its admonitions, grand in its simplicity. The qualifications which frequently invest the facade of a prison with far more dignity than is found in the facade of a palace double its size lent to this heath a sublimity in which spots renowned for beauty of the accepted kind are utterly wanting.....¹⁸

Here is one of the earliest influences on Hardy's love of Nature, the memory of Puddleton Heath, which later became "Egdon Heath" in the novel just mentioned. Lionel Johnson has this to say of the significance of Hardy's early youth associations with the countryside?

Most novelists, [Johnson wrote in 1894], are not at home among the places of their imagination; from first to last, they describe their woods and fields, not as long familiarity makes them appear, but as long as they appear to unaccustomed eyes: there is no heart in them. But Mr. Hardy has the art of impressing upon us so strong a sense of familiarity with his scenes, that we read of Wessex and we think of our own homes.¹⁹

The house where Hardy was born still remains. Egdon Heath has lost the haunting, lonesome aspect with which Hardy's youthful eyes looked at it, but the garden surrounding his house has not changed. The novelist described it in Under the Greenwood Tree as, "A little wicket admitted to the garden, and a path led up to the house. It was a long low cottage with a hipped roof of thatch, having dormer windows breaking up into the eaves, a chimney standing in the middle of the ridge and

¹⁸Thomas Hardy, Return of the Native (New York: Alfred A. Knopf & Co., 1923), p. 4.

All subsequent references to this novel will be taken from the same edition.

¹⁹Lionel Johnson, The Art of Thomas Hardy, revised edition (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1923), p. 45.

another at the further end."²⁰ These lines, written in the house where Hardy was born, are almost certainly a description of Hardy's house.²¹

In the early years in Dorchester Hardy came to have a child's familiarity with the birds and the clouds, and with the many animals he found there. An incident in Hardy of Wessex by Weber shows where Hardy got down on all fours, pretending to be a sheep. When he finally looked up, he found that he was surrounded by a group of these creatures.

That Hardy was in close communion with the animal world is shown in Far From the Madding Crowd, where he displayed pity and tenderness for Gabriel Oak's dog. This dog tries with tragic eagerness to carry out the tasks assigned to him, but the results are disastrous. And Hardy ends the chapter on the dog with the following exquisite comment:

George's son had done his work so thoroughly that he was considered too good a workman to live, and was, in fact, taken and tragically shot at twelve o'clock that same day--another instance of the untoward fate which so often attends dogs and other philosophers who follow out a train of reasoning to its logical conclusion, and attempt perfectly consistent conduct in a world made up so largely of compromise.²²

There is a kind of wistful understanding on Hardy's part of the dog's actions, an understanding of what motivated the dog - the longing to do well. Hardy cannot blame him, and instead, must place the disordered philosophy of the world at fault.

²⁰Thomas Hardy, Under the Greenwood Tree (London: MacMillan & Co., Ltd., 1964), p. 15.

All subsequent references will be taken from the same edition.

²¹Weber, op. cit., p. 7.

²²Thomas Hardy, Far From the Madding Crowd, New American Library (New York: New American Library of World Literature, 1960), p. 45.

All subsequent references to Far From the Madding Crowd will be taken from this edition.

This same love of the animal world can be seen in many of Hardy's novels. Perhaps he had become so deeply attuned to the sound of a thrush singing a mournful song in the night, "singing each note twice over," that he had come to understand the language of animals. Therefore, in each of his novels he displayed a parental wistfulness in regard to the tiniest creatures. In the Return of the Native he comments on the charming behavior of insects.

His familiars were creeping and winged things, and they seemed to enroll him in their band. Bees hummed around his ears with an intimate air, and tugged at the heath and furze-flowers at his side in such numbers as to weigh them down to the sod. The strange amber-coloured butterflies which Egdon produced, and which were never seen elsewhere, quivered in the breath of his lips, alighted upon his bowed back, and sported with the glittering point of his hook as he flourished it up and down. Tribes of emerald-green grass-hoppers leaped over his feet.... Huge flies...buzzed about him without knowing that he was a man....²³

When Diggory Venn and Wildeve are gambling, curious fireflies come to inquire about the nature of the game and serve as lights to continue the seemingly life-and-death duel.

Hardy frequently walked through the woods in his daily tramp between Brockhampton and Dorchester. The walk was often in the dark, when the uselessness of eyes increased the keenness of ears. Through his ramblings over the hillside countryside he acquired a life-long familiarity with the winds and trees:²⁴

Almost every species of tree has its voice as well as its feature. At the passing of the breeze the firtrees sob and moan no less distinctly than they rock; the holly

²³Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 298.

²⁴Samuel Chew, Thomas Hardy, Poet and Novelist (New York: Alfred A. Knopf & Co., 1928), p. 67.

whistles as it battles with itself; the ash hisses amid its quaverings; the beech rustles while its flat boughs rise and fall.²⁵

Thus Hardy spent most of his life communing with the lovely countryside of his birth. In the Wessex series of his novels, including Under the Greenwood Tree, The Woodlanders, Return of the Native, and Far From the Madding Crowd, the background of his books is intermingled with the years he spent as a child in Dorchester. Through his novels, he attempted to trace the beauty, charm, and ugliness of this country.

One of Hardy's sources, then, for many of his novels is the English countryside, especially the Southern counties, towns, villages, which he knew and loved as a child. Many of the pictorial scenes of nature he gives in his novels are a vivid recollection of this countryside. Admittedly, his drawings of nature are not what the conscientious tourist would relate. Instead, Hardy is always the sympathetic partaker of Nature's healing balm, fixed with a consciousness that man and Nature are in close proximity to one another.

²⁵Hardy, Under the Greenwood Tree, p. 11.

EARLY OUTLOOK

1. Under the Greenwood Tree (1872)
2. Far From the Madding Crowd (1874)

CHAPTER II

ROLES OF NATURE IN HARDY'S NOVELS

In Hardy's novels, from the earliest to the latest, can be seen a gradual development in his ideas concerning Nature. As the years passed, his vision broadened, became melancholy to the point that he could no longer consider Nature as the most beautiful agent in man's life.

His vision of nature, for instance: this is the most characteristic manifestation of his creative power, and it dominates his scene. This was to be expected. For one thing, nature controls the conduct of life in an agricultural community. Hardy, too, as we have seen, always stresses the poetic aspect of his subject matter. And it is in its connection with nature that the poetry of a countryman's life resides.²⁶

There seems to be a division of Hardy's moods concerning Nature. At first there is mostly pastoral loveliness, with only a small hint of the sinister tone Nature would take in his later novels. But no matter where the eye lights, Nature is always the immutable controller of man's actions, whether it is helping or hindering.

Hardy's treatment of Nature is multifarious and inclusive. He devotes much of his time to assigning Nature various parts, like an actor on stage, then he deftly weaves these parts in with the theme of his story. The use of Nature led Hardy to a technique that was distinctly his own. In his artistic hands Nature took on more than the countenance

²⁶(Lord) David Cecil, Hardy the Novelist; and Essay in Criticism (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1946), p. 94.

of a decorative painting, though Nature is often colorful. It becomes a real force in the drama of man's brief stay on earth.

