SYMBOLIC IMAGERY IN FOUR NOVELS BY THOMAS HARDY

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FOUR NOVELS BY THOMAS HARDY

By

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ABSTRACT

Unlike his late-Victorian contemporaries who preferred direct methods of characterization, Thomas Hardy opted to reveal character through setting and symbol. In each of Far From the Madding Crowd, The Return of the Native, The Woodlanders and Tess of the d'Urbervilles, imagery, particularly that of nature, plays a central role in establishing character. Not only does it help to clarify whether an individual's basic allegiance is to the natural world or to civilization, but it also plays a significant role in suggesting his psychological states.

In the following pages, I explore Hardy's peculiar use of symbolism in each of the four novels listed above, and attempt to decipher some of the images for the information they reveal about characters. Because so much of the symbolic detail provided by Hardy is derived from nature, the author's attitude to nature in each of the novels is also discussed in some detail.

TEXTUAL NOTE

In the body of this thesis, references to Hardy's four novels--*Far From the Madding Crowd*, *The Return of the Native*, *The Woodlanders* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*--are given in brackets: (26).

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Chapter I

Among the misguided ideas to have emerged over the years about the novels of Thomas Hardy lies the stubborn notion that Hardy's characters are little more than the pawns of Fate. Many critics have suggested that the workings of the "ingenious machinery contrived by the Gods" along with the less ingenious machinery of Hardy's plots have seriously hampered the author's realization of psychologically believable characters. "The characters have been required to contribute too much to the plot," wrote E. M. Forster in his 1927 Aspects of the Novel; "except in their rustic humours, their vitality has been impoverished, they have gone dry and thin."[1] Donald Davidson asserted much the same thing in his 1940 "The Traditional Basis of Thomas Hardy's Fiction". In that essay, Hardy's characters are deemed remnants of the ballad tradition, memorable for their actions rather than their motives or psychology.[2]

Though there can be no disputing Hardy's indebtedness to folk tradition or his interest in plot, to suggest that either of these concerns detracts from the vitality and psychological realism of his characters seems a rather gross misrepresentation of the author's art. Hardy's characters may be rather far removed from the ethical dilemmas which make George Eliot's characters seem real; they may have little in common with the eminently social creatures which populate Henry James's novelistic world; even so, they do not lack substance. Their psychology is powerfully suggested through a large body of symbolic imagery, most of which is derived from nature.

While Hardy's use of landscape and the imagery of nature to illuminate

character cannot be explained in terms of the methods of characterization favoured by his contemporaries, it can certainly be linked with his early reading of the romantic poets, who used nature not only as a theme, but as a "vehicle" or medium for the expression of psychological states. Whatever encouraged Hardy to prefer symbolic imagery over direct authorial commentary or the internal monologue, however, it should be noticed that he was not the first to do so. Emily Brontë had shown a strong predilection for indirect methods of characterization more than twenty years before Hardy in her 1848 Wuthering Heights. The landscape in that novel is as symbolically charged as any Hardy ever created, even if the imagery--like the cast of characters--is less various than is generally the case in Hardy's novels.

Though Wuthering Heights is radically different from anything Hardy wrote, it resembles in a very fundamental way the two novels which are to be our focus in this chapter. Like Far From the Madding Crowd and The Return of the Native, Brontë's novel concerns a young woman caught between two lovers who represent the antithetical attitudes of nature and civilization. While Brontë's tale is told from an amoral stance, however, Hardy's narratives come down heavily on the side of nature. Hardy identifies those figures who are closely linked with the natural world and traditional ways of life as the moral centre of his novels, actually allowing them to survive while the "unnatural moderns"--Troy, Boldwood, Wildeve, Eustacia and Mrs. Yeobright--are shot off, imprisoned for life, drowned, or fatally poisoned.

As different as their moral biases are, Brontë and Hardy seem to regard the universe in similar dualistic terms. Both have the conflicts

in their novels hinge on the clash between "natural" and "civilized" characters, and both use imagery to help the reader distinguish between those two types of individuals. In each of Wuthering Heights, Far From the Madding Crowd and The Return of the Native, the descriptive details which surround a given character provide the major clues to his basic allegiance, though in Brontë's novel, geography is also an important indicator of the "side" he is on. In the world of Wuthering Heights, the natural characters all live at the stormy Heights, while the civilized ones originate (even if they do not remain) in the sheltered and fertile valley below, at the house known as Thrushcross Grange.

In Hardy's novels, geography is of little consequence in suggesting which group characters belong to. In Far From the Madding Crowd and The Return of the Native, as in most of Hardy's works of fiction, the natural characters and the unnatural moderns do not inhabit separate spaces but occupy the same rural world. One rarely experiences any difficulty in telling them apart, however. The natural, traditional figures are always surrounded by a substantial body of natural imagery, while the characters who have rejected the natural world are regularly identified with man-made objects and other products of civilization.

Although Hardy's use of imagery to delineate characters is not something frequently commented upon by critics, it is fairly readily acknowledged that Hardy's characters are of two types. While I have labelled these types the "naturals" and the "moderns", Donald Davidson has found it convenient to name them the "changeless" and the "changeful". According to his scheme, the former are the characters "who accept nature as unchangeable and passively accomodate themselves to . . . [it]"; the latter are characters of a more modern, usually more complex type who tend to intrude

upon the lives of those more closely attuned to nature.[3]

The characters who populate the worlds of Far From the Madding Crowd and The Return of the Native are very easily classified according to Davidson's scheme. Boldwood, Troy, Eustacia Vye, Wildeve and Mrs. Yeobright are plainly characters of the changeful variety, while Bathsheba Everdene, Gabriel Oak, Fanny Robin, Clym Yeobright, his cousin Thomasin, and her suitor, Diggory Venn are clearly figures of the changeless type. In both novels, the most obviously changeless characters are, of course, the rustics who make their living off the land.

As though their livelihood were not enough to identify the Weatherbury folk with the natural world, Hardy provides numerous images which make these characters seem a natural outgrowth of the land. The local maltster's "frosty hair overgrowing his gnarled figure" is very like "the grey moss and lichen upon the leafless apple-tree" (102); Matthew Moon's voice is reminiscent of "the rustle of wind among dead leaves" (128); a sleeping Joseph Poorgrass resembles a hedgehog (302); Jan Coggan and Mark Clark's faces are "two copper-coloured discs" suggestive of "the setting sun and the full moon shining vis à vis" (343) and Maryann Money's face is "the image of a dried Normandy pippin" (122). It is not only as individuals that the Weatherbury workers recall the objects of nature, however. When assembled, these characters advance "in the completest balance of intention, like the remarkable figures known as Chain Salpae, which, distinctly organized in other respects, have one will common to a whole family" (126).

Although the rustics in The Return of the Native are not described in the same vivid imagery as their Weatherbury counterparts, and seem on the whole to live in less harmony with the land, their tie to the natural world is still

very strong. One indication of the strength of the bond is the way the characters speak of time and its passage. Unlike Eustacia Vye, these characters derive no pleasure from watching "representations" of time's passage in man-made hourglasses, neither do they see much relevance in the artificial divisions of the Gregorian calendar. The imagery of their speech indicates that time for them proceeds according to natural or seasonal cycles. Thus, Timothy Fairway remarks that "many summers have passed" since Susan Nunsuch's husband "snapped" her up from him (80); Christian Cantle settles his age in reference to the harvest: "thirty-one last tatie-digging" (76), and one of the women notes that Damon Wildeve is older than Tamsin Yeobright "by a good few summers" (74).

Hardy seems to prefer suggesting a character's basic nature--particularly the strength of his tie to the land--by surrounding him with natural imagery, but the author is certainly not unaware of other means of defining character. In The Return of the Native, we have seen that the way in which a character observes and defines the passage of time is an index of his commitment to the natural world. This is also true in Far From the Madding Crowd. In this novel, Hardy uses Oak's and Troy's watches as symbols of their conflicting allegiances. Gabriel's watch is a rather large silver affair hardly worth the effort of retrieving from the depths of his pockets because it is so unreliable. By contrast, Troy's time-piece is an elegant gold one with an engraving on its back of a five-pointed coronet and the inscription: Cedit amor rebus--"Love yields to circumstance."

Given the beauty, price and sentimental value of Troy's watch--not to mention its motto!--no one can argue with Bathsheba's refusing to accept it as a gift. But in rejecting the watch, Miss Everdene not only

rejects a beautiful and valuable article, she symbolically refuses Troy's concept of time--a concept based on imposed, artificial cycles as opposed to natural ones. While we can assume that Troy's watch keeps to the hour, it is also the symbol of his divorce from the natural world. Gabriel's malfunctioning clock, on the other hand, is his insurance for ongoing union with that world. For the shepherd, interpreting the position of the sun and the stars is surely the better alternative to pressing one's face against neighbours' windows "to discern . . . the green-faced time keepers within" (52).

The way a character goes about telling the time is just one indicator of whether he is of the "natural" or "civilized" variety. Names also have considerable symbolic value in this regard. This is particularly true in Far From the Madding Crowd. While the surnames "Robin", "Oak" and "Everdene" (in which we may detect the echo "evergreen"[4]) all suggest the characters' identification with the natural world, the first two surnames actually indicate the strength of the identification with that world. In a single syllable, the word "Oak" communicates all the strength, toughness and endurance we come to associate with the shepherd who wins Bathsheba's love. The name "Robin" is equally appropriate to the character it identifies; with great economy, it suggests the delicacy, even the frailty, of the "bird-brained" girl who succumbs to treacherous Troy.

The names of Bathsheba's other rival lovers, Boldwood and Troy, also have fairly powerful symbolic associations. Though the first name, "Boldwood", is somewhat problematic, it seems to conjure up the image of "a person somehow more than natural."[5] Troy's name is more direct in its symbolism, identifying Bathsheba's soldier-lover with the pagan city of Greek legend and with the

conquest, the amorous exploits, which made that centre famous.

A propos of conquests, it is significant that Miss Everdene's other name should identify her with a biblical figure who was herself the object of rival lovers and of a military dispute of sorts.[6] United with a surname which identifies Hardy's heroine with the natural world, the name "Bathsheba" works to suggest the duality of the young woman. In brief, Bathsheba Everdene's very name hints at her plight, at her being caught between two worlds--that of romantic conquest and that of nature.

If the names of Hardy's heroine suggest the complication in her life, the names of Farmer Oak identify him as the moral centre of Far From the Madding Crowd. One need not be reminded that the being after whom he takes his Christian name is the heavenly messenger who appears in order to reveal God's will. What is less well known, however, is that the archangel, who is the chief of angelic guards over Paradise in Paradise Lost, has a number of functions besides the one Milton assigns to him. According to tradition, Gabriel is also the prince of fire and the spirit who presides over thunder and the ripening of fruits.

Hardy may well have had this in mind when he decided to describe Gabriel's attempts to cover the ricks before the thunderstorm in Chapter XXXVII, or to present, even earlier in the novel, a picture of the shepherd combatting the fire at Weatherbury Upper Farm. In his account of the earlier incident, Hardy makes the blaze Gabriel fights seem something more than a blaze:

> Individual straws in the foreground were consumed in a creeping movement of ruddy heat, as if they were knots of red worms, and above shone imaginary fiery faces, tongues hanging from lips, glaring eyes, and other impish forms from which at intervals sparks flew

in clusters like birds from a nest. (94)

With this description and that of Gabriel's "weary face . . . painted over with a rich orange glow and the whole front of his smock-front and gaiters . . . covered with a dancing pattern of thorns" (93), Hardy encourages us to view the shepherd as a saviour-figure. He may not have his character declare (as Christ did): "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11), but he certainly has him bear enough responsibility to merit the title!

As important as names may be in suggesting an individual's basic allegiance, they are not, as I noted earlier, Hardy's primary means of informing his readers about his men and women. His usual technique in Far From the Madding Crowd and The Return of the Native alike is to surround his "natural" characters with the imagery of nature and his artificial characters with other types of imagery.

It is not insignificant that our first picture of Bathsheba Everdene should be one of her riding along in a cart packed with "myrtles, geraniums and cactuses . . . [all] fresh and green" (54). On subsequent occasions, the young woman continues to be identified with plants and natural phenomena. At one time, her movement recalls the springing of "a bowed sapling" back to its natural position (66); at another, her footsteps sound like "the flitting of a dead leaf upon the breeze" (69) or fall "as gently as snowflakes" (54). Her breath is like a "zephyr" (310), while her face is variously described as a "peony before the sun dries off the dew" (77) or--when her emotions alter--as "a lily . . . pale and fainty" (337). To Gabriel Oak, the young woman's countenance has all "the uncertain glory of an April day" (173).

As well as being identified with plants and natural phenomena, Bathsheba is associated with a variety of wild animals. When angry, she "swell[s] . . .

[as] tall as a lion" (255), and when she begins to become aware of Troy's true nature and to perceive her marriage to him as a kind of trap, she "chafe[s] to and fro in rebelliousness, like a caged leopard" (333).

Bathsheba, like Tess after her, is also frequently identified with birds, though the bird imagery which surrounds her, unlike that which is associated with Hardy's later heroine, is intended to suggest not victimization but grace and beauty. Thus, Bathsheba is said to move with the fluency and rapidity of a kingfisher (65) and the noiselessness of the hawk (65). In her excitement, she "pulses" like a Christmas robin.

Though from time to time Gabriel "flits" and "hovers like a moth" under Bathsheba's bright eyes (197), the majority of the images which surround the shepherd identify him with what is solid and stable in nature rather than that which is light, fluent and energetic. His features, unlike Bathsheba's, resemble those of the earth itself. His hair is "dry" and "sandy" (75), while his rough, ruddy face is characterized by "crannies" (52) and "furrows" (75). The wrinkles around his eyes, however, are compared to "the rays in a rudimentary sketch of the rising sun" (51). On another occasion, the young man's face, rising from behind the hedge, recommends comparisons with the moon.

As well as comparing Gabriel Oak to the luminaries of the natural world, Hardy identifies the shepherd with some of the "luminaries" of the Old Testament. In doing so, he takes a step towards establishing this most natural of characters as the moral centre of Far From the Madding Crowd. It is not an insignificant detail that when Bathsheba rashly dismisses Gabriel, the latter walks away "in placid dignity, as Moses left the presence of Pharaoh" (186), neither is it a minor point that Hardy should, on an earlier occasion, describe the shepherd's

hut as "a small Noah's Ark"(59). Such an image encourages the reader to view Gabriel as a man of Noah's stamp, for not only does the shepherd take new lambs into his tiny "ark" and away from winter's chilly grasp, but he also rescues ricks from the destructive elements of fire and water.

While Oak is identified with the good men of the Bible, Francis Troy, the most unnatural character in the novel--a figure "brilliant in brass and scarlet" (214), "a . . . spot of artificial red" (237) who interrupts Weatherbury's natural cycle--is linked with the ruler of hell. Boldwood calls the soldier "a juggler of Satan" and a "black hound" (226). Less emotional perhaps, but no less pointed, is Hardy's comment about the young man's similarity to the devil who smiles "from a loop-hole in Tophet" (291).

Though Boldwood is not a figure of evil like Troy, the imagery which surrounds him suggests that he is as divorced from the land as the soldier. It is true that the well-to-do farmer is occasionally identified with natural creatures, but more often than not, such comparisons only heighten our perception of him as an anomaly in the natural world. After he is introduced as "a black sheep among the flock" (141), within a short time, Boldwood's "sorry look" is being compared with that of a "grand bird without the feathers that make it grand" (211). With such descriptions in mind, we find it no wonder that Bathsheba, upon winning the love of such an unnatural human, can "value . . . it only as she value[s] . . . an artificial flower or a wax fruit" (169).

Unlike his beloved, who is surrounded by images of natural objects and creatures, Farmer Boldwood, with all his "square-framed perpendicularity", is likened to a "great tower"--an unnatural, unyielding, man-made structure. As for Boldwood's face, it is characterized by none of the natural roughness

and ruddiness of Gabriel Oak's. The farmer's "full and distinctly outlined features" more properly resemble those of a smoothly-polished sculpture, especially in their capacity to glow in the sunlight "with a bronze-like richness of tone" (141).

In the end, what most distinguishes Boldwood from the other characters in Far From the Madding Crowd is the imagery of death which surrounds him. While Bathsheba, Oak and the "chorus" of Weatherbury rustics are strongly identified with living things, the farmer is variously described as "an unhappy shade in the Mournful Fields by Acheron" (292), a "dark and silent shape" (171), and one whose carelessness (after he has been rejected by Bathsheba) is "like the smile on the countenance of a skull" (316). Boldwood himself contributes to the body of death imagery by describing his love as "'a thing as strong as death'" (257).