As one critic has said, Nature was one of the profoundest influences on young Thomas Hardy:

The first impressions upon a mind unusually sensitive to surroundings were those of Nature and the past. Wandering over the heath behind the cottage, or through the woodland that partially enclosed it, beside the From and Stour, within sound of the rushing weirs, among the apple-orchards and corn fields, upon the lush, placid dairy farms, in hamlets and larger villagers, he observed not only the silence and the calm, but also the rivalry and the struggle of animal and vegetable life. The cruelty of Nature and her beauty impressed him deeply and the sense of this contradiction abides in his writings.²⁷

Most of his early novels show this influence noted by Chew, for Nature is placed in a role of gentleness and beauty. But even the early novels have a toning down of exuberance and a tinge of the soberness that was to come full force in his later novels.

Under the Greenwood Tree (1872)

Under the Greenwood Tree begins on a clear, buoyant note, with descriptive passages that reflect soft, pastoral colors. The setting of the novel forms the backdrop for the decision which Fancy Day must make between her three lovers. The story is centered on the conflict between urban life and rural life. The rustic Mellstock choir represents the changing order of the times. Their defeat is the defeat of the antique customs by new customs. But the defeat of the choir is balanced by Fancy Day's choice of Dick as her rustic husband. Thus, urban life won in one instance, but rural life succeeded in another instance.

²⁷Chew, op. cit., p. 4.

Under the Greenwood Tree, perhaps Hardy's first successful novel, is a light and whimsical story of the young lovers, Fancy Day and Dick Dewey. Nature, in this work, is employed as a catalytic agent for love, because it is amid the sunshine of summer and the cold beauty of winter that the love of Fancy and Dick takes root and thrives.

Hardy, as he does in many of his later novels, uses the seasons in an advantageous manner. The love story coincides with the seasons. Nature's seasonal changes reflect the changes that take place in Dick and Fancy's relationship, from the coldness of winter to the warmth of a summer day.

It is winter when Dick gets his first glimpse of Fancy Day. Hardy elaborates the beauty of this wintry atmosphere at the beginning of the story.

To dwellers in a wood almost every species of tree has its voice as well as its features. 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 amid 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.²⁸

Winter, with its aura of coldness, suggests the estrangement of the two lovers. When Fancy meets Dick, she is oblivious to the fact that she will spend the rest of her life with him. As a matter of fact, she has fun flirting and dancing at the Christmas Eve party, while Dick looks on longingly.

²⁸Thomas Hardy, Under the Greenwood Tree (London: MacMillan & Co., Ltd., 1964), p. 11.

All subsequent references to Under the Greenwood Tree will be taken from the same edition.

Fancy was dancing with Mr. Shiner. Dick knew that Fancy, by the law of good manners, was bound to dance as pleasantly with one partner as with another; yet he could not help suggesting to himself that she need not have put 'quite' so much spirit into her steps, not smiled 'quite' so frequently whilst in the farmer's hands.²⁹

But spring comes and brings with it a breathtaking loveliness to the landscape, and also a new turn in the affairs of Fancy and Dick. As spring blossoms and Nature prunes its foliage, the love of Fancy and Dick begins to blossom and grow. Nature seems to smile and helps the affair by giving the days almost all her sunshine, the trees all her greenness, and the flowers the exquisite colors of the rainbow.

In the spring Dick advances his suit until there is a barely perceptible warmth on Fancy's part:

It followed that, as the spring advanced, Dick walked abroad much more frequently than had hitherto been usual with him...; and by the time he had almost trodden a little path under the fence where never a path was before, he was rewarded with an actual meeting, face to face, on the open road before her gate...Fancy faintly showing by her bearing that it was a pleasure of some kind to see him there.³⁰

The young lovers pledge themselves with their looks. They cannot resist the call of Nature in spring for young things to open up and begin to bud. In the end, they become engaged amid the caroling beauty of the thrush's song and the haphazard play of the tree animals.

As the seasons progress, the lovers undergo the same transformations usually associated with the different seasons. Autumn, with its red-gold, dying leaves, brings estrangement and almost the death of love; for Fancy is sorely tempted on a rainy Autumn night to pledge her

²⁹Ibid., p. 55.

³⁰Ibid., p. 71.

suit to another. But she resists temptation, and Dick and Fancy become united amid a blaze of sunshine and flowers.

Under the Greenwood Tree, then, is a novel in which a young Thomas Hardy, still enthusiastic about the lovely sights that Nature has to offer, writes eagerly of the flowers and the trees, the birds rustling in their roosts, and the hares dancing over the hills. For a moment, however, the pastoral calm is disturbed by the intrusion of the outside world - and the old customs of Mellstock begin to give way to the new customs of the urban world. However, Nature reasserts her power in rustic life; and the old, as personified in the marriage of Fancy and Dick, is able to elude the grasp of new ties.

Nature, in this novel, becomes the focal part of the story. Hardy deliberately separates the sections of the book into winter, spring, summer, and autumn. Then he fits the actions of the young lovers into the characteristics of each month. Spring is the budding month, when love flourishes; Winter is the month of coldness, when love lies dormant under the icy surface; Summer is the month of full, exotic blossoms, when love lies at its height of perfection; Autumn is the month of slowly dying leaves, harvesting time, when love is subdued into a state of decorum.

Hardy endows the Nature of Under the Greenwood Tree with the calmness and serenity of a parent, one moment prodding Dick, the next moment persuading Fancy. The cynicism regarding Nature that will be noted in his later novels is noticeably absent from this one; for Nature appears to be only the intelligence which guides two wayward children down the path of bliss.

Far From the Madding Crowd

As Hardy grew in stature as an author, his scenes of Nature began to take on a darker, more pessimistic tinge. The trees and the flowers, of course, were still beautiful objects to behold. But he was no longer content to discuss the pastoral aspects of the blissful sunshine. The Nature Hardy had known and loved as a youth had changed visibly. He became impressed, now, with the grand face of nature - the melancholy solemnity of Nature. In short, he gradually came to realize that Nature could be a monster as well as a friend.

In the novel, Far From the Madding Crowd, Hardy begins with a facile, gentle description of Nature. Duffin, in a critical chapter on Hardy's Far From the Madding Crowd, describes the opening chapter in terms equalling the pastorals of Theocritus:

The opening chapter is memorable for a picture as beautiful as a Constable landscape - of Bathsheba on the battered wagon, with Gabriel Oak unseen but critically observant, the whole scene steeped in color and sunlight....The chapter with its fresh, clear atmosphere is followed by the classic "Norcombe Hill by Night," which passes from pure description to a moving picture of lambing operations - one glows as one reads: this is the epic, this is the earth, this is eternal, and all is done with quiet, deliberate beauty....³¹

Nature appears in an aspect of radiant sunshine, smiling on Bathsheba as she engages in a vainglorious attempt to arrange her coiffure.

The changes from the customary spot and necessary occasion of such an act - from the dressing hour in a bedroom to a time of traveling out of doors - lent to the idle deed a novelty it did not intrinsically

³¹Henry Charles Duffin, Thomas Hardy, 3d. ed., revised and edited by Henry Charles Duffin (Manchester: The University Press, 1937), p. 10.

possess. The picture was a delicate one. Woman's pre-scriptive infirmity had stalked into the sunlight which had clothed it in the freshness of an originality.³²

Yet, even in the opening chapters of Far From the Madding Crowd Hardy delineates the incongruous, paradoxical aspect of the 'pastoral nature' that Duffin had noted. In the opening description of Norcombe Hill the pastoral element is totally lacking. It is not a place of serene beauty, but a place of desolateness, loneliness, and sadness. It is with the description of Norcombe Hill that the reader becomes fully aware of the pessimistic outlook that Hardy now begins to incorporate into his ideas concerning the Nature he has known and has loved as a child.