Though in The Return of the Native Hardy continues to characterize his men and women as belonging to one of two groups, he now relies less on similes and metaphors to make the distinction between characters. Only the basic allegiance of the less central characters, such as Thomasin and Diggory Venn, continues to be suggested through straightforward images. Thomasin's face, for example, is described to be "as red as a rose" (164), while in her movements, the young woman is said to "remind . . . the beholder of a feathered creature" (271):

> When she was musing she was a kestrel, which hangs in the air by an invisible motion of its wings. When she was in a high wind her light body was blown against trees and banks like a heron's. When

she was frightened she darted noiselessly like a kingfisher.
When she was serene she skimmed like a swallow . . . . (271)

Images which link Diggory Venn to the natural world are a little harder to come by. Though his eye is said to be "as keen as that of a bird of prey, and blue as autumn mist" (58), and though he is constantly pictured in connection with the heath-croppers, it is his colour and nomadic way of life which obviously have the greatest interest for Hardy. With his lurid red hue and almost superhuman powers of perception, Venn seems to belong with those characters in the novel whom Hardy names the "Promethean rebels". The author makes it fairly clear, however, that Venn's apparel has been donned in reaction to rejection by Thomasin. It is as much a sign of his disturbed state of mind as Thomasin's seven-stranded braid is a sign of her impending marriage. When love beckons to Venn once again, the unnatural dress is dropped and the red dye is washed away; Diggory can be his respectable self once more.

While Diggory and Thomasin's connection with the natural world is, for the most part, suggested through simile, Clym Yeobright's strong bond to Egdon Heath is noted by the author in very direct terms which are fairly devoid of symbolism. "From his boyhood," we are told, "Clym had been so interwoven with the heath that hardly anybody could look on it without thinking of him" (226); "if anyone knew the heath well it was . . . [him]. He was permeated with its substance and with its odours. He might be said to be its product" (231).

Though for a time Clym removes to the modern, fashionable world and concerns himself with "the especial symbols of self-indulgence and vainglory" (227), his strong feelings for the natural world ultimately

pull him back to Egdon. His return to the heath, however, is fraught with hardship and difficulty. He not only makes an unwise marriage, he seriously strains his eyes in his efforts to train for a schoolmaster. Much to his wife's shame and chagrin, he ultimately agrees to work as a furze-cutter on the heath. Though exhausting, this employment brings him into a much deeper harmony with nature and spiritually restores him.

Through Clym's connection with the heath, Hardy makes it clear that too great an intimacy with the natural world has serious drawbacks. Not only does the young man's marriage suffer as a result of it, but Clym himself is dehumanized by it. In being interwoven into the fabric of the heath, Clym loses his individuality, his distinctiveness as a human being. The landscape so overpowers him that he becomes as indistinguishable "from the scene around him . . . [as] the green caterpillar from the leaf it feeds on" (338).

Though Clym does not seem to be aware of nature's "flattening" effect when he is actually being subjected to it, there is a time, earlier in the narrative, when the young man is sensitive to the potential danger of a union with the heath. At this time,

> the dead flat of the scenery overpowered him . . . . There was something in its oppressive horizontality which too much reminded him of the arena of life; it gave him a sense of bare equality with, and no superiority to, a single living thing under the sun. (267)

As this description and the one before it suggest, connectedness with the natural world is not as positive a thing in The Return of the Native as it is in Far From the Madding Crowd. Even so, it is still

the essential requisite for survival and personal stability. Mrs. Yeobright, Eustacia and Wildeve are all divorced from nature; they refuse to be satisfied with what the heath has to offer. Clym's mother promotes her son in a business which is concerned with what is artificial, trivial and unnatural, while her daughter-in-law and Wildeve plan an escape to a fashionable, civilized centre. In the end, all three characters die at the hand of nature.

Though in life Mrs. Yeobright, Eustacia and Wildeve are as dissociated from the natural world as Boldwood and Troy, their divorce from nature is not communicated in the same ways. In the case of Mrs. Yeobright, for example, it is not a body of similes and metaphors, but a description of her place of residence which emphasizes the woman's lack of connection with nature. As its name suggests, "Blooms-End" is a place where the best is past; it is the domain of a woman whose "natural pride of life [has] been hindered in its blooming by her necessities" (248). Here, Mrs. Yeobright spends her time "snipping dead leaves from . . . window plants" (232). The attention, however, is only "perfunctorily bestowed", for the "flowers no longer charm . . . her" (277). She has lost connection with the natural world.

If Hardy seems to indicate that Mrs. Yeobright once derived pleasure from nature, we find no similar suggestions about Eustacia Vye. From the beginning of the novel, Hardy makes it clear that this young woman feels no attachment to the heath and that she wishes to escape it. Unlike Clym, who is closely identified with the earth--who is described as being "interwoven with the heath" (226) and "permeated with its substance" (231)--Eustacia Vye, characterized as she is by Promethean

rebelliousness", is identified with the destructive element of fire. Resistant to the stabilizing influence of the heath--a tract of land on which "time makes but little impression"--Eustacia is also strongly associated with water, the element which is a traditional symbol of change.

While it is true that even the most natural characters in The Return of the Native, the rustics, engage in a yearly ritual of "spontaneous Promethean rebelliousness" when they light their fifth-of-November fires, the spirit of revolt lasts no longer than it takes the fires to consume the furze they are made of. As the bonfires emit their last "boiling confusion of sparks," the labourers completely exhaust their supply of instinctive rebelliousness for another year by treading a "demoniac measure" with dancing partners which social convention does not grant them at any other season of the year.

Eustacia Vye's fire, however, like the rebelliousness it symbolizes, is not of the petty rustic variety. It is not built merely to resist the misery and darkness of winter, but to resist all that the the heath represents for the young woman: restriction, frustration, ennui. On a symbolic level, Eustacia's fire seems an externalization of her rage against circumstances as they are; on a very literal level, it is a signal to Damon Wildeve, another woman's fiancé--Eustacia's only hope for deliverance from the heath.

The images of fire first used in connection with the heroine of The Return of the Native in the chapters which deal with the fifth-of-November ritual continue to be applied to her as the narrative progresses. When Diggory Venn advises the young woman to break off her relations with Wildeve, he is "surprised to see how a slow fire . . . [can] blaze on

occasion" (147). When Mrs. Yeobright confronts her about the gift of guineas, Eustacia readily beomes "fired up", speaks "with a smothered fire of feeling" (303), and produces "scalding tears" (304). In her winter dress, this young woman resembles the tiger beetle "which, when observed in dull situations, seems to be of the quietest neutral colour, but under a full illumination blazes with dazzling spendour" (145). To complete the picture, we are told that she believes "a blaze of love and extinction" are better than "a lantern glimmer of the same which should last long years" (122)--the kind of love personified by Diggory Venn, who is regularly seen with a lantern in his hand.

As effective as the fire imagery which suggests Eustacia's quickness to anger, her passionateness and rebelliousness, is the series of water images which identify her as a figure of restlessness and instability. Though she first appears as an organic part of Rainbarrow's motionless structure, her sudden rapid descent from that mound--which Hardy significantly compares to "the glide of a water-drop down a bud" (63)--hints at her disruptive, unstable influence on the world of Egdon Heath.

Hardy's identifying Eustacia with water does not end with his comparing her to a drop of that liquid. The biographical details of the girl's life consistently link her with this element. The girl's place of birth is Budmouth, a watering place. Her grandfather is a retired sea-captain, and her father is said to have been "a kind of Greek Ulysses". In view of these facts, it does not seem surprising that Eustacia's motions should recall "the ebb and flow of the sea" (119). It is also little wonder that the young woman has such difficulty feeling at home on a heath which has "an ancient permanence that the sea cannot

claim" (56).

Though the imagery associated with the central figures in The Return of the Native recommends that these characters continue to be placed in one of two categories--the "natural" and the "civilized"--it is considerably more complex and various than that which surrounds the characters in Far From the Madding Crowd. In Hardy's later novel, similes and metaphors are no longer employed merely to suggest a character's allegiance; they also work to say something about his psychological make-up. In Eustacia's case, as we have seen, imagery goes a long way towards suggesting her passionate and rebellious temperament.

As well as being used to great advantage to explore and expose the psychology of certain characters, however, the imagery in The Return of the Native is regularly employed to heighten personality differences between characters. The descriptive details Hardy provides recommend not only that characters be grouped according to their allegiance to the natural world, but that they also be grouped according to their perceptiveness and their ability to manipulate appearances.

In Hardy's novels, it is the individuals who are divorced from the natural world who are most capable of manipulating appearances. This is as true in Far From the Madding Crowd as it is in The Return of the Native. In the earlier novel, Sergeant Troy's ability to speak fluently and unceasingly assists him to "be one thing and seem another . . . he could speak of love and think of dinner; call on the husband to look at the wife; be eager to pay and intend to owe" (220). Bathsheba, on the

other hand, is incapable of disguising her emotional states. The faintest changes on her face betray the actual feelings she is experiencing. "It may have been a peculiarity--at any rate it was a fact--" writes Hardy, "that when Bathsheba was swayed by an emotion of an earthly sort her lower lip trembled: when by a refined emotion, her upper or heavenward one" (186).

In The Return of the Native, Hardy continues to take pains to differentiate between characters of the deceitful and ingenuous varieties. In this novel, Clym and Thomasin, the natural characters, are exactly what they appear to be: unaffected, unsophisticated, uncomplex. They do not manipulate their appearance as Eustacia does in donning the mumming costume or as Wildeve does in "disguising a brief, tell-tale look" when one of the labourers comments on the "fess little bonfire. . . out by Cap'n Vye's" (101). Although Clym's features are described as "attractive in the light of symbols," the signification of those "symbols" is never unclear or elusive. "His countenance," we are told, "was overlaid with legible meanings" (194, added emphasis). As for Thomasin's face, it is just as revealing as her cousin's:

> her several thoughts and fractions of thoughts, as signalled by the changes on her face, were exhibited by the light to the utmost nicety. An ingenuous, transparent life was disclosed; as if the flow of existence could be seen passing within her. (89)

Further distinctions between characters are made on the basis of their blindness or perceptiveness. Diggory Venn, who possesses an eye "as keen as that of a bird of prey" (58) and who is frequently imaged carrying a lantern across the dark landscape of the heath, is

plainly the most discerning character in the novel. Mrs. Yeobright is also a character of great perceptiveness. "'You are blinded, Clym,'" she says to her son when she hears of his intention to marry Eustacia Vye; "'it was a bad day for you when you first set eyes upon her'" (252). Later, she comments resignedly to Thomasin: "'Sons must be blind if they will. Why is it that a woman can see from a distance what a man cannot see close?'" (273)

As well as revealing her powers of discernment, Mrs. Yeobright's remarks about her son help to establish him as the primary focus of the blindness motif. Though it is true that Clym's sight grows "accustomed to the first blinding halo kindled about him by [the] love and beauty [of Eustacia]" (260), his eyes are less able to cope with the strain of night studies. Ironically enough, it is only when Clym has completely blinded himself that it becomes clear to him that his ideas about bringing about an educational revolution on the heath have been conceived in ignorance and based on self-deception.

Before I abandon the blindness motif, I should note one final evocation of it which occurs in connection with Mrs. Yeobright. It consists of Hardy's comparison of Clym, who feels he is responsible for his mother's death, to the most famous of tragic figures in Greek drama. After hearing Johnny Nunsuch's account of his mother's last afternoon, Clym's eyes "fix . . .steadfastly on blankness . . . [and are] vaguely lit with an icy shine" while his mouth "passe[s] . . . the phase more or less imaginatively rendered in studies of Oedipus" (388).

Though the conflicts in Far From the Madding Crowd and The Return of the Native have similar resolutions--the individuals divorced from the natural world die, while those connected with it survive--the environments in which the characters play out their dramas are markedly different. The Weatherbury setting in which the men and women of Far From the Madding Crowd find themselves is a relatively harmonious and integrated one compared to Egdon Heath. Rural life flourishes largely because the rich land provides individuals with the opportunity to define themselves morally and spiritually through work. Though Nature here is not uniformly kind to humanity, she does speak to the man who will listen, sending him such "direct messages" as toads and garden slugs before thunderstorms, and providing him with a sky full of stars--"a useful instrument" (62) for telling the time.

In reading about her "direct messages" and provisions for man, some critics have been encouraged to view Nature in Far From the Madding Crowd as "a sympathetic force, sometimes even a moral agent."[7] In his treatment of the scene in which Fanny Robin's corpse is carried through Yalbury Great Wood, for example, Howard Babb actually goes so far as to suggest that "the underlying impression conveyed" is that of "nature's almost personal affection" for man, and for Fanny in particular:[8]

> The effect arises in part from several phrases by which Hardy suggests that the natural world itself undergoes a death of sorts here--"There was no perceptible motion in the air, not a visible drop of water fell upon a leaf . . . A startling quiet overhung all surrounding things"--and in part from the climax of the description, the condensed fog dropping

> from the trees onto the coffin, which one can hardly keep from reading as Nature's tears at the death of Fanny.[9]

While no one can reasonably object to the idea of nature's undergoing a kind of death here--the season is, after all, late autumn--I find it difficult to accept that it is, as Babb suggests, "sympathizing with" or mourning for Fanny. Where, one is tempted to ask, was nature's sympathy when Fanny was alive? One encounters further difficulty still in attempting to reconcile Babb's position with certain of Hardy's declarations and descriptions. How, for example, would the critic deal with the author's assertion that the instances in which "Nature . . . seems to spare a moment . . . to . . . make her children smile" are occasioned not by divine mercy but by "whimsical coincidences" (64)?

Among the descriptions which weaken Babb's argument is one which Hardy provides in Chapter XI of Far From the Madding Crowd. Though the author's major concern in this section is plainly to establish the relationship between Fanny and Troy, he takes considerable care in describing the setting of the scene outside the barracks, and ends up painting a picture of the natural world which seems more characteristic of The Return of the Native than of Far From the Madding Crowd. Nature now seems impersonal and mechanistic rather than benevolent in its workings. Snowflakes appear to fall according to a prescribed mathematical formula. They abate in similar fashion: at about ten o'clock, "ten flakes . . . [fall] where twenty [had fallen] . . . then one ha[s] the room of ten" (135). Even the flow of the river seems to be engineered. The water races "middle and sides, with . . . gliding precision, any irregularities of speed being immediately corrected by a small whirlpool. Nothing . . . [can be]

heard but the gurgle and cluck of one of these invisible wheels . . ." (136). Nature is not operating in sympathy with man here; in fact, she--it--is perfectly oblivious of him.

While Howard Babb's interpretation of Far From the Madding Crowd is founded on his conviction that nature is a sympathetic force, Richard Benvenuto approaches the novel in a somewhat different way. Refusing to define what qualities nature possesses, he attempts instead to describe the features of the Weatherbury world. The conclusion he reaches is that the universe of Far From the Madding Crowd is a "designed" one where "the sequences of events and expectations that make up the world of nature and the world of historical time fall into a pattern which one can harmonize with and prepare for."[10] The order and harmony of this world are, according to Benvenuto, best imaged in the sound of the wind on Norcomb Hill; here, "the trees on the right and the trees on the left wail . . . or chaunt . . . to each other in the regular antiphonies of a cathedral choir" (58).

Though Benvenuto's argument is better supported and more palatable than Babb's, it too is attended by problems. For every image in Far From the Madding Crowd which suggests nature to be harmonious, there is sure to be a counter-image which indicates that nature operates according to no particular order. The Norcomb-Hill description, for example, is cancelled by another description in which Hardy suggests that the only truly organized music is that produced by man. We are told that the notes of Gabriel's flute "had a clearness which was to be found nowhere in the wind, and a sequence which was to be found nowhere in nature" (59, emphasis added).

Perhaps the only proper conclusion to be reached about Hardy's

attitude to nature in Far From the Madding Crowd is that it is ambiguous. Even if the descriptions of the natural world are full of contradictions, however, one thing remains clear: the Weatherbury setting is a relatively integrated and harmonious one--that is to say, it is certainly more harmonious than any of Hardy's later fictional worlds.

Hardy's attitude to nature in The Return of the Native is neither ambiguous nor puzzling. Here, nature in general and Egdon Heath in particular are plainly indifferent to the plight of man. Edgon is even credited with "reduc[ing] to insignificance by its seamed and antique figures the wildest turmoil of a single man" (388).

It would seem that the creatures best suited for life on Egdon are the insects. "Amid the prostration of the larger animal species [namely homo sapiens] an unseen insect world . . . [is] busy in all the fulness of life" (351). It is not only their resilience which makes these lowly creatures better suited to earthly existence than man, however; they have no consciousness to get in the way. Thus they are free to "pass . . . their time in mad carousal . . .heaving and wallowing with enjoyment" (338).