The hill was covered on its northern side by an ancient and decaying plantation of beeches, whose upper verge formed a line over the crest, fringing its arched curve against the sky, like a mane. Tonight these trees sheltered the southern slope from the keenest blasts, which smote the wood and floundered through it with a sound of a 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 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.³³

One looks for the light, tripping note present in some of Hardy's earlier novels, but it cannot be found in the passage just cited. Instead, the passage begins on a painful note, a note of present sorrow from some unknown cause. The trees 'groan and grumble,' in a 'weakened moan;' the leaves are 'dry' and move in haphazard fashion across the earth. This then, is the Nature seen in death - the Autumn Nature of yellow boughs - that Hardy pictures as evident on Norcombe Hill -

³²Hardy, Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 16.

³³Ibid., pp. 18-19.

a Nature that is frightening because all of the freshness of newly grown trees, all of the plushness of green grass, is entirely missing.

Norcombe Hill is in the midst of a winter night. Obstructed from full view by the trees on its hilltop, it has a passive, alien quality. Even the two-fold aspect of Nature becomes evident in the structure of this swarthy force.

The thin grasses, more or less coating the hill, were touched by the wind in breezes of differing natures - one rubbing the blades heavily, another raking them piercingly another brushing them like a soft broom.³⁴

The wind has varying functions as it comes off the hill. It acts as an irritant to the blades of grass, even as it performs the menial task of a housekeeping article - tidying, wiping, cleaning bits of matter that cling to the tiny points of the blades of grass.

Naturalism in literature asserts that man is controlled by forces more powerful than himself that guide his course as if he were nothing more than a puppet. One force, in many instances, becomes Nature, or man's universe, and this Hardy employs in his novel, Far From the Mad-ding Crowd. Nature becomes the impenetrable, inexorable force, ordering man's life, pinning man to the wheel of fate. Gabriel Oak, in his most tragic moments, becomes a victim of Nature's unerring course. He loses his sheep to the forces of Nature, in fact, to one of Nature's humblest creatures, a dog. Oak stands at the summit of the broad precipice of Norcombe Hill and sees his flock of sheep a slaughtered mass, lying in a heap at the bottom of the hill.

It is the death of the sheep that causes Oak to encounter Bathsheba Everdene again. Nature has played Fate and has determined the course

³⁴Ibid.

of Gabriel Oak's life. He can no longer raise his sheep in contentment and is forced, through Nature's commands, not through any will of his own, to give up his life as a sheep-farmer. Oak's tragedy is the tragedy shared by most of the Hardian characters - a tragedy in which man is acted upon by the forces of Nature and becomes an individual tossed about in whimsical fashion by a Fate over which he has no control.

Just as Nature kills Gabriel's sheep, causing his second encounter with Bathsheba, Nature instigates another tragedy, parallel to Oak's except for circumstances, which brings Bathsheba and Gabriel together a third time. In this particular instance, Bathsheba's sheep become Nature's victims, and she is forced to rely on Oak's skill to preserve the small amount of sheep she has left.

Gabriel was already among the turgid, prostrate forms. He had flung off his coat, rolled up his shirt-sleeves, and taken from his pocket the instrument of salvation....³⁵

Nature again acts as an instrument of Fate and brings the two lovers together. The dying sheep, swollen because of a poisonous weed, must suffer the consequences of a brutal Nature, with instruments designed to kill. It is this brutal aspect of Nature that insures Bathsheba's complete reliance on Farmer Oak.

Nature not only acts as an instrument of Fate in this work, but it acts in much the same way as Tiresias³⁶ does in Greek drama. It becomes a prophet, warning Gabriel Oak of the evil that is to befall

³⁵Ibid., p. 137.

³⁶Tiresias was a Greek prophet who made his appearance in the works of the Greek tragedians. He makes his first appearance in Homer's Iliad and Odyssey. He is later found in Sophocles's Oedipus Rex. Because Tiresias is blind, he has been given insight into the destiny of man and is able to forewarn Oedipus of his tragedy. He next appears in Sophocles' Antigone and in T. S. Eliot's "The Wasteland."

Bathsheba Troy's³⁷ property.

Gabriel proceeded towards his home. In approaching the door, his toe kicked something which felt and sounded soft, leathery and distended, like a boxing glove. It was a large toad humbling, traveling across the path. Oak took it up, thinking it might be better to kill the creature to save it from pain; but finding it uninjured, he placed it again among the grass. He knew what this direct message from the Great Mother meant....³⁸

Hardy's emphasis is now on Nature as the "Great Mother," as a parent, overseeing her children's activities, sending help through one of her smaller creatures to aid man. Nature is now protective - and again Hardy is pointing out the changeling tendency of Nature. As a mother, her sole purpose is to help, as long as man will observe her signs, nor is she content to give one warning, but imperiously sends out another sign.

When he struck a light indoors there appeared upon the table a thin glistening streak, as if a brush of varnish had been lightly dragged across it. Oak's eyes followed the serpentine sheen to the other side, where it led up to a huge brown garden-slug, which had come indoors tonight for reasons of its own. It was Nature's second way of hinting to them that he was to prepare for foul weather.³⁹

Chew has pointed out that Hardy's love for the small creatures of Nature is a significant factor in many of his works. Thus we see Hardy relying on the humblest of creatures to ring a warning bell in Gabriel Oak's mind.

The next night, when Nature appears in the grand aspect of lightning, thunder, and rain, Gabriel Oak has acted on Nature's warning. He preserves the loads of hay by covering them with a tarpulin cover. But

³⁷Bathsheba Everdene marries Sergeant Troy in Far From the Madding Crowd and becomes Bathsheba Troy.

³⁸Hardy, Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 229.

³⁹Ibid.

again Nature has acted in an ambivalent fashion. Like Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," it acted first to "preserve and secondly to destroy." It is Nature that saves the hay, but it is also Nature that attempts to destroy the hay.

Hardy describes the descent of Nature's fury on Bathsheba's hay in incomparable terms. The lightning was, "dancing, leaping, striding, racing around, and mingling altogether in unparalleled confusion."⁴⁰ According to Hardy, "everything human, seemed small and trifling in such close juxtaposition with an infuriated universe."⁴¹ Nature is like an avenging warrior, heedless of man's frailty. It vents its anger, finally, on a lone tree that is suddenly stripped down to the bark and burned to the ground.

Nature not only directs its force against Bathsheba Troy, but Sergeant Troy is also made to feel the full power of its sting. When Fanny, Troy's rejected fiancée, dies, Troy plants a row of flowers in repentance for the way she has been treated.

He hung his lantern to the lowest bough of the yew-tree, and took from his basket flower-roots of several varieties. There were bundles of snow drops, hyacinth and crocus bulbs, violets and double daisies, which were to bloom in early spring, and of carnations, pinks, picotees, lilies of the valley, forget-me-nots, summer's farewell, meadow-saffron and others, for later seasons of the year.⁴²

Troy plants his flowers as a gesture of love towards the girl he has treated so unkindly while she lived. But Nature does not allow even the smallest amount of repentance to go unnoticed. In the night,

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 236.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 237.

⁴²Ibid., p. 292.

accompanied by thunder and lightning, rain sweeps over Fanny's grave. The next morning the flowers that Troy had planted float down the graveyard path in puddles of water. Troy comes out in the morning and finds strewn flowers at his feet. Filled with bitterness at this sign of reproof, Troy leaves the graveyard with the belief that he is the scum of the earth.