Although Hardy works hard to suggest that Egdon is a character in its own right, equipping it with a "complexion", a "fore-head", a "wart" (Rainbarrow), "shaggy locks" (the furze), "an antique dress", "a watch-ful intentness", and an ability "to wake and listen", the fact that the heath possesses a face "on which time makes but little impression" precludes our attaching any importance to its other apparently human features. Though Egdon, like Clym Yeobright's face, is a "waste tablet" of sorts, on it are traced no idiosyncracies by the parasite thought. In short,

the heath lacks consciousness, and so is as far from the human as one can get.

Unlike Weatherbury, which affords its inhabitants the opportunity for self-affirmation through work, Egdon Heath is a sterile environment which can offer little human fulfillment. The Tartarean images which Hardy uses to describe the place only intensify the reader's perception of it as the realm of the tortured and banished. In resisting the impress of time, "Egdon isolates men from a recognizable order or adoptable time scheme," becoming instead "the centre of superstition and primitivism--wax dolls and druidical fires."[11] We no longer have "the pastoral and pre-industrial world of Far From the Madding Crowd and Under the Greenwood Tree but a desert tract of pre-civilization."[12]

Although Hardy occasionally ascribes human qualities to the objects of nature in this novel, nature is most often suggested to be a vast, impersonal force, a huge, almost cruelly neutral presence. Instead of offering solace to man, it dwarfs him. This is particularly apparent when Clym rushes away from an argument with his mother to seek comfort in an alternate nest of vivid green. "The ferny vegetation" in the young man's place of refuge may be abundant, but it is frighteningly uniform in appearance. It is also harsh, unyielding and mechanistic. This is a grove of "machine-made foliage, a world of green triangles with saw-edges and not a single flower" (264). The scene seems "to belong to the ancient world of the carboniferous period, when the forms of plants were few. . . when there was nothing but a monotonous extent of leafage amid which no bird sang" (264). Although man is now part of this scene, Nature is entirely oblivious of him. She has remained carboniferous in her outlook.

The phrase "no bird sang", which completes Hardy's description, only intensifies our sense of the harshness of this landscape. In echoing Keats, Hardy plainly wished to suggest a correspondence between this world and that of "La Belle Dame Sans Merci". In Hardy's world, Nature assumes the role of "La Belle Dame" very well, drawing Clym to her with a promise of nothing but death.

"In making even horizontal and clear inspections," writes Hardy early in Far From the Madding Crowd, "we colour and mould according to the wants within us whatever our eyes bring in" (64). The idea enunciated here, that an individual's perception of reality--the picture he forms of his environment--is subject to his mood and personality, is hardly a new one, yet it is one that deserves to be pronounced in a novel which speaks largely through description and imagery. The statement provides the reader with some guidelines for interpreting certain descriptions--the description of what Gabriel observes immediately after losing most of his sheep, for example.

Listlessly surveying the landscape after the fateful event, the shepherd's eyes come to rest on a pool which glitters "like a dead man's eye" (87). Over the pool "hangs" the moon, "like an attenuated skeleton" (87). Though Gabriel is almost certainly unaware of it, what he has done here is paint the scene according to the wants of his severely depressed, even deadened, psyche. He seems to be expressing a death-wish in even focussing on a pool at all.

The tendency of the human being to colour and mould the scene according

to his emotional state--to unconsciously project his feelings onto the landscape--is a recurrent idea in Hardy. A few chapters after the one which treats the sheep disaster, the author notes that "the few small sounds caused by the flapping of . . . water . . . against trifling objects in other parts of the stream" (136) would be interpreted as laughter by a happy man and as moaning by a sad one. In The Return of the Native, Hardy takes this idea a little further, using it in connection with actual characters in that novel. By providing a description of two women's perceptions of the heath, he not only clarifies the differences in the women's personalities, he also demonstrates how differently the same phenomenon may be viewed by two people. To Thomasin Yeobright, Hardy writes,

> there were not, as to Eustacia, demons in the air, and malice in every bush and bough. The drops which lashed her face were not scorpions, but prosy rain; Egdon in the mass was no monster whatever, but impersonal open ground. (430)

Though many of Hardy's descriptions ought to be read as characters' unconscious projections, it is not always possible to do this. Sometimes there are no indications that a character is actually projecting his emotions onto nature at all. Sometimes the environment--by special arrangement of the author--simply objectifies a character's state of mind. We see this particularly clearly in Hardy's description of Bathsheba's flight into the natural world after being cruelly disappointed by Troy.

Although the "nest" which the heroine retreats to lacks "the machine-made foliage" of Clym Yeobright's, it is certainly as treacherous. Indeed, one might argue that Nature plays "La Belle Dame" even more con-

vincingly in Bathsheba's thicket than in Clym's. Though Hardy's first descriptions of the place--which is the same spot where Troy performed his sword exercise--emphasize its beauty and seem to suggest that the reason Bathsheba has come here is to be solaced, it soon becomes clear that the woman's flight is based less on the need to be comforted by nature than on the need to be obliterated by it. On an unconscious level, Bathsheba feels that death is the only way to escape Troy.

Nature seems determined to help the young woman carry out her unconscious desires and, in the absence of Troy, prepares to seduce her. The yellowing ferns still possess feathery arms ready to caress her, and the "blades" of the flag "glisten" with a brightness which would seem to rival that of Troy's sword. But if the blades are dazzling, they are also dangerous. Their resemblance to scythes jolts Bathsheba and the reader to the final realization that the one who presides over this spot is not Beauty personified, but the grim reaper himself.

The moment the word "scythes" is pronounced, the tenor of the description changes drastically. The aspect of the swamp is now seen to be thoroughly malignant:

> From its moist and poisonous coat seemed to be exhaled the essences of evil things in the earth, and in the waters of the earth. The fungi grew in all manner of positions from rotting leaves and tree stumps, some exhibiting to her listless gaze their clammy tops, others their oozing gills. . . . .The hollow seemed a nursery of pestilences small and great, in the immediate neighbourhood of comfort and health . . . . (363)

Bathsheba is horrified at the thought of having spent the night "on the

brink of so dismal a place" (364). She would, no doubt, be more horrified to confront her unconscious motives for doing so.

A less evocative, but still very effective, description is one that appears in Chapter XIV of Far From the Madding Crowd. It treats Farmer Boldwood's unusual reaction to Bathsheba's valentine. The part of the scene that interests us is that which occurs after Boldwood retires to his bedroom, which is, significantly enough, lit by moonlight "not of [the] customary kind." The farmer's chamber window, we are told, admits only a reflection of the moon's rays, and when the pale beams enter the room, they light up the ceiling "in an unnatural way, casting shadows in strange places, and putting lights where shadows used to be" (150). The imagery here works well to suggest the nature of Boldwood's incipient obsession with Bathsheba. Like his chamber window which admits only a reflection of the moonlight, and not the actual rays, Boldwood allows a "shadow-woman" to preoccupy him rather than a substantial one. What is only suggested here, however, becomes very clear a few chapters later when Hardy remarks:

> The great aids to idealization in love were present here; occasional observation of her [Bathsheba] from a distance, and the absence of social intercourse with her--visual familiarity, oral strangeness. The smaller human elements were kept out of sight; the pettinesses that enter into all earthly living were disguised by the accident of lover and loved-one not being on visiting terms. (175)

Later in Chapter XIV, the dawn of Bathsheba's love upon Boldwood is powerfully imaged in Hardy's account of a sunrise whose effects more

properly resemble those of a sunset, "as childhood resembles age." In this description, the rayless sun, whose "red and flameless fire" displaces a moon "dull and greenish-yellow, like tarnished brass" (151), illuminates a landscape which appears to be in the grip of Thanatos. The grass is withered and "encased in icicles", while the ground from which it ought to derive the juice of life is "hardened and glazed" by frost. The ice-bound and lifeless condition of the natural world Boldwood finds himself in at this "dawn of love" is a perfect metaphor for the emotional qualities the austere and dignified farmer possesses.

Up until now in our discussion of Hardy's use of nature to reveal the psychology of characters, we have focussed primarily on examples from Far From the Madding Crowd. It should be noted, however, that Hardy hardly abandoned this technique when he came to write The Return of the Native and that there are, in that novel, a number of descriptions which are notable for the insights they provide into characters' emotional states. One of the most brilliant of these descriptions concerns Clym Yeobright and his mother.

Before the serious quarrel with Mrs. Yeobright over his choice of marriage partner, Clym's relationship with his mother is characterized as an unusually close one: "He was part of her--their discourses . . . were carried on as if between the right and left hands of the same body" (247). We are also told that feeling runs so deep between the two as to rarely be expressed. To an outsider, relations between the mother and son would even appear cold. In this light, it is perhaps not surprising that Hardy refrains from giving a direct account of the workings of Clym's mind at the time of the break-up with his mother, choosing instead to

provide an objective commentary on the young man's unbalanced state by finding a "correlative" in nature.

Although it is June when Clym leaves his mother's house, the day is significantly described as "wet and boisterous as November" (268). It is not the weather alone which suggests Clym's emotional disturbance, however. As the young man travels across the heath to his and Eustacia's honeymoon cottage, he comes upon fir and beech trees whose boughs are "undergoing amputations, bruises, cripplings, and harsh lacerations, from which the wasting sap would bleed for many a day to come, and which would leave scars visible to the day of their burning" (268). To heighten the power of the correlative even further, Hardy makes the plantation the same age as Clym--"it had been enclosed from the heath land in the year of his birth" (268).

Hardy completes this picture of despair by describing a bird which, in its attempt to combat the "convulsive sounds" of the branches, tries to sing, but is forced to abandon its efforts by a wind which mercilessly blows under its feathers until they stand on end. Though a creature of some resilience, and a symbol of hope and transcendence, this bird is much less successful than Hardy's "blast-beruffled" darkling thrush at battling the elements. It is, in fact, completely thwarted by them.

As well as working to suggest aspects of individual characters' psychology, much of Hardy's imagery is aimed at illuminating the relationships between his characters--particularly the relationships which exist between men and women. One of the most striking symbolic

scenes in Far From the Madding Crowd is surely the one in which Hardy describes the sheep shearing--but in such a way as to establish the relationship between Bathsheba and Gabriel Oak. While the description of Gabriel's "lopping off the tresses" and "opening up the neck and collar" of an animal as Bathsheba looks on operates on one level to enhance the realistic quality of the novel, it communicates something more than a shepherd's mastery of his trade.

As Gabriel clips the wool with "clicking shears," Bathsheba appears to identify more and more strongly with the ewe. Her remark about the animal, "'She blushes at the insult'", indicates that the young woman is charged with the mixed emotions of shame and excitement as she sees it reduced to nakedness. While the connection between Bathsheba and the ewe is only suggested in the above passages, it is completely enforced when Hardy begins to describe the animal in terms of the Greek goddess of love. Until this time, such comparisons have been reserved for Bathsheba alone. Now, however, there is a highly-evocative description of "a clean, sleek creature" rising "from the foam . . . looking startled and shy at the loss of its garment which . . . [lies] on the floor in one soft cloud" (198).

While the shearing seems to excite Bathsheba, it feeds Gabriel's soul "with a luxury of content." As well as bringing his beloved to him, the activity offers the shepherd an opportunity to act out the erotic feelings which he is too modest to acknowledge.

For Hardy, however, all of this is not enough. When Boldwood enters the barn, Oak's distress at being interrupted manifests itself in his snipping the ewe he is working on. The animal is significantly

described as "plunging" in response to the bite of the misapplied shears. Although it is inadvertent, Gabriel's injuring an animal so closely identified with Bathsheba--and in the groin of all places!--seems highly symbolic.

Acknowledging the strongly erotic overtones of this episode, Richard Carpenter sees the ewe as "a surrogate for Bathsheba herself, a feminine creature who can be insulted with impunity while the woman watches the violation with interest and approval."[13] He goes on to suggest that the injury to the sheep is a symbolic act of revenge on Gabriel's part. "Bathsheba longs to be dominated and violated by an aggressive male," writes Carpenter, "but Gabriel lacks the recklessness to do this directly and must employ a symbolic substitute."[14]

If sexual symbolism is easy to detect in the sheep-shearing scene, Troy's accidental first encounter with Bathsheba in the fir plantation and his subsequent dazzlement of her with his brilliant sword exercise practically beg for Freudian interpretation. More often than not, they receive it. Although the first incident--the accidental meeting in the plantation--is much less blatant than the one which takes place in "the hollow amid the ferns," critics nonetheless note "a patent phallic symbolism . . . in the cruel potency of . . . [Troy's] spur and the soft enveloping tissues of . . . [Bathsheba's] gown."[15]

The obvious symbolism of the scene which unfolds only a few chapters later almost makes comment unnecessary. As Bathsheba approaches the appointed spot, a hollow whose very shape is suggestive of female sexuality, the "soft, feathery arms" of the ferns "caress" her. Their movements plainly represent the foreplay to Troy's demonstration of

(soldierly) prowess--a demonstration in which his sword gleams "like a living thing" (238). Although the whole incident culminates in nothing more than a kiss, the language suggests consummation:

> the blood beating into . . . [Bathsheba's] face, set her stinging as if aflame to the very hollows of her feet, and enlarged emotion to a compass which quite swamped thought . . . [A minute's interval] had brought upon her a stroke resulting. . . in a liquid stream--here a stream of tears. (242)

Sexual symbolism of the kind we see in the preceding passages does not distinguish The Return of the Native. In this novel, the imagery Hardy uses to suggest the relationships between men and women is considerably less brilliant. When Wildeve and Eustacia meet at Rainbarrow a week after the fifth-of-November fire, for example, Hardy intimates the problems between them by providing the rather subtle image of a pollard thorn through whose twigs the breeze filters "as through a strainer" (137). Not satisfied with these details alone to characterize the tension and irritation between Eustacia and her lover, however, he completes the image with the comment: "It was as if the night sang dirges with clenched teeth" (137).

Less obvious and more allusive in its symbolism than the description of the pollard thorn is the image of the well at Mistover Knap. With its contents of "strange humid leaves", "quaint-coloured mosses" and "confused rope and bucket dangling in . . . dank, dark air" (240), the well suggests a number of things. First of all, it seems to supplement Hardy's earlier description of the heath as "the hitherto unrecognized original of those wild regions which are vaguely felt to be compassing about in midnight

dreams of flight and disaster" (55). While this description of Egdon only evokes a sense of the confusion and torment which characterize the subconscious mind, the well images its depth, fertility and mystery.

Situated on the Vye property, the well is also symbolically linked with Eustacia. Its darkness and strange, rich plant life seem to suggest the mystery and fecundity of woman, and of Eustacia in particular. Placed in the narrative as it is, just before Clym and Eustacia meet formally for the first time, the image of the well--particularly the details of the dank air and the confusion of ropes--also acts as a portent of sorts, hinting at the potential dangers and complications of any relationship which develops between the two young people.

If conclusions must be reached about the imagery in Far From the Madding Crowd and The Return of the Native, a discussion of the descriptive detail Hardy uses to characterize the relations between certain of his men and women helps us to reach them. The differences we perceive in the sexual imagery in the two novels seem to be representative of the differences we note in their larger bodies of imagery. In Far From the Madding Crowd, the descriptive detail is, for the most part, concrete, bold and bright. In The Return of the Native, it is more subtle and allusive, reflecting Hardy's increased appreciation of the complexity of the human being and the world he lives in.

Chapter II

Thomas Hardy's interest in exposing the tension between traditional and modern attitudes towards life--or what F. B. Pinion has labelled "the antithesis between nature and civilization"[1]--did not end with the publication of Far From the Madding Crowd and The Return of the Native. In The Woodlanders (1887), Hardy continued to concern himself with this theme, dramatizing it as he had in the two earlier novels, in the situation of a young woman faced with deciding on an appropriate marriage partner. Grace Melbury's choice lies between Giles Winterborne, a woodsman who speaks in "the tongue of the trees and fruits and flowers" (349) and Dr. Edred Fitzpiers, one of the last surviving members of a "romantical" old English family, who dabbles in science and philosophy. Her opting for the man of fancy over the man identified with the natural world recalls Bathsheba Everdene's choice of Francis Troy over Gabriel Oak. Here the similarity between the predicaments of the two women ends. In Far From the Madding Crowd, "artificial" Troy is ultimately killed off, and "natural" Gabriel wins the day and the heroine. In The Woodlanders, we have the reverse: traditional Giles weakens and dies, and civilized Fitzpiers carries off the questionable prize.

While the ascendancy of the modern, less worthy man in the later novel is generally attributed to Hardy's darkening vision of the human condition, it is more particularly tied in with the author's sense of the disintegration of the rural world and his changed perception of nature and the natural world. In Far From the Madding Crowd, nature provides

Gabriel Oak with a series of challenges which develop his survival skills. In the end, Oak's successes with the sheep, the fire and the thunderstorm establish him as the most enduring figure in the Weatherbury community, and confirm him in Bathsheba's favour. Though nature is oblivious of man in The Return of the Native, it is still linked with his ability to survive. The permanence of Egdon Heath gives "ballast" to minds like Clym Yeobright's which are "adrift on change, and harassed by the irrepressible New" (56). For Clym, Egdon affords stability, and in The Return of the Native, stability is what is required for survival. Eustacia Vye and Damon Wildeve reject what the heath has to offer, and are lost in the waters of Shadwater Weir.

The natural world in which Giles Winterborne finds himself is radically different from that of Far From the Madding Crowd and The Return of the Native. One may catch the occasional glimpse of Hintock as "a wondrous world of sap and leaves" (399), but the more prevalent images of the place suggest it to be "the microcosm of a world in which the struggle for existence is the chief condition of existence."[2] Descriptions of the suffering and torment that natural objects inflict on one another and of the infertility of gardens seem to dominate the novel.

Though Hardy seems resigned here to the passing away of traditional, natural ways of life and to the ascendancy of modern characters like Fitzpiers, he continues to view an individual's commitment to nature as a measure of his moral worth. It should be made clear, however, that the natural world which Hardy sees as endowing man's life with meaning is not the world he describes in The Woodlanders, but some earlier, more benevolent world of which Giles Winterborne is the last remnant. Giles, who possesses

the "gentle conjuror's touch" (104), the "marvellous power of making trees grow" (105), who is pictured at one point as the fruit god and the wood god, and who is clearly the moral centre of the novel, is certainly not identified with the Hintock which is caught in the throes of Darwinism. He is a character from a kinder world. As the narrative unfolds, Hardy makes it increasingly clear that Giles's brand of naturalness--from which his "goodness" springs--does not equip him for dealing with the new and terrible natural world of Hardy's novel. This is the tragedy of The Woodlanders.

If the amount of imagery devoted to it is any indication, nature's "crippling evolutionary struggle"[3] is Hardy's primary concern in The Woodlanders. Although we know that the actions of the characters in the "great web" of this novel have profound and often harmful effects on others, Hardy rarely chooses to suggest these effects through imagery. He seems much more interested in providing descriptions of the "bleeding wounds" and "the vocalized sorrows" of the natural world. The amount of attention lavished on documenting the injuries of the trees in particular, makes them seem more vital and human than the woodlanders themselves.

In the course of the novel, Hardy provides numerous descriptions in which the objects of the natural world, most notably the trees, are made to seem human. "Huge lobes of fungi . . . [grow] like lungs" (93); the oaks sport "jackets of lichen" and "stockings of moss" (378), and the mossed rinds of the tree-trunks look "like hands wearing green gloves" (93). It is in their movements, however, that the trees most resemble

human beings. Their banging and scraping seem less a response to the wind than acts of the trees' own will. Hardy's diction is carefully managed to reinforce this impression. The oaks "brandish their arms"; they "smite" and "disfigure" their "neighbours" as a conscious man might an enemy. They are even capable of torturing one another. The black and white corkscrew shapes on the woodlanders' walking-sticks have been brought about by an encircling woodbine. This plant's "slow torture" of young branches and saplings reminds Hardy of the carefully calculated tortures of the Chinese, who "have been said to mould human beings into grotesque toys by continued compression in infancy" (94).

While nature often reminds us of the worst in man's world--one plant's "slow torture" of another recalls man's mistreatment of his fellow man--human behaviour often resembles that of the lowest order of creatures--the insect. Such a resemblance is particularly evident at the time of the barking. Hardy begins his description of this seasonal ritual with what is obviously an effort to elicit the reader's sympathy for nature. The early steps of the process are made to resemble the preparations for a guillotinade. With a small bill-hook, John Upjohn carefully frees "the collar of a tree from twigs and patches of moss in an operation comparable to the'little toilette' of the executioner's victim" (184). Once the axe meets with the tree, however, the methodical and sophisticated aspect of this particular form of savagery degenerates into pure animalism. The woodsmen "attack" the oak "like locusts", and "in a short time not a particle of rind . . . [is] left on the trunk and larger limbs" (184).

As barbaric as the woodsmen's actions may seem, Hardy makes it

clear that in the world of The Woodlanders, merging with or yielding to the natural world is not a good thing. Because John South puts off chopping down the elm outside his door--and thus refuses to assert his mastery over it--the tree grows to control him. "'The very shape of it seems to haunt him like an evil spirit,'" says Marty. "'He says that it is exactly his own age, that it has got human sense, and sprouted up when he was born on purpose to rule him, and keep him as its slave'" (149). As South's delusion intensifies, the tree becomes a "fugleman" to him. Its movements determine what his own shall be. Thus, when the tree waves, the onlooking South waves his head "with abject obedience" (138), and when the tree falls, the aging man promptly ceases to exist.

Although The Woodlanders, like most other Hardy novels, has a number of characters who accept the natural world and accommodate themselves to it, none--not even Giles Winterborne--claims to love that world as Clym and Thomasin claim to love Egdon Heath. If there is no character to voice his preference for Little Hintock, however, there are plenty to sound an opposite note. Mrs. Dollery is the first in the novel to declare her disapproval of the place: "'Bedad! I wouldn't live here if they'd pay me to. Now at Abbot's Cernal you do see the world a bit'" (42). Fitzpiers and Mrs. Charmond follow up the van-driver's comments with numerous professions of hatred. Even Percomb finds the woodland village distasteful. "'Great Hintock is bad enough,'" he says, "'but Little Hintock--the bats and owls would drive me melancholy mad! It took two days to raise my sperrits to their true pitch again after that night I went there'" (432).

Percomb's comment is perhaps the most astute of all those made

about Little Hintock. Though the hamlet's bats and owls do not drive John South "melancholy mad", one of its trees proves to be capable of doing just that. Later, the population of cuckoos there irritates Grace Melbury's condition to such a degree that she too is in danger of losing her mental balance.

All in all, Little Hintock is not a very healthy place in which to live. Indeed, the images Hardy presents of the hamlet suggest that death is a more powerful presence there than life. The sight and smell of decaying leaves is everywhere, and one does not have to walk far to see rotting stumps or a "a half-dead oak, hollow and disfigured with white tumours, its roots spreading out like claws grasping the ground" (267). In winter, the trees are "funereal", and when they are not "rocking and chanting dirges" (301), they can be counted on to break the silence with "vocalized sorrows" of some sort. Even George Melbury attests to the sepulchral atmosphere of the woodland world, though he does so unwittingly. "'The whitey-brown creeps out of the earth over us'" (62), he tells Giles Winterborne.

In both Far From the Madding Crowd and The Return of the Native, Hardy provides powerful images which suggest that nature is a mechanistic force. We recall that the river near Sergeant Troy's barracks races with "gliding precision, any irregularities of speed being immediately corrected by small whirlpools" which gurgle and cluck like "wheels" (136), and that the "green-triangled", "saw-edged" vegetation in Clym Yeobright's "nest" on the heath seems "machine-made" (264).

In The Woodlanders, we have images of frosted grass "rustl[ing] . . . like paper shavings" (126) and leaves moving in the breeze "with a sound almost metallic, like the sheet-iron foliage of the fabled Jarnvid wood" (94), but neither of these does much to suggest that nature is a machine.

In Hardy's later novel, growth does not proceed like clockwork, but in fits and starts. In the woodland, it is not an abundance of uniform foliage which is produced, but a limited variety of "deformed" and "crippled" plants whose survival has depended upon depriving other vegetation of light and warmth, or simply "strangling" that vegetation "to death". Domesticated plants fare the worst in this wild woodland world. The only vegetables which seem to grow in gardens are potatoes and cabbages, but even these must be carefully observed for signs of disease and slugs. George Melbury diligently tends and tills his garden, but a fringe of boughs overhanging it drips on and pits the surface of the seed-plots with pock-marks whenever it rains. The frustrated gardener is forced to admit "that gardens in such a place . . . are no good at all" (193). How much less feasible does the very idea of a garden become as one moves farther and farther into the woods. At Giles's forest retreat, there is no sign of a cultivated plot. In that spot, the trees have won the competition for the sun's light and warmth, leaving the earth below them sterile and unyielding.

Although Giles Winterborne is the character most closely identified with nature in The Woodlanders, the imagery which surrounds him confirms what I noted earlier, that he does not properly belong in the harsh and sterile environment of Little Hintock, but in some more benevolent and bucolic setting. He inevitably appears to Grace Melbury--and to us as well--

as a figure of fertility. One time he is "Autumn's very brother" (261); another time, he is "a faun-like figure" (353). He even rises upon the young woman's memory "as the fruit-god and the wood-god in alternation: sometimes leafy and smeared with green lichen . . . sometimes cider-stained and starred with apple-pips" (341). None of these images suggests that Giles is at all fit for the struggle in which the whole of Little Hintock seems to be engaged. Winterborne's "marvellous power of making trees grow", which is due to the "sympathy [existing] between himself and the fir, oak, or beech" (105), hardly qualifies him for survival in a world dominated by pain and death. His intimate knowledge of the natural world is an equally ineffective tool for salvation. Giles, like John South before him, refuses to resist the natural world--or control it as the barkers do--and in the end, he is claimed by that world.

Hardy provides numerous descriptions of Winterborne's cough to image nature's gradual absorption of the young woodsman. At first, the cough is "a faint noise" resembling the sounds a squirrel or bird might make; soon, it "float[s] . . . upon the weather as though a part of it" (375); finally, it ceases and Giles lapses into "an endless monologue, like that we sometimes hear from inanimate nature in deep secret places where water flows or where ivy leaves flap against stones . . ." (379). In losing consciousness, Giles loses the only faculty which seems to separate him from the natural world, and he is quickly absorbed into the woodland.

As I have intimated, the ability to struggle and compete is the prime pre-requisite for survival in Hardy's woodland world. Characters like Giles Winterborne who exhibit noticeably poor competitive skills are destined for extinction. Winterborne does demonstrate a certain

amount of competitive skill at the auction, but his efforts, unlike those of natural creatures, are excessive rather than conservative. While an animal collects only as much material as it needs for survival, Giles finds himself with "hundreds of faggots, and divers lots of timber" when all he requires is "a few bundles of spray for . . . use in baking and lighting fires" (96). Lacking instinctive competitive abilities, Giles inadvertently gains the timber rather than the approval of the man he most wants to impress. As a result, Melbury is temporarily alienated from, rather than won over by, the young woodsman.

Marty South is also noticeably lacking in competitive abilities. Never daring to compete with Grace Melbury for Winterborne's affection, Marty gives very little indication of her love for the man when he is alive and when she might advance her position with him. She does display a certain degree of craftiness, however, in writing to Fitzpiers to inform him of the origin of Mrs. Charmond's charming locks, no doubt reasoning that if she succeeds in turning the doctor's affections back where they belong, Giles will be left free for her.

Marty has a more important function in The Woodlanders than acting as letter-writer, however. As Michael Millgate notes, she, like Elizabeth-Jane Newson/Henchard before her, is "a kind of moral touch-stone of her world."

> Because she is so essentially an observer, because she functions as a chorus figure of a non-comic kind . . . and because her somewhat delphic utterances seem to carry the stamp of authorial approval, the reader quite naturally accepts Marty's viewpoint . . . .[4]

The stamp of authorial approval is felt particularly in Marty's interpretations of nature, many of which reinforce (as much as it can be reinforced) Hardy's early assertion that Little Hintock is a place where, "from time to time, dramas of a grandeur and unity truly Sophoclean are enacted in the real . . ." (44). Although Marty suggests on one occasion that three pheasants have only the weather to think of, "'and so they must be lighter-hearted than we'" (111), more often, she sees nature as being involved in the same tragic drama as man. Newly-planted firs seem to her to sigh "'because they are very sorry to begin life in earnest--just as we be'" (106), and the singeing of a pair of mating birds speaks to her of the fate of all lovers. "'That's the end of what is called love,'" she appropriately remarks to Grace and Fitzpiers.

In The Woodlanders, Hardy is specifically concerned with exploring the conflict which arises within a young heroine when she is forced to make a choice between suitors who represent two distinct approaches to life. But he is also interested in the more general question of "how to find a basis for the sexual relation" (39) between a man and woman. If Hardy never solves this "immortal puzzle", he does provide a number of symbolic images in which he attempts to illuminate aspects of characters' relationships for the reader.

A number of such images appear in Chapter XIX of The Woodlanders. This chapter, which treats the barking process and suggests an intensification in the relationship between Fitzpiers and Grace, lacks the richness and power of the scene between Bathsheba and Troy in "the hollow amid the ferns",

but the many descriptions Hardy provides here of the debarked trees stretching "naked" on the forest floor are nevertheless effective in suggesting the erotic potential of Fitzpiers and Grace's acquaintanceship.

Although Hardy does not make the identification explicit, Grace is, in this chapter, carefully imaged in connection with the "peeled" and "prostrate" trees. After the woodsmen have departed from the place where oaks earlier stood "naked-legged, and as if ashamed" (184), Grace returns to search for a lost purse. Solitary Fitzpiers spies her wending her way through "prostrate trees that would have been invisible but for their nakedness" (190). Soon after providing this vaguely erotic image, Hardy has Fitzpiers make a request which settles the purely sexual nature of the doctor's interest in Grace. "'God forbid that I should kneel in another's place at any shrine unfairly,'" he tells the young woman; "'But, my dear Miss Melbury, now that he [Giles] is gone from the temple may I draw near?'"

The images Hardy uses to suggest the nature of the relationship between Fitzpiers and Mrs. Charmond tend to be less subtle than those used in connection with the doctor and Grace. Instead of descriptions of "peeled" trees, we get descriptions of peeled gloves. This is very appropriate, since both the lady and the gentleman are "society" people--their basic allegiance is to civilization.

> Fitzpiers clasped . . . [Felice Charmond's] hanging hand, and, while she still remained in the same listless attitude, looking volumes into his eyes, he stealthily unbuttoned her glove, and stripped her hand of it by rolling back the gauntlet over her fingers, so that it came off inside out. He then raised her

hand to his mouth, she still reclining passively, watching him as she might have watched a fly upon her dress. (275)

Though Fitzpiers is plainly the more active and aggressive member of the partnership, Hardy makes it clear in this passage that it is not the young doctor but his passively reclining companion--she of the "hanging hand" and "listless attitude"--who holds the real power in the relationship. With "an arch yet gloomy smile on her lips" (275), Felice Charmond watches her sexually-eager lover with all the control of a huge and potentially dangerous spider preparing for dinner. In the end, Fitzpiers is to her little more than a "fly"--a lowly and insignificant creature--which can be dispatched with a wave or a slap of the hand.

For the most part, the imagery used to suggest sexuality in The Woodlanders is more subdued than that used in Far From the Madding Crowd. There are certainly no scenes in the later novel to compare with the scene in which Troy performs his sword-exercise. But if the sexual imagery is less brilliant here, it is still rich in its suggestiveness. The imagery which surrounds Marty South's cutting of her hair--for Hardy, a highly symbolic act in itself--is particularly noteworthy.

Marty's decision to take the scissors to her locks arises out of her hopeless love for Giles Winterborne. Overhearing George Melbury's plans to encourage a marriage between his daughter and Winterborne, Marty returns to her cottage late one evening overcome with despair. To convince herself of the futility of any further love for Giles, and also to justify the woodsman's rejection of her, she proceeds to fulfill Barber Percomb's request for her hair. A few hours after the "ravaging" scissors have performed their task, Winterborne has occasion to notice Marty's transformed

appearance. But it is pitifully ironic that the act the young woman has performed to make herself "hateful" and "ugly" should be quite uncomprehended by Giles. The "deflowered visage" so apparent to Marty when she views herself in the mirror is certainly not noticed by the woodsman. To him, her head does look remarkably like "an apple on a gate-post", but the effect has, after all, been achieved by the very unremarkable procedure of a haircut.