According to one critic, the scene at Fanny's grave is another one of Nature's interventions in the ordered course of man's life:

Troy's 'Romanticism' where he lovingly plants Fanny's grave with flowers is a mocking one. For Nature will not have this facile and belated repentance, and washes out the whole of Troy's labour. One cannot imagine this chapter of the 'Gargoyle' being done better: the desecration advances upon the mind, as upon the grave, with an awful certainty. Troy himself presently goes swimming in the sea and is carried off by a current: this is not pure fortuitousness; it is nature again intervening, as it does at so many critical moments in Hardy.⁴³

Nature has checked Troy's indulgence in sentimentality and sets his life on another course. The swift current that carries Troy away allows him to escape the vicissitudes of marriage and vanish, allowing his wife to believe that he has died at sea.

To trace the capricious whims of Nature through Hardy's earlier novels is to trace the author's growing awareness that Nature is more than a boyhood idyll. It is true that in the first novel, Under the Greenwood Tree, Nature was a guide for Fancy and Dick as they strolled through a playground of trees and woods - a place where they could be alone and plan the direction of their lives. But even in the two earliest novels, there is a minute trace of the pessimistic outlook on Nature that was to have its fruition in Hardy's later novels.

⁴³Duffin, op. cit., p. 13.

Far From the Madding Crowd gives the first concise picture of the two-fold aspect of Nature. Though the novel deals with a shepherd, it is hardly a pastoral dream of valleys and hills. Norcombe Hill, rather, becomes the burial ground for Gabriel Oak's sheep. Nor does the hill protect the occupants, but often places the lives of men and women in jeopardy. The Hill is described in a simile, because it is compared to a person, but does not present a kindly, smiling countenance. It appears solemn and grand, and Hardy describes it as an indestructible force.

Thus we can see the slowly progressing change in Hardy's concept of Nature even in his earliest novels. Alongside of the benign, indulgent Nature, he places the corrupt forces of Nature - the thrilling, yet cruel power of a rainstorm. He is beginning to recognize the evil forces of Nature - to realize that man is only a small, insignificant drop in the scheme of Nature's plan. As we proceed from the earlier novels to the later novels, Nature slowly rises in power and intent, destroying much more than it preserves.

MIDDLE OUTLOOK

1. The Return of the Native (1878)
2. The Woodlanders (1887)

In the earlier novels a change in the tenor of Hardy's descriptive passages concerning Nature becomes evident at times. However, in the middle period of his novels the reader becomes fully aware that Hardy's concept of Nature has begun to undergo a distinct change: he speaks of Nature in melancholy and pessimistic terms. Thus he begins to rely, to a large extent, on the naturalistic concept of Nature as a cruel, immutable force, ordering the course of man's life and whipping man about in a pattern of frenzy, according to the whimsical mood it takes. The uppermost idea is that Nature is a destroyer, killing without reason and venting its anger on helpless man.

The Return of the Native

The Return of the Native has often been called Hardy's best novel because of the characterization of persons like Eustacia Vye and Clym Yeobright. But it has also been called his best novel because it is really the story of Egdon Heath and the impact it has on the lives of the characters. As Duffin states:

With the Return of the Native we are back on the Wessex ground: and this in a special sense. The Return of the Native is the book of Egdon Heath; without Egdon it would not hold together. With most of the other novels the scene would be transposed to some other part of Wessex without vitally affecting the story: this story could not run its course anywhere other than amid the solitudes of Egdon.⁴⁴

This story, then, is the story of a place, Egdon Heath; it is always the focal point of the story because it determines the course of the character's actions.

⁴⁴Duffin, op. cit., p. 16.

As will be seen, Egdon is not only the scene of the tale, but it is sentient; it feels, it speaks, it slays. And the reader is impressively introduced to Egdon Heath as the drama, as a timeless and enigmatic force, its sombre nature intensifying the sad hours of day. Exhaling darkness, it lies like a brooding symbol, anticipating the crack of doom; its haggard asceticism is friend only to the stormy visitations of the elements; the tempest that wrenches its trees like bones in their sockets is to the Heath only a light caress. It is changeless as the heavens of the sea, and vegetable existence is hidden under the mask of an apparent death-like torpor. It barely heeds the changes of the seasons - only in mid-summer does it flame in crimson and scarlet; and no absolute hour of the day is reckoned by the dwellers on its monotonous surface; nor is it responsive to the pale beams of the watery moon.

Without doubt it lives; Egdon has a colossal human existence. It is untamable and Ishmaelitish. At nightfall it wakes to a watchful intentness. It is vocal with a tone as weird as the sea's own: a worn whisper, dry and papery, the ruins of a song; a voice that varies with intelligent differentiation, according to the character of the various parts of the heath - acoustic pictures are returned from the darkened scenery. It stubbornly resists cultivation and drives back the despairing tillage from its barbaric soil. What response of awakening it gives to the oncoming of dusk is feline in its stealthiness. To its best-loved child it gives warning of the approach of evil; and, the evil having fallen, resumes its imperturbable countenance again. Certainly the place, "perfectly accordant with man's nature - neither ghastly, hateful nor ugly; neither commonplace, unmeaning nor tame; but like man, slighted and

enduring,"⁴⁵ is eminently representative of Hardy's philosophy.

The solemnity of Egdon Heath engulfs the characters, making them appear frail and slighted. They perform because of the influence of Egdon Heath, and they are crushed either in the midst of a sultry summer day or in the midst of a dark subterranean night.

Even the innocent Mrs. Yeobright is consumed by the force of Egdon Heath; for she is the first character in the story who feels Egdon's swift, punishing blow. Mrs. Yeobright sets out to regain her son's favor in the sultry heat of a summer day. Egdon Heath has dressed in the colors of the rainbow, and the grass appears round and stuffed like soft downy pillows. Green trees meet the brilliant gold of sunshine and the earth is linked with sky to form a vibrant, radiant beauty. But it is amid the vivid intensity of summer that Mrs. Yeobright is bitten by an adder, leaving her son with a guilt he cannot evade.

It is, however, Eustacia Vye, singular in stature as a Hardian heroine, who becomes Egdon's most challenging victim. Eustacia's life has been ordered by Egdon; her course has been determined by Egdon. In the end she submits to the inexorable fate the Heath has destined for her.

Any one who had stood by now would have pitied her, not so much on account of her exposure to weather, and isolation from all humanity except the mouldered remains inside the Barrow; but for that other form of misery which was denoted by the slightly rocking movement that her feelings imparted to her person.... The wings of her soul were broken by the cruel destructiveness of all about her....⁴⁶

Egdon Heath had imprisoned Eustacia Vye; she could not endure the

⁴⁵Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 4.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 403.

isolation of the heath, nor the hard cold sustenance it meted out to her husband. She had tried to use Clym as her means of escape. But he became a victim of the Heath's strange powers. When Clym resumed his fondness for the Heath's magnetic quality, Eustacia sought another method of escape. Thus the heath became the center of the universe in the novel and finally plunges Eustacia to the bottom of a river.

In this novel, then, Hardy begins to assert his belief that man does not order his life, but that he is acted upon by powers greater than he ever hopes to be. Egdon Heath, in this novel, is a symbol of these powers; for it weaves a chain around the characters; and when any one of them attempts to break the chain, he becomes another broken link, lying in the dust.

In this novel more than a glimpse of Hardy's pessimistic outlook on Nature is seen. His characters appear against the background of the Heath and destroy themselves because of it. Thus the Heath becomes the central character in the novel and assumes the qualities of a dominant person. Man is passive, helpless; the heath is active, domineering. And the characters who struggle against the Heath, struggle against a fate that controls their lives and from which they cannot escape.

Finally, the Heath symbolizes more than the futile attempt of man to overthrow the control of a particular place; it symbolizes man's vain struggle against the uncaring universe itself. Eustacia mutters these words in a moment of uncontrolled passion:

"...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 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!"⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 404.

Eustacia is not the only character who must mutter these words; all of the long array of characters who appear in Thomas Hardy's novels feel the biting shock of a world that devises cruelties as a punishment for both the just and the unjust. These words become Thomas Hardy's repudiation of a world where man is unable to define himself in the hierarchy - where man is thwarted at each step - where man becomes nothing more than a helpless animal pinned to the wall by a destiny over which he has no control.

This work is Hardy's first great cry of melancholic pessimism against the injustice of man's lot on earth. This same cry will continue through the line of novels that follow The Return of the Native. Man, according to the ideas presented in this work, is nothing more than an instrument to be used by capricious Nature. He can no more escape his fate than Eustacia does. It is the sense that man cannot escape Nature's powers which causes the bitter, almost venomous outlook that will color Hardy's view of Nature in his later novels.

The Woodlanders

In his novel, The Woodlanders, Thomas Hardy has taken the reader to a land of apple trees and apple cider, and just as Egdon Heath assumed the aspect of the universe, Little Hintock takes on this very same aspect. Says one critic:

In two of his books, The Woodlanders and The Return of the Native, the setting is made to stand for the universe, and in all his other successful works it has symbolic value. Not a background, but an actor in the play, it is always present, the incarnation of a living force with a will and a purpose of its own - now and again taking a actual hand in the story, especially killing Giles.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ William Lyon Phelps, "The Novels of Thomas Hardy," North American Review, CXC(October, 1909), 502.

The people of Little Hintock are completely isolated by the trees that they have planted so carefully. They are cut off from the finer aspects of society in the outside world; but they are also protected by the trees from hunger and cold. Thus the trees of Little Hintock have a two-fold function: they serve as both a liability and an asset. The Woodlanders presents a scene as remote from civilization as was the life on Egdon, isolated not by a Heath, but by trees: the world of the novel is a few houses and cottages, gardens and orchards, snipped out of the woodland, a sequestered spot outside the gates of the world. In Little Hintock the men are not idle, certainly, but their work consists, for the most part, in lending a helping hand to nature.⁴⁹

Although a novel of Hardy's middle period, The Woodlanders, as the story progresses, begins to look more and more like the early pastoral-oriented novels of Thomas Hardy. But The Woodlanders also reaches heights greater than those of a pastoral as one reads further; it is in the setting of Little Hintock that Hardy is able to show Nature's deadly intent behind the gentle countenance.

The trees of Little Hintock have their beauty; but one of the trees in Little Hintock kills Marty South's father, inch by inch, unpitying in its wanton destruction.

The tree was a tall elm, familiar to him from childhood, which stood at a distance of two-thirds its own height from the front of South's dwelling. Whenever the wind blew, as it did now, the tree rocked, naturally enough; and the sight of its motion, and sound of its sighs, had gradually bred the terrifying illusion in the woodman's mind. Thus he would

⁴⁹Duffin, op. cit., p. 41.

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.⁵⁰

Through the years the tree had taken over a significant amount of the old man's fears. He faced the tree in stark terror, realizing that as the time passed, he was faced with a supernatural force he could do nothing to combat. Mr. South wailed and bemoaned his enemy; for he recognized the enemy as Nature:

As the tree waved South waved his head, making it his fogleman with abject obedience. 'Ah, when it was quite a small tree, 'he said, 'and I was a little boy, I thought one day of chopping it off with my hook to make a clothesline prop with. But I put off doing it, and then I again thought that I would, but I forgot it and didn't. And at last it got too big, and now 'tis my enemy, and will be the death of me. Little did I think, when I let that sapling stay, that a time would come when it would torment me, and dash me into my grave.⁵¹

John South dies almost immediately after he learns the tree has been felled by Giles in an attempt to save South's life. John South appears to have been destined to live only as long as his tree lived - and man and Nature share the same fate. When one dies, the other must die; just as they grow together, they also end together. Thus man and Nature are bound together in twin destinies, each sharing the fate of the other.

But John South is not the only person in the novel destroyed by the forces of Nature. As will be seen later, his death twists the lives of so many characters - Giles Winterborne, Grace Melbury, and Edred Fitzpiers. Grace Melbury, trapped by her snobbish upbringing, must choose between the two men who love her - Giles, the loyal rustic, and Edred, the

⁵⁰Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1964), pp. 96-97.

All subsequent references to The Woodlanders will be taken from this edition.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 97.

polished and idealistic doctor. In the end, Nature makes the choice for her. At John South's death, Giles loses his home and relinquishes any claim he might have had to Grace's affection. Spurned by Giles, Grace obeys her father and enters a loveless, tragic marriage with Fitzpiers.

The novel is rich in the description of Nature. The seasons pass visibly through the woods, and Hardy notes them as they go: it is winter evening when the story opens; suddenly Spring is there, so that the rush of sap in the veins of the trees can almost be heard; soon it is Summer, and the woodland seems to change from an open filigree to a solid opaque body of infinitely larger shape and importance; then comes the early Autumn with orchards encrusted with scarlet and gold fruit under a luminous lavender mist, and then late Autumn, with falling leaves getting redder and hornier and rotting underfoot; and so to Winter, Spring and Summer again, and on to the wet cold second Autumn, the one that killed Giles Winterborne.

Giles Winterborne becomes the tragic character in this work, the true victim of the bland face of Nature, who refuses to preserve such a man as Winterborne and yet allows Fitzpiers to live. Winterborne is left alone to fight the harsh, gripping Autumn, and he pays for his struggle with a cruel death.

The wind grew more violent, and as the storm went on it was difficult to believe that no opaque body, but only and invisible colorless 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..... To all this weather Giles must be more or less exposed; how much she did not know.⁵²

When Grace finally decides that she must allow Giles to enter into the

⁵²Ibid., p. 317.

protection of his hovel, it is already too late.

Winterborne never recovered consciousness of what was passing; and that he was going became soon perceptible also to her. In less than an hour the delirium ceased; then there was an interval of somnolent painlessness and soft breathing, at the end of which Winterborne passed quietly away.⁵³

Because of Nature's power, Winterborne loses first his home, then his love, and finally his life. Certainly he does not lose these things through his own negligence, for he stood as an upright man in the face of all disaster, and worked on, heeding nothing but his trees. When he dies, Grace loses her only chance to forego the now repentant Fitzpiers. Her marriage is again made a reality, and she soon forgets Giles in the rejuvenation of her marriage.

Thus, Winterborne is truly the innocent victim of Nature. He is as honest as Gabriel Oak,⁵⁴ yet he is not allowed like Oak to attain some measure of happiness at the end. Evidently, the passage of time between the novel in which Gabriel Oak appears (Far From the Madding Crowd), has taken its toll on Thomas Hardy. The younger Thomas Hardy would have let Winterborne suffer, but he would not have condemned to total punishment the decency of Winterborne. The older Thomas Hardy, completely aware of the cruelties in the universe, metes out to Winterborne the blind justice prevalent in the world.

⁵³Ibid., p. 330.

⁵⁴Gabriel Oak has been discussed earlier in this chapter as the honest, simple shepherd who pledged his heart to a young lady in Far From the Madding Crowd. The honesty and loyalty of Oak toward Bathsheba Everdene can be compared to the honesty and loyalty of Giles Winterborne toward Grace Melbury. However much their situations parallel at the beginning of the two novels, they do not parallel one another in the end.