For Marty, of course, the haircut is very meaningful and very painful. Here she is, after all, doing away with her only sexual charm. In the end, there is no way to view the act but as a masochistic renunciation of femininity. Hardy even intimates that the action is a kind of suicide. There is something in the image of the tresses stretched out "upon the scrubbed deal of the coffin-stool" of all places "like waving and ropy weeds over the washed bed of a stream" (58) which reminds us of another suicide: Hamlet's Ophelia--another young woman whose sexuality has been severely frustrated. The atmosphere of death is sustained in Hardy's description of the dawn which follows Marty's self-disfigurement. The sunless winter day manifests itself as "the bleared white visage . . . of a dead-born child" (62). This image is, as Mary Jacobus has noted, plainly expressive of Marty's still-born hopes where Giles Winterborne is concerned.[5]

If Marty does not actually lose her life like the tragic Ophelia, she does lose her sexuality as the novel progresses. We have already noted Winterborne's inability to respond to , perhaps even to picture, Marty as a woman. Hardy makes the woodsman's attitude towards the girl an understandable, even justifiable, one by providing descriptions of her

"slim figure in meagre black, almost without womanly contours as yet" (158). When Winterborne dies, so, apparently, do the last traces of Marty's sexuality. In the final pages of the novel, Hardy provides an image of the young girl standing by the grave of her beloved:

> a straight slim figure, clothed in a plaitless gown, the contours of womanhood so undeveloped as to be scarcely perceptible in her, the marks of poverty and toil effaced by the misty hour, she touched sublimity at points, and looked almost like a being who had rejected with indifference the attribute of sex for the loftier quality of abstract humanism. (438)

In all of the novels we have considered, we have seen how imagery offered Hardy a discreet means of suggesting sexuality and sexual relationships. In The Woodlanders, Hardy also continued to favour imagery to suggest the personality and psychological states of his characters. For the most part, his use of imagery in this novel does not differ from his use of it in Far From the Madding Crowd or The Return of the Native.

Though the dominant impression of nature in The Woodlanders is one of struggle and strife, the author continues to suggest, as he did in his earlier works, that man is capable of imposing his own meanings on the natural world. Thus, the trunks and large boughs of trees stand against the sky as "sentinels, gigantic candelabra, pikes, halberds and lances" (317) according to man's fancy. The individual consciousness, suggests Hardy in another image, is like a stained-glass window. It colours and transforms the material objects which surround a particular

character to correspond with his psychological state. This is best evidenced when Melbury goes to Hintock House in order to discuss Grace and Fitzpiers's troubled marriage with the prime trouble-maker:

> the scene to him [there] was not the material environment of his person, but a tragic vision that travelled with him like an envelope. Through this vision the incidents of the moment but gleamed confusedly here and there, as an outer landscape through the high coloured scenes of a stained window. (288)

Fitzpiers's consciousness, too, is capable of transforming the environment. When all is going well for him in his love-affair with Mrs. Charmond, "the trees, the hills, the leaves, the grass--each . . . [are] endowed and quickened with a subtle light . . ." (250).

Some of the most vivid images of nature that Hardy presents have been "coloured and moulded according to the wants" within Grace Melbury. The young woman's acceptance of Edred Fitzpiers, and the materialistic life of beautiful dresses and sapphire and opal rings he represents, affects her whole perception of nature. Upon returning to the Earl of Wessex Hotel after an eight-weeks' tour of the Continent, Grace looks out onto the natural world from her window and seems to perceive it as the interior of some spacious baroque mansion. There is certainly very little that is natural in her perception of the "gardens and orchards . . .embossed, nay encrusted with scarlet and gold fruit, stretching to an infinite distance under luminous lavender mist" (227).

By the time Grace removes to Giles Winterborne's isolated woodland cot, both her marriage and her attitude have undergone some radical changes. She may be just as fastidious, but she is less materialistic. Now, nature

does not seem richly endowed, but as disturbed and tormented as herself. When, on the eve of Winterborne's death, Grace runs a hopeless race for medical assistance, nature actually reflects her sense of Giles's imminent death. Although the young woman will not admit it on a conscious level, her perceptions of nature tell us that at least on a subconscious level, she knows Giles's end is near. A "vault" of cloud is perceived to be hanging in the damp autumn sky, and "the puddles and damp ruts left by the recent rains" appear to Grace to be possessed of "a cold corpse-eyed luminousness" (383). When she returns to her proper home a few hours after Winterborne's fever has consumed him, the whole wood seems to her "a house of death, pervaded by loss to its uttermost length and breadth" (393).

Although Hardy makes it clear that many of the images of nature he presents in The Woodlanders are to be viewed as "projections" of characters' psychological states, some images cannot be regarded as such. Many descriptions of trees struggling and injuring one another, for example, do not reflect the mental states of characters at all--more often than not, these images appear when there is no disturbed or pugnacious character about to project his hostile feelings onto the natural world. This does not make the images any less meaningful, however. Descriptions of battling trees not only suggest the intense and often fatal competition which Hardy would have us believe to be the reality of woodland existence, but they also create the atmosphere of upheaval and torment which characterizes so much of the novel.

While many of Hardy's descriptions of trees cannot be strictly viewed as "projections", they may still be effective in suggesting characters' psychological states. Hardy's account of one of Melbury's evening walks

through the forest is a case in point. The "cold sweat", the "beads of perspiration [hanging] from every tree", the colourless sky, and "the haggard grey phantom" shapes, which form the back-drop to Melbury's action, all suggest nature's bodily struggle. But they also image the man's anxiety and despair about the subject he intends to discuss with Giles Winterborne, namely, Grace's disastrous marriage.

Later in the novel, when Grace escapes to Winterborne's woodland retreat, nature acts as an "objective correlative" for her emotional state. It suggests her horror at having forced the woodsman out of his home. The natural objects which surround Grace at this time--among them, "an old beech with vast arm-pits", a "black slug", dead boughs "like ichthyosauri", rotting stumps "like black teeth rising from gums", and "gory-hued" leaves (377-378)--are the "formula" of the young woman's emotion. When Hardy provides these grotesque details, a full sense of Grace's horror is evoked in the reader himself.

The objective correlative is just one interesting feature of the scene in which Grace realizes that her lover is dying. The fact that the whole of the natural world seems symbolically charged is also worthy of our notice. The trees "wrestling for their existence, their branches disfigured with wounds" (378) image Giles's own struggle for survival and his wretched feverish condition. The "dead boughs . . . scattered about like ichthyosauri", the "perishing woodbine" and the stopping of Giles's household clock all speak of the imminence of the woodsman's extinction, while the image of the yellowish green leaves of the season "prematurely blown down by the gale" suggests the tragic untimeliness of the event.

As our discussion of Winterborne's dying scene proves, Hardy

was well aware of how the environment could be used to suggest aspects of personality and psychological states. Descriptions of a character's place of residence could also be exploited, and often are, to a similar end. In our study of The Return of the Native, we observed how the images of Blooms-End, with all its perishing plant life, were able to suggest Mrs. Yeobright's lost connection with the natural world. In The Woodlanders, the houses in which the Melburys, Mrs. Charmond, and Fitzpiers live also suggest something about their attitudes and personalities.

The images of the Melbury house, a comfortable and functional dwelling "of no marked antiquity, yet of an advanced age" where "queer old personal tales were yet audible" (62-63), suggest its inhabitants' healthy sense of tradition, connection and even communion with the past. Descriptions of Hintock House, on the other hand, "an edifice built in times when human constitutions were damp-proof" (100), highlight Felice Charmond's unsuitability for life in the woodland hamlet. Divorced as she is from the natural world by her modern sensibility, Felice is incapable of exercising any control over nature in general and over the vegetation which threatens to claim her house in particular. Overgrown with ivy, coated with lichen, and merged in moss, Hintock House is, as Richard Carpenter has suggested, a symbol of Felice Charmond's "infertile luxuriance".[6]

The physical details of the house where Edred Fitzpiers resides also have a certain amount of symbolism attached to them. The adjectives Hardy uses to describe the dwelling--"small", "box-like", and "comparatively modern"--could almost as easily be used of the young man who is ensconced within it, and within Little Hintock in general. Hardy adds a nice detail in providing Fitzpiers, the character most alienated

from the natural world, with a landlord who, though once a farmer, no longer interacts much with nature.

Although The Woodlanders is a richer novel than a single reading might suggest, it is generally--and, I think, justifiably--regarded as a more modest achievement than either Far From the Madding Crowd or The Return of the Native. The characters who populate Hardy's woodland world are certainly less brilliant and memorable than those who live at Weatherbury or on Egdon Heath. But if they sometimes seem "insipid", they do not, as Irving Howe claims they do, fail to emerge as individual figures.[7] The imagery with which Hardy surrounds them--Grace and Fitzpiers, in particular--helps us see them as fairly well-developed characters.

Hardy's early descriptions of Grace Melbury as "a conjectural creature", "a shape in the gloom, whose true quality could only be approximated by putting together a movement now and a glance then" (79), lead us to expect a character who, unlike Hardy's other heroines, will remain indistinct. The details of colour and clothing that are usually provided about a Hardy heroine are conspicuously absent in the treatment of Grace.

Hardy's refusal to describe Grace's clothing may be intended as statement on the irrelevance of fashion to essential character, but it also constitutes a rather dramatic departure from the kind of female characterization we see in Far From the Madding Crowd or Tess of the d'Urbervilles. In both of these novels, a heroine's clothing, particularly its colour, reveals a great deal about her personality. The crimson jacket in which Bathsheba

Everdene first appears, for example, suggests her passionate nature and foreshadows her connection with Frank Troy--another scarlet-garmented figure. Later, her myrtle-green riding habit, which fits to the waist "as a rind to its fruit" is expressive of the young woman's integration with and growing commitment to the natural world.

Hardy also supplies many details about Tess Durbeyfield's dress. It is no accident that she first appears in a soft, white muslin gown. This garment is plainly intended to image her innocence and vulnerability. The pink jacket she later wears also has a certain amount of symbolism attached to it. Pink is, of course, the colour traditonally associated with femininity, but it is also an appropriate colour to express the warmth and gentleness of Tess.

In his earliest descriptions of Grace, Hardy does not provide any imagery to suggest her character. In fact, he seems committed to the idea that "there never probably lived a person who was in herself more completely a reductio ad absurdum of attempts to appraise a woman, even externally, by items of face and figure" (78). As the narrative progresses, however, the author either loses his resolve or discovers that Grace can be described after all. Images begin to collect around her, but, unlike those used in connection with the heroines of Far From the Madding Crowd and The Return of the Native, they form no richly coherent body. While birds and flowers are consistently associated with Bathsheba, and fire and water turn up in almost every description of Eustacia Vye, no consistent images seem to be used in connection with Grace Melbury. As a result, she does retain a certain amount of the conjectural quality with which Hardy first endows her.

In the final analysis, what is perhaps clearest about Grace is her passivity and her "peculiar situation, as it were in mid-air between two storeys of society" (273). As if Grace's passiveness is not evident enough in her refusal to contradict her father and assert her own will, Hardy providesa number of images in which she is compared to objects fashioned and manipulated by others, not herself. Her father sees her as an ornament--"the gem he had been at such pains in mounting" (129)--and as a fine piece of "material" to be worked on. A description of the girl's face and hands as "wondrously smooth and fair" by firelight suggests that she is made of marble, as does Fitzpiers's perception of her as "a piece of live statuary" (178). On another occasion, she is likened to "a waxen figure" (208). This image is a particularly effective one, for wax, unlike marble or limestone, is known for its malleability.

The images of nature Hardy uses to describe Grace suggest the fragility of her tie to the natural world of Little Hintock. On one occasion, she is "a weak queen bee" (270); on another, she is a "turtle-dove" (404). She is also likened to a wildflower which, having been transplanted from the woodland to the greenhouse, has now come back to the place of its origin.

Everything about Grace is cultivated rather than natural. Her tastes are "implanted" (126); her views have been "tilled into foreign-ness" (158), and the "soil of her mind" has been so thoroughly "cultivated" that she cannot appreciate what "good old Hintock" soil has to offer . . . including the well-boiled slug which appears in the winter-greens served to her by Giles. This creature is too distant a cousin of the <u>escargot</u> to earn fastidious Grace's approving comment. Her close-mouthed

politeness about this matter, however, is enough to provoke agreeable Robert Creedle's disapproval. According to him, silence on such a matter means depriving the party of merriment. "'Twould have made good small conversation,'" he later tells Giles, "'especially as wit ran short among us sometimes'" (123).

Some of the most memorable and symbolic scenes in The Woodlanders are those which suggest the estrangement of Grace and Giles Winterborne. Nowhere is their alienation more dramatically imaged than in the "fog scene" of Chapter XIII. Here we see the heroine walking beneath John South's elm just as Winterborne, in an effort to relieve the brainsick man, begins shrouding it. Although the woodsman calls to Grace from his perch in the "skyey field", the young woman is so full of her father's directions to discourage him, that she makes no response. Misgivings about the kindness and propriety of her silence, however, set in directly. That the young woman is confused about how she ought to respond to Giles is suggested by more than her whispering: "'What shall I do?'"; a correlative is provided in nature in the "sudden fog". The rest of the scene shows Winterborne retreating farther and farther up the tree, "cutting himself off more and more from all intercourse with the sublunary world" (140). In time, he can "only just be discerned as a dark grey spot on the light grey zenith" (140).

While Winterborne later regards the events associated with shrouding the elm as his "burial" of Grace, Hardy makes it clear that Giles is the one who really dies during this scene. The woodsman's very aspect suggests that he loses his life in being rejected by Grace: his colour is "grey" and he holds himself as "still" and "motionless" as a corpse.

As the scene progresses, the foggy, chill region he occupies seems less a "skyey field" than a Niflheim--the underworld of Norse mythology, a true abode of the dead.

The fog scene images Winterborne's spiritual death and prefigures his physical demise, but it also suggests his alienation and separation from Grace Melbury. The most potent symbol of the division is, of course, the tree in which the woodsman is perched far above his beloved. The images of Grace leaning against a gate, or standing behind a hedge are more subtle, but they also work to suggest division and to link this scene thematically with the later one in which the beautifully-dressed heroine regards her lover "moiling and muddling" below her in the courtyard of the Earl of Wessex Hotel. Instead of a tree, gate or hedge, Hardy now uses a pane of glass to suggest the division between Grace and Giles. The window is a particularly powerful symbol here, for it suggests Grace's isolation from Giles (and the natural world he represents) as well as her heightened awareness of that isolation. Through the window, Grace sees Giles clearly; there is no "fog" to obscure her sense of superiority now.

When Fitzpiers tires of dosing Grace with the "intoxicating dram" of his presence, the young woman briefly returns to Giles Winterborne. Meeting the woodsman one day on High-Stoy Hill as her husband journeys towards Middleton Abbey and Felice Charmond, Grace feels her saddened heart rise "like a released bough". As she and Giles walk about the hill, they momentarily realize their deep "organic" passion. To suggest such a realization, Hardy provides an image of the two gazing "far into the recesses of heaven . . . past fiery obstructions . . . into a bottom-

less medium of soft green fire" (262). This "lapse back to Nature unadorned" is, however, as brief as it is sudden. The "soft green fire" cannot be sustained. The moment of transcendence, vision, and unity ends with Giles and Grace's descent of High-Stoy Hill. At its bottom, the two young people divide once again; Grace opens a gate back to civilization and Giles continues along the highway which runs outside it.

While imagery plays a significant role in suggesting Grace's estrangement from Giles Winterborne, it is used rather sparingly to shed light on her character. At the end of the novel, then, Grace is still somewhat indistinct. Edred Fitzpiers, on the other hand, is surrounded by a considerable amount of imagery and ultimately emerges as the most colourful and well-developed of the woodlanders.

The earliest allusions to Fitzpiers identify him as being "in league with the devil" (45, 53). We are assured that this is the general local opinion of the doctor when one in the woodland chorus, Farmer Cawtree, observes of him: "'There's a good reason for supposing he has sold his soul to the wicked one'" (69). Later, George Melbury explains to Giles that while he intended to encourage a match between the woodsman and Grace, "the devil tempted him in the person of Fitzpiers, and he broke his virtuous vow" (284).

Hardy's purpose in linking the young doctor with "the wicked one" is not difficult to discern. The identification forms the basis of a series of images and allusions intended to juxtapose not only the persons of "civilized" Fitzpiers and Giles Winterborne--the man identified with what is good in nature--but also the attitudes towards life that each man represents. We have already noted Giles's close connection with the

natural world. Described variously as "Autumn's very brother", "the fruit-god" and "the wood-god", the woodsman is said to possess an almost uncanny ability to make things grow. Fitzpiers, on the other hand, is consistently identified with death. His free time is spent in making offers for the skull of an elderly woman, in reclining on a couch which resembles "a canopied mural tomb of the fifteenth century" (175), or in analysing the brain tissue of a man who was given a "remedy" which brought not renewed vigour but the most negative of all results.