In The Woodlanders, then, we can see that the ambivalent aspects of Nature has really come to haunt the later life of Thomas Hardy. The opening of this novel presents Nature with a tranquillity all her own.

The breeze was fresh and quite steady, filtering through the denuded mass of twigs without swaying them, but making the point of each ivy-leaf on the trunks scratch its underlying neighbor restlessly.⁵⁵

But later on in the novel, the scene changes. We remember the Autumn weather, appearing in an earlier quote, which mercilessly swoops down on the unprotected Giles Winterborne. Truly man has become infinitely small, whipped and scorned by the very things he loved and cherished in life.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 90.

LATER OUTLOOK

1. Tess of the D'Urbervilles (1891)

Tess of the D'Urbervilles

As Hardy grew in stature as a novelist, the forces in the Victorian period began to have an even stronger effect on him. Hardy became the spokesman, in his novels, of the conflict raging throughout Victorian England. Thus, as he reached his mature height as a novelist, the dual forces at work in the Victorian period could be seen even more strongly in his works. He succumbed, presumably with some resistance, to the mechanistic idea of man's place in the universe.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles is really the culmination of Hardy's artistic representation of the duality in the natural world. It is true that Jude the Obscure also falls within the later period of Hardy's writing. But Jude the Obscure is not a novel which depicts man trapped by the forces of Nature. It is, rather, a novel which depicts man struggling to overcome his environment. It is with Jude that Hardy becomes a fore-runner of the naturalistic movement; for Jude is chained, through biological determinism, to his meaningless existence he is forced to live each day. Though he aspires to the spiritual beauty of Sue, he succumbs to the sensual charms of Arabella.

It is in Tess of the D'Urbervilles that the dual elements of Nature come together. When the novel ends, the reader is left with a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness. Tess, the protagonist, Nature, the antagonist, have fought a grim and deadly battle. The reader draws the conclusion that Tess's struggle to maintain her decency against the forces of her environment is always the cycle of human destiny, a cycle in which man comes out the inevitable loser.

There are moments in this novel when Hardy rises to the heights of excellent pictorial representation. Certainly, the story would be

meaningless if it were not for the beautiful background Hardy gives to the love story. His scenes of Nature as the catalytic agent for love hovers in the mind's eye, and there is the awareness that Tess and Angel continue their love because of Nature's tenderness and under Nature's auspices. Here is one passage providing a setting of incomparable beauty:

Or perhaps the summer fog was more general, and the meadows lay like a white sea, out of which the scattered trees rose like dangerous rocks. Birds would soar through it into the upper radiance, and hang on the wing sunning themselves, or alight on the wet rails subdividing the mead, which now shone like glass rods. Minute diamonds of moisture from the mist hung, too, upon Tess's eyelashes and drops upon her hair, like seed pearls. When 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 daz- zlingly fair dairymaid only, who had to hold her own against the other women of the world.⁵⁶

His description of Nature, in this instance, is like a delicately woven pattern of detail, where Nature seems to instigate a mood of romance and sentiment.

But if Nature appears to help the progress of Tess's love, this is only one instance in the whole work. The reader remembers much more clearly the seduction scene, where Nature watches with an intent eye, but does nothing to relieve the suffering of the young girl.

Darkness and silence ruled everywhere around. Above them rose the primeval yews and oaks of the Chase, in which were poised gentle roosting birds in their last nap; and about them stole the hopping rabbits and hares. But, might some say, where was Tess's guardian angel? Where was the providence of her simple faith? Perhaps,

⁵⁶Hardy, Tess, p. 141.

like that other god of whom the ironical Tisbite spoke,
he was talking, or her was pursuing, or he was in a
journey, or he was sleeping and not to be awaked.⁵⁷

We remember Tess, in an even sadder scene, struggling through the winter months with infinite patience. We see the work she has to perform in the presence of cruel Nature:

Amid this scene Tess slaved in the morning frosts and in the afternoon rains. When it was not swede-grubbing it was swede-trimming, in which process they sliced off the earth and the fibers with a billhook before storing the roots for future use. At this occupation they could shelter themselves by a thatched hurdle if it rained; but if it was frosty even their thick leather gloves could not prevent the frozen masses they handled from biting their fingers.⁵⁸

We see a young girl, tossed and overwhelmed by environmental circumstances, sometimes assisting and sympathizing with Nature, but almost always the victim of an ordered, planned universe which has deemed she must die.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles is the embodiment of the idea that man's course is determined, not by his actions on earth, but by a greater, unknown force. The following dialogue between Tess and her brother illustrates this fact:

"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 stubborn tree. Most of them splendid and sound - a few blighted."

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 78.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 309.

"Which do we live on - a blighted one or a splendid one?"

"A blighted one."⁵⁹

Tess was wrong though. Most of the worlds were blighted ones, at least in Hardy's novels they appear so. Tess's world is no different from the world of Eustacia Vye or of Marty South; only Tess becomes the most helpless of the credulous heroines that Hardy has created in his novels. The death of the last remaining horse in the family sets the course of the story; for Tess feels guilty and goes to her seducer's farm only to help the lot of the family. The death of her baby, Sorrow, is perhaps the saddest scene in the whole story - with Tess kneeling and praying for the baptismal cleanliness of her baby. But the will of the universe is implacable, and so it spurns the yielding Tess until her death on the gallows. Thus ends the life of a young woman whose acceptance of her lost chances is stoical, and who allows, without complaint, the injustice in the world to take its course:

"Justice" was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess. And the D'Urberville knights and dames slept on in their tombs unknowing. The two speechless gazers bent themselves down to the earth, as if in prayer, and remained thus a long time.⁶⁰

The philosophical nature of Thomas Hardy has asserted itself more in this novel than in any of the rest of his novels. But for a moment, Hardy must have become embroiled in the career of his Tess. She becomes the culmination of Hardy's ideas concerning man's disheartening stay on

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 28.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 432.

earth; she represents man pitted against her environment, an environment whose sole purpose is bent on subduing and then degrading. Against the frenzy of the elements, Tess has no more power than an ant attacking a machine gun. Her struggles are brave, but futile. She appears mocked, as if the world had designed for her an ill-conceived life and an ill-conceived existence.

Hardy moves through the novel with a tone of sadness, then sadness gives way to bitterness, bitterness to discouragement; and at the end of the novel there appears nothing more than reproach at some unnamed foe. The tragic vision concerning Nature is here, and the violence of Nature's attacks against Tess seems to stun Hardy for a moment. We see now the novelist of wisdom and despair, whose maturer years had left its impact in his novels. He appears to be crying for a "Cease;" but at best he could only note that man had no chance to escape his environment. Hardy is not only writing of the personal tragedy of Tess but also of the universal tragedy of man pitted against natural forces. And through the saga of Hardy's novels, Tess of the D'Urbervilles best illustrates Nature's control over man, until man is finally reduced to nothingness.

CHAPTER III

THE INFLUENCE OF NATURE ON THE CHARACTERS IN HARDY'S NOVELS

Far From the Madding Crowd

The character of Gabriel Oak is created from a rich background of pasture and byre, sheep-fair and sheep-farm. As a shepherd in a land of rustic beauty, Gabriel has learned faith, loyalty and endurance from the hardness of the land. In creating Oak, Hardy has created a character who drew his characteristics from nature, simple yet tender, and able to give a kind of love and beauty equal to the solemnity of Nature.

Gabriel Oak has been imbued with the qualities of Norcombe Hill, stolid, loyal, remaining unruffled in the presence of the chaotic conditions around him. Even the marriage of Bathsheba to the fascinating Sergeant Troy never prevents him from going about his daily tasks. He watches over Bathsheba's flock with a calm countenance, in spite of the love he carries for her in his heart.

Perhaps Gabriel Oak is the only character in this novel who is really sensitive to the movements of the creature world; thus, he is the only character who has a close connection with the natural world. It is to Gabriel that Nature sends the warning of an approaching storm, allowing him to save Bathsheba's hay; for he is the only character who has an understanding of the animal world:

This was enough to re-establish him in his original opinion. He knew now that he was right, and that Troy was wrong. Every voice in nature was unanimous in

bespeaking change. But two distinct translations attached to these dumb expressions. Apparently there was to be a thunder-storm, and afterwards a cold continuous rain. The creeping things seemed to know all about the later rain, but little of the interpolated thunder storm; whilst the sheep knew all about the thunder-storm and nothing of the later rain.⁶⁰

The storm scenes in this novel have been admired often, and justly, but a full awareness of their context is needed. It is with the storm scenes that Hardy closes the connection between Gabriel Oak and Nature. We see the shepherd's brave persistence after Nature has sent out her messages through her small creatures.

Not a drop of rain had fallen as yet. He wiped his weary brow, and looked again at the black forms of the unprotected stacks. Was his life so valuable to him after all? What were his prospects that he should be so chary of running risk, when important and urgent labour could not be carried on without such risk? He resolved to stick to the stack....⁶¹

Gabriel stands alone in the midst of the storm, and the reader is aware of the drunken labourers within the barn who are sleeping in the midst of Nature's fury.

Oak in the darkness working with his hands is a radial point for all the perceptions about the storm and the farmstead. During the storm, tremendous confusion prevails. Voices are heard, speaking sometimes with surprising poignancy: 'I cannot find my husband. Is he with you?' Above all, gathering momentum with the tension of the story itself, there is everywhere the incessant activity. This reaches its own climax when the flash from the lightning strikes the tree:

⁶⁰Hardy, Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 230.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 235.

It sprang from east, west, north, south, ...dancing,
leaping, striding, racing around....⁶²

In despite of an infuriated universe, Gabriel goes on thatching and binding.

Whatever may be the forces of antagonism present in the above statements, Gabriel remains stolid and laborious. Like the sturdy Oak, another instance of his connection with the natural world, he does not break from the storm's fury. He persistently works on. Oak, as he works with his hands in the darkness, blindly, becomes the strongest, clearest image for the steadfastness that, in his own person, he continually represents through the novel, whether in the story, or by his role in agricultural life.⁶³

Return of the Native

As has been indicated above, the Heath in The Return of the Native symbolizes a primitive and uncivilized, brooding, elusive majesty. It seems eternal and unconquerable. The Heath also has an irregular kind of beauty, a beauty that is unorthodox. It is strange, standing as a lonely pinnacle for persons to gaze on. It appeals to a subtler instinct in man because the question of its beauty is elusive.

Twilight combined with the scenery of Egdon Heath to evolve a thing majestic without severity, impressive without showiness, emphatic in its admonitions, grand in simplicity. The qualifications which frequently invest the facade of a prison with far more dignity than is found in the facade of a prison double its size lent to

⁶²Ibid., p. 236.

⁶³Douglas Brown, Thomas Hardy (London: John Dickens & Co., Ltd., 1961), p. 55.

this heath a sublimity in which spots renowned for beauty of the accepted kind are utterly wanting.⁶⁴

The influence of Egdon Heath on Eustacia Vye is recognizable when the reader becomes aware that Hardy is implanting many of the characteristics of the Heath in Eustacia. Hardy gives a description of Eustacia which is completely in accordance with his tone used to describe the Heath:

...Egdon was her Hades, and since coming there she had imbibed much of what was dark in its tone, though inwardly and eternally unreconciled thereto. Her appearance accorded well with this smouldering rebelliousness, and the shady splendor of her beauty was the real surface of the sad and stifled warmth within her.⁶⁵

Eustacia and Egdon stand like giant figures of somnolent intensity - one dark force pitted against the other dark force.

Egdon Heath destroys Eustacia primarily because she possesses the intensity of expression, the same majestic spirit, as the Heath does. When Eustacia battles the force of the heath, she is battling a force which is comparable to her person. She fights the isolating, indomitable, force of the Heath only because she contains the same isolating, indomitable quality. Her beauty is also the beauty of the Heath - not a fragile beauty, but a strong, reposeful beauty - with the passion always lying close to the surface.⁶⁶

Like Eustacia Vye, Clym himself is a key figure for a right appraisal of Hardy's art. He is the most direct representative of the novelist's strongest impulse in its simplest form: the return from town to country, and the rejection of urban life. He comes back to

⁶⁴Hardy, Return of the Native, p. 2.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 75.

⁶⁶Robert C. Schweik, "Theme, Character, and Perspective in Hardy's Return of the Native," PMLA, XL(January, 1922), 758.

Egdon Heath with a success story from the outside world, yet he chooses to remain on Egdon rather than return to England.

The wholeheartedness of the joy of the native's return home is clear.

...If anyone knew the heath well, it was Clym. He was permeated with its scenes, with its substance, and with its odors. 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 colored by it;Take all the varying hates felt by Eustacia Vye towards the heath, and translate them into loves, and you have the heart of Clym.⁶⁷

To Clym, Egdon was home in the final sense of the word. It was there that he could recognize his need in society. He, therefore, resumed his communion with Egdon Heath. In its forceful structure, he recognized the demands of the people who had lived there all their lives. Thus, he was content to stay and work. He tells his mother, "I am not going back to Paris again." In the end, he lost himself in the serenity of the Heath.

When Clym becomes blind, he relies on Egdon to sustain him. Finally, he merges with the Heath so that it is difficult to determine one from the other. Clym himself,

...appeared of a russet hue, not more distinguishable from the scene around him than the green caterpillar from the leaf it feeds onThe silent being who thus occupied himself 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 but fern, furze, heath, lichens and moss.⁶⁸

⁶⁷Hardy, Return of the Native, p. 196.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 292.

Clym succumbs to his earlier fascination for Egdon Heath, and in doing so, takes on the characteristics of the heath to such an extent that he is hardly distinguishable from the world of insects.

The Woodlanders

Marty South and Giles Winterborne emerge as Hardy's most representative characters of the elements of Nature in The Woodlanders. Even the names given the two characters, South and Winterborne, are names that symbolize the seasons of the year, especially the changeling tendency of the seasons; for these two persons are truly creatures of the soil. Thus Hardy establishes a relationship between Nature, Giles, and Marty, and endows the two characters with a certain amount of prescience and prophetic insight regarding the trees which surround Little Hintock.

Marty South is perhaps the most moving of the two characters for two reasons. First, she is constantly present in scenes of activity and skill, sharpening spars, or planting young trees. Second, her speaking is often contrived with lovely, imaginative truth. Marty responds to the call of Nature, and in doing so, becomes almost a part of the land. She is the female counterpart of the stoical Digory Venn in The Return of the Native and has all the appeal of a Tess D'Urberville.

Especially memorable is the scene between Marty and Giles as they plant trees together. It is memorable because in the rugged simplicity of their task, Marty finds time to comment on the young pines she is erecting so tenderly:

She erected one of the young pines into its hole, and held up her fingers; 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 had been felled themselves.