Unlike Winterborne, who is identified with the natural world at its best and most beautiful--a world we do not often see in The Woodlanders--Fitzpiers is shown to be completely divorced from the environment of Little Hintock. While the rest of the hamlet responds to nature's signals that the day is done and it is time for sleep, Fitzpiers sits up performing scientific experiments by artificial light. The light's changing colour from blue to violet to red strikes us as being emblematic of the young doctor's inconstancy and unreliability, but Grace, who lies in bed watching it, is arrested more by the unusualness and unnaturalness of the phenomenon. She observes that

> Almost every diurnal and nocturnal effect in that woodland place had hitherto been the direct result of the regular terrestrial roll which produced the season's changes; but here was something dissociated from these normal sequences, and foreign to local knowledge. (89)

Our sense of Fitzpiers's dissociation from the natural world rests on more than his lighting an unusual lamp at an odd hour. On more than one occasion we are told that the doctor, unlike other Hintock

folk, takes no pleasure in watching the passing of the seasons or remarking Nature's "changeful tricks" or "strange mistakes". In this respect, he is not unlike many of Hardy's other "unnatural" characters. Of these, he most closely resembles Troy and Wildeve. Like the former, Fitzpiers has aristocratic connections. Like the latter, he craves the better things in life. With both men, the anti-hero of The Woodlanders shares an inborn ability to act.

Perhaps because his reading material consists of old plays and French romances, Fitzpiers is more conspicuously artificial than either of his predecessors. Whatever the case, his delivery is "theatrical"; his speeches are occasionally peppered with quotations from plays, and he derives great "artistic pleasure" from playing "the role of innamorato" to his wife's "coy mistress". As an actor, Fitzpiers displays a predilection for actress-lovers. As long as Grace remains only "an inexperienced actress" (180), he toys with one who has been a professional and who continues to paint, pad, powder, and make "crooked passions her study".

While Fitzpiers's theatricality links him with Troy and Wildeve, his personality--his inward turn of mind and preoccupation with dreams and fancies--is essentially that of Eustacia Vye. The lens imagery which surrounds the doctor confirms his resemblance to the heroine of The Return of the Native. Like Eustacia, Fitzpiers is first glimpsed from a distance with a spy-glass in his hand. But while Eustacia's telescope is a fairly accessible symbol of the young woman's romantic myopia and her yearning for a distant prospect, the metaphoric value of Fitzpiers's spy-glass and microscope is more difficult to decide upon, given that the objects are so closely and actually associated with the

medical profession. The lenses may be intended to heighten our sense of Fitzpiers's capacity for analytic prying, a capacity which is the very reverse of Giles's "natural piety". They may also be aimed at suggesting that the doctor's "apparent depth of vision" (148) is anything but real.

The imagery associated with Fitzpiers is calculated to emphasize his modernity and alienation from the natural world as well as to heighten the contrast between him and Giles Winterborne. While such a usage of imagery--for characterization and thematic juxtaposition of "civilized" and "traditional" individuals--is hardly new to The Woodlanders, what is unique about the novel is its resolution. In this work, unlike the earlier Far From the Madding Crowd and The Return of the Native, the good and natural character dies--apparently because he lacks the ability to assert himself and to compete.

Although nature is often imaged as cruel and indifferent in The Return of the Native, it still offers meaning and stability to those characters who accept and identify with it. In The Woodlanders, we have quite a different situation. Man must still interact with and make his living from nature, to be sure, but nature is now so torn by strife that it is no longer easy to have "intelligent intercourse" with it. As the case of Giles Winterborne proves, it is not goodness or even intelligent intercourse with nature which guarantees one survival in this woodland world; it is struggle, brute force and competition.

Chapter III

Although in Tess of the d'Urbervilles Hardy continued to concern himself both with the antithesis between nature and civilization and with the disintegration of the rural world, the thrust of the 1891 novel is generally more psychological than that of the earlier novels we have considered. Hardy was now less interested in exploring the interaction of a number of individuals within a community than in considering the plight--physical and emotional--of a single character, Tess. The result of this, as Irving Howe has put it, is that none of the other characters "has much interest in his own right apart from his capacity to illuminate and enlarge the experience of Tess."[1] The secondary figures may "have useful parts to play, but finally . . . are little more than accessories, whose task is not so much to draw attention in their own right as to heighten the reality of [the central character]."[2]

While Tess of the d'Urbervilles is not unique among Hardy's works for its single focus--The Mayor of Casterbridge, published five years earlier in 1886, also concerns itself with the fortunes of a single figure, Michael Henchard--it is noteworthy in the Hardy canon for its brilliant symbolism. In this novel, imagery is no longer needed to assist in differentiating one character from another; it now works to distinguish and illuminate the many psychological states of a single person. In performing this function of clarifying one individual's experience, imagery forms a more coherent and unified body than formerly. Indeed, looking through Tess of the d'Urbervilles, we see very few

self-contained symbols, and instead find images prefiguring, reflecting and generally reinforcing one another in a way which is quite new to Hardy.

In Tess of the d'Urbervilles, as in most other Hardy novels, the majority of images are drawn from nature. Landscape continues to be of paramount importance here, but in a rather different way from the one we have come to expect from Hardy. In isolating the difference, Dorothy Van Ghent has noted that the earth in Tess of the d'Urbervilles, unlike the heath in The Return of the Native, "is primarily not a metaphor but a real thing"[3]--a "real thing" whose very "physical surface" is charged with symbolic meaning.[4] With his later novel, Hardy had moved away somewhat from the abstract and general to a more concrete and particular symbolism. In The Return of the Native, he had often been preoccupied with making observations about the accordance between Egdon Heath and human nature in general; in The Woodlanders, he had noted a congruity between the struggling trees and "the depraved [but anonymous] crowds of a city slum"; in Tess of the d'Urbervilles, there is still some philosophizing about man's relationship with nature, but Hardy is now very much interested in creating a landscape which corresponds with and comments upon a single identifiable human character.

Before we examine how Hardy's descriptions of the landscape deepen our understanding of Tess or consider the ways in which other images work to foreshadow and interpret her actions, it is necessary to address what has, for us, come to be something of a perennial question --namely, the author's attitude to nature. In Tess, as in most Hardy novels, nature is presented from a number of shifting viewpoints. At

one time, it may be depicted as positively beautiful; at another, it is noticeably harsh. Whether kind or cruel, however, natural and inanimate objects are fairly consistently represented in anthropomorphic terms. An old gray wall on the outskirts of Blackmoor Vale, for example, is said to "advertise . . . fiery lettering . . .with a strange unwonted mien, as if distressed at duties it had never before been called upon to perform" (129). Later, at Talbothays, while the men lie down for their afternoon nap and produce "sustained snores", large-leaved rhubarb and cabbage plants are said to "sleep", "their broad limp surfaces hanging in the sun like half-closed umbrellas" (230). Throughout the novel, the sun too is pictured with a variety of human characteristics and qualities. It alternately announces itself with "ungenial and peering" rays (127), or as "a golden-haired, beaming, mild-eyed, God-like creature gazing down in the vigour and intentness of youth upon an earth that . . . [is] brimming with interest for him" (136).

While it is relatively easy to dismiss such personifications as either literary convention or the natural impulse of a writer nursed, as Hardy was, on the writings of the Romantics, it is more difficult to reconcile them with Hardy's notoriously sceptical intellectual stance. If Hardy seems hardly the man to be governed by quasi-pantheistic or comparable doctrines, however, "his tendency to perceive sentience in an inanimate environment, and particularly in nature," demonstrates, in Charlotte Bonica's words, "an innate and human need to make sense of the universe in humanly understandable terms."[5] That Hardy's personifications are not always as conventional and complete as those cited above, however, makes us take Bonica's observation a step further

to suggest that though Hardy attempted to make sense of the universe in human terms, the universe, as he saw it, simply resisted such interpretation. For this point to be confirmed we need only turn to Hardy's description of the field and sky at Flintcomb-Ash. Although these two vast, desolate and drab expanses are imaged as faces, they significantly lack the features which make the human visage what it is, and are characterized instead by an absolute "vacuity of countenance". That there is nothing human or meaningful in their blank confrontation is made clear in Hardy's description of "the white face looking down on the brown face and the brown face looking up at the white face, without anything between them but . . . two girls crawling over the surface of the former like flies" (360). Hardy's extended personification here does not identify or endow either the field or the sky with humanity but only characterizes the vast expanses as alien and incomprehensible to man.

Hardy's "anti-personifications"--that is, his endowing inanimate or natural objects with human qualities or characteristics to heighten the sense of a gap, rather than a union, between man and nature--are not restricted to his treatment of the sterile and hellish region of Flintcomb-Ash. Early in the novel, his description of the stars over the heads of Tess and her young brother also has the effect of emphasizing nature's alien aspect. Although the stars are imaged as beating like human hearts here, they do so with inhumanly "cold" pulses, in "serene dissociation from . . . human life." Furthermore, these stellar hearts are not housed, as human hearts are, in warm solid bodies, but in insubstantial "black hollows" (69).

"Serene dissociation from . . . human life" is perhaps as good

a catchphrase as any to characterize the view of nature which seems most pervasive in Tess of the d'Urbervilles. Though Hardy applies it to the stars, it could just as easily be used of the field and sky at Flintcomb-Ash or of the sun at Talbothays. Indeed, to show the "serene dissociation" of the latter, Hardy provides a vivid image of it throwing the shadows of "obscure and homely" milchers "with as much care over each contour as if it had been the profile of a Court beauty on a palace wall" (160).

If there is a certain loss of human dignity in having the sun cast one's own shadow with no more diligence than it casts that of a common milch cow, how much greater is the sense of human inconsequence when one is compared to the meanest of creatures, the fly. We have already looked at one passage in which Hardy likens the labouring Tess and Marian to this lowly species. We now turn to consider an image which recalls even more forcefully Gloucester's saying: "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods;/They kill us for their sport"--lines which Hardy quotes in his preface to Tess of the d'Urbervilles (fifth and later editions). This is the image of Tess standing upon Var Vale's "hemmed expanse of verdant flatness . . . like a fly on a billiard table of indefinite length, and of no more consequence to the surroundings than that fly" (159). David Lodge notes of this image that it "dissociates us from Tess and check[s] any tendency to find reassurance in the identification of . . .[her] renewed hope with the fertile promise of the valley"; furthermore, it "bring[s] out Tess's defencelessness, her isolation, her insignificance in the eye of impersonal nature."[6]

Although images like the one we have just considered are not the

only means by which Hardy communicates his sense of man's inconsequence in the natural world, they are perhaps his most reliable and effective vehicles. Unlike his sardonic questioning of the source and authority of the poet who spoke of "Nature's holy plan" or his allusion later in the novel to "cruel Nature's law", images of sun and earth, field and sky are easier to accept since they form the very fabric of the novel. As one critic has noted, the "philosophical vision" they communicate is presented as a "structural principle active within the particulars of the novel"; it is "local and inherent there through a maximum of organic dependencies" and cannot be "loosened away from the novel to compete in the general field of abstract truth."[7]

However dominant Hardy's view of nature as a cruelly indifferent force may be in Tess of the d'Urbervilles, it is not the only one which he presents in the novel. Furthermore, it is not the one which is germane to our apprehension and appreciation of character. It is true that many of Hardy's natural images communicate man's insignificance in "the grand scheme of things", but it is also true that many more are calculated to express less sweeping concepts--ideas about a character's psychological state, for example.

As far back as Far From the Madding Crowd, Hardy was inviting his audience to view descriptions of nature and natural imagery as commentary on or as the externalization of a character's personality. "In making even horizontal and clear inspections," he notes in the 1874 novel, "we colour and mould according to the wants within us whatever our eyes bring in" (64). To illustrate his point, Hardy then makes an example of the effect of the "sounds . . . caused by the flapping of the waters

against trifling objects in other parts of the stream" upon individuals of different emotional casts. To a happy man, suggests Hardy, such sounds would be perceived as laughter; to a sad man, as moans (Far From the Madding Crowd, 136).

By the time he came to write Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Hardy's apprehension of man's tendency to colour nature according to his emotional wants had become even more acute. In this novel, he was not only expressing the notion in a more precise and scientific terminology--"the world is only a psychological phenomenon"; therefore, what natural processes seem, they are (134)--but he was also illustrating the principle with greater frequency. Indeed, it is very difficult to view any natural imagery contained within the novel independent of character. Although many descriptions seem, at first reading, to have an air of authorial sanction or objective reality about them, a second reading quickly confirms that the images must be regarded as expressions of an individual character's sense of reality. Hardy's description of the aspect of the natural world upon Tess's return to Marlott after her seduction is a case in point. It would be relatively easy to fall into the trap of reading this description of flora and fauna as yet another of Hardy's concealed commentaries on Nature's indifference if one did not first note that the author prefaces his picture of nature with these sombre meditations of his young heroine:

> She felt that she would do well to be useful again--to taste anew sweet independence at any price. The past was past; whatever it had been it was no more at hand. Whatever its consequences, time would close over them; they would all in

> a few years be as if they had never been, and she herself grassed down and forgotten. (141)

The details about the natural world which directly follow this insight into Tess's character are merely an extension--or better, an externalization, a word picture--of the heroine's psychological state. In plainest terms, the observation that "the trees were just as green as before; the birds sang and the sun shone as clearly now as ever," and that "the familiar surroundings had not darkened because of her grief, nor sickened because of her pain" is Tess's interpretation of the world and not Hardy's _per se_.

As the narrative progresses and Tess's emotional state alters, so does the face of nature. At the time of her return to Marlott after her "Fall", "the midnight airs and gusts moaning amongst the tightly-wrapped buds and bark of the winter twigs . . .[are] formulae of bitter reproach" to Tess, and "a wet day . . .[is to her] the expression of irremediable grief at her weakness in the mind of some vague ethical being . . ." (135). In time, however, she is able to feel cheered at the prospect of a new life in the Froom Valley, and actually hears "a pleasant voice in every breeze, and in every bird's note . . . joy" (157). As time advances, once again the feelings of happiness and release diminish, particularly when Tess feels the pull of Angel Clare's love--a love which she feels she has no right to claim.

Just how much Tess's sense of joy is subject to the memory of her past becomes evident on the day Dairyman Crick tells the story of Jack Dollop. Though considered "a humorous narration" by the other workers at Talbothays, the dairyman's story touches "the tender place"

in Tess, and infects her with such a degree of wretchedness that she perceives the once friendly sun to be "ugly, like a great inflamed wound in the sky" (192). It becomes a symbol of her intense sorrow and shame.

Another afternoon finds Tess retreating to a thicket of pollard willows in yet another effort to quell the torment which is now growing as surely and as rapidly as her love for Clare. Once within the thicket, Tess flings herself, with apparent self-punishing fervour, upon a rustling growth of spear-grass, of all things (emphasis added). Here she remains "in palpitating misery broken by momentary shoots of joy." When she emerges some hours later, she appears to have made the decision "to snatch ripe pleasure before the iron teeth of pain . . . [have] time to shut upon her." The mental struggle it costs Tess to arrive at this tentative conclusion is communicated by her perception of the pollard willows beneath which she has been sheltering herself. Although no irregularities or peculiarities were noted about the trees when Tess first came within their boundaries, when she leaves, their aspect reflects in every detail the internal conflict the young woman has experienced. Not only do the willows appear "tortured out of their natural shape by incessant choppings", but they also seem to have become "spiny-haired monsters" (241). The moon also wears a "monstrous pumpkin-like aspect"--an aspect which communicates to us Tess's full horror at the idea of her potential wrongful acquiescence to "love's counsel".

Up to this point in my discussion of the nature imagery Hardy uses in connection with Tess, I have attempted to consider in isolation those images which seem to be the unconscious projections of her psychological state onto nature--that is, those "pictures" of nature which

appear to be moulded according to her individual wants. At a certain point, however, it becomes virtually impossible to distinguish such "personal" or "subjective" images of nature from the "authorial" or "objective" ones that do not grow out of a character's own perceptions but nevertheless provide us with valuable information about her. If we were to re-examine the images associated with Tess's retreat to the willow thicket, for example, we would find it very difficult to be sure about the sort of image we were dealing with or to determine whose is the observing consciousness in the scene--Tess's or Hardy's. The distinctively emotional diction--the almost childlike use of the word "monsters" and its related adjective "monstrous"--leads me to assume that the images of nature are best viewed as Tess's own perceptions--perceptions moulded according to her psychological state. But is this a correct assumption? One cannot be sure. Neither can one be sure about how to unlock the meaning of the images Hardy uses to describe the overgrown garden at Talbothays. As David Lodge has noted, "one's reading of [that] paragraph," like one's reading of the scene which unfolds among the willows, "depends very importantly on whether we take the observing consciousness to be primarily Tess's or primarily the author's."[8]

Though most of our knowledge of Tess is derived from Hardy's symbolic descriptions of landscape and the natural world, it should be noted that a large body of similes and metaphors is also provided to clarify the heroine's character. The vast majority of these images are calculated to emphasize her oneness with nature--particularly with that

which is beautiful in nature. To reinforce his labelling her "a daughter of the soil" (183)--one who is "part and parcel of outdoor nature, and . . . not merely an object set down therein" (137)--Hardy describes Tess's features in terms of the objects of the natural world. Her mouth is "flower-like"--or, more precisely, like a peony; her hair is "earth-coloured" (76), and her arms and cheeks are as smooth and chill as "the skin of the mushrooms in the fields around" (126, 239).

Animal imagery is also recurrent in descriptions of Tess. When living a relatively calm and regular life at Talbothays, she is appropriately identified with domestic animals--the cat, in particular. On one occasion, it is her warmth after an afternoon nap which suggests comparisons with this animal; on another occasion, it is her stealthy movement through the garden.

Although she generally exhibits "the constraint of a domesticated animal" (176) when in the presence of Clare at Talbothays, there are also regular suggestions of the girl's wildness. At one point in the novel, Tess's "suspended attitude" recalls "a friendly leopard at a pause" (251). At other times, she "[wears] the look of a wary animal" (259) or winces like one which is wounded (285). Early in the novel, her large eyes stare at Alec d'Urberville "like those of a wild animal" (96); at its conclusion, of course, Alec receives something more than mere "wild-animal" gazes from Tess.

If Hardy occasionally identifies Tess with particular animals--most notably, the cat and the leopard--to suggest some of her distinctive personal features, the majority of animal images he provides are quite general in nature. He is, for example, more likely to describe Tess's

eyes as "those of a wild animal" than to describe them through comparisons to a particular animal. When it is least effective, such general imagery does little more than emphasize the girl's oneness with the natural world; at its best, it underscores the duality of her nature--that is, her ability to appear both wild and "domesticated". Sometimes, as in the case of bird imagery, it can do much more than this--suggesting how we as readers ought to interpret Tess's situation or even her relationships with other characters.

Though it does not seem particularly surprising that Hardy, in deciding on a possible occupation for Tess at "The Slopes", should have determined to make her the "manager" of Mrs. d'Urberville's "poultry farm", it was actually a very significant decision. In assigning Tess the tasks of minding the chickens and the finches, and in emphasizing early in the novel her "innate love of melody" (133), Hardy was laying the groundwork for a series of complex and highly symbolic identifications of his heroine with birds.

A certain number of the bird images Hardy uses in connection with Tess are calculated to emphasize his heroine's grace and beauty. The image which most readily comes to mind in this connection is one associated with the happy Tess of Talbothays--the girl who possesses a buoyant tread which bears comparison with "the skim of a bird which has not quite alighted" (260). As lovely and effective as this bird image is, however, it is not representative of those used in connection with Tess.

The vast majority of the comparisons made between Tess and winged creatures in general are used to characterize the girl's relationship with Alec d'Urberville. Rather than emphasizing her grace and beauty,

these images heighten our perception of Tess's weakness and vulnerability as well as her victimization and entrapment by Alec. A not uncommon image in the novel is that of Tess as one "who had been caught during her days of immaturity like a bird in a springe" (261).

Perhaps the earliest of the symbolic identifications of Tess with birds is to be found in the seduction scene which unfolds in the dark primaeval woodlands of the Chase. Here, on a foggy September evening, Alec d'Urberville makes "a sort of a couch or nest for . . . [Tess] in the deep mass of dead leaves" (117) and, after a brief feigned attempt at discovering where in the Chase the two are lost, returns to touch the girl with fingers "which . . .[sink] into her as into down" (117). From this point onward, Tess is regularly identified with birds, particularly when in the presence of Alec. When "captured" by this man for the second and final time, she is significantly made to dress in clothing which, in its softness and delicacy of hue, makes her seem birdlike. At the time of Angel's arrival at The Herons, Hardy provides a very striking image of Tess's neck rising out of a cashmere dressing gown as "out of a frill of down" (465). If Tess now seems a very subdued creature, however, she was not so a few months previous. At the time of the threshing, we remember, she briefly rebelled against Alec, using a gauntlet on him with enough force to produce a "scarlet oozing". Even then, however, she turned up her eyes after the act "with the hopeless defiance of the sparrow's gaze before its captor twists its neck" (411). As this image suggests, Tess rarely feels much more than powerlessness at the hand of Alec d'Urberville.

Among the most poignant and memorable scenes in Tess of the d'Urbervilles

is the one in which a forlorn and despairing Tess, upon making her way from Blackmoor Vale to the absolute desolation of Flintcomb-Ash, one evening enters a plantation only to be confronted with the sight of several pheasants lying about beneath the trees "their rich plumage dabbled with blood; some . . . dead, some feebly twitching a wing, some staring up at the sky, some pulsating quickly, some contorted, some stretched out . . ." (352). "With the impulse of a soul who could feel for kindred sufferers as much as for herself," Tess's first thought is to put the still living birds out of their torture. Thus she proceeds "with her own hands" to break the necks of as many of the birds as she can find, leaving them down in the same place she finds them until the game-keepers come--as Alec will for her--"to look for them a second time" (352).

Although Tess sees the wounded birds as "kindred sufferers", she resists any further personal identification with the creatures, and actually goes as far as chastising herself for "'suppos[ing] . . . myself the most miserable being on earth in the sight o' such misery as yours'" (353). Hardy leaves it to the reader to explore the ramifications of the image--to see the birds' mangled and bleeding state as a metaphor for Tess's suffering--and to make the connection between the game-keepers with the "bloodthirsty light in their eyes" and Alec d'Urberville, the young man with the "large white centre-teeth" (94).

Another remarkable scene in which birds figure prominently is the one which unfolds at Flintcomb-Ash at the time of winter's onset.

> [At that time,] strange birds from behind the North Pole began to arrive silently on the upland . . . gaunt spectral creatures with tragical eyes--eyes which had witnessed scenes of cataclysmal

> horror in inaccessible polar regions . . . and retained the expression of feature that such scenes engendered. These nameless birds came quite near to Tess and Marian, but of all they had seen which humanity would never see, they brought no account. The traveller's ambition to tell was not theirs, and, with dumb impassivity, they dismissed experiences which they did not value for the immediate incidents of this homely upland. (363)

With their gaunt, spectral bodies and tragical eyes, the strange birds of this passage have a different symbolic role from the pheasants of the plantation. They are the harbingers of Tess's unhappy fate at Flintcomb-Ash. As the days spent on this starve-acre farm go by, we can imagine Tess's eyes growing to resemble those of the birds, and we can see "dumb impassivity" setting in. Unlike the birds, however, Tess will be unable to dismiss her cataclysmal experiences.

Much earlier in my discussion of Tess of the d'Urbervilles, I briefly noted the tendency of the images in the work to prefigure, reflect and generally reinforce one another. This tendency can be observed to some extent in the bird images we have just considered. Though some of the descriptions are so well-wrought that they have a power and stature all their own, the power of many more of the images lies in their rebounding off and reinforcing previous images. The description of Alec's fingers sinking into Tess's downy muslin dress, for example, is rendered more forceful and memorable by the later image of her neck rising out of her cashmere gown as "out of a frill of down".

Like the description of the dying pheasants in the plantation, the description of the accident which kills Prince, the Durbeyfields' decrepit horse, is powerful in its symbolic suggestiveness. Though much of the force of the image of the "pointed shaft" entering Prince's body "like a sword" lies in its prefiguring both Tess's seduction by Alec and her stabbing of that man at the conclusion of the novel, at least an equal amount of the image's power lies in the details of the horse's "life's blood . . . spouting in a stream" from the wound, "and falling with a hiss into the road" and onto Tess alike (71).

These bloody particulars are the first in a novel which contains a veritable stream of them--a stream apparently calculated to underscore the full horror of Tess's situation. Among the images Hardy provides is that of the "blood-stained paper . . . from some meat-buyer's dust-heap" (374) flying through the village of Emminster just as Tess enters it--a bit of paper which seems an emblem of what Tess has become at the hands of Alec d'Urberville. Other images include that of the "scarlet oozing" of Alec's cheek when Tess hits him with her leather glove, and the "scarlet blot" with "the appearance of a gigantic ace of hearts" (471) to which her seducer's life is ultimately reduced.

Having spent some time considering the very substantial body of animal, bird and blood imagery with which Hardy surrounds Tess in order to illuminate her character and situation, we now turn to a discussion of the symbolic function of the landscape. As we discovered in our study of some of Hardy's earlier novels, the information the author provides

about the physical environment is often essential to an understanding of his characters. This is particularly true in Tess of the d'Urbervilles. In this novel, place (or setting) not only impresses itself upon Tess's consciousness, but it also comments on and reflects her emotional life. It is the latter, "reflective capacity" of Hardy's natural world which is of particular interest to us.

Tess's life journey begins in Blackmoor, a valley whose aspect is plainly intended to correspond with and explain the young woman's essential nature. Part of Blackmoor's beauty, like Tess's own, lies in its being sheltered from the influence of a sprawling and potentially corrupting humanity. Though the name of Tess's actual place of birth, "Marlott", has less than positive associations--boding ill-fortune and despoliation in its syllables--to all appearances, the place seems the symbolic representation of innocence, located as it is in "an engirdled and secluded region for the most part untrodden as yet by tourist or landscape painter" (48).

If Blackmoor Vale, like Tess herself, is a thing undiscovered, however, it is not a realm which has known no suffering. Hardy is quick to inform us that in former times

> the Vale was known . . . as the Forest of White Hart, from a curious legend of King Henry III's reign, in which the killing by a certain Thomas de la Lynd of a beautiful white hart which the king had run down and spared was made the occasion of a heavy fine. (49)

It is difficult not to make connections between this beautiful creature and the one we are introduced to only a page later--a young girl clad

in a white robe, who for now is only one of a crowd upholding "the local Cerealia" but whose life is to change dramatically.

Feeling responsible for the accident which kills the family horse and wanting to make amends for the animal's death, Tess allows herself to be carried from the rich green valley of her birth to "a gray country of which she . . . [knows] nothing except from her first brief visit" (94) there to claim kin. The grayness of the prospect which meets Tess's eye as she is jostled along in Alec d'Urberville's "highly veneered" gig suggests the impending death of the young girl's innocence and the moral ambiguity of the circumstances she is about to enter. The details of the gig's long, straight descent, its speed and instability, also have a strong symbolic suggestiveness about them. They seem to image not only Tess's moral descent, but the precariousness and potential chaos of her situation. They reinforce Hardy's earlier warnings about Alec d'Urberville, particularly those contained in the image of Alec watching Tess's "pretty and unconscious munching" from behind "the blue narcotic haze of cigar smoke" (81) and the description of the young man as the "one who stood fair to be the blood-red ray in the spectrum of her young life" (81).

As Tess's relationship with Alec deepens, there is a significant accretion of mist and fog imagery. We have already noted the cigar's "blue narcotic haze" which seems to lull Tess into dangerous submission, as well as the allusion to the (morally?) "gray country" in which the newest branch of the d'Urbervilles resides. These images, which are no doubt intended to hint at Tess's confusion and to suggest the blurring of her moral vision, culminate in Hardy's description of the atmosphere

on the night of Tess's fateful "pilgrimage" to the "decayed market-town" of Chaseborough. Fine as this particular September evening is, it is characterized by a low-lit mistiness which Hardy attributes to the combined effects of the yellow lights' struggle with the blue shades and the dancing of innumerable winged insects. Tess moves into a greater "nebulosity" than this, however, when she views a group of her hay-trussing associates dancing in a storehouse, their "turbulent feet" creating a fog of the "fusty debris of peat and hay." Though Tess does not realize it, this half-drunken revel, this impulsive surrendering of reason to the chaos of instinct, this decayed remnant of a fertility rite with its "multiplicity of Pans whirling a multiplicity of Syrinxes" (107) is the prelude to her own seduction, her own acquiescence to fog (and moral confusion) which is to take place in the very primaeval woodland where the Druids---England's pagans--performed their fertility rites.

Although Tess returns to Marlott after her brief period of "confused surrender" to Alec d'Urberville, she cannot stay long in this vale of innocence. Having learnt that "the serpent hisses where the sweet birds sing," Tess is "another girl than the simple one she had been at home"--a girl who cannot "bear to look forward into the Vale" (124). Now psychologically unsuited to the place of her birth, Tess stays in Blackmoor only until she has seen her child born and buried and has regained mental balance. Her special need for stability is communicated by her preference for walking at

> that moment of evening when the light and the darkness are so evenly balanced that the constraint of day and the suspense of night neutralize each other, leaving absolute mental

liberty. (134)

Once having regained a certain emotional equilibrium at Marlott, Tess allows the spirit of "unexpended youth"--"the invincible instinct towards self-delight" which has arisen in her "automatically as the sap in the twigs" (151)--to direct her southward to a much hoped-for "Land of Milk and Honey". Even as Tess journeys through the Valley of the Great Dairies towards Talbothays, Hardy provides rich descriptions of the land which not only speak of its physical beauty but of its promise of spiritual restoration. The air here is "clear, bracing and ethereal" (157) and the waters of the Froom are as "clear as the pure River of Life shown to the Evangelist" (157).

Knowing she is in the vicinity of her ancestral seat, Tess feels understandably "akin" to the landscape of Var Vale. What the reader soon realizes, however, is that she is related to it in a more profound way than she herself suspects. Because of her great suffering, Tess's vision has expanded and her capacity to experience life has deepened. It seems appropriate, then, that she should now find herself not in the Vale of Blackmoor where "the world seems to be constructed upon a small . . . and . . . delicate scale" (48) but in a valley where "the world . . . [is]drawn to a larger pattern" (156), and the landscape is as full and ripe as Tess herself.

A great deal of the natural detail Hardy provides about Talbothays is communicated in intensely sexual language. His description of the development and maturation of the season, for example, is, as one critic has noted, a veritable celebration of the life-giving powers of sex[9]: "Rays from the sunrise drew forth the buds and stretched them into long

stalks, lifted up sap in noiseless streams, opened petals and sucked out scents in invisible jets and breathings" (185). In the end, the effect of such descriptions as this, in which nature seems almost human in its eroticism, is to suggest an integral relationship between man and nature. Passages such as this one also betray Hardy's strong and persistent desire "to make sense of the universe in humanly understandable terms."

While the beauty and fertility of the Valley of the Great Dairies seem to recommend comparisons between that place and Paradise, Hardy's identifying Tess and Angel with the inhabitants of the original Garden makes the comparisons complete. In "the spectral, half-compounded, aqueous light which pervade[s] the open mead," the lovers are impressed "with a feeling of isolation as if they [are] . . . Adam and Eve" (186). On another occasion, Tess, upon rising from an afternoon nap, regards Angel as "Eve at her second waking might have regarded Adam" (232).

As Richard Carpenter has pointed out, Tess's "innocence and simplicity, . . . her worship of . . . [Angel] as a 'godlike' being, her naturalness and passion, and her fall from innocence into the knowledge of good and evil"[10] make it very easy for us to accept Hardy's comparing her to Eve. Angel's likeness to Adam is, however, generally more difficult to discern. Intellectualism and a puritanical temperament are, after all, not the characteristics one usually associates with primordial man.

Glorious and paradisiacal as most of Hardy's images suggest Talbothays to be, they eventually begin to hint that something might be

rotten in the land of the Great Dairies. One wonders, for example, at Hardy's not infrequent use of the word "rank", a word which--need we be reminded--means "too luxuriant, gross, coarse, over-productive, choked with or apt to produce weeds, foul-smelling, offensive, rancid, loathsome, corrupt." We remember that both Hamlet and Claudius use the word to suggest the corruption in their "unweeded garden" of a world, briefly ask ourselves if Hardy is attempting to say something similar about the Valley of the Great Dairies--the land in which "milk and butter . . . [grow] to rankness" (156)--and promptly dismiss the idea as absurd. In turning to consider Hardy's description of Tess standing on the outskirt of a garden, listening "like a fascinated bird" to Angel's harp music, however, we understand that if Hardy is not delivering Hamlet's message, he is using some of the same imagery to communicate another one of equal importance.