'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.'⁶⁹

This is perhaps the only comment that Marty South ever makes on the hardships in her life, and this comment is beautifully understated. Marty recognizes the tremulous conditions of life only as they pertain to a young tree, which moans because it is aware that from the day of creation life becomes earnest. "We are sorry to begin life in earnest, too," says Marty. And yet she never once complains about the bareness of her own life.

In recognition of the relationship which exists between Marty and Giles, a spiritual kinship in Nature, Hardy has only this comment to make:

The casual glimpses which the ordinary population bestowed upon that wondrous world of sap and leaves called the Hintock woods had been able to read its hieroglyphs as ordinary writing; to them the sights and sounds of the night, winter wind, storm, amid those dense boughs, which had to Grace a touch of the uncanny, and even of the supernatural, were simply occurrences whose origin, continuance, and laws they foreknew....⁷⁰

This sums up the tie which binds Marty and Giles together. It is not a tie of love for one another, nor of dependence on one another. It is a tie felt by two people who recognize that they love Nature and are a part of Nature.

Giles may be said to stand in somewhat the same relation to Grace - the real Grace - as Marty stands toward him. But Giles is a woodlander, a protagonist in the story, and before us more often; so

⁶⁹Hardy, The Woodlanders, p. 69.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 34.

while Marty represents an ideal possibility, Giles in practice represents the worth of the agricultural life and its skills and the worthiness of traditional virtues - chivalry, loyalty, devotion. His symbolic function shows clearly at certain points in the novel; once or twice the feeling generated toward Giles is almost anthropological. There is first the passage where he stands with his apple tree in the market-place.

Then this:

An apple-mill and press had been erected on the spot, to which some men were bringing fruit from divers points in mawn-baskets, while others were grinding down the pomace, whose sweet juice gushed forth into tubs and pails. The superintendent ... was a young yeoman.... He had hung his coat to a nail of the outhouse wall, and wore his shirt sleeves rolled up beyond his elbows to keep them unstained while he rammed the pomace into the bags of horsehair. Fragments of applerind had alighted upon the brim of his hat - probably from the bursting of a bag - while brown pips of the same fruit were sticking among the down upon his fine round arms, and in his beard.⁷¹

It is much more than picturesque. Giles is not a day-dream figure. Much later in the tale comes a second inference:

Winterborne walked by her side in the rear of the apple-mill. He looked and smelt like Autumn's very brother, his face being sunburnt of a wheat-color, his eyes blue as cornflowers....⁷²

Giles becomes a part of the landscape, and when Hardy describes him as looking like, "Autumn's very brother," then the reader is aware that Giles assumes his make-up from the forces of Nature. In other words, Giles is the prince of Autumn and symbolizes Hardy's hope for an agricultural life.

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 180-81.

⁷²Ibid., p. 213.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles

Hardy composed nothing finer than the opening of Tess, and it is in the opening that Hardy really begins to delve into the agricultural aspects of the English countryside. His description of the village of Marlott has a wonderful picturesque quality.

Here, in the valley, the world seems to be constructed upon a smaller and more delicate scale; the fields are mere paddocks, so reduced that from this height their hedgerows appear a network of dark-green threads overspreading the paler green of the grass.⁷³

Marlott is a village that has a measure of simplicity in the fields and in the work of the laborers. This same simplicity Hardy gives to his opening description of Tess Durbeyfield, so that she is linked with the agricultural community.

Tess Durbeyfield at this time of life was a mere vessel of emotion untinged by experience. The dialect was on her tongue to some extent, despite the village school....⁷⁴

The preparation for such later scenes as Tess harvesting at Marlott, or the picture of Tess in the early dawn at Talbothays is perfect. For Tess is not only the pure woman, the ballad heroine, the country girl: she also represents the agricultural community in its moment of ruin.⁷⁵ Tess's defeat, at the end of the story, is the defeat of the village families who have been forced to give up their homes to seek a new place to live. Tess is the agricultural predicament in metaphor, engaging Hardy's deepest sympathy of allegiance.

⁷³Hardy, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 7.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 10.

⁷⁵Brown, op., cit., p. 91.

For the most part, Tess appears passive in the story. She does nothing to change the course of events, but submits to each catastrophe which befalls her. Especially memorable is the passage where a sleep-walking Angel carries a non-resisting Tess in his arms toward an unknown destination.

He paused in his labors for a moment to lean with her against the banister. Was he going to throw her down?, she lay in his arms in this precarious position with a sense rather of luxury than of terror. If they could only fall together, and both be dashed to pieces, how fit, how desirable.⁷⁶

Tess takes almost the same course of non-interference with Fate throughout the whole of the novel. She does not interfere with her environment, but only works on patiently and calmly until the inevitable end.

The story moves through the seasons, spring, summer, fall, and winter. As the seasons grow stormier, Tess's life also grows stormier. Finally, she is forced to toil at the most menial of tasks, amid the wind, rain, rain, and snow of winter.

Amid this scene Tess slaved in the morning frosts and in the afternoon rains. When it was not swede-grubbing it was swede-trimming, in which process they sliced off the earth and fibers....⁷⁷

In the end, she says, "What is it, Angel?" she said, starting up. "Have they come for me?" Tess does nothing to resist, but accepts her death as a form of happiness.

⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 266-67.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 309.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Throughout this paper, it has been my contention that Hardy's concept of Nature, because of various influences during the periods of his writing, often fluctuated; as a result, Hardy became a man with a double-vision of Nature: on the one hand, Nature was cruel and heartless; on the other hand, Nature was calm and serene.

His novels reflect the transitional development from the Romantic view of Nature to the Darwinian idea of Nature. In his earlier novels, Under the Greenwood Tree and Far From the Madding Crowd, we get such pictures of Nature that please the eye and tempt the mind. Like the romantics' view of Nature, Hardy's Nature becomes the benign parent, the soothing comforter that helps rather than hinders man. But even this soothing picture of Nature is sometimes interrupted. We remember that a love scene between Fancy and Dick is broken by the jarring, screaming sound of a bird being killed by his prey.

The Woodlanders and The Return of the Native represent the middle period of Hardy's novels. It is with these two novels that the Darwinian idea of Nature begins to influence Thomas Hardy. Though The Woodlanders begins with delicate apple trees and pale leaves, the Nature in this novel becomes a cruel menace, killing Giles and killing John South. In The Return of the Native Hardy has completely adopted the Darwinian idea that man is controlled by his environment. The implacable

Heath controls and destroys its residents, asserting itself as the one great force, caring nothing for puny man's resistance.

Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles is perhaps his crowning achievement in a portrayal of humans pitted against the order of the universe. Tess represents "the pure girl" conquered by her environment. In this novel, Nature assumes the complete role of a destroyer, operating on no principle of selection, but operating only through whim and wanton destruction.

Thus, we see the transition of thought slowly developing from the period in which Hardy wrote his earlier novels, the period where his eyes still beheld the wonderful, natural scenery in the Nature, to his later novels, where he is writing under the influence of the New Science in the Victorian period. Then, his Nature becomes an inscrutable force, killing in wanton destruction.

When one reads Hardy's novels, then, there is a sense that he has a double-awareness of Nature. In his first novels, he paints Nature with rose-colored scenes and green grass. In his later novels, there is a melancholic, pessimistic tinge; for he quietly paints Nature as a stern, unyielding God, determined to inflict punishment on a mankind that has done nothing to deserve this punishment.

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