It is clear that a good part of Hardy's purpose in including the "garden scene", or at least in describing it as he does, is to suggest his heroine's sexual awakening. Hardy tells us that Tess has heard Clare's music before from the attic above her head--where else does an earthly Angel play his harp?--but that it held little appeal for her. Then, the notes seemed "dim, flattened [and] constrained by their confinement," but now, "they wander . . . in the still air with a stark quality like that of nudity" (178). Before long, Tess experiences the music even more fully than this; she "undulates" upon its notes and feels its harmonies pass through her like breezes (179). Perhaps, however, it is not just the music which is eliciting this erotic behaviour in Tess. A. Alvarez suggests that the plant life around her may also be exerting

some influence. To him, it seems "as though the vegetation itself contain[s] all the secret smells and juices of physical passion."[11]

Although Alvarez's interpretation of the description of the vegetation is an interesting and viable one given the other obvious erotic elements in the passage, it seems to overlook the darker aspects of nature which are also noticeably present. There may be some beauty in "the outskirt of the garden in which Tess . . . [finds] herself," but there is a great deal more that is unpleasant about the place:

> [It] had been left uncultivated for some years, and was now damp and rank with juicy grasses which sent up mists of pollen at a touch; and with tall blooming weeds emitting offensive smells--weeds whose red and yellow and purple hues formed a polychrome as dazzling as that of cultivated flowers. She [Tess] went stealthily as a cat through this profusion of growth, gathering cuckoo-spittle on her skirts, cracking snails that were underfoot, staining her hands with thistle-milk and slug-slime, and rubbing off upon her naked arms sticky blights which, though snow white on the apple-tree trunks, made madder stains on her skin; thus she drew quite near to Clare still unobserved of him. (179)

Acknowledging the malignant aspects of the weed-plot--the plants' abilities to stain, slime and blight, their rankness and offensive odour--as Alvarez does not, Dorothy Van Ghent sees these details as prefigurative of the evil that is to come to Tess at the hands of Angel Clare. "It is in this part of Paradise (an 'outskirt of the garden' . . .)," she notes, "that the minister's son is hidden, who, in his

conceited impotence, will violate Tess more nastily than her sensual seducer."[12] Interesting as this interpretation of the imagery is, one wonders why Van Ghent has seen it as having a prefigurative rather than a reflective function. Would it not be equally feasible to view the staining, sliming weeds through which Tess passes as emblems of her former association with Alec d'Urberville--an association which Hardy himself refers to as "Tess's passing corporeal blight" (180). It is, after all, Alec who has so "stained" Tess that she is unacceptable to the puritanical Clare.

If the paragraph treating the uncultivated plot reflects Tess's past and projects her future, it also provides us with a commentary on the natural world in general (and, by extension, a commentary on the young woman so closely identified with that world). As David Lodge has put it, the passage

> might be aptly described as an image of "unconstrained nature". It reminds us of the wild, exuberant, anarchic life that flourishes on the dark underside, as it were, of the cultivated fertility of the valley . . . . it . . . reveal[s] something similar about Tess--that she is "a child of Nature" in a sense that extends far beneath the surface of conventional pastoral prettiness and innocence which that phrase denotes to Angel.[13]

However its finer details are interpreted, most readers would probably agree that the garden description provides hints of a difficult relationship between Tess and Angel. As their love matures with the season, an even stronger note of imminent danger can be perceived in the imagery Hardy provides. Although Tess demonstrates and confesses her

love to Angel easily enough, she significantly stalls on the question of his marriage proposal. Finally, however, she is "gently coerced" into pronouncing her answer. Though Hardy has hardly led us to expect that Tess would do anything but acquiesce to "love's counsel" and Angel's wishes, her actual acceptance seems both affecting and oddly momentous. The physical details Hardy provides are of particular interest. The fateful day dawns with a "frigid pallor" (247) and by the time evening has come, with Tess moving ever closer to her moment of acceptance, the sky is "leaden" (248). It is also significant that when Tess sets out with Angel to deliver the milk at the station, she views a prospect which is anything but cheering. Before her, "the meads stretch . . . away into gray miles, and . . . [are] backed in the extreme distance by the swarthy and abrupt slopes of Egdon Heath" (249). In time, the "stagnant air" which surrounds her changes to a "fitful breeze"; rain begins to fall, and rivers and pools vanish, or change from broad, enchanting mirrors to "lustreless sheets of lead" (249). Images like these hardly bode well for Tess and Angel's relationship.

After Tess accepts Angel, she manages to keep the "gloomy spectres" of her past sorrows at bay while she roves over the meads during the warm October month of her engagement. There are numerous suggestions, however, that such happiness is not to last. By the time November has come, the meadows in which Tess and Clare have grown to love each other are said to be "changing". This detail, which prepares us to expect a corresponding alteration in Tess and Clare's relationship, is followed by a description which seems to comment on the fragility and evanescence

of their happy time together:

> Looking over the damp sod in the direction of the sun, a glistening ripple of gossamer webs was visible to their eyes under the luminary, like the track of moonlight on the sea. Gnats, knowing nothing of their brief glorification, wandered across the shimmer of this pathway, irradiated as if they bore fire within them, then passed out of its line, and were quite extinct. In the presence of these things he would remind her that the date [of their marriage] was still the question. (266)

As though uncertain of the power of his imagery to communicate a sense of doom, or perhaps simply to enhance it, Hardy provides a number of events for Tess to interpret as "signs" of coming evil. Early in the novel, it is the pricking of her chin by Alec's roses which speaks to Tess of ills to come. Later, the legend of the d'Urberville coach will hold the same portentous significance for her. At present, however, it is the unnatural repeated crowing of a cock in mid-afternoon. To Mrs. Crick, the sound "only means a change in the weather", but to Tess it is an omen of quite a different order. "'I don't like to hear him!'" she exclaims to her husband when the cock crows straight in Clare's direction, "'Tell the man to drive on!'" (282)

Hardy's imagery continues to prophesy doom in the following chapter, which deals with Tess and Angel's arrival at "the mouldy habitation" which the latter has chosen for their honeymoon abode. By this time, the weather has changed according to the predictions of the cock. Both the sun and the calm mood of the day have departed. Now the air is unsettled, even turbulent: "out of doors there began noises as of silk smartly rubbed;

the restful dead leaves of the preceding autumn were stirred to irritated resurrection and whirled about unwillingly, and tapped against the shutters" (285). While this image suggests that Tess and Angel's marriage is on the brink of ruin, another projects even more forcefully the drastic and devastating effect Tess's revelation will have. Before her story is told, Hardy likens the "red-coaled glow" of the fire near which Tess and Angel sit to a "torrid waste" in which the imagination might perceive a "Last Day luridness" (293). After the revelation, the same fire significantly confronts Angel with nothing more than "extinct embers" while Hardy, maintaining the metaphor of fire, goes on to observe: "The pair were, in truth, but the ashes of their former fires. To the hot sorrow of the previous night had succeeded heaviness; it seemed as if nothing could kindle either of them to fervour of sensation any more" (307).

Before Tess separates from Angel, the two make a brief call at Talbothays--"as Clare wishe[s] . . . to wind up his business with Mr. Crick, and Tess . . . [can] hardly avoid paying Mrs. Crick a call at the same time, unless she would excite suspicion of their unhappy state" (322). Although Hardy's description of this visit is rather sketchy--his main purpose in including it seeming to lie in Mrs. Crick's delivering her suspicions about the marriage--he does provide some significant details about the landscape. We remember that at one time it was the "oozing fatness", "warm ferments" and "Thermidorean weather" of the Var Vale which "seemed effort[s] on the part of Nature to match the state of hearts at Talbothays Dairy" (207); now, it is the gray, "mean" colours of the landscape, the muddy soil and the cold river (322) which provide the powerful commentary on the state of affairs between Tess and Angel.

The next stage of Tess's life journey unfolds in a landscape "almost sublime in its dreariness". As its very name suggests, Flintcomb-Ash is a place where hardness and sterility prevail: "There was not a tree within sight; there was not, at this season, a green pasture--nothing but fallow and turnips everywhere, in large fields divided by hedges plashed to unrelieved levels" (358). With its "bosom" of "semi-globular tumuli--as if Cybele the Many-breasted were supinely extended there" (355) --and its stoney lanchets--"the outcrop of siliceous veins in the chalk formation, composed of myriads of loose white flints in bulbous, cusped, and phallic shapes" (360)--this landscape represents "the mockery of impotence--the exile."[14]

It is no mere coincidence that Tess, in making her way to this region, attempts to "disconnect herself from her . . past" by obscuring her sexual identity with handkerchief and scissors. Though her self-disfigurement is less drastic than Marty South's, it seems to spring from the same kind of frustration. Like Marty, Tess sees no outlet for her sexuality, and so makes a bold attempt to deny it by an act of self-mutilation.

Rejected by Clare--in fact, quite deprived of all human affection--Tess seems less a human than an animal in her existence at Flintcomb-Ash. She and Marian work on hour after hour in a state of unconsciousness, "not thinking of the injustice of their lot" (361). Crawling over the surface of the drab and desolate turnip field, they resemble flies more closely than humans. It is not until the threshing of the last wheat-rick, however, that they experience dehumanization in its fullest, most hellish degree. Then the master the girls serve is no mere mortal but a "red tyrant",

"a buzzing . . . glutton", an "insatiable swallower" which, in its desire for wheat sheaves, keeps up a "despotic demand" upon their tired muscles (404).

In all their plutonic suggestiveness, the images associated with the threshing are plainly intended to communicate the immense and futile suffering of Hardy's heroine. The allusion to Tophet, the loathsome "place of burning" on the outskirts of Jerusalem where Jews made human sacrifices to strange gods, is particularly telling. In Hardy's version of the place, the "strange god" is, of course, the threshing device. Imaged as a monstrous infernal machine, "an automaton which works regardless of human suffering,"[15] this piece of equipment is an emblem of Inexorable Fate. As F. B. Pinion has noted, the workings of the contraption remind one of the operation of the First Cause or the Will of The Dynasts.[16]

Hardy does not abandon the infernal imagery, which is so closely associated with Tess's great suffering at Flintcomb-Ash, even when he has her return to her sick and destitute family in Blackmoor Vale. Now, however, the author uses it in combination with allusions to the Fall to characterize Tess's renewed relationship with Alec d'Urberville. This is best observed in a scene which unfolds in a rented allotment-plot a couple of hundred yards out of Marlott. Here, on an evening not long after her return to her home village, Tess works diligently with a pitchfork in the hope that her efforts will bring forth something to sustain her family.

Among the details Hardy presents about the physical person of his heroine at this point is a description of her clothing. He notes, first

of all, that she is "oddly dressed", and goes on to point out that the neutral tones of her gown and jacket make Tess seem "a wedding and funeral guest in one" (430). What is most striking about Tess's attire, however, is the contrast it makes with the pink and white clothing of her former days. The aspect of her present dress suggests how hopeless and colourless Tess's life has become.

As symbolic as her clothing is the dense smoke in which Tess labours. Actually produced by a myriad glowing fires of couch-grass and cabbage stocks, the smoke, like the earlier images of dust and "vegeto-human pollen" at the Chaseborough dance or the thick fog in the Chase itself, is an emblem of oncoming moral confusion. The source of such confusion is soon made clear when Tess, on going up to one of the bonfires to pitch some weeds upon it, "beholds" in a flare of light the ghastly and dreaded features of Alec d'Urberville. As though Alec's grotesque appearance, including his possession of a pitchfork, were not enough to recommend infernal associations, Hardy has the young man deliver this "whimsical remark": "'A jester might say this is just like Paradise. You are Eve, and I am the old Other One come to tempt you in the disguise of an inferior animal'" (431). It would be a rather obtuse reader, who, given clues like this one, was unable to predict the outcome of this modern variation on the most archetypal of stories.

When Tess finally yields to Alec d'Urberville, she is promptly whisked away from the natural world and settled in a stylish lodging house whose name, "The Herons", was surely chosen by Hardy for its ironic effect. We remember that a solitary heron was the first creature to acknowledge Tess's presence in the beautiful and luxuriant Valley of the Great

Dairies--that land of spiritual restoration. We also remember that the heron was the bird commonly viewed by Tess and Angel when they walked the meads at Talbothays "in that strange and solemn interval, the twilight of the morning" (186).

If its name has symbolic associations with the land of Tess's emotional healing, The Herons brings no such renewal to the young woman. She may have all her material needs met in this house, but she sinks deeper and deeper into spiritual oblivion here. Indeed, by the time Angel Clare arrives to claim her, she has "spiritually ceased to recognize the body before him as hers--allowing it to drift, like a corpse upon the current" (467). Though Tess seems to have lost the animal consciousness that characterized her in her life at Flintcomb-Ash, however, her killing of Alec d'Urberville confirms that there is something left of it yet. The stabbing is Tess's single most assertive and instinctive act in the novel. If it brings death to Tess, it also allows a "heroic return through the 'door' into the folk fold, the fold of nature and instinct,"[17] as Dorothy Van Ghent has observed.

Hardy's decision to use Stonehenge--"Temple of the Winds" and place of heathen sacrifice--as the last of the symbolic backdrops against which he places Tess, seems to be a final affirmation of his heroine's essential naturalness and her inherent paganism. Earlier in Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Hardy had testified that "women whose chief companions are the forms and forces of outdoor Nature retain in their souls far more of the Pagan fantasy of their remote forefathers than of the systemized religion taught their race at a later date" (158). Tess's life, particularly its ending, is a confirmation of this statement. In killing

Alec d'Urberville, Tess acts independently of "systemized religion" and asserts an identification with the pagan past. Once at Stonehenge, she confirms that identification in her conversation with Clare. "'One of my mother's people was a shepherd hereabouts,'" she observes; "'And you used to say at Talbothays that I was a heathen. So now I am at home'" (484).

When the stories of all Hardy's characters are considered and compared, Tess is perhaps the figure we feel we know best. Her fate is certainly among the most affecting of all Hardy's heroines. There are a number of reasons for this, of course, only one of which concerns us. As we have observed, so much of Tess of the d'Urbervilles is given over to descriptions of the landscape. Every region in which Hardy's young heroine is placed is imaged in powerful and highly evocative language which makes her emotional life and her sad fate all the more "present" to us.

In the novels we have examined that came before Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Hardy was plainly more interested in considering the question of the antithesis between nature and civilization than he was in exploring the psychology of a single character. His use of symbolic imagery reflects this. Though there are, in each of the three earlier novels, some striking scenes in which there appears to be "no separation between what the characters feel and the setting in which they feel it,"[18] the most significant function of imagery in those novels is to suggest the differences between characters and expose the relationships between them. It apparently was not until Hardy reduced his cast significantly that symbolic imagery could be used to full effect for psychological

characterization. In Tess of the d'Urbervilles, descriptions of birds, plants and the landscape in general--in fact, nearly every detail that is provided about the natural world increases our psychological insight into Tess and suggests or reflects the tragic beauty of her life.

NOTES

CHAPTER I

[1] E. M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970) 100.

[2] Donald Davidson, "The Traditional Basis of Thomas Hardy's Fiction," Hardy: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Albert J. Guerard (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice, 1963) 15.

[3] Davidson 21.

[4] Howard Babb, "Setting and Theme in Far From the Madding Crowd," ELH 30 (June, 1963): 151.

[5] Babb 151.

[6] The original Bathsheba was the daughter of Eliam and wife of Uriah, a Hittite mercenary in David's army. After his intrigue with her, when he ordered Joab to put Uriah in the forefront of the battle that he could be killed, David married her.

[7] Babb 149.

[8] Babb 156-157.

[9] Babb 156-157.

[10] Richard Benvenuto, "The Return of the Native as a Tragedy in Six Books," Nineteenth-Century Fiction 26 (1971): 85.

[11] Benvenuto 88.

[12] Michael Millgate, Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist (New York: Random, 1971) 132.

[13] Richard C. Carpenter, "The Mirror and the Sword: Imagery in Far From the Madding Crowd," Nineteenth-Century Fiction 18 (1964): 340.

[14] Carpenter 341.

[15] Carpenter 342.

CHAPTER II

[1] F. B. Pinion, A Hardy Companion (London, Melbourne and Toronto: Macmillan, 1968) 44.

[2] Michael Millgate, Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist (New York: Random, 1971) 251.

[3] M. Jacobus, "Tree and Machine: The Woodlanders," Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy ed. Dale Kramer (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979) 116.

[4] Millgate 256.

[5] Jacobus 117.

[6] Richard C. Carpenter, Thomas Hardy (New York: St Martin's, 1964) 121.

[7] Irving Howe, Thomas Hardy (New York: Macmillan; London: Collier-Macmillan, 1968) 104.

CHAPTER III

[1] Irving Howe, Thomas Hardy (New York: Macmillan; London: Collier-Macmillan, 1968) 112.

[2] Howe 131.

[3] Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function (New York: Harper, 1953) 201.

[4] Van Ghent 208.

[5] Charlotte Bonica, "Nature and Paganism in Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles," ELH 49 (1982): 849.

[6] David Lodge, "Tess, Nature, and the Voices of Hardy," Language of Fiction: Essays in Criticism and Verbal Analysis of the English Novel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; New York: Columbia UP, 1966) 173-174.

[7] Van Ghent 197.

[8] Lodge 186.

[9] Richard C. Carpenter, Thomas Hardy (New York: St. Martin's, 1964) 131.

[10] Carpenter 132-133.

[11] A. Alvarez, introduction, Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978) 17.

[12] Van Ghent 201.

[13] Lodge 184.

[14] Van Ghent 203.

[15] F. B. Pinion, A Hardy Companion (London, Melbourne and Toronto: Macmillan, 1968) 48.

[16] Pinion 48.

[17] Van Ghent 209.

[18] Alvarez, 13.

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